

# VISIT ROWAN COUNTY

NORTH CAROLINA

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## ROWAN COUNTY TOURISM BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

Wednesday, May 17, 2023, Noon

### MEETING AGENDA

- I. Call to Order Krista Sullivan, Chair
  
- II. Approval of Meeting Minutes Krista Sullivan, Chair
  
- III. Financial Report
  - A. Tourism Financial Report and Market Update James Meacham
  - B. Fiscal Year 2023-2024 Budget Presentation
  
- IV. Tourism Program of Work Report
  - A. Destination Sales & Marketing Tara Furr
    - 1. Trolley Program Update Brooke Arrowood
  - B. Tourism Development Sarah Michalec
    - 1. Wayfinding
    - 2. Tourism Development Plan: Railwalk
  - C. Tourism Policy Updates James Meacham
  
- V. Additional Business
  
- VI. Adjourn



**ROWAN COUNTY TOURISM  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING**

Wednesday, March 15, 2023, 12:00 pm

**BOARD MEETING MINUTES**

**Board Members Attending:** Sada Troutman, Craig Pierce, Therese Henderson, Michelle Patterson (ZOOM), and Cyndi Greenwood (ZOOM). Karen Alexander, Vivian Hopkins

**Not Attending:** Krista Sullivan, Kimberly Morgan, Richard Reinholz, John Ketner

**TDA Staff:** James Meacham, Tara Furr, Sarah Michalec, Brooke Arrowood

**RCTDA Call to Order**

Meacham called RCTDA to order at 12:02pm.

**Approval of the Minutes**

Motion: Craig Pierce made the motion for approval of the February 2023 minutes.

Second: Therese Henderson

Motion: Approved

**Organizational & Financial Update**

Meacham reported that the financials ending 2.28.23 were not yet available from the accountant's office today due to tax season and staff illnesses. Meacham stated that he is happy to report that the organizational financial position and cash position continue to be strong. Revenue continues to exceed expectations in budget. The TDA finished the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter 10.9% ahead and January came in at 18.2% ahead. Feb should be 9-10% ahead and the first 11 days of March indicate 75% occupancy in the market, 19% ahead on revenue, and 15% ahead on rate. All profitability rates are ahead of March last year and March 2022 was a very profitable month. Meacham said that the February and March financials should be available at the next TDA board meeting.

Meacham welcomed Tara Furr back from maternity leave. Meacham directed the members to the page in the packet that illustrates a staff restructuring. The chart indicates the two key buckets for the organization, tourism marketing communications and tourism development. Sarah Michalec has been promoted to manage the tourism development side and Tara Furr will continue to manage the tourism marketing and communication expanding within that to continue focus on storytelling and brand development and be engaged on the tourism developed projects when needed. Brooke Arrowood will move into the full digital development section. The tourism coordinator position listed will fall underneath Furr and the tourism marketing communication side. The

tourism coordinator position handles trolleys, packages, partner outreach, and works closely with groups sales. Meacham praised the team and stated that he thinks the new position structure will be good for the organization and staff.

### **Program of Work**

Meacham briefly reviewed the lodging data which shows that year to date occupancy is basically the same through January. When factoring in February, occupancy is ahead and trending back into the low to mid 70% for occupancy, showing the health and stability of the local market. January is typically a slower month, but going into the Covid pandemic in January 2020 was 58%. January 2023 was up 8% in occupancy, \$24 in rate and \$14 in profitability which means the market is healthier than it was right before going into Covid in 2020. The numbers are outpacing the region as well as the statewide numbers. Meacham said that Rowan County is well positioned and is seeing strong economic growth. Local businesses are doing well, there was no drop in leisure travel and the group business has come back well and is diverse in nature. The local market was always underbuilt but had a quality supply just not a great deal of supply.

