

# Josephine County Visitors Association **STRATEGIC PLAN**

June 2022 - May 2025



# INTRODUCTION

Josephine County Visitors Association (JCVA) is a new 501c6 nonprofit funded through the Transient Lodging Tax to directly benefit and represent the retail, restaurant, lodging, entertainment, recreation, cultural entities, and area attractions through increased awareness, visitation, and patronage.

JCVA was incorporated in early 2021 with an executive board, followed in a few months by a full board of fifteen members to represent the diversity of stakeholders representing the visitor industry. They hired their Executive Director on November 1, 2021. The emergence of JCVA came from the need to expand the scope and execute marketing and other tourism promotion for the greater benefit of the visitor industry in alignment with the intended use of TLT funds in described in ORS 320.300 to 320.350 and OTC rulings: 284.101 - 284.146.

Faced with an ever-changing travel & tourism industry, increased competition from sites and towns throughout the Pacific Northwest, and the uncertainty of post-COVID travel, JCVA hired Civic\* Possible to help build the organizational strategic plan to guide JCVA and their stakeholders through the first years of existence.

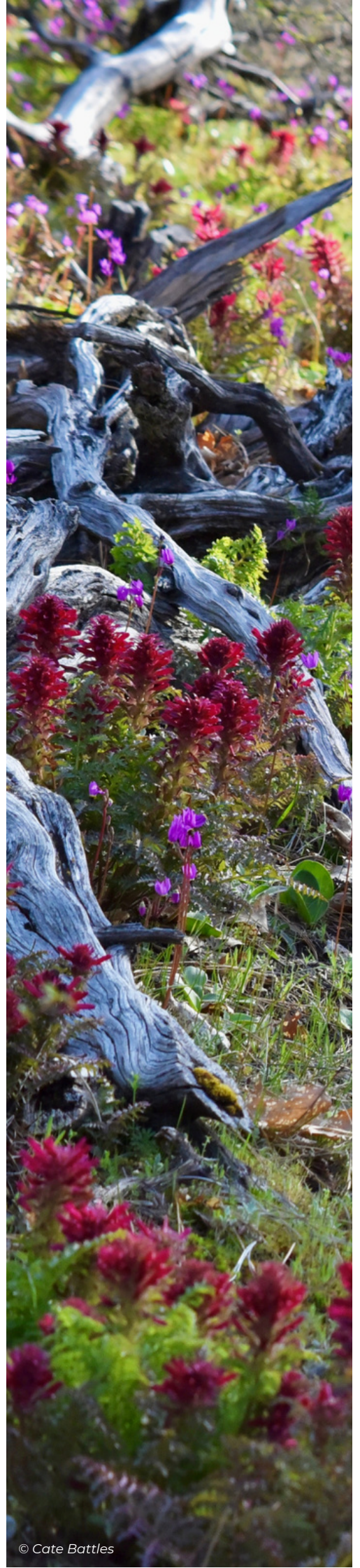
Looking ahead, JCVA will need to adopt and implement a full-scale inclusive marketing campaign and build strategic partnerships with the business community, residents, area partners, and local municipalities, all while managing the internal work of building a high-performing organization capable of executing the work laid out in this plan.

Whether you were part of this process or are reading this a few years later, you will find a thorough, informed strategy that sets Josephine County Visitors Association up for success well into the future.



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



## > Executive Summary

This Strategic Plan provides guidance to JCVA and its stakeholders through the foundational years of the organization. While encompassing JCVA's primary charge of marketing, this Strategic Plan focuses on three additional strategic objectives that to help JCVA through its first three years of existence.

This document incorporates thoughts from stakeholders representing the multiple business sectors, geographic locations, nonprofit interests, and local government entities.

Through this process, marketing the area to expand the economic impact of visitors was clearly identified as JCVA's prime charge. Along with marketing, there was significant discussion regarding what a healthy visitor industry means to various stakeholders, what the stakeholders expect and desire from JCVA, and what measures to use as indicators of organizational success.

