

2020 DESTINATION RECOVERY PLAN

VISIT
ROCHESTER
LIMITLESS

INTRODUCTION + BACKGROUND

In March 2020 the global coronavirus pandemic forced many Monroe County tourism and hospitality businesses to temporarily close their doors. Meetings and events were cancelled or postponed, and most tourism-related functions came to a halt. New York on PAUSE was implemented to protect the public, but the pandemic has undoubtedly caused significant economic distress for the tourism and hospitality industry. Prior to the pandemic, the tourism and hospitality industry employed 20,000 people in Monroe County and has an annual economic impact of more than \$1 billion.

The purpose of this document is to inform our members and community stakeholders of the efforts in which Visit Rochester will deploy to aid in the recovery of Monroe County and as a regional leader in the Finger Lakes as it relates to hospitality and tourism. It will serve as an active working document that will be adapted as we learn more on the reopening of the local and regional economy.

We refer to this document as a roadmap because it tells us where we have been as an organization, and where we anticipate we are heading. While we face many unknowns, we must do our best to anticipate what a recovery will look like, and apply strategic resource management to benefit the community and bolster the return of the tourism and hospitality industry in Monroe County.



MULTI-PHASE RECOVERY + ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSE

ADAPT + REACT (Pre-Recovery, Phase I)

When the pandemic was declared and the travel industry essentially ground to a halt, Visit Rochester pivoted the focus of the organization from bringing visitors into Monroe County to providing resources and support to the Greater Rochester community.

We doubled down on supporting local businesses by:

- Focused on connecting a local audience with those businesses that were still open or providing some kind of service, for example restaurants offering takeout, delivery and curbside pickup.
- Connected with our arts and cultural partners to promote virtual tours and experiences.
- Compiled a list of “fresh air” activities that could be done safely with social distancing considerations.
- Created resources for local families to engage and explore through educational scavenger hunts and a custom coloring page.
- Took on the task of compiling the many good things still happening in Rochester during what is otherwise a challenging time. The latter task fell under the umbrella of Visit Rochester’s Rochester Rising initiative. Also included in this initiative was an inspirational video meant to deliver a message of hope and resiliency to our local community, ***The Flower City Will Bloom Again.***
- All of these activities and resources were heavily promoted across all Visit Rochester social media channels, as well as shared via email with Visit Rochester member businesses.

By pivoting the organization’s focus at the start of the pandemic and “New York State on Pause” period, Visit Rochester was able to serve both the local tourism and hospitality businesses and local residents who were looking for ways to support small and local businesses.

The Visit Rochester Membership department maintained frequent communication and personal outreach to member organizations, providing immediate assessment of member operating status and needs. A decision was made to suspend membership dues until further notice.

The meetings, convention and sports sales/services teams assisted clients working through cancelled events. Additionally, the team has worked with clients to reschedule or postpone events whenever possible. On top of event cancellation mitigation, the sales team has been closely focused on client relationship management and support.

At the start of the pandemic, the organization stopped all paid media, travel and other expenditures and postponed all tourism programming.

Group tours that were scheduled to attend the Lilac Festival were immediately notified of the festival cancellation and our entire tour operator database was sent digital communication with virtual tour ideas to inspire their clients and our message *the flower city will bloom again*.

During the earliest stages of NYS on PAUSE the film office began conversations with producers whose projects were slated to film in the Rochester/Finger Lakes Region in 2020 to accommodate their schedule changes. The Film Office also worked with partners to navigate and apply for Small Business Association Disaster Relief.

REGROUP (Phase II)

During the second phase of the pandemic, Visit Rochester and its industry partners began to acclimate to operating under the “new normal.” During this phase Visit Rochester conducted an economic impact survey of Monroe County tourism partners, continued to update resources available for local businesses, and continued to promote local takeout and delivery options, virtual tours and events, and special promotions around holidays like Easter and Mother’s Day.

Visit Rochester continued to provide regular updates to, and stay connected with, industry partners, including the hosting of the first-ever virtual Visitor Industry Council meeting.

To broaden the support and resources it can provide for the tourism and hospitality community, Visit Rochester launched **“Rise Up with Visit Rochester,”** a new community partner membership program. As our community continues to navigate through these uncertain times, hospitality-related businesses are invited to partner with Visit Rochester and take advantage of a free community partnership. **Rise Up with Visit Rochester** community partners will have access to industry updates and alerts, the opportunity to create and communicate specials and promotions, and a virtual calendar of events.

