



Visit Mendocino County Strategic Plan 2013-2016



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Executive Summary

Welcome to the **Visit Mendocino County Strategic Plan**, which outlines the strategic direction for the organization for 2013-2016. Visit Mendocino County is charged with the integrated management and marketing of the Mendocino County visitor experience.

This plan was developed to respond to **the changing marketplace and addresses the needs of both visitors as well as stakeholders.**

The following plan outlines the core elements of Visit Mendocino County's strategic direction in guiding its marketing efforts. **The plan is inclusive** as it is based on stakeholder participation. **It is also results focused** as it is intent on increasing the overall competitiveness of the destination.

Visit Mendocino County is focused on **increasing the revenues, employment and taxes generated by tourism** for the county and its stakeholder partners. Visit Mendocino County's marketing efforts include visitor services, marketing communications and promotions.

Visit Mendocino County



Project Overview

Visit Mendocino County is charged with generating economic benefits for Mendocino County and its jurisdictions through marketing Mendocino as a visitor destination.

To that end Visit Mendocino County facilitated a strategic planning session for its board of directors for the purpose of providing input for the strategic plan. This plan serves as a **blueprint for the organization to achieve specific goals related to board governance, tourism infrastructure, public awareness and other issues.**

Methodology

The methodology included a three phase process identified below:

Phase 1 – Information Collection

This phase included a review of relevant material provided by Visit Mendocino County pertinent to the organization and the market.

Additionally SMG interviewed the President/CEO regarding key issues facing the destination and the organization.

Phase 2 – Strategic Planning Facilitation

SMG implemented a survey of the board of directors to identify key issues. SMG also facilitated several meetings with representation from Visit Mendocino County, the Mendocino County Lodging Association and the Mendocino County Promotions Alliance.

Phase 3 – Information review, analysis and plan development

SMG then reviewed and analyzed the collected information from the first two phases, and based on the information developed the following Strategic Plan.





Mendocino County – An Overview

Mendocino County is located on the north coast of California, north of the greater San Francisco Bay Area and west of the Central Valley. The county seat is Ukiah.

The county is noted for its distinctive Pacific Ocean coastline, Redwood forests, wine production and microbrews. The area is also rich in both land based and water based recreation and offers a variety of special events.

The area has primary access via Highway 1, Highway 128, Highway 20 and Highway 101. The area has very limited air access through Sonoma County Airport, Oakland International Airport, Sacramento International Airport and San Francisco International Airport.

Visit Mendocino County Inc. is the official destination marketing organization for Mendocino County and its incorporated towns. The primary mission of Visit Mendocino County is **to develop and implement comprehensive destination management programs designed to increase revenues, employment and taxes for the County.**

Area Map





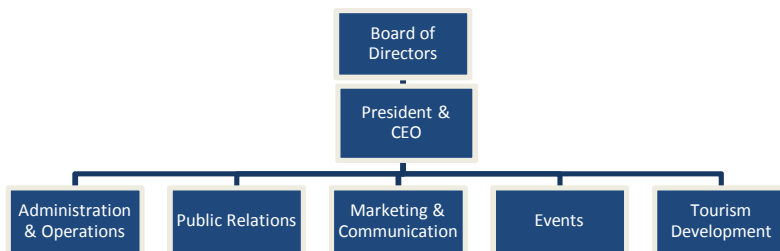
The Organization

Structure

Visit Mendocino County is the destination marketing organization (DMO) for Mendocino County and its incorporated towns. The organization is charged with developing and implementing a comprehensive destination marketing program designed **to attract visitors to the region who in turn generate economic, employment taxes for the region.**

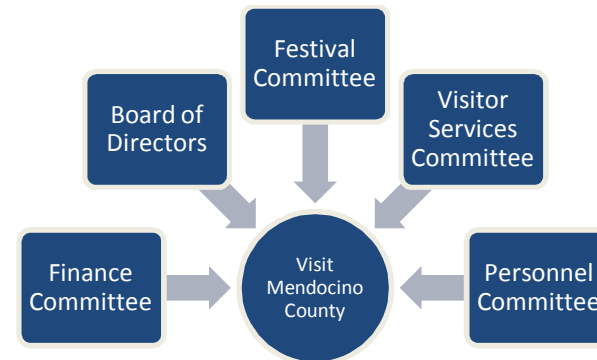
The organization, managed by a diverse board of directors, employs a professional staff that designs and implements marketing programs. The organization leads the Mendocino County tourism industry **by working together as a destination to generate visitor spending.**

Visit Mendocino County Organizational Structure



The organization is also supported by a number of community based advisory groups including the following:

- Board of Directors
- Finance Committee
- Festival Committee
- Visitor Services Committee
- Personnel Committee



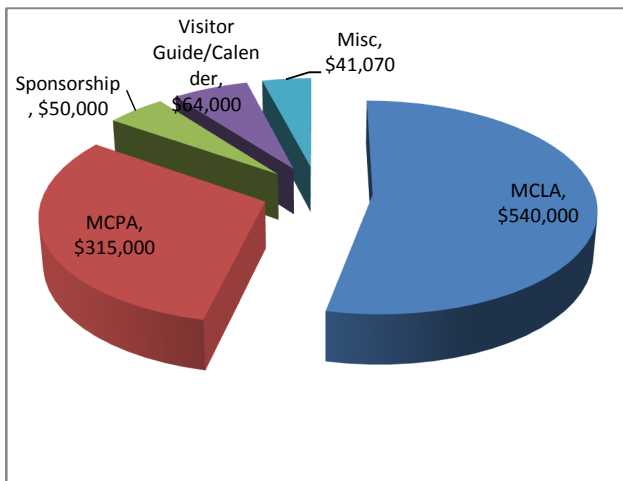
These advisory committees, combined with the professional staff and the board of directors, provide leadership for the tourism industry.



Funding

The Visit Mendocino County annual budget is approximately \$1.0 million. It is funded by several different sources with the majority of funding from Mendocino County Lodging Association (via its Tourism Business Improvement District) and the Mendocino County Promotional Alliance.

