



*Little Rock*TM

CONVENTION &
VISITORS BUREAU

TOURISM MASTER PLAN

2023



January 2023

To the Little Rock Tourism & Hospitality Industry and Community,

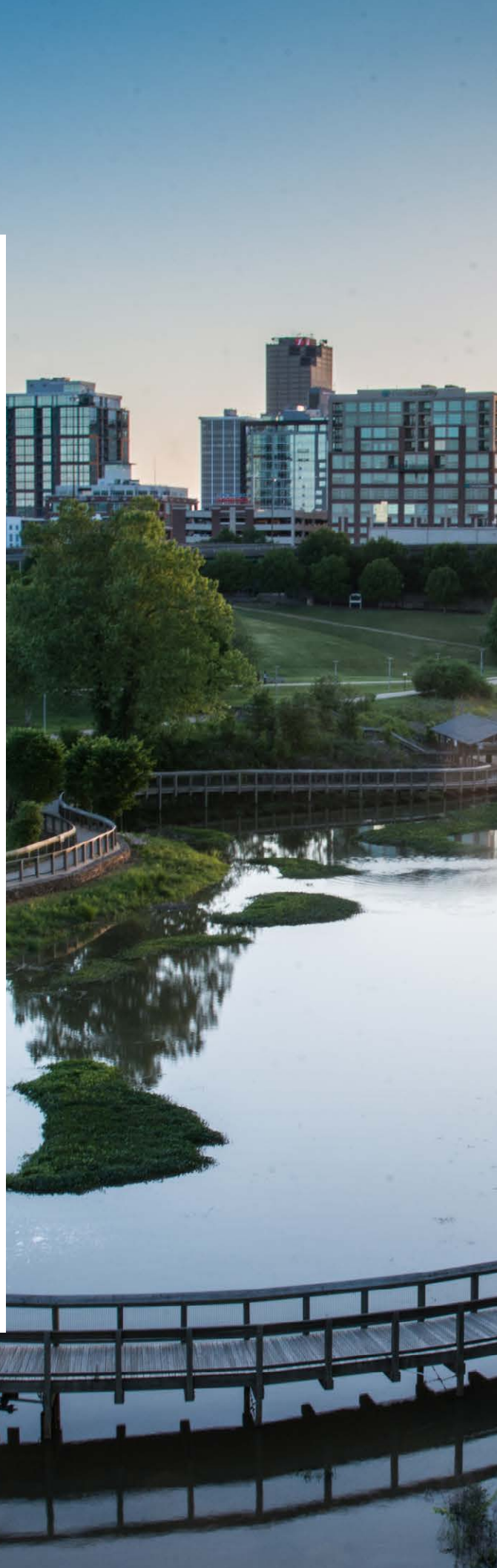
What does the future of tourism in Little Rock look like? What can we do today to ensure that tomorrow's tourism industry is strong? How can we use the best attributes of Little Rock to strengthen our community for the decade to come?

As Little Rock's official destination marketing organization, those are the questions the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau set out to answer. This document – our Tourism Master Plan – holds the answers. The future vision outlined in these pages was created by members of the tourism industry, community and the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau to prepare Little Rock for a future of growth, success, and sustainability.

Much of the work outlined here will be internal to the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau, and true success will only come with the cooperation and buy-in of partners across the tourism industry and throughout Little Rock. The Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau cannot tackle this plan alone, and as you read on, you'll see a glimpse of what Little Rock can be when we rally behind a single vision of economic growth and prosperity. Only by working together can we unlock the true, transformative power of the tourism industry in our community.

Gina Gemberling

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President and CEO
Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau







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WHAT'S INSIDE?

Executive summary

06

Market study

12

Stakeholder engagement

14

Priority areas

18

Conclusion

54

Appendix

56

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



OVERVIEW

Little Rock isn't just Arkansas's capital and largest city; it's also where 21% of the state's total tourism spending took place in 2021. At \$1.6 billion in 2021, the tourism economy is vital to Little Rock's overall economic health. As the official destination marketing organization, the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau is charged with shepherding the tourism industry by marketing and selling the city as a meetings, sports, and leisure travel destination. It also operates the Statehouse Convention Center, Robinson Center, Cromwell Building, River Market (Ottenheimer Hall, First Security Amphitheater, and the pavilions), and multiple parking facilities. The Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau does this on behalf of the Little Rock Advertising & Promotion Commission, which the city board established in 1970 to ensure a long-term plan for economic development in the tourism sector.

The goal of this Tourism Master Plan is to combine a vision for the future with actionable strategies to build a roadmap for Little Rock's tourism industry over the next 10 years. The process of building this plan began in late 2021 in the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic, an event that caused catastrophic business interruption to the hospitality and tourism industries across the globe. Leadership at the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau saw this interruption as an opportunity to plan and optimize the organization for the post-pandemic future. The Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau hired JLL's Global Tourism and Destination Advisory practice to facilitate the plan.

Over the course of the last year, JLL and the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau worked to reach into the community, listening to and learning from residents and stakeholders, conducting extensive market research interviews, and outlining a series of prioritized recommendations that, once enacted, will grow Little Rock's tourism industry while also strengthening the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau's position within the community and among its partners as an economic leader.

The COVID-19 pandemic made clear that the health of Little Rock's tourism and hospitality industries are intrinsically linked to the city's greater prosperity, and it is the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau's goal that, through this completion of this Tourism Master Plan, it will emerge as an even stronger strategic partner in the advocacy, growth, and vision for these industries in Little Rock for decades to come.

GOAL OF THE TOURISM MASTER PLAN

The immediate goal of this Tourism Master Plan is to develop recommendations, strategies, and implementation plans that will help Little Rock's tourism industry achieve its fullest economic potential as a driver of quality-of-life developments across the city. In parallel with this Tourism Master Plan, there was also an internal look at the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau as an organization to refine and refocus its internal processes to be the best possible steward of this Tourism Master Plan. The goals of both research efforts were to create a roadmap for the future of the destination and ensure the organization can stay the course for Little Rock's tourism economy.

The Tourism Master Plan takes a comprehensive look at the entirety of Little Rock's tourism and hospitality landscape, analyzing the city's current assets – attractions, hotels, restaurants, entertainment options, meeting facilities, sales strategies, marketing plans, and more – and views them through the lens of the diverse visitor segments that impact Little Rock, including the leisure, meetings and conventions, sports, and entertainment markets. The Tourism Master Plan also looks beyond the city's obvious tourism assets to closely and intentionally analyze what may seem at first to be ancillary but is, in fact, impactful to the tourism ecosystem, including infrastructure, transportation, and economic development. This approach ensures that the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau and its partners fully understand the positive impacts the plan's recommendations will have on more than just the tourism sector when achieved. It also underscores the vital role the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau's many industry partners will play in achieving the plan's goals.





PLANNING PROCESS

The Tourism Master Plan process was divided into four phases:

Phase One: Stakeholder Engagement

The Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau sought extensive stakeholder engagement to listen and learn from industry and community leaders. This included outreach to more than 500 individuals via nine focus groups with more than 120 participants, a stakeholder survey with 228 total respondents, 15 industry and community trailblazers as part of the External Advisory Committee, and 60 individual meetings. This engagement effort was broad and inclusive to intentionally seek diverse input that would shape the plan's outcomes.

Phase Two: Market Research

Market research focused on both Little Rock and a set of comparable and competitive markets. This phase of the process was also comprehensive, with a focus on understanding the destination's current positioning, readiness for tourism growth, and areas of opportunity. Phase two's analysis provided insight that furthered the plan's outcomes and recommendations.

Phase Three: Prioritization

Priorities were created based on the knowledge gained in phases one and two. The Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau used these priorities to look inward and assess the organization's needs for the future. Phase three enabled the plan to develop a framework.

Phase Four: Final Outcomes

Phase four brought the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau and its stakeholders' work together by developing the priorities, recommendations, and tactics for the Tourism Master Plan. The final plan was developed with input from partners, staff, and community leaders. The Tourism Master Plan, as outlined in this document, will serve as a roadmap for the next 10 years with goals for the tourism industry's collective success.

RECOMMENDATIONS & PRIORITIES

The outcomes of this process included nine categorical priorities each with its own recommendations, milestone action items, and identified partners. These priorities include:

1

Product Development

Identify new tourism demand drivers such as trail development, riverfront access and activations in concert with the Army Corps of Engineers and the Port of Little Rock, hotel product, new sports facilities, small business development, signature event development, etc. to further Little Rock's competitiveness as a great place to visit.

2

Tourism Infrastructure Investment

Work to improve connectivity between the downtown convention district, tourism attractions, the central business district, and destination amenities for pedestrians, public transit users, and vehicle users, while taking advantage of the existing successes managed by Rock Region METRO. Enhance pedestrian access to new parts of the city using an expanded trail network, and explore new wayfinding options in the wake of I-30 construction completion.

3

Placemaking

Reinvest in public and open spaces downtown and along the riverfront, creating a network of pedestrian and bicycle trails that creates an overall air of openness and mobility.

4

Evolve Targeted Marketing Approach

Use the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau's in-house marketing departments and its agencies of record to utilize the organization's research tools to engage target markets via unique marketing campaigns that drive overnight stays and highlight key tourism partners.

5

Enhance The Visitor Experience

Conduct all visitor services operations with a proactive, concierge-style approach, including determining a location for a future visitor center.

6

Optimize Utilization of the Statehouse Convention Center & Robinson Center

Implement a five-year ramp-up approach to booking and hosting events at the Statehouse Convention Center and Robinson Center, including booking policy revisions and partnerships with hotels for room block commitments. Additionally, focus on improving the Statehouse Convention Center with deferred maintenance projects and cosmetic renovations to fix competitiveness issues post-COVID. Longer term strategies should include both Statehouse Convention Center expansion and hotel feasibility studies to determine needs and timing of these major destination projects.

7

Community Engagement

Invest resources within the organization to develop an external affairs and advocacy role, expanding the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau's reach and impact into Little Rock through concentrated awareness efforts among its partners and key constituencies.

8

Destination Perception

Leverage positive storytelling to improve current perceptions of the city as well as further support the Little Rock Police Department's efforts in supplemental ways to improve the visitor perception of our community before arrival and while in market.

9

Breaking Down Barriers

Invest resources within the organization to further in-progress equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts and to integrate them as a cornerstone for tourism over the next 10 years.