Visit Rochester also partnered with the New York State Hospitality & Tourism Association to distribute protective masks to Rochester-area hotels and hospitality workers.

The team continued to participate in industry calls and webinars, seeking the latest information on state and federal regulations and guidelines to share with industry partners. Visit Rochester was also represented on regional reopening calls with local leaders.

The meetings and sports sales and services teams continued to provide support for clients and mitigation of cancelled or postponed events. The team also creatively engaged with current and past clients, keeping critical relationships strong. During this uncertain time, the convention and sports services team continued to plan for events scheduled for the fall, along with the sales team fielding leads for 2021 and beyond. Anticipating the opportunity to host displaced athletic events in the fall, the sports sales team developed a number of resources tailored for tournament planners, including a Sports Facilities Playbook.

The Film Office collaborated with a Rochester based partner to develop a “virtual scout” tool that can capture images of a location and deliver 3D architectural drawings of the spaces, and distributed a survey to Rochester-based crew and support services to understand their questions and concerns about reopening the film production industry.

As the restaurant industry has been especially hard hit during the pandemic, Visit Rochester is working on the creation of a digital cookbook featuring a compilation of favorite recipes from area restaurants. It would be a digital download and the funds would be donated back to the local industry.

REOPENING + RECOVERY PLANNING (Phase III) ****Current Phase****

Communication around health and safety measures will be a critical factor for reopening and recovery planning. As businesses begin to reopen, local residents will be the first to navigate the “new normal” of reduced occupancy in restaurants and museums, continuing to practice social distancing and mask wearing and confidence in ongoing cleaning and sanitizing practices. It is important to note that reopening, and any messaging/communications around reopening, will be aligned with New York State’s requirement for safe reopening throughout the Finger Lakes region.

As our region prepares for a safe reopening, Visit Rochester is repurposing our existing 2020 Visitor Industry Council (VIC) committees and task forces to focus on tourism reopening and recovery. We have also created several new segment specific committees, including hotels, restaurants and attractions. Under the structure of the VIC committees, Visit Rochester members are invited to join forces with their fellow members and discuss reopening/recovery strategies, plans, best practices, and more. **These recovery-focused committees will form the blueprint of Visit Rochester’s future recovery messaging, strategies and tactics across audiences.** More details on the repurposed committees and their structure/participants are available on request.

Research and travel industry data tells us that local visitors will be the first to return, followed by regional drive-in markets and eventually, national and international visitors. As such, during the reopening and recovery phase, Visit Rochester will begin to safely promote travel to Rochester once again, using a phased approach to identify appropriate audiences with tailored messaging for each audience.

Event services is exploring virtual tools and add-ons to provide to existing groups who are currently planning to host a program virtually in 2020.

Local promotion and messaging will be organized under the banner of ***“Find Your Flower City.”***

RECOVERY + A RETURN TO TRAVEL (PHASE IV)

As Rochester’s tourism and hospitality features and assets reopen and are ready to once again accept visitors, Visit Rochester will employ a phased approach to market the destination and welcome back visitors responsibly.

Based on insights gained during segment-specific recovery committees, Visit Rochester will explore different marketing messages for separate audiences, with appropriate strategies and tactics. We anticipate providing co-op marketing opportunities for partners, with a focus on regional drive-in markets. We also anticipate a heavy focus on digital marketing and communications, allowing our marketing efforts to be nimble, measurable and highly-targeted.

PRE-RECOVERY + VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENT

During the earliest stages of the travel shutdown, Visit Rochester quickly responded and created a cadre of online resources designed to connect our local community with virtual activities, tours, events and more ways to support local businesses. Development of a digital tool for virtual familiarization tours/site visits for meeting and event planners, tour operators and media is underway. For more details on pre-recovery activities, please see **"Adapt/React (Phase 1)"** above.

