

Kentucky Department of Tourism

2022–2026 STRATEGIC PLAN



TEAM 
KENTUCKY

DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM

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MENDENHALL'S ROAD MAP OF KENTUCKY.

MOVING KENTUCKY'S TOURISM INDUSTRY FORWARD

Hello,

On behalf of the entire Kentucky Department of Tourism team, and in support of all our industry partners statewide, we are excited to share our 2022-2026 Strategic Plan.

As we think about the passion and commitment put forth by so many to create this plan, we are reminded of the wisdom found in our state motto:

United we stand, divided we fall.

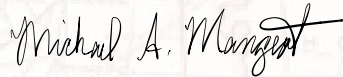
The development of this plan has truly been a united effort, deeply rooted in a spirit of generous industry collaboration and inspired by an exciting vision of possibility and new opportunity for our industry. We are grateful for the passion and commitment shown by the hundreds of partners with whom we engaged statewide. Their insight and wisdom are what made this plan possible—and will be what continues to make Kentucky the unique and special experience it is for the millions of travelers who travel here each year.

The plan offers a bold path forward. You will read about the Department's five areas of focus—informed by what we heard through our statewide survey, Town Hall-style listening sessions in all nine of our tourism regions, and a 26-person Industry Advisory Panel. You will also learn about the many action-oriented initiatives we created, each designed to solidify Kentucky as a top U.S. travel destination, while at the same time honoring our rich culture and heritage and preserving the unique quality of life for all Kentuckians.

We look forward to many good things to come as a result of implementing this plan. As important, we look forward to our continued partnership with you as we all do our part to inspire travelers from around the world to discover the diversity and abundance of the Kentucky story.



Michael E. Berry
Secretary
Kentucky Tourism, Arts, and Heritage Cabinet



Michael Mangeot
Commissioner
Kentucky Department of Tourism




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ABOUT THIS PLAN

This Strategic Plan provides a North Star for Kentucky Department of Tourism and a roadmap for our partners in the Kentucky travel and tourism industry. It was informed by guidance we received through a statewide survey, discussions with a volunteer industry advisory panel, and listening sessions conducted in all nine of Kentucky's tourism regions.

Five Imperatives—those big moves that must be accomplished if the plan is to be successful—are at the center of the Plan. Each Imperative is supported by a set of Initiatives designed to achieve the Imperative, and Performance Measures that will measure progress. We may choose to work on several Initiatives at a time, or take on one or two at a time. The Initiatives are not meant to be an inflexible to-do list. Rather, they should be reviewed regularly to ensure the work specified continues to meet the Performance Measures tied to each Imperative.

To ensure the Imperatives and Initiatives track toward success in accomplishing the goals of the Plan, KDT will identify a Plan Manager to help move the plan forward. This person is responsible for tracking progress on Initiatives and communicating the status of the Plan with staff. In addition to a Plan Manager, each Initiative will have a person in charge of moving it toward completion, working in close collaboration with other KDT team members.

There will be a quarterly report from the Plan Manager to staff on progress made toward accomplishing the work of the Plan, with a semi-annual review of Initiatives to ensure they continue to remain responsive to unforeseen developments impacting Kentucky's travel and tourism industry. Work on each Initiative should progress with a cadence as agreed upon between the Plan Manager and each Initiative Lead. Last, we will report to our statewide industry stakeholders once a year on the progress of the Plan.

Overview





Kentucky Department of Tourism embarked upon the creation of a Four-Year Strategic Plan in the summer of 2021. The purpose of the Plan is to set a course for the Agency, Kentucky's travel and tourism industry, and the destination over the next four years. KDT engaged Coraggio Group and Michele Shelton, LLC to support the creation of this work.

The first steps in the process of developing the Plan included gaining feedback from industry stakeholders on priorities, challenges, and opportunities. A survey was made available in early August 2021 and had 143 respondents. Additionally, nine listening sessions were held throughout the state, also in August 2021, with a total of 75 participants. Feedback from these engagement efforts was synthesized into a comprehensive Situation Assessment that provided strategic context for a series of planning sessions to create the Plan.

