

Jackson County Tourism Development Authority 2022 Strategic Plan

Prepared for:

- Jackson County TDA



NORTH CAROLINA MOUNTAIN TOWNS OF CASHIERS,
CHEROKEE, DILLSBORO AND SYLVA



Study Conducted: November 2018 – March, 2019

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Plan developed: May, 2019

Research Conducted by:
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Charlotte, NC

Organization & Board Structure

STRATEGIC VISION AND DIRECTION

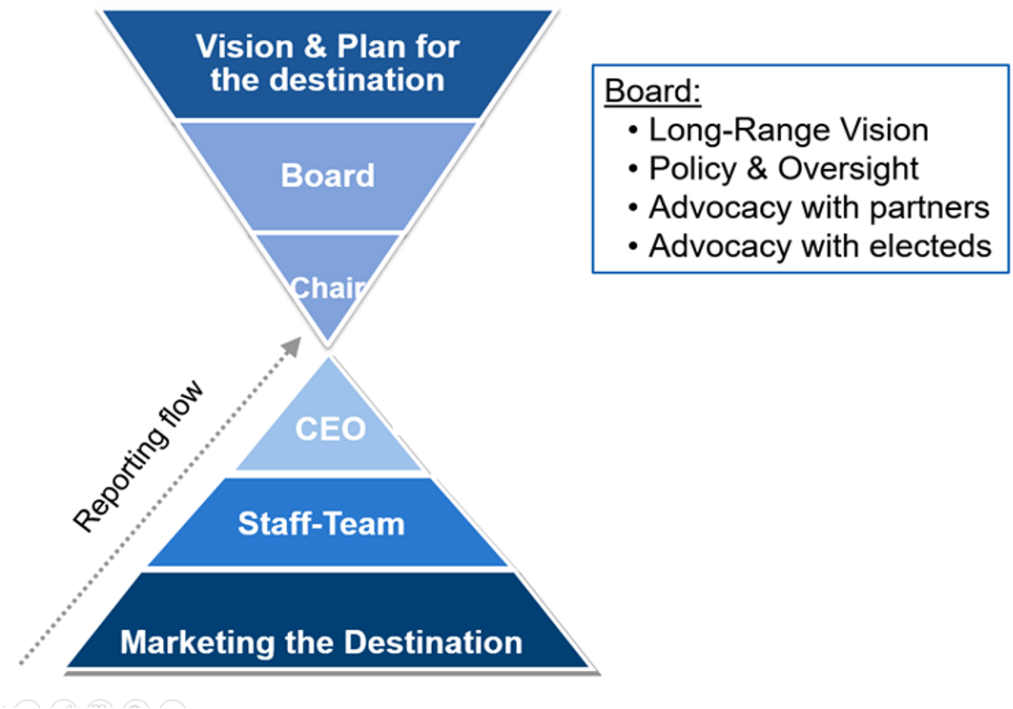
The Jackson County Tourism Development Authority (JCTDA) promotes Jackson County, North Carolina as the premier mountain destination in the North Carolina mountains. The JCTDA operates as a department of Jackson County Government with oversight provided by the Jackson County TDA Board (JCTDA). The JCTDA Board is appointed by and has representation from the Jackson County Commissioners. The Executive Director manages the work of the organization and reports to the Board Chair and the Board of Directors.

Travel promotion is a unique approach to economic development because it has a dedicated funding source from traveler-paid lodging taxes and a measurable return on investment. JCTDA is committed to a program of work guided by smart, research-based strategy.

Vision: To be the premier mountain destination providing an active lifestyle, spectacular natural assets and a friendly community for citizens and visitors alike.

Mission: To promote the growth of year-round tourism opportunities that benefit the Jackson County economy. Our efforts put people to work, grow jobs, build community, and make our towns a vibrant place to live, play and work.

JACKSON COUNTY TDA STRUCTURE



The Jackson County TDA Board will be engaged in two primary functions: **A) Providing proper oversight** related to the ROI of the staff's research-based marketing of the destination; **B) Provide leadership** and encourage elected officials and other economic development groups to fulfill the vision for Jackson County as a destination. The Board is comprised of representatives of travel industry businesses. The Board accomplishes its work through Committees (Executive/Finance, Audit) and Advisory Committees (Marketing, Governance, Destination Experience, etc.).

Strategic Direction

Travel to Jackson County is currently driven by leisure demand for scenic mountain beauty, Cherokee, and major WNC regional attractions. Western Carolina University and group travel are also drivers of visitation. The Jackson County TDA will drive growth in visitation and visitor spending by promoting an active-lifestyle destination and focusing on longer weekend stays, weekdays, shoulder and off-seasons. A combination of leisure and group promotion will drive maximum ROI.

