

Optimizing Inclusion – Final Report

October, 2020



Our research and inclusive collaboration method.



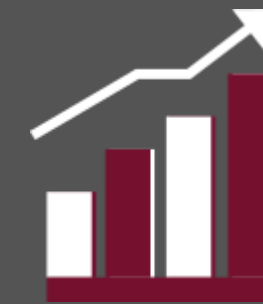
Interview
Stakeholders



Conduct Surveys



Study
Best Practices



Synthesize



Ideate,
Prioritize, and Plan

- Conducted interviews with 3 staff, 4 Steering Committee Members, 4 Advisory Council Members, and 1 influencer.
- Distributed an online survey to all Advisory Council members to capture the "voice of the diverse LC T&H Community".
- Conduct an operational review of feedback, processes, and associated data that provide insight into areas of optimization.
- Facilitated Ideation and Collaboration Workshop at D & I Advisory Council Meeting on October 6, 2020.

This report aggregates the research findings and solutions prioritized by the Advisory Council.



Diversity and Inclusion Stakeholders

Local stakeholder engagement was paramount to this research. The following people contributed to this work as an interviewee and/or participated in the October 6, 2020 DIAC Advisory Council Meeting.

DIAC Members

Black History Committee of the Friends of the Thomas Balch Library
Nostalgia Boutique
Cork and Keg Tours
Adarga
Catoctin Creek Distilling
Always Creating Studio
Formerly With The National Conference Center
Le Boudoir
Fairbrook Hotel
Best Rack Around

Alicia Cohen
Silas Redd
Renee Ventrice
Alexandria Davila
Becky Harris
Glory Barbaris
Dahlia Williams
Kayse Small and Sara Crutcher
Vinay Patel
Nanette Parsons

Influencer

Salamander Resorts

Sheila Johnson

Steering Committee Members

Shenandoah University
Bow Tie Strategies
Aspen Institute
The Conche
Sweet Jazz Fest
Salamander Resorts

Melanie Mathewes
Rusty Foster
Esther Turner *Board Liaison
Santosh Tiptur
Tracy Hamlin
Reggie Cooper

Staff

Visit Loudoun
Visit Loudoun
Visit Loudoun
Visit Loudoun

Ann D. Hayes
Jennifer Christie
Jennifer Sigal
Beth Erickson

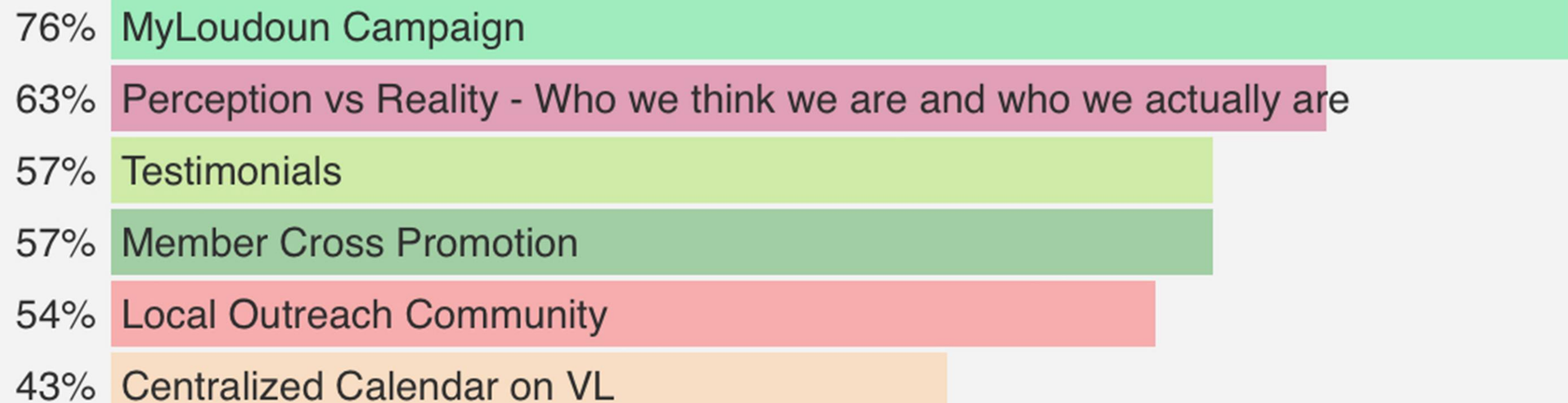
Priority Solutions

Participants at the October 6, 2020 VL DIAC meeting broke into small groups assigned to one of three areas of focus – marketing, attracting diversity, and engaging with the community. They examined optimization opportunities based on data outlined in the current state report.

