

FY 2022-2023

Johnston
County
VISITORS BUREAU

MARKETING PLAN

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Thoughts by Donna

In year two of recovery from the pandemic, travel seems to be on the rise, however, new challenges continue to plague the tourism industry. These issues are not unique to Johnston County, but are felt throughout North Carolina, the United States, and the world. How destination marketing organizations are adapting and changing is the focus of this marketing plan -- as in this past year, the JCVB has gone through a staff reorganization, updated the strategic plan, added data intelligence into the mix of our tools to market with precision, and as we write this marketing plan we continue to bring forward the most overused word ever -- **pivot**.



To be completely honest and transparent, I might have been overly conservative in planning the FY 2021-22 budget, but not knowing the trajectory of the return of travel for our destination I felt being conservative was the thing to do. This strategy has given our fund balance a chance to recover from the impact of COVID on hotel revenues in 2020. Therefore, all grant programs, chamber memberships and sponsorships, and advertising placements are back in the FY 22-23 marketing plan.

New for the Visitors Bureau in FY 23 is the use of Near.com data intelligence which provides the staff tremendous insight into the day-trip and overnight visitors to the county, their visits to area attractions, where they travel from, and their demographics. This knowledge is already shaping ad placements, Google and social media target audiences, and the ability to run custom reports for tourism partners following major events or researching competitors. This data is proving to be very helpful. The JCVB team is also adding email automation as a new tool with the addition of the Act-on email platform through our CRM platform with Simpleview. This means more learning curves for us all, but AI is certainly the trend in marketing today!

Our goals and promises are to continue to be innovative, inclusive, involved and inventive when it comes to being the best destination marketing organization possible. We don't do any of that without our tourism partners and the support of the Tourism Authority board. Here's to year three of the pandemic and the challenges we hope to overcome -- workforce issues, supply chain shortages, gas prices affecting travel, and the impact of high food prices. If you have ideas or pitches for our team -- reach out, we continue to be in this together!!

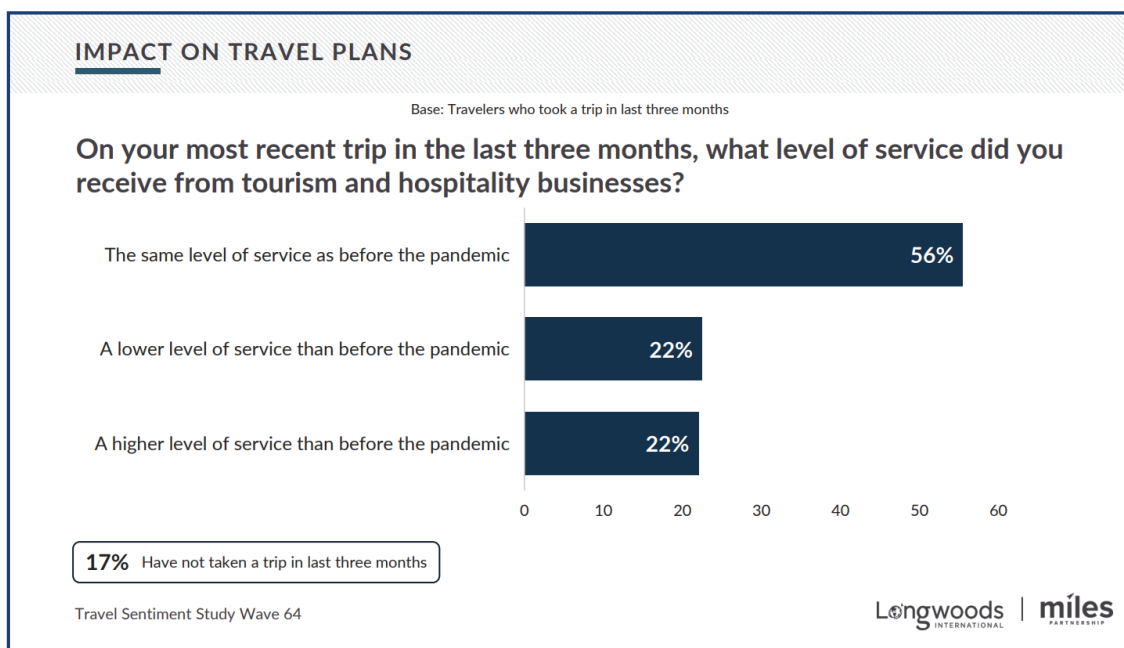
Donna

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What does recovery look like?

As we write this plan, the country continues to see high positivity rates of COVID version BA.5, which is highly contagious but mild for many infected. As we resume our lives, we ponder if this is the new normal? The latest reports from Smith Travel Research shows hotels in the United States are seeing occupancy rates increasing, with very high ADR as well as very strong RevPars. Hotels facing staffing shortages are now seeing how services are affected, and now have many overworked employees. There is concern that this is not sustainable and the industry is getting tired.



Smith Travel Research report for Johnston County hotels, calendar year 2022.

Occupancy (%) - **59.9%**

ADR - **\$94.89**

RevPar - **\$56.86**

US Travel Report on Trends

Domestic leisure travel spending has already surpassed pre-pandemic levels, even when adjusted for inflation—though it is projected to remain \$46 billion below where it should have been in 2022 if not for the pandemic.

Domestic business travel is finally picking up and volume is expected to reach 81% of pre-pandemic levels in 2022 and 96% in 2023. Nevertheless, spending, when adjusted for inflation, will not fully recover to pre-pandemic levels within the range of the forecast.

WHAT DOES RECOVERY LOOK LIKE?

International inbound travel is making a big comeback, aided by the recent drop of pre-departure testing. It is projected to grow rapidly through the rest of 2022, and then grow at a slower pace in 2023-2026. A full recovery to pre-pandemic levels (volume and spending) is not expected until 2025.

