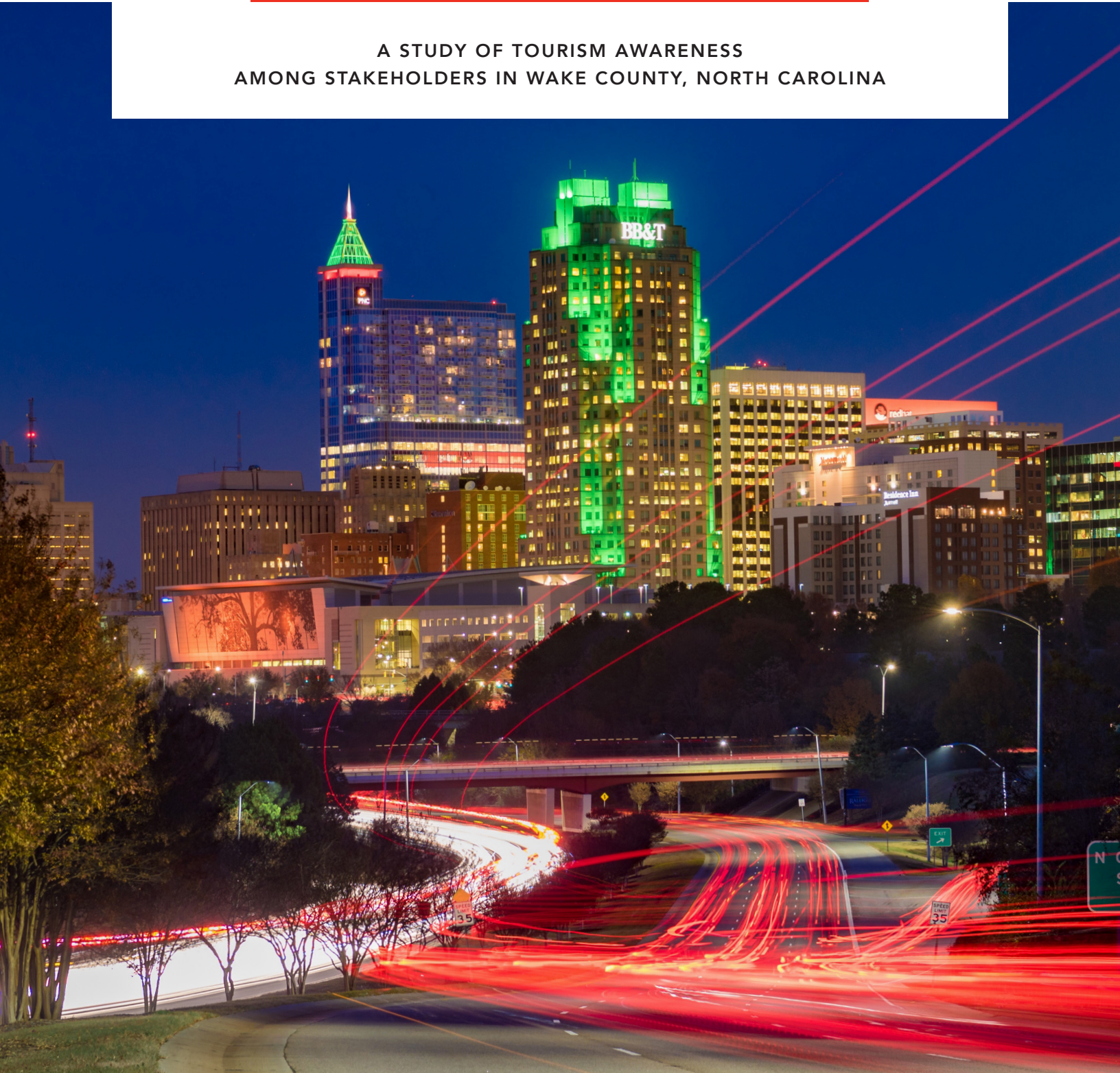


# Building Tourism Advocacy

A STUDY OF TOURISM AWARENESS  
AMONG STAKEHOLDERS IN WAKE COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA







## Tourism needs advocacy

The tourism industry contributes to economic stability, job generation, and quality of life. These benefits extend to residents, sectors of the tourism industry, and adjacent industries. Yet, tourism is not recognized for its value among all stakeholders and the destination communities it serves. This lack of knowledge extends to residents, professionals working in different sectors, and decision-makers. Stakeholders can be empowered through education to become advocates for tourism.

