



FY 22–23 Business Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND OVERVIEW

Richmond Region Tourism - Organization Overview and Objectives

Richmond Region Tourism is the official destination marketing organization (DMO) for the Richmond Region which is comprised of (Chesterfield, Hanover, Henrico and New Kent counties, as well as the cities of Richmond and Colonial Heights and the town of Ashland). An accredited member of Destinations International and a member of the U.S. Travel Association, Richmond Region Tourism actively markets and promotes the Richmond Region as a premier leisure, convention and sports travel destination. The organization is a private, nonprofit 501(c) 6 corporation and is in its 38th year of operation.

Richmond Region Tourism's primary funding comes from a tax (transient lodging tax) that hotel guests pay on lodging in the localities of Chesterfield, Hanover, Henrico and the City of Richmond. Richmond Region Tourism receives 1.75 percent of the transient lodging sales. RRT is also partially funded by Class B member localities (New Kent, Colonial Heights and the town of Ashland) the Greater Richmond Convention Center Authority (GRCCA) the ChamberRVA, and from other local partners and sponsors.

Richmond Region Tourism Mission, Vision and Values

MISSION:

Grow the economy of the Richmond Region by attracting conventions, meetings and visitors and ensuring that all have a great experience.

VISION:

Be a world-class organization known for our superior service and innovative marketing.

VALUES:

Inclusiveness

- Collaboration
- Diversity
- Regional focus

Superior Service

- Customer focused
- Exceeding the promise

Integrity

- A culture of honesty
- Credibility
- Fairness

Innovation

- Creativity
- Resourcefulness
- Catalyst

Passion

- Enthusiasm
- High Energy

Organization Objectives

Richmond Region Tourism presents the 2022-2023 Business Plan to be implemented as the approved budget allows. In pursuit of its mission, Richmond Region Tourism seeks to:

- Increase the demand in the Richmond Region for overnight hotel stays, attraction visits, sports events, restaurant receipts, retail sales, local transportation and other event activities that positively affect the economic impact of the local tourism industry.
- Boost the demand for and usage of the Greater Richmond Convention Center for groups and special events that draw attendees to stay overnight in the Region.
- Recruit, grow and retain sporting events in the Richmond Region and continue expansion of the Richmond Region's visibility as a premier athletic destination, particularly in the youth sports market.
- Advocate for the development assets such as the Fall Line Trail, Henrico convocation hall, breweries, sports and event facilities, hotels that will increase tourism and improve the visitor experience.
- Identify and pursue marketing and advertising opportunities to promote the Richmond Region to regional, national and international visitors.
- Gain national and international media exposure for the Region's diverse attractions, arts and culture, sports and recreation, diversity, history and noteworthy culinary and craft beer scenes.
- Support and contribute to the enrichment of the Region's cultural, creative, historic, recreational, sports and entertainment communities.
- Welcome all visitors, regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, race, color, natural origin, marital status, religion, military affiliation or disability.
- Through strong and focused outreach and with recognized expertise in the tourism industry, actively participate in and contribute to community planning efforts focused on the growth and sustainability of the visitor and meeting industry, as well as the quality of life in the Region.
- Leverage the recommendations of the Tourism Master Plan and pursue its strategic vision to address the Richmond region's future efforts to attract leisure travelers and meetings, conventions and tournaments to Richmond Region Tourism's partner localities.

Richmond Region Tourism focuses on those programs that directly impact hotel occupancy and drive visitor spending. Efficient and accountable fiscal controls are carefully monitored by the Richmond Region Tourism Board of Directors to ensure that resources are invested carefully and efficiently. To allow for adjustments to changing market conditions, select plan objectives and/or tactics may change throughout the year.

TOURISM MASTER PLAN

Richmond Region 2030: A Strategic Direction for the Richmond Region's Visitor Economy

Richmond Region 2030 was developed in 2019 with extensive feedback from the community. Launched in fall 2020, the plan establishes priorities that, when executed over the next decade, will ensure that the quality of the visitor experience can be balanced with the quality of life for residents; that we attract the kinds of visitors who would most appreciate the region's character; and that we responsibly grow our tourism industry for the benefit of **all** in our community. The work in creating this plan was completed pre-COVID. However, as tourism rebounds over time, that this plan will serve as a North Star to guide us toward success.

Over the last year, committees have been advancing the tourism master plan in four initial focus areas: experience development, infrastructure and investment, industry advancement and advocacy and place branding.

A key deliverable is an Image and Perception study led by the Place Branding Committee that will be used to shape messaging in the future. The Infrastructure and Investment Committee has engaged on long-term development projects including the City Center Plan, convention center headquarters hotel and the VCU Athletics Village. The Experience Development Committee is prioritizing action steps in the areas of Cultural, Adventure and Sports Tourism.

