



ELEVATING NC SMOKIES

Submitted by:
Dariel Y. Curren
Executive Vice President
Development Counsellors International
215 Park Avenue South, Suite 1403
New York, NY 10003
dariel.curren@aboutdci.com
Phone: 203-733-7942

**A Research-Driven Destination Brand Strategy
and Tourism Master Plan**

Proposal Table of Contents



05

Agency/Advisory
Team Overview

15

Relevant Experience

18

Team Composition

22

Availability and
Office Location

26

References

27

Conflict of Interest
Declaration

28

Understanding of
the Project

30

Methodology &
Approach

46

Project Timeline

47

Budget
Breakdown

50

Value Proposition

52

Potential
Collaboration

54

Additional Insights

55

Appendix:
Case Studies

70

Bidder
Certification

Submission Letter



Hello Visit NC Smokies / Haywood County!

Development Counsellors International (DCI), in partnership with Destination Consultancy Group (DCG), Nichols Tourism Group (NTG) and Tourism Impact Services (TIS), hereafter the Advisory Team, is pleased to present this proposal to Visit NC Smokies. Our proposal incorporates an unparalleled mix of team skill sets and destination management practical knowledge that can address the diverse range of destination research and planning needs called for in the RFP. We are firstly destination-driven in philosophy and practice, and thereafter tourism project viability supportive.

The combined Advisory Team offers:

- Over 100 combined years of destination branding and strategic planning experience
- Deep tourism research capabilities – how to undertake new analysis efforts and apply findings in identifying and prioritizing target markets, their personas and associated product experiences
- Extensive tourism branding capabilities – how to evaluate brand embrace and effectiveness, as well as how to ensure it is carried through the destination itself
- One of the most extensive backgrounds in destination product assessment and identification of new visitor and/or resident opportunities
- Cutting edge skills and tools to evaluate organizational structures, deployment effectiveness and best-practice refinements
- Foremost thought leaders and educators in destination leadership through founding involvement in CDME and predecessor DMAP programs and subsequent new research tools
- Deep experience in destination sustainability in how to assess current destination status and how to proactively implement new strategies
- A single team integrating branding, marketing, destination development and sustainable strategies and practices – a holistic solution approach for Visit NC Smokies and Haywood County

Submission Letter



The Advisory Team's proven process is rooted in research which includes an ample stakeholder engagement process and in-depth onsite visits relative to destination orientation and tourism asset and brand marketing evaluation. We've outlined our proposed scope of work for the eight-month destination branding and tourism master planning assignment on the pages that follow.

The Advisory Team has the personnel and technical capabilities to undertake all of the elements presented in the proposal and no additional outside support is anticipated.

We look forward to working with your team and the community in the advancement of successful and sustainable NC Smokies tourism.

Contact:

Dariel Y. Curren
Executive Vice President
Development Counsellors International
215 Park Avenue South, Suite 1403
New York, NY 10003
dariel.curren@aboutdci.com
Phone: 203 -733-7942

02

Advisory Team Overview



The Advisory Team members are well-respected leaders in tourism marketing, branding, research and destination strategic planning/master plan development.

Development Counsellors International (DCI) is an expert in tourism, economic development and talent attraction marketing. By integrating research, branding, paid advertising, digital, social media and public relations, we build demand for your destination to increase visitor arrivals and spending. Established in 1960, DCI has worked for more than 500 cities, regions, states and countries and now has a staff of more than 90 place-marketers. Our complete client list through the years may be found at www.aboutdci.com.

Destination Consultancy Group (DCG) is a destination marketing/management consulting company at www.dcgconsultancy.com with a track record of advising more than 350 DMOs/CVBs and sports commissions in market research, strategic and annual marketing, development and advocacy planning, brand strategy formulation and governance leadership. The firm was formed in 1996 and has offices in Texas, USA and Alberta, Canada.

Nichols Tourism Group (NTG) is positioned as a national leader in providing strategic planning, marketing and destination development services to the travel and tourism industry. While many firms bring either a pure development or strict analytical focus to tourism consulting, NTG combines both to create innovative, balanced and practical approaches that help its clients capture an increasing share of the billions of dollars that are annually spent by travelers. For more information, please www.nicholstourismgrp.com.

Tourism Impact Services (TIS) is a strategy and implementation firm who focuses on helping outdoor communities thrive through destination stewardship and regenerative tourism. TIS is based in the upstate of South Carolina and brings 20+ years of experience activating standards, strategies and solutions that generate positive impacts for people, places and the planet. TIS's work has shaped tourism policy in global destinations such as Jamaica, Panama and Norway, as well as domestic destinations like Vail, Breckenridge and Jackson Hole. TIS is a trusted partner for Visit NC, Colorado Tourism Office, and Travel Oregon and a thought-leader and invited speaker on destination stewardship and the transformational impact this approach can have in gateway communities.



Economic Development • Tourism • Talent Attraction

63
YEARS
SPECIALIZING
IN MARKETING
PLACES

500+
places
represented

cities
states
regions
countries

90 

MARKETERS
WITH A PASSION FOR
PLACES

OUR LOCATIONS

New York | Denver

BOSTON | CHARLOTTE | LOS ANGELES | ORLANDO



TORONTO | VANCOUVER | MONTREAL

A Sampling of DCI's Tourism Clients



Tourism • Hospitality • Destinations

25

Years advising
in Destination
Marketing

**Leadership
Assistance in 10
Practices**

750

Assignments

**Representing 350+
Destination Organizations**

- Communities
- Counties/Parishes
- Regions
- States/Provinces

2

Offices



Temple, Texas



Calgary, Alberta

**CDME
FOUNDER**

**LeadDO
LeadDESTINATION
SURVEYS**

www.dcgconsultancy.com

A Sampling of DCG's Tourism Clients





NICHOLS TOURISM GROUP

Advisory services for an evolving tourism industry

A national leader in providing strategic planning, marketing and destination development services to the travel and tourism industry.

***Developing Innovative Strategies
to Maximize Performance***

26+

Years of Experience

400+

Clients Across U.S. and
Mexico

SERVING:

- State Tourism Offices
- Destination CVBs
- National and State Parks
- Land Management Organizations
- Private Sector Businesses

A Sampling of NTG's Tourism Clients



CHICAGO OFFICE OF ★ ★ ★ ★
TOURISM + CULTURE





Tourism Impact Services: Stewardship, Sustainability and Regeneration

20+
YEARS

activating strategies
and programs that
generate positive
impacts for people,
places, and the
planet

**Bringing Insights From Some of
The Most Sensitive Destinations and
Organizations in the World**

Jamacia

Panama

Norway

Vail

Jackson Hole

Breckenridge

Park City

International Mountain Biking

Association

Leave No Trace

Since 2019,

working closely with Western
North Carolina stakeholders
to advance the outdoor
economy and communities

Senior Director and Program
Architect for the
Mountain IDEAL Program



[www.tourismimpactservices.co](http://www.tourismimpactservices.com)

m

A Sampling of TIS's Tourism Clients



An aerial photograph of a dense green forest covering a mountain. A tall, lattice-structured radio tower stands prominently in the center, with a small blue-roofed cabin at its peak. In the upper left, another tower is partially visible. The valley below is shrouded in a thick, golden-hued fog or mist, creating a dramatic and atmospheric scene.

03

Relevant Experience

Relevant Experience



Please see Appendix for DCI branding case studies.

Deep Expertise in Destination Brand Strategy

These five examples are analogous to the destination brand strategy work we'll be doing for Haywood County.

