



Texas Heritage
Tourism Program
&
Texas Heritage
Trails Program

2020-2025 Strategic Plan

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Opportunity Strategies LLC would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for their participation in this planning process.

Texas Historical Commission Representatives

Mark Wolfe, Executive Director
Texas Historical Commission

Brad Patterson, Community Heritage
Development Division Director
Texas Historical Commission

Sarah T. Page, Heritage Tourism Program
Coordinator
Texas Historical Commission

Teresa Caldwell, Heritage Trails Program
State Coordinator
Texas Historical Commission

Susan Shore, Heritage Tourism Program
Development Specialist
Texas Historical Commission

*Additional THC staff from other Divisions and
Programs including:*

Historic Sites Division

Texas Main Street Program

Certified Local Government Program

County Historical Commission Outreach Program

Administration Division

Architecture Division

Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program

Museum Services Program

Communications Division

Cemetery Preservation Program

Archaeology Division

Texas Heritage Trail Regions Representatives

Texas Brazos Trail Region

Andrea Barefield, Executive Director
Coleman Hampton, Board Chair
Joy Summar-Smith, Vice Chair

Texas Forest Trail Region

Del Polikretis, Executive Director
Holli Fourniquet, Board Chair
Marty Prince, Former Executive Director

Texas Forts Trail Region

Tammie Virden, Executive Director
Owen Miller, Board Chair
Margaret Hoogstra, Former Executive Director

Texas Hill Country Trail Region

Joanne Crawford, Executive Director
Debra Stifflemire, Board Chair

Texas Independence Trail Region

Seneca McAdams, Executive Director
Pam Summers, Board Chair

Texas Lakes Trail Region

Jill Campbell, Executive Director
Heather Juarez, Board Chair

Texas Mountain Trail Region

Wendy Little, Executive Director
Robert Alvarez, Board Chair
Randall Kinzie, Vice Chair

Texas Pecos Trail Region

Melissa Hagins, Executive Director
Brenda Kizziar, Board Chair
Ellen Crossland, Former Board Chair

Texas Plains Trail Region

Allison Kendrick, Executive Director
Vicki Hamblen, Board Chair
Barbara Brannon, Former Executive Director

Texas Tropical Trail Region

Nancy Deviney, Executive Director
Valerie Bates, Board Chair



Opportunity Strategies LLC is community and economic development consulting firm based in Austin, Texas. Established in 2012, the firm provides customized training, professional facilitation, and strategic planning services.

CONTACT
Opportunity Strategies LLC
PO Box 50101
Austin, TX 7873
512-963-2263
OpportunityStrategies.com

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....5

Mission of the Texas Historical Commission10

Core Values of the Texas Historical Commission10

Texas’ Statewide Historic Preservation Plan10

Mission of the Texas Heritage Tourism Program.....11

Vision of the Texas Heritage Tourism Program11

Definition of Heritage Tourism12

Guiding Principles of Heritage Tourism12

Swot Analysis13

Strategic Priorities14

 Strategic Priority #1: Raise the Standards of Heritage and Cultural Attractions around the State.....15

 Strategic Priority #2: Foster Heritage Preservation and Education17

 Strategic Priority #3: Encourage Regional Cooperation and Promotion of Heritage
and Cultural Attractions.....23

 Strategic Priority #4: Foster Effective Local Tourism Leadership and Organizational Skills31

Keys To Successful Plan Implementation.....37

Conclusion.....38

Appendix A: Key Performance Indicators39

Appendix B: Standards for Point of Interest Listings in Texas Time Travel44

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The Texas Heritage Tourism Program (HT Program) is a multifaceted Texas Historical Commission (THC) initiative that supports the development and promotion of heritage tourism statewide. Major components include:

- 1) the development of travel-related products such as printed travel guides and mobile apps,
- 2) community assistance to strengthen authentic visitor experiences in towns across the state,
- 3) supporting and promoting other THC programs that impact heritage tourism, and
- 4) the Texas Heritage Trails Program (THTP), consisting of ten (10) dedicated, regional, nonprofit organizations, each led by a board and executive director working to provide marketing and visitor development assistance to heritage sites, attractions, and communities throughout each geographic region.

The Texas Heritage Trails Program (THTP) is the THC's award-winning heritage tourism initiative that encourages communities, heritage regions, and the state to partner in preserving and promoting Texas' historic and cultural resources. The division supports heritage tourism by assisting local governments, organizations, and individuals in the preservation, enhancement, and promotion of heritage and cultural attractions in the state.

Each of the ten Trail Regions across Texas is a separate nonprofit organization that has its own volunteer board of directors and paid executive director. Each has its own assets and liabilities, strengths and challenges, and brings together hundreds of regional volunteers through partnerships, memberships, and collaborations. Their efforts help millions of travelers make their way to state historic sites and other heritage and cultural attractions throughout the state of Texas.

The THC provides training, technical and organizational assistance, and is the primary funding stream to the Trail Regions.

Purpose

The purpose of this Strategic Plan is to enhance the incorporation of the Texas Heritage Tourism Program with the agency's other programs, therefore creating efficiencies and helping the Texas Historical Commission leverage its impact across the state while benefiting the Trail Regions. This product was suggested by the [Texas Sunset Advisory Commission findings of January 2019](#). Recent recommendations for the HT Program include better integration of the THTP into the THC's long-term planning. Specifically, "the regional structure of the THTP provides an existing framework to support THC projects across the state, allowing the agency to develop heritage preservation efforts and expand the reach of other geographically diverse programs like historical markers, historic sites, Main Street cities, and historic county courthouse renovations."

The HT Program must balance formalizing a system that is streamlined and uniform in design, and respecting some necessary regional autonomy in execution. Striking that proper balance is what this document has been developed to fulfill.

Process

The process began in the fall of 2019. After meeting with THC staff to determine project parameters, the consultant embarked on a number of listening sessions. The first ten listening sessions were half-day facilitated discussions with each Trail Region board and staff in their respective region. Results of the discussions were recorded anonymously and aggregated with others' responses.

The eleventh listening session was with Heritage Tourism Program management and staff and the twelfth was with staff from THC's other Divisions to solicit their feedback and discuss areas of improvement from an internal partner standpoint.

All feedback was compiled, analyzed, and shared with Heritage Tourism staff internally, then again at an all-partner joint strategic planning session held in February 2020 in Georgetown, Texas. Each Trail Region executive director and board chair (or other board representative if the board chair was unavailable) participated in the strategic planning session as well as the entire Heritage Tourism team and other THC partners and management. Results from that joint strategic planning session are incorporated throughout this document, coupled with other consultant recommendations.

Agency Guideposts

The [2011-2020 Texas' Statewide Historic Preservation Plan](#) and the [2019-2023 THC Strategic Plan](#) each served as guideposts for the development of this Strategic Plan. There are goals in each of these two THC Strategic Plans that can be partially fulfilled through the implementation of the goals and strategies in this plan. They are designed to work in unison to achieve the mission of the THC.

The development and implementation of this Strategic Plan helps fulfill two of the eight goals within Texas' Statewide Historic Preservation Plan:

- **Leverage Economic Development Tools:** "Communities leverage preservation-based and traditional economic development tools to revitalize historic areas."
- **Learn and Experience History through Place:** "Texas residents and guests of all ages learn and experience the state's diverse history through formal education, recreation, and everyday interactions with historic places."

The development and implementation of this Strategic Plan helps fulfill two of the four Agency Operational Goals within the THC Strategic Plan:

- **Encourage Economic Development, Tourism, and Education:** "Encourage economic development, tourism, and heritage education through historic places in partnership with local public, private, and nonprofit entities."
- **Maximizing Quality and Effectiveness of Services:** "Cultivate an agency culture of innovation and creativity that results in a motivated and diverse staff working to maximize the quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of services to the public."

Outline

This Strategic Plan includes 4 Strategic Priorities and provides several goals and strategies for each. These are:

Strategic Priority #1: Raise the Standards of Heritage and Cultural Attractions around the State

Goal A: Enhance the Visitor Experience

Strategy 1: Heritage Tourism Site Standards are Re-established

Strategy 2: All Points of Interest Must Meet the Criteria

Goal B: Explore Various Grant Opportunities

Strategy 1: Trail Regions to Explore Grant-Making Opportunities

Strategy 2: Heritage Tourism Program to Leverage Existing Agency Grants

Strategy 3: Heritage Tourism Program to Explore Grant-Making Opportunities

Strategy 4: Seek Grants from Other Sources

Goal C: Visitor Experience Development

Strategy 1: Develop an Initiative to Enhance Visitor Experiences in Communities

Strategic Priority #2: Foster Heritage Preservation and Education

Goal A: Honor Texas' Statewide Historic Preservation Plan

Strategy 1: Economic Development Relationship Building

Strategy 2: Learn and Experience History through Place

Strategy 3: Trail Regions to Participate in Next Statewide Historic Preservation Plan

Goal B: Create Opportunities for Information & Content Sharing

Strategy 1: Resource Library Development

Strategy 2: Create a Speakers' Bureau

Strategy 3: Trail Regions to Offer Workshops/Seminars

Goal C: Provide Customer Experience Hospitality Training

Strategy 1: Trail Regions to Develop Hospitality Training

Strategy 2: Trail Regions to Deliver Hospitality Training

Strategic Priority #3: Encourage Regional Cooperation and Promotion of Heritage and Cultural Attractions

Goal A: Develop Communications Plans

Strategy 1: Develop a Communications Plan for the Trail Regions

Strategy 2: Develop a Communications Plan for the Heritage Tourism Program

Strategy 3: Provide Professional Media Training

- Strategy 4: Develop THTP Style Guide
- Strategy 5: Provide THTP Style Guide Training
- Strategy 6: Trail Regions to Utilize and Adhere to Style Guide
- Strategy 7: Provide Marketing Training Workshops
- Strategy 8: Collaborate in the Development of Marketing Materials
- Strategy 9: Design and Implement a Social Media Usage Guide
- Strategy 10: Develop and Deliver a Social Media Workshop
- Strategy 11: Ensure New Website Fully Showcases Heritage Assets
- Strategy 12: Trail Regions to Appear as Podcast Guests
- Strategy 13: THC to Explore Creating a Podcast in the Future

Goal B: Provide Technical Assistance to the Trail Regions

- Strategy 1: Provide Email Assistance
- Strategy 2: Provide Newsletter Assistance

Goal C: Maximize State Fair of Texas Booth Benefits

- Strategy 1: Standardize State Fair of Texas Booth Participation to Leverage Value

Goal D: Develop Detailed Visitor Avatars/Personas

- Strategy 1: Heritage Tourism Program Staff to Conduct Statewide and National Research
- Strategy 2: Trail Regions to Conduct Local and Regional Research
- Strategy 3: Use Research to Develop Marketing Strategies

Goal E: Provide Robust Marketing Assistance to the Trail Regions

- Strategy 1: Provide Cooperative Advertising/Marketing Consulting Assistance
- Strategy 2: Encourage Trail Regions to Participate in Travel Shows/Trade Shows

Goal F: Increase Real Places Conference Engagement Among Trail Regions

- Strategy 1: Trail Regions to Help Generate Content/Speakers for Real Places

Strategic Priority #4: Foster Effective Local Tourism Leadership and Organizational Skills

Goal A: HT Program Staff to Increase Frequency of Field Visits

Goal B: Trail Region Boards to Increase Frequency of Field Trips

Goal C: Provide Increased THC Commission Information to Trail Regions

Goal D: Modify the Existing THTP Statewide Semiannual Joint Meeting Format

Goal E: Establish and Nurture Strategic Alliances

- Strategy 1: Partner with Texas State Agencies and THC Divisions and Programs
- Strategy 2: Partner with the Friends of the THC

Strategy 3: Each Trail Region to Better Engage with Historic Sites

Strategy 4: HT Program to Provide Workshops for Trail Regions on Other THC Divisions/Programs

Strategy 5: Enhance Strategic Alliances by Fostering Communications Networks

Goal F: Enhance Trail Region Board Member Effectiveness and Engagement

Strategy 1: HT Program to Provide Workshops on Interested Topics for Trail Regions' Boards and Executive Directors

Strategy 2: Equip Trail Region Boards with Tools and Templates

Goal G: Research and Consider Modern Philanthropic Tools

Strategy 1: Trail Regions to Research Legacy Giving Programs

Strategy 2: Leverage Giving Tuesday

The Strategic Priorities, Goals, and Strategies listed above set the tone for the entire HT Program and the Trail Regions. However, aligning Trail Region goals to HT Program goals does not mean that those goals are the exclusive goals a Trail Region can establish. Trail Regions are encouraged to add additional items as needed into their individual Scopes of Work and to develop their own strategies on how to help fulfill program goals.