Each of these priorities surfaced through stakeholder input and were further analyzed during the Market Study components. The priorities and subsequent recommendations will enable the destination and the organization to achieve its goals of positively impacting the industry and community in the short and long term. Many of these priorities will take time, but there are actions to be taken now.



MARKET STUDY

MARKET STUDY COMPONENTS

The foundation of the Tourism Master Plan is built on a combination of market research and validation of stakeholder engagement and participation. The market research conducted for the Little Rock Tourism Master Plan included:

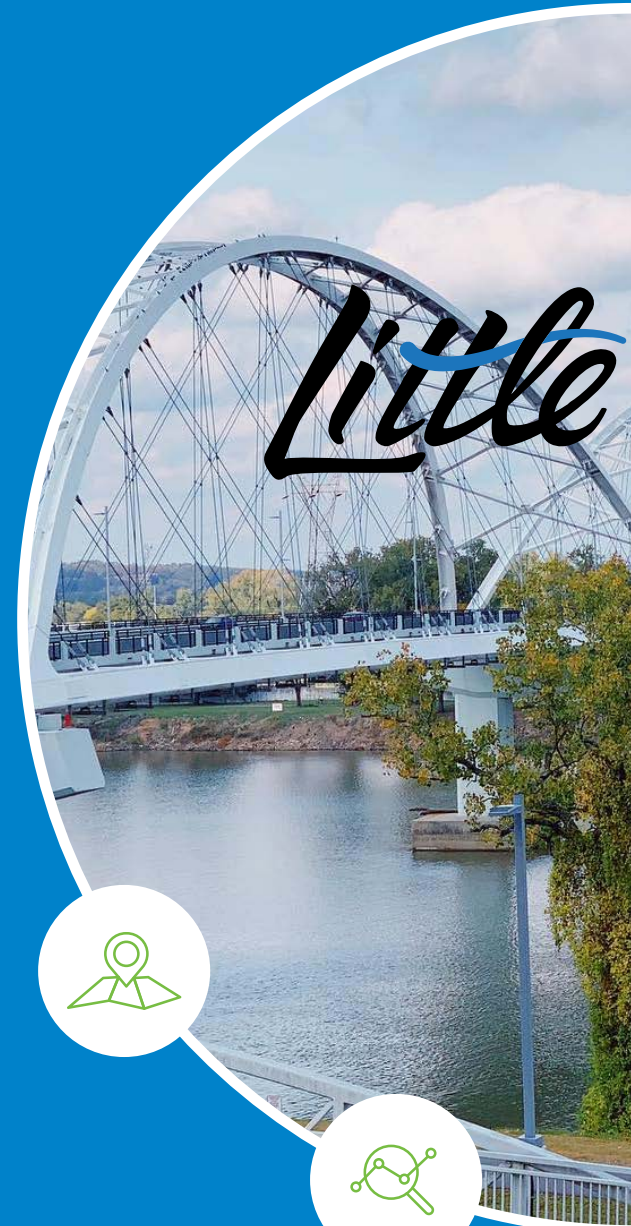
LITTLE ROCK AREA MARKET ANALYSIS

Studied 10+ year trend analysis of local population and demographics.



BENCHMARKING COMPARABLE AND COMPETITIVE DESTINATIONS

Studied 15 comparable and competitive destinations for leisure and group business.



TOURISM READINESS INDEX

Studied 75 different data points key to the tourism industry's success and the destination's overall positioning and indexed Little Rock against comparably sized destinations.



LODGING AND ALTERNATIVE ACCOMMODATION REVIEW

Studied the 10+ year performance trends for all hotel accommodations and short-term rentals currently in-market.



ASSET AND AMENITIES INVENTORY AND EVALUATION

Reviewed all of the attractions listed by the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau to determine how they impact the tourism economy using a score card method.



EVENT INVENTORY AND EVALUATION

Reviewed events on their own score card to determine how events can be utilized to further impact the tourism economy.



ASSESSMENT OF OVERALL DESTINATION LANDSCAPE

Considered all other factors and themes raised by stakeholders to round out how the tourism industry is impacted today and for the future.

All these elements included detailed research and collaboration between JLL and the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau team for data validation and vetting of outcomes from the stakeholder feedback received throughout the planning process. This research demonstrates how crucial the tourism and hospitality industries are to Little Rock and its community.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

A successful strategic planning process begins with an organization's commitment to stakeholder inclusion. Given the Tourism Master Plan's intent to be used as a guide for future strategic and sustainable tourism development, the support of stakeholders was integral to this process. The strategic planning process included outreach to more than 500 individuals including interviews, focus groups, surveys, and email updates. Care was taken to ensure that feedback was gleaned from the many diverse constituencies that make up Little Rock.

The Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau is grateful to all of the stakeholders, partners, and community members who participated in this process.

530

**Distribution of
stakeholder survey**

228

**Total responses to the
stakeholder survey**

120

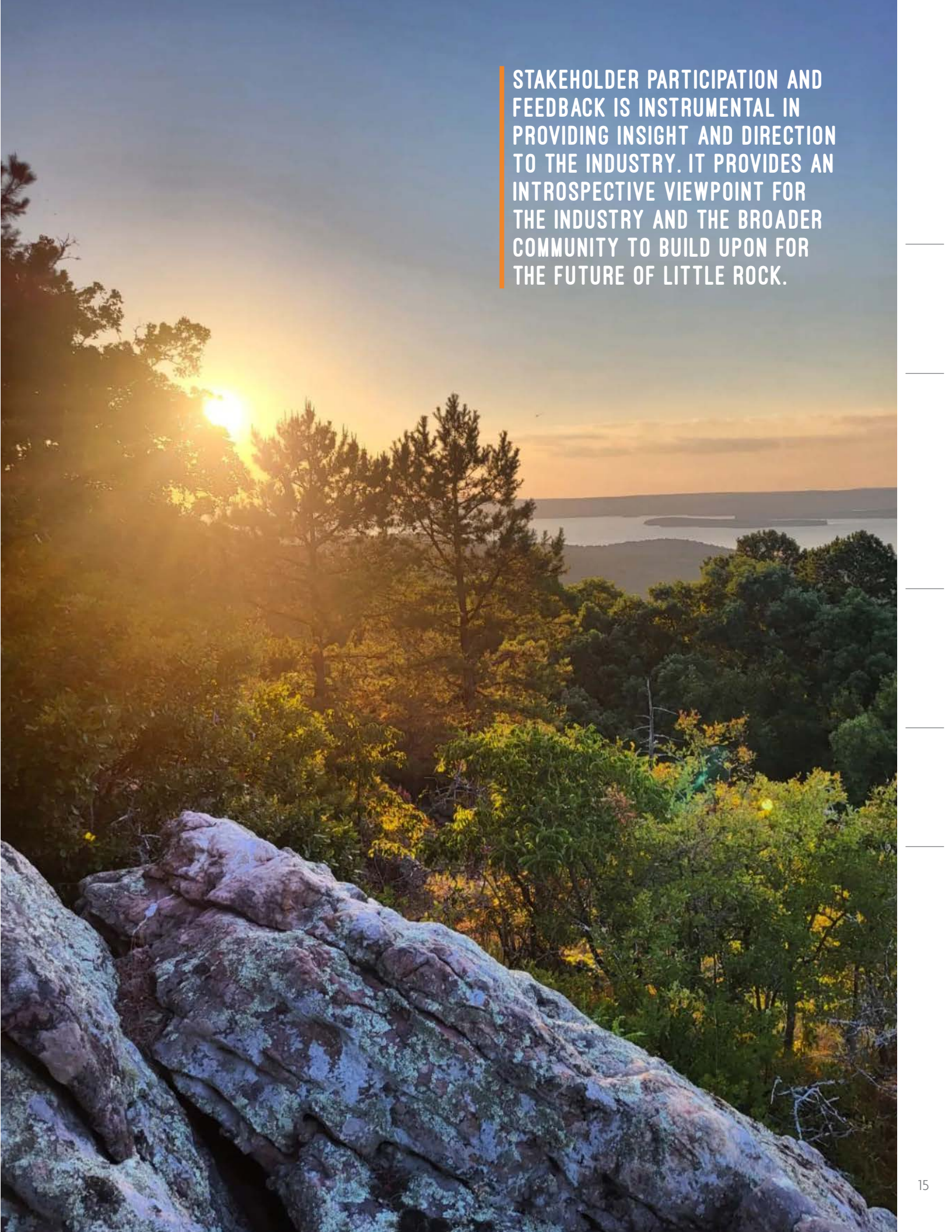
**Focus group participants made
up of key members of the
tourism community**

60

**Individual
meetings**

15

**Members of the External Advisory
Committee composed of community
members and industry leaders**



STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION AND
FEEDBACK IS INSTRUMENTAL IN
PROVIDING INSIGHT AND DIRECTION
TO THE INDUSTRY. IT PROVIDES AN
INTROSPECTIVE VIEWPOINT FOR
THE INDUSTRY AND THE BROADER
COMMUNITY TO BUILD UPON FOR
THE FUTURE OF LITTLE ROCK.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT OUTCOMES

Stakeholder participation and feedback is instrumental in providing insight and direction to shape the Little Rock Tourism Master Plan. These stakeholder meetings were the foundational element in shaping the priorities and recommendations of this plan. The outcomes gathered from the various avenues of stakeholder expertise and feedback identified the following key themes:



There is a great need for tourism infrastructure investment to expand a multimodal transportation network in order to enhance visitor access to more dispersed areas of Little Rock.



Little Rock has an abundance of natural and existing resources that, if revitalized or connected to new activations, would have a greater impact on the tourism landscape. This includes activations along the riverfront, neighborhoods, and the heavily trafficked visitor areas.



There is an opportunity to create connection and placemaking for visitors by providing marketing resources to and amplifying the digital presence of local businesses, making it seamless for a visitor to engage and experience these opportunities.



The Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau, while very active in the community, can provide additional benefit through a consistent brand identity for the destination and serving as a connection for residents, visitors, and community stakeholders.

These four themes were consistent throughout the many interviews conducted during the planning process and were then developed into the priorities outlined in this plan. This clear feedback at such an early stage in the planning process provided a solid foundation for the remainder of the Tourism Master Plan.





PRIORITY AREAS

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Research Based Strategic Direction

Product Development is defined as any visitor-facing amenity promoted or marketed to travelers for experiences in Little Rock today. Little Rock's tourism product is always evolving as existing offers are refreshed and new attractions come online. For purposes of this Tourism Master Plan section, conventions and meetings are excluded and focused on separately in the facilities section.

