

Galena  
COUNTRY

# Galena

COUNTRY

## Tourism Master Plan

A strategic direction for the region's visitor economy



The Tourism Master Plan sets a new direction for Galena Country's visitor economy. It is the outcome of a community-driven process initiated by Galena Country Tourism and guided by a Steering Committee of community leaders.

**Our vision is to build a more livable, lovable, and prosperous region.**



# Steering Committee Members

## Mike Casper

President & CEO, Jo-Carroll Energy, Inc.

## Nikki Peebles

Vice President Regional Retail Manager, Illinois Bank & Trust

## Kathy Gable

Director, Village of Hanover/  
Owner, Sullivan's Laundromat

## Jill Pepin

Grant/Loan Writer and Administrator, Community Funding & Planning Services

## Melisa Hammer

Treasurer, Jo Daviess County

## Kelly Raab

President, Warren Chamber of Commerce

## Loras Herrig

City Manager, East Dubuque

## Kirk Raab

Mayor, Village of Warren

## Jamie Loso

Coordinator for Interpretation, Ulysses S. Grant Home State Historic Site

## Dino Rigopoulos

Owner, Rigopoulos Restaurant Group

## Marc McCoy

Ward 1 Alderman, Galena

## Colin Sanderson

Director of Sales and Marketing/Eagle Ridge Resort & Spa, Board Chair Galena Country Tourism®

## Terry McGovern

Chairman, Village of Stockton/  
Owner, Beautifully Berkley Bouquets & Home

## Christie Trifone Millhouse

Associate Director, Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation

## Rose Noble

CEO and President, Galena Country Tourism®

# Table of Contents

<i>5</i>	Foreword
<i>6</i>	An Increased Focus on Destination Management
<i>7</i>	The Challenge
<i>8</i>	Project Approach
<i>9</i>	Tourism Master Planning Process
<i>10</i>	Engagement & Research Findings
<i>10</i>	Destination Assessment
<i>11</i>	Community Engagement
<i>13</i>	Our Vision
<i>13</i>	Our Vision for 2030
<i>14</i>	Our Objectives
<i>15</i>	Strategic Pillars
<i>16</i>	Enhance and Diversify the Galena Experience
<i>18</i>	Address and Mitigate Visitor Pressures
<i>20</i>	Improve Livability and Community Wellbeing
<i>22</i>	Foster Stronger Stakeholder Alignment and Collaboration
<i>24</i>	Next Steps
<i>25</i>	Back Page



# *A Message from* Galena Country

A walk through Galena Country is like taking a journey back to the 19th century. Where else can you climb the stairs Ulysses S. Grant took to work? Or stand in the room where he heard he had become the 18th President of the United States? It's historic treasures like these, and vignettes of what life was like in the 19th century, that make Galena Country an authentic step back in time.

And while we will continue to celebrate our historic past, we must do so with an eye toward the future. We know that great places to live, work, and visit only stay that way if we look after them. The Galena Country Tourism Master Plan is about all of us working collaboratively to ensure a more sustainable future for our region. It sets a new long-term direction for our region's visitor economy and identifies critical opportunities to create genuine, tangible momentum towards turning aspiration into reality.

A key underlying objective to this strategy is to encourage partnerships within the community, and to work in an integrated way to embrace opportunities for growth in a manner that benefits all of our community members and increases the year-round strength of the region as a destination.

Working together, we can build a stronger tourism industry, we can achieve a new vision for our region, and we can create exceptional and original experiences for our visitors.

*Rose Noble*

Rose Noble  
CEO / President  
Galena Country Tourism

# An Increased Focus on Destination Management

The biggest shift in the global visitor industry today is the growing focus on destination management, which aligns tourism, community, government, and economic development priorities. Simply put, destination management seeks to optimize the interactions between visitors, the industry that serves them, the community that hosts them, and the natural environment to deliver a more balanced year-round economy.

