

DESTINATION STRATEGIC PLAN 2030

The Path Forward - Recommendations

Approved by Visit Sarasota County Board 10/17/24

Recommended Directional Imperatives

Visit Sarasota County can deliver success and elevate its important role within the community by implementing the strategies contained within the following directional imperatives. Each imperative contains specific strategies and actions to guide investments, organizational structure, and the individual action plans needed to accomplish the included objectives.

DRIVE CATALYTIC MARKETING & SALES RESULTS

Program destination marketing and sales initiatives that address expressed needs across Sarasota County

PREPARE A MORE RESILIENT AND COMPETITIVE FUTURE

Meaningful programs and tools that enhance the viability and success of both the destination and its businesses

DELIVER THE IMPORTANCE AND VALUE OF TOURISM

Effective and influential programs that communicate the important role that tourism provides for Sarasota County

DRIVE CATALYTIC MARKETING AND SALES RESULTS

Desired Outcomes:

- Overnight business becomes more consistent across days of the week and times of the year
- Air service to SRQ expands in both number routes and seats
- The Visit Sarasota County family of brands becomes more recognized and utilized
- Interest in relocating both talent and corporations to Sarasota County skyrockets
- Investments in parks, performance and sports venues becomes shared between visitors and residents



What Visit Sarasota County Must Do

In 2024, Destinations International released "Destination Promotion: A Catalyst for Community Vitality", a landmark research report profiling how ten North American destinations repositioned the value of destination marketing and sales. The 2021 collaboration between Visit Sarasota County and the Economic Development Corporation of Sarasota County to attract working talent to the area provides a definitive example of the principles from the report. Continuing this program and extending its community alignment focus into other market opportunities shapes a new sense of purpose and importance for destination marketing and sales. Purposeful destination marketing and sales supports key community needs and initiatives. Few destination organizations are positioned as effectively as Visit Sarasota to intentionally and strategically deliver community success across the following priorities:

- Air service expansion
- Talent and workforce recruitment
- Corporate leadership awareness
- Cultural vitality
- Seasonal stability
- Sports, recreation, and quality of life venue support

Why This Is Important

Some community members question whether Sarasota County should attempt to limit tourism growth. Perceptions that peak season visitor volume creates congestion overshadows the seasonality of the destination and the need for consistent business levels to offer a greater sense of stability to its hospitality workforce. Marketing Sarasota County can shift to focus on key catalytic outcomes and change the concept that tourism is simply a benefit to the lodging properties and attractions of Sarasota County. Tourism can be and should be a driving force for a more successful, effective, and livable community.

STRATEGIES TO DRIVE CATALYTIC MARKETING AND SALES RESULTS

Continue honing overnight visitor audiences

Sarasota County is a seasonal destination with distinctive periods of time that need amore stabilized production of overnight business. Concentrating marketing efforts on the audiences that have higher propensity to visit during these need periods can boost business success and support stable employment opportunities for the area's hospitality workforce while not adding to traffic congestion.

Recommended possible actions:

