South County Destination Development Assessment Report

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EXPERIENTIAL ASSESSMENT

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ASSESSMENT REPORT

PROJECT OVERVIEW AND SITUATIONAL APPRAISAL

The Fairfax Convention and Visitors Bureau, together with the Mount Vernon District and Tourism Task Force, requested a Tourism Assessment of the attractions, sites, and tourism assets in the South County region of Fairfax County.

At present, tourism is the number two economic driver in South County. There is a tremendous amount of opportunity and potential to drive continued economic growth and further develop a sustainable tourism landscape in the region.

The project's strategic goals are as follows.

1. Conduct a comprehensive onsite assessment of designated sites in South County to evaluate customer service, visitor experience, product offerings, and new development opportunities.
2. Identify possible infrastructure enhancements to develop the region and for specific attraction sites.
3. Suggest potential branding and messaging ideas for the South County region.
4. Evaluate the digital footprint of www.FXVA.com to uncover opportunities to grow the online promotion and marketing reach of the County and the South County region.
5. Identify possible online booking engines to create point-of-sale visitor offerings for lodging, attraction tickets, programs, performance tickets, and vacation packages.
6. Develop a list of travel package themes and product offerings that can be developed and marketed to visitors.
7. Recommend possible new experiences and visitor offerings at regional attractions sites.

ASSESSMENT ORGANIZATION RECAP

The following is a list of attractions, sites, and venues that were visited and evaluated as part of the Assessment. Initial visits were unannounced to evaluate the customer service and visitor experience.

A second visit or conversation was done with a majority of the sites to discuss current customer base, programs, potential opportunities, and willingness to develop new offerings for visitors.

South County site visits

I. Historic Sites
   Arcadia Farm
   Civil War Interpretive Center Fairfax
   Frank Lloyd Wright's Pope-Leighey House
   George Mason's Gunston Hall
   George Washington's Distillery and Gristmill
   George Washington's Mount Vernon
   Gum Springs Historical Society and Museum
   Pohick Episcopal Church
   The National Museum of the Army
   Woodlawn Historic Site
   Workhouse Arts Center

II. Nature Based Sites
   Green Spring Gardens and Horticultural Center
   Huntley Meadows Park
   Lake Accotink Park
   Laurel Hill Golf Club
   Mason Neck State Park & Wildlife Refuge
   Occoquan Regional Park
   Pohick Bay Regional Park
       Pirates Cove Waterpark
       Pohick Bay Golf Course
   River Farm

III. Additional Sites
   Fairwinds Brewing Company
   Lorton, Virginia (Town of Lorton)
   Springfield Town Center

IV. Other areas of Fairfax County visited
Mosaic District
Reston
Tysons Corner
Wolf Trap Performing Arts

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY - KEY FINDINGS

The South County region of Fairfax County has a unique collection of both natural and manmade assets that currently do and will appeal to visitors. However, in order to drive visitation, there needs to be greater awareness for visitors, as well as increased marketing and collaboration among South County attraction partners.

Currently, the number one tourism driver in South County is George Washington's Mount Vernon with over a million visitors annually. For Americans, visiting George Washington's Mount Vernon should be considered a pilgrimage trip to connect with our nation's first president and one of our most important founders.

In South County, there are also multiple area attractions that have connections to history and George Washington, but they have not capitalized on existing Mount Vernon visitors.

In addition, there are over 23 million visitors annually that travel to Washington, D.C. Most travelers to D.C. want to connect to the nation's history, which is a perfect opportunity for South County tourism attractions.

With the opening of the National Museum of the Army, there will be an additionally projected 750,000 to 1,000,000 visitors in South County, which represents another large opportunity to expand visitor time in the region.

Building awareness and connecting to South County's historic, cultural, and nature-based assets is a critical first step. South County tourism assets will appeal to a variety of visitors. These include families with school-age children, and travelers interested in history, art, and culture. In addition, the great natural assets and parks in the County will appeal to outdoor adventure travelers.

In order to grow visitation, "Visit Fairfax" and travel partners need to make travel products and packages easily available to purchase online. Potential visitors want to be able to research, plan, and purchase travel seamlessly from one source.

To develop a stronger, more sustainable Tourism base that will drive economic development for the district, the following is an Executive Summary of both strategic and tactical recommendations to implement:

Recommendations
➢ Wayfinding: For potential and in-destination visitors, wayfinding is one of the most important elements in a destination.
  - In South County, the quality of wayfinding (signage) for attractions varies greatly. Enhance the wayfinding for all South County attractions to provide visitors with more awareness of local offerings and slow them down. (Mount Vernon wayfinding is the best of all attractions.)
  - Wayfinding in materials developed by the Visit Fairfax CVB online, in brochures, and in printed materials needs to include integrated wayfinding maps to provide customers context and familiarity with the regions, neighborhoods, and sites in Fairfax County.

➢ Operating Schedules: All major visitor attractions in South County need to create a consistent operating schedule based on months of the year, days of the week, and daily opening/closing hours to benefit visitors. In addition, attractions need to be open, operational, and staffed according to their schedules.

➢ Branding: South County needs to create a micro brand to build consumer awareness, quantify the specialness of the region, and create a recognizable brand identity. This will make it easier to market, sell, and promote the region to visitors. Overarching brand themes to consider should include history, arts and culture, nature, and outdoor adventure.

Create a micro brand that will connect to key destination themes. The Mount Vernon District currently used by the County is one way to frame the region for visitors. Another option is to develop a new micro brand. Possible ideas to consider:
- Portals (this connects to discovery)
- Pathways (this connects to journey and exploration)
- Gateway to (this connects to accessibility)
- Or create a combination microbrand using the Mount Vernon District…

➢ Fairfax County would also benefit greatly from developing a cohesive visitor brand for the region's diverse assets. Currently, due to the diversity and variety in the County, there is not a unifying brand message. The brand would build awareness and also become a more recognizable identity for visitors.

