

Finger Lakes Visitors Connection – 2020 Tourism Industry Segment Reports Impacts and ideas from COVID-19

Industry Segment Zoom Meetings

Content Summary – Ideas – Needs – Analysis

Facilitated and Summary provided by Finger Lakes Visitors Connection
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Ontario County's Visitors Connection (FLVC) held meetings between April 9 and April 27 with its industry. All were invited to join in the segment(s) that best suited them. 65 people from 11 industry segments, plus Melissa and Valerie, Tracey and Christen participated at different times.

Specific notes have been created for each segment and will be shared back with them. The purpose of this document is to highlight the common threads across the segments and identify next steps and needs.

The following segment discussions were conducted. Some segments requested a "re-meet" when appropriate and more information could be gathered.

The general format of each meeting was to:

1. Get together and reconnect and share the current situation at their facilities
2. Brainstorm and share opportunities and needs or concerns for the situation going forward and to help identify what role FLVC can play in helping. Also, to identify leadership within the segments to tap if necessary.
3. Run some ideas and information by each segment. I.E. the FLVC development and role in community sharing and messaging. The concept of the activity guide to carry us through the different stages, and have relevancy with both our closed status, our open status, etc.
4. Look to the future for planning and ideas.

Universal thoughts:

We have to share in the humanness of our condition. People want people connections. How do we keep those connections even under these new guidelines?

Each person's perception is their reality. We have to give outward and visible signs of the experience here being safe, clean, trustworthy, etc.

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Financial Impacts:

Funding – not one of the people we talked to had received any funding or commitment to fund through the PPP or the EIDL. Subsequently, I have learned of two who have gotten it, but only two.

1/3 of prescheduled events are being refunded; 1/3 are taking it in a gift certificate; 1/3 are rescheduling

Below 20% occupancy and reduction in average daily rate. Accounting for late tax payments by the industry.

50 people laid off, the challenge is that some are earning more from unemployment and a concern of will they come back? Serious talent retention issues.

Don't lose sight of the impact of festivals (or lack of them) on the many not-for-profits in the communities. Naples Grape Festival for example and funding toward the Naples Historical Society projects. They need to make a decision on what to do, but don't even know what the decision points are. The loss of these community festivals cannot be underestimated. For example – the Naples Historical Society accounts for 88 – 90% of funding from engagement in the Naples Grape Festival. The roll down impact of the lack of these things to community groups is huge and devastating.

Don't forget the status of the "camps" and "learning activities" what if they can't be held? What impacts are there on the lack of people in the community related to them. Example came through the Finger Lakes Chamber Music Festival, but others include the Cornell Cooperative Extension, etc.

An area that we have overlooked and need to articulate better is the value of our volunteerism and the integral part of that for our operational success. Without counting this in the past as a dollar and cents value, we are now compromised for trying to recreate its value when the volunteers are unable to "work" anymore. We cannot get PPP for them, etc. So how do we make up that gap.

Feelings/Employee Management/Human Impacts

Anxiety

What's tomorrow going to bring?

I need camaraderie

Our strength is in our collaboration

Legal ramifications. Are there standard guidelines and protocol for our employees. Discussions about following the FDA and CDC guidelines in the short term to cover you from any kind of a wrongful death suit. (R)

I am doing temperature checks on my employees at beginning and mid-shift (R)

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On a positive note: Sure, this is challenging, but look outside. We have green grass, blue skies, we are breathing wonderful fresh air. We have a chance to make people happy in the future. It's not all doom and gloom. (R)

Agreed with above – added. Look what our great grandparents had to do. Look at what their “war” was and compare it to this. We are up to the challenge.

Frustrated that we (our industry) seems to be closed out of PPP programs. Only two people mentioned successfully getting them. The smallest businesses have been least successful.

A business who has been looking to change some things over the years and this has created an opportunity to reflect on things. There are trends that were beginning to happen anyway, so how do we readjust. Example: ski areas - people aren't skiing as long as they used to, with faster lifts, improvements, etc. people ski less, so what does that mean for their offerings, maybe this helps to create new offerings - staggered skiing. Use this as an opportunity/deadline to create a new normal.

Afraid to misstep on re-opening, because it would cause more suffering if we reopened, had to close and then tried to reopen again.

