



Blowing Rock
NORTH CAROLINA

BLOWING ROCK TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

ORGANIZATIONAL MISSION AND STRATEGIC PLAN



VISION & MISSION STATEMENT

The Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority (BRTDA) operates as the official Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) for the Town of Blowing Rock, and exists to increase and enhance Blowing Rock's visitor economy. Utilizing the 6% occupancy tax levied on short-term lodging stays in the Town of Blowing Rock, the TDA funds the promotion of tourism in Blowing Rock and provides a funding base for improvement and maintenance of the Town's tourism-related infrastructure.

Vision

Blowing Rock will be recognized as one of the premier travel destinations in the Southeastern USA.

Mission

Provide leadership and primary funding for marketing, developing, and supporting year-round travel and tourism to and within the Town of Blowing Rock to increase lodging sales, extend overnight stays, and boost visitor spending.

Values

- Recognizes tourism as a major economic driver in Blowing Rock and rejects a passive dependence on current market position.
- Promotes economic growth and stability in the local business community in tandem with the preservation of local charm, personality, and appeal.
- Encourages the appreciation and preservation of local recreational, cultural, and natural resources.
- Encourages the cultivation of arts and culture in Blowing Rock.
- Believes community involvement is integral to a stable tourism economy, and that education and communication facilitates constructive relationships between community groups.
- Dedicated to implementing and encouraging sustainable practices, regulations, and programming as related to tourism in Blowing Rock.
- Advocates for ongoing research in tourism marketing, market analysis, customer reach, and travel trends.

1. Market Blowing Rock as a premier destination with a highly skilled team. The BRTDA will represent the Town of Blowing Rock as a destination through state and national advertising and promotion, and will meet the highest standards of performance as a research-based DMO.
 - Utilize a research-supported mix of traditional, digital, and social media advertising to promote travel and tourism to and within Blowing Rock.
 - Update research and marketing strategy continually as part of an annual plan that is supported by the local travel industry.
 - Provide dynamic visitor information services to drive increased satisfaction & spending, including operation and maintenance of BlowingRock.com and digital kiosks, and printing of various collateral pieces.
 - Deliver on the Blowing Rock brand and expand the brand to appeal to new and varied audiences.
 - Maintain a strong level of tourism promotion for the summer and fall seasons while utilizing events and/or activities to focus the promotion efforts on “filling the gaps” of shoulder and off- seasons and mid-week.
 - Provide focused tourism promotion to draw the targeted tourist segment, continually defining the “targeted tourist segment” using the results of surveys, commissioned studies, and other data to develop a comprehensive understanding of Blowing Rock’s current tourism community.
 - Support the staff in achieving the highest standards of excellence and performance through on-going education, certifications, measurement and accountability.
 - Track and demonstrate measurable growth.

Measures of Success, reported regularly:

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| -Growth in occupancy tax collections | -Growth in event attendance | -Awards & recognition |
| -Increased visitor spending | -Positive tracking for ads | -Staff retention |
| -Increased web traffic | -Increased visitor satisfaction | |



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ONGOING INITIATIVES: PUBLIC RELATIONS

2. Maintain a strong public relations program to promote Blowing Rock in a cost effective way. Where marketing and advertising are paid media, public relations leverages time and relationships to tell the Blowing Rock story and increase awareness.

- Create and distribute press releases to local and regional media contacts, focusing on relevance and timely delivery of information on events and seasonal offerings.
- Respond to requests from travel writers and influencers, and create itineraries and arrange visits.
- Maintain communication with visitors through seasonal email newsletters, and create relevant content to keep them interested.
- Communicate with local businesses and partners through weekly newsletters and general tourism advocacy.
- Plan and execute social media content, promoting the Blowing Rock lifestyle and experience.
- Create and maintain relevant content for pitches to writers and media partners, including regional event calendars and regional marketing organizations like VisitNC.
- Maintain relationships with local news stations and mitigate potentially negative coverage of weather events or other occurrences that may affect visitor opinion.
- Curate user-generated-content and reach out to visitors that are creating images and content that exemplifies the Blowing Rock experience.
- Maintain regional advocacy efforts through work with elected officials and groups like the National Park Service, Blue Ridge Parkway Association, and others.