Possible ideas:
- FXVA.com, use the X in FX to connote Xperience. Experiences are the currency of 21st Century Consumers.
- Fairfax County is a gateway to ………...
- Fairfax County provides access, accessibility to ………...
- Fairfax County is the/a connector to ………...

➢ Develop a comprehensive online promotional strategy for the South County region and micro brand that will create consumer awareness, build attraction, generate buzz, and drive visitation. This would include website, SEO, online content, social media channels, hash tags, blogs, influencer content, and videos all designed to drive visitation.

➢ Partnership: Attractions in South County need to partner and promote the assets in the region to extend visitor stay and increase economic impact. Key strategies:
- Destination training for frontline employees at all attractions sites so they can recommend and refer visitors to other sites in South County.
- Brochure racks and maps or kiosks that identify major attractions in South County at all major attractions sites (slow visitors down).
- Creation of online content to support FXVA.com and other South County travel assets.
- Development of themed packages that include multiple attractions as well as lodging, attractions, etc.
- Creation and coordination of themed events at multiple attractions, e.g., gardens, culinary, archeology, etc., to extend visitor stay.
- Cooperative advertising and promotional opportunities to build consumer awareness.

- ➢ Transportation infrastructure: South County attractions would benefit if there was a transportation network linking the major visitor sites in the region. This might be done with motor coaches, trollies, or mini-coaches and provide both access and convenience for visitors.

- ➢ Hotel(s): South County would benefit greatly from added hotel inventory in the County. A full-service hotel is needed in the region that has meeting space and full-service food and beverage facilities.

  With the opening of the National Museum of the Army, there will be added demand for Military reunions and meetings. The Visit Fairfax CVB Sales team also mentioned the need for an event space capable of hosting events for groups of 1,200 people.

  In addition, there is also an opportunity to build a smaller boutique lodging property in South County. Given the elements of Mount Vernon's "lifestyle" brand and the arts and cultural assets at Workhouse Arts, there should be enough demand for a niche property of about fifty rooms.

- ➢ Expand Customer Audiences: presently, most attractions in South County serve the local/resident population or regional customer. Expand the audience reach of attractions by creating offerings, programs and events for overnight visitors coming to the region. The visitor offerings would be supported through Visit Fairfax online promotion, marketing and packaging initiatives.

  - Create attraction programming for visitors that are bookable online. Develop programs that help new, interested travelers get into new activities: the arts, birding, kayaking/canoeing, gardening, mountain biking, etc. Package these programs into themes at multiple sites that are bookable online.

- ➢ Package the assets of South County in multiple ways to make it easy and seamless for visitors to research, decide, and purchase offerings in the region. Possible packages types:
  - A Passport(s) for attractions, wrapping up historic sites, attractions, park programs, golf courses, breweries.
  - Lodging and attractions ticket packages.
  - Lodging, attractions, and performance packages.
  - Lodging, programming (classes, activities, events), and attractions packages.

- ➢ Implement a dynamic booking engine platform on the Visit Fairfax website to convert lookers to visitors. Booking engines would aggregate lodging, attractions, golf, activities, programing, and performance events into packages. The technology would allow Visit Fairfax to convert lookers to visitors and measure the results.

  Packages would be themed, changed seasonally, and connected to attractions, programs and events in the County.

- ➢ Visitor Experiences: develop new visitor programs and Experiential offerings:
  - Arcadia Farms needs to build out visitor offerings to connect to its brand and expand the offerings at Woodlawn.
  - Develop African American programs for visitors at multiple sites, from Enslaved to Free.

- Build out Gum Springs Museum as well as other notable community sites.
- Create a series of new engaging and immersive visitor experiences at South County attractions. Themes include hands-on, first-person history, behind the scenes, special access, and culinary.

➢ Develop additional anchor attractions in South County that will drive visitation and economic impact in the region. Workhouse Arts has tremendous potential to become the third anchor attraction for visitors to South County after Mount Vernon and the National Museum of the Army. The potential of an indoor ski facility is another great opportunity.

Ongoing development of current attractions and the creation of new anchor attractions in South County will build the infrastructure necessary to support a sustainable tourism landscape.

➢ Develop Workhouse Arts into an anchor tourism attraction in South County for visitors as well as locals. Strategies to develop:
- Create more visual appeal and placemaking.
- Schedule classes and workshops to appeal to visitors.
- Add elements to extend visitor stay, e.g., Wi-Fi, a coffee shop, craft brewery, restaurant(s) (with a well-known chef), industrial kitchen (for classes and workforce development classes).
- Create and brand gift shops in each of the art studio buildings.
- Schedule art demonstrations throughout the day by artists in various buildings for visitors.
- Add more themed specialty events to the calendar.

➢ Create a Destination Development position at Visit Fairfax. This person would be responsible for the Destination Development initiatives, creating packages, coordinating compelling events and festivals, and generating partnership opportunities among Fairfax County and South County Travel Partners.

DIGITAL AUDIT EVALUATION

In today's digital world, travelers are online researching, planning, and purchasing travel products 24/7, 365 days a year. As a result, Destinations and their travel partners must be constantly providing an easily accessible web presence, creating compelling content, offering seamless real-time travel products to purchase, and actively promoting their assets.

Therefore, as part of the South County Assessment, a digital audit was conducted of www.FXVA.com and online content associated with Visit Fairfax and South County.

The following is an Executive Summary of the audit and findings.

➢ Destination promoters (DMO/Municipal/Attractions)
  • How does what you say, post, and show tell others online about who you are and what they can expect?
    – Website voice: content, colors, photos
    – Social media voice: content, story line, graphics, photos

➢ Community participation
  • Does the community (residents and local businesses) talk about itself? Do visitors? This is evaluated by watching the place name on social media through search and hashtags.
  • What are people often saying? What images do they share? How does this compare with other communities?