In the area of Industry Advancement and Advocacy, Richmond Region Tourism completed an engagement with a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion specialist on a series of internal staff and board workshops, conversation cafes, assessments and training. An internal DEI Task Force completed a global benchmarking process and drafted a plan to advance the organization's efforts. These efforts complement our deep commitment to our community-facing programs of OutRVA and BLK RVA and are designed to ensure Richmond Region Tourism lives up to its core value of inclusiveness.

With an eye toward economic recovery from the pandemic, staff has also advanced a targeted business development program as outlined in the Tourism Master Plan. The new program, called Meaningful Meetings, engages business leaders, innovators and influencers to build actionable strategies to attract business events--meetings, conventions and conferences--aligned with key industry and economic development priorities.

In the next year, the board will focus on three immediate priorities emerging from the work:

- Convention Center Headquarters Hotel
- Collaborative, high-investment image marketing campaign to align messaging with tourism and economic development and expand reach
- Workforce development within the tourism industry

Richmond Region 2030 is a robust and inclusive plan to move our industry and our community into the future. Visit www.RichmondRegion2030.com to read through the plan and engage in this important work.

STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

Outlook for Travel Recovery

Even as the Richmond travel sector faced untold challenges over the past year, we never slowed down. Now, as we continue to navigate the evolving COVID-19 pandemic, we are seeing the impact of that work: safely welcoming visitors back.

Despite the uncertainty around the pandemic, our team at Richmond Region Tourism remained steadfast in working to safely welcome back meeting, convention and sports events planners, tour operators and leisure travelers.

While the market for both sports and leisure tourism, as well as meetings and convention business, remains strong, business travel will be slower to return, even as 68% of U.S. companies that are not currently traveling say they are planning to resume domestic business travel throughout the fall of 2021.

Notwithstanding this forward momentum and the strong economic rebound this spring and summer, the hospitality sector still has not regained all the jobs it lost throughout the pandemic. In fact, the American Hotel & Lodging Association says that it expects the Virginia hotel industry will lose 23.7% of its jobs by the end of 2021, compared to the pre-pandemic 2019 baseline.

Nationwide travel recovery forecasting continuously changes as the pandemic evolves with vaccines, variants and surges. Following are updates as of late summer 2021:

- Although Americans generally continue to see travel and leisure activities as safe rather than unsafe, air travel, indoor attractions and restaurants have suffered notable declines in safety perceptions.
- Although Americans largely remain excited to travel in the next 12 months, expectations to travel for leisure in the next 3 months have declined.
- The appeal of out-of-state business trips and convention travel has improved among employed American travelers relative to early this year. Now 45.7% of employed American travelers says they would be happy to take an out-of-state business trip in the next 6 months, up from 39.5% the week of April 12th.
- The welcoming reputation of destinations remains important to a majority of American travelers (68% consider it important or very important), but perceptions of specific destinations as being unwelcoming appears to be shifting.
- After a recent period of decline, Americans' travel marketability index scores have held at the same levels, offering hope for a turnaround. In particular, Millennial and Gen Z age travelers are likeliest to be in a ready-to-travel mindset right now (77.1%). They are also likelier to be supportive of pandemic protocols like indoor mask requirements right now (72.1%).

Relevant data points as of October 2021 include:

- Travel recovery cools after a scorching summer of 2021. More than half (53%) of American travelers indicated they are changing travel plans due to the pandemic with **more than a third (36%) postponing travel until later this year.**
- Hotel demand fell for the first time in nine months, from 4% below 2019 levels in July to **10% below 2019 in August 2021.**

- Business travel, which continues to lag in its recovery, appears to be more sensitive to the challenging health environment.
- While the share of businesses **currently traveling rose to 68% in September**, intentions to resume travel among businesses not currently traveling plummeted.
- After peaking at 68% in July, **only 25% of businesses in September were planning on resuming domestic business** travel in the next three months.
- The **pace of DMO/CVB group bookings slipped in September** with Q4 2021 bookings declining six percentage points to 26% below 2019 levels and Q1 2022 regressing to 26% below 2019 levels

ADMINISTRATION

Richmond Region Tourism's Administration Department provides support for its staff as well as its 22-seat Board of Directors, which governs Richmond Region Tourism, and the five-seat Greater Richmond Convention Center Authority (GRCCA), which governs the Greater Richmond Convention Center. The department also oversees financial and human resources, and overall management of the organization.