Through proactive education, committed collaboration, and compelling communication, destination marketing/management organizations (DMOs) can empower their community stakeholders to become advocates for tourism. Community engagement strategies (CES) are one effective way to engage directly with their stakeholders.

The Greater Raleigh Convention and Visitors Bureau recognizes CES can be an effective tool in building relationships. **Tourism U**, a presentation to educate Wake County stakeholders on the work of the GRCVB and tourism's impact on Wake County, is one of these CES strategies. The goal of this study was to assess stakeholder knowledge of tourism's value and provide a baseline measure of their potential for engaging in tourism advocacy.

Through these findings, this study aims to provide evidence of how CES can be used to help improve advocacy for the tourism industry, and recommendations for the future.

## Study methods

Interviews were conducted with over 25 stakeholders representing various sectors (i.e., hospitality, healthcare, real estate, transportation, local government, retail). A total of 22 interviews were conducted before **Tourism U** was implemented and a total of 12 interviews were conducted after **Tourism U** was implemented.

Post-CES interviews were conducted following the stakeholders' participation in **Tourism U**. Some post-CES interviews were with stakeholders who participated in the pre-interviews, others were new. Interview data were analyzed to determine the impact of CES on stakeholder knowledge of tourism's value and advocacy engagement.



Greg Butler

## Identifying the impacts of CES

### Perceptions of the role of tourism in Wake County economic development

#### Pre-CES Perception

*"All of us experience some level of benefit from tourism as a community...the tourism dollar goes a long way across the community."*

—Retail Stakeholder

#### Post-CES Perception

*"Tourism is vital to our community...it's a huge part of our economic growth, our ability to sustain ourselves. It's part of the blood that keeps us going."*

—Hospitality Stakeholder

### Knowledge of the impacts of tourism on the community

#### Pre-CES Knowledge

*"I don't think residents are aware. If I wasn't in the job that I was in I would have no idea."*

—Retail Stakeholder

#### Post-CES Knowledge

*"The average citizen sees the least benefit [of tourism], just because they don't understand."*

—Transportation Stakeholder

### Engagement in advocacy for tourism in Wake County

#### Pre-CES Engagement

*"I think I need to be more in touch with [GRCVB] more on projects. I would love to be involved a lot more with them and kind of see that effort moving forward."*

—Community Leadership Stakeholder

#### Post-CES Engagement

*"If [the GRCVB has] taglines or stories, please share those... I always think we need to have one voice, or one message. It could be in different voices, but share the same message."*

—Business Development Stakeholder



Brian Strickland



Brian Strickland





Todd Gunshier

## Findings

### CES change perceptions of tourism's role in economic development

Stakeholders perceive tourism as a beneficial economic driver but recognize opportunities to expand these benefits to smaller communities.

### CES increase knowledge of the impacts of tourism in Wake County

Stakeholders connect how tourism benefits quality of life in Wake County but recognize that not all residents understand this relationship.

### CES encourage engagement in tourism advocacy

There is strong support from stakeholders, but they need a specific ask (e.g., speak to policymakers) and strengthened communication.

## Recommendations

- Improve stakeholder perceptions of tourism...highlight one community outside of Raleigh to focus on each month. Communicate with their local leaders, host events to connect with partners, and showcase their assets.
- Increase knowledge of tourism impacts...expand efforts to educate residents about the value of tourism by implementing programs to reach younger residents and their parents as well as new residents. Educating residents could take many forms such as an adapted **Tourism U** presentation for young residents. These efforts should focus on long-term and new residents to communicate both the economic and social impact tourism has on quality of life in Wake County.
- Encourage engagement in tourism advocacy...charge a committee with identifying annual advocacy needs, creating an "ask" for those needs (e.g., speak directly to city council members about improving transportation networks). Then communicate each ask to the appropriate advocate.

**Further Questions?** Contact Hailey Post (hapost@ncsu.edu) or Whitney Knollenberg (wgknolle@ncsu.edu) at North Carolina State University.