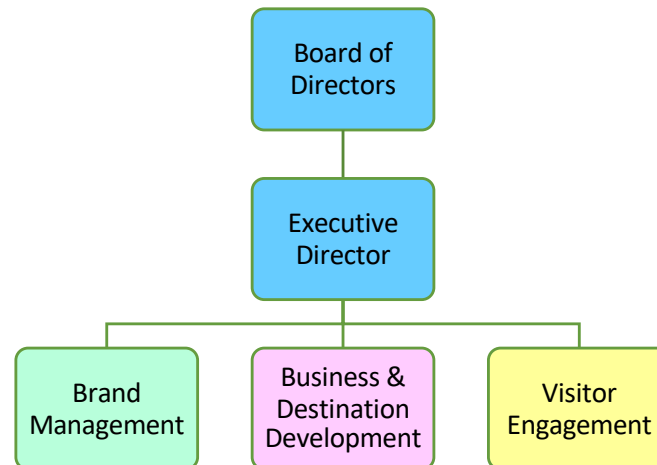
Destination Marketing – Expand and promote the “play-on” brand to an active-Outdoors Mountain Brand

- 1. Maintain and support the highest skilled and most dynamic sales and marketing team.** JCTDA will meet the highest standards of accreditation and performance (research driven ROI) with measurable results as a research-based DMO driven by a team of professionals.
- 2. Promote and expand the active-lifestyle brand based on the market research.** Jackson County requires a brand that sets it apart as unique from other mountain destinations while capturing the active outdoors vacation/getaway experience. The brand will serve as a foundation for all marketing, sales and public relations as well as future destination development.
- 3. Maintain/expand a comprehensive research/ tracking program to guide all decisions–** Track KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) for all programs with ROI reported at all Jackson County TDA Board meetings. Provides annual reports to County Commission.
- 4. All plans, marketing, activities, events must be on-brand** – deliver on the active mountain lifestyle experience.

Destination Management – Enhance the Active Outdoors Lifestyle – a mountain destination unlike any other

- 5. Connect Jackson County visitors with memorable experiences.** Jackson County is large and visitors must be able to find activities to engage in them. Implement county-wide directional signage and way-finding systems. Improved cellular and Wi-Fi service provides visitor with connectivity. Support traffic planning efforts to diminish traffic jams during peak periods.
- 6. Support improved and expanded access to traveler experiences,** with emphasis on year-round outdoor experiences. Expand & improved parking at trail heads and waterfalls. Improved trail quality and safety. Create new trails. Support outfitters to equip visitors for biking, kayaking, canoeing, fishing
- 7. Encourage and support unique mountain dining, shopping and entertainment that set Jackson County apart from other mountain destinations.**

1. **Maintain and support the highest skilled and most dynamic sales and marketing team possible.** JCTDA will meet the highest standards of accreditation and performance (research driven ROI) with measurable results as a research-based DMO. It takes a team to promote a destination and teamwork between the Board and staff is critical.
 - a) Operate the JCTDA as a creative and supportive work environment based on core values.
 - b) Expand the team to improve efficiency and drive increased visitation. Expanded in-house focus on digital/social marketing, group sales and operations is necessary. Based on industry standards it is recommended that JCTDA staffing expense should be in the range of 25% - 35% of total annual budget. Marketing outreach should be 50% - 60% of total annual budget.
 - c) Maintain competitive wage and benefits structure to retain the highest qualified team possible.
 - d) Achieve and maintain accreditation with Destinations International (DMAP).
 - e) Support all team members in continued education online and at industry conferences and certification programs offered through Destinations International, US Travel Association, Travel and Tourism Research Association, Southeast Tourism Society and vendor conferences.
 - f) The organization chart below reveals the structure and primary focus areas of the JCTDA.



2. Promote and expand an active-lifestyle brand based on market research.

Jackson County is an active-outdoors-destination that is a western North Carolina hub between Great Smoky Mountain National Park, Cherokee, Blue Ridge Parkway, Biltmore, Asheville, Maggie Valley, etc. Jackson County requires a brand that sets it apart as unique from other mountain destinations while capturing the active outdoors vacation/getaway experience. The brand will serve as a foundation for all marketing, sales and public relations as well as future destination development.

- a) **Drive increased visitation during slower months of the year to become a year-round destination.** Eight priority months (in rank order): April, late August, March, February, January, November, September, and December (excluding peak-weekend and major events). Weekdays have most available rooms.
- b) **Marketing targeted to life stage segments:** Active couples; Singles; Friends; Empty-Nesters; Outdoors enthusiasts (hiking, walking, biking, fishing, kayaking, canoeing, birding, relaxation/soft adventure, holistic/healthful travel etc.).
- c) **Geographic targeting:** Top-tier large target markets in short drive range are recommended to include Atlanta, Charlotte, Raleigh/Durham, Nashville, Birmingham. Top tier drive markets – Upstate SC (GSP/Anderson), Columbia, Chattanooga, Knoxville. Florida tier – Tampa/St Pete Clearwater, Orlando, Jacksonville
- d) **Group sales to drive weekdays and off-season weekends:** small meetings & conferences, sports, competitions, weddings, reunions, festivals & events, etc.
- e) **Public Relations** targeted at core drive markets featuring the active-outdoors lifestyle experiences and demand drivers.



