



Visit Montgomery Work Plan – Fiscal Year 2020

VISIT MONTGOMERY MISSION

The mission of Visit Montgomery is to market and develop the county and its communities as a preferred destination for group and individual travel thereby fostering economic growth and quality of place through tourism.

ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE

Visit Montgomery is a 501 (c) 6 non-profit organization with the oversight by a volunteer board of directors.

ORGANIZATION FUNDING

Sources

- 7% hotel occupancy tax allocation from Montgomery County
- 3.5% of the hotel occupancy tax collections from the City of Rockville (current occupancy rate is 2%)
- 4.0% of the hotel occupancy tax collections from the City of Gaithersburg (current occupancy rate is 2%)

Visit Montgomery's annual operating budget is composed of several other revenue sources including partnership dues, marketing grant from the Maryland Office of Tourism, cooperative advertising and trade show partnerships, events and housing service rebates.



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VISIT MONTGOMERY TEAM

WE MARKET FUN

Visit Montgomery

3 – Year Strategic Destination Plan Fiscal Year 2019 -Fiscal Year 2021

Background

In Fiscal Year 2018, Visit Montgomery Staff and its Board of Directors, worked with Destination Consultancy Group (DCG) on developing a 3-year strategic plan. Steps in the process included strategic planning sessions with the Visit Montgomery Board of Directors and visitor industry community workshops held in Silver Spring/Wheaton/Takoma Park, Rockville, Bethesda and Gaithersburg/Germantown. The feedback of the sessions and one-on-one meetings with key industry leaders as well as research were used to develop a 3-year Strategic Destination Plan. Implementation began in Fiscal Year 2019.

Overall Conclusions from the Strategic Planning Sessions in Fiscal Year 2018

- Insufficient off-peak and weekend visitor demand: pursue new group/meeting, sports event and recreational leisure /agritourism market potential and related programming and packaging
- Low level of tourism importance and value and relationship to stakeholders, residents and county economic development: formalize an influential community relations strategy with impactful program activities
- Inadequate resources to accomplish strategic initiatives and meet county and partner expectations: assess new funding opportunities and subsequently prepare a business case rationale and new funding strategy

Strategic Goals

REINFORCE DESTINATION MARKETING PRESENCE

To increase the awareness of the county's community brand experiences resulting in higher leisure visitor conversion through targeted promotional strategies

INCREASE TARGETED DESTINATIONS SALES AND SERVICES

To achieve high group visitor conversion through targeted sales and service strategies

FACILITATE IMPACTFUL DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

To encourage and fully support the strategic branded development of the county's attractions, events, amenities, hospitality services and related tourism infrastructure

STRENGTHEN DMO MEMBERSHIP COMMUNICATIONS

To regularly communicate to members the Visit Montgomery value proposition benefits and returns received

ENGAGE IN INFLUENTIAL DMO ADVOCACY AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS

To inform stakeholders of the importance and value of tourism and effective roles and beneficial impacts of Visit Montgomery

TO MANAGE EFFECTIVE DMO RESOURCES AND ADMINISTRATION

To operate as a fiscally responsible and talent-based organization delivering optimal returns

Main Challenges

Given the previous discussions and issue analysis, the following four priority-based opportunity challenges were determined to effectively market and manage Montgomery County as a destination.



Grow new visitor markets to increase demand

Research, Programming, Product Development and Partnership



Delivery quality visitor-host experience to ensure repeat/referral business

Destination Service Standards, Branded Customer Training and Satisfaction



Engage members/stakeholders on tourism worth and form appropriate partnerships

Value Proposition and Benefits Dialogue



Seek new funding to achieve expected results

Revenue opportunity assessment and Agreed-To Strategy

Our Guiding Principles



Strengthen destination awareness and conversion



Increase overnight visitors



Convert day visitors to overnight guests



Increase visitor frequency year-round/off-peak periods



Extend length of visitor stays



Enhance destination experience value



Objectives & Action Plans

MARKETING DIVISION

MARKETING – SALES SUPPORT

Collaborate with the sales division to ensure all marketing tools are in place to sell the destination to groups and meetings market clients

