

2012-2017 MICHIGAN TOURISM STRATEGIC PLAN NICHE MARKETING PLAN TEMPLATE

In 2014-15 the Promotion, Marketing and Communications (PMC) Implementation Committee of the 2012-2017 Michigan Tourism Strategic Plan (MTSP) worked with bicycle tourism advocates and enthusiasts from across the state to develop Michigan's first ever Bicycle Tourism Marketing Plan. It is hoped that this plan and the process via which it was developed will contribute to the continued growth and increasing prominence of bicycle tourism throughout Michigan. Moreover, it is anticipated that other niche activities will use that piece and this accompanying planning process template to develop their own marketing plan materials. The following represents a series of activities through which the proponents of any niche activity could work to bring likeminded groups and individuals together to develop the outline for a marketing document. The list is meant neither to be prescriptive nor exhaustive; rather, these are the activities that worked well for the bicycle tourism community – other activities might identify an alternative methodology that could be more effective given their circumstances. So, use this document as a guide, but be creative in your interpretation of it!

1. Identify a small group of {insert activity here} tourism champions, people who have the interest, expertise and commitment to follow the process through from start to conclusion, e.g., leaders of state or regional organizations or associations. Also identify individuals qualified resources to help guide and facilitate the process, e.g., members of the MTSP facilitation team or of the PMC committee.
2. Develop a comprehensive listing of resources relevant to your activity, including:
 - state, county and local agencies, associations, clubs and other organizations;
 - manufacturers/producers;
 - stores;
 - events;
 - online resources (e.g., 'how to' and 'best practice' guides, academic studies, industry reports, recent news articles, other states' websites, etc.); review all of these materials and take note of those that seem most relevant to the Michigan case.
3. Determine historical and recent levels of interest in/demand for your activity, e.g., via a survey of the state's convention and visitor bureaus (CVBs); activities that are seeing increases in levels of participation are much more likely to capture the attention of tourism providers.
4. Host a facilitated forum that brings together all interested groups and individuals to generate a common goal and guiding principles for the process. Some key questions to consider at this event should include:

Assets and Strengths: What are Michigan's strengths as a {activity} tourism destination? What people/partnerships/places/brands/stores/events, etc. do we have in Michigan that are unique or that have been recognized as the 'best of' in the region, the nation, or the world? Why would or should someone choose to come to Michigan to {activity}?

2012-2017 MICHIGAN TOURISM STRATEGIC PLAN NICHE MARKETING PLAN TEMPLATE

Who Does It Best? Which cities/states/countries do {activity} tourism best or are {activity} tourism leaders? Which cities/states/countries would we most like Michigan to be compared to, or to be considered even better than? What assets do these places have that make them great (people, agencies/organizations, partnerships, plans, etc.)?

How Do We Get There From Here? What do we need to do to improve Michigan's {activity} tourism offerings? Who should be involved? Who or what is missing? Who could help (who else should have been here today)? What data or research do we need? What opportunities do you see for growth or improvement in Michigan? Who would we need to partner with to achieve this growth?

The questions above might best be answered via a series of individual and small group exercises, the results of which can then be shared out verbally to all forum participants. There won't be time for everyone to talk, and some people are more vociferous than others. Starting with individual writing exercises allows the capture and transcription of everybody's ideas, so be sure to take back and type up all responses. These can then be reviewed and categorized, and key themes identified based on the proportion of participants who independently came up with each item or idea.

If an in-person forum is not possible, consider some kind of online forum or survey.

5. Once input has been received and summarized, and key themes identified, draft an outline of the plan. There are many ways to frame this document – the Bicycle Tourism Marketing Plan is based on a goal (to increase and improve bicycle tourism opportunities in Michigan), and a series of objectives and tactics. Objectives are subsets of goals that reflect broad action categories, i.e., they answer the question of what needs to be accomplished to reach the goal. Objectives should ideally be specific and measurable. Tactics – also called strategies – represent the activities required to fulfill the objectives, i.e., they answer the question of how each objective is to be accomplished via identification of who needs to do what and when. Tactics are the most specific element of the plan; they should ideally be measurable, attainable, results-oriented and time-specific.
6. Once this draft has been prepared, share it with everyone who might be interested, either at a second forum or online. Ask people to provide specific feedback.
7. Last but not least – identify who will lead the implementation of the plan. This should be a person or group who is dedicated to the cause and who is comfortable assigning tasks and following up on their completion. This person should also take the lead in an annual evaluation of progress, at which point achievements should be celebrated and pending elements of the plan identified for future focus.

For more information about this template or about the MTSP please contact Dr. Sarah Nicholls, Michigan State University, (517) 432 0319, nicho210@msu.edu