Following their discussions, each group presented two ideas they felt would achieve VL's strategic goals.

All participants then ranked the ideas with the highest propensity of achieving the desired outcomes. The following image shows the recommended solutions in order of priority.

The recommendations, as discovered in the DIAC meeting on October 6, 2020, are **highlighted** within this report.



Council Meeting Notes and Resources

The comments, poll results and digital engagement activities shared during the DIAC meeting will be available until 12/31 at:

www.connex.me/LVDIAC



EMBRACING VARIETY

Understand and market to diverse audiences.

Reflect the community it serves and attracts.

OVERALL GRADE

#attract

B-

Visit Loudoun desires to reflect the community it serves, but also the visitors it strives to attract, ensuring that Loudoun County is a welcoming destination and community.

If you were grading their performance with these goals (A, B, C, D, or F,) what grade would they earn and why?



OVERALL GRADE - WHY?

These comments exemplify the others.

#attract

“ All of the events that I have attended in Loudoun County over the last 7 years lack diversity. There is also a lack of knowledge and awareness of the awesome events and of the wonderful work of the VL team. ”

“ As a minority small business owner, the VL team has gone above and beyond to assist and offer full support. ”

“ Over the last few years, VL leadership has been extraordinary! ”

“ I feel that there are times when Visit Loudoun doesn't focus on the more rural businesses outside of wineries. ”

NET PROMOTER SCORE

#attract

When diverse travelers leave LC, how likely are they to recommend LC to their friends and family?



Detractors



Neutral



Promoters

*Respondents with higher knowledge of VL resources, provided a much higher rating with an average of 9.

DIVERSITY-FRIENDLY

#attract

60% likely to encounter profiling in LC



80% of LBGTQ+ travelers chose destinations based on the "friendly" factor.

Black travelers report similar requirements.

DIVERSITY-FRIENDLY

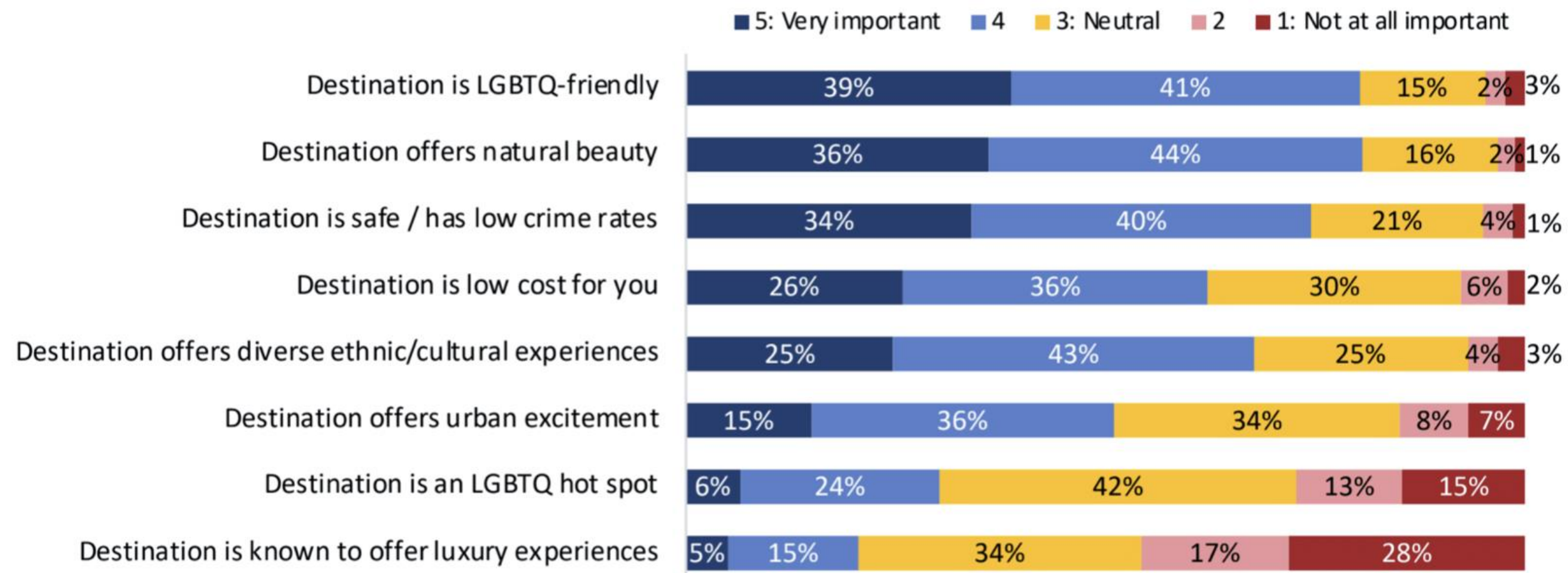
#attract

24th Annual LGBTQ Tourism & Hospitality Survey

U.S. Overview Report | December 2019

KEY ATTRIBUTES FOR LGBTQ DESTINATION SELECTION

On a 5-point scale, how important are the following, in your vacation destination selection process?
Among All LGBTQ Travelers



