

An aerial photograph of Cayuga Lake, showing the shoreline with trees in autumn colors (yellow, orange, green) and a road. A blue rectangular overlay is positioned on the left side of the image, containing white text. The text reads "Tour Cayuga" in a large, bold, sans-serif font, followed by "2026-2030 (and beyond)" in a smaller font, and "Strategic Plan" in a medium-sized font.

# Tour Cayuga

2026-2030 (and beyond)  
Strategic Plan

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## Special Thanks

Organization	Name	Title
Inns of Aurora	Alex Schloop	Director of Marketing
Cayuga Chamber of Commerce	Amy Fuller	Director
Colloca Estate Winery	Chris Colloca	Owner
New Leaf Massage Therapy	Colleen Weibel	Owner
NYS Equal Rights Heritage Center	Courtney Rea Kasper	Customer Exp. Manager
1010 BBQ	Fritz Hess	Owner
Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor	Jean McKay	Deputy Director
City of Auburn	Jennifer Haines	City Manager
Auburn Downtown BID	Jesse Kline	Exec. Director
Mayor of Auburn	Jimmy Giannino	Mayor Auburn
Izzo's White Barn Winery	John Izzo	Owner
United Way	Julisa Stone	Tourism Ambassador
Cayuga County	Kari Terwilliger	Planning/Economic Development Director
Otter Lake Farm	Kate Pelkey	Farmer
Cayuga Works	Kelly King	Employment & Training Director
Melody's (co-working space)	Melody Smith-Johnson	Owner/Community leader
Auburn IDA	Michael Miller	Director
Belesai Communications	Nikita Jankowski	Owner, guide for Tour Cayuga
Ward W. O'Hara Agricultural and Country Living Museum	Tim Quill	Director

# Getting To Know Tour Cayuga

The 5-year strategic plan is intended to serve as the guiding work plan for the Board of Directors and incoming leadership at Tour Cayuga.

## The Organization

The Cayuga County Convention and Visitors Bureau (CCCVB), also known as Tour Cayuga, is Cayuga County's official Tourism Promotion Agency (TPA). Tour Cayuga contracts with Cayuga County to execute on its long-term mission to "develop and promote the tourism industry of the county for the economic benefit of the county's residents."

The strategic planning process is an opportunity for Tour Cayuga to evaluate the strengths and challenges of our tourism region and to define future priorities. The 5-year strategic plan is intended to serve as the guiding work plan for the Tour Cayuga Board of Directors and leadership. The plan identifies specific goals and related strategies to aid Tour Cayuga in its shift to becoming a Destination Stewardship Organization.

## How is Tour Cayuga funded?

In 2025, Tour Cayuga will manage a budget of \$1,411,178.00 with 90% of that funding provided through its contract with the County (\$1,282,500), and the remaining 10% funded through a mix of grants and co-op advertising sales.

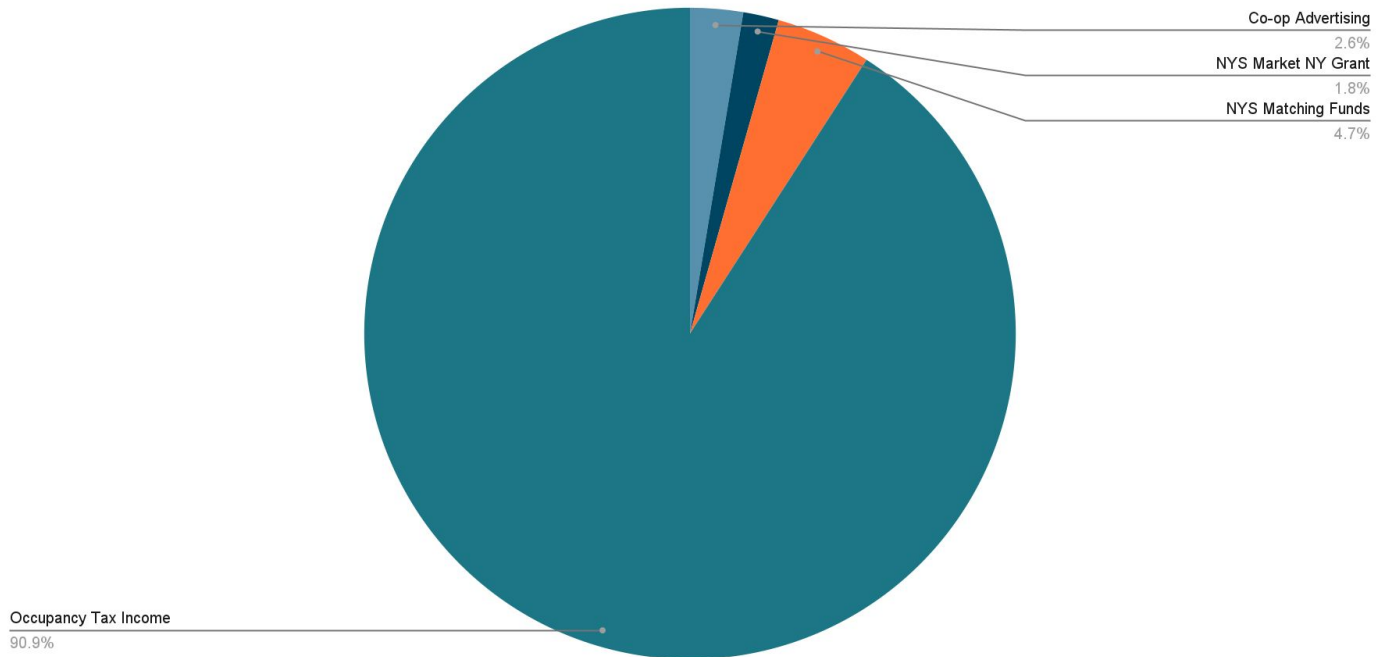
## What does Tour Cayuga do with its funding?

A majority of Tour Cayuga's budget, or approximately \$725,000, is currently being spent on a mix of marketing, management, and stewardship programs to advance Cayuga as a preferred destination for tourism. At this time, about 75% of that share of the budget is spent on sales and marketing activities, including PR, advertising, e-marketing, and group sales expenses. The remaining share of the program budget is split between industry management programs and stewardship efforts such as local advocacy and outreach initiatives, industry research, and local promotions.

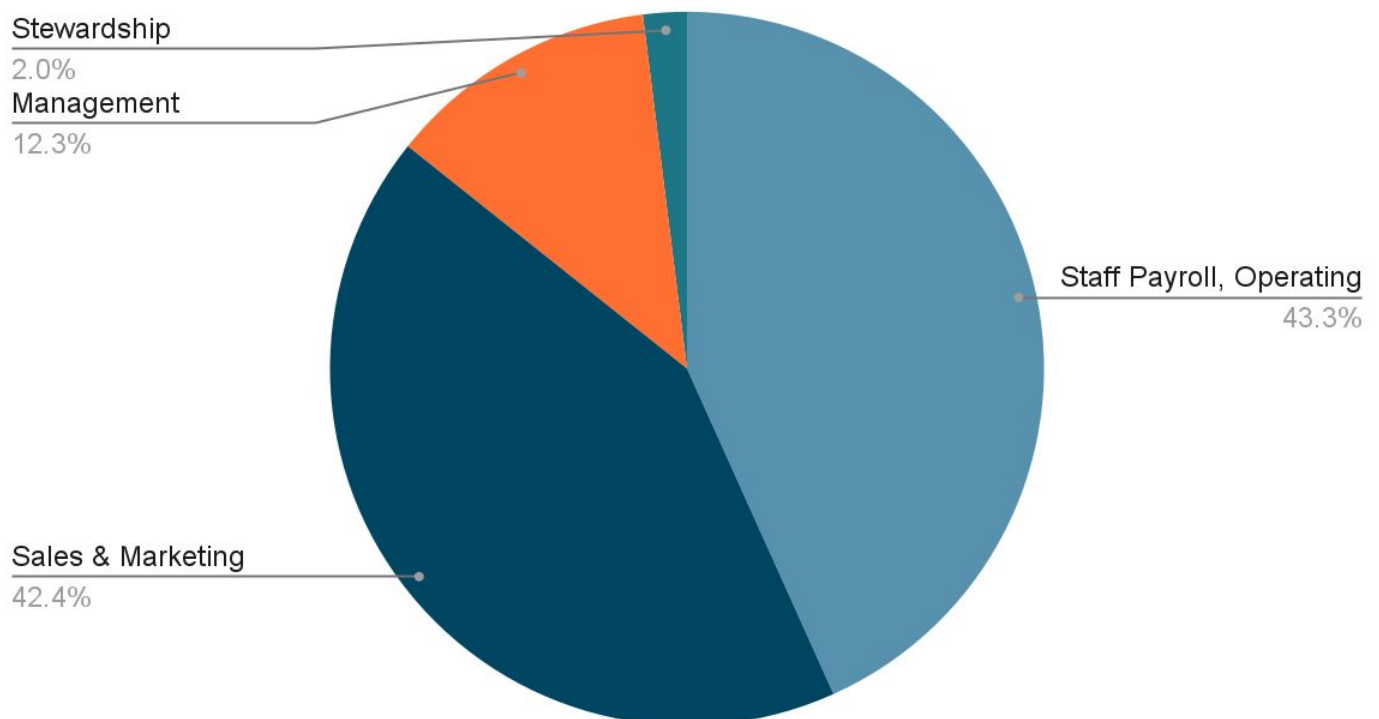


## ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW

### 2025 Tour Cayuga Budget



### 2025 Tour Cayuga Expenses

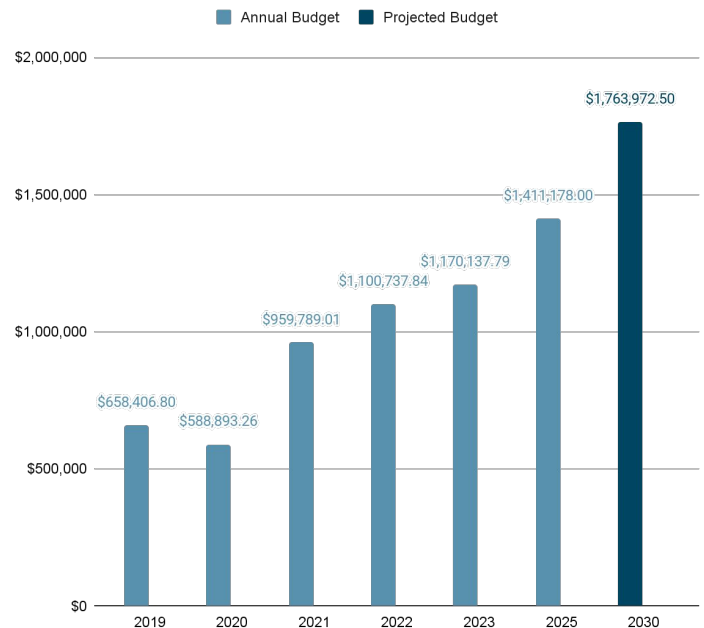


## ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW

**As Tour Cayuga evolves and strengthens its position as a destination stewardship organization, there is a need to explore the inclusion of full-time destination management and stewardship staff roles - particularly as its annual budget continues to grow.**

The remaining 43% of the total Tour Cayuga budget is spent on staff and operating expenses, including payroll for four full-time employees. At this time, Tour Cayuga's staff includes an Executive Director, Director of Marketing & Sales, Marketing Assistant, PR Manager, and an Operations/Office Manager. The titles of 3 of 5 staff members reflect roles focused on sales, marketing and PR - or destination marketing roles.

While these individuals also support destination management efforts through their participation in local and regional committees and/or lead the design/management of industry community events, these tasks and actions are secondary to their roles at the organization. As Tour Cayuga evolves and strengthens its position as a destination stewardship organization, there is a need for the organization to explore the inclusion of full-time destination management and stewardship staff roles.



To start, it is recommended for the board of directors to consider the creation of a Partner and Community Engagement Manager position to spearhead the recommended engagement strategies included in this strategic plan. This role builds and maintains relationships with community stakeholders, tourism partners, and local businesses to advance the mission of VisitXYZ. This role strengthens collaboration and supports the development of authentic visitor experiences.

Currently, the staff reports its activities to the board of directors, composed of a broad range of community and travel industry leaders who adhere to the organization's Bylaws in providing effective oversight and guidance to Tour Cayuga staff.

