



STRATEGIC PLAN

Update – 2006

THE PURPOSE

This document represents a three year strategic guide for the Hocking Hills Tourism Association, developed by the Board of Trustees. This is an update from the 2001 Strategic Plan and is intended to be a living document that annually provides direction and establishes goals and objectives concurrent with and supportive of the Association's mission statement. To this end, the Board acknowledges the importance of annually reviewing the goals, strategies, and accomplishments in light of the current plan, and to make changes as situations change.

MISSION STATEMENTS

The mission of the Hocking Hills Tourism Association is to promote the growth of responsible tourism through marketing strategies and programs that balance economic growth with the need to preserve the natural and cultural heritage in the Hocking Hills Region.

The mission of the Hocking Hills Tourism Association's Board of Trustees is to provide leadership, strategies and programs that promote the growth of responsible tourism in the Hocking Hills Region for the benefit of members and the community.

The Board of Trustees of the Hocking Hills Tourism Association will be recognized as a working board that:

- professionally and competently supports the mission of the association;
- governs the affairs of the HHTA with decisiveness and equity;
- guides the HHTA by remembering the past, serving the present and planning for the future;
- acts as stewards and ambassadors for the tourism industry and the cultural and natural resources of the Hocking Hills Region.

It is within these mission statements and purpose in mind that the Board of Trustees presents these 2005 updates to the strategic plan originally developed in the year 2001.

SITUATION ANALYSIS: What are we today?

Community

Central-Southeast Ohio Appalachian region based in Hocking County, approximately sixty miles from Columbus.

Region includes Hocking College in Nelsonville and Ohio University in Athens.

Region bisected by US Route 33, providing main corridor between Columbus and Athens. New Lancaster US 33 bypass expected to cause a significant increase in residential growth.

In addition to increasing the resident population (bedroom communities), the bypass will make access easier for day and multi-day visitors to the region.

Logan is the Hocking County seat and is the commercial center of the primary tourist region. Lancaster is the largest nearby city and is on the main corridor to the region. Athens is located at the southern end of the region. The region also contains several small towns and villages.

Industrial past includes coal mining and clay production. Eastern part of the region was a major coal producing area. Western region has significant logging operations.

Reduced industrial activity as represented by recent plant shut-downs and relocations.

Significant commuting labor force, primarily to Columbus. Relatively large unskilled labor pool.

Promotional activities supported by Logan-Hocking Chamber of Commerce and local groups to attract light industry and commercial growth.

Tourism Industry

Visitor destination primarily centered around the Hocking Hills State Park.

Primarily localized within Hocking County, but expanding beyond county borders into contiguous counties.

Considered part of Ohio Appalachian country.

Business base comprised of:

- State Parks and natural areas and facilities;
- lodging and camping facilities;
- shops, galleries, and artisans;
- casual eating establishments;
- workshop and wedding facilities and services.

Primary attraction is natural beauty of Hocking Hills wooded lands, natural caves and hiking trails. Activities include hiking, canoeing, horseback riding, golf, off road motoring, etc.

Region represents one of the top visitor destinations in Ohio.

Tourism is the largest commerce in the county/region with approximately \$248 million in annual revenue to the area, according to the Ohio Division of Travel & Tourism.

The area is rich in small, local festivals.

Tourism Association

Member-based organization chartered as a non-profit association. Members include businesses and individual supporters.

Funded primarily by lodging tax collections authorized and contributed by the Hocking County Commissioners. Additional funding includes membership dues, fund raising, donations and minimal Welcome Center sales.

Association funded as a county-based organization, although it represents and supports tourism and membership throughout a more than ten-county region.

Primary function of the association is marketing and advertising the Hocking Hills as a destination, thereby bringing more business and tax dollars to the community. Marketing activities include publication of annual Hocking Hills Visitors Guide, direct advertising, promotions, media relations, event sponsorship and the web site, www.1800hocking.com. A primary marketing activity is the operation of the Hocking Hills Regional Welcome Center, located in Logan and a secondary Visitor Center located in Laurelville.

VISION: What do we want to be in three years?

Community

To become an economically vibrant region that promotes responsible growth of commerce and protects its natural resources and historical culture...a community that represents the harmonious co-existence of commerce, people, nature and heritage.