Michalec reported that the email newsletter had a 34% open rate with 4,900 active subscribers. The visitrowancountync.com website had 33,000 page views and just under 16,000 users. One year after the launch of the new site, the Simpleview representative states that the new site is very healthy and engaging with visitors. Michalec said, the booking widget affiliate program through Root Rez continues to roll out. The widget is in place on the Rowan County site, Dan Nicholas Park site, and will go onto NCTM this week. Staff are still working with DSI and a few other partners to get that program completely rolled out.

Michalec reported that all social media platform performances continued to hold strong in February. Staff focused on the year of the trail, the new exhibit at Waterworks Visuals Arts Center and the NC Transportation Museum visit. Arrowood produced some great blogs in February covering 11 historic experiences, pickleball, African American Heritage, the local February events and the Februarys Arts blog. Year to date social media engagement was 51,000 and reach is at 270,000. Michalec reported that for Tic Tok Jenna did three videos in February which generated 718,000 views and 60,000 likes. She attended Wine about Winter, Sewanee theatre in Kannapolis, and spent the weekend at Cherry Treesort. As mentioned last month, Jenna brought with her an influencer friend from Charleston, SC who also has a huge following. Michalec reported paid marketing placements year to date are at 468.

Furr reported that Arrowood is continuing to do a great job with trolleys. As of the first of March, there are 73 bookings for the year and 8 over the next 90 days. Looking at the stay and play packages, Day Out with Thomas packages will start on March 31<sup>st</sup>.

In group sales, Furr reported a group called Bike Walk NC reached out to her just prior to the meeting about hosting their yearly summit in Rowan County with an estimated 300-450 room nights in September 14-16, 2023. This is the 12<sup>th</sup> year they have held the summit but will be their first time in Rowan County. This is a conference on sustainability, alternate travel, and biking safety not a biking event. This group will be utilizing the trolleys for their event.

Furr reported that the Little League Tournament will be here again in July. Furr reported there is potential for even more room nights than the 605 from last year. The qualifying for the senior division is changing and could offer more team participants. In addition, two weeks prior, Rowan County is hosting the state junior and senior state tournament as well generating residual room nights.

Furr reports that the Aspire National Dance competition is coming up in May and they are right at a sellout.

Furr referred the members to the running tourism support chart and upcoming locations that Arrowood will be visiting in the marketing report.

Michalec reported that Datafy cell phone data from December – February reported 586,000 unique and active mobile devices in the destination with location services turned on. Michalec briefly reviewed the visitor totals from top states, cities, and out-of-state cities. Michalec noted that total trips coming for attractions was 54,000 and total coming for dining was 134,000.

Furr reported that staff is working on spring, summer and fall marketing campaigns and how to position Rowan County and how to tell our story. Community engagement is a big part of that, Meacham and Furr were in Kannapolis last week for a press event with Jiggy with the Piggy and the Cannon Ballers. Furr reminded everyone about the hospitality day with the Cannon Ballers on May 4<sup>th</sup>. The event is being expanded this year with more invites of our tourism partners and will give away baseballs to all attendees with the team and TDA logos. Special giveaways will be taking place again this year as well.

### **Tourism Development**

Michalec reported that most of the municipalities are excited and embracing the countywide wayfinding. Staff and Bizzell are working on customizing each municipality's signage with specific colors and styling. Meacham noted that it is a lot of communication with the towns. East Spencer received some additional funds from the state to assist with their signage. Michalec will be following up with the lead planner at the county to develop the final package to send to NCDOT once each municipality's plan is finalized.

Meacham reminded the board members that prior to the most recent capital plan, there was a big effort that centered around the Rail Walk expanding from the developments of Lee Street theatre, the brewery, and the farmer's market. The TDA was hoping to launch the pavilion and the Railwalk itself in 2019. The farmer's market was completed two months after Covid hit. With the Tourism board adopted capital plan focusing on two key hubs RailWalk and Agritourism Adventure staff is ready to start moving again on the RailWalk.

