



**ROWAN COUNTY TOURISM
PROPOSED BUDGET AND PROGRAM OF WORK**

FISCAL YEAR 2023-2024

2023-2024 ROWAN COUNTY TOURISM BUDGET MESSAGE: MAY 17, 2023

Rowan County Tourism Board of Directors:

The Rowan County Tourism staff is honored to submit a proposed program of work, strategic direction and operating budgets for the Rowan County Tourism Authority and Salisbury-Rowan County Convention and Visitors Bureau for fiscal year 2023-2024. The work plan and budgets focus on fostering growth and development in the Rowan County Tourism and Hospitality Sector. As of May 2023, the local tourism economy has fully recovered from the COVID pandemic and has exceeded pre-pandemic levels.

Rowan County Tourism is County-wide in scope and its efforts are directed towards fostering economic growth in tourism through the development and promotion of Rowan County's tourism industry, tourism-related businesses, organizations and all sections and communities of Rowan County. Rowan County Tourism deploys strategies, tactics and programs that seek to increase visitation and grow annual visitor expenditures in Rowan County.

County tourism efforts organize and tell Rowan County's original story, promote, and encourage visitor expenditures and to assemble and disseminate information designed to further develop Rowan County's market position with visitors.

For fiscal year 2023-2024 Rowan County Tourism seeks to expand product development and capital investment in line with the Rowan Tourism capital plan and focus on sales and marketing reach, attracting overnight visitors and telling the County's brand story. The proposed budget seeks to provide capacity to manage and implement the expectations and goals of the Tourism Board: launch capital investments, deploy effective marketing, provide partner support, launch new tourism product, and foster economic growth in tourism.

Key areas identified by the Tourism Board for focus in 2023-24:

- Sales and marketing to support increased economic activity, overnight stays, returning and growing group business and greater engagement with tourism partners.
- Allocate resources to tourism development and capital investments through a continuation and expansion of the Rowan County Tourism Industry Master Plan and dedicate increased resources for partnerships with tourism-related businesses and organizations.
- Further emphasis on digital marketing, packages, and incentive travel to drive overnight stays.
- Resources to support tourism partners and community relations.
- Implementation of tourism-related capital projects.



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2023-2024
MARKETING, COMMUNICATIONS AND
VISITOR SERVICES PROGRAM OF WORK

2023-2024 OBJECTIVES AND GOALS

- Continue to drive visitation by promoting the Rowan County brand through destination marketing and digital avenues to reach a regional audience.
- Emphasize Rowan County key attractions and events to boost and promote overnight visitation.
- Foster relationships between key Rowan County tourism partners and their events to create destination awareness to strengthen existing success and expand the tourism market.
- Develop consistent regional marketing through an avenue of outlets.
- Promote and continue programming of the F&M Bank Historic Trolley System through visitor services and digital avenues.
- Manage and maintain relationships with existing and potential groups hosting events and making group accommodations in Rowan County lodging properties.
- Continue to increase engagement within the destination and expand communication with partners and communities.

DESTINATION AWARENESS MARKETING

Destination Awareness Marketing will be completed throughout the year to attract new and returning visitors to Rowan County. Marketing will be done through numerous avenues to keep Rowan County top of mind and encourage overnight stays.

- Destination marketing campaigns will be implemented through multiple avenues to entice travelers to Visit Rowan County. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, lifestyle blogs and digital influencers will be utilized to create highly visual messaging to show original experiences and invite visitors to Rowan County for destination experiences, seasonal attractions, and special events.
- Destination co-op programs will be completed with tourism partners to make special events known throughout the region, attracting visitors and overnight stays. Using our online events calendar and submission process, social media, and our lifestyle blog, we will be able to tell the story of special events happening in Rowan County throughout the year.
- Play a central role in advocacy in promoting Rowan County as a destination for overnight travel, as well as business travel to promote community growth. This will be accomplished through marketing programs such as stay and play packages, as well as through group sales efforts.
- Promote Rowan County as a destination with a rich array of original destination experiences with personalized options for our visitors and overnight travelers. This will be accomplished through a mixture of digital and traditional marketing, and the use of our new photo asset library. These tools will allow us to tell highly visual stories to specific target audiences about destination assets, experiences and events awaiting them.