Because JCVA is a new organization, it is crucial to give the organization a solid foundation in which to become a key partner in the overall success of the community for decades to come. This requires a significant amount of internal work to build organizational capacity to be a valuable partner for all stakeholders as it delivers on its primary objective for the community.

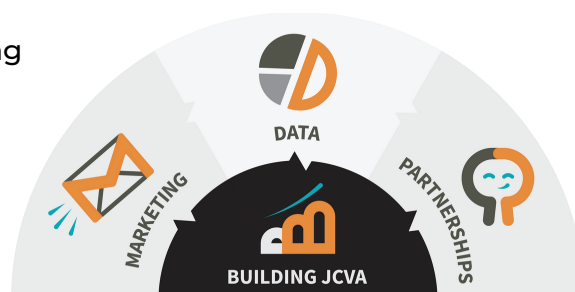
To meet its mission "to establish trust in the community by promoting our unique tourism assets while enhancing local livability." JCVA will focus on four Strategic Objectives.

Objective One: **Tourism Promotion & Marketing**

Objective Two: **Data**

Objective Three: **Partnerships**

Objective Four: **Building a Strong JCVA**



Strategic Objectives are high-level goals that provide direction to JCVA and its partners in prioritizing work to achieve its mission. Because of the high-level nature of these Strategic Objectives, they are written to be directional while not being prescriptive. Within the sections covering these objectives, success is defined as outcomes that should be achieved, leaving the exact path up to JCVA to navigate in real time.

JCVA and its stakeholders should measure the organization's success in meeting these Strategic Objectives. While increased tourism and the success of JCVA are closely linked, the preceding years of pandemic and increased fire activity have demonstrated that the increase or decrease of tourism can not be solely attributed to a single organization.

# BACKGROUND



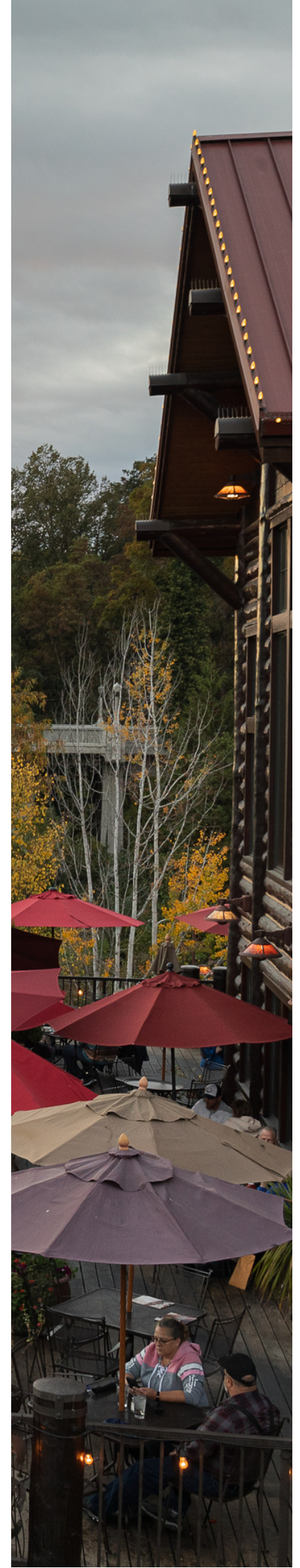
## > Background

JCVA has come into existence during a period of immense change. The world is not only emerging from COVID, but also technology has enabled rapidly changing visitor experiences, and these changes have radically changed how communities attract and manage their visitor industries. This is a global phenomenon affecting local communities in unforeseen ways just a few years ago.

Along with these changes, tourism organizations are evolving. For decades tourism organizations were solely responsible for filling hotel rooms; they are now key partners in the economic development and community development ecosystems. DMOs are shifting more into community stewards of the visitor ecosystem.