Board of Directors

The Board of Directors is comprised of the following matrix of members:

10 (SEATS) - CLASS A MEMBERSHIP DIRECTORS:

- Henrico County: 3 seats – 1 elected official and 2 seats filled by a hotel, attraction, retail, restaurant or tourism stakeholder
- City of Richmond: 3 seats – 1 elected official and 2 seats filled by a hotel, attraction, retail, restaurant or tourism stakeholder
- Chesterfield County: 2 seats – 1 elected official and 1 seat filled by a hotel, attraction, retail, restaurant or tourism stakeholder
- Hanover County: 1 seat – 1 elected official
- ChamberRVA: 1 seat – CEO

1 (SEAT) – CLASS B SHARED SEAT:

- Town of Ashland – Elected Official (holds vote FY23)
- City of Colonial Heights – Elected Official (holds vote FY22 and again in FY25)
- New Kent County – Elected Official (holds vote FY24)

8 (SEATS) – EX OFFICIO DIRECTORS:

- Capital Region Airport Commission: 1 seat – CEO
- Kings Dominion: 1 seat – CEO
- Richmond Raceway: 1 seat – CEO
- Venture Richmond: 1 seat – CEO
- Virginia Tourism Corporation: 1 seat – CEO
- Richmond Sports Backers: 1 seat – CEO
- Retail Merchants Association: 1 seat – CEO
- Richmond Region Hospitality Association: 1 seat – CEO

3 (SEATS) OTHER APPOINTED DIRECTORS:

- At-Large Director: 1 seat – appointed by the Richmond Region Tourism Board
- At-Large Director: 1 Corporate seat appointed by the Richmond Region Tourism Board
- At-Large Director: 1 seat appointed by the Museum Directors Association

Administration Plan

OBJECTIVE:

Maintain effective financial and human resource management of all aspects of the organization.

TACTICS:

- Manage office facilities, equipment, office supplies and inventory while allowing staff to work a hybrid work schedule due to COVID19. Ensure effective internal communications with staff
- Control purchasing and cost management with future budget planning
- Manage IT support and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) System
- Manage employee relations and work with external HR consultant. Manage the recruiting and hiring process as needed
- Maintain job descriptions and performance appraisals for all positions
- Ensure the employee policies and procedures document is updated continuously to reflect recent laws and legislation. Communicate all changes to staff in an efficient manner
- Continually update the Crisis Communication Plan to accurately keep all staff informed and educated with tools and resources to follow in case of an emergency
- Monitor annually an efficient Technology Plan for keeping the appropriate technology trends and resources available to staff to carry out the mission of the organization
- Manage finances and all budget and accounting for Richmond Region Tourism and the Richmond Region Tourism Foundation
- Ensure that the organization maintains accreditation through the Destination Marketing Accreditation Program of our industry's parent association

SPECIFIC GOALS FOR FY23:

- Expand Internship Program and focus on students in the tourism and hospitality industry through local Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HCBUs). Offer a summer and fall/winter experience
- Tourism Diversity Matters Apprenticeship Program – work to provide a recent or upcoming ethnically diverse college graduate with a concentration in business studies, a paid opportunity to gain valuable hands-on cross training experience through the rotation of various departments of the organization and with two other partners such as a hotel and the convention center.
- Engage in a financial assessment designed to identify areas that are working well, highlight areas of improvement and provide expert advise with financial stability and processes.
- Create a Transparency landing page on the VisitRichmondVA.com website that will assist people with finding out more about Richmond Region Tourism
- Develop best practices that support responsible sourcing, equitable partnerships and business impact across all departments, both internally and externally. Survey vendors and track for diversity spending initiatives. Create a new purchasing policy for goods and services.

Richmond Region Tourism's work in Diversity Equity and Inclusion is ongoing. An internal taskforce was created with staff led co-chairs to design a DEI plan which will focus on the following areas:

- Advancement & Retention
- Staff Education Experiences
- Business Impact

The goals and short term tactics of each are:

ADVANCEMENT & RETENTION

Goal: Strengthen and provide equitable access to opportunities for employee professional growth and advancement

Short Term Tactics:

- Conduct biannual data collection to find out where employees serve in leadership capacities and areas where they have leadership interest outside of the role at Richmond Region Tourism
- Identify areas of focus and organizations where Richmond Region Tourism should have representation
- Twice yearly assess professional development credentials/programs already acquired by staff and determine future ambitions for development via self-evaluation during reviews
- Compile a list of leadership and development opportunities within our community and industry
- Intentionally connect employees to leadership and professional development opportunities

STAFF EDUCATION/EXPERIENCES

Goal: Educate staff and board members about the importance of a diverse, equitable and inclusive organization which improves the quality of life for our residents, partners and visitors

Short Term Tactics:

- Create partnerships with local community organizations to share their knowledge through educational presentations and written information, and optimize relationships with BLK RVA and OutRVA to educate staff on DEI topics
- Host educational experiences once a quarter, such as walking tours and heritage related training
- Intro DEI mission/vision and goals during IAT classes
- Incorporate DEI mission, vision statement, progress and accomplishments into new hire onboarding information

BUSINESS IMPACT

Goal: Develop best practices that support responsible sourcing, equitable partnerships, and business impact across all departments, both internally and externally

Short Term Tactics:

- Conduct survey of internal spending to determine areas of opportunity to increase economic impact among small, minority-owned businesses and services
- Establish qualitative and quantitative goals within each department that are relative, attainable and conducive to primary business function
- Create a responsible sourcing SOP for all employees with purchasing power
- Introduce goals to Richmond Region Tourism personnel, effective at the beginning of the next FY, and communicate expectations

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Introduction

Community Relations and advocacy are central to expanding Richmond Region Tourism's value and leadership role in the community.

