

ROWAN COUNTY TOURISM 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 the 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 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:
 - o creates organic search traffic.
 - o generates leads cost effectively.
 - o increases brand awareness.
 - o 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.

- o 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:
 - o Building and advocating for tourism in Rowan County.
 - Highlighting standout employees of the tourism/hospitality sector.
 - Focusing on tourism partner location and events.
 - o 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:
 - o RPCA: Rail Passenger Car Alliance
 - Boar Goat Association
 - o 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
 - o 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.

1,391,000

0

Total Expenses

Difference

1,013,600

0

1,761,000

0

2,036,000

0

2,211,000

0

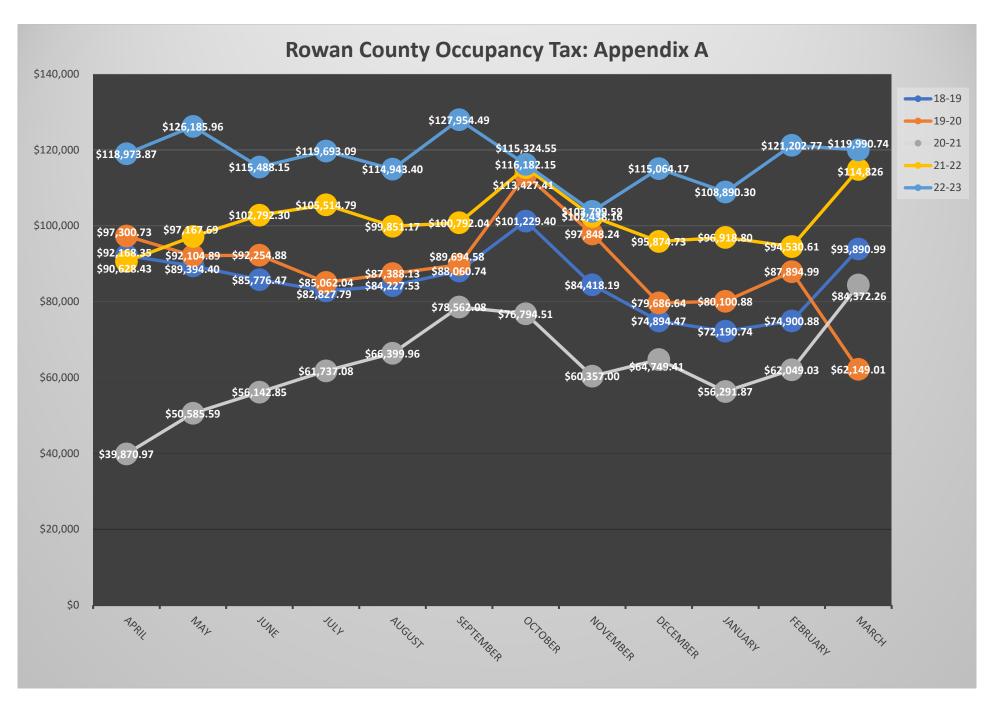
Revenues	FY19-20	FY20-21	FY21-22	FY22-23	FY23-24	Budget Notes
Occupancy Tax	1,175,000	800,000	925,000	1,280,000	1,400,000	Projected occupancy tax figure is based on FY22-23 actuals with a reduction from 22-23 actuals due to uncertainty in the economy (both positive and negative factors) impacting travel.
Partner Services	33,000	57,000	57,000	40,000	60,000	Revenues from partners in the Gateway for shared services provided through Tourism in the Gateway and cooperative partner programs. Services include phone, data, server and Gateway front desk staff support. Increase from FY22 23 due to increase in usage of services.
Holiday Caravan Parade	30,000	40,000	40,000	50,000	50,000	Revenues from the Holiday Caravan Parade. Rowan Tourism will continue to support the Parade by processing the Parade's fiscal transactions. No occupancy tax revenues will be utilized for supporting the Parade, only Parade revenues and Parade funds are utilized to cover Parade expenses.
Miscellaneous	3,000	600	1,000	1,000	1,000	
Gateway Building	90,000	110,000	110,000	110,000	134,000	Revenues from leases and meeting space rentals in the TDA owned Gateway building. Lease increases schedulded for 7-1-23, 7-1-24 and 7-1-25.
Tourism ARPA Funding			595,000	500,000	500,000	ARPA funds approved in 22-23 for wayfinding allocation in 23-24
Interest Income					6,000	
Trolley	60,000	6,000	33,000	55,000	60,000	Revenues from trolley tours, rentals, sponsorships & ticketed events.