Base: All LGBTQ Travelers n=4,980 – 5,007

OBSERVATIONS

- **A common reaction from diverse travelers is “I didn’t expect to belong here, but I do.” Diverse travelers anticipate under-inclusion due to patterns of exclusion experienced in other destinations.**
- **All of the interviewed stakeholders mentioned how much Loudoun County has changed over the last 20 years. It has evolved from unwelcoming, to diverse travelers, to extremely welcoming.**
- **Perceptions of Loudoun County are influenced by geopolitical forces and patterns of exclusion experienced by the target market - LGBTQ+, Blacks, and Muslims. These perceptions include - rich, White, exclusive, expensive, and not-welcoming.**
- **There is value in LC's evolution story, however, it is not explicitly stated.**
- **Salamander Resort is an unfair advantage in Loudoun County and serves as a successful model for D&I across the industry. Synergies with Salamander may not be fully maximized. "Hitch your wagon to a star and pull the rest of the community along too."**

Recommendations - EMBRACE VARIETY

- **#2 Priority** Build a new brand story for Loudoun County “Perception vs. Reality.” Proactively label potential objections and overcome with them with the reality of LC.
- Mitigate risk of profiling for diverse tourists. Local law enforcement is cited as the primary concern; not patron profiling.
- Join Salamander’s Academic Partnership initiatives and expand opportunities for students to work or intern for Visit Loudoun. Or, establish one independently with NOVA Community College’s hospitality program. Will help diversify VL staff.
- Partner with Kristin Braswell, the owner of CrushGlobal to craft Road trip suggestions, focus on – diversity-friendly and COVID protocol considerations. Will appeal to regional travelers.
- Establish deeper collaboration with local event planner associations – MPI – Potomac (heavily focused on D&I), PCMA, VSAE, Society of Government Meeting Planners.
- Consider geotagging special events that focus on the target market – LGBTQ+, Black, Asian, etc.
- Leverage geotagging around Loudoun county to cross promote local businesses. For example geofence Salamander resorts with offers to visit other local T&H businesses.
- Produce a D/I event, in conjunction with Salamander, focused on the business of diversity for hoteliers.