Align marketing efforts with the meetings held in the county to capitalize on promoting weekday business travelers to extend their stay through the weekends

Develop media presentations as a sales tool for use at trade shows, webinars and client presentations

Maximize the Cvent relationship with regular updates to advertisements and content

Design and distribute a venue guide to promote non-hotel properties

Develop community-centric marketing programs to position the downtown centers as “conference destinations”

Add tour & travel and meetings market information as landing pages on visitmontgomery.com

Foster sales strategies with focus on bringing weekend group room nights from the sports, tour & travel, religious, association, educational, reunion and social markets

Update fact sheets for each target market segment



Objectives & Action Plans

MARKETING DIVISION

MARKETING – PARTNERSHIPS

Create a partnership level designed for Airbnb hosts

Develop and design marketing materials that will better communicate the value of the partnership program to new member subscriptions and improve the retention rate

Create a cooperative advertising program that will give partners an opportunity to advertise in the Travel Guide and across all social media channels

Continue the advertising offerings on Visit Montgomery's own platforms including website, emails, social media, travel guide, signature events, etc.

Strengthen communications between Visit Montgomery and partners to demonstrate value and results to the partnership

Develop a customized partnership program with Montgomery County's restaurant industry

Launch a Silver Spring/Takoma Park Restaurant Week in September 2019

Leverage a sponsor for launching a new industry summit bringing together local and regional businesses to learn more about short term rental zoning and registration mandates, and development project updates impacting tourism

Launch the Tourism Emerging Hospitality Professionals program, piloted in Fiscal Year 2019

Relaunch the promotions section on visitmontgomery.com to expedite process for partners to post deals





Objectives & Action Plans

MARKETING DIVISION

MARKETING - LEISURE WEEKEND TRAVEL

Exhibit/Attend the New York Travel Show, January 24-26, 2020 targeting leisure weekend travelers

Exhibit/Attend the Philadelphia Travel and Adventure Show, March 14-15, 2020 targeting leisure weekend travelers

MARKETING - PUBLICATIONS

Release the 2020 Travel Guide in June prior to the start of summer travel season

Generate fresh and new ideas for editorial in the Travel Guide

Implement a sales initiative to sell advertising in the Travel Guide to help off-set production and printing costs

Produce self-guided trails for distribution at regional service centers, State Visitor Centers, parks, etc.

Produce a wedding and event venue guide in Fall 2019

Re-produce the Silver Spring downtown Visitor Map for distribution at hotels, Silver Spring Civic Building and Regional Services Center

Objectives & Action Plans

MARKETING DIVISION

MARKETING - DIGITAL AND PRINT

Manage a focused \$150,000 print advertising campaign and \$300,000 digital marketing/advertising campaign

Increase the email database by 5,000 opt-in subscribers

Implement a design and content strategy that will improve the consumer newsletter's open and click rates

Automate the newsletter sign-up process to reduce the amount of manual entry that occurs internally with each sign-up

Centralize the database into Simpleview and improve how subscribers are categorized by interest and geographic location

MARKETING – PUBLIC RELATIONS

Formalize metrics and ROI on the public relations efforts

Increase earned media through stronger programming of familiarization tours and direct contact with print media editorial, digital bloggers and social media influencers

Host one social media influencer event in FY 2020

Identify ongoing thought leadership opportunities and proactively pitch seasonal stories

Bid to host a future Society of Travel Writers (STW) annual convention



Next Door to Washington, DC

Your next weekend getaway begins in Montgomery County, Maryland. Explore the great outdoors along the C&O Canal, visit wineries and breweries in the county's 93,000-acre Agricultural Reserve, soak up rich history, and indulge in some of the country's finest dining and shopping. Catch a show at one of several world-class performance venues, just a short Metro ride to Washington, DC. Experience your weekend, your way – with classic Maryland flavor!