Total Revenue 1.391.000 1,013,600 1,761,000 2,036,000 2,211,000 Expenses Marketing & Visitor Services **Budget Notes** Tourism funding to the CVB (501c6). Funding for marketing, communications, public relations, visitor services, tourism staff, branding, Trolley programming and CVB operations; per the TDA-CVB Memorandum of Understanding and operating structure since FY2016-17. CVB Appropriation 900,000 700,000 910,000 1,045,000 1,100,000 Allocates \$250,000 from occupancy tax (18%) to product development. Decrease from FY22-23 due to one-time ARPA County funds for wayfinding. 190,000 77,500 420,000 700,000 750,000 Tourism Development Program was one time in FY21-22. No proposed funding for 23-24 Lodging ARP Support 100.000 Propose no special allotment in budget to reserves. 100,000 **Tourism Operating Reserves** Expenses associated with the Holiday Caravan Parade, expenditures are approved by the Parade Committee/Organizers. Rowan Tourism will continue to support the Parade by processing the Parade's fiscal transactions. No occupancy tax revenues will be utilized for supporting the Parade, only Parade revenues and funds to be used to cover Parade expenses. 30.000 60.000 40.000 50.000 50.000 Holiday Caravan Parade Operational costs for Gateway (maintenance, janitorial, utilities, repairs, service agreements, operating reserves and property & liability insurance). 80,000 100,000 Gateway Building 80,000 90,000 134,000 Expenses paid on behalf of partners in the Gateway building specifically for shared services provided through the TDA (any expenses coded to CVB are ncluded in CVB operating budget). 24,000 10,000 10,000 25,000 25,000 Partner Services Trolley related expenses specific to ownership costs related to the trolley (maintenance, repairs, tags, insurance) Trolley 24,000 5,000 10,000 10,000 10,500 Supplies & Equipment 6,500 4,000 4,000 5,000 4,000 5,000 2,500 Miscellaneous 4.100 4,000 2.400 Total Marketing & Visitor Services 1,259,500 940,600 1,688,000 1,937,400 2,076,000 Operations & Administration **Budget Notes** 89,500 46,000 46,000 81,100 117,000 Staffing (payroll, taxes, benefits) Annual insurance premiums for workers comp. and board liability. Property Workers Comp and Liab. Ins. 12,000 12,000 12,000 2,500 3,000 iability now included in Gateway line item. Accounting, legal and audit services for TDA. Professional Services 30,000 15,000 15,000 15,000 15,000 Total Operations & Admin. 131,500 73,000 73,000 98,600 135,000

Rowan Tourism: Operational categories as a percentage of budget

	Fiscal Year				
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Core Budget	\$1,391,000	\$1,013,600	\$1,166,000	\$1,512,600	\$1,711,000

Budget Category	Amount	Percent of Budget	Amount	Percent of Budget						
Tourism Staffing	\$564,600	40.6%	\$420,000	41.4%	\$506,000	43.4%	\$566,600	37.5%	\$706,500	41.3%
Sales & Marketing	\$420,400	30.2%	\$270,400	26.7%	\$353,400	30.3%	\$470,000	31.1%	\$437,000	25.5%
Programs & Services	\$175,600	12.6%	\$188,600	18.6%	\$172,800	14.8%	\$232,000	15.3%	\$269,000	15.7%
Tourism Development	\$190,000	13.7%	\$77,500	7.6%	\$70,000	6.0%	\$200,000	13.2%	\$250,000	14.6%
Administrative	\$40,400	2.9%	\$57,100	5.6%	\$63,800	5.5%	\$44,000	2.9%	\$48,500	2.8%



Totals: 2017 - \$927,805.27 2018 - \$1,023,979.95 2019 - \$1,064,912.42 2020 - \$757,912.61 2021 - \$1,216,659.27 2022 - \$1,408,368.68