Meacham reported that architectural services are in place and construction management services are available if the project structure comes to fruition. Michalec and Sada are working closely on this project and Sarah is going to give the board a quick update on where the project stands. Phase I was the Farmer's Market, with Phase II consisting of the Railwalk and potentially phase 3 including dynamic event space and further streetscape improvements. Meacham said that staff is working on the RailWalk itself as well as potential new property acquisitions in that area that could be added to further expand the tourism footprint and create the tourism hub experience.

Michalec reviewed the existing plans from 2013, noting that one minor tweak to those will be to avoid poured concrete and using a paver system to assist with drainage. Michalec and Troutman have received the architecture proposal back for \$39,000 that includes the small changes staff would like to be made to the plan, bids, construction management, design services, permits, inspections and storm water. The proposal is with Bill Burgin who was the original architect. New drawings are being developed with the minor changes and are hoping to work out those agreements with property owners and break ground by the end of the year. Meacham noted that the approval from the HPC may have lapsed, and staff may need to go back and receive new approval. Staff will utilize dollars allocated in the 2022-23 capital budget for the architectural services.

The meeting adjourned at 12:40 pm.

Respectfully submitted.

Lesley Pullium

SRCVB



## FINANCIAL SUMMARY REPORT AS OF 4-30-2023

Report Date: May 17, 2023

**\*The Tourism Authority utilizes modified accrual-based accounting in accordance with GASB. Year to date expenses typically run about 6 weeks ahead of year-to-date revenues. \***

### Fiscal Year 2022-2023 Statement of Activities: Highlights as of 4-30-2023

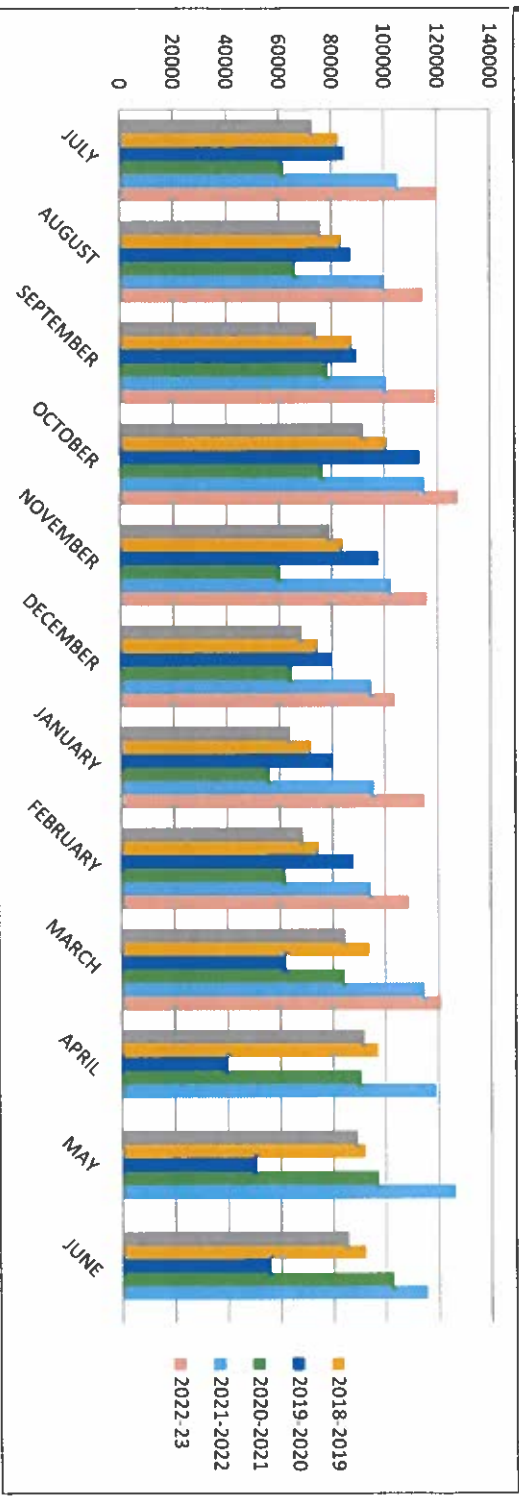
- Occupancy tax revenues as of 3-31-23 for fiscal year 2022-23 on an accrual basis equaled \$1,175,628 and are 9.2% ahead of budget.
  - March 2023 actuals for occupancy taxes were \$121,202 and 6% ahead of March 2022 and were an all time high for March.
  - April 2023 occupancy taxes are in line for \$122,000 and approximately 2.5% ahead of April 2022 and will be another all-time high collection for the month of April.
- Year to date revenue on an accrual basis has exceeded expenses by \$76,575.

