

WELL CRAFTING THE FUTURE.

NEW STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS FOR
THE ELKHART COUNTY CONVENTION
AND VISITORS BUREAU AND ITS LOCAL
TOURISM INDUSTRY AND COMMUNITY
PARTNERS



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2023 – 2027

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Wellfield Botanical Gardens

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ELKHART COUNTY, INDIANA

ELKHART



BRISTOL



MIDDLEBURY



GOSHEN



WAKARUSA



MILLERSBURG



NAPPANEE



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1.0

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I.O EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I.1 CHANGE & OPPORTUNITY

The Elkhart County Convention and Visitors Bureau (ECCVB), along with its tourism industry and community partners, progressed through a multitude of dynamic circumstances moving into 2020 and the new decade. Most significant was the emergence and evolution of COVID realities in early 2020 and the massive implications it had on the hospitality and tourism industry at all levels. Beyond COVID, the ECCVB experienced a change in the executive leadership for the organization brought on by the retirement of its longest tenured CEO in the organization's 35-year history. Additionally, the organization relocated to a new facility for the Visitor Center and administrative offices that elevated the visibility of the ECCVB. Finally, within the destination there have been changes in the ownership of a variety of key, long time, private sector tourism assets, and the emergence of new assets including the development of the Beacon Health and Aquatics Center, which features an Olympic sized pool and can host swimming and diving events at a national scale.

The ECCVB recognized the opportunity to undertake a new strategic planning process to help the organization identify and prioritize future initiatives and navigate through the changing dynamics to maintain its position and reputation as the champion for both the local tourism industry and community placemaking in the County. This planning process was structured in a way that would incorporate insights not only from the ECCVB staff, its Board of Directors, and the Elkhart County Innkeeper Tax Commission, but also from the broader visitor and hospitality industry. Importantly, Elkhart County political leadership and residents themselves would also be considered in the planning process to ensure a wide range of perspectives were incorporated.

VISION STATEMENT

Elkhart County, IN is a “Well Crafted”, year-round destination that embodies a diversity of arts and cultural attractions, vibrant downtown communities, sports and outdoor adventures, grounded in craftsmanship and an entrepreneurial spirit, attracting multi-generational audiences.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Elkhart County, IN Convention and Visitors Bureau is the County's champion for sustainable tourism promotion and placemaking initiatives to achieve economic vitality and enhanced quality of place through diverse affiliations and collaborations.



Elkhart Riverwalk, Elkhart

1.2 PLANNING APPROACH

In the development of the strategic plan process, the planning team's approach focused on **two primary study elements**. The focus of the first element was to conduct a comprehensive assessment of both the destination and the ECCVB's organizational initiatives. Informed by the findings and related implications identified through the assessment, planning activities in the second element involved identifying and defining the strategic frameworks to guide future activities and outcomes. A project Steering Committee, chaired by representatives from the ECCVB's Board of Directors and the Elkhart County Innkeeper Tax Commission, and made up of both tourism/hospitality industry and general community partners were tasked to provide guidance and input throughout the process.

State of the Destination Assessment

Components of the destination assessment included: 1) a review of visitor industry trends and research reports to gather an understanding of the current conditions and market forces influencing the industry and destination, and 2) an examination of the ECCVB's organizational activities, initiatives, structure, capacities and performance. Specific activities undertaken as a part of the assessment included:

- Collection and review of secondary data sources related to destination conditions and performance, including DestinationThink Branding/Research, STR Hotel Performance, CERTEC Economic Impact Performance, and historical innkeeper tax Collection data;
- Individual interviews with all ECCVB staff members, Steering Committee members, ECCVB Board Members, and Elkhart County Innkeeper Tax Commission members;
- Development and implementation of a Visitor Profile Survey utilizing the qualified customer contact database collected through the organization's website and social media marketing activities;
- Development and implementation of a Resident Sentiment Survey to measure community awareness and perceptions of both the industry and the organization leveraging the ECCVB's Vibrant Communities platform and social media partners for survey distribution;
- Collection and review of previous ECCVB organizational business plans and performance reporting; and
- Review and analysis of ECCVB placemaking priority projects, activities and messaging.



The results of these assessment activities were compiled into a "State of the Destination" report and were presented to the Steering Committee, along with the ECCVB leadership, staff, and a combined meeting of the Board of Directors and Elkhart County Innkeeper Tax Commission.

2 ECCVB New Strategic Directions

Based on the State of the Destination findings, the next phase of the process involved creating the framework for developing new strategic approaches for the ECCVB to meet the agreed-to destination and organizational challenges and realize its visions. Defined strategy pillars were developed, outlining long-term goals over a 3-5 year horizon set across the organization's core competencies as follows:

- Driving the destination brand awareness & visitor conversion among broader and more diverse target audience segments;
- Enhancing visitor & resident experiences through increased product development activities and a focus on improvements to quality of place;
- Securing and managing the resources to lead an organizational program of work that strives to balance marketing, communications and expanded development activities; and
- Providing the tourism voice and heightened cause engagement to support the organization's role in the visitor industry and placemaking to community decision makers and influencers.

After building consensus on the longer-term strategic pillars, a mix of objectives were crafted that reinforced the Pillars. Additionally, a series of associated strategies and tactics were developed that provided detail on how the strategy would be prioritized and implemented. The planning team engaged the ECCVB leadership and staff in the process of integrating the annual business plan process within the larger strategic framework.



Downtown Middlebury

1.3 FINDINGS & IMPLICATIONS

The State of the Destination assessment provided a foundation to establish the current industry and market conditions, as well as trends and opportunities facing both the destination and the ECCVB as an organization. Initial findings were organized around their implications to external customers, destination products and services, placemaking activities and objectives, and the ECCVB's organizational programs and structure.



External Customers

- Results from the Visitor Profile Survey support previous research findings indicating the current demographics of existing visitors are largely dominated by more mature, boomer generation segments. As a result, opportunities for activities to expand and diversify to broader demographic groups should be considered.
- The ECCVB had previously invested in Community DNA research with Destination Think that resulted in the identification of high value, niche leisure market segments. Continued execution of strategies targeting these niche segments should be prioritized.
- Elkhart County communities have made a number of recent investments in new resident amenity facilities, including a competition aquatic center, renovated theater facilities, and trails/outdoor recreation facilities. These new assets represent opportunities to leverage new visitor audiences, including youth sports, music/theater, and outdoor recreation enthusiasts.
- Day-trip visitors currently account for approximately 40% of the total destination visitors, averaging a little over a 5 hour stay. Industry standards suggest that 6-7 hours of activity will influence a visitor to consider an overnight stay. Strategies aimed at incremental increases in activity programming and packages should result in the conversion to more overnight visitors.



Products & Services

- The density and reputation of the Amish culture products and assets remain a strength as a primary driver for destination visitation. However, some modernization within the Amish culture and turnover of established Amish themed attractions present opportunities for repositioning and reinterpretation of the Amish experience that can relate to a wider demographic audience.
- As the ECCVB considers broadening the targeted customer audiences based on the identified Destination Think niche segments, it will be critical to develop product experiences that support and deepen the authenticity of the “Well Crafted” brand and messaging.
- The RV manufacturing cluster offers opportunities for RV owners/ travelers growth, but will require the development of new experiences and linkages to existing and emerging outdoor recreation assets and amenities.
- Growth in the youth sports market and outdoor recreation segments should incorporate new product experiences with relevance to families and children to support the competitive advantages of the local event host facilities.

KEY FINDINGS

KEY FINDINGS



Placemaking Activities

- The ECCVB has identified its role as a Champion for placemaking activities within the County to achieve higher quality experiences for both residents and visitors. As demands on funding for placemaking activities increases, the ECCVB should prioritize activities that are in alignment with target visitor audiences and experiences.
- The Vibrant Communities Action Agenda has been a successful initiative in helping communities identify and prioritize placemaking projects and programs. The ECCVB has been a leader and manager of this process and has the opportunity to increase local awareness of the organization's role.
- As awareness within the community regarding the values of improved quality of place has increased, multiple organizations have initiated placemaking messaging and programs. The ECCVB has an opportunity to formulate strategic partnerships that promote efficiency and consistency in placemaking efforts within the County.



ECCVB Structure

- The ECCVB was launching the “Well Crafted” brand messaging in early 2020 just as the COVID pandemic occurred. Initial efforts were related to building connections and awareness with local/internal audiences. Balancing continued internal curating activities, as well as supporting increased external communication activities will be important to ensure the experience delivers on the promises of the messaging.
- Championing the visitor industry, while also driving community placemaking are both identified as core organizational roles. Measuring and tracking the success of these initiatives will be vital to maintain an appropriate balance of resource and staffing investment dedicated to these activities.
- As the ECCVB evolves its role as a destination architect through increased development activities, consideration should be given to securing additional resources to support stimulating new development opportunities in order to minimize the impacts on marketing resources. Options could include enhanced local funding partnerships or potential increase in lodging tax funds.

1.4 STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

These findings and conclusions carried through into the development of four strategic pillars to guide the ECCVB's approach to optimizing outcomes associated with the identified market opportunities. Specifically, these Pillars include:

- Diversify** - This Pillar is focused on external visitors, with the goal of expanding the target visitor audiences to integrate a broader mix of both generations and interests.
- Curate** - This is a product and experience focus, with the goal of expanding and creating new experiences that support more diverse audiences, while complementing existing assets and audiences.
- Balance** - This is an ECCVB organizational focus, with the goal of aligning staffing and resources to adequately support the Diversify and Curate activities.
- Advocate** - This is a communication focus with the goal of creating awareness of the benefits of the tourism/hospitality industry, as well as the ECCVB in its role as a champion for placemaking within the local community.

A brief outline of the Strategic Pillars, Objectives and Strategies is provided on the following pages. More detail, including proposed tactics for implementation as well as research support, is provided in the remainder of this report.

THE ECCVB & PLACEMAKING

The ECCVB has established as part of its mission to be a champion for placemaking in the community. The basic principles of placemaking revolve around creating community vibrancy through investments in aesthetics, amenities and activation of public spaces and gateways. These same factors directly impact the experiences of visitors regardless of the primary driver of their visit.

Tying the ECCVB's investments in community placemaking to activities that support the visitor experience and expanded customer audiences will help ensure consistency with its statutory guidelines. Additionally, specific tracking of these investments will assist the organization in promoting the economic value and impacts of these activities.





Diversify

Diversify the destination's visitor base to better position it to integrate multiple generations and interests.

Diversify Objective 1 - Launch new communication initiatives that connect and engage identified niche segments – Creative, Cultural and Roadtrippers.

- Strategy 1 - Align existing assets/ experiences with defined niche outcomes.
- Strategy 2 - Develop content relevant to the defined niche outcomes.
- Strategy 3 - Communicate via multiple channels.

Diversify Objective 2 - Deepen promotional initiatives targeted to youth sports and outdoor recreation.

- Strategy 1 - Inventory existing assets and promotional activities.
- Strategy 2 - Identify target audiences and channels.

Diversify Objective 3 - Execute new initiatives that increase the identity of Elkhart County as a multi-day experience.

- Strategy 1 - Integrate multi-day messaging in the Area Guide.
- Strategy 2 - Develop similar messaging efforts for other channels.

Diversify Objective 4 - Undertake increased priorities to attract small group meetings and social reunion gatherings.

- Strategy 1 - Undertake target opportunity discussions.
- Strategy 2 - Integrate findings in marketing efforts.



Curate

Curate new products and experiences that resonate with targeted segments, while being synergistic with existing assets.

Curate Objective 1 - Align existing assets/ experiences with the defined niche audience segments.

- Strategy 1 - Identify working groups and support.
- Strategy 2 - Integrate new product ideas in marketing.

Curate Objective 2 - Link and integrate existing resources that are relevant to youth sports and outdoor recreation markets.

- Strategy 1 - Use previously developed asset listings to identify high-value opportunities.
- Strategy 2 - Identify resources needed to be competitive.

Curate Objective 3 - Expand connections with local RV manufacturers to increase their realization of opportunities within the tourism marketplace.

- Strategy 1 - Develop a road trip visit showcasing experiences of other destinations.
- Strategy 2 - Educate the RV industry about local tourism opportunities.

Curate Objective 4 - Utilize the Vibrant Communities brand and Action Agenda process to identify and prioritize future community driven development initiatives.

- Strategy 1 - Use the 2022 Action Agenda for new project identification.
- Strategy 2 - Clarify role of events.

Curate Objective 5 - Develop prioritization process and rating attributes to evaluate development project investments.

- Strategy 1 - Consider the possible role of a Tourism Development Task Force.
- Strategy 2 - Identify range of ECCVB support.



*Downtown
Wakarusa*



Balance

Balance the areas of focus of the ECCVB to optimize its potential and lead the visitor industry and communities.

Balance Objective 1 - Know role priorities and funding requirements with refined fiscal deployments to demonstrate balance between tourism promotion and development.

- Strategy 1 - Achieve consensus on ECCVB roles.
- Strategy 2 - Assess new ECCVB funding opportunities.
- Strategy 3 - Prepare an executable ECCVB financial strategy.

Balance Objective 2 - Investigate funding options that provide resources to stimulate product development/placemaking initiatives.

- Strategy 1 - Evaluate product development/placemaking tax-related funding alternatives.
- Strategy 2 - Explore non-tax funding options with select community partners.

Balance Objective 3 - Align staffing to ensure appropriate skills and resources are consistent with new priorities.

- Strategy 1 - Conduct an ECCVB staffing audit.
- Strategy 2 - Prepare an executable ECCVB people strategy.

Balance Objective 4 - Integrate metrics that demonstrate effectiveness and undertake necessary research and data collection to develop Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

- Strategy 1 - Determine recognized CVB performance metrics.
- Strategy 2 - Agree on destination and ECCVB pillar goal measures.
- Strategy 3 - Prepare an executable multi-year research program.
- Strategy 4 - Compile a customized ECCVB performance dashboard.

Balance Objective 5 - Ensure the ECCVB Board is provided oversight materials to evaluate effectiveness and give guidance.

- Strategy 1 - Determine ECCVB oversight documentation and process.
- Strategy 2 - Agree on ECCVB performance oversight tracking.



Advocate

Advocate on behalf of the ECCVB, the visitor industry and communities to better ensure the recognized role of tourism in the County.

Advocate Objective 1 - Build a deeper understanding of the visitor industry's contributions to economic vitality and resident quality of place and life.

- Strategy 1 - Prepare an executable stakeholders' communication program.
- Strategy 2 - Develop relevant layperson tourism benefit information.

Advocate Objective 2 - Leverage the Vibrant Communities brand to be the ECCVB's communication vehicle for product development and placemaking messaging.

- Strategy 1 - Implement an ECCVB tourism advocacy plan.
- Strategy 2 - Activate an ECCVB public relations program.
- Strategy 3 - Promote the ECCVB as the Vibrant Communities leader.

Advocate Objective 3 - Expand "Well Crafted" internal marketing campaign to build recognition with residents and political leadership.

- Strategy 1 - Continue "Well Crafted" local communications.
- Strategy 2 - Activate new stakeholder engagement tools.

Advocate Objective 4 - Foster opportunities for creative ideation and innovation, and brainstorming.

- Strategy 1 - Initiate relevant community tourism issue dialogue.
- Strategy 2 - Nurture new tourism futures thinking.



*Downtown
Goshen*



2.0 BACKGROUND

*Das Dutchman Essenhaus
Middlebury, IN*

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 STUDY TEAM COMPOSITION

The ECCVB selected a planning team led by Abonmarche Consultants to facilitate and implement the process of developing the new strategic plan. The study team incorporated the unique placemaking capabilities of Abonmarche Consultants, with the long-time tourism advisory tenure of Destination Consultancy Group (DCG) and Nichols Tourism Group (NTG).

By combining the diverse skill-sets of the three consultant team organizations, a mix of differentiated attributes were brought to this important assignment. These included:

- A complementary mix of community and tourism research/planning capabilities;
- An extensive experience in both Elkhart County and the Northern Indiana regional marketplace;
- A strong local understanding, while bringing national perspectives;
- A blend of innovative/leading edge thought educators and advisors; and
- The ability to integrate sustainability and stewardship in the planning process.



ECCVB Board of Directors
Elkhart County Innkeeper Tax Commission
Jon Hunsberger, CDME, Executive Director
Janis Logsdon, Assistant Director
Cindy Ostrom, Director of Finance & Administration



Mike Huber, Senior Planner
Crystal Welsh, Senior Planner
Jordan Wyatt, Planner



Mitch Nichols, President



Don Anderson, Executive Partner

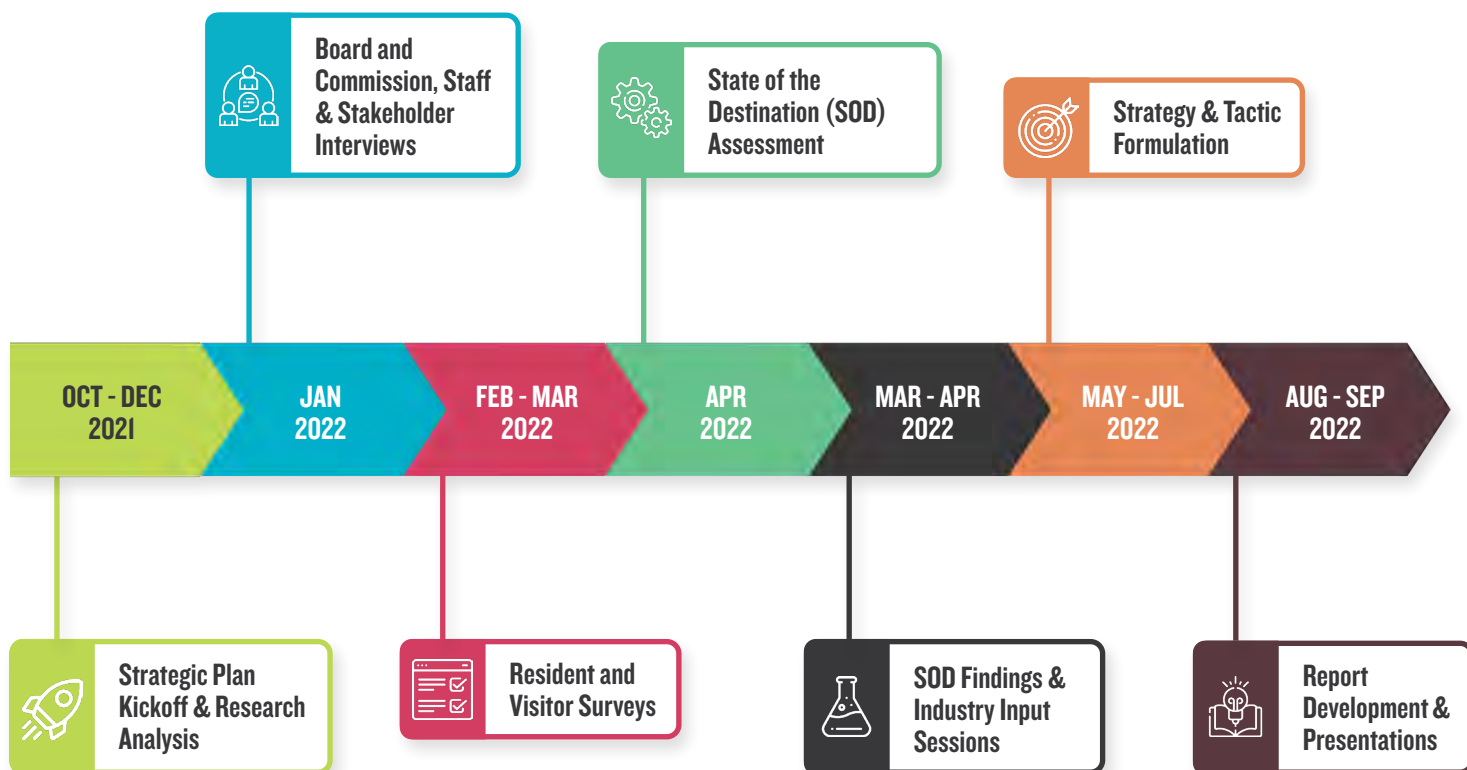
2.2 REPORT FORMAT

Following Section 1.0 Executive Summary and Section 2.0 Background, Section 3.0 presents a review of the State of the Destination, an analysis of factors influencing Elkhart County’s visitor industry. This analysis considers critical issues facing the destination in four strategic areas: External Customers, Products & Services, Placemaking, and the ECCVB Structure itself.

Based on Section 3.0 findings, Section 4.0 lays out the new strategic directions, beginning with the vision and mission statements and a set of four foundational Pillars that were presented to and approved by the ECCVB Board and Elkhart County Innkeeper Tax Commission in June 2022. A blend of objectives, strategies and tactics supporting each Pillar is then presented. The report concludes with a series of recommendations for optimizing collaboration among the many partners involved with Elkhart County’s visitor industry.

This report’s written findings and subsequent conclusions are supplemented by two PowerPoint decks that were shared in the two rounds of listening sessions. Each provides additional analysis and detail. To develop a full understanding of the strategic planning findings and implications, these presentation materials should also be reviewed.

PROJECT TIMELINE



A wide-angle photograph of a grand, ornate theater interior. The ceiling is a large, circular dome with intricate gold and blue patterns. The walls are decorated with classical architectural elements, including columns and arched niches. A live band is performing on a stage at the far end, illuminated by purple and blue stage lights. The audience, seen from behind, fills the lower half of the frame, seated in rows of chairs. A banner on the stage reads "STAGE: WELCH PACKAGING".

3.0 STATE OF THE DESTINATION

3.0 STATE OF THE DESTINATION

The first phase of the strategic planning process included an in-depth investigation of the State of the Destination, in essence, an examination of the critical issues facing Elkhart County's local tourism and hospitality industry relative to External Customers, Products & Services, Placemaking and the ECCVB Structure.

A wide scope of background research from a number of secondary data and report sources was examined, allowing the planning team to consider a variety of factors and trends including:

- Lodging inventory and performance;
- Changes related to key attractions and destination product themes;
- Trends within the economic impact of the industry over recent years;
- Visitor profile demographics and interests;
- Resident preliminary views on tourism from the Vibrant Communities discussions; and
- Recent partnering efforts by the ECCVB on community placemaking programs with organizations including the Community Foundation of Elkhart County, multiple chambers of commerce, and local municipalities.

A series of public listening sessions were held across the County to ensure broad participation from both tourism and local community stakeholders, including tourism and hospitality industry partners, government officials and Elkhart County residents. In addition, two new survey initiatives were undertaken of both Elkhart County visitors and Elkhart County residents, to better understand the attitudes and perceptions of the destination's product offerings and the local tourism industry.

Collectively, this information was aggregated, and a mix of key findings and critical issues were identified for each of the four strategy areas found to the right.

STRATEGY AREAS



3.1 EXTERNAL CUSTOMERS

In order to evaluate recent market trends for Elkhart County's lodging and hospitality industry, a review of visitation volumes and lodging performance was considered. Based on an analysis developed by CERTEC, while the level of visitor spending grew by an annual rate of approximately 5% between 2015 and 2019, the number of total visitors was relatively flat at around 5 million visitors annually. This visitor volume only grew by an annual rate of 1% over the similar 2015-2019 time frame, indicating a relatively stagnant level of expansion of the visitor industry. With the disruption caused by COVID in 2020, visitation dropped to less than half the levels of previous years.

A wide variety of new transient accommodations helped support these visitation volumes. There are a total of 3,101 rooms in Elkhart County, with 72% of the rooms located in the City of Elkhart and the remaining rooms spread throughout Goshen, Middlebury, and Nappanee.

Reflecting the range of new hotel construction that occurred through the 2019-2021 time period, approximately 30% of the County's room base was added in that 36-month period.

These included:

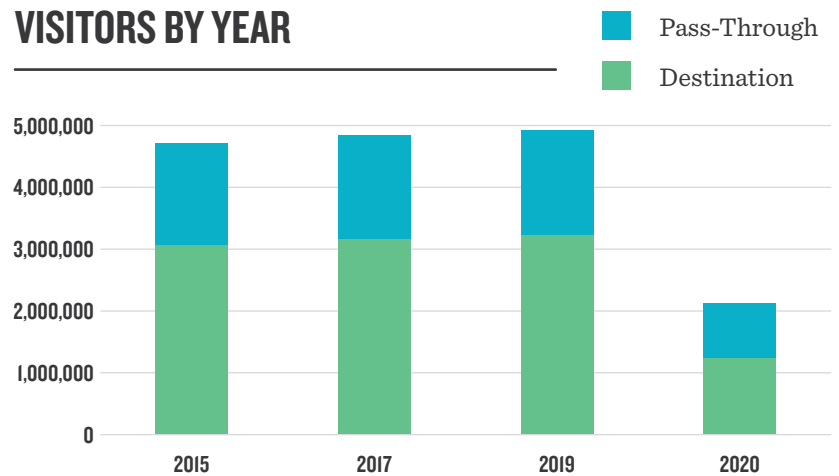
- Four Points by Sheraton Elkhart (101 rooms)
- Holiday Inn Express & Suites Elkhart North (84 rooms)
- Tru by Hilton Elkhart (82 rooms)
- Fairfield Inn & Suites Goshen (92 rooms)
- Home2 Suite by Hilton Elkhart (91 rooms)
- Courtyard Elkhart (99 rooms)
- Hotel Elkhart, Tapestry Collection by Hilton (93 rooms)

These additions, teamed with relatively flat visitation growth, resulted in 2021 occupancy rates in the 56-57% level, approximately 6-8% below healthy rates achieved in 2017.

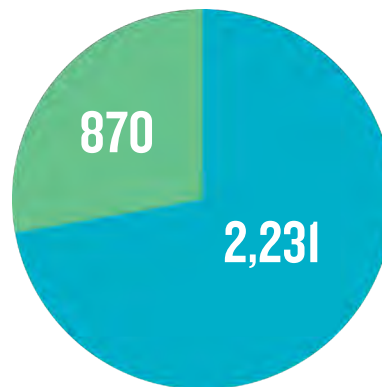


Four Points by Sheraton Elkhart

VISITORS BY YEAR



Source: STR YE 2021



GUEST ROOM INVENTORY

- Elkhart
- Goshen, Middlebury & Nappanee

Source: STR YE 2021

YEAR BUILT



Holiday Inn Express & Suites Elkhart



Home2 Suite By Hilton Elkhart



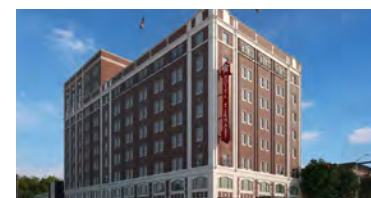
Tru by Hilton Elkhart



Courtyard Elkhart



Fairfield Inn & Suites Goshen



Hotel Elkhart, Tapestry Collection by Hilton

Although most travelers came to Elkhart County as an overnight visitor (60%), the remaining 40% were day-trippers and thus while in the County, many spent the night at another location. These visitors were very satisfied with their Elkhart County experience, as they rated their satisfaction at 4.5 on a 5 point scale, with 95% rating it as good or excellent.

VISITOR SATISFACTION %

95%

*Overnight Visitor
Satisfaction as
Good or Excellent*

92%

*Day-tripper Visitor
Satisfaction as
Good or Excellent*

Source: Visitor Profile Survey

While the consistent volume of visitors and strong satisfaction bodes well for Elkhart County as a destination, the older orientation of most visitors poses a critical issue as to how the destination will be positioned in the next 5 to 10 years.

The ECCVB has recognized this reality and engaged Destination Think in 2019 to identify new prospective visitor segments that held potential. This effort resulted in three niche segments being prioritized:

NICHE SEGMENTS

The Cultural Explorer



Visitors centered around craftsmanship and cultural experiences, including the area's strong Amish reputation.

The Creatives



Visitors attracted by arts, crafts, and music.

The Roadtrippers



RV travelers attracted by the manufacturing dominance of Elkhart County.

In addition to identifying the niche segments, this effort stimulated the creation of the “Well Crafted” brand to capture the essence of Elkhart County. The important progress that came out of this planning process was placed on pause in 2020 as COVID hit, limiting the momentum toward the execution of efforts targeted to these new niche audiences. This pause occurred in both new communication efforts targeted to these segments, as well as the development of new products and experiences that would resonate with these niche audiences. It was recognized that many of these younger visitor segments would need engaging, experiential offerings to truly capture their interest and attention.

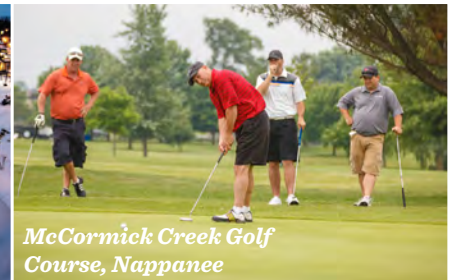
Beyond the niche audiences identified by Destination Think, opportunities to grow visitation within the youth sports and outdoor recreation segments (which emerged through leadership interviews and the public input sessions). These opportunities are driven by powerful new assets like the Elkhart Aquatic Center and increased local community investments in the diversity of hiking, biking and kayaking.



*Pumpkinvine Trail,
Goshen*



*NIBCO Water & Ice Park,
Elkhart*



*McCormick Creek Golf
Course, Nappanee*



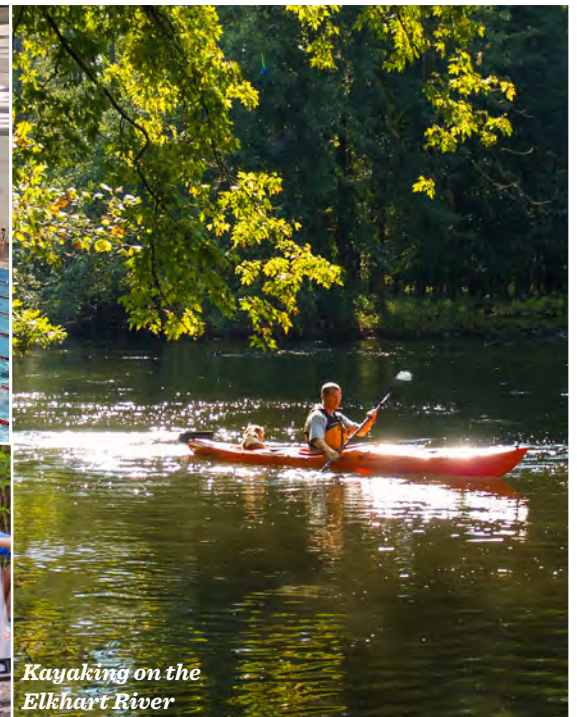
*Elkhart Aquatic Center,
Elkhart*



*Moose Rugby Grounds,
Elkhart*



*Linton's Enchanted Gardens,
Elkhart*



*Kayaking on the
Elkhart River*

As previously noted, while 60% of visitors come as overnight guests, the 40% who come as day-trippers hold strong potential for extending their stay and contributing more to the Elkhart County visitor economy. The visitor profile survey identified a variety of factors that would play an important role in converting these day-trippers to overnight guests.

One additional factor that needs to be recognized is the shifts occurring in group motorcoach visitor segments. This segment has seen moderating demand and was particularly hard hit with the impacts of COVID. While this had been an important segment historically for Elkhart County, because of its older visitor focus and reduced demand, a shift in group market focus should occur, capitalizing on the range of smaller meeting facilities and social event spaces that now exist throughout the County.

KEY FINDINGS

Though the investigation of these External Customer factors, a variety of critical issues were prioritized including:

- Need to expand demographic appeal
 - current over-reliance on mature/boomer segments;
- Increasing importance of independent leisure travel and demand for new experiential product development;
- Expand connections with Destination Think niches;
- Investigate other market segment potentials – sports events, leisure outdoor recreation, small meetings, etc.; and
- Formulate strategies to convert day visits to overnight stays.



Wellfield Botanical Garden, Elkhart

3.2 PRODUCTS & SERVICES

The visitor-oriented attractions and experiences are a key element in how a destination is both experienced and perceived by its visitors. An image and perception study was completed previously in 2013 and while it was conducted a number of years ago, it is still believed to be representative of how destination visitors perceive Elkhart County. The size of the font in the word cloud diagram depicts the frequency that a theme was identified by visitors during the 2013 study. The dominant themes related directly to the Amish, along with related shopping and food & beverage elements that also frequently have an Amish overlay in the destination.

As a part of the visitor profile survey conducted by the consulting team, respondents were asked to note the attractions they visited and their level of satisfaction with the attraction. The Included table presents both the % of respondents who rated the attraction experience as excellent, and the % of respondents noting they went to a particular attraction. The table highlights the diversity of both traditional and emerging new attractions that are providing high quality experiences for visitors, including those that are relevant to the niche audience segments. It is also notable that many Amish based experiences were among the most visited attractions.

A challenge that was frequently noted in interviews and public input sessions was the changing nature of the Amish culture and population in Elkhart County. Many Amish families are choosing to work in the RV manufacturing plants and are pursuing a wider array of interests and activities, rather than the more traditional agricultural or furniture crafting business that helped build the reputation of the destination. Additionally, there have been ownership changes among key Amish themed attractions within the destination. These trends are collectively making it more difficult to experience the core Amish themes in ways similar to how they have traditionally been presented.



ATTRACTION	% RATING	
	EXCELLENT	% VISITED
Wellfield Botanic Gardens	74%	21%
RV/MH Hall of Fame Museum	72%	19%
Das Dutchman Essenhaus	70%	75%
Menno-Hof Museum	70%	28%
Downtown Shipshewana	67%	84%
Heritage Trail Tour	66%	41%
Quilt Gardens Tour	65%	43%
Blue Gate Theater	63%	38%
Shipshewana Trading Place	63%	50%
Pumpkinvine Nature Trail	60%	15%
Midwest Museum of American Art	60%	6%
Lerner Theatre	57%	6%
Shipshewana Flea Market	57%	65%
Ruthmere	53%	8%
Davis Mercantile	52%	56%

To effectively attract and engage the new visitor segments noted in Section 3.1, a broader diversity of attractions and experiences will need to evolve. Whether it is experiences related to arts and music that will have greater appeal for the Creatives or attracting more youth sporting events, a mix of new products and experiences must proactively be pursued. This again was beginning to occur prior to the COVID challenges of 2020 with initiatives such as the “Makers along the Heritage Trail” showcasing local ceramic artisans, bakeries and brew pubs. Without new product development strategies and investments supporting the interests of the new targeted audiences, there is a risk that new visitors could be attracted based on experience expectations without the depth of product execution within the destination on the brand promises that would leave these visitors dissatisfied.

Beyond the Amish dominance, Elkhart County has long been known as the RV Capital of the World, with its broad range of manufacturing entities calling the County home. Many have noted the potential to act on this RV presence in new ways, similar to other destinations who have brought innovative partnerships with manufacturers and the visitor industry.



THOR
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CASE STUDY - JOHN DEERE QUAD CITIES EXHIBITS

John Deere, the iconic maker of farm equipment, has embraced the significant consumer interest, and have created a number of programs that provide consumers to interact with the company's history and products, including the John Deere Historic Site, John Deere Harvester Works, John Deere Pavilion, and John Deere Store. Visit Quad Cities has leveraged the investments of John Deere to attract visitors, and worked to develop additional agritourism related attractions and experiences within nearby Western Illinois and Eastern Iowa.



*John Deere Pavilion,
Moline, IL (Source: John Deere)*



*John Deere Historic Site,
Dixon, IL (Source: John Deere)*

It is important to recognize that the ECCVB has been a leader within the region in embracing a more direct role in tourism product development activities over the past 10 years. The organization invested in the creation of the 2013 Product Development Plan, which detailed an array of approaches for the ECCVB to use to take more proactive steps in moving new product development efforts forward in Elkhart County. Both the Heritage Trail Driving Tour and the Quilt Gardens Along the Heritage Trail are examples of the ECCVB developed programs that demonstrate the power of linking attractions and experiences and curating special interest themes that appeal and deliver an array of experiences. Additionally, the ECCVB has provided investments in feasibility and planning studies that have resulted in the construction and renovation of significant new product additions in the destination, including the Hotel Elkhart, the Beacon Aquatic Center, and the Lerner and Goshen Theater renovations. Finally, through the Vibrant Communities Initiative, the ECCVB has created a community driven process that results in the generation of new resident supported placemaking programs and projects.

Lastly, whether it is developing new products or reinterpreting existing products to speak to broader audiences, strong care should be taken that these new initiatives do not negatively impact or minimize the existing Amish environment provided by Elkhart County. This theme has been a key identity in the County for many years and has strong attraction power that should continue to be valued.

KEY FINDINGS

Though the investigation of these Product and Service factors, a variety of critical issues were prioritized including:

- Need to retain/enhance the Amish culture traditional product;
- Need to build on Destination Think niche product development opportunities;
- Existing visitor experiences are largely mature oriented and younger age targets are critical in new product development;
- Lack of products/services for young families/children and tie-in to youth sports; and
- Strong potential for RV industry tourism related growth, with focus not just on dealers, but RV owners.

3.3 PLACEMAKING

As described previously, the ECCVB has been evolving in its role to bring a broader destination management perspective that takes proactive steps to mold the products of the destination. Within this evolution, the organization has recognized the relationship between the successful outcomes from building and promoting visitor attractions and the industry's impact on the quality of place for the residents of Elkhart County and its communities. Through this evolution, the ECCVB has been on the forefront of successful destination management efforts and has taken a leadership role in championing placemaking initiatives throughout Elkhart County.

Placemaking:

Investments in community aesthetics, amenities, or activity generation that support and contribute to increases in community vibrancy. These same factors, primarily social offerings and community aesthetics, can have a direct impact on the experiences of visitors regardless of the primary driver of their visit.