What Comes Next

KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Key 1: Ensure a Culture Shift

Key 2: Develop Standard Operating Procedures

Key 3: Organizational and Resource Alignment

There is already a culture shift underway with the Trail Regions and the Heritage Tourism Program. New exciting ideas are being explored and there is a renewed enthusiasm to work together to discover additional ways to attract and serve heritage travelers.

When these goals are pursued and these strategies implemented, the Heritage Tourism Program structure and the Texas Heritage Trails Program will be strengthened, and accountability will be increased. These accomplishments will benefit the THC, the Heritage Tourism Program, the Trail Regions, the heritage traveler, and heritage and cultural attractions across Texas for years to come.

MISSION OF THE TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

The mission of the Texas Historical Commission is to protect and preserve the state's historic and prehistoric resources for the use, education, enjoyment, and economic benefit of present and future generations. This Mission and Core Values are found inside the [THC Strategic Plan](#).

CORE VALUES OF THE TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Core Values are beliefs that are shared among the staff and leadership of the agency and are woven into the day-to-day work, in the projects endeavored, and in the decisions made.

- **Quality of Life:** Historic places enhance the general well-being of individuals and communities.
 - **Authenticity:** We focus on telling the real stories of the state's history through the people, places, structures, objects, and traditions that convey them authentically.
 - **Cultural Diversity:** We preserve the places and stories of Texas' rich cultural heritage and communities.
 - **Partnerships:** We work together across cultures, interests, and disciplines to achieve mutually beneficial goals.
 - **Communication:** We keep people informed and develop strong lines of communication internally and externally with partners and stakeholders.
-

TEXAS' STATEWIDE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN

There are eight goals in [Texas' Statewide Historic Preservation Plan](#), two of which directly pertain to the Texas Heritage Tourism Program and are therefore included in the Strategic Priority #2: Foster Heritage Preservation and Education.

Texas' Statewide Historic Preservation Plan is a guiding element for use by the HT Program and the Trail Regions. The eight goals for 2011-2020 are:

- Survey and Online Inventory
- Emphasize Cultural Landscapes
- Implement Policies and Incentives
- Leverage Economic Development Tools
- Learn and Experience History through Place
- Connect Preservation to Related Fields
- Cultivate Political Commitment
- Build Capacity of Preservation Community

MISSION OF THE TEXAS HERITAGE TOURISM PROGRAM

The THC's Heritage Tourism Program partners with participating regional trail organizations to develop and promote strong heritage experiences throughout Texas.

The Heritage Tourism Program supports heritage tourism by assisting local governments, organizations, and individuals in the preservation, enhancement, and promotion of heritage and cultural attractions throughout Texas. This is accomplished in part through the relationships with each of the ten Heritage Trail Regions, called the Texas Heritage Trails Program. *(Source: Administrative Code, Title 13, Part 2, Chapter 30, Rule §30.1)*

This purpose must be clearly conveyed to each of the ten Trail Regions and it must be made clear that their organizations are the conduit between the THC and those local stakeholders. This purpose can become a mantra or theme that each Trail Region fully understands and rallies around.

VISION OF THE TEXAS HERITAGE TOURISM PROGRAM

A Vision Statement is the Texas Heritage Tourism Program's depiction of its desired future. It clearly and boldly declares what the Program shall one day be known as. It articulates what the entire team is working to accomplish and serves as a touchstone for crafting that dream.

We envision Texas as a place where:

- The diverse places of the Lone Star State are preserved and promoted for present and future generations.
- Visitors and residents delight in experiencing, firsthand, the real places telling the real stories of our state's heritage and cultures.
- The total visitor experience of Texas' diverse places stimulates local economies.
- Heritage tourism is a community-based enterprise that contributes to its livability and sense of place.

DEFINITION OF HERITAGE TOURISM

Heritage Tourism: Travel directed towards experiencing the heritage of a city, region, state, or country that enables the tourist to learn about, and be surrounded by, local customs, traditions, history and culture. (Source: [Administrative Code, Title 13, Part 2, Chapter 30, Rule §30.2.6](#))

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF HERITAGE TOURISM

Guiding principles reflect the core values of an organization. They are intended to establish the framework for expected behaviors and decision-making considerations. Guiding Principles encompass the spirit of the organization, guiding the program's philosophies and culture.

This Strategic Plan is designed to reflect the five Guiding Principles in use by the Heritage Tourism Program and outlined in the Texas Heritage Trails Program's [Administrative Code, Title 13, Part 2, Chapter 30, Rule §30.2](#)

- **Preserve and protect resources.** We will make decisions that provide preservation and protection for Texas' precious heritage tourism assets.
 - **Focus on authenticity and quality.** We will find and showcase high quality tourism attractions that exhibit the authentic Texas heritage experience.
 - **Make places come alive with interpretation.** We will continually seek new opportunities to provide interesting and dynamic understanding of heritage assets that make visitors feel a part of the experience and want to keep coming back.
 - **Find the fit between community and tourism.** We will strike a balance between respecting the communities' expectations and the tourists' desire to visit new places.
 - **Collaborate for sustainability.** We will continually work with our Trail Regions, their partners, our partners, other THC Divisions, other state agencies, and a variety of other stakeholders to maintain sustainability and commit to continuous improvement.
-

SWOT ANALYSIS

A SWOT Analysis was conducted in each of the ten Trail Region listening sessions. The facilitator asked the participants to share their opinions of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats of the Heritage Tourism Program. Their responses were aggregated and reported to HT Program staff. The responses listed below are the ones mentioned multiple times in multiple Trail Regions.



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

This Strategic Plan is built on the four Strategic Priorities outlined below. These Strategic Priorities apply to the THC's Heritage Tourism Program and are mandated specifically for the [Texas Heritage Trails Program in the Texas Administrative Code, Title 13, Part 2, Chapter 30, Rule §30.1](#).

In this document, the Strategic Priority sections discuss a variety of Goals and Strategies that are listed under a specific Strategic Priority. These suggestions are not specifically mandated, nor are they limiting. This document provides suggestions discussed in organizational meetings with the understanding the Trail Regions, in conjunction with the THC Heritage Tourism staff, will be designing individual work plans to meet their unique needs.



Strategic Priority #1: Raise the Standards of Heritage and Cultural Attractions around the State

The quality of the visitor experience depends on quality standards being established and maintained in both products and programming. When the visitor experience is enhanced, that experience will often lead to long-term, even multi-generational stewardship. Asset protection, longevity, legacy, and financial investment are signs of visitor experiences that have been remarkable enough to lead to such stewardship.

TO RAISE THE STANDARDS OF TEXAS HERITAGE AND CULTURAL ATTRACTIONS, THE TEXAS HERITAGE TOURISM PROGRAM MUST ENGAGE IN ACTIVITIES THAT IMPROVE THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE. THIS IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF BOTH THE THC HERITAGE TOURISM PROGRAM TEAM AND THE TRAIL REGIONS.

Goal A: Enhance the Visitor Experience

Raising the standards to enhance the visitor experience implies first the need to re-establish the set of standards for heritage and cultural attractions around the state. Realizing some attractions are designated THC State Historic Sites and therefore already have met certain criteria, there are other attractions around the state that are promoted by the Trail Regions with lesser known standards.

Strategy 1: Heritage Tourism Site Standards are Re-established

Local attractions should strive to reach and maintain certain high standards. These standards have recently been updated by the Heritage Tourism Program team and are included in this strategic plan as Appendix B. Standards include a list of requirements an asset may have based on physical characteristics, safety, accessibility, signage, visitor usage, interpretation and more.

Re-establishing quality standards ensures heritage and cultural attractions around the state create experiences that encourage or ultimately result in the preservation of Texas historic treasures.

Strategy 2: All Points of Interest Must Meet the Criteria

These standards are to be used as a program tool by both the HT Program staff and the Trail Regions to enhance the heritage visitor experience throughout Texas, both in person and online. Recognizing that some local attractions may have physical improvements, maintenance, and visitor program needs greater or lesser than others, the Trail Regions can serve as a liaison between the attraction and one or more of the THC's programs or divisions to help them get the information they need. It could be an architectural improvement if they are housed in structures considered historic, or it could be for organization, programmatic, or exhibit development needs for Texas history museums, in which case they could work with Museum Services. The Trail Regions can recommend funding workshops such as those offered by the Friends of the Texas Historical Commission or other organizations to help research or grow an existing local point of interest funding campaign.

Goal B: Explore Various Grant Opportunities

Strategy 1: Trail Regions to Explore Grant-Making Opportunities

Each Trail Region should review any existing grant program they may already have and explore new opportunities to be able to provide small regional grants to help attractions, preservation, education, and other efforts within their regions. The benefits of such a grant program can be a talking point during their fundraising and friendraising efforts to solicit support. Each Trail Region should have a specific goal in their Scope of Work to raise enough additional funds to be able to provide a few such small regional grants.

Strategy 2: Heritage Tourism Program to Leverage Existing Agency Grants

There are some existing grant programs within the Texas Historical Commission that should be considered by the Heritage Tourism Program team as possible matches for the Trail Regions to be able to qualify for and leverage in their communities. The Texas Preservation Trust Fund (TPTF) and the Certified Local Government (CLG) Program's annual CLG Grant Program each provide grants to protect historic resources.

The TPTF is a competitive grant distributed as a matching grant to qualified applicants for acquisition, survey, restoration, preservation, planning, and heritage education activities that lead to the preservation of historic architectural and archeological properties and associated collections of the State of Texas. CLG matching grants are available for CLG participating communities in good standing for projects leaving a lasting impact on preservation in the community. Typical projects include historic resource surveys, National Register nominations, preservation plan or design guidelines development, and property rehabilitation projects.

These are two existing grant programs within the THC that the HT Program should explore as untapped potential for the Trail Regions to possibly leverage. It is recommended that the HT Program collaborate with staff within each grant program to better learn how heritage tourism projects could benefit within their current grant program frameworks and selection criteria. If opportunity lies there, HT Program staff should teach the Trail Region executive directors about it and encourage them to identify communities and organizations within their region that may qualify and encourage them to apply.

