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Strategic Plan

For Baker County Tourism



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Introduction

In the spring of 2018, the Baker County Transient and Lodging Tax Committee hired PARC Resources to facilitate a strategic planning process to engage community members in setting goals and objectives for countywide tourism efforts in the coming five years. This process was a community-based approach that included survey questionnaires, focus groups, community visioning meetings and phone interviews with key stakeholders throughout Baker County. The Transient Lodging Tax Committee (TLT) then reviewed the findings of the community process and set specific objectives for the next five years, which the TLT, Baker County Tourism, and Baker County Visitor's Center will pursue as part of their effort to support desirable growth for the tourism industry in Baker County.

The community planning process was conducted with absolute transparency to ensure that all input was collected and evaluated. As part of the evaluation, PARC Resources made recommendations based which community desires were feasible to achieve now and which would require additional preparation or planning.

The outcome of this process is captured in the following Strategic Plan and is intended to be a guide for the community on key steps the TLT, Baker County Tourism, and Baker County Visitor's Center will pursue in the coming years. As with all plans, this document is intended to be living document, subject to change as necessary to capture opportunities, build on successes and to anticipate changes that can benefit all community members.

The TLT wishes to acknowledge and thank all those citizens and interested parties who took the time to participate in meetings, surveys, and/or phone interviews. Together, the TLT and all tourism partners is poised to take advantage of the opportunities, natural beauty and wonderful natural resources found throughout Baker County.

Overview of the Plan

The following Strategic Plan is broken into six chapters, with conclusions and a source document at the end. The first chapter, "Who we are," includes the values and mission of the TLT, describes partnerships, provides an organizational chart, and uses feedback from the community outreach process to define the county and communities. Key sections in this chapter are the specific targets and the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis. This chapter forms a baseline understanding of the organizations and issues involved in subsequent chapters.

The second chapter, "Business assistance, retention, and development," considers ways that the TLT can attract new businesses and support existing businesses to help them succeed. Key considerations that came up during the planning process were the need for assistance to new businesses, particularly young entrepreneurs that might not have the personal financing to obtain

bank loans as well as the need for training for businesses owners in the areas of technology and frontline employee interactions.

Chapter 3, “Marketing,” focuses on the methods currently used and those that Baker County Tourism and the Baker County Visitor’s Center could add to their marketing approach. Special attention is devoted to the differentiation between, “slogan,” and, “branding,” as well as to the niche markets on which the tourism partners should focus their efforts.

The fourth chapter, “Product development and opportunities,” looks at the facilities, infrastructure, events, attractions, and lodging needs of Baker County that will build Baker County’s brand and the local tourism industry. One issue that came up over and over during community meetings, focus groups, and individual interviews was the issue surrounding way finding signage. The problem is multifaceted and warrants a standalone plan, but this chapter lays the foundation and offers some ideas for consideration that can be incorporated into the new plan.

The final chapter, Chapter 5, “Communications,” covers the hot-button issue surrounding communication flow in the County. The communities – and even to a degree the organizations within each community – have identified the need for more consistent and comprehensive communication to keep everyone updated and to help everyone understand the importance of such communication. This chapter delves deeper into the issues and

The plan wraps up with, “Conclusions and next steps,” which summarizes the top priorities identified in the plan, gives the TLT, Baker County Tourism, and Baker County Visitor’s Center their immediate next steps, and points to potential funding opportunities to address the identified priorities in this plan. The plan also includes a source document that contains all research resources listed in the footnotes so that the TLT and its partners can easily refer to these sources for additional or updated information as-needed.



Priorities

The priorities set are included in further detail with actionable steps in the conclusion section, but are included here to provide context for the document. They are broken down into immediate, mid-range, and long-range priorities as follows:

Immediate Priorities

1. Hire a new staff position.
2. Develop a new Baker County Tourism website.
3. Encourage community-based marketing.
4. Provide training and technical assistance resources to small businesses.

Mid-range Priorities

1. Organize a countywide event.
2. Complete a way finding sign plan.
3. Complete a plan for a non-motorized path for cyclists and pedestrians.
4. Seek funding to support start-up businesses.

Long-range Priorities

1. Implement the Way Finding Signage Strategic Plan.
2. Implement the Bike/Ped Master Plan.
3. Initiate consideration of using the Municipal Airport as a small commercial airport.
4. Update this Strategic Plan for the next five years.



Chapter 1: Who We Are

Vision and Mission

Baker County and its tourism partners are united in their desire to boost tourism for the county. In 2017, visitors to Baker County spent \$45.2 million, supporting 740 jobs.¹ The solar eclipse in 2017 certainly inflated these numbers, but not as much as one might expect. The visitor spending for 2016 was \$43.1 million in real dollars but adjusting for inflation brings the adjusted rate to \$44 million, meaning the increase in visitor spending was only approximately 2.7% in 2017. The jobs supported by the tourism industry in 2016 was over five percent less at 700 but in a county with a workforce of only 6,879, more than 10% of all jobs are tourism-related. The tourism partners understand the significance of these figures and are working together to ensure that the community continues to grow its tourism industry that has become so vital to the local economy.

The TLT has set the following targets for the next five years:

1. To increase tourism revenue by ten percent by Year 5 over current revenue.
2. Add 40 new tourism-related jobs through increasing tourism business support and event development.
3. Increase inter-organizational communication as measured by tourism partner feedback in Year 5.
4. Increase business educational opportunities through concerted, grant-funded efforts with logical local partners.

SWOT Analysis

Through this strategic planning process, PARC Resources completed the following SWOT Analysis of Baker County Tourism to guide the priorities and strategies for the next five years.

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Strengths</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Partnerships2. Committed contractors3. Countywide focus	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Communication2. Understaffing3. Confusing partner roles
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Opportunities</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Economic development grant funding2. Growing interest in agricultural tourism and outdoor activities3. Increase online footprint4. Competition	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Threats</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Economic decline

¹ Dean Runyan Associates, "Oregon Travel Impacts: Statewide Estimates," Accessed on June 28, 2018 from <http://industry.traveloregon.com/research/archive/oregon-travel-impacts-1991-2011-dean-runyan-associates/>

Strengths

The greatest strength of tourism in Baker County are the dedication shown by the contractors – namely Timothy Bishop, representing Baker County Tourism, and Shelly Cutler, representing the Baker City Chamber of Commerce and Baker County Visitor’s Center. These two individuals were largely praised by planning participants and demonstrated their commitment to tourism throughout the planning process. Additional strengths include the numerous partner organizations working toward improving tourism regionally and the countywide focus that creates an economy of scale greater than any community could hope to achieve on their own.

Weaknesses

Community members almost universally identified communication as a weakness. The system needs to be revamped, beginning with streamlining the flow of information between the community businesses and organizations and the TLT, Baker County Tourism, and Baker County Visitor’s Center, which would help both the communication flow and another identified weakness: confusing partner roles. Many community organizations are confused about the distinction between Baker County Tourism and Baker County Visitor’s Center, aiding the communication problems. The final identified weakness is understaffing. Though funding a new staff position is always difficult – particularly in rural communities – adding even one new staff person to the Baker County Tourism contract that can serve as a central contact would significantly improve all of the current weaknesses.

Opportunities

The first opportunity is the resources available to support economic development – particularly in the form of grant funding and local partnerships that benefit business assistance and development. The second opportunity is the growing trend of agritourism – a niche market that Baker County, with its rich agricultural history, is primed to take advantage of. Thirdly are the advancements in digital marketing such as websites, smartphone apps, and especially social media that provide a lower-cost avenue to reach a wide audience. Baker County Tourism does a lot of work in this area and there is room to expand this effort.

The final opportunity is competition. Many business owners PARC Resources spoke with saw competition as a threat – and it is to a point. However, overall competition is generally healthy for the market to attract a new or larger audience and avoid complacency. When a new business comes to town, it provides more resources for the community, which aids in drawing more tourists. It also forces other businesses to take notice and revamp their own efforts – a sometimes painful, but necessary process for growth.