EMBRACING VARIETY

Marketing

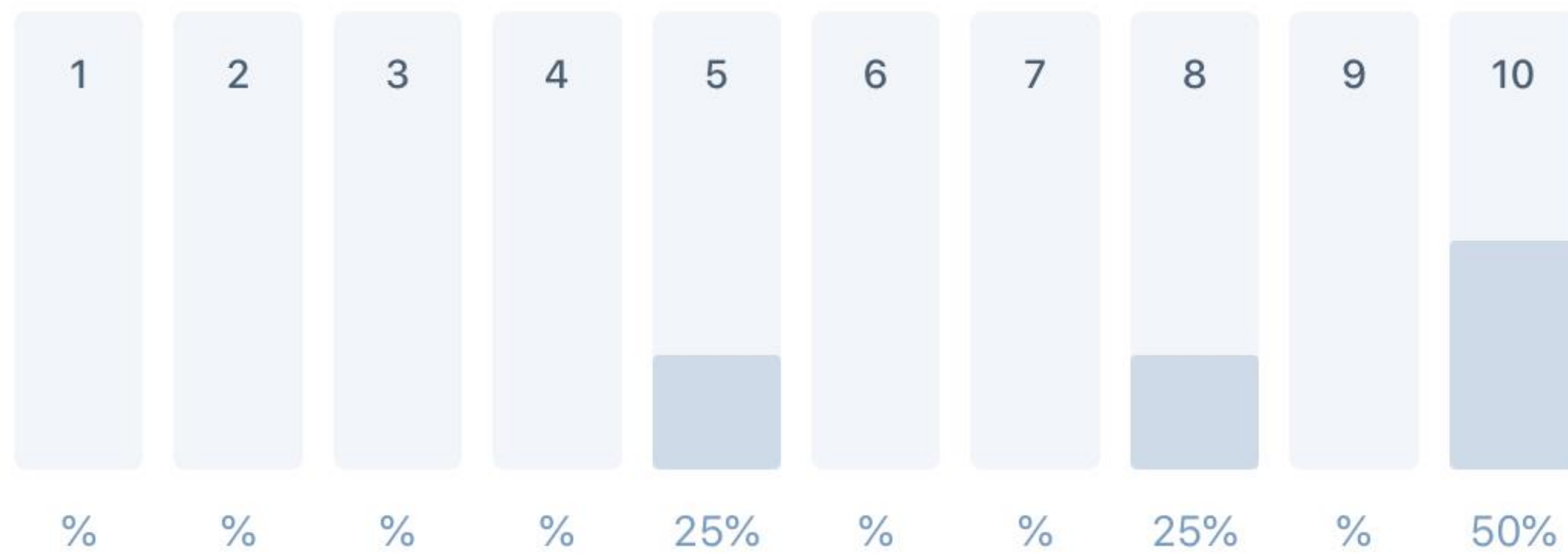
#marketing

MARKETING



How well do the marketing assets highlight the variety and diversity that Loudoun has to offer?

Avg. 8.2



Not Diverse

Highly Diver...

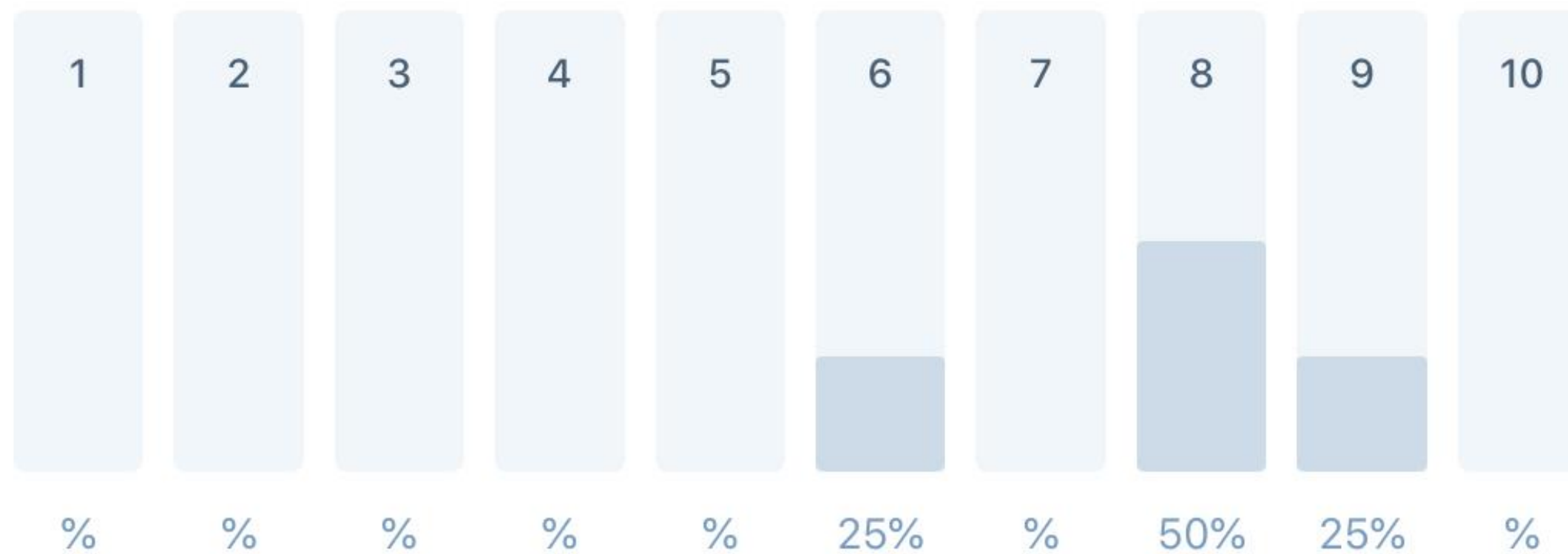
#marketing

MARKETING



Rate the authenticity of imagery used in both print and online assets.

Avg. 7.8



Not Authent...

Very Authent...