LOCAL LIFT: FIND YOUR FLOWER CITY

Industry research indicates that the first audience that will begin to travel in and around Rochester as it is safe to do so will be local residents. We will adopt a hyper-local approach to messaging and content, including itineraries and promotional offers, with the local audience in mind, and will utilize social media, the Visit Rochester website and other owned channels to engage a local audience with the experiences and businesses that are open and eager for their business. This campaign will be organized under the banner of *"Find Your Flower City."*

REGIONAL DISCOVERY

As consumers begin to grow more comfortable with traveling, destinations that do not require getting on a plane will see an uptick of visitation more quickly than those that are long-haul destinations. With this in mind, Rochester is well-positioned to capture the travelers who will be interested in visiting Western New York/the Finger Lakes region. Regional promotional partnerships will be key in driving awareness and visitation with reduced resources.

Visit Rochester will focus marketing efforts on the 3-5 hour and/or 200 mile driving radius, and throughout all of New York State. Messaging will be targeted to core audiences, including family travelers, food and wine enthusiasts and cultural trippers. Experiences that align with these markets will be heavily promoted, along with hotel/attraction packages, itineraries and more. The area of Canada, known as the "Golden Horseshoe," will also be included in regional messaging, but only once borders have reopened.

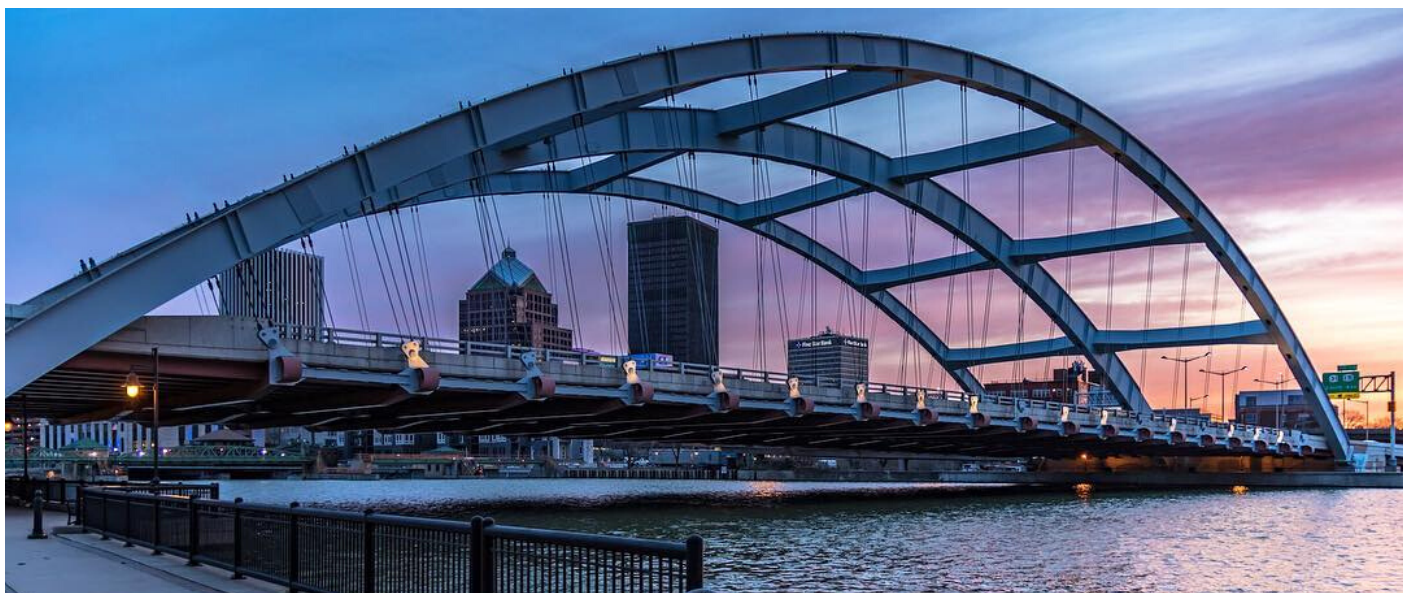
MEETINGS, CONVENTIONS + SPORTS SALES

Client relationship management and growth will prove to be one of the most impactful strategies for rebuilding the conference, convention and competition markets. As state and federal guidelines allow for large groups to once again convene, Visit Rochester will lead with messaging on safety, cleanliness and the comfort of groups meeting in Rochester. Messaging will be deployed digitally and will be tailored for different meeting segments and audiences.

Messaging will reflect that the Visit Rochester team is able to assist with the planning and execution of hybrid meetings and events, which will include both in-person and virtual programming.