- Visit Raleigh: DCI created a comprehensive brand strategy for Visit Raleigh in 2014 and has just been re-engaged to reassess and refresh this NC destination brand strategy.
- Chattanooga Tourism Co./Chattanooga Area Chamber: With both the CVB and Chamber as long-time clients, DCI developed a robust strategy for talent attraction, which sits at the intersection of tourism and economic development.
- Lexington, KY: To coalesce the nine counties surrounding Lexington, KY around talent attraction, DCI created the new "Greater LEX: Kentucky's Bluegrass Region" that leans into and capitalizes on the existing Visit LEX brand.
- Racine County CVB: We developed a new brand leaning into the community's Frank Lloyd Wright heritage and a detailed marketing strategy to boost visitation to this family-friendly WI destination on the Western shore of Lake Michigan.
- Redding, California: With Visit Redding moving under the Redding Chamber of Commerce umbrella, DCI developed and activated a comprehensive brand strategy to position this Northern California community as a basecamp for outdoor adventure and hidden gem with food and culture around every corner.

Relevant Experience



Deep Expertise in Tourism Master Planning and Sustainability

These seven examples are most analogous to the work we'll be doing for Haywood County.

- **Gaston County NC Destination Development Strategy and Plan: DCG**
- **Elkhart County IN Strategic Destination Plan: DCG/NTG**
- **Fredericksburg TX Tourism Master Plan: DCI, DCG and NTG**
- **Pasco County/Florida's Sports Coast Destination Development Strategy: DCG/NTG**
- **Sedona AZ Sustainable Tourism Plan: NTG**
- **Sonoma County CA Tourism Strategic Plan: NTG**
- **Teton County WY Sustainable Destination Management Plan: TIS**

Please see Appendix for DCG/NTG/TIS planning case studies.

04

Team Composition



Key Personnel for NC Smokies



DCI has assembled an Advisory Team with the right mix of tourism marketing, research and creative experience to deliver a powerful brand strategy and tourism master plan for the NC Smokies.

For full bios, please visit our DCI website here: aboutdci.com/the-team/ and our respective partner websites



Karyl Leigh Barnes

DCI PRESIDENT, TOURISM PRACTICE

Karyl Leigh is the President of DCI's Tourism Practice. Since joining DCI in 1998 from a New York State DMO, she has led destination strategy and campaign implementation for destinations on every continent except Antarctica. Karyl Leigh holds a master's degree in global marketing communications from Emerson College/Brussels, is professionally accredited in marketing communications by the International Advertising Association and has completed her CDME credential with Destinations International.



Dariel Curren

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT | BRAND STRATEGIST

With more than 25 years of experience in destination marketing and branding, Dariel has worked for DCI since 1995. Dariel's clients have spanned the world. She has been deeply involved in branding for the Netherlands Foreign Investment Agency for the past six years and recently led DCI's branding work for Butte, MT; Redding, CA; Racine, WI; and the Canadian provinces of Alberta and British Columbia. Considered DCI's lead global branding expert, Dariel is a graduate of Brown University.



Robyn Domber

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT | RESEARCH

Since joining DCI in 2011, Robyn has spearheaded research programs for all tourism audiences — consumers, travel trade, media and meetings and incentives. In addition to concrete familiarity with public and private data sources in multiple industries, she is well-versed in original research techniques, such as interviews, focus groups and surveys. Robyn is a graduate of Hobart and William Smith Colleges.

Key Personnel for NC Smokies



Kevin Gardiner
CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Kevin joined Development Counsellors International in February of 2022 as the agency's Creative Director. Based in New York City, Kevin is the former Creative Director for Nordstrom and spent more than two decades in the world of retail and fashion. A small business owner prior to joining DCI, Kevin provided creative services and talent acquisition services to many well-known brands like LL Bean, 1800 Flowers, Bloomingdale's, CVS, Neiman Marcus and Sundance.



Sarah Reinecke
VICE PRESIDENT, BRANDING | ACCOUNT LEAD

Since joining DCI in 2013, Sarah has worked for dozens of places across the globe, leading branding, messaging and creative strategies for clients ranging from Wake County Economic Development to the North African country of Tunisia. A former journalist, Sarah seeks to tell the unique stories of places through strategic marketing, branding and communications. Sarah graduated from the University of South Dakota with a degree in print journalism.



Don Anderson
EXECUTIVE PARTNER | DCG | TOURISM MASTER PLAN

Don is the Executive Partner of Destination Consultancy Group (DCG) providing sound research and practical management and leadership advisory services to private, not-for-profit and government clients since 1996. He has more than 35 years' experience in the tourism/hospitality, entertainment and transportation professions, of which half were in various senior operating positions such as hotel general manager, destination organization president, resort marketing director, attraction/special event manager and industry consultant, and with the remaining years as a college instructor and educational officer with California State University Fullerton and Purdue University, USA and University of Calgary, Canada. Don is the core founder of Destination International's CDME professional development program.

Key Personnel for NC Smokies



Bobby Chappell

STRATEGIST, PROGRAM ARCHITECT, CHANGE MAKER | TIS

Bobby Chappell has spent more than 20 years activating strategies and programs that generate positive impacts for people, places and the planet. He has been a public land manager and conservation ecologist responsible for assessing visitor use impacts and critically endangered habitats. Bobby has worked on the front line of nearly every sector of the hospitality industry and has played an influential role in advancing destination stewardship and sustainable tourism around the world.



Mitch Nichols

PRESIDENT | NTG

Mitch Nichols is President of Nichols Tourism Group, Inc. (NTG) and leads the strategic planning and product development activities of the firm. His expertise is focused on the study of a destination's underlying economic factors, the impacts of changing market conditions and the resulting implications to product and destination performance. He has directed and overseen a wide range of strategic destination planning efforts, ranging from the states of Alaska to Sonora, Mexico.

05

Availability & Office Location

Availability and Office Location



The Advisory Team is available to start at your convenience. We have indicated a start date of November 1, giving you ample time to make your selection and get the contract in place, but we are flexible to adjust as you see fit.

DCI is headquartered in New York City and has a regional office in Denver. Even before the pandemic, our agency embraced remote work as a means of attracting and retaining the “best and brightest” talent. Using Microsoft Teams and Wrike project management software, we work seamlessly together regardless of location. We also have a track record of collaborating with other members of the Advisory Team. Here’s where your team members are located:

- **New York, NY:** Dariel Curren, Robyn Domber, Kevin Gardiner
- **Grand Junction, CO:** Sarah Reinecke
- **Temple, TX:** Don Anderson
- **Bellingham, WA:** Mitch Nichols
- **Greenville, SC:** Bobby Chappell

06

References



Our References: Branding



We invite you to speak with our clients as references. We just have one request: Tell them we said hello!



Blount
Partnership

Bryan Daniel, President and CEO
Blount Partnership
bdaniels@blountpartnership.com | 865.983.2241
Branding and Marketing Plan



Dave Santucci, Principal Consultant
Mission2Market
dave@mission2market.com | 720.287.9650
(Former VP Marketing, **Chattanooga Tourism Co.**)
Brand Strategy for Tourism and Talent Attraction



Jenny Trick, Executive Director
Racine County Economic Development Corporation
jtrick@rcedc.org | 262. 898.7400
Branding and Marketing Plan



Jake Mangas, President and CEO
Visit Redding and Redding Chamber of Commerce
jake@reddingchamber.com | 530.225.4433
Branding, Website, Paid Media, PR, Social Media

Our References: Tourism Master Planning



Heidi Walters
Director, Partner & Industry Relationships
Visit NC
Heidi.walters@visitnc.com | 919.447.7762
Outdoor NC Stewardship Programming



Michael Applegate
Director of Tourism Development
Gaston County
Michael.Applegate@gastongov.com | 704.866.3000
Destination Development Strategy/Tourism Master Plan



Michelle Conway
President & CEO
Visit Sedona
mconway@sedonachamber.com | 928.204.1123 Ext 115
Sustainable Tourism Master Plan



Brady Closson
President & CEO
Fredericksburg Convention & Visitors Bureau
bclosson@fbgtx.org | 830.997.6523
Tourism Master Plan

An aerial photograph of a snowy mountain landscape at sunset. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and blue. In the foreground, there's a ski resort with many people on the slopes and some buildings. The middle ground shows rolling hills covered in snow and some evergreen trees. The background features more distant mountain ranges under the twilight sky.