Figure 1: Mendocino County Funding Sources



Source: Visit Mendocino County

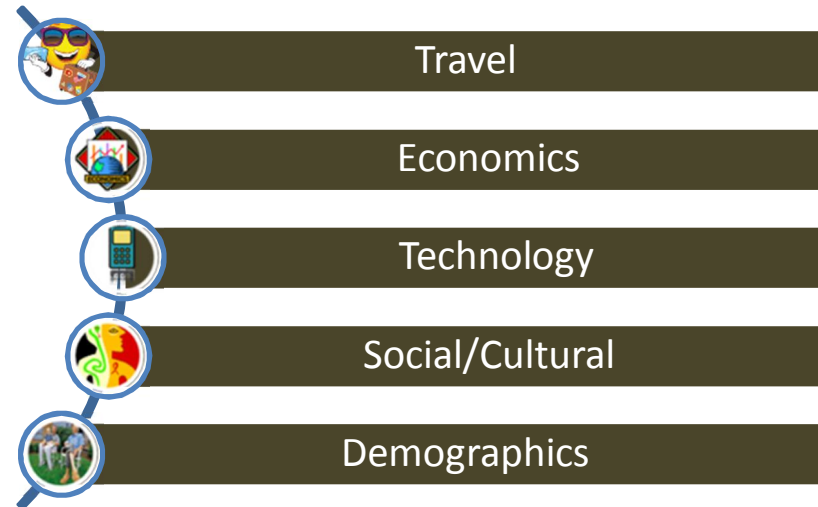


Part 1: Key Trends

There can be no doubt that Mendocino County, like every tourism destination, does not operate in a vacuum, but rather is subject to a variety of market influences, including **travel, economics, technology, social/cultural and demographics**. As such, it is important to understand the changing environment in which the organization is operating.

Significant changes are occurring in the marketplace that impact tourism destinations like Mendocino County, which Visit Mendocino County has responded to with new programs and efforts. These shifts are primarily the result of a dramatically changed economic environment, though there are also changes in demographics, travel, socio-cultural and consumer value trends that tourism decision makers should be aware of. For the purposes of background and context, the following is a summary of the key tourism, economic and demographic trends that will help to provide a comprehensive context for the development of the Mendocino County strategic direction.

Key Macro Trends Impacting Mendocino County



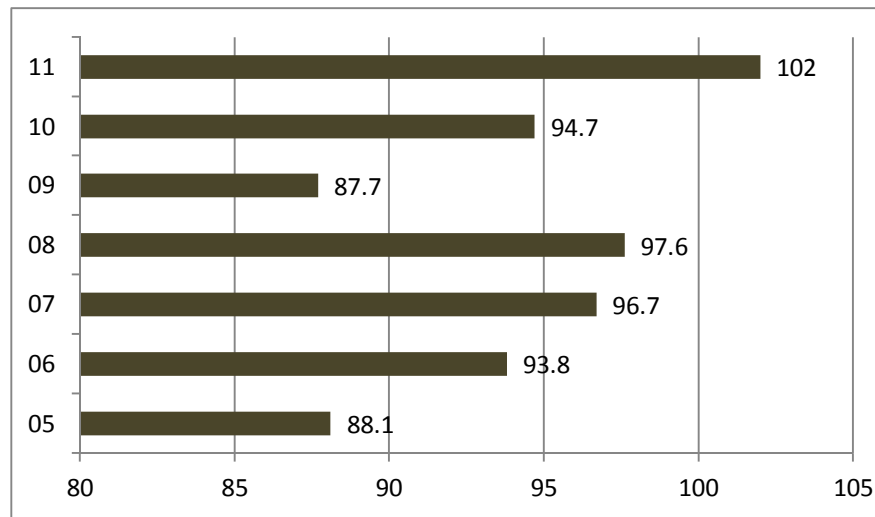


California Travel Trends – California Travel Spending Breaks a New Record

1. Domestic

Each year, California residents and visitors travel within the state to experience its variety of attractions, scenic beauty and local culture. According to the most recently released data by Visit California¹, **the state generated over \$100 billion in direct travel spending in 2011**, a first, translating into a 5.5% increase over the preceding year.

Figure 2: California Travel Spending | 2005-2011 (\$ Billions)



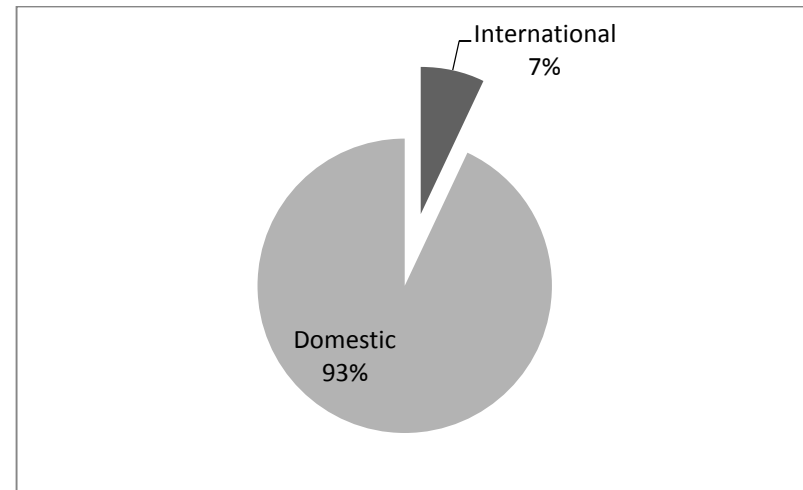
Source: Visit California

¹ Visit California Economic Impact of Travel 2011

For perspective, **Mendocino County generated approximately \$313 million in travel spending during 2011.**

In terms of visitor volumes, Californians represent the lion’s share of the state’s travel and tourism industry. In 2010 (the most recent year’s data available), 75% of visits and 60% of spending were from California residents².

Figure 3: 2011 Total California Travel Visitors



Source: Visit California Presentation, November 2011

² Visit California Presentation, November 2011



Economic Trends – Improving

As can be seen in Table 1 below, recession is giving way to an improved economic picture. National economic indicators are showing signs of improvement.

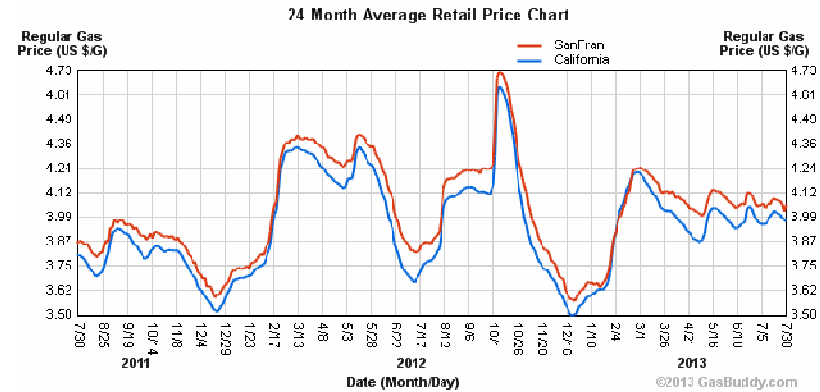
Table 1: Key U.S. Economic Indicators

	2013	2014
U.S Gross Domestic Product	2.4	3.4
Unemployment U.S.	7.9	7.3
Personal Income Growth U.S.	4.2	5.0
Consumer Price Index US	2.0	2.1

Source: Department of Commerce

One important economic issue that has been an ongoing concern is the price of fuel **which can impact the travel decisions of price sensitive consumers.** The price of gas in the Bay Area has trended above the California average. High gas prices can work in two ways; the price sensitive part of the travel market typically reduces its trip spending while those less sensitive shift their vacation destination choices from areas they may have flown to and instead consider those destinations they can drive to.