A Planning Team of KDT executive, management, and front-line staff met over multiple sessions through the fall of 2021 to create the Strategic Plan. The elements of the Strategic Plan are below. To ensure alignment of the Strategic Plan with Kentucky's travel and tourism industry, an Advisory Panel was convened in mid-October to review the work, share insights, and provide guidance.


Strategic Clarity

 **VISION**
The ideal future state we are striving to create for Kentucky as a destination


 **REPUTATION**
What we want to be known for as an organization


 **MISSION**
The core purpose of our work


 **POSITION**
The key differentiators of Kentucky as a destination

 **VALUES**
The fundamental beliefs that shape how we work together as a team and serve our partners and stakeholders statewide

Strategic Focus & Action

 **IMPERATIVES**
What must be accomplished over the planning horizon and our overarching areas of focus

 **INITIATIVES**
The big bodies of work we will take on

 **PERFORMANCE MEASURES**
How we will measure success

Strategic Clarity



Kentucky Department of Tourism



VISION

A flourishing quality of life for all Kentuckians who are enriched by Kentucky's authentic roots, while welcoming all visitors who find themselves here time and again.



MISSION

We promote premier visitor experiences, care for Kentucky's natural beauty and cultural heritage, and ensure tourism's critical role in enhancing a thriving statewide economy and quality of life. Through marketing, education, partnerships, and exemplary customer service, we inspire travelers from around the world to discover the diversity and abundance of the Kentucky story.



VALUES

Dedicated Service. We bring care and compassion to all our relationships.

Spirit of Kentucky. We are proud of Kentucky, confident in its future, and share a passion for telling its story.

The Power of Inclusivity. We foster trust, authenticity, and diversity. We value and respect the collective strength of our differences.

Meeting the Challenge. We embrace a can-do attitude. Through adaptable leadership and teamwork, there is no challenge we cannot successfully address.



REPUTATION

We will be known as:

- Knowledgeable, passionate, and effective leaders in the industry.
- Inclusive, welcoming, and responsive for all.
- Curious and courageous partners seeking innovations to benefit all stakeholders.
- Trustworthy and collaborative tourism professionals who are best in class.



POSITION

Kentucky is a premier destination for unforgettable and authentic travel experiences that truly connect visitors with Kentucky's people and places. Kentucky is renowned for its equine culture and events like the Kentucky Derby, which energize and enliven the state. Similarly, Kentucky is synonymous with the history, art, and craft of bourbon, and how it brings people together. Visitors become part of a bigger and enduring story when they come here.

And Kentucky has so much more to discover. From our smallest towns to our largest cities, our main streets offer authentic connections to the history, people, and places that make up Kentucky's stories. Our one-of-a-kind attractions, like the Corvette Museum and Mammoth Cave, bring avid niche travelers to Kentucky, then invite them to explore more. And our abundant outdoor recreation opportunities, from boating to world-class rock climbing, to robust biking and hiking trails can satisfy the most curious of adventurers. For the traveler seeking deeply connecting travel experiences, authenticity, and inspiration, Kentucky is the place.

Strategic Focus and Action



Develop the full potential of Kentucky's unique and diverse visitor experiences.

 PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- Increase average statewide hotel occupancy by 4% by 2026, using 2019 as the baseline.
- Increase visitor spend by 10% by 2026, using 2019 as the baseline.
- Increase the number of visitors by 10% by 2026, using 2019 as the baseline.
- Establish a baseline of the number of underrepresented and minority-owned businesses currently active within the tourism industry.

 INITIATIVES

Design and implement a regional Tourism Development Initiative. KDT will establish a Tourism Development Initiative in each of our nine tourism regions. The program will promote connection, enhancement, and success of Kentucky's tourism industry by engaging stakeholders in purposeful conversations and interactions, and providing informational, networking and other supportive resources. It will assist the regions in the development of new, and enhancing existing, tourism products and experiences that capitalize on emerging opportunities and tourism trends, and align with Kentucky Tourism's brand, vision, and mission. This work will serve to enhance Kentucky's relevance as a leading U.S. travel destination that honors local authenticity, perspectives, and overall quality of life.