Little Rock has a pair of iconic and globally recognizable attractions that represent key assets that drive a level of demand into the destination: the William J. Clinton Presidential Library & Museum and Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site operated by the National Park Service. Beyond these two, the city boasts a deep bench of engaging attractions and experiences: The Little Rock Zoo, the Museum of Discovery, the Mosaic Templars Cultural Center, the Historic Arkansas Museum, the Old State House Museum, Vogel Schwartz Sculpture Garden, the Arkansas Inland Maritime Museum, ESSE Purse Museum, Pinnacle Mountain State Park, and more than 1,200 miles of cycling trails including the Big Dam Bridge, not to mention the city's unique and historic neighborhoods, nightlife and live music options, and the city's robust collection of craft beverage producers, including breweries, wineries, and a distillery. Notably, the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts will reopen in April 2023 after a \$155 million renovation, marking a significant investment in the region's arts and culture offerings.





The Tourism Master Plan process considered the depth and breadth of individual leisure assets and attractions as well as events, conventions, and meetings to understand the destination's product offerings. Individual assets were scored on JLL's Demand Driver Score Card as well as the Events Matrix (both included in the appendices of this document) to understand the impact of leisure events on the destination. The landscape of offerings is important when considering how to market the city to visitors.

The research conducted leveraging JLL's Demand Driver Score Card and Event Matrix tools during the Tourism Master Plan process identified that Little Rock has existing demand drivers, however there is room for growth and improvement in current tourism products, as well as the development of new assets and events to drive incremental demand to the destination. This was echoed by stakeholder feedback as well, with stakeholders identifying a need for new and diverse attractions to improve the quality of the Little Rock experience.

Additionally, the sports segment, while being relatively successful with the existing assets (i.e., Statehouse Convention Center and adequate baseball/softball, basketball, tennis, and soccer venues throughout the area) that can host sporting events, was identified as an area for future growth by stakeholders and market research. Programming in available space across the city was also identified as a potential area to deliver new events and new programming to positively impact the visitor experience and drive new interest in Little Rock.

Recommendation

Assets & Attractions

The first recommendation of the Tourism Master Plan is to implement the Demand Driver Score Card. It acts as a rubric for visitor-facing assets and makes the important distinction between a “nice to see” and a “must-visit” experience. The leisure market is highly competitive and to have success with Little Rock’s target audiences, the destination will need to ensure that its assets and attractions remain competitive for both in and out-of-state visitors.

The Demand Driver Score Card is focused on understanding where the assets and amenities are positioned today, but it also highlights strategic opportunities that will better impact the destination. This recommendation will enable the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau to easily work with individual attractions to think through future product and programming development needs.

The Demand Driver Score Card also helps identify leverage points and connection points across the city’s assets and attractions. Additionally, it can show areas where there are gaps in product. For example, stakeholder feedback and market research identified the lack of riverfront activations and the need for greater leverage of the river.

A key recommendation over the 10 years of this Tourism Master Plan is to seek out partners to develop and activate areas of the riverfront in the River Market District. The area is currently home to many attractions, including the 33-acre Riverfront Park, with its unique mix of art installations, playgrounds and splashpads, pavilions, and amphitheater.

Outside the park’s grounds, the area still offers many diverse attractions and experiences, but a proactive effort to increase riverfront accessibility and activations is needed. Any on-water activations must be undertaken in partnership with the US Army Corps of Engineers and the Port of Little Rock, as the Arkansas River shipping channel, which runs directly parallel to the downtown Little Rock waterfront, must take priority over any development designs and plans.

To be clear, riverfront access does not exclusively mean on-water activities. Many comparable destinations with rivers have additional amenities for passive recreation as well as food and beverage and retail outlets along their waterfronts. The positive impact this could have on the city’s placemaking ability and overall appeal should not be underestimated.





It should be noted that as construction continues on the expanded I-30 Crossing project, downtown Little Rock will gain up to 18 acres of greenspace for potential park development. Plans have not been finalized for the park's development, but it represents an opportunity for iconic placemaking in the heart of the destination.

The popularity of outdoor spaces grew immensely during the COVID-19 pandemic, a trend that is unlikely to fade in the future. Because of this, destinations with urban cores that have immediate outdoor and waterfront experiences will have a greater opportunity to capitalize on the duality of the experience.

Family-oriented attractions were also identified as a need for the future. Currently, two of Little Rock's cornerstone attractions – the Little Rock Zoo and the Museum of Discovery – have current capital plans to enhance their offerings. Additionally, during this planning process, the City approved a millage increase continuation that will benefit existing assets. It is possible that these funds could be directed to the Little Rock Zoo and River Market Hall, and other key assets including landscape and hardscape. This potential reinvestment into the industry will be a major benefit not just to the assets themselves but to the entire visitor experience.

There is also a need for additional family-oriented assets that will create a critical mass of attractions for families deciding on their vacation destinations. One such example that already exists in Little Rock is the recently opened Children's Gallery at the Mosaic Templars Cultural Center, the only gallery of its kind located in a cultural center. Not only does this gallery add a specifically family-oriented asset to downtown, it also features an incredible focus on diversity which furthers its reach and leverages new and unique storytelling perspectives.



It is also recommended that a family-oriented indoor-outdoor water-themed attraction with an onsite hotel be considered for future development. Nothing similar exists within a four-hour drive radius of Little Rock, and the surrounding area's population could easily support this development. A national brand attraction in this space would be another anchor attraction for families when considering Little Rock and would drive demand for the city's existing family-focused assets.

Outdoor live entertainment was also regularly cited in stakeholder interviews and further highlights the need for riverfront access and development. Currently, the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau has engaged a promoter to produce a concert series. Though the COVID-19 pandemic pushed the activation of the concert series back, the concerts, held at the 7,500-seat First Security Amphitheater in Riverfront Park, have been well attended and well received by the community. Expanding the popular and diverse programming even further would be a dynamic experience for visitors and locals alike.

There is also a need to reinvent the Ottenheimer Market Hall as the anchor destination for the River Market District. The River Market has grown to become a diverse and thriving Little Rock destination, and it's important that the market hall reflects that growth. The vision is for a culinary attraction that will attract both visitors, downtown workers, and residents from across Little Rock. It is suggested that the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau explores alternative operating models, including partnering with local brands as well as regional and national entrepreneurs in reimagining and reactivating the space. Highlights of a reimagined market hall could include live music, additional programming, extended hours and days of operation, a destination dining experience, and the ability for guests to purchase adult beverages. The River Market Entertainment District, a legal boundary in which patrons may take their alcoholic





drink outdoors and into the street, has been popular since its inception. The market hall's location inside this entertainment district would add to the appeal for both visitors and residents. Improvement to the market hall as well as programming and amenity enhancements throughout the River Market District will combine to create a critical mass of engagement for visitors to the area.

Research has already been conducted to potentially engage a food industry partner in the building's oversight and future development. Engaging an outside partner allows the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau to create a multiyear, accountability-based roadmap for the building, with concrete goals and timelines. As the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau currently manages the facilities on behalf of the City of Little Rock, there will need to be a collaborative decision-making process with City leadership on the evolution of the space and adequate financial inducements.

As the Tourism Master Plan is implemented and Little Rock grows, the Demand Driver Score Card can and should be implemented in specific neighborhoods to assess the unique needs and opportunities of each area.



Events

Like the Demand Driver Score Card, the Events Matrix is another tool used in the Tourism Master Plan process. It's used to support the growth of existing events as they seek to attract visitors and to ensure that new events are planned with visitor-facing aspects in mind. Research indicates that both industry stakeholders and community members believe that there are currently few leisure events that would interest visitors enough to drive them to book an overnight stay in Little Rock, however, there are many local events that provide an excellent foundation for growth among targeted visitor segments, including: the Little Rock Marathon, the Main Street Food Truck Festival, Central Arkansas Pride, Filmland, the Mosaic Templars Cultural Center's Juneteenth celebrations, the Big Dam Bridge 100, Pops on the River, and the Arkansas State Fair. Each of these is successful, well attended, and significantly drives overnight visitation. The Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau also manages two successful seasonal events that add to the overall tourism product and visitor experience: the Little Rock Farmers' Market and Jazz in the Park.

A focused events strategy is needed to build visitor interest in Little Rock as a vacation destination. The Events Matrix provides a platform for event organizers to understand what is most important to driving visitors' interest. Additionally, it can be used by the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau and its partners to evaluate how to support events in order to grow. When the Event Matrix tool is implemented successfully, event organizers can build programming that achieves success around the established criteria and demonstrates to the industry that there is tangible return on investment including room nights, direct spending into the Little Rock economy, and increased awareness of the Little Rock brand.

The potential for increased programming at the pavilions and parks within the River Market District has already been mentioned, but it's important that it should also be considered through the lens of events as both a draw to





visitors and as a community amenity especially for increased arts and cultural programming. It is recommended that the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau continue to work with and support local performing arts organizations and explore entertainment options in the First Security Amphitheater and River Market Pavilions.

It's also recommended that effort be made to partner with established event organizers for key events that will grow over time and serve as a catalyst for the destination's appeal. The Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau should identify existing events that meet the minimum criteria and support them with a sustained growth strategy.

When it comes to ticketed events at Robinson Center, research shows that stakeholders feel strongly about the positive work done to maximize programming at that venue since its renovation in 2016. The Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau and its booking partners have worked hard to balance the schedule of touring Broadway shows, local performing arts organizations, and other events. Still, Robinson Center has immense potential to positively impact the destination and resident landscape well beyond the tentpole Broadway and Arkansas Symphony Orchestra seasons.

The Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau should be even more proactive in its efforts to attract and book additional entertainment – including concerts, comedy shows, special events, and speaker events – even more frequently. These events are proven to have a draw beyond the local community, causing visitors to drive into the market, patronizing area restaurants and hotels. Local restaurants and hotels have confirmed the positive impact that a booked Robinson Center has on their business, and the facility's ability to lift the entire market should not be underestimated. Robinson Center is an extremely valuable asset in driving both ticketed attendance and overnight stays. Its renovation has been a win for the community, and the facility will continue to play a leading role in the future economic prosperity of the downtown core for decades to come.

