
**VISIT
ROWAN COUNTY**

NORTH CAROLINA

Be an original.®

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

FISCAL YEAR 2025-2026



Rowan County Tourism: 2025-2026 Program of Work

Goals & Objectives



Destination Promotion

Drive visitation through targeted destination marketing, digital channels and implementation of new tourism products to reach regional audiences.



Tourism Partnerships

Foster relationships with key tourism partners to create destination awareness, strengthen existing success, and expand the tourism market.



Overnight Visitation

Emphasize key attractions, events, and Stay & Play packages to boost and promote extended stays in Rowan County.



Destination Development

Complete current capital projects and initiate new infrastructure and placemaking efforts to enhance visitor experiences and support tourism growth.

Additional objectives include maintaining regular communication with media members, promoting the F&M Bank Historic Trolley System, managing relationships with groups hosting events, increasing community engagement, and maintaining the Paul E. Fisher Gateway Building as a professional environment through proactive maintenance and planned renovations.

Destination Marketing & Digital Infrastructure

Multi-Platform Marketing

Execute year-round destination awareness campaigns across Facebook, Instagram, X, lifestyle blogs and through digital influencers to highlight Rowan County's original experiences. These highly visual, story-driven campaigns will promote seasonal attractions, signature events, and unique local offerings with the goal of achieving a 10% annual increase in digital engagement and reaching at least 1 million impressions annually.

- Develop co-op marketing with tourism partners to amplify awareness of unique events
- Create Stay & Play Packages targeting 575 bookings (835 room nights)
- Support at least 25 partners annually through the Tourism Support Program

Digital Growth Targets

Enhance digital infrastructure to support overall marketing strategy with specific performance targets for 2025:

- 532,000 website pageviews (+3.55%) and 237,000 users (+5.55%)
- Grow social media following to 47,000 (+6.19%) across platforms
- Secure influencer content partnerships generating 2.5M+ views
- Publish 95+ blog posts with 60,900 views (+17.4%)
- Increase booking platform conversions to 600 reservations (+9.96%)

Digital marketing efforts will focus on SEO enhancements, content optimization, influencer partnerships, and reallocation of resources from underperforming channels to high-ROI strategies.

Branding, PR & Group Sales



Be an Original™ Brand

Adhere to established brand guidelines across all materials to ensure consistency and brand integrity while using the brand as the cornerstone of all messaging.



Partner Engagement

Make 65+ partner visits to strengthen relationships, distribute quarterly stakeholder newsletters, and develop compelling press releases to generate media coverage.



Group Travel

Cultivate strategic partnerships targeting groups aligned with Rowan County's authentic assets, providing customized support for venue recommendations, logistics, and hospitality.



Coordinated Promotion

Align group sales with PR efforts to communicate recruitment efforts, bookings, meeting locations, and trolley services to stakeholders.

The Be an Original™ brand will continue to position Rowan County as a distinctive destination while championing the vitality of the local tourism industry. Through robust digital marketing, story-driven content, and strategic partnerships, these efforts aim to foster destination pride, industry recognition, and increased visitation from both leisure and group travelers.

Visitor Services & Trolley Operations

Enhanced Visitor Center Experience

Rowan County Tourism will continue providing comprehensive visitor services through both traditional and digital channels. Key initiatives include:

- Annual evaluation of print and digital collateral to explore consolidation opportunities
- Launch of a fully digital downtown Salisbury walking tour with interactive map integration
- Installation of user-friendly digital lobby displays
- Maintaining quick fulfillment of visitor inquiries by mail and email
- Complete renovation of the Visitors Center lobby by the end of 2025

Staff will ensure a welcoming environment with accurate information on attractions, events, and points of interest while supporting the operational oversight of both the Visitors Center and the Paul E. Fisher Gateway Building.

F&M Bank Trolley System

The trolley system will continue as a premier destination experience for tours, weddings, private groups, and special events with ambitious growth targets:

- Expanding themed programming through theatrical, history, holiday, and urban-themed tours
- Strengthening partnerships with key stakeholders like F&M Bank and Novant Health
- Targeting 200 private rentals for the year (8.7% increase)
- Implementing targeted digital marketing campaigns to promote trolley services

Through strategic programming and partnerships, the trolley system aims to increase overall ridership and engagement while serving as a unique attraction that differentiates Rowan County's visitor experience.

