



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

To: TDA Board

From: Nick Breedlove, TDA Executive Director
Caleb Sullivan, TDA Sales & Marketing Manager

Date: May 15, 2020

Subject: Updates for TDA Board

Executive Director Report – Nick Breedlove

Director efforts over the last month have been heavily focused on COVID-19 recovery efforts, marketing and communication planning with our partners, and budget planning for the upcoming fiscal year.

-The State Tourism Recovery Working Group was successful in getting \$5 million of the \$20 million we requested from the state’s COVID-19 relief package. These initial funds will help the state tourism office begin recovery planning related to advertising efforts to bring visitors back to the state. While we had hoped for more funding, we are thankful to be included. The state tourism office will offer an update next week as to what the recovery plans include.

-We shared information with Economic Development about a grant program with \$350,000 in funding for our retail, accommodation, tourism and entertainment sectors to recover. The program is called Creating Bridges; it is a North Carolina effort from NC State, and they are looking for partnerships and proposals from two to five contiguous counties.

-We received notice from the U.S. Travel Association that EDA funding was available which could be used for tourism recovery efforts. We quickly mobilized our efforts to provide a narrative in how we would utilize funding, with a request of \$140,000. That narrative appears on the next page. We submitted this to County Leadership and our Economic Developer to request they apply on our behalf. Rich Price is working on this. Time is of utmost importance as funding goes quickly.

EDA Narrative

Jackson County, North Carolina's economy is primarily based on tourism, which came to a halt in late February due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We've seen the decline stretch into March and April. We estimate at least \$11.6 million in lost visitor spending at our tourism-related businesses for the month of April alone, not inclusive of resident spending.

Tourism represents almost 2,000 jobs in our county, most of which have entered extended unemployment. In order to help this industry recover, we need funds to help advertise and support our tourism businesses. The COVID-19 crisis brought to light the amount of business that depends on tourists. A recent survey to our business community (n=132), shows that 43.6-percent of our businesses have closed as a result of COVID-19, 28-percent have changed services and 30-percent have had to alter their hours of operation. Every business is feeling the impact of COVID-19 in our community.

The Jackson County Tourism Development Authority's budget is based solely on occupancy tax revenues from overnight stays – we receive no other funds. We are an extension of our County Government, created to promote the county to visitors. Annually, tourism spending contributes \$9.8 million back to our County government's budget, lessening the burden on every taxpaying citizen.

As our tourism accommodation stays came to a standstill, we have seen massive declines in the past few months and have fewer funds to be able to recover. We expect next fiscal year's entire budget, solely funded by overnight stays, to be down almost 27-percent. This is the time we need to increase advertising in order to drive visitation and spending here, but we can't do this with fewer funds available. Every dollar invested in tourism marketing drives 15 dollars back to the community, national research shows.

We are requesting \$140,000 in CARES grant funding to support the recovery of our tourism industry. Below, we break down its proposed use.

With occupancy tax revenue at a trickle, budgets for our outbound marketing campaigns have been slashed by nearly 40% at a time when we're in desperate need of a boost in spending to compete and help our economy recover. These tactics (brand advertising, paid search, paid social media, and website SEO) are a very effective part of the JCTDA's promotional communications, which strongly support the county's economy by attracting overnight visitors.

With the additional investment of \$100,000 in these tactics, we're confident that our data-driven decisions will attract even more visitors for less money. Why? Because we've proven it over the last 12 months by increasing our lead volume (inquiries, requests for visitor guides, and emails) by 47.7%. We did this through strategic research and targeted marketing tactics. In the last three years, visitor spending has grown from \$175 million a year to \$205 million according to U.S. Travel Association Studies.

These campaigns will garner higher returns for the dollars invested in tried-and-true media such as geo-targeted ads via Advanced (streaming) TV, boosted Facebook posts and Instagram stories, and Google Ads, as well as partnerships with proven local and in-state channels Romantic Asheville and VisitNC, our state tourism marketing office. All of these digital campaigns are highly trackable and demonstrable in return on investment.

The primary goal of the Jackson County Tourism Development Authorities' public relations plan is to drive visitation via the influence of positive earned media and coverage of the destination. In the past two years, our PR messaging has reached more than 1 billion people. One of the county's most cost-effective marketing platforms to reach visitors, the PR campaign continually delivers an annual return on investment of between 1,300- and 23,000-percent. With the PR budget impacted by a 50% reduction due to COVID-19, we are seeking to re-fund this program with \$40,000 to continue to leverage the impact that the third-party endorsement of PR has on our audience.

Through strategic PR campaigns, our efforts allow us to share crafted messaging about our destination with billions of viewers across the US. In 2019, we worked with a small PR budget of \$78,500 and received an ROI of the equivalency of \$7 million in advertising purchases and reached 400 million viewers. With this additional investment to be used towards the FY-21 budget, we will be able to reinstate: a media tour of our county, a targeted media messaging campaign, and deskside visits to introduce media to our destination. All efforts are to align with our goal of getting our destination back into the minds of travelers by sharing our new messaging, and in turn, putting people back to work.

-As of Today, Friday, May 15, we are meeting key metrics to move to Phase II. Gov. Cooper's office issued the following statement in a press conference today:

The Phase 1 executive order remains in effect until 5 pm on Friday, May 22 but moving forward to Phase 2 will depend on the data and trends. While North Carolinians have done well during the first week of Phase 1, the state will continue monitoring to determine when North Carolina can move into phase 2.

Governor Cooper said, "a key factor in our state's readiness to move to Phase 2 is testing. Statewide, we have doubled the number of tests in recent weeks, which is good, but we know we need to do more."