Threats

The only true threat on the horizon is the always-present threat of economic decline. There is not much if anything that the tourism partners can do about this, other than to monitor the market and set aside or seek out resources to support businesses through any upcoming declines. The U.S. economy is, “booming,” at the moment and might continue to do so for some time, however

it will inevitably reach its peak and begin to decline – a certainty that economists agree is inevitable, although they cannot agree on when or how significant the decline will be.²

Countywide and Community Identities

Baker County, like many in Eastern Oregon, is a large, rural county with a variety of different identities. It has strong ties to the Oregon Trail and pioneer history and is part of the ancestral homeland of the Cayuse, Umatilla, Walla Walla, and Nez Perce tribes.³ The County is home to numerous ghost towns, a thriving artistic community, and several museums celebrating the regions rich history. Copper Belt Winery and Glacier 45 Distillery are gaining in popularity and Barley Brown’s Beer has gained national attention with its award-winning beer.

Baker County is perhaps best known for its startling scenery. Baker County hosts two major mountain ranges – the Wallowa Mountains and the Elk Horn Mountain Range – parts of the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests, numerous lakes and reservoirs, one of the northwest’s major rivers – the Snake River – and the Hells Canyon Scenic Byway. All of this natural beauty lends itself to a hearty outdoor recreation industry.

Further adding to the diversity are the regional identities of specific communities. Halfway has two primary audiences – those seeking outdoor adventure and those seeking arts and culture – while Sumpter attracts audiences that want to learn about the gold mines and travel on the Sumpter Valley Railroad. Baker County’s heritage is further on display in Haines, Halfway, and Huntington with multiple museums showcasing pioneer, mining, and railroad history that make up the story of Baker County. Baker City features pioneer and farming history through the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center and Baker Heritage Museum respectively. In addition, Baker City has historically been noted for its nearby outdoor excursions and historic downtown area and in recent years has garnered attention for its artistic organizations, galleries, shops and culinary experiences.

Authentic Rural Experiences

A common description of Baker County from the perspective of its residents is, “authentic,” meaning that the region does not put on airs or make any pretense about its identity. Baker County is a hardworking place that has rugged terrain, stunning natural views, working ranches, and people working hard every day to sustain the lives they have built in this place. Urbanites from Portland, Salem, Eugene, and other larger communities have increasingly become interested in how the other half live. Looking for “authentic,” experiences that give them a taste of rural life. Those experiences might include agritourism, where they can come see how food is grown, or stay on a working ranch to see cattle raising in action. Experiences might also include

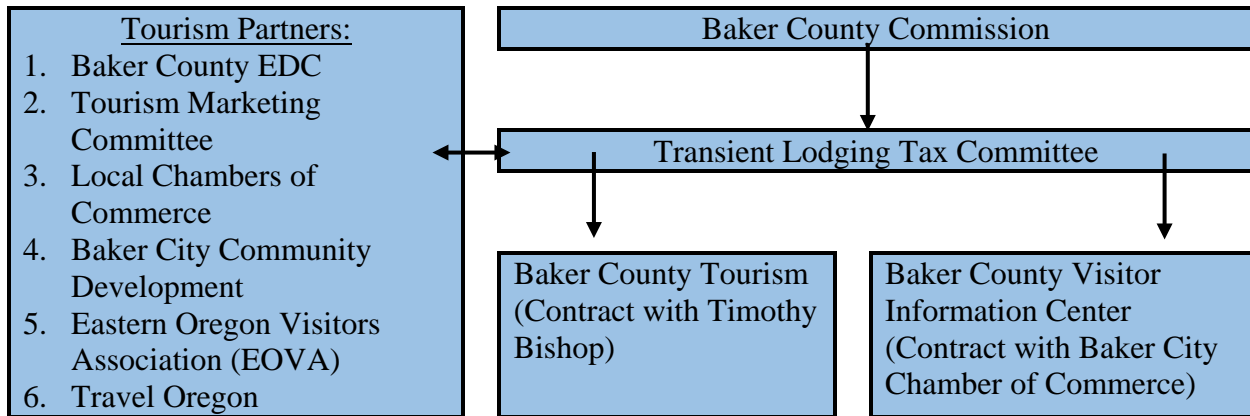
² Kemp, John. “U.S. Economy Accelerates Toward Cyclical Peak: John Kemp.” Viewed on August 30, 2018. Available at <https://www.nasdaq.com/article/us-economy-accelerates-towards-cyclical-peak-john-kemp-20180830-00457>

³ “History of Baker County, Oregon,” Oregon Genealogy. Accessed June 15, 2018 at <http://www.oregongenealogy.com/baker/historybc/page1.htm>

staying in an Airbnb in the region and just spending time in a smaller town – walking around to see the shops, the historic buildings, and the local culture. Baker County has plenty of that authenticity that urbanites are looking for and should capitalize on the trend now.

Organizational Structure

Baker County’s tourism promotion team has an unusual configuration, with effectively five separate entities engaged in tourism. The organizational chart looks like this:



Tourism Partners

The partners that work together primarily to support the local tourism efforts are Baker County Tourism and Baker County Visitor Information Center, both of whom report to the Transient Lodging Tax Committee (TLT). The TLT is overseen by the Baker County Commission. Supporting the local tourism partners are Baker County Economic Development Commission (EDC), Tourism Marketing Committee, local Chambers of Commerce throughout the county, Baker City Community Development, the Eastern Oregon Visitors Association, and Travel Oregon. The day-to-day efforts of promoting local tourism are split between Baker County Tourism and Baker County Visitor’s Center. Baker County Tourism is contracted to focus on branding, advertising, and drawing in visitors to the area. These goals are achieved through maintaining the Basecamp Baker website, actively using social media, placing advertisements in newspapers throughout the Pacific Northwest, and maintaining relationships with regional and statewide partners such as the Eastern Oregon Visitors Association and Travel Oregon.

The Baker County Visitor Information Center is cared for on a contracted basis by the Baker City Chamber of Commerce, who owns the building. The Chamber staff answer phones, respond to in-person inquiries, and mail out fulfillment products. Both the Chamber and the contracted Baker County Tourism work with the TLT, who oversees marketing efforts, manages the contracts with the Visitor’s Center and Tourism Marketing entities, and advises the Baker County EDC. The Tourism Marketing Committee works with Baker County Tourism to develop and implement the marketing strategy each year.

State and Regional Tourism Partners

The Eastern Oregon Visitors Association (EOVA) exists to promote tourism throughout all of Eastern Oregon. They accomplish this goal through providing trip planning assistance, vacation packages, developing the visitor's guide, and posting photos to social media. Travel Oregon and the EOVA work to promote Eastern Oregon, including sights, activities, events, and routes. While the focus EOVA is on all of Eastern Oregon, Travel Oregon's focus is on the whole state, not merely Baker County. The benefit of partnering with these organizations, however, is that they have a broader marketing reach. In FY 2017, Travel Oregon had over 3.8 million visits to their website, which features Baker County often. Therefore, it makes sense to continue to maintain close working relationships with these organizations.

Tourism Partner Complications

The overabundance of tourism-focused organizations leaves most of the community confused about which organization is responsible for any given activity. The community at-large seems unaware of Timothy Bishop's true purpose – to advertise Baker County throughout Oregon and, indeed, the Pacific Northwest. Instead, many believe his role is to advertise Baker County within the county itself or to provide coverage via social media on events that have already happened. While these activities are byproducts of his efforts, the community does not see the rest of the work that he is doing.

Similarly confusing for community members – particularly those from the smaller communities throughout the County – is the role of the Baker City Chamber of Commerce. Several individuals commented that they do not bother with the Baker City Chamber of Commerce because they were not members and therefore the Chamber could not do anything for them. It is true that the Chamber's mission is to serve its members, which for some creates the impression of a conflict of interest in promoting tourism for the whole county. In that light, the misunderstanding about the Chamber's role is understandable.

Funding for Baker County Tourism

Funding for tourism promotion comes from the countywide transient lodging tax, which is set around 7%. In FY 2018, the county set a marketing budget of \$154,000, with the balance of tax funds being used to pay the contracts to Timothy Bishop and the Chamber of Commerce for their actual marketing and visitor fulfillment services.

Chapter 2: Business Assistance, Retention and Development

This chapter discusses the needs of the existing businesses as well as discusses methods of recruiting new businesses to the region.