Marketing Trends & Destination Development

Evolving Marketing Strategies

Rowan County Tourism will align with emerging industry trends to enhance brand visibility and strengthen its position as a leading regional destination:

- Leveraging authentic influencer partnerships to tell the destination's story
- Maintaining a streamlined hotel booking process within the website
- Focusing on storytelling rather than transactional messaging
- Promoting unique, authentic experiences rather than generic "something for everyone" messaging
- Targeting family travel across various dynamics, from parents with children to multigenerational travelers
- Fostering a connected, collaborative community among tourism partners

By sharing real stories and highlighting authentic experiences, these efforts aim to build stronger emotional connections and increase recognition of Rowan County as a memorable travel destination.

Infrastructure & Visitor Experience Improvements

Significant investments will enhance tourism infrastructure and visitor-facing tools:

- Complete redesign of the Visit Rowan County, NC website to improve user experience and accessibility
- Implementation of countywide wayfinding signage, including downtown directional signs, welcome signs, and interstate signs
- Completion of the Railwalk Development project in Downtown Salisbury by Q3
- Renovations to the Paul E. Fisher Gateway Building lobby by end of 2025
- Annual vendor and contract review to reduce costs and streamline services

These capital projects and digital improvements will support tourism growth by enhancing navigation, creating pedestrian-friendly spaces, and providing better access to information.

Gateway Building Management & Operations



Facility Excellence

Maintain the Paul E. Fisher Gateway Building with a focus on operational excellence, tenant satisfaction, and facility preservation through quarterly and annual maintenance tasks including HVAC inspections, pressure washing, window cleaning, landscaping, and pest control.



Administrative Oversight

Conduct annual reviews of vendor contracts and tenant leases to ensure quality service, cost-effectiveness, and compliance, with updated agreements provided in May and biannual building partner meetings to discuss facility needs.



Operational Efficiency

Streamline internal workflows, digitize office records by Q3 2025 to reduce physical storage by 50%, define performance standards for core processes, and implement quarterly vendor review cycles to maintain value-driven partnerships.



Meeting Space Management

Ensure efficient scheduling of meeting spaces with clear visibility and booking options through the Visit Rowan County website, providing community access while maintaining a professional environment for all users.

These operational initiatives will be supported by enhanced team communication protocols, regular capital asset management through annual inventory and evaluation, and ongoing facility readiness inspections at least once per month to ensure a welcoming environment for visitors and tenants alike.

Financial Management & Administration



Budget Oversight

Monitor annual tourism budget with monthly reviews to maintain alignment with financial goals



Transparent Reporting

Ensure 100% on-time submission of monthly, quarterly, and year-end financial summaries



Process Improvement

Reduce manual entry by 25% through payment system automation



Strategic Analysis

Develop mid-year projections to support informed decision-making

Financial goals prioritize fiscal responsibility, transparent reporting, and integrated practices that enable strategic growth. Additional initiatives include conducting annual insurance and benefit provider reviews by Q4 2025, increasing ACH and digital payments to improve reconciliation speed, and providing comprehensive support for grants and sponsorships through accurate tracking and reporting.

These financial and administrative frameworks will reinforce the foundational structure of Rowan County Tourism operations, supporting programming and marketing initiatives while ensuring resources are allocated efficiently to maximize impact and drive tourism growth throughout the county.

Leveraging Technology: Enhanced Visitor Experiences

AI Integration

Integration and utilization of AI tools and platforms for increased productivity, efficiency and effectiveness in fulfilling job responsibilities, while meeting organizational goals and objectives.

Transition to Digital-First Collateral

- Eliminate the traditional printed visitor guide. Instead, design a compact, double-sided postcard featuring a prominently displayed QR code directing users to a newly developed "Visitor Guide" section on the website.
- As part of the upcoming website redesign, create a dedicated, streamlined, mobile-friendly visitor guide landing page.

Digital Visitor Guide Features

- Quick links to dining, lodging, attractions, and events
- Itinerary ideas or "Top 10" lists tailored to different interests
- An interactive map and downloadable PDF for offline access

QR Code Materials

Supplement with additional QR code-based materials (one-sheets or table tents) for hotel lobbies and visitor touchpoints. These will link directly to themed itineraries.

AI-Driven Solutions

Implement an AI-driven itinerary builder that curates personalized, multi-day trip plans based on traveler preferences, interests, and event schedules, encouraging longer stays.

Create short-form videos to replace traditional email communications to partners, launching an engaging video series featuring a host who shares quarterly updates on events, attractions, and partner offerings in Rowan County.