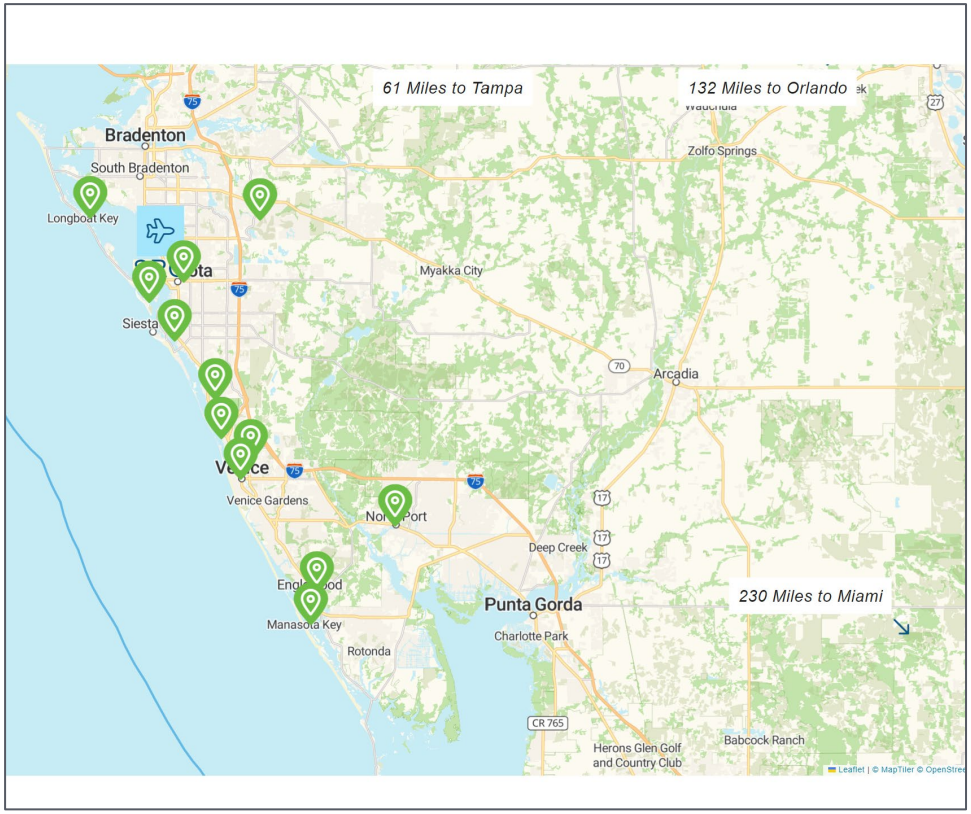
1. Prioritize need periods with potential audience groups
    - Florida drive market - Similarity in summer climate
    - Expanded Orlando vacation – Already traveling within the summer season, promote option to expand trip to this beach destination
    - European summer vacationers – Positive perceptions of Florida destinations with addition of Sarasota County beaches and cultural assets
2. Develop messaging and marketing placement emphasizing the escape aspects of Florida's Cultural Coast

2024 – Prioritize markets and build supportive data for decisions

2025 – Develop and deliver first campaigns around the top two priority markets

2026 – Measure 2025 results; Hone program; Continue delivery

2027, 2028 & 2029 – Measure 2026 results; Continue to hone program and delivery; Add third and fourth priority markets as able



STRATEGIES TO DRIVE CATALYTIC MARKETING AND SALES RESULTS

Expand air service marketing collaboration

Sarasota Bradenton International Airport (SRQ) serves 54 nonstop destinations through 11 airlines. The expansion of the airport will add more flight options as new gates enhance SRQ's important role in the economic growth of the region and its attractiveness as a place to live. Continued expansion and support for current and future routes requires collaboration between the airport and each county. Strategic focus and prioritization of markets helps both the expansion of service and the success of each route and carrier.

Recommended possible actions:

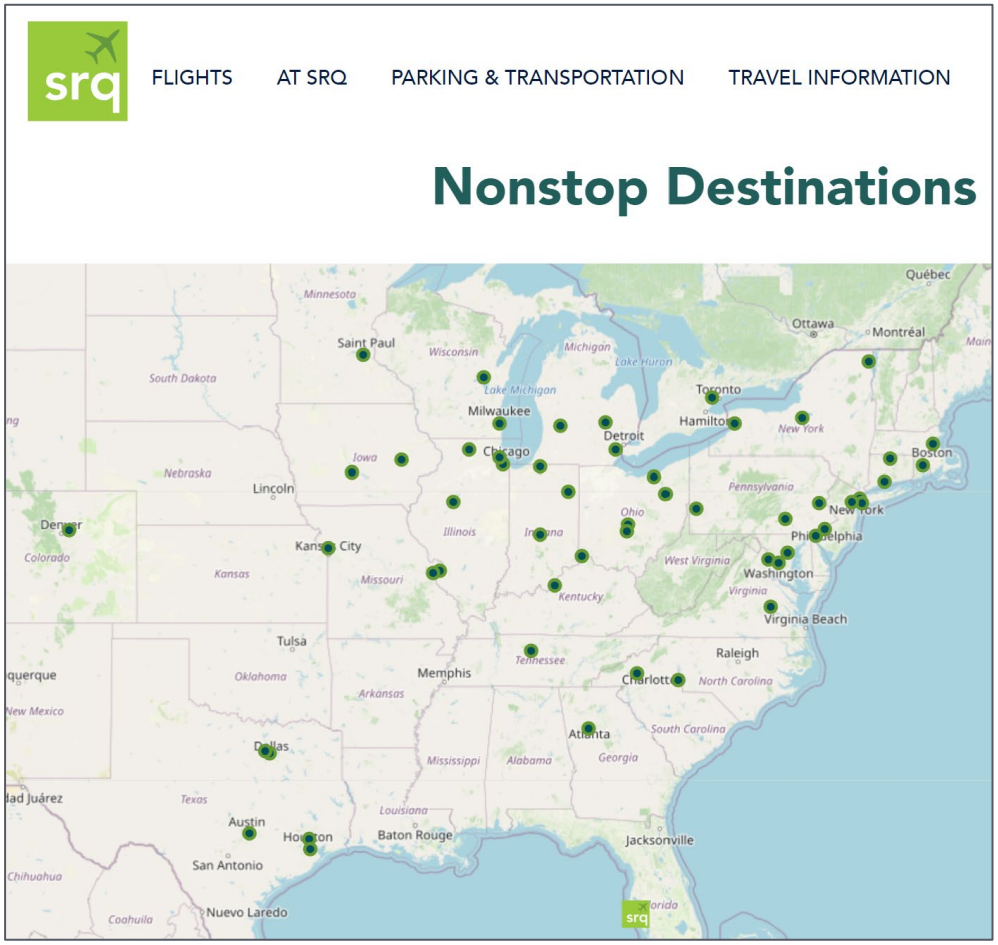
1. Prioritize the existing and upcoming new routes needing passenger growth and establish goals for seats
2. Continue collaborative planning with both SRQ officials and the Bradenton Area Convention and Visitors Bureau
3. Build messaging and marketing programs to accomplish goals
4. Prioritize future desired route additions and establish goals
5. Secure additional funding to support to new route additions