➢ Reviews
  • What are people saying about your community in the areas of cultural attractions and dining? Are there things to do? Does it make a memorable impression (good or bad)?
  • What assets stand out? Reviews and ratings are evaluated from Google, Trip Advisor, and Yelp.

➢ Search
  • What do people find when they search your community name?
  • What websites grab their attention?
  • What do search images say about who you are?
  • How does your community and its asset search results compare versus other communities?
  • Are people actually looking for you? And if so, what do they find?

➢ Objectives and Methodology
  • A review of the FXVA.com website content
  • A review of other websites that promote the Fairfax County region including virginia.com
  • A review of how Fairfax County social media compares to neighboring destinations
  • A review of social media content from others aired around Fairfax County, D.C., area and Northern Virginia

- A review of how Fairfax County is portrayed on TripAdvisor.com and yelp.com
- A review of search engine results for Fairfax County, VA. Both raw number of searches around the area and a dive into content most often depicted of Fairfax County
- Observations of branding and positioning
- Digital Scorecard

➢ Primary Observations
- Visitors aren't searching for Fairfax County as much as they are for regional attractions and cities – they are searching for specific things to do – which is why "intercepting" the visitor is critical.

VISIT FAIRFAX DIGITAL AUDIT		
	Ranking 1 – 5	
SOCIAL MEDIA	4.0	
Facebook	4	Utilized well. Opportunity to drive more traffic to the website.
Instagram	4	Strong photography. Tells a story. Use more links.
Twitter	3	Not as active. Look to conect more with local partners. Not an easy brand name to fit into travel habits.
YouTube	5	Great content. Opportunity to use more in social media in the future.
WEBSITE	4.0	
Design/Brand Image	5	Strong design. Professional.
Usability/Navigation	4	Easy to use. There is the potential to get lost with so much content.
Content	5	High volume. Working hard for SEO.
Captures visitor information	5	Very customer centric.
Organic traffic	4	Shows site is providing 'tour guide' content.
Referral traffic	1	Social is not generating enough referral traffic.
REVIEWS	4.0	
TripAdvisor	4	Attractions are rated high. Fairfax County is not the normal searched destination.
SEARCH	3.0	
Searches for your destination	3	Most travelers are not searching for Fairfax. Fairfax County shows non-traveler listings.
Searches for your attractions	3	Attractions rank well but fxva.com does not.
MOBILE APP	4.67	
Design/Brand Image	5	Mirrors website. Strong design.
Usability/Navigation	4	Easy and simple.
Content	5	Great job at providing travel tools and an added beer FIELD GUIDE.
TOTAL SCORE	3.8	Mobile app not included in total score. Apps are nice customer service tool but not considered a "must".

- Website, mobile experience and app are all well designed and focused on the user experience; they do a good job developing content for SEO targeted around things like what to see and do in Fairfax, activities for kids, what to do in the winter, etc.
- There are a lot of other supporting websites: Virginia Tourism website, Fun in Fairfax, and Nova Parks website

➢ Primary Observations

1. Consider branding South County to give it stronger familiarity. One consideration may be to leverage the existing Mount Vernon District moniker. Mount Vernon is the area's most well-known tourism attraction, and its strength could be a platform for packaging the area.

2. Give greater attention to packaging the South County assets together with content in blogs, videos, and trip packages. The FXVA.com site has performed well in using its "things to do" content. Do this with South County assets, often using Mount Vernon as the draw while directing to other things to do, such as Workhouse Arts Center, Gunston Hall, and others.

Create a section on the website that is specific to South County/Mount Vernon District. A South County specific historic or food trail may be a nice product-development program.

3. Continue the use of FXVA.com web links in Facebook posts, but extend this practice into Instagram and a more active Twitter effort. This will help generate greater referral traffic to the website. Also be sure to use your outstanding video content. It is a driver of engagement.

4. Create more referral traffic to FXVA.com by becoming more active with outside partners. This includes attractions websites, guest posters, bloggers, and other influencers. The current referral-traffic percentage for FXVA.com is a meager 2.3% (it should be closer to 25%).

5. Capitalize on opportunities for people searching for Washington, D.C., and other attractions by focusing digital marketing – potentially focused on hotels near D.C.

➢ Key Insights – FXVA.com Website
   - The FXVA.com website is built very well for search engine optimization. It needs to work extra hard since the destination name is not as natural of a travel search as Washington, D.C., Arlington, Alexandria, or Northern Virginia are.
   - The site is very "customer centric" – also great job targeting different groups to the site (meeting planners, sports team, etc.)
   - Overall website design is very consistent in brand design. Strong consistency with brand colors. Clean design.
   - Professional – patriotic – great use of photography.
   - The site does a really good job of organizing so much information and creating a good user experience.
   - Emphasis on customer service in many areas is great.
   - Mount Vernon as the most-visited attraction in South County receives a lot of attention versus other attractions. This content is key in grabbing visitors and search engine attention.
   - The *Fairfax County Breweries and Field Guide* seems to be creating a nice, amount of online attention.
   - Mobile and desktop appears to be seamless experiences (both deliver same with great responsive adjustments). This is good since most users are experiencing the site on a mobile device.
   - There seems to be an absence of trip packages. Creating packages may be a good way to direct more attention to South County.
   - It may be worth adding "Hotels Near D.C." in the hotels listings.
   - Referral traffic to FXVA.com is disproportionately low. Social should be driving more referral than current numbers.
   - More referrals from social media and travel sites should be emphasized. This can done by greater emphasis on social links, guest bloggers/posters, partner links, and getting in front of influencers.
   - At 863,000 visitors, visitfxva.com should make 1,000,000 website visitors a goal for 2020.

