



# MINUTES

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## Visit SLO CAL Advisory Committee

### Visit SLO CAL Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Thursday, June 3, 2021

3:00pm

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82184076159> Meeting ID: 821 8407 6159

Call-In Phone Number: (669) 900-6833

#### 1. CALL TO ORDER: Clint Pearce

**PRESENT (VIA VIDEO CONFERENCE):** Matt Bronson, Greg Carpenter, Scott Collins, Lynn Compton, Red Davis, Lan George, Wade Horton, Jim Lewis, Steve Martin, Heather Newsom, Rachelle Rickard, Dan Rushing

**ABSENT:** Heidi Harmon, Derek Johnson, Whitney MacDonald, Scott Newton

**STAFF PRESENT:** Chuck Davison, Cathy Cartier, Brendan Pringle, Kyla Boast, Kacey Drescher, Ashley Mastako, Melissa Murray, Eric Parker, Vanessa Rodriguez, Katie Lovelace

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Alma Ayon, Jed Bickel, Kathy Bonelli, Aaron Graves, Jay Jamison, Toni LeGras, Hemant Patel, Clint Pearce,

**MARKETING COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:** Ashlee Akers, Jim Allen, Terrie Banish, Jocelyn Brennan, Molly Cano, Cheryl Cuming, Gordon Jackson, Stacie Jacob, Joel Peterson, Michael Wambolt

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Call to Order by Pearce at 3:03 pm.

#### 2. PUBLIC COMMENT (On Non-Agenda Items)

None.

#### ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

#### CONSENT AGENDA

#### 3. Approval of October 1, 2020 Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion.

**ACTION:** Moved by Bickel/Collins to approve the Consent Agenda as presented.

**Motion carried: 12:0**

## **BUSINESS ITEMS**

### **4. COVID-19 Recovery Strategy**

Davison outlined Visit SLO CAL's COVID-19 recovery strategy. He noted that Visit SLO CAL is currently finalizing its FY 2022 Business & Marketing Plan, its most robust plan to date. The Business & Marketing Plan contains organizational and departmental objectives and key results (OKRs) focused on driving recovery and increasing competitive market share. He outlined the timeline for its approval, and noted that copies will be sent to all elected officials and city managers (and CAO) once the plan is approved. Visit SLO CAL is planning for a FY 2022 media spend of more than \$2M, the largest campaign in the organization's history. Davison outlined the strategy of the media plan. Visit SLO CAL is partnering with Xplorit, an award-winning virtual site inspection company, as part of a \$65k investment, which will include the creation of a fully immersive destination experience, using 360 degree photo and video technology to reach potential visitors around the world. All destinations will be featured at no additional cost to them, and local destinations will have access to host the experience on their website or use in their pitch process at no additional licensing costs. It will focus on unique SLO CAL meeting spaces and experiences for the meetings and conferences industry to drive recovery. Davison noted that Visit SLO CAL will be focusing its air service recovery strategy on restoring terminated flights, as well as attracting additional flights from new markets. He noted that Alaska Airlines will be launching direct service from Portland and relaunching direct service from San Diego on June 17, 2021, and he outlined the air service conferences and airline headquarter meetings planned for FY 2022. He added that Visit SLO CAL is hoping to host the spring 2022 Volaire Air Service conference, noting that when the Sixel Conference was hosted in the County, it helped lay the groundwork for direct service from Seattle. Davison provided an update on the potential US government RFP in the works at Camp Roberts, but noted that the Department of Health & Human Services announced on June 2, 2021 that they do not plan to move forward with using Camp Roberts at this time. Visit SLO CAL asked the following questions from the committee:

What feedback have you heard in your communities about Visit SLO CAL's COVID-19 recovery strategy?

What feedback have you heard in your communities about Visit SLO CAL's COVID-19 response efforts?

In your specific communities, what continued or new response efforts would provide the greatest impact moving forward?

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion. Horton asked how heavy of a lift it will be to bring air service back. Davison noted that leisure markets like SLO CAL are bouncing back the fastest with air service, and that SLO CAL is seeing a strong resurgence already in passenger counts and in interest from the airlines. He said that ancillary factors are ultimately affecting the recovery, including a nationwide pilot shortage, since many airlines provided early retirement for older pilots during the pandemic. While demand and airline interest are high, the availability of infrastructure – planes, pilots and open routes – have affected how quickly SLO CAL recaptures that business. George asked if the issues were more universal or only for the destinations that SLO CAL is trying to get back. Davison responded that it was mostly the former. United dehubbed Los Angeles, so they don't have the gates or the infrastructure. He noted that he was hopeful that United would bring the flights back, and suggested that one option would be for Skywest to manage that flight service. He also suggested that another avenue could be negotiating the flight with Alaska. He said that Visit SLO CAL will be in front of the airlines five times over the course of FY 2022, and if SLO CAL can secure the Volaire conference, it would be a great opportunity to showcase the destination to route planners.