Suggestions/Activities/changes during the pause

Develop a sign at the store that is “photographable” has all the details in how to contact them, make sure it has a logo/business name. What to do about pick-up orders.

Make sure the placement of the signs is where people are going to “be”

Management is putting together a timeline and different scenarios

People are understanding of reduced services – example, no housekeeping services until the room is ready to turn. Put it outside the door, make them aware.

Keep in touch with those in your database. Ask them how they are and ask them how they are doing! Let them know how you are doing. (bb)

Add to your curb appeal (Gardening? Cleaning? Other?) bb

Use your time to do a thorough cleaning. Take down cobwebs, freshen up, refinish floors. Will need to anyway. (Retail)

Create family packs, do it yourself packs, take out packs.

This is the time to reinvent yourself. Really do a deep dive into your business plan.

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Ideas for future

Changes in the layout of the offering. Can only serve ½ the people that they used to be able to

Give people choices to be alone if they want (i.e. and provide some spaces or a list of spaces, potentially some outside your business to take your offering to-go)

Give visitors the tools for “self-guided” tours

Create a space for Mom’s and Dad’s that have been teachers, too!

Redirect budgets to promote Staycation/closer guests as opposed to flights or 6-hour drive radius

We need to position ourselves even more as a driveable destination and provide routes and activity information for “windshield tours”, punctuated by safe activities and special treats along the way.

Use every “canvas” we can, including sidewalk messaging of hope and encouragement.

Are QR codes going to be coming back and be more accepted within the United States? Why? Because they can contain much more information – and direct more information than a link to a URL, etc. They were already more adopted in international culture for payment and other information, but now even more so? We have to be on top of this trend again.

Create new products – and those especially related to wellness. Position as such. See ideas from CDGA sailboard as an example. Investment in a product which makes the participant feel like they are getting an experience and creating their own memories, and also have options for those still maintaining or worried about social distancing.

Consumer mood seems to be changing literally day by day. One commonality is that people are looking to dream and be on the other side of this. So, if you can appeal to memories of the good times that people had and can have again ... they will feel connected and contribute. Be sensitive though because many are still suffering, and you have to keep an ear to the tone. It’s a fine line. It won’t be a flip back to what was normal.

Market Realities/observations/challenges/opportunities:

Spontaneity is gone from the consumer/retail world. I needed people to be driving by or to want to hop in their car and go!

Everyone in this segment agreed that we have to bring out the humanness and connection of our experiences. People are needy for this right now. Virtual actually presents an opportunity to do this.

For those who have student tours as a segment of their business, they have extra “market” issues to deal with. 1. The student market may not be able to come back. There’s definitely a chance that their “timing” of learning may need to be adjusted.

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When will people be comfortable in groups? 30 – 60 days or longer? Groups again, what is a crowd? What is a comfortable level?

Most of my tours are bus tours; Five families will show up at the same time – how to keep these types of groups coming. Or how to change to still accommodate five families – five private tours vs. one large tour

Video is king

A need to stay tuned to TripAdvisor and how it is positioning destinations

Uncertain when to make even outdoor furniture and seating areas available. When to put it out again? How does that “floor” plan change? (R)

If everything is going to be moved to the fall – then how will we compete in the fall? Do we need some kind of market coordination so that we don’t just book all over each other?

We need to be very careful about overcrowding and managing crowds, even at the outdoor venues. We need to consider how we spread these people out --- even in our outdoor spaces. (bb)

Testing out our delivery system. Not what we were set up for, but it may be the key to volume. Grub hub and dining dash are taking a ton of “cut” and we might better look at the business model of doing it ourselves. (R)

Events are NOT coming back in the same way. We are looking at short term losses and longer-term impacts, as some of this just won’t get off.

Opportunities – driving (themed) opportunities. I.e. barn quilt trail, etc.

Are there certain places where you can reserve your time at a site?

While in quarantine – offer quiet spaces at hotels for a reduced day rate. These are the new clean “home offices” or escape rooms.

Rates are hard to adjust during this even though costs are going up. People will be more cautious with their resources and will remain price sensitive.

How can we restart a construction project enhancement when we cannot get the revenues in, but you know that some day you will need that work.