Figure 4: Gas Prices



Source: Gas Buddy.com



Social and Cultural Trends – Consumers Keep Changing

In addition to the changing economic and demographic situation (which will be addressed in an upcoming section), several social trends are also impacting travel and tourism throughout the country, as identified by the US Travel Association. Below are the primary trends having the most significant strategic impact on tourism to Mendocino County.

Changing Consumer Tastes

- **Consumers as destination brand ambassadors**
Social media + mobile technology = empowered visitors. Visitors are now brand ambassadors for destinations. Constant updates about the experience (both good and bad), along with posted photographs can make the **consumer an ever more important promoter and potential influencer of a destination.**
- **Outdoor recreation**
According to the recently published Outdoor Recreation Economy Report, **outdoor recreation spending is approximately \$646 billion in the United States and generates 6.1 million American jobs.** Of that \$646 billion

fully \$524 billion was spent on trips and travel related spending.³

- **Health and wellness**
Consumers are increasingly integrating health and wellness into their lifestyles and in so doing look for destinations that enhance those opportunities through wellness vacations and wellness travel. A **wellness vacation** is about being proactive in discovering new ways to promote a healthier, less stressful lifestyle. **Wellness travel** is the pause that reenergizes and rejuvenates each traveler. The **wellness vacation** is considered an occasional break for the body, mind and soul.
- **Purpose driven travel**
As consumers continually see vacation time reduced, there is a heightened need for purpose driven travel e.g. a specific special event, hiking a specific a specific location, etc. These trips are also driven by consumers who self- identify with a particular event or activity. For example, certain consumers may see themselves as foodies, wine aficionados, or are avid cyclists or golfers. **As such, the ability to reach and communicate with niches based on activities is increasingly important for a destination.**

³ The Outdoor Recreation Economy Report, Outdoor Industry Association, http://www.outdoorindustry.org/images/researchfiles/OIA_OutdoorRecEconomyReport2012.pdf



- **Culinary tourism**
Many consumers today are looking for expanded culinary experiences while on vacation. In interacting with the local food, Mendocino County visitors are dipping into the area's agricultural history.
- **Cultural tourism**
Cultural offerings and experiences continue to provide destination visitors with an opportunity to access the authenticity of a destination through such offerings as art, entertainment, architecture, history, events and food. **Those experiences available in Mendocino County provide visitors with an excellent opportunity to understand the cultural interests of the area.**
- **Environmental issues remain a priority**
Environmental issues continue to play an important role in the selection of a destination as well as the selection of activities while on vacation. **Those destinations like Mendocino County that place a strong emphasis on the environment will have a competitive advantage over those that do not.**
- **Despite increases in travel – value still prevails**
There can be no doubt about the shift in the marketplace towards value, and this trend continues throughout all aspects of the industry. As such it is critical for Mendocino County **to effectively communicate the value it offers.**

Marketing and Communications

- **Traveler flexibility and control – research everything**
With the continued growth of online and mobile resources, **consumers looking for flexibility and control of their vacation decisions have the ability to research everything** and often do it not only in pre-trip planning but once a trip is underway.
- **Social media more important as travelers resist more formal marketing.**
As consumers continue to resist traditional marketing efforts they are **relying more and more on social media to research destinations and activities.** As such Visit Mendocino County needs to ensure it provides updated content and information to meet those needs.
- **Greater degree of personalization**
Facilitated by increased data mining capabilities, marketing efforts will lead to much more customization for each consumer. Traditional demographic segmentation and targeting will no longer be enough as cutting edge DMOs will focus more and more on **customized targeting and offers.**



Changing Planning/Booking Trends

- **Shorter booking windows (with lots of shopping around)**
Another continuing trend that can present a challenge to the lodging industry is consumers' short term booking window. As lodging properties have experienced the booking window has decreased significantly. This trend has broad implications for the tourism industry. **A shorter booking window makes it more difficult to gauge future demand and plan accordingly.**⁴ Potential may exist in converting day visitors to overnight visitors with appropriate incentives. Additionally, research by the Cornell School of Hotel Administration reveals that consumers do extensive shopping, with over half looking at an average of fifteen different sites before booking⁵.
- **Time poverty/hectic lives = shorter trips**
Time continues to be the new currency due to the hectic nature of consumers' lives, and the impact is seen on vacation and travel. As has been written many times, **vacation trips have become significantly shorter in duration.** Additionally, consumers are looking for hassle-free vacations, placing greater importance on methods of booking and travel to and from destinations.



⁴ Vizergy Blog, "Google's Latest Research", <http://ht.lv/auAwq>

⁵ Skift.com, Nov 15, 2012, "Who looks at 150 sites before booking a hotel? About 5 percent of travelers, study says" <http://skift.com/2012/11/15/five-percent-of-travelers-will-search-over-150-sites-before-booking-a-hotel-says-study/>



Technology Trends

Table 2 below summarizes key technology trends and their implications.

Table 2: Technology Trends

1. Fragmentation – Digital users are everywhere, but hard to pin down exactly where

- Consumers are accessing the web through a variety of devices (mobile, tablet, desktop) and operating systems (iOS, Android)⁶
- Along with mobile app and mobile web, this makes it more challenging to identify target audience behavior.
- Multi-screen multitasking (think using a smart phone while watching TV) is no longer unusual consumer behavior.

Implication – Identifying where a target audience spends time is not as simple as it used to be. Destinations need to recognize consumers as individuals...or “micro-audiences”.

2. It’s all about mobile

- Time spent on the mobile web is growing at 14 times the rate of desktop internet usage⁷.
- Mobile internet now trumps ‘regular’ internet.

Implication – A mobile marketing strategy is no longer optional for destinations.

3. Content marketing is king

- Marketers are now publishers, using content to drive a variety of interactions throughout (and beyond) the AIDA (Awareness, Interest, Desire, Action) funnel.⁸
- Content includes paid, earned and owned content, as well as images, video and words.

Implication – It is absolutely critical to have a content marketing strategy to effectively reach passion based target segments.

4. Social driven engagement drives preferences

- User reviews are a key influence in consumer decision making (71% of people say reviews from family members or friends influence purchase decisions)⁹. Look for continued increase and applications in use from many social marketing sources.
- Social influences consumer decisions, as users are exposed to the thoughts, opinions and recommendations of friends, families and influencers – a group of people that is growing wider through social media.¹⁰
- 47% of social media users engaged in customer service via these channels.¹¹

Implication – Online reputation management and social media monitoring are long term critical elements for tourism.