## The Board of Directors

Organization	Type	Representative
The REV Theatre	Attraction	Erin Katzker
Inns of Aurora	Lodging	AnnaMarie Vukmanovich
County Parks & Trails	County	Doug Dello Stritto
Lunkenheimer Craft Brewing Co.	Business	Kristen Lunkenheimer-Slocum
Cayuga County Planning and Economic Development	County	Kari Terwilliger
City of Auburn Planning	City	Stephen Selvek
The Hamilton Salon & Apothecary & Moravia-Locke Chamber of Commerce	Business	Jacob Hamilton
Otter Lake Farm & Fiber	Business	Kate Pelkey
MacKenzie-Childs	Business	Amber Ganser-Dagnesi
National Park Service	Attraction	Ahna Wilson
County Legislature	County	Aileen McNabb-Coleman
Turtle Cove, Mayor of Fair Haven	Lodging	Brian DiBernardo
Seward House Museum	Attraction	Kate Grindstaff
Little Yard Farm	Business	Laura Hahn
Old Mentz Heritage Center	Attraction	Michael Riley
Hilton Garden Inn	Lodging	Ryan Marx
Arise Inc.	Workforce	Sara Douglass

## Our Strengths & Challenges

Cayuga has a strong opportunity to extend visitor dwell time and grow its shoulder months by shifting visitor perceptions on connectivity challenges through strategic marketing, and through intentional product development efforts, in partnership with industry stakeholders.

### Research Approach

The following findings are based on a set of research activities including:

- **Review of 25+ background documents** including the past strategic plan, marketing plans and campaign reports, economic impact reports, market studies, visitor data and demographics acquired via data providers ROVE and Zartico, park master plans, and downtown plans, etc.
- **Engagement with 30+ Board members and industry stakeholders**, who provided insight on asset-level market performance and ongoing development opportunities, and
- **Qualitative tours and assessments of 10+ tourism attractions and assets** throughout the County, including downtowns, parks/trails, and historic/cultural sites.

### Key Findings

#### Audience & Market Demand

- Cayuga is expanding its appeal to wider audiences through accessibility enhancements and extensive use of inclusive language.
- Nationally, the cultural heritage market (\$123.6 billion market) is a much smaller audience than outdoor recreation market (\$639 billion market).and may not have the widest appeal across audiences.
- Cayuga has the opportunity to grow shoulder months to lengthen its season (March-April, Nov) and to further target 'Conscious Travelers' with interest in social and environmental justice.
- Cayuga's limited hotel and meeting/event facilities inventory and disconnected luxury products creates a challenge for attracting business groups and conventions.



# Our Strengths & Challenges

## **‘The Great Outdoors’ Products/Experiences**

- Outdoor recreation experiences remain the primary visitor driver given County access to miles of freshwater shorelines and the renaissance of the Erie Canalway.
- There are gaps in agritourism promotion and limited physical connectivity between agritourism experiences.
- Nature & outdoor recreation is the foundational experience pillar that can thread other experiences together (including heritage, music/arts/culture, craft beverage/dining, wellness, etc.)
- Outdoor nature & adventure experiences are limited from December to February, inspiring partners to get creative about themed workshops and experiences during the colder months.

## **Arts, Culture & Heritage Products/Experiences**

- The renaissance of Downtown Auburn has created a central hub of activity and experiences for visitors.
- Cayuga has the opportunity to extend visitor dwell time by offering more music and modern culture events and experiences.
- There is a need to develop on-site immersion and visitor experiences at cultural/heritage sites to extend dwell time and grow audience interest in the assets.
- The uncertainty of federal funding facing arts and cultural organizations will require public-private partnerships and support (outside of capital grants) to sustain our cultural and heritage assets and events in the years to come.

# Our Strengths & Challenges

## Capital Projects & Infrastructure

- The County is ahead of the curve in terms of capital planning efforts. Multiple major capital plans have been completed in the last 5 years across the County and, as a result, the County also has a strong track record with State/Federal funding and local fundraising efforts.
- Limited multimodal mobility within Auburn and across the County inhibits visitor exploration equitably across the County.
- Planned Emerson Park experiences and nearby lodging will further grow Auburn as the visitor hub of Cayuga County.
- There are pockets of localized pushback on commercial development in various parts of the County, which often limits offerings available to visitors - whether dining, lodging, entertainment, etc.

## Brand & Marketing

- Regional PR and marketing partnerships help secure high-profile media placements featuring diversity of attractions and experiences.
- Cayuga can confidently position itself as a sustainable destination, as long-term preservation is deeply rooted in its identity as an agricultural community.
- Luxury brands in the destination and region want to better collaborate on curated campaigns that appeal to market segments with higher purchasing powers.
- Cayuga's primary message "Where you go matters" lends heavily to history/heritage experiences and can be strengthened by cultivating it for other types of experiences, including outdoor recreation, culinary, etc.

# Our Strengths & Challenges

## Industry Communications

- The industry looks to Tour Cayuga as the industry convener and as the northstar for industry updates; partners are hungry for more.
- Industry stakeholders are eager, engaged, appreciative and want more opportunities to learn and collaborate with one another.
- Industry partners are looking for ways to standardize feedback/leads/content loop between individual assets at Tour Cayuga.
- Staff time will be an important consideration with any increase in stakeholder engagement. Ongoing, regular, and effective communications with industry partners is a heavy lift on a small team.

## Leadership & Governance

- Strong regional partnerships and inclusivity lens cultivated by the current Executive Director creates a welcoming workplace and collaborative destination.
- The primary mandate of the organization is in marketing and promotion, however Tour Cayuga has supported product development and destination stewardship to some extent.
- Tour Cayuga has made significant strides to coordinate closely with municipal councils and chambers of commerce, with varied effects.
- There is current competition from local municipalities for managing lodging tax revenues, requiring careful education with municipality leaders across the County to demonstrate the value and work of the organization.

# Understanding the Evolution of Destination Organizations

The destination stewardship approach has emerged in recent years as a concept “embodying sustainable and responsible destination management” and that is “based on the responsible use of shared or ‘common pool’ resources”.

–WTTC “Towards Destination Stewardship”

**There are various types of destination organizations (DMOs) that lead the tourism and hospitality industry towards a collective vision for the destination.**

**Destination Marketing Organizations** are primarily focused on attracting visitors by promoting its unique attractions and experiences, rather than focusing on individual products or services. Its key functions also include ensuring the creation and maintenance of a positive image of the destination.

**Destination Management Organizations** emphasize connecting various components of a destination to create a cohesive and quality experience, and creating a coalition of organizations/ interests working towards the competitiveness and sustainability of the destination.

**Destination Stewardship Organizations** are in a continuous pursuit of a net positive tourism ecosystem that balances a positive tourism experience for visitors with that of the needs of local communities (including meeting the economic, environmental, and social/cultural needs of a destination). Destination stewardship requires full public-private -community collaboration.

A movement toward destination stewardship means resources and capacity increasingly support residents’ quality of life, environmental health, and the visitor experience - while fostering community pride and collective ownership of the destination.




**Tour Cayuga is committed to evolving its role as a leader in destination management and stewardship. Over the next five years, its strategies will continue to strengthen foundational marketing while placing greater emphasis on destination management and stewardship. Each strategy that follows is marked to indicate its primary focus: marketing, management, stewardship, or a combination.**







## How To Read The Plan

<b>The Strategy</b>	A general action-oriented statement that may be a continuation or expansion of an existing program by Tour Cayuga and other partners, or a newly proposed initiative.
<b>Why is this important?</b>	Each strategy will be proposed to either address or leverage findings identified in the Destination Diagnostic/SWOT analysis in the preceding section.
<b>Key Actions</b>	In order to ensure implementation of the strategy, we have outlined a set of key actions that should be taken by Tour Cayuga and this may include a list of chronological steps to be taken to fully implement the initiative, for example training, program development, outreach, etc.
<b>Lead Entities &amp; Partners</b>	We have included a list of public/non-profit/private entities and individuals whose support and cooperation is critical to successful implementation of each strategy, as well as identified any specific roles that may be played by each entity/partner.
<b>Level of Effort/Resource</b>	<p><b>Low:</b> Strategies that may easily be executed by existing Tour Cayuga staff based on existing roles/responsibilities. Low effort/resource strategies also do not require the reallocation of existing budgets.</p> <p><b>Medium:</b> Strategies that may require the introduction of new roles/responsibilities to existing Tour Cayuga staff work plans (with training involved) but that align closely with existing roles/responsibilities. Medium effort/resource strategies may require some reallocation of existing budgets or minimal effort to acquire new funds through sponsorships/grant applications, etc.</p> <p><b>High:</b> Strategies that may require the introduction of new roles/responsibilities to existing Tour Cayuga staff work plans or the hiring of new staff with additional skill sets/work experience. High effort/resource strategies will likely require reallocation of existing budgets and significant effort on the part of the team to acquire new funds through sponsorships/grant applications, etc.</p>
<b>Phasing</b>	<p><b>Short:</b> 1-2 years,</p> <p><b>Medium:</b> 3-5 years</p> <p><b>Long:</b> More than 5 years</p>
<b>Performance Metric</b>	A suggested indicator to measure the success of implementation of a strategy.
<b>Focus</b>	 <b>Marketing</b>  <b>Management</b>  <b>Stewardship</b>
<b>Case Study</b>	<p>Each case study starts with a challenge/opportunity identified by the destination that led to the implementation or pilot of the solution. Solutions presented in each case study are intended to provide Tour Cayuga and its partners with examples of how to be able to implement the strategy and, in particular, guide the incoming Executive Director as they step into the new role.</p> <p><b>Note: No case study is perfect. As such, we have also included any barriers to implementation and challenges faced by case study destinations to consider in the implementation in Cayuga.</b></p>

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## Goals

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Tour Cayuga's Strategic Plan is organized around four priority goals that guide how we support tourism development, marketing, and management across the county, by aligning with partners, promoting the destination, enabling the creation of unique experiences, and leading with our values:









1. Deepen Regional and Community Collaborations
2. Shift Brand Positioning and Visitor Perception
3. Improve Tourism Product and Experience Readiness
4. Center Destination Stewardship

# Glossary of Strategies

This simplified matrix is intended as a cheat sheet for the plan. For details on each strategy, please reference full strategy page.

Goal	Status	Focus	Strategy	Level of Effort/ Resources	Phasing
<b>1 - Deepen Regional and Community Collaborations</b>	Continuation	  	1.1 Actively participate in regional tourism partnerships and support regional marketing programs	Low	Short
	Continuation	  	1.2: Refine the Hibernation campaign to highlight indoor wellness, dining and seasonal outdoor experiences	Low	Short
	New	  	1.3: Launch a partner portal to provide partners with access to key industry resources and direct communication with Tour Cayuga	High	Medium
	New	  	1.4: Produce annual localized tourism impact reports for municipalities in the County	Medium	Short
	Continuation	  	1.5: Streamline partner communications through site visits, community meetings, and regular newsletters	Medium	Short
	Continuation	  	1.6: Grow and promote the annual tourism summit	Medium	Medium
<b>2 -Shift Brand Positioning &amp; Visitor Perception</b>	Continuation	  	2.1: Develop a luxury travel co-op marketing program with regional partners to unify messaging and brand for high-end Finger Lakes experiences	Medium	Short
	Continuation	  	2.2 Leverage the Go Beyond campaign to promote slow travel and sustainable experiences during the shoulder seasons	Low	Short
	Continuation	  	2.3: Expand tourism ambassador program to include social media influencers with aligned content and brand values	High	Short
	New	  	2.4: Create new digital resources and application processes to facilitate out-of-the-box meetings, events and group travel	Medium	Short
	Continuation	  	2.5: Enhance and expand trail campaigns to connect visitor experiences across the county	Medium	Medium
	New	  	2.6: Promote and advocate for alternative transportation options in the county	Low	Long

## STRATEGIC PLAN

Goal	Status	Focus	Strategy	Level of Effort/ Resources	Phasing
<b>3 - Improve Tourism Product and Experience Readiness</b>	Continuation	  	3.1: Provide funding and technical assistance for partners to develop on-site visitor experiences and cultural events (outside of capital grants)	High	Medium
	New	  	3.2: Support creation of lodging development package	Low	Short
	Continuation	  	3.3: Improve market readiness of attractions and experiences for FAM tours	Low	Short
	Continuation	  	3.4: Partner with education institutions and workforce organizations to grow the talent pipeline for tourism and hospitality	High	Medium
	Continuation	  	3.5: Lead partnerships to improve accessibility communications of accommodations and visitor attractions	Medium	Short
<b>4 - Center Destination Stewardship</b>	New	  	4.1: Revise Tour Cayuga's mission statement	Low	Short
	New	  	4.2: Create a place brand for Cayuga as a destination	High	Medium
	New	  	4.3: Restructure Tour Cayuga staff positions and responsibilities to incorporate stewardship responsibilities	Medium	Short
	Continuation	  	4.4: Expand destination stewardship programs and resource allocation	High	Long
	Continuation	  	4.5: Connect partners to available resources and training opportunities to support adoption of sustainable and inclusive practices	Low	Medium
	Continuation	  	4.6: Continue to participate on boards and committees focused on stewardship, cultural heritage, and DEI leadership	Medium	Short

## Goal: Deepen Regional and Community Collaborations

Tourism in Cayuga County thrives on strong relationships, both locally and across the Finger Lakes region. This priority focuses on deepening connections with regional partners and community stakeholders to position Cayuga as a valued, year-round destination and ensure residents benefit from a well-understood tourism economy.