Your Weekend Your Way

Request a Travel Guide & Enter to Win a Weekend Getaway

VisitMontgomery.com/Weekend



Montgomery, MD



Maryland
VisitMaryland.org

Objectives & Action Plans

MARKETING DIVISION

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Website | <p>Make the website easier for consumers to request information (i.e. request a travel guide, download the guide, sign-up for email newsletter)</p> <p>Integrate multi-media content with emphasis on video</p> <p>Redesign the Moco-Sports.com website to be a more valuable resource for youth sports visitors to the county</p> |
| Social Media | <p>Continue to grow Facebook and Instagram followers to 15,000 in the overnight markets</p> <p>Improve the monthly Facebook Giveaway program</p> <p>Place a higher emphasis on converting social media followers into email subscribers</p> |
| Content Development | <p>Create a unified content editorial calendar that will align all content channels into a single document</p> <p>Publish two magazine-quality blog posts per month for the leisure market</p> <p>Publish two static landing pages per month including cycling and Civil War Trail themes</p> |
| Event Pages | <p>Improve categorization/search tool to make it easier to find events on the platform</p> <p>Pursue providing a platform on Localist for ticket sales to events, venues, etc.</p> <p>Integrate the City of Rockville and City of Gaithersburg’s event calendars to auto populate on Visit Montgomery’s calendar.</p> <p>Further embed event content into other website pages</p> |





Objectives & Action Plans

MARKETING DIVISION

MARKETING - PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Compile a work group to begin discussion and planning of a new signature event for Montgomery County with a music festival theme

Implement a weekend package promotion in partnership with Federal Realty/Visit Montgomery and Private Sector Grant funds from the MD Office of Tourism to encourage weekend travel during need times of the year

Launch one Agricultural Themed Tour (day) to sell to the local, regional and mid-Atlantic consumer markets during the 2019 Farm Tour & Harvest Sale Event

Encourage business travelers to extend weekday visits over weekends with the development of themed itineraries and hotel-encouraged special weekend rates

Create themed tours to test with bloggers and influencers prior to potential retailed tour launch. For example, tours themed around the growing brewery industry combined with culinary experiences, and agricultural tours of specific sites within the Agricultural Reserve

Develop self-guided trails in the brewery/winery, arts/culture and outdoor activity segments to promote regional visitation

Secure placement of one Visit Montgomery signature product sales item at one local gift shop

Relaunch ecommerce platform adding new items to sell as branded Visit Montgomery products

Objectives & Action Plans

MARKETING DIVISION



RESEARCH



Subscribe to Airdna, the data source for short term rental information on trends, tracking of average daily rate and occupancy, booking lead times and rental revenues to evaluate trends specific to Montgomery County



Continue Smith Travel Data subscription to collect hotel industry data for Montgomery County and the region



Participate in cooperative research program with MD Office of Tourism to gather industry data through Tourism Economics providing metrics in visitation, tourism tax impact, and total industry economic impact



Track hotel tax collections and short-term rental taxes/revenues



Conduct marketing conversion study of the previous year marketing programming including the email database and website traffic to determine incremental economic impact (marketing firm Streetsense to complete the study)

Objectives & Action Plans

SALES DIVISION

SALES – DIGITAL TOOLS FOR PROSPECTING AND SALES DATA REPORTING

Cvent-specializes in meetings management technology. Web-based software for meeting site selection, online registration, etc.

Simpleview – combines meeting sales, industry partner management, consumer marketing, forecasting, business analysis, and reporting. Simpleview CRM is the most widely used tool in destination marketing.

Create an updated metric for Simpleview that provides Visit Montgomery Sales Division investment return.

Complete four webinar/presentations with clients unable to meet in person

Participate in Conference Direct's Marketing on Cvent Sourcing Platform in an effort to increase visibility and Lead Volume

Participate in Helms Briscoe Destination Partner Program to enhance Montgomery County's recognition as a destination for sourcing for upcoming meetings and events.



