



Finger Lakes
Visitors Connection
Ontario County, NY

Strategic Plan 2021 – 2025

Plan Developed: May 2021



STRATEGIC PLAN

The plan in this document was developed in the first six months of 2021 and provides strategic focus for Finger Lakes Visitors Connection (FLVC) through 2025. This plan is based on input from 89 community, civic and travel industry leaders who participated in the DestinationNext Planning Model. The survey was deployed January-May 2021. A planning workshop was conducted in Ontario County with the Finger Lakes Visitors Connection Board of Directors and staff in May 2021. Berkeley Young of Young Strategies, Inc. Young led the planning process with strategies identified by the FLVC workshop included in this strategic plan.

Destination, Mission and Vision

Ontario County is situated in the heart of western New York, about 10 miles southeast of Rochester, and is one of 14 counties that make up the Finger Lakes region. Within its 644 square miles (663 square miles if you include water), the county has two cities (Canandaigua and Geneva), 16 towns, eight villages, and more than a dozen school districts. Ontario County hosts most of the Canandaigua Lake shoreline and has breathtaking views, soaring mountains, lush vineyards, and charming communities.

Established in 1789, about a week before George Washington was elected president, Ontario County, known as the Mother of Western New York Counties, encompassed all of western New York State from the Pre-Emption Line to Lake Erie and from Lake Ontario to the Pennsylvania border. It now has a population of 109,561 (2015 census estimate) and is one of the few upstate counties that is still growing.

Located within a 6-hour drive radius of most major East Coast and Midwest cities, Ontario County provides a friendly and authentic experience, offering wine, food, cultural, wellness, and outdoor adventures. FLVC tells the story of the Finger Lakes, from our historic past to our innovative future.

The Finger Lakes Visitor Connection (FLVC) functions with a volunteer board, four full-time employees who are tasked with promoting Ontario County/Finger Lakes Region as a destination. FLVC is funded through a dedicated county-wide lodging tax levied at 3%.

Mission: To drive increased visitation and economic vitality by marketing and developing the assets of Ontario County as a premier leisure and meetings destination.

Vision: Tourism is recognized as an industry that contributes to the economic prosperity of Ontario County by infusing new dollars into our communities, enhancing the quality of life for our residents, and promoting the natural beauty of our county.

IMPLEMENTATION

The FLVC will assign committees to address each of the strategic initiatives outlined herein. Annual reviews of this four-year strategic plan, with committee reports/updates, will take place in lieu of annual retreats. The annual review takes place with staff and Board leadership. There is no need for a retreat if the plan implementation is on track and there are no external factors that change the overall strategies and goals. If significant changes are needed the Board/staff will schedule a retreat to adjust the plan. The FLVC will invest in market research to guide future sales and marketing efforts while monitoring in-market trends and visitor behavior to adjust destination-management strategies.



Overall Direction and Organization Structure

Finger Lakes Visitors Connection (FLVC) is a destination marketing and management organization focused on the progressive growth of the travel industry in Ontario County/Finger Lakes, NY. A thriving travel industry diversifies and improves the local economy for the benefit of all citizens.

The Finger Lakes Visitors Connection will promote and build awareness of Ontario County/Finger Lakes as a leisure and group destination with the highest caliber staff providing leadership and innovation to drive:

- Increased overnight and day-trip visitation
- Longer average length of stay
- Increased spending per travel party
- Increased visitor satisfaction

The Finger Lakes Visitors Connection is committed to creating a total visitor destination by providing leadership and innovation from the Board of Directors and staff to focus on the following strategic initiatives:

- 1. Market Ontario County as THE Finger Lakes destination** – (Page 4) Ontario County/Finger Lakes must stand out as a unique visitor experience in a highly competitive travel region.
- 2. Build and enhance a better visitor experience** (page 5) focusing on the attractors that inspire people to visit and the experiences that keep them in Ontario County longer.
- 3. Advocacy for travel industry issues** (Page 6) including sustainability, image and awareness of travel within Ontario County as a valued economic development engine.

Board Focus

The FLVC Board of Directors will be engaged in two primary functions:

- 1) Providing proper oversight** related to the function and ROI of the Visit Finger Lakes staff’s research-based marketing of Finger Lakes and Ontario County as a destination.
- 2) Fulfill this vision for Ontario County/Finger Lakes in 2025** in partnership with County/City Officials and other economic development groups. FLVC will foster, facilitate and encourage the growth and development of the destination.

Staff Focus

- 1) Research and strategic marketing of Ontario County/Finger Lakes to visitors.
- 2) Coordinating the implementation of the Board Vision for the destination.



Strategic Initiatives

1. **Market Ontario County as THE Finger Lakes as a destination with the highest skilled and most dynamic sales and marketing team.** Ontario County/Finger Lakes must stand out as a unique visitor experience in a highly competitive travel region.