### Balance Sheet: Summary as of 1-31-2023

- Total Current Assets equaled \$473,952 and are up \$48,903 from the month ending March 31st.
- Accounts Receivables equaled \$252,021 an increase of \$19,991 from the month ending March 31<sup>st</sup>. The receivables consist primarily of March and April occupancy taxes.
- Cash on hand as of 4-30-23 equaled \$221,075 an increase of \$28,911 from the month ending March 31, 2023.

Rowan County Occupancy Tax Receipts Collected (GROSS)

MONTH	FY18-19	FY19-20	%CHNG	FY20-21	%CHNG	FY21-22	%CHNG	FY22-23	%CHNG
July	82,827.79	85,062.04	2.7%	61,737.08	-27.4%	105,514.79	70.9%	119,693.09	13.4%
August	84,227.53	87,388.13	3.8%	66,399.96	-24.0%	99,851.17	50.4%	114,943.40	15.1%
September	88,060.74	89,694.58	1.9%	78,562.08	-12.4%	100,792.04	28.3%	119,384.91	18.4%
Quarter Total	255,116.06	262,144.75	2.8%	206,699.12	-21.2%	306,158.00	48.1%	354,021.40	15.6%
October	101,229.40	113,427.41	12.0%	76,794.51	-32.3%	115,324.55	50.2%	127,954.49	11.0%
November	84,418.19	97,848.24	15.9%	60,357.00	-38.3%	102,438.16	69.7%	116,182.15	13.4%
December	74,894.47	79,686.64	6.4%	64,749.41	-18.7%	95,874.73	48.1%	103,799.59	8.3%
Quarter Total	260,542.06	290,962.29	11.7%	201,900.92	-30.6%	313,637.44	55.3%	347,936.23	10.9%
January	72,190.74	80,100.88	11.0%	56,291.87	-29.7%	96,918.80	72.2%	115,064.17	18.7%
February	74,900.88	87,894.99	17.3%	62,049.03	-29.4%	94,530.61	52.3%	108,890.30	15.2%
March	93,890.99	62,149.01	-33.8%	84,372.26	35.8%	114,826.05	36.1%	121,202.77	6%
Quarter Total	240,982.61	230,144.88	-4.5%	202,713.16	-11.9%	306,275.46	51.1%	345,157.24	12.7%
April	97,300.73	39,870.97	-59.0%	90,628.43	127.3%	118,973.87	31.3%		
May	92,104.89	50,585.59	-45.1%	97,167.69	92.1%	126,185.96	29.9%		
June	92,254.88	56,142.85	-39.1%	102,792.30	83.1%	115,488.15	12.4%		
Quarter Total	281,660.50	146,599.41	-48.0%	290,588.42	98.2%	360,647.98	24.1%		
Admits Penalties									
Penalties									
Year Total	\$ 1,038,301.23	\$ 929,851.33	-10.4%	\$ 901,901.62	-3.0%	\$ 1,286,718.88	42.7%	\$ 1,175,069.31	