Ultimately, destination management is a strategic framework that informs smart growth and investment decisions for residents and stakeholders. The overarching purpose is to increase destination competitiveness and visitor spend, protect the character of the local community and the

environment that surrounds them, provide more opportunities for local businesses and residents, and improve the overall quality of life. Protecting the authentic character of Galena Country is of paramount importance to everyone who participated in this project.

A Tourism Master Plan provides a road map for all of the above. It prioritizes the long-term sustainability of the entire community by delivering strategies to enhance infrastructure, facilities, attractions, events, and services related to growing the visitor economy. However, tourism isn't the end goal, specifically. Rather, the visitor economy is a pipeline for delivering more equitable economic and community development that balances tourism revenues, resident quality of life, and visitor satisfaction.



# The Challenge

Galena Country's tourism industry saw a resurgence in 2021, bringing economic impact to the region at levels beyond what was experienced prior to the global COVID-19 pandemic. But residents of our community today no longer regard economic growth alone as a sufficient measure of success. Our challenge is to ensure that the growth in our region's visitor economy enriches the community in other ways too: helping

us protect and improve our unique identity and cultural heritage, protect and enhance our environment, and generally improve our quality of life.

We must ensure that the more desirable Galena Country becomes as a place to visit, the more it develops into a community where we can live, work, and thrive.

## The Destination Management Cycle

By Maura Gast, FCDME

If you build a place people want to visit, you build a place where people want to live.

And if you build a place where business has to be, you'll build a place where people have to visit.



If you build a place where people want to live, you'll build a place where people want to work.

If you build a place where people want to work, you'll build a place where business needs to be.



# Project Approach

This Tourism Master Plan was initiated by Galena Country Tourism in 2021. The 12-month process began with an empirical destination assessment based on a comprehensive survey of public and private stakeholders. The results identified opportunities and challenges for the community through the lens of tourism, and they provided a series of prioritized action items.

That led to a robust series of community engagement that included a variety of 1-on-1 interviews, focus groups, surveys, visioning workshops, and meetings with community leaders. Engagement was supplemented with an extensive review of existing research and planning documents to ensure the strategies in this plan align with and support other plans.

Galena Country Tourism is poised to have a role in coordinating the next phase of the Tourism Master Plan. Because this is a strategy with ideas that transcend the tourism industry, initiative planning and implementation will be shared responsibilities among the tourism industry, the City of Galena and various organizations within Jo Daviess County.

The strength of engagement and alignment between all stakeholders is the key element towards building a successful destination management strategy. It is a journey that the people of Jo Daviess County will take together, and one that will benefit residents, businesses and visitors for years to come.



# Tourism Master Planning Process





Dirty Gurt's

# Engagement & Research FINDINGS

The development of the Tourism Master Plan engaged many community and industry leaders throughout the year-long process to ensure the widest breadth of input and collaboration as possible.

## Destination Assessment

MMGY NextFactor conducted a comprehensive DestinationNEXT assessment survey with local elected officials, community leaders, and industry stakeholders. The survey asked participants to rank the overall strength of the destination's experience and the level of community alignment around 24 key variables. The data was aggregated and plotted in the scenario model below comparing the community against a global industry average.