07

Conflict of Interest Declaration

DCI confirms that neither we, nor our sub-consultants, DCG, NTG nor TIS have any conflicts of interest in undertaking this project.



08

Understanding of the Project

We Get It. We Really Do.



We hope you'll agree after reviewing the methodology and approach outlined on the following pages that the Advisory Team is the best partner for this exciting project.

Our team brings unmatched expertise. We're a powerhouse team when it comes to tourism branding, marketing, destination development and sustainability. We live and breathe destination marketing and development leadership, which means we understand the many nuances involved. More importantly, we have solutions in place for how to overcome those obstacles we'll certainly face.

Our process is rooted in research and in stakeholder engagement. We're anything but cookie-cutter. We embrace innovative approaches and creative solutions to deliver high-quality results. We know how to effectively target and engage with your desired audience.

Haywood County's goals for these two projects are crystal clear, and the Advisory Team's proven process will ensure we can work together to establish a clear brand promise highlighting Haywood County's distinctiveness and forge a brand strategy that serves as a beacon for future marketing initiatives. We also understand that you're facing disjointed marketing efforts and inconsistent messaging. Don't worry – you're not alone in this, and the good news is, we can help. We've seen this before and our meticulous research and discovery process will ensure we craft a brand strategy that speaks to the broader region, while also celebrating the unique characteristics and elements each individual community brings. We'll embrace a holistic approach to combat these challenges and usher in a new era of regionalism.

We're skilled at working closely with clients to bring the right people to the table, ensuring stakeholder buy-in from the beginning. Our team is organized and proactive. And, while we work hard, we noticed (and love!) that you're looking for a touch of light-heartedness and collaboration. That is a guarantee with the Advisory Team. Think of us as your collaboration partner. In reading your carefully-crafted RFPs, we not only understand the work, the goals, and the scope—but we absolutely cannot wait to get started. Our team is ready to hit the ground running and would be honored to get to work alongside you!

09

Methodology and Approach

Destination Branding Process

Our step-by-step process involves four stages – illustrated in the diagram to the right—that we have found successful in producing authentic, credible and distinctive brands and messaging campaigns for destinations across the country. At every stage of the process, we would seek your input to ensure that our final deliverables are exactly in line with your goals and objectives.



Phase I: Research & Discovery



The Advisory Team believes that **all branding must be rooted in research**. We will deploy the following internal and external research inputs in order to best understand the assets that Haywood County offers – as well as challenges faced. In addition, we will carefully consider and review existing research already conducted and available. This first Research and Discovery phase will enable our Advisory Team to evaluate current perceptions of Haywood County as a destination. We understand that stakeholder engagement is a crucial piece to the success of all branding and messaging projects, and as such, we will engage your key stakeholders from the beginning, inviting them to participate in focus groups, interviews and surveys to gather their insights.

INTERNAL RESEARCH:

- **Immersion Tour:** Our team will conduct a thorough assessment of Haywood County's destination offerings, amenities and identity through **a three-day immersion tour**. The immersion tour will include an in-depth strategy session and brand workshop with your internal team, as well as tours and site inspections of key visitor assets.
- **Stakeholder Workshops/Focus Groups:** To ensure community and key stakeholder engagement, we will conduct **a series of 6-8 focus groups** with 8-10 people per group during our immersion tour. In consultation with Haywood County, key players from the public and private tourism sector in the region will be identified to participate in the workshops and will share valuable insights and perceptions on the region's strengths, challenges and opportunities.
- **One-on-One Interviews:** The team will be available to conduct **up to 10 one-on-one 30-minute interviews** with key stakeholders (in addition to the workshops). These can be done in person in conjunction with the immersion, or virtually, following our visit.
- **Product Assessment and Proprietary LeadDO and LeadDESTINATION Surveys:** As part of the tourism master planning research process, we will conduct these surveys to receive advice on the status of DMO strategy/best practice standards, and future tourism development and community relations from the Haywood County staff, Board of Directors and select stakeholders.

Research & Discovery

- 
- **Internal Stakeholder Survey:** To supplement the qualitative input gathered during the focus groups and interviews, the Advisory Team will conduct an online survey to gather insights from internal stakeholders, assessing perceptions of strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities. Haywood County would distribute an online survey link to key internal stakeholders.
 - **Brand Audit:** The Team will conduct a detailed examination of existing brand elements and marketing materials being used by Haywood County to determine what explicit and implicit messages are being sent. We understand that a key challenge faced throughout Haywood County is disjointed marketing efforts and inconsistent messaging due to the 1% occupancy tax requirements. We will be available to conduct one-on-one interviews with key stakeholders and tourism partners as part of the brand audit to fully understand the various marketing messages and present best-bet recommendations for a more coordinated, county-wide approach to marketing and branding while maintaining the distinct character of each community.
 - **Competitor Analysis:** The Team will analyze the branding strategies of up to **five competitors** through online research to identify key differentiators and which of these are likely to drive consideration of Haywood County. The competitor analysis will provide recommendations for creating a new regional brand that fits within the competitive set.
 - **Destination Brand Architecture:** Based on the Advisory Team's research and discovery findings, our team will outline how the destination master brand will serve as a “brand umbrella” for the broader region. The destination brand architecture will outline a clear plan that enables regional communities to work cohesively under one master brand umbrella. Additionally, the Team's research and discovery phase will serve to uncover the local nuances and unique assets, enabling our team to build a strategy that speaks to the entirety of Haywood County while at the same time leaning into—and respecting—each of the individual local communities.
 - **Destination Stewardship:** The Team will use a set of internationally-recognized guidelines to conduct and evaluation of stewardship and sustainability practices currently being employed by the destination will be undertaken to better understand the most sensitive areas of the destination and any steps currently being applied to mitigate impacts.

Research & Discovery



EXTERNAL RESEARCH:

- **Perception Surveys:** For a clear understanding of the motivations, interests and values that will drive future travel to Haywood County as well as current perceptions of the destination, the Advisory Team will conduct two perception studies:
 - **Past/Potential Visitors:** The Team will conduct an online survey of past and potential visitors to test new descriptors and messaging and better understand impressions and perceptions of the region. Should an internal database of past/potential visitors be available, we can use this database for survey distribution but can also identify qualified survey respondents. We will target a minimum of 1,000 valid responses but can expand the sample.
 - **Travel Media:** The Team will conduct a media perception study to gauge perceptions of Haywood County and its competitive set. DCI's analysis will highlight differences in perceptions among media members who have and who have not visited the region, gain insights into editorial interest in covering the region and topics of most interest.
- **SWOT Analysis:** We will create a succinct destination and DMO **SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analyses**, based on the findings of our discovery research.

OUTCOMES: The Advisory Team will develop and present to Haywood County via a 90-minute Teams call a **detailed presentation of our key findings from the Research & Discovery Phase.**

Phase 2: Brand & Messaging Strategy



We will work closely with your in-house team and Marketing Committee to devise a comprehensive destination brand for Haywood County that is based on the destination SWOT analysis and all research findings from Phase 1. The Advisory Team agrees wholeheartedly that branding is about MUCH more than just a logo. Our brand strategy process outlined below will result in long-term, positive benefits across all of Haywood County.

Phase 2 is when the verbal brand identity is unveiled through the following deliverables:

- **Brand Character and Voice:** What is the **unique character** that Haywood County embodies and wants to project to your visitors? What is the distinctive voice that you want to project and be heard? How do these translate across all communications platforms and channels? These questions will be answered during this part of the project.
- **Brand Promise:** DCI will develop a powerful brand promise for Haywood County that is both sustainable and authentic.
- **Value Proposition/Brand Promise:** Our team will develop a value proposition, which is a clear and concise statement of what makes Haywood County **a unique and ideal destination for your target audiences**. This value proposition should serve as a guide for all marketing efforts.
- **Target Audience Identification & Brand Drivers:** We will outline emotional brand drivers for Haywood County's different target audiences. These will distill what Haywood County can "own" for each audience vertical and will be aligned with what each audience "wants".
- **Key Messages:** Based on your brand promise and value proposition, we will deliver compelling key messages in the form of written talking points for your target audience, including detailed proof points. This is your story and the basis of your brand. The Team will deliver 4-6 key messages that aim to succinctly convey your key visitor assets and characteristics.