Strategy 3: Heritage Tourism Program to Explore Grant-Making Opportunities

Years ago, the Heritage Tourism Program offered modest grants to nonprofit organizations, sites, and attractions within the Trail Regions, but no longer do. One strategy is for the HT Program team to explore if and how they could reinstate or revamp that service once again, even on a smaller scale. Depending on the size of the grant program the HT Program wishes to pursue, it may also require additional funding requests. Exploring this reinstatement would be a great way for the THC and HT Program to build goodwill and provide a valuable added benefit in the communities it serves.

Strategy 4: Seek Grants from Other Sources

Trail Regions should explore grant opportunities that could be utilized to augment their operations funding. Friends of the Texas Historical Commission offers a workshop specifically for the purpose of identifying grants. It is recommended that that Trail Regions executive directors and board members attend that workshop first as the beginning point into grant seeking before pursuing other opportunities.

The University of Texas Grants Resource Center (TGRC) is a great place to make a consultation appointment with a Grant Resource Concierge to begin the grant-seeking process. The TGRC is located in Austin and serves as a bridge between the grant-seeking and the grant-making communities. The TGRC has one of the most extensive foundation directories in the US.

In addition to centralized libraries such as this, the Trail Region executive directors should explore grant opportunities within their regions, statewide, and nationally to help fund their individual nonprofit organizations. There are likely family and/or community foundations within each region that philanthropically fund programs and/or services of interest to them. Many such foundations fund cultural and arts related projects, which is a perfect correlation to the operations of the Trail Regions themselves as well as heritage and cultural attractions and sites the Trail Regions promote.

Goal C: Visitor Experience Development

Visitor Experience Development is an in-depth journey into interpreting a community's heritage resources and developing programming to bring these stories to light for the public. Historic sites and museums sometimes do this well and prove to be excellent partners in this endeavor. However, not every partner is skilled in crafting visitor experiences and there are opportunities for the Heritage Tourism Program team to help. Visitor experience development with an eye toward heritage tourism for communities and points of interest is done much less frequently and should be a facilitated process complete with strong community and business commitment for long-term benefit.

Strategy 1: Develop an Initiative to Enhance Visitor Experiences in Communities

The HT Program staff should coordinate with qualified professionals to create Visitor Experience Development training that can be provided to communities and the points of interest within them as a long-term goal. This will ensure the most current information and techniques are used when providing the training. This can be a new service provided by either HT Program staff (once trained) or by a private sector professional and will help to raise the standards of heritage and cultural attractions by improving the experience of heritage travelers.

Strategic Priority #2: Foster Heritage Preservation and Education

*TO FOSTER HERITAGE PRESERVATION AND EDUCATION, THE
TEXAS HERITAGE TOURISM PROGRAM MUST ENGAGE IN ACTIVITIES
THAT EDUCATE AND WORK WITH REGIONAL PARTNERS AND COMMUNITIES
TO PRESERVE AND INTERPRET HISTORIC RESOURCES.*

Goal A: Honor Texas' Statewide Historic Preservation Plan

Every 10 years the THC develops [Texas' Statewide Historic Preservation Plan](#). It's a collaborative process and one of the key responsibilities as a State Historic Preservation Office under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. The THC recognizes Texas' Statewide Historic Preservation Plan as an opportunity for Texans to preserve, protect and leverage the historic and cultural fabric for the betterment of communities statewide and ensures that each division within the THC helps support the others as opportunities to collaborate arise.

There are eight goals in Texas' Statewide Historic Preservation Plan for 2011-2020, two of which directly pertain to the Texas Heritage Tourism Program and are therefore included in the strategic priority of fostering heritage preservation and education. They are "Leverage Economic Development Tools" and "Learn and Experience History Through Place."

The Statewide Plan is a guiding element for use by the HT Program and the Trail Regions. These two statewide plan goals, along with suggested strategies, are discussed here.

Strategy 1: Economic Development Relationship Building

The Texas' Statewide Historic Preservation Plan goal, "Leverage Economic Development Tools for Preservation" means that communities must leverage preservation-based and traditional economic development tools to revitalize historic areas. Expected statewide outcomes are:

- Increased percentage of economic development tools being used for historic preservation
- Historic preservation is proven conclusively and promoted as an economic engine
- Increased visitation statewide at historic sites

Each Trail Region should work to build relationships with economic development professionals serving in their region. That may include visiting economic developers to learn more about the marketable business assets in their community, as well as Trail Region executive directors educating the local economic developers about the cultural and heritage assets and attractions. More and more professional economic developers are realizing the impact of tourism as a critical component of the economic development success for their community, but it is important for the Trail Regions staff and board to clearly articulate the specific value of heritage tourism in the overall tourism product offering. Heritage tourism needs to become as top-of-mind an economic impact element as other tourism types such as recreational, sports, nature tourism, film, or agritourism.

Experience proves that quality of life is a growing criterion in the economic development site selection industry. Business owners and leadership want to live in and employ people in communities where they feel welcome, safe, and interested, as well as profitable for their business. It's a profitability issue until two or more communities will suit their needs, and it then comes down to where one feels good about moving their family. The more the local economic development professionals know about the cultural assets in the region, the better job he or she can do selling the location as a quality of life choice.

An additional reason to help Trail Regions foster relationships with their local economic developers is because heritage tourism is a sales tax generator. In many communities, a portion of that sales tax funds the Economic Development Corporation (EDC,) which gets reinvested back into the community to help create and retain jobs, a Trail Region-benefiting cycle.

Partnering with other THC programs such as Texas Main Street, State Historic Sites, County Historical Commission Outreach, Museum Services, and Historic Courthouse Preservation will create new opportunities to help maximize exposure and usage of existing agency tools for preservation, economic development, and sustainability.

The HT Program should leverage the Texas Treasure Business Award (TTBA) which recognizes enduring businesses in the region for their extended local economic impact, some of which have long served heritage travelers. One way to do this is to search through the list of tourism related TTBA businesses over the years and develop short stories with photos or videos for the HT Program team to use to publicly celebrate them and for promotional purposes. Trail Region executive directors should know how to receive information on TTBA announcements and attend TTBA recognition events in their respective regions as schedules allow.

The Heritage Tourism staff should make efforts to develop strategies with these other divisions and programs to integrate their respective services more deeply into the Trail Regions, resulting in more robust inter-agency engagement throughout the communities.

Strategy 2: Learn and Experience History through Place

Another goal from Texas' Statewide Historic Preservation Plan, "Learn and Experience History through Place" means that Texas residents and guests of all ages learn and experience the state's diverse history through formal education, recreation, and everyday interactions with historic places. Expected statewide outcomes include:

- 4th and 7th grade kids learn community/regional culturally inclusive history through place
- Adults within a community learn local history and value of preservation
- Increased visitation at historic sites statewide
- Increased participation of underrepresented people in historic preservation

Over the next several years, the HT Program staff can work with the Trail Regions and their partners to help expose more heritage travelers to what Texas has to offer. One way is to expand the Trail Region's awareness of school curricula related to Texas heritage and preservation. THC has a Youth Education Specialist providing this service. It would be advantageous if the Trail Region executive directors were to build relationships with this Program to help expand the THC's reach and interest in heritage tourism to children. The benefits are increased interest in heritage preservation and education as well as increased participation from curious students who may not come from a family of typical heritage travelers.

Reaching today's younger generations in the areas of Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Junior Achievement, history clubs, farming/agriculture clubs, arts clubs, school field trips, student councils, etc. are great ways to educate students about the heritage and cultural assets within their communities. This exposure can lead to fostering interest and affection for history and heritage. It is recommended that Heritage Tourism staff develop additional actionable strategies on reaching youth and share those ideas with the Trail Regions for implementation that is relevant to local groups and needs.

One suggestion from the planning workshops was for each Trail Region to record at least five brief video segments called "History in 5 Minutes" or "History in 10 Minutes." These would be brief videos of someone in the region telling the story of something that took place there that would be of interest to a heritage traveler. These snippets of stories could be posted on the Trail Regions' social media channels and websites as well as the Texas Time Travel website and THC social media channels in an effort to educate tourists. This could be a quick and inexpensive way to also support the "Learn and Explore History Through Place" goal within Texas' Statewide Historic Preservation Plan.

Strategy 3: Trail Regions to Participate in Next Statewide Historic Preservation Plan

Texas' Statewide Historic Preservation Plan is typically refreshed and rewritten every ten years or so. As the current one expires year-end 2020, there is an opportunity for the Trail Regions to become engaged in the creation of the next one. The Trail Regions should become proactively involved in the public portions of developing the next version of Texas' Statewide Historic Preservation Plan when the time arises. Their contributions to the next plan are valuable to help shape preservation efforts throughout Texas for the next decade.

Goal B: Create Opportunities for Information & Content Sharing

Strategy 1: Resource Library Development

In order to foster heritage preservation and education throughout the program, the THC should build and implement a rigorous education and professional development resource library for use by regional directors to help in providing hands-on assistance to their partners and stakeholders. The library should also include, but not be limited to idea sharing, template sharing, event ideas, travel itineraries and information sharing. Best practices, checklists, graphics, and other tools are shared, not just for uniformity, but for repurposing useful content and leveraging financial, human, and time resources and to foster education.

Uniform educational/workshop materials could be developed by expert professionals in each respective category, include current images and graphics from the Trail Regions, include speaker notes, and be enthusiastically delivered by staff or consultants skilled in the content.

Strategy 2: Create a Speakers' Bureau

Another beneficial way HT Program staff and Trail Region executive directors can share information is by creating a Speakers' Bureau. A Speakers' Bureau is a collection of names, contact information, notes from past experiences/hirings, bio (if known,) fees (if known) are listed in a directory, sorted by subject matter or content specialty. This information should be housed in the Resource Library.

This is a tool by which stakeholders share speaker information with one another and for this type of organization, the list may include motivational speakers, keynote presenters, lunch and learn presenters, professional facilitators, and experts in preservation, tourism, culture, heritage, education, the arts, marketing, fundraising, etc. This list could also include local experts or docents who have expertise in explaining or demonstrating some element of history or heritage that multiple Trail Regions could benefit learning from.

Strategy 3: Trail Regions to Offer Workshops/Seminars

Hosting workshops and seminars is a great way for each Trail Region to foster heritage preservation and education. New workshops can be created to add to existing events being produced or they can be new learning opportunities created as stand-alone seminars to provide stakeholders with educational training.

Some Trail Regions currently offer workshops and events to serve their members and other stakeholders, but each Trail Region needs to consider offering some type of regular event, whether it be an annual, semiannual, quarterly, or monthly. Each Trail Region should also consider providing occasional workshops as needed by those whom they serve. These workshops can be in-person or online in webinar form.

This effort should be spearheaded by each Trail Region individually or regions could choose to partner together. Each Trail Region should poll their constituents to determine what topics would be most beneficial and timely to benefit those constituents and their local communities, then make plans to develop and deliver such workshops. This may include the Trail Region executive director as the speaker, or it could be a speaker that the executive director secured to develop and deliver the presentation. This is an excellent yet simple value-added benefit each Trail Region could provide if they're not already.