Sports

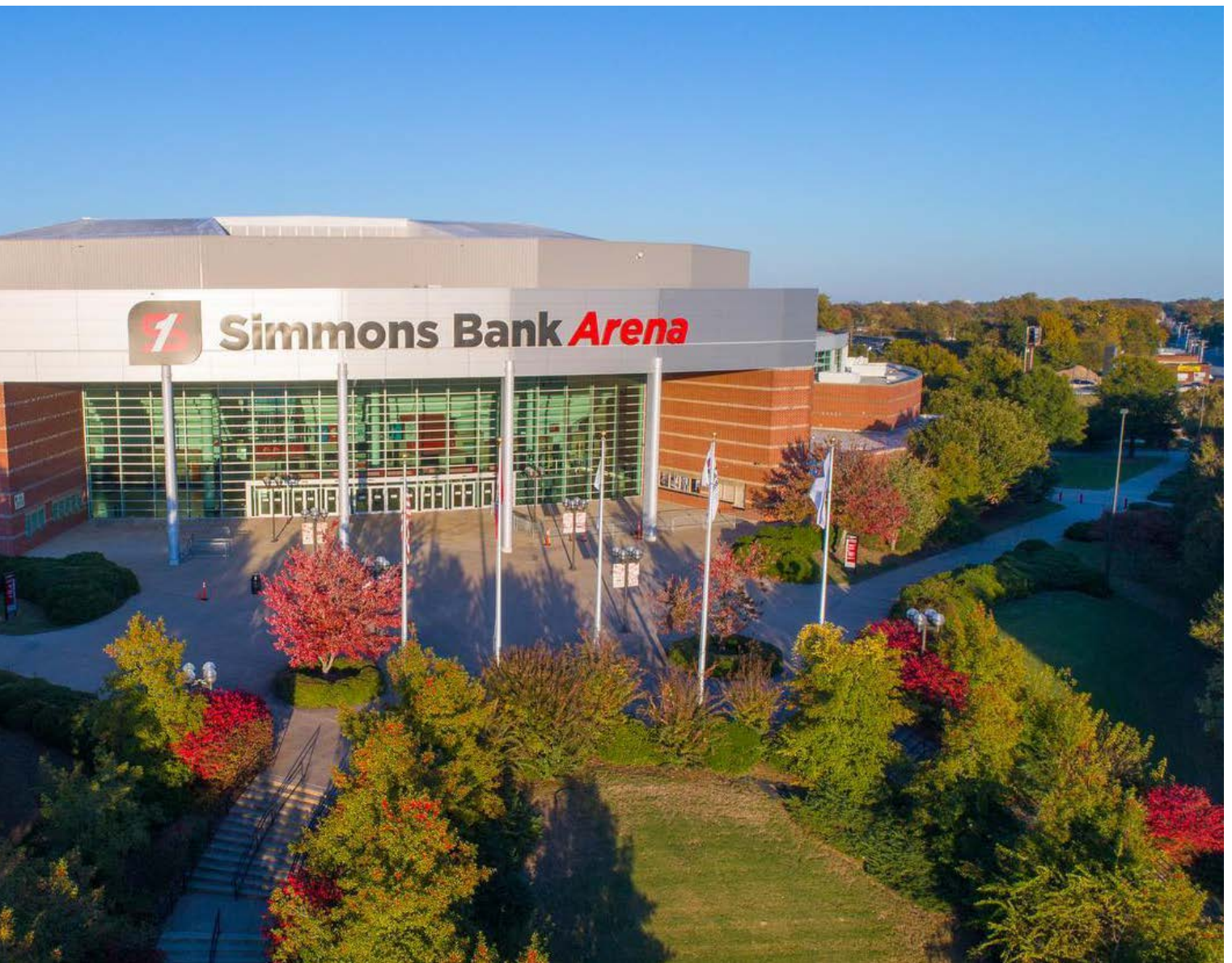
Youth sports tournaments are highly valuable events for host communities. In 2015, the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau conducted a feasibility study that recommended the construction of an indoor sports facility including 8-10 basketball courts, 16-20 volleyball courts, spectator seating for 2,000-4,000 attendees, and ancillary support spaces. The Tourism Master Plan process reiterated the need for this facility, and it is recommended that it be the first priority in a larger sports complex to eventually include outdoor flat fields and a network of trails. The original 2015 study, as well as a 2019 updated study, evaluated several possible sites across Little Rock, with Western Hills, War Memorial Park, and a site directly south of the University of Arkansas Little Rock campus, ranking among the top locations.

It is recommended that the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau reignite this process and focus on identifying funding opportunities to restart the conversation. A recent attempt to dedicate a sales tax increase at the city level failed. Without moving the funding aspect forward, the conversation will be slow to start, but it is an important component in Little Rock's overall visitor offerings and its construction is vital to the city's positioning relevant to other destinations in its competitive set. Once a pathway for funding has been identified, it will be imperative to consider a local sports commission.

One important potential feature of a sports complex is the ability to create public-private partnerships with material investment from the private sector. With this in mind, it is recommended that the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau lead a public-private process to determine funding capacity and potential investment streams for the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau to participate in the funding of such a facility.

With a future sports facility in place, the Statehouse Convention Center will also be able to free up space that is currently used for wrestling, volleyball, martial arts, cheer, and dance competitions. With more space available, the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau will be able to achieve a greater level of utilization at the Statehouse Convention Center as detailed in the Optimization section of this report. The need for a convention center expansion is also mentioned in that section of this report, but it is important to note that the sports facility development and the convention center expansion are separate recommendations that will both work to increase the impact of tourism throughout the destination.





TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT

Research Based Strategic Direction

During the Tourism Master Plan planning process, positive announcements were made that will improve transportation and connectivity including the rebuilding of the I-30 corridor that runs through Little Rock. While this impacts the downtown core during construction, this project will enhance one of the most traveled roads in Arkansas. When complete, the improvements will enhance the transportation connection through central Arkansas, increase capacity, and improve traveler safety. Additionally, outcomes from the rerouting of this traffic in the downtown core will free up almost 18 acres of potential new greenspace in the popular River Market District.

Little Rock is well served by a network of cycling trails, with a clear pathway of expansion. The Arkansas River Trail connects the downtowns of both Little Rock and North Little Rock to multiple parks and the Big Dam Bridge, the longest pedestrian-intended bridge in North America. The Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau maps more than 1,200 miles of cycling trails on its website, and the future expansion of local trail systems, including the Southwest Trail to Hot Springs and the Tri-Creek Greenway will greatly add to visitor appeal.

Across the country, and even internationally, the trends in pedestrian connectivity and mobility are rapidly changing. Destinations are searching for transportation solutions that enable visitors and residents to move seamlessly through a place. The need for new and innovative tourism transportation infrastructure surfaced in many stakeholder conversations and focus groups. The current transportation network has limitations, and visitors can be restrained in their ability to move about Little Rock without their own vehicles.



For decades, public transit service has operated to the airport seven days a week, starting with fixed route bus service; however, the transit system has a challenge common to small US urban public transit systems in that the span of service does not necessarily match that of airport operations, leaving a gap in service before roughly 5:30 a.m. and after 8 p.m. on weekdays and before roughly 8:30 a.m. and after 5 p.m. on weekends. Rock Region METRO, which has served the airport via on-demand, micro-transit service since May 2020, is exploring implementing a premium-fare, distance-based pricing, on-demand service that could potentially take riders to and from the airport from a wider service area within Pulaski County, but such service would depend on additional long-term community funding to support the service. It's not clear that such funding would be made available to support what would be a service primarily used by the private sector to have a guaranteed safe ride to and from the airport when other local options may not be available. Support from the business and hospitality sectors would be essential for funding advocacy efforts.

Additionally, Rock Region METRO operates a streetcar system in both Little Rock and North Little Rock. Rock Region METRO's streetcar service is free and operates every day of the week with varying hours, providing a great option for visitors staying in or exploring the downtown core. With 15 stops between Little Rock and North Little Rock including the Clinton Presidential Center, North Little Rock's historic Argenta district, the Little Rock River Market, and the Main Street Creative Corridor, this service gives visitors a reliable way to move around some parts of the destination.

Beyond the need for greater vehicle transportation solutions, better connectivity between assets for pedestrians was a key theme in many stakeholder interviews. Priorities were identified including the accessibility of the bike and walking trails from downtown and awareness of how to access these trails. The City currently has a master plan called Little Rock Complete Streets: Bicycle Plan specifically focused on pedestrian mobility using a network of trails and bike ways. This plan will create a safer, more comfortable transportation environment for people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds, and it's urgent that this plan be completed to allow for a seamless visitor experience, as increasing visitor access to new parts of the community allows those areas to be impacted by visitor spending. Without these transportation options in place, the visitor dollar does not reach as far into the community and, even worse, is limited altogether. Simply put, where visitors go, their dollars follow, and every effort should be made to make as many parts of the city easily accessible as possible.

Recommendation

The recommendation of the Tourism Master Plan is to work with Rock Region METRO and other transportation partners to support the need for an improved city-wide connectivity effort. There is a greater need for transportation to support the visitor's ability to travel across the city and reach new and different points of interest.

The tourism infrastructure investment priority should include a strategy to improve access, expand service, and remove boundaries for alternative pedestrian mobility options, i.e., bikeshare, scooters, e-bikes, and other alternate electric vehicle options. Rideshare networks and taxicabs are also important aspects of the transportation solutions in the near-term especially for airport connectivity and access.

With increased pedestrian options, upkeep of the public realm will become increasingly important. Sidewalks, streetscapes, dependable lighting, cleanliness, and overall beautification will be critical to encouraging the visitor to explore more of and deeper into Little Rock. Investment must be made into the public realm, which is detailed in the placemaking section.

Wayfinding, which the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau has engaged with in the past, will continue to be important as an impactful branding tool throughout the destination. Currently, branded wayfinding signage is used downtown, and it should be expanded throughout Little Rock. This will also help grow residents' adoption of the brand. The timing of additional wayfinding elements will be crucial as traffic patterns change in the wake of the I-30 Crossing project.

It is also important to note that accessibility must continue to be at the forefront of transit solutions planning. Research should be conducted on best practices to accommodate a full range of disability types. Travelers with disabilities are seeking destinations that have considered their needs, and this represents an opportunity for Little Rock to set itself apart from other cities if transit accessibility is done well. This will also be a great benefit for Little Rock's resident disabled population.