Phase 3: Brand & Logo Development



Phase 3 is where we begin to develop the visual brand identity for Haywood County. This phase will bring the brand promise and key messages to life and include the following:

- **Potential Taglines or Brand Concepts:** Using the SWOT analyses and key messaging as a guide, our creative team will **brainstorm dozens of tagline options and/or brand concepts. We will present 2-3** that we believe are the strongest for Haywood County. Haywood County will select one brand concept to move into creative design.
- **Logo & Brand Development:** Upon approval of the brand concept, the Team will explore it graphically. We will present two directions for the new Haywood County brand, including the logo/brand mark, considerations for typography and color palette and mock-ups to bring the concepts to life. We will seek feedback/approval from Haywood County to refine the concept(s) over the course of three presentations. We will ultimately select one logo and our team will make any necessary refinements in the final Round 3. The Team **will finalize all aspects of the logo, including selection of final color palettes and typography, as well as making recommendations on imagery assets.**
- **Brand Testing/Research:** The team will evaluate brand identity options by testing the new brand elements through a simple survey conducted with your stakeholders (internal perspective) and DCI's staff of 90 place makers (external perspective).

Brand & Logo Development



After we have arrived at the successful umbrella brand concept, the Advisory Team will work with Haywood County to bring the new brand to life within the work of Haywood County Tourism Development Authority and other organizations. The goal will be to showcase potential executions of the brand in advertising and other promotional avenues. We'll work with you to determine 5-6 brand activation concepts that will be most helpful to your team. While it's difficult to know what that exact package will consist of until we know more about your needs, we believe that some of the following elements will likely be necessary:

- **Logo Adaptations for Partner Organizations**
- **Co-Branding Examples for key Haywood County Stakeholders**
- **Website Homepage Mockup**
- **Social Media Profile Icons and Banner Images**
- **Digital Ad Mockups**
- **PowerPoint/Google Slides Template**
- **E-Newsletter Template Mockup**
- **Print & Digital Collateral Mock-Ups, such as Key Message Brochure**
- **Merchandise, such as t-shirts, hats, water bottles, etc.**

Phase 4: Brand Promotion



The Advisory Team brands aren't designed to sit on a shelf and collect dust. In conjunction with the rebrand, we will design a strategic implementation guide that outlines management of and ongoing promotion of the new brand, ultimately ensuring Haywood County can optimize your marketing investments to reach your key target audiences.

The core elements of the implementation guide will be based directly on our findings during Phase One (Research/Discovery), and while each plan is unique to the destination, the ultimate plan will include insights into the following:

- Best practices on how to launch the brand, as well some “big ideas” on how to activate the brand based on your budget parameters.
- Recommendations for integrating the entire destination and visitor sector in the brand rollout.
- Considerations, strategies and tactics for introducing the brand to stakeholders and establishing it as a permanent way of thinking about the destination. We will consider all stakeholders and how Haywood County can communicate and amplify the brand strategy through meetings, hand-off training materials, presentation decks, etc.
- The plan will include specific tactics, tangibles and tools for internal and external audiences.

OUTCOMES: The Advisory Team will deliver a virtual final presentation of the implementation plan.

Brand Guidelines

Brand Standards Manual:

Upon finalizing the logo and brand concepts, we will develop comprehensive brand guidelines documenting all components of the brand identity, including implementation, composition examples and design examples that can be leveraged in brand activations and print and digital marketing campaigns/applications.

The brand standards manual will include details surrounding naming, logos, supporting graphics, colors, typography, brand purpose, promise and values, brand messaging and positioning (including brand voice and language), brand implementation and asset collection (including photography style and videography style). Finally, the guidelines will include brand standards violations and other recommendations for successfully activating the new brand.

In addition, all brand assets, including native files for the brand activations, will be provided to Haywood County.

All print and digital assets developed during the project will also be shared as InDesign files to enable Haywood County to jumpstart implementation.



Effective Branding and Measurement of Success



Effective brands and brand strategies must be honest, authentic and embraceable by your target audiences. We believe your place brand is your DNA and stems from who you are, who people perceive you to be and who you want to be. The DCI-led Advisory Team has a proven destination branding process that integrates research, community engagement, strategy, powerful storytelling and creative concepts.

In terms of metrics, establish realistic and measurable targets in terms of increases in leisure and business visitor spend; meetings and sporting events booked, etc. In addition, we believe real-time tracking through digital and social media is a valuable measure of success in terms of increase in website and social media engagement.

We believe the following to be the most important KPIs for this refreshed branding initiative with Haywood County.

Primary Measurements:

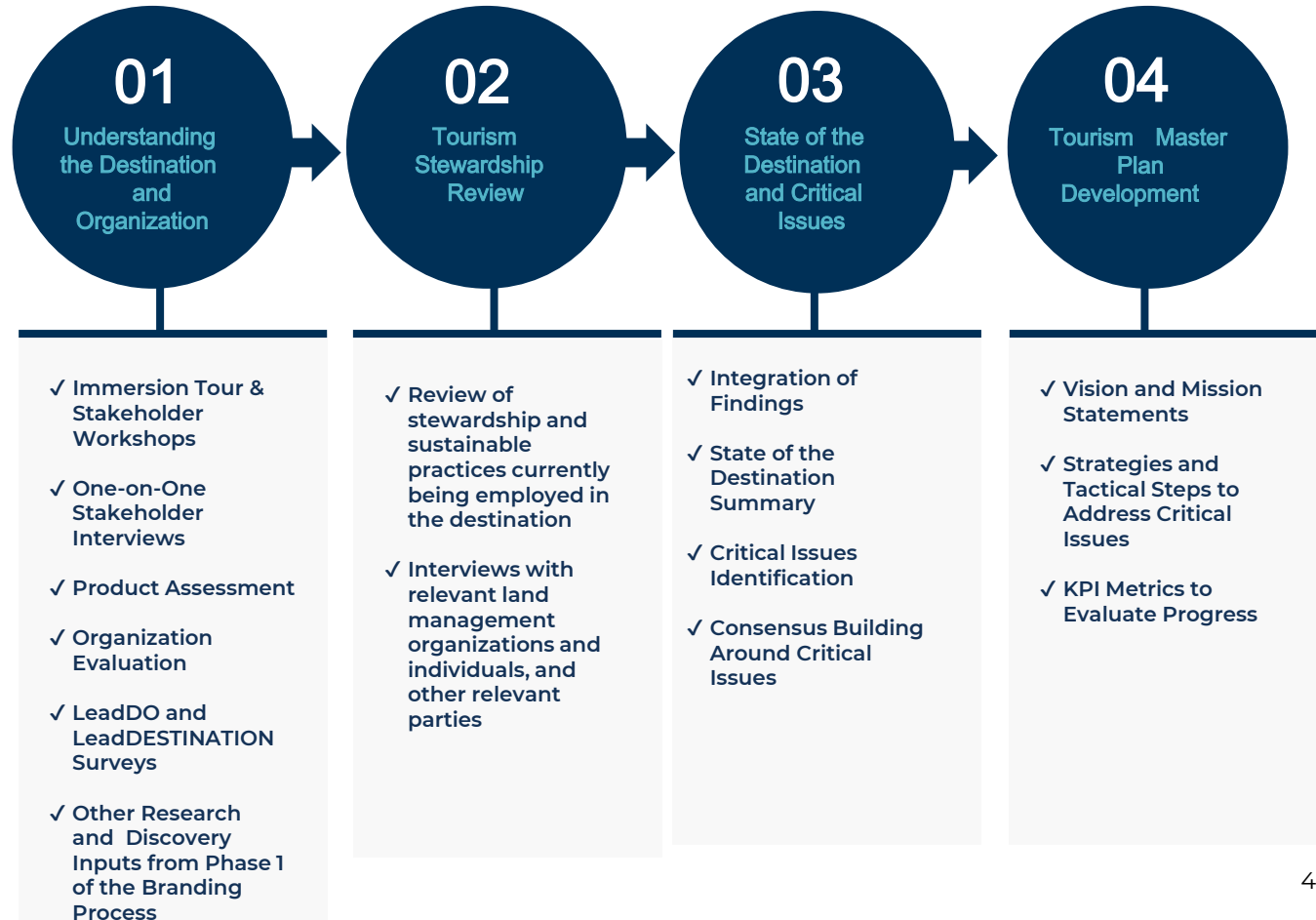
- Increased overnight visits and day-trips
- Increased lodging industry and food/beverage sales
- Increased visitor spending
- Increased bookings of conferences, events and meetings for FY 2024 through FY 2026