Measures of Success, reported regularly:

- | | | |
|-------------------------|---|---------------------|
| -Increased earned media | - Continued interest from writers | -Accolades for town |
| -Positive news coverage | -Positive growth in social media followers and engagement | |

3. Support tourism in Blowing Rock consistent with the Town of Blowing Rock's Comprehensive Plan, funding improvements to the infrastructure that supports tourism with 1/3 of the net tax revenue, off-setting resident tax burden.

- Work with the Town to provide funding for infrastructure support and advocate for continued improvements (i.e. parking, traffic flow, information availability, etc.).
- Provide support for Town events.
- Enhance the visitor experience in Blowing Rock.
- Provide strategic oversight through the TDA Board, while relying on the Town government for direction and management of infrastructure support.

Measures of Success, reported regularly:

- Completed projects
- Improved appearance of Town
- Increased tax value to residents
- Improved crowd management at events



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ONGOING INITIATIVES: PARTNERSHIPS

4. Cultivate partnerships with like-minded and relevant organizations to increase awareness and leverage our local voice. Communication within the travel industry is critical to the sustainability of travel industry growth.

- Develop and maintain strong ties and cooperative efforts with other local and regional tourism-based organizations.
- Establish the TDA as an essential partner and welcome member of other area, regional, state and national organizations (Blue Ridge Parkway Association, NC High Country Host, Southeast Tourism Society, NC Restaurant & Lodging Association, etc.) through intentional engagement, steady communication, and a neighborly approach.
- Partner with the Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce to enhance support for tourism based businesses in town, and find synergies in local promotions and initiatives.
- Provide promotional support for organizations that create events for visitors.
- Participate on Boards and event committees where applicable.
- Partner with Appalachian State University for internship program and resources from Hospitality Management educators and professionals.

Measures of Success, reported regularly:

- Proof of participation & engagement
- Marketing and special event support from partner programs & groups
- Invitations to participate in partner programs



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BLOWING ROCK AS A TRAVEL DESTINATION

Strengths

- Proximity to the Blue Ridge Parkway and other major regional attractions
- Accessibility to outdoor recreation and natural beauty
- Charm and character of local structures
- Long history of hospitality and positive brand
- Easy travel conditions and distance from major markets
- Safe town with few incidents

Weaknesses

- Limited infrastructure for crowd management- parking, narrow streets, etc.
- Aging lodging properties vs. ROI for new projects
- Weather dependent destination
- Service industry workforce difficult to source in area where workforce housing is often located in other towns

Opportunities

- Major feeder markets still growing
- Recreational options expanding in the area, i.e. Middle Fork Greenway, trail connections, new outdoor attractions
- Potential for growth in mid-week travel and shoulder seasons
- Increasing focus on unique/bucket-list travel experiences

Threats

- Overdevelopment compromising natural areas, recreational access, and views
- Splintering unity across local associations preventing beneficial decision-making
- Underfunding of nationally protected areas continuing to diminish the quality of visitor experience
- Potential strain on discretionary spending due to recessions or volatile economy

CURRENT AREAS OF FOCUS

GOALS & ACTION ITEMS



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AREA OF FOCUS: MARKETING

Expand strategies for marketing Blowing Rock as a destination.

Goal: Increase (then maintain) inclusivity in general marketing images throughout 2019-2020 year, in order to appeal to all segments of our target market.

Action Items:

- Source images that show a variety of ages, races, abilities, and family dynamics.
- Increase use of images sourced through user generated content (UGC).

Goal: Increase emphasis on Blowing Rock as a destination of choice for business and focused activity groups, in order to improve weekday bookings.

Action Items:

- Increase promotion of Blowing Rock directly to groups and meeting planners in target publications and digital marketing in 2019-2020 marketing plan.
- Produce collateral for retreats and business travelers.

Goal: Update BlowingRock.com for current Search Engine Optimization (SEO), appearance trends, and user habits by Jan 2020, to stay relevant in the travel industry.

Action Items:

- Expand listing pages to add larger photos and increased content pages.
- Incorporate Crowdriff UGC galleries on all main landing pages.
- Update content to follow current web trends, with larger photos and more list articles.