The Community Relations Department serves as a voice for the tourism industry in government relations, a voice of the visitor in regional planning and development, and as a resource to develop opportunities and build quality of life to benefit all the residents of our Region.

The Community Relations Department also operates the Richmond Region Tourism Foundation to advance the impact and benefit of the department by supporting and investing in local education, diversity and inclusion and sports tourism.

DEPARTMENT GOALS/OUTCOMES

- Serve as a voice for the industry so that the economic impact and value of tourism is better understood amongst jurisdictions, constituents, and regional partners.
- Play a significant role in both policy and product development and advocacy in the destination.
- Support regional tourism efforts by serving as a leader/convener amongst the hospitality community.
- Connect visitor experience with residents' quality of life through enhanced public relations efforts.
- Provide support within the hospitality community to regional partners focused on workforce development.
- Drive and support meetings and convention business by generating interest within the Richmond Region through existing, ongoing corporate and partner outreach.
- Lead the organization's externally facing diversity, equity, and inclusion programs in BLK RVA and OUT RVA.
- Produce awareness-driving and revenue-generating programs and events through both the Richmond Region Tourism Community Relations Department and the Richmond Region Tourism Foundation.
- Secure sponsorship and in-kind partnerships to advance the mission and reach of the Richmond Region Tourism Foundation

Community Relations Strategies

The primary audiences for this plan are local stakeholders, government and elected officials, hospitality industry partners, sponsors, and partners.

Local Awareness

OVERVIEW

The value of travel and tourism to the Richmond Region community is appreciated and apparent as a result of the pandemic. The specific role of Richmond Region Tourism in the recovery is understood by investing in jurisdictions and community partners and educating our residents.

OBJECTIVES:

- Engage influential community leaders to highlight the importance of tourism as an economic driver for recovery and a benefit to the quality of life for our residents.
- Continue to generate regional media coverage of travel and tourism-related news.
- Make Richmond Region Tourism as the go-to source for travel and tourism-related stories through regular outreach and knowledge sharing.

Government Relations

OVERVIEW

As a regionally funded organization, government relations is critical to our success on a regional and state level.

OBJECTIVES:

- Make tourism a leading public policy priority.
- Be the public policy expert on the travel industry and Richmond Region's place within it.
- Advocate on the local, state, and national level.
- Be known as the trusted source of advice on RVA travel and tourism industry issues.

Community Awareness and Resident Engagement

OVERVIEW

Richmond Region Tourism has continuously worked on telling the story of the importance of tourism to our residents. We must ensure our residents are educated and understand the full benefits of our region to influence future travel, meetings, convention and sports development and recruitment. With a collaborative, engaged, and informed hospitality and services network, we can help more people discover our region and ensure the best possible visitor experience when visitors are here. Richmond Region Tourism will work to empower residents and local business owners to become ambassadors and stewards of the region, while also supporting the local business community.

Workforce development in the tourism and hospitality industry sector is also essential. From job creation to economic prosperity, bringing group business to a destination creates a ripple effect in our communities and is key to our industry's full recovery. Connections, interactions, and business opportunities that are born out of bringing meeting, conventions, sporting events and tournaments to the Region are instrumental to our recovery and will continue to fuel the economic engine that is tourism.

OBJECTIVES:

- Instill pride and comfort for residents who both explore and invite guests to the Region.
- Grow the I Am Tourism Ambassador Training to educate tourism professionals, constituents, and other partners so that they become resources for all who visit the Region.
- Work with entities involved with the visitor economy to open lines of communication and participation.
- Communicate regional tourism economic impact to non-traditional partners.
- Create strategic workforce development partnerships to assist local hospitality and tourism businesses and organizations with the heightened demand of recruiting talented workers and retaining them.

Industry Support

OVERVIEW

The Community Relations department exists to support the local industry on a variety of levels ranging from product and economic development to cultural champions and stakeholder engagement.

OBJECTIVES:

- Work with the Richmond Region Tourism Visitor Experience Department on tourism product development, community partnerships, and experiential tourism that enhance the Region.
- Support various events through sponsorships from both the Richmond Region Tourism Community Relations Department and the Richmond Region Tourism Foundation to provide marketing support, guidance, etc. on a case-by-case basis.
- Act as a voice for the tourism and travel industry in regional planning.
- Provide information resources, intellectual capital, and guidance to tourism-related businesses.
- Work closely with economic development organizations and departments to drive synergistic development and tourism.

Partnership Development

OVERVIEW

The Community Relations Department strategically cultivates partnerships with tourism and hospitality partners and local businesses to offset Richmond Region Tourism Foundation organizational costs and provide businesses added exposure with the intention of growing our community facing programs. The department is dedicated, post pandemic, to rebuilding tourism and expanding partnerships with the local business community through strategic programs, marketing/promotional opportunities, and special events aimed at championing tourism and its impact on the Region.