Secondary Measurements:

- Increased recognition of Haywood County as a preferred region for investment in new and emerging industries
- Growth in real estate transactions and demographic growth through the attraction of skilled talent, college graduates and other professionals

Tourism Master Planning Process

Our step-by-step process also involves four stages that we have found produce authentic, truly implementable plans, integrating best practices from around the country.



State of the Destination & Critical Issues Identification



DCG, NTG, and Tourism Impact Services has assisted more than 400 destination marketing organizations (DMOs) and/or Convention & Visitor Bureaus (CVBs) in North America with organizational setup and governance, strategic and annual marketing, promotional planning, research program development, stewardship and sustainable practices, destination development strategy, destination funding rationale submissions and advocacy communications planning since the early 1990s.

As members of the Advisory Team, we will gather relevant tourism master planning information in the Research & Discovery phase. This foundational research will integrate insights from both visitors and the local community, enabling our team to capture a holistic understanding of the current state of tourism. Insights derived from Phase 1 will be pivotal in shaping the subsequent Tourism Master Plan process.

The Advisory Team will ultimately deliver a Tourism Master Plan for Haywood County that is focused on long-term sustainability. The process will include initially two phases:

Research & Insight Gathering and Analysis: As previously noted, the DCI-led Advisory Team will travel to Haywood County for the three-day immersion tour, stakeholder workshops/focus groups and one-one-one meetings. As part of the process, we will conduct a series of workshops to crystalize priorities and address distinct opportunities and challenges. Additionally, the Advisory Team will conduct a benchmarking analysis of comparative and competitive destinations.

Destination Stewardship Evaluation: An investigation of stewardship and sustainable practices currently being employed in the destination will also be undertaken as the second element of the process. This will include a review of current key stewardship and sustainability initiatives that are being undertaken in the destination. Assets and activities that are particularly at risk will also be identified, along with factors impacting this risk. A series of interviews will be undertaken with relevant land management organizations and individuals, as well as other relevant parties to ensure a diverse range of perspectives are considered.

State of the Destination & Critical Issues Identification



The third phase of the planning process will integrate all findings up to this point and organize them to evaluate the current "State of the Destination." This summary will provide the foundation to identify a grouping of critical issues facing the destination. These critical issues could relate to visitors (both past and future), Haywood County products and experiences (again both those that currently exist and potential additions), the NC Smokies' organization structure and operational priorities, factors that could impact the long-term sustainability of the destination, the external destination identity, and factors related to residents of Haywood County. Efforts to ensure these are the "right" issues for future focus will be developed through a series of testing efforts. It will be essential for a consensus to be reached that these are the most important challenges to address before moving into the actual strategic destination master planning processes of Phase Four.

Refinement and Prioritization of Critical Issues

- Customers – who are they currently, who do we want more of, which are high value segments
- Products – how do we stack up now, what are new development opportunities, what stewardship practices could better ensure sustainability,
- Destination Identity- what and how do we move refined branding efforts forward
- NC Smokies Organization – is the current structure and resource deployment optimal and what are key opportunities for the future (LeadDO survey outcomes)
- Internal Positioning and Values – how do residents perceive the visitor industry and what changes or additions could add to their "quality of place and life"

Build Consensus on Critical Issues

Invited industry/community workshops to present findings to date, including results from the stakeholder-based LeadDESTINATION survey and to test critical issues

OUTCOMES: Presentation of the State of the Destination and testing of the critical issues that rise to the top of priorities

The Tourism Master Plan



The tourism master plan developed in Phase 4 will focus on the greatest opportunities and mitigating the most significant weaknesses identified in the previous State of the Destination process. The plan will:

- **Set Vision and Mission:** The Advisory Team will develop a brief, highly focused and/or revised vision and mission, accounting for existing materials.
- **Identify Foundational Pillars/Goals:** Building off the findings of the assessment process, a series of Pillars that will act as the key thematic elements of the Master Plan will be developed, along with goals associated with the pillars.
- **Objective Formulations:** Specific actionable objectives will then be developed building on the Pillar goals. Associated strategies and tactics will then be identified that more specifically note steps to achieve the various objectives.

As the team has operated in the “real world” for more than a combined 100 years, the strategies and tactical implementation steps will be truly implementable. Sound tactical recommendations and initiatives (such as new and/or expanded development, marketing, organizational changes, resource deployment strategies, etc.) will be delivered after the vision, mission, goals, and objectives have been completed.

The recommendations will consider implementation over a 5- to 10-year time horizon, specifying early, mid- and longer-term timeframes including,

- A benchmarking analysis of competitive destinations along with an initial dashboard of destination/DMO metrics and measurables
- Recommendations on developing an even more effective countywide DMO structure including Haywood County and community/industry partners with priority tourism initiatives, stakeholder engagement activities and ongoing reporting.
- Specific recommendations on best practices for leadership and area/regional collaboration will also be provided.

The Tourism Master Plan



Strategy Execution and Continuous Improvement: This piece of the project is where the practical application of the master plan comes into play. The Advisory Team will:

- Articulate a robust implementation strategy, clearly defining responsible parties for each action point.
- Propose a mechanism for consistent monitoring and periodic refinement of the plan, ensuring it remains relevant and effective.
- Establish benchmark metrics/measures to gauge the plan's success and areas for enhancement.
- Consider Haywood County's goals, and take into special account opportunities for fostering sustainable, community-centric growth that benefits both visitors and residents; fills economic gaps and builds resilience; balance growth with sustainability; and cater to the growing number of visitors without straining local resources.

Timeline & Final Delivery: At the outset of the project, the Advisory Team will develop a timeline for all project deliverables to ensure timely delivery. We'll work with you to engage stakeholders at multiple points throughout the project, ensuring your stakeholders have a line of sight into the process and can weigh in where relevant.

Initial findings and recommendations will be presented virtually, enabling us to solicit Haywood County's feedback and comments.

The final plan will incorporate all feedback gathered and will be presented in-person to Haywood County.



10

Project Timeline

This will be a 10-month project, kicking off November 1, 2023 and concluding by August 31, 2024. A detailed timeline with major milestones and deliverables will be developed at the outset of the project.

11

Budget Breakdown



The Budget



The cost of the 10-month program is estimated to be \$252,965 including all fees and expenses. A line-item budget follows on the next page.

What It Will Cost

Professional fees for this project total \$231,415. For your convenience, DCI will bill all professional fees for the Advisory Team in 10 equal installments of \$23,141.50, billed at the beginning of each month.

A communications fee of \$280/month will cover ongoing communication expenses, such as telephone, internet access while traveling, media monitoring service, databases, etc.

Out-of-pocket travel and survey incentive expenses will be billed separately with appropriate documentation.

If either time needed or client requests for deliverables increase significantly beyond the scope of work outlined above, DCI's hourly blended rate of \$195/hour will be used to calculate the additional hours needed to complete the work. DCI will request approval prior to increasing hours toward the program of work.

This agreement may be canceled by either party, NC Smokies/Haywood County or DCI, for any reason upon 60 days written notice to the other. Time costs for work already completed will be required.