### **5. Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Conversation**

Davison noted that while Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) has been an important conversation for many organizations, it has been a large priority for Visit SLO CAL. He introduced Cathy Cartier, Chief Marketing Officer, who joined the team full-time on June 1, 2021. Cartier provided some background on Visit SLO CAL's EDI efforts. In July 2020, the Board formally adopted Visit SLO CAL's Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Plan (included in your agenda packet), in which Visit SLO CAL

committed to several actions. In May 2021, staff provided the Board with a full update of Visit SLO CAL's EDI efforts. Cartier reported out on high-level progress to date. Visit SLO CAL's Leadership Team is attending Destination International's 12-month EDI Masterclass and staff is vetting agencies for a staff, board and committee EDI training program. Staff has prioritized EDI through planned media campaigns and through Visit SLO CAL's EDI tracking matrix. Cartier described some of the campaigns, including Black History Month, Women's History Month, AAPI Heritage Month, and noted that Visit SLO CAL is, or will be, running campaigns for Pride Month, Hispanic Heritage Month and other commemorative months/days. Cartier noted that work is just beginning on an EDI Audience and Asset Alignment Study, approved by the Visit SLO CAL Board of Directors in May, which will help inform Visit SLO CAL's FY 2022 scope of work. The study will develop an understanding of what the destination can authentically market to the diverse visitors we want to attract, and what diverse assets exist throughout SLO CAL. From the work, local communities can choose to prioritize economic development work in areas where gaps exist. Cartier noted that Visit SLO CAL would appreciate insight from our local communities on their interest in development around EDI opportunities in their community. Davison recognized two Visit SLO CAL board members, Jed Bickel and Amar Sohji, who helped advise the formation of Visit SLO CAL's EDI Plan.

Visit SLO CAL asked the following questions from the committee:

What feedback do you have on Visit SLO CAL's EDI work?

How can we continue to partner with you on this important work and what does success look like?

Are there unintended consequences to this work that we need to be aware of?

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion. Bronson said he recalled that Visit SLO CAL's EDI statement was fantastic. He asked if Visit SLO CAL's recognition of Pride Month was a prospective example, since many communities have risen the pride flag already. Davison noted that Visit SLO CAL's celebration of Pride Month is happening now. Cartier pointed out that the first piece of Pride content was featured on Instagram today. Davison introduced Eric Parker, Digital & Marketing Specialist to provide additional details. Parker noted that many Pride events occurred virtually in May, and that Visit SLO CAL featured the Pride Parade, the Pride Hike, and other SLO CAL assets. Visit SLO CAL's Facebook and Instagram profiles both feature the rainbow flag. Overall, Visit SLO CAL has created a framework around authentic LGBTQ businesses. He discussed the Pride blog, which will remain evergreen on SLOCAL.com. Davison thanked Parker and Katie Lovelace, Brand Marketing Coordinator, for their work in generating content for these pieces, and noted that they have been traveling throughout the county to inform this work. Davison reaffirmed the committee that this is not simply a "check the box"; it is something Visit SLO CAL believes is important. In the end, Visit SLO CAL's EDI content is all about storytelling, but it is simply using a different group of people to better tell the story more inclusively. George asked how closely Visit SLO CAL worked with the Arroyo Grande TBID, noting that she had provided feedback to them that she felt like many of their personas were white and middle-aged, and that their proposed marketing efforts didn't feel as welcoming of other cultures and lifestyles. She asked if Visit SLO CAL could further this EDI conversation with Arroyo Grande TBID's marketing agency and make their strategy more consistent with the values outlined in this presentation. Davison noted that Visit SLO CAL has worked closely with the Arroyo Grande TBID on a number of items, and pointed to two specific ways Visit SLO CAL could help SLO CAL communities in their EDI efforts: 1) Communities have the opportunity to participate in Visit SLO CAL's EDI Audience and Asset Alignment Study co-op, which will help highlight what's authentic in their communities that they can feature, and areas of opportunity that they can build in order to be authentic; and 2) Communities can participate in an asset-production co-op that will utilize a diverse group of talent and be at a very high production level. Asset creation is a large part of how communities can be able to tell that story. Davison noted that originally, the EDI Plan noted that Visit SLO CAL would simply be a partner on EDI, but that Jed Bickel and other Visit SLO CAL board members asked that the organization be a leader in it instead. He said that those who want to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Visit SLO CAL can help the organization advance SLO CAL as an inclusive countywide destination. Lewis noted that he thought this was important work, and said he trusts Visit SLO CAL will work well with the other communities on this to leverage each other's resources. He thanked Visit SLO CAL for its leadership in this area. Davison noted that tourism is one of the most inclusive industries, and that for Visit SLO CAL and all of SLO CAL's destination partners, the work left to do is to feature the diversity that exists, highlight it and help it grow.