OBJECTIVES:

- Generate cash and in-kind sponsorships to augment programming and marketing initiatives to support the Richmond Region Tourism Foundation.
- Engage partners with outstanding events and partnership opportunities.
- Create multi-year partnership opportunities to generate long-term support during the recovery process.
- Foster networking among partners to encourage business-to-business partnerships and cross promotional opportunities.

TACTICS

- Enhance corporate sponsorship development strategies and build relationships to create increased sponsorship revenue for programs and events including:
 - Signature RRT events including the Tourism Awards and Annual Meeting, Richmond Region Open Golf Tournament, and the RVA Sports Awards.
 - I Am Tourism Ambassador and Ambassador Academy.
 - DEI Programs in BLK RVA and OutRVA that work to change perception of the Region and create a welcoming environment for both constituents and visitors alike
 - Scholarships for students in both hospitality and sports management programs.
 - Sports Grant program that incubates new events and provides marketing support to existing events to drive increased participation and new visitors to the Region.
- Execute the Richmond Region Open Golf Tournament and RVA Sports Awards as primary fundraising vehicles for the Foundation.
- Execute Tourism Awards & Annual Meeting event to raise awareness for Richmond Region Tourism and the Richmond Region Tourism Foundation by recognizing stakeholders and celebrating the Region's stellar tourism and hospitality professionals.
- Recruit and expand Foundation donation solicitation process to augment traditional Foundation sponsorship recruitment.
- Maintain engagement with sponsors and partners to continue to highlight the relevancy and value of partnerships.
- Identify and solicit new partners while refining and expanding existing partnerships.

MARKETING

Department Overview:

As the official voice of the destination, Richmond Region Tourism’s Marketing team coordinates and oversees all consumer-facing owned, earned and paid content. This includes advertising, websites, promotions, collateral, social and digital content, market research and PR/media relations efforts. The team provides strategic marketing and PR consultation, direction and solutions to Richmond Region Tourism’s Destination Sales, Visitor Experience, Administration, Community Relations departments, OutRVA and BLK RVA.

The Marketing team focuses on creating, curating, sharing and influencing content that inspires leisure travelers, and meeting and sports event planners. Owned, earned and paid content is at the center of our destination marketing outreach, and we have expanded our strategy to include high-profile consumer activations that bring the Richmond region experience alive in important feeder markets. While our focus overall is to inspire travel to the Richmond region, we also recognize the need to periodically pursue lower-decision-funnel campaigns that influence leisure travelers to book hotels during identified occupancy need periods, promote new air service to and from the Region and adjust our media buys to reflect consumer sentiment resulting from the pandemic. We’ve made content more accessible than ever before, by engaging with travel consumers where they’re looking for inspiration – online on Google, TripAdvisor and our websites, through influencers and travel media, and on social platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Pinterest.

Richmond Region - Destination Creative Platform

OVERVIEW

In the fall of 2020, amid the pandemic and following months of social justice protests, Richmond Region Tourism developed a new creative platform and messaging designed to work across all verticals (consumer/leisure, local, meetings & conventions and sports). The goal was to create messaging that would be tone appropriate for reaching out during the recovery phase, and that would transition as the industry moves into the “next normal.” This creative platform will inform creative development for advertising, promotions, activations, and client and local community outreach.

Platform: The core of our creative platform is “Find Your Moment,” a phrase that serves to inspire the direction and focus of our messaging. In addition to the platform phrase, we have developed sample messaging, guidance on how the platform phrase shapes messages, and how we interpret the phrase for various audiences.

Narrative: These days, we must prepare for travel like never before. Yet, if we’re informed and ready, you can still find those moments that make travel worth it – moments over picnics, moments kayaking, meaningful moments that make us look deeper at ourselves. You can find your moment in the Richmond Region.

OBJECTIVE:

Build engagement and increase visitation by creating and sharing inspirational content that highlights the benefits of the Richmond Region as a leisure, meetings and sports destination.

Consumer Marketing, Advertising and Promotions

OVERVIEW

The Marketing team oversees and executes consumer-facing marketing communications strategies for Visit Richmond. This includes paid marketing initiatives, including advertising, consumer brand activations, sponsorships, promotions and social media.

OBJECTIVES:

- Implement high-level brand awareness campaigns to attract new, repeat and high-yield visitors to the Richmond Region
- Increase share of voice in the Mid-Atlantic, Southeast, East Coast and Midwest among competitive destinations
- Balance interactive and online spend appropriately to reflect media consumption habits and consumer trends (90% interactive with emphasis on top-of-the decision funnel, 10% offline)
- Leverage vast influence of Google and TripAdvisor by significantly expanding scale and scope of partnerships with added value offered through VTC co-ops
- Support industry partners with marketing leverage and other grant program support (consultative and financial) as required and warranted by business goals
- Support M&C and Sports lead generation and enewsletter opt-ins for all RRT departments through targeted advertising, promotions and sweepstakes/contests
- Deploy Visit Richmond's, OutRVA's and BLK RVA's creative campaigns to increase awareness of the Richmond Region as a leisure, meeting, sports and group tour destination. Generate buzz and communicate the destination's unique assets and personality to drive awareness, consideration and visitation to the Richmond Region.