-On April 28 the JCTDA held its first webinar for the lodging industry co-hosted by Berkeley Young. We had almost 90 in attendance and received great feedback from the information we were able to provide our lodging accommodations to prepare them for reopening.

Additional Director involvement in the COVID-19 recovery is below:

- Attended Destinations International Weekly COVID-19 recovery calls
 - Attended Destinations International Membership Committee Update
 - Attended Destinations International Small DMO Task Force Committee
 - Attended U.S. Travel Association's Weekly webinars
 - Attended Southeast Tourism Society's webinars
 - Attended VisitNC Legislative Update calls and Regional DMO leadership calls
 - Attended COVID-19 Virtual Town Hall with Jackson County Chamber and area business leaders
 - Attended Skift's webinar on Short Term Rentals
 - Attended WCU's Installation Committee Meeting re: COVID-19 considerations/changes
 - Attended Jackson County COVID-19 Economic Recovery working group meetings
- Reviewed marketing plans with Pineapple PR & Rawle Murdy; followed up by Executive review of plans during monthly Executive Meeting
- We created an 'Avoid the Crowds' itinerary for our website for those who want to visit but enjoy our wide-open spaces. [\[Link\]](#)
- We shipped our first two hammocks as part of our Hammock Adventure Capital campaign. The contest is generating great engagement on our Instagram page.
- Director worked with the Main Street Sylva Association and the Jackson County Chamber of Commerce to develop 'Safe & Clean' business and restaurant posters with a uniform look for our county's individual cities. The TDA paid for the printing of these, and the Jackson County Chamber distributed them. We sent the design to the Cashiers Chamber for their business community. We may make revisions to it depending on what information we need to showcase for businesses. A copy of that flier appears on the next page.

Business flyer. A Customized separate version for each city in the county, along with another version for restaurants.



**SYLVA
BUSINESSES
CLEAN & SAFE**

ENHANCED PRACTICES

- Routine & Frequent disinfecting of surfaces
- Staff Wellness Checks
- Social Distance Markings
- Decreased Capacity
- Implementation of all CDC Guidelines and Industry Best Practices

MAX OCCUPANCY:

- Please sanitize your hands before entering
- Masks are encouraged
- Shop Smart - 6 feet apart
- Place an order by phone:
- You may also purchase by email or online store:

Social Media & Blog Status Report – Caleb Sullivan

Cross Channel Report April 1 – 30 vs. March 1 – 31

- Total Audience Growth increased by 0.001% MOM (158) (214,972 total)
 - Total Instagram Followers (15,583)
 - Total Facebook Page Likes (197,334)
- Total Impressions decreased by 67.4% MOM. (470,551)
- Total Engagement decreased by 50.1% MOM (38,5654)
 - Both Impression and Engagement decreases due to lack of FB boosting, and decreased post frequency due to COVID-19.

Google Post/Event Platform

- All Google Post/Events have been suspended due to COVID-19

Instagram Stories

- Instagram Story Impressions totaled 4,409 for April.

Updates

- Began utilizing MobileMonkey software for Facebook Chatbot. This platform allows us to better engage with our audience, providing them automated information.
- Followers across all platforms remained constant MOM.
- Native posts are performing exceptionally well and positioning us to be top of mind when travel restrictions are lifted.
- Messaging and CTA has shifted, continue to put out #StayHome #StaySafe and #WeCantWaitToSeeYouSoon.
- Upward trends observed for May to be reported on next month. May is already performing extremely well.

Blogs

- Authored 2 blogs for the month of April:
- [Favorite Mountain Memories \[Link\]](#) – Posted 4/3/20
- [100 Years of Memories on the WNC Fly Fishing Trail® \[Link\]](#) - Posted 4/24/20

Continued on next page


Top Performing Posts for April

  North Carolina Mounta...
Fri 4/3/2020 3:42 pm PDT


There's always a light at the end of the tunnel. #StaySafeStayHome and #WeWillSeeYouSoon 😊 📸 @





Total Engagements	4,394
Reactions	2,764
Comments	141
Shares	415
Post Link Clicks	-
Other Post Clicks	1,074

  North Carolina Mounta...
Wed 4/22/2020 8:02 am PDT


Happy Earth Day from the most beautiful place on earth, the N.C. Mountains! 🌍 🌸 🌿 🏞️





Total Engagements	2,843
Reactions	1,725
Comments	133
Shares	411
Post Link Clicks	1
Other Post Clicks	1,110

  North Carolina Mounta...
Mon 4/6/2020 8:24 am PDT


We did some exploring in our neck of the woods yesterday! Pictured is High Falls, located near Lake Glenville.





Total Engagements	2,616
Reactions	1,099
Comments	119
Shares	213
Post Link Clicks	-
Other Post Clicks	1,185

  discoverjacksonnc
Thu 4/2/2020 8:49 am PDT


Elk Crossing - These majestic creatures can't wait to welcome you back to the NC Mountains and neith





Total Engagements	731
Likes	711
Comments	4
Saves	16

  discoverjacksonnc
Thu 4/9/2020 3:19 pm PDT

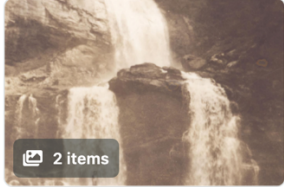
You never know what you'll see along the WNC Fly Fishing Trail! 🐟 🌿 We can't wait to see you on the river



Total Engagements	701
Likes	685
Comments	5
Saves	11

  discoverjacksonnc
Mon 4/6/2020 8:12 am PDT

We did some exploring in our neck of the woods yesterday! Pictured is High Falls, located near Lake Glenville.



Total Engagements	623
Likes	597
Comments	6
Saves	20