Tourism Industry

To become the Midwest's leading visitor destination based on natural resources and heritage.

Tourism Association

To support, market and promote tourism throughout the area.

To be a key player in the effort to communicate, educate and promote responsible commercial growth in the area.

To provide leadership in the development and expansion of natural and historic attractions in the region.

To support marketing efforts of development projects and activities within the regional tourism industry.

Develop and promote clear, consistent message and branding of Hocking Hills image.

STRENGTHS: What elements are in place to support us in achieving our vision?

Internal

Diversity of membership

Consistent budget growth

Well functioning accounting and budgeting processes and committees

Good management (staff) cadre

Thriving volunteer program supplements staff efforts, visitor centers and mailings

External

Ability to educate members and community

Growing recognition of tourism industry to visitors and locals

Excellent marketing with given resources

Support of county commissioners

Regional/national attractions

Attractive, strategically located visitor centers

WEAKNESSES: What will prevent us from achieving our vision?

Internal

Small percent of members actively involved in association functions.

Dependence on a single source of 'funding'

Technology limited

External

National trend of fewer willing volunteers

Physically limited for Welcome Center expansion

HHTA has no enforceable authority in integral functions: zoning, lodging tax collection/remittance, complaint procedures

Political nature of lodging tax

Community resistant to change

A faction of the community skeptical of tourism industry

THE PLAN

The following pages define the strategic plan in terms of themes, goals and strategies.

- ***THEME*** Used to organize the goals and strategies into categories. The themes defined in this plan are:
 - Organization
 - Industry definition
 - Community Relations
 - Resource Stewardship
 - Resource Development
 - Business Development
 - Marketing
- ***GOAL*** A desired outcome or objective of the association to be accomplished within the 2-3 year timetable.
- ***STRATEGY*** Specific activities to accomplish the goals.

CRITICAL NOTES

This is a plan that covers a 2-3 year timetable. Its scope is enormous and the effort required to accomplish all of the goals within this timetable will require a great deal of volunteer participation from many members.

This strategic plan is a living document that will change over the course of time as events, conditions and needs dictate. The plan will be reviewed in its entirety on an annual basis and revisions will be published, with explanations as to the causes for significant changes.

An Action Plan must be developed each year to establish priorities and define activities that address the strategies appropriate for that time period. The action plan should include specific actions that support strategies within the plan. The actions, or tasks, must be assigned to individuals and include specific, measurable results. The plan must also include budget considerations for the year.

THEME: ORGANIZATION

Goal #1: *Re-evaluate membership structure*

Strategy: Evaluate pros & cons of being a member-based organization and determine most appropriate structure for HHTA.

Strategy: If organization remains member-based, define geographical boundaries of membership eligibility, related to "Hocking Hills region."

GOAL #2 *Identify capacity in relation to the overall tourism experience.*

Strategy: Conduct resource inventory including capacity of tourism businesses.

Strategy: Work with parks and others to determine capacity of natural attractions in the area.

Strategy: Clearly define boundaries of Hocking Hills region.

Strategy: Determine seasonal business activity.

Strategy: Establish methods for identifying and communicating opportunities for new business growth.

Strategy: Support local organizations' efforts to attract and support the efforts of new business owners.

THEME: INDUSTRY DEFINITION

GOAL #1 *Promote a clear, consistent message and branding of the Hocking Hills image.*

Strategy: Engage services of an outside marketing firm to aid in defining image and branding.

GOAL #2 *Engage the support of local and regional organizations in overall industry definition.*

Strategy: Build cooperative practices among all parties involved in the tourism industry in the area.

THEME: COMMUNITY RELATIONS

GOAL #1 *Develop the association's role in promoting desirable business growth and preserving natural resources.*

Strategy: Conduct Board training on land use planning / zoning issues.

Strategy: Determine HHTA's desired role regarding these issues.

Strategy: Share our chosen role with the community using appropriate tools (i.e. community meetings, op ed articles, etc...)

Strategy: Establish a working relationship with all planning authorities throughout the region, to provide input and support for smart growth planning.

GOAL #2 *Create and maintain effective communications with appropriate local, state and federal office holders.*

Strategy: Maintain primary contacts within the organizations of appropriate state and federal office holders.