TARGET LEISURE MARKETS:

Millennials, Gen Z and Gen X families seeking getaways and road trips of a few nights, within an eight-hour drive or flight.

Online Marketing

STRATEGY

VisitRichmondVA.com, **OutRVA.com** and **BLKRVA.com** are the online presence of the Richmond Region. These websites serve as a destination portal for leisure visitors, meeting planners, sports promoters, tour operators, industry partners and locals to research things to do, events, attractions, accommodations and meeting facilities. A significant portion of Richmond Region Tourism's advertising budget is dedicated to influencing travel decisions through paid media, original and curated online content, designed to drive traffic to these websites.

OBJECTIVES:

- Position VisitRichmondVA.com as a portal for COVID-safe and post-COVID travel and meeting information
- Position OutRVA.com and BLKRVA.com as the authoritative sources for LGBTQ+ and African American travel information in the Richmond Region
- Develop organic search and paid online marketing strategies to influence higher-funnel consumer travel decisions
- Increase Click Through Rate (CTR) for Search Engine Marketing (SEM) campaigns 2% YoY
- Maintain a healthy ratio of paid vs. organic traffic to the website
- Continue to create new video and photography content for deployment through owned, earned and paid marketing channels
- Utilize ADARA, Arrivalist and TSI analytics platforms to measure leisure travel sentiment to identify and target potential new/emerging markets for online advertising campaigns
- Utilize ADARA and Arrivalist analytics to measure ROI for paid media and the website by capturing in-market arrivals and hotel room-rights-booked data

TOP ORIGIN MARKETS – PAID MEDIA (SOURCE: ADARA)

Ranked in order of return on investment based on hotel revenue generated.

Virginia, Maryland, New Jersey, North Carolina, New York

Research

OVERVIEW

With a limited advertising budget, it is essential that research informs paid campaign strategy tone and budget allocation.

STRATEGIES

The ability to plan for the future has proven challenging in 2021, and RRT has relied upon valuable insights on travel-related sentiment among consumers, meeting planners and local communities. This research, updated weekly, has guided planning, tone and spending across our verticals. These studies will continue to provide valuable insights into traveler profiles, behavior, safety expectations, planning horizons, and satisfaction and tourism promotion ROI.

Advanced online marketing/advertising analytics software such as Arrivalist, ADARA and TSI deployed for the last four years and continuing in FY21-22 enable us to cost-effectively monitor travel sentiment, better target our paid campaigns and track the ROI of our paid and owned marketing programs.

Public Relations

OVERVIEW

Public Relations raises the visibility of the Richmond Region among leisure travelers, meeting planners and sports event directors by generating media coverage that positions the destination as an attractive place to visit or host an event. Recent, relevant accolades demonstrate the value of public relations in promoting destination awareness, even during a pandemic. Here are just a few examples:

- Travel + Leisure: [The 50 Best Places to Travel in 2021](#)
- Thrillist: [Underappreciated American Cities You Should Totally Move To](#)
- Forbes: [10 Reasons Why Richmond, Virginia Is A Hidden Culinary Gem](#)
- The Root: [5 American Cities That Thrive on Black Culture](#)
- Northern Virginia Magazine: [Here's How to Have an Incredible Romantic Getaway in Richmond](#)

OBJECTIVE

- Influence top-of-funnel decision making by positioning the Richmond Region in the media as a welcoming, accessible, creative, delicious, active and hip travel destination.

TACTICS:

- Pitch Richmond Region news, events and story angles to media channels followed by potential visitors
- Host select media and influencers for official media visits, and curate their Richmond region experience
- Establish relationships with key media and influencers through one-on-one meetings, events and conferences
- Research media leads and fulfill media inquiries and image requests

Content Marketing

OVERVIEW

Content marketing spreads the overall marketing message outside the Richmond Region primarily through social media channels and the Visit Richmond blog. Through these platforms, the content marketing function shares news and information about regional attractions, restaurants, local artisans, craft beverages, outdoor activities, festivals and special events. Content marketing also highlights and directs followers to OutRVA, BLKRVA and the Richmond Beer Trail, and serves as a vehicle through which we can engage with visitors and influencers when they are in market.