RETURN OF NATIONAL + INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

As borders reopen, and as travelers once again feel safe traveling nationally/internationally and by plane, Visit Rochester will be ready to welcome them. International marketing efforts reside under the *Wine, Water and Wonders* program, a co-op created in part by *Corning Museum of Glass*, *Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance*, *Destination Niagara USA*, and *Visit Rochester*. The program is intended to capture the international visitor traveling from New York City to Niagara Falls and encourage them to stop along the way. Expansion over the past year has welcomed new destinations within New York State and a partnership with *Delta Air Lines* as the official air line partner. Efforts will be in concert with that of *I Love New York*.



A high-level summary of individual department activities for recovery.

LEISURE TOURISM

Focus: Use a multi-phased approach to help bolster tourism in Monroe County, and safely promote the return of visitors to area hotels, attractions, restaurants and more.

Tactics

- Please see “**Marketing and Communications Multi-Phased Recovery Outreach**” section above for details on the marketing approach we will implement to drive a safe return of tourism to Rochester and Monroe County. A multi-phased approach will be implemented to target different audiences with tailored messaging based on reopening status of tourism attractions and features.
- Collaborate with regional partners to drive awareness of the Finger Lakes region, the Erie Canalway, Scenic Byways, etc., as being safe places to visit.

MEETINGS + CONVENTION SALES & SERVICES

Focus: Rebook 2020 cancellations and postponements; book new groups that are unable to rebook in original destination.

Tactics

- Work with customers to manage any changes needed to Group & Meeting bookings on a case by case basis. Our hotels are actively supporting groups and meeting organizers to address the needs of each group, including moving event dates, in line with terms and conditions of that booking.
- Foster collaboration among NYSDMOs on a Regional rebooking recovery program. New York State is one the hardest hit states during the COVID -19 pandemic. The road to recovery will be longer in certain regions across the state. Keeping a group or meeting within the state is priority.
- Collaborate with hoteliers to collect new reopening standards and new standard operating procedures. Incorporate responses and data into the destination sales convention strategies; as this is a key concern for meeting planners. Communicating that Rochester, NY is open for business and ensuring meeting attendees will remain safe while visiting and our hotels and venues are following proper protocol.
- Tradeshows will be attended only when safe to do so and on a slow pace for return. Utilize past show reports to connect with specific market segments.
- Educate hotel partners and meeting venues on new hybrid meeting trends, communicate new technology needs that hotels and facilities must have in order to participate in transformed meetings market.
- Identify ways to service virtual meetings that plan to host future meetings in the Rochester area. Reinventing service offerings to increase assistance with attendance building, and other detailed planner needs.

ROCHESTER, NY SPORTS COMMISSION

Focus: Contact outreach utilizing the Sports Facility Playbook targeting events that are looking for a new home, as demand for facilities is compressed into a shorter calendar.

Tactics

- Support the recovery of sports following the Visit Rochester sales recovery strategies and develop specific recovery methods for each sector.
- Understand and aim to help parents, coaches, administrators, educators and other stakeholders respond to challenges presented by the virus.
- Ensure all sports can return to normal as soon as possible following the Covid-19 outbreak. To do this we need to work closely with organizations to understand and communicate appropriate guidelines for sports in accordance with Monroe County and New York State.
- Hotel business plans and budgets have changed. Some hotels that didn't pursue sports business in the past and may now be reconsidering. Work with clients to understand and evaluate what makes the most sense for utilizing shared facilities.
- Develop and implement a virtual site visit: A very valuable tool, they give first-hand insight into the places and personalities that will put your tournament funds to work. In-person visits are always best, because they allow you to tour facilities, see programs in action, and observe operations at work. This amenity must be accessible to event planners not able to travel.
- Monitor the return of "tournacations," health checks, sanitation policies, spectator caps and allowing participants from "hot spots," will all need to be outlined and incorporated into the destination sales process.

PUBLIC RELATIONS + DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS

Focus: Increase brand awareness and engagement of Visit Rochester's digital platforms (website, social media and email marketing), and use these platforms to message when the time is right that Rochester is ready to welcome visitors. Actively engage multiple stakeholders in the organization's recovery process, including the media.