- Stay and Play Packages will be offered in conjunction with tourism partners to promote overnight stays in Rowan County in exchange for various incentive options related to their stay with an objective of booking at least 525 packages, totaling 775 room nights.
- Continue offering support to partners and their events through the Tourism Support Program that fosters hospitality, lodging and overnight event packages with an objective of supporting at least 14 applications, totaling 1,000 room nights.
- Continue to develop up-to-date visual assets that promote the destination.
- Utilize influencers to make larger, existing audiences aware of Rowan County as a destination.
- Continue to expand partner relationships and site visits to enhance marketing and organization awareness.

DIGITAL MARKETING & INFRASTRUCTURE

Digital Marketing will continue to support and enhance the larger Destination Marketing Plan for Rowan County. Digital Marketing will be accomplished using VisitRowanCountyNC.com website and blog, Visit Rowan County social media platforms, e-Newsletters and Google Ads.

- Encourage two-way conversation and engagement through Visit Rowan County social media platforms to connect with customers through all stages of their experiences in Rowan County.
- Maintain and increase lifestyle blogs for distribution through VisitRowanCountyNC.com and Visit Rowan County social media platforms to inform visitors of original attractions and experiences awaiting them in Rowan County. These blogs present highly customized content about the destination to potential audiences. Three to four blogs will be produced monthly, with an objective to reach at least 42 content rich blogs within the year.
- Continue to optimize VisitRowanCountyNC.com through Search Engine Optimization (SEO) for easy navigation and a visitor-friendly experience in finding information about attractions, restaurants, special offers, lodging accommodations and more. A continued investment in SEO will focus on:
 - creates organic search traffic.
 - generates leads cost effectively.
 - increases brand awareness.
 - optimizes our website for mobile users.
- Use hotel online booking platform as a tool to improve:
 - visitor experiences while booking lodging and to increase overnight stays at local hotels, by making it convenient and easy to book in the same place they are browsing for information.
 - online package booking process to improve overnight stay packages and expand future package opportunities, by eliminating steps from the original process making it faster and easier to participate in the package program and drive overnight stays.

- partnerships with local destinations and communities by expanding the online booking platform in connection to partner websites to grow online bookings. This affiliate program allows partners to place the booking widget and/or customized booking landing pages to their website for their users to book hotels directly through our website.
- online booking rates with a set objective for calendar year 2024 of at least 450 reservations (+5.3%) and 600 room nights (+8.3%) for increases over the 2022 calendar year.
- Continue to promote Rowan County attractions and special events using Google Pay Per Click to reach a larger audience on multiple websites who may be searching for destinations or events that can be found in Rowan County.
- Utilize visitor and website data collected in comprehensive destination dashboards to make informed targeted decisions for digital marketing efforts. Data will drive customized marketing initiatives that appeal directly to what our users are looking at and searching for, which will result in most effective marketing spends with the highest returns on investment.
- Digital Marketing efforts will focus on presenting consistent, compelling content that displays an original destination experience by focusing on purposefully curated experiences from our destination. We will create highly visualized experiences using new photography assets, short form video, lifestyle blogs, storytelling of people and places, and event promotion.
- Continue to refresh and update partner listings by expanding on current partner relationships to keep content relevant and up to date.
- Significant progress has been made in the first 6 months of Rowan County Tourism’s third-party influencer engagement program. Third-party influencer relationships will continue to grow as a way to promote Rowan County as a destination, and to expand social media reach to our target market through influencer’s existing follower reach and platforms. Our objective is to continue engaging additional third-party influencers to obtain at least 3,000,000 views and 300,000 engagements in the 2024 calendar year.

BRANDING / PR

Rowan County Tourism will continue to promote and foster the countywide, Be an Original, branding initiative. Rowan County Tourism will continue to promote our own brand, as well as our key assets that make our county a destination for travelers and overnight guests.

- All promotional materials, traditional and digital, will follow brand guidelines and stand as good representation of the Visit Rowan County brand. The Be an Original tagline will serve as the basis of all marketing and branding.
- Protect Rowan County’s assets by presenting a cohesive look and feel, promoting an original experience. Presenting an original brand image will influence travel decisions and help attract visitors seeking a deep and transformative experience in Rowan County.
- Visit key partners to keep open line of communication, strengthen partner relationships and encourage the “Be an Original” brand.
- Inform community stakeholders of updates in the Rowan County tourism industry through quarterly email newsletters.