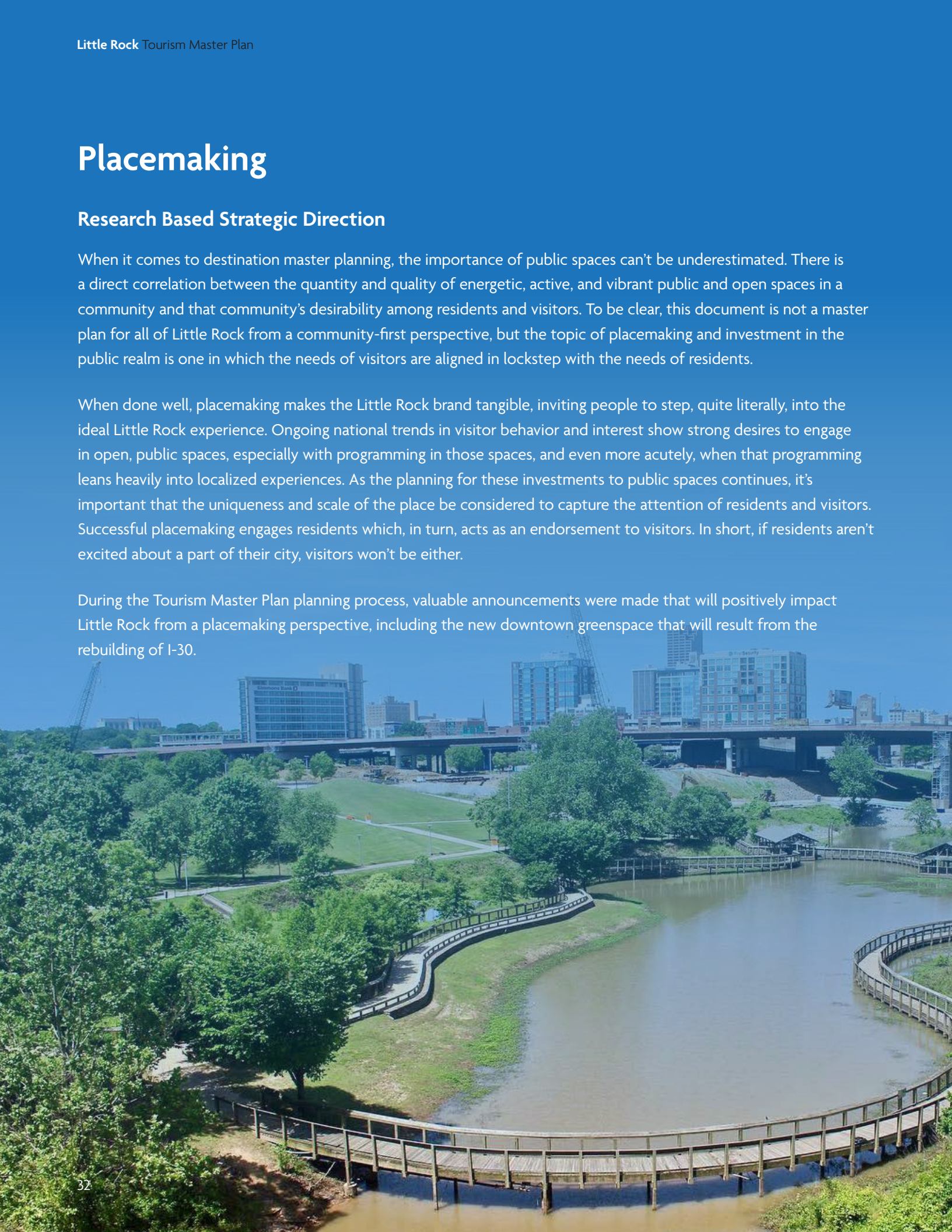
Placemaking

Research Based Strategic Direction

When it comes to destination master planning, the importance of public spaces can't be underestimated. There is a direct correlation between the quantity and quality of energetic, active, and vibrant public and open spaces in a community and that community's desirability among residents and visitors. To be clear, this document is not a master plan for all of Little Rock from a community-first perspective, but the topic of placemaking and investment in the public realm is one in which the needs of visitors are aligned in lockstep with the needs of residents.

When done well, placemaking makes the Little Rock brand tangible, inviting people to step, quite literally, into the ideal Little Rock experience. Ongoing national trends in visitor behavior and interest show strong desires to engage in open, public spaces, especially with programming in those spaces, and even more acutely, when that programming leans heavily into localized experiences. As the planning for these investments to public spaces continues, it's important that the uniqueness and scale of the place be considered to capture the attention of residents and visitors. Successful placemaking engages residents which, in turn, acts as an endorsement to visitors. In short, if residents aren't excited about a part of their city, visitors won't be either.

During the Tourism Master Plan planning process, valuable announcements were made that will positively impact Little Rock from a placemaking perspective, including the new downtown greenspace that will result from the rebuilding of I-30.





Recommendation

It is recommended that a concerted effort be made to focus on placemaking within the downtown core and riverfront of Little Rock through reinvesting in public and open space, connecting pedestrian and bicycle trails to a network of parks, and creating an overall vibe within the city's downtown core. Placemaking in the public realm requires intentionality to develop concepts that meet the needs of a space's various users, including residents, commuters, leisure visitors, convention attendees and more. Without a focus on the visitor, placemaking efforts will be limited to servicing only the residential needs and, therefore, will leave out important amenities that could enhance the overall effort.

It will be important for the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau to advocate for the visitor in placemaking including:

- Improving the landscape and hardscape of public and open spaces
- Amenities for recreation, family travel and larger group activations
- Consistency in curb appeal
- Expand wayfinding signage
- Influence of elevating the brand standard for Little Rock in any public space
- Local artists, entrepreneurs, creators, and storytellers embedded in the process to drive unique activations in the outcomes
- The development of an iconic piece that will become known as synonymous with Little Rock

As mentioned previously, the I-30 project with its new 18 acres of downtown green space will be a positive amenity for locals and visitors. The Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau will need to be part of evolving conversations surrounding the development of that space to advocate for the visitor experience.

Over the course of Tourism Master Plan discussions, the desire for a signature, “iconic” landmark – akin to Chicago’s Cloud Gate “bean” sculpture or Los Angeles’ Hollywood sign – was continually reiterated. There is immense local desire to unite behind some as yet unidentified local object, be it a new art installation or architectural work as a sense of community pride and identity. The Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau should always be a part of the efforts to develop such places or landmarks, advocating for the visitors’ perspective on the matter.

The Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau should also be focused on carrying the city’s brand throughout the customer journey. From the first time a potential visitor visits LittleRock.com until they depart the city after an enjoyable visit, every opportunity should be taken to reinforce the city’s brand, including targeted digital messaging and branded assets in-market that will bolster the community experience.

As a placemaking strategy, furthering the city’s branding effort will also build a sense of community pride and encourage residents to come out and use their public and open spaces actively.

DIRECT MARKETING

Research Based Strategic Direction

The Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau is the city's only marketing organization tasked with raising the city's profile across the region, nation, and world, by attracting leisure, group, and business travelers. The existing marketing effort to attract leisure and group visitors to Little Rock has been driven by the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau, which has a dedicated marketing budget and an employee division focused on increasing the visibility of the destination. As the official destination marketing organization for Little Rock, the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau has executed many successful dedicated campaigns to meet those goals and further that mission. As tourism marketing continues to evolve and gets smarter thanks to technology and research insights, it's important that the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau's marketing team refine their efforts to convert specific targeted markets.



Recommendation

Research-Based Approach to Direct Marketing

It is recommended that the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau continue to grow its arsenal of research and data collection tools and use the results and analysis these tools provide to refine key target market segments and their related outreach strategies.

Unique and engaging multichannel campaigns should continue to be created and deployed, with clear calls to action surrounding overnight stays in Little Rock for each target market. Along with other digital channels, these campaigns should also include targeted emails. It is recommended that the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau acquire a database of prospective leisure visitors that fit the city's identified target market segments while also expanding and enhancing its own email database. The organization's own email database will be expanded through efforts at the mobile marketing vehicle, online signups via a new LittleRock.com, and with signups collected at leisure travel trade shows.

A strategy for direct email marketing should be created and integrated into the organization's comprehensive marketing and content calendar. This effort should be supported by targeted social media campaigns and Google Ads placements, and effort which should be done in tandem with the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau's partner agencies.

Direct Marketing for Meetings and Conventions

While the leisure visitor is the primary focus of the recommendations in this section, the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau's marketing department is also responsible for group business and marketing the facilities it manages. Currently, the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau engages in direct marketing efforts, including the creation of collateral that sells and markets Robinson Center and the Statehouse Convention Center, as well as venues across the city, to group planners and decision makers. It is recommended that these initiatives be refined and realigned with key target segments. This is more specifically laid out in the Utilization and Optimization of the Statehouse Convention Center and Robinson Center section of this report but is worth including here to underscore the importance of cross-collaboration between sales & services and marketing departments.

Visitor Research

In order to market Little Rock most effectively, it is recommended that the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau allocate resources in future years to invest in greater data intelligence to better understand current and prospective visitors. This should include regularly recurring visitor profile studies, geotargeted software platforms, visitor and brand perception research, and other recognized industry-related research initiatives to gain intelligence on the potential opportunities to enhance visitor marketing.

As this Tourism Master Plan was being developed the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau began a portion of this research investment by onboarding a new industry partner in Zartico, which will enable the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau to map the destination with geofencing technology, track visitor devices to understand travel patterns and points of interest, as well as measure spending within the destination. This is an incredibly valuable tool that should be monitored regularly and reported out to stakeholders for a greater understanding of the impact of marketing efforts on influencing visitors to Little Rock. Insights from this tool will also influence marketing strategy going forward.

The Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau has a greater opportunity to extend efforts in feeder markets through a mobile marketing strategy and creating pop-up experiences that increase the visibility of the destination in specific target markets. As the Tourism Master Plan was being created, the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau purchased a mobile marketing vehicle, which will be outfitted as a traveling destination showcase to represent Little Rock at targeted events both in and outside of Little Rock. As a tangible expression of the Little Rock brand, it will instill local pride and excitement among residents and generate curiosity and interest among potential visitors.





Destination Package Development

Additionally, it is recommended that the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau collaborate with its hotel, attractions, and transportation partners to develop a series of multiday experience packages that are tailored to the interests of key target market segments. The key to the success of these packages is an intense focus on their effective fulfillment. The ability and ease of a prospective visitor to see an offer, purchase it, and enjoy a seamless experience in Little Rock is an essential element of the package's success.