Placemaking, when applied within community planning and economic development context, relates to the investments in strategies that improve and enhance community vibrancy and livability, specifically related to community aesthetics, amenities or activity generation. Research conducted by the Knight Foundation of cities across the country have identified a direct link between these core elements and the attachment of residents to their city. The finding further indicates that cities with the highest levels of resident attachment experienced stronger levels of economic growth and were more successful in achieving net increases in attracting population growth.



The ECCVB's 2013 Tourism Product Development Plan established as its mission statement to "Assist in the development of Elkhart County and its communities in ways that promote entrepreneurship and the visitor industry's long-term viability, while enhancing the quality of place and of the life of residents." New efforts outlined in the plan were established to focus efforts around the following four areas:

1. Artisan Diversity;
2. Creative, Vibrant Downtowns;
3. Active Sports & Outdoor Recreation; and
4. Diversity of Quality Lodging.

The need to create greater community awareness and gain support from elected officials related to the value and benefits of investments in placemaking were the primary drivers behind the ECCVB's partnership with the Community Foundation of Elkhart County (CFEC) in the development of the Vibrant Communities Action Agenda. This community engagement and planning process involved a series of widely attended public presentations by noted placemaking experts, including Peter Kagayama and the City Doctor Katherine Loflin, along with community-based engagement activities that resulted in the development of 77 Action Agenda Items to enhance community quality of place. The Action Agenda served as a road map to guide community investments toward these important projects. Given the success of both the program and the partnership with the CFEC, Vibrant Communities is embarking on a second Action Agenda process in 2022.

As the Vibrant Communities resident focused placemaking efforts evolved, it was clear that many were oriented to making Elkhart County downtowns more creative and vibrant, stimulating new and expanded arts and the artisan communities, and enhancing the array of outdoor experiences available to residents. These priorities are in direct alignment with strategies created in the 2013 Tourism Product Development Plan. The intersection and relevancy to both residents and visitors was clear and if done well it reinforces the oft used line *"A great place to live is a great place to visit."* It is also important to recognize the alignment of these priorities and activities with the niche audiences identified by Destination Think, specifically the Creatives and the Cultural Explorers.



*Hispanic Heritage Festival,
Goshen*

The ECCVB has found success through aligning and integrating new placemaking initiatives within the organization's broader tourism product development strategy, which has been guided by *three distinct approaches*.

1) Creating an attraction or experience essentially something brand new. This is often the most difficult as it can take significant resources and the planning process can extend over a long period of time.

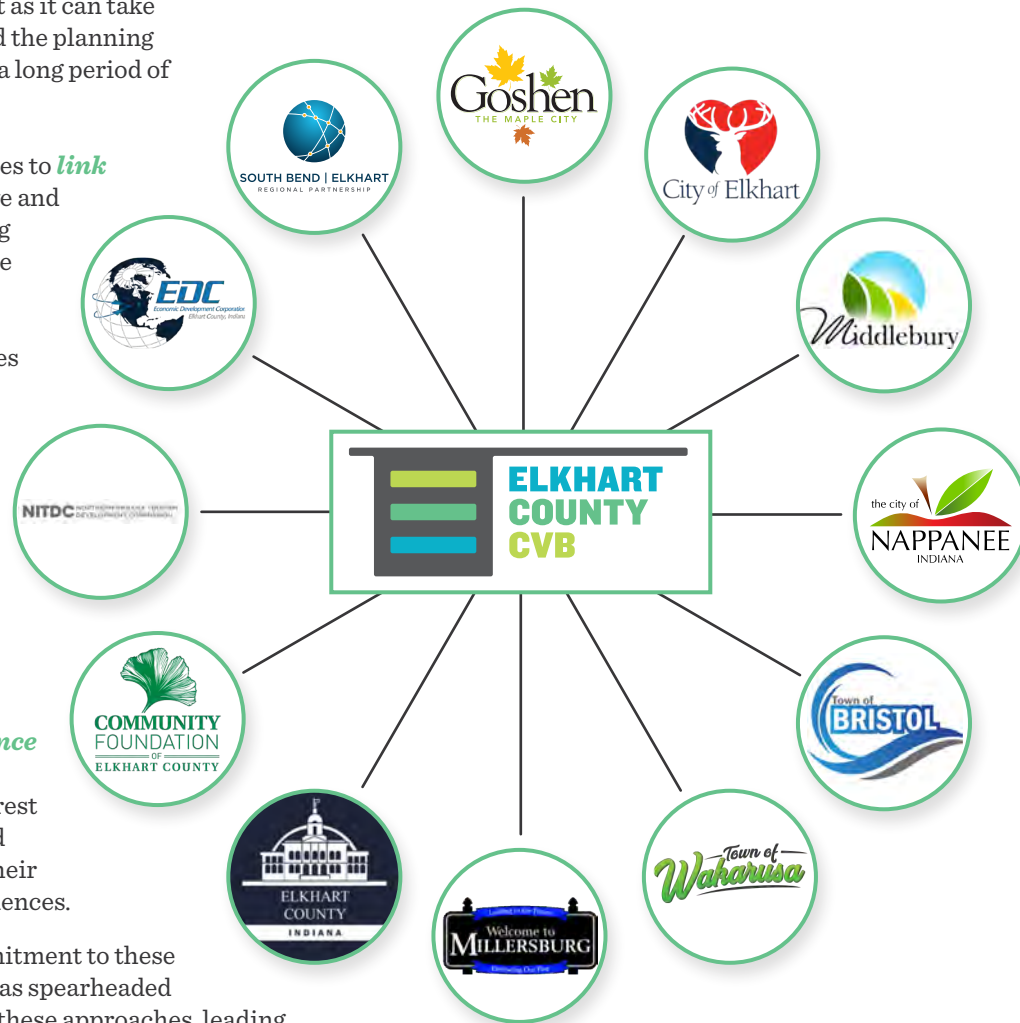
2) Acting on opportunities to link existing assets in creative and innovative ways, building on the maxim "The whole is greater than the sum of its parts." Too often, attractions or experiences operate independently and have limited power to draw on their own. By integrating a critical mass of assets, they can often have much greater attraction power and be more relevant to a prospective visitor.

3) Executing programs and activities that enhance an existing product or experience that has interest but has not been updated or refreshed to expand their relevancy to today's audiences.

Demonstrating its commitment to these principles, the ECCVB has spearheaded initiatives using each of these approaches, leading to some of the most recognized quality of place elements in Elkhart County.

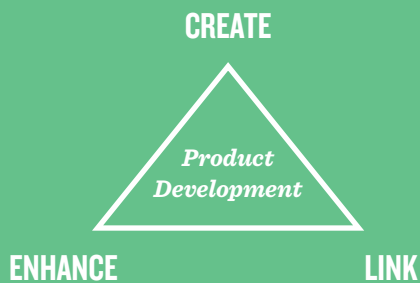
Due in large part to the success of the Vibrant Communities process in creating greater community awareness of the value of placemaking as both a visitor and resident attraction strategy, both local governments and community/economic development organizations are embracing activities and plans to enhance quality of place. A key outcome of the Action Agenda was the identification of all of the strategic partnerships needed for project and program implementation to achieve the desired outcomes of economic and population growth. As a champion of placemaking activities within the community, the ECCVB can continue to play a larger convening and coordination role, helping to bring various entities together whether cities and towns, the EDC, and the Community Foundation. Additionally, there is a need for the ECCVB to help define ways to measure these roles and the overall effectiveness of these placemaking efforts. This will help ensure the organization is recognized for the time, staff and resources they commit to these efforts.

ECCVB RELATIONSHIPS



A final point relating to placemaking is the need to stimulate innovative thought leaders. Often, new concepts and ideas germinate in informal settings as the thought leaders convene over a coffee or a drink.

ECCVB PLACEMAKING PROJECTS



CREATE

New Product Experiences

- SoMa (Lerner Theatre)
- Goshen Theater Feasibility & Fundraising Plan
- Downtown Hotel Feasibility Study (Elkhart & Goshen)
- Vibrant Communities Plan (Community Action Agendas)
- Coppes Commons Study (Nappanee)

LINK

Mental Mortar with Linking and Integrating Existing Projects

- Gateway Mile
- Heritage Trail Driving Tour
- Quilt Gardens along th Heritage Trail

ENHANCE

New Interpretation or Presentation of Existing Products

- Signature Event Sponsorships
- Seward Johnson QGT
- Destination Experience Development Activities
- Epic Art Adventures for 2022

KEY FINDINGS

Through the investigation of these Placemaking factors, a variety of critical issues were prioritized including:

- Need to build a full understanding of what placemaking is, how it is applied and past successes;
- Determination of KPIs and measurements for placemaking and partnerships, including communicating of value proposition;
- Limited recognition of ECCVB role in placemaking and sponsorships (residents and elected leaders), including Vibrant Communities;
- Identification of the lead contingent in driving innovative thinking in community development; and
- Clarification of role and partnerships in resident attraction.



**Quilt Gardens
Elkhart**



**Downtown
Goshen**

3.4 ECCVB ORGANIZATION

The ECCVB has taken active steps to further its evolution toward operating as a true destination management organization (DMO), embracing the role of both external visitor promotion, as well as internal community placemaking and visitor product development.

A key challenge for the organization is defining the “right balance” for the organization and the associated allocation of resources (both staff and fiscal) to optimize opportunities going forward. Importantly, the “Well Crafted” brand must not only be communicated effectively to prospective external audiences, but significant new efforts must be undertaken to develop new attractions and experiences that will engage and speak to these new audiences.

As part of our analysis efforts, the performance of the ECCVB was benchmarked against national norms using averages from Destinations International, the industry’s leading trade association. Among the operational key findings was the fact that the organization operates at staffing levels somewhat lower than national norms. While the average staffing for organizations of a similar size is 11.3 full time equivalents (FTEs), the ECCVB operates with only 8 FTEs. With a total of 3,100 lodging rooms, Elkhart County includes a slightly smaller inventory than the average 4,000 rooms of similar CVBs. As part of the analytical efforts, additional findings indicate that the ECCVB has a board of directors that is sized slightly smaller than national norms (7 members versus 9) and the checkout rate (visitor tax rate + state sales tax rate) visitors pay for their hotel accommodations is 12%, with a visitor tax rate of 5%. This is one point below the industry norm of 13% with a 6% visitor tax rate. It should be noted that jurisdictions within the region are above 13%, including St. Joseph County at 15% total check out rate and 8% visitor tax rate.



In reviewing the ECCVB’s traditional role of marketing and promotion of the destination and the organization, they have demonstrated effective deployments utilizing the full range of traditional channels, including area guides, traditional print advertising supporting important partnerships with the Northern Indiana Tourism Development Commission, web based activities, and toll road billboards. Recently, activities have been initiated to broaden the destination identity, with one example being the use of two area guide covers “Amish Country” and “People and Places”. Additionally, the organization has integrated a variety of social media channels as a part of the activities to connect and engage prospective visitors. The main challenge going forward will be to continue to refine both the messaging and channels to speak to the new targeted audience segments. Given the nature of the more mature audiences that have traditionally made up the bulk of visitation, emerging digital and social media channels will likely take on greater importance as younger, more diverse audiences are targeted.

Beyond marketing and promotion, the greater challenge for the organization will be its ability to truly stimulate the development of new products and experiences that speak to these new targeted audiences. While the organization has demonstrated its product development and placemaking commitment and capabilities, efforts will need to be expanded to provide the range of products and experiences needed to deliver on the “Well Crafted” branding promises. The ECCVB will need to increase activities that support the role as a Destination Architect, helping to shape and stimulate new destination elements that will attract a more diverse audience base. Essentially, the ECCVB will need to “Communicate Externally and Curate Internally”.

To effectively undertake these “Curate Internally” roles, the ECCVB will need to possess the sufficient staff and fiscal resources necessary to truly provide a leadership role and stimulate new product development and placemaking initiatives. They will need to clearly delineate these roles in their organizational chart and define the skill sets needed for this role and the associated budgets to undertake these efforts.

As the organization continues to broaden its role, targeting new audiences, taking on increased development and placemaking roles and advocating on behalf of the industry, clear metrics will need to be identified to demonstrate performance and effectiveness. These metrics and associated measures will need to be understood by both internal staff and the organization’s Board of Directors and Elkhart County Innkeeper Tax Commission.

KEY FINDINGS

Though the investigation of these Organization factors, a variety of critical issues were prioritized including:

- Agreement on ECCVB organization role priorities respecting marketing, product development/placemaking and advocacy/community relations;
- Clarity in the roles and responsibilities of the ECCVB in executing the “Well Crafted” brand to key audiences - Curate Internally & Communicate Externally;
- Refine integrated destination marketing to connect with new audience/segment priorities and resource allocation;
- Use of technology to engage existing and/or new visitors and stakeholders;
- Need for funding and related resources to act as destination architect/facilitator; and
- ECCVB effectiveness regarding research data interpretation and performance success metrics and measures.



4.0
GOHN BROS.

DESTINATION

STRATEGY

IMPLEMENTATION

Quilting

Fabric

GOHN BROS.

Clothing

Footwear

Downtown
Middlebury

4.0 DESTINATION STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

Using the findings of the State of the Destination as a foundation, this section outlines how the ECCVB should strategically position itself for the future. It outlines new Vision and Mission statements and identifies four strategic Pillars that incorporate a mix of objectives and strategies and tactics. Successful implementation of the plan's strategies and tactics will result in the ECCVB achieving the ultimate goal of this new strategic plan for Elkhart County's tourism industry to define and fully maximize its competitive advantage.

4.1 VISION, MISSION & PILLARS

VISION STATEMENT

Throughout this planning process, a wide variety of perspectives were gathered on Elkhart County's tourism potential in the coming years. This Vision is intentionally aspirational and focused on how Elkhart County will be regarded in the future as a visitor destination.

Elkhart County, IN is a "Well Crafted", year-round destination that embodies a diversity of arts and cultural attractions, vibrant downtown communities, sports and outdoor adventures, grounded in craftsmanship and an entrepreneurial spirit, attracting multi-generational audiences.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Mission reflects the organization's role in both promotion and community placemaking in Elkhart County, and the importance of ongoing collaboration with an array of entities to achieve the desired impacts.

The Elkhart County, IN Convention and Visitors Bureau is the county's champion for sustainable tourism promotion and placemaking initiatives to achieve economic vitality and enhanced quality of place through diverse affiliations and collaborations.

PILLARS

To help achieve this Vision and Mission, four strategic Pillars that serve to organize the objectives, strategies and tactics are recommended in the plan's framework. These communicate the essence of the new strategic directions recommended in this plan. The remainder of this section considers each of the following Pillars in greater detail:



4.2 DIVERSIFY



Diversify

Diversify the destination's visitor base to better position it to integrate multiple generations and interests.

As noted, the Diversify Pillar is focused on broadening the destination's target visitor audiences, and attracting a multi-generational visitor base who would be attracted by a mix of thematic experiences.

DIVERSIFY OBJECTIVE 1 - LAUNCH NEW COMMUNICATION INITIATIVES THAT CONNECT AND ENGAGE IDENTIFIED NICHE SEGMENTS - CREATIVE, CULTURAL AND ROADTRIPPERS.

The previous work developed by Destination Think set the stage for attracting three defined niche segments. Deeper refinements and approaches for connecting and engaging with these targets should be pursued.

STRATEGY 1 - ALIGN EXISTING ASSETS/EXPERIENCES WITH DEFINED NICHE OUTCOMES.

In order to provide a foundation on what and how Elkhart County is presented to the targeted niche segments, an inventory of how existing visitor assets relate to each niche audience should be developed and considered.

Tactic 1 - Develop a product matrix.

This matrix should inventory all key Elkhart County visitor assets and note low/mid/high relevance to each niche audience. This matrix will allow ECCVB staff to better understand how they frame and present the destination to demonstrate relevance to the niche segments. The matrix should also note the level of relevance to local resident audiences to keep community placemaking objectives top of mind.

Tactic 2 - Evaluate the need for a new/refined interpretation.

As the matrix is developed, ECCVB staff should consider if the current asset presentation would resonate with targets, or if new/refined interpretation would be required.

STRATEGY 2 - DEVELOP CONTENT RELEVANT TO THE DEFINED NICHE OUTCOMES.

Considering the findings of the asset matrix, new efforts to build content that showcases Elkhart County experiences and their relevancy to each segment should be developed.

Tactic 1 - Identify image needs.

As new ideas are formulated on how to connect with targeted niche audiences and what products and experiences to showcase, the range of existing images that could be used to present these experiences should be inventoried. In some instances, new photography could be needed to ensure the experiences capture the demographics and engagement in compelling ways.

Tactic 2 - Develop new "Well Crafted" copy.

New copy and associated imagery will need to be developed that speaks to the targeted niche audiences. This new content should integrate the "Well Crafted" theme whenever possible, reinforcing this theme in diverse ways.

Tactic 3 - Utilize softer, indirect approaches in presentation.

Rather than presenting this content in distinct sections targeted to individual niche sectors, a softer, more indirect approach should be considered that communicates this connection through the story's copy and imagery. The defined niche segmentation should be used more for internal planning and not as a foundation for external outreach.

Tactic 4 - Integrate Destination Think Playbook recommendations.

Destination Think developed individual Playbooks for each of the three niche audiences and presented recommendations as to storytelling, key messaging and image selection. These recommendations should be closely considered as this strategy evolves.

STRATEGY 3 - COMMUNICATE VIA MULTIPLE CHANNELS.

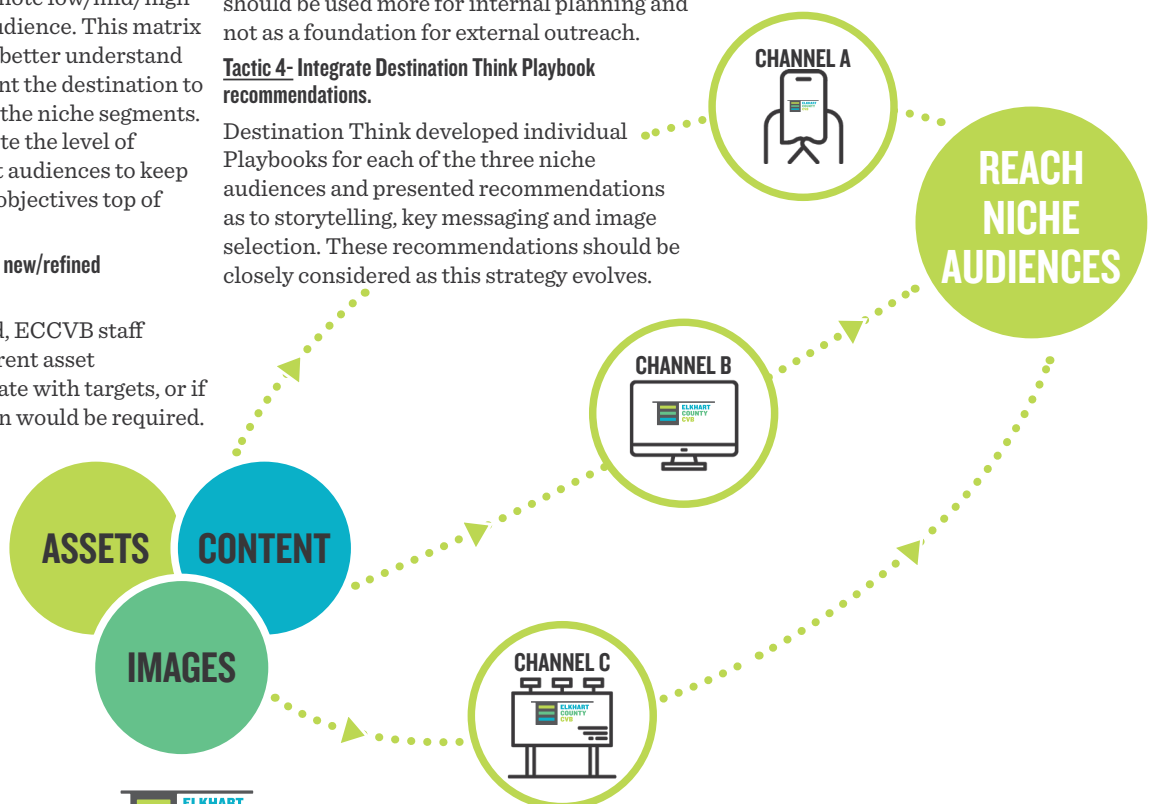
As the new communication elements are developed, the identification of planned channels for communication should also be considered. The traditional channels typically used by the ECCVB may or may not be the most effective way to connect and engage with a Cultural Explorer or other niche segment audiences. The prioritized channel approach should be considered as part of this objective's execution.

Tactic 1 - Evaluate desired channels by niches.

ECCVB staff should identify the full range of channels and approaches they have traditionally used in their marketing and communication outreach and evaluate which would be most relevant to each of the niche audiences. In some instances, new channels may need to be considered to increase potential connections and engagement with the target niche audience.

Tactic 2 - Prioritize new messaging integration.

As the new content and messaging approaches are developed, their roll out needs to be considered within a context of how it can be integrated with the existing content and themed approaches that have been traditionally utilized. Caution should be used to ensure existing audiences are not jeopardized and that message prioritization is closely considered.



2 DIVERSIFY OBJECTIVE 2 - DEEPEN PROMOTIONAL INITIATIVES TARGETED TO YOUTH SPORTS AND OUTDOOR RECREATION.

In addition to the new visitor niche segments noted in Objective 1, there is strong potential to use youth sports and outdoor recreation to help achieve the goals of the Diversify Pillar. New and expanded efforts should be made to connect and engage with these segments.

STRATEGY 1 - INVENTORY EXISTING ASSETS AND PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES.

Similar to the asset inventory and relevancy done for niche segments, an inventory of existing assets relevant to the destination's sports and outdoor recreation audiences should be undertaken. Additionally, any current promotional efforts related to each segment should be investigated.

Tactic 1 - Develop an asset listing.

An inventory of all Elkhart County assets related to both youth sports and outdoor recreation audiences should be developed. This listing should incorporate subheadings (such as Hiking, Biking, Kayaking) or (Rugby, Swimming, etc.) to provide additional clarity as to the types of visitors most likely be attracted. The ownership or management of each asset should also be identified.

Tactic 2 - Identify synergistic assets or experiences.

Destination selection decisions for both youth sports and outdoor recreation travelers are often made not just on the available facilities themselves but also on other assets that would be an important part of their visit. Identification of these synergistic assets (range of affordable name-brand hotels, other child-friendly attractions, quality F&B options, etc.) should also be a priority as they will likely be an important element to utilize in attracting these segments.

Tactic 3 - Identify current target audiences and promotional efforts.

Outreach to the asset managers of these youth sports and outdoor recreation assets should be pursued to understand the current target audiences they have prioritized and any outreach or promotional activities they are utilizing to drive interest and attraction.

STRATEGY 2 - IDENTIFY TARGET AUDIENCES AND CHANNELS.

Increased clarity should be developed regarding the nature and orientation of prospective visitors that could be attracted from these segments. Rather than new research and/or survey efforts, preliminary insights could be gained from discussions with entities currently operating and managing these assets.

Tactic 1 - Identify demographic and geographic attributes of targets.

Based on discussions with the local asset managers, outline the key audiences that hold the greatest potential for attraction, along with any insights gained regarding their associated demographics, geographic concentrations and what influences/drives their fundamental travel decisions.

Tactic 2 - Investigate preferred channels to drive connections.

Both target audiences may have channels they use and prefer that are different from the ECCVB's traditional approaches. These could include various traveling sport associations, university sport publications or outdoor recreation apps. These channels should be investigated to determine any potential opportunities for messaging integration.

Tactic 3 - Use an approach similar to the defined Destination Think Niches in prioritizing outreach activities to the youth sports and outdoor recreation audiences.

Similar to the Destination Think niche messaging integration, the prioritization and extent of outreach activities should consider existing content and themed approaches and ensure existing audiences are not jeopardized.

CONNECT IN ELKHART COUNTY



Connect in Elkhart County is a county-wide trail planning and development initiative that was initiated by the Community Foundation of Elkhart County. Connect In Elkhart County has established a vision of an Elkhart County where "...vibrant and active communities come together on a world-class, interconnected network of trails, streets, and public spaces where neighbors can meet, companies can grow, and visitors can experience everything our county has to offer."

In addition to the development of the plan, the Community Foundation has added dedicated staffing from the organization to manage the plan's implementation. Primary CFEC activities will include:

- *Facilitate the creation of a trail organization that leads and/or coordinates the building and management of trail facilities;*
- *Convene government, philanthropy and corporate citizens to advocate for and financially contribute to the trail network's success; and*
- *Enable the efforts of small businesses, non-profits and community members to activate and animate the trail.*

Connect in Elkhart County represents a significant commitment by the community to invest in new facilities that will contribute to quality of place improvements for residents that will also have relevance to a new external visitor audience targeted by the ECCVB for outdoor recreation. It is possible that the ECCVB could identify new strategic partnerships across all three of the identified primary activities.

3 DIVERSIFY OBJECTIVE 3 - EXECUTE NEW INITIATIVES THAT INCREASE THE IDENTITY OF ELKHART COUNTY AS A MULTI-DAY EXPERIENCE.

As noted in the State of the Destination findings, approximately 40% of visitors are coming to Elkhart County as a day visitor, with many staying for a significant part of the day. More efforts should be made in advance of a visitor's trip to convince them that Elkhart County is a multi-day experience.

STRATEGY 1 - INTEGRATE MULTI-DAY MESSAGING IN THE AREA GUIDE.

The Area Guide is often a key resource to connect with prospective visitors while they are in the trip planning stages of their travel decisions. Multiple approaches should be taken in the guide to reinforce the need for an overnight stay while in Elkhart County.

Tactic 1 - Expand the messaging in initial pages of the destination Area Guides.

While there is current content in the Area Guide regarding ways to experience Elkhart County over multiple days, it is in the later portions of the guide and centered around the Heritage Trail experience. Messaging on why the destination experience requires multiple days should be presented in multiple ways early on in the guide.

Tactic 2 - Develop itineraries considering new targeted audiences.

Whether in stories or suggested itineraries, ways to experience the destination over multiple days should be "served up" particularly considering the interests and desires of the new targeted audiences.

STRATEGY 2 - DEVELOP SIMILAR MESSAGING EFFORTS FOR OTHER CHANNELS.

While the Area Guide is a key resource in trip planning, similar multi-day messaging efforts should be utilized in other visitor connective channels.

Tactic 1 - Develop condensed messaging for social media.

The messaging and concepts developed for stimulating multi-day interest should be re-crafted to shorter, bite-sized messaging for use in various social media communication efforts. These would use similar themes as the Area Guide but be more suited for these channels.

Tactic 2 - Utilize extended first-person stories on the website.

Given the greater depth available for web based connections, longer, more detailed approaches should be utilized to stimulate multi-day thinking on the website. First person stories that reinforce how others were glad they spent multiple days could be showcased.



*Fruit Hills Winery & Orchard,
Bristol*

4 DIVERSIFY OBJECTIVE 4 - UNDERTAKE INCREASED PRIORITIES TO ATTRACT SMALL GROUP MEETINGS AND SOCIAL REUNION GATHERINGS.

In a post-COVID environment, the nature of the group market has evolved and efforts should shifted from targeted motorcoach outreach with their older visitor base, to other group opportunities including small group meetings and social reunion gatherings. This does not mean there should be no motorcoach connections, but that new efforts should be prioritized to other prospects.

STRATEGY 1 - UNDERTAKE TARGET OPPORTUNITY DISCUSSIONS.

The range of facilities that can accommodate small group meetings have expanded in Elkhart County and possess a mix of size and quality. The ECCVB should undertake “targeted opportunity” discussions with venues to determine segments holding the greatest potential in the future.

Tactic 1 - Convene outreach with facilities to refine targeted opportunities.

Launch semi-annual outreach sessions where venue operators convene and discuss successes and challenges in attracting various group market segments. Use this input in prioritizing areas of focus and building synergies in how and why segments are targeted.

Tactic 2 - Engage chambers/industry groups as part of sales force.

As new group market opportunities are refined, work to use area Chambers or other industry groups to stimulate their members or associates to showcase Elkhart County as a great meetings destination. Often these entities can be important allies in getting that message out to expanded targets.

STRATEGY 2 - INTEGRATE FINDINGS IN MARKETING EFFORTS.

As these new group market opportunities and targets are identified, refine marketing materials to showcase reasons to consider Elkhart County. Identify ways that the venues themselves could reinforce these outreach efforts.

Tactic 1 - Integrate insights in marketing and group meeting support materials.

Both online and print materials should be updated to incorporate insights gained from the venue operators. This should include both marketing outreach efforts, as well as support information that could help stimulate meeting planner decision making.



*The Learner Theatre,
Elkhart*

4.3 CURATE



Curate

Curate new products and experiences that resonate with targeted segments, while being synergistic with existing assets.

The Curate Pillar recognizes that to successfully attract a wider array of visitor segments, new placemaking and experience elements will need to be developed. The ECCVB is well suited to increase its activities as a leader in stimulating ideas and working to move them into part of the Elkhart County visitor experience.

CURATE OBJECTIVE 1 - ALIGN EXISTING ASSETS/ EXPERIENCES WITH THE DEFINED NICHE AUDIENCE SEGMENTS.

While the ECCVB will play a leadership role, the organization requires a diverse range of individuals and businesses to participate in identifying and strategizing how new products and experiences can be brought to life that will resonate with the targeted niche segments.

STRATEGY 1 - IDENTIFY WORKING GROUPS AND SUPPORT.

Three separate product development working groups should be created, focusing around the three niche audience segments defined by Destination Think. These groups will work to consider both existing and prospective new experiences that would resonate with targeted visitor niche audiences.

Tactic 1 - Identify prospective individuals for participation.

Working group participants who have clear relevance to the individual niche segments will need to be identified, along with outreach efforts to build participation. These individuals will need to be educated on the goals of the working group and what ultimately is anticipated to come from its efforts.

Tactic 2 - Designate dedicated ECCVB staff to manage efforts.

ECCVB destination development staff should play a management role for each of the working groups, guiding idea development and building consensus on concepts that hold the greatest potential. The same staff member should work with all three groups to ensure ideas that hold potential across niche segments are considered across groups.

Tactic 3 - Showcase successful initiatives.

As innovative ideas are developed and moved forward in a particular working group, use them as “case studies” for others. Call out factors that helped elevate that concept, elements that were considered and either accepted or rejected and challenges that will need to be addressed to move the concept forward.

Tactic 4 - Facilitate collaborative meetings.

As work within the product development working groups evolve, consider holding joint sessions with all three working groups where opportunities to tie experiences among multiple niche segments are identified and considered.

STRATEGY 2 - INTEGRATE NEW PRODUCT IDEAS IN MARKETING.

As efforts to move new products and experiences proceed, make sure they are integrated in marketing outreach activities outlined in the Diversify Pillar.

Tactic 1 - Showcase new experiences as they evolve.

ECCVB staff should identify the full range of channels and approaches they have traditionally used in their marketing and communication outreach and evaluate which would be most relevant to each of the niches. In some instances, new channels may need to be considered to increase potential connections and engagement with the target niche.



*Downtown
Elkhart*

2 CURATE OBJECTIVE 2 - LINK AND INTEGRATE EXISTING RESOURCES THAT ARE RELEVANT TO YOUTH SPORTS AND OUTDOOR RECREATION MARKETS.

To be increasingly relevant to the youth sports and outdoor recreation segments, many of the existing Elkhart County assets need to be linked and integrated, rather than be seen as independent, autonomous assets and experiences. A focus on using and showcasing the collective power of these assets must take place.

STRATEGY 1 - USE PREVIOUSLY DEVELOPED ASSET LISTING TO IDENTIFY HIGH-VALUE OPPORTUNITIES.

An inventory of youth sports and outdoor recreational assets and experiences would have been developed as a tactic in the Diversity Pillar. This inventory should be used as a starting point to raise awareness on future opportunities.

Tactic 1 - Identify potential product pairings.

With the findings of the inventory done in the Diversify Pillar, work to identify logical product pairings like multiple outdoor recreation experiences (how/where to have a great biking experience and then an afternoon kayaking the river) or youth sports experiences (following an Aquatic Center meet, go to another great children's experience like the Wakarusa Dime Store).

Tactic 2 - Use working groups to stimulate dialogue across multiple products.

Integrate youth sports and outdoor recreation ideas with concepts evolving from the niche segments by having cross dialogue across working groups. It's very likely that outdoor recreation ideas could have strong relevance to all three niche visitor segments. Again, the same staff member should work with all three groups to ensure ideas that hold potential across all niche segments are considered.

STRATEGY 2 - IDENTIFY RESOURCES NEEDED TO BE COMPETITIVE.

To effectively compete, particularly in the youth sports marketplace, it is often not just the physical facilities a destination can provide but also the range of incentives it can offer. These can range from bid fees, to helping underwrite lodging costs of participants. A clear understanding of what Elkhart County is able to offer is key, as well as how this relates to offerings of key competitive destinations also vying for similar demand.

Tactic 1 - Engage facility management to better understand the expectations they face.

The individuals operating and managing key facilities will likely be one of the best sources to understand who they target, what expectations these groups have, whether on the facilities themselves or on incentives to lure them to consider Elkhart County. Multiple sessions bringing these individuals together to share experiences will be an important input to the process.

Tactic 2 - Consider local businesses as potential sponsors.

Often, local businesses can be important allies in providing resources to leverage the attraction power of the facilities themselves. Outreach to these businesses to develop a deeper understanding of the level of interest and various ways the business community could be part of an attraction solution.

Tactic 3 - Consider potential product improvements to enhance competitiveness.

Based on findings of both the existing asset base of Elkhart County and the expectations of prospective visitor groups, improvements to facilities themselves will likely be identified ranging from enhanced field lighting to new kayak launch locations. The costs of various improvements and likely impacts to draw additional visitation should be outlined and considered.



Elkhart Aquatic Center,
Elkhart



Moose Rugby Grounds,
Elkhart

3 CURATE OBJECTIVE 3 - EXPAND CONNECTIONS WITH LOCAL RV MANUFACTURERS TO INCREASE THEIR REALIZATION OF OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN THE TOURISM MARKETPLACE.

As noted in the State of the Destination, the greater opportunity to build on Elkhart County's identity as the *RV Capital of the World* came up time and time again in interviews and public input sessions. New initiatives need to be undertaken to further explore how the visitor industry can more extensively build on this competitive advantage and demonstrate why manufacturers should increasingly think of themselves as part of the local visitor industry.

STRATEGY 1 - DEVELOP A ROAD TRIP VISIT SHOWCASING EXPERIENCES OF OTHER DESTINATIONS.

More than a decade ago, the ECCVB led a team of thought leaders to Asheville, North Carolina to better understand how this destination used their ECCVB and the visitor industry in proactive product development and placemaking efforts. The on-the-ground opportunity to learn from Asheville was an important initiative that led to many of the strides the ECCVB has made in both new product development and placemaking over the last 10 years. A similar initiative should be considered on how new approaches could be used to build on the RV industry presence.

Tactic 1 - Identify examples of regional destinations.

A mix of regional destinations that have successfully integrated powerful manufacturers as part of their tourism offerings should be identified. These could include John Deere in the Quad Cities or Caterpillar in Peoria as examples. As examples are noted, they should be prioritized as to which could provide the greatest case studies for Elkhart County to learn and gain insights..

Tactic 2 - Form a leadership group for road trip participations.

As road trip plans are developed, a contingent of leaders should be identified that could not only visualize how case study lessons can be applied in Elkhart County, but also be on the frontline of sharing and convincing others of the vision opportunity.

Tactic 3 - Develop materials outlining lessons learned.

Coming out of the road trip, lessons learned should be captured in a variety of ways (eg., reports, illustrated graphics, first person stories) that could be used in outreach efforts to explain the Elkhart County RV opportunity.

STRATEGY 2- EDUCATE THE RV INDUSTRY ABOUT LOCAL TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES.

As lessons developed from the road trip evolve, examples of new opportunities should be proactively developed. As ideas are refined, specific steps should be taken to demonstrate why they make sense from a business context and the benefits RV manufacturers might realize from being a partner in moving ideas forward.

Tactic 1 - Develop preliminary concepts on ways Elkhart could act on opportunities.

As ideas germinate from the road trip on how Elkhart County could build on its manufacturing identity, new concepts should be outlined and evaluated. They would strive to showcase Elkhart County as a national leader in not only attracting manufacturing suppliers, but also RV owners and enthusiasts. This could range from national RV homecoming events to multi-week exhibitions of the latest innovations in the RV industry and how owners can incorporate them.

Tactic 2 - Craft examples of how new visitor attraction concepts can strengthen engagement with an RV customer.

Steps should be taken to craft a business rationale on how attracting more RV owners to Elkhart County makes sense and should be considered as a marketing strategy by the manufacturers themselves. The ability to deepen customer connections and engagement and think in terms of lifetime value of customers should be outlined.

Tactic 3 - Showcase opportunities to targeted CEOs.

Using lessons from the road trip, prospective new opportunities and business rationale developed in the other tactics, outreach to a select mix of CEOs should be undertaken. This would proactively present the opportunity and why it makes sense from a business context. Road show leaders should be utilized to help present these opportunities.



Elkhart County 4-H Fair, Goshen

4 CURATE OBJECTIVE 4 - UTILIZE THE VIBRANT COMMUNITIES BRAND AND ACTION AGENDA PROCESS TO IDENTIFY AND PRIORITIZE FUTURE COMMUNITY DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES.

Vibrant Communities has been a vital initiative to move placemaking forward in Elkhart County and new efforts outlined in the previous three objectives should be considered in alignment with initiatives and priorities of the Vibrant Communities process.

STRATEGY 1 - USE THE 2022 ACTION AGENDA FOR NEW PROJECT IDENTIFICATION.