Assist Existing Businesses

Community members identified the need for business assistance such as technical assistance and education and offered some suggestions for assistance areas such as website development and social media training. However, beyond social media training, there did not seem to be a consensus about what topics or services to support business development are most critical and some within the community felt that such services might not be used. There is some merit to that opinion, given the business assistance programs that already exist locally. HatchLab Baker and Blue Mountain Community College (BMCC) offer great programs such as low-rent office space, one-on-one advising, workshops, and other similar support.⁴⁵ Between the two entities, new and existing businesses have the opportunity to access information and receive technical assistance. Rather than reinventing these services, a better strategy would be to partner with HatchLab Baker and BMCC to develop a community outreach campaign encouraging businesses to seek help as well as offering subsidies for workshops and technical assistance to new or struggling businesses that need the services the most.

One training topic that came up several times during community meetings was the need for “frontline,” training to teach tourism industry staff how to interact with tourists. Such “frontline,” employees include the obvious hotel and nonprofit staff, but it also includes sales associates, cashiers, gas attendants, and others that come into regular contact with the general public. Though this training does not directly impact the individual business, it does impact the tourism industry in Baker County overall and therefore is an important component of the overall business assistance strategy. It is worth noting, however, that many business owners might not be able to spare their employees for the day to go to training or might not see the need for it. Any attempt to train frontline staff will inevitably begin with working with business owners, managers, and supervisors to stress the importance and benefits of the training. Likely, the strategy will involve teaching them how to train their employees before or in place of working with frontline employees directly.

New Business

Spurring economic development is a top priority for the tourism industry. Recruiting new businesses not only creates new jobs, but also builds the amenities to attract visitors. Most

⁴ Blue Mountain Community College, “Small Business Development Center,” Accessed on June 12, 2018 from <http://www.bluecc.edu/community/small-business-development-center#ad-image-0>

⁵ HatchLab Baker, “A Center for Entrepreneurship on Main Street in Baker City, Oregon,” Accessed on June 12, 2018 from <https://hatchthefuture.org/hatchlab-baker/about/>

travelers do not visit a single destination. Rather, they go to places that have many offerings to suit multiple needs, interests, and preferences. Adding tourism-based businesses, then, supports the economic development work prioritized by the county. Tourism-businesses include lodging, dining, retail, arts and culture, outdoor adventure, and travel services such as gas stations.

During PARC Resources' outreach attempts, meeting attendees pointed out the empty storefronts – or storefronts that were still operational but had been for sale for years. Empty buildings and those soon to exchange hands do not attract visitors. In fact, the mere presence of multiple, “for sale,” signs, leaves the impression to visitors that the community is dying and there is little reason to return. One solution to combat this problem is for the County to help encourage business entrepreneurs by providing start-up assistance and recruitment incentives.

At opportune times, the County has stepped in to offer assistance to young entrepreneurs and might well do so again. The assistance does not come from an official or competitive program and does not have set criteria for qualification beyond the obvious need for the business to be impactful in order to make the investment worth it. As part of a business recruitment campaign, the County should consider developing such an assistance program that can provide down payment assistance, low-interest loans for minor building repairs, and scholarships for workshops or one-on-one technical assistance provided by BMCC and HatchLab Baker.

Develop New Business Opportunities

The potential exists for Baker County to identify the gaps in service and develop enterprises or coordinate existing businesses to fill the need. For example, given the increasing popularity of cycling, Baker County could create infrastructure to support the cycling industry. Such infrastructure would include adding bike paths and signage as well as investing in a targeted marketing campaign for cyclists around the Pacific Northwest. At the same time, it is important to ensure that businesses exist that can likewise support the cycling industry, such as rental and equipment shops or guided tours where needed. If no such businesses exist locally, Baker County should make a concerted effort to recruit new businesses or work with existing businesses to branch out and fill the gaps. Such efforts are part of developing a vibrant tourism industry that is sustainable through the ongoing attraction of new and recurring guests.

Industry Best Practices

Encouraging business development is a top priority for every community. One common practice to drawing in new businesses is to offer tax incentives – particularly to large companies that promise tens or even hundreds of jobs. Such businesses are certainly impactful to the community and economy, but generally tend to be manufacturing jobs or call centers. Neither of these business types will benefit the tourism industry in Baker County and therefore the tax incentive strategy is not likely to be particularly effective, except to recruit chain hotels and the like.

Other cities across America are trying to recruit people to their communities. Many are suffering from a worker shortage and developing creative solutions to the problem, such as offering down

payment assistance on home purchases, student loan relief, or even simply writing a check to new residents that move into town for work.⁶ While these solutions are not necessarily applicable to Baker County, it shows a nationwide trend beginning to shape of competing to attract individuals through financial incentives as a means of economic development. The idea is not new. For hundreds of years, incentives such as cash and property have been used as a means of encouraging migration.

The strategies suggested for assisting and recruiting new businesses fall in line with the programs designed to attract individuals. Namely, cash incentives such as down payments for business – as opposed to down payments for houses – are used to draw people to the community. Once they are established in the community, have invested some of their own capital and time into the business development, and built a successful business, it is likely they will want to stay and continue to support small businesses and tourism in Baker County.



⁶ D. Harrison and S. Raice. Wall Street Journal, “How Bad is the Labor Shortage? Cities Will Pay You to Move There.” Accessed on June 1, 2018 from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-bad-is-the-labor-shortage-cities-will-pay-you-to-move-there-1525102030>

Chapter 3: Marketing

The following sections review the key concerns with regard to marketing, such as developing a countywide brand, targeting advertising efforts, and developing products. Through PARC Resources' interactions with the community, it became clear that the Basecamp Baker brand does not work for most of the county. While some residents felt the slogan was appropriate, they did think Basecamp Baker as a website was confusing, both to visitors and even to local business owners. To that end, one of the first steps toward changing the way that Baker County markets itself is to develop a new slogan and an intuitive website for visitors.

Baker or Baker County

One of the first considerations for developing a new website and slogan is whether to refer to the region as, "Baker," or as "Baker County." Many county residents feel strongly that, "Baker," only refers to Baker City, effectively leaving out the other communities in the county. However, not all residents felt this way. Some Baker City and county residents pointed out that, "Baker County," is not an intuitive search term because most people do not think to search for things to do in a whole county; rather they search for things to do in a specific community they visit.

Google Trends supports the assessment that Baker County is not an intuitive search term. The PARC Resources team researched search phrases relating to Baker County, Oregon; filtering out responses that could be related to other states. Of the phrases researched, "Baker City," was by far the most used search term July 2017 – June 2018. "Hells Canyon," was the second most used search term during that time frame – particularly in the Midwest and Eastern states. "Halfway," "Haines," "Sumpter," "Huntington," "Richland," and "Anthony Lakes," each received a few searches per month, but not more than ten searches in any one month for any of these locations. "Baker County," "Baker County Tourism," "Visit Baker," "Things to do in Baker," and similar phrases returned almost no results, with an average of only about 1-2 searches per month. "Basecamp Baker," or "Base Camp Baker," did not return any results for the year.

It is clear that using, "Baker County," as the focus in marketing is inefficient as people simply are not looking for things to do countywide. Mostly, they are interested in the specific communities or attractions they are visiting. For those unfamiliar with the area, they might not even realize that communities such as Huntington, Sumpter, and Richland are even part of Baker County.

To balance the two viewpoints, Baker County Tourism will develop a domain name for the new website that includes, "Baker County," but will make use of metadata and alt tags that include individual communities, major local businesses, and defining geographic landmarks such as Hells Canyon and Pine Valley to increase search engine results.⁷ In addition, the TLT will seek

⁷ Michigan Tech: University Marketing and Communications. "Five Ways To Improve Your Site's Ranking." Viewed on August 6, 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.mtu.edu/umc/services/digital/seo/>

funding to support communities in developing their own individual brand that will be linked to the Baker County Tourism Website.

Branding & Slogans

The community had a lot to say about marketing in Baker County. Many agreed with the distinction between a permanent brand and a temporary slogan. For example, “Staples,” is a brand that used the slogan, “That was easy,” for years before retiring it in favoring of a new, “Make more happen,” campaign. In addition, a single brand can use multiple slogans or campaigns simultaneously depending on what audience they hope to reach. In Baker County, that could be creating separate marketing campaigns with individual slogans for each community or continuing to group together types of activities into categories. The latter is the approach currently in use on the Basecamp Baker website and fits with the efforts of Travel Oregon.