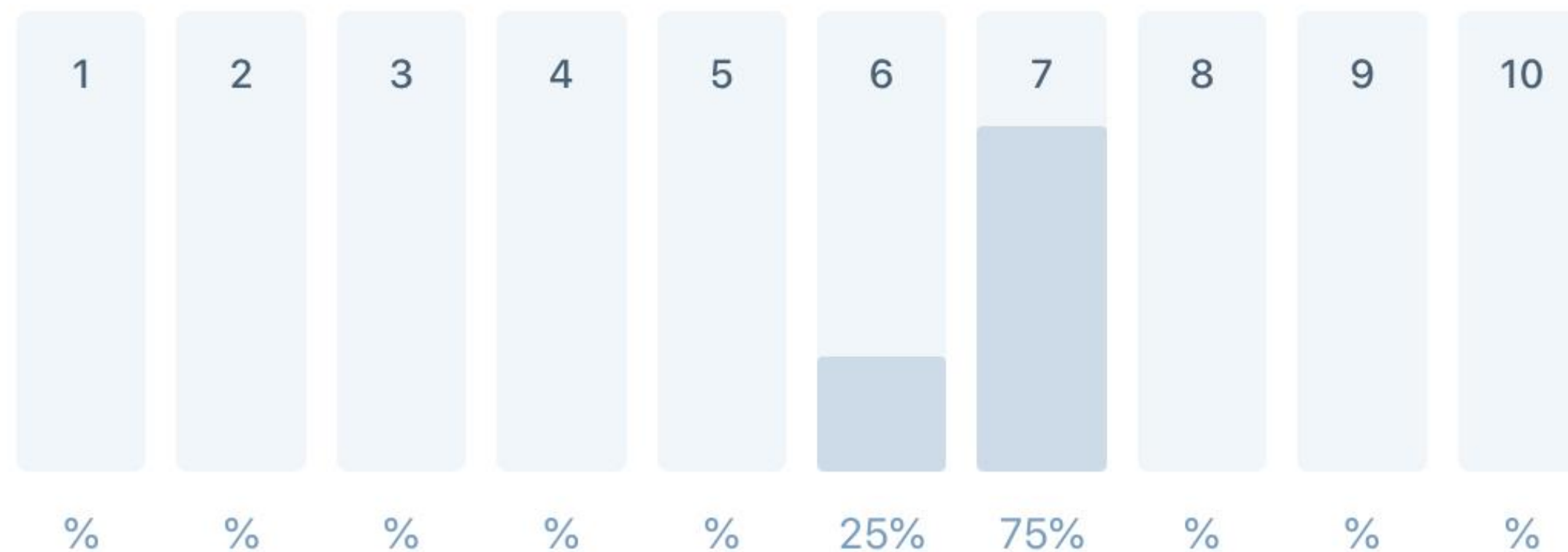
#marketing

MARKETING



Will these assets attract diverse tourists to Loudoun County?

Avg. 6.8



Not Likely

Highly Likel...

#marketing

THOUGHTS ON MARKETING ASSETS

“ Room to grow and include other experiences based on more inclusive groups. ”

“ Pretty good diversity of offerings presented, along with a diverse subject group. ”

“ The images are mostly of locations and events which are inviting in general, but the faces and people could be more diverse. ”