2024 – Convene conversations to establish future approach and programs to help strengthen existing routes

2025 – Set priorities; Develop and deliver targeted approach

2026 – Measure 2025 results; Hone air service program; Continue delivery; Begin regional conversations on new route targets

2027, 2028 & 2029 – Measure 2026 results; Continue to hone program and delivery; Add new route priority markets as able



STRATEGIES TO DRIVE CATALYTIC MARKETING AND SALES RESULTS cont.

Boost "Work Where You Want to Live" outreach

The "Work Where You Want to Live" program between Visit Sarasota County and the Economic Development Corporation of Sarasota County clearly exemplifies the principles behind Destinations International "Catalyst" report. Since the talent recruit promotion launched in 2021, other destinations attempted to copy the concept and approach. Continuing to be a front runner in the talent marketing competitive will help Sarasota County and its employers address future workforce needs while also reminding locals how lucky they are to live in Sarasota County.

Recommended possible actions:

1. Continue marketing placement and research on program effectiveness
2. Extend involvement into each community to encourage local messaging around livability and conversion
3. Communicate results to community

2024 – Convene discussion to refine talent marketing approach and key targets, including local messaging around talent retention

2025 – Develop and deliver campaigns around the top priority markets; Convene discussion with expanded group of participants

2026 – Measure 2025 results; Hone program; Continue delivery; Convene business and corporate sector involvement

2027, 2028 & 2029 – Measure 2026 results; Continue to hone program and delivery; Expand program to include Manatee County

Target corporate leadership events

Throughout the Destination Strategic Plan 2030 planning process, stakeholders often mentioned the absence of a convention center as a weakness or as a need. This perceived weakness masks the opportunity created through a unique focus on a specific group and conference market segment that ties perfectly into the hotel and resort capabilities of Sarasota lodging properties. Small corporate gatherings, board meetings, and corporate retreats build off the population dynamics of Sarasota County while adding a supportive program approach to the "Work Where You Want to Live" program. Successful luring of these small meetings to Sarasota has the potential to also grow business relocations to the area.

Recommended possible actions:

1. Research corporate leaders with homes or repeat vacation patterns to Sarasota County
2. Prioritize potential outreach methods including market segment specifics, corporate travel planners, event planners, and business travel associations
3. Develop messaging and marketing placement emphasizing the advantages of meeting in Sarasota County and extending a business meeting into a vacation getaway

2025 – Begin planning and research to develop the program

2026 – Develop and deliver first campaign and sales initiatives

2027, 2028 & 2029 – Measure 2026 results; Continue to hone sales initiatives and network of corporate leaders

STRATEGIES TO DRIVE CATALYTIC MARKETING AND SALES RESULTS cont.