5. Big Data isn’t just jargon

- Huge amounts of data are now generated with every interaction on every digital platform. This presents a real opportunity for destinations...if harnessed effectively.

Implication – Destinations should seek to improve how they collect and use customer information to provide a better experience for potential visitors before, during and after their visit.

⁶ eMarketer, Key Digital Trends for 2013, <http://www.emarketer.com/Webinar.aspx?R=4000061>

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Harris Interactive 2010

¹⁰ Nielsen Social Media Report 2012

<http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/social/2012/>

¹¹ Ibid

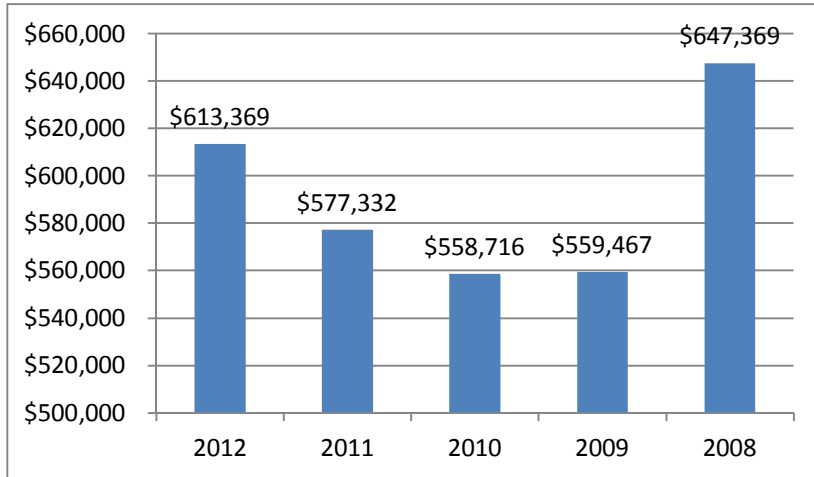


Part 2: The Marketplace

Lodging Trends

Mendocino County marketplace has improved since 2010 but has not fully rebounded to 2008 levels.

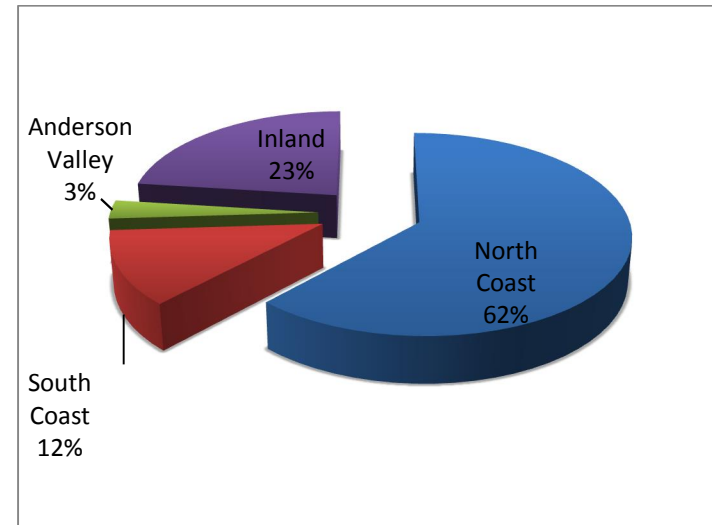
Figure 5: Annual BID Collections



Source: Mendocino County

Geographically the highest concentration of revenues is generated in the North Coast area approximately 62% followed by the Inland area 23%, the South Coast area 12% and the Anderson Valley 3%

Figure 6: Mendocino County BID Revenue by Area



Source: Mendocino County

In terms of seasonality Quarter 3 generates 37% of BID collections followed by Quarter 2 at 25%, Quarter 4 at 21% and Quarter 1 at 15%

Table 3: TBID Collections by Season

Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
\$102,664	\$156,612	\$225,296	\$128,797

Source: Mendocino County

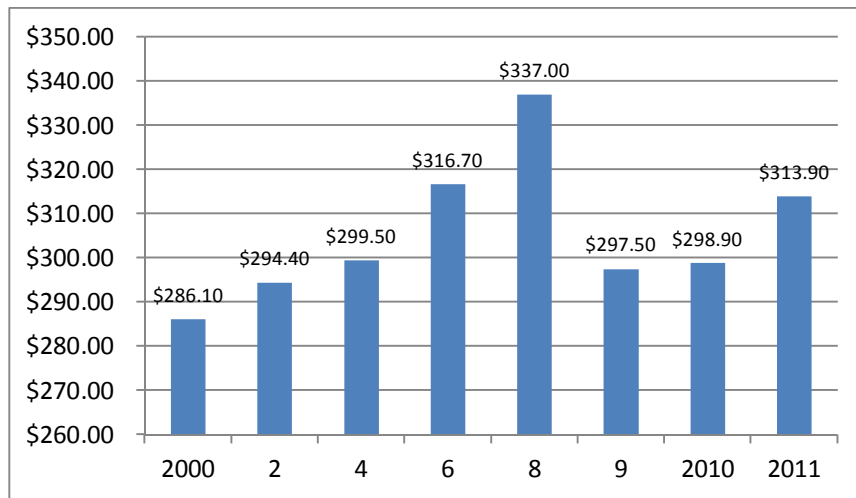


Travel Spending

A. Size and Scope of the Mendocino County Market in Perspective

Within the State of California, **Mendocino County as a whole generates approximately \$313 million in travel spending¹²**. The 2000 through 2011 trend is found below in Figure 7.

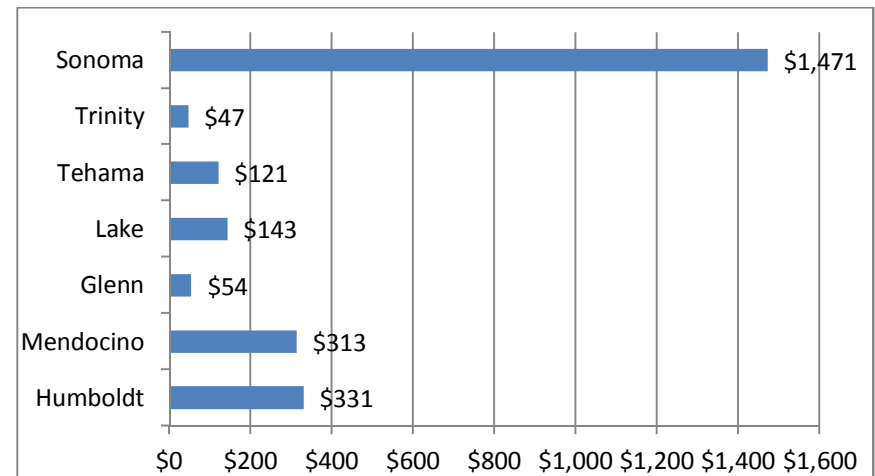
Figure 7: Mendocino County Visitor Spending 2000-2011 (\$ Millions)



Source: Dean Runyan Associates

Increases in visitor spending have averaged approximately 2.4% annually during the 1992 -2011 time frame, below the 3.8% State of California average. In terms of overall travel spending, as compared to neighboring counties, Mendocino is ranked third behind Sonoma and Humboldt among all counties that border Mendocino County.