**Rowan County Tourism Development Authority**  
**Balance Sheet**  
 As of April 30, 2023

	Apr 30, 23
<b>ASSETS</b>	
<b>Current Assets</b>	
Checking/Savings	
1052 · F&M Bank-Operating 9224	20,215.04
1020 · Petty cash	16.83
1050 · First Bank checking #0436	39,454.58
1065 · NC Capital Mgmt Trust	141,229.70
1070 · First Bank MM account-4509	20,159.73
<b>Total Checking/Savings</b>	<b>221,075.88</b>
Accounts Receivable	
1201 · Accounts Receivable	252,876.12
<b>Total Accounts Receivable</b>	<b>252,876.12</b>
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<b>473,952.00</b>
<b>Fixed Assets</b>	
1503 · RAILWALK PAVILION	506,594.36
1501 · Land	250,604.00
1500 · Building	2,098,436.00
1505 · Computers	13,223.52
1510 · Furniture & fixtures	51,529.00
1515 · Office equipment	23,278.13
1516 · Trolley cars	319,880.00
1990 · Accumulated depreciation	-515,808.81
<b>Total Fixed Assets</b>	<b>2,747,736.20</b>
<b>Other Assets</b>	
1900 · Pension Asset	12,674.00
<b>Total Other Assets</b>	<b>12,674.00</b>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>3,234,362.20</b>
<b>LIABILITIES &amp; EQUITY</b>	
<b>Liabilities</b>	
<b>Current Liabilities</b>	
Other Current Liabilities	
234 · 457b Withholdings	288.45
2039 · United Way	-800.00
2033 · State withholding payable	272.00
2100 · Payroll Liabilities	1,910.39
<b>Total Other Current Liabilities</b>	<b>1,670.84</b>
<b>Total Current Liabilities</b>	<b>1,670.84</b>
<b>Long Term Liabilities</b>	
2700 · Pension Deferrals	20,011.00
<b>Total Long Term Liabilities</b>	<b>20,011.00</b>
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>21,681.84</b>
<b>Equity</b>	
3050 · Investment in fixed assets	2,397,736.00
3100 · Fund balance	154,914.16
3105 · Restricted Fund Balance	112,820.00
3900 · Retained Earnings	470,635.09
Net Income	76,575.11
<b>Total Equity</b>	<b>3,212,680.36</b>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES &amp; EQUITY</b>	<b>3,234,362.20</b>

**Rowan County Tourism Development Authority  
Statement of Activities Actual vs Budget**

Accrual Basis

July 2022 through April 2023

	<u>Jul '22 - Apr 23</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>\$ Over Budget</u>
<b>Ordinary Income/Expense</b>			
<b>Income</b>			
4350 · Tourism ARP Funding	0.00	416,666.66	-416,666.66
4070 · Misc and Ticket Sales	5,262.47	833.34	4,429.13
4060 · Holiday Caravan Parade	68,473.89	41,666.66	26,807.23
4100 · Fund Balance Interest	3,054.26	0.00	3,054.26
4010 · Occupancy taxes	1,175,628.48	1,066,666.66	108,961.82
4000 · Trolley Operations	45,755.82	45,833.34	-77.52
4300 · Gateway Building Revenue	85,135.29	91,666.66	-6,531.37
4025 · Partner Services	39,009.56	33,333.34	5,676.22
	<u>1,422,319.77</u>	<u>1,696,666.66</u>	<u>-274,346.89</u>
<b>Total Income</b>			
	1,422,319.77	1,696,666.66	-274,346.89
<b>Gross Profit</b>			
	1,422,319.77	1,696,666.66	-274,346.89
<b>Expense</b>			
6501 · Tourism Capital Projects	9,187.69	583,333.34	-574,145.65
6510 · Holiday Caravan Parade Expense	64,673.75	41,666.66	23,007.09
6511 · Partner Service Expense	15,330.27	20,833.34	-5,503.07
6500 · Destination Development	24,247.80	0.00	24,247.80
60001 · Marketing & Visitor Services			
6135 · Salisbury-Rowan CVB	962,300.26	870,833.34	91,466.92
6465 · Trolley	6,301.41	8,333.34	-2,031.93
6180 · Dues and subscriptions	327.70	0.00	327.70
6165 · Marketing Supplies & Equipment	0.09	4,166.66	-4,166.57
6070 · Miscellaneous	3,356.28	2,000.00	1,356.28
	<u>972,285.74</u>	<u>885,333.34</u>	<u>86,952.40</u>
<b>Total 60001 · Marketing &amp; Visitor Services</b>			
	972,285.74	885,333.34	86,952.40
60002 · Operations & Administration			
6010 · RCTDA Operations Staff	74,217.83	57,500.00	16,717.83
6025 · Payroll taxes and unemployment	5,144.91	4,583.34	561.57
6030 · Retirement	11,036.76	5,500.00	5,536.76
6020 · Health Benefits	-439.53	0.00	-439.53
6040 · Worker's comp insurance	715.00	2,083.34	-1,368.34
6105 · Professional Services	27,478.10	12,500.00	14,978.10
6600 · Gateway Building Expenses			
6600.5 · Building Insurance	3,379.00	0.00	3,379.00
6600.1 · Utilities	1,625.72	0.00	1,625.72
6600 · Gateway Building Expenses - Ot...	136,826.31	83,333.34	53,492.97
	<u>141,831.03</u>	<u>83,333.34</u>	<u>58,497.69</u>
<b>Total 6600 · Gateway Building Expenses</b>			
	141,831.03	83,333.34	58,497.69