In general, community members supported phrases such as, “Getaway,” “Welcoming,” “Adventure,” “Explore,” and, “Authentic,” all of which were initially offered as suggestions during community meetings. Some participants pointed out that most of these words were too generic or overused, and others thought that, “authentic,” was not descriptive enough. The County should consider a separate marketing plan, perhaps engaging the guidance of a Public Relations firm. In lieu of that, PARC Resources recommends using Travel Oregon as a model for local advertising – both to have a template to work from as well as to keep messaging familiar throughout Oregon’s marketing efforts.

To fall in line with Travel Oregon’s approach, Baker County Tourism should consider either renaming or developing additional categories of businesses to reflect the mood of the traveler. For example, Travel Oregon uses phrases such as, “magical,” “relaxed,” “adventurous,” and, “nostalgic,” all of which could apply to Baker County as well. The benefit of this approach is that it allows the possibility of organizations, activities, and events that are not normally in the same category to be grouped together. A “relaxed,” visit to the area could include a ride on the train traveling on the Sumpter Valley Railroad, taking in a play by Eastern Oregon Regional Theatre, and visiting the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center; all of which are currently listed in separate categories.

Advertising

Baker County Tourism budgeted \$154,000 on marketing campaigns in Fiscal Year 2018 – a healthy and reasonable sum for an industry that received \$45.2 million in visitor spending and supported 740 jobs in 2017.⁸ The FY 2018 budget is included on the next page to demonstrate all of the ways Baker County markets tourism:

⁸ Dean Runyan Associates, “Oregon Travel Impacts: Statewide Estimates,” Accessed on June 28, 2018 from <http://industry.traveloregon.com/research/archive/oregon-travel-impacts-1991-2011-dean-runyan-associates/>

2017-18 Baker County Tourism marketing budget

Marketing Expenses	Description - Notes
Cooperative Marketing with Baker County Businesses	\$20,000 Cooperative ads targeting core target markets. In the past has included Co-op pages in Eastern Oregon Guide, Winter ski campaign, and other opportunistic co-op efforts
Travel Oregon Advertising channels	\$2,500 Travel Oregon Guide, website, print or social media channels
Cooperative Marketing with EOVA Eastern Oregon Partners	\$9,000 Eastern Oregon Visitors Association including Hells Canyon Scenic Byway marketing group and other potential eastern Oregon regional Ag and Cultural tourism partners
Tourism Associations Memberships	\$4,000 For example: Oregon / Washington Festivals Association and Travel Industry Association of America etc.
Fulfillment Products and ad Design and Production	\$4,500 ad production costs and design for fulfillment products (Anticipates \$1,000 each to reprint Sumpter and Halfway Snowmobile Maps)
Fall/Christmas holiday campaign	\$3,000
Advertising in Travel Related Guides and Periodicals (online and/or print)	\$15,000 Target periodicals based on core demographic and likelihood of editorial coverage. Evaluate current publications including Oregon festivals and Events guide, EOVA Guide and other local/regional guides, and explore potential new opportunities based on market plan niche segments
Social Networking and Internet advertising	\$5,000 Online advertising driving site traffic, and software/program subscriptions or fees
Website Development, Refinement and Maintenance	\$3,000 Ongoing hosting, maintenance and development or additional features and tools.
Digital Content/Assets Creation	\$4,000 Digital content creation beyond our in-house ability, i.e. 360 video, and specific video production using stock B-roll footage and additional drone/go pro footage as needed
Public Relations and Media Outreach	\$2,000 Hosting travel writers, pitching story leads and developing media and press kits etc.
Tourism and Travel Related Trade Shows and expos	\$7,500 Travel, registration, and vendor fees for trade shows such as the Idaho Snowmobile and Seattle Motorcycle show etc. Selection of conferences/ tradeshow to be reviewed and determined with guidance and direction from the marketing committee based on marketing goals and potential ROI.

In County / regional Travel Expenses	\$9,000	Reimbursement for in county travel for site visits, product development, relationship building, and brand building. Reimbursable at standard IRS rate
Tourism conferences, association meetings and industry training including conferences	\$8,000	Includes Oregon Tourism, Oregon Washington Festivals and Events, Oregon Travel and Tourism Association, Oregon Economic Development, Staff expenses out of county and statewide Workshops, meetings and misc. training including conferences such as Oregon Tourism, Oregon Festivals and Events, Oregon Travel and Tourisms Association, EOVA meetings
County Event Development and Marketing	\$11,000	Used to sponsor and/or promote events within the county that focus on target markets or reinforce marketing efforts. Past efforts have included the Super 16 events campaigns
Printing and Miscellaneous Expenses	\$3,000	Includes potential Base Camp Baker merchandise and giveaway promotional items
Hospitality and Small Business Training and Education	\$2,500	Training and workshops for county businesses focusing on hospitality training and how to capitalize on tourism as an economic development tool for their business.
Brochure Distribution	\$3,500	Distribution of the EOVA Guide at State Welcome Centers, OTE Info Centers, and Boise Airport including bulk shipping as needed
Winter events and recreation	\$4,000	Focus on Jan-March winter season events and winter recreation
Baker County Visitors Guide	\$5,000	includes back page and Contribution towards printing overrun of guide
Cycling Specific	\$4,000	Dedicated marketing fund for cycling specific product/event development, and or marketing.
Arts and Culture	\$4,000	Dedicated marketing fund for arts, culture and heritage events, product development and marketing
Ag Tourism	\$4,000	Agritourism product development and marketing
International Marketing	\$6,000	International marketing targeting FIT and Group travelers. Potential to partner with Travel Oregon most likely German market as main focus
Group and packaged tour marketing	\$7,500	includes attending Go West, and development of group travel specific itineraries and itineraries specific to Baker County and in conjunction with regional and state group travel partners
Reserve /Contingency Fund	\$3,000	For unknown opportunities or projects. May be used at the guidance and direction of the TLT, and County Commission for advertising, projects, or as local match when seeking outside grant dollars
Total:	\$154,000	

Niche Efforts

Numerous niches exist within the tourism industry; and many are available in Baker County. A few of the current trends in tourism that Baker County can capitalize on are listed below.

Outdoor Adventure

Outdoor adventure is a broad category that includes many types of activities. Currently, these activities are all grouped together on the Basecamp Baker website, but they could be fleshed out further. There are also some activities missing that have come up in community meetings, such as drop camps – essentially an experience for visitors who want to be taken to a remote location and then left to either hike or bike out themselves or picked up in a few days. Winter sports are adequately represented but should highlight cross country skiing in Pine Valley as well as consider providing maps of snowmobile areas for Halfway, Sumpter, and Burnt River Canyon.

It is important to note that while PARC Resources heard some discussion about needing to focus less on promoting outdoor activities and turning more attention to other industries, the evidence suggests that continuing to support outdoor recreational activities is the more logical choice. This does not mean to cut support to arts, culture, heritage, agriculture, or culinary businesses – which are a significant contributor to the success of the travel industry. Rather, this recommendation reflects the fact that the number one reason that visitors come to Eastern Oregon, other than to visit relatives, is for outdoor recreation with 40% of marketable travelers coming to Eastern Oregon for that purpose.⁹ PARC Resources fully supports allocating marketing funds to other niche efforts, but recommends maintaining a significant budget to continue to promote outdoor adventure in Baker County.

Arts /Culture /Heritage

Arts, culture, and heritage refer to all of the humanities-based organizations that attract visitors. For example, representing the artistic community are the Classical Music Festival, Clear Creek Music Festival, Crossroads Art Center, Eastern Oregon Regional Theatre, Main Street Stage Concert Series, Music in the Wilds, Pine Fest and numerous art galleries.

In addition, culture and heritage are represented through the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, Sumpter Valley Railroad, Sumpter Valley Dredge State Park, Historic Downtown area in Baker City, and eight museums scattered throughout the county. While some community residents commented that the County should move away from promoting history as part of its tourism offerings, these offerings represent an established infrastructure that should not be ignored completely. Instead, PARC Resources recommends weaving historic features and opportunities into other packages, such as suggesting a day of outdoor adventure, followed by a day of leisure riding the railroad and visiting one of the museums.