Figure 8: Travel Spending By Selected County (\$ Millions)



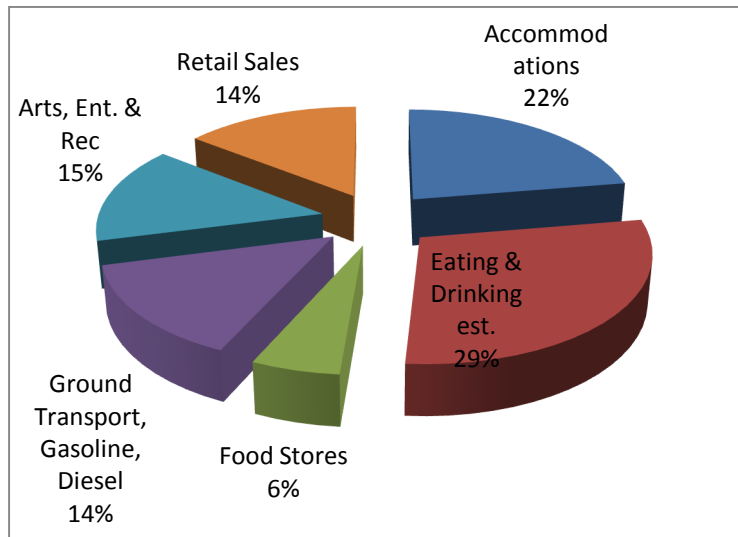
Source: California Travel Impacts by County, March 2013

¹² California Travel Impacts by County 2000-2011



With regard to how those travel dollars are spent, Figure 9 below identifies travel spending by type of business service.

Figure 9: Mendocino County Travel Spending by Type of Business Service (\$ Millions)



Source: California Travel Impacts by County, March 2013

Table 4: 1992 vs. 2010 Regional County Travel Spending

County	2000		2010	
	Spending (\$ Millions)	%	Spending (\$ Millions)	%
Humboldt	\$250.4	13.7%	\$331.0	13.3%
Mendocino	\$286.1	15.6%	\$313.0	12.6%
Glenn	\$39.4	2.2%	\$54.0	2.2%
Lake	\$128.0	7.0%	\$143.0	13.3%
Tehama	\$89.3	4.9%	\$121.0	4.9%
Trinity	\$41.1	2.2%	\$47.0	1.9%
Sonoma	\$997.5	54.5%	\$1,471.0	59.3%
	\$1,831.8	100.0%	\$2,480.0	

Source: California Travel Impacts by County, March 2013

Table 4 on the next page below illustrates the share of travel spending among Mendocino County and its key competitors. **As can be seen travel spending share has decreased for both Mendocino and Humboldt County.**



Mendocino County’s Product Experience

Mendocino County’s geographic location and natural surroundings create a highly desirable visitor destination that offers a unique visitor experience, one that combines the California coast with redwood forests and the winegrowing valley region. In addition to these primary revenue generators, Visit Mendocino County also promotes a collection of year-round events that celebrate its unique location, natural beauty and local culture.

In order to understand the appeal of Mendocino County, following is an overview of its primary tourism assets and revenue generators.

Table 5: Mendocino County Experiences

Wine/Beer	Recreation	Communities
Wineries	Hiking	Coastal
Winery events	Road biking	Inland
Beer	Mountain biking	
Special Events		
		Wine
		Cultural
		Family
		Special interest
		Weddings

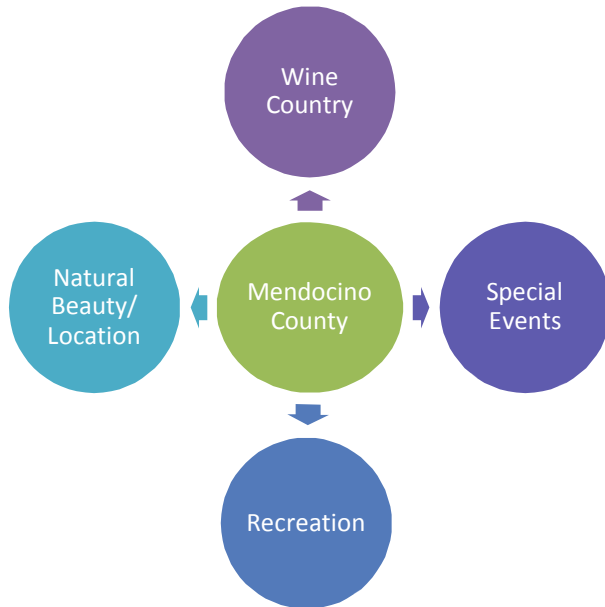




Primary Tourism Assets/Revenue Generators

From another perspective it is important to understand the overall regional demand drivers, namely those assets which actually drive overnight consumer demand and visitation to the area. These demand generators include natural assets like the wine country experience; special events that attract visitors and appeal to their interests; and specific ‘niche’ activities that visitors engage in, ranging from golf to hiking and paintball.

Figure 10: Regional Demand Drivers





Part 3: Destination/Organization Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats

Mendocino County has a range of strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats which are summarized below.

Strengths

- **Destination Related** – Multi-activity destination including wine tasting, recreation, special events.
- **Funding Related** – Combined TBID and public sector funding.
- **Strategic Alliance** – Good relationship with Visit California, North Coast.
- **Natural Environment** – California Coast location, Highway 1, redwood forests, wine country.
- **Organizational Continuity** – Visit Mendocino County has provided ongoing tourism promotion leadership. Organization is best suited for strategic marketing initiatives.
- **Good Perception** – General public and Board of Supervisors have favorable perception of the organization.

Weaknesses

- **Current Perception** – There are elements within the industry that don't have a favorable perception of the organization.
- **Capital Investment** – Area needs additional capital investment to continue improvements.
- **Lack of anchor infrastructure** – Area lacks anchor hotel, higher educational institution.
- **Awareness** – Limited awareness of destination beyond region.