Both parties agree that they will not offer employment or consulting opportunities to staff members of the other party.

Proposed Budget for NC Smokies

November 1, 2023 – August 31, 2024



Professional Fees	
DCI Fees for Destination Branding (Phase 1: \$41,535 Phase 2: \$21,450 Phase 3: \$36,465 Phase 4: \$16,965)	\$116,415
DCG/NTG/TIS Fees for Master Plan Development (Phase 1: \$35,000 Phase 2: \$20,000 Phase 3: \$35,000 Phase 4: \$25,000)	\$115,000
TOTAL FEES	\$231,415
Program Expenses	
Ongoing Communication Expenses (\$280/month x 10 months)	\$2,800
Branding Travel to Haywood County for Immersion Tour, Interviews, Focus Groups and Follow-up/Final Presentation (3 staff trips x \$1,500/trip)	\$4,500
Master Planning Travel to Haywood County for Immersion Tour, Focus Groups and Follow-up/Final Presentations (5 staff trips x \$1,500/trip)	\$7,500
Media Perception Study (75 responses x \$10/response)	\$750
Panel Provider for Visitor Survey (if needed) (1,000 responses)	\$6,000
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$21,550
TOTAL BUDGET	\$252,965

12

Value Proposition



Value Proposition



Suggest any enhancements or modifications to the scope of work that could elevate the value of the final brand and master plan deliverables.

The DCI-led Advisory Team has a strategic process in place for creating authentic and distinct destination brands, messaging campaigns and tourism master plans. You'll note that the program outlined in the previous pages follows very closely the scopes of work outlined in both of Haywood County's RFPs. Where appropriate, the Advisory Team has added in key milestones and additional deliverables in order to achieve the best final result possible. However, we were able to develop a scope of work for both the destination brand and tourism master plan which closely mirrors Haywood County's initial requests. Kudos to your team for so thoughtfully outlining your program goals and objectives.

The process, research and methodology outlined in this proposal has been proven, time and time again, for hundreds of destinations across the globe.

13

Potential Collaboration



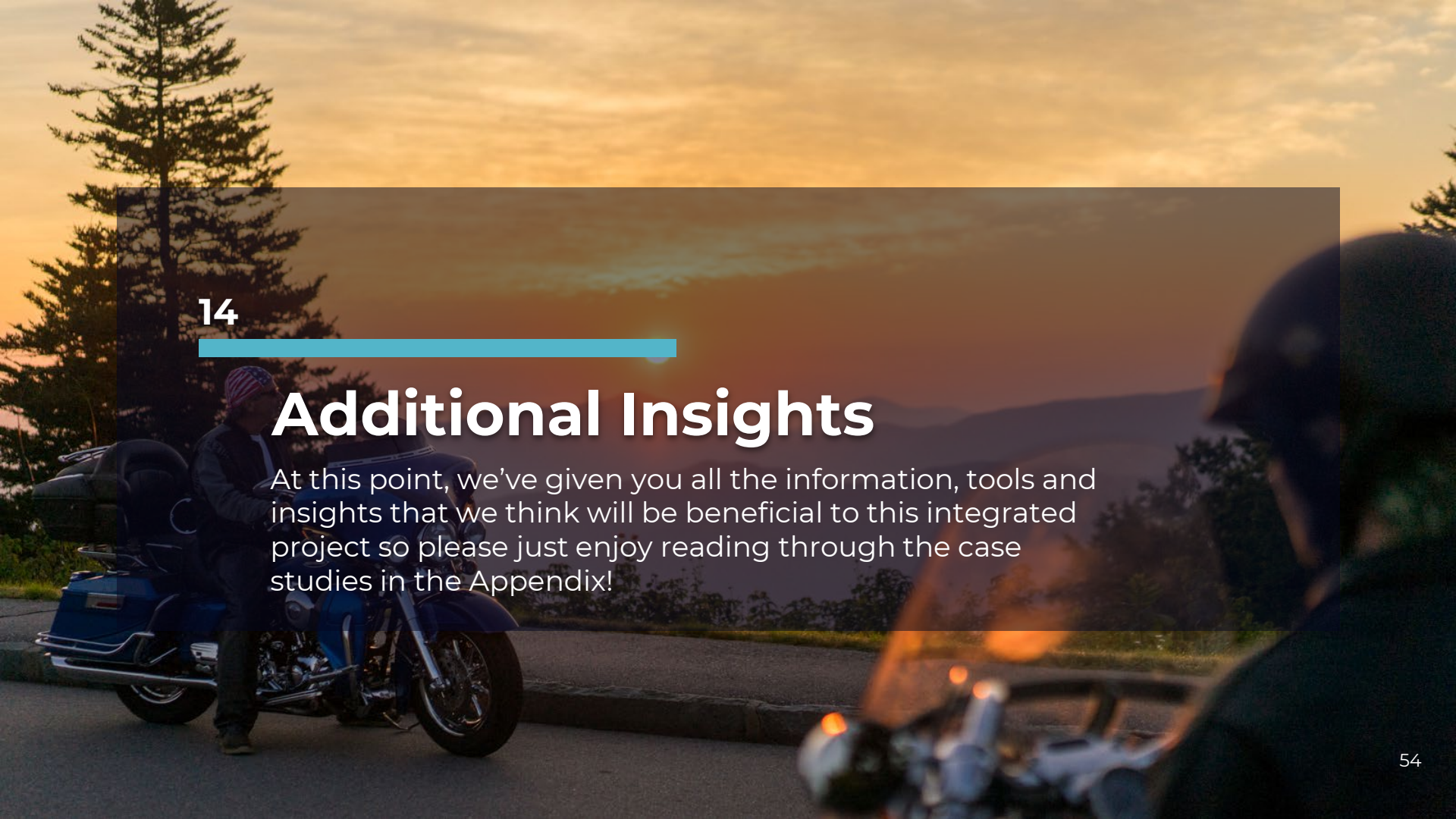
Potential Collaboration



As previously declared, DCI is partnering with DCG, NTG and Tourism Impact Services to complete this project. The partnership is a natural fit given DCI's tourism and branding expertise and DCG/NTG and Tourism Impact Services skills and experience in tourism master planning and strategy formulation.

We, like you, see many economies of scale given the overlapping nature of baseline research across the two projects.

The Advisory Team partners have worked together for many years, on a variety of projects, and our teams are adept at finding synergies and working through efficiencies while still delivering high-quality results.

A person wearing a red and white striped beanie and a dark jacket is standing next to a blue motorcycle. The motorcycle has a large black storage bag on the back. The scene is set outdoors at sunset, with a large evergreen tree on the left and a hazy mountain range in the background. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and blue. In the foreground, the back of a person's head wearing a dark helmet is visible, looking towards the motorcycle. The overall mood is serene and adventurous.

14

Additional Insights

At this point, we've given you all the information, tools and insights that we think will be beneficial to this integrated project so please just enjoy reading through the case studies in the Appendix!

An aerial photograph of a town, likely Asheville, North Carolina, showing a mix of residential and commercial buildings, a central street, and a gas station in the foreground. The town is surrounded by dense green forests, and rolling mountains are visible in the background under a clear blue sky. A semi-transparent dark grey rectangle is overlaid on the upper half of the image, containing the title text and a teal horizontal bar.

Appendix | Case Studies

Case Study: Differentiating Chattanooga, TN

BRAND STRATEGY

Discovering A Southern City's 'chattitude' For Visitors

DCI partnered with the Chattanooga Convention and Visitors Bureau to conduct research and develop foundational brand positioning. DCI's research included surveys of 2,050+ past and potential visitors, 120 stakeholders, 430 residents and 73 meeting planners, as well as a competitive assessment of Chattanooga against five competitors.

By identifying competitor positioning for each destination, DCI was able to identify the areas that Chattanooga can “own” – both in terms of messaging and target audiences. The final product was succinct messaging platform paired with a collection of curated photos from local photographers that exemplify what Chattanooga has to offer visitors and meeting planners.