Strategy: Implement an information process for local officials on tourism in the Hocking Hills

GOAL #3 *Develop working alliances with trade associations and organizations involved in tourism or that can provide support for any of the Association's goals and activities.*

Strategy: Identify and prioritize associations and organizations.

Strategy: Create a resource plan for managing the relationships and contacts with associations and organizations.

GOAL #4 *Continue to educate local community on the benefits of tourism and the functions of HHTA*

Strategy: Establish a public relations, publicity function. Use special meetings to invite community and government leaders for discussion when necessary.

Strategy: Establish a process for educating the public on the benefits of the tourism business to the local and regional communities.

THEME: RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP

GOAL #1 *Maintain an aggressive program to identify needs and support efforts in preserving the natural resources and beauty of the region which are vital to the continued success and growth of the tourism business.*

Strategy: Identify and analyze ongoing public and private programs for natural conservation efforts that may be appropriate to adopt, publicize or support.

Strategy: Support efforts in litter control and beautification.

GOAL #2 *Establish a program to identify the needs and support the region's historical sites and landmarks.*

Strategy: Identify, document, and maintain a database of people and organizations that may be appropriate resources of information or affiliations.

Strategy: Develop and implement an ongoing effort to identify and support historical sites and landmarks and maintain a list of these sites.

Strategy: Continue work with the Scenic Byway Designation committee, town center (promote downtown and development of business), Historical Society, County Planner and others.

GOAL #3 *Establish a program to identify opportunities and support the promotion of cultural activities and the arts in the region*

Strategy: Promote arts and artisans in the area in conjunction with established arts organizations. Emphasize arts and shops that feature items handmade in the region.

Strategy: Develop and implement a plan for supporting cultural activities and events.

THEME: RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

GOAL #1 Support a vital volunteer program to serve the needs of the Association.

Strategy: Expand outreach program for recruiting new volunteers

- Identify and contact community groups to solicit volunteers
- Continue working with Hocking College to optimize internship opportunities

Strategy: Continue retention program for existing volunteers

GOAL #2 Identify and develop future Association leaders.

Strategy: Revisit committee structure to determine need and frequency

Strategy: Solicit ongoing suggestions from Board and staff for members with potential to serve the Association

Strategy: Invite potential leaders to serve on committees or task groups as appropriate to their interests

Strategy: Continue annual Board of Directors training

THEME: BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Goal #1 *Promote sound business practices, quality customer service levels and business growth potential of owners and operators of tourism related enterprises.*

Strategy: Maintain acceptable standards for facilities and services offered to visitors.

Strategy: Maintain processes for validating acceptable standards.

Strategy: Continue network breaks with topics to educate members on sound business practices.

Strategy: Develop a plan that identifies gaps in or needs for different types of businesses. Maintain the list for reference and ongoing strategic planning.

Strategy: Develop a program for ensuring quality control related to all aspects of the visitor experience. Consider service industry training programs or other similar efforts to address the tourism industry from all aspects.

THEME: MARKETING

GOAL #1 *Continue comprehensive marketing process that provides a structure for planning all marketing approaches, measurable goals and objectives, financial requirements, with the ability to evolve over periods of time.*

Strategy: Maintain structure for obtaining external assistance for supporting marketing efforts.

Strategy: Continue to grow effective alliances for the purpose of marketing and promoting regional tourism activities.

Strategy: Continually evaluate specific marketing goals and approaches that support those goals.

Strategy: Annually review and modify specific goals, strategies and actions for the marketing efforts.

Strategy: Annually, re-evaluate funding requirements and alternatives for obtaining support for the marketing plan.

GOAL #2 **Expand processes for obtaining and/or developing appropriate market research data and implement recommendations.**

Strategy: Identify and obtain appropriate statistical information needed to make future oriented marketing decisions.

Strategy: Assess findings in light of the larger strategic plan and the immediate marketing needs.

Strategy: Identify and establish evaluation criteria to determine effectiveness of marketing decisions and media buys

Strategy: Determine best niche marketing opportunities to promote Hocking Hills.

Strategy: Determine need for group tour and conference planning functions in-house.