## 6. Experience SLO CAL 2050 Conversations

Davison provided a progress update on key Experience SLO CAL 2050 initiatives. On the Events and Festivals Strategy, he noted that an RFP was released for strategy development through a consultant. Three proposals were received and are being vetted. Davison and Melissa Murray, Visit SLO CAL's Project Manager, Destination Management, are working with the local DMOs on a draft MOU between Visit SLO CAL, the Cities and the County for the development and implementation of the work. He noted that each DMO and any requested City or County staff would serve on a development committee to steer the outcome of the strategy. Davison outlined next steps, and noted that the purpose of the initiative is bring visitors to the county during off-peak times and help yield rate. On the Customer Service Training initiative, an RFP was released for development of an online customer service training program through a consultant. Four proposals were received and are being vetted. Davison reminded the committee that during the development of ESC 2050, research revealed that SLO CAL was scoring in the low 60's in terms of customer service. Davison outlined next steps. On the Countywide Trails initiative, Visit SLO CAL will join efforts with strategic partners, stakeholders and other interested groups in SLO CAL. He noted that this initiative is focused on the mapping of current trails across the county with a goal to create, feature and promote a connected countywide trail system. Staff will encourage county and municipal stakeholders, as well as regional agencies, to share asset mapping; share current and future trail plans and development, including challenges; and to promote partnerships in order to advance and advocate for continued development of the trail system. Currently, resources are disjointed, causing confusion for visitors and residents alike. This initiative will help Visit SLO CAL understand each community's assets to provide greater connectivity. On the Workforce Housing & Transportation initiative, Visit SLO CAL will join efforts with lodging investors, industry and strategic partners and stakeholders, in conjunction and cooperation with SLOCOG and other partners, and survey SLO CAL Travel & Tourism industry workers regarding current housing and transportation habits and future needs. Visit SLO CAL will work with county and municipal stakeholders to assist with any and all public sector information, data, and research available to deliver a successful initiative. This survey assessment will help inform what gaps need to be filled in SLO CAL leading to the development of a future Travel & Tourism Workforce Housing and Transportation Strategy. Davison noted that currently the lead staff member tasked with overseeing and advancing ESC 2050 recommendations is on extended leave. At the last Advisory Committee Core Group Meeting, staff was asked to continue to remind the local governments about their areas of ownership (or collaboration) on ESC 2050 recommendations, in order to keep them moving forward. Davison recapped these recommendations, which include: Authentic Communities; Manage, Develop and Grow Communities; San Luis Obispo County Conference Center; Ground Transportation; Nightlife, Music and Entertainment; and the Morro Bay Waterfront.

Visit SLO CAL asked the following questions from the committee:

What overall feedback do you have on the direction of this work?

Where and how would you like to partner with Visit SLO CAL in the coming year?

Public Comment.

Committee Discussion. Bronson complimented Visit SLO CAL's efforts, and said he appreciated the great synergy between Visit SLO CAL and SLO CAL's communities. He noted that on the Workforce Housing recommendation, tourism can serve as a key voice for why affordable housing is important when affordable housing projects are before the cities. He noted that Visit SLO CAL's advocacy on these projects would be helpful in getting them approved. He asked about the Cannabis Tourism recommendation, noting that Grover Beach is currently exploring "cannatourism" as a short-term opportunity that can grow into a long-term opportunity for the city. Davison noted that Visit SLO CAL has been a supporter of on-site consumption of cannabis, and that staff would like to continue to remain informed about Grover Beach's work on this.

## 7. Travel Trade & Marketing Efforts

Davison noted that a major area of focus in Visit SLO CAL's planning is how it is measuring its success throughout the year. He outlined Visit SLO CAL's organizational objectives and key results (OKRs), noting that each department and team member's OKRs ladder down from these. Each organizational OKR is linked to an initiative in Strategic Direction 2023, Visit SLO CAL's three-year strategic plan. Davison introduced Kyla Boast, Visit SLO CAL's Associate Director of Sales, who outlined the travel trade strategies for FY 2022, and Cartier provided an overview on Visit SLO CAL's House of Brands strategy.