Opportunities

- **Health and Wellness** – Mendocino County lends itself to health and wellness trend.
- **Recreation Growth** – Recreation offers growth potential as the area provides a variety of recreational opportunities.
- **Infrastructure Related** – Willits bypass will remove north and south bound and will create a more community experience.
- **Increased Funding** – Potential exists for increased TBID funding to improve the competitiveness of the destination.



Threats

- **Economic Related** – National and state related economic performance, federal budget reductions impact travel to the region.
- **Competition Related** – Other competitive areas, including Northern California competitive set.
- **Internal Fighting** – Internal fighting between different elements of the tourism industry.
- **Potential Marijuana Issue** – Area is known for high quality marijuana, but there are related issues including gang involvement, environmental damage, etc., that may have negative impacts.



Part 4: Vision & Mission

The Visit Mendocino County Vision

To establish Visit Mendocino County as the primary tourism promotion organization in Mendocino County, working with private and public sector partners to improve the overall competitiveness of the destination in order to increase revenues, employment and taxes while being stewards of the natural environment.

The Visit Mendocino County Mission

To establish Mendocino County as a premier destination featuring quaint and charming villages, towering redwood forests and intimate and unique wineries, resulting in a high return on investment and increased room nights.



The Visit Mendocino County Principles

- ❖ Create programs that **sustain the balance of the county on both the coast and inland** while maintaining the unique urban and rural assets of the county.
- ❖ **Be research-based and innovative** in promotions, strategies and programs.
- ❖ Engage all constituencies and stakeholder groups in an effort **to continually solicit new ideas and present marketing results.**
- ❖ **Exceed expectation** through the customer service the organization provides for its constituents and stakeholders.
- ❖ **Provide transparency** for all aspects of the organization and open to community and constituent review.
- ❖ Be recognized by industry peers **by achieving and maintaining accreditation through the Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI).**



Part 5: Visit Mendocino County Core Services

The following are Visit Mendocino County's core services:

- Provide ongoing **community relations**.
- **Represent the tourism industry** to policy makers and stakeholders.
- Provide **referral services** to assist other agencies and organizations with tourism related issues.
- **Participate in economic development functions** as they relate to tourism industry development products and services.
- **Recommend funding** for tourism programs.
- **Represent Mendocino County** and its incorporated towns in national, regional statewide tourism initiatives that benefit the area.
- **Implement a destination marketing** program designed to provide a sustainable economic return for invested funds
- **Be a catalyst to bring the region together.**



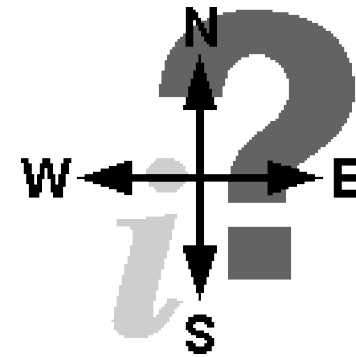


Part 6: Visit Mendocino County Strategic Goals

Input from stakeholders, staff and the board of directors has identified the following strategic goals.

- 1. Strengthen strategic alliances**
- 2. Identify and obtain increased tourism funding**
- 3. Improve research, planning and measurement**
- 4. Implement effective destination sales and marketing promotion**
- 5. Develop a sustainable tourism product**
- 6. Implement effective communication and outreach**
- 7. Provide industry education and training**
- 8. Strive for Visit Mendocino County organizational excellence**

The successful implementation of these goals will provide will bring together the industry stakeholders specifically including the Mendocino Lodging Association as well as the Mendocino County Promotional Alliance with a sustainable and competitive direction.





Action Steps

Part 7: Implementation

Strategic Alliances

Visit Mendocino County must continue to improve its strategic alliances with the Mendocino County Lodging Association as well as maintain good relationships with other public and private sector partners. These alliances include those within the region as well as those outside the region.

Key Opportunity

Key opportunity exists in further leveraging Visit Mendocino County's human and financial resources to gain further reach or improved efficiencies with marketing programs. The organization will need to work to maintain a good relationship with identified industry partners.



1. Continue to work with key strategic alliances within the tourism industry. Work through the 'gang of 7' efforts to fully understand and communicate with the Mendocino County Lodging Association.
2. Proactively work with other regional tourism destinations to help in implement Visit Mendocino County domestic and international marketing programs.
3. Identify potential areas to share costs in an effort to improve efficiencies (ex: joint research, special event strategies)
4. Continue the transparency process including an open budget, annual audit, annual meeting, publishing all employee salary ranges (and job descriptions) for every position for the organization, publishing meeting documents and posting the transparency policy.

Staff: Scott Schneider, President & CEO

Funding: \$50,000 (Projected over three years)



Tourism Funding

Tourism funding is a key to the current and future competitiveness of Mendocino County. As a result of the recession tourism has become increasingly important to many destinations throughout California. The dramatic increase of Tourism Business Improvement Districts (over 70 within the state) now means that funding is extremely important.

Key Opportunity

Visit Mendocino County and its partner, the Mendocino County Lodging Alliance, has a potential opportunity to increase business improvement district funding. There are a number of important issues to work through, but the destination does need to grow this funding source in order to remain competitive.

Action Steps

1. Continue to listen to and be responsive to the lodging industry's needs.
2. Work proactively with the lodging industry to develop the needed analysis, rationale and timeline for a TBID increase.
3. Work with the lodging association to develop an approach to educate the industry about the funding increase and how it will be used and measured.
4. Work with the lodging industry to develop an accepted approach to measure the impact of increased funds.

Staff: Scott Schneider, President & CEO

Funding: \$25,000 (Projected over three years)





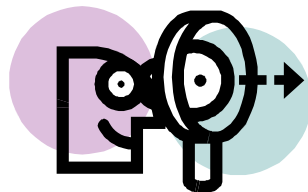
Research, Planning and Measurement

Ongoing destination research, planning and measurement are imperative for the long term synergy between Visit Mendocino County its stakeholder partners. Research, planning and measurement will give Mendocino County the ability to be at the forefront of changing market conditions and communicate those changes to the local tourism industry, keeping the tourism experience relevant. This information needs to be continually integrated into adaptive marketing plans and strategies.

Likewise the ability to continually improve the organization's measurements and effectiveness over the long term is a necessity, as it will allow it to provide specific Return on Investment (ROI) information to funding organizations.

Key Opportunity

To provide ongoing information for Visit Mendocino County market planning, to provide information for change to the tourism community and to develop state of the art measurement systems to complement specific program measurements.



Action Steps

1. Develop and implement a strategic approach to research, planning and measurement, always refining marketing efforts.
2. Work with stakeholder groups to be a part of the measurement process. Have them assist in developing measurements that are accurate and agreeable to all.
3. Develop a macro level measurement approach to Visit Mendocino County's programs that will generate a Return on Investment analysis.
4. Continually refine program level measurements to provide as much insight as possible for marketing programs.
5. Develop an ongoing rotation of marketing research that includes visitor profile information and out of market perceptions of Mendocino County.
6. Develop a comprehensive system to disperse research in a tailored and targeted way to different constituent groups.