Workshop ideas and possible speakers would be listed in the Speakers' Bureau earlier mentioned and housed in the Resource Library. Topic suggestions for workshops should be requested at various events throughout the year and be the first source to review when considering hosting a workshop.

Goal C: Provide Customer Experience Hospitality Training

Although the Trail Region executive directors and boards have expertise in heritage tourism, travel, and customer service, it is beneficial for them to provide Customer Service Excellence workshops every 2-3 years for the Trail Region members and partners.

HT Program staff should ensure that the Hospitality Training Program provides an element of consistency in content topics and delivery, even if specifics may vary region to region.

Strategy 1: Trail Regions to Develop Hospitality Training

New tips and techniques emerge from time to time and new stakeholders and ideas come onto the scene. It's responsible organizational management for the Trail Regions to provide periodic training on current customer service, visitor experience, tourism trends and best practices being used across the country. This type of training workshop can be developed by the Trail Region executive directors or they can hire a hospitality industry expert to build it.

Strategy 2: Trail Regions to Deliver Hospitality Training

As a service, the Trail Regions should arm their boards and partners with the best and most current customer service and hospitality information. This type of training is likely best when each Trail Region customizes the delivery to suit their region's specific attractions, visitors, cultures, and needs. This workshop can be delivered by the Trail Region executive directors or they can hire a hospitality or human resources professional as the presenter.

Post-COVID-19 Considerations

In a post-coronavirus environment, the HT Program and each Trail Region should be brainstorming topics and seeking feedback from community stakeholders regarding online trainings and/or webinars. Each Trail Region and the HT Program team should also establish a policy of meeting online via Zoom, TEAMS, GoToMeetings, or Skype to conduct regular or special called meetings when meeting in person is impossible or difficult.

The national travel restrictions have no doubt diminished the income and ability to operate for many hospitality-based businesses within each Trail Region. There will be restaurants, retailers, and possibly lodging facilities or attractions that will be forced to close their doors permanently. Each Trail Region should be partnering closely with their own members, the area Chambers of Commerce, and Convention & Visitor Bureaus (CVBs)/Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) to offer advice and resource assistance to affected tourist attractions or businesses typically serving tourists, trying to help them weather the effects. For those businesses and/or partners that are unable to survive and for those whose hours may become limited, Trail Region executive directors must update their listings and materials to reflect the changes.

This is a unique opportunity for the Trail Region executive directors and their board members to reach out to partners and stakeholders to offer assistance and advice and to be a sounding board and brainstorm partner. It will be important for Trail Regions to take note of best practices during recovery and share those tips and tools with their regional stakeholders. It's an opportunity to shine as an essential resource with outstanding customer service skills, compassion, and hopeful optimism for the future of tourism. The same is true for HT Program staff reaching out to share best practices to the Trail Regions they serve.

Strategic Priority #3: Encourage Regional Cooperation and Promotion of Heritage and Cultural Attractions

TO ENCOURAGE REGIONAL COOPERATION AND PROMOTION OF HERITAGE AND CULTURAL ATTRACTIONS, THE TEXAS HERITAGE TOURISM PROGRAM MUST ENSURE THAT THE TRAVELING PUBLIC CAN PARTICIPATE IN AN AUTHENTIC HERITAGE EXPERIENCE.

Promoting and supporting regional cooperation (in each Trail Region and among all the Trail Regions) by creating cohesive marketing opportunities to promote heritage and cultural attractions will leverage resources and maximize taxpayer investment.

Goal A: Develop Communications Plans

Two Communications Plans need to be developed: one for the Trail Regions and one for the Heritage Tourism Program. Each plan should include the formal Style Guide developed by THC Communications Division.

Each of these two deliverables should be a comprehensive Communications Plan that addresses the heritage traveler as audience, unique selling propositions, desired objectives/calls to action, messaging development, tactics to target the avatars developed (see Goal D) media types, media outreach channels, determining relevant events, campaigns, and important dates in Texas history, developing a marketing calendar, and effectively measuring impact.

Strategy 1: Develop a Communications Plan for the Trail Regions

A Communications Plan should be developed for the Texas Heritage Trails Program to give professional communications guidance to the Trail Regions. It can be designed as a mandate for certain THC and HT Program communication style and language usage dos and don'ts, and also serve as guidebook menu of ideas on creative communications tools Trail Regions can choose from to use in their local markets.

Strategy 2: Develop a Communications Plan for the Heritage Tourism Program

A second Communications Plan should be developed for the Heritage Tourism Program to provide guidelines for the HT Program staff regarding official THC internal and external outreach. The HT Program Communications Plan should be more universal than the THTP one because the HP Program encompasses additional services. This plan should include all the elements listed above and communications strategies related to the inter-division relationship building the HT Program is working to facilitate. It should also include professional guidance on the elements listed regarding how to best build Strategic Alliances in Strategic Priority #4.

In the [THC Strategic Plan](#) under the Agency Operational Goal of Maximizing Quality and Effectiveness of Services, one of the Action Items is to “Create Agency Brand Identity Guidelines: Update and standardize guidelines and best practices for the THC agency brand, Texas Heritage Trail Region logos, Texas Time Travel design graphics, and state historic sites branding for staff and approved stakeholders to utilize for any communication project or need.” The Communications Division’s fulfillment of this Agency Goal could serve as the Heritage Tourism Communications Plan with a few minor HT Program specifics added; this strategy does not necessarily need to be the wholesale development of a separate or additional Communications Plan.

A few other possible actions the HT Program can take to streamline communications between themselves and the Trail Regions include:

- Restructuring the current monthly reporting tool into a more effective straightforward quarterly reporting tool; one simple tool to be used by every Trail Region
- Restructuring and templating the annual report required from each Trail Region
- Assisting the Trail Regions in transition of expectations; the HT Program staff should help Trail Region executive directors understand the new expectations and how to use the newly developed reporting tools, including software instruction when needed, i.e. Google Drive, Dropbox, Word, Excel, etc. These new sets of expectations should be revisited periodically once firmly established.
- Ensuring that the data they are asking the Trail Regions to track, record, research, collect, and provide is either required by statute to be collected or that it is used in-house to shape Heritage Tourism Program goal accomplishment or funding or programming decisions. Periodic internal self-audits on data collection vs. data value is a healthy time and information management practice for any organization.

Strategy 3: Provide Professional Media Training

A smart add-on would be to bring in a professional media instructor to briefly share tips with HT Program staff and Trail Region executive directors on how to present one’s best self on TV, radio, podcasts, photos, video, and newsprint. Many indicated they have never received formal training in this area. This could be an online workshop or an in-person training at one of the statewide semiannual joint meetings.

Strategy 4: Develop THTP Style Guide

THC and Heritage Tourism and Heritage Trails brand standards must be established and required use by the Trail Regions. The Heritage Tourism team should request assistance from the THC Communications Division to specifically develop a Style Guide for use by Heritage Tourism and the Heritage Trails.

Strategy 5: Provide THTP Style Guide Training

This type of THC and division branding should be taught by the THC Communications Division to both the HT Program team and the Trail Regions. This division has offered to help train Trail Region executive directors on proper logo usage, brand standards, styling, official color formulas, fonts, voice, product positioning, etc. to help create a uniform distinct identity across the entire program. This training workshop is most efficient if all HT Program staff and Trail Region executive directors come to one location and the Communications Division can teach them all at once together.

The HT Program team should observe the new Communications standards and should expect the Trail Regions to adhere as well.

Strategy 6: Trail Regions to Utilize and Adhere to Style Guide

Each Trail Region should have access to a Style Guide developed by the THC Communications Division specifically for the Heritage Trails brand and begin to adapt marketing standards to match those of the HT Program. Not every single item produced has to be uniform, but there must be a consistency in look, feel, and voice in the marketing that the Trail Regions produce to be identified as a THTP partner. A visitor traveling from one region of the state to another should be able to recognize a familiarity in messaging.

Strategy 7: Provide Marketing Training Workshops

Each of the Trail Regions have their own marketing tools and philosophies, and while individuality is necessary, there is opportunity for more on-brand marketing, especially when promoting heritage and cultural attractions with their local partners. Marketing tools, tips, and tricks can also be taught in group workshop form by the THC Communications Division or a private sector marketing professional to the Trail Region executive directors to help them best leverage the taxpayer dollars they receive from THC combined with partner or other self-generated revenue.

HT Program staff should query the Trail Regions to determine what the specific marketing needs are and then bring in the appropriate professional to best assist them. This type of training might involve:

- the mechanics of compelling storytelling
- collateral development
- target marketing
- cooperative advertising
- newsletter tips, etc.
- videos recorded to share with members or partners of the Trail Regions to leverage promotional dollars

Strategy 8: Collaborate in the Development of Marketing Materials

Marketing material/collateral development must be a tighter collaborative effort between the Trail Regions, the HT Program staff and the Communications Division. Both the THC and the Trail Regions each already develop marketing materials, but not in as collaborative an environment as preferred. Each entity has something to contribute to making most marketing pieces more valuable. Not that every document produced must be subject to approval; just that they should use each other's knowledge more frequently. Such expectations can be outlined in future contractual agreements if need be.

In the 2020 joint strategic planning session, the Trail Regions agreed to send various pieces of content they have developed to the Communications Division (via the HT Program staff) for repurposing into other forms of content and for the communications professionals to edit or polish up items for distribution. It will be the Trail Regions that are responsible for initiating such a collaborative.

Strategy 9: Design and Implement a Social Media Usage Guide

HT Program staff should engage the assistance of THC Communications Division to develop a Social Media Usage Guide for the HT Program and each Trail Region to use. This guide should be distributed to each Trail Region with the expectation they will use those guidelines in consistent fashions to promote heritage and cultural attractions and events in their regions. The HT Program should also use those Communications Division guidelines when promoting heritage tourism from THC accounts to ensure uniformity of messaging and maximizing paid, un-paid, and earned exposure. The HT Program could also contract this service out and have the Communications Division approve it before implementation.

Strategy 10: Develop and Deliver a Social Media Workshop

The HT Program should create and deliver a Social Media Workshop to educate each Trail Region executive director on how to effectively promote their heritage and cultural attractions through common social media channels such as Facebook and Instagram. A quick review on Instagram reveals that not every Trail Region has an account and some of those who do, do not use it regularly or effectively, or have ever used it at all. This is a relatively simple skill to teach and the HT Program staff should require regular promotional social media posts as part of the contractual expectations.

THC is promoting heritage attractions across Texas and is funding each Trail Region to promote attractions, so it is a reasonable expectation that each Trail Region should be responsible for this type of modern promotion to travelers. The training should include hands-on assistance in creating accounts where none exist, dos and don'ts of creating posts, commenting, proper and improper use of hashtags, and sharing. This workshop should also contain tips for still photographs, video postings, posting multi-photo sets, and soliciting local photos from local amateur and professional photographers as well as reposts of visitor photos of attractions in the Trail Region. Equipping the Trail Region executive directors with these tools will help them promote their region and develop regional cooperation to attract visitors.

Strategy 11: Ensure New Website Fully Showcases Heritage Assets

The THC is currently in the updating phase of the Texas Time Travel website. Ensure that the finished product, once delivered, includes intuitive functionality, ease of use, ease of maintenance, and the ability to drive more traffic to it. The new website should clearly and accurately showcase all heritage and cultural attractions that meet Heritage Tourism Site Standards (see Appendix B) within each of the Trail Regions.