Agriculture/Culinary

Baker County has many agritourism opportunities, including several farms and ranches that either already are or have the potential to host visitors for overnight stays, provide tours of their

⁹ Longwoods International, “Oregon 2015 Regional Visitor Report: The Eastern Region,” Accessed on 7/3/18 from <http://industry.traveloregon.com/research/archive/eastern-oregon-overnight-travel-study-2015-longwoods-international/>

farms, or even just be represented on a map for drivers and cyclists to ride by and see in person. As previously discussed, many urbanites are more interested than ever in learning about farm to table practices, and what better way to learn than to see a farm in action. Additionally, dining establishments in Baker County are producing top quality cuisine – some of which were reviewed in a 2017 publication from Travel Oregon outlining a culinary walking tour in Baker City.¹⁰ While a list of dining establishments is provided on the Basecamp Baker website, PARC Resources recommends adding further details, such as a description of the type of foods served and links to Yelp, or other review site.

Packaged Group and International

Increasingly, visitors are looking for prepackaged vacation options that they can easily research, modify and reserve from their computers. This is especially true for international travelers where phone correspondence is not only time consuming, but costly. While the County does not have the ability to develop the packages themselves, it should be a priority to work with businesses in the area to build package options for visitors that the County can promote on their behalf.

Two-wheeled Travel

Cyclists are a strong subset of Oregon’s tourism industry. In 2014, cyclists spent over \$12.4 million in Oregon’s Scenic Bikeways alone.¹¹ Building up this industry through added infrastructure – such as pike paths or lanes – a community marketing campaign encouraging locals to look out for cyclists, and a larger marketing campaign to draw in visitors would be an economic boon for the community. Initially, marketing dollars for scenic bikeways and paths are best spent by focusing on bicycling hotspots such as Portland and Eugene, eventually expanding further as the region builds a reputation for the activity.



¹⁰ Anderson, Jen. “Culinary Walking Tour of Baker City.” Viewed on June 12, 2018. Available at <https://traveloregon.com/things-to-do/eat-drink/artisan-producers/culinary-walking-tour-baker-city/>

¹¹ Dean Runyan Associates, “The Economic Significance of Cycling Oregon Scenic Bikeways, 2014,” Accessed on June 29, 2018 from <http://industry.traveloregon.com/research/archive/eastern-oregon-overnight-travel-study-2015-longwoods-international/>

Earned Media/Paid Media

Paid media is the traditional concept of paying for predesigned advertisements in newspapers, magazines, radio, and television. Earned media, on the other hand, refers to other people generating buzz about a brand; essentially word-of-mouth from customers and the like. Bloggers, social media followers, and unsolicited press mentions are all forms of earned media. Search engine results are also a form of earned media, whereby the organization whose name ending up at the top of a list of search results gets the most attention. Endorsements from Cycle Oregon and Travel Oregon both contribute to Baker County’s earned media buzz, as well as followers sharing posts on social media about experiences in Baker County.

Earned media is typically considered the most trustworthy, although the organization has the least control over how it is presented. Most importantly, given the limited resources for tourism, earned media is free and often widely circulated. Cultivating relationships with bloggers, continuing to use social media and build a follower-base, and maintaining positive relations with travel organizations such as EOVA, Travel Oregon, and Cycle Oregon all contribute to the County’s earned media.



Chapter 4: Product Development Needs and Opportunities

Facilities & Infrastructure

Baker County has a reasonable number of tourism facilities – including museums, art centers, theatres, community rooms, conference rooms, fairgrounds, and sports facilities. These facilities provide opportunities for meetings, events, and recreation both as a form of entertainment while visitors are in the community and as a draw for them to visit in the first place. Maintaining the facilities currently available and encouraging the addition of new facilities – particularly ones that fill gaps in services – should always be a priority for the County.

The top two infrastructure items that Baker County should consider to improve tourism is to develop a non-motorized trail for pedestrian and bicycle use and set the stage for a commercial airline to schedule flights into the Baker City Municipal Airport. Multiuse paths are becoming a common theme for many communities – meaning more funding sources are responding by opening grant programs for this purpose. Multiuse paths provide recreational and physical fitness opportunities for local residents but are also a draw for pedestrians and cyclists that wish to tour the scenic beauty of Baker County while remaining safely off the roadway. The path could start small – even broken up as multiple pathways of only a mile or two each with the eventual plan to merge them together. This is a project that will take years to develop and even longer to implement. It has a big enough scope to warrant a separate master plan.

The recommendation for an airport stems from the undeniable barrier of travelling to Baker County in the winter. Though the county has been noted of doing an admirable job keeping the roads clear within Baker County, getting to the area – particularly coming up I-84 from Pendleton – can be treacherous. In March 2018, Oregon Live reported a 20-vehicle pileup on Cabbage Hill and took the opportunity to also mention a similar crash that happened six years previously killing nine people and injuring 38 more. While these accidents are certainly tragedies and stories no one wants to hear about, they also depict Eastern Oregon as being a dangerous place to visit in the winter – particularly from travelers on the west side of the state that typically have milder winters than Eastern Oregon.

Contracting with a commercial airline to offer flights even a few times per week into Baker City would help alleviate travel concerns and would mark Baker City as the only commercial airport between Pendleton and Boise, ID. Pendleton contracts with a small company called Boutique Air. Flights are only available to and from Portland at a rate of approximately \$90 per person (\$180 per person for round trip). This option is a relatively affordable way for visitors from the West side of the state and from outside of the normal driving distance to access Baker County more easily.

The airport currently does not have the infrastructure to support commercial flights, even small ones such as Boutique Air. To make commercial flights available for Baker County will include additional planning, such as expanding the airport, lengthening the runways for larger planes, and developing a bus, shuttle, taxi, or rental car service to help visitors get around once they

land. These supportive services are not readily available and will take time and planning to complete. Further, expanding the airport will take significant coordination between the City and County. In short, this is a project best suited for the long-term, though the TLT should begin the conversations and consider putting together an informal strategy for developing this resource. As tourism in Baker County grows, commercial flights in and out of the county will likely boost visitors and strengthen the tourism market.

Events & Attractions

Baker County hosts a multitude of events from music festivals and artistic performances, to rallies, rodeos, and harvest festivals. These events are generally reasonably well-attended although there appears to be some confusion about how these events are publicized. Part of the confusion harkens back to the confusion among the general public about the roles and responsibilities of each of the organizations involved in promoting tourism for Baker County. The general confusion over which entities were responsible for which activities adds to the general feeling that marketing Baker County might be going out to the Pacific Northwest, but internally there is no marketing to help business owners know what events are scheduled at any given time. Without that knowledge, communities develop events that conflict with another community or fail to cross-promote each other in an effort to encourage visitors to extend their stays.

Currently, there appears to be a gap in service on marketing events in Baker County to local residents – outside of the individual businesses and event organizers themselves. The focus of Baker County Tourism and the Visitors’ Center is to advertise outside of the region; although the argument has often been made that the information is publicly available on the Chamber and Basecamp Baker websites to anyone that cares to look. Still, clarifying to local entities that they are ultimately responsible for local marketing would eliminate confusion and some consternation.

Lodging

Lodging options in Baker County are nearly as diverse as the geography in Baker County itself. There are obviously large hotels such as the Rodeway Inn and Super 8. There are also hotels that are destinations in and of themselves, such as the Geiser Grand Hotel and Cornucopia Lodge as well as small inns or bed and breakfasts such as Pine Lodge, Blue Door Inn, and Crown Courtyard Inn. Anthony Lakes provides the resort treatment with their ski lodge, although it is only open seasonally. Vacation rentals and Airbnb properties abound as do campgrounds along with a few RV sites. With all of these lodging opportunities throughout Baker County, travelers have many options for locations to stay and ways to experience all that Baker County has to offer.

Travel research shows that visitors are much more impactful to the local economy when they stay overnight. Overnight stays usually amount to a minimum of one extra meal and often more money spent at local attractions or events. Therefore, supporting lodging partners is a key

priority for the success of tourism in Baker County. Through the course of the community outreach efforts for this strategic plan, PARC Resources designed surveys for the lodging partners and invited partners to participate in a public meeting. The survey received a reasonable return rate and though the community meeting was not well-attended, the participants were very active in voicing their opinions and giving feedback for the County.