The best market opportunity is with existing customers. Touch base with these people. They are your friends. They know you care about them and they care about you. Even if they can’t come back this year, they can come back in the future and will remain loyal to you because you cared when they needed it the most.

The demographic of guests may be changing dramatically too — the demo of guests that may change - because the high-risk group that used to travel, won’t. How do we attract the low-risk demo? — they will be the ones in the workforce in the highest number and so that will also be impacted.

Drivable destinations — are going to be the first to re-open and visit — as a predominately drivable destination we need to step up across the board.

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Concern – is your clientele ready for things like a cashless system i.e. Venmo/Square? (older folks, etc. How do you get them ready and not cut them out of the picture – if they are an important part of your business.)

Sanitation Specifics

This is absolutely necessary to alleviate consumer fears

Everyone – please remember that as you sanitize, we need to remember our environment and still keep an eye on sustainability. (boats, etc.) Important for the lake.

Hire one contractor to do all the area hotels? (HS)

There is merit in promoting that our businesses are clean and safe – underwriter's seal of approval (HS)

To develop or expand an existing high-end cleaning and sanitizing business to expand and provide strong comprehensive services to our hospitality industry and other businesses.

Hilliard (Farmington) Purell stations and Eastview Mall combo

Val's idea to Buy one; give one to a public space

Is there an opportunity for a cooperative laundry service for like businesses (restaurants etc.) to wash/sanitize masks/cleaning towels/etc. at the end of each day/three times a week, etc.

Every staff member to wear gloves and a mask; Getting ready to do infrared thermometers to temp employees before, during work.

Remove things from table, from counter – anywhere that people can touch.

Payment without touch. (should we be teaching (helping) people set up Venmo and cashless payments

Visual clues for social distancing. Black tablecloths mean that people aren't sitting there, but at least it's not huge spaces or chairs turned upside down. White tablecloths are what's being seated. Leave some "life" in the space.

Several businesses spoke of having a dedicated staff member who will be responsible for sanitizing everything and keeping up on it. Demonstrating visibly even for customers.

Have one person's whose job it is to watch for "touching" and wiping up after touching.

Look at the materials that you are using and do they have to be changed to be "cleaner" materials and cleaner, what products will sanitize to CDC levels, but also remain sustainable, eco-friendly for our communities?

Consider an ozonator for the rooms (like after someone has smoked in them) if people see these.

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We need (our museums need) special sanitizers that will be safe with the pre 1940's shellac, etc. Can we get some advice?

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Speculation/Longer Term Concerns/Bigger Picture Needs

Belief that safety will be an important element in competing for tourism dollars for possibly many seasons to come. Let's have our house in order (HS) 4/9/ 3:30

Marketing, Technology, and Funding — collaboration – FLVC needs to provide.

Can FLVC provide experts to talk with the industry Can we get an event expert? To do a webinar on all the touch points. How does the industry handle events/festivals?

Policy. We need to figure out what policy changes are holding us up at the local/state level from being able to efficiently, effectively and cooperatively make changes that are within the guidelines of the new orders, directions. For example: wineries, outside tasting areas – cannot taste outside, so can't allow people to use the outdoors to do that.

Similarly - employee testing time for migrant workers.

Technology piece is important, but eventually we are going to have to figure out a way to monetizing content. Eventbrite vs. zoom. (especially important for events/theaters)

Can FLVC set up a community of marketers — a Facebook audience of 10,000.

Engaging with as many people as possible. How do you find funding when people are all hurting/recovering financially?

Employee/volunteer training/professional development — teaching someone how to smile through a mask, etc.

Industry has a lot of people who are furloughed or laid off - but will people have their own professional development?

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Plans

April – Crisis Communications; Industry Assessment

May – Safety, Stabilization

Brand Pillar Spots

June ? Recovery ?

Consumer Campaign

Segments and Participation: Total – 65.

Events, Festivals – 3

Lodging

B and B – 8

Franchise Hotels 2

Resort Hotels 8

BIDS/Chambers/Community – 4

Retailers – 5

Museums 6

Craft Beverage and Wineries 6

Restaurants

General 5

Canandaigua Main Street – 8

Seasonal Businesses (outdoor) – 4

Indoor attractions and Theatres – 6