Recognizing these global changes, the City of Grants Pass reevaluated its approach to managing visitor attractions and experiences. After years of managing this work internally and then through a subcontracted firm, the city, with the help of DMOPROZ, determined the need for a 501c6 nonprofit to be formed in order to manage the marketing and visitor experience. Thus the formation of the Josephine County Visitors Association.

The process of creating the organization started in 2020 by forming a steering committee that handled the incorporation, setting bylaws, forming the organization's board, hiring staff, and signing a contract with the City to use TLT funds in alignment with Oregon Revised Statutes and stakeholder needs.



# STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT



## > Stakeholder Engagement

The Stakeholder Engagement for this Strategic Plan engaged targeted stakeholders who represent a broad cross-section of the Josephine County community with a vested interest in the health of the visitor industry. The process revealed insights, opinions, and facts that formed this plan and helped shape the strategic objectives.

The Stakeholder Engagement process included 43 inputs from 29 interviews and 14 survey responses. The responses included representatives from the City of Grants Pass, City of Cave Junction, Josephine County, visitor-based business owners from downtown and around the county, and other regional partners. Each interview covered desired goals and opportunities and challenges in regard to the success of JCVA and the visitor industry as a whole.

Thank you to every Stakeholder who offered their time and thoughts to support this plan. The following community members donated a combined 53 hours and 40 minutes to the creation of this plan. This donation of the community's time demonstrates a deep commitment by those listed here to the success of JCVA.

### Josephine County

- Commissioner Herman Baertschiger
- Commissioner Darin Fowler
- Commissioner Dan DeYoung
- Tamra Martin - *Fairgrounds Director*

### City of Grants Pass

- Mayor Sarah Bristol
- Councilor Rob Pell
- Councilor Brian DeLaGrange
- Councilor Rick Riker
- Councilor Valerie Lovelace
- Councilor Curt Collins

### City of Cave Junction

- Council President Jean Ann Miles

### Visitor Industry Stakeholders

- Seth Kaplan - *A Greater Applegate*
- Bob Hackett - *Travel Southern Oregon*
- Marta Tarantsey - *Business Oregon*
- Colleen Padilla - *SORED!*
- Terry Hopkins - *Steam Distillery & the Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association*
- Chad Thorsen - *Rogue Vally Mountain Bike Association & Grants Pass Parks and Recreation Committee*
- Doug Bradley - *Kensington Investment Group*
- Brittni Doyle - *Mama Bee's Farm*
- Heather White - *BikeKraft*
- Sydney Mitchell - *Shoefly Oregon*
- Lindsay Jones - *Illinois Valley Community Development*
- Josie Molloy - *Chamber of Commerce*
- Ashley Crews - *Weekend Beer Co.*
- Tamara Bushnell - *CHI Hospitality Group*
- Mandi DelVaglio - *Community Member*
- Ward Warren - *Downtown property owner and Historical Committee Member*
- Hyla Lipson - *Grants Pass Arts Museum*
- Jeff Voigt - *Community Member*

### OTHER INTERVIEWS

In addition to the formal research conducted, many informal conversations with community members and visitors while undergoing everyday activities in Grants Pass and the surrounding area.

# VISION MISSION & VALUES



## > Vision

A year-round, robust, tour industry that is balanced with local livability needs to keep the friendly small town values and sustain unique experiences within Josephine County.

## > Mission

JCVA's mission is to establish trust in the community by promoting our unique tourism assets while enhancing local livability.

## > Values

### COMMUNITY

We are all in this together. JCVA values our community and understands we are a part of it. Though we may have a direct charge of increasing tourism, we value the well-being of our industry partners and community members.

### COMMITMENT

We are committed to our local stakeholders through acts of service in advocacy and marketing partnerships.

### ENERGY

We approach our service with positive, creative energy and passion for the visitor experience.

### TRANSPARENCY

We build trust through open communication and the sharing of information.

### INCLUSION

We value relationships with everyone without prejudice based on race, geographic location, industry, socio-economic status, gender identity, sexual orientation, or political and personal beliefs.