Strategy 12: Trail Regions to Appear as Podcast Guests

It is recommended that the Trail Regions staff explore relevant local, regional, or national podcasts they are interested in and pursue opportunities to appear as guests. It's a unique opportunity to share their own heritage tourism expertise and showcase their respective regions to a multitude of listeners, while leveraging their recent media training mentioned earlier. It's a chance to creatively market their heritage and cultural attractions at no cost.

Strategy 13: THC to Explore Creating a Podcast in the Future

At the joint strategic planning session in preparation for this plan development, several participants raised an inquiry regarding the possibility of the THC creating a podcast series within the next five years. Although no plans are in works now to start a podcast, it is recommended that the HT Program team at least explore with THC Communications what is involved in creating, maintaining, and promoting a state agency podcast to determine if it is feasible and effective.

Goal B: Provide Technical Assistance to the Trail Regions

Strategy 1: Provide Email Assistance

In conversations with participants in the joint strategic planning session, there was discussion about the ten Trail Regions using different email providers, different server host companies, and different email signatures. The Trail Regions should be expected to adhere to current and appropriate email specifications for the sake of recognizability, consistent branding, and use of their own logo.

There was also discussion regarding group efficiency software tools. Some Trail Regions expressed an interest in exploring and comparing project management and team communications software tools, i.e. Trello, Slack, Basecamp, etc. This is an area where HT Program staff and/or Communications Division staff may be able to offer advice.

The THC Communications Division offered to help the Trail Regions and the HT Program team streamline any necessary services as well as educate users on any software usage expectations. It is anticipated that some of the email inconsistencies across the Trail Regions may get resolved through the new website installation, but if not, the Trail Regions may need the further assistance of the Communications Division.

Strategy 2: Provide Newsletter Assistance

Each Trail Region prefers different newsletter subscription services to send out their e-newsletters. The THC Communications Division offered to help the Trail Regions and HT Program staff streamline any necessary services as well as educate users on maximizing the tools within their chosen software packages. Trail Region newsletters should also be appropriately branded using the THTP Style Guide.

Goal C: Maximize State Fair of Texas Booth Benefits

It is time for some refinement of rules and expectations around the State Fair of Texas exhibit booth. The HT Program provides the booth and the Trail Regions manage the installation and work the booth each year. Some elements of exhibiting in the shared space work very well and others need some updating and clarification.

Strategy 1: Standardize State Fair of Texas Booth Participation to Leverage Value

In order to maximize the value of the State Fair of Texas booth opportunity, it is recommended that an ad hoc committee be created to refine parameters of participation and to standardize expectations. This committee should be created by the Trail Region executive directors and consist of Trail Region executive directors, HT Program staff, and Communications staff as committee members craft or update the following:

- State Fair of Texas Standard Operating Procedures manual
- Distinct preparedness, behavior, dress expectations
- Financial and booth time expectations
- Any additional facilities setup or breakdown protocols
- A Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document
- Discussions about the possibility of THC assisting with additional funding to secure a larger booth space
- Discussions about the possibility of THC assisting with creativity and development of the booth
- Consistent branding of the Texas Heritage Trail Program at the State Fair of Texas
- Assistance with developing photo/selfie opportunities and visual appeal to booth visitors
- Consider sharing the collected emails (through giveaways or just sign-up sheets)
- Expand email marketing and list building efforts – consider sharing lists between Trail Regions
- Ensure equitable representation

This ad hoc committee can dissolve after these elements have been developed and implemented.

Goal D: Develop Detailed Visitor Avatars/Personas

It became clear in the listening sessions throughout each of the ten Trail Regions that there is a need for improved awareness for executive directors and board members of exactly who are their target market travelers. There is no cookie-cutter one-size-fits-all tourist for the entire state.

Strategy 1: Heritage Tourism Program Staff to Conduct Statewide and National Research

The HT Program staff should invest in developing consumer research that will help build a picture of a statewide heritage tourist persona or avatar. This research should be used to guide all educational outreach and marketing efforts for the HT Program and the THTP. This “umbrella” persona can then be further developed into a more specific persona by each Trail Region to customize outreach and marketing efforts produced regionally.

Strategy 2: Trail Regions to Conduct Local and Regional Research

Experience proves that once an organization clearly defines its ideal audience, it is much better equipped to make accurate assumptions about things that will appeal to that traveler and how to position local and regional experiences tailored to their respective interests. It will be the responsibility of each Trail Region to begin collecting data to further analyze current travel patterns.

Data collected by tourism organizations often includes:

- zip code data from the regional attractions
- zip code data from hotels and other lodging facilities
- zip code data from local Chambers of Commerce
- zip code data from local CVBs/DMOs
- license plate or drivers' license data
- demographics of followers/fans on social media channels
- online surveys of visitors
- in-person surveys collected at events
- spending habits evaluated after events occur

Although research data can be acquired based on behaviors, movements, and information shared by past and current travelers to each Trail Region, much of this type of research is merely probing and asking the regional experts for detailed descriptions of their ideal heritage traveler.

This will result in a more detailed and customized regional visitor persona. This data should be used for the Trail Regions' own regional marketing purposes and be submitted to HT Program staff quarterly so that agency staff can begin building more accurate information for their facilitated workshop sessions. This data analysis could also be shared with Trail Region partners as a member service. Every stakeholder, from the local attraction to the agency, benefits when traveler research is conducted.

Strategy 3: Use Research to Develop Marketing Strategies

It is recommended that the HT Program develop a facilitated session onsite with each Trail Region within the first two years of this plan to help each organization determine from their local and regional research efforts who their ideal traveler is (may be 2-5 avatars.) Together, the HT Program staff and each Trail Region board can clearly articulate descriptions and buying habits of each avatar/persona.

Such avatars typically include, but are not limited to:

- age
- gender
- household income
- interests
- home zip codes
- shopping habits
- vehicle preferences
- typical vacation spots
- travel budgets
- food and restaurant preferences
- lodging preferences
- activities and events enjoyed
- books/magazines/reading preferences
- social media preferences

At the end of the workshop, the Trail Regions should be able to implement targeting these avatars into practice for their marketing plans.

Goal E: Provide Robust Marketing Assistance to the Trail Regions

Strategy 1: Provide Cooperative Advertising/Marketing Consulting Assistance

Many of the cooperative advertising and marketing relationships work well, but some may need some revamping. Since it's difficult for the HT Program staff to fully know which cooperative advertising relationships are ideal and which need improvements, it is recommended that the HT Program require each Trail Region to share with them feedback on the cooperative advertising they provide to partners and the HT Program to give professional guidance to improving any elements of that marketing alliance. This can also make for a valuable discussion topic at the THTP statewide semiannual meeting or during site visits made by HT Program staff to the Trail Regions. There are always opportunities for improvement and sharing of best practices to raise the promotion effectiveness and maximize taxpayer investment.

Strategy 2: Encourage Trail Regions to Participate in Travel Shows/Trade Shows

It is recommended that the HT Program staff encourage Trail Regions to participate in applicable travel and trade shows. Participation may involve having a booth or merely attending and working a show floor. This is an excellent way for the Trail Regions to have direct communication with their exact markets –heritage tourists and heritage stakeholders. This can become even more customized once the traveler personas are fully developed in each Trail Region; it will become more evident which Trail Regions should attend/exhibit at which shows to reach their ideal traveler.

Goal F: Increase Real Places Conference Engagement Among Trail Regions

HT Program staff and the Trail Regions should brainstorm each year on what topics are most relevant to develop and present at the Real Places Conference based on heritage tourism trends, economic recovery, hospitality industry advocacy, and what is currently going on in the Trail Regions. Basing educational offerings upon current needs is always on-point for conference content development that delivers on participant expectations.

Strategy 1: Trail Regions to Help Generate Content/Speakers for Real Places

It is recommended that HT Program staff encourage Trail Regions (staff or subject matter expert board members) to submit proposals to conduct sessions at Real Places. Trail Regions should also be helping HT Program staff develop relevant topic ideas and helping secure speakers for the event. It's a great way for each Trail Region to showcase its relevance on a statewide and inter-agency audience scale. This can also raise the profile of individual Trail Regions in the eyes of THC Commissioners and local elected officials.

Strategic Priority #4: Foster Effective Local Tourism Leadership and Organizational Skills

The HT Program needs to ensure the work plans of each Trail Region directly align to the HT Program Strategic Plan and the THC's mission, values, and goals to ensure organizational integrity and intended use of taxpayer funds, as noted in the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission findings of January 2019.

TO FOSTER EFFECTIVE LOCAL TOURISM LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS, THE HERITAGE TOURISM PROGRAM AND THE TRAIL REGIONS MUST INCLUDE ACTIVITIES DEVELOPED TO BUILD LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY AT BOTH THE STATE AND REGIONAL LEVELS, RESPECTIVELY.

Goal A: HT Program Staff to Increase Frequency of Field Visits

It is recommended that the HT Program staff get into the field more often to visit the Trail Region executive directors and sometimes their boards. As the many changes recommended in this Strategic Plan take effect, it is evident that more hands-on customer service and relationship building will be necessary to ensure success. These visits can include one-on-one assistance with anything the executive director expresses needing help with, or they may include a workshop delivered by a HT Program team member at the Trail Region board meeting. The HT Program staff is the Trail Region's most valuable partner and partners require working time together.

Goal B: Trail Region Boards to Increase Frequency of Field Trips

It is highly recommended that each Trail Region periodically take their board members on field trips around the region to visit historic sites, attractions, courthouses, cemeteries, etc. and to stop in to meet the local Main Street Directors, Chamber of Commerce folks, and CVB/DMO staff. The purpose of field trip visits is to learn effective tactics other sites and communities are using and how they work, as well as to better understand history and heritage from a regional standpoint.

Visits do not have to be limited to just other communities within their region. Trail Regions have expressed an interest in learning more about Texas history and heritage within the other Trail Regions across the state. Trail Region boards should plan visits to other Trail Regions as time and budgets allow. This type of cross-region awareness can lead to creative opportunities for cross-region collaboration, marketing, and promotion.

This expectation can even be tied to the new quarterly reporting tool being developed.

Goal C: Provide Increased THC Commission Information to Trail Regions

Many participants in the joint strategic planning session expressed an interest in learning more about the Texas Historical Commission's meetings and decisions. There was feedback that they aren't fully aware of the Commission's ideas, decisions, and interests other than the Texas Heritage Trail Program's continued support from the THC Commissioners. The executive directors and Trail Region board chairs indicated they are interested in each receiving the published minutes or a video link (unlisted YouTube link) to recorded THC Commission meetings to gain a better understanding of the Heritage Tourism Program and the Texas Heritage Trails Program within the entire THC structure.

Goal D: Modify the Existing THTP Statewide Semiannual Joint Meeting Format

It is recommended that the joint THTP statewide meeting that occurs twice a year with each Trail Region executive director, board chair, HT Program staff, and THC leadership be modified into a new format. The exact format should be created from the participants sharing their ideas of what that should look and feel like. Suggestions at the joint strategic planning session included:

- a day-long brainstorming session
- sharing of new ideas or best practices used recently or seen elsewhere
- sharing of work plan implementation strategies that have been successful
- "60 ideas in 60 minutes" format
- topical discussions based on current trends/concerns

Any or all of these formats could be tried over time. Not all meetings are necessarily required to be in Central Texas/Austin.