OBJECTIVES:

- Influence top-of-funnel decision making by promoting Richmond Region attractions, experiences and authentic sense of place
- Attract new followers and engage with current followers by spreading Visit Richmond VA ethos on social media channels

TACTICS:

- Develop captivating content for the Visit Richmond blog and drive traffic by sharing through social media channels
- Leverage enhanced platform features such as Instagram Guides, Highlights, and Stories to redistribute content from the Visit Richmond blog and VisitRichmondVa.com
- Expand reach and attract new followers by developing a Visit Richmond presence on newer social media platforms such as TikTok. Monitor engagement on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google, and Pinterest and adjust priorities as necessary
- Increase short-form video content across all platforms
- Enhance consumer-facing content across Google platforms by uploading new, vibrant images and other fresh, relevant content through our Google DMO Partnership Program/Google Local Guides account
- Create, update and maintain concise, inspirational, personality-focused, optimized copy throughout VisitRichmondVA.com

Creative Services

OVERVIEW

Creative Services manages brand guidelines, standards and messaging for the organization, and oversees the in-house production of creative materials for advertising, social media, promotions, digital communications, and collateral materials for RRT's Sales, Sports, Visitor Experience and Community Relations departments. Creative Services also oversees the production of the annual Visitors Guide, area maps and the Richmond Beer Trail program. Creative Services manages photography shoots and procurement of visual assets from outside providers.

OBJECTIVES:

Influence decisions of leisure travelers, locals and industry clients (planners and promoters) by providing compelling marketing and promotional materials and engaging and informative publications.

Add communication and production value to the work of all internal departments with cross-functional strategy and creative support.

STRATEGIES:

- Ensure brand integrity and cohesion in all design projects.
- Produce a revenue-generating annual Visitors Guide and as-needed guides for Meetings & Conventions and Sports
- Brand consumer activations
- Design digital and/or social media campaigns
- Manage image library
- Art direct photography shoots
- Provide attractive and effective collateral (maps, signage) for inbound and in-market visitors.

- Oversee Richmond Beer Trail program in support of this major consumer marketing initiative.
- Increase the reach of printed publications online with digital tools

VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Department Overview

The professionals of the **Visitor Experience** team connect, communicate, and deliver authentic RVA experiences to local travelers, out-of-town visitors, group tour operators, meeting and convention planners, and meeting and convention attendees. The team's responsibilities are to exceed planner expectations, track group tour bookings, communicate the region's rich experiences to our guests, and maximize out of town dollars spent in businesses throughout the destination. The team will create value-based, customized convention service proposals, incentivize, and create new value to tour operators, leverage the marketing department's campaigns, and bring tourism businesses together to deliver the most authentic RVA experience.

The Visitor Experience department will achieve the following goals to deliver on Richmond Region Tourism's mission statement:

- Collaborate with tourism product providers and developers
- Customize convention service proposals to help planners, associations, and participants reach their goals
- Meet our visitors and guests where they are
- Increase departmental presence with regional stakeholders including hotels, attractions, restaurants, and event service providers
- Become the DMO industry leader in terms of group tour through innovation and value-based deliverables
- Advocate for the visitor and the visitor experience to government and businesses throughout the destination
- Be intentional in our efforts to attract diverse experience providers and diverse visitors
- Exceed visitor expectations

Visitor Interaction

OBJECTIVES:

- Bring destination information to where people gather, festivals and events
- Create innovative wayfinding throughout the destination that will help our visitors navigate the opportunities
- Utilize technology to assist with our visitors' in-market needs and questions
- Reimagine the visitor center experience
- Create useful tools to make the destination more accessible to travelers with disabilities

Group Tour

OBJECTIVES:

- Promote incentives to tour group owners to create a mechanism that will capture room nights, economic impact, and track effectiveness of the program
- Create the industry's best practice for tracking group tour economic impact and room night generation
- Create a group tour welcome center
- Expand group tour opportunity promotions to minority operators

Convention Services

OBJECTIVES:

- 80% response to initial outreach
- 65% post-event survey response rate (industry average is less than 45% according to E-Auto Feedback)
- Develop new signage packages for conventions meeting downtown
- Meet and collaborate with businesses that support conventions
- Purchase a minimum of 50% of goods & services purchased by RRT from minority and women owned businesses
- Generate report to be added to Richmond Region Tourism's Annual Report that visualizes the impact convention services delivers to clients, Richmond Region Tourism, and the destination's economy

Visitor Experience/Tourism Master Plan

OBJECTIVES:

- Adventure Travel and Tourism Association – work with sales team to host Adventure Elevate
- Increase attendance at quarterly attractions meetings: 25 attendees minimum
- Conduct experience gap analysis throughout the region
- Meet with 50% of the experience providers in the region
- Create no less than three objectives to develop experiences and/or enhance current experiences using key results to track progress

DESTINATION SALES

Meetings and Conventions Sales Overview

The Richmond Region Tourism Destination Sales team's goal is to maximize positive impact on the Richmond Region by recruiting and retaining group business.

The department is responsible for attracting, selling and providing outstanding service to meeting, convention group business within the Richmond Region.

