

**2012-2017 Michigan Tourism Strategic Plan  
Research and Technical Assistance (RTA) Committee Meeting  
East Lansing, July 29, 2013**

**Agenda**

1. Welcome – Sarah Nicholls and Susan Sherer
2. Introductions – All
3. Review of Plan Process, Update from other Implementation Committees and Review of RTA Goal/Objectives – Sarah Nicholls
4. Consideration of Prioritization of the RTA Objectives – All
5. Discussion/Identification of Metrics for the RTA Objectives – All
6. Consideration of Formation of RTA Subcommittees – All
7. Review of RTA Suggested Strategies and Identification of Additional Strategies – All
8. Preliminary Identification of Funding Needs – All
9. Next Steps and Next Meeting – Sarah Nicholls
  - a. Identification of RTA Committee Co-Chair

**2012-2017 Michigan Tourism Strategic Plan  
Research and Technical Assistance (RTA) Committee Meeting  
East Lansing, 10am – 3pm, July 29, 2013**

**Meeting Notes**

**In attendance:** Susan Sherer (Co-Chair), Linda Freybler, Heather Khan, Dan Sippel, Melisa Thom-Brown, Scott Watkins, Sarah Nicholls, Anna Popp.

**Absent:** none.

**Welcome** – Provided by Sarah Nicholls and Susan Sherer.

**Introductions** – Made by all.

**Review of Plan Process and RTA Goal/Objectives** – Provided by Sarah Nicholls.

- *Objective One: Define and prioritize the research and technical needs of the other seven plan goals.* This objective is tied directly to the implementation phase of the plan and therefore has a clear beginning and end date (2013-2017). However, it is likely that many of these needs will occur up-front, i.e., in the first year or two of the implementation phase. The RTA committee should solicit these needs from the other implementation committees. Sarah differentiated between small/short collation/collection projects that she and her students can handle versus long term and/or large scale primary data collection and analysis efforts that will require additional time and funding. The latter will be the emphasis of the first RTA objective.
- *Objective Two: Develop a financially sustainable online information system to capture and share relevant industry research.* This objective relates to a longer term system, with the intention that this system lives beyond the timeframe of the plan. Much of the impetus for such a system comes as a result of the closure of MSU's Travel, Tourism and Recreation Resource Center (TTRRC) in 2007. The TTRRC tracked industry and multiple other relevant data (e.g., economic indicators, weather patterns, etc.) at the state and county scale. It is also conducted a variety of statewide and county/community specific analyses, and contracted with individual communities and entities on tourism assessments and marketing projects. Key elements of good research – timely, reliable, accurate, at an appropriate spatial resolution, market (place + activity) specific. TM purchases three major datasets/reports [D.K. Shifflet (spending, volume, satisfaction, value), Longwoods (awareness, ROI), Smith Travel (hotel occupancy, ADR, RevPAR)] but these are primarily at the state level; even when county level numbers are available, the sample size is usually too small to be of use. The industry has indicated a desire for finer scale data that can be of use at the level of the individual entity or community. With regards to financial sustainability – TM's monies are

currently legislated for use on PM only (some discussion of this issue ensued) – therefore need to identify other ways of developing and maintaining this system independent of TM or any other government entities.

**Review of RTA Suggested Strategies and Identification of Additional Strategies** – A subset of suggested strategies as published in the plan document was reviewed.