General Budget Allocation	FY 2023-24	
-		Budget Notes
Capital Funding	250,000.00	Appropriation from CVB General Budget.
ARPA Funding	500,000.00	One time ARPA grant from Rowan County.
Total	750,000.00	
Expenses		Budget Notes (Expenses)
Rowan Countywide Wayfinding System	500,000.00	Countywide wayfinding system to be paid for with one time ARPA funding. Estimated project completion in FY 23-24.
Railwalk Project	115,000.00	Development of alleyway connecting Arts District to Farmer's Market Pavillion. Total project cost and start of project to be determined in fall 2023 Resources allocated towards proposed project.
Agritourism Adventure	115,000.00	Resources allocated towards concept approved by Board of Directors.
Capital Reserves	20,000.00	Unallocated funds for additional or future projects.
Total Marketing & Visitor Services	750,000.00	
Difference	0.00	

Rowan County CVB Fiscal Year 2023-24 Budget

Revenue						
	FY19-20	FY20-21	FY21-22	FY22-23	FY23-24	Notes
Tourism Support, Marketing-Visitors Services	900,000	700,000	865,000	1,045,000	1,100,000	Budget allocation from TDA.
						Digital ad revenues from website
Cooperative Marketing Partnerships	57,000	0	0	5,000	5,000	partnership program.
Miscellaneous	1,000	0	1,200	1,000	1,500	
Total Revenue	958,000	700,000	866,200	1,051,000	1,106,500	
Marketing and Visitor Services						
marketing and visitor Services						
						Includes all sales, marketing and package
						programs. In addition to digital, social, sponsorships and group sales. See
Sales, Marketing and Communications	360,000	184,000	267,000	468,000	437,000	appendix B for greater detail.
						Wages for all CVB staff and trolley drivers (6 FTE's and 4 PT Drivers). Includes
						funding for new FT marketing position,
CVP Staff Warran	360,000	300,000	360,000	400,000	460,000	flexibility for COLA increases and merit and increases for trolley drivers
CVB Staff Wages	360,000	300,000	360,000	400,000	460,000	increases for trolley drivers
Rowan County Branding/Dig. Inf. Loan	86,400	86,400	86,400	0	0	Branding loan retired in FY21-22.
						Trolley program costs for operating
Trolley	12,000	3,000	10,000	10,000	11,000	(marketing and fuel costs). Visitor Center lease, visitor center materials
Visitor Center & Office Rent	27,000	27,000	19,200	20,000	23,500	and tourism office lease.
Professional Development	5,600	3,600	3,600	6,000	7,000	Continuing education & board meetings.
Miscellaneous	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	
Total Marketing & Visitor Services	852,000	605,000	747,200	905,000	939,500	
Administration						
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Office Supplies	4,000	4,000	4,000	4,000	4,000	
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Payroll Taxes	28,000	23,000	28,000	31,000	33,000	Includes all benefits, retirement (with
Employee Benefits	72,000	54,000	75,000	96,000	110,000	approved increase by Board) health ins. Life, AD and ancillary.
Liab. Insurance Coverages	2,000	2,000	0	3,000	5,000	Workers comp, officer and board liability
Professional Services	0	12,000	12,000	12,000	15,000	Accounting, audit and legal fees
Total Operations	106,000	95,000	119,000	146,000	167,000	
	,	•	•	•	•	
Total Expenses	958,000	700,000	866,200	1,051,000	1,106,500	
Difference	0	0	0	0	0	

Rowan County Tourism Fiscal Year 2023-2024 Destination Marketing Program Budget Appendix B

General Budget Allocation	FY 2023-24	
		Budget Notes
Destination Marketing Program Funding	437,000.00	Appropriation from CVB General Budget.
Total	437,000.00	
Expenses		Budget Notes (Expenses)
Direct Support Programs	75,000.00	Marketing funds to support packages for Day Out With Thomas, Polar Express, NCTM and other direct overnight and package programs.
Tourism Partner Support Funds	44,000.00	Tourism marketing funds allocated for tourism partner support requests and sponsorships that adhere to and meet funding requirements for support funds as outlined by Rowan County Tourism.
Tourism Digital Infrastructure and Marketing	194,000.00	Includes unallocated funds for utilization of general digital marketing, including: website, social media paid promotion, influencer program, PPC, all digital infrastructure, SimpleView (including: website, CMS, CRM, enewsletters, blogs, database and data) and telecommunications.
Tourism Partner Program Support	124,000.00	Funds for utilization on collateral production, brand marketing, partner engagement, fulfillment costs, general marketing, production costs brand marketing, group sales and overnight event support.
Total Marketing & Visitor Services	437,000.00	
Difference	0.00	