### Strategies:

- 1.1 Actively participate in regional tourism partnerships and support regional marketing programs
- 1.2: Refine the Hibernation campaign to highlight indoor wellness, dining and seasonal outdoor experiences
- 1.3 Launch a partner portal to provide partners with access to key industry resources and direct communication with Tour Cayuga
- 1.4 Produce annual localized tourism impact reports for municipalities in the County
- 1.5 Streamline partner communications through site visits, community meetings, and regular newsletters
- 1.6 Grow and promote the annual tourism summit



## 1.1 Actively participate in regional tourism partnerships and support regional marketing programs to stay top of mind as a destination that is part of Central NY, the Finger Lakes, and the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad NY Byway.

Lead Entities/Staff & Partners	Tour Cayuga (lead - Executive Director), Partners include: Finger Lakes Regional Tourism Council, adjacent counties (Oswego County, Onondaga County, Cortland County, Tompkins County, Seneca County, Wayne County) and the Underground Railroad Consortium of New York
Level of Effort/Resource	Low
Phasing	Short
Performance Metrics	Number of regional campaigns supported; media impressions or shared leads resulting from co-op efforts
Focus	 Marketing  Stewardship

This strategy is a **continuation** of Tour Cayuga's regional partnership collaborations to promote the Finger Lakes region and the proposed NYS scenic byway.

### Why is this important?

Regional collaboration ensures Cayuga County remains visible within broader Finger Lakes messaging and benefits from pooled media reach. In addition, these collaborations enable Tour Cayuga to access state or federal funding for larger regional initiatives that it may otherwise be unable to.

### Key Actions:

- Actively participate in the Finger Lakes Regional Tourism Council and advance collaborative initiatives through various committees such as FLX Outdoor, Brave Women Winter, and Treasures Along the Erie Canal
- Actively support passing of legislative bill to designate the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad as a New York State Scenic Byway
- Align seasonal campaigns with regional efforts
- Identify joint funding opportunities

## 1.2: Refine the Hibernation campaign to include a well-curated but narrow mix of indoor wellness, dining and wintertime outdoor recreation

Lead Entities/Staff & Partners	Tour Cayuga (lead - Marketing & Sales Director, Marketing Manager), adjacent counties' DMOs (Oswego County, Onondaga County, Cortland County, Tompkins County, Seneca County, Wayne County), lodging and spa partners, wellness service providers, food and beverage providers, winter recreation partners
Level of Effort/Resource	Low
Phasing	Short
Performance Metrics	Partner participation; pageviews and engagement; winter overnight stays
Focus	 Marketing

This strategy is a **continuation** of the local Hibernation campaign, however with an additional regional sub-campaign to elevate a curated set of offerings that have the ability to attract more regional and long-haul visitors to cozy up and enjoy the winter season in the area. Rather than a wide range of product mix, Tour Cayuga should curate the mix of wellness experiences during the wintertime to cater to travelers with the ability to afford higher price points.

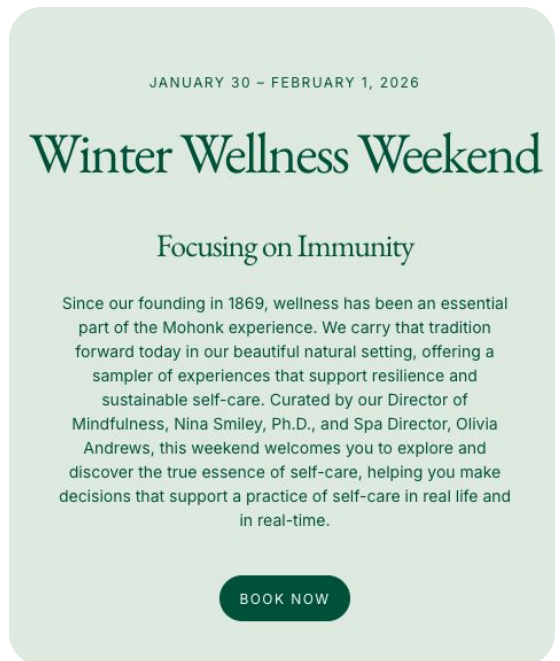
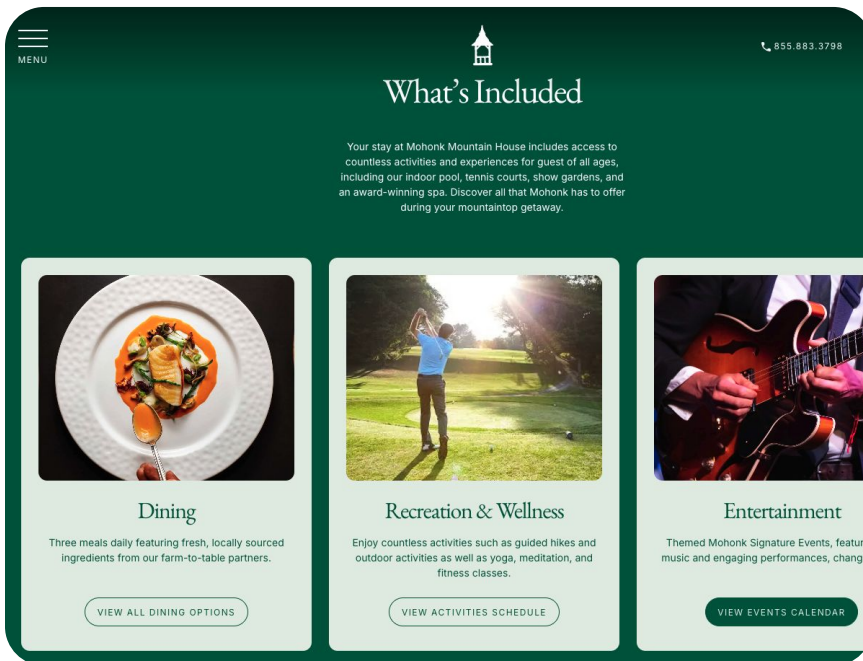
### Why is this important?

Supports off-season visitation from Jan-Apr, which were reported by stakeholders as challenging sales periods, and repositions winter as a time for elevated restorative experiences.

### Key Actions:

- Discuss campaign success metrics to-date and identify new opportunities
- Curate Hibernation products and focus on highly differentiated offerings that can create a 2-3 day wellness retreat-like experience with the ability to pull visitors from wider trade areas
- Identify regional partners with complementary experiences that could amplify the campaign
- Create new partner packages that align with new campaign metrics
- Refresh campaign visuals and update landing page content
- Promote through email and paid ads

## CASE STUDY: MOHONK MOUNTAIN HOUSE, NY



In order to overcome its slower trafficked season in the winter, Mohonk Mountain House began developing a series of 3-day to week-long curated experiences that include signature entertainment, dining, and activities based on themes to drive interest and bookings.

### The Solution

On the last weekend of January, for example, Mohonk Mountain House invites a wellness expert to curate a 3-day 'Winter Wellness Weekend' experience across the destination with specially-designed recreation activities including guided hikes, yoga, and meditation classes, themed entertainment in the evenings with special artists/performers, and wine-pairing dinners.

In the month of March, its 'Chefs on the Mountain' weekend invites guests to partake in hands-on cooking/baking workshops and other neatly curated food and beverage-themed experiences.

### 1.3: Launch a partner portal to provide partners with access to key industry resources and direct communication with Tour Cayuga

**Lead Entities/Staff & Partners** Tour Cayuga (lead - Partnerships Manager), CRM provider

**Level of Effort/Resource**  High

**Phasing**  Medium

**Performance Metrics** Volume of partner communications/responses, partner satisfaction and feedback

**Focus**  Management

This strategy is a **new initiative to improve access and transparency of industry resources and updates for partners to better engage with Tour Cayuga, without straining staff capacity.**

**Why is this important?**

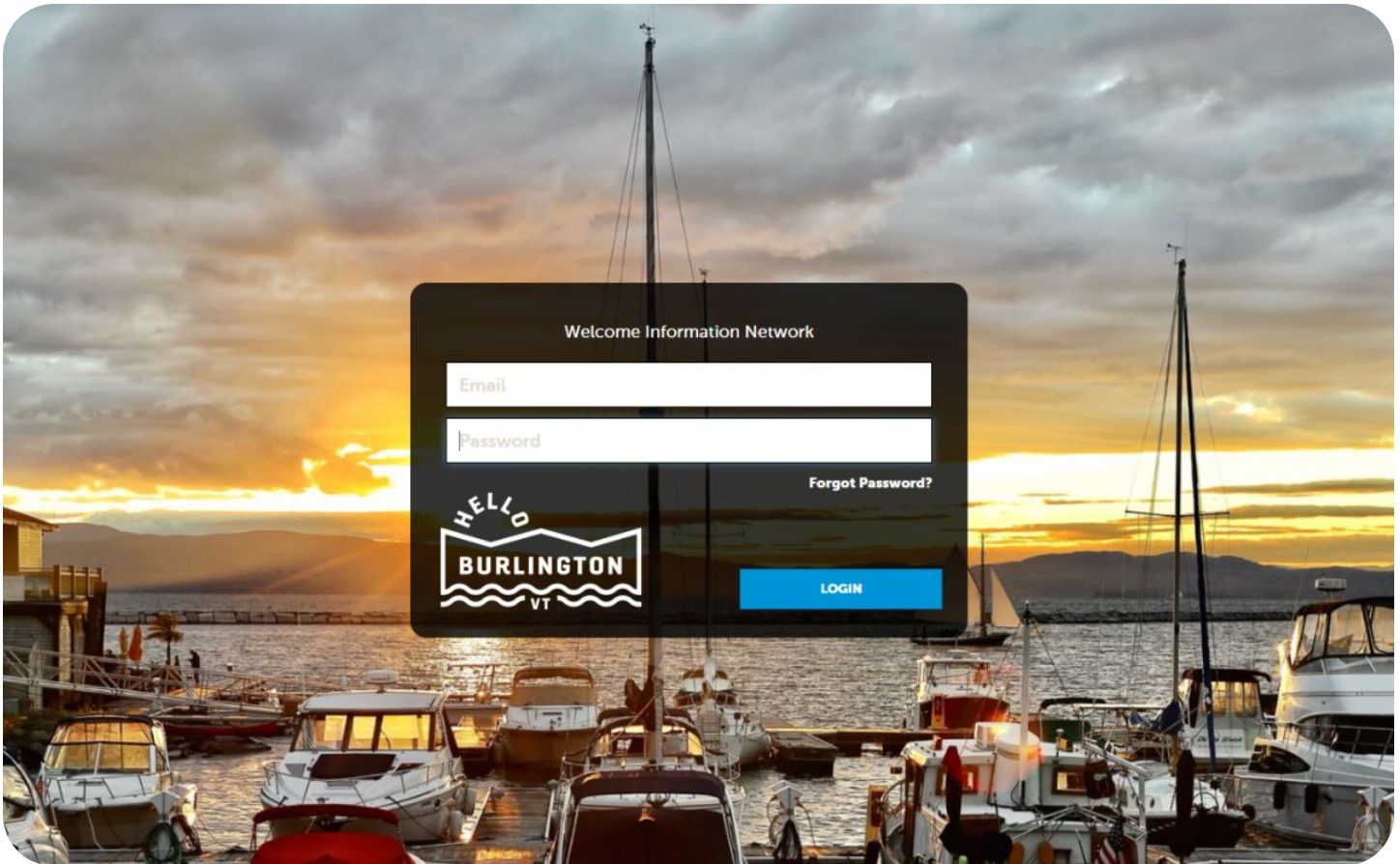
Centralized access to tools and updates supports consistency, professionalism, and alignment across partners, with less burden placed on internal staff to create specialized email newsletters and rather relying on automated notifications to partners with portal access.

**Key Actions:**

- Design a secure partner portal that can be accessed through unique login, which allows hotels, restaurants, attractions, and other stakeholders to manage their data and access reports/ resources
- Provide in-person training to onboard partners to the portal and demonstrate value of the portal to partners
- Regularly update the portal with campaign engagement opportunities, promotional toolkits, visitor and tourism economic data, industry updates, and sales opportunities
- Create incentives for partners to continuously access and utilize the portal

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## CASE STUDY: HELLO BURLINGTON, VT



Hello Burlington was utilizing a myriad of tools to track engagement with partners resulting in inefficiency and inaccuracy in customer relationship management processes.