Some relief from high gas prices welcomed

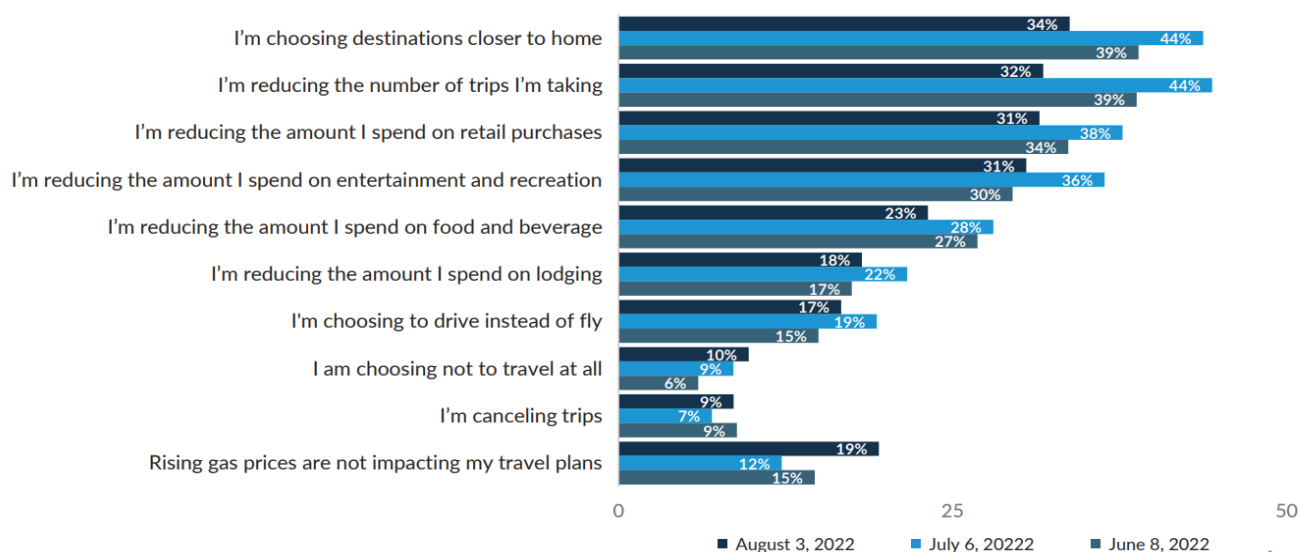
According to the latest Longwoods International tracking study of American travelers, the recent decline in gas prices is a positive indicator for travel for the rest of the summer and into the fall. While 31% of travelers said gas prices would greatly impact their decision to travel in the next six months, that is down dramatically from the 43% of travelers who expressed the same sentiment just a month ago.

"Falling gas prices is an automatic plus for the travel industry," said Amir Eylon, President and CEO of Longwoods International. "And if fuel costs continue to decline as expected, more Americans will have more money in their pockets and will be hitting the road."

Nine in ten travelers have trips planned in the next six months. Also, despite the staffing challenges facing the industry since the pandemic, eight in ten travelers reported the level of service they received from tourism and hospitality businesses was equal to or higher than pre-COVID-19 levels.

IMPACT ON TRAVEL PLANS

Impact of Rising Gas Prices on Travel Plans



Travel Sentiment Study Wave 64

Longwoods INTERNATIONAL | miles PARTNERSHIP

WHAT DOES RECOVERY LOOK LIKE?

SPENDING

U.S. TRAVEL FORECAST - SPENDING (ADJUSTED FOR INFLATION)*

	ACTUAL			FORECAST				
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Total Travel Spending	\$1.17 T	\$722 B	\$886 B	\$1.05 T	\$1.15 T	\$1.21 T	\$1.24 T	\$1.26 T
Business	\$306 B	\$101 B	\$122 B	\$222 B	\$270 B	\$287 B	\$287 B	\$286 B
Leisure	\$867 B	\$622 B	\$764 B	\$827 B	\$880 B	\$920 B	\$952 B	\$970 B
Domestic	\$992 B	\$682 B	\$846 B	\$941 B	\$1.01 T	\$1.04 T	\$1.05 T	\$1.06 T
Leisure	\$722 B	\$589 B	\$731 B	\$741 B	\$765 B	\$783 B	\$797 B	\$803 B
Business	\$270 B	\$93 B	\$115 B	\$201 B	\$244 B	\$256 B	\$256 B	\$255 B
Transient	\$157 B	\$63 B	\$80 B	\$124 B	\$146 B	\$151 B	\$151 B	\$150 B
Group	\$113 B	\$30 B	\$35 B	\$77 B	\$98 B	\$105 B	\$105 B	\$104 B
International**	\$181 B	\$41 B	\$40 B	\$109 B	\$141 B	\$167 B	\$186 B	\$198 B
Leisure	\$145 B	\$33 B	\$33 B	\$87 B	\$115 B	\$137 B	\$155 B	\$167 B
Business	\$36 B	\$8 B	\$7 B	\$22 B	\$26 B	\$30 B	\$31 B	\$31 B
Transient	\$22 B	\$5 B	\$4 B	\$15 B	\$17 B	\$19 B	\$19 B	\$19 B
Group	\$14 B	\$3 B	\$3 B	\$7 B	\$10 B	\$12 B	\$12 B	\$12 B

U.S. TRAVEL FORECAST - SPENDING, % OF 2019 LEVELS (ADJUSTED FOR INFLATION)

	ACTUAL			FORECAST				
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Total Travel Spending	100%	62%	76%	90%	98%	103%	106%	107%
Business	100%	33%	40%	73%	88%	94%	94%	93%
Leisure	100%	72%	88%	95%	101%	106%	110%	112%
Domestic	100%	69%	85%	95%	102%	105%	106%	107%
Leisure	100%	82%	101%	103%	106%	108%	110%	111%
Business	100%	34%	43%	74%	91%	95%	95%	94%
Transient	100%	40%	51%	79%	93%	96%	96%	96%
Group	100%	26%	31%	68%	87%	93%	93%	92%
International	100%	22%	22%	60%	78%	93%	103%	109%
Leisure	100%	23%	23%	60%	80%	95%	107%	115%
Business	100%	22%	19%	61%	72%	84%	85%	85%
Transient	100%	22%	19%	67%	76%	87%	88%	86%
Group	100%	20%	19%	50%	66%	80%	80%	84%

U.S. TRAVEL FORECAST - WHERE WE SHOULD BE (ADJUSTED FOR INFLATION)

Prior to the pandemic, the travel industry experienced ten straight years of growth. While the forecast shows the timeline for international travel's recovery under the current circumstances, the analysis below takes into consideration where we should have been if not for the pandemic.