- ➢ Key Insights – Other Websites
  - Fairfax County has the benefit of other websites that include information about the County, the attractions, and "the things to do" in the area. This helps, since most prospective visitors aren't typically searching for the County but instead specific things to do or specific interests (family vacations, parks, history, etc.).
  - Virginia Tourism Website
    - – Virginia tourism sells Northern Virginia, then a filter for cities, then a filter for counties.
    - – They sell Northern Virginia as a destination for HISTORY and near D.C.
    - – Virginia tourism website breaks history down into many subcategories. This makes a lot of sense and something Fairfax County should consider. History alone may be too broad.
  - Other destinations are promoting their attractions on the Fairfax County pages. (Sponsored Competitor Ads for other areas on pages promoting Fairfax County.)

- ➢ Fun in Fairfax Website
  - Does a good job highlighting some of the things to do in Fairfax.

- ➢ NOVA Parks Website
  - Does a good job highlighting the parks in the area.
  - Key Insights – Other websites in South Fairfax County
  - Only one South County attraction (Mount Vernon) shows up in the top 25 page views.
  - Many attraction websites do not have a strong sense of place (where am I) and could use more emphasis on helping visitors find other things to do in the area. Visit Fairfax could help create these partnerships.
  - Very few websites appear to backlink to FXVA.com (and it would help in traffic referral a lot).

- ➢ Key Insights – FXVA App
  - Easy to use with emphasis on the *Brewery Field Guide*.
  - There are only 4 reviews for the app. We aren't sure how much the app is being utilized.
  - Great way to highlight some of the top attractions with your "6 Bucket List Attractions"; however, Mount Vernon gets lost a bit.
  - Extra emphasis given to the brewery field guide. Major part of app experience.
  - Maps are helpful to show the area, attractions, shopping, and hotels.
  - It is nice to have a listing of events, but it would be helpful to improve the user experience by allowing a user to search by region for types of events or by date so they could plan their trip better.

- ➢ Key Insights – Social Media
  - Overall, hashtags are a great way to build your brand, boost a marketing campaign, or keep in touch with your audience. It will be helpful to look at the impressions from your hashtags and determine which ones are most effective.
  - Hashtag usage tied to other areas such as #washingtonDC, #virginiaisforlovers, and #loveva are much higher than #fxva.
  - @VisitFairfax has been effective at building social media relationships and does get recognized.
  - There are only nine posts in all of 2019 about "Fairfax County tourism" and none appeared to be from visitors. They were all business-news related.
  - Timely attention to website content creates great social content.

- Twitter is an opportunity for greater outreach and building local connections.

➢ Key Insights – Online Reviews
- Reviews for Fairfax County-related restaurants and attractions are very good and plentiful.
- Trip Advisor and other travel planning sites such as hotels.com naturally looks for cities versus counties.
- There seem to be positive experiences from those who travel to the area.

➢ Key Insights – Search
- Appears important to intercept people's geography search for Northern Virginia, Washington, D.C., National Capitol Region.
- SEO is critical for FXVA.com to land on page 1 of any regional visitor's search.
- Great job leveraging content to help with SEO: YouTube videos, blogs, website content are all working very hard.
- Search volumes around common tourist attractions and destinations:
  - Volume of searches landing on FXVA.com for Mount Vernon is low.
  - Higher search volumes for Things to Do in other cities compared to Fairfax.
  - Travel-related searches are mostly around cities and attractions – not counties. Fairfax County- related searches are related to schools, living, property, and general information, not travel sties.
  - Travel-related searches for Fairfax County are very small compared to area city destinations such as Alexandria and Arlington.
  - "Mount Vernon" searches, compared to top Washington, D.C., attractions; George Washington's Mount Vernon is much less.
  - The CVB does a good job providing content/stories/editorial that can get noticed when searching for things to do in the area.
- Overall, search volume seems to also consist of those somewhat knowledgeable with Fairfax or know to search Fairfax specifically.
- The number of "Near me" searches indicates in-market mobile users.

➢ Additional Recommendations
- Add to the site (and app) as soon as you can contact about the new National Museum of the Army "opening soon," and add a section about what to expect.
- Create the Mount Vernon District – it already exists – just brand it and leverage in your marketing to draw more attention to South Fairfax County.
- Intercept visitors – consider digital advertising when a user is searching for some of your competitor destinations.
- Opportunity to promote a Branded "Food Trail" to include some of the unique local restaurants in the southern part of Fairfax County.
- Identify opportunities to promote and market "experiences" to attract visitors to the area. These could be in terms of "packages," which include hotel and attractions or "history tours" -- "outdoor adventures" – which include hiking, camping, etc.

- Target digital advertising and SEO around the types of experiences prospective travelers are looking for, such as "family vacation," "history buffs," "outdoor adventure," etc.
- As mentioned previously, consider adding "Hotels near D.C." in your listings in the navigation to attraction more attention.

TRAVEL PACKAGING BOOKING PLATFORMS

One of the best ways to grow visitation to South County is to package the assets of the region in an easy and seamless way for consumers.

At present, Visit Fairfax has a strong online presence with website, destination app, and social media channel promotions. All of these elements are powerful tools to promote and market the region. However, to close the sale and measure visitation requires the ability to book travel products and attractions online.

Today's consumers looking to travel are expecting the ability to research, plan, and purchase destinations and travel products online 24/7 with real-time rates and availability. They are looking for trusted sources and do not want to go to multiple websites multiple times to assemble and book travel.

To satisfy today's consumers, travel sites need to provide the same level of information and experience as OTA (online travel agency) portals like Expedia, Travelocity, Trivago, etc.

Visit Fairfax is a trusted source for consumers providing information in an impartial way to travelers on lodging, attractions, restaurants, breweries, etc. However, at present, despite all the content, there is not an opportunity to close and measure the sale.