Goal E: Establish and Nurture Strategic Alliances

In order to foster effective local tourism leadership, the HT Program and Trail Regions must seek to establish and nurture alliances with a variety of strategic partners within the state structure and within the local and regional structure.

Strategic alliances will remain important to gather and maintain accurate inventory lists of cultural and heritage attractions and hospitality assets. These must be conducted with even higher levels of sensitivity and respect in the post-coronavirus environment where some will have likely had to close, file bankruptcy, or operate with fewer hours or staff. See more COVID-19 considerations under Strategic Priority #2.

Continual identification of internal and external partners and developing sustained strategic alliances will ensure the continued success of the HT Program and affiliate organizations.

Strategy 1: Partner with Texas State Agencies and THC Divisions and Programs

Potential partnerships to explore establishing or growing include:

- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
- Texas Department of Transportation
- Texas Commission on the Arts
- Texas Department of Agriculture
- Office of the Governor, Economic Development and Tourism
- Other THC Divisions, Departments, and Programs such as:
 - Communications Division
 - Texas Main Street Program
 - Education and Outreach Program
 - Historic Sites Division
 - Museum Services Program
 - Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program
 - Texas Historic Roads and Highways Program

Many of these programs participated in the inter-agency listening session conducted in preparation for this plan and offered to present to the Trail Region executive directors on their products and services, and to establish working relationships with them. THC programs support the success of the THTP and are willing to consult and collaborate as their expertise allows. They realize that inter-agency success depends on inter-agency collaboration. In turn, they requested that they be kept informed quarterly with an update from the HT Program of what is going on in the Trail Regions so they can look for ways to plug in and assist, as well as assess what impact their division's contributions are having to the overall Program enhancement.

For instance, the Communications Division offered to assist the HT Program and the Trail Regions in developing Communications Plans (see Strategic Priority #3, Goal A) They should accept those type of outreach offers and work the Communications Division to leverage those skills. The THC must support and foster this relationship building between the Trail Regions and other THC divisions to leverage assets and resources, and to help fulfill its preservation mission.

Strategy 2: Partner with the Friends of the THC

The Friends of the Texas Historical Commission (FTHC) has expressed a willingness to work with the Trail Region executive directors to teach fundraising methods and industry best practices in a centralized workshop. This is a skill set this team is extremely experienced or well-versed in and is a proficiency that many Trail Region executive directors have expressed an interest in developing. This effort will help teach each Trail Region how to raise money outside the funding they receive from the THC. The HT Program will benefit from providing the Trail Region leadership such education because when the Trail Regions become more successful at revenue generation, they will have more opportunity to fund their efforts, providing even greater value to their members and stakeholders.

The HT Program team should work with the FTHC to organize a series of training sessions to be provided to the Trail Regions as a part of the THTP statewide semiannual meetings. In addition to formal training in the areas of fundraising, friendraising, and financial sustainability, this also provides an opportunity for Trail Region executive directors to engage with FTHC for assistance with individual needs. It is beneficial for the Trail Regions to establish and sustain a working relationship with FTHC.

Strategy 3: Each Trail Region to Better Engage with Historic Sites

Another method that at least one Trail Region already uses to keep THC Historic Sites engaged with the region is to create ex-officio positions on their board and invite the regional site manager(s) in their area to serve in that role. That naturally allows for mutual sharing of information at the board level, but that certainly filters down into better conversations about THTP collaboration when regional site managers get together, and vice versa. It also formalizes the relationships with the sites. Extending this relationship to all or multiple Trail Regions will require a conversation between HT Program staff and the Historic Sites Division regarding approval of board service invitations, but the idea is mutually beneficial for all parties.

Strategy 4: HT Program to Provide Workshops for Trail Regions on Other THC Divisions/Programs

Interest has been indicated by Trail Regions to learn more in these areas in this order:

- Historic Sites
- Texas Main Street Program
- Museum Services
- Texas Historic Highways
- Friends of the THC
- Historic Preservation Tax Credit Program
- County Historical Commission Outreach
- National Register of Historic Places
- Historical Marker Program
- Certified Local Government

Strategy 5: Enhance Strategic Alliances by Fostering Communications Networks

It will be important for the HT Program staff to monitor and help foster the various communications networks that will need to become more robust. The board members of the Trail Regions specifically requested greater communications directly to them. It will be the responsibility of the HT Program staff to determine which communications warrant board inclusion vs. those that do not. The HT Program staff must pay close attention to fostering the communications between the following groups:

- Between THC Other-Divisions/Department staff and Trail Region Executive Directors
- Between THC Other-Divisions/Department staff and Trail Boards of Directors
- With Commissioners & Legislators to promote continued funding

Naturally, it is upper management at THC that communicates with Commission members and legislators most directly, but the HT Program staff can play a role in making sure management has the best information, tools, and regional success stories to help them tell the most compelling achievements about and within the program.

All communications will be expected to be professional in nature and consistency, high quality, and accuracy will be required at all times. It must be remembered that all communications are subject to the Open Records Act and written communications such as memos, text messages, and emails can be requested by the public at any time for review or publication. High standards require high expectations.

Goal F: Enhance Trail Region Board Member Effectiveness and Engagement

There are several opportunities for the HT Program to provide the Trail Regions with education, resources, and tools to maximize their contributions to board service.

Strategy 1: HT Program to Provide Workshops on Interested Topics for Trail Regions' Boards and Executive Directors

Interest has been indicated by Trail Regions in these areas in this order:

- Board development training (see Strategy 2 below)
- Effective marketing
- Nonprofit education (finance, policies, board recruitment, strategic planning, grants)
- Leadership development
- Social media strategy development
- Latest technology trends, tips, and tools
- Product/experience development

Strategy 2: Equip Trail Region Boards with Tools and Templates

There are three steps to effective board member effectiveness and engagement:

1. Commitment Form/Job Description
2. Onboarding System
3. Board Development

The following documents and processes are necessary for the THC to provide to the Trail Regions, including training on how to implement and use the new tools. The structure being recommended in the Strategic Plan is that each Trail Region have that 3-Step Approach to Board Member Effectiveness and Engagement:

The specific documents included (but not limited to) are in these 3-Step categories:

1. Commitment Form (job description for all potential board members considering service)
2. Onboarding (one-time one-on-one meeting between executive director and new board member(s) to orient them to their new organization, usually 1-2 hours)
3. Board Development (annual refresher for all board members regarding roles, governance, engagement, best practices, review of current plan, etc., usually 3-4 hours prior to their annual strategic planning workshop)

Documents for a template for each of these three stages of board engagement is needed:

1. Commitment/Accountability Form: A commitment form template that includes the position description requirements and expectations of all board members. The purpose is to completely inform all potential board members prior to their nomination so they fully understand what is expected of their performance should they be invited to serve.

2. Onboarding: This deliverable will contain many documents including:
 - a. Confidentiality Form
 - b. Conflicts of Interest Form
 - c. Code of Conduct Form
 - d. Sample Bylaws
 - e. A checklist of things that the ED needs to share, distribute, or explain to the new board member(s.)

3. Board Development: The third deliverable will include:
 - a. A checklist of what goes in each board member notebook prior to the workshop
 - b. A customized Board Development PowerPoint template including speaker notes
 - c. Committee structures and organizational management
 - d. Roberts Rules of Order
 - e. Sample monthly agenda for board meetings
 - f. Board matrix for filling expired terms/vacancies

Equipping the Trail Region executive directors and their board members with the tools they need to succeed and govern effectively will enhance the quality of the entire Texas Heritage Trails Program as well as elevate the prestige of board service.

Goal G: Research and Consider Modern Philanthropic Tools

There are innovative modern tools that nonprofits across the country utilize to effectively build long-term financial sustainability. These are in addition to the foundation grants mentioned in Strategic Priority #1.

Strategy 1: Trail Regions to Research Legacy Giving Programs

Creating a Legacy Giving Program is an ideal strategy for Trail Regions to consider exploring over the next few years. It is a tool that many nonprofits use as an option to substantially grow the financial strength and sustainability of their nonprofit over time. A Legacy Giving Program is a way for anyone anywhere to contribute to any nonprofit posthumously.

If any Trail Region were to add this option to their fundraising tools and be willing to share their template, any other Trail Region could insert their own logo, name, and use it for the future benefit of their nonprofit should they choose to exercise this option to grow their funding. Many legacy giving programs also allow the donor to make the donation in “honor of” or “memory of” as well as their own name as benefactor. Potential contributors could include former Trail Region board members, former elected officials, local philanthropic families, local art collectors, and other heritage and cultural stakeholders.

It’s impossible to tell who in a community might be willing to make a financial contribute after death to a cause they support unless they are made aware of the option to give that way while still alive.

Strategy 2: Leverage Giving Tuesday

All Trail Region stakeholders should still be encouraged to give financially to the Trail Region annually on National Giving Tuesday beginning with November 2020. The THC Communications Division can design a tasteful holiday ad to post and/or run for the benefit of each Trail Region.

KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Key 1: Ensure a Culture Shift

Crafting a new culture in any organization or relationship can be challenging to do, but well worth the effort once that new culture is firmly established and embedded in execution over time. It can be an exciting fresh start to implementing new goals and strategies. It will be the responsibility of both the Heritage Tourism Program team and each Trail Region to work together to shape an enhanced culture.

When trying to shape a new culture, there are several collective mindset shifts that should occur. A few of them are listed here:

- Becoming a solutions broker
- New beginnings (only looking forward)
- “Us” & “Us” teamwork
- Positivity and optimism
- Customer experience excellence
- Collaborative environment
- Clarity in mutual expectations
- Embracing change and new ideas

The Trail Regions and the HT Program team must position themselves as elements to augment the success of the entire program. Having a mindset of serving others and helping others develop and perform at their highest levels is healthy for any team working together. Everyone involved should see themselves as eager service providers and skilled solutions brokers, the people that stakeholders can turn to help find solutions to their challenges. The Trail Regions and HT Program staff should have the understanding and confidence that each are there to help one another achieve success. There must be universal application of a willingness to embrace new ideas and shape a new culture.

A new culture also includes resisting the human tendency to look to the past to understand or explain how things used to be, or why things were done a certain way, or why certain expectations weren't understood or met....frankly, anything that looks backward. It is not about “us” and “them”; it is about “us” and “us.” Fresh beginnings are about looking to the future with hope and optimism and positive curiosity. There should be a sense established that it is, indeed, a new day in the Texas Heritage Tourism Program, and that everyone involved as a team of agency staff and nonprofit staff and volunteers are jointly focused on one Vision and four Strategic Priorities.

Customer Experience Excellence is the new standard in heritage tourism. Nothing less. HT Program staff will be committed to providing the highest levels of customer service and the Trail Regions will be committed to providing the highest levels of customer service. There must be a clarity in mutual expectations for performance, and a commitment to rectify any ambiguities anywhere along the way. A new environment of collaboration, mutual respect, and a healthy understanding that interdependence is necessary for success should be embraced by everyone.

This new culture will be even more significant and necessary in a post-COVID-19 economy. Economic recovery in the heritage tourism industry is going to require aggressive innovation, solicitation of creative solutions, and continuous feedback loops.