**Rowan County Tourism Development Authority  
Statement of Activities Actual vs Budget**

Accrual Basis

July 2022 through April 2023

	<u>Jul '22 - Apr 23</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>\$ Over Budget</u>
6145 · Office Postage	35.31	0.00	35.31
Total 60002 · Operations & Administration	260,019.41	165,500.02	94,519.39
Total Expense	1,345,744.66	1,696,666.70	-350,922.04
Net Ordinary Income	76,575.11	-0.04	76,575.15
Net Income	<u>76,575.11</u>	<u>-0.04</u>	<u>76,575.15</u>

**Rowan County Tourism Development Authority  
Statement of Activities**

Accrual Basis

April 2023

	Apr 23	Jul '22 - Apr 23
<b>Ordinary Income/Expense</b>		
<b>Income</b>		
4070 · Misc and Ticket Sales	1.08	5,262.47
4060 · Holiday Caravan Parade	0.00	68,473.89
4100 · Fund Balance Interest	515.68	3,054.26
4010 · Occupancy taxes	128,330.82	1,175,628.48
4000 · Trolley Operations	4,967.17	45,755.82
4300 · Gateway Building Revenue	10,796.24	85,135.29
4025 · Partner Services	13,126.70	39,009.56
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>157,737.69</b>	<b>1,422,319.77</b>
<b>Gross Profit</b>	<b>157,737.69</b>	<b>1,422,319.77</b>
<b>Expense</b>		
6501 · Tourism Capital Projects	52.58	9,187.69
6510 · Holiday Caravan Parade Expense	0.00	64,673.75
6511 · Partner Service Expense	-141.42	15,330.27
6500 · Destination Development	0.00	24,247.80
60001 · Marketing & Visitor Services		
6135 · Salisbury-Rowan CVB	91,428.29	962,300.26
6465 · Trolley	0.00	6,301.41
6180 · Dues and subscriptions	30.00	327.70
6165 · Marketing Supplies & Equipment	0.00	0.09
6070 · Miscellaneous	439.00	3,356.28
<b>Total 60001 · Marketing &amp; Visitor Services</b>	<b>91,897.29</b>	<b>972,285.74</b>
60002 · Operations & Administration		
6010 · RCTDA Operations Staff	6,603.84	74,217.83
6025 · Payroll taxes and unemployment	505.20	5,144.91
6030 · Retirement	1,033.63	11,036.76
6020 · Health Benefits	0.00	-439.53
6040 · Worker's comp insurance	0.00	715.00
6105 · Professional Services	1,703.50	27,478.10
6600 · Gateway Building Expenses		
6600.5 · Building Insurance	3,379.00	3,379.00
6600.1 · Utilities	337.62	1,625.72
6600 · Gateway Building Expenses - O...	2,952.11	136,826.31
<b>Total 6600 · Gateway Building Expenses</b>	<b>6,668.73</b>	<b>141,831.03</b>

**Rowan County Tourism Development Authority  
Statement of Activities**

Accrual Basis

April 2023

	<u>Apr 23</u>	<u>Jul '22 - Apr 23</u>
6145 · Office Postage	0.00	35.31
Total 60002 · Operations & Administration	16,514.90	260,019.41
Total Expense	108,323.35	1,345,744.66
Net Ordinary Income	49,414.34	76,575.11
Net Income	<u>49,414.34</u>	<u>76,575.11</u>



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

**FISCAL YEAR 2023-2024**

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# 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.