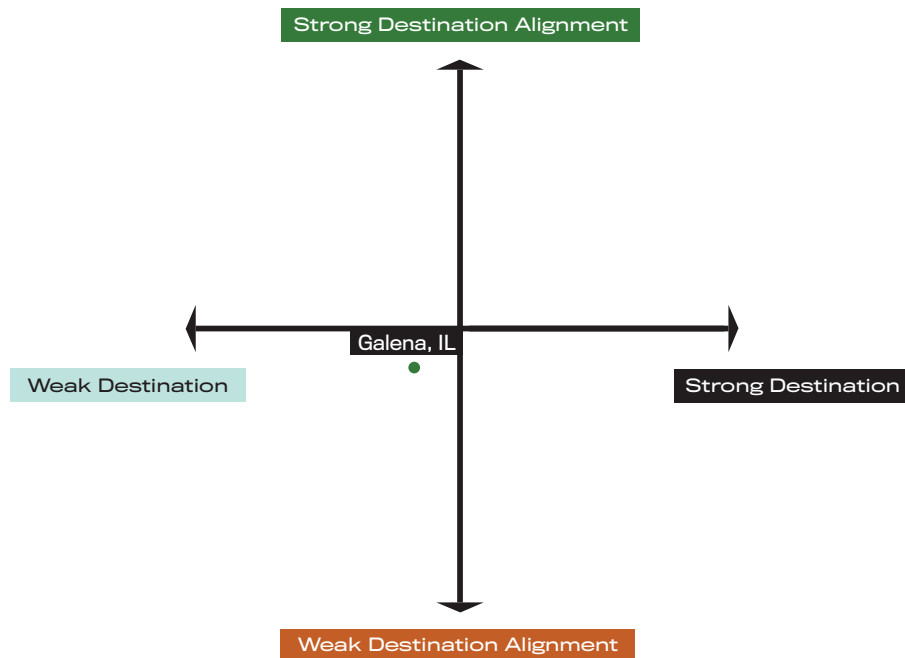
Galena Country plotted slightly below the industry baseline for community alignment, and below average relating to overall experience. The data results also showed that stakeholders felt the biggest challenges were related to three specific variables out of the 24: Mobility & Access, Communication Infrastructure, and Workforce Development.



Millennium Bar & Marina



Elizabeth's Grand Antique Co.





## Community Engagement

The initial step of community engagement was the creation of a Steering Committee, consisting of residents in the public, private and civic sectors. The committee was consulted throughout the development of the plan.

The MMGY NextFactor project team also conducted more than a dozen individual interviews and facilitated 8 virtual focus groups with an equally diverse scope of residents, elected officials, community leaders, and industry stakeholders. In addition, more than 500 residents of Jo Daviess County participated in a community survey.

Stakeholders and local community members in Galena Country were aligned around the following opportunities and challenges impacting quality of life for residents and quality of place for visitors.

## OPPORTUNITIES

### Enhance the Destination Experience

- Further develop niche visitor experiences for growing consumer segments, including outdoor recreation, agritourism, wellness, etc.
- Expand the region's tourism success beyond the peak season
- Create initiatives to disperse visitors throughout the region

### Diversify Visitor Markets

- Expand family-friendly offerings and experiences
- Develop offerings and experiences that appeal to Millennials and Gen-Z
- Increase demand for experiential product and learning experiences that allow the visitor to connect with the destination

### Improve Livability

- Expand economic development and diversify the local economy beyond tourism
- Improve cell service and broadband connectivity
- Preserve, beautify, and increase vibrancy in Jo Daviess County

## CHALLENGES

### Mobility & Transportation

- Parking and traffic congestion have reached a critical point
- Improved wayfinding is needed to guide visitors
- Improved public transportation is needed to distribute visitors and residents across the region

### Workforce & Housing

- Issues of affordable housing and the impact on workforce are a top priority
- Access to public transportation and childcare facilities further compound workforce concerns
- Staff shortages are hindering the region's ability to support a year-round, 24/7 visitor economy

### Aligning Vision & Priorities

- More collaboration is needed between the public and private sectors
- Diversity of views among stakeholders and residents regarding the region's future
- Diverse views among community regarding how to adapt to growth

**Tourism is lifeblood for our community. Let's manage growth wisely with a long-term outlook. Let's promote buy-in from locals by creating tourism attractions and amenities that benefit locals and tourists. After all, it is our community we are sharing.**

**- Jo Daviess  
County resident**



Fergedaboutit Vineyard & Winery

# *Our* VISION

## Our vision for 2030

The Galena Country region will be a thriving and sustainable year-round destination, with a reputation for being an attractive place to live, work, and visit. The region will be well known for the originality and quality of its experiences, rooted in the proud spirit of community among locals and the authentic character of the destination. The industry will be recognized for its commitment to work together to strengthen the visitor economy for the benefit of all.