External Marketing (outreach to visitors):

- A. **Update research and marketing strategy continually** as part of an annual plan that is supported by the local travel industry.
- B. **Conduct annual planning workshop** to share research and develop new strategies with local travel partners.
- C. **Build brand awareness** of Finger Lakes and Ontario County based on the visitor experience.
- D. **Define what great visitor experiences look like** year-round. An all-season approach to experiences will drive year-round demand for overnight lodging, dining and shopping.
- E. **Drive growth in visitation by focusing on the shoulder seasons** two months in Spring, two months in Fall.
- F. **Feature small businesses** in marketing and promotions to encourage entrepreneurship and new business development.
- G. **Use multiple channels in traditional, digital and social** to connect with new and repeat visitors. Capitalize on User Generated Content (UGC)
- H. **Partner with the other regional DMO's** to leverage the brand and reach a wider audience.
- I. **Provide dynamic, digital visitor information services** for individual, group and event visitors to drive increased spending in-market.
- J. **Tracking and accountability** to demonstrate highest possible Return-on-Investment (ROI) – Lodging market segmentation research of key performance metrics (KPIs) and lodging revenue tracking/analysis.

Measurable Success:

Annual plan with trackable ROI
Awards & Certifications
Longer length of stay
Increased shoulder & winter season visitation

Annual market research & analytics to track performance
Increased participation in partner co-op programs
Increased Spending

Increased visitor satisfaction
Growth in lodging room demand & ADR



Strategic Initiatives

- 2. Build new and enhance existing visitor experiences** – focusing on the attractors that inspire people to visit and the experiences that keep them in Ontario County longer. The Finger Lakes Visitors Connection will work with other economic development entities, business partners, town and County officials to support and encourage the development of activities that will enhance the visitor and resident experience.
 - A. Focus on “attractors”, those experiences that inspire visitation to Ontario County in each season–**
 1. Year-round – lakes, towns, history/heritage, unique shopping, unique dining, unique lodging
 2. Spring, summer, fall – wineries, water sports, boating, cycling, hiking, garden tours, scenic drives
 3. Winter – winter sports, cozy lodging & dining,
 - B. Support and encourage growth at all attractions –Expand Outdoor experiences** – capitalize on long term demand for active outdoor engagement. Travelers want to run, walk, hike, climb, swim, ski, cycle, sail, paddle, fish, explore and they need outfitters and guides to rent equipment and provide experiences.
 - C. Mobility & Access within the County is critical** – connecting travelers from lodging to experiences, walking paths/trails, expand trails to trail networks, maintenance of trails, shuttles to connect travelers and group to experiences and activity centers. Evening and alcohol related activities demand ride sharing to transport visitors safely.
 - D. Continue developing towns to be more engaging and walkable-** more unique local shopping, providing that which visitors want & shipping; unique local dining and rooftop experiences, expanded sidewalks (dining), accessible parking and smooth curbs at intersections for mobility.

Measurable Success:		
New experiences at attractors	New and expanded attractions	More evening activities
Rooftop dining	New & expanded sidewalks, trails	New shopping and dining
New outfitters and guides for outdoor experiences		



Strategic Initiatives

3. **Advocacy for Travel Industry Issues, Image and Awareness For Sustainability** – the FLVC will regularly convene travel industry businesses and conduct research to identify issues affecting the Ontario County/Finger Lakes travel industry. Partnership with other economic development entities and DMOs in the state and region will leverage the industry’s voice when reaching out to state and federal officials. Further, the FLVC will conduct annual updates and training of the crisis communications plan that addresses a wide range of potential incidents that could negatively affect the long-term success of the destination.
 - A. **Create a policy/action committee** of travel industry leaders and conduct regular listening sessions and surveys with travel industry leaders to identify issues that affect their growth and success. Possible issues of concern are workforce/wages, taxation, disruptors, crime, regulations, traffic congestion, signage, etc.
 - B. **Foster and support an abundant and well-trained workforce for hospitality businesses** – the FLVC will coalesce the travel industry businesses with schools, governments and workforce organizations on a long-term plan to inspire younger generations to seek out careers in hospitality, to provide training/education for those entering the workforce and to address competitive pay and benefits to retain a qualified workforce.
 - C. **Budget** – maintain adequate FLVC funding to compete and support managed, sustainable growth
 - D. **DEI** – Diversity, equity and inclusion is not a trend, it is a tangible standard of welcoming all as visitors, leaders, workers and citizens. FLVC will reflect the diversity of the region in its staffing and leadership. FLVC will welcome all in its marketing.
 - E. **Connectivity and Community engagement** – FLVC will be the voice of the travel industry in all parts on Ontario County and will be seen as enhancing the quality of life in Ontario County by promoting responsible economic growth through travel.
 - F. **Collaborative Relationships** – FLVC will coalesce travel industry partners to foster collaboration, facilitate partnerships and encourage entrepreneurship.
 - G. **Internal Marketing (in-reach to local businesses, leaders and residents)** - Place advertising and messaging in-market for citizens to see what Visit Finger Lakes does to attract visitors
 - H. **Provide leadership to the Ontario County/Finger Lakes travel industry** through training, co-op sales/marketing programs, workshops, marketing updates and workforce development.
 - I. **Deliver annual economic impact/ROI** updates to leaders & elected

Measurable Success:

Policy/Action Committee meets quarterly
 Priority list of policy initiatives
 Successful approval of lodging tax referendum
 Part-time jobs converted to full-time jobs

Crisis plan posted at all travel industry businesses
 Bi-annual presentations to elected bodies
 Increased applicants for hospitality jobs