### The Solution

To provide the greatest support with limited resources, Hello Burlington's Welcome Information Network, powered by simpleview, enables partners to easily access industry information and resources through a secure network, maintain/manage their business information/event details, and create special packages/offers in collaboration with Hello Burlington.

To ensure success of the portal and increase utilization amongst partners, Hello Burlington created robust onboarding assets prior to the launch of the portal to educate partners on the use of the platform and types of services/information that can be accessed. In addition, username/password access can easily be managed by partners through a single click and email.



## 1.4: Produce annual localized tourism impact reports for municipalities in the County

**Lead Entities/Staff & Partners** Tour Cayuga (lead - Executive Director, Partnerships Manager)

**Level of Effort/Resource**

Medium

**Phasing**

Short

**Performance Metrics**

Number of reports produced and distributed; feedback from municipal leaders

**Focus**

 Management

**This new strategy will strengthen Tour Cayuga's relationships with local governments by providing annual tourism impact reports directly to municipal staff and elected officials. These reports will share data and insights to build a common understanding of the industry's value and evolving needs, helping guide local decision-making related to tourism.**

### Why is this important?

Local government decisions regarding commercial development and infrastructure/capital improvements continue to impact the visitor experience in the County. In order to ensure all municipalities play their part to build positive experiences and manage the overall destination, local decision makers need the information and evaluation tools to be able to compare themselves against other municipalities and identify ways to improve local offerings.

### Key Actions:

- Conduct a municipality survey to verify the types of data and impact results that may be informative and valuable to local governments
- Customize countywide data to municipal level
- Design digestible annual tourism reports for localities
- Present findings at Town Halls/local Chamber annual meetings

## Performance Index

# Destination Dashboard

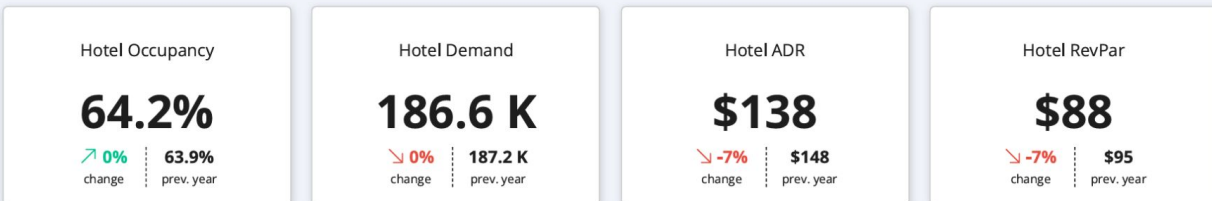
At each monthly board meeting, Explore Asheville generates a statistical output report. This snapshot of the local tourism economy includes the latest lodging and airport passenger data.

### Destination Performance Report- May 2025

# ASHEVILLE

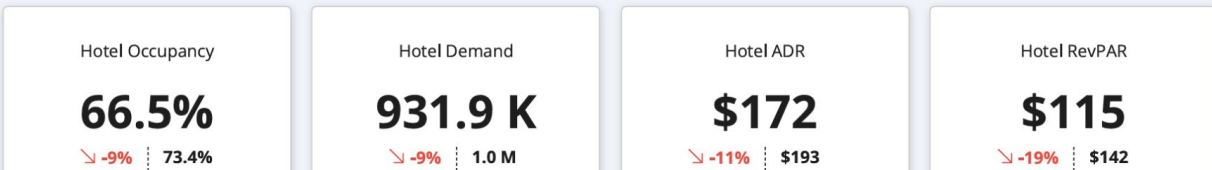
#### Hotel Performance - March 2025

Source: STR



#### Hotel Performance - FY25 YTD

Source: STR



In Asheville, North Carolina, city and county leaders needed more consistent, localized tourism data to make informed decisions on infrastructure, event support, and public investment. While overall visitor impact data existed at the county level, it wasn't presented in a way that was timely, digestible, or clearly connected to local planning priorities. This lack of clear, accessible information contributed to public skepticism about the value of tourism.

## The Solution

Explore Asheville began producing monthly and annual Tourism Impact Dashboards that track key metrics such as lodging occupancy, revenue, short-term rental trends, and air travel data. These dashboards are public-facing, visually accessible, and broken down in ways that allow municipal leaders and the public to understand the economic role of tourism. The reports are regularly presented to elected officials, media, and community stakeholders to build transparency and support data-informed decision-making.

## 1.5: Streamline partner communications through site visits, community meetings, and regular newsletters.

**Lead Entities/Staff & Partners** Tour Cayuga (lead - all team members), Chambers of Commerce, Municipalities, Community Groups, Outdoor Recreation/Tourism Community Groups

**Level of Effort/Resource** Medium

**Phasing** Short

**Performance Metrics** Number of meetings attended; newsletter and portal open/click-through rates; partner satisfaction feedback

**Focus**  Management

**This strategy is a continuation and expansion of Tour Cayuga’s ‘Tourism Community Days’ engagement and current partner communications with chambers, businesses, municipalities and tourism asset managers. These targeted forms of communications creates opportunities for partners to share market challenges or propose ideas for industry improvements.**

### Why is this important?

While digital forms of communication through monthly/weekly email newsletters provides a regular and consistent means of providing one-sided update from Tour Cayuga, partners have shared their preference for more in-person, personable means of communications to be able to share their updates as well.

### Key Actions:

- Develop a questionnaire template for in-person partner meetings/site visits
- Connect with each local chamber and/or municipality to identify opportunities for in-person meetings and site visits on a quarterly or annual basis
- Schedule monthly site visits to key attractions/assets and attend local chamber/town meetings
- Create a brief record of engagement to be shared internally with the team and Board and to use to track any changes in the industry
- Produce a visually engaging quarterly newsletter with updates, funding opportunities, and partner highlights as collected via the Partner Portal.

## 1.6: Grow and promote the annual tourism summit

<b>Lead Entities/Staff &amp; Partners</b>	Tour Cayuga (lead - Executive Director, Partnerships Manager), Tourism businesses and organizations (including tourism attraction operators/ managers), Chambers of Commerce, Municipality leaders
<b>Level of Effort/Resource</b>	Medium
<b>Phasing</b>	Medium
<b>Performance Metrics</b>	Event attendance; participant feedback; number of partner contributions to the event or program
<b>Focus</b>	 Management  Stewardship

**This strategy supports the continuation of the annual tourism summit to enable in-person countywide collaboration with industry partners and celebrate success stories from across the county.**

### **Why is this important?**

These events foster a sense of shared purpose, highlight industry contributions, and offer space for reflection, feedback, and collaboration across sectors.

### **Key Actions:**

- Expand the summit program to include booth/exhibitor opportunities for industry partners to support learning/sharing within the industry
- Create an awards program to highlight/showcase industry partners with key innovations in sustainability practices, customer service, etc.
- Create an event marketing toolkit for partners to be able to support the promotion of the event (including creative assets for use on websites, social media, etc.)

## Goal: Shift Brand Positioning and Visitor Perception

How Cayuga County is perceived by visitors directly impacts its ability to attract the right audiences throughout the year. This priority focuses on strengthening brand storytelling, shifting perceptions of accessibility and connectivity, and positioning Cayuga as a destination for meaningful group travel and one-of-a-kind experiences.

### Strategies:

- 2.1: Develop a luxury travel co-op marketing program with regional partners to unify messaging and brand for high-end Finger Lakes experiences**
- 2.2 Leverage the Go Beyond campaign to promote slow travel and sustainable experiences during the shoulder seasons**
- 2.3: Expand tourism ambassador program to include social media influencers with aligned content and brand values**
- 2.4: Create new digital resources and application processes to facilitate out-of-the-box meetings, events and group travel**
- 2.5: Enhance and expand trail campaigns to connect visitor experiences across the county**
- 2.6: Promote and advocate for alternative transportation options in the county**





## 2.1: Develop a luxury travel co-op marketing program with regional partners to unify messaging and brand for high-end Finger Lakes experiences

Lead Entities/Staff & Partners	Tour Cayuga (lead - Marketing & Sales Director, PR Manager), Lake Ontario and Cayuga Lake Wine Trails, regional boutique inns, Chef-driven dining businesses, New York State Tourism Industry Association
Level of Effort/Resource	Medium
Phasing	Short
Performance Metrics	Participation in campaign; increase in off-season luxury bookings; earned media mentions
Focus	 Marketing

This strategy is a **continuation** and expansion on efforts to promote Cayuga and the Finger Lakes region as a desirable destination for unique luxury experiences.

### Why is this important?

Luxury travel remains a relatively untapped market segment in Cayuga and surrounding counties; regional alignment can create a more compelling offering and benefits from pooled media reach. This program will, however, require significant financial contribution to ensure partner commitment and participation. As such, the regional partnership will need to pursue access to state or federal funding (e.g. Market NY, NYS EDC Tourism Matching Funds) to sustain the program.

### Key Actions:

- Define shared audience
- Assess current and in-development luxury products and experiences
- Build messaging guide to use regionally
- Partner with luxury brands and accommodations
- Develop bundled promotions

## CASE STUDY: VISIT NAPA VALLEY



# Cheers, The Good Life

## The Good Life isn't simply something you experience in Napa Valley

It's all about how to savor the best that life has to offer – and there's no better place to spend quality time than Napa Valley.

So you're thinking about a Napa Valley escape?

Well, you've come to the right place, because we've got a few secrets to share and insider tricks up our sleeve to make sure you experience Napa Valley right. And we believe *once-in-a-lifetime experiences should happen at least once a day.*

Whether you're ballooning over the vineyards at sunrise, soothing away stress at one of the most blissful spas in the world, or simply savoring a glass of cabernet with friends overlooking a spectacular view, *every day in Napa Valley is the best day ever.*



Napa Valley region's previous brand, 'Legendary Napa Valley', had been successful at building a strong image for the region as a fine wine and gourmet cuisine destination. However, it no longer resonated with travelers in a post-pandemic environment who valued time and meaningful connections over the materiality of expensive wines.

## The Solution

While the updated 'Cheers, the Good Life' brand of the Napa Valley region maintains the luxurious image of the destination, it instead places more emphasis on the importance of shared experiences and meaningful connections. The campaign highlights Napa Valley not just as a destination for wine enthusiasts but as a place where visitors can savor life's pleasures in a relaxed, elegant setting with those we value most.

## 2.2: Leverage the Go Beyond campaign to promote slow travel and sustainable experiences during the shoulder seasons

Lead Entities/Staff & Partners	Tour Cayuga (lead - Marketing Manager, PR Manager), Tourism businesses and organization, Chambers of Commerce, Regional partners
Level of Effort/Resource	Low
Phasing	Short
Performance Metrics	Number of campaign participants; Reach of campaign content (views, engagement); Partner satisfaction and repeat participation
Focus	 Marketing  Stewardship

**This strategy is a continuation and expansion of Go Beyond, engaging Cayuga County’s tourism partners in a collaborative marketing campaign to promote slow travel, sustainability, and experiences aligned with local values. The campaign will highlight businesses that embrace responsible practices and encourage longer, more immersive visitor stays outside the busiest season.**

### Why is this important?

Partners increasingly want to align with responsible tourism messaging, but lack the tools or platforms to do so. A coordinated campaign helps amplify their efforts, educates visitors, and positions the county as a values-aligned destination while also driving visitor traffic to the destination during shoulder months, April, October, and November.

### Key Actions:

- Adapt Go Beyond campaign brand and message platform to include a ‘Go Beyond Summer’ pillar to highlight experiences that are best experienced outside of the May-September season
- Recruit participating partners and provide a communications toolkit
- Feature stories and itineraries on website, email, and social channels
- Include slow travel content in seasonal and regional campaigns



## CASE STUDY: VISIT NAPA VALLEY, CA



**LAKE TAHOE RUM TRAIL**

Run has become the unofficial beverage of choice for North Lake Tahoe, as it can be found in cocktails all around the lake. Follow the **Tahoe Rum Trail** around these six locations and raise your glass over scenic lakefront views.

**What Is It?**  
The Tahoe Rum Trail is a collection of six restaurants and bars located around the North Lake Tahoe shoreline that feature specialty rum cocktails to enjoy lakefront.