Galena Country



Otto's Place



Belvedere Mansion

# Our Objectives

The objectives are aligned around elevating the long-term viability of the local economy, maintaining the community's authentic character, protecting the environment, and improving the overall destination experience for both visitors and residents.

1. Maximizing the value of tourism to the region – economically, socially, and environmentally
2. Delivering a balanced year-round visitor economy
3. Delivering exceptional and original experiences for our visitors and residents
4. Enhancing the region's reputation as a place to live, work, and visit



Galena Cemetery Walk



Galena Trolley Tours



Historic Ulysses Grant Home Grounds

# Strategic Pillars

The core deliverable for the Galena Country Tourism Master Plan is a new strategic framework with four high-level goals and actionable initiatives for each to accomplish the destination vision for Galena Country. The goals are interdependent and designed to collectively optimize the year-round economy and enhance the local community character and cultural DNA. All of the strategies are the result of extensive community input collected during the many individual consultations and group sessions conducted specifically for this plan.

1. Enhance and Diversify the Galena Experience
2. Address and Mitigate Visitor Pressures
3. Improve Livability and Community Wellbeing
4. Foster Stakeholder Alignment and Collaboration

# Enhance & Diversify the Galena Experience

## WHAT IT MEANS

Tourism is undergoing a transformation in how it is developed, marketed, and managed, driven by rapidly changing visitor expectations. The increasing emphasis being placed on “experiences” by consumers is far more than a shift in terminology or a fad; it is a well-researched and quantifiable trend.

Experiential Tourism is travel motivated by the desire to really connect with a place, its culture and people. It is less concerned with simply seeing or doing things, but rather with

immersing oneself in the locale, interacting with people, engaging the senses, and learning the history and stories of the place.

A meaningful experience is something that one does, sees, or feels which is unique and certainly distinctive to a particular place. Experiences help the potential visitor make decisions to go to one place over another by imagining themselves there. It also helps them remember the visit as being special and ensures that they talk about it afterward.





## WHAT IT MEANS FOR OUR DESTINATION

Delivering a more diverse experience is critical for attracting high-value visitors, who spend more, stay longer, explore more of the destination, and align with local community values. This target customer can also mean people who visit in shoulder season or mid-week.

The most successful methods to accomplish that revolve around enhancing local culinary, cultural, wellness, and active tourism, often with an integrated educational delivery connecting two or more of those themes. Those verticals also spur higher visitor spend, length of stay, and loyalty, and they're effective catalysts for accelerating off-season demand.

More diversified experiences also have vast and far-reaching benefits for local residents and for attracting new residents, investors, and organizations to Galena Country. Meaning, a more highly diversified visitor experience is directly related to higher quality of life for residents and higher tax revenues for the City of Galena and Jo Daviess County.

## HOW IT WILL BE ACHIEVED

- Further develop tourism product and programming to appeal to the growing market of family travelers
- Expand outdoor recreational opportunities by developing and promoting experiences that emphasize engaging with the region's rolling terrain, waterways, and outdoor spaces
- Support agricultural economic development efforts in the region through the development of agritourism that embraces and showcases the unique sense of place of the region
- Identify and address water access issues within a wider policy context for the use of regional waterways
- Work with partners to expand the product offering in spa, culinary, and special events that will complement traditional winter activities
- Identify event and festival opportunities to drive offseason visitation, i.e., Night of the Luminaria and Living Windows, Galena Whiskey Tasting Weekend, etc.
- Encourage businesses to extend midweek and evening hours of operation and provide support in terms of research and promotion



Verilife Marijuana Dispensary

# Address & Mitigate Visitor Pressures

## WHAT IT MEANS

Tourism has historically prioritized the needs of the visitor. Today's sustainable tourism thinking prioritizes the needs of the local community, along with the natural environment, while maintaining the long-term benefits derived from a thriving visitor economy.