# SWOT ANALYSIS



## > SWOT

A SWOT Analysis – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats – was conducted throughout the engagement process. This process helped shape the strategic objectives and identified areas to address in order for the Strategic Plan to be successful.

### Strengths

- Five-year runway contract
- Stable TLT funding
- Representational board of directors
- Committed and passionate Executive Director with years of industry experience
- Limitless opportunity
- Strong community support from key stakeholders

### Weaknesses

- Divergent views amongst stakeholders on how to attract visitors and what they do when visiting.
- Lack of understanding from secondary and tertiary stakeholders
- Inexperienced board of directors
- First-time executive director
- Limited budget compared to other regional DMOs
- City-County politics
- City Micromanagement
- Target markets not yet identified
- Distinct seasonality
- Confusion among the groups involved in community marketing – who is responsible for various efforts
- Lack of relevant visitor data

### Opportunities

- Businesses, regions and industry sectors desire a network builder
- Identify target market/s
- Craft business and community understanding of the role of tourism
- Explore visitor data in meaningful ways
- Grants Pass is still “undiscovered”
- Grow visitation during the shoulder seasons
- Collecting TLT on Short Term Rentals countywide
- Collaboration in re-opening from the pandemic – an opportunity for a stronger community
- Collaborative marketing with business and community partners
- Collaborative programming (example: coordinating a customer service workshop or other training to improve the visitor experience)

### Threats

- Community residents concerned with “too many visitors”
- Fire season
- Pandemic 2.0
- The visitor industry is followed by relocations to Grants Pass, housing prices increase, and availability diminishes
- Community understanding of the value of tourism
- A bad visitor experience – poor customer service
- Homelessness
- Shifts in the local political landscape

# STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES



## > Strategic Objectives

Anyone who has written a plan, whether it be for business or just a vacation, knows that reality has a way of interfering. Because of this, the following Strategic Objectives are written as high-level outcomes to be achieved as opposed to an action plan.

Through the strategic planning process, it was clear that while each stakeholder holds different ideas regarding the roles, responsibilities, and actions that JCVA should take, a few themes emerged in which nearly all stakeholders aligned. The following Strategic Objectives incorporate the overlapping agreement from the diversity of engaged stakeholders.

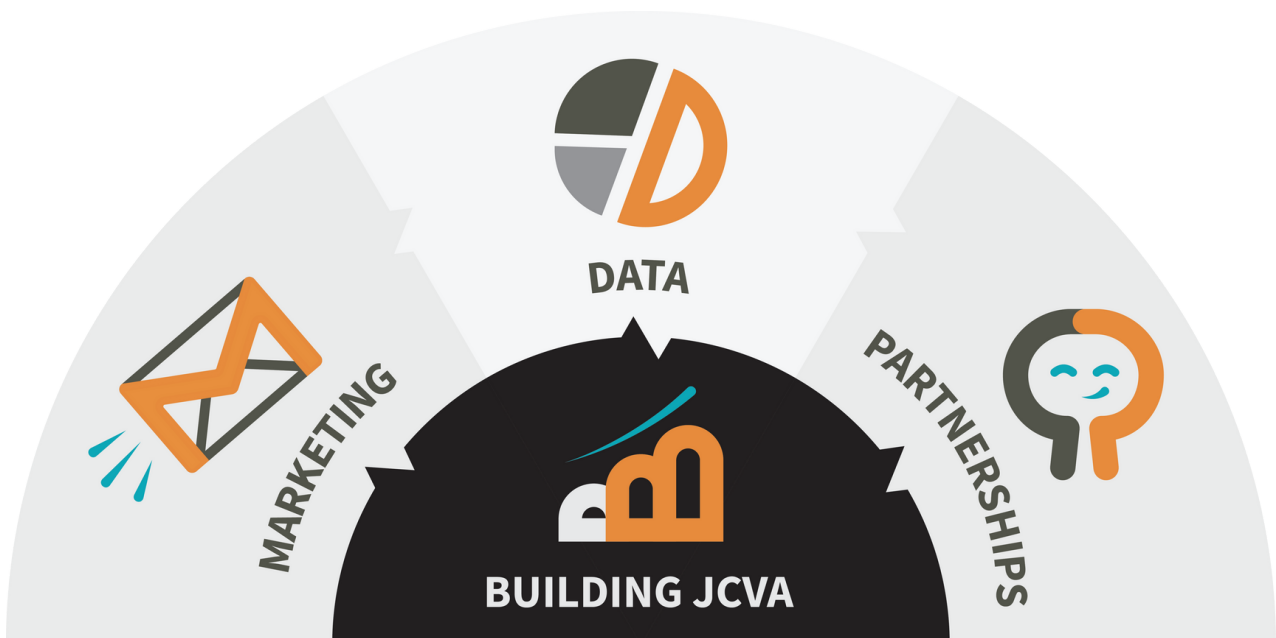
These objectives are written according to these central themes. They are written as and can be measured by outcomes achieved vs. tasks performed. This provides JCVA flexibility in meeting contractual obligations and stakeholder demands based on the operational environment at the time for decision making. Many actions taken by JCVA may meet multiple goals identified in this document.