Staff: Scott Schneider, President & CEO

Funding: \$50,000 (Projected over three years)



Destination Sales and Marketing Promotion

Destination sales and marketing promotion are at the heart of Visit Mendocino County's mission. As such these marketing programs are integral to developing a sustainable tourism economy. Visit Mendocino County currently promotes a variety of destination elements including the following:

Reason for visiting

- Wine tasting and wineries/culinary
- Redwoods
- Special events
- Arts and culture
- Recreation

All of these activities are set within the coastal and wine country atmosphere the county offers.

These tourism elements are promoted to several target market segments including the following:

Target segments

Primary markets:

1. Leisure – This segment includes visitors from traditional geographic markets including the Bay Area, Sacramento and other parts of Northern California, out of state visitors and international visitors via the San Francisco gateway.

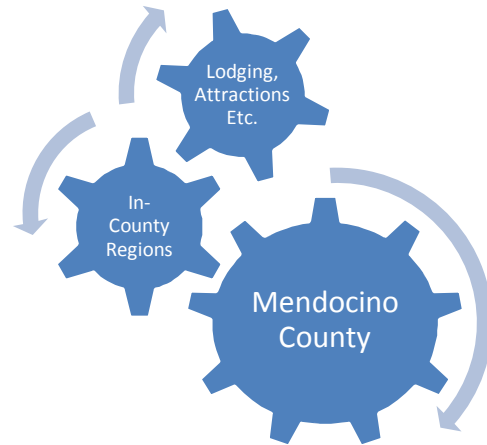
2. LGBT – This segment has significant potential given Mendocino's proximity to the San Francisco Bay Area, one of the country's largest LGBT markets.
3. Pet Friendly – The pet friendly segment continues to grow with many consumers now viewing their pets as extended members of their family.

Key Opportunity

There are several key opportunities for Visit Mendocino County to consider, including the following:

1. Iconic brand development – Integral to the long term success of Mendocino County is the need to create awareness and interest in the destination through its branding efforts.

These efforts are critical to influencing potential visitors to visit the region. By creating effective branding, consumers will be directed to the website where they can get a fuller picture of what the area has to offer.



2. New market development – Mendocino County’s proximate location to the San Francisco Gateway is a significant opportunity to develop new markets. It should begin to target key segments from both domestic markets outside of California as well as international markets.
3. Increased technology platform – Given the advances in technology marketing and social media, Visit Mendocino County can be a leader within the County in integrating these elements into its marketing and targeting efforts. The capability is there to identify niche segments regionally, statewide and nationally and reach these important segments.

Action Steps

Branding

1. Continue to implement branding to effectively differentiate Mendocino County from other California coastal destinations.
2. Draw sharp distinctions between Mendocino County and other competitive California coastal destinations.
3. Increase awareness for Mendocino County by effectively positioning the destinations core elements: coastal location, redwoods and wine location along with the County’s unique culture and attitude.

Markets

1. Broaden Mendocino markets including domestic and international utilizing existing partners. Begin to consider a strategy for more international visitation.
2. Evaluate the potential of visitors flying into San Francisco interested in taking a coastal vacation.

Direct Sales

1. Concentrate direct sales efforts primarily in the leisure segment.



2. Continue to reinforce a strong Bay Area connection and encourage Mendocino to be a part of a California vacation.
3. Continue to integrate the brand into all sales elements.

Visitor Services

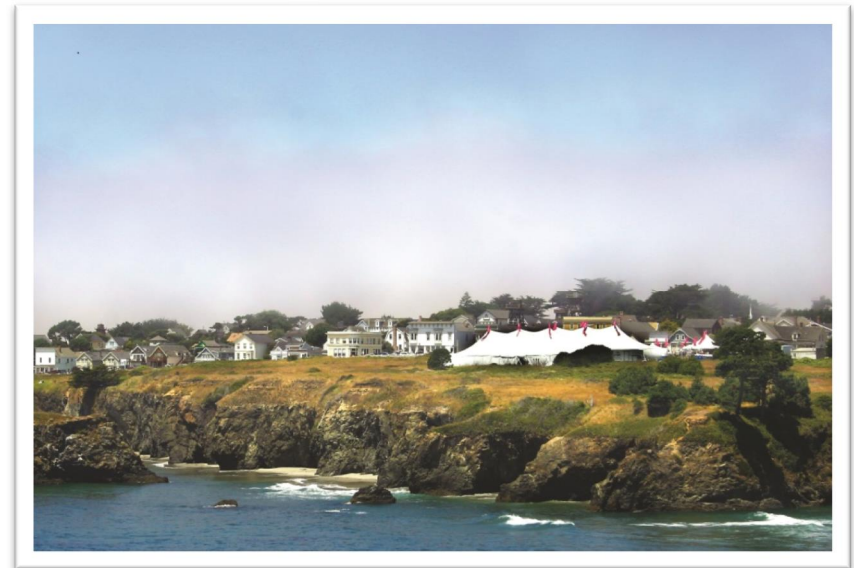
1. Continually enhance the visitor information using technology to enhance the experience and encourage visitors to stay longer.

Special Events

1. Work to develop a year-round special events strategy that identifies events for shoulder seasons.
2. Develop a strategy to link events in an effort to create incremental return visits.

Staff: All Staff

Funding: \$1, 500,000 (Projected over three years)





Sustainable Tourism Product Development

The “Tourism Product” within Mendocino County includes the physical aspects and emotional elements that combine to provide a unique travel experience.

The physical elements of the Mendocino County tourism product include the **natural setting, the infrastructure and superstructure of a destination**, while the emotional components of the tourism product includes the **local community, cultural and historical resources and overall destination hospitality**. These elements combine to provide an overall tourism experience including everything from events and activities to dining and shopping.

Visit Mendocino County has different levels of opportunity to support tourism development within the region. Tourism product development efforts can increase the frequency of visitor trips. It can increase the length of stay as well as attract new segments to Mendocino County.

With regard to physical product development Visit Mendocino County can and should be supportive (where appropriate) of infrastructure that can enhance and improve the local tourism economy.

At the same time the emotional components of the destination can change and improve. It is the ongoing role of Visit Mendocino County to support the tourism product improvements that, in the end, will provide visitors with a range of experiences that the

organization can effectively promote and will ultimately be sustainable over time.

Action Steps

1. Continue to support the wine and brewery industries as they develop new product opportunities.
2. Support new recreation programming.
3. Look to develop tourism product experiences that generate ongoing repeat visitors.
4. Continue to support additional full service lodging so as to increase the competitiveness in the group market.
5. Look to develop 3-5 niche opportunities like road biking, or motorcycle touring for potential long-term sustainable market development.
6. Educate visitors to the importance of protecting the local environment.