Lodging partners generally disagreed that a longer, “tourist season,” would impact their occupancy rates – as many posted as little as 60% and as much as 90% year-round. The reason stated for the year-round occupancy rather than the traditional peak and off-season differential is that the off-season is really split between fall and spring due to the active winter season as well as the traditional summer peak season. While developing activities to extend the season through the fall and/or spring would be beneficial for most businesses, lodging partners did not feel it was a priority for them, particularly given that the downtime gives them a chance to do maintenance and prepare for the next onslaught of guests.

Visitor Experiences

With regard to enhancing visitor experiences, the lodging partners listed several options they had either implemented or heard of others doing. One hotel mentioned sending out a, “Real Adventures Form,” to all clients upon them making their reservation that lists different events and activities about which they might want more information. Others noted that handing out rack cards of information for local businesses and events was helpful for their guests and yet another puts together her own visitor’s packet with a copy of the Eastern Oregon Visitor’s Guide and various brochures. An Airbnb owner stated that they would leave gift baskets with coupons or samples for guests. These touches improved visitor experiences to make the business more successful and cross-promoted other businesses to boost tourism throughout the county. The goal of this practice is to try to either extend visitors’ stay or encourage them to come back to the area.

On the survey, every respondent answered that they do provide promotional materials – mostly magazines, brochures, and fliers. Some offered package deals, discounts/coupons, or business cards. While these services are offered and available at the lodging partner establishments, it is unclear to what extent frontline staff are utilizing the materials, especially when clients do not think to ask for the promotions. There is a perception in the community that frontline staff are not effectively cross promoting businesses and therefore frontline staff need help to better understand the importance of presenting this information to guests.

In addition to cross promotion, lodging partners are increasingly making the effort to partner with other businesses and develop packages for guests. This practice should be encouraged and as more successful partnerships develop, pointing to their success for other lodging partners can add to the desired amenities modern travelers look for.

Visitor Infrastructure

During the phone interviews, some community members expressed the opinion that Visitor Information Centers are outdated and not an effective method of disseminating information to

potential visitors to Baker County. The Chamber of Commerce tells a different story, stating that their phone calls are frequently about tourism and that they send promotional materials by mail on a regular basis. A 2007 study showed that Visitor Information Centers tended to be frequented by first-time visitors and those not visiting families in the area and that one of their main functions is to influence visitors to stay longer.¹²

The study found that Visitor Information Centers were very effective but offered some caveats. Firstly, they pointed out that the type of visitor likely to use the Visitor Information Center was someone not from the area, without family nearby, and who was willing to adapt their plans. Given that nearly half of Baker County visitors are out-of-town relatives, however, the Visitor Information Center likely attracts less than its fair share of visitors. Secondly, the study was careful to state that with changing technology, the usefulness of Visitor Information Centers could be lessened in the future. Considering the initial publication was over 10 years prior to this strategic planning effort and the amount of technology that has changed in that time, it is possible that the study is no longer accurate. Unfortunately, researchers were unable to find a more recent article on the effectiveness of Visitor Information Centers in the face of growing technology. The County should carefully consider its approach with the Visitor Information Center and determine whether its current approach is sustainable or whether some resources should be allocated for other types of advertising and visitor information fulfillment.



Way Finding Signage.

Way finding signage consistently came up as a topic of conversation in community meetings, focus groups, and surveys. Some residents told stories of even locals missing turns due to poor

¹² University of Massachusetts Amherst, “Effectiveness of Community-Based Visitor Information Centers,” Accessed on July 10, 2018 from <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1360&context=ttra>

signage while local nonprofits mentioned the difficulty of guiding people to the correct location without proper signage. The need and demand for way finding signage is clear in Baker County.

There are many ways to approach updating the way finding signs in Baker County, including differences in design, purpose, and placement. Given the scope of the options and the importance of this topic to local residents, PARC Resources recommends developing a supplemental plan dedicated only to this topic. As a preliminary step toward developing that plan, the remainder of this chapter is dedicated to discussion of the ideas and options presented in meetings and surveys as well as an overview of research results from the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT).

Community Input

The community focused on describing the scope of the problem, which forms a solid basis for justifying the need and highlights way finding signage as a top priority for tourism development in Baker County. The problem is widespread and common between all communities. Directional signage appears to be significant in the communities located away from the interstate and major highways. Residents of Sumpter and Halfway specifically mentioned the difficulty in helping guests find the correct turn off the main highways to reach their cities. While ODOT has recently installed a new sign to mark the turn toward Sumpter, the current tourist season will determine how effective the signage will be and whether further improvements should be made.

Some suggestions for improving signage that came up include categorizing different types of signs. Specific categories could include directional, route, and local signs. For example, directional signs refer to helping travelers find communities and major attractions, while route signs refers to scenic byways, biking, and hiking paths. Localized signs would be specific services, districts, and tourist locales within each community.

ODOT Guidelines

ODOT prioritizes regulatory signs, such as speed limit and no passing zones, followed by warning signs, such as “Stop,” and curve warnings.¹³ These are already in place and therefore should not be a factor for way finding signs, also referred to as guide signs by ODOT, unless there is a traffic revision. Placement of new, additional signs must work around the regulation and warning signs already in place. The County should further consider the exact placement of all interstate and highway signage in a detailed way finding sign plan.

In general, directional guide signs on I-84, state highways, and county highways, should follow the prescribed design that drivers expect to see throughout the state. Matching color is important, but so too is using the specific font guidelines including differing font size depending on the speed limit in a given area. ODOT also regulates the types of materials that can be used to make a sign, focusing heavily on aluminum, but allowing high density overlay plywood as an alternative substrate. ASTM Type III and Type IV sheeting are the standards for ground signs in Oregon. ASTM Type IX sheeting, with its greater reflectivity, is generally used for overhead signs and can be used for ground signs when needed for high-impact signs.

¹³ ODOT. “Sign Design Manual.” Accessed on July 2, 2018 from <https://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/Engineering/Pages/Sign-Policy.aspx> All other facts are from this source unless otherwise noted.

Local Signs

Local signs guide visitors to specific amenities and services, including tourist sites, parking, information, government services, hospitals, and even public restrooms. Local signs tend to be consistently designed throughout a community and reflect the community's identity. Baker County will need to determine whether local signs should reflect the county's identity overall or each individual community's identity. Either is acceptable, although it is more common for each community to design their own signage.



Local signs take their cues from facility signs, such as those found on college and hospital campuses as well as mall locations, much like this example from South Shore Plaza Mall in Braintree, Massachusetts. The consistency in color scheme and logo placement identify the company's "brand," much the way cities' local signs attempt to do through establishing a community identity. Below are examples of local signs that illustrate some design possibilities.



Pendleton, Oregon

Pendleton's wayfinding signs highlight the heritage of the Pendleton Round Up by featuring a photo of a cowboy atop a bucking bronco above the directions. The picture not only symbolizes the prevalence of the rodeo in the community's identity, but also the history of the rodeo due to the sepia-toned black and white image. The brown background blends the signage into the scenery, making it look more natural and keeping to ODOT's color scheme of brown representing historical, cultural, and recreational sites.¹⁴

¹⁴ Ibid.

Tacoma, Washington has similarly styled signage to Pendleton's, with a pop of color near the top to attract the eye. The signs also note with a symbol where to find parking.



Tacoma, Washington



Venice, Florida

This version of wayfinding signage includes more vibrant colors than what is found in Tacoma or Pendleton and includes graphic depictions of each location, reflective of Venice, Florida's beachy, bold personality. While undoubtedly eye-catching, this approach might be a little busy and difficult to read for drivers. Nonetheless, it is a unique, standout sign that is memorable.



South Bank, Australia

This ultra-modern take on wayfinding signage stands out, is eye catching, and provides multiple symbols for various services, such as the bus and train stations. The print is a little small for drivers, but could work for pedestrians and cyclists.

Route Signs

Route signs identify pathways, byways, and districts that visitors might want to find. Getting to the route usually involves local or directional signs. Once at the trailhead or district entrance, however, there is often a sign that marks the entrance, such as this example from Dublin, California.