Partner Support

The Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau engages in a complex series of marketing initiatives that tout the city's many tourist attractions, and it is recommended that the organization proactively seek congruency between the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau's marketing campaigns and those of its key tourism partners. This will deepen the relationship between the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau and its partners as well as uncover new areas of synergy and alignment between marketing messages, content deliverables, and media assets. When possible, data intelligence gained through Zartico and other future information platforms should be shared with relevant tourism partners so that all entities are able to make decisions based on the most accurate and up-to-date information possible. The Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau has already begun this by offering its access to CrowdRiff, its digital media storage and social media listening service, to its tourism partners.



ENHANCE THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Research Based Strategic Direction

Throughout the development of the Tourism Master Plan, discussions on how best to serve the needs of future visitors abounded. Much like the Direct Marketing priority, enhancing the visitor experience is critical to ensuring a successful visit. This includes the visitor experience extending beyond the walls of the traditional visitor center, encompassing a visitor's needs before they arrive in Little Rock and specific services once they're here. The Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau has a central role to play in ensuring the city provides a positive visitor experience by partnering with other related organizations. For many prospective visitors, their first impression of Little Rock will be influenced by word-of-mouth recommendations from prior visitors, highlighting the importance of quality visitor services to develop brand loyalty. It is also important that the immense public goodwill toward the historic iteration of the Big on Little Rock brand be capitalized on to grow resident buy-in. As locals embrace the brand, their support of it will enhance the visitors' perception of the brand.





Recommendation

Proactive Visitor Services

The primary recommendation of this section is focused on overhauling all reactive visitor services efforts to become more proactive, concierge-style services, especially concerning services offered before a visitor's arrival to Little Rock. A proactive approach to visitor services is successful when it utilizes an array of tools to educate visitors before they arrive about the city's diverse offerings, highlighting additional experiences beyond what initially drew the visitor's attention to Little Rock. During the Tourism Master Plan development, the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau began some of this work by adjusting its website to cater more towards visitors looking for specific experiences, i.e., Big on Cycling, Big on Black Culture, and the LGBTQ microsites.

Upgraded Visitor Information Center Services

In order to further this effort, concierge and sales-style services should be integrated into all visitor center operations. Existing visitor center operations should be transformed into activity hubs rather than passive experiences.

Currently, the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau only has one official visitor center at Historic Curran Hall Visitor Center which is run by the Quapaw Quarter Association. The facility has great historic value in Little Rock, and its gardens are maintained by the Pulaski County Master Gardeners. As this plan is deployed, the services offered there will need to be updated to meet the recommended standards of a dynamic, proactive visitor center with concierge-style service.

New Visitor Center Development

Location is an incredibly important factor in the success of a visitor information center. Though conveniently located for vehicle traffic entering and exiting Interstate 30, its location, three blocks from the southern edge of the River Market District, is not conducive to capturing pedestrian traffic from the area's primary thoroughfares and feels removed from the concentrated visitor activity downtown. It is recommended that an additional visitor center site be considered inside the River Market's Ottenheimer Hall. It is also recommended that the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau work with the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage, and Tourism on the viability of a state visitor center, as there currently is not an official state visitor center in the capital city. Additionally, as mentioned in the Direct Marketing section, the mobile marketing opportunities should be utilized throughout the city for pop-ups and events.

STATEHOUSE CONVENTION CENTER & ROBINSON CENTER UTILIZATION

Research Based Strategic Direction

The Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau is unique compared to most other destination marketing organizations across the country in that two of the city's largest meetings and entertainment venues – the Statehouse Convention Center and Robinson Center – are directly under its management. Because of this, the Tourism Master Plan development process included two distinct studies of the Statehouse Convention Center and Robinson Center, focusing on the utilization and optimization of each building, respectively. These studies were conducted in parallel to determine how best to position each venue for future growth that will positively impact Little Rock's tourism economy.

The results of the Statehouse Convention Center study clearly show room for growth in the utilization and overall yield management of the rentable space. The results of the Robinson Center study also show room for growth, but the pathway to that growth is more nuanced and is potentially capped at an earlier stage than that of the Statehouse Convention Center due to the nature of touring show seasonality and scheduled releases.

The Robinson Center seasonality exclusively applies to the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra season schedule and the Broadway Theater Series managed by Celebrity Attractions. The decades-long partnership between the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra has resulted in a consistent schedule with slight year-to-year variation. Once the symphony sets its annual schedule, the remaining calendar availability can be turned over to Celebrity Attractions for booking touring productions. This arrangement has served all parties for some time, and ensuring the long-term viability of these partnerships is a priority. Ballet Arkansas represents another important community partnership, though the ballet's annual schedule in Robinson Center is limited. Together, these community partners, as well as the Miss Arkansas Pageant, the Miss High School America Pageant, and additional promoter-executed concerts total approximately 150 user days for the performance hall each year. This leaves opportunities to seek out and book additional ticketed events in the performance hall.

In addition, Robinson Center opened a new conference center in 2016 as part of a \$70 million restoration and renovation of the building. New facilities include a ballroom that can sit up to 500 in banquet settings and 700 in a theater configuration, along with five additional meeting rooms and a large outdoor patio overlooking the Arkansas River for large, outdoor seasonal events. These facilities are physically attached and seamlessly connected to the conference level of the adjacent hotel.





The analysis of the Statehouse Convention Center took a granular look at the facility's square footage and broke down how groups used space daily. This detailed analysis provided clear indications of how the venue could be better positioned in the future. Analyzing the three years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic showed that from 2017-2019, utilization of the facility was approximately 45% in total. Over the next five years, the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau aims to increase utilization by 15%. This target of 60% of square footage utilization in a single year is compared to an industry tier one target of 70%. This is an aggressive goal given the competitive landscape of the convention industry and the current product positioning of both the convention center and associated hotel packages.

The building is fortunate to host a variety of annual events, including pageants, seminars, conventions, trade shows, and community events. In 2019, the Statehouse Convention Center set a record of 160 events and more than 273,000 patron days, representing an immense benefit to the community, and increasing the building's productivity will only bolster its role as a positive economic booster for Little Rock.

Little Rock's two primary headquarters hotels are physically attached to their respective meetings venues: The DoubleTree by Hilton with Robinson Center and the Little Rock Marriott with the Statehouse Convention Center. Both hotels are city-owned and are operated under long-term lease agreements with the hotel operators. This unique lodging arrangement allows the city to have a direct say in hotel brands and their operational brand standards. In return, the hotels receive exclusivity for food and beverage operations in the respective attached venues. These strategic partnerships have allowed many efficiencies in the staffing, sales process, booking, and event management of conventions and events over the years.

This analysis is highly data-driven, and the recommendations predominantly impact the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau from an organizational perspective of growing the sales pipeline and managing space. With that in mind, the following recommendation section provides a summarized version of what is contained in the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau Business Plan to support implementation.



Recommendation

The primary recommendation of the Statehouse Convention Center and Robinson Center Utilization & Optimization priority is to implement the five-year ramp up approach to booking and hosting events at the Statehouse Convention Center. This ramp up at the Statehouse Convention Center includes the following:

- Continuing refinement of the booking policies to create greater distinction of what is a Priority 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 piece of business and how they can be booked in concert with partner hotels.
- Timeline in the booking policy for holding space.
- Prospecting efforts to reach a new target of pipeline business.
- Improvements in internal and external booking processes to streamline the sales process.
- Improvements to language and coding in both Ungerboeck (space management system) and iDSS (sales CRM system) to ensure both systems mirror each other for sales and booking purposes.
- Room night commitments from partner hotels in order to solicit desired business.
- Reestablishing target level of citywide pieces of businesses on an annual basis to be booked and hosted.
- Gaining approval for the multiyear goal increases that have been proposed.
- Identifying new opportunities for revenue from within the facilities.

The capital budget has been a priority in the past, with funds being designated to the maintenance and upkeep of the buildings ensuring they remain at the top of their competitive set. In addition to these largely internal recommendations, it is also recommended that a convention center expansion and renovation study be completed to determine the future footprint of the Statehouse Convention Center. Currently, the building is positioned with its “back” along the river which is not the highest and best use of river frontage. Furthermore, design trends from attendee flow and trends for indoor-outdoor space suggest that a riverfront convention center could be better positioned to leverage the outdoor amenity and create a more desirable convention center when competing for new business. Additionally, when the optimization goal is achieved, the Statehouse Convention Center will essentially reach its capacity for incremental growth, and without expansion and new hotel development its impact will be limited.





The ramp-up for Robinson Center also includes the following:

- Changes to the booking policy to ensure priorities are booked and space is held and released appropriately.
- Further work with external partners who route and book touring shows appropriate to Little Rock.
- Secure room night commitments from partner hotels in order to solicit desired business.
- A review of move in/move out and rehearsal days given to shows in order to enable an increase in bookings by freeing up more space.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Research Based Strategic Direction

Throughout the Tourism Master Plan process, it became clear that there was great community pride across Little Rock. Paradoxically, stakeholders also noted that there seemed to be a perception of a lack of community pride across the city.

Community engagement, understanding, and impact were consistent themes throughout the Tourism Master Plan process. The need to communicate with – both talking and listening to – the community is increasingly important in tourism destinations not only to keep people informed but to correctly manage growth and balance for residents of the tourism destination. Similar to the placemaking priority, community input to ensure community pride will be incredibly important here.



Recommendation

External Affairs and Advocacy

It is recommended that the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau invest resources within the organization to develop an external affairs and advocacy role. Though this recommendation is completed by internal actions outlined in the organization's Business Plan, its impact is very much external in the way it applies to the Tourism Master Plan. This role will support the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau's leadership by focusing on the alignment of tourism efforts with key partners in the industry as well across Little Rock at large. This role will serve as a liaison to community groups and will be an integral part of onboarding new partners and promoting the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau's mission, vision, and story within the community.

Partner Awareness

One of the many structural benefits of the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau is that it is not membership driven and therefore does not have to be recruiting members constantly. One benefit to membership-driven organizations, however, is the high degree of awareness members have of the value of their destination marketing organization. This plan does not recommend adding membership, but rather ensuring that the community touchpoints of a membership organization be instilled and furthered through a consistent effort to raise awareness of the organization's work with external partners and to advocate for the industry. An important element of determining success is developing a baseline of awareness with both stakeholders and the broader community through a survey process. This process will continue into the future to validate progress.