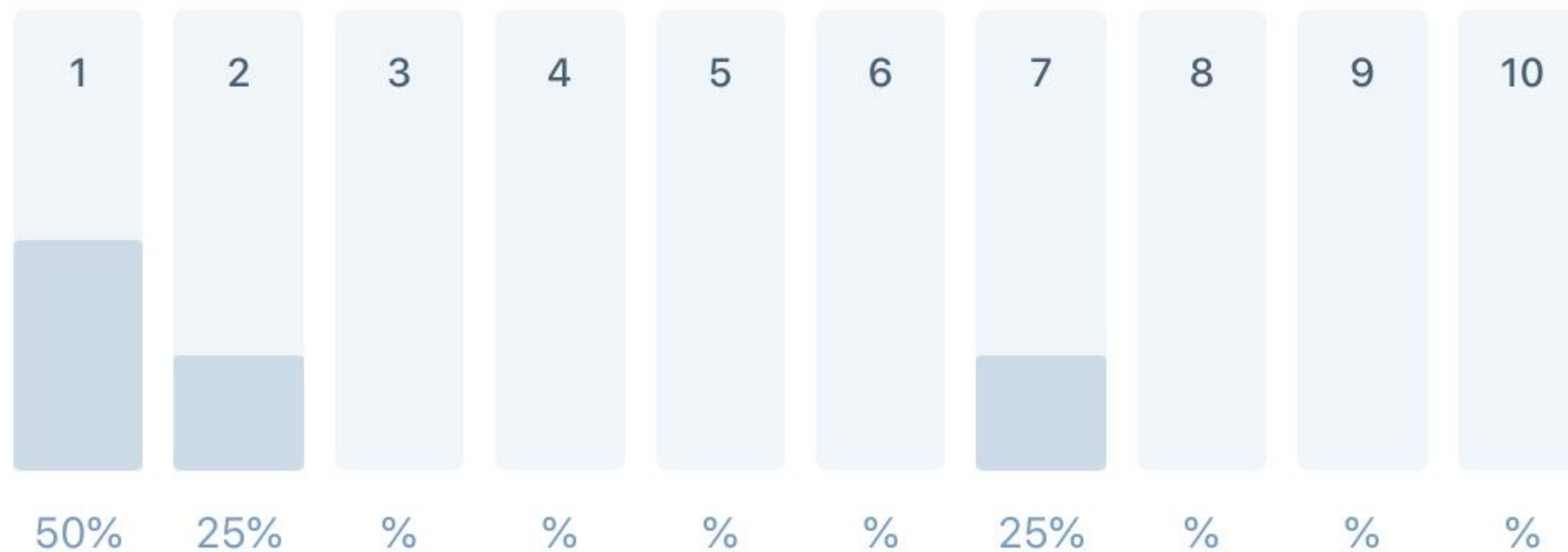
#marketing

MARKETING



Are you aware of the Social Campaign #LoveLoudoun?

Avg. 2.8



No

Very Aware

OBSERVATIONS

Although the marketing assets have improved in diversity and authenticity, they still may not achieve the outcome of attracting diverse travelers.

Knowledge of social campaigns, such as #loveloudoun, is low. This lack of adoption creates an access barrier to crowd-sourced imagery. This likely impacts VL Marketing's ability to maximize the use of curated, diverse content.

Diversity-Friendly messaging is likely too subtle to overcome perceptions of fear, safety concerns and exclusion. VL must debunk the inaccurate brand assumptions to attract the target market.

INVOLVE THE COMMUNITY

Foster Connectivity and Community

Ensure diverse tourism and hospitality businesses feel included and engaged.

INVOLVE THE COMMUNITY

Do you feel your voice is heard and considered by Visit Loudoun?



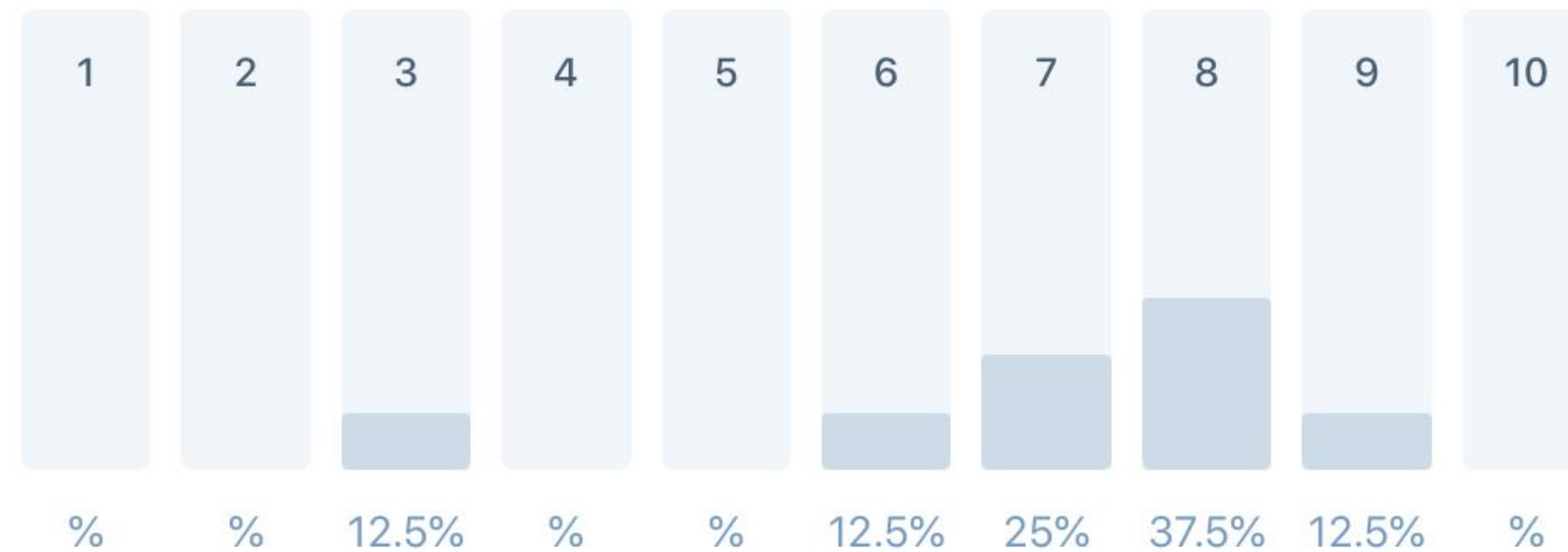
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INVOLVE THE COMMUNITY



Rate your knowledge on Visit Loudoun's role, contributions and key metrics when it comes to promoting tourism in Loudoun County.