The 2022 Vibrant Communities Action Agenda process will result in the development of prioritized community-based, placemaking projects and programs. The ECCVB should identify the projects and programs that are most aligned with the organization's visitor audience and promotion targets.

Tactic 1 - Develop a matrix with Vibrant Community projects.

Similar to what was undertaken in other product inventory matrices, the various action agenda items should be identified and categorized.

Tactic 2 - Build consensus on their alignment with other objectives.

Utilizing this inventory, their alignment with other ideas and concepts developed in Objectives 1-3 of this Pillar should be considered. Though this approach, increased clarity can be reached in which opportunities can best speak to both external visitors and internal residents.

STRATEGY 2 - CLARIFY ROLE OF EVENTS.

Events have played an important role in community placemaking and visitor attraction throughout Elkhart County. However, there is a current lack of clarity in what events, and their associated attributes, should be supported and prioritized. New efforts should bring increased clarity to these questions.

Tactic 1 - Build clarification on how events will be evaluated.

A new process should be developed for all events looking for ECCVB support to undertake. The rationale for the process and the evaluative elements should be clearly outlined.

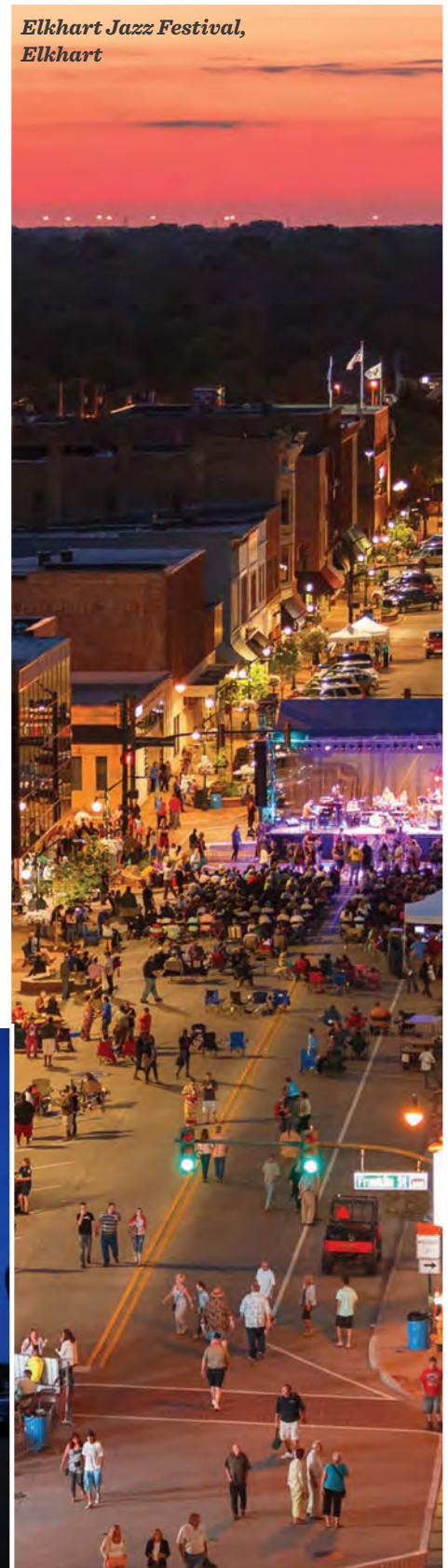
Tactic 2 - Identify attributes for prioritized focus.

As part of the evaluation process, a mix of attributes the ECCVB is attempting to achieve though events should be presented. This could include extending overnight visitation, driving demand in off-season, or dispersing visitors throughout the County. Event organizers would be asked to demonstrate how their event would help achieve these targeted goals.

Tactic 3 - Recast event funding under the Vibrant Communities brand.

ECCVB funding of events would be recast to align with the Vibrant Communities brand. Events can play a significant role in increasing place attachment and fit within the mission of the Vibrant Communities initiative. This will also help reinforce community awareness of the ECCVB's role as a champion for placemaking.

Elkhart Jazz Festival, Elkhart



Elkhart County 4-H Fair, Goshen

5 CURATE OBJECTIVE 5 - DEVELOP A PRIORITIZATION PROCESS AND RATING ATTRIBUTES TO EVALUATE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT INVESTMENTS.

As efforts from the previous four objectives of this Pillar evolve, one of the challenges will be to determine which projects move to the top for consideration and what processes are used in determining these priorities. Clarity in this process is the focus on this last objective.

STRATEGY 1 - CONSIDER THE POSSIBLE ROLE OF A TOURISM DEVELOPMENT TASK FORCE.

Often times in similar destinations, a Tourism Development Task Force is created to help in this prioritization process. While managed by the ECCVB, the Task Force would include a group of other industry leaders who could bring a mix of perspectives and experience to this prioritization process.

Tactic 1 - Identify Task Force participants.

Task Force members should be selected who can provide a holistic understanding of Elkhart County needs and bring these perspectives to the prioritization process.

Tactic 2 - Craft a mix of factors to use in the process.

A list of factors should be clearly identified by the ECCVB that should be considered in the prioritization process. This could include products that add diversification to current Elkhart County offerings, ones that speak to the new targeted visitor segments, or products that can attract demand off season.

Tactic 3 - Determine the frequency of Tourism Development Task Force actions.

The frequency and timing of Task Force meetings will need to be determined. This will be largely influenced by the range of concepts and ideas that evolve and the resources the ECCVB has to initiate these new efforts.

STRATEGY 2 - IDENTIFY RANGE OF ECCVB SUPPORT.

As new concepts evolve through the development process, the ECCVB will need to formulate strategies on how to best support moving these ideas forward. This will include clarifying the range of options for assisting prioritized projects.

Tactic 1 - Provide support to assist in concept development.

One of the most basic roles the ECCVB and the Tourism Development Task Force can play is providing insights to a potential project to increase its potential for success. This review and input process can occur early on in concept development and can provide important refinements while still in the concept stages.

Tactic 2 - Provide resources to assist in early stages feasibility.

One of the more challenging steps in new development efforts, particularly for smaller developers, is funding early stage needs to move a concept forward. Depending on resource availability, the ECCVB could potentially assist in funding some of the early-stage costs like planning fees, feasibility studies, or new research initiatives.

Tactic 3 - Advocate on behalf on projects.

While providing input on concept development and funding early-stage needs can be important, sometimes the most important role an organization like the ECCVB can play is in being an advocate for a project. This is another important role that should be considered.

4.4 BALANCE



Balance

Balance the areas of focus of the ECCVB to optimize its potential and lead the visitor industry and communities.

The Balance Pillar is concentrated on rightsizing the ECCVB resource allocations to tourism promotion and new product development and placemaking investments. This includes monitoring year to year investment needs associated with the increased focus on product development activities and keeping aware of local partnerships and other opportunities for new funding sources.

BALANCE OBJECTIVE 1 - KNOW ROLE PRIORITIES AND FUNDING REQUIREMENTS WITH REFINED FISCAL DEPLOYMENTS TO DEMONSTRATE BALANCE BETWEEN TOURISM PROMOTION AND DEVELOPMENT.

With the ECCVB Board and Staff working together a full understanding and agreement can take place on the ECCVB main roles, intermediate priority initiatives and appropriate funding allocation through a long-term financial strategy.

STRATEGY 1 - ACHIEVE CONSENSUS ON ECCVB ROLES.

This involves activities to determine the priority roles of the ECCVB given previous advice received, and CVB new directions research. A full agreement on the future of the ECCVB roles and responsibilities is paramount.

Tactic 1 - Recast current ECCVB budget.

This entails undertaking activities to identify programmatic expenses allocated to promotion versus development, and to identify investments in placemaking across all activities as a part of the annual budgeting process. A 2022 actual budget reallocation has been done in relation to Destination International's composite benchmark DMO financial report with advice to adopt on an ongoing basis.

Tactic 2 - Establish a Task Force to set organization priorities.

While the ECCVB Leadership Team and Staff are responsible for developing the specific annual goals and activities, the Board of Directors is charged with providing guidance on keeping these in alignment with the core mission and vision of the organization. A joint Task Force inclusive of representatives from the Board and Leadership Team would be required to bring specific role/responsibility and funding recommendations to the full Board. This activity is noted in the ECCVB detailed Advocacy and Community Relations Plan for completion.

Tactic 3 - Facilitate working sessions as needed internally with Staff and Board/Commission Task Force.

Periodically facilitate working sessions internally with staff and Board Task Force on past and current relevant information related to ECCVB evolution and destination marketing/management new directions with special attention to Destinations International/DestinationNEXT and other related futures research.

Tactic 4 - Formalize budget allocation guidelines.

A defined set of guidelines should be created to inform and provide support for recommended allocation of financial resources and staffing related to promotion, development and advocacy activities. These guidelines should result from the Board and Leadership Team Task Force deliberations outlining primary roles, but could include input from community stakeholders related to the impacts of placemaking activities. Guidelines should provide for flexibility to allow growth in priority activity areas.

STRATEGY 2 - ASSESS NEW ECCVB FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES.

While the ECCVB currently receives the full allotment of innkeeper tax revenue collected within the County, the transient/visitor tax rate is currently 5% which is below both the state average and neighboring counties such as St. Joseph County (8%). As the organization identifies funding gaps related to successfully implementing promotional and community placemaking projects, it will be beneficial to maintain awareness on both existing and emerging opportunities to increase funding, including expanded non-traditional partnerships.

Tactic 1 - Investigate emerging state and national funding models.

As priority programs and activities are defined, it is recommended that the organization review and highlight key applicable takeaways for new tourism/CVB tax and non-tax funding in Indiana and nationwide from work completed by Destinations International, Indiana Tourism Association, and expert subcontractor Civitas.

Tactic 2 - Identify funding gaps and appropriate new funding strategies.

Given results from Objective 1 and previous Tactic 1 takeaways, a determination of best new funding solutions going forward with its intended investment uses is to be made to gain increased competitive advantage.

STRATEGY 3 - PREPARE AN EXECUTABLE ECCVB FINANCIAL STRATEGY.

The strategic plan identifies strategies and tactics for accomplishing the organization's promotion, development and placemaking objectives over the next 3-5 years. The organization should align high level budget sources and needs over a similar timeframe, including staffing and capital investment needs.

Tactic 1 - Develop an integrated five-year ECCVB financial strategy.

It is important that in developing a financial strategy the ECCVB take a comprehensive and integrated approach, comprising operational and capital budget development and monitoring, and new funding and related program investments with supportive rationale. This is a destination industry standard which brings a needed long-term perspective on anticipated new funding to meet visitor industry and community expectations.

Tactic 2 - Allocate revenues based on strategic priorities.

Applying the priority guidelines established in Strategy 1 will ensure the ECCVB allocates both current and future revenues to strategic and high priority programs covering promotion, communications and development activities. The alignment of strategic and ongoing annual business plans with executable priority programs enables the proper allocation of financial resources to destination marketing, sales and management functions.

2 **BALANCE OBJECTIVE 2 - INVESTIGATE FUNDING OPTIONS THAT PROVIDE RESOURCES TO STIMULATE PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT/ PLACEMAKING INITIATIVES.**

With the increased emphasis on destination product development activities and the ECCVB's early adoption of this emerging role, there is an acute need for a consistent funding mechanism for this responsibility. Numerous destinations across the nation have dedicated funding resources for tourism product development such as Asheville, NC and South Bend, IN.

STRATEGY 1 - EVALUATE PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT/ PLACEMAKING TAX-RELATED FUNDING ALTERNATIVES.

It is anticipated that the expansion of the ECCVB's product development activities as recommended in the Curate Pillar will increasingly require additional funding resources. Identifying sources of funding to be allocated specifically to these development activities are the focus of this strategy.

Tactic 1 - Investigate potential innkeeper tax increase to support development activities.

One potential option for the ECCVB to consider is the feasibility of securing a transient room tax increase that could be dedicated to stimulating new tourism-related product development initiatives, while still keeping Elkhart County competitive in relation to regional hotel checkout rates. At the same time, evaluate other tourism-related statewide tax/assessment options.

Tactic 2 - Integrate Tourism Development Task Force recommendations in funding allocations.

Priorities established as part of the Curate Objective 5 activities should be fully considered when making decisions to develop resource deployments necessary for initial development activities. Through the Tourism Development Task Force recommendations, allocate the required funding to priority tourism projects.

STRATEGY 2 - EXPLORE NON-TAX FUNDING OPTIONS WITH SELECT COMMUNITY PARTNERS.

The ECCVB has demonstrated success in creating partnerships that leverage the organization's resources in the execution of placemaking and development activities. Examples of this include the investments of the Community Foundation of Elkhart County in the Vibrant Communities initiative, and all of the local community and volunteer partners who engage in the Quilt Gardens Along the Heritage Trail. New product development activities, specifically projects related to community placemaking, provide opportunities for additional strategic partnerships with local community organizations.

Tactic 1 - Identify strategic partners related to product development and placemaking projects.

Organizations, such as Economic Development Corporation of Elkhart County (EDCEC), Community Foundation of Elkhart County (CFEC), and local municipalities are increasingly moving into investing in community placemaking and business development activities. The ECCVB is encouraged to identify other potential public and private sector financial assistance that align with encouraging new tourism product development initiatives. Assistance could cover grants, donations and private giving.

Tactic 2 - Convene partner organizations around common development priorities.

Through the Curate Pillar, the ECCVB will have developed an inventory of priority development projects and programs. ECCVB Development staff should be tasked to convene and meet with potential partners and sponsors to frame funding 'business case' proposals with best success potential to secure resources.

*Venturi,
Goshen*



3 **BALANCE OBJECTIVE 3 - ALIGN STAFFING TO ENSURE APPROPRIATE SKILLS AND RESOURCES ARE CONSISTENT WITH NEW PRIORITIES.**

With anticipated new and/or redirected funding, it is essential that ECCVB staffing covers and is complementary to new destination marketing and management initiatives. Personnel gaps are to be identified with new or enriched positions recognized for fulfillment.

STRATEGY 1 - CONDUCT AN ECCVB STAFFING AUDIT.

Foundational to efforts that result in aligning staff resources to the strategic priorities will be an analysis of the organization's current staff responsibilities and skill sets.

Tactic 1 - Complete an assessment of existing staff.

The ECCVB should complete an assessment of the organization's current organization chart, position descriptions and staff knowledge and skills capabilities and interests in relation to strategic plan priorities. With this staffing needs evaluation, new or revised positions will be determined in order to successfully implement priority functional programs.

Tactic 2 - Update the ECCVB organization chart.

Using results of the above assessment, an updated organization chart can be completed identifying any new reporting lines and new current and future staffing coverage.

STRATEGY 2 - PREPARE AN EXECUTABLE ECCVB PEOPLE STRATEGY.

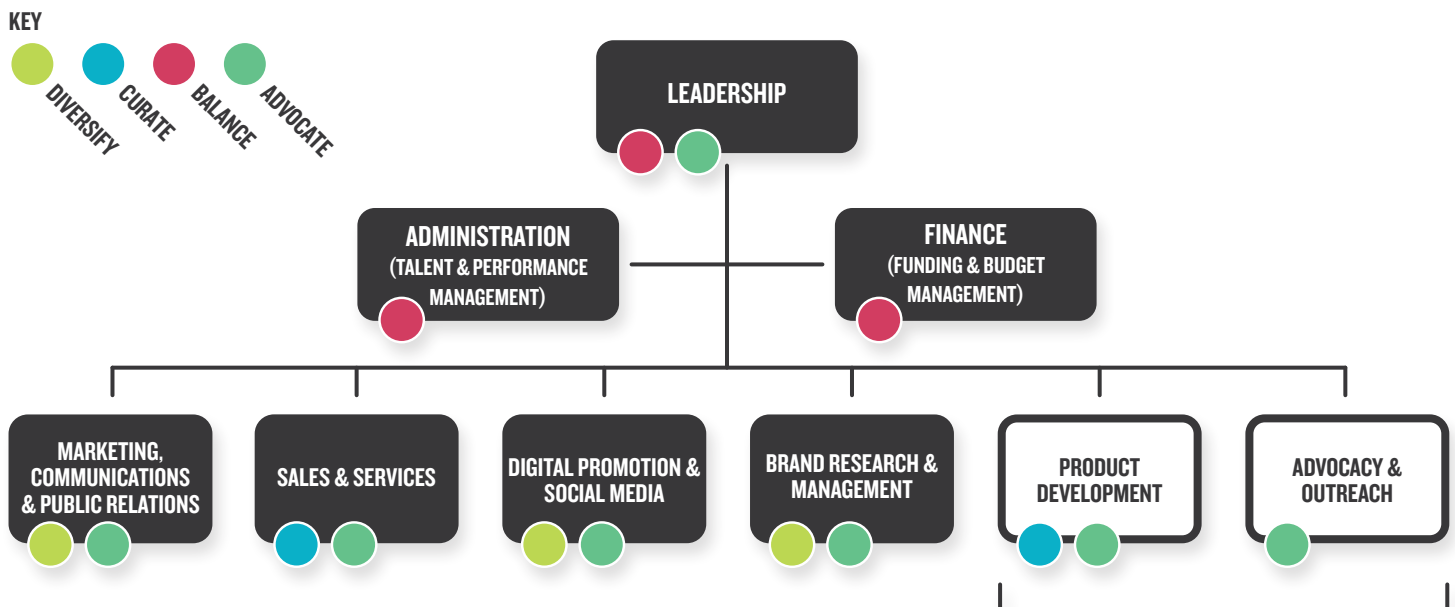
New realities related to changes within the current employment climate have raised challenges for organizations in the area of attracting and retaining talented employees. As noted previously, the ECCVB operates with fewer staff positions based on national industry averages for similar budget DMOs. Given the ECCVB's lean operating model, it's important that the organization be intentional in its employee attraction and retention approach.

Tactic 1 - Integrate a situation analysis in the organization's staffing assessment.

As the organization completes the staffing audit in Strategy 1, it will be important to acknowledge the current ECCVB staff/employment issues, main opportunity challenges, value proposition and organization vision contribution through a current review of local and regional employment situational realities.

Tactic 2 - Identify potential new employee attraction and retention activities.

Based on the results of the situational analysis, the ECCVB should identify new activities to increase staff collegiality and productivity. This human resources strategy is a destination industry standard which brings a necessary long-term perspective on staff investment and increased capability to perform.



**Strategic responsibilities not assigned within current organization structure.*

4 **BALANCE OBJECTIVE 4 - INTEGRATE METRICS THAT DEMONSTRATE EFFECTIVENESS AND UNDERTAKE NECESSARY RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION TO DEVELOP KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs).**

Performance accountability is a requirement today to know destination and CVB program results. An agreement on appropriate metrics and measurables is needed to compile and report on a regular basis a complete scorecard of achieved outcomes.

STRATEGY 1 - DETERMINE RECOGNIZED CVB PERFORMANCE METRICS.

Currently ECCVB performance reporting includes high levels of detail related to the activities undertaken by the staff and the organization on a monthly and annual basis. Activity measurement can be a part of measuring the organization's performance toward achieving strategic goals, however there is room for building tools to assess and measure the impacts and success that result from the activities based on identified key performance indicators (KPIs).

Tactic 1 - Evaluate past activity and results metrics.

As a part of its annual business plan development process, the ECCVB should include an evaluation of the activity and results metrics used for destination/ community and CVB success performance under the lens of applied standards from Destinations International and associated Tourism Economics research. This process will help the organization with the identification of common CVB performance management indices to be set.

STRATEGY 2 - AGREE ON DESTINATION AND ECCVB PILLAR GOAL MEASURES.

Through the work involved with Strategy 1, the ECCVB will assess existing activities and identify new performance metric needs and opportunities. This strategy will focus on building consensus within the organization's leadership on what and how to best measure and communicate performance based on existing and emerging tools.

Tactic 1 - Engage key leadership in building consensus on performance metrics.

Engaging key organizational leadership in the annual business planning process can help build consensus on best destination and ECCVB performance measures for strategic and marketing/business plans. This can help ensure that full agreement is achieved on destination/ECCVB performance metrics and quantifiable measures.

STRATEGY 3 - PREPARE AN EXECUTABLE MULTI-YEAR RESEARCH PROGRAM.

Moving beyond just measuring activity, additional destination research is needed to identify and measure the organization's success in conversion and achieving growth in attracting new and more diverse visitor audiences to the destination.

Tactic 1 - Develop a long-term, strategic research program, with dedicated staff responsibilities.

Develop a long-term research program aligned to strategic and annual business plan measurements will provide the organization with the tools to assess and measure the success of its programs and activities. Responsibilities for the design and implementation should be assigned to designated staff and can be activated by engaging appropriate research vendors and consultants to undertake primary research activities to support promotion, development and advocacy activities including the value of placemaking.

Tactic 2 - Integrate research findings in organization planning and communication activities.

Develop and communicate key research results by Staff and Leadership Team members pertinent to specific annual business plan activity and strategic plan initiative effectiveness and to be used in future allocation of staff and fiscal resources.

STRATEGY 4 - COMPILE A CUSTOMIZED ECCVB PERFORMANCE DASHBOARD.

A dashboard can be an intuitive and effective tool for the organization to both compile and communicate the broad and diverse results of the organization's research and performance. While there are currently dashboard models available for purchase from industry vendors, it is recommended that the ECCVB consider a customized dashboard approach.

Tactic 1 - Develop a custom performance dashboard tool.

As opposed to utilizing an existing, off the shelf model, the ECCVB should develop a simplified performance dashboard tool to be reviewed by Board/Commission and posted for public acknowledgment. With a customized performance dashboard prototype, finalize layout, contents and frequency reporting.

Tactic 2 - Develop performance reporting communications materials.

The dashboard should be included as a part of the ECCVB's efforts to prepare an abbreviated destination/ECCVB performance report that can be shared with partners and key influencers.



*The Electric Brew,
Goshen*

5 **BALANCE OBJECTIVE 5 - ENSURE THE ECCVB BOARD IS PROVIDED OVERSIGHT MATERIALS TO EVALUATE EFFECTIVENESS AND GIVE GUIDANCE.**

Reporting to destination Boards and/or Commissions with appropriate oversight materials is crucial in being transparent and becoming more effective as a leading Destination Management Organization. Boards and Commissions can provide valuable feedback and advice and act as a future ‘sounding board’ on issues of importance.

STRATEGY 1 - DETERMINE ECCVB OVERSIGHT DOCUMENTATION AND PROCESSES.

Having agreed-to oversight documents that are timely and easy to comprehend build mutually supporting trust and confidence in new directions taken and results expected. The ECCVB should evaluate its current processes and consider new opportunities to integrate strategic plan priorities and performance.

Tactic 1 - Integrate strategic plan results into regular reporting activities.

Future Board and Commission reporting should provide a strategic plan summary along with an annual ECCVB business plan/ budget aligned to long-term priority initiatives. With strategic and operational perspectives covered, the ECCVB Board and Elkhart County Innkeeper Tax Commission will receive on an ongoing basis the work status of priority strategic initiatives and related annual activity programming.

Tactic 2 - Convene regular progress study sessions.

Convening as required, combined ECCVB Board and Elkhart County Innkeeper Tax Commission study sessions can be an effective tool as a part of a system to monitor the progress of the strategic plan priorities and operational activities, and to evaluate ongoing effectiveness. Sessions can be extensions of regular monthly meetings or at a designated Board/Commission retreat.

STRATEGY 2 - AGREE ON ECCVB PERFORMANCE OVERSIGHT TRACKING.

Being intentional to engage the leadership of the Board and Commission throughout the development of performance metrics and tools should provide the levels of transparency and clarity necessary for the Board and Commission to fully evaluate progress toward achieving the strategic goals and provide ongoing guidance and advocacy.

Tactic 1 - Implement regular performance reporting system.

A regular performance reporting system should be implemented to provide a current/ year-to-date performance dashboard on an agreed-to reporting timetable based on previous Objective 4/Strategy 4 activities.

EXAMPLES OF KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs) FOR BOARD/COMMISSION CONSIDERATION

OVERALL

- *Change in lodging performance indicators (occupancy, demand, ADR, room tax collections).*
- *Change in economic impacts (CERTEC report trends on direct/indirect visitor spending.*

DIVERSIFY

- *Visitor profile demographic profile and activity trends.*
- *ECCVB stimulated prospective visitor conversion from target audience segments.*
- *ECCVB impacts in stimulating the sports travel business.*
- *DestinationThink sentiment trends.*
- *Changes in perceptions of the destination in key feeder markets.*

CURATE

- *Number of new product development initiatives moving forward.*
- *Level of investment in public and private amenity projects (outdoor recreation/trails and emerging resident/visitor attractions).*
- *Event frequency, attendance, and impact.*

ADVOCATE

- *Resident/leader perceptions of industry value trends.*
- *Resident place attachment trends.*
- *Resident/leader perceptions of organization trends.*

4.5 ADVOCATE



Advocate

Advocate on behalf of the ECCVB, the visitor industry and communities to better ensure the recognized role of tourism in the County.

The Advocate Pillar centers on the ECCVB's role as the Champion for the power of tourism impacts accrued from socio-economic and stewardship benefits, and the value and return on investments made toward community placemaking. In addition to the objectives, strategies and tactics outlined in this strategic plan document, a dedicated Advocacy and Communication plan has been created as a part of this process.

ADVOCATE OBJECTIVE 1 - BUILD A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE VISITOR INDUSTRY'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO ECONOMIC VITALITY AND RESIDENT QUALITY OF PLACE AND LIFE.

Tourism is neither a frequently used household or recognized community term. There is an ongoing need to communicate its value to all community stakeholders and residents. Benefits have to be translated into layperson understanding with economic, social and environmental returns highlighted. Sustainability, regeneration, stewardship and placemaking are clearly part of today's tourism thinking and application. Simply though, tourism builds communities through wealth creation emanating from visitors.

STRATEGY 1 - PREPARE AN EXECUTABLE STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAM.

The Diversify Pillar of this plan recognizes the importance of a research based, multi-channel communications and marketing plan built around targeted high-value audience segments. The ECCVB should model this approach when creating advocacy communication activities focused on internal stakeholder and resident audiences.

Tactic 1 - Measure and communicate resident sentiments.

As a part of this planning process, the consultant team conducted a resident sentiment survey to measure the awareness and value of the tourism industry in the community. Using this survey as a benchmark, the organization should develop activities to communicate key survey findings for full understanding by community/industry stakeholders and residents. It is recommended that this be conducted on a regular basis (1-2 years) in order to measure trends and changes in resident sentiment.

Tactic 2 - Use storytelling as a tool to localize resident communication activities.

Using open-ended response questions as a part of resident survey efforts can provide unique insight into how the industry impacts residents on an individual basis. These individual stories can add a richness to the messaging and provide for greater levels of resident connection. Advocacy communication efforts should include composite quantitative and qualitative survey responses in story development identifying the beneficial impacts of tourism and the visitor industry.

STRATEGY 2 - DEVELOP RELEVANT LAYPERSON TOURISM BENEFIT INFORMATION.

A key challenge for developing effective internal advocacy communications is building relevancy of the messaging at the general resident level. For many destinations, residents can overlook the amenities and activities in their community that might serve to attract visitors from outside the community, or possibly have a view that too many visitors can create negative impacts including crowded restaurants or increases in traffic. New advocacy activities should connect the benefits of a strong hospitality and visitor industry directly to impacts felt at the individual resident level where possible.

Tactic 1 - Create intuitive, user friendly tools for communication.

It's important for planning documents to be developed and organized with an understanding of the many audiences they serve. Communications activities should include detailed infographic briefing sheets on primary tourism contributive benefits based on available research information from recent destination visitor profile, tourism economic impact, visitor conversion analysis, resident tourism survey and other primary/secondary sources, and posting of such on ECCVB website.

2 ADVOCATE OBJECTIVE 2 - LEVERAGE THE VIBRANT COMMUNITIES BRAND TO BE THE ECCVB'S COMMUNICATION VEHICLE FOR PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT AND PLACEMAKING MESSAGING.

It is important that the ECCVB take full ownership of the Vibrant Communities initiative given its role of primary administration and project management since the initiative was started in the early 2010s. The initiative should continue to be partner vested, but become the key ECCVB communications vehicle for tourism product development and placemaking messaging.

STRATEGY 1 - IMPLEMENT AN ECCVB TOURISM ADVOCACY PLAN.

Community placemaking represents an opportunity to provide direct connection to resident benefits by highlighting the synergies of enhanced visitor and resident experiences. Vibrant Communities offers the vehicle to bring increased attention and awareness to these synergies and can be accomplished through the implementation of coordinated advocacy activities.

Tactic 1 - Finalize key audiences and messaging.

Much like with the ECCVB's external marketing, the Advocacy plan includes activities to identify and prioritize key community stakeholder, influencer and resident audiences through an available customized advocacy and community relations plan that identifies opportunity challenges, strategic goal, and key activities.

STRATEGY 2 - ACTIVATE AN ECCVB/COMMUNITY FOUNDATION PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAM.

One success of the Vibrant Communities initiative has been that both organizations have derived similar benefits from the program. Programs and projects developed through the Action Agenda process are presented as a prioritized list developed with local resident input and support. The list serves as a guide for placemaking investments by each organization and allow for leveraging power of community resources.

Tactic 1 - Track and report placemaking impacts as a part of advocacy communications.

The ECCVB staff currently report progress on identified metrics to the Community Foundation of Elkhart County related to the project grant funding agreements. This plan recommends developing a joint report on progress of operational activities pertinent to an ECCVB/CFEC public relations effort and their impacts to the community to support overall advocacy messaging from both organizations.

Tactic 2 - Formalize Vibrant Communities placemaking value advocacy activities.

Generating community awareness on the relationship between quality of place, resident attraction and economic growth was a significant win for the Vibrant Communities initiative. The ECCVB should examine the success of previous advocacy public events, including a Speaker Series, and continue facilitation of activities that generated the most impact.

Tactic 3 - Continue Vibrant Communities activities that connect at a neighborhood and individual level.

Through Vibrant Communities, a series of activities including 365 Vibrant People, Vibrant Neighborhoods and the Little Big Idea Grants advocated for placemaking through personal connections. Both the ECCVB and its Vibrant Community Partners should continue support and development of these advocacy activities.

STRATEGY 3 - PROMOTE THE ECCVB AS THE VIBRANT COMMUNITIES LEADER.

The ECCVB's Tourism Product Development plan set the stage and provided the rationale for the organization to promoting the importance of placemaking. The Vibrant Communities initiative has an established reputation within the community for generating community awareness on the relationship between quality of place, resident attraction and economic growth among community leaders and decision makers. Future advocacy efforts should include messaging that recognize the ECCVB's role as a leader in placemaking within the community to benefit both resident and visitor experiences.

Tactic 1 - Communicate and collaborate with strategic community partner organizations.

Since the implementation of the initial Vibrant Communities Action Agenda, local governments and community/economic development organizations are embracing activities and plans that enhance quality of place. As the Champion of placemaking activities within the community, the ECCVB can continue to play a larger convening and coordination role, helping to bring various entities together whether cities and towns, the EDCEC, and the CFEC through strategic alliances. Additionally, the ECCVB can help define ways to measure these roles and the overall effectiveness of these placemaking efforts. An agreed-to protocol/memorandum of understanding could be prepared and approved.



*Bristol Opera House,
Bristol*

**VIBRANT
COMMUNITIES**
VibrantElkhartCounty.org



*Downtown
Wakarusa*

3 ADVOCATE OBJECTIVE 3- EXPAND “WELL CRAFTED” INTERNAL MARKETING CAMPAIGN TO BUILD RECOGNITION WITH RESIDENTS AND POLITICAL LEADERSHIP.

The “Well Crafted” brand development commenced pre-COVID and needs to be reactivated with a reinforced local engagement and communications program. Focused attention on communities and small businesses involvement is important.

STRATEGY 1- CONTINUE “WELL CRAFTED” LOCAL COMMUNICATIONS.

The levels in which local business embrace and deliver on the “Well Crafted” brand will drive how the visitor perceives the destination. The ECCVB has initiated both investments and activities to engage, inform and educate local businesses and attractions about the core brand promises and how their business can fit within the brand’s core promises.

Tactic 1 - Create “Well Crafted” brand essence materials for distribution among local businesses.

These activities should reinforce use of past campaign video and initiate new town hall/neighborhood sessions on meaning, application and accrued benefits.

Tactic 2 - Develop small business engagement outreach and engagement program.

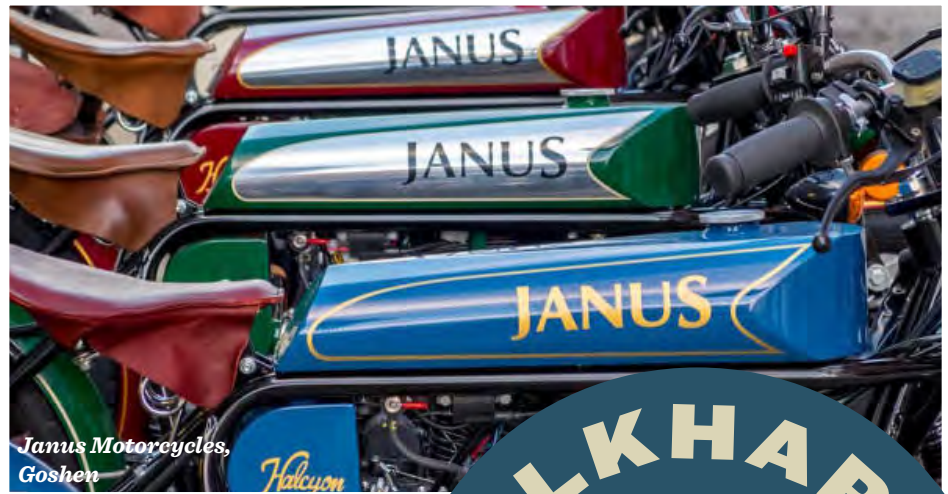
Complementing the ECCVB’s Curate product development strategies, staff could develop a small business engagement program to demonstrate “Well Crafted” adoption and examples. Affiliated business partner “Well Crafted” brand acceptance strengthens visitor and resident understanding and conversion.

STRATEGY 2- ACTIVATE NEW STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT TOOLS.

The “Well Crafted” brand was developed after the facilitation of a community DNA process, that recognized the traditions and strengths associated with the community’s strengths in manufacturing, artisanship and Amish craftsmanship. The core elements of the brand reflect the values of the community residents, allowing them to be ambassadors of the brand as they interact with destination visitors.

Tactic 1 - Develop resident targeted “Well Crafted” brand engagement opportunities.

The ECCVB should seriously consider the development of an ECCVB website resident content section and stakeholder/resident e-newsletter. These tools will fully reinforce the “Well Crafted” call to action and ongoing involvement.



Janus Motorcycles,
Goshen



Chuppville Carving,
Nappanee



Goertzen Pottery,
Goshen



Goshen Brewing Company,
Goshen



Soapy
Gnome,
Goshen

4 ADVOCATE OBJECTIVE 4 - FOSTER OPPORTUNITIES FOR CREATIVE IDEATION AND INNOVATION, AND BRAINSTORMING.

Opportunities to discuss future tourism potentials and new programming are important to nurture with creative and strategic thinking individuals in a supportive environment of trust and community welfare. Proper setup up and credible leader invitations are key to this process.

STRATEGY 1 - INITIATE RELEVANT COMMUNITY TOURISM ISSUE DIALOGUE.

High-visibility, high-impact projects often require a broad base of community support to achieve implementation. The ECCVB has been a leader in convening conversation and leading such projects as the SoMa Plan in Downtown Elkhart, and efforts related to the renovations of key community assets like the Lerner Theatre and the Goshen Theater. The ECCVB should continue an intentional approach to convening conversations around future projects that fall within the organization's strategic pillars.

Tactic 1 - Identify high visibility projects based on the Strategic Pillars.

Based on strategic plan priorities, develop a list of key issues or projects that require additional community buy-in or support to advance. These critical issues are likely determined from the Vibrant Communities and ECCVB strategic planning discussions.

Tactic 2 - Identify and convene community stakeholders.

The ECCVB should leverage relationships the organization has established with key local community leaders based on experience, contacts or ability to marshal community support for additional planning or implementation activities. Past ECCVB Board chairs/members and senior Management staff, and county/community leaders are a good initial focus.

STRATEGY 2 - NURTURE NEW TOURISM FUTURES THINKING.

Creating opportunities and systems to research, understand and process emerging issues, future trends, and key community opportunities should be incorporated into the ECCVB's business operations, whether through formal or informal venues.

Tactic 1 - Facilitate Board and Commission strategy sessions.

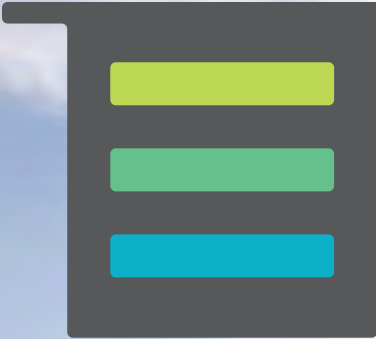
Given previous Strategy 1 Tactic 1 strategic plan priorities, the ECCVB Board of Directors and Elkhart County Innkeeper Tax Commission are best suited to provide guidance on top tourism issues/challenges.

Tactic 2 - Engage subject matter experts to inform strategic discussion sessions.

ECCVB staff are encouraged to identify and invite topical guest speakers and facilitate brainstorming opportunities related to the above issues/challenges outside regular Board/Commission meetings schedule.



St. Joseph River



ELKHART COUNTY CVB



A WELL CRAFTING THE FUTURE SUMMARY SHEET

WE BELIEVE IN HERE.