Currently, the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau engages in several partner engagement campaigns. It hosts quarterly industry mixers to spur face-to-face interaction with local industry members. During the Tourism Master Plan process, it also launched the Community Communications Plan, where members of

the Sales & Services and the Marketing, Communications & Community Engagement Divisions visit hotel and attractions partners to deliver quarterly news and updates. It is important that these communications continue and that the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau remain intentional in its messaging.

Additionally, it is recommended that the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau utilize industry partners such as Destinations International when strategizing its approach to the local community. Consulting the Destinations International Community Shared Value Workbook to acquire insight for creating a roadmap for the organization to follow.

Community Awareness

During the development of the Tourism Master Plan, the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau created a position for a community liaison as a part of the Marketing, Communications & Community Engagement Division. It is recommended that this role evolve to support an external affairs and community engagement department. Given the organization's size, this kind of build-out is warranted to support leadership in its effort to move the organization forward.

Additionally, these initiatives should include a concerted effort to instill and lift community pride. It is recommended that a community campaign and, potentially, a community branding effort, be undertaken in the near future to support this effort.

DESTINATION PERCEPTION

Research Based Strategic Direction

Over the course of the Tourism Master Plan's development and the 200+ stakeholder interviews and focus group conversations, the issue of crime and safety and the real and perceived impact that it has on the city and the destination came up almost every time. When a destination is faced with local crime and safety issues that plague perception with negative statistics and news headlines, it has a correlating effect on the destination and its people. The interaction with law enforcement and a review of the key statistics do indicate areas for continued focus to improve both the public realm as well as its perception. At this time, the perception issues appear to be more pervasive than the actual issues of crime and safety for visitors.

An effort to better understand and guide destination organizations is underway at Destinations International at the time that this Tourism Master Plan was developed. It will be important for the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau to work with Destinations International as their process evolves for continued guidance.

“ This [crime and safety] is clearly not an area where destination organizations should be expected to play a leading role. We will leave that to the experts on crime and its causes. But this is something that affects our communities and therefore, our brand, our product and let's face it, our home. We may not have a leading role, but we have a supporting role in our community's response and in the development of solutions.”

— Jack Johnson, Chief Advocacy Officer, Destinations International





Recommendation

At the very core of this comprehensive topic is the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau's support of the City and the Little Rock Police Department to carry out their work. The Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau supports the Little Rock Police Department's efforts to prioritize its presence and needs across the community. That support is unwavering in this Tourism Master Plan. The Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau's goal in including this topic is to further support the Little Rock Police Department's efforts in supplemental ways.

Crime and Brand Awareness

In lieu of a comprehensive set of recommendations or guidance from the industry association at the time of this report, it is recommended that the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau take a supporting role to further conversations about crime and its impacts on the destination's brand appeal. This will be accomplished in parallel with the new community engagement effort, with a concerted focus on the impacts of crime and perceived safety issues. It is recommended that Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau evolve its action plan and engagement with local law enforcement while gaining industry insight on additional actions that can be taken as new information becomes available.

Public Relations Campaign

In addition to tackling the issues of crime, it is recommended that the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau leverage its marketing and public relations efforts to tell positive stories where the community is aligned and incorporate factual data when applicable. While there is a need to address the actual issues of crime and safety, allowing the negativity to continue in headlines only bolsters perception issues. Stakeholders felt strongly that Little Rock has too much to offer to be brought down by crime statistics that do not penetrate the tourism districts. It is recommended that the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau engage in a public relations campaign to lift the positive perception of the destination and lessen the impact of the crime and safety issues that are perpetuated.

Ambassador Program Support

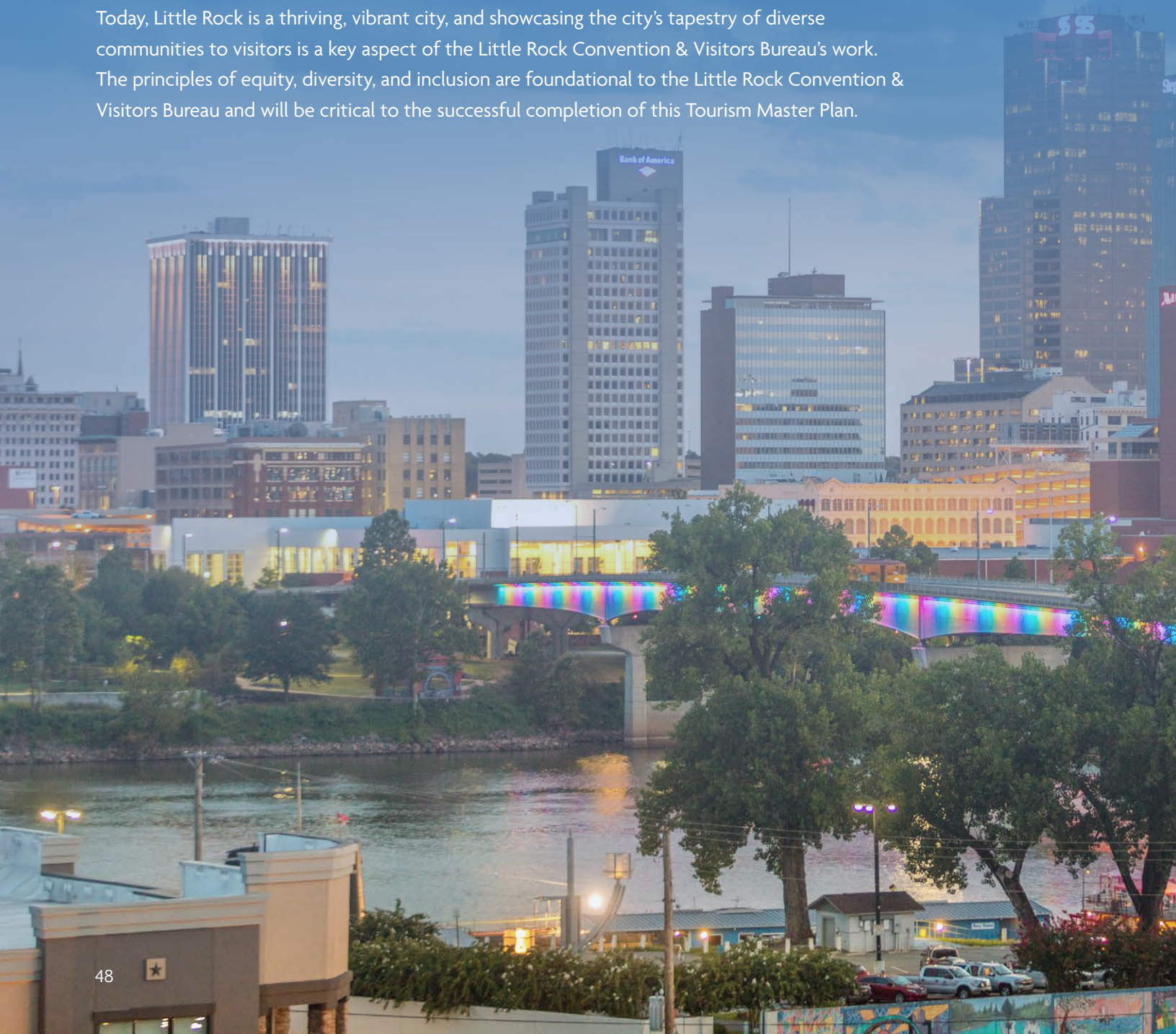
There is action that can be taken with partners to improve the concern over such perceptions through services like the Ambassador Program. It is recommended that the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau work closely with the Downtown Partnership to expand and evolve the Ambassador program to grow its on-street presence, leverage new technologies, connect directly to city services, and track visitor engagement.

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

Research Based Strategic Direction

Little Rock is no stranger to the changing tides of history and its power to shape a community. In the minds of many, Central High School and the integration crisis of 1957 loom large, and they do so for good reason. The story of the Little Rock Nine is one of courage in the face of fear and righteousness in the wake of hate; a story that still, to this day, guides Little Rock and the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau on a path to justice.

Today, Little Rock is a thriving, vibrant city, and showcasing the city's tapestry of diverse communities to visitors is a key aspect of the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau's work. The principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion are foundational to the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau and will be critical to the successful completion of this Tourism Master Plan.





Recommendation

Equity, diversity, and inclusion must continue to be a cornerstone for tourism over the next 10 years. It is recommended that the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau continue to invest resources within the organization. Internally, the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau maintains an employee-led Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Committee and, in 2021 the organization hired its first full-time equity, diversity, and inclusion specialist in its human resources department.

It is recommended that the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau expand on these existing efforts by building out a structure similar to Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau's PHL Diversity, a minority business development division of their organization. PHL Diversity is an industry benchmark for destination marketing organizations as one of the first destination organizations to highlight the unique and authentic fabric of their community as a defining and competitive advantage when selling to meeting planners and attracting visitors. In this proposed model, the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau would have explicit goals to reach into Little Rock's diverse communities and ensure business opportunities are equitable. This expanded effort on behalf of the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau would have its own strategic plan and metrics. This direction will facilitate a broad spectrum of engagement from an intentional cross section of the community.

On a macro level, the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau would also find it beneficial to utilize industry resources such as Destinations International, which partners with the National Society of Minorities in Hospitality, the National Coalition of Black Meeting Planners, and Tourism Diversity Matters, just to name a few. By engaging these resources, the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau can build upon its own efforts to ultimately produce a strategic roadmap for implementation using the industry's best practices. The Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau has already begun utilizing these tools, including its completion of Destinations International's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Assessment Tool.

This build-out should continue to be conducted internally first to create the foundation for engaging external efforts for many years to come. Initial external efforts should be done in conjunction with the community engagement priority to coordinate all messaging and contact with community leaders.

Early initiatives of this effort would include multilingual visitor collateral, adaptations of the website and partner platform – two projects currently in motion – as well as going into diverse communities to establish relationships and building network opportunities for business services, training, education, and more.

As mentioned in the community engagement section, community pride is an issue in Little Rock, and there is a strong desire to have symbols and a strong brand the community can unite around. The continued focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion will continue to lift the entire community, break down the barriers that impede progress, and ultimately deliver a sense of pride in the place we call home.

In addition to this structural recommendation and, tied to the overarching product development area of the Tourism Master Plan, it is also recommended that the diversity of Little Rock play a greater role in marketing efforts with a focus on encouraging visitors to experience the variety of opportunities that are available. Diverse target markets have been key components of the organization's marketing efforts, with targeted campaigns directed to Black families and LGBTQ travelers. These campaigns were supported by dedicated micro-sites on the organization's primary tourism website. In 2021 one of these campaigns, "Big on Black Culture," was awarded a silver Adrian Award by Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International.