Staff: Richard Strom, Director of Tourism Development

Funding: \$250,000 (Projected over three years)





Communication and Outreach

Tourism is an important part of Mendocino County's economic profile. As such everyone is a stakeholder, including local residents, private businesses, government agencies, as well as visitors. To ensure long term success all stakeholders need to feel that their issues and perspectives are understood and that they understand the issues of other stakeholders.

Key Opportunity

Creating and maintaining positive stakeholder attitudes are critical to the success of Mendocino County and Visit Mendocino County's tourism promotion efforts.

Within Mendocino County tourism industry communication and outreach, it is critical to understand all sides of issues and well as to have as inclusive tourism promotion process as possible. The challenge often becomes how to do it more effectively given the ongoing contact with the industry.



Action Steps

1. Develop periodic stakeholder surveys to assess the perception of Visit Mendocino County programs and efforts.
2. Develop periodic outreach programs and forums that allow stakeholders to ask questions, voice concerns and make suggestions.
3. Provide accurate and consistent information on tourism related issues to all stakeholders through a variety of communication vehicles.
4. Develop and support programs that increase pride and involvement from all stakeholders.
5. Provide support for new and existing activities that are interesting for both residents and visitors and that encourage interaction between them.
6. Continually educate policymakers as to the economic and quality of life value that tourism has for Mendocino County.

Staff: Scott Schneider, President & CEO

Funding: \$25,000 (Projected over three years)

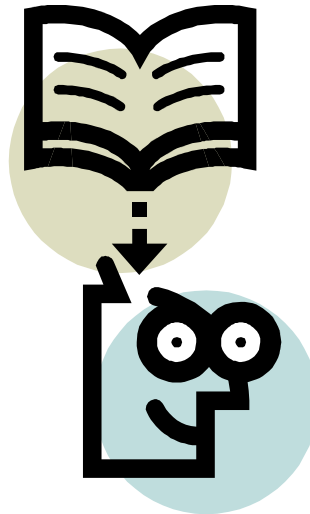


Industry Education and Training

New technology is constantly changing. Visit Mendocino County can play an important role educating and training the local tourism industry in order to improve coordination and effectiveness with the organization's programs.

Key Opportunity

To improve the quality of marketing, product development and customer services offered by the Mendocino County Tourism industry.



Action Steps

1. Maintain education and training standards including regular scheduled, accessible, and affordable educational programming that fits the needs of the local tourism industry.
2. Continually evaluate educational delivery mechanisms including traditional seminars, videos, etc.
3. Increase training in technology marketing so as to improve the overall competitiveness of the destination. Ongoing topics could include but are not limited to:
 - Tourism product distribution
 - Social marketing
 - TripAdvisor and Yelp strategy
 - Trends in technology marketing
 - Customer service
 - Revenue management
4. Develop specific training for non-profits (museums, special events) on how to integrate into the Mendocino County tourism industry.
5. Develop and maintain a Visit Mendocino County tool kit to assist in industry training.

Staff: Scott Schneider, President & CEO

Funding: \$25,000 (Projected over three years)



Visit Mendocino County Organizational Excellence

Along with DMAI certification, the organization needs to integrate into its culture and continue to strive for organizational excellence, setting an example for tourism promotion within the region.

Key Opportunity

The key opportunity is to clearly understand the role of the board and staff and to provide the highest quality of leadership throughout the county. Additionally the organization at (all levels) should provide transparency throughout the organization to instill confidence in funding partners and the tourism industry.

Action Steps

1. Continually review board operations with regard to the following:
 - Direction – To provide overall direction for the organization
 - Strategy (not develop but rather to help direct staff)
 - Board should spend 1 day marketing, 4 days politics
 - Staff can be 4 days marketing, 1 day politics
 - Accountability
 - How are we measuring? What new measurements can we employ? Must measure room nights
 - **Advocacy**
 - **Promote the positive and challenge the naysayers by offering them the opportunity to provide better ideas. Effectively communicate to members/community**
 - Leadership
 - Convince the membership that we are in this together.
 - Preparedness
 - Board members must be prepared
2. Review the organization for current and future staffing needs.
3. Continue to integrate best practices throughout the organization.



4. Obtain accreditation to DMAI.
5. Be transparent in dealing with all stakeholders, clearly articulating the organization's transparency policy.
6. Continue staff development including training, cross training, project management and leadership training.
7. Continue to reinforce the value of innovation among the staff.
8. Review outside non-tourism organizations to understand "how they do it".
9. Periodically visit other destinations to review methods and practices.
10. Expose the staff to key educational elements that support an innovative culture.

Staff: Scott Schneider, President & CEO

Funding: \$50,000 (Projected over three years)



Part 8: Success Factors

The following are key factors for success. They are critical for Visit Mendocino County to achieve its strategic direction and further enhance the success of the destination.

Success Factors

- **You have to work together**

Mendocino County is a destination that does not work as well as it can together. The organization is talented, but underlying issues of trust remain with some constituents. It is important for the leaders of all tourism industry organizations steer a steady and consistent path and stay focused on the key strategic challenges.

- **Act like you belong | move the destination to the next level**

The growth and marketplace presence of Mendocino County as a complete destination has evolved over time. As such it is important to envision moving the destination to the next level, one that attracts both strong regional domestic and international destination visitors.

To that end it is important for Visit Mendocino County to work to continue to develop the County as complete destination that motivates consumers to visit. The strategic plan and the direction of the board point the way to this success. Mendocino County has

emerged as an important player in the California tourism market, but the effort needs to continue.

- **Political Support**

Visit Mendocino County needs to continue to maintain political support for the organization and for tourism as a driver of the local economy. In order to take the destination to the next level it will require continued political support at the County level.

- **Community**

Critical to the destination's success is the continuation of efforts to educate and involve the community in tourism. It is important that the local community understand the importance of tourism in Mendocino County and the industry's role in generating employment and local tax revenue.

- **Culture of innovation**

Visit Mendocino County must continue to innovate and change to meet the changing dynamics of the industry in order to continually increase the destination's competitiveness and overcome its limitations.



Clearly there are a variety of strategic and tactical opportunities available for Mendocino County. However the board and staff have identified a number of potential obstacles that must be effectively managed for increased success of the destination.

Obstacles/Limitations

- **Increased tourism funding** – As tourism has become an increasing popular economic development strategy, both regionally and nationally, it will be ever more important to increase sources of funding to remain competitive.
- **Understating of tourism at the community | government | industry levels** – It will be important to educate the local community about the role tourism plays within the county and what it could play over the long term, including state and local regulations and zoning.