Objective One: Tourism Promotion & Marketing

Objective Two: Data

Objective Three: Partnerships

Objective Four: Building a Strong JCVA



# JCVA STRATEGIC PLAN

## MISSION:

Establish **trust** in the community by promoting our **unique tourism assets** while enhancing **local livability**.

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

### OBJECTIVE 1 MARKETING

Cohesive branding

Marketing strategy

Crafting visitor experience

### OBJECTIVE 2 DATA

Baseline visitor data

Stakeholder access

Education

### OBJECTIVE 3 PARTNERSHIPS

Stakeholder communication

Industry convening

Industry leadership

### OBJECTIVE 4 BUILDING A STRONG JCVA

Board of directors development

Increase staff capacity

Create & manage work systems

## Tourism Promotion & Marketing

Tourism Promotion is the primary objective of the JCVA. Successful tourism promotion enhances the industry's economic impact by increasing visitor spending within the community. It aims to create a better quality of life for those that call the area home. Successful tourism promotion not only increases the number of visitors to the area, but also increases the length of stay, diversifies visitor experiences, and influences their desire to return and/or share their positive experiences with friends and family.

To be successful in tourism promotion, JCVA will focus on the following outcomes:

### BRANDING

From the consumer lens, JCVA markets as Travel Grants Pass. As an organization that markets with funds from the City of Grants Pass lodging tax, marketing should include and support all the key assets a visitor might experience on their trip; many are within greater Josephine County. The brand should inspire visitation, sell the authenticity of the communities, and represent the whole county.

#### Outcomes:

- Stakeholders and visitors will be able to identify a cohesive brand for the region that is easily identifiable by visitors, locals, and stakeholders alike
- The brand reflects an authentic community voice and visitor experience

### MARKETING STRATEGY

Marketing programs will use data to make strategic investments to see the highest return on investment for TLT funds. Investments will be made that look for the best opportunity to encourage bookings during times of the year where there are larger potential increases in visitation and opportunities to encourage demand that might increase the average daily return on investment.

#### Outcome:

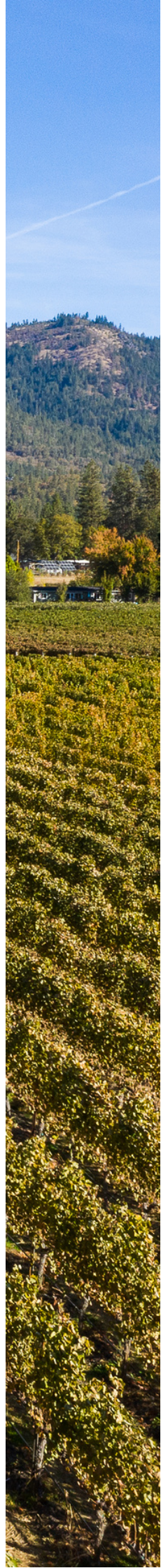
- A targeted, flexible, and data-driven strategy will be used to demonstrate a positive return on investment of resources

### CRAFTING THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Currently, the Rogue River is one of the biggest attractors to visitation in the area and the driving force of a well-oiled visitation machine that correlates to strong May - September visitation. Marketing experience beyond the Rogue River that supports year-round visitation and possible return trip during the lesser visited season running October - April.

