HUERFANO COUNTY TOURISM BOARD

2020 Strategy
PARTICIPANTS
In attendance, Karen Wilson, Sarah Jardis, Kat Correll, Olan Adams, Dominic Elizondo, Evan Ksander, Bryan Jordan, Kerry Jordan, Max Vezzani, Debbie Channel, Bob Kennemer, John Galusha, Carl Young.

PURPOSE
The Huerfano County Tourism Board (HCTB) is seeking to establish a strategy and action plan for the next three to five years. The strategic planning discussion for the HCTB considered the past accomplishments, input from stakeholders, and the Board’s ideas for moving forward. The abbreviated process intended to take stock of where the Board sees the effort moving next and identifying some strategic goals to direct the future action.

TOURISM BOARD MISSION + VISION
In the first quarter of 2020, the Tourism Board will revisit the Mission and Vision as an exercise in the first quarter of 2020. The Mission is primarily used in RFPs and grant applications. The Vision statement is used as a guide for the board.

Mission Statement: The HCTB mission statement should describe what your organization does. As you focus on your mission each day, it can assist to reach the vision.

Vision Statement: The HCTB vision statement should be how envision your organization. The vision statement should be reviewed continuously to ensure it is still aligned with the Board.

2017-2019 ACCOMPLISHMENTS
Marketing initiatives focused on reaching visitors and promoting the Huerfano experience to potential visitors were most successful.

- Last two years increase in lodging tax from $50k to $75k.
- Completed Highway of Legends Audio Tour.
- Successful contract and rebranding with VistaWorks, including a refresh of all materials for the website, Facebook, social media, and print brochure.
- Success with grants: Craft 101, CTO Grants, History CO Grant, Branding & Visitors guide funding, new marketing grant.
- Change of Colorado Tourism Office (CTO) districts, alliance with San Luis Valley Tourism Association (SLVTA)
- Hwy of Legends progress
- Engaged in the Dark Skies Initiative
AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The Tourism Board focused on bringing in visitors and has focused less on developing internal partnerships and connecting with locals. Building stronger partnerships, sharing initiatives and accomplishments with locals, and identifying more authentic local content is a proposed area for enhanced activity.

- Develop a newsletter sign up campaign. Better utilize FB pages, blogs, etc.
- Follow up with stakeholders and survey respondents
- Share the Tourism Board 2020 plan with stakeholders
- Establish and build a stakeholder contact list
- Share data and results on a quarterly basis with stakeholders
- Explore mobile rack card station option to share info through other events
- Coordinate a County Tourism/Hospitality
- Increase outreach and engagement of vacation rentals, hunting outfitters and other accommodations

STAKEHOLDER INPUT

Prior to the Huerfano Tourism Board Retreat, a survey was distributed to local partners and stakeholders to collect input and feedback for the discussion. Some of the recurring themes explored were:

- Showing good progress, there is appreciation for website, branding, positive feedback on Heritage Tourism accomplishments
- Need for locally focused marketing and engagement. Build on the opportunity to increase engagement with YouTube, Podcasting, Instagram, Newsletter, etc.
- Support for local businesses and attractions. Help with marketing, link to tourism marketing, creating marketing collaborations.
- Support specific venues/assets. For example, Cuchara Mountain Park, Fox Theatre Walsenburg, Museum of Friends.
- A need for attractions and resources. For example, lodging, restaurants, places that are open.
- Negative perceptions. For example, appearances, image, crime, etc.
- Need to promote outdoor assets. For example, parks, trails, outdoors.
STRENGTHS, WEAKENESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, + THREATS (SWOT)

The following ideas were some of the most common responses and areas highlighted in the Board discussion. A SWOT analysis provides the Board with a brief review of your internal and external position and placement for next steps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
<th>WEAKNESSES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Natural Environment</td>
<td>Awareness of public lands</td>
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<td>Parks and Recreation</td>
<td>Lack of local Engagement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cuchara Mountain</td>
<td>No holistic strategy/clear target audience</td>
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<td>Non-Profit Partners</td>
<td>Lacking dynamic business websites</td>
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<td>Fox Theater not energy efficiency</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>THREATS</th>
<th>OPPORTUNITY</th>
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<tr>
<td>Poor image</td>
<td>Reopening golf course</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of lodging and restaurants</td>
<td>Guide to Huerfano public lands/trails</td>
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<td>Expand newsletter audience and content</td>
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<td>Expand YouTube and Instagram content</td>
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<td>Expand support for local businesses/non-profits to enhance web presence, find grants, etc.</td>
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<td>Develop a rack card</td>
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<td>Post local events</td>
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<td>Promote local business openings</td>
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<td>Develop the idea of “Part of the Family”</td>
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<td>Develop small recurring events – Film Festival</td>
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EVENT REVIEW

In a quick review of the largest events in Huerfano County, the following list demonstrates the number of events bringing visitors to the area. This represents a huge opportunity for the Tourism Board and partners to build stronger connections with these event participants to expand events to keep visitors an extra day or to bring them back for other events during the years. Consider the events that focus on Visitors and explore the opportunity for marketing at event, through registration or other information distribution, and with visitor feedback.
Additional discussion included the dates of the events, with the common understanding that all of the largest events are planned between April and October. When considering new events, encourage partners to establish events in the off season to shape year round tourism rather than adding more content in the times that are already busy.