To convert lookers to bookers and increase visitation to South County and Fairfax County at large, Visit Fairfax should implement a dynamic booking platform on the website. This will enable potential customers to not only research and plan a potential trip to the County but also book their travel plans seamlessly.

Travel packaging platforms vary in the capabilities they provide. The following is a list of booking engine packaging models.

Referral
Referral models take booking inquiries from customers on a DMO website and refer it directly to a lodging/hotel website where the transaction is completed. The reservation is made and payment is made directly to the lodging partner's website. This model bypasses GDS fees and commissions associated with third party sites.

Bundling
Bundling access when a package is created that bundles multiple attractions for one price. This might include attractions, museums, golf courses, breweries, etc.

Bundling creates convenience for consumers and in many cases provides incentives. There might be special pricing, value-added extras, or special access.

Dynamic
The dynamic model enables consumers to plan and complete bookings on the DMO platform. Bookings may be made for individual components, e.g., lodging, attractions, golf courses, programs, and performances as well as ready-made or dynamic packages. Ready-made packages are offerings that are

predesigned while dynamic packages are assembled by the customer at point-of-purchase. The inventory and pricing is real-time.

The transaction and payment are completed on the DMO website; customer service, operational details with travel suppliers, and accounting/payment are all handled through the booking platform.

Hybrid Model
The hybrid packaging model occurs when the referral model and dynamic model are both available on a DMO website.

In this scenario, the consumer interested in lodging only can book reservations seamlessly through the referral model. Customers looking for lodging plus attractions and other offerings can opt to use the dynamic model.

After researching the most popular technology company booking platforms used by DMOs, the four popular options are:
- ARES – Advanced Reservation Systems.
- Bandwango – Destination Experience Engine.
- Halex Technologies – Meridian Reservations Systems.
- Simpleview Jack Rabbit – Book Direct Referral Engine.

The following is a summary of the capabilities and offerings of each platform.

ARES, Advance Reservation Systems
San Diego, California

ARES is a premier provider of online travel and tourism technology solutions for destination marketing organizations. The company was founded in 1995 and is headquartered in San Diego, California.

ARES was one of the Tourism Industry's first private-label booking-engine platforms. It offers custom technology solutions for Hotels, Attractions, DMOs (Destination Marketing Organizations), Meetings, and Events.

ARES technology solutions offers DMOs a completely branded white-label booking engine that matches the look and feel of the partner's website. The ARES suite of travel-planning services includes lodging, attractions, and activities; dynamic packaging; lodging deals; and air and car reservations.

ARES also provides DMOs with a branded reservation call center with dedicated 800 numbers.

For consumers, ARES booking platforms provide a secure, one-stop shop experience for purchasing all their travel needs in a single transaction. Print-at-home ticketing and a Dynamic Experiential Packaging solution help cross merchandise activities and attractions with lodging partners.

For partnering with the Lodging Industry, ARES has a number of options. First, ARES has seamless rates and connectivity with most major chains to the CRS. Second, ARES has inventory connection to most non-chain properties through the Global Distribution Channel – GDS. Finally, an ARES ExtraMet is used for non-traditional lodging properties.

For attraction ticketing, ARES has the ability to sell a wide variety of ticket types and programs. This includes general admission as well as ticketing for date- and time-specific attractions and events. Barcode integration, custom e-tickets, and vouchers provide flexible fulfillment options.

Packaging Models: ARES offers multiple packaging models available to DMOs. First, ARES has a proven track record with its Dynamic Packaging model that enables consumers to book ready-made packages or assemble and customize their own packages with multiple features.

In addition, ARES has the capability to offer a referral booking model for lodging properties reservations.

ARES provides robust reporting and analytics on all customer activity and transactional data providing insight into booking behavior and demographics.

To assist consumers, ARES maintains a central reservations call center specializing in local knowledge of hotels, attractions, and destinations. Call center agents provide travelers with a traditional way to secure travel plans via a dedicated toll-free phone number.

Sample clients include Washington, D.C., CVB, Jamestown Yorktown Foundation, Nashville CVB, San Diego Tourism Authority, Visit Salt Lake, Visit Baltimore, and others.

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Bandwango Destination Experience Engine
Salt Lake City, Utah

Bandwango Destination Experience Engine is an online booking engine company that partners with Destination Marketing Organizations to organize in-destination activities into Digital Experience passports.

Bandwango focuses on end-of-sales-funnel objectives to increase visitation, boost brand recognition, and drive in destination engagement.

The platform provides real-time understanding of Marketing ROI and insights that accelerate economic impact. The data capture helps better understand who customers are, where they are from, what they like to do, and how much money they are spending.

Bandwango's platform instantly delivers results directly to customers' mobile devices.

All Bandwango's products are white-labeled for the clients they serve. Solutions include:

➢ Attraction Passes: Bandwango allows DMOs to curate attraction passports tailored to various visitor types.

➢ Destinations can create one or more attraction passports for Leisure Visitors, Convention Attendees, or Group Travelers.

➢ Passports may be the highlights in a destination, a collection of museums or historic sites, or a group of specialty attractions.

➢ Golf Passports: Bandwango's golf passports provide a seamless solution to create golf trails and/or connect multiple golf courses in a destination.

➢ Ale Trail and Brew Passes: Creating an Ale Trail, pub crawl, or brewery tour that are wrapped into one seamless experience provides visitors with access to one of the hottest trends in travel – craft breweries.

By connecting multiple sites, visitors stay longer and spend more while enjoying the local flavors in a destination. Wine passports are also a popular application of Bandwango Destination Experience Engine technology.

Savings Programs: Bandwango has reimagined discounts, coupon books, and special offers into Destination Savings Programs. With a mobile exclusive savings program, visitors are able to redeem offers. Options for savings passports include:

• One-time offers or repeating discounts.
• Offers for a specific time period or conference attendees.
• Encourages local shopping.
• Remarket to customers digitally.