Objectives & Action Plans

SALES DIVISION

SALES – SALES MISSIONS AND CLIENT EVENTS

Host two client appreciation events with one event inviting regional clients and the other a non-local client event in a feeder market

Sponsor the “Spotlight on the Mid-Atlantic,” a tour and travel industry trade show, in October 2019, hosted in Montgomery County for the first time

Conduct a sales mission in Spring 2020 targeting Pharmaceutical/Corporate markets in the Boston, MA area, appointment based with invited hotel partners

Sponsor Global Meeting Industry Day 2020 Event in New Jersey or Boston Market

Sponsor the Society of Government Meeting Professionals Certified Government Meeting Professional Training Program

Sponsor the Travel and Tourism Research Association Conference on October 7-9, 2019, Board of Director’s Dinner and Opening Reception

Host third-party meeting planners from Mid-Atlantic market for a familiarization tour of Montgomery County with sponsored dinner

Organize a regional sales blitz targeting the association market client base

Develop relationships with local bio health and pharmaceutical companies to create strategies for attracting meetings and other events to Montgomery County

Objectives & Action Plans

SALES

BOOK MONTGOMERY, MD

INCENTIVE PROGRAM FOR EVENT PLANNERS

The FY 2020 program is designed to provide incentives to customers booking business through the Visit Montgomery Destination Sales Team

Categories of incentives for issuing American Express Gift Cards include:

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|---------|---|
| 50-100 | \$75 Gift Card + Travel Guides |
| 101-200 | \$100 Gift Card + Travel Guides + One Value-Add |
| 201-300 | \$150 Gift Card + Travel Guides + Two Value-Add |
| 301+ | \$200 Gift Card or Site Visit Benefit + Travel Guides + Three Value-Add |

- Reward guidelines include: Visit Montgomery must be part of the RFP process; minimum of 10 guest rooms must be booked peak night; booking must have a minimum of 50 total room nights; meeting rewards paid upon signed agreement; and, contracts must be signed before June 30, 2020
- Attendee Add-Ons include airport transfers, visitor guides, metro passes, credit towards welcome reception and/or happy hour, and scholarship or community partner donation

Objectives & Action Plans

SALES



SALES - SPORTS MARKETING



Assist and providing funding matches to our county-based and non-local youth and amateur sports event organizers with securing grants from Maryland Sports (the Maryland Sports Commission) to help in growing their events' attendance



Work in partnership with the Maryland SoccerPlex to identify larger events to attract to the county generating more room night demand over need weekend and off-peak months, specifically USYSA Region I Championships



Create an inventory of sports venues in Montgomery County with details on capacity to use in development of promoting the County in the sports market



Research and develop action plan for attracting the emerging MD Youth Cricket program tournament and infrastructure development opportunities

Trade Show Schedule - Sales

Fiscal Year 2020

| EVENT NAME | Market Segment | Date | Location | Staff Attending | Total Cost |
|---|----------------|-------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|------------|
| Student Youth Travel Association (SYTA) | Group Tour | Aug 7-13, 2019 | Birmingham, AL | Lee | \$ 3,250 |
| Meeting Professionals International (MPI) Virginia Annual Conference- NEW | Corp/Assoc | August 7-9, 2019 | Norfolk, VA | Leila | \$ 1,400 |
| SMART Meetings East Coast Annual - NEW | Corp/Assoc | August 18-20, 2019 | Marco Island, FL | Leila | \$ 6,500 |
| Connect Association | Assoc | August 26-28, 2019 | Louisville, KY | Lee | \$ 5,200 |
| Going on Faith - NEW | SMERFE | September 4-6, 2019 | Grand Rapids , MI | Lee | \$ 2,395 |
| Connect Faith | SMERFE | October 28-30, 2019 | Grand Rapids , MI | Lee | \$ 5,050 |
| Spotlight on the Mid Atlantic | Group Tour | October 31-Nov. 1, 2019 | Gaithersburg, MD | Lee | \$ 545 |
| Connect Georgia | Assoc/Corp | November 18-19, 2019 | Atlanta, Georgia | Leila | \$ 4,950 |
| National Tour Association (NTA) | Group Tour | December 8-12, 2019 | Ft. Worth, TX | Lee | \$ 3,495 |
| Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) - NEW | Assoc | January 5-8, 2020 | San Francisco, CA | Lee | \$ 3,995 |