Avg. 7



No Knowledge

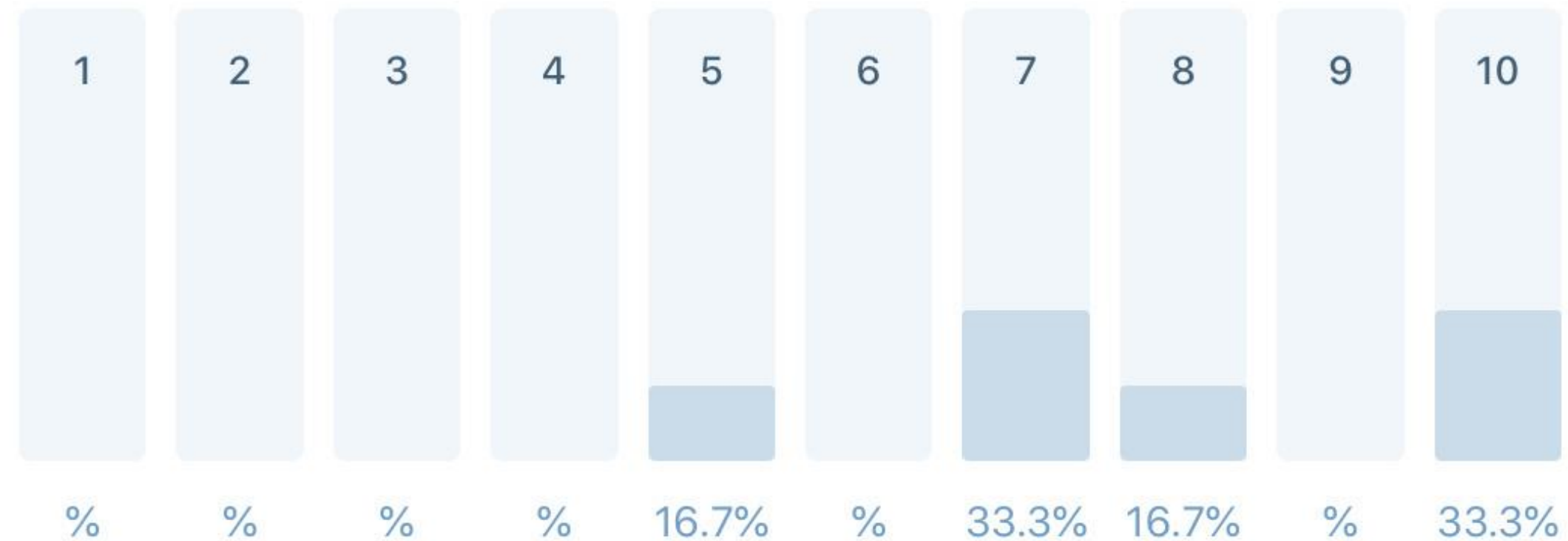
Very Knowled...

INVOLVE THE COMMUNITY



Visit Loudoun shows interest and is vested in the success of my business.

Avg. 7.8



No

Absolutely

DOES VL SHOW A VESTED INTEREST IN MY BUSINESS?

This comment exemplifies the others.

“

I chose that rating because Visit Loudoun has been such a strong ally in growing my business. They have been helpful in the marketing and growth of my business.

”

OBSERVATIONS

- **VL does an exceptional job supporting the success of businesses in their known network.**
- **Engaging with VL results in a high ROI for local businesses. One stakeholder reported a 3x increase in revenue within five years because of being a VL member. However, not enough business are aware and engage as evidenced by a 70% rating on their awareness of VL's value and resources.**
- **All non-member, LC T&H businesses are considered 'Partners'. However, not all T&H businesses are known, and therefore captured in the VL database.**
- **This may create barriers for relationship building, awareness of VL resources, and mutual success.**

OBSERVATIONS

- **Local, diverse T&H professionals are likely more disenchanted with Loudoun County than tourists.**
- **The correlation between lower engagement with VL and a somewhat negative perception of LC suggests that outreach and education for local T&H professionals are warranted.**
- **Respondents desire interconnectivity and community engagement through social media.**
- **#4 & #5 Priority** These resources exist; however, the local T&H community lacks awareness and adoption of resources such as VL's Facebook Group, including a highly sought-after centralized calendar of events.
- **The Visit Loudoun Team lacks diversity. This may deter some buyers (event planners) from bringing groups to LC. Event Planners report a desire to see diversity during the sales process, not just in marketing material.**