Key 2: Develop Standard Operating Procedures

It is reasonable to expect that each Trail Region will develop a Standard Operating Procedures Manual outlining how things operate in their nonprofit within the next 12 months. A template can be created or curated by the HT Program staff and shared with each Trail Region for populating it based on their own procedures.

This does not need to be a huge labor-intensive or voluminous document; the purpose is to give future Trail Region executive directors a reasonable guidebook to follow in the event the current executive director were to leave the post or unexpectedly unable to share their experiences and advice to anyone filling in. Preparedness is good organizational management.

Key 3: Organizational and Resource Alignment

To ensure intended use of taxpayer funding, certain elements of operation of the Trail Regions must be contractually tied to their funding. This must begin with a renewed strategic alliance between the THC and the nonprofit Trail Regions including performance-based contracts as noted by the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission findings of January 2019. Funding should be released when reasonable expectations are fulfilled, such as:

- Trail Region Scopes of Work annual goals match the THC Heritage Tourism Program's 5-Year Strategic Plan goals
- Quarterly Reporting Tool complete, accurate, and submitted on time
- Annual Report submitted on time using provided template that highlights each Trail Region's successes and progress toward its own goals and the four HT Program strategic priorities.
- Social media channels and hashtags used as advised to promote brand awareness
- Demonstrated proper use of Marketing Materials standards and styles

While the Strategic Priorities set the tone for the entire HT Program and the Trail Regions, matching Trail Region goals to HT Program goals does not mean that those goals are the only goals a Trail Region can establish. Trail Regions should add other items they plan to accomplish into their individual Scopes of Work and develop their own strategies on how to help fulfill program goals.

Trail Region executive directors and boards should review the HT Program goals regularly and align their goals within a similar framework to help the overall program goals be accomplished. This type of accountability and continuity is especially attractive to the THC Commissioners and legislators for future funding support because the HT Program goals directly align with the Texas Administrative Code.

CONCLUSION

These 2020-2025 goals and strategies are about creating and implementing streamlined processes and systems and raising the quality of services provided.

These four Strategic Priority streamlined process improvements and systems integration will take significant time and effort to fully implement, but they will generate countless efficiencies, leverage taxpayer investment, and create more time for meaningful execution of the Heritage Tourism Program and the Texas Heritage Trail Program mission.

APPENDIX A:

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS TO GAUGE IMPLEMENTATION of TEXAS HERITAGE TOURISM PROGRAM & TEXAS HERITAGE TRAILS PROGRAM

The following are the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) by which the success of this strategic plan will be measured. KPIs shown in **red** indicate activities that are required.

Strategic Priority #1: Raise the Standards of Heritage and Cultural Attractions around the State

Goal A: Enhance the Visitor Experience

KPIs:

- Did Trail Regions distribute and encourage adherence to the new Site Standards?
(annual and total YE 2025)
- # of Points of Interest that Trail Regions worked with to help them meet Site Standards _____
(Target = 10 each annually)
- % of all Points of Interest that worked with Trail Regions meeting Site Standard criteria? _____%
(annual and year-end 2025)

Goal B: Explore Various Grant Opportunities

KPIs:

- # of Trail Regions that explored grant-making opportunities? _____ *(Target = 10 by YE 2025)*
- Did the HT Program leverage existing THC grants to help the Trail Regions? *(annually)*
- Did the HT Program explore grant-making opportunities within HT?
- # of Trail Regions that sought grants from other sources? _____ *(Target = 10, annually)*
- # of successful grants awarded to Trail Regions? _____

Goal C: Visitor Experience Development

KPIs:

- Did the HT Program create Visitor Experience Development training by year-end 2025?
- Did the HT Program begin implementation of Visitor Experience Development training by year-end 2025?

Strategic Priority #2: Foster Heritage Preservation and Education

Goal A: Honor Texas' Statewide Historic Preservation Plan

KPIs:

- # of Trail Regions that indicate they have built meaningful relationships with economic development professionals in their region? _____ (Target = 10 annually)
- Did the HT Program and each Trail Region leverage the TTBA by developing and promoting stories?
- # of Trail Regions that have established working relationships with the THC's Youth Education Specialist? _____ (Target = 6, annually)
- # of Trail Regions that successfully assisted Youth organizations experience history/heritage? What was the impact of this assistance? _____ (Target = 5 by year-end 2025)
- # of Trail Regions that created and posted at least 5 video segments telling history/heritage stories? _____ (Target = 5 by year-end 2025)
- # of Trail Regions that actively participated in Texas' Statewide Historic Preservation Plan development? _____ (Target = 10)

Goal B: Create Opportunities for Cross-Region Information & Content Sharing

KPIs:

- Did the HT Program and each Trail Region create and populate a Resource Library?
- Did the HT Program and each Trail Region create and populate a Speakers' Bureau?
- # of workshops or events produced and delivered by each Trail Region? _____ (Target = 3 per region, annually)

Goal C: Provide Customer Experience Hospitality Training

KPIs:

- # of Trail Regions that provided Hospitality Training? _____ (Target = 4 regions, annually)
- Did the HT Program and each Trail Region establish a policy of conducting board meetings, trainings, and other meetings online when they are unable to meet in person?

Strategic Priority #3: Encourage Regional Cooperation and Promotion of Heritage and Cultural Attractions

Goal A: Develop Communications Plans

KPIs:

- Was a Communications Plan created for the Trail Regions?
- Was a Communications Plan created for the Heritage Tourism Program?

- Was Professional Media Training provided to HT staff and Trail Regions?
- Was a THTTP Style Guide created?
- Was training provided on appropriate use of the Style Guide, if training is determined to be necessary?
- # of Trail Regions that regularly and actively adhere to new Style Guide? _____
(Target = 10, annually)
- # of Marketing Training Workshops HT Program staff provided to Trail Regions by year-end 2025? _____ (Target = 6)
- Was a closer collaborative relationship between the HT Program, the Trail Regions, and the Communications Division established? (Target = 70% of Trail Regions, the HT Program, and the Communications Division saying yes)
- Was a Social Media Usage Guide designed and implemented?
- Was a Social Media Workshop for each Trail Region designed and delivered?
- Does TTT website fully showcase Heritage assets? (Target 80% of Trail Regions saying yes)
- # of Trail Regions that appeared as a podcast guest at least once by year-end 2025? _____ (Target = 4)
- # of podcast shows total that Trail Region representatives appeared on by year-end 2025? _____
(Target = 4)
- Did THC explore creating a podcast by year-end 2025? Why or why not?

Goal B: Provide Technical Assistance to the Trail Regions

KPIs:

- Was email assistance provided to Trail Regions by the Communications Division?
- Was newsletter assistance provided to Trail Regions by the Communications Division?
- # of newsletter templates developed for Trail Regions by year-end 2025 _____ (Target = 5)
- # of newsletter templates used by Trail Regions by year-end 2025 _____ (Target = 5)

Goal C: Maximize State Fair of Texas Booth Benefits

KPIs:

- Were the State Fair of Texas Booth rules updated and distributed to all Trail Regions?
- # of Trail Regions using updated State Fair of Texas booth rules _____ (Target = 10)

Goal D: Develop Detailed Visitor Avatars/Personas

KPIs:

- # of Trail Regions that fully developed their visitor avatars/personas by year-end 2025? _____
(Target = 6)
- # of Trail Regions that developed marketing strategies based on their visitor avatar/personas by year-end 2025? _____ (Target = 6)

Goal E: Provide Robust Marketing Assistance to the Trail Regions**KPIs:**

of Trail Regions to which the HT Program Staff gave professional guidance regarding cooperative marketing? *(Target = 4, annually)*

of travel or trade shows attended by Trail Regions? _____
(Target = 2 each, annually)

Goal F: Increase Real Places Conference Engagement Among Trail Regions**KPIs:**

of session proposals at Real Places generated by Trail Regions? _____
(Target = 7, annually)

of speakers at Real Places who are Trail Region Executive Directors or board members? _____
(Target = 2, annually)

Strategic Priority #4: Foster Effective Local Tourism Leadership and Organizational Skills**Goal A: HT Program Staff to Increase Frequency of Field Visits****KPIs:**

of field visits by HT Program staff to Trail Regions annually (in addition to regular board meeting attendance)? _____ *(Target = 10, annually)*

Goal B: Trail Region Boards to Increase Frequency of Field Trips**KPIs:**

of Trail Regions that took their board on at least one field trip annually? _____
(Target = 7)

Goal C: Provide Increased THC Commission Information to Trail Regions**KPIs:**

Did the HT Program provide links or information to the Trail Regions about THC Commission meetings and minutes?

Goal D: Modify the Existing THTP Statewide Semiannual Joint Meeting Format

KPIs:

- Was the THTP Statewide semiannual joint meeting format successfully modified? *(semiannually)*
- Satisfaction score on the THTP Statewide semiannual joint meeting feedback survey *(Target = Score of at least 3.5 out of 5, semiannually)*

Goal E: Establish and Nurture Strategic Alliances

KPIs:

- # of Texas state agencies the Trail Regions successfully partnered with? _____
(Target = 3, annually and 15, YE 2025)
- # of THC Divisions and Programs the Trail Regions successfully partnered with? _____
(Target = 3, annually and 15, YE 2025)
- # of Trail Regions that partnered with Friends of the THC? _____
(Target = 3, annually and all 10 by YE 2025)
- # of Trail Regions that created ex-officio positions on their board for regional site managers? _____
(Target = 10)

Goal F: Enhance Trail Region Board Member Effectiveness and Engagement

KPIs:

- # of workshops about THC Programs provided to Trail regions by HT Program? _____
(Target = 4, annually)
- Can we accurately say that communications have improved between Trail Region Executive Directors and a variety of THC Divisions and Program staff? How have communications improved? *(Target = 70% of Trail Regions saying yes)*
- Can we accurately say that communications have improved between Trail Region boards of directors and a variety of THC Divisions and Program staff? How have communications improved? *(Target = 70% of Trail Regions saying yes)*
- # of Workshops provided to Trail Regions by HT Program staff on interested topics? _____
(Target 4, annually)
- Did HT Program staff adequately provide board development tools and templates to all Trail Region boards? *(Target = 100% of Trail Regions saying yes)*
- # of Trail Regions using board development tools and templates _____ *(Target 10, annually)*

Goal G: Research and Consider Modern Philanthropic Tools

KPIs:

- # of Trail Regions that indicated they researched Legacy Giving Programs by year-end 2025? _____
(Target = 4)
- # of Trail Regions that promoted their own nonprofit for National Giving Tuesday? _____
(Target = 3, annually)

APPENDIX B:

Standards for Point of Interest Listings For General Evaluation and for Inclusion in Texas Time Travel

Maintaining quality standards ensures heritage and cultural attractions around the state create experiences that encourage or ultimately result in the preservation of Texas historic treasures. Standards include a list of requirements an asset may have based on physical characteristics, safety, accessibility, signage, visitor usage, interpretation, and more.