**Where Can I Find It?**  
The Tahoe Rum Trail is made up of six locations, each with their own iconic rum beverage:

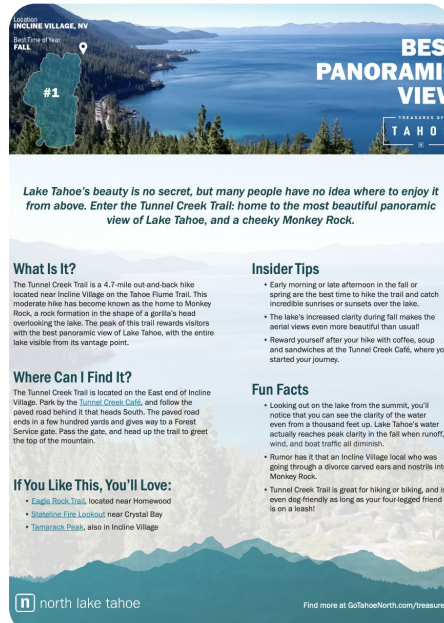
- **Duke 111** can be found behind the Hyatt Regency in Incline Village, and is known for their Rum Runner
- **Gar Woods** is located in Carnelian Bay, and is home to the iconic Wet Woody
- **John's on the Lake** is a piece of Hawaii in Tahoe City, exemplified by their Mai Tai's
- **Sundaebeach** can be found in Tahoe City, and features their signature Duke's Mai Tai
- **West Shore Cafe** is located in Homewood, where you can try their latest drink, the Hakuna MaTahoe
- **Chatterbox Landing** can be found in Homewood, where you can enjoy their signature Chambers Punch

**If You Like This, You'll Love:**

- **Sundaebeach** in King's Beach
- **Lone Eagle Cafe** in Incline Village
- **Wentworth's Cuisine** in Tahoe City

north lake tahoe

Find more at [Golahearth.com/treasures](http://Golahearth.com/treasures)



**BEST PANORAMIC VIEW**

Lake Tahoe's beauty is no secret, but many people have no idea where to enjoy it from above. Enter the **Tunnel Creek Trail**: home to the most beautiful panoramic view of Lake Tahoe, and a cheeky **Monkey Rock**.

**What Is It?**  
The Tunnel Creek Trail is a 4.7-mile out-and-back hike located near Incline Village on the Tahoe Rim Trail. This moderate hike has become known as the home to **Monkey Rock**, a rock formation in the shape of a gorilla's head overlooking the lake. The peak of this trail rewards visitors with the best panoramic view of Lake Tahoe, with the entire lake visible from its vantage point.

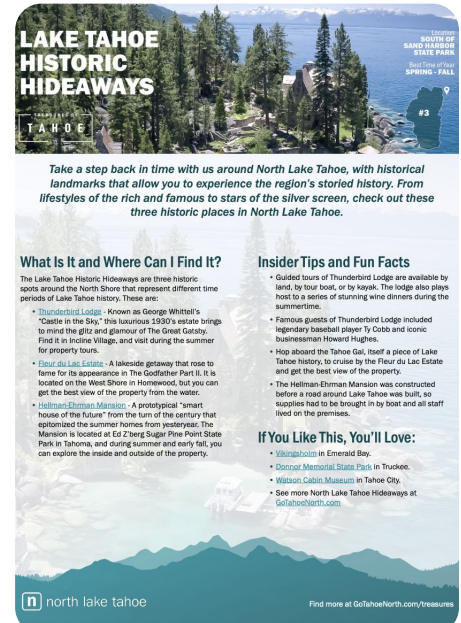
**Where Can I Find It?**  
The Tunnel Creek Trail is located on the East end of Incline Village. Park by the **Tunnel Creek Café**, and follow the paved road behind it that heads South. The paved road ends in a few hundred yards and gives way to a Forest Service gate. Pass the gate, and head up the trail to greet the top of the mountain.

**If You Like This, You'll Love:**

- **Eagle Rock Trail**, located near Homewood
- **Stateline Fire Lookout** near Crystal Bay
- **Tamarack Peak**, also in Incline Village

north lake tahoe

Find more at [Golahearth.com/treasures](http://Golahearth.com/treasures)



**LAKE TAHOE HISTORIC HIDEAWAYS**

Take a step back in time with us around North Lake Tahoe, with historical landmarks that allow you to experience the region's storied history. From lifestyles of the rich and famous to stars of the silver screen, check out these three historic places in North Lake Tahoe.

**What Is It and Where Can I Find It?**  
The Lake Tahoe Historic Hideaways are three historic spots around the North Shore that represent different time periods of Lake Tahoe history. These are:

- **Thunderbird Lodge**: Known as George Whittell's "Castle in the Sky," this luxurious 1930's estate brings to mind the glitz and glamour of The Great Gatsby. Find it in Incline Village, and visit during the summer for property tours
- **Fleur du Lac Estate**: A lakeside getaway that rose to fame for its appearance in The Godfather Part II, it is located on the West Shore in Homewood, but you can get the best view of the property from the water
- **Helman-Ehrman Mansion**: A prototypical "smart house of the future" from the turn of the century that epitomized the summer homes from yesteryear. The Mansion is located at Ed Z'berg Sugar Pine Point State Park in Tahoe, and during summer and early fall, you can explore the inside and outside of the property

**Insider Tips and Fun Facts**

- Guided tours of Thunderbird Lodge are available by land, by tour boat, or by kayak. The lodge also plays host to a series of stunning wine dinners during the summertime
- Famous guests of Thunderbird Lodge included legendary baseball player Ty Cobb and iconic businessman Howard Hughes
- Hop aboard the Tahoe Gal, itself a piece of Lake Tahoe history, to cruise by the Fleur du Lac Estate and get the best view of the property
- The Helman-Ehrman Mansion was constructed before a road around Lake Tahoe was built, so supplies had to be brought in by boat and all start lived on the premises

**If You Like This, You'll Love:**

- **Vikingholm** in Emerald Bay
- **Donner Memorial State Park** in Truckee
- **Wentworth Cabin Museum** in Tahoe City
- See more North Lake Tahoe Hideaways at [Golahearth.com](http://Golahearth.com)

north lake tahoe

Find more at [Golahearth.com/treasures](http://Golahearth.com/treasures)

North Lake Tahoe has long been known as a winter sports destination and equally popular in the summer. Both seasons accounted for over 24 million annual visitors while occupancy and visitor spending dips in the Spring and Fall.

### The Solution

North Lake Tahoe curated a set of leisure activities that can be best enjoyed in the Spring and Fall and developed a campaign, 'Tahoe Treasures' that aimed to raise awareness of these available opportunities, and to inspire the desire to visit during the shoulder seasons. The campaign included a 12-part video series featuring a specific shoulder-season recreation activity, user-generated content from micro-influencers, and various other owned media assets.

## 2.3: Expand tourism ambassador program to include social media influencers with aligned content and brand values

**Lead Entities/Staff & Partners** Tour Cayuga (lead - PR Manager), tourism businesses and attractions, media influencers

**Level of Effort/Resource** High

**Phasing** Short

**Performance Metrics** Number of active ambassadors and creators per year; Demographic and thematic diversity of participants; Volume and engagement rates of ambassador-generated content; Increase in traffic to highlighted experiences on the Tour Cayuga website

**Focus**  Marketing  Stewardship

**This strategy is a continuation and expansion of the existing Tourism Ambassador Program. It seeks to deepen engagement with current ambassadors while expanding outreach to include diverse nationally-renowned content creators who are aligned with Tour Cayuga’s brand. These creators should have a loyal base of followers and will highlight key visitor experiences, such as family-friendly outdoor adventures, women’s history, and Black heritage, through authentic storytelling that resonates with a range of audiences.**

### Why is this important?

Authentic, peer-driven content is increasingly influential in travel decision-making. By supporting and diversifying the Tourism Ambassador Program, Tour Cayuga can foster deeper engagement with residents, visitors, and creators who reflect the full spectrum of the region’s stories and identities. It also helps ensure that local voices are centered in marketing and storytelling efforts.

### Key Actions:

- Continue recruitment and training of ambassadors, with a focus on representation across ages, interests, and backgrounds.
- Establish content themes tied to priority tourism experiences (e.g., lake life, heritage tourism, culinary exploration).
- Partner with aligned influencers to co-create seasonal content or trip itineraries.
- Develop simple content creation guidelines and incentives for consistent participation.
- Highlight ambassador content across Tour Cayuga’s owned and earned media channels.





## 2.4: Create new digital resources to facilitate out-of-the-box meetings, events and group travel

**Lead Entities/Staff & Partners** Tour Cayuga (lead - Marketing & Sales Director), Downtown Auburn BID, Local hotels, venues, and tourism businesses, Chamber of Commerce & Economic Development Partners

**Level of Effort/Resource** Medium

**Phasing** Short

**Performance Metrics** Number of venues listed in the digital inventory; Number of RFPs submitted and fulfilled; Growth in group travel or meeting-related bookings year-over-year; Visitor and business feedback on the ease and utility of the new resources

**Focus** MK Marketing MG Management

**This new strategy aims to position Cayuga County as a distinctive location for small-to-medium sized meetings, events, and group travel. It includes creating a digital inventory of non-traditional venues, such as historic sites, art spaces, lakefront properties, and community gathering places, while also formalizing processes for connecting interested planners with the right spaces and service providers.**

### Why is this important?

Cayuga County offers a wide variety of memorable settings for group gatherings, but many are underutilized due to limited visibility or lack of centralized information. With the rise of demand for experiential and place-based meetings and events, this strategy addresses a key opportunity to diversify tourism revenue, increase shoulder-season visitation, and support local businesses by better connecting planners with unique venues. It also supports the county's goal of leveraging Downtown Auburn and its waterfronts as regional hubs.

### Key Actions:

- Develop a digital inventory of unique venues and gathering spaces, with emphasis on Downtown Auburn and waterfront locations - the inventory should feature standard specs of each space but also details on accessibility and examples of unique events/meetings that have been held in each space to serve as inspiration to meeting planners.
- Create a formal RFP process via the partner portal to enable group planners to submit requests more easily to multiple potential suitable venues and services.
- Partner with hospitality businesses to promote packages and group-friendly experiences.
- Feature the inventory on the Tour Cayuga website with itineraries and testimonials.
- Offer onboarding resources for venues new to group or meeting bookings.



## CASE STUDY: VISIT MADISON, WI

### MEETING FACILITIES —

#### Facility Info

#### Meeting Rooms

Floorplan File	Floorplan File
Largest Room	11400
Total Sq. Ft.	32509
Reception Capacity	800
Theatre Capacity	2255
Onsite A/V Equipment	✓
Banquet/Catering Managers	✓
Bar Services	✓
Dance Floor	✓
In-House Audio/Visual	✓
In-House Pipe & Drape	✓
Onsite Catering	✓
Tables & Chairs Available	✓
Banquet Capacity	450
Number of Rooms	16
Classroom Capacity	108

[LINK TO PREVIOUS](#)

## OVERTURE CENTER FOR THE ARTS



201 State St.  
Madison, WI 53703  
Phone: (608) 258-4163

[Email](#) | [Website](#)

TripAdvisor Traveler Rating  
 336 reviews



Despite its attractive location for meetings and events with direct flight connections to major hubs like Dallas and D.C., Madison, WI competes frequently with neighboring destinations such as St. Paul, MN and Green Bay, WI, for event business.

### The Solution

In order to differentiate itself from regional competitors, Destination Madison took a bold approach to curate collections of unique venues that are non-traditional, or 'beyond the ballroom', to encourage meeting planners to utilize the destinations' variety of venues. The curated collections featured venues with varying 'vibes': Historical & Architectural, Activity Based, Campus Connections, LGBTQ+ Friendly, and Beautiful Barns.

For each venue in the collection, a comprehensive and detailed spec list and gallery of images were established to ensure that meeting planners have all the necessary information and inspiration to support decision-making.

## 2.5: Enhance and expand trail campaigns to connect visitor experiences across the county

Lead Entities/Staff & Partners	Tour Cayuga (lead - Marketing Manager), Local businesses, farms, and makers; Municipal and cultural partners, Regional tourism organizations
Level of Effort/Resource	Medium
Phasing	Medium
Performance Metrics	Number of trails launched or refreshed; Web traffic and downloads of trail materials; Business participation and visitor feedback; Increase in visitor engagement across multiple locations
Focus	<div><div>MK</div>Marketing<div>ST</div>Stewardship</div>

This strategy is a **continuation** and expansion of previous thematic trail efforts including the Sweet Treat Trail, Treasures Along the Erie Canal, Canal Town Program, and the Erie Canal Resource Guide. It focuses on enhancing existing campaigns and developing new experiential trails, such as local food, arts, retail, or seasonal experiences, to better connect attractions, drive regional exploration, and encourage longer stays.