**ELKHART
COUNTY
CVB**

VISION STATEMENT

Elkhart County, IN is a “Well Crafted”, year-round destination that embodies a diversity of arts and cultural attractions, vibrant downtown communities, sports and outdoor adventures, grounded in craftsmanship and an entrepreneurial spirit, attracting multi-generational audiences.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Elkhart County, IN Convention and Visitors Bureau is the County’s champion for sustainable tourism promotion and placemaking initiatives to achieve economic vitality and enhanced quality of place through diverse affiliations and collaborations.

TOP 6 DESTINATION OPPORTUNITY CHALLENGES

- 1** Grow new sustainable leisure and group travel segments with influential *Well Crafted* visuals and messaging.
- 2** Develop integrated event-based, multi-day visitor experiences for younger generations.
- 3** Capitalize on the RV manufacturing industry’s prime tourism potential.
- 4** Use the Vibrant Communities placemaking initiative to better ECCVB advantage.
- 5** Heighten the importance and value of tourism in Elkhart County community prosperity.
- 6** Continue to be a resourceful, accountable, and impactful CVB as a community lead organization.





STRATEGIC PILLARS



Diversify

Diversify the destination’s visitor base to better position it to integrate multiple generations and interests.



Curate

Curate new products and experiences that resonate with targeted segments, while being synergistic with existing assets.



Balance

Balance the areas of focus of the ECCVB to optimize its potential and lead the visitor industry and communities.



Advocate

Advocate on behalf of the ECCVB, the visitor industry and communities to better ensure the recognized role of tourism in the County.

PRIORITY OBJECTIVES

Diversify Objective 1 - Launch new communication initiatives that connect and engage identified niche segments – Creative, Cultural and Roadtrippers.

Diversify Objective 2 - Deepen promotional initiatives targeted to youth sports and outdoor recreation.

Diversify Objective 3 - Execute new initiatives that increase the identity of Elkhart County as a multi-day experience.

Diversify Objective 4 - Undertake increased priorities to attract small group meetings and social reunion gatherings.

Curate Objective 1 - Align existing assets/ experiences with the defined niche audience segments.

Curate Objective 2 - Link and integrate existing resources that are relevant to youth sports and outdoor recreation markets.

Curate Objective 3 - Expand connections with local RV manufacturers to increase their realization of opportunities within the tourism marketplace.

Curate Objective 4 - Utilize the Vibrant Communities brand and Action Agenda process to identify and prioritize future community driven development initiatives.

Curate Objective 5 - Develop prioritization process and rating attributes to evaluate development project investments.

Balance Objective 1 - Know role priorities and funding requirements with refined fiscal deployments to demonstrate balance between tourism promotion and development.

Balance Objective 2 - Investigate funding options that provide resources to stimulate product development/placemaking initiatives.

Balance Objective 3 - Align staffing to ensure appropriate skills and resources are consistent with new priorities.

Balance Objective 4 - Integrate metrics that demonstrate effectiveness and undertake necessary research and data collection to develop Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Balance Objective 5 - Ensure the ECCVB Board is provided oversight materials to evaluate effectiveness and give guidance.

Advocate Objective 1 - Build a deeper understanding of the visitor industry’s contributions to economic vitality and resident quality of place and life.

Advocate Objective 2 - Leverage the Vibrant Communities brand to be the ECCVB’s communication vehicle for product development and placemaking messaging.

Advocate Objective 3 - Expand “Well Crafted” internal marketing campaign to build recognition with residents and political leadership.

Advocate Objective 4 - Foster opportunities for creative ideation and innovation, and brainstorming.

PERFORMANCE METRICS

DESTINATION IMPACT

- Leisure and business visitor growth.
- Tourism economic spending impacts.
- Key attraction/event attendance counts.
- Hotel sector statistics/innkeeper tax proceeds growth.
- ECCVB budget/investment growth.

ECCVB PROGRAMMING

- Digital promotion conversion.
- Social media engagement analytics.
- Earned media exposure value.
- Group travel indices growth.
- Stakeholder/partner tourism awareness and communications.



B ADVOCACY & COMMUNITY RELATIONS STRATEGY & PLAN



**ELKHART
COUNTY
CVB**

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INTRODUCTION & BENEFICIAL OUTCOMES

The Elkhart County Convention and Visitors Bureau (ECCVB) 2023 Advocacy and Community Relations Strategy and Plan was prepared over the summer and fall of 2022. Over the past two decades the ECCVB has recognized the importance of effective community relations or stakeholder communications in its role as the leader of destination tourism for Elkhart County, Indiana. It was felt that a more formal and inclusive written plan be prepared and implemented to ensure ECCVB positioning as the primary tourism advocate for the county and its communities. This plan provides the rationale, overall goal and objectives to be achieved and the specific programs/activities targeted to key identified audiences and is aligned to the recently approved 2023 – 2027 Strategic Plan Advocacy Pillar objectives, strategies and tactics. It is to be acknowledged that there is a separate communications strategy and plan focused on key public relations activities related to dedicated travel-related media and travel trade (meeting/sports event organizers, tour operators, travel agents and other group planners) proponents as part of the ECCVB 2023 Business Plan.

The benefits of being proactive in stakeholder relationship building are:

- Enhanced awareness of the importance of tourism and associated ECCVB activities;
- Specific effort on initiatives to influence directions on key destination and tourism issues;
- New potential partnership opportunities identified and capitalized upon for mutual resource advantage;
- Increased ECCVB recognition as a community leadership organization that effectively facilitates and executes “quality of place” community projects and builds a strong destination team; and
- Further ECCVB Board of Directors and Innkeepers Tax Commission engagement with active involvement in plan implementation.

Details on the components of the 2023 Advocacy and Community Relations Plan follow.

B-1.0 DESTINATION COMMUNITY RELATIONS SITUATION

B-1.1 RECENT

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

From internal meeting discussions, the key advocacy accomplishments of the ECCVB over the past decade were determined to be the following:

- Formal recognition of an advocacy/ community relations role in strategic directions .
- Active visitor industry engagement and dialogue through ongoing meetings and events.
- Effective county and local community government relationship building.
- Key proponent and advocate of the award-winning Quilt Gardens and Epic Art attraction and tour .
- Catalyst and active partner/leader in the Vibrant Communities initiative .
- Agreement achieved on a county-wide destination brand positioning, promise and ECCVB identity platform.
- Recent COVID-19 driven resident.

B-1.2 DESTINATIONNEXT & RELATED FUTURES RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Over the past two years numerous relevant tourism research survey evaluations and studies have been conducted that provide strategic focus and directional assistance to future destination management potential and to reactivate local visitor economies given the COVID-19 situation. The DestinationNEXT and OrganizationNEXT research and Knowing the Big Seven Impactful Changes on DO Roles, Responsibilities and Relationships Through 2025 report outcomes and key implications pertinent to Elkhart County tourism advocacy and CVB community relations follow.

There is a need to focus on:

- Formulation of a new value proposition/ promise for community residents;
- Preparation and execution of a segmented tourism advocacy and community relations plan;
- Formation of integrated CVB regional and community partnerships;
- Development of a dedicated visiting friends & relatives (VFR) promotional program; and
- Full understanding of resident sentiment of tourism value and business readiness for renewed tourism growth.

These five key implications have been seriously considered for adoption in the enclosed plan.

B-1.3 COUNTY RESIDENT TOURISM SURVEY ANALYSIS & CONCLUSIONS

A resident tourism sentiment survey (n = 300) was conducted as part of the recent ECCVB strategic planning process. The respondent results (out of a 5-point scale) indicated the following:

STATEMENT	LEVEL OF AGREEMENT
Tourism is an important component in the County's economy.	4.1
The visitor industry is an important sector that adds to residents' quality of life.	4.0
The visitor industry is an important generator of jobs in the County.	3.8
The visitor industry helps moderate the tax burden of county residents.	3.7

In addition, 62% of Elkhart County respondents indicated a greater role of tourism in the future and that the impact of tourism was significant in the variety of events, restaurants, outdoor recreation, and arts and cultural offerings. There was a strong 89% awareness of the ECCVB and its influential role and effectiveness in driving tourism to the county through its Well Crafted brand messaging.

There is a solid foundation of support for tourism and the ECCVB in the county that can be further strengthened through ongoing targeted communications and engagement.

B-1.4 SWOT ANALYSIS & MAIN CHALLENGES

To fully understand the issues in advocacy and community relations, a SWOT (strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats) analysis was conducted from both destination and ECCVB perspectives with concluding remarks.

STRENGTHS (PRESENT ADVANTAGES)

- Strong industry and community networking and event participation.
- Ongoing website/social media development.
- 500+ community partners.
- Agreed-to “Well Crafted” destination and CVB brand identities.
- Impactful engagement through Vibrant Communities initiative.
- Committed CVB staff complement.
- Effective Board of Directors and Innkeepers Tax Commission.
- Ongoing communications through newsletter and special reports.

WEAKNESSES (PRESENT DISADVANTAGES)

- Tourism not fully recognized as a leading industry.
- Moderate visibility/recognition of ECCVB.
- Basic community understanding of ECCVB roles.
- Wider resident awareness of tourism benefits.

OPPORTUNITIES (POTENTIAL ADVANTAGES)

- Dedicated visiting friends and relatives programming.
- Stronger Northern Indiana tourism advocacy voice.
- Enhanced ECCVB and resident website contents on activities and performance results.
- Sponsorships and grant writing support potential.
- New visible ECCVB visitors center
- Increased partnerships and resource leveraging.

THREATS (POTENTIAL DISADVANTAGES)

- Tourism not fully recognized as a leading industry.
- Moderate visibility/recognition of ECCVB.
- Basic community understanding of ECCVB roles.
- Wider resident awareness of tourism benefits.

Given this advocacy/community relations evaluation, it was concluded that the following be cited and acted upon to the best advantage of the ECCVB.

1. Local recognition of increased tourism importance and ECCVB visibility to be enhanced by being more involved and influential under the Vibrant Communities effort.
2. Focus on improved community inter-organizational communications through stronger engagement on key committees, task forces and/or regular update meetings.
3. Implementation of a proactive and well-resourced stakeholder communications plan with outcomes leading to higher credibility and value.
4. Formation of a stronger and more effective approach to Northern Indiana tourism advocacy.

With the key problems and opportunities identified in the previous advocacy SWOT analysis, the key issue areas of expanded visibility, partnership development, resident and elected official engagement and overall performance accountability were determined. With these outcomes, the main advocacy challenges facing ECCVB are then the following:

1. Be the unified destination and tourism voice and spokesperson for the county, its communities, and the visitor industry
2. Be the facilitator of improved county intercommunications among tourism, business, economic development and civic government proponents
3. Be the leader and, where needed, participant/supporter of Vibrant Communities and placemaking/destination development & experiences for the benefit of visitors and residents.

B-2.0 ECCVB ADVOCACY ROLE & COMMUNITY RELATIONS STRATEGY

B-2.0 ADVOCACY PILLAR



Advocate

Advocate on behalf of the ECCVB, the visitor industry and communities to better ensure the recognized role of tourism in the County.

Within the recent ECCVB Well Crafting the Future Strategic Plan and its Annual Business Plan, the purpose and benefit of advocacy/community relations activities are acknowledged. The long-term goal of this core function is “to advocate on behalf of the ECCVB, the visitor industry and its communities to better ensure the recognized role of tourism in the county.” With this goal, the three key ECCVB responsibilities in relation to stakeholders are:

- To be viewed as a credible leader for tourism and the destination
- To educate audiences about tourism and its implications for sustainable community growth
- To be supportive of stakeholders’ applicable tourism-related agendas or plans for the county and communities.

B-2.1 PRIMARY STAKEHOLDERS

Based on Elkhart County’s destination community relations needs, the top ECCVB stakeholder groups, not in priority order, are:

1. Government officials;
2. Visitor industry owners/operators and partners;
3. Industry trade association, economic development council, foundation and chamber executives;
4. Local media representatives/influencers;
5. Board and Commission members and professional staff; and
6. Residents.

B-2.3 DESTINATION/TOURISM & CVB BRAND COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY & MESSAGING

With the overall community relations goal in place, a set of more specific program objectives have been set as identified:

- To nurture and maintain positive relationships with priority stakeholders within the county and elsewhere.
- To develop and implement focused communications activities targeted at specific stakeholders.
- To identify and communicate several themes or messages which emphasize a mutually beneficial relationship between the ECCVB and its key stakeholders
- To engage the Board of Directors/Tax Commission members, respective staff and/or others in the implementation of appropriate communications activities
- To measure the effectiveness of the advocacy and community relations plan and its programs.

DESTINATION/TOURISM BRAND MESSAGING

- Tourism builds communities through new visitor spending that provides jobs and government taxes.
- Tourism assists in improving quality of place and life amenities.
- Tourism enhances “Pride in Place” programming.
- Tourism assists in talent attraction and retention.
- Tourism reinforces the place brand reputation.

CVB BRAND MESSAGING

- ECCVB is a not-for-profit tourism marketing and management entity.
- The ECCVB is a shared community asset and advocate of community wealth through tourism.
- ECCVB is funded through a self-directed innkeepers tax, and not by resident property taxes.
- The ECCVB is a facilitator and conveyor for sustainable community and tourism development.
- The ECCVB is the champion for Quality of Place and Entrepreneurialism.

These above 10 staff identified messages are to be sorted and emphasized differently according to each stakeholder group.

B-3.0 ECCVB COMMUNITY RELATIONS ACTION PLAN

B-3.1 STAKEHOLDER PRIORITY INFLUENCING ACTIVITIES

The following six key stakeholder charts identify the existing and new communication programs/activities to be implemented in order to meet the previous advocacy and community relations challenges and positively influence ECCVB local and state audience groups.

B-3.2 GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

STRATEGY: AUDIENCE PENETRATION

ACTIVITIES/OBJECTIVES	RESPONSIBILITY	2023 TIMING
Contact database update.	TM/JH	Ongoing
County and community scheduled meetings.	TM/ALL	Ongoing
2023 State legislative agenda and outreach with NITDC and ITA.	JH/TM/BOD	Q4 & Ongoing
County/community communications technical support.	ALL	Ongoing
Vibrant Communities interface.	JH/BOD/ALL	Ongoing

B-3.3 VISITOR INDUSTRY OWNERS/OPERATORS & PARTNERS

STRATEGY: AUDIENCE PENETRATION

ACTIVITIES/OBJECTIVES	RESPONSIBILITY	2023 TIMING
Contact database update.	TM/JH	Ongoing
Partner survey results evaluation.	TM/JH	Q1
Industry partner specialized training workshops.	TM/ALL	Ongoing
Quilt Gardens partner recognitions.	TM/ALL	Q1/Q2
Industry newsletter.	TM/JL/JH	Ongoing
Ambassadors program.	TM/JH	Ongoing
Partner website content update.	JMB/TM	Ongoing
Business outreach and interaction.	TM/JH/ALL	Ongoing
<i>Well Crafted</i> small business program.	TM/JL/JH	Ongoing

KEY

ALL	All Staff	JH	Jon Hunsberger
BOD	CVB Board of Directors	JL	Janis Logsdon
ITC	Innkeeper Tax Commission	TM	Terry Mark
AE	Amanda Eckelbarger	SN	Sonya Nash
JMB	Jessica Miller-Barnhart	CO	Cindy Ostrom

B-3.3 INDUSTRY TRADE ASSOCIATION, ECD, FOUNDATION AND CHAMBER EXECUTIVES

STRATEGY: AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

ACTIVITIES/OBJECTIVES	RESPONSIBILITY	2023 TIMING
Contact database update.	TM/JH	Ongoing
Regularly scheduled collaborative meetings.	TM/JL/JH	Q1-Q4
Strategic Plan priorities sharing.	TM/JH	Ongoing
Project driven meetings/calls.	TM/JH/CO/JL	Ongoing

B-3.4 LOCAL MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES

STRATEGY: AUDIENCE PENETRATION

ACTIVITIES/OBJECTIVES	RESPONSIBILITY	2023 TIMING
Contact database update.	TM/JH	Ongoing
Local media relations plan.	TM/JL/JH	Q1
Partner podcasts distribution.	TM/AE/JL/JH	Ongoing
Op-eds.	TM/JH	Q1-Q4

KEY

ALL	All Staff	JH	Jon Hunsberger
BOD	CVB Board of Directors	JL	Janis Logsdon
ITC	Innkeeper Tax Commission	TM	Terry Mark
AE	Amanda Eckelbarger	SN	Sonya Nash
JMB	Jessica Miller-Barnhart	CO	Cindy Ostrom

B-3.5 RESIDENTS

STRATEGY: AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

ACTIVITIES/OBJECTIVES	RESPONSIBILITY	2023 TIMING
Contact database update.	TM/JH	Ongoing
Social media engagement.	JMB/TM/JH	Q1-Q4
Resident tourism sentiment survey storytelling.	TM/AE/JH	Ongoing
VFR resident website content.	JMB/TM/JH	Ongoing
Educational offerings.	JL/TM/JH	Ongoing

B-3.6 BOARD/COMMISSION MEMBERS & STAFF

STRATEGY: AUDIENCE SUPPORT

ACTIVITIES/OBJECTIVES	RESPONSIBILITY	2023 TIMING
Regular Board/Commission meetings.	JH/CO/BOD/ITC	Ongoing
Advocacy Committee meetings.	JH/TM/JL/BOD/ITC	Ongoing
Annual Board/Commission retreat and following year strategy.	JH/BOD/ITC	Q4
Annual staff retreat and following year strategies/plans.	JH/ALL	Q4
Speaker series.	TM/JL/CO/ALL	Ongoing
Tourism Week Celebration.	TM/JH/ALL	Ongoing
Champion Placemaker podcast.	JH/AE/ALL	Ongoing
Annual Community Report on Tourism.	TM/AE/JL/JH	Q1
Key audience and messaging confirmation.	TM/JH	Q1
Tourism benefits infographic briefing sheets.	AE/TM/JH	Q1/Q2
Vibrant Communities placemaking communications leadership.	JH/TM/ALL	Ongoing

KEY

ALL	All Staff	JH	Jon Hunsberger
BOD	CVB Board of Directors	JL	Janis Logsdon
ITC	Innkeeper Tax Commission	TM	Terry Mark
AE	Amanda Eckelbarger	SN	Sonya Nash
JMB	Jessica Miller-Barnhart	CO	Cindy Ostrom

B-4.0 ECCVB COMMUNITY RELATIONS ACTION PLAN

GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS	
METRIC	MEASURE
<div></div>	<div></div>
<div></div>	<div></div>
<div></div>	<div></div>
<div></div>	<div></div>
VISITOR INDUSTRY OWNERS/OPERATORS & PARTNERS	
METRIC	MEASURE
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<div></div>	<div></div>
<div></div>	<div></div>
INDUSTRY TRADE ASSOCIATION, ECD, FOUNDATION AND CHAMBER EXECUTIVES	
METRIC	MEASURE
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<div></div>	<div></div>
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LOCAL MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES	
METRIC	MEASURE
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<div></div>	<div></div>
<div></div>	<div></div>
RESIDENTS	
METRIC	MEASURE
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<div></div>	<div></div>
<div></div>	<div></div>
<div></div>	<div></div>
BOARD/COMMISSION MEMBERS & STAFF	
METRIC	MEASURE
<div></div>	<div></div>
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C WELL CRAFTING THE FUTURE IMPLANTATION PHASING



**ELKHART
COUNTY
CVB**

WELL CRAFTING THE FUTURE

The following pages outline a suggested phasing plan for the objectives, strategies and tactics identified in the 5-year plan. This phasing recognizes that some strategies and tactics will need to be in process prior to others being started, as well as the acknowledgment of the staffing and funding realities of the organization. It should be recognized that like any multi-year plan, factors outside the organization can change and the ECCVB will need to be flexible in adjusting to these changes. Thus, this phasing plan should be seen as broad directional recommendations that identify when the primary efforts of a strategy or tactic would occur. In some instances, certain earlier stage activities could be occurring outside of the main timeframe cited in the phasing plan (i.e., initial efforts to build more recognition of Elkhart County as a multi-day destination could occur in the “Near Term” even though its main efforts are identified as occurring in “Mid” stages of the plan.)



Diversify

Diversify the destination's visitor base to better position it to integrate multiple generations and interests.

Diversify Objective 1 - Launch new communication initiatives that connect and engage identified niche segments – Creative, Cultural and Roadtrippers.

Diversify Objective 2 - Deepen promotional initiatives targeted to youth sports and outdoor recreation.

Diversify Objective 3 - Execute new initiatives that increase the identity of Elkhart County as a multi-day experience.

Diversify Objective 4 - Undertake increased priorities to attract small group meetings and social reunion gatherings.

NEAR 12-18 months	MID 2-3 years	LONG 4-5 years



Curate

Curate new products and experiences that resonate with targeted segments, while being synergistic with existing assets.

Curate Objective 1 - Align existing assets/ experiences with the defined niche audience segments.

Curate Objective 2 - Link and integrate existing resources that are relevant to youth sports and outdoor recreation markets.

Curate Objective 3 - Expand connections with local RV manufacturers to increase their realization of opportunities within the tourism marketplace.

Curate Objective 4 - Utilize the Vibrant Communities brand and Action Agenda process to identify and prioritize future community driven development initiatives.

Curate Objective 5 - Develop prioritization process and rating attributes to evaluate development project investments.

NEAR 12-18 months	MID 2-3 years	LONG 4-5 years



Balance

Balance the areas of focus of the ECCVB to optimize its potential and lead the visitor industry and communities.

Balance Objective 1 - Know role priorities and funding requirements with refined fiscal deployments to demonstrate balance between tourism promotion and development.

Balance Objective 2 - Investigate funding options that provide resources to stimulate product development/ placemaking initiatives.

Balance Objective 3 - Align staffing to ensure appropriate skills and resources are consistent with new priorities.

Balance Objective 4 - Integrate metrics that demonstrate effectiveness and undertake necessary research and data collection to develop Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Balance Objective 5 - Ensure the ECCVB Board is provided oversight materials to evaluate effectiveness and give guidance.

NEAR 12-18 months	MID 2-3 years	LONG 4-5 years



Advocate

Advocate on behalf of the ECCVB, the visitor industry and communities to better ensure the recognized role of tourism in the County.

Advocate Objective 1 - Build a deeper understanding of the visitor industry's contributions to economic vitality and resident quality of place and life.

Advocate Objective 2 - Leverage the Vibrant Communities brand to be the ECCVB's communication vehicle for product development and placemaking messaging.

Advocate Objective 3 - Expand “Well Crafted” internal marketing campaign to build recognition with residents and political leadership.

Advocate Objective 4 - Foster opportunities for creative ideation and innovation, and brainstorming.

NEAR 12-18 months	MID 2-3 years	LONG 4-5 years



Diversify

Diversify the destination's visitor base to better position it to integrate multiple generations and interests.

	NEAR 12-18 months	MID 2-3 years	LONG 4-5 years
Diversify Objective 1 - Launch new communication initiatives that connect and engage identified niche segments - Creative, Cultural and Roadtrippers.			
Strategy 1 - Align existing assets/experiences with defined niche outcomes.			
Tactic 1 - Develop a product matrix.	●		
Tactic 2 - Evaluate the need for a new/refined interpretation.	●		
Strategy 2 - Develop content relevant to the defined niche outcomes.			
Tactic 1 - Identify image needs.	●		
Tactic 2 - Develop new "Well Crafted" copy.	●		
Tactic 3 - Utilize softer, indirect approaches in presentation.	●		
Tactic 4 - Integrate Destination Think Playbook recommendations.	●		
Strategy 3 - Communicate via multiple channels.			
Tactic 1 - Evaluate desired channels by niches.	●		
Tactic 2 - Prioritize new messaging integration.	●		
Diversify Objective 2 - Deepen promotional initiatives targeted to youth sports and outdoor recreation.			
Strategy 1 - Inventory existing assets and promotional activities.			
Tactic 1 - Develop an asset listing.		●	
Tactic 2 - Identify synergistic assets or experiences.		●	
Tactic 3 - Identify current target audiences and promotional efforts.		●	
Strategy 2 - Identify target audiences and channels.			
Tactic 1 - Identify demographic and geographic attributes of targets.		●	●
Tactic 2 - Investigate preferred channels to drive connections.		●	●
Tactic 3 - Use an approach similar to the defined Destination Think Niches in prioritizing outreach activities to the youth sports and outdoor recreation audiences		●	●
Diversify Objective 3 - Execute new initiatives that increase the identity of Elkhart County as a multi-day experience.			
Strategy 1 - Integrate multi-day messaging in the Area Guide.			
Tactic 1 - Expand messaging in initial pages of the destination Area Guides.	●		
Tactic 2 - Develop itineraries considering new target audiences.	●		
Strategy 2 - Develop similar messaging efforts for other channels.			
Tactic 1 - Develop condensed messaging for social media.	●		
Tactic 2 - Utilize extended first-person stories on the website.	●		
Diversify Objective 4 - Undertake increased priorities to attract small group meetings and social reunion gatherings.			
Strategy 1 - Undertake target opportunity discussions.			
Tactic 1 - Convene outreach with facilities to refine targeted opportunities.	●		
Tactic 2 - Engage chambers/industry groups as part of the sales force.	●		
Strategy 2 - Integrate findings in marketing efforts.			
Tactic 1 - Develop condensed messaging for social media.	●		

WELL CRAFTING THE FUTURE



Curate

Curate new products and experiences that resonate with targeted segments, while being synergistic with existing assets.

Curate Objective 1 - Align existing assets/experiences with the defined niche audience segments.

Strategy 1 - Identify working groups and support.

Tactic 1 - Identify prospective individuals for participation.

Tactic 2 - Designate dedicated ECCVB staff to manage efforts.

Tactic 3 - Showcase successful initiatives.

Tactic 4 - Facilitate collaborative meetings.

Strategy 2 - Integrate new product ideas in marketing.

Tactic 1 - Showcase new experiences as they evolve.

NEAR
12-18 months

MID
2-3 years

LONG
4-5 years



Curate Objective 2 - Link and integrate existing resources that are relevant to youth sports and outdoor recreation markets.

Strategy 1 - Use previously developed asset listings to identify high-value opportunities.

Tactic 1 - Identify potential product pairings.

Tactic 2 - Use working groups to stimulate dialogue across multiple channels.

Strategy 2 - Identify resources needed to be competitive.

Tactic 1 - Engage facility management to better understand the expectations they face.

Tactic 2 - Consider local businesses as potential sponsors.

Tactic 3 - Consider potential product improvements to enhance competitiveness.



Curate Objective 3 - Expand connections with local RV manufacturers to increase their realization of opportunities within the tourism marketplace.

Strategy 1 - Develop a road trip visit showcasing experiences of other destinations.

Tactic 1 - Identify examples of regional destinations.

Tactic 2 - Form a leadership group for road trip participation.

Tactic 3 - Develop materials outlining lessons learned.

Strategy 2 - Educate the RV industry about local tourism opportunities.

Tactic 1 - Develop preliminary concepts on ways Elkhart could act on opportunities.

Tactic 2 - Craft examples of how new visitor attraction concepts can strengthen engagement with an RV customer.

Tactic 3 - Showcase opportunities to targeted CEOs.



Curate Objective 4 - Utilize the Vibrant Communities brand and Action Agenda process to identify and prioritize future community driven development initiatives.

Strategy 1 - Use the 2022 Action Agenda for new project identification.

Tactic 1 - Develop a matrix with Vibrant Community projects.

Tactic 2 - Build consensus on their alignment with other objectives.

Strategy 2 - Clarify role of events.

Tactic 1 - Build clarification of how events will be evaluated.

Tactic 2 - Identify attributes for prioritized focus.

Tactic 3 - Recast event funding under the Vibrant Communities brand.



Curate Objective 5 - Develop prioritization process and rating attributes to evaluate development project investments.

Strategy 1 - Consider the possible role of a Tourism Development Task Force.

Tactic 1 - Identify Task Force.

Tactic 2 - Craft a mix of factors to use in the process.

Tactic 3 - Determine the frequency of Tourism Development Task Force actions.

Strategy 2 - Identify range of ECCVB support.

Tactic 1 - Provide support to assist in concept development.

Tactic 2 - Provide resources to assist in early stage feasibility.

Tactic 3 - Advocate on behalf of projects.





Balance

Balance the areas of focus of the ECCVB to optimize its potential and lead the visitor industry and communities.

Balance Objective 1 - Know role priorities and funding requirements with refined fiscal deployments to demonstrate balance between tourism promotion and development.

Strategy 1 - Achieve consensus on ECCVB roles.

Tactic 1 - Recast current ECCVB budget.

Tactic 2 - Establish a Task Force to set organization priorities.

Tactic 3 - Facilitate working sessions as needed internally with Staff and Board/Commission Task Force.

Tactic 4 - Formulate budget allocation guidelines.

Strategy 2 - Access new ECCVB funding opportunities.

Tactic 1 - Investigate emerging state and national funding models.

Tactic 2 - Identify funding gaps and appropriate new funding strategies.

Strategy 3 - Prepare an executable ECCVB financial strategy.

Tactic 1 - Develop an integrate five-year ECCVB funding strategy.

Tactic 2 - Allocate revenues based on strategic priorities.

Balance Objective 2 - Investigate funding options that provide resources to stimulate product development/placemaking initiatives.

Strategy 1 - Evaluate product development/placemaking tax-related funding alternatives.

Tactic 1 - Investigate potential innkeeper tax increase to support development activities.

Tactic 2 - Integrate Tourism Development Task Force recommendations in funding allocations.

Strategy 2 - Explore non-tax funding options with select community partners.

Tactic 1 - Identify partners related to product development and placemaking projects.

Tactic 2 - Convene partner organizations around common development priorities.

Balance Objective 3 - Align staffing to ensure appropriate skills and resources are consistent with new priorities.

Strategy 1 - Conduct an ECCVB staffing audit.

Tactic 1 - Complete an assessment of existing staff.

Tactic 2 - Update the ECCVB organization chart.

Strategy 2 - Prepare an executable ECCVB people strategy.

Tactic 1 - Integrate a situation analysis in the organization's staffing assessment.

Tactic 2 - Identify potential new employee attraction and retention activities.

Balance Objective 4 - Integrate metrics that demonstrate effectiveness and undertake necessary research and data collection to develop Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Strategy 1 - Determine recognized CVB performance metrics.

Tactic 1 - Evaluate past activity and results metrics.

Strategy 2 - Agree on destination and ECCVB pillar goal measures.

Tactic 1 - Engage key leadership in building consensus on performance metrics.

Strategy 3 - Prepare an executable multi-year research program.

Tactic 1 - Develop a long-term, strategic research program with dedicated staff responsibilities.

Tactic 2 - Integrate research findings in organization planning and communication activities.

Strategy 4 - Compile a customized ECCVB performance dashboard.

Tactic 1 - Develop a customer performance dashboard tool.

Tactic 2 - Develop performance reporting communications materials.

Balance Objective 5 - Ensure the ECCVB Board is provided oversight materials to evaluate effectiveness and give guidance.

Strategy 1 - Determine ECCVB oversight documentation and process.

Tactic 1 - Integrate strategic plan results into regular reporting activities.

Tactic 2 - Convene regular progress study sessions.

Strategy 2 - Agree on ECCVB performance oversight tracking.

Tactic 1 - Implement regular performance reporting system.

NEAR
12-18 months

MID
2-3 years

LONG
4-5 years



WELL CRAFTING THE FUTURE



Advocate

Advocate on behalf of the ECCVB, the visitor industry and communities to better ensure the recognized role of tourism in the County.

Advocate Objective 1 - Build a deeper understanding of the visitor industry's contributions to economic vitality and resident quality of place and life.

Strategy 1 - Prepare an executable stakeholders' communication program.

Tactic 1 - Measure and communicate resident sentiments.

Tactic 2 - Use storytelling as a tool to localize resident communication activities.

Strategy 2 - Develop relevant layperson tourism benefit information.

Tactic 1 - Create intuitive, user-friendly tools for communication.

NEAR
12-18 months

MID
2-3 years

LONG
4-5 years

4-3

4-3

4-3

Advocate Objective 2 - Leverage the Vibrant Communities brand to be the ECCVB's communication vehicle for product development and placemaking messaging.

Strategy 1 - Implement an ECCVB tourism advocacy plan.

Tactic 1 - Finalize key audiences and messaging.

Strategy 2 - Activate an ECCVB public relations program.

Tactic 1 - Track and report placemaking impacts as a part of advocacy communications.

Tactic 2 - Formalize Vibrant Communities placemaking value advocacy activities.

Tactic 3 - Continue Vibrant Communities activities that connect at a neighborhood and individual level.

Strategy 3 - Promote the ECCVB as the Vibrant Communities leader.

Tactic 1 - Communicate and collaborate with strategic community partner organizations.

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Advocate Objective 3 - Expand "Well Crafted" internal marketing campaign to build recognition with residents and political leadership.

Strategy 1 - Continue "Well Crafted" local communications.

Tactic 1 - Create "Well Crafted" local communications.

Tactic 2 - Develop small business engagement outreach and engagement program.

Strategy 2 - Activate new stakeholder engagement tools.

Tactic 1 - Develop resident targeted "Well Crafted" brand engagement opportunities.

4-3

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Advocate Objective 4 - Foster opportunities for creative ideation and innovation, and brainstorming.

Strategy 1 - Initiate relevant community tourism issue dialogue.

Tactic 1 - Identify high-visibility projects based on the Strategic Pillars.

Tactic 2 - Identify and convene community stakeholders.

Strategy 2 - Nurture new tourism futures thinking.

Tactic 1 - Facilitate Board and Commission strategy sessions.

Tactic 2 - Engage subject matter experts to inform strategic discussion sessions.

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D

PROJECT SURVEY SUMMARIES



**ELKHART
COUNTY
CVB**

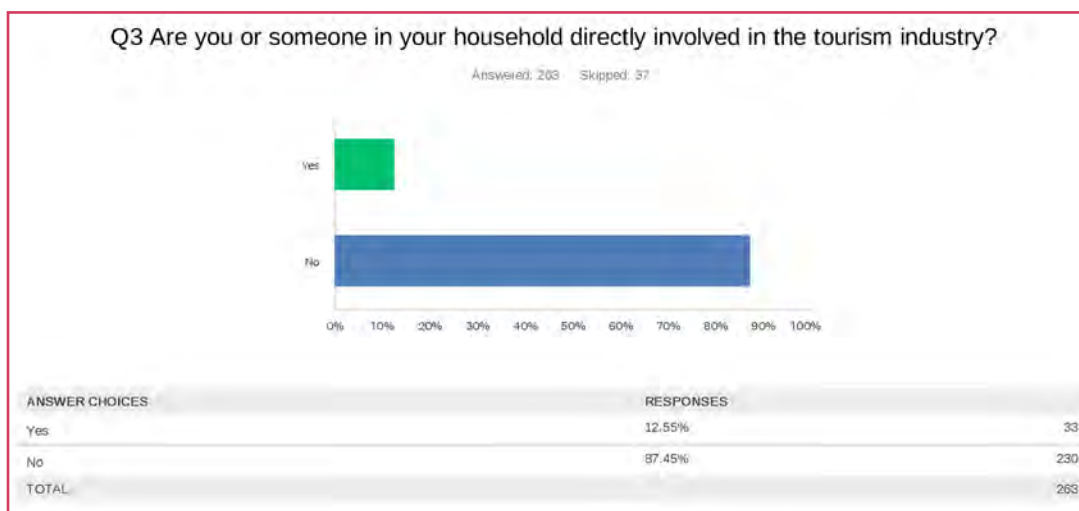
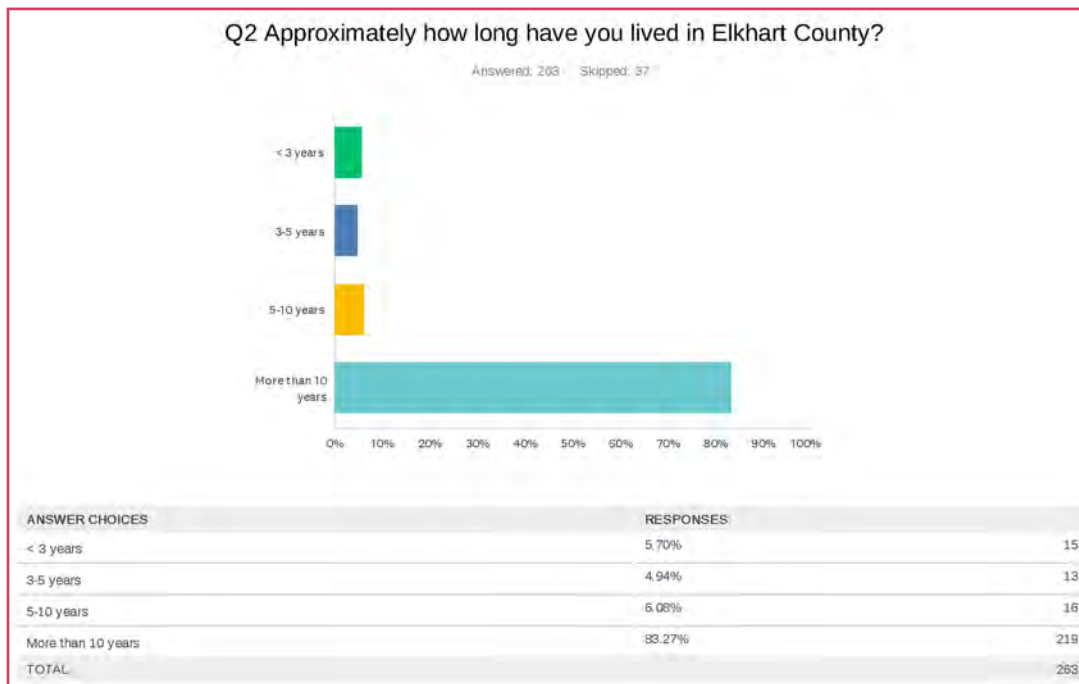
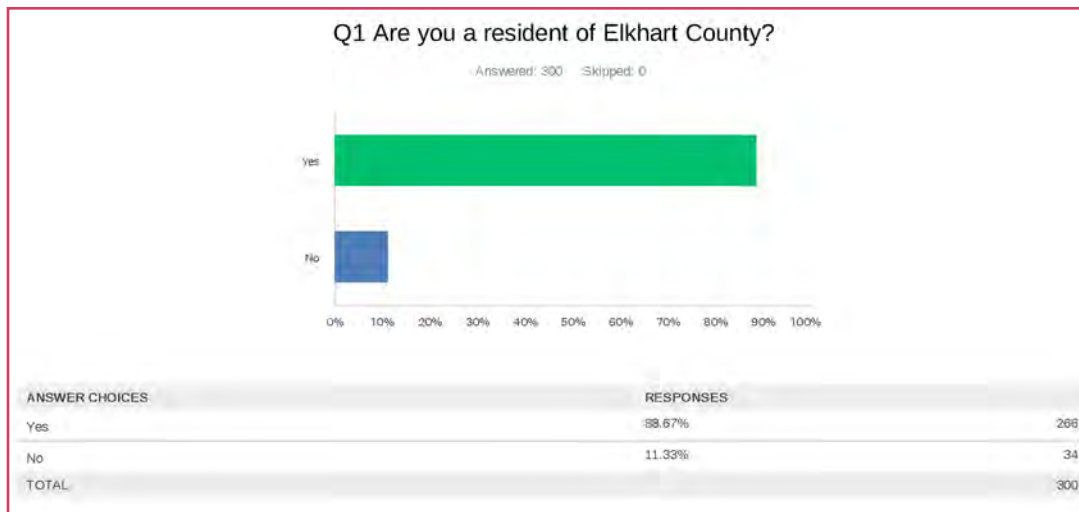
D-1.0 ELKHART COUNTY RESIDENT SURVEY

In March of 2022 the Abonmarche Planning Team undertook a new survey of Elkhart County residents to better understand their attitudes and perceptions of the County's visitor industry. This survey utilized a database of local resident contacts that were developed through multiple previous community surveys conducted as a part of the Vibrant Communities efforts to measure community attachment, and also included social media promotion by the ECCVB and local Chamber of Commerce partners.