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Total Travel Spending	\$1.17 T	\$1.20 T	\$1.23 T	\$1.26 T	\$1.30 T	\$1.34 T	\$1.37 T	\$1.40 T
Loss in spending due to pandemic		\$476 B	\$338 B	\$206 B	\$151 B	\$130 B	\$129 B	\$141 B
Domestic Leisure	\$722 B	\$744 B	\$765 B	\$787 B	\$808 B	\$827 B	\$845 B	\$864 B
Loss in spending due to pandemic		\$155 B	\$34 B	\$46 B	\$43 B	\$44 B	\$48 B	\$61 B
Domestic Business	\$270 B	\$271 B	\$274 B	\$278 B	\$296 B	\$307 B	\$315 B	\$320 B
Loss in spending due to pandemic		\$178 B	\$158 B	\$77 B	\$52 B	\$51 B	\$59 B	\$65 B
International	\$181 B	\$183 B	\$186 B	\$191 B	\$197 B	\$203 B	\$208 B	\$213 B
Loss in spending due to pandemic		\$142 B	\$146 B	\$83 B	\$56 B	\$35 B	\$22 B	\$15 B

*All spending data is cited in "real" 2019 \$, deflated based on the Travel Price Index

**International spending projection now includes the effect of the removal of pre-departure testing on June 12 (an increase of \$9 billion in 2022)

U.S. TRAVEL ANSWER SHEET

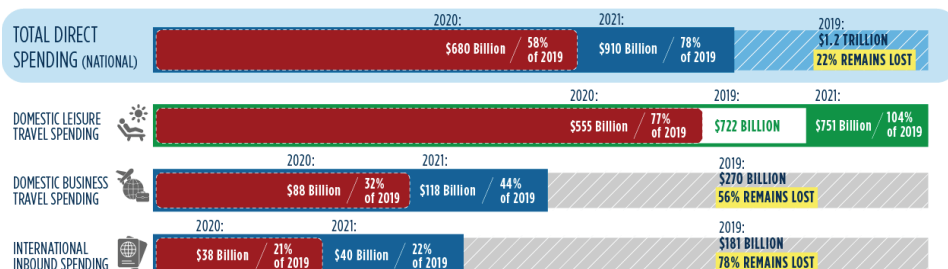
UPDATED MAY 2022

JUMP TO:

[Business Travel Fact Sheet >](#)[International Inbound Travel Fact Sheet >](#)

Prior to the pandemic, the U.S. travel industry experienced 10 straight years of growth due to the strength of the domestic leisure travel, domestic business travel and international inbound travel segments. Travel was a significant economic driver in every region of the country, representing 1 in 10 jobs and generating a travel trade surplus.

TODAY, TRAVEL REMAINS THE HARDEST-HIT INDUSTRY, WITH AN UNEVEN RECOVERY ACROSS ALL SECTORS



\$755 BILLION

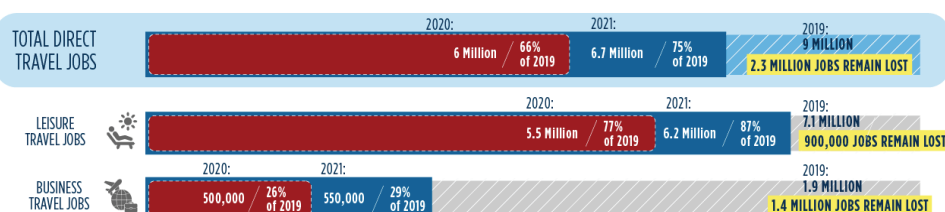
Total 2-year direct travel spending losses throughout the end of 2021.

- In 2021, domestic business travel spending remained 56% below 2019 levels and international travel spending remained 78% below 2019 levels
- The U.S. travel industry suffered unparalleled losses amid the COVID-19 pandemic
- While domestic leisure is thriving, the recovery remains uneven across other travel sectors. Domestic business travel and international inbound travel spending remain severely depressed, dragging the overall industry's recovery**
- We not only need to get back to pre-pandemic levels but also make up for years of losses. The right policies can return us to the trajectory of growth

SOURCES OF TRAVEL

	FOOD SERVICES	LODGING	PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION	AUTO TRANSPORTATION	RECREATION	RETAIL	TRAVEL PLANNING
2019: \$1.2T	\$261 B (22%)	\$237 B (20%)	\$223 B (19%)	\$156 B (13%)	\$111 B (10%)	\$129 B (11%)	\$56 B (5%)
2021: \$910B	\$238 B	\$206 B	\$125 B	\$136 B	\$79 B	\$92 B	\$34 B

THE LOSS IN TRAVEL SPENDING HAD A DRASTIC EFFECT ON AMERICAN JOBS*



- One third of the 9 million direct travel jobs (3 million jobs) were lost at the onset of the pandemic in 2020 and **2.3 million travel jobs remained lost in 2021 (staying at 75% of pre-pandemic levels)**
- Jobs that were generated by business travel suffered more than those generated by leisure
- At only 29% of pre-pandemic levels in 2021, 1.4 million jobs generated by business travel remained lost
- At only 87% of pre-pandemic levels in 2021, 900,000 jobs generated by leisure travel remained lost

TRAVEL PRODUCES AN ECONOMIC FOOTPRINT THAT FAR EXCEEDS DIRECT SPENDING



BY THE NUMBERS

\$1.1T Direct domestic and international traveler spending in the U.S. prior to the pandemic (in 2019), which generated a total of \$2.6 trillion in economic output

-22% Direct travel spending in 2021 (vs 2019)

9M Direct travel jobs in 2019 (16.7 million travel-supported jobs)

-25% Direct travel jobs in 2021 (vs 2019)

79M International arrivals in the U.S. in 2019—declined to 29 million (36% of 2019) in 2021

2.9% Percentage of U.S. GDP attributed to travel in 2019—it was only 1.5% in 2021

1 OUT OF 10 U.S. jobs that depended on travel in 2019—it was one in 20 in 2021

NO. 7 Where travel ranked in terms of employment compared to other major private industry sectors in 2019—it ranked number 14 in 2021

TOP 10 Travel was among the top 10 industries in 49 states and D.C. in terms of employment in 2019—but only in 25 states in 2021

*All data here reflects *direct travel* jobs. This differs from the Leisure & Hospitality (L&H) data, released by the government, that [we share each month](#). Travel jobs include industries beyond L&H such as transportation. On the other hand, L&H also includes leisure activities or dining that are not travel related. Please see [this fact sheet](#) for more info on this distinction.



How has Covid changed our strategies?