#### Outcome:

- Visitors will easily access a diversity of experiences during their time in the community, encouraging them to share their experiences and return for another visit



## Data

The two most common questions from stakeholders during the engagement process were; “who visits” and “why do they visit.” While most people interviewed have anecdotal evidence, data has been extremely limited. Collecting visitor data through traditional, digital, and non-traditional methods will help JCVA and its regional stakeholders identify their markets and make better strategic business decisions.

To be successful in building a data-driven visitor industry, JCVA will focus on the following outcomes:

### BASELINE VISITOR DATA

It’s impossible to manage what isn’t measured. While “heads in beds” is easily obtainable, it does not paint a complete picture of the visitor experience or help those operative visitor-based businesses make strategic decisions. To this end, JCVA will, along with its partners, assess and select key metrics for visitor data. Once key data is identified, JCVA will collect, interpret and share this data.

#### Outcomes:

- JCVA & stakeholders will have a reasonable understanding of historical trends in tourism
- JCVA & stakeholders will have a broader understanding of who visits and why than the current anecdotal evidence
- JCVA & stakeholders will have data and examples of the visitor experience to help make better decisions

### STAKEHOLDER ACCESS TO DATA

In alignment with Strategic Objective 3: Partnerships; JCVA’s core value of transparency, it is important that stakeholders have easy access to broad and detailed information regarding the visitor industry in which to make their decisions.

#### Outcomes:

- Stakeholders will have access to tools through JCVA to understand and act on market trends
- Stakeholders will know where to find information to assist their knowledge search

### DATA LITERACY

The understanding of available data is what makes it useful and actionable. Data only shows a specific slice of a much larger picture and can easily be misunderstood or misrepresented because of missing and unavailable data or personal biases. Because of this, JCVA will educate itself and its stakeholders on how to explore the available data for useful decision-making and identify missing or unavailable data for future inclusion.

#### Outcomes:

- JCVA Board and staff will have a strong working knowledge of current and emerging data sets and sources
- Stakeholders will have access to educational opportunities
- Stakeholders will have access to educational resources

## Partnerships

Through the engagement process, stakeholders identified a strong desire to work collaboratively to create a better visitor experience and use JCVA as the leading organization to do so. The visitor experience is broader than simply the primary reason for their visit, it encompasses every interaction they have along with their stay, the anticipation for their trip, and their memories afterward. The kind of memorable experience that makes someone rave about their trip or entices them to return requires a multifaceted and cooperative effort on the part of every experience they encounter. As the sole tourism-focused organization that encompasses the greater community, JCVA is positioned to assist its partners in building a connected & cohesive tourism industry.

### COMMUNICATE

In line with the expressed views of stakeholders and JCVA's core principles of Transparency, Community, and Inclusion, the organization will strongly emphasize communication with all stakeholders by utilizing channels that meet stakeholders where they are.

#### Outcomes:

- Stakeholders will trust JCVA to keep them informed on all pertinent information
- Stakeholders will feel their concerns are understood
- Community members/residents will have an understanding of not only JCVA's role but that of tourism in the community

### CONVENE

To have a thriving visitor industry in a landscape as diverse as Grants Pass & Josephine County will require conversations that cross traditional business, geographic, or political silos. Because of this, JCVA will identify and convene partners around visitor-related opportunities and assist in facilitating the larger conversation to the benefit of all stakeholders.