KEY FINDINGS

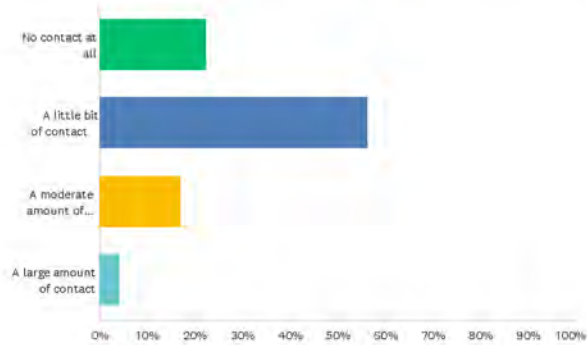
A summary of key findings is initially provided and is followed by detailed tabulations for the survey.

- The long-time tenure of respondents was evident as 83% noted they had lived in Elkhart County for more than a decade.
- These findings represent attitudes of those largely disconnected from the visitor industry, as 87% noted that no one in their household was directly involved in the visitor industry and 79% said they had little or no involvement with tourists visiting Elkhart County.
- While most were not connected to the visitor industry, 84% had hosted friends or family that had come to Elkhart County in the past.
- The general positive attitude of residents related to the visitor industry was evident, as when they were asked how important a role should tourism play in Elkhart County's economy in the future 36% said the same role as today and 62% said a greater role.
- The diverse impacts of the tourism industry were recognized by residents. When asked to rate their beliefs regarding a variety of statements on a 5-point scale (1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree) tourism is an important component in the County's economy 4.1, the industry helps moderate resident's tax burden 3.7 and the industry adds to resident's quality of life 4.0.
- The recognition of the visitor industry helping to expand the array of community amenities residents enjoy was also evident. When asked to rate tourism's role on the number and quality amenities on a 3-point scale (no, moderate or major impacts) events and festivals rated the highest at 2.7, with restaurants, art and cultural venues and outdoor recreation opportunities scored near 2.5.
- The positive aspects of the visitor industry significantly outweighed the negative aspects. When asked to rate their beliefs regarding tourism's impacts on a 5-point scale (1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree) adding to heritage and culture scored a 4.1, introducing employers and employees to the area scored 3.8, and the benefits outweigh the negative impacts scored 3.9. Only limited concerns were noted regarding tourism negative impacts with visitors add much to traffic and congestion impacts rating a 2.3, they cause Downtown crowding a 2.0, and they crowd parks and outdoor recreational facilities a 1.9.
- Fully 89% of residents were aware of the Elkhart County Convention and Visitor's Bureau and in addition to the organization's role with visitors, 63% noted the entity also had a moderate role with Elkhart residents, with another 17% noted it had a major role.
- The need for more internal utilization of the Well Crafted brand was shown as only 34% of residents noted they were familiar with the brand. The role Vibrant Communities has played in introducing the brand was noted, as 58% said that is where they had seen the brand.
- Residents had mixed feelings regarding the effectiveness of the Well Crafted brand in communicating the essence of Elkhart County, as 56% noted it was only moderately effective and 29% noted it was very effective.



Q4 How much contact do you or your family members have with tourists visiting Elkhart County?

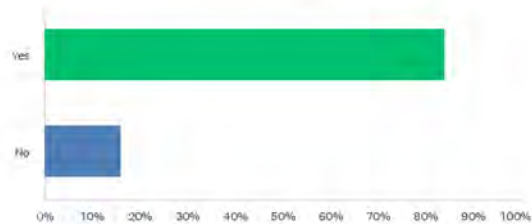
Answered: 263 Skipped: 57



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
No contact at all	22.43% 59
A little bit of contact	56.27% 148
A moderate amount of...	17.11% 45
A large amount of contact	4.18% 11
TOTAL	263

Q5 Have you hosted friends or family to come and visit Elkhart County in the past?

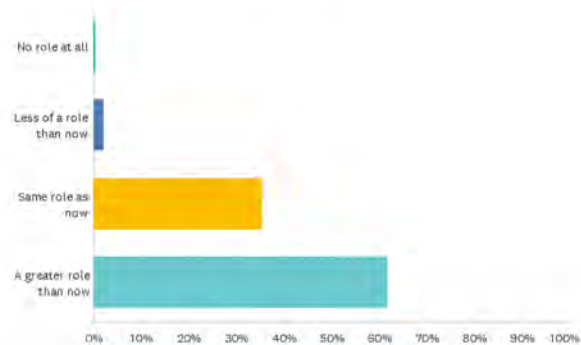
Answered: 263 Skipped: 57



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	84.03% 221
No	15.97% 42
TOTAL	263

Q6 Compared to other Elkhart County industries, how important a role do you think tourism should have in the County's economy in the future?

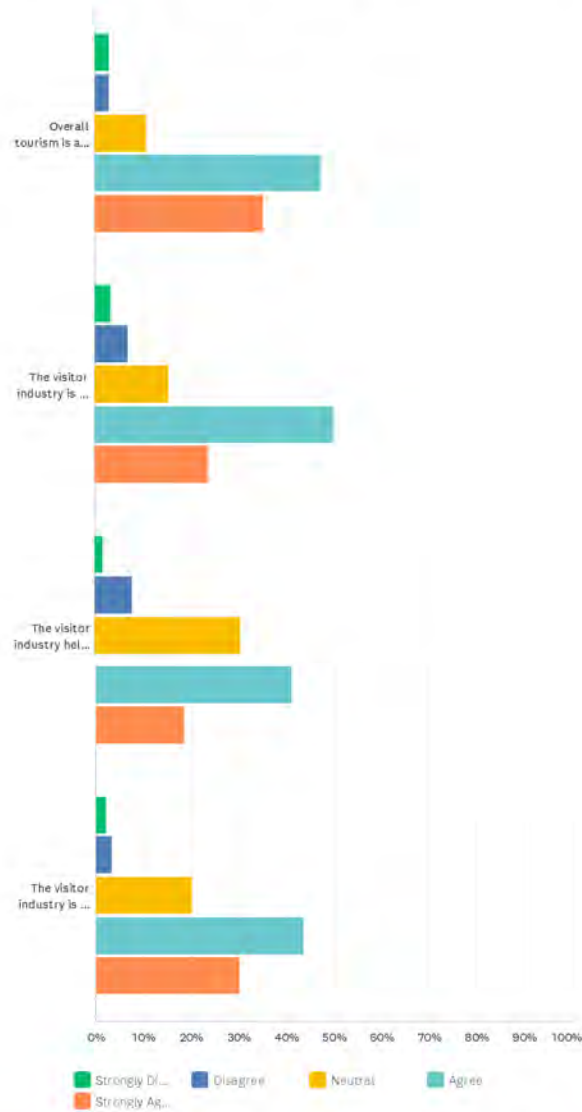
Answered: 231 Skipped: 69



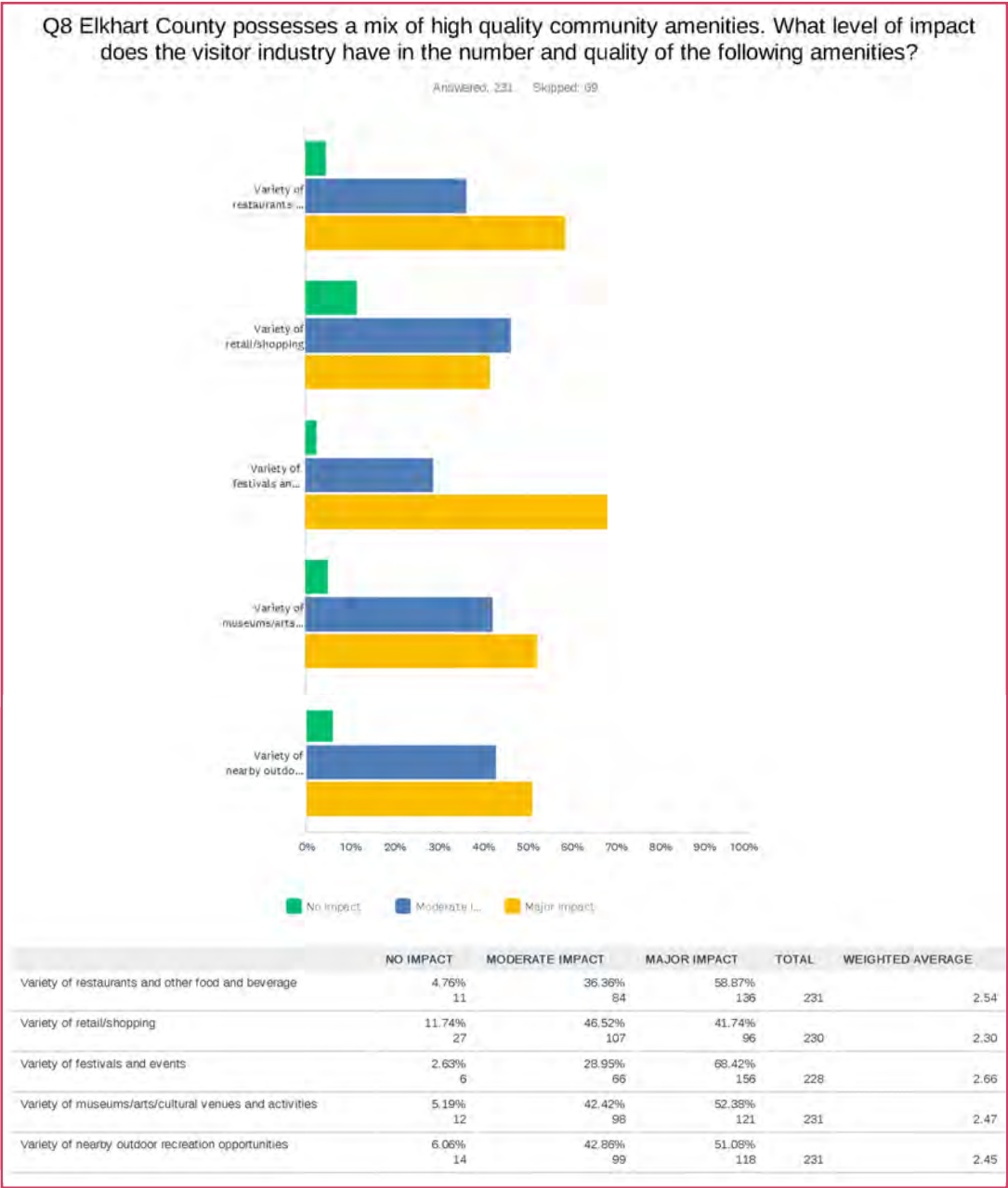
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
No role at all	0.43% 1
Less of a role than now	2.16% 5
Same role as now	35.50% 82
A greater role than now	61.90% 143

Q7 Please note your level of agreement with the following statements:

Answered: 231 Skipped: 69

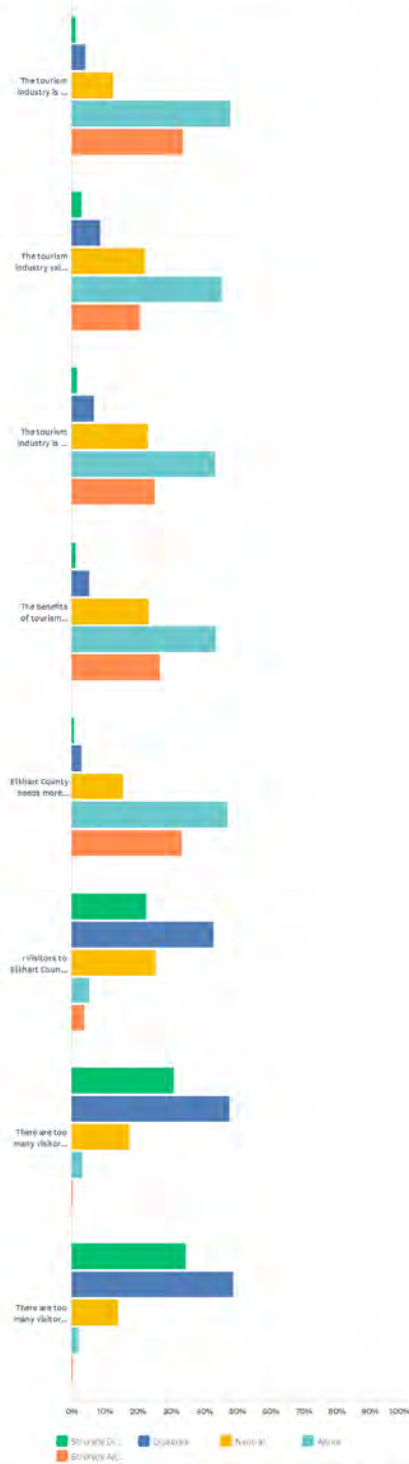


	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Overall tourism is an important component in the County's economy.	3.03% 7	3.03% 7	10.82% 25	47.62% 110	35.50% 82	231	4.10
The visitor industry is an important generator of jobs for the County.	3.48% 8	6.96% 16	15.65% 36	50.00% 115	23.91% 55	230	3.84
The visitor industry helps moderate the tax burden of County residents.	1.73% 4	7.79% 18	30.74% 71	41.13% 95	18.61% 43	231	3.67
The visitor industry is an important sector that adds to residents' quality of life.	2.16% 5	3.46% 8	20.35% 47	43.72% 101	30.30% 70	231	3.97

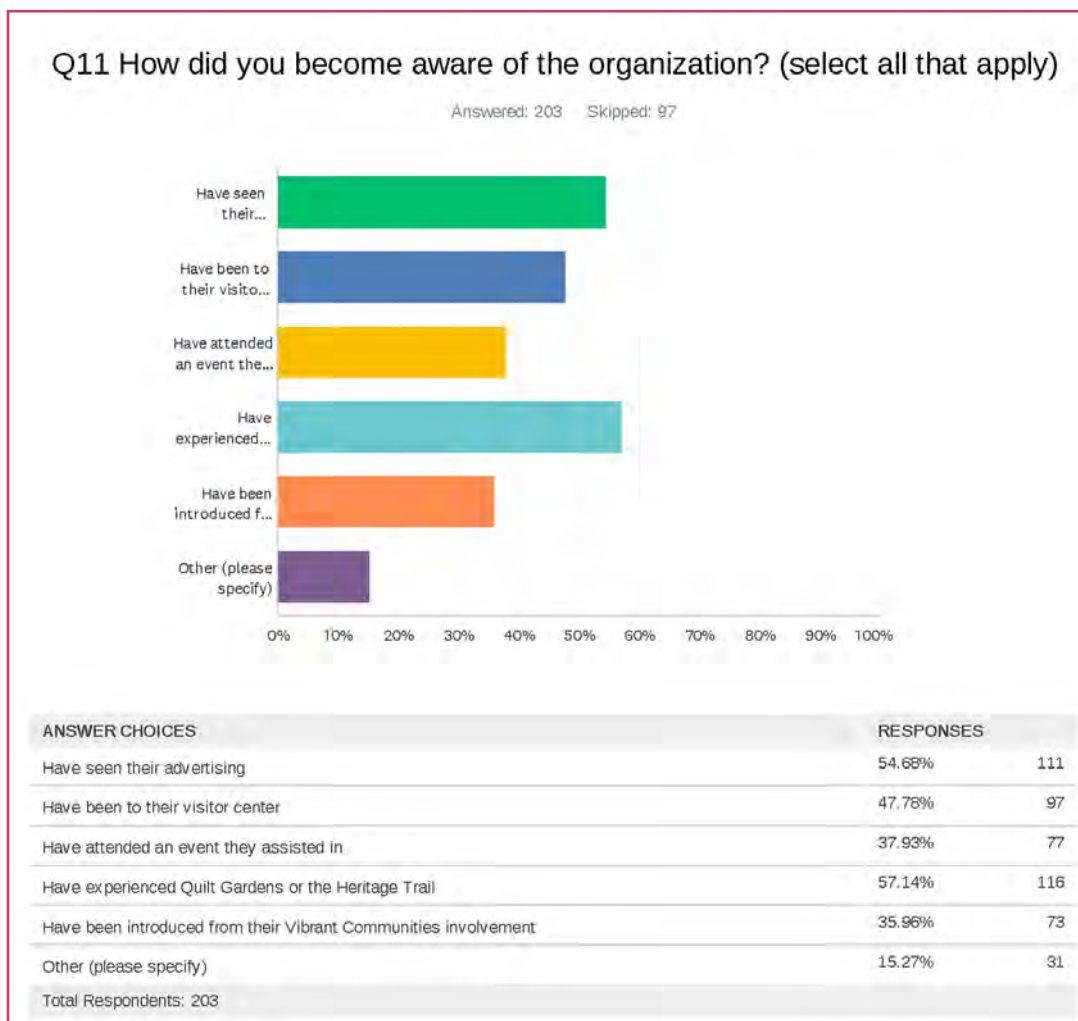
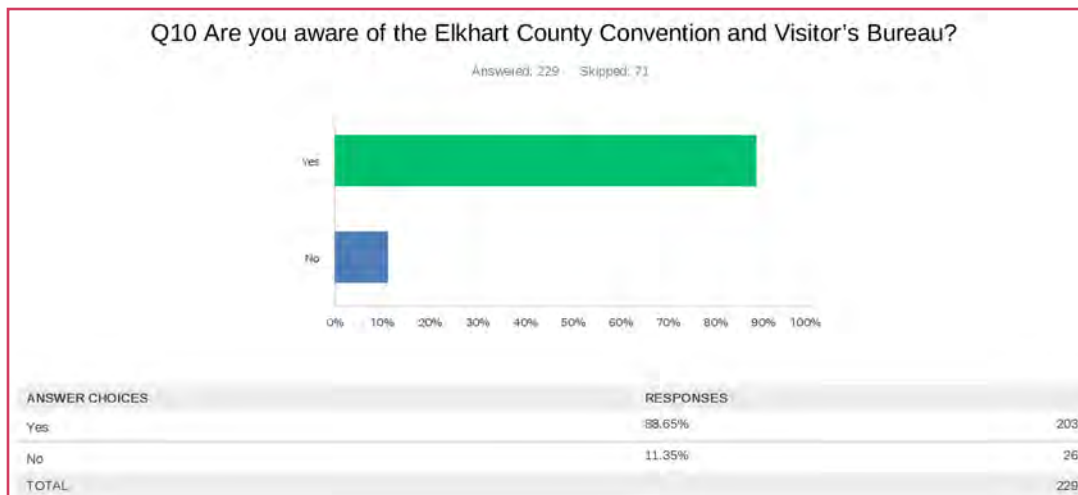


Q9 Please note your level of agreement with the following statements:

Answered: 231 Skipped: 59

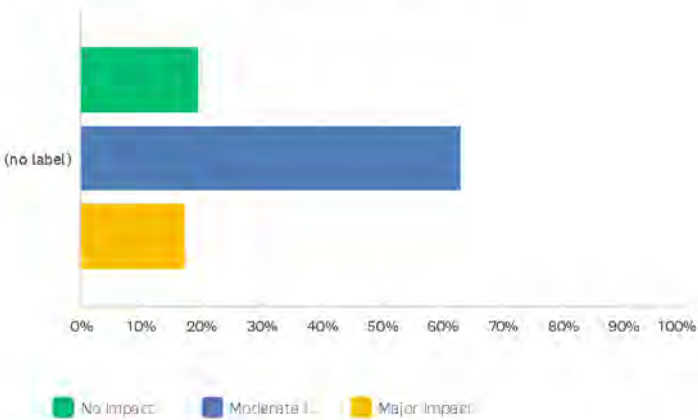


	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
The tourism industry is an important element in enhancing the heritage and unique cultures found in Elkhart County, including the Amish traditions and beliefs.	1.30% 3	4.33% 10	12.55% 29	48.05% 111	33.77% 78	231	4.09
The tourism industry values sensitive heritage and natural resources and works to ensure their long term sustainability	3.03% 7	8.66% 20	22.09% 51	45.45% 105	20.78% 48	231	3.72
The tourism industry is an important factor in introducing both new employees and their employees to Elkhart County.	1.73% 4	6.93% 16	22.94% 53	43.29% 100	25.11% 58	231	3.83
The benefits of tourism outweigh the negative impacts of the industry.	1.31% 3	5.24% 12	23.14% 53	43.67% 100	26.64% 61	229	3.89
Elkhart County needs more visitors from outside the area coming to visit the area.	0.87% 2	3.02% 7	15.59% 36	47.19% 109	33.33% 77	231	4.09
Visitors to Elkhart County are adding too much traffic causing congestion on Elkhart County roads	22.71% 52	42.79% 99	25.32% 58	5.24% 12	3.62% 8	228	2.25
There are too many visitors to Elkhart County causing crowding in downtown areas.	30.67% 71	47.60% 110	17.39% 40	3.46% 8	0.40% 1	230	1.95
There are too many visitors to Elkhart County causing crowding of parks and outdoor recreational facilities.	34.50% 79	45.91% 112	13.97% 32	2.18% 5	0.44% 1	229	1.85



Q12 While the organization is most frequently recognized for its role in connecting with visitors, they also can have a role with Elkhart County residents. What is your perspective on the organization's role with Elkhart County residents.

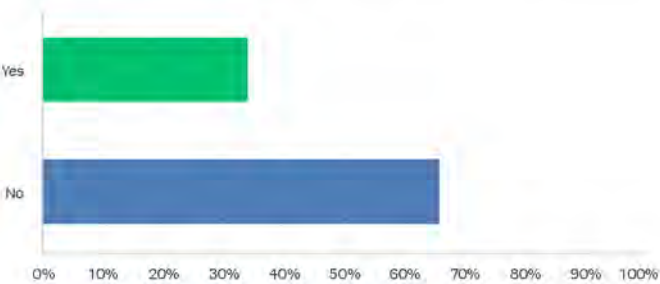
Answered: 203 Skipped: 97



	NO IMPACT	MODERATE IMPACT	MAJOR IMPACT	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
(no label)	19.70%	63.05%	17.24%	203	1.98
	40	128	35		

Q13 Are you familiar with the Well Crafted brand?

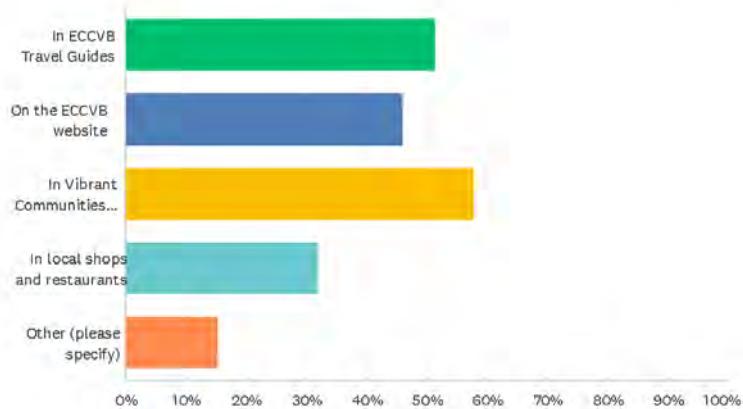
Answered: 228 Skipped: 72



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	34.21%	78
No	65.79%	150
TOTAL		228

Q14 Where have you seen the Well Crafted brand? (select all that apply)

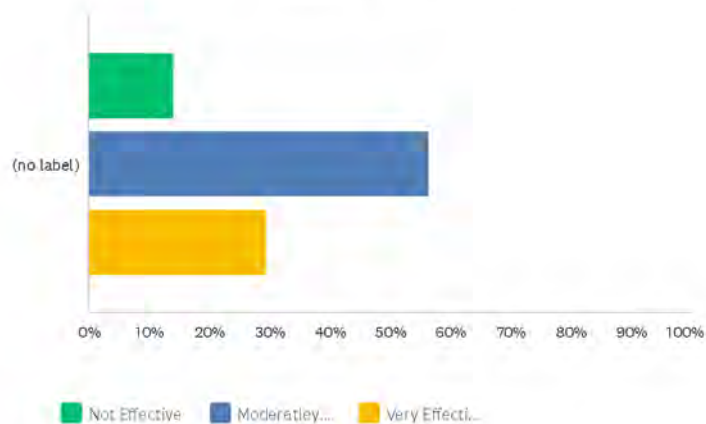
Answered: 78 Skipped: 222



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
In ECCVB Travel Guides	51.28%	40
On the ECCVB website	46.15%	36
In Vibrant Communities initiatives	57.69%	45
In local shops and restaurants	32.05%	25
Other (please specify)	15.38%	12
Total Respondents: 78		

Q15 How effective do you believe the Well Crafted brand communicates the essence of Elkhart County?

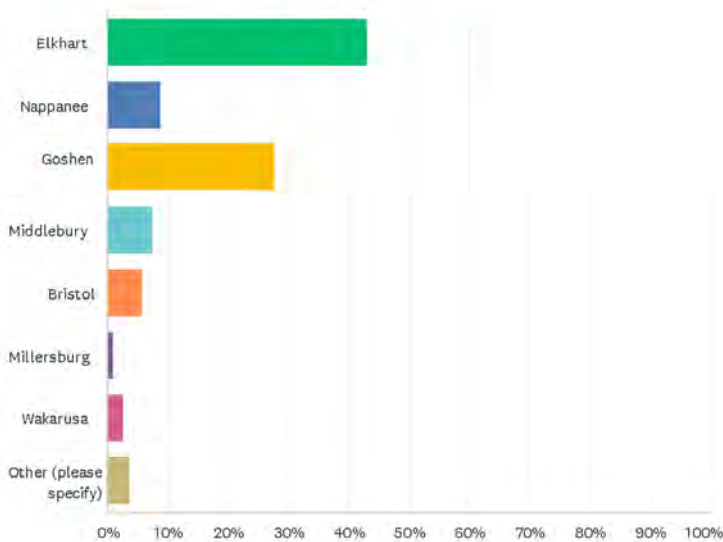
Answered: 78 Skipped: 222



	NOT EFFECTIVE	MODERATELY EFFECTIVE	VERY EFFECTIVE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
(no label)	14.10% 11	56.41% 44	29.49% 23	78	2.15

Q16 In what community do you live?

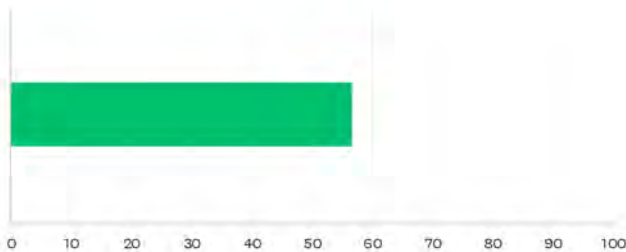
Answered: 227 Skipped: 73



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Elkhart	43.17%	98
Nappanee	8.81%	20
Goshen	27.75%	63
Middlebury	7.49%	17
Bristol	5.73%	13
Millersburg	0.88%	2
Wakarusa	2.64%	6
Other (please specify)	3.52%	8
TOTAL		227

Q17 What is your age?

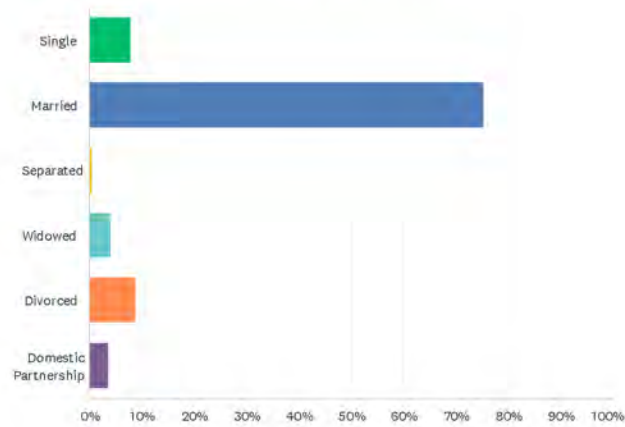
Answered: 227 Skipped: 73



ANSWER CHOICES	AVERAGE NUMBER	TOTAL NUMBER	RESPONSES
	57	12,898	227
Total Respondents: 227			

Q18 What is your marital status?

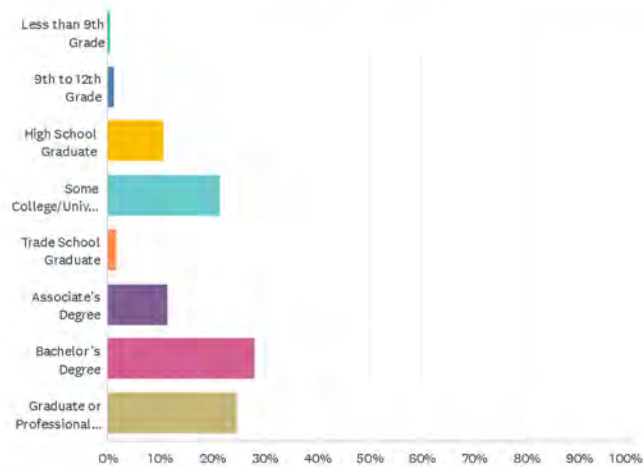
Answered: 227 Skipped: 73



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Single	7.93%	18
Married	75.33%	171
Separated	0.44%	1
Widowed	3.96%	9
Divorced	8.81%	20
Domestic Partnership	3.52%	8
TOTAL		227

Q19 What is the highest level of education you have achieved?

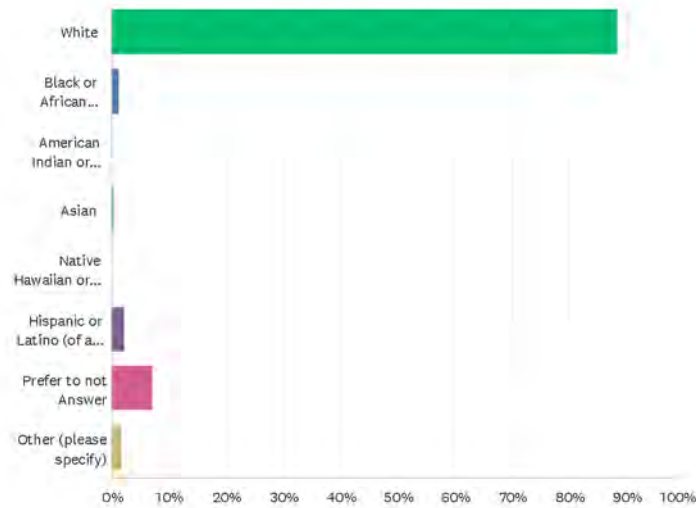
Answered: 227 Skipped: 73



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Less than 9th Grade	0.44%	1
9th to 12th Grade	1.32%	3
High School Graduate	10.57%	24
Some College/University	21.59%	49
Trade School Graduate	1.76%	4
Associate's Degree	11.45%	26
Bachelor's Degree	28.19%	64
Graduate or Professional Degree	24.67%	56
TOTAL		227

Q20 Which of the following best describes your race or ethnicity? (select all that apply)

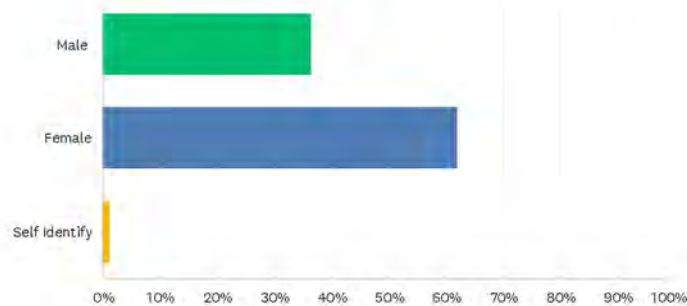
Answered: 227 Skipped: 73



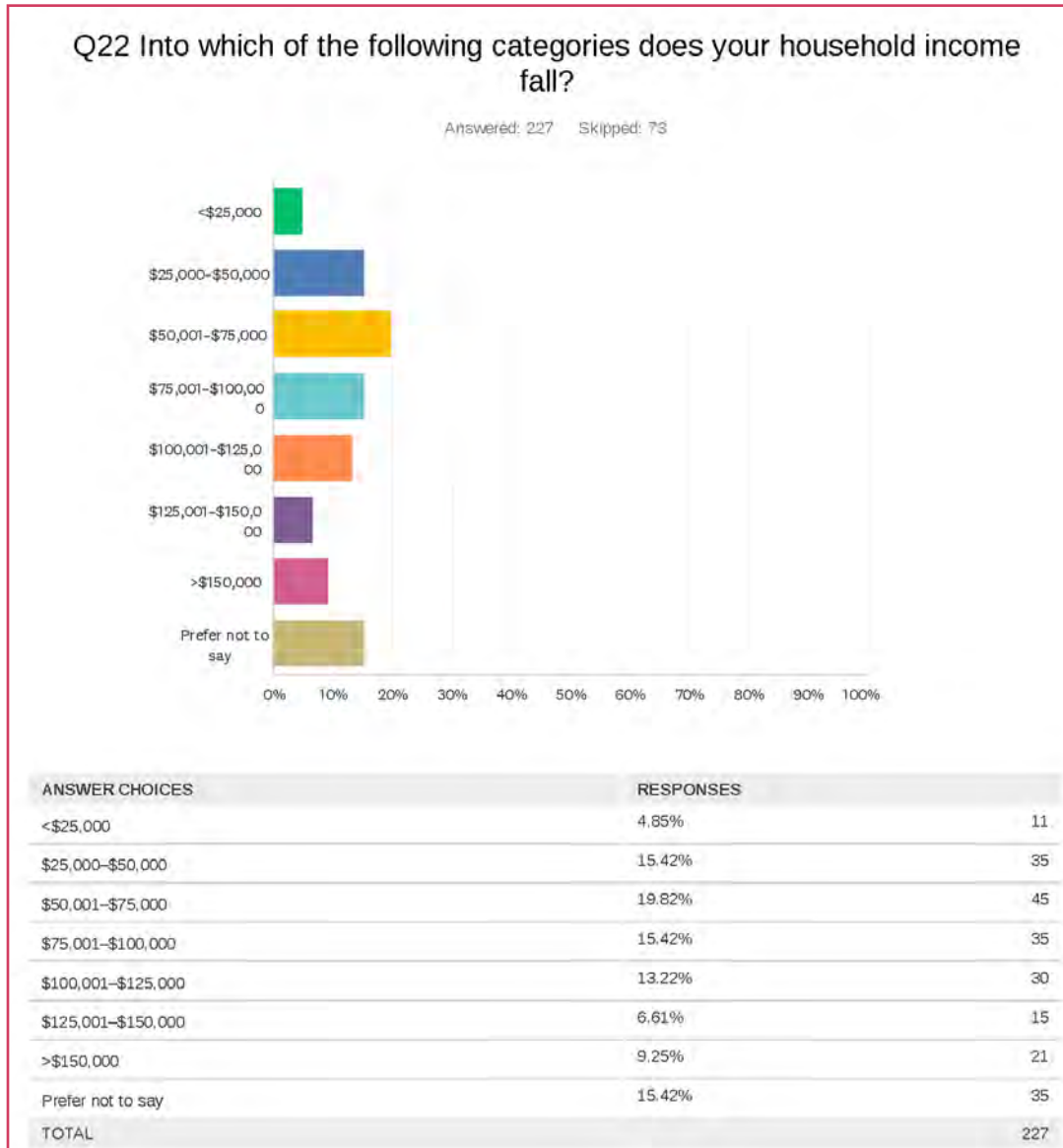
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
White	88.55%	201
Black or African American	1.32%	3
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.00%	0
Asian	0.44%	1
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.00%	0
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	2.20%	5
Prefer to not Answer	7.05%	16
Other (please specify)	1.76%	4
Total Respondents: 227		

Q21 What is your gender?