UPDATING THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The Johnston County Tourism Authority and Visitors Bureau staff met on March 9, 2022, to conduct a strategic planning retreat, which was led by Dr. Twyla Casey Wells. Due to COVID, the Authority was unable to hold its regular two-year retreat which would have been in 2021. The half-day retreat started with a short historical review and focused on what is different for the tourism industry, and what is different for the Visitors Bureau following the pandemic.

The Authority and Staff reviewed the 2019 Strategic Plan which was adopted just a few months before the industry-changing pandemic hit in March 2020. The group agreed that the majority of the strategic plan was still relevant and the 3-year goals would simply shift to FY 2023-2025 and that the staff would update the current document.

Through the technique known as compression planning and SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results), new goals were developed and ranked by the retreat participants. The following additions to the Strategic Plan will be used to direct the staff and board for the next three years.

HOW HAS COVID CHANGED OUR STRATEGIES?

Many of these goal important steps have been implemented into the FY 23 Marketing Plan and several are now underway.

Goals from the 2022 JCTA Board & Staff Retreat

GOAL 1 - County-wide Branding Project

Description of the project: Johnston County's brand was updated in 2017 embracing the JoCo name to flip the narrative that using JoCo reflects a positive experience and brand for the county. The County leadership has considered also adopting the JCVB logo for the county and its departments but has not at this point. Inviting the county to join the Visitors Bureau in the final steps of creating the overarching brand position statements and tagline is the final and missing part of this project.

Need for the Project: Unifying the county with a brand that reflects the growing and changing county in which we live, work, and play with a more modern logo and message is needed to truly project who we are as a county. A brand is not what we think we are, but how others see and feel about us whether that be visitors, residents, economic developers, the Triangle communities, or a national audience. First, we must aim to understand ourselves before conveying that to others in the form of branding and marketing. A branding exercise will help us achieve that!!

Important Steps:

Get the commitment of the County Commissioners to join us in developing a unified county brand either in partnership with JCVB's refresh and use of the JoCo brand, or something "alongside" our project.

Funding for the JCVB project is currently in the budget at \$30,000. If the project expands to include the full county, will the Commissioners match our budget amount, if needed?

How the roll-out of the project will be handled and the implementation of the final project will be an important decision.

Involvement of the community, town leadership, chambers, and tourism partners is an important consideration.

Take that refreshed brand and tagline and integrate it into our advertising, website, and messaging to target markets.

Continue vetting local branding agencies such as Engine Brandmakers that have worked with the Durham CVB and Durham County.

GOAL 2 - Developing a Deeper Alliance w/ other CVBs

Description of the project: Our efforts to be included in the Triangle region beyond just the Raleigh - Durham - Chapel Hill definition has been years in the making and unfortunately does not seem to be possible. The leadership of the Triangle CVBs does not embrace a regional approach to marketing the Triangle. Although difficult, this will remain a goal of the JCVB, but efforts will shift back to the I-95 CVB Association group and other smaller bureaus within a 50-mile radius such as Goldsboro, Sampson County, the new Sanford CVB, all who may be more willing regional partners.

Need for the Project: The Triangle markets are a critical part of the JCVB's 50-mile radius plan to attract visitors to local attractions, performing arts, recreation, outlet shopping and special events. Visitors do not define their trips based on county lines and some niche markets transcend these lines and would enhance some visitor experiences. Visitors discover these experiences on their own, why not step up these marketing efforts as a region like other areas of the state as had Charlotte and the Triad area of Winston-Salem, Greensboro and High Point. It is possible with some improved efforts and open minds in the Triangle.

Important Steps:

Host a regional CVB meeting in Smithfield to see how we may work together in the future.

Create a group email tag in Simpleview to step-up communication efforts to this 50-mile radius group.

Continue to develop regional experiences in culinary trails, recreation, and craft beverage marketing.

See how the I-95 Corridor CVBs Association could be revitalized and become a leading regional organization in the state.

Goal 3 - Consider New Markets of Importance

Description of the Project: How COVID-19 has changed the landscape of tourism marketing is now shaping how the JCVB will direct assets towards marketing the county, investing in data intelligence, using AI marketing platforms, and restructuring the staff.

Need for the Project: COVID 19 has forced tourism marketing organizations to adapt and pivot in so many ways as budgets funded by room tax were greatly affected by the drop-in travel in 2020. As the JCVB budget is recovering, and the staff returns to the office full time the 2022-23 Marketing Plan will reflect many new investments in technology, restructuring of job duties because of the reduction in staff, and some return to traveling to trade shows for group, leisure, and media outreach.

Important Steps:

Potential new visitors to market to or key target markets to continue JCVB marketing efforts:

Remote business workers and how to attract them to work "anywhere," and the shared office space available in our market. Broadband Internet is an important issue for this visitor.

The Family/Social Events and Weddings market remains strong with several new facilities opening during COVID.

With our meetings market not returning to full strength for the next 24 months per national trend reports - when the JCVB returns to NC meeting conferences and trade shows will most likely be in 2024. How the renovated JCC auditorium and its meetings market plans evolve will most likely affect the meetings market.

The JCVB will continue to invest in the NC Retire

Communities programs with limited trade shows in the DC and New Jersey markets and continue to fulfill inquiries for pre-retirement visits to Johnston County.

The JCVB meetings market will remain focused on the SMERF market - Social, Military, Education, Religious and Fraternal. These meetings tend to be more flexible for unique meeting spaces and seek more affordable options than those offered in major markets.

Adding diversity to our marketing message and target markets via photography and outreach to diverse meeting planner groups, travel trade groups, and leisure influencers will increase via all avenues available to the bureau.

The JCVB staff will continue to partner with the VisitNC Outdoor NC Program to promote recreation tourism assets in Johnston County as leisure travel during and following the pandemic is focused on outdoor recreation.

Investment in Simpleview email marketing module Act-On to step-up community, visitor, and partner communications.

Investment in near.com data intelligence and using this data to tailor future messages and campaign to top overnight markets to drive more hotel stays.

Investment in moz.com SEO services to increase our website's authority and step up our competition for Keywords with our regional CVBs to convert more website visitors to attract more visitors.

Goal 4 - Explore DI Accreditation

Description of the Project: The DI Accreditation program is similar to the US Chamber of Commerce Accreditation program to showcase that the Visitors Bureau meets the high standards and best practices outlined by the DI trade association for bureaus. This program involves over 30 standards and requirements for bureau to provide and complete to achieve accreditation.