Invigorate the Florida's Cultural Coast brand

The Cultural Coast brand is a differentiator for Visit Sarasota County and its various partners and communities. The promise of this brand provides an opportunity for widespread use and adaption by area partners. Strengthening and expanding the utilization of the brand allows Visit Sarasota to establish greater traction for the brand message while diversifying the meaning and interpretation of the brand connection to the community. Successful implementation for Florida's Cultural Coast branding recommendation creates the opportunity to extend similar steps into other Visit Sarasota County brands.

Recommended possible actions:

1. Develop creative branding toolkits for use within different types of businesses and organizations
2. Convene the arts, entertainment, and cultural community to ensure their understanding, use, and adoption of the brand
3. Facilitate community engagement to connect the Cultural Coast brand to the area's lifestyle
4. Explore pursuing outside third party designation to intensify the brand's reach and meaning

2024 – Build branding engagement into Partnership programs

2025 – Develop branding toolkits; Convene brand utilization workshops among arts-related partners

2026 – Continue implementation with partners

2027, 2028 & 2029 – Add lifestyle initiative; Continue to hone partnership program

Sarasota County: Cities of Arts and Artists

February 7, 2021 - *Visit Sarasota County Staff*

Sarasota is known as Florida's Cultural Coast® because of its abundance of performances, galleries and more packed into a relatively small geographic area. Learn about all the cultural offerings in this beautiful beach community

Discover your artistic side with a trip to one of Sarasota's many performing arts venues or art galleries. There is something new to see every week in the arts and culture world of this Gulf Coast destination.

Watch: Why Sarasota County is Considered Florida's Cultural Coast®



STRATEGIES TO DRIVE CATALYTIC MARKETING AND SALES RESULTS cont.

Leverage tourism support for parks & venues

Sarasota County's vibrant parks, performance, and sports venues provides some of the area's most vibrant and appealing assets. Maintaining current venues while adding new facilities requires investment and support. Tourism related event bookings of these venues provides outside funding support without impacting the taxes of local residents. The partnership between Visit Sarasota and Sarasota County Parks and Recreation continues to produce event booking successes.

Recommended possible actions:

1. Convene biannual market conversations to discuss opportunities for new, expanded, or repeat group events at local venues
2. Research and develop a target list including event producer and dates
3. Evaluate the performance and seasonality of events to prioritize list and targets
4. Build and refine replicable and relevant measurement tool for public facility event bookings

2025 – Convene market conversations; Build initial target list

2026 – Pursue targets through direct and indirect prospecting; Begin building measurement tool; Continue market conversations

2027, 2028 & 2029 – Hone program and delivery; Implement measurement tool; Communicate results



PREPARE A MORE RESILIENT AND COMPETITIVE FUTURE

Expected Outcomes:

- Visit Sarasota County partners become more engaged and successful
- Visit Sarasota County enhances the overall preparedness for natural disaster response
- The Cultural Coast brand becomes more recognized and utilized
- Visit Sarasota County becomes engaged across a wider portion of the area's tourism industry



What Visit Sarasota County Must Do

Visit Sarasota County's relationship with its partners is vital to both its operation, structure, and programming. This relationship must emerge from a traditional business membership approach to become fully connected to service, guidance, and advisory services. The organization currently plays this role in certain situations, but full adoption of an approach that builds supportive services across the wider range of tourism and hospitality businesses changes the connection and value between Visit Sarasota County and its partners.

Why This Is Important

Partner-based destination organizations underwent tremendous changes in their partnership models since the pandemic. Some did away with the partnership program entirely, while others shifted to a direct pay for services/promotions approach. Visit Sarasota County operates somewhere in the middle of this spectrum. The opportunity to fully shift into an advisory role as a partner focused organization allows Visit Sarasota County to continually seek and provide new products that address success, resiliency, and competitiveness of its partners. The new success metric is no longer new partnerships or partnership retention, but rather partner engagement and partner utilization of tools. This revised partnership approach provides more opportunities for Visit Sarasota County to show its affection for its partners across the area's wide hospitality and tourism landscape.

STRATEGIES TO PREPARE A MORE RESILIENT AND COMPETITIVE FUTURE

Transform the VSC partnership model

Although the current Visit Sarasota County partnership model helps organize and focus the relationship between Visit Sarasota County and its business partners, the model's set-up creates challenges around expectations and level of engagement. Many destination organizations changed their partnership models following the pandemic by engaging partners more directly through tools and services to form a more meaningful and valuable relationship between the partner and the destination organization.