Online Trolley Booking Platform



Centralized Booking System

Create a centralized, easy-to-navigate booking system on the Visit Rowan County website for trolley rentals and private tours.



Key Platform Features

- Calendar-based availability search
- Secure payment system for private bookings
- Real-time updates and confirmation emails
- Integration with itineraries and public tour listings



Event Booking

Enable booking for events such as weddings, tours, conferences, and more, streamlining the process for visitors and reducing staff workload.

Content Creation and Immersive Experiences

Immersive Tours via STQRY/Story App

Develop a series of immersive, self-guided tours using the STQRY (or Story) platform to enhance storytelling and heritage interpretation across the county.

Established Tours


- African American Heritage Trail (Rowan Roots: African American Heritage Trail & Experience)
- Historic Downtown Salisbury Tour
- Historic Walking Tour
- Historic Cemetery Tour
- Scavenger Hunt involving key attractions

Expanded Tour Concepts


- "Rails & Tales": An Immersive Heritage Trolley Experience
- "Rowan Roots & Routes": A Heritage Trail Network
- "Outlander" Experience: Tracing Fraser's Ridge
- Salisbury & Rowan County Literary Trail
- Rowan County Barn Quilt Trail
- "Interactive Scavenger Hunt"
- "Booze & Boos Tour"
- "History + Bites Tour"
- "Mural & Makers Tour"

Include tour locations (such as murals and public art) on the STQRY public art tour.


Itinerary-Based Content and Influencer Partnerships

 **Short-Form Video Content**

Shift toward short-form, itinerary-based video storytelling to meet content consumption trends, using Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, and TikTok to highlight things to do across Rowan County.

 **Themed Video Series**

Create short videos with specific themes, such as "24 Hours in Downtown Salisbury," "A Day of Family Fun in Spencer & East Rowan," and "Girls' Weekend in Rowan County."

 **Local Collaborations**

Work with towns to create itineraries for blogs, reels, influencers, emails, and similar marketing initiatives. Partner with micro-influencers from various niches to create authentic content, collaborating with local communities and small businesses.

Repurpose content across platforms for broad exposure and long-term value.

Instagrammable Murals and Public Art

Commission Vibrant Murals

Commission vibrant, branded murals in key towns throughout the county, serving as photo ops and public art experiences.

Promotion Strategy

Promote each mural with a soft launch (e.g., ribbon cutting, photo contest).



Community-Specific Design

Each mural should be unique to the community and its story (e.g., train themes in Spencer, lake scenes in High Rock), subtly branded with the Rowan County logo and #VisitRowanCountyNC, and installed in high-foot-traffic areas.

Revitalize Existing Art

Refurbish and revitalize preexisting murals, preserving established public art and reintroducing them through renewed attention and signage.

Rowan County Tourism Development Authority: 2025-2026 Proposed Budget

Revenues	FY21-22 *COVID*	FY22-23	FY23-24	FY24-25	FY25-26	Budget Notes
Occupancy Tax	925,000	1,280,000	1,400,000	1,400,000	1,590,000	Projected occupancy tax figure is based on FY24-25 actuals with a zero growth projection.
Partner Services	57,000	40,000	60,000	66,500	70,000	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.
Holiday Caravan Parade	40,000	50,000	56,500	56,500	65,000	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	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	2,500	Based on historical amount of miscellaneous revenues received annually.
Gateway Building	110,000	110,000	134,000	142,500	168,500	Revenues from leases and meeting space rentals in the TDA owned Gateway building. Lease increases of \$2.00 per square foot scheduled for 7-1-25.
Tourism ARPA Funding	595,000	0	0	500,000		ARPA funds approved for wayfinding utilization occurred in 24-25
Interest Income			6,000	12,000	12,000	
Trolley	33,000	55,000	60,000	80,000	95,000	Revenues from trolley tours, rentals, sponsorships & ticketed events.