#### Outcomes:

- Stakeholders ask that JCVA help facilitate conversation when multiple interests are at play
- JCVA will identify needs/concerns/topics and help lead the community in conversations around it
- JCVA holds regular conversations to identify issues ahead of time and help stakeholders manage changing needs
- Stakeholders will rely on JCVA to play a leadership role in relevant initiatives pertaining to area tourism

## Building a Strong Organization

To successfully build all other strategic pillars of this plan, it's crucial that JCVA commit itself to building a strong organization from the ground up. As important as it is for JCVA staff and board of directors to focus on this, it will be instrumental for regional partners to understand that building an organization from scratch is challenging and time-consuming. Patience and diligence will serve everyone well. The core components of this pillar are:

### BOARD ENGAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

This is key to a successful organization. Board members will need to dedicate enough time to conduct the board's business and learn and follow the ever-changing visitor industry to represent JCVA to partners and continue to provide vision and guidance to the organization.

#### Outcomes:

- Each board member understands and acts on their roles and responsibilities
- The board works as a whole
- Committees are well defined and focused on the work of the board
- Clear delineation of roles and responsibilities between staff and board
- Focuses on big goals
- Maintains a practice of continuing education

### STAFF CAPACITY

JCVA needs to ensure staff has the right capacity, tools, and resources to execute everything the organization is responsible for. This will include protecting and advocating for adequate resources to maintain all work that is required of the organization and learning to clearly communicate with partners what is and is not possible with existing resources.

#### Outcomes:

- Adequate and competent staffing levels to ensure execution of all contracted and expected work
- Work-life balance for each staff to avoid burnout
- Working committees that serve the executive director and focus on the execution of work.
- Clearly anticipated triggers identified for future staffing needs

## Building a Strong Organization continued...

### PLANNING AND EXECUTING

The behind-the-scenes work of administering an organization, especially one responsible for public funds and outcomes, is resource-intensive. JCVA will focus on building systems to execute its marketing focus and effectively include strategic partners in planning marketing and other relevant work, which often takes a considerable amount of administrative work behind the scenes.

#### Outcomes:

- Most work is done according to an executive action plan
- Practices are in place for staff to quickly and easily identify the urgency and importance of competing needs
- Procedures for most administrative work are in place for efficiency, succession, or emergencies

### TRANSPARENCY AND COMMUNICATION

As a community-based non-profit, success is based on stakeholder and community sentiment towards the organization. Therefore JCVA will build and maintain practices that help everyone stay informed and ensure the organization is responsive to emerging needs.

#### Outcomes:

- Stakeholders feel that they are heard when expressing desires/concerns
- Stakeholders have access to responsive staff and BOD when needed
- Staff and BOD feel that their partners share thoughts and information openly
- Good relationships exist between JCVA and their primary stakeholders
- The community at large has a basic understanding of JCVA's role and work for the community