Recommended possible actions:

1. Finalize a new tiered partnership system designed to encourage active participation and collaboration
2. Recraft the partnership offerings to provide a wider array of tools and services beyond networking and promotional listings
3. Assess partner satisfaction through a quadrant rating system
4. Standardize partner access through program reminders embedded in all reports, plans, and presentations

2024 – Build and prepare the overall new partnership model and subsequent programs

2025 – Launch new partnership model; Pursue one-on-one engagement with every partner

2026 – Continue adding services; Expand partnership outreach; Measure partnership benefit

2027, 2028 & 2029 – Adapt and improve partnership program



Interested in a Partnership?

Learn More about becoming a valued Visit Sarasota County Partner

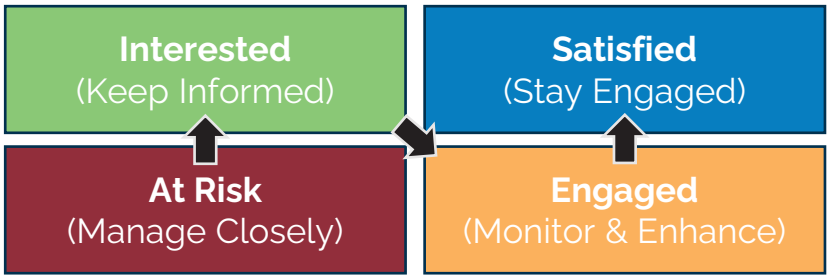
Join Our Tourism Marketing Family

Tourism is a multibillion-dollar industry in Sarasota County—and growing. We welcome Sarasota area businesses looking to partner with us to continue strengthening our destination and the quality of life we all enjoy. Our mission is to make Sarasota the must visit destination on the Gulf Coast.

Who We Are

VSC is the official destination marketing organization for the Sarasota County region, presenting our community as the ideal location for leisure visits, meetings, reunions, wedding and sporting events. We provide targeted exposure with regional, national and global audiences, direct sales opportunities, visitor experience opportunities, free educational events and extensive social media endeavors that feature our partners.

Stakeholder input praised Visit Sarasota County staff for their individual responsiveness and availability. While the ability to have one-on-one connections with staff is an obvious advantage for partners, it is difficult to consistently provide. The following partner satisfaction quadrant system helps determine whether one-on-one attention is needed based on previous engagements.



STRATEGIES TO PREPARE A MORE RESILIENT AND COMPETITIVE FUTURE

Provide toolkits as a partnership program

Toolkits provide a direct service for Visit Sarasota County to offer partners. Developing a wide range of toolkits and providing training and education on how to best utilize the information, data, programs, content, and other elements of each toolkit moves the partnership model away from the more static/indirect partner services and events to being intentionally focused on supporting business needs and success.

Recommended possible actions:

1. Develop business service toolkits that help partners better understand how to perform more competitively and efficiently within the Sarasota County tourism system
2. Implement a concerted in-person training and education program to help disseminate the toolkits to the hospitality business community

2024 – Build and prepare the overall new partnership model and subsequent programs

2025 – Develop initial toolkits; Begin training program on toolkits and services; Include initial toolkits as part of new partnership model

2026 – Continue adding toolkits; Expand educational outreach; Measure and track toolkit use

2027, 2028 & 2029 – Adapt and improve partnership program

Partnership Toolkits & Services:

Each of these topical areas represents an option for a Visit Sarasota partnership toolkit. Each toolkit should be continually monitored and managed by the key individuals or vendors working within Visit Sarasota.

1. Social Media – tools for expanding the partner's social media presence, especially with Visit Sarasota County's programs
2. Branding – tools for engaging any of the Visit Sarasota County family of brands
3. Research – tools for interpreting and applying research results and data on Sarasota County's tourism industry
4. Promotion – tools for marketing and advertising to prospective visitors before their stay in Sarasota County
5. Co-op marketing – tools and programs that help promote partners to prospective customers
6. Events – tools for planning and producing events within the different areas of Sarasota County
7. Sales – tools for understanding and reaching the group market
8. Visitor services – tools for marketing and advertising to actual visitors during their stay in Sarasota County
9. Product awareness – tools that help hospitality employees make suggestions for things to do or see
10. Disaster readiness – tools and systems for preparing and recovering from crisis and disasters

PLUS

- Advisory services to help partners strategically implement each toolkit

DELIVER THE IMPORTANCE AND VALUE OF TOURISM

Expected Outcomes:

- Residents and community leaders understand the valuable role tourism plays across Sarasota County
- Community leaders and tourism stakeholders become more aware of the competitiveness of the destination and the importance of Visit Sarasota County's programs



What Visit Sarasota County Must Do

Visit Sarasota County plays a vital role in supporting the vibrancy of all parts of Sarasota County. The destination organization is hindered when the community misperceives that tourism will remain strong and competitive without business development or destination marketing efforts. To help reset community sentiment on the value and importance of year-round, overnight stays, communications need to include certain key elements, including:

- Why is tourism important to the local economy and resident quality of life?
- How do visitor taxes reduce overall taxes on residents?
- How are local visitor taxes invested back into the community?
- What community assets are supported by tourism spending?
- How do visitors in overnight travel markets learn about Sarasota County?
- How does VSC manage marketing and sales to address community needs?
- What is needed to ensure that resident quality of life is a key consideration for future tourism decisions and infrastructure development?

Visit Sarasota County and its partners must be continually communicated the answers to those questions.

Why This Is Important

Tourism is the primary driver of the Sarasota County economy. Unlike other industries that can move to locations, tourism cannot and will not relocate because the assets are locked into place. Tourism can be pinched by a lack of local support and governmental attempts to divert funding. Tourism is extremely competitive, and marketing for overnight stays must continue. Tourism gets blamed for many of the challenges facing Sarasota County, especially traffic congestion. Providing accurate information on traveler profiles, travel patterns, and regional growth helps to create a more objective understanding of tourism's impacts.

STRATEGIES TO PRESENT THE VALUE OF TOURISM

Drive an understanding of tourism's role & impact

Visit Sarasota County maintains a strong research program that monitors travel and measures the impact. This research should be continually expanded to provide clear guidance for decision making. Additionally, the findings and results from the research program need to be marketed and communicated across the community. The local audience needs to under why Visit Sarasota exists and the role the organization and tourism plays in support of quality of life and the local economy.

Recommended possible actions:

1. Activate a comprehensive and objective destination impact communication program
2. Align destination impact communications to respective audiences and their connections to impacts
    - Residents – Evidence of tax savings, Public amenities paid for by tourism taxes
    - Elected officials and governmental leaders – The importance of tourism in generating visitor tax dollars
    - Businesses – The reasons for/results of catalytic marketing
    - All – The current competitive state and business needs of Sarasota's tourism economy
3. Continue surveying local businesses and residents to better align VSC programs to the community
4. Launch destination stewardship program to communicate visitor management efforts

2025 – Link research messaging to audiences; Develop outreach plan

2026 and beyond – Spread communications; Evaluate effectiveness; Commission destination stewardship plan

Mission:
We make Sarasota County a better place by promoting our community on the world stage

Vision:
Creating a vibrant Sarasota County through tourism

Visitor Diversity Statement:
We are proud of the diverse communities and cultures which help make up our destination and are equally proud of and welcoming to the broad diversity of travelers who choose our destination for their leisure, sports and meeting needs. We continue to commit to extending our very best hospitality to all those who come to experience the vast options our great destination offers.

Values:
- Kinship – We lead with kindness – cultivating a community in which you feel welcomed, connected, and included
- Credibility - We earn trust through collaborative, quality acts of service and transparent, honest, consistent communication.
- Respect - We honor your time and your perspective- fostering an inclusive and harmonious environment for visitors and community members.
- Fun - We intentionally choose joy - creating celebratory atmospheres for our partners, visitors, and ourselves.

2030 Strategic Plan: Progress and the Path Ahead

October 2026 Update



2030 Strategic Plan Commitments

The 2030 Strategic plan is guided by three directional imperatives

DRIVE CATALYTIC MARKETING & SALES RESULTS

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Effective and influential programs that communicate the important role that tourism provides for Sarasota County

VISIT Sarasota beaches and beyond



From Planning to Measurable Success

2024:
Build the foundation

- Established Priorities
- Reviewed Research
- Analyzed Partnership Strategies
- Evaluated Measurement Needs

2025:
Launch and test

- Introduced:
  - Campaigns
  - Programs
  - Partner Resources
  - New Market Approaches

2026:
Measure and expand

- Refined successful programs
- Increased/maintained investments
- Strengthened measurement

VISIT Sarasota
beaches and beyond



Strategic Area 1

DRIVE CATALYTIC MARKETING & SALES RESULTS

Program destination marketing and sales initiatives that address expressed needs across Sarasota County