Dublin, California



Fort Wayne, Indiana

Within a district, the signage can look much like local wayfinding signs. This version of wayfinding signage includes the name of the district above the standard arrows directing visitors to their desired destinations. The sign also has subtle design details such as the blue stripes underneath the sign and the column at the top, and leaves room for future additions with the blank space.

For outdoor recreational areas such as hiking trails, bike paths, river walks, or other similar areas, a map of the route is often beneficial. Maps are usually placed at entrance points to a trail and contain additional information such as the length of the trail, GPS location, and the location of amenities, such as restrooms, benches, and shelters users can expect to find along the way. The obvious method of disseminating this information is through a trailhead kiosk.



West Tiger Mountain (Near Seattle, Washington)

Outdoor kiosks are common to place at trailheads. The downside to this approach is when a trail has multiple points of entry. Smaller signs such as this one found at the Mt. Nittany Conservancy in Boalsburg, Pennsylvania is a less expensive alternative to large kiosks.



Boalsburg, Pennsylvania



Charleston, South Carolina

Even throughout the trail, placing markers to keep new users on track is very helpful. The College of Charleston’s four-mile nature trail contains trail markers that subdivide the trail and help users easily identify their location.

Chapter 5: Communications

Internal Partner and Industry Communication

The most significant communication concerns within Baker County are between the partners and travel industry itself. There appears to be disconnect between communities as well as between individual businesses, particularly those that fear rather than embrace competition. While there is a movement that is beginning to push for more cooperation between businesses in developing group packages and making recommendations, such ventures are relatively early in their planning and implementation. Successfully partnering will set an example that other businesses in Baker County should want to emulate.

Barriers to Communication

While there is some resistance to the idea of cooperating with other organizations, it appears that most organizations are simply unaware of or uninterested in what is going on in other communities. Community members mentioned multiple times that they did not know what other businesses and communities were doing at any given time, while other mentioned that the information is readily available on the Chamber of Commerce's website. A quick review of the Chamber of Commerce website confirms that a robust calendar of activities is easily accessible. Therefore, the problem is more rooted in businesses and event organizers not knowing where to look, or not thinking to look at what other events are taking place. It is possible that people did not know where to look due to the genuine confusion of the role of the Baker City Chamber of Commerce in tourism. This communication gap is unfortunate because the County as a whole would benefit from greater collaboration between communities.

In addition to the confusion regarding where to look for information, it is important to note that many businesses in the service-industry – such as gas stations, retail shops, and markets – do not think of themselves as part of the tourism industry. Without that self-identification, they do not think to reach out to the tourism partners. It is vital that tourism partners reach out to them. Community outreach to these businesses develops a holistic picture of the amenities available locally.

Finally, there is a small number of businesses that are resistant to the idea of competition. To their view, there is not enough business to go around. On the other hand, more competition forces businesses to be at their best, provides more amenities in the region to attract more visitors, and generally lifts everyone up. Unfortunately, Baker County cannot force business owners to take that view, although the County can provide information to the business owners, which will hopefully sway some into embracing competition and cooperation.

Communication Solutions

One significant way to benefit the communication between entities is to identify one organization as the central point of contact for all tourism-related businesses. The organization should be Baker County Tourism due to the perception of the Chamber of Commerce within the smaller communities. Unfortunately, Baker County Tourism consists of one individual that is

tasked with far too many responsibilities to even consider adding on the full-time job of keeping in contact with the business community throughout Baker County. To address this need, it would be beneficial to fund a Community Outreach Facilitator position; a second full-time position that would operate either directly under the County, or by Baker County Tourism. Though funding such a position would be difficult, and probably require some grant assistance, the long-term benefits would likely be worth the initial investment.

While it will not be easy to bring together multiple communities with their own biases and agendas, Baker County Tourism must continue its effort to unite organizations. One of the ways that Baker County Tourism can do that is to take the lead on developing countywide events. At present, Baker County Tourism does not have the capacity to enact such a plan, but with a second employee to field calls, coordinate businesses, and recruit volunteer support, such an endeavor could be very successful. Community members stated that they were in favor of the County organizing events that all communities can participate in. Doing so fulfills that desire for the communities and demonstrates a positive example of working together toward meeting the goal. In this effort, Baker County Tourism should refrain from taking the lead, but rather should carefully select a task force made up of representatives from every community in Baker County and facilitate planning a major event for Baker County. This process encourages dialogue and relationship-building that can help foster communication outside of the event-planning.

Public Communications

The primary method of communicating with the public is through forms of advertising, thus the marketing strategy is crucial to the continued success of communication with current and prospective visitors. Baker County Tourism updates their marketing strategy every year; a trend that should continue. Communication generally happens through the internet, phone/mail, paid advertisements, and earned media, as discussed in more detail below. It is important to note that while Chapter 3 covers many of these topics, it does so in relation to using these tools as a means of attracting visitors, rather than as a method of communicating with them once they have committed to coming to Baker County or are already in the vicinity.

Visitor Information Center

Despite some community assertions to the contrary, the Visitor Information Center is still a utilized resource for visitors as they come into Baker City. It is conveniently located, easy to identify, and easy to access, making the physical location a good choice for the Center. With the increasing advent of technology, however, some community residents question whether a fully staffed Visitor Center is the most efficient use of limited funding. Unfortunately, objective research on the subject did not conclusively confirm one way or another whether Visitor Centers as a rule are necessary for the successful dissemination of information to visitors. Anecdotal evidence from lodging partners suggests that fewer people are stopping by the Visitor Information Center than they had done five years ago. If this general trend continues, it would be prudent for the County to reduce the contract to the Visitor Information Center in favor of allocating much-needed funds to the Community Outreach Facilitator position or marketing in general.

Website

Increasingly, websites and social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Reddit, Flickr and Pinterest among many others are becoming a primary medium for travelers to get their information. The obvious reason for this is due to the prevalence of smart phones, which allow visitors to review or change plans even when they are already in the car, driving toward Baker County. One of the drawbacks to this method of communication is that not all of Baker County has cell phone service, much less 3G and LTE data. Nonetheless, connections to consumers via internet is increasingly critical to business success.

The County will need to develop a new website with the departure of the Basecamp Baker brand. With that departure, the issue of the website domain becomes a discussion point. Though the TLT has committed to keeping a baker-county brand, there is still the issue of the Visit Baker website, currently owned and operated by the Chamber of Commerce. The history of this issue stems from an old contract with the Chamber of Commerce where they took on the roles of both the Visitor Information Center and Baker County Tourism. Subsequently, they Chamber took over the website. It is impractical to demand that the Chamber give the website over to Baker County Tourism and start from scratch, however having two websites that fill similar purposes is confusing for visitors.

One favorable solution from the viewpoint of the TLT is to help the Chamber develop a different website and keep the Visit Baker website as a single-page site that directs visitors to the separate Chamber and Tourism websites. The Chamber has not agreed nor indicated that they would be willing to consider such a proposal, but the prospect is worth considering as a compromise for all sides.

For the Tourism website, the TLT and Baker County Tourism should consider new features for the new website to keep it modern and make it more user friendly. For example, rather than merely categorizing businesses by the types of services they offer, consider creating additional categories that interweave different market sectors to provide consumers with new ways to think about and plan trips to the region. Enhance the list of dining establishes to include brief descriptions of each and links to both the business website and Google or Yelp review sites that consumers trust. Imbedding videos and linking the Flickr photo gallery to the website provide even more stunning visuals that both attract attention and provide visual clues for the reader.

If staffing capacity allows, consider adding a blog to the home page – updated weekly or monthly – that encourages readers to re-conceptualize what a visit to Baker County looks like. This is a strategy that Travel Oregon does very effectively – often themed around a specific type of experience such as hiking, cycling, road trips through scenic areas, and exploring territories such as ghost towns.