Total Revenue 1,761,000 1,536,000 1,717,500 2,258,500 2,003,000

Expenses						
Marketing & Visitor Services						Budget Notes
CVB Appropriation	910,000	1,045,000	1,050,000	1,095,500	1,144,000	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.
Tourism Development	420,000	200,000	250,000	750,000	400,000	Allocates \$400,000 from occupancy tax (25%) to product development. Detail included in full budget packet
Lodging ARP Support	100,000					COVID Program was one time in FY21-22.
Tourism Operating Reserves	100,000					COVID program; one time funding in FY21-22
Holiday Caravan Parade	40,000	50,000	85,000	56,500	65,000	Rowan Tourism will continue to support the Parade by processing fiscal transactions. No occupancy tax will be utilized for supporting the Parade, only Parade revenues and existing funds to be used to cover Parade expenses.
Gateway Building	90,000	100,000	134,000	142,500	168,500	Operational costs for Gateway (maintenance, janitorial, utilities, repairs, service agreements, operating reserves and property & liability insurance).
Partner Services	10,000	25,000	20,000	25,000	26,500	Expenses paid on behalf of partners in the Gateway building specifically for shared services provided through the TDA (any expenses coded to CVB are included in CVB operating budget).
Trolley	10,000	10,000	10,500	11,500	12,000	Trolley related expenses specific to ownership costs related to the trolley (maintenance, repairs, tags, insurance)
Supplies & Equipment	4,000	5,000	4,000	4,500	4,500	
Miscellaneous	4,000	2,400	4,000	4,500	4,500	
Total Marketing & Visitor Services	1,688,000	1,437,400	1,557,500	2,090,000	1,825,000	

Operations & Administration						Budget Notes
Staffing (payroll, taxes, benefits)	46,000	81,100	120,000	124,000	132,000	Includes wages, payroll taxes and benefits
Workers Comp and Liab. Ins.	12,000	2,500	8,000	8,500	9,000	Annual insurance premiums for workers comp. and board liability. Property liability now included in Gateway line item.
Professional Services	15,000	15,000	32,000	36,000	37,000	Accounting, legal and audit services for TDA.

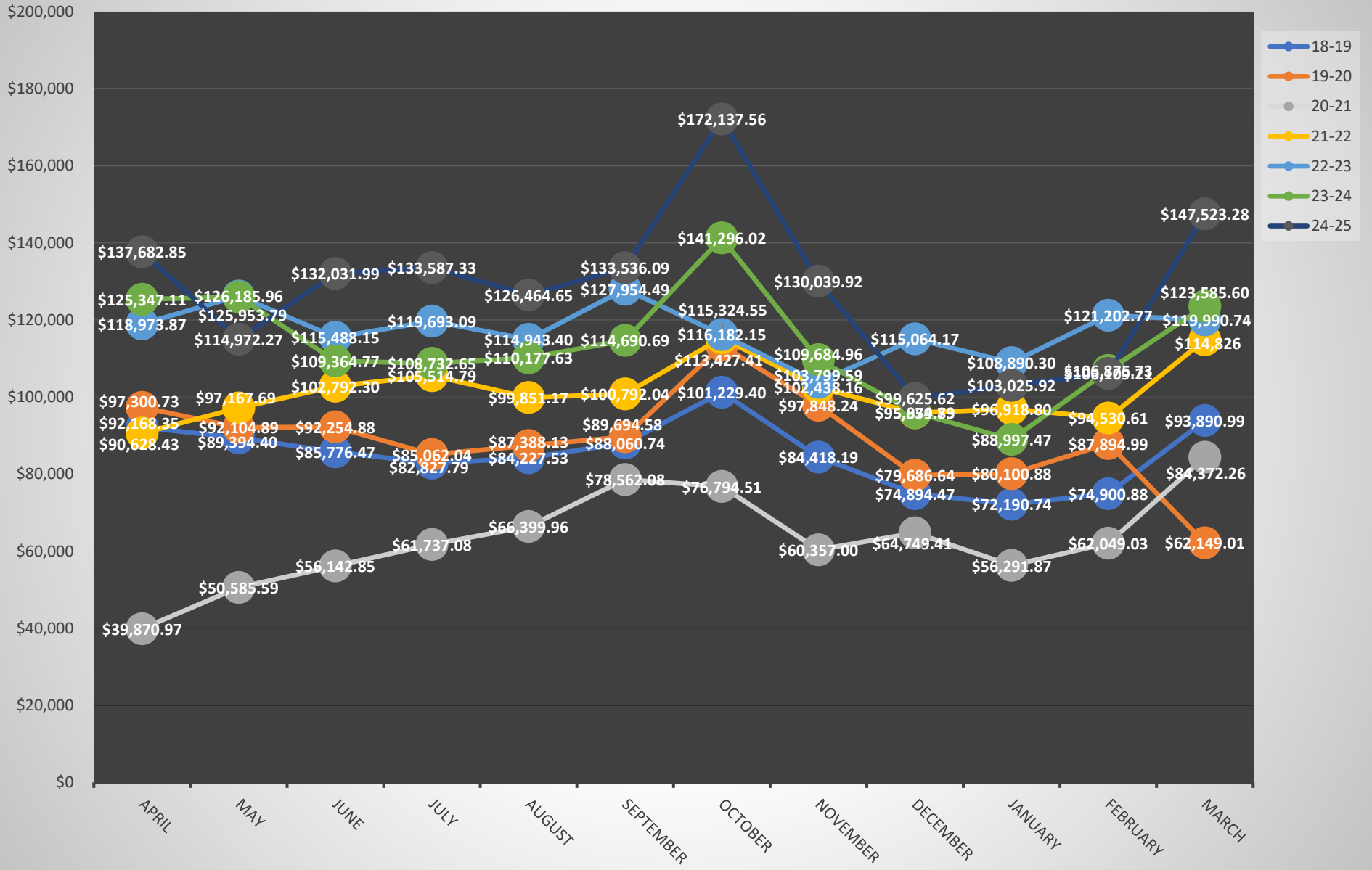
Total Operations & Admin. 73,000 98,600 160,000 168,500 178,000