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AREA OF FOCUS: MARKETING (CONT'D)

Expand strategies for marketing Blowing Rock as a destination.

Goal: Increase awareness in local market to encourage repeat High Country visitors to visit Blowing Rock.

Action Items:

- Purchase billboards in local market in 2019-2020 year.
- Increase (then maintain) Public Relations efforts with local communities and groups in 2020.

Goal: Reinforce influence in retiree market in 2019-2020 year to maintain attraction to that market

Action Items:

- Increase utilization of stock photography for ideal looks.
- Use hyper-targeted digital marketing to increase focus on specific market.

Goal: Strategize messaging in remote markets to reach potential visitors more cost-effectively.

Action Items:

- Create “attraction” printed piece for regional distribution in 2020, focusing on more general appeal.
- Distribute new collateral to Interstate Visitor Centers to replace detailed Guide for FY 2020-2021.

Goal: Improve brand association with the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Action Items:

- Incorporate #ParkwayTown in marketing and public relations throughout 2019-2020 year.
- Coordinate and promote a giveaway focused on #ParkwayTown in 2019-2020 year

Increase integration of public relations initiatives and expand reach.

Goal: Shift travel writer communication to have a more pro-active focus by July 2020, to increase earned media value in subsequent years.

Action Items:

- Foster writer/influencer relationships and create then make tailored pitches.
- Reach out to more writers for national publications and create calendar for follow up.
- Track produced pieces and ROI for each visit to build frameworks for writer fulfillment.

Goal: Increase (then maintain) social media engagement in 2020, to grow conversations about and awareness of Blowing Rock.

Action Items:

- Implement a marketing-integrated social media plan in FY 2019-2020
- Launch a brand-centric social media contest/giveaway in summer/fall 2019.
- Track specific engagement with planned themes and edit plans as needed.
- Incorporate user generated content and leverage visitor experiences in content planning.

Goal: Increase active media contacts by 10% by Jan 2021, to increase visibility across platforms and publications.

Action Items:

- Reach out to more individual publications.
- Expand contact types for tailored communication.

Goal: Implement regular video programming for web and social media by Jan 2021, to stay relevant in travel promotions.

Action Items:

- Identify opportunities for niche concepts for low-overhead themes and build content calendar.
- Purchase necessary editing software.

Enhance the awareness of the role of the tourism industry in the local economy, and improve the visitor experience through advocacy (an area of public relations).

Goal: Implement front line employee educational/advocate program in 2020, in order to increase support for visitors and local buy-in for the tourism economy.

Action Items:

- Partner with Chamber of Commerce to build program.
- Invest in program to increase value to community.

Goal: Improve communication with local lodging to improve relationships and build partnership strategies with constituents.

Action Items:

- Establish monthly in-person meetings between member of TDA staff and hotel owner or manager.

Goal: Increase community understanding and support of tourism as an economic driver, to improve overall community perception of tourism.

Action Items:

- Focus on outlets like local newspapers for regular coverage of tourism economy in 2019.
- Assess & promote “traditional” impact statistics (e.g., jobs, taxes generated, spending totals) in 2020.
- Emphasize the connections between visitor spending and resident quality of life.
- Develop a series of videos to better explain the importance of the tourism economy and the BRTDA’s role in its maintenance and growth in 2020.
- Increase Tattler distribution while maintaining open rate.

Increase locally-focused data to track successes and areas that need improvement.

Goal: Examine reach and fulfillment rates for Jack Rabbit Software in FY 2019-2020, to assess success with investment.

Action Items:

- Analyze monthly reports with account representatives.
- Survey hotel satisfaction.

Goal: Track overall occupancy rates for lodging in Blowing Rock, with at least 50% of properties reporting by Jan 2020, to compare occupancy tax collections to actual overnight visitation.

Action Items:

- Emphasize success measurement and address concerns of private businesses.
- Create efficient and trusted reporting process.

Goal: Create ongoing profile for overnight visitor based on hotel interviews & surveys, to improve understanding of our customer segments, with regular program set by Jan 2021.

Action Items:

- Conduct intercept surveys of visitors and build parameters for regular schedule.
- Work with lodging businesses on guest tracking for groups and individuals.
- Create and implement quarterly in-room surveys.