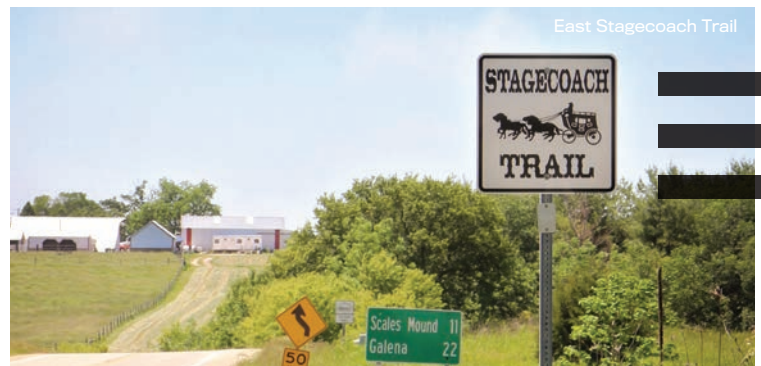
Economic, social, and environmental impacts are felt at every destination touched by visitors, regardless of the volume or the locality. For example, overcrowding and congestion of tourism-related infrastructure, often referred to as overtourism or unbalanced tourism, can lead to the degradation of natural and historical sites,

landscapes and public spaces. This in turn can lead to a loss of identity and authenticity for destinations, negatively affecting not only the tourist experience but also the environment and host communities upon which tourism so clearly depends.

The purpose of this document is not to grow visitor volumes. Rather, the overarching vision is to use tourism as a catalyst for providing more opportunities for more people in Galena Country, so the local community can help protect the authentic character of the region while adding new layers to it for future generations.



Historic Ulysses S Grant Home



East Stagecoach Trail



Cajun Jack's Bar & Grill

## WHAT IT MEANS FOR OUR DESTINATION

The tourism industry is the economic lifeblood of Galena Country. But at the same time, it's imperative that future growth is managed responsibly so residents can enjoy the lifestyle that brought them to the region in the first place.

The growing volume of car traffic in Galena Country diminishes quality of life for locals and the overall destination experience for visitors. Developing alternative transportation systems is a long-term strategy with significant capital expenditures in road and trail networks. However, looking 10 years ahead, it's not a leap to imagine that people will continually gravitate towards healthier, cleaner modes of transportation.

Similarly, there should be an accelerated focus on previous efforts at improving walkability and accessibility for people of all abilities. Major Main Street upgrades in recent years are supporting those efforts greatly, but more can be done to improve wayfinding to increase walkability among both visitors and locals.

Finally, the natural environment is a critical element of what makes Galena Country so special. Ensuring the visitor economy delivers sustainable and desirable environmental outcomes will be an important aspect of maintaining a resilient visitor economy for the long term.

## HOW IT WILL BE ACHIEVED

- Advocate for passenger rail service to be implemented from Rockford to Dubuque with a stopover in Galena to encourage visitors without cars
- Continue to promote a park-and-ride system to local residents and visitors
- Develop and implement a parking and multi-modal transportation plan that preserves the character of the community
- Improve wayfinding and signage to direct and disperse visitors more effectively
- Support local governments and community groups in implementing policies and undertaking projects to increase the appeal of public spaces, particularly Main Street
- Develop infrastructure for the surging national growth of e-bikes and other e-mobility options
- Support an agreed definition of sustainability and a set of measurable indicators and targets
- Establish a working group to develop a long-term sustainability action plan for the visitor economy
- Encourage more businesses take part in the Galena Area Green Designation and encourage responsible tourism
- Develop and pilot a Pledge Program that is designed to educate guests and potential visitors on the importance of the values that underlie the region's commitment to sustainability.

Improve

# Livability & Wellbeing

Community

## WHAT IT MEANS

The most sustainable and prosperous destinations have long ago developed beyond "tourism destinations." They're just outstanding destinations, period. Local leaders focus on enhancing the high quality of life by bringing together all types of people to celebrate the local lifestyle and community values.