Social Media

Baker County Tourism has active Facebook, Instagram, Flickr, YouTube and Twitter accounts with thousands of followers. These are some of the most popular and most commonly used sites. In fact, according to the Pew Research Center, as reported by Forbes, YouTube is the most

commonly used social media platform with 79% of adults using the site.¹⁵ Unsurprisingly, Facebook is the next most commonly used platform at 68%. While more adults use YouTube, 74% of Facebook users visit the site daily, meaning it is used more frequently than YouTube. The next six most popular social media platforms following YouTube and Facebook are Instagram (35%), Pinterest (29%), Snapchat (27%), LinkedIn (25%), Twitter (24%) and WhatsApp (22%). Interesting to note is that Instagram users jumped from 28% to 35% in two years, showing it has the potential to grow significantly in use and importance. Clearly maintaining and increasing social media presence is a necessity to reaching large audiences and must continue to be a part of Baker County Tourism’s communication strategy.



¹⁵ Forbes, “Which Social Media Platform Is The Most Popular In The US?” Accessed on July 10, 2018 from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kevinmurnane/2018/03/03/which-social-media-platform-is-the-most-popular-in-the-us/#3ec2885d1e4e>. All other facts regarding social media in this chapter come from this source.

Conclusions and Next Steps

The planning effort for this strategic plan relied heavily on community input; a method that generally leads to greater support for a plan once complete. The purpose of this document is to synthesize the multitude of ideas and opinions on the topic of countywide tourism so that the TLT, Baker County Tourism, and Visitor Information Center have a comprehensive look at and understanding of the general attitudes and needs of the businesses and organizations that make up the local tourism industry.

Next Steps

Through this process, many themes emerged. Top concerns revolve around disseminating information, such as the need for improved internal communication and improving way finding signage for visitors. These among other themes defined the priorities for this plan. These priorities are included in both the Introduction in condensed form as well as reiterated here and given actionable steps for the TLT, Baker County Tourism, and Visitor Information Center.

Immediate Priorities

1. Hire a new Community Outreach Coordinator. This position should be full-time, managed under either Baker County Tourism or the TLT, and could likely be grant funded. Potential funding sources are included later in this chapter. This position is critical to enabling strategies to streamline communication, spearhead a county-sponsored event, and generally support the roles of the Visitor Information Center and Baker County Tourism.
2. Develop a new Baker County Tourism website. It is clear through community input that the Basecamp Baker website is no longer suitable for the whole community. As such, Chapters 3 and 5 discuss the needs for the website and recommendations in further detail.
3. Encourage community-based marketing. The TLT should seek funding for community-based marketing efforts to provide a pot of funding for individual communities to design their own marketing campaigns that represent their communities. Baker County Tourism will then incorporate these marketing efforts into its overall plan.
4. Provide training and technical assistance resources to small businesses. Reach out to potential partners such as HatchLab Baker and BMCC to increase support for and awareness of local opportunities to receive business training and technical assistance.

Mid-range Priorities

1. Organize a countywide event. The purpose of this priority is two-fold. The first purpose is to host a large event to draw tourists into all of Baker County, rather than merely one community or another. The second purpose is to encourage communication between organizations and communities with the goal of spurring subsequent communications going forward.
2. Complete a way finding sign plan. This plan should use the foundation described in Chapter 4 and expand on it to formulate a detailed strategy that includes a comprehensive

list of all locations to include on signs, groups the locations depending on sign type (directional, route, or local), completes the designs including style, color-scheme, font, and shapes of the various signs, and includes a series of maps pinpointing the exact location way finding signs should go. All of these decisions must take into account legal requirements by ODOT and practical considerations such as visibility and durability.

3. Complete a plan for a non-motorized path for cyclists and pedestrians. There are many different ways to approach the need for infrastructure to support the niche cycling market, but none as important as providing safe pathways. The benefits of these pathways is that it removes bicycles from the roads, which makes local drivers happy, and provides new recreational opportunities for locals. The plan should consider whether to make one path, multiple individual paths, or an entire network, as well as the location, materials, cost and construction of the pathways, which will enable the County to seek state and federal funding. The plan should also break the project into phases, with the goal that the County can complete one phase by the end of the 5-Year range covered in this Strategic Plan.
4. Seek funding to provide assistance programs for young entrepreneurs to start-up businesses or receive training and technical assistance as-needed. Such a program must include cooperation from resources such as HatchLab Baker and BMCC and possibly from financial institutions that can facilitate favorable loans. The program must also be well-advertised to be effective.

Long-range Priorities

1. Implement the Way Finding Signage Strategic Plan. Assuming the plan is completed by the end of Year 2, the TLT should be able to complete implementation by the end of the 5-Year period this Strategic Plan covers.
2. Implement the Bike/Ped Master Plan. This will likely take longer to complete than the Way Finding Signage Strategic Plan because it involves significantly more funding to complete. As such, a good long-range priority would be to complete the most important steps identified in the plan by the end of the 5-Year period and incorporate the subsequent steps into the next Tourism Strategic Plan in 2023.
3. Initiate conversations with Baker City regarding the use of the Municipal Airport as a small commercial airport. Any such conversations will need to include an understanding of the necessary modifications to make the airport suitable for commercial planes and a willingness of the City to work with the County to achieve these modifications. The TLT expects that if anything comes of this discussion, it will be long past the five-year mark for this Strategic Plan, but includes it here as a reminder to keep this goal in focus.
4. Update this Strategic Plan for the next five years.

Funding Sources

In order for the TLT to carry out any of the aforementioned actions, they will need funding. There is no reasonable way for the TLT to complete all actions without some grant support, though they have a reserve for some of the required planning efforts. The list of funding sources below reflects a brief look into grant opportunities, not an in-depth search, but does give the tourism partners some ideas of where to seek funding. New opportunities are announced

regularly, so the partners should keep an eye out for requests for proposals and be prepared to respond accordingly.

Federal Grants

The Economic Development Administration provides grant funds on a quarterly basis, which the County is eligible to apply for, as are any of the individual communities. Any grant request will only be competitive if they can demonstrate significant job creation or retention as a direct result of the project. For example, funds could be used for improvements to a property that would then be leased to a number of pre-identified businesses. It is possible that the TLT could request a grant for business development, such as a loan program for new businesses. However any such request would need to have a demonstrable list of people in need of the program and the support of the regional representative, David Porter, located in Seattle.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has a variety of programs for communities through their Rural Development branch.¹⁶ Though not all of these programs are applicable, some of these could be used for planning and infrastructure necessary to support tourism, such as the Community Facilities grant or Community Connect grant (for Broadband in rural areas).

State Grants

Travel Oregon is the most obvious source of funding at the state level. The agency offers three levels of grants: Small (up to \$20,000), Medium (up to \$100,000), and Large (over \$100,000). The small and medium grants are available throughout the year, but the large grant is only opened under specific direction by the Oregon Tourism Commission.¹⁷

Another likely source of state funding come from the Oregon Parks & Recreation Department (OPRD), which also includes the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). These departments provide grant opportunities that the County can use for planning and implementing the Bike/Ped Path Master Plan, helping community organizations restore historic buildings, creating interpretive signage for historic landmarks, and other similar purposes.

Finally, the travel partners should look to Business Oregon to help connect individual businesses to resources, such as tax incentives. Though these funds do not directly benefit business assistance programs for the County to manage, they do reduce the burden on the TLT to provide assistance through offering incentives for starting a businesses, incorporating green building or retrofitting technology, and other similar benefits.

Private Foundations

The travel partners should consider the following private foundations as they move forward with actions. Though not every foundation is suitable for every project, they are all major funders in the region and are worth looking into.

¹⁶ USDA. "Programs & Services for Communities & Nonprofits." Viewed on August 10, 2018. Available at: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/programs-services-communities-nonprofits>

¹⁷ Travel Oregon. "Travel Oregon Competitive Grants Program." Viewed on August 10, 2018. Available at: <http://industry.traveloregon.com/industry-resources/matching-grants-program/oregon-tourism-commission-matching-grants-program/>

Small funders (Up to \$20,000)

Autzen Foundation
Banner Bank
Cycle Oregon
Leo Adler Foundation
Northwest Farm Credit Services
U.S. Bank

Medium funders (\$20,000 - \$50,000)

Collins Foundation
Oregon Community Foundation
Wheeler Foundation

Large funders (Over \$50,000)

Ford Family Foundation
MJ Murdock Charitable Trust

As previously stated, these funders do not represent a comprehensive list, merely a brief overview to get projects started. The travel partners should continuously seek grant support and be prepared to respond to newly announced opportunities as they arise.



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