1 MARKETING RECOMMENDATIONS

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The overarching goal of the marketing initiative is to connect visitors with neighboring Parkway communities to grow employment and economic development, especially in travel, tourism, and outdoor recreation. The initiatives of Travel Itineraries, Coordinate Events, and Passport Program all had a designated action team, composed of community leaders and subject-matter experts, to fast-track each strategy.

MARKETING RECOMMENDATIONS

FIRST TIER

- WAYFINDING AND SIGNAGE
- TRAVEL ITINERARIES
- WEBSITE OR MOBILE APP
- COORDINATE EVENTS
- INTERNET ACCESS ON/NEAR THE PARKWAY
- PASSPORT/VISUAL TRAIL PROGRAM

SECOND TIER

- REGIONAL BRAND
- MARKET SEGMENTATION
- AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

ADDITIONAL CALLS TO ACTION

- TOURISM COORDINATION
- BROCHURES
- AUDIO CONTENT

1.1 WAYFINDING AND SIGNAGE

Work with the National Park Service and state Departments of Transportation (DOTs) to develop and implement wayfinding solutions on the Blue Ridge Parkway and at key intersections to lead tourists to local communities and related amenities – and back to the Parkway. The priorities for wayfinding and signage include increasing public awareness and unifying branding and information for the variety of assets found within the Parkway communities. All signage should have a unique regional brand and be consistent and uniform in design and materials.

TYPES OF SIGNAGE INCLUDE:

- Informational and directional signs or kiosks at Parkway intersections and/or visitor centers.
- Signs at Parkway overlooks with information about the Parkway communities within each viewshed.
- Within the gateway communities, signage directing visitors and residents to the Parkway.

12-24 MONTH GOAL:

Develop a master plan for a Parkway community-wide wayfinding system with a unique regional brand, including a variety of sign types and uniform design standards and material options to meet specific community needs/requirements.

KEY STEPS:

- Conduct an inventory of existing wayfinding signage programs both on the Parkway and in adjacent gateway communities.
- Complete a gap analysis regarding existing signage.
- Meet with key stakeholders (National Park Service, DOTs, community planners, transportation committees, etc.) to inform signage needs, design concepts, and locations for installation.
- Create a unique regional brand and design for the wayfinding system.
- Conduct a planning project to develop a Parkway and community-wide wayfinding master plan, including specific sign locations, types of signage, and sign information.

Examples of Wayfinding:

- Watauga County (North Carolina): https://dbdplanning.com/project/watauga-county-wayfinding/
- Rockbridge County (Virginia): https://frazierassociates.com/portfolio-item/rockbridge-county-va/
- Henderson County (North Carolina): https://merjedesign.com/henderson-county-wayfinding-signs-guide-visitors-to-our-attractions/

WATAUGA COUNTY WAYFINDING

The county-wide wayfinding system in Watauga County, North Carolina, directs visitors and residents to major locations and recreational activities in the area.

1.2 TRAVEL ITINERARIES

Create, promote, and share curated travel itineraries and themed trails that showcase the gateway communities. Itineraries can be organized geographically, thematically, or both together. Examples suggested by community members are music, art, dark skies, storytelling, agritourism, literary trails, and gravel cycling. Consider generating brochures or other print materials to complement online resources.

12-MONTH GOAL:

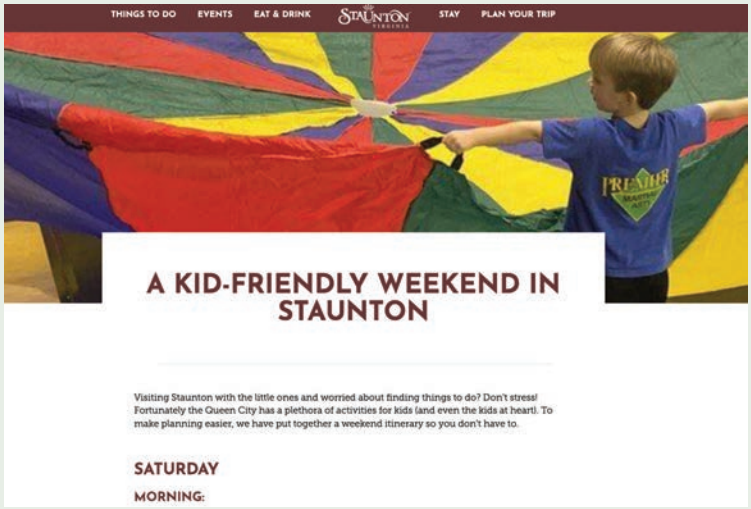
Generate 7-10 regional travel itineraries that showcase di□erent themes or geographies and develop a prototype website or webpage(s) to host travel itineraries.