- Email newsletters will include tourism information, such as: changes in the industry, tourism impacts on the community, tourism business impacts, highlighting an employee in the tourism/hospitality sector.
- Use cohesive storytelling to produce press releases to send to local media to promote Rowan County tourism.
- Rowan County Tourism will promote the Be an Original brand and continue to uphold the well-being of the tourism/hospitality industry by:
 - Building and advocating for tourism in Rowan County.
 - Highlighting standout employees of the tourism/hospitality sector.
 - Focusing on tourism partner location and events.
 - Incorporating digital marketing, such as: email newsletters, social media, and short form video.

GROUP SALES

Continuous efforts will be made to work with groups and organizations wishing to make large group arrangements in Rowan County lodging properties. Rowan County Tourism staff will work alongside groups to support and help them prepare for their event and assist with implementation.

- Staff will maintain and protect current group relationships, as well as foster new group relationships to attract tournaments, conferences, events and more to Rowan County to be catalysts for economic development.
- Continue to place emphasis on market segmentation to attract distinct groups to our destination. Avoid promotion that suggests Rowan County has something for everyone, but rather promote what original experiences it has to offer for individual groups. This will allow for highly curated and customized destination content that caters individual certain types of groups. Past examples of groups that Rowan County Tourism catered to original experiences for individual groups include:
 - RPCA: Rail Passenger Car Alliance
 - Boar Goat Association
 - Inspire National Dance
 - SmokeOut
- Staff will maintain communication between Rowan County lodging properties to make them aware of groups visiting the county.
- Staff will maintain follow-up communication after groups visit Rowan County.
- Offering customized support based on individual group needs.

- Combine PR and Group Sales efforts to communicate to community stakeholders through internal email marketing the recruitment of potential group leads by promoting hotels, meeting locations, trolleys, etc.

VISITOR SERVICES

Traditional visitor services will continue to be offered through the Rowan County Visitors Center. Visitors can request brochures to be mailed or stop in for additional information on attractions.

- Distribute collateral pieces to promote the destination. Develop new pieces as need be.
- Continue to accommodate visitor requests for materials to be mailed.
- Provide a visitor friendly atmosphere by assisting with questions about attractions, directions, events and more.
- Visitor center staff will continue to maintain the visitors center and Paul E. Fisher Gateway Building, as well as continue to meet the needs of those visitor the Gateway Building either as visitors or meeting attendees.

TROLLEYS

The F&M Bank Trolley System will continue to be used as a destination experience for tours, weddings, groups and more.

- Maintain and explore the increase of F&M Bank Trolley System programming and thematic tours by creating new tours by integrating community partnerships, such as: theatrical tours, history tours, holiday tours and urban trends
 - Implement a 12- 18-month plan to promote original tours. Tours will be ticketed per person and developed through strategic partnerships.
- Continue communication and relationships between the Trolley System and partners, such as: F&M Bank and Novant Health.
- Continue to emphasize trolleys for private group rentals through digital marketing, such as social media and online magazine platforms.

OVERARCHING MARKETING TRENDS

Rowan County Tourism marketing team will stay abreast to current overarching marketing trends in the tourism industry.

- Influencers & Microinfluencers will be used to reach expansive audiences readily available to them via their own existing platforms. Third-party influencers are currently the best story tellers in the digital marketing and communications space, and they can share the message of our destination authentically and organically.
- Simplicity in hotel booking creates a desirable visitor experience by making their stay seamless and enjoyable from start to finish. Allowing them to book in the same place they are searching for

things to do and places to eat, makes our website a one stop destination for all things Rowan County.

- Promoting the destination experience, rather than the benefits allows us to connect with visitors emotionally. Telling them the story of our destination makes them want to come and make the same lasting memories with their families and loved ones.
- Promoting original experiences, rather than suggesting Rowan County has something for everyone allows us to appeal most deeply to our target audience. We strive to attract visitors that will enjoy their visit and return to the area. Showing them authentic, real-life experiences help them picture themselves in the destination.
- Family travel is our most important focus due to our target market's heavy emphasis on families. Our destination provides countless, original experiences for families. This can include parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren, or any type of family dynamic.
- Destination engagement is important to our overall communication plan for our destination to appear united and engaged with one another. A destination where it's neighbors, businesses and attractions come together provides community and is appealing to visitors and locals alike.
- Storytelling and positive branding elicit emotional responses from visitors striving for experiences like what Rowan County has to offer. Telling the story of our destination helps visitors picture themselves here and portraying a positive view of the destination gives them incentive to come visit and learn more for themselves.