Bandwango's booking engine focuses almost exclusively on bundling destination attractions into passports. Travel packages may be sold on the platform only if they are ready-made, meaning a lodging property assembles and delivers a ready-made package.

Bandwango does not have a solution to book lodging properties or build dynamic packages.

Sample clients include Visit Salt Lake City, Visit Houston, Experience Grand Rapids, Bloomington, MN CVB, Visit Indy, and others.

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Halex Travel Technologies, Inc.
Niagara Falls, Canada

Halex Travel Technologies, Inc. is a Canadian-based reservation technology company established in 1998. The company specializes in white-label reservation services for partners in multiple sectors.

Currently the company has 1,500 clients in 12 countries with connectivity to 500,000 hotels, attractions and events.

Travel technology brands include Meridian Reservation Systems, Simple Res Solutions, Check in Canada, LaaSie, Rezserve, and Comencia.

The technology solutions include:
- Booking Engines
- Dynamic Packaging Engines
- Itinerary Builders
- Gift Certificates and Coupons
- Restaurant Reservations
- Group/Tournament Housing Software

Meridian Reservation's Engine offers three types of Booking Engine models:
Referral Reservations
- Visitor booking inquiry referrals from DMO website direct to hotel website.

Transactional Dynamic Reservations
- Reservations and package bookings completed on DMO platform.
- Final payment transaction processed by Meridian Reservation Systems or hotel.
- Call center services and accounting data done by Meridian Reservation Systems.
- Hotels pay commissions of around 10%.

Hybrid Reservations
- Referral model for hotel-only bookings.
- Transactional model for packages.
- DMO can track package bookings.

  Content available to bundle into packages: accommodations, attractions, event tickets, restaurants, golf, ground transportation, etc.

Packages
- Predetermined set packages are sold through the platform.
- Dynamic packages that consumers can build and customize are available in real-time. Meridian Reservation Systems processes payments and handles the operational details.

Sample clients include Visit Pittsburgh, Visit Milwaukee, Ottawa Tourism, The Hotel Association of Canada, and others.

Booking Engine fees are determined by the solutions and technology capabilities employed with the DMO and travel partners.

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Simpleview Book Direct Referral Engine
Tucson, Arizona

Simpleview acquired Jack Rabbit systems in December 2018. Jack Rabbit, a book-direct referral engine for lodging properties, serves over 900 DMOs worldwide.

Simpleview's Book Direct Engine allows visitors to enter their desired travel dates in real-time and immediately search for lodging rates and availability in a destination directly through the DMO website.

Visitors book directly with the DMO lodging partner through a seamless referral link. Booking Direct does not charge commissions or fees to clients.

For lodging partners, this Book Direct solution facilitates reservations from customers directly to their websites, enabling hotels to bypass booking commissions.

Simpleview provides DMO partners with actionable marketing data to measure referral results.

The Book Direct Engine does not have the ability to dynamically package lodging, attractions, timed tickets, etc., into a seamless destination experience for the visitor.

There is a fee for the booking engine, which is traditionally paid for by the destination DMO.

Sample clients include Visit Philly, Poconomountains.com, ValleyForge.org, and others.

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TRAVEL PACKAGE THEMES AND IDEAS

The following is a list of themed package ideas to drive visitation and connect attractions and activities in South County.

- ➢ Agriculture, Gardens, and Culinary
  - 18th Century Hearth Cooking/Culinary
  - Fall Harvest
  - Farming from 18th to 21st Century
  - Field to Table
  - Green Thumb Gardening
  - Nature's Bounty Tasting Experience (one or multiple sites)
  - Spring Gardens

- ➢ Art and Architecture
  - Art and Architecture
  - Art packages connected to workshops at Workhouse Arts

- ➢ Family Fun Weekends (activities connected to family)
  - Winter Weekends
  - Spring Breaks
  - Summer Fun
  - Fall Getaways

- ➢ History
  - African American: From Enslaved to Freedmen and Women
  - Archeology sites in South County
  - Civil Rights, freedom, and liberties
  - Footsteps of our Nation's Founder (George Washington sites)
  - Historic Passport, Portals of History
  - Historic Women of South County
  - Revolutionary Ideas
  - The 19th Amendment
  - The African American Experience
  - World Changing Ideas

- ➢ Military
  - Army History and Heritage
  - Art and the Army (National Museum of the Army and Workhouse Arts)
  - George Washington, National Museum of Army, Arcadia, Veterans Training
  - Thank you for your Service (November) – Military Appreciation

- Parks and Outdoor Adventure
  - Birding (Huntley Meadows, Mason Neck)
  - Golf
  - Men-at-pause Weekend – guys, golfing, paddling, outdoor adventure
  - Mountain Biking (Fountain Head, Meadow Woods, Wakefield)
  - Paddling (multiple parks)
  - Photography (Huntley Meadows, Mason Neck)

- Seasonal Packages
  - Winter
  - Spring
  - Summer
  - Fall
  - History Holiday Stroll (multiple historic sites)

- Shopping
  - Girlfriends' getaway – shopping, spa, culinary
  - Holiday shopping packages (Workhouse Arts, historic sites' gift shops)

VISITOR EXPERIENCES TO DEVELOP

Experiences are the currency of 21st century travelers. As a result, visitors are looking for Experiences that engage and immerse. Focus on hands-on, first-person, behind-the-scenes, special access, and culinary. The following is a list of potential new revenue producing Experiences to be developed by South County attractions.