Recommendations - INVOLVE THE COMMUNITY

- **#1 Priority** Develop "My Loudoun" campaign featuring actual T&H locals and their businesses. Debunk the stereotypes and inaccurate perceptions.
- Increase proactive requests for diverse, crowd-sourced imagery. Knowledge of social campaigns such as #loveloudoun is low, therefore creates a barrier to access.
- **#3 Priority** Launch locally focused campaign to boost testimonials for local business – YELP, Google Reviews, etc.
- Create a target percentage for diverse businesses to become members/partners of VL.
- Be intentional about diversifying VL's supply chain. When sourcing opportunities arise, procure net new local vendors.
- Provide a master class for LC T&H community on Loudoun's story, evolution, brand, D&I, and VL resources is recommended. Reengage and cause the locals to fall back in love with Loudoun.
 - **EXAMPLE–** Visit Dallas' Customer Services Hospitality Master Class ([it's hospitality y'all](#)) with SWA and is a huge success. Get a local tech and hospitality partner to sponsor. Free to locals to attend to enhance their customer service training and expertise.



10.6.2020 Trending ConnexMe Posts By DIAC

Glory Barbaris

Create stronger community outreach. Many people of color don't know that VL exists and therefore are unable to take advantage of what is offered. [#community#marketing](#) - Create more programming that will reflect the diversity in the community. [#marketing](#)

Vinay Patel

beautiful pics but doesn't entice a minority to visit. [#marketing](#)

Alexandria Davila

show diversity not only in race in photos but also in styles, I think will help to attract younger groups. [#marketing](#)

Renee Ventrice

many business owners aren't social media savvy and do not embrace social media marketing to see and spread the messaging [#marketing](#)

Tracy Hamlin

Consider following a Diversity calendar. [#marketing](#)

Renee Ventrice

rediscover your hometown would get more Loudouners to know what we have here that goes unnoticed or underrepresented

[#attract](#) [#community](#) [#marketing](#)

Renee Ventrice

[#marketing](#) messages are only reaching those engaged already, missing people who have no idea or don't feel compelled to engage

Glory Barbaris

create FAM programs to help highlight the diverse offerings, programs, and attractions here in LoCo by inviting local LoCo influencers to visit and share experiences to their diverse audiences to create a community of inclusivity [#community](#)

Alicia Cohen

Yes, I understand the perceptions because the news media also pushes the fact that we are the wealthiest (sp) county in the county which is the economics but doesn't go further to discuss the welcoming and rich community. [#attract](#)

Melanie Mathewes

Having lived in Virginia for most of my life and in different parts of VA, other regions of the state view Loudoun through similar lenses as we have discussed today. These perspectives are not just from outside of the state. [#attract](#)

Glory Barbaris

I've also had more of my clients and their families staying at the resort and they're coming in from affluent McLean and Arlington. And I couldn't agree more with Ms. Johnson about casting the net to include more diverse talents to work on projects, especially in events [#attract](#)

Renee Ventrice

there are multiple groups around blacks, minorities and women in the wine industry that should be aware of our wine country [#attract](#)

Alicia Cohen

I have suggested and bought many friends, groups and family to Salamander for the "Wow" factor of excellent hospitality, but I have also introduced them to the black history of the area like Bureau corner. This is confusing since they see almost no local people of color.

Renee Ventrice

I envision a campaign that shows people saying what they are NOT, but then saying that they ARE Loudoun county and they welcome that group... or what they ARE and that they feel welcome in LoCo. still working it out in my head... [#marketing](#)



Lead Generating Opportunities



During our research, we discovered potential lead generating opportunities for VL.

- **VL should consider courting the SOMM world. Include classes at Salamander for SOMM certification/classes. <https://www.mastersommeliers.org/> Closest course to DC is in Baltimore. This is business VL could offer alongside the Salamander.**
- **Terrance Luther, although not official involved in this project, appears to have influence with Black sororities and fraternities. Anecdotally, they are in the sales process for event destinations and would like to reconsider Loudoun County.**

The Project Team



**Melissa
Majors**

Inclusion Strategist &
Innovator



**Cass
McMann**

Destinations
Marketing Consultant

Our team is unapologetic about putting the people we serve at the center of everything we do. We find joy in helping our clients innovate and serve others in a meaningful way.

The team at Melissa Majors Consulting has fallen in love with Loudoun County! We're vested in your success and look forward to watching your continued growth. Please don't hesitate to contact us if there is anything we can do to support you.

For questions about this report, data, or the research methodology, please contact Melissa Majors, CEO of [Melissa Majors Consulting](https://www.melissamajors.com), melissa@melissamajors.com.