Tactics

- Create a wide range of content for Visit Rochester's website and social media channels that promotes Rochester's tourism features for both a local and prospective traveler audience.
- Continue to develop Rochester Rising initiative and capture uplifting and good news stories to use in web and social content, as well as proactive pitching to media.
- Engage member-based committees for Public Relations and Social Media/Digital Communications to collaborate with partners on recovery messaging and strategy.
- Support other departments with content creation and messaging needs, including meeting and conventions sales, leisure tourism, membership and visitor services.
- Partner with other departments on the development of a virtual site visit tool for future media familiarization tours.

GROUP TOUR + TRAVEL TRADE

Focus: Through the work of the Group Tour and Travel Trade VIC Committee, recovery efforts will focus on efforts to keep Rochester top of mind as a preferred destination and stopover for future travel trade and group tour programs.

Tactics

- Hosting a phone blitz to our 350+ tour operator contacts to survey about current impact of COVID-19 on their organization and what their business recovery looks like, and how we can assist them moving forward. This will be done on a state by state basis, beginning with New York due to varying social distancing measures and regulations.
- Identifying healthy and safety expectations of tour operators as they resume group travel.
- Develop a virtual sales mission program, complete with a pre-shipment discovery and sensory basket to guide the client through the call. This will replace in-person sales missions until further notice.

MEMBERSHIP

Focus: Solidify personal relationships with the hospitality community in Rochester and the Finger Lakes region and ensure that Visit Rochester is seen as a trusted leader and resource in the industry. Expand awareness and engagement of Visit Rochester benefits and programs.

Tactics

- **Rise Up Community Partner Program** – Continue to cultivate new potential members for community partner program to support the local businesses, develop relationships and awareness of Visit Rochester with the ultimate goal of growing our membership program.
- **VIC Steering Committee Engagement & Virtual Visitor Industry Council Meeting** – Initiate bi-weekly Zoom Meetings with Steering Committee to plan for enhanced member engagement through the pandemic. Continue planning and executing virtual Visitor Industry Council meetings (VIC), drawing 150+ attendees each month.
- **Repurposed VIC Committees and Task Forces** – Repurposed existing VIC committees comprised of Visit Rochester members and staff liaisons to focus on industry recovery and planning. Also established new segment-specific committees for hotels, attractions and museums, and restaurants. Repurposed committees will support each segment of our membership to provide a forum of peers to network, share best practices, and will position Visit Rochester leaders in the industry.
- **Member Engagement** – Continued engagement with our members to assess their needs, how to best support them and their future business plans as we move into recovery will be critical.
- **Membership Dues Suspended** – Visit Rochester suspended the collection of membership dues for the immediate future. We anticipate many individual conversations to work out a plan that works for our members and Visit Rochester. This strategy is in line with other CVB's from across the country.

VISITOR SERVICES

Focus: Safely communicate with visitors and locals alike; enhancing their experiences in Rochester and the Finger Lakes region and encouraging them to revisit often.

Tactics (Pending removal of travel restrictions)

- Mass distribution of the 2020 EXPLORE guide (over 250 locations in and outside of Monroe County).
- Re-opening of visitor centers with new health and safety procedures in place
- Identify additional local high traffic areas to communicate the benefit of exploring Rochester and the Finger Lakes region

ROCHESTER/FINGER LAKES FILM + VIDEO OFFICE

Focus: Attract film productions to return to Rochester, or to select Rochester for new projects, bring back the important economic impact of film production in Rochester and the Finger Lakes. Film production is an important part of the New York State economy, and will play a critical role in its economic recovery.

Tactics

- Initiated a new program with specific NYC partners to attract production spending and to address significant changes to the NYS film tax credit that impact eligibility for some productions. These partners will recommend the Rochester/Finger Lakes region to filmmakers whose productions no longer qualify for the tax credit if they film in NYC.
- Continuing talks with productions whose schedules have been impacted by NYS PAUSE, including:
 - TV series that is filming at Steiner Studios in NYC: tentative plan to relocate to a 12K space in Rochester, rebuild sets and utilize various exteriors as well.
 - Feature length film that was scouted virtually during NYS PAUSE utilizing both interiors and exteriors.
- Continue conversations with producers who are slated to film in the Rochester/Finger Lakes Region in 2020 to accommodate schedule changes.
- Continue to offer “virtual scouting” experiences to prospective filmmakers and content creators.
- Maintain communication with content creators, NYS Film Office, NYPA, AFCEI, IATSE, OSHA, EP, NYC partners and Rochester based film business partners to assess status of and opportunities for the industry.