Answered: 227 Skipped: 73



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Male	36.56%	83
Female	62.11%	141
Self Identify	1.32%	3
TOTAL		227



D-2.0 ELKHART COUNTY VISITOR SURVEY

In March of 2022 the Abonmarche Planning Team undertook a new survey of prospective visitors to Elkhart County. This survey utilized the lead contact database from the Elkhart County Convention and Visitors Bureau (ECCVB) as a source for this information. This database included prospective visitors who had contacted the ECCVB for information, as well as contacts from the organization's various social media accounts. A total of 258 visitor responses were received, allowing an approximate 6% margin of error at a 95% confidence level.

KEY FINDINGS

A summary of key findings is initially provided and is followed by detailed tabulations for the survey.

- Demonstrating the high conversion potential of these prospective visitors, 85% of respondents had actually visited Elkhart County, with 2/3rds of respondents visiting within the last 2 years.
- Of those traveling to Elkhart County, 71% noted it was their primary destination. Of those with somewhere else being the primary destination, 25% noted it was Shippshewana and 4-5% noted Notre Dame or Indiana Dunes.
- The largest noted reason for not visiting (27%) was they lacked knowledge of Elkhart County, reinforcing the potential for stimulating new demand with education about the destination.
- Most visitors stayed overnight in Elkhart County (60%) – the 40% who came as day visitors stayed an average of 5.3 hours, illustrating the strong potential to convince more to extend their stay and convert them to overnight guests.
- When asked what it would take to convince a daytripper to stay overnight, better/wider range of lodging was cited by 25%, more deals/pkgs/discounts by 23%, more to see & do multiple events by 20%, more time by 18%, and more campgrounds by 8%.
- Demonstrating the ongoing attraction ability of Elkhart County, the mean number of times a visitor returned over the last 3 years was 3.2 times.
- The average party size of visitors was 2.4 persons, with only 11% traveling with children.
- The mature nature of many Elkhart County visitors is clear as the average age of respondents was 65 and 84% of visitors were above 55.
- Approximately 90% of visitors arrived in the County using their own personal vehicle, while 5% came by RV.
- 75% of visitors to Elkhart County are attracted from 5 regional states – IN 23%, IL 18%, MI 18%, OH 11% and WI 4%.
- Most visitors came to Elkhart County for a leisure vacation (59%), with shopping (22%), Festival/Event 14%, and Visiting Friends and Relatives (13%) the next highest categories.
- Similar to most destinations, the most frequently cited activity/event or services a visitor attended or participated on their last trip was dining, shopping and sightseeing. The power of proactive product development is illustrated as the Quilt Gardens Tour was the 4th most cited activity, and the Heritage Trail Tour was the 6th most cited activity.

ACTIVITY/EVENT/SERVICE	% PARTICIPATED
Dining	69.3%
Shopping	64.8%
Sightseeing	47.5%
Quilt Gardens Tour	24%
Festivals/Fairs/Concerts	20.1%
Heritage Trail Tour	17.9%
Historical/Heritage Sites	16.8%
Visiting Parks and Trails	16.8%
Entertainment/Nightlife	16.2%
Arts/Cultural Performance	15.6%
Nature Hiking/Walking	12.9%
Visit F&R	12.3%

WELL CRAFTING THE FUTURE

- Respondents were asked what attractions or experiences they went to when in Elkhart County as well as their rating of the experience on a 5-point scale. The table below ranks the attractions by the percent visited, as well as the % rating the attraction as excellent.

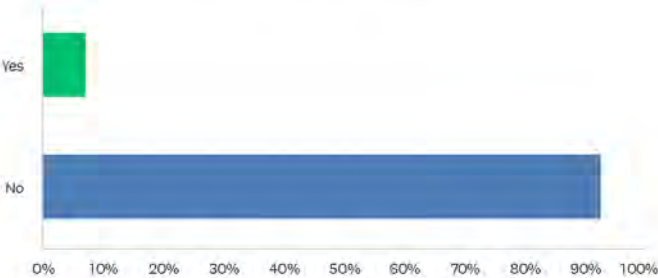
ATTRACTION	% RATING	
	EXCELLENT	% VISITED
Downtown Shipshewana	83%	67%
Das Dutchman Essenhaus	73%	70%
Shipshewana Flea Market	66%	57%
Downtown Nappanee	63%	45%
Downtown Middlebury	60%	43%
Downtown Goshen	57%	36%
Old Bag Factory	57%	36%
Davis Mercantile	54%	52%
Shipshewana Trading Place	49%	63%
Quilt Gardens Tour	41%	65%
Blue Gate Theatre	39%	63%
Downtown Elkhart Gateway Mile	37%	31%
Downtown Bristol	36%	29%
Heritage Trail Tour	36%	66%
The Barns at Nappanee	34%	48%
Downtown Wakarusa	33%	40%
Bonneyville Mill	27%	28%
Menno-Hof Museum	27%	70%
Coppes Commons	24%	38%
Wellfield Botanic Gardens	22%	74%
RV/MH Hall of Fame Museum	21%	72%
Elkhart Exit 92 Area	19%	38%
Michiana Event Center	17%	45%
Nappanee Apple Festival	17%	52%
Pumpkinvine Nature Trail	14%	60%
Ruthmere	10%	53%
Middlebury Fall Festival	10%	41%
Wakarusa Maple Syrup Festival	9%	50%
Lerner Theatre	8%	57%
Goshen College	8%	43%
Midwest Museum of American Art	6%	60%
Goshen Theatre	5%	33%
Elkhart Aquatics Center	5%	25%
Elkhart Jazz Festival	3%	0%

- The satisfaction of visitors is clear as they rated their satisfaction with their most recent trip a 4.4 on a 5-point scale, with 60% rating it as excellent.
- 94% of respondents would recommend the destination to others and 67% noted they would likely return to Elkhart County within the next 12 months.
- The important role the ECCVB plays in guiding visitors as they come to Elkhart County is clear as when asked where they obtained information for their most recent trip, #1 and #3 were the Elkhart County Visitor Guide and the Elkhart County Tourism Website.

CHANNEL	% USED
Elkhart County Visitor Guide	40.1%
Brochure	35.7%
Elkhart County Tourism Website	35.2%
Email	29.5%
Indiana Tourism Website	26.2%
Search Engine (i.e. Google)	26.2%
Elkhart County Visitor Center	19.5%
Facebook	13.8%
Magazine	11%
Direct mail	11%

Q1 Do you live in Elkhart County, Indiana?

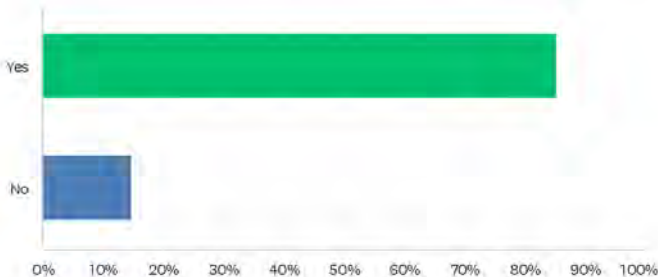
Answered: 278 Skipped: 0



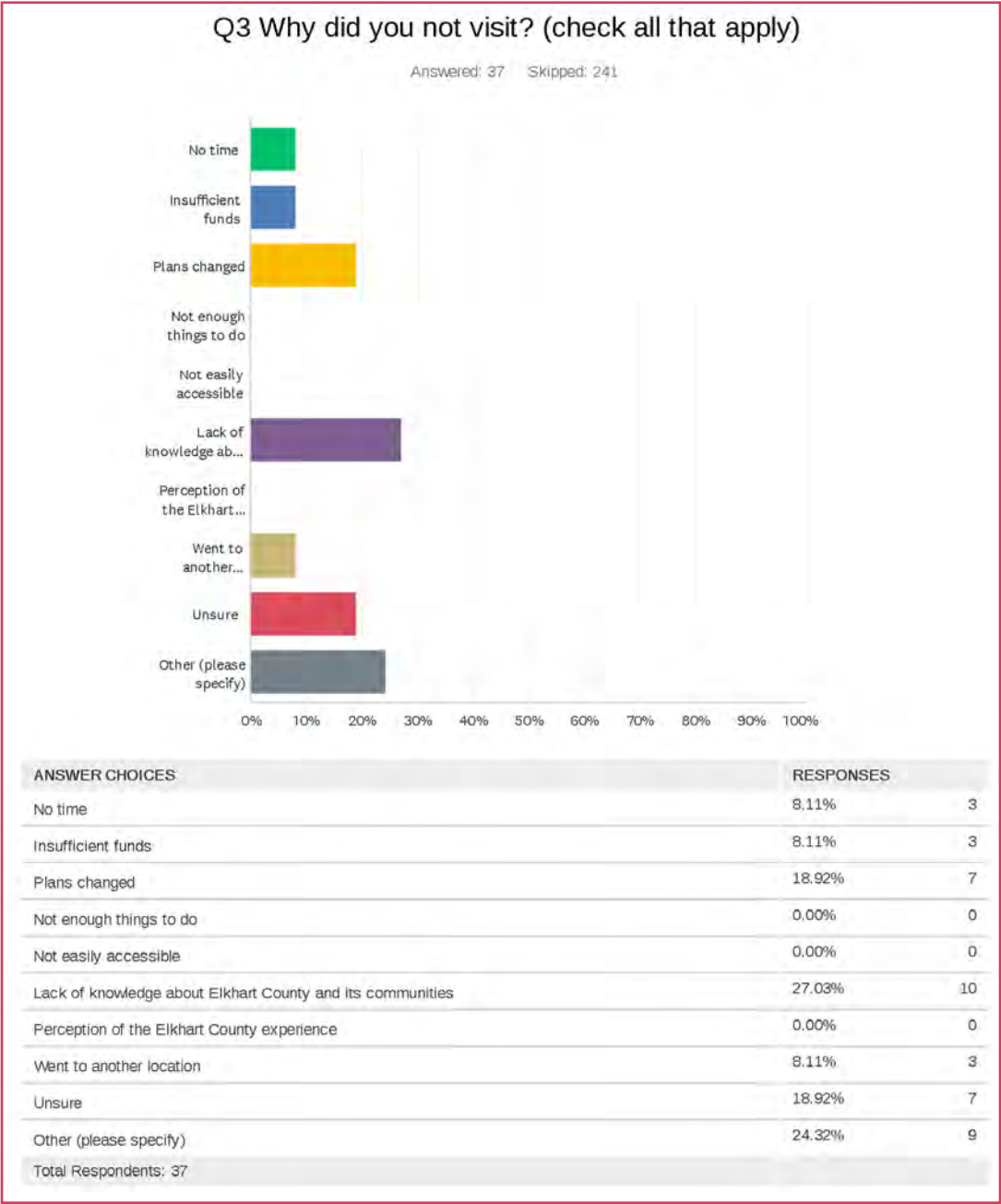
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	7.19%	20
No	92.81%	258
TOTAL		278

Q2 Have you ever visited the Elkhart County area?

Answered: 257 Skipped: 21



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	85.21%	219
No	14.79%	38
TOTAL		257

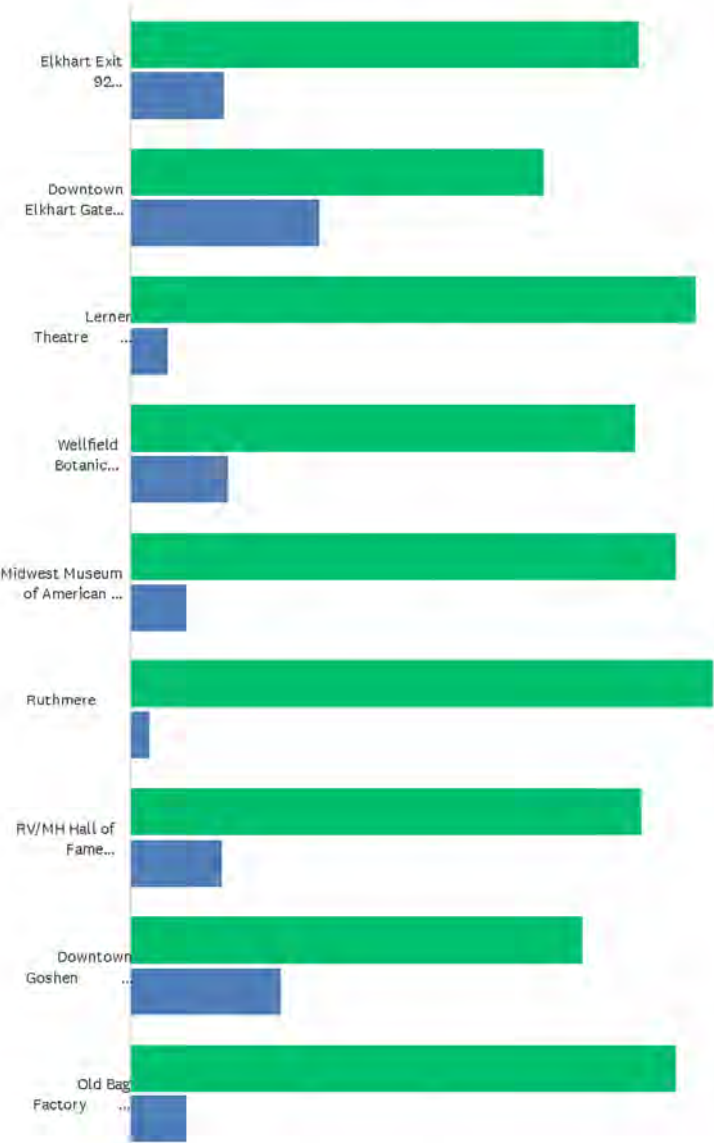


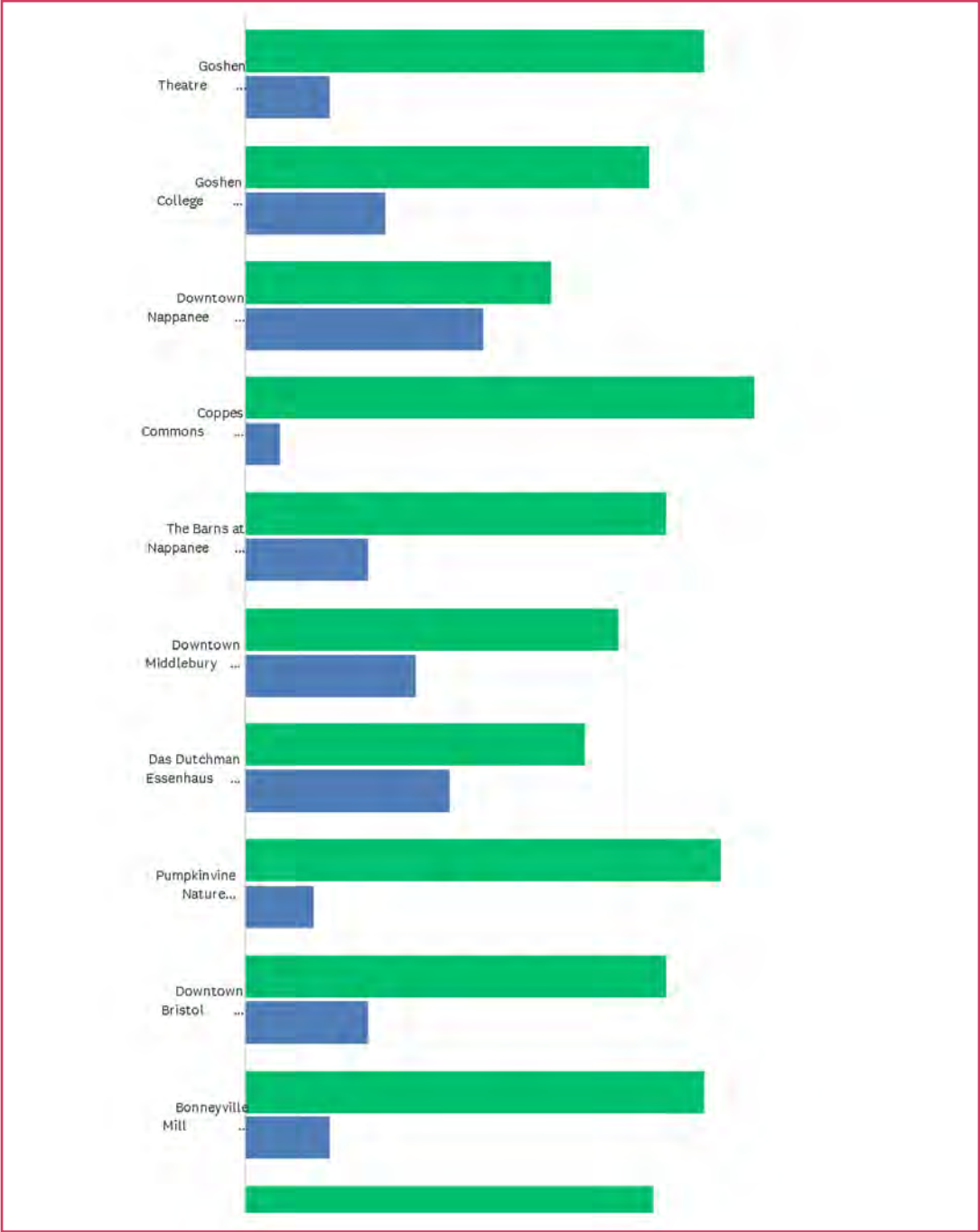
Q4 Where did you end up visiting instead of Elkhart County?

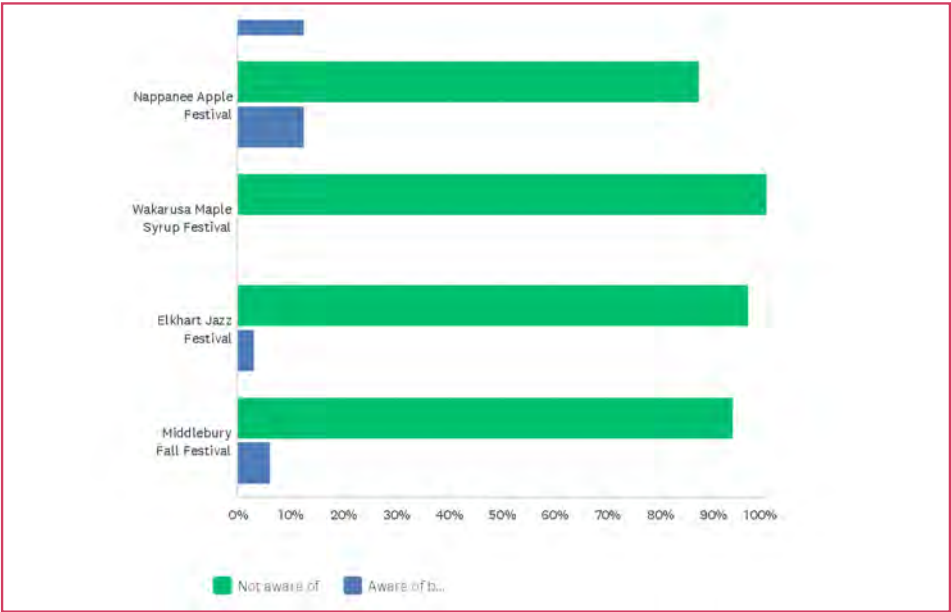
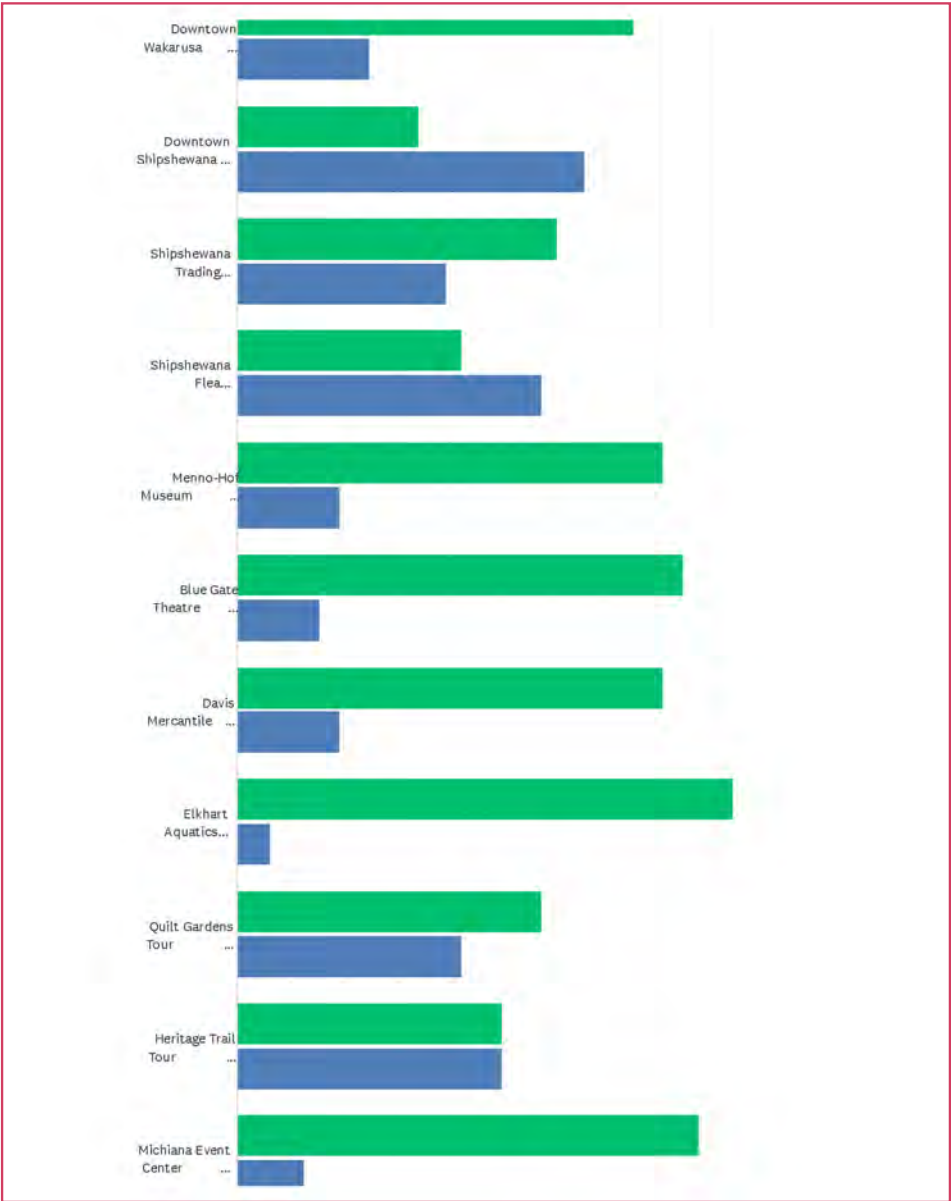
Answered: 1 Skipped: 277

Q5 Please indicate if you are aware or not aware of the following Elkhart County area attractions.

Answered: 33 Skipped: 245







	NOT AWARE OF	AWARE OF BUT NEVER VISITED	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Elkhart Exit 92 Area	84.38% 27	15.63% 5	32	0.16
Downtown Elkhart Gateway Mile	68.75% 22	31.25% 10	32	0.31
Lerner Theatre	93.75% 30	6.25% 2	32	0.06
Wellfield Botanic Gardens	83.87% 26	16.13% 5	31	0.16
Midwest Museum of American Art	90.63% 29	9.38% 3	32	0.09
Ruthmere	96.77% 30	3.23% 1	31	0.03
RV/MH Hall of Fame Museum	84.85% 28	15.15% 5	33	0.15
Downtown Goshen	75.00% 24	25.00% 8	32	0.25
Old Bag Factory	90.63% 29	9.38% 3	32	0.09
Goshen Theatre	84.38% 27	15.63% 5	32	0.16
Goshen College	74.19% 23	25.81% 8	31	0.26
Downtown Nappanee	56.25% 18	43.75% 14	32	0.44
Coppes Commons	93.55% 29	6.45% 2	31	0.06
The Barns at Nappanee	77.42% 24	22.58% 7	31	0.23
Downtown Middlebury	68.75% 22	31.25% 10	32	0.31
Das Dutchman Essenhaus	62.50% 20	37.50% 12	32	0.38
Pumpkinvine Nature Trail	87.50% 28	12.50% 4	32	0.13
Downtown Bristol	77.42% 24	22.58% 7	31	0.23
Bonneyville Mill	84.38% 27	15.63% 5	32	0.16
Downtown Wakarusa	75.00% 24	25.00% 8	32	0.25
Downtown Shipshewana	34.38% 11	65.63% 21	32	0.66
Shipshewana Trading Place	60.61% 20	39.39% 13	33	0.39
Shipshewana Flea Market	42.42% 14	57.58% 19	33	0.58

Menno-Hof Museum	80.65% 25	19.35% 6	31	0.19
Blue Gate Theatre	84.38% 27	15.63% 5	32	0.16
Davis Mercantile	80.65% 25	19.35% 6	31	0.19
Elkhart Aquatics Center	93.75% 30	6.25% 2	32	0.06
Quilt Gardens Tour	57.58% 19	42.42% 14	33	0.42
Heritage Trail Tour	50.00% 16	50.00% 16	32	0.50
Michiana Event Center	87.50% 28	12.50% 4	32	0.13
Nappanee Apple Festival	87.50% 28	12.50% 4	32	0.13
Wakarusa Maple Syrup Festival	100.00% 32	0.00% 0	32	0.00
Elkhart Jazz Festival	96.88% 31	3.13% 1	32	0.03
Middlebury Fall Festival	93.75% 30	6.25% 2	32	0.06

Q6 When did you last visit the Elkhart County area?

Answered: 192 Skipped: 86

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Best guess of when you visited.	100.00% 192

Q7 Including yourself, how many people were in your travel party?

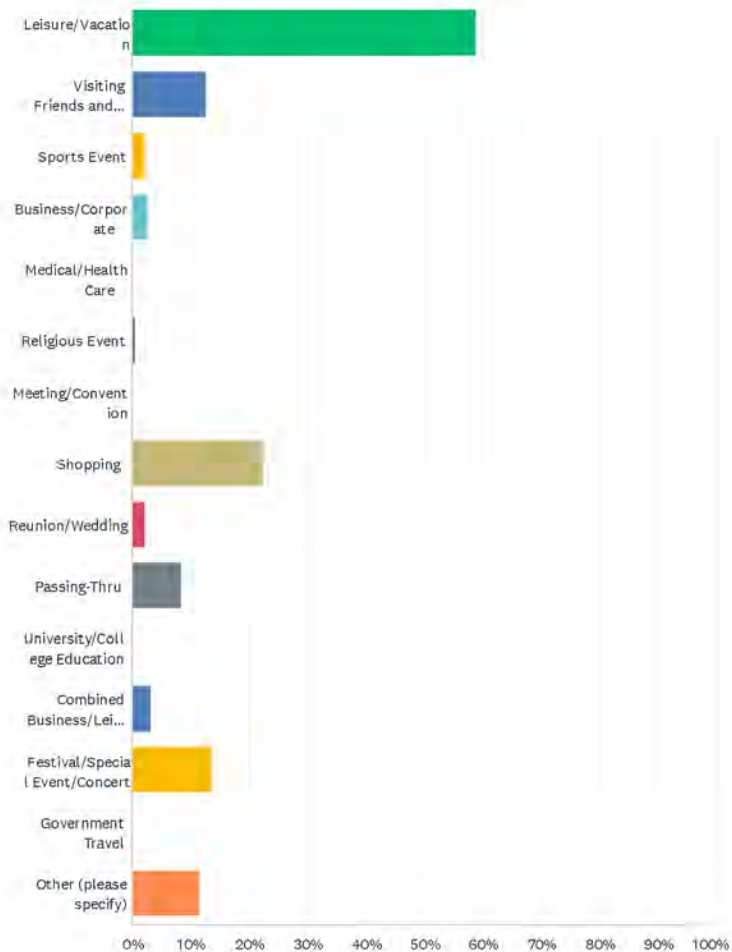
Answered: 192 Skipped: 86



ANSWER CHOICES	AVERAGE NUMBER	TOTAL NUMBER	RESPONSES
Adults	5	875	192
Children (under 18)	1	53	100
Total Respondents: 192			

Q8 What was the primary purpose of your last trip to the Elkhart County area? (check all that apply)

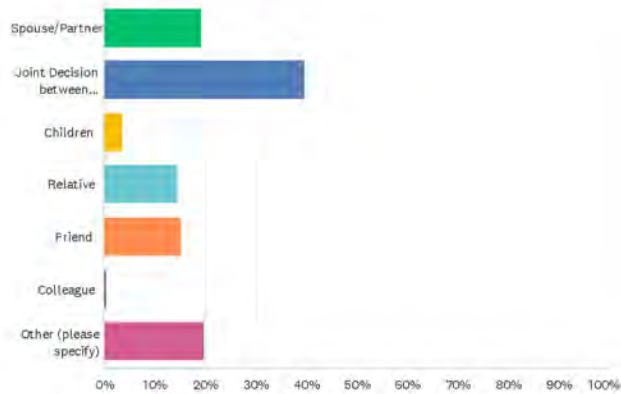
Answered: 192 Skipped: 86



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Leisure/Vacation	58.85%	113
Visiting Friends and Relatives	12.50%	24
Sports Event	2.08%	4
Business/Corporate	2.60%	5
Medical/Health Care	0.00%	0
Religious Event	0.52%	1
Meeting/Convention	0.00%	0
Shopping	22.40%	43
Reunion/Wedding	2.08%	4
Passing-Thru	8.33%	16
University/College Education	0.00%	0
Combined Business/Leisure	3.13%	6
Festival/Special Event/Concert	13.54%	26
Government Travel	0.00%	0
Other (please specify)	11.46%	22
Total Respondents: 192		

Q9 Who was most influential in your decision to visit the Elkhart County area the last time you visited? (check all that apply)

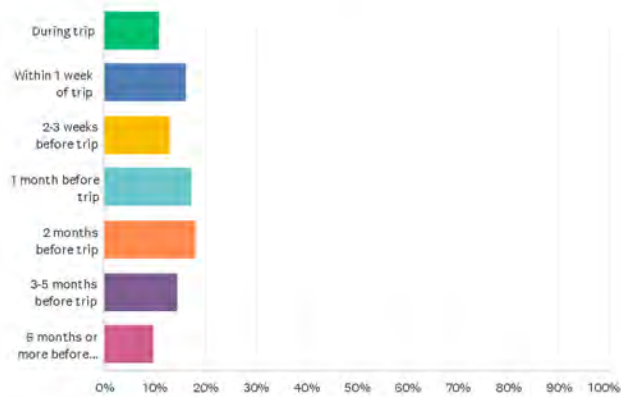
Answered: 192 Skipped: 86



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Spouse/Partner	19.27%	37
Joint Decision between spouses/partners	39.58%	76
Children	3.65%	7
Relative	14.58%	28
Friend	15.10%	29
Colleague	0.52%	1
Other (please specify)	19.79%	38
Total Respondents: 192		

Q10 When did you decide to make the last trip to the Elkhart County area?

Answered: 192 Skipped: 86



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
During trip	10.94%	21
Within 1 week of trip	16.15%	31
2-3 weeks before trip	13.02%	25
1 month before trip	17.19%	33
2 months before trip	18.23%	35
3-5 months before trip	14.58%	28
6 months or more before trip	9.90%	19
TOTAL		192

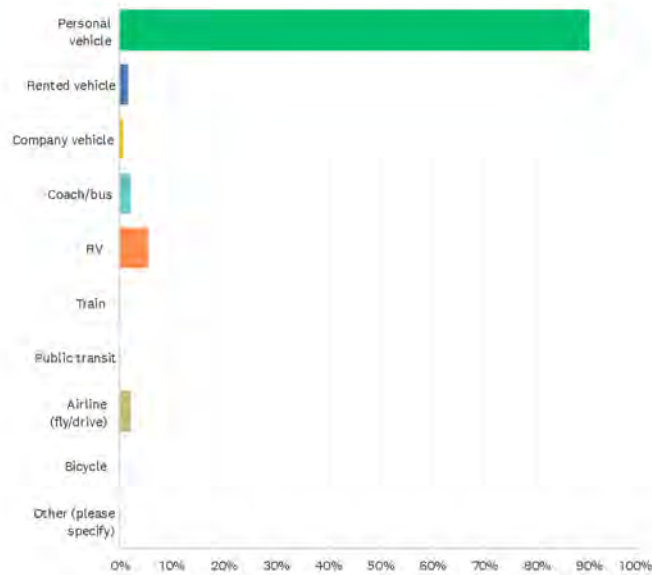


Q12 What was your primary destination?

Answered: 55 Skipped: 223

Q13 What type of transportation did you use to get to the Elkhart County area the last time you visited?

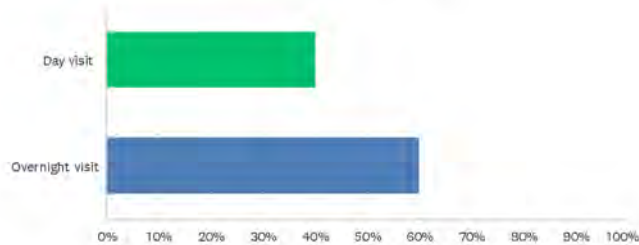
Answered: 182 Skipped: 96



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Personal vehicle	90.11%	164
Rented vehicle	1.65%	3
Company vehicle	0.55%	1
Coach/bus	2.20%	4
RV	5.49%	10
Train	0.00%	0
Public transit	0.00%	0
Airline (fly/drive)	2.20%	4
Bicycle	0.00%	0
Other (please specify)	0.00%	0
Total Respondents: 182		

Q14 Was your last visit to the Elkhart County area a day visit or an overnight visit?