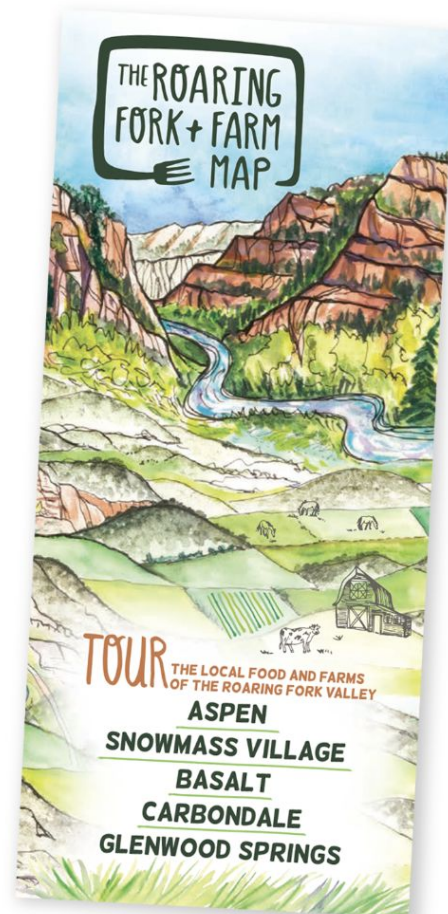
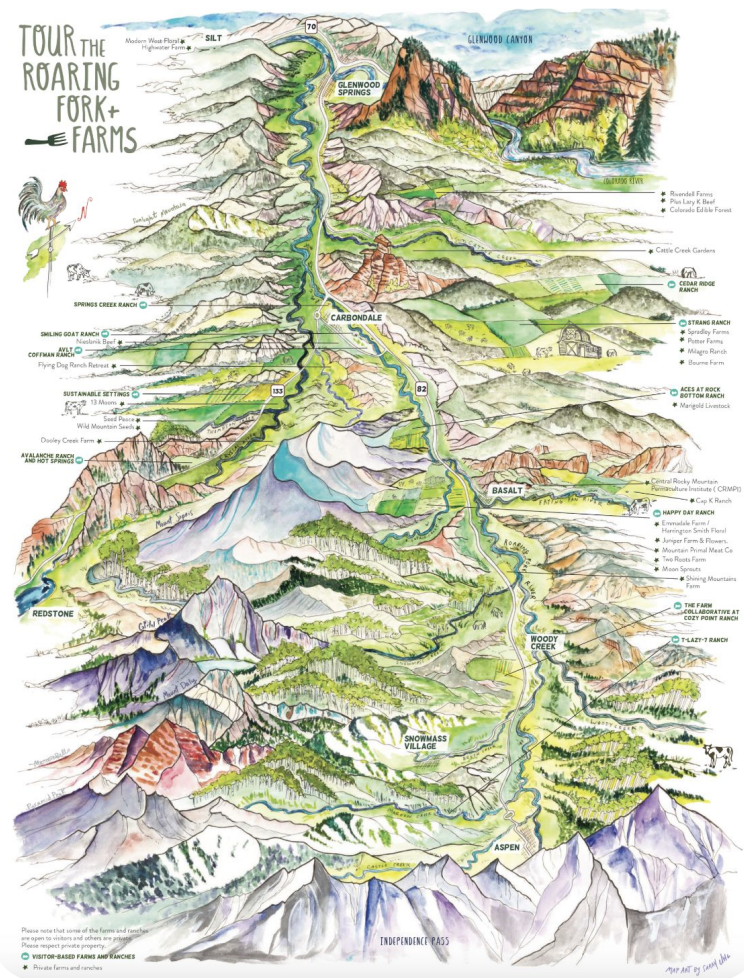
### Why is this important?

Cayuga County is rich in dispersed, locally-owned attractions, some of which can be difficult for visitors to discover or connect to without a clear narrative. Themed trails help tie together sites, businesses, and experiences in a way that's easy to explore, while also elevating lesser-known areas. Trails also support cross-promotion, drive business to multiple locations, and align with travelers' increasing interest in curated, self-guided experiences.

### Key Actions:

- Convene partners to co-create new experiential trails (e.g., produce market or local maker trail).
- Refresh content for existing trails and align with updated branding and seasonal campaigns.
- Create a consistent format and naming convention for all trails to build brand recognition.
- Promote trails through digital maps (with travel time details), itineraries (suggested time of day/week/month), and partner channels.
- Explore low-cost signage or in-store displays to signal trail participation.

## CASE STUDY: ROARING FORK VALLEY, CO



The Roaring Fork Valley in Colorado faced a common challenge for rural destinations: how to connect small, locally owned farms, markets, and food artisans across a dispersed region in a way that encourages visitation and supports the local economy. While the area had a rich local food scene and agricultural heritage, visitors found it difficult to discover and navigate these experiences without a centralized tool or story.

### The Solution

Local organizations collaborated to launch the Roaring Fork + Farm Map, a curated online and print resource that highlights more than 50 food-related experiences across the valley. The map connects visitors to farms, restaurants, markets, and events that showcase the region's food systems and culture. Designed as a self-guided experience, it encourages travelers to explore at their own pace while supporting multiple local businesses. The project incorporates storytelling, custom icons, easy-to-use filters, and seasonal updates, offering a model for experiential trails that are both practical and visually engaging.

## 2.6: Promote and advocate for alternative transportation options (public transit, shuttles, EV charging stations, and cycling) throughout the county

**Lead Entities/Staff & Partners** Cayuga County Department of Planning & Economic Development, Centro & Transit Operators, City of Auburn & Municipal Partners, NYS and local Parks managers, Bike Advocacy Groups & Local Outfitters, Tour Cayuga (support - Executive Director)

**Level of Effort/Resource** Low

**Phasing** Long

**Performance Metrics** Number of transportation-related resources or promotions published; Visitor usage of transit/shuttle options (where available); Number of new multi-modal connections or amenities developed; Qualitative feedback from partners and users on ease of access

**Focus** MG Management ST Stewardship

**This is a new initiative that aims to expand awareness, access, and advocacy for alternative transportation options throughout Cayuga County. It focuses on promoting Canal Town Bike Friendly-certified businesses (and supporting others to be certified), supporting new multi-modal connections, collaborating with partners to increase EV charging stations, and improve mobility for visitors and residents, especially between natural assets and urban centers.**

### Why is this important?

Improving access to parks, trails, and downtowns through non-driving options supports both sustainability and equity goals. It also helps reduce congestion, increases dwell time in key areas, and aligns with growing visitor demand for car-free experiences. Enhancing public transit, shuttles, and cycling infrastructure can strengthen Cayuga's appeal to eco-conscious travelers and make it easier for all visitors to explore the region.

### Key Actions:

- Promote existing public transit routes that serve visitor-friendly destinations.
- Improve signage and connectivity between parks, trails, and downtowns using bike lanes, sidewalks, and wayfinding.
- Support development of park-and-ride experiences for visitors in the Auburn area, with access to shuttles or trails.
- Collaborate with partners to explore pilot shuttle programs or mobility hubs during peak seasons or events.
- Advocate for bike-friendly infrastructure and secure bike parking near high-traffic visitor sites.
- Advocate for more EV charging stations in strategic locations, supporting a growing network of EV-easy routes in the region.



## Goal: Improve Tourism Product and Experience Readiness

To deliver on the promise of the Cayuga County brand, tourism experiences on the ground must be ready to meet visitor expectations. This priority focuses on helping partners develop, refine, and promote market-ready, accessible, and workforce-supported offerings that reflect the character of the region.

### Strategies:

- 3.1: Provide funding and technical assistance for partners to develop on-site visitor experiences and cultural events
- 3.2: Support creation of lodging development packages
- 3.3: Improve market readiness of attractions and experiences for FAM tours
- 3.4: Partner with education institutions and workforce organizations to grow the talent pipeline for tourism and hospitality
- 3.5: Lead partnerships to improve accessibility communications of accommodations and visitor attractions

### 3.1: Provide funding and technical assistance for partners to develop on-site visitor experiences and cultural events (outside of capital grants)

Lead Entities/Staff & Partners	Tour Cayuga (lead - Executive Director), Cultural and historical organizations, Event organizers and experience hosts
Level of Effort/Resource	High
Phasing	Medium
Performance Metrics	Number of funded experiences or events, Estimated room nights generated, Visitor and partner satisfaction feedback
Focus	 Management  Stewardship

This strategy is a **continuation** and expansion of previous event sponsorship support. It introduces more structured funding and guidance to help partners design visitor-ready experiences (outside of capital grants) that increase overnight stays and regional appeal.

#### Why is this important?

While Cayuga County has a wealth of community events and potential experiences, many are not designed with tourism audiences in mind. Strategic investment and technical support will help local partners build on the successes of existing cultural events and festivals happening throughout the year that have grown their own niche audience segments and not only convert these visitors into overnight stays (particularly in shoulder seasons) but make history and culture more accessible to new and younger audiences.

In particular, historic and cultural assets in the destination are in need of engaging exhibits and experiences that enable visitors to really immerse themselves in the history of each site.

#### Key Actions:

- Determine grant program goals and priorities, applicant eligibility/requirements (e.g. matching component, sustainability criteria), etc.
- Launch pilot grants for priority sites/regions and match successful applicants with technical assistance providers (e.g. curator, app developer, PR/marketing expert, event management teams, etc.)
- Fund development of new visitor-ready experiences, such as guided tours, workshops, or site activations.
- Evaluate impact of pilot grant distribution

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## CASE STUDY: NJ HERITAGE TOURISM GRANT



### Learn about the Jacobus Vanderveer House

This video is made possible by a grant from The Society of the Cincinnati in the State of New Jersey



### Learn about General Henry Knox

This video is made possible by a grant from The Society of the Cincinnati in the State of New Jersey

Over the last five decades, the state of New Jersey has made significant strides in historic preservation, following the passing of the state's Preservation Act in the 1970s. While funding for capital historic preservation projects significantly increased during that time, the quality of visitor experiences on offer and management of the historic sites remained limited.

### The Solution

As such, the New Jersey Historic Trust began administering the Heritage Tourism Grants, which provide a 3:1 funding match of up to \$75,000 to municipalities or non-profit organizations seeking to develop interpretive signage, trainings, workshops, and other visitor-ready experiences to be hosted at historic sites.

The goal of the grant program is to enhance visitor experiences at historical sites and ensure visitor-readiness of key assets in preparation for the semiquincentennial anniversary of the Revolutionary War.

### 3.2: Support creation of lodging development package

Lead Entities/Staff & Partners	Cayuga Industrial Development Agency, Cayuga County Department of Planning & Economic Development, Private landowners and developers, Tour Cayuga (support - marketing manager)
Level of Effort/Resource	Low
Phasing	Short
Performance Metrics	Number of development packets distributed, Lodging inquiries or proposals generated, New accommodations opened near target sites
Focus	 Management

This **new** strategy is intended to leverage efforts previously made by Tour Cayuga to assess the hotel market and feasibility of lodging development in the greater Auburn submarket. A lodging development package should serve as a developer pitch/marketing tool to present to potential developers/hoteliers at industry trade shows and drum up interest for priority sites, especially around Emerson Park.

#### Why is this important?


Cayuga County lacks a range of lodging options near key visitor hubs. By proactively supporting development readiness and applying a broader tourism lens to priority sites, Tour Cayuga can help attract investment and address a key infrastructure need.

#### Key Actions:

- Develop site packets for 'lodging-ready' parcels near Emerson Park and other high-potential areas, including zoning, infrastructure, and market data.
- Research and contact potential investors from Central NY and Finger Lakes region
- Host developer roundtables
- Release RFQ for potential development sites

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### 3.3: Improve market readiness of attractions and experiences for FAM tours

Lead Entities/Staff & Partners	Tour Cayuga (lead - PR Manager), Hospitality and attraction partners, Tourism workforce and front-line teams
Level of Effort/Resource	Low
Phasing	Short
Performance Metrics	Number of partners using the checklist, FAM tour outcomes (coverage, referrals), Partner/staff confidence and preparedness ratings
Focus	 Management

This is a **continuation** of frontline FAM tour efforts with a more structured approach to improving business and attraction readiness.

#### Why is this important?

FAM tours are key to generating earned media and industry exposure. Ensuring experiences are visitor-ready and partners are confident presenting their offerings increases the impact of these tours.