When We Talk, Chattanooga Sounds...

- **Honest as Heck.** We're one of the kindest, friendliest people you'll ever meet, but we won't lay on the sugar-coated Southern charm.
- **Down to Earth.** We think we're pretty great, but we won't brag about it. Instead, we'll let you experience Chattanooga for yourself.
- **Energized.** Whether you want to scale a cliff, win a race or keep your family happy all vacation long, we're rooting for you.
- **Thoughtful, But Never Serious.** We put care into everything we do, but we're not overly buttoned up. We'll give it to you straight with a side of our famous Chattitude.



Case Study: A New Brand, Website and Marketing Strategy for Redding, CA

CHALLENGE

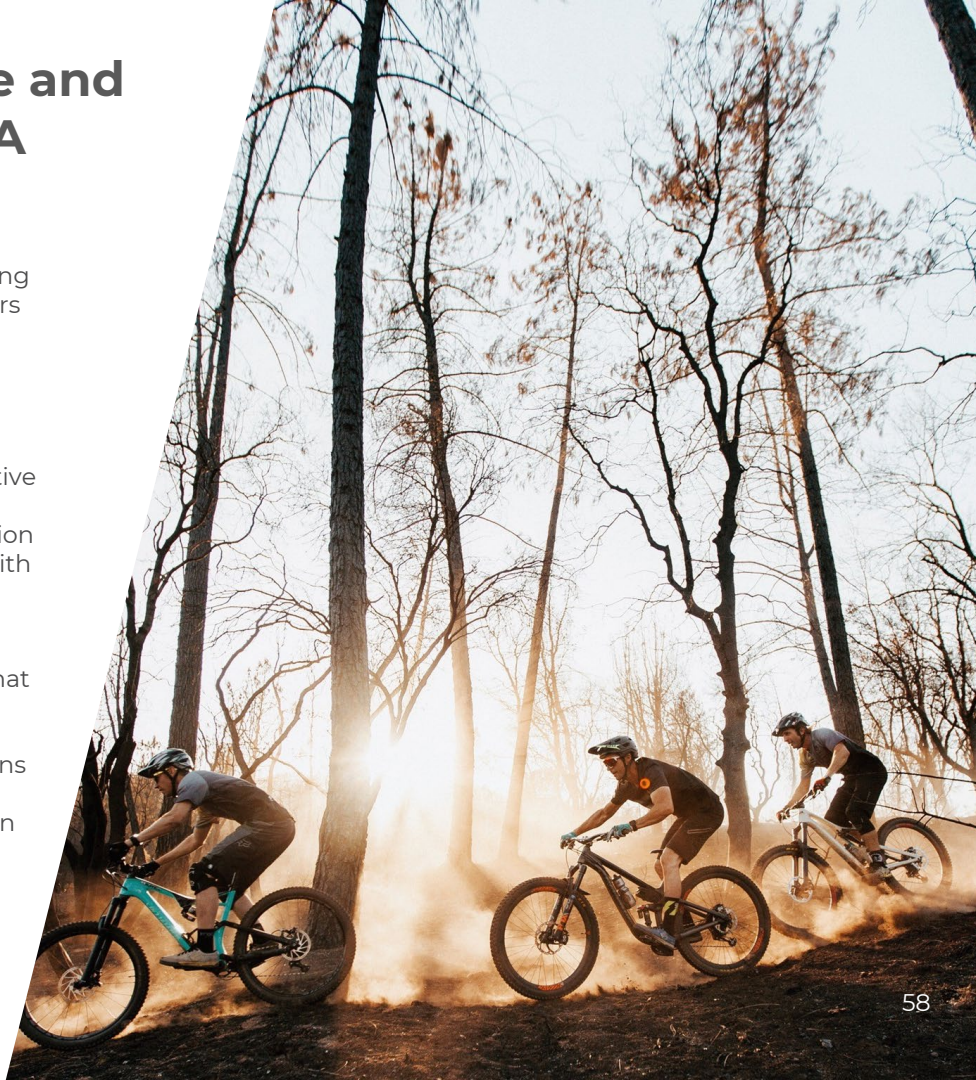
Known largely as a “pit stop” between San Francisco and Portland, Redding needed a new brand, website and marketing campaign to inspire travelers to get out and explore everything the region has to offer from outdoor recreation to one of California’s top cultural districts.

DCI STRATEGY

Based on a foundation of research that included a three-day immersion tour, a series of focus groups and perception studies of past and prospective visitors, DCI developed a new brand, website and integrated marketing program for Visit Redding with the campaign “Redding. Set. Go.” to position Redding as a homebase for outdoor experiences in Northern California with a burgeoning downtown and arts scene.

RESULTS

- **Website:** DCI launched a new website for Visit Redding in 2021 that modernized the digital experience for visitors.
- **Digital Ad Campaign:** In the first three months of the campaign, paid media drove 40% of sessions and 22,800+ primary conversions to the website.
- **PR:** In the first months of the program, DCI secured placements in target outlets including Men’s Journal, Fox News and L.A. Parent.
- **Social Media Strategy:** DCI created a multi-channel social media strategy for Visit Redding, which contributed to an 8.34% growth rate and 6.1% post engagement rate on Instagram.
- **Digital Influencers:** DCI facilitated an influencer visit from @milkandcardamom, resulting in 102 posts with a reach of 865K and 1.5M Impressions.





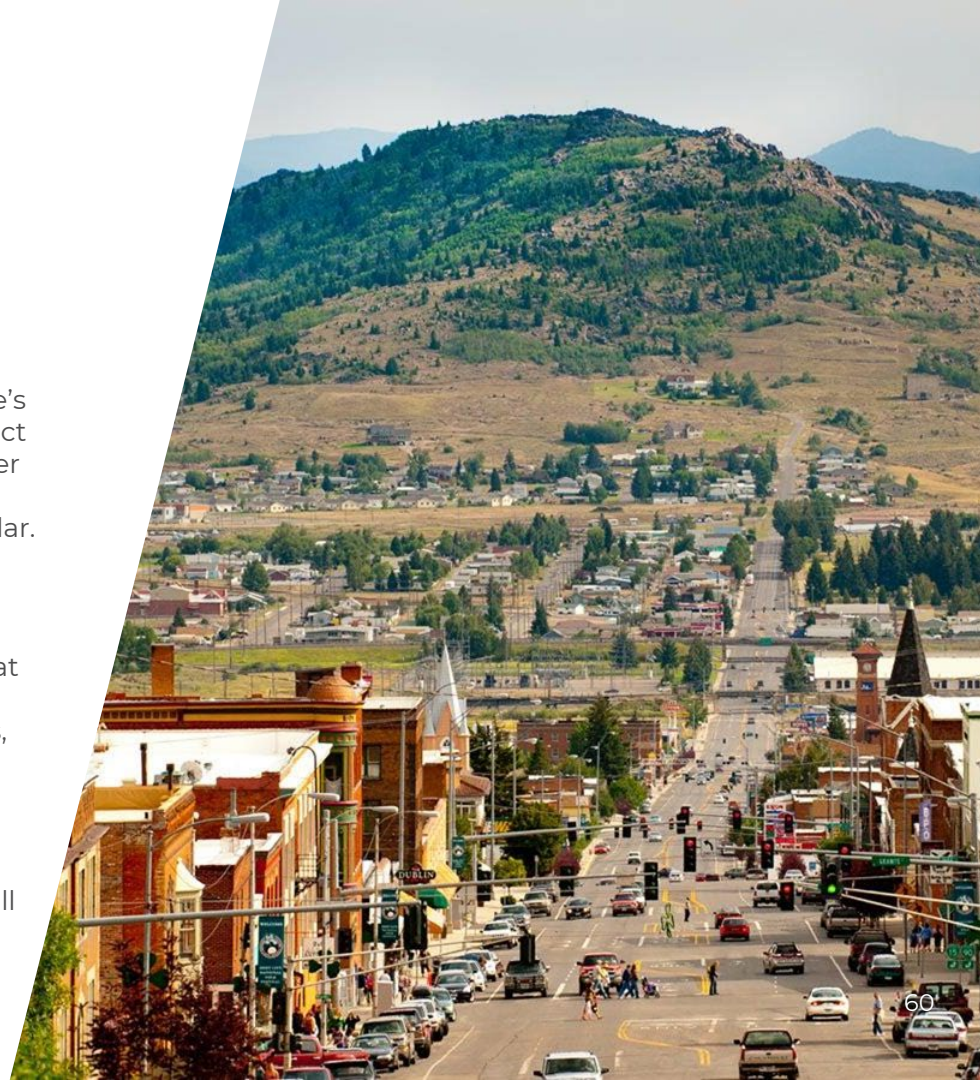
Tourism Branding Case Study: Butte, Montana