Need for the Project: The JCVB has reviewed the

HOW HAS COVID CHANGED OUR STRATEGIES?

requirements and the cost both financially and the staff time needed as well to complete this program. Our strategy in the past has been to operate at this level or higher to be a top CVB for our size in North Carolina. Operating with integrity and complete transparency has been a core value for the bureau for over 20 years.

Important Steps:

The 2022 Retreat has identified this project as something to explore and make a recommendation to the board in the next 12-24 months if to move forward or to continue to operate the bureau with the highest possible standards and to continue to be a leader in the tourism industry in NC.

Download the Requirements to Apply for DI Accreditation and review them with the JCVB staff.

Based on the review of requirements, develop a work plan excel spreadsheet on what the project will take for staff to complete.

Based on the evaluation, cost, staff time, and value of the accreditation to the organization, make a recommendation for or against to the board in the 2023-24 budget.

Goal 5 - Develop the JCVB Advocacy Plan

Description of the Project: During COVID the JCVB turned our communications efforts inward to residents, community leaders, and tourism industry partners needing critical health and safety information, and getting sharing info closings, hours, digital experiences, and how businesses pivoted during this difficult time. Our efforts resulted in new communication tools, the JoCo Insider Newsletter and the Tourism Does That? Newsletter to tourism industry partners on the activities of the bureau. The JCVB Crisis Plan has been in existence for many years, but like other CVBs around the world, there were no plans to address a pandemic. Having a more comprehensive Advocacy Plan is needed to be more prepared for the next event that the bureau has to face.

Need for the Project: The national conversation about travel and the impact it has both positively and sometimes negatively is something that CVBs cannot ignore. At any time a destination may face politically charged issues around race relations, diversity and inclusion, natural disasters, or even mass shootings which are all too common in our society. How would the JCVB respond in any of these situations and will we be ready, recognized as a leading resource for the county, and how will we pivot during then next challenge. These questions should be addressed and plans should be in place. Having an Advocacy Plan will hopefully set us up for success or at least give us a road map to follow as a staff to be leaders in our county.

Important Steps:

Components of the Advocacy Plan includes the following:

Resident survey on the awareness of tourism as economic development

Updating the Visitors Profile Study

Producing Annual Reports for the County and each Town with a 2% Room Tax

Annual luncheon with the County Commissioners

Monthly "Tourism Does That?" Newsletters to the tourism industry, chambers, and elected officials

Community speaking engagements for "Get to Know your Visitors Bureau"

JCVB Board Responsibilities include the following:

Frequently review strategic plan to keep projects moving forward and that resources are provided to the JCVB staff as needed

Provide Board speaking points on the impact of Tourism in Johnston County

JCVB staff reorg and training and items needed:

IT plan for the next 3-5 years for budget planning

HR plan for the next 3-5 years to address; restore staff to 7 full-time employees

Succession plan for future retirement of President/CEO

HOW HAS COVID CHANGED OUR STRATEGIES?

Discuss and determine what is the next staff person needed

What items on the work plan could be outsourced or contracted

Develop a Video on “Tourism Does That” similar to this example: Mat-Su CVB - A Community Resource - YouTube

Goal 6 - Continue Destination Development Projects

Description of the Project: The JCVB, since its inception in 1987, has invested in tourism development projects from direct room tax allocation to Johnston Community College, and the Triangle East Chamber of Commerce, to marketing grants for festivals and events, and Capital Grants there have been more than \$2 million dollars invested in the county. How the bureau continues to invest these dollars into the community, what the impact these dollars have on tourism, and what future funding opportunities are available, are vital to the JCVB story and mission to build the tourism infrastructure in Johnston County.

Need for the Project: Johnston County is still an immersing tourism destination in the Triangle and along major interstate corridors 95, 40, and future 42 in North Carolina and has the potential to grow, especially in the area of recreation, meeting space, full-service hotels, sports tournaments, and agritourism.

Important Steps:

Write a Johnston County Destination Master Plan to include the following:

How to engage the arts groups to develop public art

Document roads project timelines and transportation disruptions

Create a Tourism Development historic review of JCVB & Towns 2% support of projects

Review the current Workforce shortages and document plans in place locally and statewide to address the issue for the hospitality industry

Funding sources: provide a list of possible grants to write and the room tax for the Town of Clayton that may be implemented in 2023

Support and advocate for a Recreation bond to support recreation and park development and to complete the Mountains to the Sea trail in Johnston County.

Determine if the Conference Center study needs to be updated and then allocate funds to conduct the study.

Work with hotel developers as needed to attract a full-service hotel with some meeting space for groups of 200-500 people.

Continue to seek family-oriented attractions for children to enjoy while traveling in the county.

Continue the work of the JoCo Grows Agriculture Steering Committee to market and protect the county's agriculture heritage.

Continue the promotion and expansion of the 301 Endless Yard Sale event to hopefully reaches through to Lumberton.

Have staff increase their involvement in area tourism-related organizations to support growth of tourism projects.

Discuss the future role of the Johnston County Recreation and Sports Council on the development of recreation in the county.

Seek state funding for the new Bentonville Battlefield State Historic Site expansion and new Visitor Center which is estimated at a little more than \$16 million.

Target Markets

Leisure Travel

The primary focus of destination marketing efforts of the Johnston County Visitors Bureau is to drive visitor demand in the identified top target markets for leisure travel. The bureau's in-house team of marketing professionals use data insights to place the county's destinations in the forefront of visitor's minds as they travel Interstates 95 & 40 in North Carolina.

Leisure travel marketing includes messaging for pass-thru visitors, visiting friends and family, outdoor enthusiasts, visitors seeking culinary experiences, festival and major event attendees, and outlet shoppers. Leisure travel is the top producing market for Johnston County, for in-state and out-of-state day trips and overnight trips. Leisure marketing messages are integrated into the bureau website(s), social campaigns, print advertising, digital and email outreach, as well as publicity and in-person sales missions.



New this year is the Bureau's use of Near.com Data Intelligence, which provides real-time data on where visitors to Johnston County come from, exactly where they go while in-market, and how long they stay for. The data allows the Bureau to define our leisure market and reach visitors in new and targeted ways.