- Art Experiences
  - Workhouse Arts – workshops
  - Drawing and Nature – Workhouse Arts classes and Park experiences

- Behind-the-Scenes Experiences with a Curator
  - Mount Vernon
  - Gunston Hall
  - Woodlawn and Pope Leighey House

- Culinary
  - Hearth Cooking
  - Field to Table Cooking Experiences
  - 18th Century Mixology
  - Original Recipes from Mount Vernon, Gunston Hall and/or Woodlawn
  - Washington's Wheat from Field to Table
  - Historic Teas (with characters)

- Discovery
  - Wildlife Experts: birding, wildlife
  - Photography classes
  - Archeology sites and participating in a dig

- Gardening and Agriculture
  - 18th century and 21st century gardening and plants (multiple sites)
  - Working on farm site at Arcadia

People-Related Experiences
- Lucy Burns Museum
  - Tour by a former prison guard
  - Tour by a Suffragist (first-person)
  - Tour by a prisoner (first-person)
- Gunston Hall
  - Meet George Mason
  - Meet the Gardener at Gunston Hall
- Enslaved and Freedmen and Women – multiple sites (first-person)
- West Ford – Gum Springs Museum (first person)
- Enlisted Army Soldiers at National Museum of the Army
- Meet an Artist(s) to see their work. (This is a designed and staged experience.)

Volunteerism Experience:
- Hosted by Mount Vernon and tied to George Washington's life of service

SPECIAL EVENTS

Special Events are opportunities for destination attractions to drive visitation with special activities, themes, or particular focus.

In evaluating the special events at major historic sites in South County, Mount Vernon, Workhouse Arts, Gunston Hall, and Woodlawn all produce special events. The Events Matrix on page _____ provides a monthly list and comparison of current special events.

Presently, there are no special events that are being organized that incorporate multiple attraction sites. This is a missed opportunity to drive visitation, increase spending, and extend the stays of visitors.

In addition, there are several months of the year that do not have special themed events.

Here is a list of months and special-event theme suggestions to consider. The event themes should be used to build programming and incorporate multiple attractions in South County.

- January: Civil Rights and Service
- February: African American History Events
- March: Archeology
- April: Gardens
- May: Revolutionary History month
- June – August: Summer Weekend Specials – focus on families (model Gunston Hall's success)
- September: Nature & Adventure (South County Parks)
- October: Fall Harvest and Culinary
- November: Veterans Appreciation and National Service
- December: Holiday Experiences and Events

Special themed events at multiple sites with unique programming would provide visitors with unique opportunities to visit or for a return visit.

The attractions and special programs could be built out into unique vacation packages that are available to purchase online.

SPECIAL EVENTS MATRIX

2019	Mount Vernon	Gunston Hall	Woodlawn	Workhouse Arts*
January				Second Saturdays and Create & Sip – monthly – 300 people
February	Washington's Birthday Celebration	18th Century Game Night – 25 people	Girl Scout Cookie and Cider Event (2020)	
March		Archeology Symposium – 34 people	Needlework Show, March each year, draws approximately 1,200 people	
April		Kite Festival – 231 People	The Flights and Tyler Tour, once a month, April to November, 40 people capacity	
May	Revolutionary War Weekend – May, 1,300 people. Spring and fall wine festivals – 1,500 people a night for three nights			
June		Summer Saturdays – 156 people Declaration Day – 276 people	Picnic Theater – Great Gatsby Frank Lloyd Wright Birthday	

July	July 4th celebration -- 8,244	Summer Saturdays -- 171 people		Fireworks, 5,000 to 8,000 people
August		Summer Saturdays -- 308 people		Brewfest – 2,000 people
September	Colonial Market & Fair, 18th century craft artisans, 8,000 people per day	Archaeology Day – 136 people Naturalization Ceremony – 150 people	Twilight & Tipple – Pope Leighey House (September and October only)	
October	Spring and fall wine festivals – 1,500 people a night for three nights.	Cocktails by Candlelight -- 30 people Hearth Workshops -- 10 people	African laborers and building of Woodlawn	Haunted Trails – 3 nights weekly – 7,500 people
November	Whiskey Festival – 600 seats sold out		Smoke and Mirrors Mystery Event – 40 Picnic Theater – An Evening with Ray Bradbury	
December	Candlelit tours at holiday weekends, 500 to 600 people per night Christmas Illuminations, 3,761	Christmas Tide – 151 people		*Workhouse Arts presents monthly art shows and performance-based programs.

NEXT STEPS

In order to grow tourism and economic development in the South County region and create a sustainable tourism economy, the following Next Steps need to be implemented.

➢ Build consumer awareness for the tourism assets in South County.
  • Create a micro brand for the region.
  • Build out special content on the FXVA.com, social media channels, and partner attraction sites.
  • Enhance the wayfinding for visitors both physically and online.
  • Add brochure racks and maps at attraction sites and train frontline staff.
  • Implement the findings on the Digital Audit on FXVA.com

➢ Create Partnerships among South County travel attractions.
  • Create attraction operating schedules that will complement and support visitors to the area.
  • Participate in packaging initiatives to wrap up offerings to sell online.
  • Build out programming to support special events at multiple attraction sites.
  • Create online content for visitors to support South County attractions and FXVA.com.

➢ Implement a Dynamic Booking Engine platform on FXVA.com to create travel products that consumers can purchase online. Offerings include: attraction passports, lodging and attractions/activities and special event packages.

➢ Develop new visitor Experiences.
  • Create a series of new engaging and immersive experiences.
  • Build new visitor offerings at:
    – Arcadia Farms.
    – African American programs (Gum Springs and historic attractions).
  • Develop a group of new special events incorporating multiple attraction sites.

➢ Infrastructure: research the viability of the following:
  • Transportation service to link the major attractions and visitor sites in South County.
  • Hotel options for a full-service hotel with meeting space, food and beverage and the ability to host events with 1,200 people.
  • Boutique/ "lifestyle" lodging property to support cultural travelers.