**James Meacham**  
Chief Executive Officer  
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**2023-2024**  
**MARKETING, COMMUNICATIONS AND**  
**VISITOR SERVICES PROGRAM OF WORK**

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## 2023-2024 OBJECTIVES AND GOALS

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- 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.

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## DESTINATION AWARENESS MARKETING

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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.

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#### DIGITAL MARKETING & INFRASTRUCTURE

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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.

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**BRANDING / PR**

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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.

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#### GROUP SALES

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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.

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#### VISITOR SERVICES

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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.

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#### TROLLEYS

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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.

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#### OVERARCHING MARKETING TRENDS

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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.

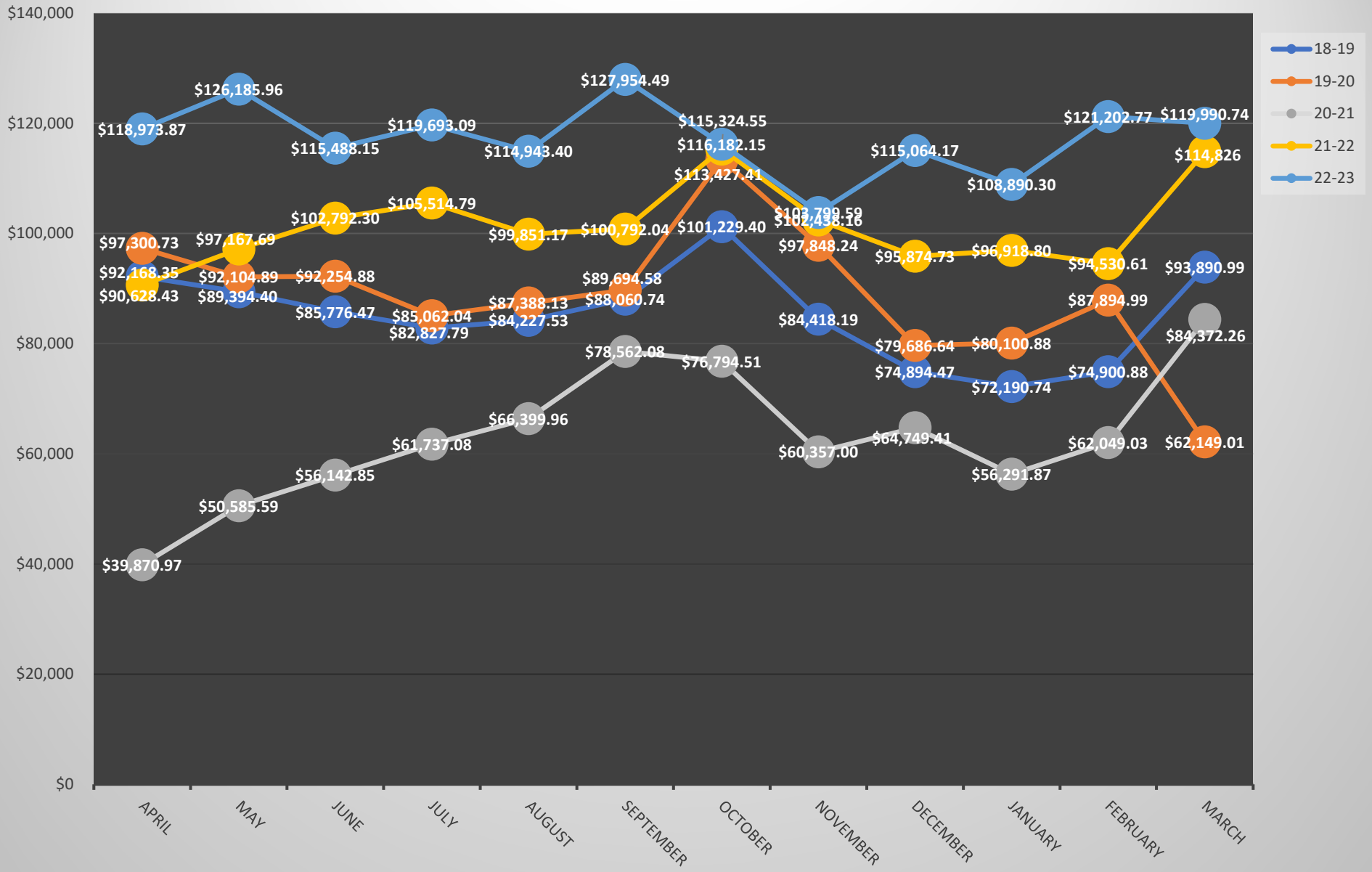
- Promoting the destination experience, rather than the benefits allows us to connect with visitors emotionally. Telling them the story of our destination makes them want to come and make the same lasting memories with their families and loved ones.
- Promoting original experiences, rather than suggesting 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.