Branding Butte, Montana as Wildly Historic

Butte is where Montana's rich history and wild nature meet. There's little that compares to the city's National Historic Landmark District with its jaw-dropping architectural heritage and vestiges of copper mining reminiscent of days gone by. Embraced by the Rockies' Continental Divide, the high alpine landscape is equally spectacular. The problem? Butte was largely only known as a "pitstop" on the way from Yellowstone to Glacier National Park.

Through research, DCI determined that Butte needed a brand that leaned into both its remarkable history and its untamed natural assets. For the traveler who associates Montana with open spaces, rugged wilderness and uncrowded trails, we selected the word "wild" because it also captured Butte's mining past. The perfect combination emerged in the tagline "Wildly Historic."

The brand mark represents the iconic mining headframes that still punctuate the landscape as reminders of their heritage. DCI also developed a marketing strategy to activate the brand, along with a series of print, digital and out-of-home ads.





Talent Attraction Branding Case Study: Upstate South Carolina



Building A Modern Brand for a Booming Region

Smack dab in the middle of the booming Charlotte-Atlanta corridor is a region bursting with authentic Southern charm, affordable amenities and good-paying jobs: Upstate South Carolina. The fast-growing 10-county region wanted to attract talent from outside the region to showcase the region's lifestyle amenities and, most importantly, its job openings.

Inspired by upward momentum and the region's upstate location, DCI created the tagline, "Upstate SC: Move Up." This strong call to action hosts a double meaning and allows for multiple uses – "Move to Upstate SC", "Move Up in your career", "Move Up in life." With the new tagline in mind, DCI created a new logo that both symbolized upward movement and provided a modern take on South Carolina's state flag and its crescent moon. Paired with a mobile-first, search engine optimized website - moveupstatesc.com, DCI also developed marketing collateral and a paid media strategy.





Move Up
UPSTATE SC



Up Your Lifestyle

Case Study: Gaston County Tourism Development, NC (DCG Client)

Building and Executing a Destination Development Strategy, and Subsequent County and Community Tourism Master Plans

Key project elements included:

- Destination development strategy for county government agency prepared in 2020/2021
- Allied specific community tourism action plans (CTAPs) prepared for local TDAs (Gastonia, Belmont and Mount Holly) and Gaston College over the same time period
- Planning process including destination reconnaissance, new and proposed tourism projects identification, LeadDESTINATION survey research, city management/college leadership team meetings and ongoing DMO staff review sessions
- Destination product strategy/master plan aligned to DMO strategic plan and annual destination marketing and business plans



Case Study: Strategic Destination Master Planning, Elkhart County, IN (DCG/NTG client)



Formulating and Executing a Destination Strategy

- First not-for-profit DMO strategic plan initiated in 2012 and recent comprehensive 2023 – 2027 Well Crafting the Future strategic master plan prepared in 2022
- One year planning process covered Board/Commission retreat and steering committee meetings, online visitor and stakeholder/resident sentiment surveys, personal interviews, scheduled invited community/visitor industry proponent sessions, and full DMO staff input meetings
- Continued strong focus on destination development and tourism placemaking with interactive community engagement
- Increased attention to leisure/cultural heritage tourism marketing with appropriate brand messaging to visitors and residents
- Preparation and execution of a formalized DMO/tourism advocacy plan
- New and/or expanded tourism trail development in concert with Northern Indiana partners



Case Study: Sustainable Tourism Plan, Sedona Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Bureau, AZ (NTG client)



NTG, with the assistance of Arizona State University, crafted one of the first major Sustainable Tourism Plans in the nation.

The project went far beyond the traditional industry strategic planning process and undertook new resident, business, and visitor survey initiatives to understand sustainability issues from a broad range of perspectives. In addition to the survey initiatives, multiple public input sessions were held, as well as electronic versions where interested parties could weigh in with an on-line system. A broad range of strategies and tactics were developed centered around four Pillars – the Environment, Resident Quality of Life, the Quality of the Economy, and the Visitor Experience. This approach thus recognized that for true long-term sustainability, all four areas needed to be considered.

- The Plan was adopted by both the Chamber and its Board, as well as the City Council in 2018.
- The Sedona Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Bureau actively manages the plan's implementation and maintains an on-line system that provides insights as to progression on the plan.
- The plan continues to serve as a key element as both the organization and the City itself works to ensure Sedona maintains the allure to both residents and visitors in the future.



Case Study:

Colorado Tourism Office Tourism Recovery Strategy (TIS client)

The Colorado Tourism Office (CTO) customized the multi-year Colorado Recovery Assistance For Tourism Program to assist Colorado tourism destinations and industry associations in advancing collaborative projects to foster the long-term resilience of the statewide industry. As a consultant working on behalf of CTO, TIS-led projects included:

- Regional Tourism Alliance Facilitator and Project Implementation: TIS acted as the alliance facilitator and was responsible for conducting various assessments and surveys; engaging with core team members, land managers, and community stakeholders; and establishing regional partnerships with local organizations that advance RFVDA's mission.
- Outdoor Recreation Regional Needs Assessment: TIS collaborated with PPORA and other stakeholders to determine the core elements of a needs assessment questionnaire; developed survey instruments; analyzed survey results; and provided an interpretation report of findings.
- Destination Stewardship Stakeholder Engagement Program: TIS was responsible for interviewing land managers; establishing communication themes; defining business engagement activities; and outlining a framework for future program development.
- Tourism Supply Asset Inventory: The historic Silver Thread Scenic Byway traverses 117 miles of spectacular scenery in southwest Colorado. The rural towns along the byway of this region offer various levels of visitor services. To better understand the available services, TIS conducted a tourism supply inventory along the byway.



Case Studies:

Destination Stewardship (TIS clients)



STRATEGY & IMPLEMENTATION

Destination stewardship aims to strike a balance between visitor experience and resident quality of life. Taking a proactive approach to long term planning coupled with impact projects implementation can be transformational for outdoor communities.

Outdoor NC Stewardship Programming. TIS was contracted by Visit North Carolina to research, recommend, and develop a series of flagship programs for the state tourism office to distribute to local destination managers. Program areas included: destination stewardship learning workshops, accessible outdoor recreation communication framework, and trail town designation program.

Made x Mountains Building Outdoor Communities. TIS supported the development of regional assessment, planning, and development initiative to encourage growth in the outdoor economy. TIS led the development of the Tourism Development & Stewardship module for the program.

Mountain IDEAL. TIS authored the internationally-recognized Mountain IDEAL standard and led the development of the Mountain IDEAL program as a response to the growing demand of outdoor spaces and unfortunate impacts of over-tourism in gateway communities. TIS developed a full toolkit, online learning series, assessment and verification program, and partner network for the Mountain IDEAL Program.





Bidder Certification

dci

BIDDER CERTIFICATION

(Bidder must sign and return with proposal)

I certify that this information is complete and correct to the best of my understanding and that I am authorized to submit this information on behalf of the company.

Daniel Curren

Authorized Signature

9/14/23

Date

Executive Vice President

Title

Daniel Curren

Print/Type Name

Development Counsellors International

Print/Type Company Name