Enhance Kentucky's existing products and visitor experiences. In the spirit of continuous improvement, KDT can take a more active role in helping to ensure and support the success of the state's existing portfolio of visitor experiences. With an emphasis on those tourism products and visitor experiences that have historically played a key role in driving visitation to and within the state, KDT will take steps to further understand what support and/or enhancements are needed to realize the full potential of identified regional "anchor" offerings and lesser-known local favorites.

Develop a comprehensive inventory and assessment of Kentucky's statewide tourism products and visitor experiences. As we imagine the long-term relevance of Kentucky as a destination, it's important to take intentional steps to understand our starting point. This initiative will be designed to do just that—develop a comprehensive inventory of our state's existing visitor experiences, including key attractions at every scale, in all nine tourism regions. This inventory will be used as a basis for

understanding ways KDT might partner with local DMOs and other tourism partners to further promote and amplify messaging that leads to increased visitation or, where needed, develop or provide access to programs that help local businesses enhance their tourism products and offerings.

Partner to innovate new visitor experiences that showcase the depth and richness of the Kentucky story. The creation of our Strategic Plan was based on robust input from industry stakeholders statewide. Through this process, we heard a common refrain: "Kentucky is much more than horses and bourbon." To be clear, the spirit of this sentiment was not expressed as guidance to walk away from Kentucky's legacy industries of horses and bourbon. It was offered as encouragement to expand the lens and intentionally expose the full riches that bless every region of our state. To do this, KDT will leverage incentive programs to create new product development throughout the state and bring greater balance to the perception of Kentucky as a world-class visitor destination.

Help our partners effectively leverage technology to improve the visitor experience. It's no secret that technological advances have dramatically changed the way we travel—and will only continue to do so over time. Emerging technologies are reshaping the visitor experience from end to end. Evidence of this is clear, especially when considering the impact of the tech-savvy Millennial and Gen Z generations, the purchasing power they represent, and how they consume, learn, and interact. This Initiative will be organized to bring needed modernization guidance, education, and assistance to stakeholders across our state on how to adapt to new visitor-facing technology solutions—especially those that are fast becoming expected by travelers as they not only make their travel decisions, but often evaluate the quality of their destination experience.



IMPERATIVE

Strengthen the branding pillars that position Kentucky as an iconic, multi-faceted U.S. destination for generations to come.



PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- Increase earned media impressions by 3% per year, using 2021 as the baseline.
- Establish a baseline for earned media impression on platforms in diverse markets which may include racial, gender and generational. As markets are established, then a year-over-year target increase for future years will be projected for those diverse markets.
- Increase number of visitors from top five target markets by 10% by 2026, using 2019 as the baseline.
- Increase year-over-year visitor spend by 3%, using 2019 as the baseline.



INITIATIVES

Maximize Kentucky's unique cultural and geographic diversity. We acknowledge and are proud of the brand we have carefully nurtured over the years. As a result, we have achieved an unparalleled, world-renowned reputation for horses and bourbon. No other destination can claim these one-of-a-kind icons. And while we will never walk away from these fundamental pillars that have become synonymous with the spirit of Kentucky, we know they are only the tip of the iceberg in terms of what can inspire visitation to our state. An abundance of opportunity comes to mind when thinking about all that Kentucky has to offer. Our rich culture and heritage, the vibe of our small towns set against the backdrop of stunning geographic diversity, make our state truly remarkable. This initiative seeks to expand and build upon our legendary reputation for horses and bourbon and begin to cultivate a reputation that speaks to a more diverse range of visitors. We will develop content that helps us inspire travel through compelling stories that reveal local culture and heritage, better promoting Kentucky's many hidden gems—those little-known activities and attractions that only our state can boast. We will also take steps to dive deeper into our unique music and culinary scenes that give evidence of unique Kentucky experiences. Finally, we will develop a comprehensive plan to position Kentucky as a first-choice destination for outdoor recreation enthusiasts.

Strengthen and expand industry and visitor research to make better informed investment strategies. Our Strategic Plan outlines a range of bold steps not only to solidify but, as important, sustain Kentucky's reputation as a top U.S. travel destination. To do this successfully, KDT will need to expand and further enhance its research and data analysis capabilities to understand visitor demand trends, inform its future investment decisions, determine product development strategies, and provide additional value to industry stakeholders.