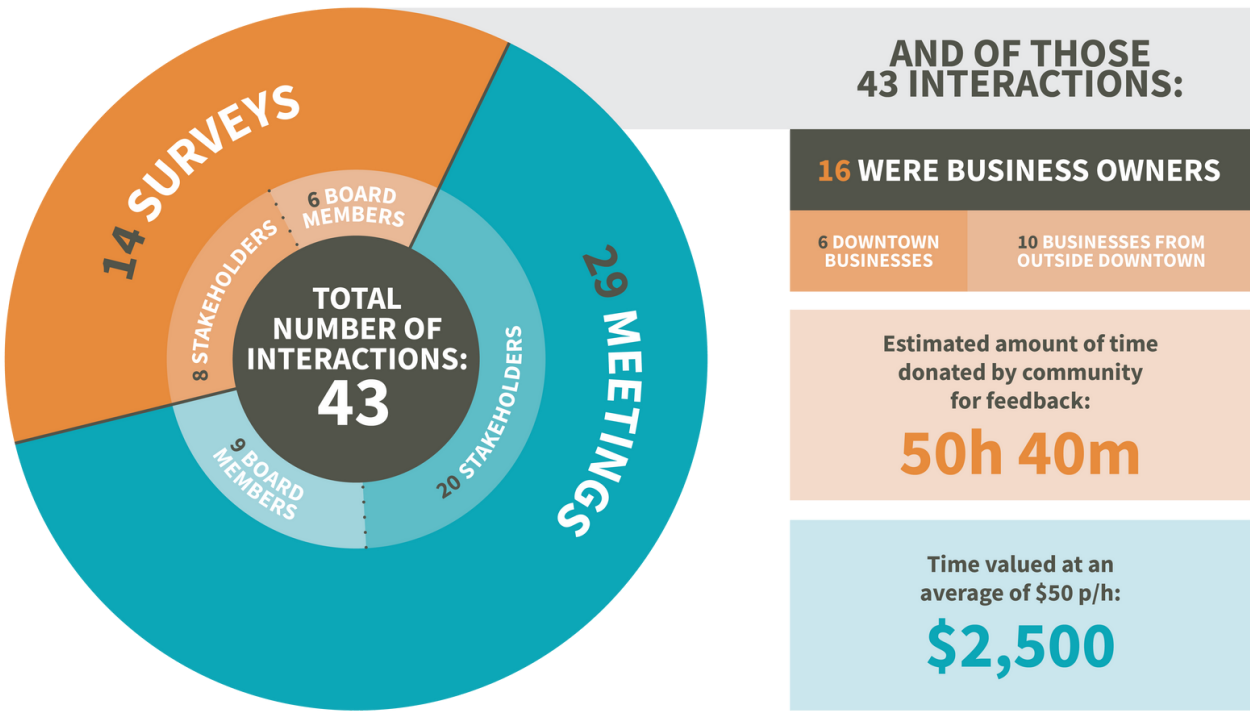


# APPENDICES



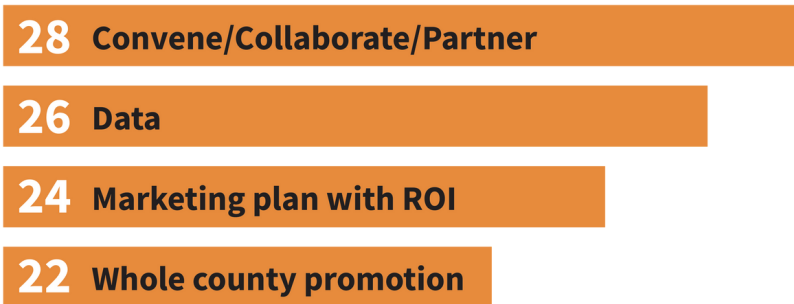
# > APPENDICES

## Feedback results

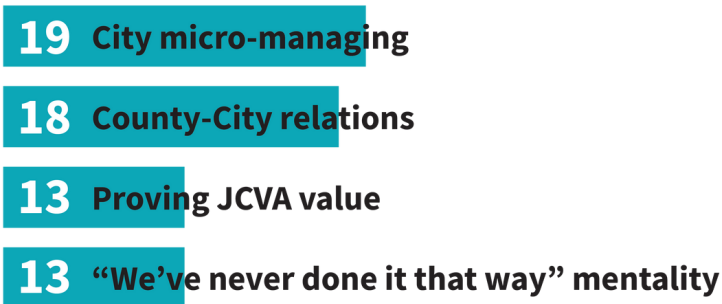


### TOP TOPICS FROM FEEDBACK

**Success means:**  
(in # of respondents)



**Challenges faced:**  
(in # of respondents)





**Amplifying the work of civic changemakers**

I am an altruistic mischief-maker hell-bent on making our communities better by supporting those in the thick of it. My strength is working across disciplines, silos, and ideologies to identify opportunities, and then facilitate, plan, and build collective solutions.

I believe in asking hard questions. I believe in doing hard things.  
And, I believe we're in this together.

**Jason Schneider**

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