This focus on creating a more livable community helps fuel both tourism and

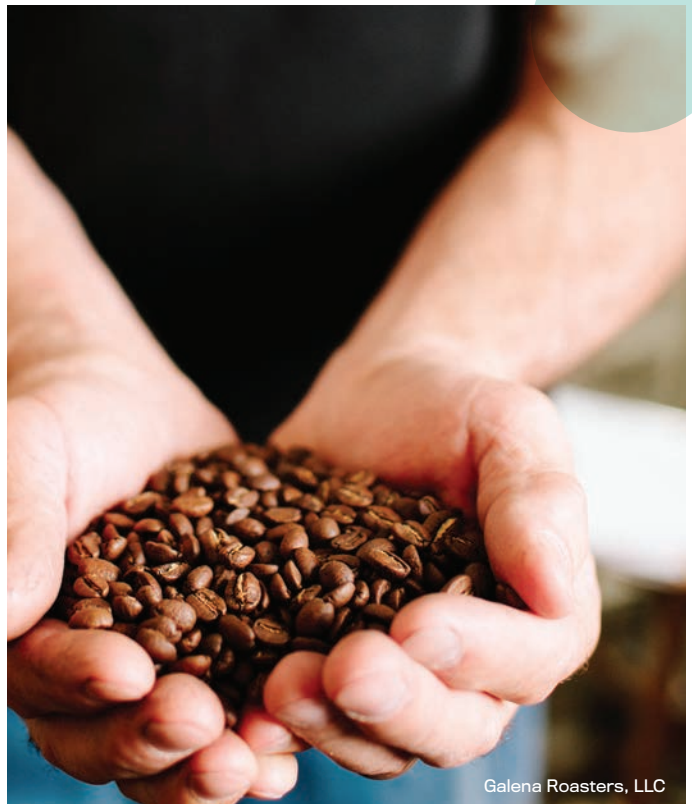
broader economic development. Repeat visitors don't return to a destination to feel like a tourist. For many, they return because they want to feel like they're part of the local community where they share the same values, passions, and like-minded interests. The identity of a particular neighborhood, defined by its lifestyle, way of life, community and cultural DNA, etc., is the destination's competitive advantage to help drive incremental repeat visits.



Galena Country



Nine Generals Cigar Company



Galena Roasters, LLC

## WHAT IT MEANS FOR OUR DESTINATION

One of the most important intended outcomes for diversifying and optimizing the local economy is to provide greater opportunities for full-time residents of Galena Country. Due to rising costs of living, it is increasingly challenging for families raising kids and young residents seeking professional development opportunities. To have a thriving community, it is imperative that people across all social and economic segments have pathways for achieving their goals so they can afford to stay in the community.

Aligned with that, there was considerable input from the community that local residents no longer enjoy the experiences in their own backyard. One of the strategies in this section recommends the development of more local programming and promotion to encourage residents to be active participants in their community and help contribute to the local economy.

## HOW IT WILL BE ACHIEVED

- Expand public-private partnerships to enhance workforce development initiatives revolving around housing, transportation, and wage increases
- Incentivize commercial and residential landowners to develop workforce housing
- Expand commuter options for workforce living outside of Galena
- Provide reliable and competitive broadband service to citizens, businesses, and vendors
- Ensure access to affordable quality childcare for local working families
- Prioritize Main Street initiatives and the development of a more diverse local economy, vibrant public spaces, and access to the outdoors
- Enhance and develop avenues for citizens to engage with Galena Country Tourism, the City of Galena, and Jo Daviess County so they are informed, feel heard, and become involved and collaborate to find solutions
- Adopt street transformation policies that create shared stewardship of public spaces and repurpose streets to be more active, accessible, and safe



Historic Main Street Galena



Foster Stronger

# Stakeholder Alignment & Collaboration

## WHAT IT MEANS

Destinations of all sizes are more competitive in the global visitor economy when government, community, and industry priorities are aligned as much as possible. A whole-of-destination approach, where the public, private, and civic sectors are all speaking to each other, creates stronger communities that elevate the visitor experience, support sustainable and economic development across all sectors, and improve the quality of life for residents.