Total Expenses 1,761,000 1,536,000 1,717,500 2,258,500 2,003,000

Difference 0 0 0 0 0

	Fiscal Year 2021-22 *COVID*		Fiscal Year 2022-23		Fiscal Year 2023-24		Fiscal Year 2024-25		Fiscal Year 2025-2026	
Core Budget	\$1,166,000		\$1,512,600		\$1,711,000		\$1,758,500		\$2,003,000	
<i>Budget Category</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Percent of Budget</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Percent of Budget</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Percent of Budget</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Percent of Budget</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Percent of Budget</i>
<i>Tourism Staffing</i>	\$506,000	43.4%	\$566,600	37.5%	\$706,500	41.3%	\$716,500	40.7%	\$734,000	36.6%
<i>Sales & Marketing</i>	\$353,400	30.3%	\$470,000	31.1%	\$437,000	25.5%	\$450,000	25.6%	\$480,000	24.0%
<i>Programs & Services</i>	\$172,800	14.8%	\$232,000	15.3%	\$269,000	15.7%	\$274,000	15.6%	\$314,000	15.7%
<i>Tourism Development</i>	\$70,000	6.0%	\$200,000	13.2%	\$250,000	14.6%	\$250,000	14.2%	\$400,000	20.0%
<i>Administrative</i>	\$63,800	5.5%	\$44,000	2.9%	\$48,500	2.8%	\$68,000	3.9%	\$75,000	3.7%

Rowan County Occupancy Tax: Appendix A



Totals: 2019 - \$1,064,912.42 2020 - \$757,912.61 2021 - \$1,216,659.27 2022 - \$1,408,368.68 2023 - \$1,360,666.31 2024 - \$1,536,736.69

Rowan County Tourism
 Fiscal Year 2024-2025
 Capital Budget
 Appendix C

General Budget Allocation		FY 2025-26	Budget Notes
Capital Funding		400,000.00	Appropriation from TDA General Budget.
Total		400,000.00	

Expenses			Budget Notes
Rowan Countywide Wayfinding System		50,000.00	Continuation of signage program
Railwalk Project		150,000.00	Year 1 of 5 year repayment to County
Agritourism Product Development		50,000.00	Resources allocated towards implementation of agritourism development plan
New Website		60,000.00	Redesign of website and AI integration
Gateway Building Visitor Center and Lobby		50,000.00	Upfit visitor center and lobby includes furnishings and fixtures
Capital Reserves		40,000.00	Unallocated funds for additional or future projects.
Total Marketing & Visitor Services		400,000.00	

Difference **0.00**

Rowan County Tourism
 Fiscal Year 2025-2026
 Destination Marketing Program Budget

General Budget Allocation		FY 2025-2026	Budget Notes
Destination Marketing Program Funding	480,000.00		Appropriation from CVB General Budget.
Total	480,000.00		

Expenses		Budget Notes (Expenses)
Direct Support Programs	70,000.00	Funds to support packages and other direct overnight stay programs.
Tourism Partner Support Funds	35,000.00	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	205,000.00	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, e-newsletters, blogs, database and data) and telecommunications.
Tourism Partner Program Support	130,000.00	Funds for utilization on collateral production, brand marketing, partner engagement, fulfillment costs, general marketing, production costs brand marketing, group sales and overnight event support.
Marketing Reserves	40,000.00	Unallocated funds
Total Marketing & Visitor Services	480,000.00	