Examples of Travel Itineraries:

- Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge (Virginia): www.visitroanokeva.com/plan/sample-itineraries/
- Yadkin Valley (North Carolina) www.yadkinvalleync.com/news/four-yadkin-valley-itineraries-fun-elkin-getaway/
- Visit Staunton (Virginia): https://visit-staunton.com/plan-your-trip/trip-ideas/
- Visit Amherst County (Virginia): https://visitamherstcounty.org/day-trips/

KEY STEPS:

- Catalog existing travel itineraries that organizations within the Blue Ridge Rising region have published.
- Determine the thematic categories that are compelling for tourists and suitable for the region.
- Create 7-10 regional itineraries based on the identified thematic categories that provide a broad representation of the region geographically.
- Post and share travel itineraries and corresponding materials on the internet (e.g., websites that promote the region, websites that focus on the themes highlighted in the various curated itineraries).



STAUNTON VISITOR ITINERARIES

Visit Staunton provides a list of trip suggestions to help put visitors on the right path. Itineraries include "Taste Craft Beer," "Kid-Friendly Trip," and "Date Night."

1.3 WEBSITE OR MOBILE APP

Create, regularly update, and promote a website or mobile app that provides easy access to community information, events, local businesses, intentional detour options, and mapped itineraries.

12-MONTH GOAL:

Inventory the websites and mobile apps that are currently available with information about the Parkway and Parkway communities to determine the information gaps that exist and assess what type of data and platform is needed to better serve tourists and residents. Based on feedback, develop a concept plan for meeting online visitor needs, community desires for interaction, and e□ciency of communication.

KEY STEPS:

- Catalog existing websites and mobile apps that provide information about the Parkway and Parkway communities.
- Identify the information that is most desired by tourists and residents, such as community information, local businesses, and detour options.
- Determine the best technology platform, such as a mobile website or app, to catalog, maintain, and publish the information.

Examples of a Website or Mobile App:

- The Great Allegheny Passage (Pennsylvania and Maryland): https://gaptrail.org/where-to-go/trail-towns/
- Visit Lynchburg (Virginia): www.lynchburgvirginia.org/
- Authentically Alleghany (North Carolina): https://authenticallyalleghany.com/
- NC Foothills Experience Web App (North Carolina): http://expncfoothills.com/

THE GREAT ALLEGHENY PASSAGE INTERACTIVE MAP

The Great Allegheny Passage offers 150 miles of biking and hiking from Cumberland, Maryland, to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The website and interactive map help visitors plan their trips and create sharable trip itineraries.

1.4 COORDINATE EVENTS

Coordinate and promote events that showcase the o□erings of gateway communities to Parkway travelers.

12-MONTH GOAL:

Host events at key locations on the Parkway for local communities to showcase their community o□erings, events, etc. (e.g., information booths, artist demonstrations). Investigate the potential to create an online calendar to help promote community events, resources, and programming.

Examples of Event Coordination:

- Great Smoky Mountains National Park Plein Air Event: https://friendsofthesmokies.org/plein-air/
- Explore Asheville (North Carolina): www.exploreasheville.com/event-calendar/
- Destination Bedford (Virginia): https://destinationbedfordva.com/events/
- Explore Caldwell (North Carolina): https://explorecaldwell.com/

KEY STEPS:

- Pilot an event located on the Blue Ridge Parkway that highlights the o□erings of nearby gateway communities. Identify a key location and optimal date. Coordinate with Parkway o□cials. Identify theme, criteria, and conditions for presenters and content. Invite and select presenters consistent with event purpose and size. Market and hold the event. Evaluate results. Modify event plans and expand to other sites and dates as appropriate.
- Inventory existing online content that collects and shares Parkway and community events and programming (e.g., music calendars, festival calendars, storytelling event calendars). Determine if there are significant gaps in content and coverage for Parkway visitors (e.g., by geography, type of event, or topic). As appropriate, pilot an online calendar to address one or more identified gaps, including event type(s), listing process and restrictions, etc.

PLEIN AIR EVENTS

Plein Air events, like those in Great Smoky Mountains and other national parks, provide excellent examples of in-park events that encourage visitors to learn about and engage with artists from local communities and beyond.

1.5 INTERNET ACCESS ON/NEAR THE PARKWAY

Improve visitor access to WiFi hotspots, 5G coverage, and/or AM radio stations along the Blue Ridge Parkway to help deliver travel and tourism content to visitors. Because internet connections on the Parkway are scarce, it is difficult for Parkway travelers to access helpful information during their travels, and it is equally difficult for local destinations to reach those travelers by internet. Many of the solutions are costly, and the technology is always subject to change, so low-cost and low-tech solutions have a role to play, especially in the short term.

12-MONTH GOAL:

Assess, expand, and publicize current availability of WiFi hotspots and LTE, 4G, and 5G coverage along and near the Parkway to help visitors connect with local information during their travels.