OBJECTIVES:

- Execute Sales Strategies that align with Tourism Master Plan
- Key account retention
- Solicit accounts within driving radius
- Maximize Convention Center bookings
- Continue comprehensive B2B Marketing Program to increase client engagement
- Identify and engage key decision makers and influencers in the industry who have the potential to bring meetings the Region and create an awareness of RVA as a safe, affordable destination
- Influence local and regional headquarters to host meetings in the Region
- Enhance the Region's identity and promote its support of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the regional and national multicultural community
- Educate business leaders in the community on tourism role in restating economy through recruitment of business events
- Engage Economic Development agencies on RRT's business events economic sector strategy via the Meaningful Meetings program

SALES STRATEGIES:

- Develop and implement a comprehensive recovery strategy that focuses on reintroducing meeting and convention planners to the Richmond Region, post pandemic, through targeted marketing campaigns, updated print and digital media, new and enhanced convention services, and incentives
- Optimize relationships with hotel partners through increased opportunities participate in traditional and virtual tradeshow partnerships, local and regional sales missions, local and regional industry networking events and educational opportunities (MPI, AMPs, PCMA, DI, SGMP)
- Cultivate relationships with meeting and convention planners in the multicultural and diversity markets through ongoing support and increased sponsorship of NCBMP programming and annual events, leveraging the transformation of Monument Ave., along with strategic and increased presence at industry trade shows like Connect Diversity and Audacity Fest.
- Target hybrid meetings and conventions by partnering with hotels and GRCC to offer incentives.

The meetings and convention sales team continues focusing on recruiting groups to harness collaboration and innovation in the community to strengthen economic recovery.

Meaningful Meetings Program

Project Meaningful Meetings is an economic development plan, initiated and led by Richmond Region Tourism's meetings and convention development team as one of the priorities outlined in the Richmond Region 2030, the Tourism Master Plan.

Meaningful Meetings will utilize business events as a vehicle for economic stimulation and diversification. The program offers strategies that activate the power of business events with the goal of driving economic recovery and renewal.

OBJECTIVES:

- Leverage regional strength and economic sectors by attracting business events aligned with key priorities of the leading industry sectors and economic development goals of the region.
- Focus on Meaningful Meetings by identifying the events that will help Richmond Region promote sector strengths, attract talent and offer economic development opportunities.
- Establish collaborative partnership by creating a community-based taskforce of thought leaders in private and public sectors to assist Richmond Region Tourism in recruiting targeted meetings and conventions.
- Leverage the Richmond Region's position within the regional and global marketplace by concentrate on emerging opportunities in the following sectors:
 - Information Technology
 - Finance and Insurance
 - Bioscience
 - Supply Chain
 - Advanced Manufacturing
 - Food and Beverage
 - Education
 - Sustainability
 - Arts
 - Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

SPORTS

Department Overview

Sports Tourism has been a significant catalyst to the restart and reentry into tourism at large. Community sentiment from Sports Tourism has been largely seen in both economic value and community value. As we emerge from the pandemic, the Sports team will continue to focus on ensuring events are happening safely within our state and local jurisdiction guidelines. The team will work to strengthen both local and national partnerships that will allow the development and growth of local sporting events as well as bring new opportunities to the region. When sports events take place in the region, the team takes pride in delivering first-class service and hospitality.

SALES STRATEGIES

- Enhance the presence of Sports Richmond, VA at national tradeshows by strengthening existing partnerships with TEAMS, Connect Sports, US Sports Congress, and Association of Chief Executives of Sports (ACES) and establishing new partnerships with Sports Events & Tourism Association, Sports Express, and S.P.O.R.T.S Relationship. These strategic partnerships will provide engagement with rights-holders and branding for the Richmond region sports facilities.
- Create a strategic destination collaboration plan for multi-city hosting opportunities.
- Grow partnerships with local universities, colleges, and athletic conferences to enhance collegiate sports championships hosting opportunities.
- Enhance sports diversity by continuing to partner with Compete Sports Diversity, Connect Sports Diversity, Sports Express LGBTQ+, and All in Sports to establish relationships with key rights holders specifically targeting LGBTQ+ sports and adaptive sports planners.
- Host a RVA Sports Field Trip to introduce rights-holders to the region and our world-class facilities.
- Drive economic impact to the region through retaining annual staple events and recruiting new national sporting events with multi-year commitments.
- Advise and support jurisdiction partners with facility enhancement and development projects.

SPORTS SERVICES OBJECTIVES

- Deliver world-class services and hospitality to sporting event organizers.
- Grow the Experience Pass by collaborating with our restaurant and attraction partners on special offers to promote to sports visitors in advance.
- Create unique partnership with attractions partners, like Kings Dominion, in effort to give sports participants an opportunity to have an #RVAMoment outside of competition.
- Promote PlayInRVA.com to all sporting groups and enhance the visitor information provided to sports travelers prior to and during their time in the Richmond region.
- Utilize the @PlayRichmondVA social media accounts (Instagram and Twitter) for social engagement pre-event and during the event.
- Grow local sports media relationships to help with sports events promotion and attendance building.
- Grow database of local service providers, including minority owned businesses, to share with sports event organizers that will help support the execution of their event.