- *Objective One: Define and prioritize the research and technical needs of the other seven plan goals.* Development of an RFP, to distribute to the other plan implementation committees, was discussed. RFP should consist of a template to include items such as: identification of data, research and technical needs with respect to development/achievement of metrics for each plan objective; expected outcomes of acquisition of requested data/research/technical assistance; preferred timeline associated with data acquisition/research/technical assistance; and, if possible, estimated cost of data acquisition/research/technical assistance. Suggested deadline of October 31 for committees to submit preliminary requests. RTA committee will need to develop an evaluation mechanism to help prioritise requests. Question of who should be involved in prioritization – RTA committee, all plan committees, Travel Commission? RTA committee should liaise with Funding committee on this item since that committee is also considering an RFP related to funding needs and first year funding needs are highly likely to be research-related.
- *Objective Two: Develop a financially sustainable online information system to capture and share relevant industry research.* Need to identify entity to develop and manage system, e.g., via RFP. Such entity/system must be capable of collating, collecting and analyzing industry data, as well as sharing results in appropriate forms. Discussion of sensitivity of data sharing due to concerns about proprietary nature of numbers and how numbers might be used/shared. Need to convince participants of confidentiality of system and ensure that confidentiality. Need to minimize time/effort necessary to participate, e.g., via some kind of automated/online data transferal mechanism. Need to maximize incentives for participating – what will participants gain, what will be the value or return to them, what will be the products and services on offer?

With respect to both objectives, the current availability and use of data, research and technical assistance was discussed. Questions: What sources exist, which entities are buying or collecting what? In addition, what data, research and technical assistance are desired? Suggested that RTA committee survey industry to investigate these questions (see action items, below).

By Governor's Conference, committee would like to have identified what sources of data/research/technical assistance exist, and what additional items are needed to enable achievement of plan objectives and goals.

**Prioritization of the RTA Objectives** – Agreed that objective one should be prioritized over objective two since the success of the other implementation committees and

achievement of the other objectives and goals is in many cases dependent upon their timely access to relevant data and research. Come back to objective two next year.

**Identification of Metrics for the RTA Objectives** – Will come back to this topic once the research needs of the other implementation committees are identified.

**Consideration of Formation of RTA Subcommittees** – Group agreed that formation of subcommittees is premature at this point, especially given the small size of the committee. Will reconsider this option at a later date as/when appropriate.

**Discussion of Potential Additional Members of RTA Committee** – The RTA committee is smaller than other groups and is especially short in the area of technology/technical assistance. Suggestions: someone in web development, Mark Howe from Cameo Multimedia (<http://www.cameomm.com/>), someone from Grand Rapids Community Media Center (<http://www.grcmc.org/>), Paul Jaques or Jeff Smith from Lansing Economic Area Partnership (LEAP, <http://www.purelansing.com/>), ask Dave Morris for his suggestions.

**Preliminary Identification of Funding Needs** – Not possible until research needs of other implementation committees established and associated costs assessed. Some discussion of potential funding sources, e.g., foundations such as Kellogg and Kresge that are funding proposals tied to development of sustainable infrastructure.

**Identification of RTA Committee Co-Chair** – On other committees, there is a Co-Chair from the Advisory Council. Since Annie Rummel stepped away from the RTA committee and Dan is unable to commit to that role, the committee is in need of a Co-Chair. Question – is there any issue as far as a Co-Chair potentially wanting to bid on any of the research projects proposed by other committees?

**Next Meeting** – Agreed that East Lansing is a convenient meeting location (AEG or MSU). Next meeting scheduled for 10am December 2 at AEG offices. Plan for at least one more meeting between December 2 and Governor's Conference (March 9-11, Grand Traverse Resort). Potential agenda items for December 2 listed below.

### **Action Items and Their Status –**

#### General

- Sarah will develop draft RFP template for distribution to other plan implementation committees, share with Scott and then with rest of group.
- Sarah will develop draft of rating/ranking system to be used to evaluate research requests and share with group.
- Sarah will draft survey of tourism associations, entities (including lodging, attractions, transportation), CVBs, etc. regarding current/desired data/research sources and needs.
- Sarah will attempt to locate copy of RFP developed by 2007-11 MTSP research group.

## **Agenda Items for December 2 –**

- Regarding Objective One
  - Prior to meeting, all committee members to review/rate/rank requests for research from other committees.
  - At meeting – discuss reviews/ratings/rankings.
  
- Regarding Objective Two
  - Review of work of MSU’s TTRRC including data collected, analyses provided, reasons for closure (Sarah could provide this, or we could invite Don Holecek, founder and former director, to speak).
  - Review of similar tourism resource/research centers around the nation/world and the products/services they provide.
  - Based on items above, discussion of potential models to address objective two.