Support, strengthen, and elevate partners to increase industry impact.

 PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- Increase visitor satisfaction by 4% by 2026, using 2021 as the baseline.
- Establish baseline resident sentiment (aggregated and disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, LGBTQ+, disability, and socio-economic status), then project a year-over-year target increase for future years.
- Establish baseline number of KDT-led trainings/education opportunities in 2022, then project a year-over-year target increase for future years.
- Establish baseline attendance at KDT trainings in 2022, then project a year-over-year target increase for future years.
- Establish DEI industry training and baseline for attendance in 2022, then project a year-over-year target increase for future years.
- Establish baseline of KDT partnerships and collaborations to increase tourism industry awareness and engagement of diverse populations for attraction development in 2022, then project a year-over-year target increase for future years.
- Establish a baseline of statewide college-level tourism and hospitality programs and identify opportunities to increase engagement of diverse populations.

 INITIATIVES

Develop and deliver industry training. With the travel and tourism industry evolving at a rapid pace, and with many new people entering the industry as professionals, there is a clear need for initial and ongoing industry-wide education and training. KDT will survey the industry to understand its needs for training and will develop and administer training programs in response. The outcome of this effort will be to help elevate the industry as it delivers travel experiences to increasingly diverse and technologically savvy visitors.

Cultivate more robust industry collaboration and engagement. While we collaborate and engage with other travel partners in Kentucky, now there is space to deepen these connections. Efforts focused on regional collaboration, communications between KDT and local partners, collaboration across different aspects of the industry—i.e., lodging, restaurant, attractions, and association partnerships—could bring greater strength and cohesion to the industry and raise its prominence within the state and to travelers.

Raise awareness of the travel/tourism industry. Across the state there are key allies and partners who participate in the overall success of the travel and tourism industry. Ensuring all understand the economic, social, and environmental impact of tourism on the state and within a particular region, as well as how policy changes can affect these impacts, allows us to grow the circle of partners who are aware and supportive of the travel and tourism industry, and its contributions to the quality of life of all Kentuckians.

Develop a plan to engage residents to foster positive sentiment for tourism. The success of our tourism economy is based in part on host communities' understanding the value of tourism and creating welcoming visitor experiences for all. KDT may seek to utilize surveys or other tools to better understand resident sentiment, then be responsive to the feedback received. KDT may then develop a resident engagement plan based upon feedback from this engagement to further cultivate positive feelings among residents statewide.

Develop locally driven ambassador programs. Part of a destination's greatness stems from its residents' value of tourism. Identifying education opportunities that include the community fosters an investment in the positive impacts and benefits of tourism on local quality of life. An ambassadorship program, be it to support outdoor recreation assets or to promote local events, is one way to do so. Creating ambassadorship programs allows for communities to honor their uniqueness and local quality of life. It also helps them think about their businesses as being tourism-ready and create a pro-tourism environment that benefits from existing and future visitors. This will be especially important as marketing of Kentucky reaches greater audiences and more people come to our state.



Share the role of improving Kentucky's tourism-related infrastructure with other partners and decision-makers.

 PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- Increase the 1% transient room tax by 2-3% per year, using 2019 as the baseline.
- 100% of Kentucky's state parks and Visitor Centers are serviced by broadband by 2026.

 INITIATIVES

Expand relationships with federal, state, and regional partners. Many of the challenges the tourism industry confronts are not solvable by the tourism industry alone. While many relationships already exist between us and partners at the federal, state, and regional level, continued energy can be applied to expand and further strengthen these relationships. Doing so will grow our ecosystem of partners and allies in the on-going promotion of sound tourism.

Partner with other entities to address signage and wayfinding needs of the industry. Currently, signage and wayfinding along Kentucky's major thoroughfares can do more in support of a vital and vibrant tourism industry. Many attractions could benefit from having more signage for visitors to know they are there or how to navigate. Signage, while not our purview, affects how successful we are in promoting and increasing visitation around the state. By partnering with those entities that oversee signage and associated rights-of-way, we can affect change in how this infrastructure is delivered.