**STRATEGIC GOALS AND ACTION STEPS**

Strategic goals are statements that if accomplished will take you closer to your vision. The more focused actions will lead toward accomplishing the strategic goals, directly aligning with the mission and vision statements. The next step will be to set some milestones for the “how to” and “when” of implementing the actions. Include a focus on projects that might connect several goals and use the project planning template to strategically think through each project.

**TOP PRIORITIES:**

- Self-promotion of Tourism Board efforts and accomplishments
- Spur greater collaboration/communication with stakeholders including HCED, LVCCC, SPBA, County, and Employers.
- Cultivate a Hospitality initiative with contacts and collaboration
STRATEGIC GOAL 1:
EXPAND INTERNAL MARKETING TO BUILD STRONGER PARTNERSHIPS + AWARENESS AROUND HUERFANO TOURISM INITIATIVES

- **Local awareness building.** Expand communications to reach local audiences to increase awareness of initiatives with locals, businesses, non-profits, event planners, and other potential partners.
- **Celebrate successes.** Create a focused approach toward self-promotion of accomplishments, sharing the good news of grant funding, focus on the economic impact of tourism tax collected and dollars spent.
- **Invite local participation consistently.** Send an invitation with a link to join the Huerfano Tourism Newsletter to ALL emails available. Include a further invitation to share relevant stories, successes, or ideas that can be used for additional content and partnership building.
- **Broaden your reach.** Build a list of contact emails and groups who can further distribute and invite participation in Tourism Board efforts. Review current lists including the Huerfano hospitality industry, County Employees, SPBA, and LVCCC, and then brainstorm other groups that will help share communication.
- **Share the strategy broadly.** Make sure that locals and partners receive a thank you for responding to the survey, a link to view the Tourism Board Strategy document, an invite to join the newsletter, and a regular update of projects completed, in progress, or in need of additional resources with survey respondents and recipients of the newsletter.

Marketing notes: Authenticity, being ‘In the Know’, ‘part of the family’, inviting people who share our interests and values, ‘fam/concierge tour’, discounts, ‘Taste of Events’

STRATEGIC GOAL 2:
LOCAL BUSINESS SUPPORT/TRAINING & EXPANSION OF HUERFANO COUNTY TOURISM & HOSPITALITY RESOURCES.

Ensuring that While the Tourism Board may not be the primary partner to train businesses, it is a key player in identifying the need, areas to focus on, and to help promote the general effort.

- **Develop an inventory of hospitality partners.** Work with Sector Partnership & Business (SPBA) Resource Analyst to build a list of hospitality industry businesses and non-profits.
- **Establish an annual convening, training, and team building for hospitality partners.** Support the effort to create a Huerfano Tourism Hospitality Conference. Consider how to engage the Chamber, Business Alliance, Colorado Tourism Office, Workforce Development, and other partners to facilitate content and sponsor the event.
• **Renew efforts to stock guidebooks and local information at all hotels, vacation rentals, and hunting lodges.** Enlist the support of the Chamber to collect and update the Huerfano visitor guidebook and ensure availability in lodging establishments. Similarly, work with the Chamber to maintain inserts in the Western Spirits and other publications.

• **Establish a “cheat sheet” of local amenities and attractions to assist front line employees.** Enlist the support of the Chamber to develop a short list of talking points by region of the county for local “Front Line” employees who frequently encounter visitors (hotels, gas stations, grocery, restaurant, etc.) might help communicate to visitors.

• **Create locally focused events to educate front line employees.** Enlist the support of the Chamber to develop regional familiarity events for local Front Line employees to experience the restaurants, retail, and services available in Huerfano County.

• **Consider workforce and housing needs to support a growing industry.** While markets will adapt as demand grows, it is useful to track and communicate trends to local owners so that they can plan investments and remain current. Working with municipalities and economic development efforts can assist in encouraging local investment to maintain the authentic spirit of Huerfano.

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**STRATEGIC GOAL 3: EXPAND MARKETING AROUND OUTDOOR RECREATION.**

**BUILDING A WAY FORWARD THAT PROTECTS OUR ‘UNSPOILED’ FEEL - THAT PROMOTES ‘HIDDEN GEMS’**

• **Build an inventory of recreational partners.** Invite participation in collaborative marketing from hunting lodges, outfitters, guides, etc. that are working Huerfano. Establish a contact list and process for collecting information around services, products, and promotional content.