Marketing and sales targets the audiences and markets that matter most

Key Actions

- Audience-Driven Seasonal Marketing
- Regional / Chamber Spotlight Campaign
- Airline Expansion Efforts
- Florida's Cultural Coast Evolution
- Meetings Campaigns
- Luxury Sales Efforts
- Sports facilities
- Sports International events



VISIT Sarasota beaches and beyond

Strategic Area 1

DRIVE CATALYTIC MARKETING & SALES RESULTS

Program destination marketing and sales initiatives that address expressed needs across Sarasota County

Marketing and sales targets the audiences and markets that matter most

Key Metrics

- **Regional Spotlight Campaign:** The campaign expanded destination marketing across six Sarasota County communities, helping address the need for more balanced countywide promotion. In FY26, it generated 9.5 million impressions and 36,600+ meaningful actions, directly supporting the Strategic Plan goal of using marketing to address needs across Sarasota County.







- **Florida's Cultural Coast Evolution:** An evolving initiative, from toolkit development for partner use and annual Arts & Culture Forums to the current development of the brand into a broader lifestyle platform that can flex across audiences, including leisure, meetings, sports, arts, outdoors with a "What Will It Inspire In You?" Message.







VISIT Sarasota
beaches and beyond

Strategic Area 2

PREPARE A MORE RESILIENT AND COMPETITIVE FUTURE

Meaningful programs and tools that enhance the viability and success of both the destination and its businesses

Partner support is becoming more practical and measurable

Key Actions:

- Partnership Model Structural Changes
- Partner Satisfaction Survey
- Partner education, resources and toolkits
- Disaster readiness and recovery support
- Research and Data capabilities
- Inaugural Partner Events
  - Annual GM GM Meeting
  - Local Services Workshop
  - Vacation Rental Meeting
  - Quarterly Hotel DOS Meetings
  - PR Roundtables



Support the 941

VISIT Sarasota beaches and beyond

Strategic Area 2

PREPARE A MORE RESILIENT AND COMPETITIVE FUTURE

Meaningful programs and tools that enhance the viability and success of both the destination and its businesses

Partner support is becoming more practical and measurable

Key Metrics:

- **Sentiment:** In our Annual Partner Survey, 93% would recommend partnership to a peer and 94 agreed that VSC's tourism efforts are effective—a 13% YOY increase.
- **Engagement:** In FY26, our signature events – Summit & NTTW – generated record revenue and attendance. NTTW was our highest grossing in the last 5 years, with 210+ tickets sold, 170+ attendees, and $18,305 in revenue and 15 sponsorships.



Support the 941

VISIT Sarasota beaches and beyond

Strategic Area 3

DELIVER THE IMPORTANCE AND VALUE OF TOURISM

Effective and influential programs that communicate the important role that tourism provides for Sarasota County

Tourism value extends across Sarasota County

Key Actions:

- Transparency Page
- Internal Communications Plan & Broad Stakeholder Engagement
- Communication of TDT Benefits & Research
- Visitor Economic Impact



Sarasota County tourism grows as Florida numbers decline



Strategic Area 3

DELIVER THE IMPORTANCE AND VALUE OF TOURISM

Effective and influential programs that communicate the important role that tourism provides for Sarasota County

Tourism value extends across Sarasota County

Key Metrics

- **Local Media Coverage:** In FY25 and FY26, VSC earned and/or was placed in 634 regional stories, garnering 2.2 BILLION impressions. More inbound inquiries than ever before, thanks in part to data pitches

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Sarasota County tourism grows as Florida numbers decline



The Next Phase: Priorities Through 2030

VSC's next phase will focus on measuring impact, strengthening successful programs and responding to changing community needs.

Refine Demand Generation
- Continue targeting audiences with the greatest potential during need periods
- Strengthen air service, meetings and sports opportunities
- Use (and share!) performance data to guide investment

Strengthen Destination Resilience
- Expand practical resources and education for partners
- Advance website, CRM and measurement capabilities
- Support workforce, crisis readiness and destination assets

Build Community Understanding
- Launch a new resident sentiment survey, Measure and Share Results
- Continue To Communicate Tourism's Economic and Community Benefits
- Monitor Changing Policy Conditions and Advocate, Educate & Adapt as Needed

VISIT Sarasota beaches and beyond