Partner with other entities to address transportation needs of the industry. Similar to signage and wayfinding, there are aspects of Kentucky's transportation system that prevent the state from being a premier destination for visitors. While we do not control these transportation infrastructure assets, we can partner and educate those agencies that do, so solutions may be considered that address industry needs. Infrastructure assets to consider include, but are not limited to, interstate bridge and road capacity leading into Kentucky, airlift capacity at major airports, public transportation, and rideshare programs.

Address tourism's needs for universal broadband coverage. Visitors have come to expect decent wireless coverage while they travel for wayfinding, learning when businesses are open, and discovering other nearby attractions. Kentucky's coverage is currently lacking, with many places, even those close to larger cities, or as under-resourced and underserved communities within those cities, having little to no coverage. KDT can work with other governmental partners to emphasize the importance of this service to the tourism industry in an effort to expedite the delivery of statewide broadband coverage.

Partner to cultivate a strong and sustained workforce. Kentucky, like the rest of the nation, has seen a decline in the size of the hospitality workforce, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many people were laid off or furloughed at the beginning of the pandemic and the return to work has been slow. Rebuilding the hospitality workforce will take a coordinated effort by all hospitality partners to share the stories of what it means to work in the industry and what career opportunities exist for growth. Additionally, training opportunities exist to better prepare hospitality industry workers to engage with travelers, be it greater knowledge of nearby attractions, how to integrate inclusiveness into interactions, or new ways of bringing the unique brand of Kentucky hospitality to client communications.

Develop and deploy a Visitor Center kiosk system. Kentucky's Visitor Centers are often the first line of interaction for visitors who drive to and through our state. While nothing will ever substitute for the value and connection of interacting with staff at the Visitor Centers and gaining their knowledge, the Centers are not staffed 24 hours a day. Developing and deploying a visitor kiosk system will enable KDT to offer information to visitors and provide the opportunity to share tips, attractions, lodging, and restaurant suggestions with visitors any time of the day or night.

Ensure operational excellence in service of the tourism industry.

 PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- Increase mean employee engagement score from 4.04 to 4.2, using 2021 Gallup Q12 survey as the baseline.
- Increase workplace diversity specific to race/ethnicity and gender as measured by, at minimum, Kentucky state labor force and population data.
- Achieve 100% staff participation in DEI-related learning and development opportunities provided by KDT.
- Increase internal Net Promoter Score from 26 (good) to 40 (excellent) by 2026.

 INITIATIVES

Develop and implement an internal DEI learning and development program. Defining what diversity means to KDT will be an early step in the journey to greater diversity, equity, and inclusion for the Agency and Kentucky as a destination. Arriving at a shared definition will be part of a DEI learning and development program that will not only seek clarity on what DEI means, but also seek to identify and launch initiatives to move KDT along its DEI journey towards equity and inclusivity. Doing so will enhance our organization, promote insightful stakeholder connections, and translate into new and innovate ways to promote the destination.

Document and improve workflow efficiency across the organization. Enhancing the flow of work across the organization will empower KDT to become even more effective in what it does to serve the state and tourism industry. This may include the development of standard operating procedures, organizing these in a central location, and ensuring staff have the knowledge and ability to access these procedures. Doing this will provide a common understanding of the organization and provide assurance for staff that they know how the Department operates, and their roles within the organization.

Improve key internal communication channels. With the large number of efforts underway at any given time, having clearer communications will provide greater efficiency in ensuring all staff are aware of the work within the Department. Similarly, there are differing views of how successful communications are between: the executive team, management, and staff; and from headquarters to the Visitor Centers. Developing a robust agency-wide approach will provide additional transparency in how work is accomplished and how decisions are made, contributing to a highly productive, healthy organization.

Attract, recruit, develop and retain a diverse team. In the spirit of ensuring KDT is representative of the state it promotes, KDT will seek to attract, recruit, develop, and retain a diverse team. Doing so will bring a sense of inclusivity and belonging to the KDT workforce, as well as a greater range of observations, experiences, and perspectives to bear on the work of the Agency, ultimately informing the way Kentucky is marketed as a welcoming destination to potential visitors.



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Advisory Panel:

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