• **Review and expand online content for Huerfano trails.** Engage local trails experts to review the information available on existing apps for exploring Colorado trails systems like COTREX, Open Snow/Open Summit, etc. Consider the content and how to promote “Hidden Gems” without sacrificing the unspoiled feel.

• **Broaden social media and online impacts.** Establish and use hashtags to promote Huerfano outdoor recreation opportunities and track the uses.

• **Invite content sharing.** Broaden connection with local recreational businesses and services by inviting them to share content that can be used in Newsletter, blog posts, and social media posts.
STRATEGIC GOAL 4: EXPAND THE TOURISM YEAR ROUND

- **Establish a list of parameters for tourism expansion.** Consider the October to April timeframe, the amenities and services that are open (which days, hours, etc.), and itineraries and local activities that could add to a visitor’s experience. Use this information to establish a framework to shape a call for ideas for expanding tourism into the off season.

- **Invite partners to plan winter events.** Create an invitation to local and existing event planners, outdoor recreation entrepreneurs, venues/lodging, etc. to propose ideas for off season events that fit into established parameters. Some ideas to target include: CMP winter season events (expand Howl & Growl); Fox Theatre Walsenburg. Look at possibility of recurring events, that can be flexible and resilient against weather impacts such as the Fox Film Festival. Other festival ideas: Mushroom Festival, Huerfano Wind Festival, more Star Gazing related events, etc.

- **Solicit content from locals.** Create an ongoing campaign with a call for sharing “Huerfano Winter Tales” and activities that take place October to April that share the Huerfano Experience. Use the content in newsletter, online marketing, and other marketing venues.

- **Consider how to cross promote for Cuchara Mountain Park (CMP).** Consider significant updates for the CMP website that indicates the park is open and invites people to use it. Expand the winter activities section with more details on do it yourself activities (like cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, hiking, star gazing, animal spotting, etc.) that anyone could do without a guide. Expand the details and possibly frequency of planned events, like How and Growl. Remove dates from event posters that make the content appear outdated. Consider sharing new content with Colorado.com for the CMP.

- **GOAL:** Review timing, and look at the calendar re: seasonality and timing of additional events. Possibility of partnering with event folks above on new events.

STRATEGIC GOAL 5: RENEWED FOCUS ON HIGHWAY OF LEGENDS

- **Continue the Highway of Legends marketing efforts.** The Highway of Legends marketing has been successful and should be maintained and updated regularly. Consider how to link to outdoor recreational activities and connect with events and visitor draws in the October to April timeframe.

- **Expand Highway of Legend content to showcase assets.** The Highway of Legends now connects Colorado’s first State Park to the newest CO State Park, and Cuchara Mountain Park (CMP) is in the middle. Build more language into the Highway of Legends about Huerfano County assets to foster the idea of destinations rather than a stop in the path.
• Invite local businesses and non-profits to create Highway of Legend activities and merchandise. Consider how best to foster “must see” stop on the Highway while creating an opportunity for visitors to market the trip. Post cards are a great opportunity for visitors to share their experience. Murals that inspire selfies are also a great thing to advertise.

MEASURING IMPACTS

Increased Tax Revenue. The primary impact from Tourism Board activities focuses on increasing the number of room nights for lodging, with an ancillary impact on sales tax from dollars spend by visitors. Tracking progress in this area will include monitoring and reporting on:
  • Increased lodging tax revenues
  • Increased sales tax revenues

Ancillary Long-Term Impacts. Secondary impacts result from additional investment in the built environment to bring new housing, rehabilitate sub-standard housing, and allow for a greater number of Huerfano residents. Tracking progress in this area will include monitoring and reporting on:
  • Increased housing stock 5%/increased population
  • Increased participation of short term lodging/vacation rentals in tourism
  • More restaurants and retailers

Connectivity + Communication Impacts. The Tourism Board’s 2020 Plan includes a strong focus on building stronger connections with visitors and enhancing local awareness and engagement. Tracking progress in this area will include monitoring and reporting on:
  • Increased newsletter subscriptions
  • Increased social media marketing and trackability
  • Increase and track media exposure, promote the ‘earned media’ results
  • Build social media influencer campaigns
### PROJECT PLANNING CHECKLIST

**Primary Project Goal:**

**Project Partners:**

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<th>STRATEGIC GOAL</th>
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<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>3: OUTDOOR RECREATION</td>
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<tr>
<td>4: RENEWED FOCUS ON HIGHWAY OF LEGENDS</td>
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<tr>
<td>5: EXPANSION OF WINTER TOURISM</td>
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