➢ Develop additional anchor attractions in South County to support added visitation.
  • Build out additional assets at Workhouse Arts to become a major tourism driver.
  • Look for added opportunities to build out existing historic assets and/or develop new outdoor adventure assets.

➢ Create a Destination Development position at Visit Fairfax to facilitate the creation and development of new products, packages, experiences, and events for visitors.

APPENDIX:

➤ Customer Service Calls

➤ Fairfax County CVB Focus Group

➤ Fairfax County Hotel Package Matrix

FAIRFAX COUNTY HOTEL PACKAGE MATRIX

An audit of Fairfax County hotels that are listed on FXVA.com was done to discover which properties are offering packages for visitors. Special attention was paid to find hotels that offer packages that include local area attractions.

Here are the results of the audit:

Area	Hotel Name	Notes	Packages	Attractions	Ticket Link
Alexandria & Mount Vernon	Best Western Mount Vernon-Fort Belvoir	dead link			
	Candlewood Suites Alexandria/Fort Belvoir		none		
	Comfort Inn & Suites Alexandria	dead link			
	Days Inn Alexandria South	website "temporarily unavailable"			
	Hampton Inn and Suites Alexandria-Old Town Area South		none		
	Hampton Inn & Suites Mt. Vernon/Fort Belvoir - Alexandria South Area		none		
	Hampton Inn Alexandria/Pentagon South		none		
	Holiday Inn Express Hotel and Suites Alexandria/Fort Belvoir		none		
	Homewood Suites by Hilton Alexandria/Pentagon South		3 packages	Riverboat Package Shopping Package Mount Vernon Package	Book hotel then - tickets/gift card, voucher given?
	Quality Inn Mount Vernon Alexandria		none		

Area	Hotel Name	Notes	Packages	Attractions	Ticket Link
	Red Roof Plus+ Washington, D.C. Alexandria	dead link			
	SpringHill Suites by Marriott Alexandria		none		
	TownePlace Suites by Marriott Alexandria Fort Belvoir		none		
Area	**Hotel Name**	**Notes**	**Packages**	**Attractions**	**Ticket Link**
Springfield	Courtyard by Marriott		none		
	Best Western	dead link			
	Comfort Inn		none		
	Embassy Suites by Hilton		none		
	Extended Stay America – Washington, D.C.	link to all hotels - no packages when search for Fairfax/DC			
	Hilton		none		
	Holiday Inn Express	dead link			
	Homewood Suites by Hilton		none		
	Motel 6 Washington, D.C.	link to all hotels - no packages when search for Fairfax/D.C.			
	Residence Inn by Marriott Old Keen Mill		none		
	TownePlace Suites by Marriott		none		
	Wingate by Wyndham		none		
Area	**Hotel Name**	**Notes**	**Packages**	**Attractions**	**Ticket Link**
Reston	Extended Stay – America – Washington, D.C. - Reston	link to all hotels – no packages when search for Fairfax/D.C.			
	Hyatt Regency Reston		none		

Area	Hotel Name	Notes	Packages	Attractions	Ticket Link
	Sheraton Reston		3 packages	Experience the Metrorail Reston Town Center Shopping Package Stay and Play in Reston (golf)	Book hotel to receive passes, gift card, discount
	The Westin Reston Heights		none		
Area	**Hotel Name**	**Notes**	**Packages**	**Attractions**	**Ticket Link**
Tyson Corner	Vienna Wolf Trap Hotel		5 packages	Shopping Package Smithsonian Air & Space Museum Package Jammin Java Package Great Fall Park Package	No links to hotel packages or bookings or even description of what package entails. Only description of experience.
Area	**Hotel Name**	**Notes**	**Packages**	**Attractions**	**Ticket Link**
Chantilly	Comfort Suites Dulles Airport		none		
	Courtyard by Marriott Dulles Airport Chantilly		none		
	Extended Stay America – Washington, D.C. - Chantilly – Airport	link to all hotels – no packages when search for Fairfax/D.C.			
	Extended Stay America – Washington, D.C. - Chantilly - Dulles South	link to all hotels - no packages when search for Fairfax/D.C.			

Area	Hotel Name	Notes	Packages	Attractions	Ticket Link
	Extended Stay America – Washington, D.C. – Chantilly	link to all hotels – no packages when search for Fairfax/D.C.			
	Fairfield Inn & Suites by Marriott Dulles Airport Chantilly		none		
	Hampton Inn Dulles Airport South		none		
	Holiday Inn Chantilly – Dulles Expo (Arpt)		none		
	Hyatt Place Chantilly/Dulles Airport-South		none		
	Residence Inn by Marriott Chantilly Dulles South		none		
	Staybridge Suites Chantilly-Fairfax		none		
	TownePlace Suites by Marriott Chantilly		none		
	Westfields Marriott Washington Dulles Hotel		none		
	Wingate by Wyndham – Chantilly – Dulles Airport	website "temporarily unavailable"			
Area	**Hotel Name**	**Notes**	**Packages**	**Attractions**	**Ticket Link**
Washington Dulles Airport	Westin Washington Dulles Airport		none		
	Candlewood Suites Washington Dulles Herndon		none		
	Courtyard by Marriott Dulles Airport Herndon		none		
	Crown Plaza Dulles Airport		none		
	Embassy Suites Dulles Airport		none		
	Extended Stay America – Washington, D.C. – Herndon-Dulles	link to all hotels – no packages when search for Fairfax/DC			
	Hilton Washington Dulles Airport		none		

	Homewood Suites by Hilton Dulles International Airport		none	
	Hyatt Place Herndon / Dulles Airport East		none	
	Hyatt Regency Dulles		none	
	Staybridge Suites Herndon / Dulles		none	
	Washington Dulles Marriott Suites		none	

* Did NOT note packages pertaining to "hotel" bookings, e.g., AAA Senior/Military discounts, grocery package, etc.