Defining the Leisure Market

Near.com splits the leisure market into 4 categories: out-of state overnight, in-state overnight, out-of-state day trip, in-state day trip. Johnston County pulls in-state overnight visitors from areas including Greensboro, Charlotte, Greenville, and Wilmington. Out-of-state feeder markets include Florida, South Carolina, Virginia, Georgia, New York, and Pennsylvania. Top performing months of leisure travel for the county starts with spring break and Easter vacation travel and peaks for the months of July and August for summer vacation travel. Off season peak leisure travel revolves around snow bird travel to warmer climates in late October to November and return travel in early spring.

TARGET MARKETS

Marketing Goals

Increase the use of email marketing and email automation via Act-on to build curated email lists based on segmented visitor interests: outdoor, culinary, shopping, and family activities.

Continue to grow the audience for both monthly bureau email newsletters: Events Calendar & JoCo Insider Blog.

Create a Visiting Friends and Family section on the website to encourage local visitation to area attractions and festivals.

Run a regional Shop Local campaign in October/November as a lead-in to holiday shopping with a focus on Shop Small Saturday.

Extend marketing support to major festivals and events that draw non-resident attendance to the county.

Increase cabin stays at Howell Woods, Raleigh Oaks, and AirBnB alternative stays as this inventory continues to grow with Alternative Lodging information on the website.

Revamp the culinary marketing messages to all target markets as one of the county's strengths; focusing on the new food halls and new restaurant openings in the next year.

Formulate and implement an expanded digital marketing and social strategy in select feeder market cities utilizing Google Ads, web ads, sponsored content, and paid social.

Focus heavily on marketing the Ava Gardner Festival and all Ava 100 initiatives and events in partnership with the Ava Gardner Museum through 2023.

Use VisitNC partnership to further increase reach in both the retirement and outdoor leisure segments via the RetireNC and OutdoorNC programs.

Through JoCo Grows, and the NC Tobacco Trust Fund grant, continue to increase agritourism marketing messaging to visitors focusing mainly on the in-state day trip market regarding farm products and events.



Tactics

Google Ads paid marketing with a new focus on Performance Max campaigns and video promotion.

Implement monthly digital and social campaigns in target markets in peak season travel months through third-party partnerships.

Work with food travel influencers and culinary podcasts both regionally and in target markets.

Place sponsored content with Philly Voice, the Washingtonian, AAA Living and other magazines in select feeder markets through out the year.

Use Visitnc.com co-op programs and direct placement to focus print advertising mostly within the Southeast market to reach overnight visitors in top feeder markets.

Create and execute mini marketing plans for the JoCo Grows initiative timed around u-pick seasons and in partnership with the county's Co-operative Extension office., and the Visit NC Farms App.

Return to direct-to-consumer leisure sales shows in partnership with VisitNC; attend shows in select feeder markets including retirement and travel adventure themed shows in DC, NY, & NJ.

Visit NC's 1-800-Call Center and the I-95 Welcome Centers throughout the year to stay top-of-mind with frontline staff.

Maintain billboard programs for attractions, as well as, individual campaigns for Smithfield, Selma, Benson and Kenly utilizing 2% funding drawing interstate travellers off the highway.

Paid print advertising in leisure publications including the NC Travel Guide, Our State Magazine, Southern Living, and Carolina Country.

Paid digital advertising email newsletters in the same print publications, in addition to AAA Living.

Use Town of Smithfield funds to support the Ham & Yam Festival, Ava Gardner Festival, and three calendar of events postcard mailings to residents and businesses.

Use Town of Selma funds to support direct marketing for Selma Railroad Days Festival and other town events downtown like Rockin' on Railford.



Design and print guides to promote the destination and for visitor in-market use:

Official Johnston County Visitors Guide
You are Here - Smithfield Selma Guide
JoCo Bike Routes
Geocaching Brochure
Girls Weekend Rack Card
Beer, Wine, Shine Trail Guide
Smithfield Walking Tour Guide
Selma Visitors Guide

Maintain and keep the content fresh on johnstoncountync.org, and the many microsites managed by the bureau staff: visitbenson.org, visitclayton.org, visitfour Oaks.org, visitkenly.org, visitpinelevel.org, visitprinceton.org, visitselma.org, visitsmithfield.org, avagardner.org, 301endlessyardsale.com, and jocogrows.org

Measurable Objectives

Update current BLOGS and/or articles weekly to use on the website and social media to drive traffic to the websites.

Use Near.com data to measure increase in visitation from targeted feeder cities/states to compare leisure market increases.

Increase visitor inquiries and brochure downloads on the website by 10%.

Increase email lists in Act-on from 7,000 to 10,000 in FY 23.

Increase occupancy tax revenues by 5% in FY 2023 over FY 2022.

Complete the new destination video for the Town of Smithfield, place on the YouTube channel and use paid ads to get 10,000 views.

Add (3) additional inclusive photo shoots which build the image database with diversity.

Conduct the 301 Endless Yard Sale marketing campaign for the June 2023 sale.

Execute the JoCo Grows Agriculture campaigns per the NCTTF grant to achieve the grant deliverables.

GROUP MARKETS

Getting partner involvement for group sales whether it be direct sales calls to meeting planners in Raleigh or sales missions to motor coach companies in Virginia; the JCVB team is ready to shift efforts to bring more group business to the county. These additional direct group sales missions will be based on the opening of the Paul A. Johnston Auditorium or the new Eastfield Conference space next to the Old North State Food Hall.



Defining the Group Market

North Carolina, mid-atlantic, and southern states continue to be the largest feeder states for group business for Johnston County. Motor coach companies will be reached through memberships with NC Motorcoach, leads from VisitNC, and Travel South. The bureau will rejoin and reconnect with meeting planners trade associations, SGMP, AENC, and MPI to establish the county as a new meeting destination..

Motor Coach

Marketing Goals

As the motor coach market slowly recovers from the pandemic, efforts will include direct mail and email marketing as passive goals.

To return to in-person trade shows for motor coach market including NC Motor Coach Association and Travel South Showcase.

Tactics

Update group tour itineraries including new attractions like the Food Hall in Selma.

Attend Travel South Domestic Showcase in April 17-20, 2023 in Huntsville, AL.

Work with partners already attending group shows to cross-promote and encourage partners to assist with sales outreach at trade shows through physical participation or items/gifts.

Partner with Live@ The Rudy to attend the NC Motor Coach Association show, August 23-26, 2022.