Trade Show Schedule - Sales

Fiscal Year 2020

| EVENT NAME | Market Segment | | Date | Location | Staff Attending | Total Cost |
|--|----------------|--------------------|---------------|----------|-----------------|------------|
| Religious Conference Management Association (RCMA) | SMERFE | February 4-6, 2020 | Irving, Texas | Lee | \$ | 3,250 |
| 16 th Annual PHARMA Forum | Corporate | March 8-11, 2020 | New York, NY | Leila | \$ | 1,400 |
| Christian Management Conference Association (CMCA) - NEW | SMERFE | April, 2020 | TBD | Leila | \$ | 6,500 |
| Conference Direct Industry Insight – NEW | Corporate | April, 2020 | TBD | Leila | | |
| Travel Alliance Partnership (TAP) | Tour & Travel | June 15-17, 2020 | Branson, MO | Lee | \$ | 3,245 |
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| TOTAL | | | | | \$ | 51,175 |

Metrics

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| Increase | Increase overall visitor spending and tourism tax impact by 2% <i>(results recorded through annual Tourism Economics Study, released in the Fall)</i> |
| Increase | Increase weekend lodging occupancy through leisure travel, group travel sales and marketing programming <i>(Source: Smith Travel Data)</i> |
| Increase | Increase the number of hotel rooms sold year-over-year through focused sales and marketing strategies <i>(Source: Smith Travel Data)</i> |
| Increase | Increase the overall definite group room night bookings in the sales division by 15% year over year |
| Increase | Increase the number of sales bookings by 20% generated by the sales division from group travel segments that have weekend room night booking patterns |
| Implement | Implement strategic advertising programs with data metric of increasing the number of visitor inquiries year-over-year by 10% |
| Increase | Increase earned editorial coverage by 10% through development of social media influencer connections and direct contact with travel trade publications |
| Grow | Grow social media followers across all digital marketing platforms by 15,000 year-over-year <i>(current following is 45,000)</i> |
| Obtain | Obtain with opt-in feature, 5,000 new email addresses collected for future marketing <i>(current database is 40,000)</i> |



Wish List

The list below will remain within the scope of future programming. The organization is currently limited in financial and personnel resources.

Develop a micro grant program to foster and grow small festivals/events into larger events with a regional and/or national draw.

Develop a dedicated program to brand, market, promote and activate tourism experiences in Montgomery County's 93,000-acre Agricultural Reserve and surrounding rural communities. The program would include a new brand name, logo, brand notion, website and advertising strategy. Activation would include experiences such as festivals, curated tours and self-guided trails.

Secure a larger marketing grant from the MD Office of Tourism Development through the recognition of the sales tax revenues collected in the new sales tax lodging sector, Short Term Rentals

Development and implementation of a customer service training program to educate local employees of the visitor industry including the ride share sector, short term rental hosts, hotel front line employees, taxi drivers, retail and restaurant front line employees. The benefits are to create stronger more memorable visitor experiences that in turn generate positive word-of-mouth and social media promotion of the county.

Complete the steps necessary to become an Internationally Accredited Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) through the Destination Marketing Accreditation Program (DMAP) of Destinations International, Washington, D.C.

Conduct a feasibility study to determine demand for additional meetings and event venue space that could help in generating more room night demand.

Complete research to further understand the specifics of the county's current customer including household incomes, origin, travel party size, and reason for travel.

Secure a mid-sized meetings industry trade show for Bethesda North Conference Center to provide the opportunity for visiting meeting professionals to experience Montgomery County first-hand.

Participate in sales missions in targeted international markets to attract more leisure and group tour overnight visitors.

Complete a conversion study to determine further return on investment in advertising efforts in print and digital medias.

Work with the Tiger Woods Foundation to start a new tournament with a local major sponsor.

-Identify tourism attractions/resorts/venues/entertainment businesses that could be potential prospects for attracting development in Montgomery County.