Examples of Providing and Publicizing WiFi/5G Coverage:

- Southwestern Commission (North Carolina): https://regiona.org/wifi-hotspot-interactive-map/
- Commonwealth Connection (Virginia): https://commonwealth-connection.com/
- Multiple Western National Parks: https://bit.ly/3utJtwz

KEY STEPS:

- Map current availability of cell phone coverage and WiFi hotspots along and near the Parkway, including Parkway overlooks, visitor centers, and other Parkway locations with established parking areas, as well as public and private locations within a short drive of the Parkway.
- Make this information available to the public electronically and in print (e.g., Google map, ArcGIS StoryMap, downloadable PDFs, printed brochures/flyers).
- Ask NPS/Blue Ridge Parkway to help the public identify the best on-Parkway internet access points (e.g., add content to www.nps.gov/blri, add roadway signage).
- Work with nonprofit Parkway partners and concessioners to create and publicize internet coverage and WiFi hotspots along the Parkway.
- Ask state and local officials and local businesses to help the public identify the best off-Parkway internet access points (e.g., website content, signage).
- Identify significant gaps in internet access (e.g., gaps longer than 10 miles), and pursue cost-effective options on and near the Parkway to fill those gaps.

BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY INTERNET ACCESS SIGNAGE

Internet access icons, as shown on this sign for the Bluffs Restaurant at Milepost 241, help travelers identify safe places to stop and access the internet for local travel information.

1.6 PASSPORT/VISUAL TRAIL PROGRAM

Develop a passport program, visual trail program, or Blue Ridge Parkway "bucket list" that encourages visitors to explore and return to gateway communities.

12-MONTH GOAL:

Pilot a regional visual trail program that includes at least one location for each Parkway community.

Examples of Visual Trail Programs:

- Virginia LOVEworks (Virginia): www.virginia.org/love/
- Cherokee Bears (North Carolina): https://visitcherokeenc.com/play/outdoor-adventure/cherokee-bears/
- Quilt Trails (North Carolina): www.haywoodarts.org/county-quilt-trail-information/
- Appalachian Mural Trail: https://www.muraltrail.com/

KEY STEPS:

- Determine the criteria for the location and type of art (mural, sculpture, etc.) that can qualify as a visual icon within a Parkway community.
- Create a specific icon or regionally-branded type of art, such as the Parkway mile marker post, that Parkway communities can design or paint to represent the unique aspects of the community.
- Develop funding mechanisms (i.e., small grants) that would enable all communities to participate in the branded program.
- Develop online content, curated travel itineraries, hashtags, and other means to publicize the program and locations.

LOVEworks at Blue Ridge Visitor Center in Meadows of Dan, Virginia.

LOVEWORKS BRANDING INITIATIVE

LOVEworks is a state-wide branding initiative designed to promote travel throughout Virginia and generate organic promotion.

1.7 SECOND TIER

REGIONAL BRAND

Create a unique regional brand for "designated" Blue Ridge Parkway communities. This brand should be similar or related to the brand created for wayfinding and signage. Many regional trails such as the Great Allegheny Passage and the Appalachian Trail have trail town programs with a unique brand, unified signage, and a website that help attract visitors to the towns.

MARKET SEGMENTATION

Develop and implement plans to attract more types of Blue Ridge Parkway visitors. The region already benefits from general marketing and awareness of the entire Blue Ridge Parkway; marketing to specific audiences and interests will grow Parkway visitation. The 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States in 2026 (a.k.a., America 250) provides another very specific marketing opportunity. To help fill weekday vacancies, several project participants suggested marketing the Blue Ridge Parkway region as a prime location for corporate retreats, business meetings, and team-building events. This market segmentation strategy also complements the travel itinerary strategy by ensuring that itineraries are actively promoted to the appropriate market segment (e.g., "dark sky" itineraries should be promoted and shared in media outlets that focus on astronomy).

AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

Work with National Park Service (NPS), partners, and volunteers to create an Ambassador program for sta and volunteers at Blue Ridge Parkway visitor centers and other Parkway venues (e.g., Blu s Restaurant). Ambassadors will be knowledgeable about outdoor recreation, cultural assets, restaurants, lodging, and other opportunities in Parkway communities, and will encourage Parkway travelers to visit, explore, and stay in nearby gateway communities. The Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation has previously funded an Interpreter-in-Residence at Crabtree Falls, and that model might provide another means of adding "ambassador" capacity along the Parkway.

1.8 ADDITIONAL CALLS TO ACTION

TOURISM COORDINATION

Coordinate a quarterly call for Destination Marketing Organization/Tourism Directors for all Parkway communities to help facilitate regional collaboration and co-marketing. Building stronger relationships among the tourism professionals within the Parkway communities can help present a more unified regional voice in terms of marketing and promotion, while also reducing competition and redundancy.

BROCHURES

Generate brochures or rack cards that promote specific gateway communities, and make them available at locations on the Blue Ridge Parkway. Although a significant portion of marketing has moved online or to QR codes, many visitors still seek out brochures to learn about things to do on or near the Parkway. Printed information is especially helpful in areas where internet access is limited or non-existent.

AUDIO CONTENT

Produce audio content showcasing the gateway communities. Opportunities include podcasts, AM radio intersection messaging, and recorded audio tours. Many visitors enjoy tuning into audio content before or during their trip to learn about the region or to experience a guided itinerary. An example of this is the Headwaters podcast (https://glacier.org/headwaters/) about Glacier National Park that is produced with support from the Glacier National Park Conservancy.