#### Key Actions:

- Create a FAM Tour preparation checklist for participating partners
- Provide partner-specific guidance on what will ensure a quality tour experience where needed
- Conduct pre-season trainings/tours for the tourism and hospitality workforce to experience county offerings first-hand and better promote them to visitors

### 3.4: Partner with education institutions and workforce organizations to grow the talent pipeline for tourism and hospitality

Lead Entities/Staff & Partners	Tour Cayuga (lead - Executive Director, Partnerships Manager), Local schools and colleges (e.g., CCC, BOCES), Workforce development agencies, Tourism employers
Level of Effort/Resource	High
Phasing	Medium
Performance Metrics	Number of participating students or interns, Employer satisfaction with workforce programs, Increased awareness of tourism career pathways
Focus	 Stewardship

This is a **continuation** of existing workforce development efforts, such as the Youth Summit, to create stronger connections between local schools, training programs, and tourism-related careers to help employees in the industry build career pathways as well as grow awareness of the diversity of occupations within the industry.

#### Why is this important?

Staffing challenges are widespread across the tourism industry, particularly post-pandemic. Early engagement and training will help build a future workforce while increasing local awareness of career paths in tourism and hospitality.

#### Key Actions:

- Conduct a labor market survey to collect data about the availability, demand, wages, and qualifications of workers within the industry regionally.
- Partner with BOCES, community colleges, and workforce boards to develop/align customer service/ hospitality excellence training curriculum with the needs of local employers as uncovered through the labor market survey.
- Offer upskilling training and/or internships/mentorship opportunities to employees in the industry at low cost, with sponsorship from tourism businesses.
- Develop a tourism career spotlight campaign to promote industry roles and raise awareness of possible career pathways.

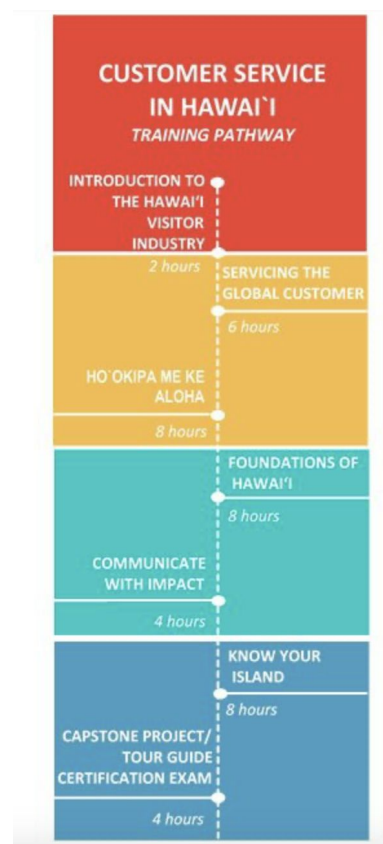
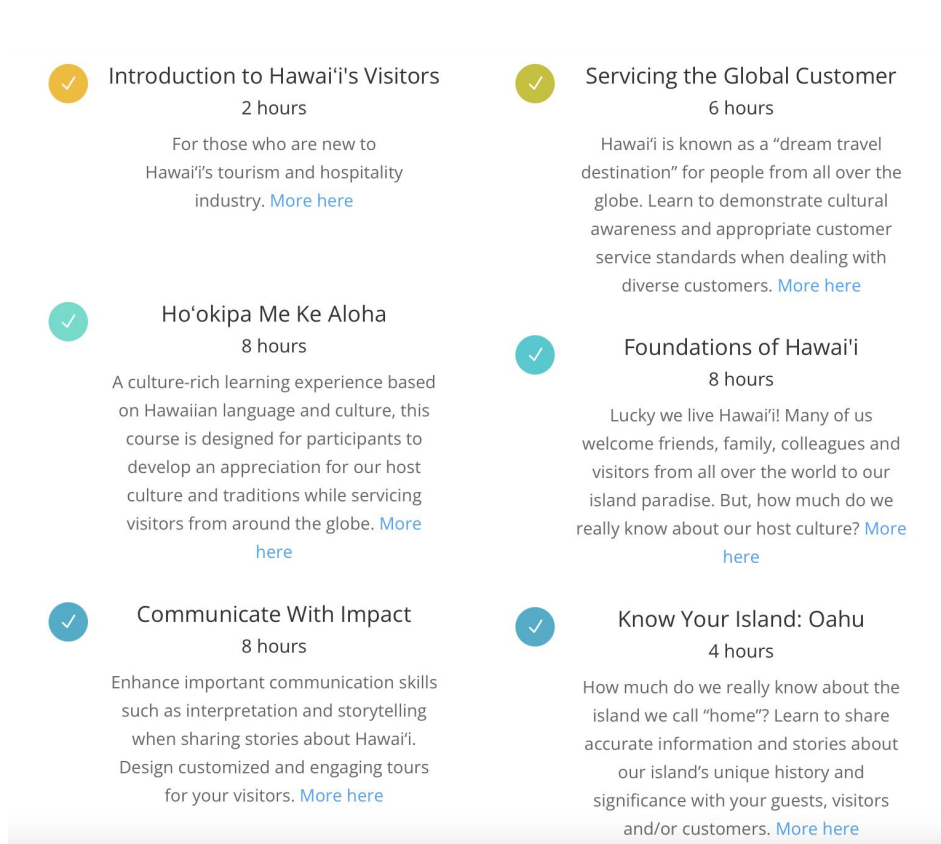


## CASE STUDY: UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

Customer service excellence is critical to the success of any destination. At a time of rapid growth in tourism in Hawaii, industry partners shared that employees were in need of ongoing soft skill training to advance in the industry following entry into back-of-house roles.

### The Solution

In partnership with the University of Hawaii, the Hawaii Tourism Authority designed the Certificate of Professional Development in Customer Service curriculum for existing and potential hospitality employees. Skills developed through the course are intended to be transferable across various types of businesses in the industry including hotels, restaurants, entertainment venues, convention centers, airport agencies, and museums/cultural attractions, and would therefore enable employees to explore roles and opportunities within tourism.



### 3.5: Lead partnerships to improve accessibility communications of accommodations and visitor attractions

Lead Entities/Staff & Partners	Tour Cayuga (lead - Executive Director, Partnerships Manager), Wheel the World, Participating accommodations and attractions, Disability advocacy organizations
Level of Effort/Resource	Medium
Phasing	Short
Performance Metrics	Number of accessibility listings or updates completed on Tour Cayuga website, Partner participation in accessibility initiatives, Visitor feedback on clarity and usefulness of accessibility information
Focus	 Marketing  Stewardship

This strategy is a **continuation** and deepening of Cayuga’s commitment to accessible travel, focused on improving visitor information and industry awareness.

Why is this important?

Visitors with disabilities often face major challenges in accessing accurate, helpful information. By leading on accessible communications, Tour Cayuga can help businesses become more inclusive while increasing trust and visitation among underserved audiences.

Key Actions:

- Continue to lead regional partnership with Wheel the World to enhance accessibility communications of accommodations and visitor attractions
- Add accessibility content to website and visitor guide to better inform travelers of potential barriers to entry/participation

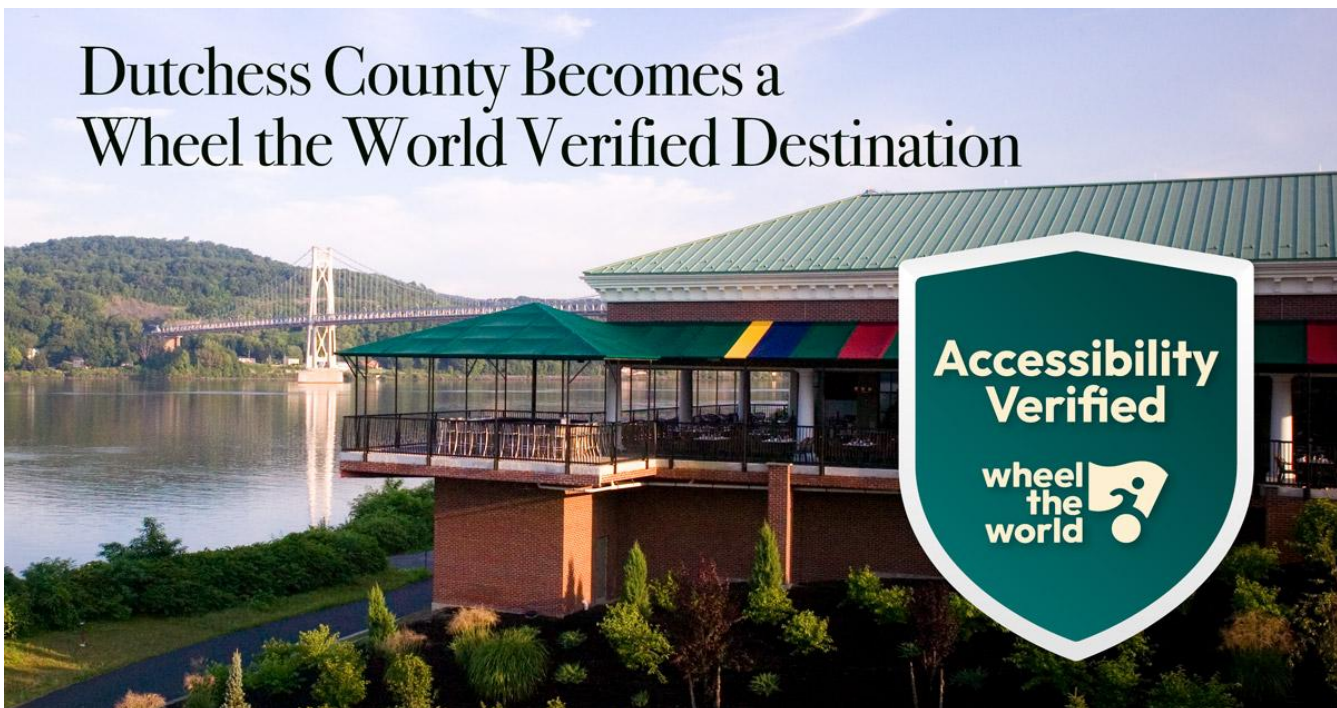
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## CASE STUDY: DUTCHESS COUNTY, NY

Dutchess County recognized a gap in reliable, detailed information for travelers with disabilities. Many visitors were unsure which accommodations and attractions could meet their needs, leading to frustration, limited trip planning, or avoidance of the destination altogether. The county wanted to improve accessibility communications but lacked a standardized way to assess and share that information.

### The Solution

Dutchess Tourism partnered with Wheel the World to become a Verified Destination - the first in New York State. Through the partnership, 15 tourism-related businesses received accessibility assessments and were added to the Wheel the World platform. The county also launched a dedicated accessibility webpage and included the new accessibility information in their visitor materials. This initiative made it easier for travelers with disabilities to plan with confidence while encouraging more businesses to improve and communicate their accessibility features.



## Goal: Center Destination Stewardship Positioning & Visitor Perception

As a core value of Tour Cayuga, destination stewardship is central not only to promoting the region responsibly, but also to protecting what makes it special. This priority ensures that Cayuga County's tourism development is grounded in sustainability, inclusion, and responsible leadership across the industry.

### Strategies:

- 4.1: Revise Tour Cayuga's mission statement
- 4.2: Create a place brand for Cayuga as a destination
- 4.3: Restructure Tour Cayuga staff positions and responsibilities to incorporate stewardship responsibilities
- 4.4: Expand destination stewardship programs and resource allocation
- 4.5: Connect partners to available resources and training opportunities to support adoption of sustainable practices
- 4.6: Continue to participate on boards and committees focused on stewardship, cultural heritage, and inclusive leadership





# 4.1: Revise Tour Cayuga’s mission statement

Lead Entities/Staff & Partners	Tour Cayuga (lead - Executive Director, Board)
Level of Effort/Resource	Low
Phasing	Short
Performance Metrics	Mission adopted and integrated into strategic documents and outreach materials
Focus	 Management  Stewardship

This **new** action will ensure that Tour Cayuga’s mission reflects the organization’s evolving role in managing tourism more sustainably and responsibly, aligning with its leadership in destination stewardship.

## Why is this important?



A clearly defined mission aligns staff, partners, and the public with Tour Cayuga’s evolving role in responsible tourism leadership. Although the Tour Cayuga team has been actively supporting product development and destination stewardship efforts, the organization’s mission statement and mandate does not reflect this evolution of the staff’s roles and responsibilities.

## Key Actions:

- Facilitate board and staff review of mission statement to better define Tour Cayuga’s role in destination stewardship
- Draft and adopt updated mission language



## 4.2: Create a place brand for Cayuga as a destination

Lead Entities/Staff & Partners	Tour Cayuga (lead - Executive Director, Marketing Director), Cayuga County Department of Planning & Economic Development, Cayuga Industrial Development Agency, Cayuga Chamber of Commerce, brand/creative agency
Level of Effort/Resource	High
Phasing	Medium
Performance Metrics	<p>Mission adopted and integrated into strategic documents and outreach materials</p> <p>Updated brand launched; engagement across platforms; partner alignment with new materials</p>
Focus	 Marketing  Stewardship

**This new action should follow the adoption of Tour Cayuga’s new mission statement, which establishes its role as a destination stewardship organization. The Cayuga place brand should be developed and adopted by a range of critical partners working toward destination stewardship, including business/economic development organizations, and agencies overseeing quality of life and infrastructure.**

### Why is this important?

A place brand employed consistently across multiple players and partners will help create a strong sense of place for the county and shape how others (visitors, businesses, investors, residents) perceive it and promote it. In particular, the place brand should align closely with Cayuga County’s sustainability leadership and Tour Cayuga’s shift towards destination stewardship to strongly resonate with values-driven travelers.