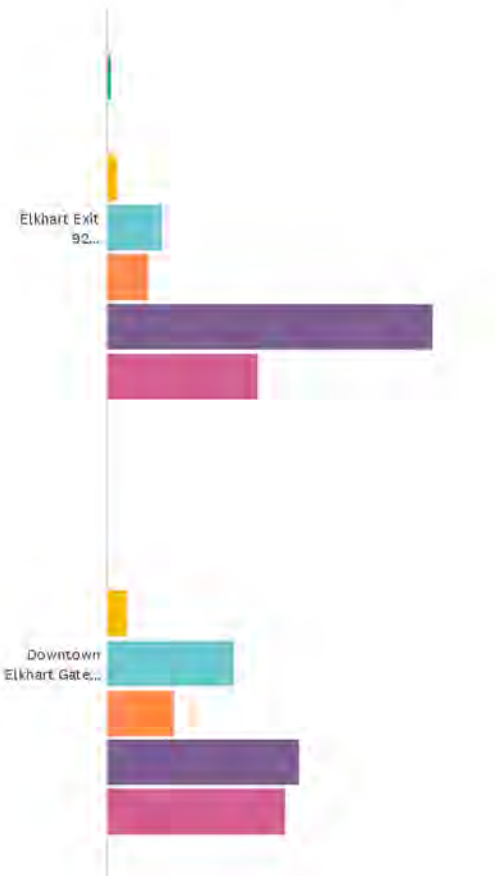
Answered: 182 Skipped: 96

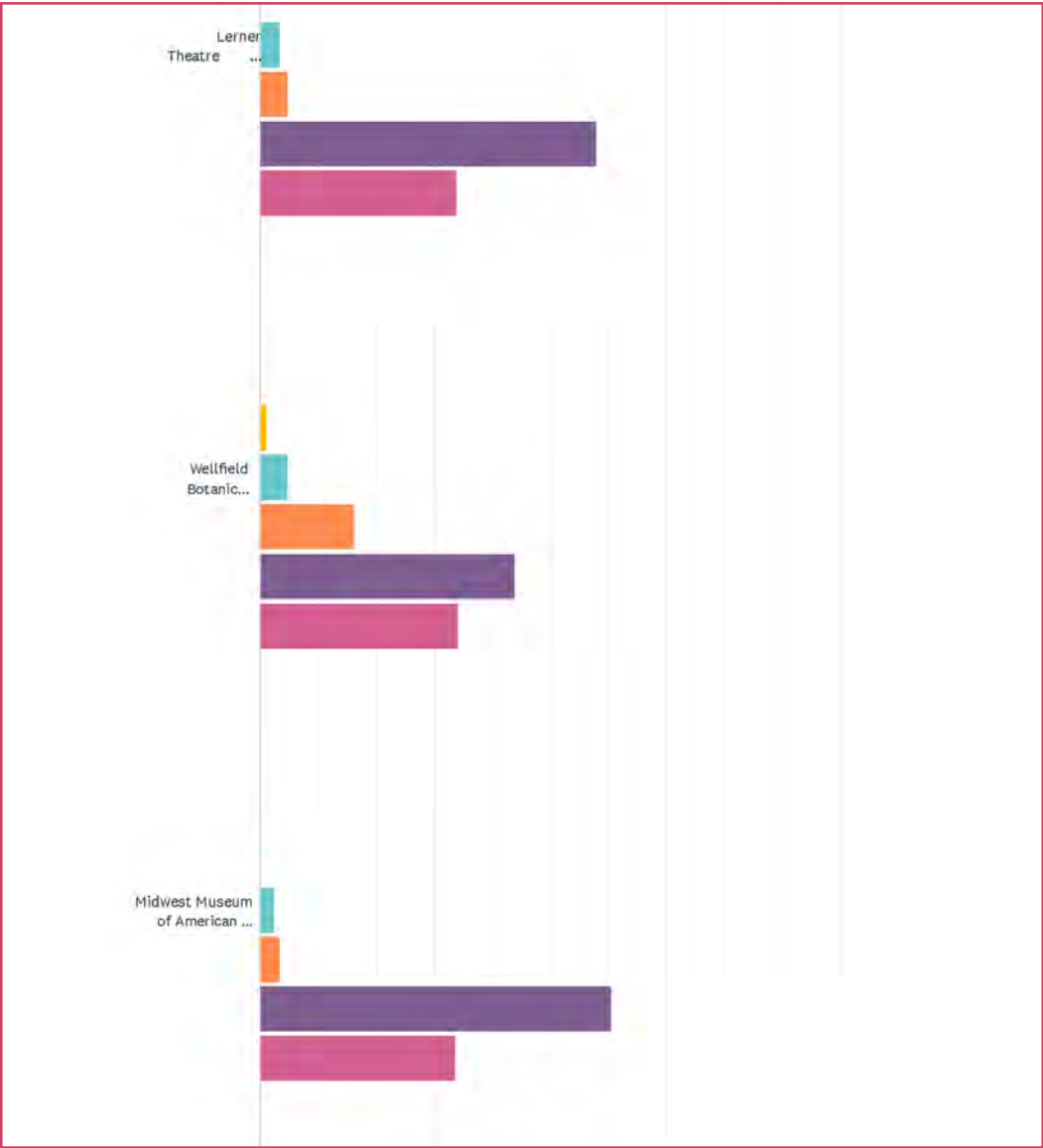


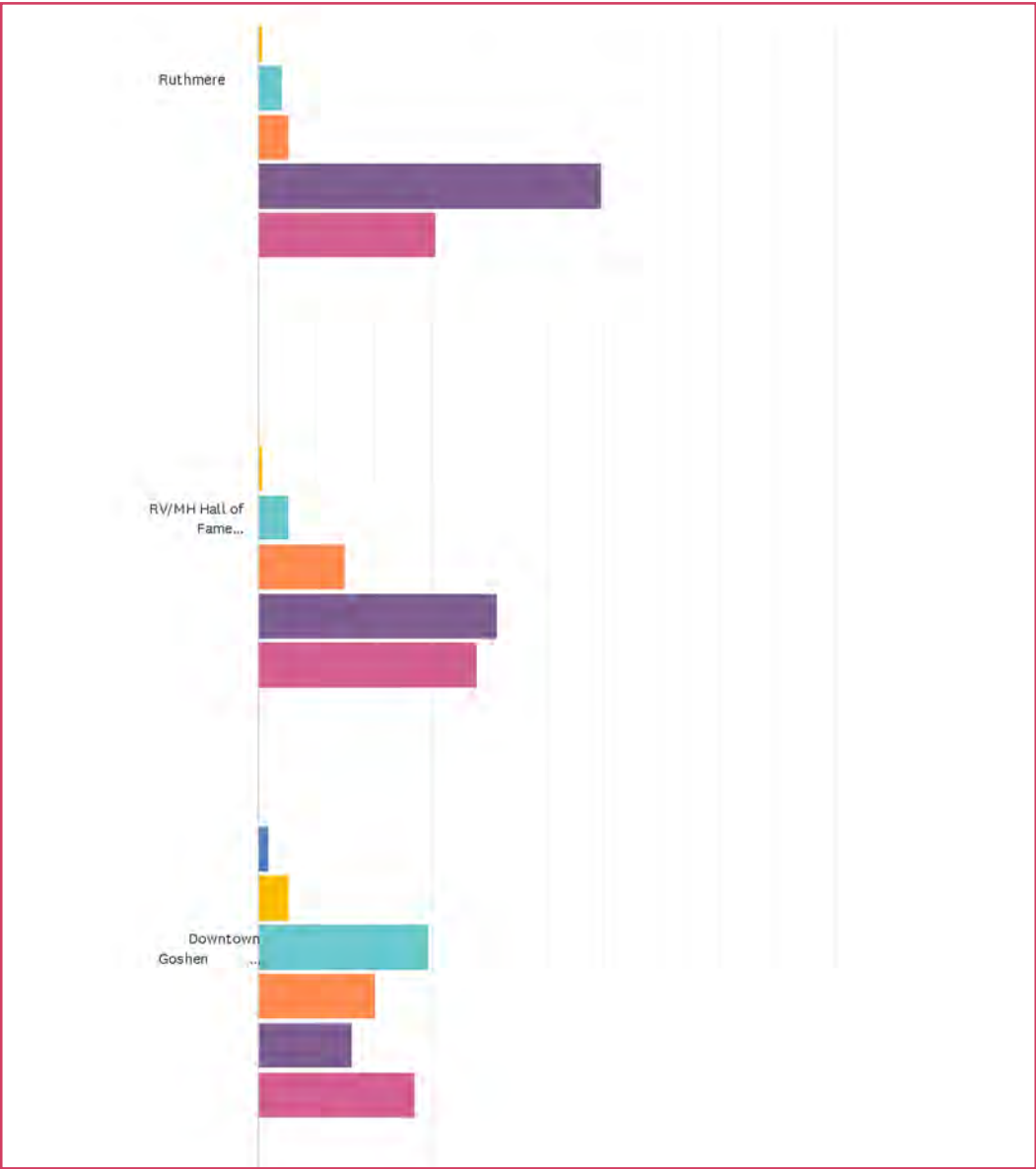
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Day visit	40.11%	73
Overnight visit	59.89%	109
TOTAL		182

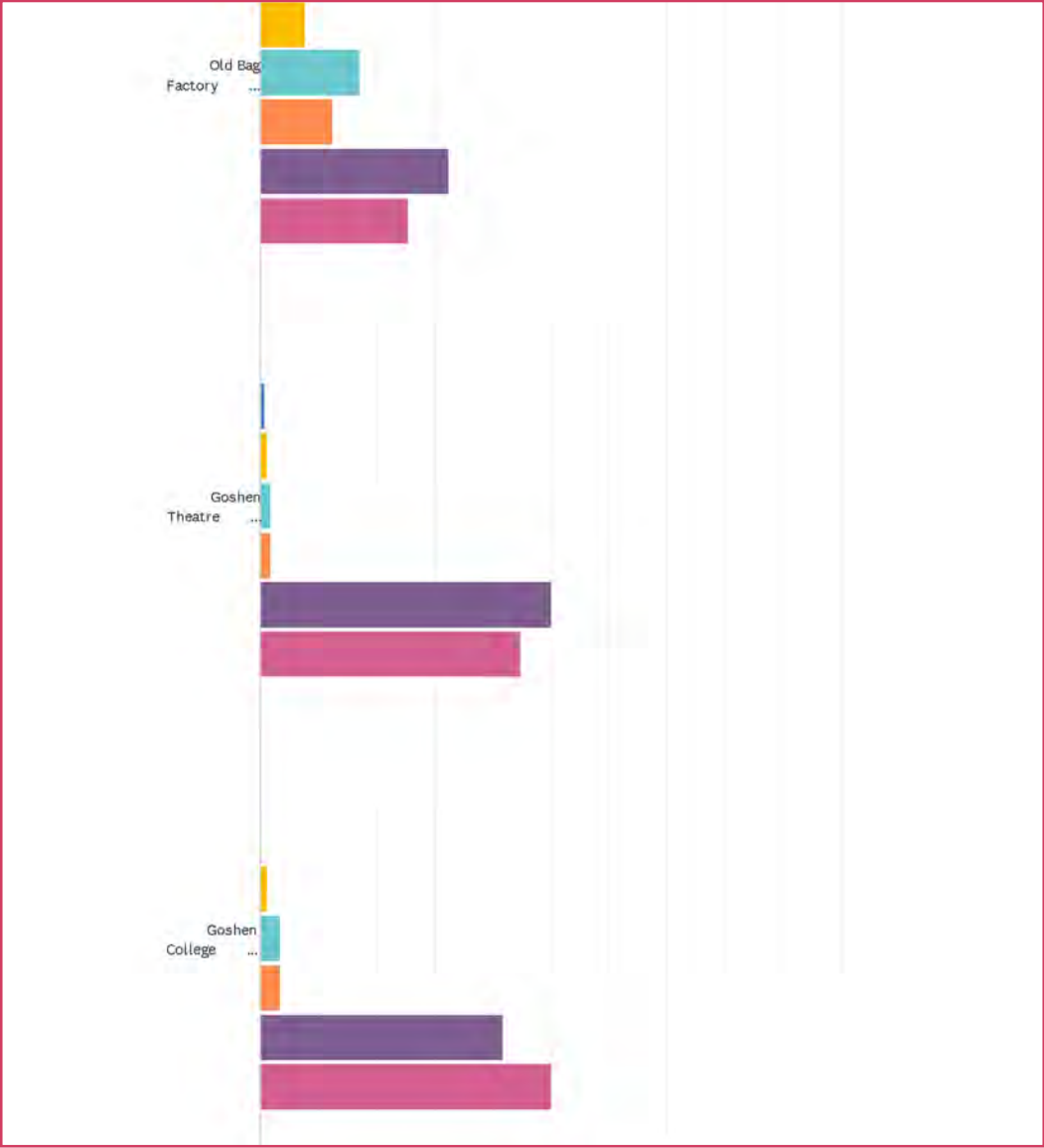
Q15 Please rate the following Elkhart County area attractions and events you have visited. If you are not aware of the attraction or event, select the “Not aware of” option. If you are aware of the attraction but have not visited it, please check the “Aware of but never visited” option.

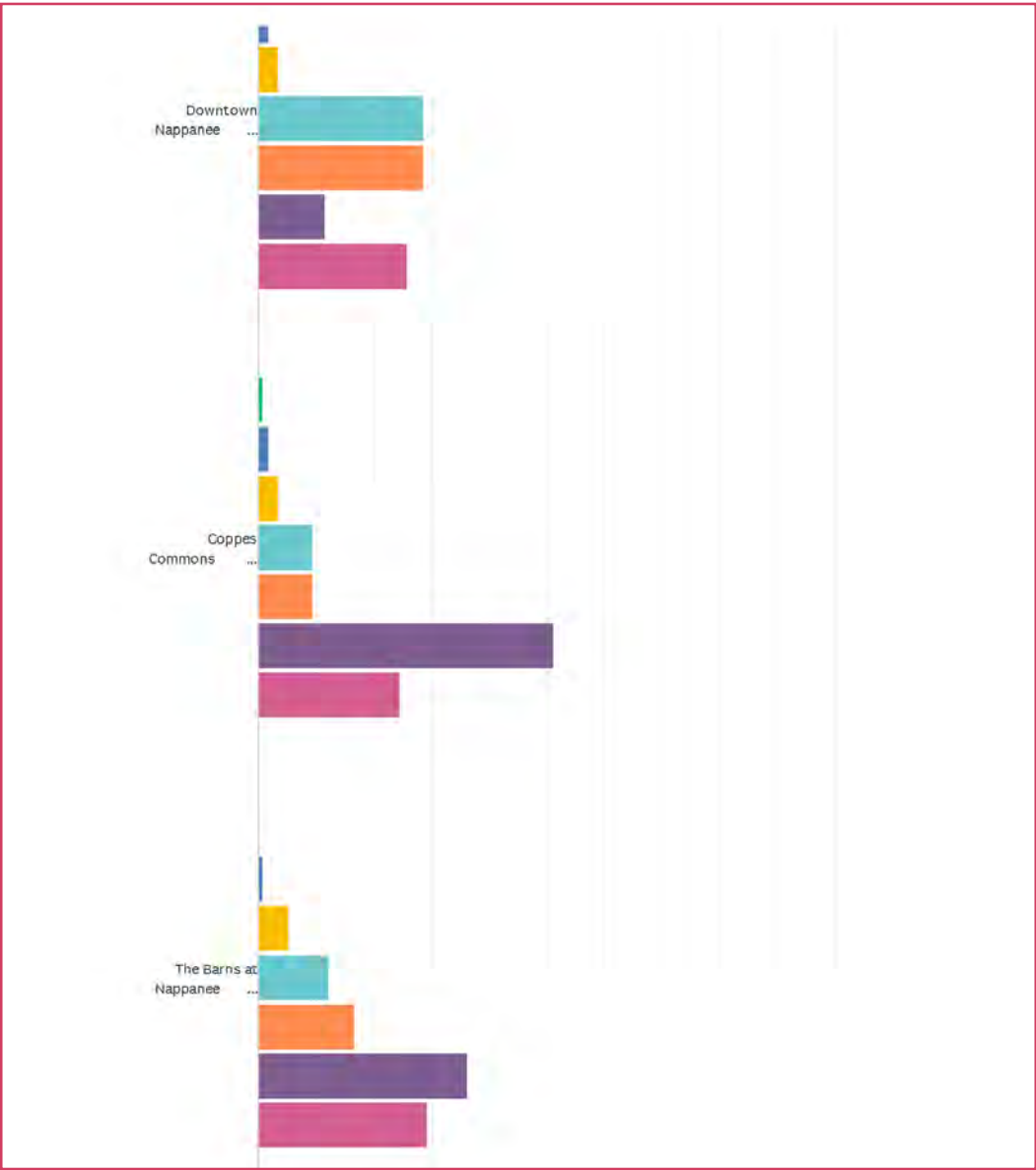
Answered: 162 Skipped: 96

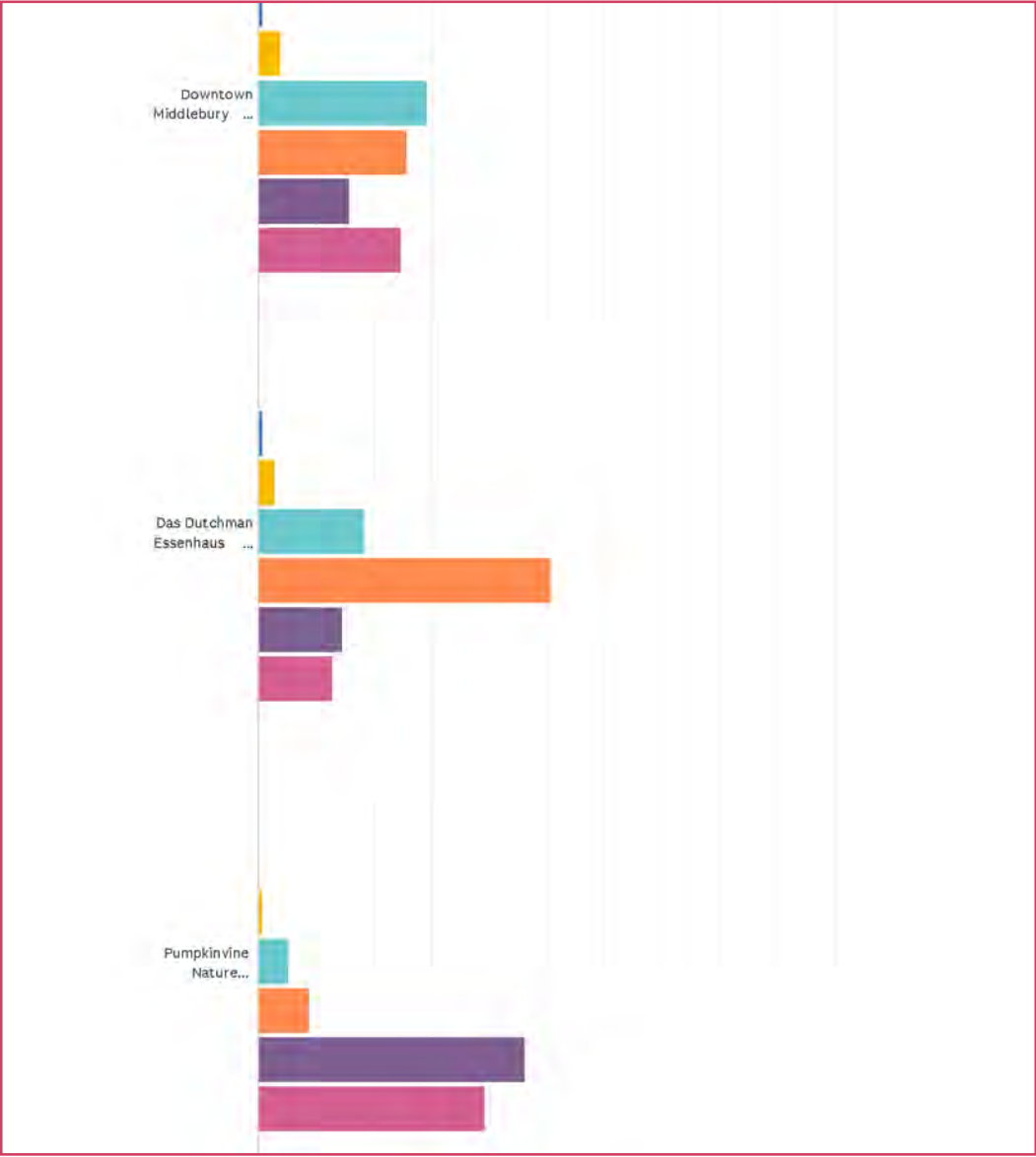


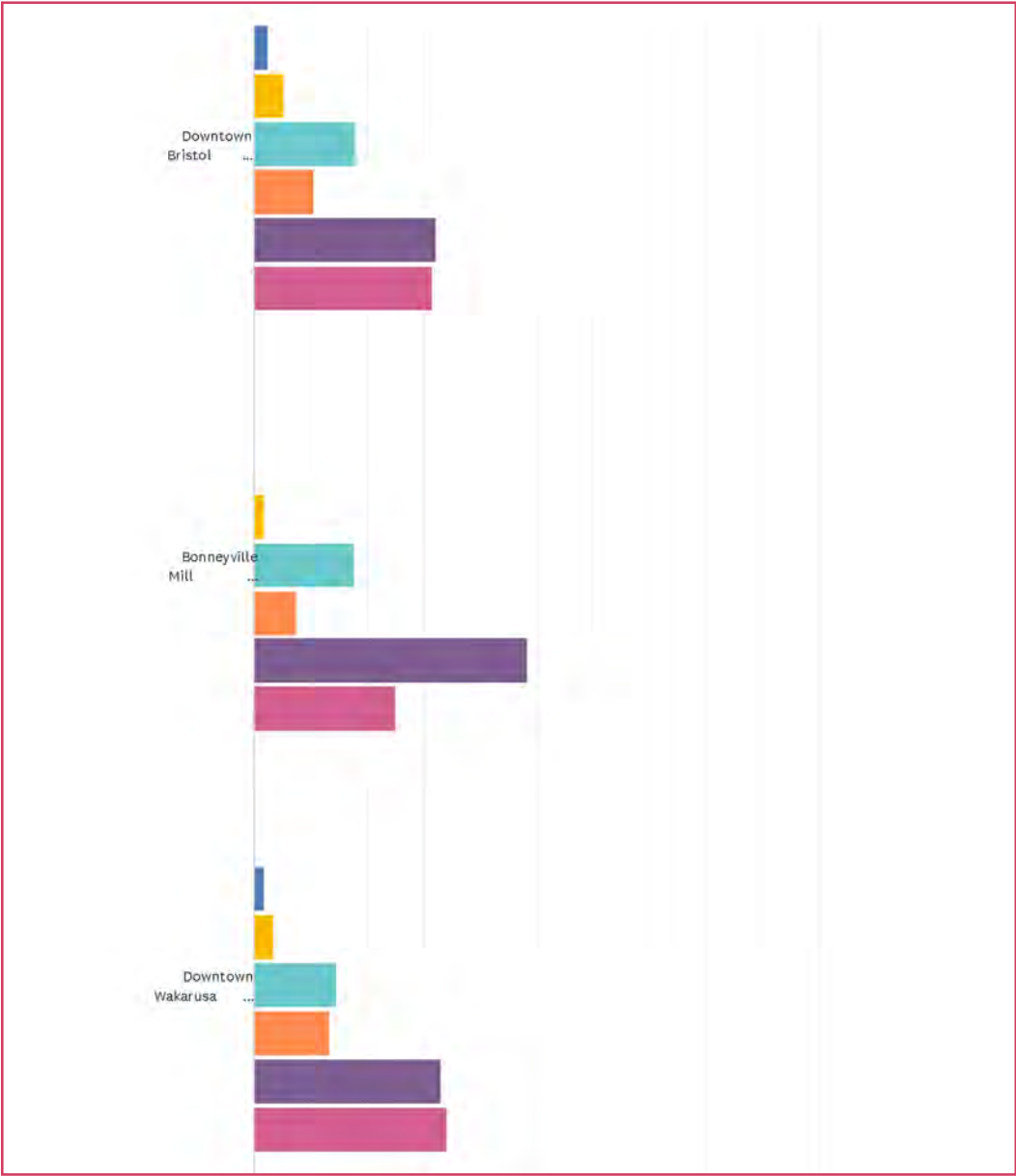


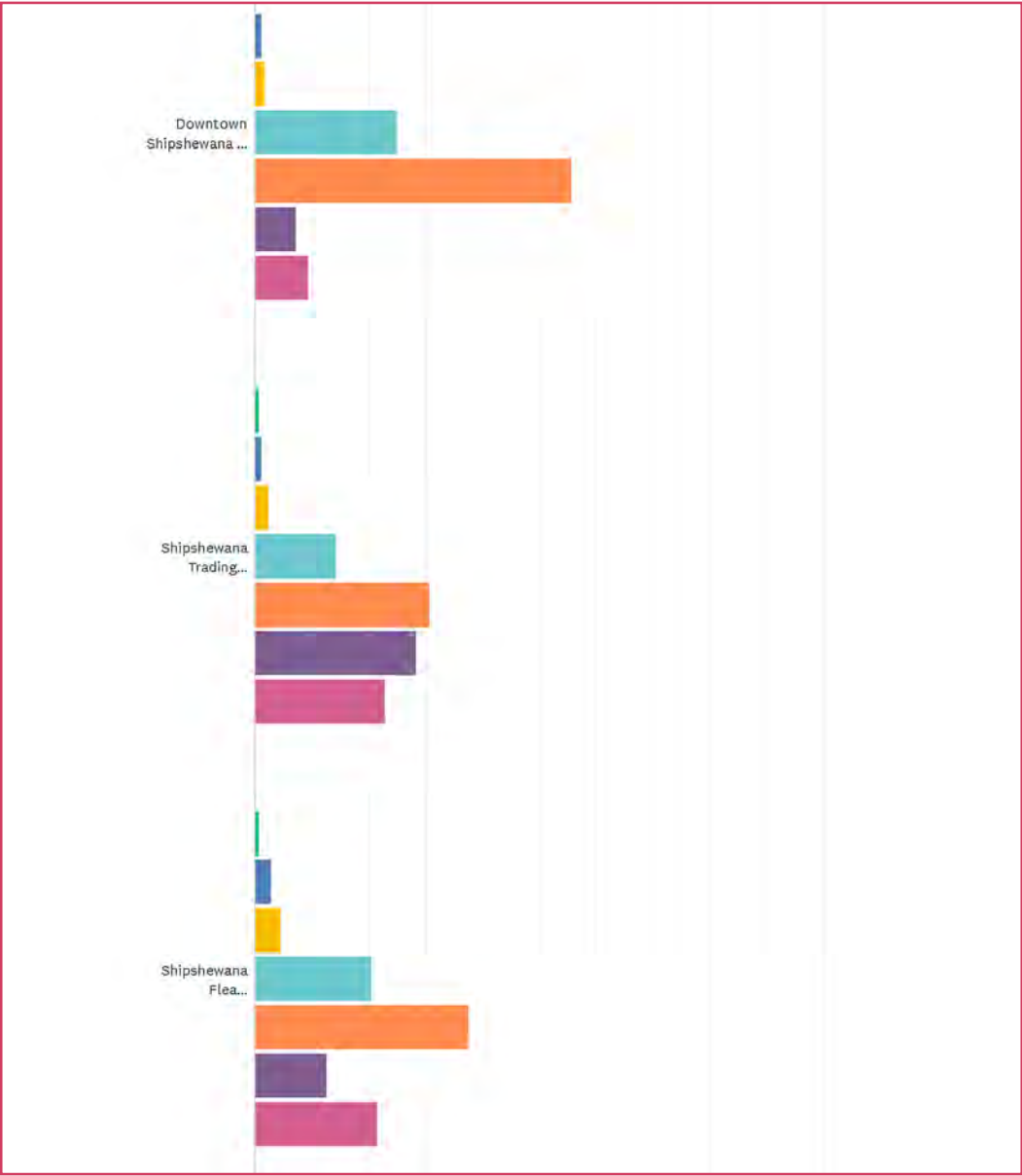


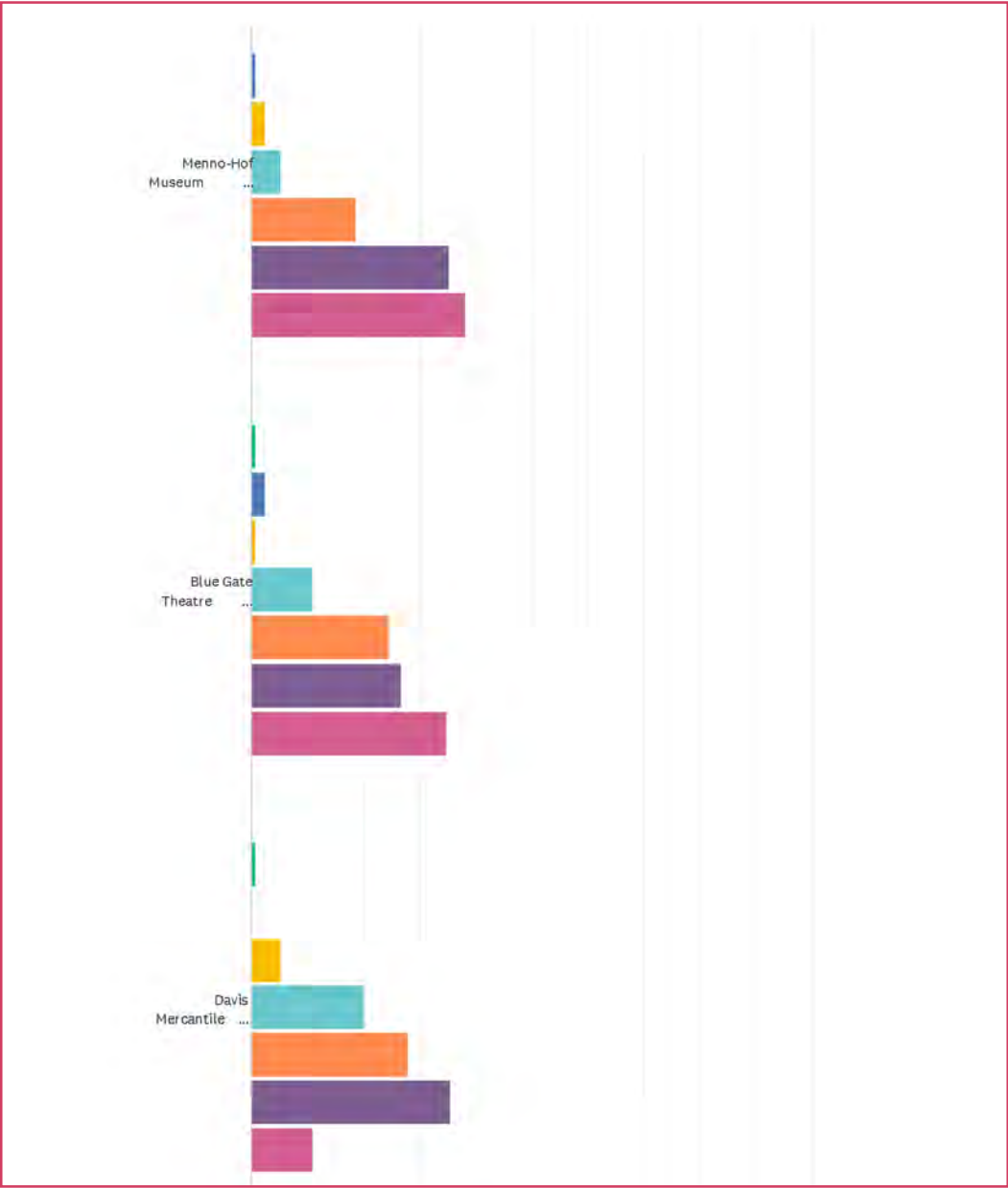


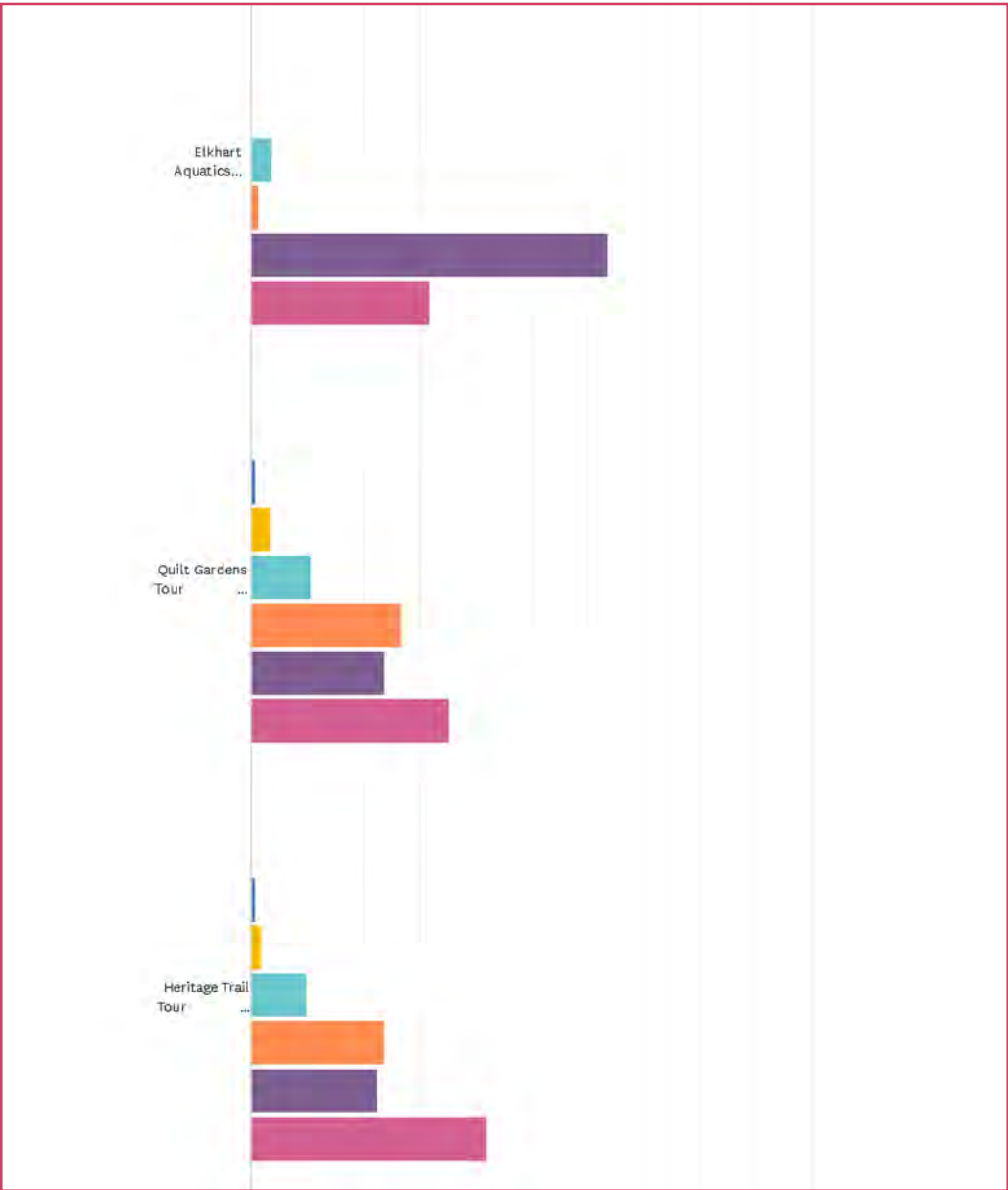




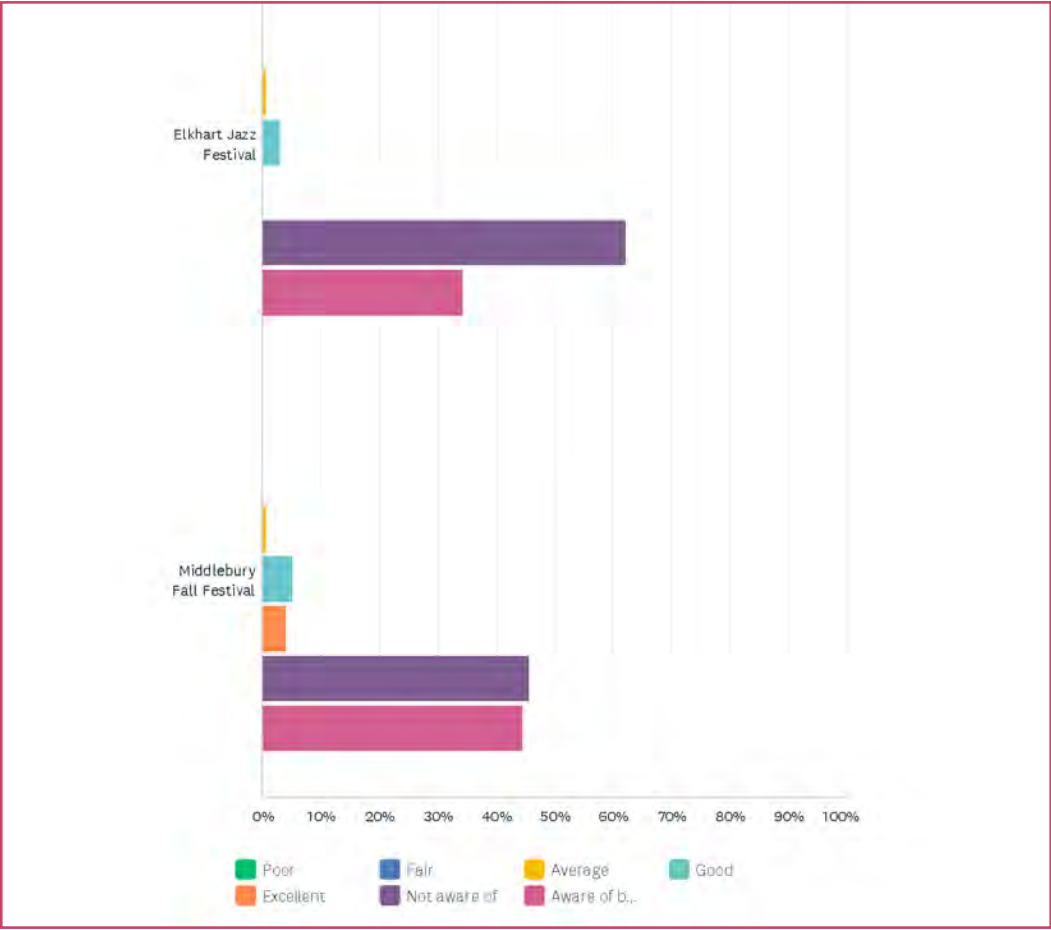












					VISITED				
Elkhart Exit 92 Area	0.58% 1	0.00% 0	1.75% 3	9.36% 16	7.02% 12	55.56% 95	25.73% 44	171	1.23
Downtown Elkhart Gateway Mile	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	3.45% 6	21.84% 38	11.49% 20	32.76% 57	30.46% 53	174	2.22
Lerner Theatre	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	3.51% 6	4.68% 8	57.89% 99	33.92% 58	171	0.80
Wellfield Botanic Gardens	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	1.16% 2	4.62% 8	16.18% 28	43.93% 76	34.10% 59	173	1.59
Midwest Museum of American Art	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	2.33% 4	3.49% 6	60.47% 104	33.72% 58	172	0.66
Ruthmere	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.58% 1	4.05% 7	5.20% 9	59.54% 103	30.64% 53	173	0.84
RV/MH Hall of Fame Museum	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.57% 1	5.17% 9	14.94% 26	41.38% 72	37.93% 66	174	1.56
Downtown Goshen	0.00% 0	1.73% 3	5.20% 9	29.48% 51	20.23% 35	16.18% 28	27.17% 47	173	3.22
Old Bag Factory	2.35% 4	2.94% 5	7.65% 13	17.06% 29	12.35% 21	32.35% 55	25.29% 43	170	2.29
Goshen Theatre	0.00% 0	0.58% 1	1.16% 2	1.74% 3	1.74% 3	50.00% 86	44.77% 77	172	0.70
Goshen College	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	1.16% 2	3.49% 6	3.49% 6	41.86% 72	50.00% 86	172	0.93
Downtown Nappanee	0.57% 1	1.71% 3	3.43% 6	28.57% 50	28.57% 50	11.43% 20	25.71% 45	175	3.60
Coppes Commons	0.58% 1	1.74% 3	3.49% 6	9.30% 16	9.30% 16	51.16% 88	24.42% 42	172	1.47
The Barns at Nappanee	0.00% 0	0.57% 1	5.17% 9	12.07% 21	16.67% 29	36.21% 63	29.31% 51	174	2.12
Downtown Middlebury	0.00% 0	0.56% 1	3.93% 7	29.21% 52	25.84% 46	15.73% 28	24.72% 44	178	3.43
Das Dutchman Essenhaus	0.00% 0	0.56% 1	2.79% 5	18.44% 33	50.84% 91	14.53% 26	12.85% 23	179	4.23
Pumpkinvine Nature Trail	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.58% 1	5.20% 9	8.67% 15	46.24% 80	39.31% 68	173	1.20
Downtown Bristol	0.57% 1	2.30% 4	5.17% 9	17.82% 31	10.34% 18	32.18% 56	31.61% 55	174	2.11
Bonneyville Mill	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	1.70% 3	17.61% 31	7.39% 13	48.30% 85	25.00% 44	176	1.64
Downtown Wakarusa	0.00% 0	1.73% 3	3.47% 6	14.45% 25	13.29% 23	32.95% 57	34.10% 59	173	2.05
Downtown Shipshewana	0.00% 0	1.11% 2	1.67% 3	25.00% 45	55.56% 100	7.22% 13	9.44% 17	180	4.78

