

## *P*erformance Standards

NCHA can play an important role in improving how people perceive the tourism industry and ensure that they understand its important contribution to the economy and to the state's competitiveness as a business location. Many people still cling to the notion that tourism is a frivolous industry that generates only low-paying, seasonal jobs. However, tourist expenditures support desirable quality-of-life amenities such as restaurants and cultural facilities. Moreover, tourism businesses and tourism employees pay sizable taxes. Finally, few persons recognize that attributes that induce people to visit the area for pleasure can also influence business location decisions. Since tourism is poorly understood, oftentimes worthy initiatives and funding proposals fail to garner the support they deserve either at the state or local levels.



### 9.1 Measurement Tools for Meeting Visitor Expectations

Educating the public about the real benefits of tourism requires data. Otherwise, why should anyone accept claims about economic impact and tax revenues? Consequently, NCHA needs to establish milestones and performance standards that:

- set ambitious but achievable goals: the same performance depicted as accomplishing stated objectives is more impressive than when it must be characterized as falling short of stated targets;
- establish a system for using existing data to track the region's tourism industry using proper SIC code classifications and proper units: jobs, establishments, wages, etc.;
- institute standard methodologies for data collection by local partners, as, for example, in the cases of visitor counting techniques and protocols.
- identify tax and other direct revenues accruing to state and local governments.
- utilize commercial data providers specializing in collecting tourism industry statistics about visitation to specific geographic areas.

Tracking results from year to year represents an important check on whether initiatives are succeeding. Common measurements include:

- business volume and employment as tracked by state and federal third party agencies;
- revenues from bed taxes;
- attendance at festivals;
- sales per square foot or per seat in NCHA community businesses;
- real estate indicators (property tax base, rent/sale prices achieved, and days to market);
- program enrollment in the hospitality training courses;
- credit card sales volume (available from American Express);
- visitor information requests and conversion rates.

NCHA might work with area colleges and universities, such as Concord College, to identify professors teaching statistics classes that could use a real life lab for some low-cost assistance.



## 9.2 Procedures for Plan Update

The 10-year action agenda described in this plan will establish a stable foundation for the heritage area, and provide the basis for new organizations and activities that may come into being. One of the biggest threats to plan implementation is a change in the conditions that existed when this plan was prepared that makes certain policies or recommendations invalid. It is one of the inevitabilities of planning that conditions, resources and policies will change. A good example may be federal legislation relative to heritage area programs. Although no one can anticipate the type or timing of changes, it must be assumed that the planning framework of tomorrow will differ from that of today. This plan has stressed implementation, with the intent of bringing about the recommendations over a number of years in a geographically broad area. Implementation will be a continuous process – following up on policies and projects and checking various proposals against the plan.

As conditions change, departures from the plan will occur and the NCHA will want to note changes in order to provide continuity of implementation. In anticipation of such events, the NCHA will need to review key plan elements periodically to ensure that the plan reflects current conditions. Key plan elements include the 10-year action plan, marketing and promotions, partnering and effectiveness in preserving critical physical and cultural resources. A review of the plan will occur during development of the annual NCHA work plan. A more detailed evaluation of the plan will take place every other year where formal changes or amendments to the

plan may be proposed. Performance indicators are recommended as a means of measuring plan effectiveness in achieving implementation milestones.