As noted in the events section of the plan, the development of a signature event that is designed to bring the entire community together, utilizing history, and all the unique local talent to build an event that will





become nationally recognized is encouraged. Over time, the goal would be for this event to draw people from a great distance to spend a few days in Little Rock.

In addition to this, there was a keen interest in how to connect all visitors to the special offerings in the diverse communities of Little Rock. A concept has been discussed to create a platform on the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau website that would make it seamless for a visitor to engage and experience these opportunities.

From a meetings and conventions perspective, the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau should continue its ongoing efforts to target diverse events. It has a proven track record of success in this regard, having hosted many multicultural and diverse organizations in recent years, including Miss Gay America, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc., Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, National Association of Colored Women's Clubs Inc., National Society of Black Engineers, National Association of Black Law Enforcement Officers, American Associations of Physicians of Indian Origin, and Association of Physicians of Pakistani Descent of North America.

Targeting diverse meetings is not only financially rewarding, but it brings new audiences to Little Rock that otherwise may not have considered the city for leisure travel. These visits, in conjunction with the recommendations contained in the visitor experience section, will ensure that these business travelers will leave Little Rock with a good impression of the city and will act as positive word-of-mouth ambassadors to others in their respective communities.

Currently, the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau employs a salesperson for the multicultural meetings market, and it is recommended that the organization develop a targeted direct marketing campaign for meeting planners in this space to elevate Little Rock's position as a meetings destination.

CONCLUSION

Little Rock is a unique destination full of well-positioned existing assets and amenities for visitors. It has a strong tourism leader in the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau, and the city's tourism future is ripe for success. Careful planning of the city's brand, infrastructure, and development will be key to this growth, but the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau is more than capable of shepherding the needed progress in these areas.

This Tourism Master Plan has identified key priorities to act as an industry road map over the next 10 years. The Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau is well positioned to carry these initiatives forward, but it will take participation from key stakeholders, partners, and the community at large to maximize the local tourism industry's potential.

Beyond this planning process, the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau has produced a detailed business plan with the organization beginning to implement the Tourism Master Plan in 2023. The recommendations of this Tourism Master Plan will move forward with the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau's leadership and partners across Little Rock.





APPENDIX

THANK YOU

The Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau would like to extend a special “thank you” to all of the individuals and organizations that participated in the Tourism Master Plan process by providing input over the last year. Special thanks to the City of Little Rock and the City Board of Directors. We appreciate your continued leadership of our city. Additionally, we’d like to thank the members of the Advertising & Promotion Commission who work with us every day to guide the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau forward. The Advertising & Promotion Commission’s commitment to our organization and this plan have empowered our focus at the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau as we work towards the next decade serving Little Rock’s visitors.





DEMAND DRIVER SCORE CARD TEMPLATE

Process - Multi-step assessment of destination assets.

1

Utilize visitor traffic and flow data to assess current demand

2

Place individual assets on scale based on eight criteria to score

3

Rate anything that is a 6-7 or greater as Little Rock's Attractors

4

Utilize the outcome to identify future competitive position

5

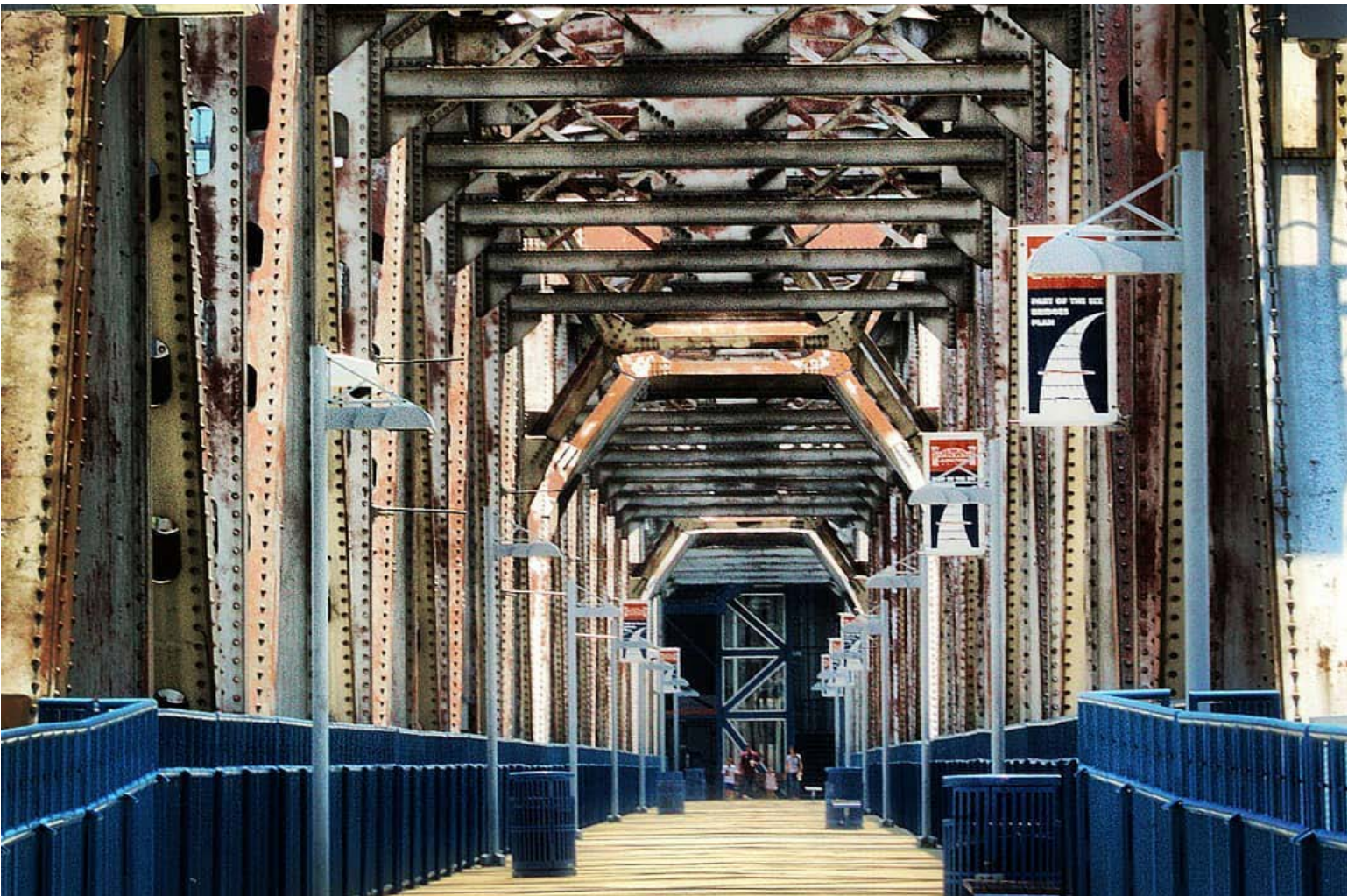
Recommend new investment or enhancement to grow assets on the scale

Score Card Elements

Item	Definition	Max Point Value
One of a Kind	Captivating content or collections that drives interest and appeal. Proximity of alternative similar offerings can be a factor in overall uniqueness	25
Iconic Scale	Dramatic visual prompting a curiosity powerful enough to inspire a visit (Instagram worthy- trying to capture a moment)	20
Engaging Visitor Experience	Interaction between the guest and the attraction	15
Current Visitor Demand	Level of visitor traffic, reviews, etc. to the asset currently	15
Event Opportunities	Programming temporal, catalytic events	10
Venue Capabilities	Easily transformed and adapted to host various functions	5
Identified Target Audience(s)	Multiple target audience and visitor types can be targeted based on overall connectivity	5
Future Unique Development	Upcoming additions or plan initiatives that elevate potential	5

Score Card: Sample Scoring

Item	Definition	Example	Max Point Value	Max Point Value
One of a Kind	Captivating content or collections that drives interest and appeal. Proximity of alternative similar offerings can be a factor in overall uniqueness	Louvre Museum	25	25
Iconic Scale	Dramatic visual prompting a curiosity powerful enough to inspire a visit (Instagram worthy- trying to capture a moment)	Eiffel Tower	20	20
Engaging Visitor Experience	Interaction between the guest and the attraction	Red Rocks Amphitheatre	15	15
Current Visitor Demand	Level of visitor traffic, reviews, etc. to the asset currently	Central Park	15	15
Event Opportunities	Programming temporal, catalytic events	Philadelphia Art Museum	10	10
Venue Capabilities	Easily transformed and adapted to host various functions	LA Live	5	5
Identified Target Audience(s)	Multiple target audience and visitor types can be targeted based on overall connectivity	Rock and Roll HOF	5	5
Future Unique Development	Upcoming additions or plan initiatives that elevate potential	Disney Parks	5	5



EVENT MATRIX

Purpose – Utilize criteria that cause events to drive return to understand the current landscape of events generating the desired outcome AND position the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau to support up and coming events to be successful

1

Identify key events serviced by Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau

2

Rate event on matrix using 13 criteria

3

Identify those events that can grow in specific areas through matrix outcomes

4

Work with organizers on tactics for implementation

Program Components

- Tourism Promotion – Destination Impact
- Benefit to the Destination Brand
- Innovation - uniqueness
- Evidence of Partnerships
- Organizational Structure & Management Capability
- Economic Impact (Direct Spending)
- Quality of Research – understanding of audience
- Suitable Target Market(s)
- Comprehensive Marketing Plan/Approach
- Funding plan
- Evaluation/Measurement Plan
- Room nights
- Scale of Project – future potential

Sample Event Outcomes

	Fail	Poor	Average	Above Average	Excellent	Total Points Awarded
Point Allocation Maximum = 5 points per component	1	2	3	4	5	65 MAX
Program Components						
1. Tourism Promotion – Destination Impact						5
2. Benefit to the Destination Brand						5
3. Innovation - uniqueness						5
4. Evidence of Partnerships						5
5. Organizational Structure & Management Capability						5
6. Economic Impact (Direct Spending)						5
7. Quality of Research – understanding of audience						5
8. Suitable Target Market(s)						5
9. Comprehensive Marketing Plan/Approach						5
10. Funding plan						5
11. Evaluation/Measurement Plan						5
12. Room nights						5
13. Scale of Project – future potential						5
Total Maximum possible points = 65						65