3. **Maintain/expand comprehensive research/tracking program to guide all decisions**— Track KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) for all programs both in-house and agency related with results reported to the Jackson County TDA Board. Provide annual reports to County Commissioners.
 - a) **Lodging Market Metrics** – overnight visitors drive 3 -4 times the spending of day-trippers and lodging taxes fund the program of work. Track all aspects of the overnight market. Tax Revenue Reports, STR, AirDNA, Destimetrics, etc.
 - b) **Annual Economic Impact of Visitors** - annual report of statistics to show the impact of visitor spending.
 - c) **Visitor Profile Research** – every third year to track changes in visitor behavior, travel party composition and spending.
 - d) **Digital Analytics** – track effectiveness of the website and e-marketing through Google Analytics, conversion surveys.
 - e) **Social Media Analytics** – monitor followers and engagement on social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram.
 - f) **Big Data** – explore platforms that track data from lodging, OTA's etc. to provide visitor analytics.
 - g) **Attribution Analytics** – to determine the conversion of those who visit the website and arrive in the destination.
4. **All plans, marketing, activities, events must be on-brand** – deliver on the active mountain lifestyle experience. Use research to guide all efforts and focus on those attributes that set Jackson County apart as a unique experience unlike other mountain destinations. Jackson County must stand out as unique and offer experiences that are worth the travel time/expense in order to compete with other mountain destinations.

Destination Management – Enhance the Active Outdoors Lifestyle. A mountain destination unlike any other!

5. Connect Jackson County visitors with memorable experiences.

Jackson County is large and visitors must be able to find activities to engage in them. There are three primary visitor hubs within Jackson County: Sylva/Dillsboro; Cashiers and Cherokee. Each of these hubs include a wide array of visitor amenities including lodging, dining, shopping and activities. Connecting visitors with activities within Jackson County comes first. Activities outside of Jackson County will drive longer stays within the county.

- Support Chambers of Commerce in visitor information services and on-going front-line hospitality training.
- Maintain partner relationship with Western Carolina University.
- Implement county-wide directional signage and way-finding systems to move visitors among the three primary hubs and connect them with experiences.
- Support improved cellular and Wi-Fi service provides visitor with connectivity.
- Verify the accuracy of GPS, Google/online listings and visitor information apps frequently used by visitors.
- Support traffic planning efforts to diminish traffic jams during peak periods.
- Support the hospitality industry by coalescing organizations involved in workforce development and advocating for jobs and training in the hospitality industry.



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6. **Support improved and expanded access to traveler experiences**, with emphasis on year-round outdoor experiences. Jackson County will benefit from growth in shoulder and off-season visitation and less emphasis on peak demand periods such as leaf season weekends and summer holidays. The research study revealed visitor's desire for more access to outdoors experiences including hiking, biking, fishing, kayaking, tubing, canoeing, etc.
- Expanded & improved parking and bathroom facilities at attractions, trail heads and waterfalls as some of the trail heads have limited or no parking.
 - Improved trail quality, view/vista maintenance and safety to open access to a wider audience.
 - Create new trails to drive longer stays in Jackson County.
 - Support outfitters to equip visitors for biking, kayaking, canoeing, fishing.
 - Encourage and promote guides who help connect visitors with unique experiences.



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7. **Encourage and support unique mountain dining, shopping and entertainment that set Jackson County apart from other mountain destinations.** Emphasis is placed on supporting the Chambers of Commerce and Jackson County Economic Development in their efforts to build dynamic communities that are great places to live, work and visit.
 - a) **Communities that are walkable and bikeable** – walkways, crosswalk and trails make communities accessible while connecting residents and visitors with experiences and creating a sense of place.
 - b) **Unique Shopping** – most travel research identifies shopping as a top visitor activity and it is typically one of the top categories of discretionary visitor spending. Shopping is usually one of the top rainy day activities in mountain destinations. Encourage retail that offers unique and local shopping experiences and merchandise that will drive higher visitor spending and satisfaction.
 - c) **Unique Entertainment** – something fun every night of the year focused on entertainment and activities for all demographics. Encourage and support but not operate!
 - d) **Unique dining** – destination dining is a thing! Support and encourage those dining experiences that research identifies as motivating visitation and extending stays.