### Key Actions:

- Form a destination stewardship coalition/task force with partners such as the Cayuga County Department of Planning & Economic Development, Cayuga Industrial Development Agency, and Cayuga Chamber of Commerce
- Establish a place branding fund to procure brand agency services
- Engage in cross-sector engagement process to create a place brand identity and strategy for Cayuga (to be adapted and employed across all partners’ platforms and channels)
- Align brand rollout with promotion of new mission

## CASE STUDY: VISIT LAKE TAHOE, NV



During the summers of 2020 and 2021, along with many other outdoor recreation destinations across the United States, the Lake Tahoe region experienced an influx of visitors seeking release from pandemic restrictions in outdoor spaces. The negative impacts of the high rates of visitation over those two years forced a regional collaboration of DMOs, asset/public land managers, tourism businesses, and other public agencies and nonprofits to band together to commit to a shared stewardship vision for Tahoe.

Alongside the destination stewardship planning efforts, Tahoe South (as it's formerly known) embarked on a concurrent rebranding effort to align with the evolution of the region as a sustainable-forward destination.

### The Solution

'Awe and then Some', the new Visit Lake Tahoe brand line, embodies the move of the destination toward promoting responsible tourism during shoulder seasons to ensure that the needs of locals, the capacity of the natural environments and the desirable visitor experiences are well-balanced throughout the year.

The campaign continues to position the lake as the main draw - the 'Awe' - however, with the diverse activities and entertainment offerings that the South Shore continues to provide to visitors in 'and then Some'.

Visit Lake Tahoe also made concerted efforts to launch the brand locally by sharing the new organization principles with local communities to ensure the message was clear that Visit Lake Tahoe "has a vested interest in the right kind of tourism moving forward."

### 4.3: Restructure Tour Cayuga staff positions and responsibilities to incorporate stewardship responsibilities

Lead Entities/Staff & Partners	Tour Cayuga (lead - Executive Director & Board)
Level of Effort/Resource	Medium
Phasing	Short
Performance Metrics	New or revised job descriptions include stewardship; percentage of staff time dedicated to stewardship; new impacts related to destination stewardship
Focus	Management  Stewardship

**This new initiative ensures that stewardship is not just a stated value, but an embedded function of Tour Cayuga’s daily operations. By adjusting staff roles to include stewardship-focused roles and duties, the organization can dedicate consistent time and leadership to long-term, value-aligned programming.**

In the long term, a full-time partnerships director staff position may be established to support the Executive Director in the critical role of building and managing relationships in the industry locally, aligning stakeholder interests and supporting local advocacy efforts, and to lead destination development efforts across the County.

#### Why is this important?

Stewardship responsibilities currently sit across roles informally or are secondary to other duties. Formalizing this focus in staff roles will ensure continuity, accountability, and stronger implementation of sustainability, inclusion, and destination management priorities.

#### Key Actions:

- Review current organizational structure and staff workload
- Define core stewardship responsibilities across internal and partner-facing functions
- Revise job descriptions to incorporate stewardship roles (e.g. stakeholder engagement, tracking partner practices, sustainability programming)
- Communicate changes to staff and board and align with performance planning
- Identify future staffing needs based on expanded programming

## 4.4: Expand destination management and stewardship programs and resource allocation

Lead Entities/Staff & Partners	Tour Cayuga (lead - Executive Director & Board), Industry partners, Industry partners, NYSTIA
Level of Effort/Resource	High
Phasing	Long
Performance Metrics	Annual budget dedicated to stewardship programs; Number of partners engaged or funded; Number and scope of stewardship programs implemented; Annual stewardship report produced and shared
Focus	 Management  Stewardship

**This strategy is a continuation of Tour Cayuga's commitment to supporting programs that prioritize environmental sustainability, community well-being, and inclusive tourism. It calls for growing both the range of stewardship-focused initiatives and the financial and staff resources dedicated to supporting them, including actively pursuing grants.**

### Why is this important?

At this time, less than 15% of the total annual budget of Tour Cayuga is being spent on destination management and stewardship efforts.

Meaningful destination stewardship requires consistent resourcing, not just one-off efforts. Expanding financial support and resources will allow Tour Cayuga to enable industry partners to implement long-term programs that meet community expectations, improve destination resilience, and model responsible tourism leadership.

### Key Actions:

- Review current stewardship programs and identify areas for growth
- Set an annual budget allocation goal for stewardship activities and partner support
- Develop an internal stewardship tracking and reporting framework
- Identify new funding sources (e.g. grants, state/federal support) to expand impact
- Formalize application processes for partner mini-grants, technical assistance, or sustainability training

## 4.5: Connect partners to available resources and training opportunities to support adoption of sustainable and inclusive practices

Lead Entities/Staff & Partners	Tour Cayuga (lead - Partnerships Manager), Destination International, FLRTC, NOAA
Level of Effort/Resource	Low
Phasing	Medium
Performance Metrics	Number of downloads or resource uses; Feedback from partners; Observable practice adoption (tracked via surveys or grant participation); Number of businesses receiving funding; Certifications completed; Rates of participation at learning forums
Focus	<div> <div>MG</div> Management <div>ST</div> Stewardship </div>

Tour Cayuga will **continue** to share resources such as ‘Leave No Trace’ (via its partner portal) to help tourism partners implement sustainable operations, from energy efficiency to waste reduction and water conservation. Resources may include guides, checklists, vendor lists, and access to regional or state technical support.

In addition, Tour Cayuga should also consider facilitating local learning opportunities and offering mini-grants or reimbursements to support partners pursuing sustainability certifications or attending related professional development (e.g., Green Business Certification, Travelife, etc.).

Local learning opportunities should be designed as informal but regular forums for industry partners to explore sustainability topics, share best practices, and learn from one another. Each session may focus on a specific theme, such as green events, responsible and respectful storytelling, etc.

### Why is this important?

Many businesses want to operate more sustainably but don’t know where to start. Providing practical, regionally relevant tools, and financial resources to pursue sustainability certification makes sustainability more accessible and scalable across the industry. Sustainability certifications help businesses stand out in the marketplace and signal credibility to visitors.

### Key Actions:

- Research and organize existing sustainability and inclusivity toolkits for key sectors (e.g. lodging, food & beverage) and define eligible certifications and training opportunities
- Set grant criteria and application process
- Promote tools and grants via partner portal, newsletters, and events
- Identify experts or peer mentors who can assist partners and plan quarterly virtual or in-person sessions
- Facilitate open discussion and follow-up resources

## 4.6: Continue to participate on boards and committees focused on stewardship, cultural heritage, and inclusive leadership

Lead Entities/Staff & Partners	Tour Cayuga (lead - Executive Director), Finger Lakes Regional Tourism Council Outdoor Committee, Upstate Revitalization Committee of New York State, NOAA Advisory Council, Lake Ontario Water Trail Board, Cayuga Lake Scenic Byway, CCC Perkins Local Advisory Board, Auburn Historic Sites Commission, Harriet Tubman Boosters, Finger Lakes Outdoor Education Collaborative, United Way, H3C, Travel Unity, New York State Tourism Industry Coalition DEI Committee, Brave Women FLX, Destination International - Social Inclusion, Auburn BID - DEI Committee
Level of Effort/Resource	Medium
Phasing	Short
Performance Metrics	Number of boards/committees engaged annually; Influence on regional/state initiatives; Local awareness or alignment with committee work
Focus	<div> <div>MG</div> Management </div> <div> <div>ST</div> Stewardship </div>

Tour Cayuga will **continue** to actively participate on boards and advisory committees that focus on issues of sustainability, equity, and cultural preservation at the local, regional, and state levels.

### Why is this important?

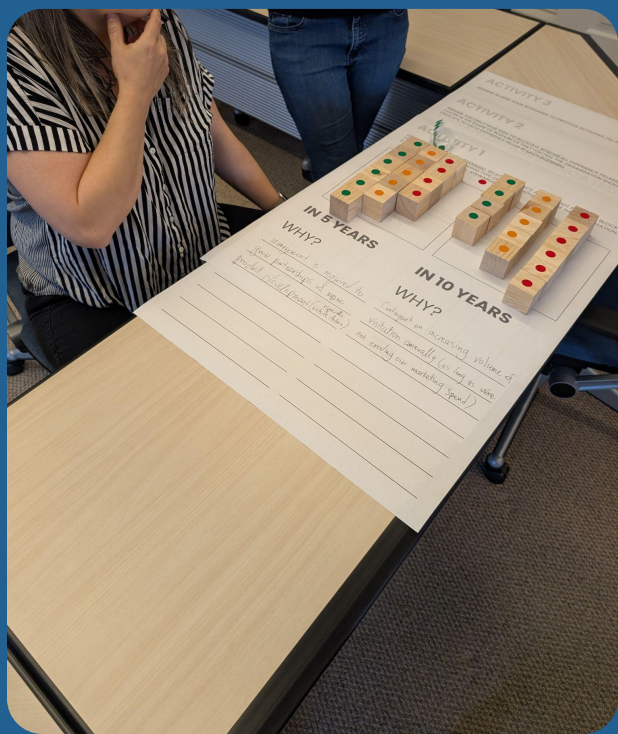
By showing up consistently in these spaces, Tour Cayuga helps ensure that the tourism sector is represented in broader conversations about inclusion, conservation, and heritage—and that local perspectives inform statewide initiatives.

### Key Actions:

- Maintain current committee participation
- Identify opportunities to contribute meaningfully to working groups and policy discussions
- Share insights from these committees with local partners through updates, reports, or collaborative projects

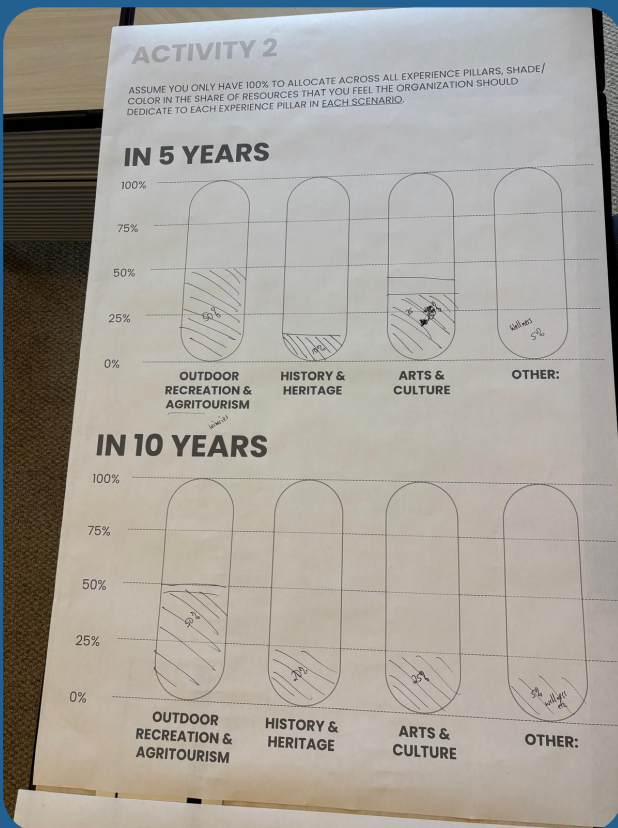


# Conclusion



Tour Cayuga is entering a new era with new leadership and an opportunity to reposition itself as a destination stewardship organization that owns its responsibilities and roles in managing industry stakeholders and leading the development and growth of tourism more sustainably and responsibly.

Over the next five years, Tour Cayuga should take incremental steps to change its mission statement and brand positioning to reflect the destination management and stewardship roles that the organization already plays, as well as formally adapt staff roles/responsibilities to include stewardship-focused duties, and ensure dedicated time and commitment to long-term, value-aligned programming.





An aerial photograph of a university campus during autumn. The campus features several large, multi-story brick buildings with red roofs and a prominent central tower. The surrounding landscape is filled with trees displaying vibrant yellow and orange foliage. A winding road and a body of water are visible in the background. A blue rectangular overlay is positioned in the lower-left quadrant of the image, containing white text.

June 2025

2026-2030 (and beyond)  
Strategic Plan