Every destination is made up of interconnected networks and complex systems. A visitor will encounter and patronize many of those, spanning a range of industry stakeholders, community organizations and events, small businesses, and all of the infrastructure that connects a destination. The leisure or business traveler isn't generally aware of how they are navigating so many of these interrelated elements that make up a destination, but all of them impact and influence the visitor in some way.

Therefore, how well government, community, and industry leaders work together influences how well visitors will experience the destination. It impacts where visitors travel in the region and for how long, when they go and why, how much they spend, what types of businesses they patronize, and what they share on social media, etc. It impacts why they even show up in the first place.

Because of COVID-19, there is now much greater awareness of how and why governments, community organizations, and the visitor industry are all linked. And, furthermore, the pandemic showed how they all share many like-minded goals for each of their audiences related to community and neighborhood development, equitable workforce development, small business, and priority sector growth, etc.



Scent Workshop Galena



Historic Main Street Galena



Simply Elegant Boutique

## WHAT IT MEANS FOR OUR DESTINATION

Guided by this plan for the advancement of our destination, Galena Country Tourism will continue its work of uniting the industry and advancing our collective goals, leading to countless benefits for residents and visitors, including infrastructure development, job creation, economic spending, major event attraction, and accessibility to grassroots sport and cultural events.

By fostering stakeholder alignment and collaboration, this community will strengthen and grow for the betterment of both our residents and visitors. This also means supporting our partners as they advance their work. We will continue to provide leadership to the industry through leveraging effective partnerships, communicating relevant and timely information and sharing useful research insights. We will also advance our efforts through educational programs and supporting skill and product development within our industry and community.

Ultimately, the success of this strategy will come from meaningful, mutually beneficial participation and alliances with our stakeholders and industry partners. By working together, we will achieve more for the benefit of our citizens and visitors to our region.

## HOW IT WILL BE ACHIEVED

- Support the development and implementation of a cross-selling program where businesses are incentivized to refer customers to other local businesses
- Develop and promote training programs for stakeholders to strengthen alignment and positioning of the region
- Build industry engagement with organizations and networks responsible for planning and policy decision making that impacts the visitor economy
- Develop community-wide programs to increase awareness and support of tourism and hospitality as a key economic driver that provides growth opportunities for all locals and small businesses
- Develop a more expansive resident sentiment survey program that measures and tracks support for the local visitor economy, and publish the results on a regular basis for ongoing conversation
- Invest in data management platforms and community crowd-sharing tools to ensure intelligent, data-driven decision making across all levels of the public and private sectors





# Next Steps

Throughout the planning process, our community demonstrated an overwhelming willingness to come together and develop a shared vision for Galena Country's visitor economy. That collaborative spirit will be needed once again as we aim to bring this vision to life. No single individual or organization will be able to implement this plan alone. It will require the support of a broad reaching group of contributors and a collaborative mindset.

Galena Country Tourism will champion this strategy, at times leading initiatives, at times supporting others in their pursuits and at all times advocating for the strategic development of our visitor economy for the benefit of residents and visitors.

When appropriate, project teams will be recruited and tasked with developing strategic initiatives and collaborative metrics, guiding and aiding implementation, reviewing success measures and ensuring the lasting relevance of the work.

Many of the strategic initiatives resulting from this plan will be incorporated into Galena Country Tourism's strategic plans, ensuring the work plan becomes a natural part of the organization's values and operations, not a one-time activity.



# Galena

COUNTRY

101 Bouthillier Street, Galena, IL 61036

815.776.9200

[VisitGalena.org](http://VisitGalena.org)