## Rowan Tourism: Operational categories as a percentage of budget

	Fiscal Year 2019-20		Fiscal Year 2020-21		Fiscal Year 2021-22		Fiscal Year 2022-23		Fiscal Year 2023-24	
<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>
<b>Core Budget</b>	<b>\$1,391,000</b>		<b>\$1,013,600</b>		<b>\$1,166,000</b>		<b>\$1,512,600</b>		<b>\$1,711,000</b>	
<b><i>Tourism Staffing</i></b>	\$564,600	40.6%	\$420,000	41.4%	\$506,000	43.4%	\$566,600	37.5%	\$706,500	41.3%
<b><i>Sales &amp; Marketing</i></b>	\$420,400	30.2%	\$270,400	26.7%	\$353,400	30.3%	\$470,000	31.1%	\$437,000	25.5%
<b><i>Programs &amp; Services</i></b>	\$175,600	12.6%	\$188,600	18.6%	\$172,800	14.8%	\$232,000	15.3%	\$269,000	15.7%
<b><i>Tourism Development</i></b>	\$190,000	13.7%	\$77,500	7.6%	\$70,000	6.0%	\$200,000	13.2%	\$250,000	14.6%
<b><i>Administrative</i></b>	\$40,400	2.9%	\$57,100	5.6%	\$63,800	5.5%	\$44,000	2.9%	\$48,500	2.8%

## Rowan County Occupancy Tax: Appendix A



**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**

Rowan County Tourism  
 Fiscal Year 2023-2024  
 Capital Budget  
 Appendix C

<b>General Budget Allocation</b>		<b>FY 2023-24</b>	<b>Budget Notes</b>
Capital Funding		250,000.00	Appropriation from CVB General Budget.
ARPA Funding		500,000.00	One time ARPA grant from Rowan County.
<b>Total</b>		<b>750,000.00</b>	

<b>Expenses</b>		<b>Budget Notes (Expenses)</b>	
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.
<b>Total Marketing &amp; Visitor Services</b>		<b>750,000.00</b>	

**Difference** **0.00**





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

<b>General Budget Allocation</b>		<b>FY 2023-24</b>	<b>Budget Notes</b>
Destination Marketing Program Funding	437,000.00	Appropriation from CVB General Budget.	
<b>Total</b>	<b>437,000.00</b>		

<b>Expenses</b>		<b>Budget Notes (Expenses)</b>
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, e-newsletters, 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.
<b>Total Marketing &amp; Visitor Services</b>	<b>437,000.00</b>	

<b>Difference</b>	<b>0.00</b>
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