Optimizing Inclusion – Final Report
October, 2020
Our research and inclusive collaboration method.

- 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.

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

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<tr>
<th><strong>DIAC Members</strong></th>
<th><strong>Interviewee/Participant</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Black History Committee of the Friends of the Thomas Balch Library</td>
<td>Alicia Cohen</td>
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<td>Nostalgia Boutique</td>
<td>Silas Redd</td>
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<td>Cork and Keg Tours</td>
<td>Renee Ventrice</td>
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<td>Adarga</td>
<td>Alexandria Davila</td>
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<td>Catoctin Creek Distilling</td>
<td>Becky Harris</td>
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<td>Always Creating Studio</td>
<td>Glory Barbaris</td>
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<td>Formerly With The National Conference Center</td>
<td>Dahlia Williams</td>
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<td>Le Boudoir</td>
<td>Kayse Small and Sara Crutcher</td>
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<td>Fairbrook Hotel</td>
<td>Vinay Patel</td>
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<td>Best Rack Around</td>
<td>Nanette Parsons</td>
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<th><strong>Influencer</strong></th>
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<td>Salamander Resorts</td>
<td>Sheila Johnson</td>
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<th><strong>Steering Committee Members</strong></th>
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<td>Shenandoah University</td>
<td>Melanie Mathewes</td>
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<td>Bow Tie Strategies</td>
<td>Rusty Foster</td>
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<td>Aspen Institute</td>
<td>Esther Turner *Board Liaison</td>
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<td>The Conche</td>
<td>Santosh Tiptur</td>
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<td>Sweet Jazz Fest</td>
<td>Tracy Hamlin</td>
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<td>Salamander Resorts</td>
<td>Reggie Cooper</td>
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<td>Visit Loudoun</td>
<td>Ann D. Hayes</td>
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<td>Visit Loudoun</td>
<td>Jennifer Christie</td>
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<td>Visit Loudoun</td>
<td>Jennifer Sigal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visit Loudoun</td>
<td>Beth Erickson</td>
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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.
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.
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.

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

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

60% likely to encounter profiling in LC

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

Black travelers report similar requirements.
### 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Not at all Important</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Destination is LGBTQ-friendly</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>15% 2% 3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destination offers natural beauty</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>16% 2% 1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destination is safe / has low crime rates</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>21% 4% 1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Destination is low cost for you</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>30% 6% 2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Destination offers diverse ethnic/cultural experiences</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>25% 4% 3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destination offers urban excitement</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>34% 8% 7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destination is an LGBTQ hot spot</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>42% 13% 15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destination is known to offer luxury experiences</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>34% 17% 28%</td>
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</table>

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

Not Diverse

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

Not Authentic...  Very Authentic...

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

% % % % % 25% % 50% 25% %

Avg. 7.8
Will these assets attract diverse tourists to Loudoun County?

Not Likely  Highly Likely...

1% 2% 3% 4% 5% 6% 7% 8% 9% 10%

25% 75%
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.”
Are you aware of the Social Campaign #LoveLoudoun?

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No | Very Aware


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?

9.25/10
INVOLVE THE COMMUNITY

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

No Knowledge

Very Knowled...
INVOLVE THE COMMUNITY

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

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No Absolutely

Avg. 7.8
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.
OBSEVATIONS

- 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.

Maximize adoption of the member and partner programs.
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

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

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 #attract #community #marketing

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
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. #attract #community #marketing

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 #marketing

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

Vinay Patel
beautiful pics but doesn’t entice a minority to visit. #marketing

Tracy Hamlin
Consider following a Diversity calendar. #marketing
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/](https://www.mastersommeliers.org/) Closest course to DC is in Baltimore. This is business VL could after 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.
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, melissa@melissamajors.com.