Send Christmas in July email blast for the Live@ The Rudy Christmas show dates.

Set-up the Drivers Eat Free program for motor coach companies at the Food Hall.

Measurable Objectives

Complete (3) Restart direct sales missions to motor coach companies in NC, SC, and VA.

Increase group sales leads/bookings by 10% over 2022.

Sign up 50 motor coach companies to the Drivers Eat Free program at the Food Hall in the first 12 months.

Work with Live@ The Rudy and the Food Hall to book motor coach groups with catered meals prior to shows, especially during the Christmas season.

Small Meetings, Weddings, Reunions

With new venues opening and unique service providers popping up regularly in Johnston County, the wedding market continues to grow.

Marketing Goals

Increase the use of email marketing and email automation via Act-on to reach meeting planners, brides, and reunion planners during the search phase of finding space for events.

Improve content on johnstoncountync.org on the meeting, sports and group sections adding more editorial content, photos, and video.

Tactics

Participate with the opening committee for the renovated Paul A. Johnston Auditorium in mid-spring 2023.

Rejoin MPI and become active in the Carolina's Chapter when spaces re-open.

Host bi-annually hotel sales meetings to exchange information on sales efforts and missions our partners can participate in.

Use the JCVB LinkedIn page to push out information on Johnston County as a meeting destination.

Build a segmented meetings list through the use of Act-on automation.

Measurable Objectives

Set and execute new sales calls goals for local, regional, and state meeting planners.

Increase group sales leads/bookings by 10% over FY 2022.

Sports Market

Participate in the Johnston County Recreation & Sports Council to build relationships for sports tournament bids and services will continue to be the strategy with sports tourism. As facilities in the county increase, the possibility for multiple towns partnering together on bids for baseball, basketball, and soccer will allow the JCVB to bid on more tournaments.

Marketing Goals

Goals for the sports market include keeping the content in the digital sports facility guide updated.

Develop a segmented sporting events planners list through Act-on to use for specialty sports with high potential for tournaments.

Continue listings of facilities with the NC Sports Association and sharing updates with VisitNC.

Tactics

Host JoCo Recreation & Sports Council meetings to build relationships with venues and supply services for events being held.

Maintain membership in NC Sports Association and follow up with obtainable leads from trade shows.

Find a sports venue partner that can attend TEAMS and Connect Sports with the JCVB sales staff when there is a partner interested in pursuing tournaments.

Consider marketing to planners with non-traditional sports now gaining in popularity: Quidditch, Flag Football, Corn Hole, Pickle Ball, E-Sports and Disc Golf.

Measurable Objectives

Work with the JoCo Rugby Club to bid on the NCAA Collegiate tournament lost in 2020 to bring to the county in Spring 2023.

Work with GALOT on the drag race seasonal events to better market the facility. Create a segmented email list through Act-on for motor sports.

Work with the Clayton Clovers on attendance growth and Clayton Parks & Recreation on awareness of Clayton as a sports destination.

Submit a bid to Cycle NC for the fall of 2023 to return to Clayton or Smithfield. Invite planners to the Town of Benson as a possible future location for Cycle NC.

Meet with the planners of the 3 Little Pigs Triathlon to see how this sporting event can grow and showcase the area for other sporting events.

VISITOR SERVICES

The Visitors Bureau offers group services for meetings held in the county for small meetings, weddings, and sports tournaments. Leisure visitor services are provided in the Visitor Center by helping visitors off the interstate with brochures, maps, and coupons.

With the reorganization of job descriptions, leisure and group services were moved to the visitor center team.



Visitor Services goals

To provide timely visitor services upon request with brochures and swag items that represent the destination.

To be knowledgeable of all attractions, shopping, dining and events to represent the destination.

To build the JoCo Hospitality Association membership to 75 members.

Tactics

Service all events in 2022-23 as requested by planners and to support the sales department.

Distribute leisure marketing brochures to the 100+ racks in Johnston County, as well as, the

NC Welcome Centers. Discover a way to distribute brochures to AirBnB guests in the county.

Engage visitors staying in area campgrounds to seek out “things to do” while camping in the area.

Host (4) tourism partner events aligned with the JoCo Hospitality Association Meetings.

Support the Johnston County Angel Tree project recruiting presents from tourism industry partners and hosting an open house in December 2022.

Return to an in-person visit to the NC Call Center at the Women’s Prison for the 1-800-VisitNC program.

Send monthly emails to tourism partners to keep up with brochure distribution.

Coordinate the National Tourism Week visits to the NC Welcome Centers I-95 North and South.

Visit both welcome centers during Christmas with promotional items from Johnston County.

Upon request place attraction displays in the Welcome Center to promote Johnston County.

Order swag items as needed such as 2023 Calendar strips, band-aid holders for sports tournaments, and any new items to represent the destination.

Measurable Objectives

Increase traffic to the visitor center by 10% in 2023.

Redesign the Visitor Center to include a more attractive retail display for swag items such as coffee cups, t-shirts, etc.

Have a least 5 partners attend Welcome Centers for National Tourism Week.

Have Visitor Service staff trained in FY 23 to take over leisure sale trade shows.

Marketing & Communications

Public Relations

JCVB will continue to invest in public relations activities to tell our tourism stories in target markets supporting all strategic initiatives for leisure, group, and small meetings/weddings markets.

Tactics

Monthly news releases and weekly BLOG posts to support all leisure, group, and festival campaigns.

Use all social channels to drive visitation to johnstoncountync.org and other JCVB landing pages and microsites.

Curate content that engages potential visitors to learn more about Johnston County and encourages visits and support of local tourism assets.

Host media tours and site visits with regional partners and VisitNC team whenever assignment aligns with our feeder markets.

Conduct desk tops in media markets from the top DMAs from research, especially in the North Carolina and Virginia/DC markets.

Engage top-tier digital influencers as brand ambassadors for our top marketing messages for leisure visitors.

The following media outreach missions are scheduled for FY 2022-23:

State Media Mission, VisitNC - October 2022, Durham

IMM (Int'l Media Marketplace) - January, 2023, New York City

VisitNC 365 Media Roundtable - April 2023, Asheville

Measurable Objectives

Host at least five mini-media fams or visits to the county.

Place at least 12 Bureau-generated articles in national or international publications and generate over \$2 million in earned media impressions.

