



NORTH CAROLINA MOUNTAIN TOWNS OF CASHIERS,
CHEROKEE, DILLSBORO AND SYLVA

To: Full TDA Board

From: Nick Breedlove, TDA Director *Nick*

Date: December 7, 2018

Subject: Updates for TDA Board Meeting

Visitor Survey – The Visitor Survey project is going very well, and to date, we have 2,830 responses, which is excellent. The number of responses is far above the ‘statistically accurate’ number of 400 responses, which will allow us to analyze and segment data in such a way we can ask it questions and have enough responses in that subset to generate actionable data.

Director Engagement – In the last month, I have been to two major week-long conferences including the Travel and Tourism Research Association Marketing Outlook Forum in Las Vegas where I presented a session to young professionals in the tourism industry and attended all conference sessions. I also attended the Certified Destination Management Executive training in Seattle through Destinations International for professional development. I plan to finish that certification next year which is the highest attainment one can achieve in the Tourism industry.

Advertising – In advertising, we are working on new commercials for Hulu in the Atlanta market to debut this spring and Rawle Murdy, and I had a great conversation Wednesday (Dec. 6) about the creative direction for the spot. We also are working through details for a winter-themed video to drive increased occupancy during a traditionally lower-occupancy time of year. In that same context, we are also launching a media buy with an existing partner to promote the winter season and all there is to do here between January and March, in an attempt to drive increased occupancy during a traditionally slower season.

New Meeting Location – Beginning with our January meeting we will meet at a new location on Southwestern Community College’s campus in Sylva. A copy of that schedule and a map of campus is located online [here](#). The move saves funds paying for meeting space as they have waived the fee as a professional courtesy to a governmental entity; we are very appreciative of partnerships like this in the community. The meeting location is also more ideal as it’s easily accessible off N.C. 107 and offers ample parking next to the building.

SCC Hospitality Institute – In news related to Southwestern Community College, we authored a letter on behalf of the TDA supporting the creation of a Hospitality Training Institute on SCC's Jackson County Campus. This potential development would be a first for the region and is greatly needed. As SCC formalizes details of the Institute, I will share them with the board.

Website – We continue to improve on our website offerings, and our efforts are showing significant improvements in key metrics. Our recent mobile optimizations have decreased the bounce rate to around 10% (previously about 50%), meaning people don't visit our website or a page on it then immediately leave. That means more significant engagement with our content and potentially driving more interest in visiting. Rawle Murdy and I work on website enhancements weekly, if not daily, and are always in discussion about ways we can improve our online platforms. We have a 12/13 meeting in Charleston for an all-day planning session.

New Board Member – Commissioners appointed Jay Grissom of Best Western Plus River Escape Inn & Suites to fill Vick Patel's seat vacancy, and we look forward to his knowledge and expertise on our board. Mr. Grissom has lived in the area for some time and before the hospitality industry he held leadership roles in the education sector. We welcome him to the board and appreciate his willingness to serve.

Shadow of the Bear – Cashiers Area Chamber Executive Director Stephanie Edwards, Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust Gary Wein, and I met with Jackson County Manager Don Adams to begin discussions about traffic congestion related to Shadow of the Bear and potential solutions. Discussion about the traffic congestion and possible fixes will be an ongoing dialogue.

Upcoming:

Partner email – I am working to deploy a January partner e-mail to update our key tourism partners (restaurants, lodging, attractions, government leaders) on the last six months of JCTDA activities shortly after the new year. Our previous partner update went out to over 500 stakeholders throughout the county and was well-read.

Visitor Guide – We are soliciting updates from lodging partners to their listings for our 19-20 Visitor Guide. We will send this guide to press much sooner than past years, allowing people to have in their hands early in the season to best formulate travel plans. We aim to send to the publisher by Jan. 15 and to press by Feb. 20 for receipt the first week of March. This schedule gets new Visitor Guides into people's hands as they're planning their spring and summer vacations. It is far ahead of previous production schedules.

Future networking/meetings:

-Rawle Murdy Strategy meeting FY 19-20, Charleston, S.C., Dec. 12-14

Director Requests:

- 1) **Internship** – The Executive Committee discussed with Director the need for additional help before a full-time employee is hired and agreed during November’s Executive Committee meeting with bringing on an intern this spring for support. Two students seeking internships this spring contacted me, and one of them is a good fit. The internship is for 150 hours and is a paid internship. I would recommend a rate of \$12/hour; we have around \$838 in funds for contracted services, so with board approval, I will ask Finance to locate the best line item for the additional funds. On Dec. 12 I will request board approval on this so that the Chair can execute any agreements as needed in the future related to this internship.

Destinations International –

- 2) I would request the board’s Dec. 12 approval to join Destinations International, which provides resources that we need to begin the process to hire an employee. They publish a comprehensive study on salaries and positions that we need to find comparable salaries for the sales and marketing position we are seeking to hire. This data is only available through DI. The cost is \$1,500 for the remainder of this fiscal. Alongside this salary study report, they also publish numerous proprietary papers in a number of key topics that are beneficial to us as a DMO.
- 3) For my CDME Certification, I am required to take four core courses and two electives. Three of the four remaining courses I need for my CDME certification are in Washington, D.C. Feb. 9-12. The cost is \$2,875 + airfare and hotel. I had budgeted for this in next fiscal; since the courses have been announced and the course offerings are classes I have not already taken, I’d request we use fund balance to fund in this fiscal year. That leaves only one course I need for my certification next fiscal. As a result of our membership in Request two (above) the courses are significantly discounted. ***This travel was included in next fiscal year’s draft budget, so we are simply shifting it to this fiscal year***

Southeast Tourism Society

- 4) The dates for the 2019 Congressional Summit have been announced as June 10-13, 2019 and this was an important summit last year as we met with leadership to discuss issues critical to our region. The dates this year were in July (in current fiscal) and the dates next year are also in the current fiscal. The cost is \$275 + airfare and hotel. ***This travel was included in next fiscal year’s draft budget, so we are simply shifting it to this fiscal year***

These professional development and education courses are crucial to our continued success as a DMO and I would ask the board to support all four requests in full.

The total increases requested to this fiscal year’s budget from fund balance are:

Internship additional funds: +\$962 – Request 1

Memberships, Dues and Subscriptions: +\$1,500 – Request 2

Travel: +\$5,575 – Request 3 and 4 (shifting from next fiscal to this fiscal’s budget)