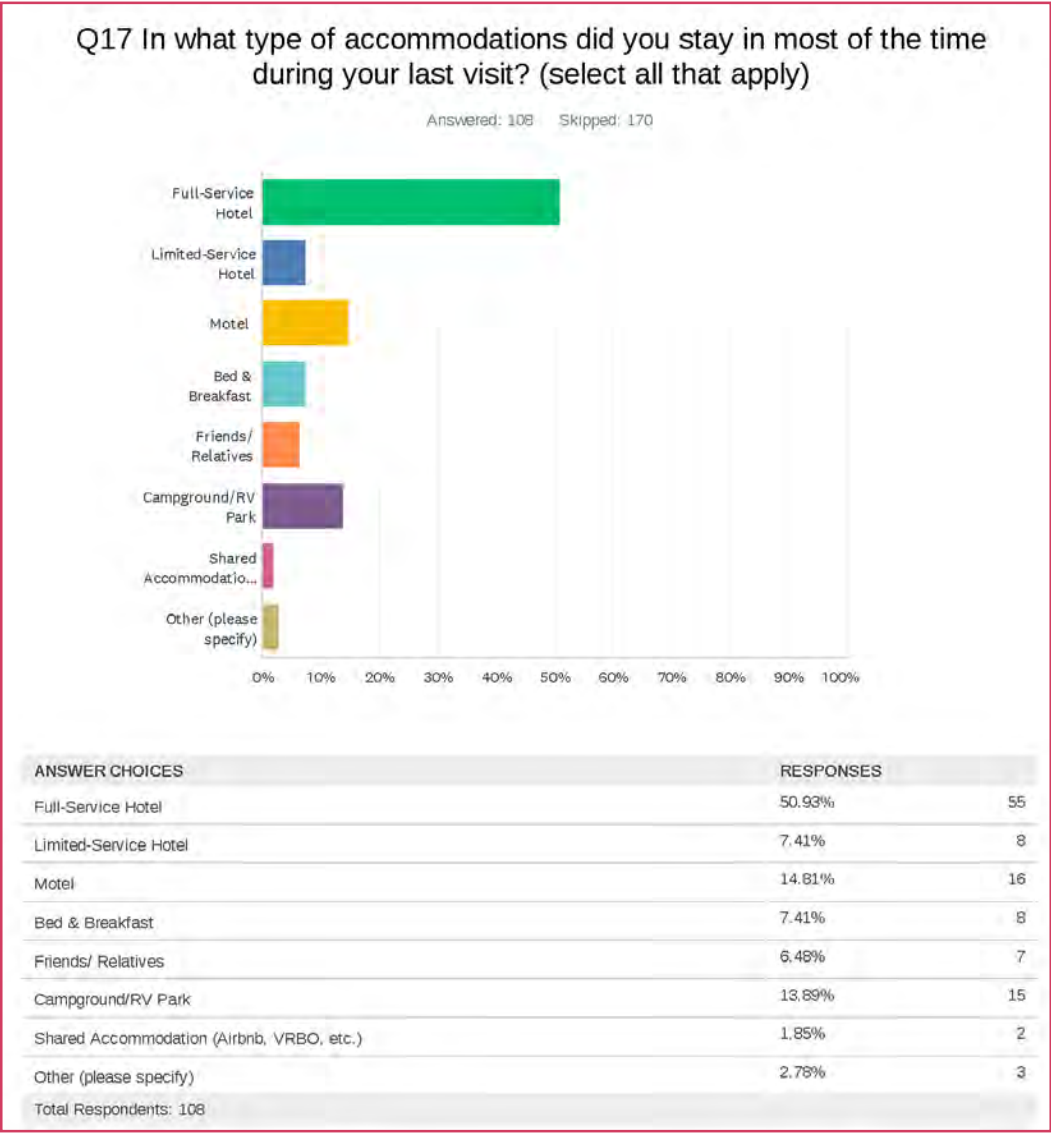
Shipshewana Trading Place	0.57% 1	1.14% 2	2.27% 4	14.20% 25	30.68% 54	28.41% 50	22.73% 40	176	2.91
Shipshewana Flea Market	0.57% 1	2.84% 5	4.55% 8	20.45% 36	37.50% 66	12.50% 22	21.59% 38	176	3.77
Menno-Hof Museum	0.00% 0	0.58% 1	2.31% 4	5.20% 9	18.50% 32	35.26% 61	38.15% 66	173	1.86
Blue Gate Theatre	0.57% 1	2.27% 4	0.57% 1	10.80% 19	24.43% 43	26.70% 47	34.66% 61	176	2.45
Davis Mercantile	0.57% 1	0.00% 0	5.14% 9	20.00% 35	28.00% 49	35.43% 62	10.86% 19	175	3.01
Elkhart Aquatics Center	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	3.53% 6	1.18% 2	63.53% 108	31.76% 54	170	0.56
Quilt Gardens Tour	0.00% 0	0.58% 1	3.47% 6	10.40% 18	26.59% 46	23.70% 41	35.26% 61	173	2.62
Heritage Trail Tour	0.00% 0	0.57% 1	1.72% 3	9.77% 17	23.56% 41	22.41% 39	41.95% 73	174	2.41
Michiana Event Center	0.00% 0	0.58% 1	2.33% 4	6.40% 11	7.56% 13	45.35% 78	37.79% 65	172	1.26
Nappanee Apple Festival	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.58% 1	7.51% 13	8.67% 15	44.51% 77	38.73% 67	173	1.31
Wakarusa Maple Syrup Festival	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.58% 1	4.05% 7	4.62% 8	49.71% 86	41.04% 71	173	0.91
Elkhart Jazz Festival	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.58% 1	2.91% 5	0.00% 0	62.21% 107	34.30% 59	172	0.51
Middlebury Fall Festival	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.58% 1	5.20% 9	4.05% 7	45.66% 79	44.51% 77	173	0.97

Q16 How many nights did you stay in Elkhart County?

Answered: 108 Skipped: 170

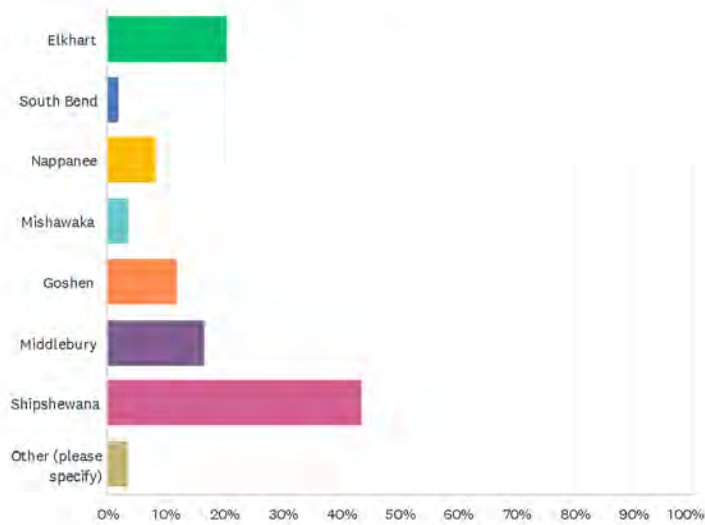


ANSWER CHOICES	AVERAGE NUMBER	TOTAL NUMBER	RESPONSES
	4	420	108
Total Respondents: 108			



Q18 In which community was the accommodations located? (select all that apply)

Answered: 108 Skipped: 170



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Elkhart	20.37%	22
South Bend	1.85%	2
Nappanee	8.33%	9
Mishawaka	3.70%	4
Goshen	12.04%	13
Middlebury	16.67%	18
Shipshewana	43.52%	47
Other (please specify)	3.70%	4
Total Respondents: 108		

Q19 How many hours did you stay in Elkhart County?

Answered: 72 Skipped: 206



ANSWER CHOICES	AVERAGE NUMBER	TOTAL NUMBER	RESPONSES
	10	691	72
Total Respondents: 72			

Q20 What would it take to entice you to stay overnight?

Answered: 72 Skipped: 206

Q21 How many times have you visited the Elkhart County in the last three years?

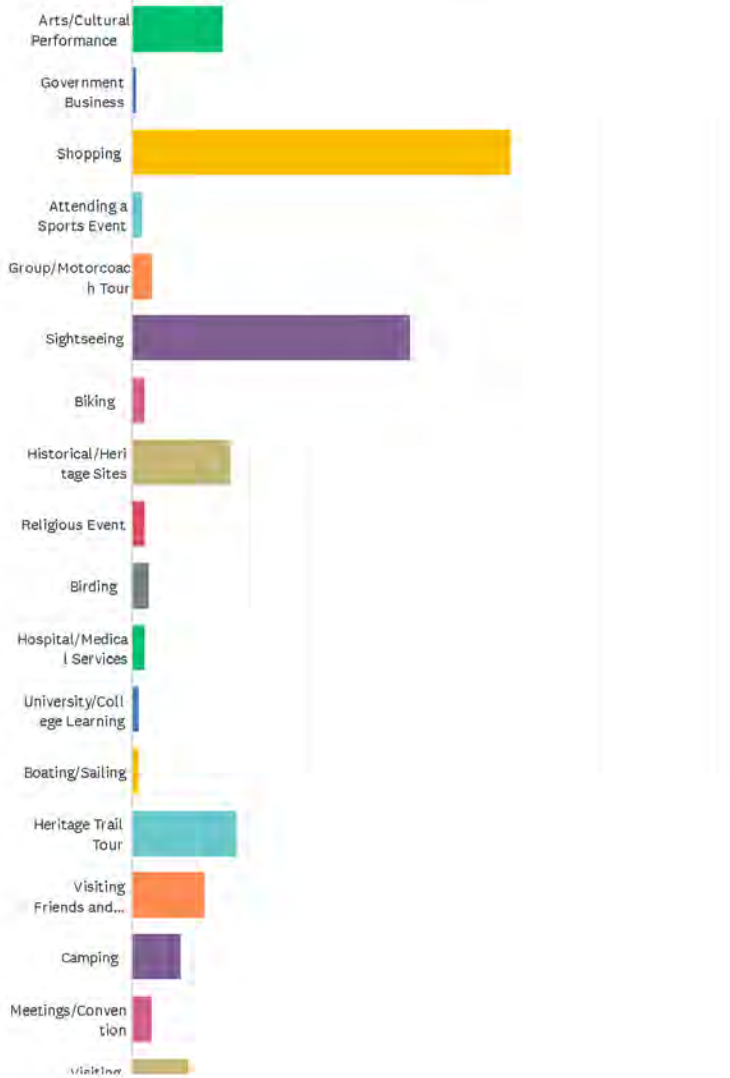
Answered: 175 Skipped: 103

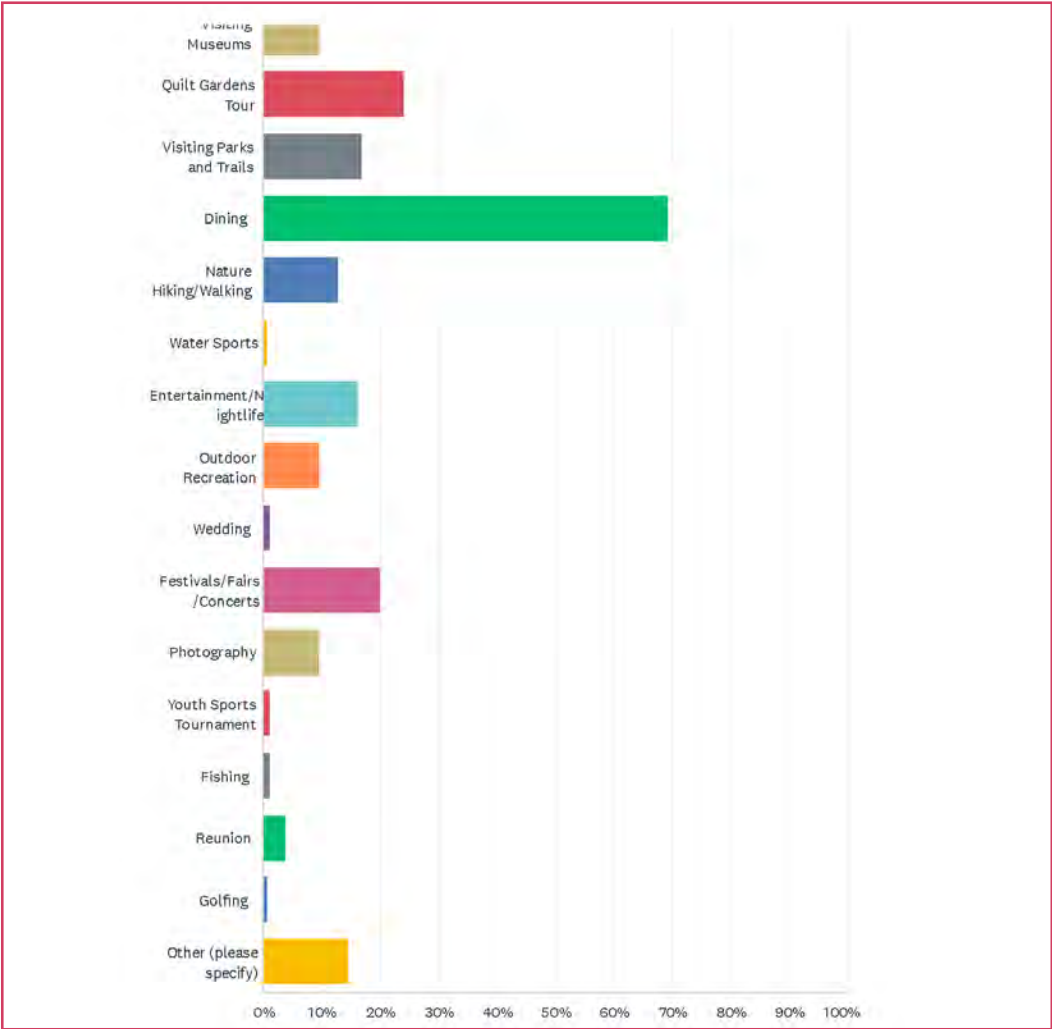


ANSWER CHOICES	AVERAGE NUMBER	TOTAL NUMBER	RESPONSES
	6	1,112	175
Total Respondents: 175			

Q22 During your last visit to the Elkhart County area in which activities/events/services did you participate/attend/use? (check all that apply)

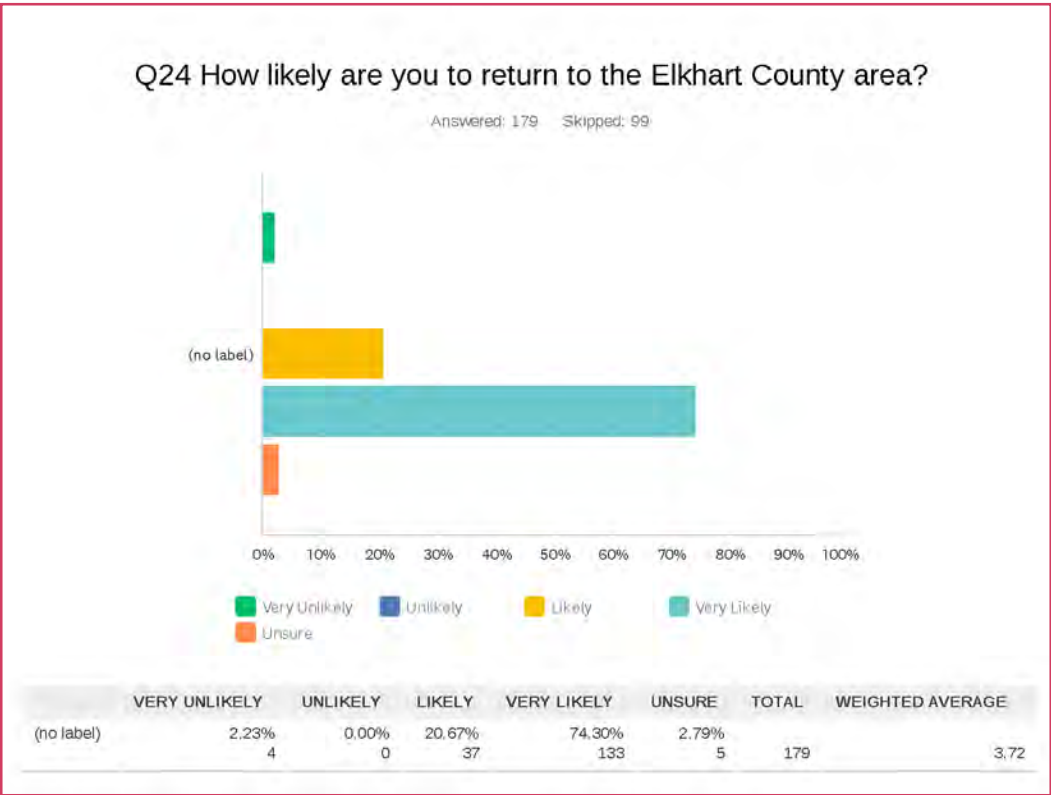
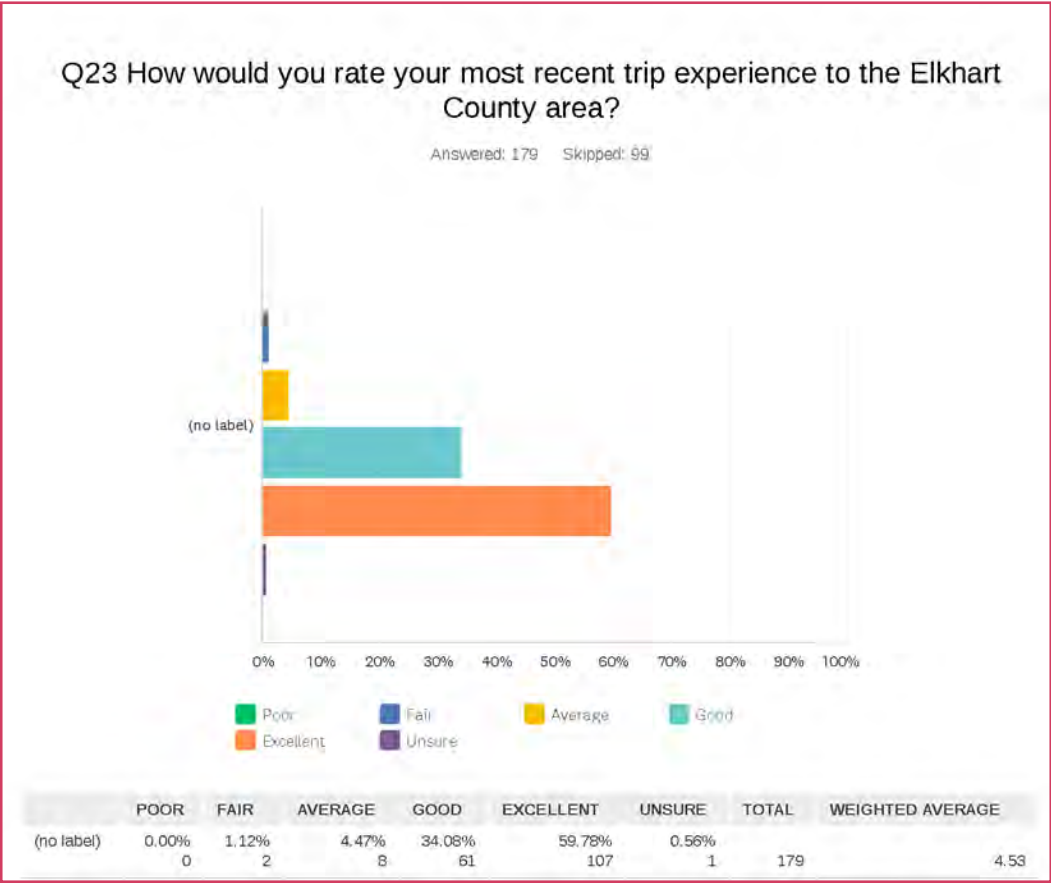
Answered: 179 Skipped: 99





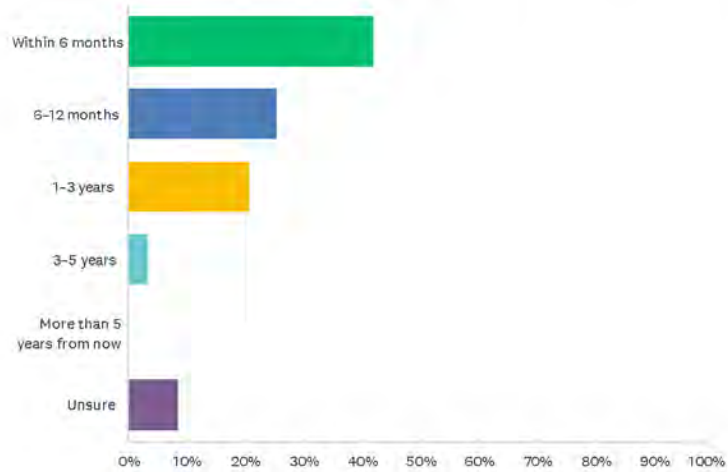
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Arts/Cultural Performance	15.64%	28
Government Business	0.56%	1
Shopping	64.80%	116
Attending a Sports Event	1.68%	3
Group/Motorcoach Tour	3.35%	6
Sightseeing	47.49%	85
Biking	2.23%	4
Historical/Heritage Sites	16.76%	30
Religious Event	2.23%	4
Birding	2.79%	5
Hospital/Medical Services	2.23%	4
University/College Learning	1.12%	2
Boating/Sailing	1.12%	2
Heritage Trail Tour	17.88%	32
Visiting Friends and Relatives	12.29%	22
Camping	8.38%	15
Meetings/Convention	3.35%	6
Visiting Museums	9.50%	17
Quilt Gardens Tour	24.02%	43
Visiting Parks and Trails	16.76%	30
Dining	69.27%	124
Nature Hiking/Walking	12.85%	23
Water Sports	0.56%	1
Entertainment/Nightlife	16.20%	29
Outdoor Recreation	9.50%	17
Wedding	1.12%	2
Festivals/Fairs/Concerts	20.11%	36
Photography	9.50%	17
Youth Sports Tournament	1.12%	2
Fishing	1.12%	2
Reunion	3.91%	7
Golfing	0.56%	1

Other (please specify)	14.53%	26
Total Respondents: 179		



Q25 When are you most likely to return to the Elkhart County area?

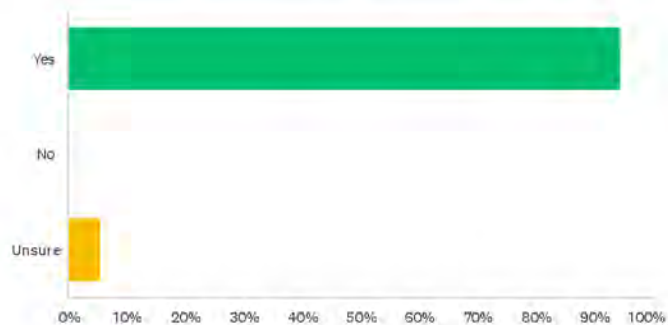
Answered: 174 Skipped: 104



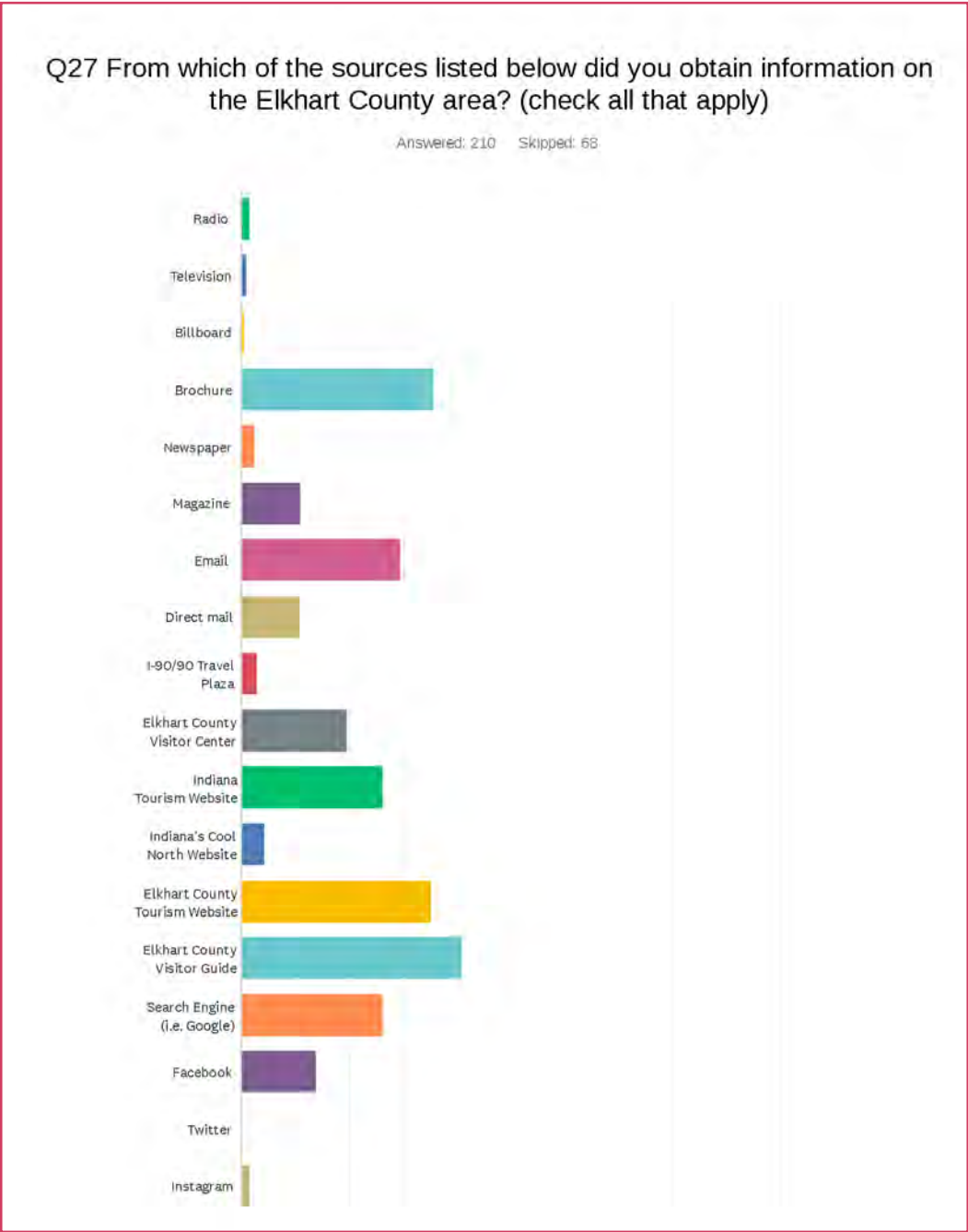
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Within 6 months	41.95%	73
6-12 months	25.29%	44
1-3 years	20.69%	36
3-5 years	3.45%	6
More than 5 years from now	0.00%	0
Unsure	8.62%	15
TOTAL		174

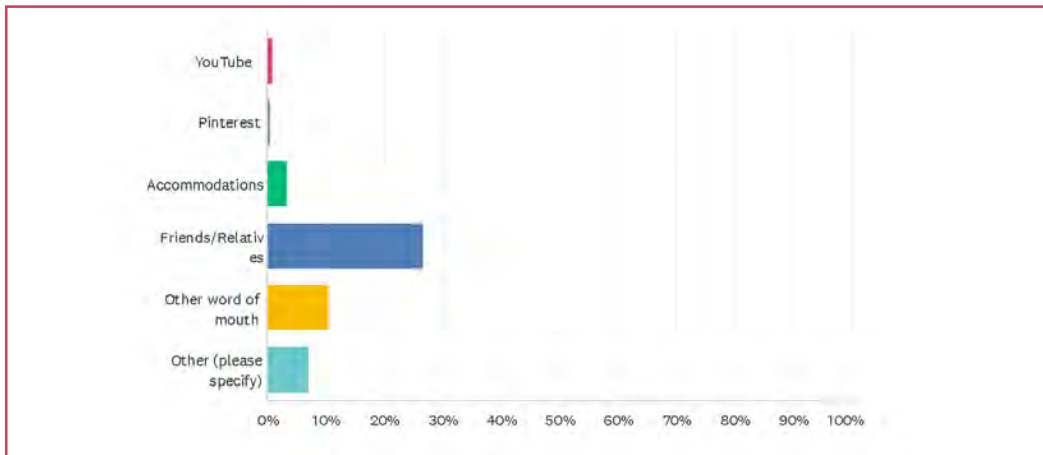
Q26 Given your Elkhart County area visitor experience, would you recommend this destination to others?

Answered: 178 Skipped: 100



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	94.39%	168
No	0.00%	0
Unsure	5.62%	10
TOTAL		178

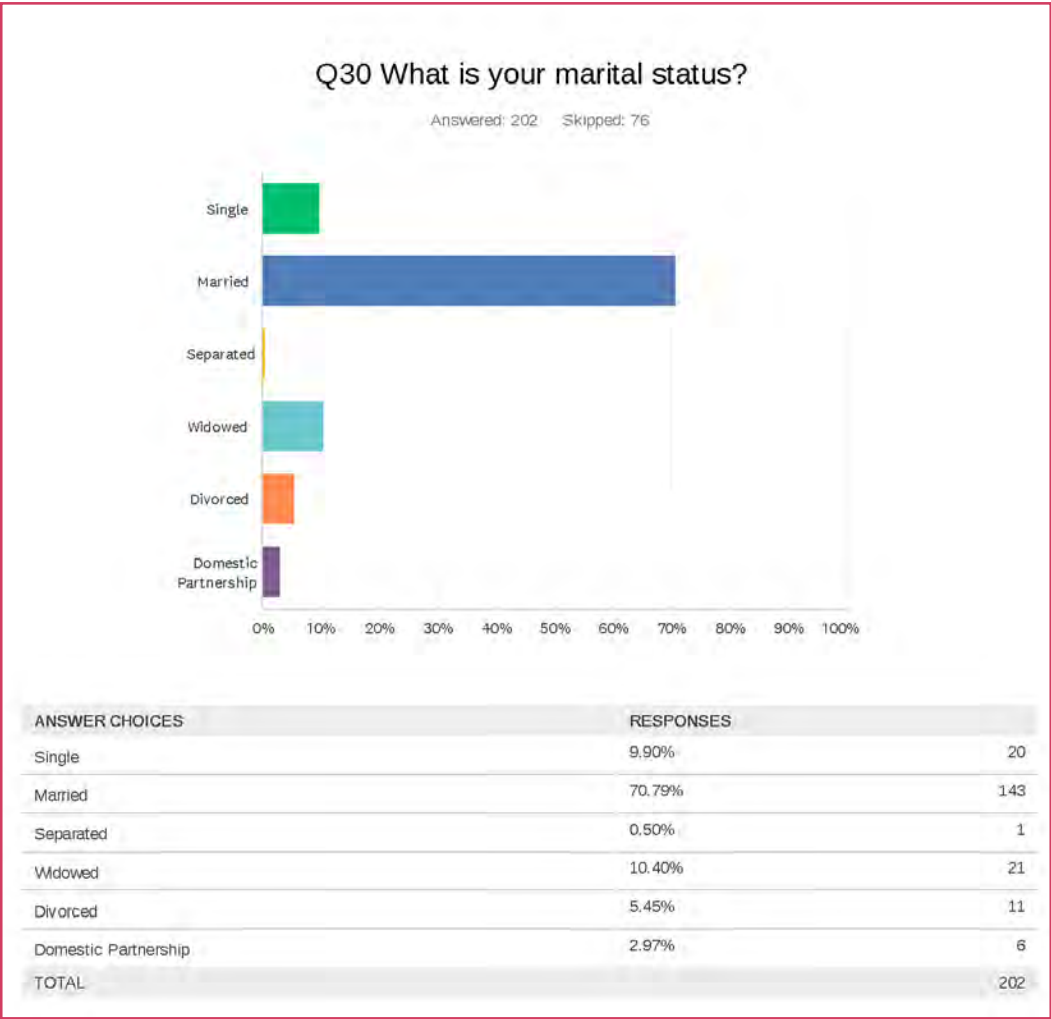
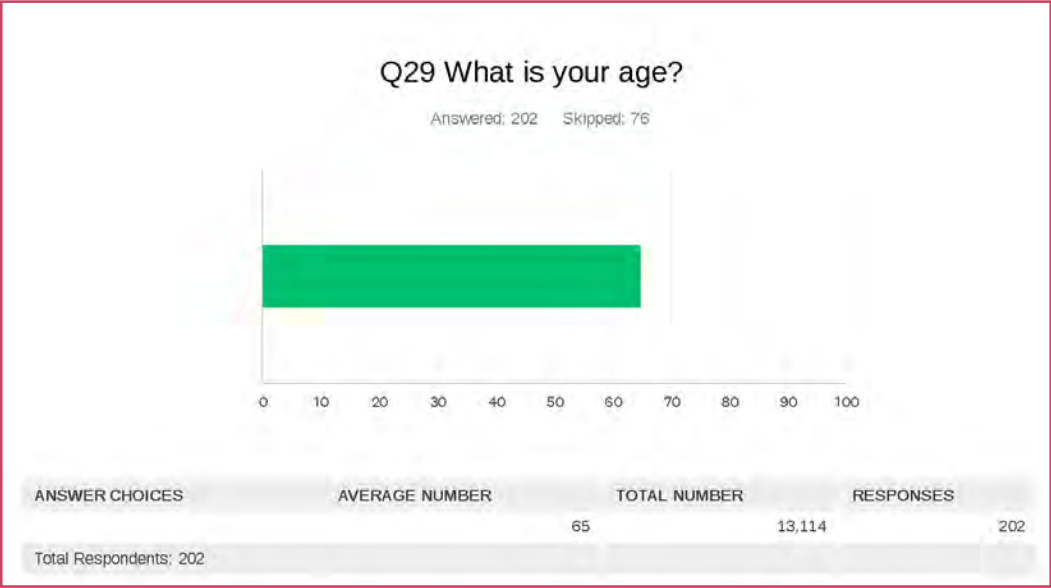




ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Radio	1.43%	3
Television	0.95%	2
Billboard	0.48%	1
Brochure	35.71%	75
Newspaper	2.38%	5
Magazine	10.95%	23
Email	29.52%	62
Direct mail	10.95%	23
I-90/90 Travel Plaza	2.86%	6
Elkhart County Visitor Center	19.52%	41
Indiana Tourism Website	26.19%	55
Indiana's Cool North Website	4.29%	9
Elkhart County Tourism Website	35.24%	74
Elkhart County Visitor Guide	40.95%	86
Search Engine (i.e. Google)	26.19%	55
Facebook	13.81%	29
Twitter	0.00%	0
Instagram	1.43%	3
YouTube	0.95%	2
Pinterest	0.48%	1
Accommodations	3.33%	7
Friends/Relatives	26.67%	56
Other word of mouth	10.48%	22
Other (please specify)	7.14%	15
Total Respondents: 210		

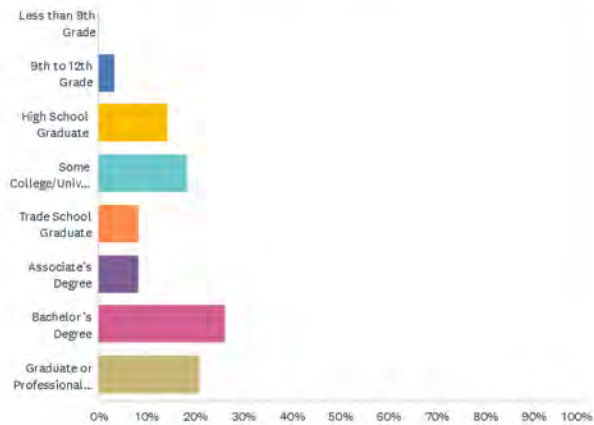
Q28 Where do you live?

Answered: 202 Skipped: 76



Q31 What is the highest level of education you have achieved?

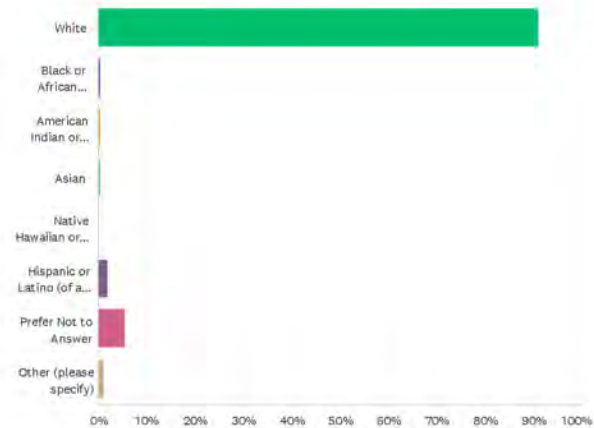
Answered: 202 Skipped: 76



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Less than 9th Grade	0.00%	0
9th to 12th Grade	3.47%	7
High School Graduate	14.36%	29
Some College/University	18.32%	37
Trade School Graduate	8.42%	17
Associate's Degree	8.42%	17
Bachelor's Degree	26.24%	53
Graduate or Professional Degree	20.79%	42
TOTAL		202

Q32 Which of the following best describes your race or ethnicity? (check all that apply)

Answered: 202 Skipped: 76



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
White	91.09%	184
Black or African American	0.50%	1
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.50%	1
Asian	0.50%	1
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.00%	0
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	1.98%	4
Prefer Not to Answer	5.45%	11
Other (please specify)	0.99%	2