Davison noted that this House of Brands Strategy is how Visit SLO CAL believes SLO CAL will get to the “next level.” Cartier noted the evolution of Life’s Too Beautiful to Rush with the messaging of “Living Vividly.” With people forced to slow down during the pandemic, the concept of Living Vividly is about “leaning in to making it matter.” Cartier defined and explained the purpose of the House of Brands strategy, which, she noted, will show how all of the local destination brands relate to one another, allowing for greater depth and dimension in Visit SLO CAL’s storytelling and will set the foundation for shareable assets for partners to utilize. The approach will help SLO CAL better connect the dots for the consumer, encouraging them to visit multiple destinations during their trip. She clarified that under this House of Brands, each brand extension (Travel Paso, Visit Arroyo Grande, etc.) can have its own identity and still be associated with the master brand (SLO CAL). They can choose to leverage master brand equity or develop an independent strategy. She reviewed the three-phase strategy. Phase 1 (Connectivity/Reciprocity), set to be completed by December 31, 2021, will focus on the adoption of SLO CAL brand identification, creating a SLO CAL brand that stands out and is more easily understood by potential travelers with greater connectivity and reciprocity. Phase 2 (Wayfinding) will evolve SLOCAL.com to create greater clarity and make navigation easier for potential travelers, and also unify all destinations within the county. She noted that the site navigation will marry geography and experience, in order to provide this clarity to the consumer. Phase 2 is set to be completed by March 31, 2022. Phase 3 (House of Brands Campaign and Unified SLO CAL Brand), set to be completed June 30, 2022, will build a base of sharable assets and establish a micro-campaign approach. This will include collaboration with local DMOs at the annual Marketing Committee retreat, around micro-campaign concepting. The dedicated microcampaign would launch across paid, owned and earned channels and would include expanded storytelling that honors the experiences of each individual destination within the overarching SLO CAL brand campaign. Cartier noted that this work is kicking off with a five-day photography and video shoot, informed by research to reflect current and potential visitors, that will build the creation of hero brand assets (the “wow” shots) and House of Brands assets (a reflection of the individual communities). Cartier noted that local destinations have the opportunity to participate in a co-op. Following this shoot, the new Life’s Too Beautiful to Rush brand campaign will launch in September.

Visit SLO CAL asked the following question from the committee:

What feedback do you have on Visit SLO CAL’s travel trade and marketing strategies for FY 2022?

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion. George noted that “Living Vividly” is a fabulous two-word combo, and that she hopes to see more of that in the campaign moving forward. She asked in Phase 2 (Wayfinding), if there is a need for visitors to distinguish the different cities, and how much effort is going to be placed on the overall experience versus a visitor knowing if they are in a certain community. Cartier responded that there would be a balance. Visit SLO CAL’s job is to create that umbrella brand so that they want to come to the county. What matters is that the visitor comes to the county, and then it is up to the individual destinations to encourage them to visit their destination. The effort is meant to create the umbrella brand and help the destinations tell their story. George noted that she would like to see all of the communities come together on one event. Davison noted that part of the Signature Event recommendation in ESC 2050 is focused on how do we create that countywide event in nonpeak times. Davison referenced Restaurant Month as an example of a countywide, month-long event, and SAVOR the Central Coast, which the organization hosted several years ago. He noted that the Events & Festivals Strategy is scheduled to be done in April of 2022. George noted how Arroyo Grande TBID and Visit SLO CAL can make sure Arroyo Grande is maximizing the photo shoot and not double paying. Davison noted that Ashlee Akers of Verdin (Arroyo Grande TBID’s agency) is on Visit SLO CAL’s Marketing Committee, and is very much in-tune and informed on this work. Cartier noted that the co-op opportunities were sent Tuesday afternoon (June 1, 2021), and that the local DMOs will have opportunities to buy-in and create assets specific to their communities (ranging from small shoots to full-day photography). Cartier added that ultimately this saves time and money because the crews and models will be in town. Davison noted that he believed every community should take advantage of this opportunity, and noted that he would like to see communities like Morro Bay, Atascadero, Arroyo Grande, and Grover Beach involved in this shoot. George added that from an Arroyo Grande point of view, she would ask that the shoot doesn’t just focus on the Village area. George also complimented Visit SLO CAL on a phenomenal job. She noted that the meeting was packed with valuable information, and she appreciated the staff’s diligence and professionalism, and the ability to provide feedback.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Meeting adjourned at 4:40pm.