Grow JoCo social media primary channel followers for Facebook to 5,000, the VisitJoCo Facebook

page to 22,000, and Instagram to 5,000.

Increase visitors to johnstoncountync.org to 1/2 million-page views.

Learn the ins-and-outs of the new Google A4 measurements for the website.

Use the SemRush service to improve the page authority and health of the website, as well as, use the keyword services to compete with website competitors.

Advocacy & Community Relations

JCVB will embark on strengthening our relationship with tourism partners in the county, as well as launch a new campaign of community awareness on the importance of tourism in Johnston County.

Advocacy Goals

To increase awareness of the Johnston County Visitors Bureau's marketing efforts and the importance of tourism to the county's economy.



Tactics

Have National Tourism Week proclamation read and adopted by the County Commissioners in 2023.

Monthly "Tourism Does That" newsletter to explain the mission and activities of the bureau to local leaders and elected officials.

Use the JoCo LinkedIn company page to reach more professional contacts in-market and statewide on the activities and accomplishments of the bureau.

Continue board participation in the county by the staff: Friends of Bentonville Battlefield, Ava Gardner Museum, Clayton Piano Festival, Friends of Johnston County Parks, Benson Art Advisory Board.

Complete the advocacy video on the importance of tourism in the county.

Measurable Objectives

Design and implement a new community awareness campaign during National Tourism Week (May), Summer Travel is Important (July/August), and Shop Local (Nov/Dec).

Build the local audience email database to 1,000 recipients for in-market messaging.

(10) speaking engagements at area chamber and civic club meetings.

Relaunch the JoCo Hospitality Heroes free customer service program with tourism partners.

Hold quarterly (4) meetings with the County PIO to stay in-sync on the bureau's activities.

Print an Annual Report and distribute to elected officials, tourism partners, and use for local speaking engagements.

Visitors Bureau Management

Investing in the professional management of the bureau and providing educational opportunities for the staff are key initiatives for the long term viability of the organization.

Bureau Management Goals

To update the phone system with the county IT department.

To have the JCVB staff complete all Simpleview Brainery courses.



Tactics

Restart the visitor bureau's progress on the 2023-25 Strategic Plan and create a report for the tourism authority, setting goals on completing remaining projects.

The following staff education and programs are scheduled for FY 2022-23:

NCTIA Tourism Leadership Conference, November 17-18, 2022

VisitNC 365 Conference, March 6-8, 2023

Measurable Objectives

Complete the cross-training and long-term succession plan for the bureau.

Destination Development

The JCVB budget has been restored to FY 2019 levels so all marketing grants for festivals and community events, as well as capital funding for tourism development projects are in the FY 23 budget.

What's under development for 2022-23?

The long anticipated renovations for the Paul A. Johnston Auditorium will be completed in the Spring of 2023 with a renewed strategy for performances and use of the meeting facilities at JCC.

Howell Woods is conducting a strategic plan for development at the venue offering more recreation, camping, and programming to residents and visitors.

Work is underway for the design and build at the first ever county park in the Cleveland Community, as well as, a county-wide trails plan that will address the route for the Mountains to the Sea trail.

Eastfield Development, Copper Development, and the Benson Hotel group have hotel projects under development, but no construction dates have been announced at this time.

The Town of Smithfield will complete the renovations of the Amphitheater at Town Commons in June 2023, and plans are underway to build a new soccer complex on Hwy 210.

The Johnston County Heritage Center is moving their exhibits to the Rose Building next to the Ava Gardner Museum, with a new 4,000 square foot museum in October 2022.

Tactics

Update the website with a list of grants awarded for matching marketing and capital grants.

Include news about grants program in the "Tourism Does That" monthly newsletter.

News releases and social announcements for each grant awarded by the JCVB board.

Update the five year review of capital grants and survey tourism partners on future development plans.

For FY 2022-23, the staff of the bureau will conduct a tourism development survey to gather an updated list from our towns and tourism partners to create a 3-5 year destination development plan.

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

Matching Marketing Grants

Continue to take matching marketing grants on an on-going 90-day application process for the Special Projects Committee to approve.

Capital Grants

The FY 2023 grant application were sent out in March, 2022 to ensure that the requested amounts for the budget were addressed in advance of approving the budget. The Special Projects Committee extended the 5-year rotation one additional year due to COVID, and the cycle will reset in FY 24.

Measurable Objectives

Conduct a resident survey on wants and needs for tourism development in Johnston County.

Continue the relationship with the new Parks, Open Space and Trails Coordinator with the county.

Budget Planning following COVID

Throughout the fiscal year 2021-22, the budget was closely monitored and in January 2022 the Tourism Authority met and evaluated adding back additional marketing dollars, investing in Simpleview CMS upgrades for the website, renewing chamber memberships, and marketing grants for the county's major festivals: Benson Mule Days, Clayton Harvest Festival, Four Oaks Acorn Festival, Selma Railroad Days, and Smithfield Ham & Yam Festival.

The Tourism Authority decided to extend the 5-year Capital Grants timeline for one additional year to allow those non-profit organizations that did not get the chance to apply in the last two years to do so. In the effort to plan appropriately for the FY 23 Capital Grants program, the decision was made to move up the application process to coincide with the approval of the budget. In January 2023, the bureau will expand the staff back to seven team members.

2022 Actual		2023 Budget
Revenues		
Room Tax	1,716,434.6	1,678,290
Misc. Rev.	7,796.15	75,620
Total Rev.	1,724,230.77	1,753,910
Expenses		
Human Resources	535,921.23	623,600
Operations	620,295.03	1,130,310
Total Exp.	1,156,216.26	1,753,910
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2022-23 Operating Budget



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Johnston County Tourism Authority

Rick Childrey, Chairperson

Melody Worthington, Secretary

Randy Capps, Special Project Committee Chair

Paul Boucher, Marketing Committee Chair

Ben Cook, Sports Council Representative

Colleen Roby

Maria Smith

Jeff Jennings

Bud Andrews

Mark McDonnell

Chad McLamb, Ex-Officio Finance

2022-23 Dates for JCTA Meetings

July - no board meeting

August 10

September 7

October 12

November 9

December - Angel Tree Project

January 11

February 8

March 8

April 12

May 10

June 14

The Tourism Authority meets the second Wednesday each month at 12N, excluding July. Meetings are open to the public, please join us as we tackle the task of marketing the county.



Johnston County Visitors Bureau
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