These standards are to be used as a program tool by both the HT Program staff and the Trail Regions to enhance the heritage visitor experience throughout Texas, both in person and online. Recognizing that some local attractions may have physical improvements, maintenance and visitor program needs greater or lesser than others, the Trail Regions can serve as a liaison between the attraction and one or more of the THC’s programs or divisions to help them get the information they need.

| STANDARDS (Types defined below chart) | Museum | Historic Site | Monuments/Public Art | Roadside Heritage | Structures | Cultural Landscape - Unrestricted | Cultural Landscape - Restricted | Heritage Events | Historic Arts & Cultural Facilities | Historic Lodging | Historic Restaurants | National, State, or Local Parks | Visitor Centers | Selected Commercial |
|---|----------|---------------|----------------------|-------------------|------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------------|------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| STANDARDS - REQUIRED | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | |
| POI represents a strong connection the heritage/culture of the region. | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| POI is safe and poses no identified threat to visitors. | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| POI exterior is accessible to the public at least during daylight hours | | X | X | X | X | X | | | | | | X | X | |
| POI is open to the public and maintains regular hours. | X | X | X | | | | | X | X | X | X | X | X | |
| Promotion of the site preserves and protects the resource. | X | X | | | | | | X | X | X | X | X | | |
| POI has on-site signage. | X | X | | | | | | | X | | | | X | |
| POI provides adequate interpretation to enhance the visit. | X | X | | | | | | | X | | | | X | |

Preferred standards could have applications in all categories and are not specifically prescribed for any.

| |
|--|
| STANDARDS - PREFERRED |
| PRESERVATION |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a POI consists of a historic structure, efforts should be made to appropriately preserve or restore the structure, if feasible |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The integrity of archeological and protected or sacred sites has been preserved |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Properly preserve and protect artifacts |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property/exhibits are authentic, and reproductions are labeled as such |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal and zoning compliance with local governments |
| PRESENTATION |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • POI has quality programming verified via visitor feedback mechanism with managed oversight |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • POI provides adequate parking |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • POI provides public restrooms |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • POI provides amenities for movement and accessibility that meets ADA standards |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • POI provides amenities for visual, auditory, and kinetic engagement that meets ADA standards |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • POI provides alternative methods of visual engagement for inaccessible areas (i.e. videos, photographs, brochure, etc.) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality hospitality training of staff/volunteers every 3 years |
| PROMOTION |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • POI promotes itself as a tourism attraction |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • POI maintains a relationship with local media to keep the public informed |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • POI markets itself through brochures, website, promotional signage, etc. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web presence maintained |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Claimed attraction by management on Google, Yelp, and TripAdvisor |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Posted management replies to online reviews – Google, Yelp, TripAdvisor, Facebook |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Showcasing recognitions – best of, top 10, earned press |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrated efforts to Shop Local for procurement needs |
| PARTNERSHIP |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • POI works with local, regional and statewide tourism and preservation organizations to take advantage of opportunities and increase awareness of the importance of heritage to a community |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship with local promoters such as CVB, DMO, Chamber, City, County |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local community support for the attraction and tourists to visit it |

Types of Sites and Attractions Appropriate for the Heritage Travel Content

The suite of websites is designed to assist consumers in the planning of current and future travel that involves visitation and participation in heritage-related activities. The content of the websites is intended to be curated rather than comprehensive and is focused on the market of heritage travelers.

The websites identify hundreds of Texas communities that have historic characteristics, features, buildings, neighborhoods, or sites and attractions that are of interest to heritage travelers. The specific identification of sites within the community is sparse in some cases. This may be due to inadequate time to identify and describe the sites or attractions. However, more often it is a case where the community has historic characteristics but lacks visitor-oriented and ready-to-visit sites. The community may have historical significance that is yet to be interpreted. However, at a minimum city identification on the websites remains important for wayfinding and travel planning. A user viewing a city with limited to no description or sites is likely to simply move on to the next listing.

When a site or attraction is specifically listed and provided an entry, the user is likely to expect value should they visit. Therefore, the quality of the sites and attraction information as well as the quality of the site itself is of utmost importance. Given the program's focus on heritage, a user might assume that any listing has a heritage connection implied simply by being listed. The following are the types of sites and attractions most likely to be listed by the agency or region and are clearly appropriate content. In many instances, the properties have been formally designated as historic but in other cases, they appear to be of historic age or significance but have not been officially evaluated and designated.

If the site, attraction, or business is unlikely to be useful or of interest to travelers and visitors, it should not be listed on the websites. This includes private entities without a direct relationship to travelers or visitors but that may partner or financially support the program or regions.

Types of Points of Interest defined:

Texas Time Travel includes a variety of points of interest (POI) designated as 'sites' in its database. There will be natural crossovers in these broad categories for many POIs. These categories are put forth to help identify types.

Types of sites and attractions that represent appropriate content:

- **Museum** – a building in which objects of historical, scientific, artistic, or cultural interest are stored and exhibited. Caters to visitors and has history and heritage interpretation and/or protection as part of its core mission. The facility and property may or may not be historic.
- **Historic/Heritage Site** - any building, landscape, site or structure that is of local, regional, or national significance. Examples:
 - o Texas THC and TPWD State Historic Sites, but this category is not limited to these offerings
 - o [Thurber Historical Association Park](#), Thurber
 - o [Dealey Plaza Historic District](#), Dallas
 - o [Lamesa Farm Workers Community](#), Los Ybañez
 - o [Aldridge Sawmill Historic Site: Angelina National Forest/ Boykin Springs Recreation Area](#), Zavalla

- **Monuments/Public Art** – a statue, building, or other structure erected to commemorate a famous or notable person or event. Examples:
 - [Fannin Memorial Monument](#), Goliad
 - [Centennial Statue of Jim Bowie](#), Texarkana
 - [U.S. Post Office Mural](#), Odessa
 - [Stubb's Memorial](#), Lubbock

- **Roadside Heritage** – a feature along the side of a road meant to attract tourists. Examples:
 - [An Early Phillips 66 Service Station in Texas](#), McLean
 - [World's Tallest Roadrunner](#), Fort Stockton
 - [Trabajo Rustico](#), San Antonio
 - [Moonlight Towers](#), Austin

- **Historic Civic & Cultural Structures** - sole purpose is not the visitor experience: Courthouses, government offices, libraries, education facilities, bridges, and churches. Examples:
 - [San Elizario Presidio Chapel](#), San Elizario
 - [Cameron County Courthouse](#), Brownsville
 - [Waco Suspension Bridge](#), Waco
 - [Fort Worth Water Gardens](#), Fort Worth

- **Heritage Events** - events or processes that have a special meaning in group memory; must be connected to a specific place. Examples:
 - [Motley-Dickens Old Settlers' Reunion and Ranch Rodeo](#), Roaring Springs
 - [Mount Vernon Music Association](#), Mount Vernon
 - [TEXAS Outdoor Musical Drama](#), Canyon
 - [Texas Cowboy Reunion](#), Stamford

- **Cultural Landscape Unrestricted** - a landscape containing a variety of natural and cultural resources that associated people define as heritage resources. Accessible to the public. Includes historic neighborhood or commercial districts that are home to residences and/or businesses. Some may be visitor-oriented while others such as residential districts may have no visitor services or interpretation. Examples:
 - [St. John Colony](#), Lockhart
 - [Black Seminole Indian Scout Cemetery](#), Brackettville
 - [The 1867 Settlement Historic District](#), Texas City
 - [Dolores-Applewhite Crossing](#), San Antonio
 - [Marine Commercial Historic District](#), Fort Worth

- **Cultural Landscape Restricted** - a landscape containing a variety of natural and cultural resources that associated people define as heritage resources. Located on private property. Examples:
 - [Red Rock Ranch](#), Van Horn
 - [White Shaman Preserve \(Rock Art Foundation\)](#), Comstock
 - [Zaal Ranch](#), Collinsville
 - [Paint Rock Indian Pictographs](#), Paint Rock

- **Historic Arts & Cultural Facilities** - including those contemporary institutions located within historic buildings. Examples:
 - o [Sons of Hermann Hall](#), Dallas
 - o [Cactus Theater](#), Lubbock
 - o [Bastrop Opera House](#), Bastrop
- **Historic Lodging** - can include properties that have historically served as transient lodging as well as contemporary lodging services that are incorporated into historic buildings that once served other functions. Examples:
 - o [Hotel El Capitan](#), Van Horn
 - o [Excelsior House Hotel](#), Jefferson
 - o [Historic Rocksprings Hotel](#), Rocksprings
- **Historic Restaurants** - can include properties that have historically served as restaurants as well as contemporary food service that are incorporated into historic buildings or settings. Examples:
 - o [Stagecoach Inn](#), Salado
 - o [Midpoint Café](#), Adrian
 - o [Blanco Bowling Club Café](#), Blanco
- **National, State, or Local Parks and Recreation Facilities** - often with heritage-related components and experiences for the visitor though their mission may be broader. Examples:
 - o [Beason's Crossing Park](#), Columbus
 - o [Chandor Gardens](#), Weatherford
 - o [Landa Park](#), New Braunfels
 - o [Caverns of Sonora](#), Sonora
- **Visitor Centers** - provide information to travelers based on locations or subject matter. The facility and property may or may not be historic. Examples:
 - o [Judge Roy Bean Visitor Center](#), Langtry
 - o [Sam Houston Statue/Visitor Center](#), Huntsville
 - o [Los Portales Tourist Museum and Information Center](#), San Elizario
- **Selected Commercial Entities.** Care must be given to the inclusion of commercially operated sites and attractions that do not adhere to one or more of the categories above to avoid promoting a particular commercial site while intentionally or inadvertently not including other sites of a similar nature. Ideally, commercial enterprises included on the websites should be associated with an historically designated property or have been awarded the Texas Treasure Business Award which sets them apart from non-listed competitors. The following are the types of sites and attractions occasionally listed by the agency or region that warrant further analysis to determine appropriateness:
 - o Arts, cultural, science, and educational institutions and attractions that are visitor-oriented and may be attractive to heritage travelers but that are not specifically heritage-related. Generally, but not always, under nonprofit or public in ownership. Examples:
 - [Chicken Farm Art Center](#), San Angelo
 - [Lee-Bunch Studio Gallery](#), Del Rio
 - [Homestead Heritage](#), Elm Mott

- o Retail shops and other commercial ventures that may be of interest to travelers and visitors, including those that may primarily cater to local clientele. This may include providers of traditional crafts and goods. Examples:
 - [El Mercado](#), San Antonio
 - [First Monday Trade Days](#), Canton
 - [An Ancient Art Soap Company](#), Strawn
 - [Candies by Vletas](#), Abilene

- o Private attractions, tour operators, self-guided tours, or other services to travelers and visitors that are not specifically heritage related, though they may be located in a historic setting or includes elements or experiences loosely associated with history. Examples:
 - [Cardinal Boat Cruises on the Neches River](#), Beaumont
 - [North Texas Horse Country Tour](#), Denton
 - [Steamboat on Caddo Lake](#), Karnack

- o Wineries, breweries, or distilleries which may occasionally be located in historic settings but are rarely historic business operations in Texas. Examples:
 - [Revolver Brewing](#), Granbury
 - [Val Verde Winery](#), Del Rio
 - [Hill Country Distillers](#), Comfort

- o Texas Treasure Business Award Winners. Current list is here: <https://www.thc.texas.gov/past-award-recipients>. There are several listed that are incorporated into mobile tours but do not appear on TTT such as Henne Hardware in New Braunfels and El Fenix in Dallas. Examples:
 - [Silver Dollar Saloon](#), Bandera
 - [Galvan Ballroom](#), Corpus Christi
 - [John T. Floore Country Store](#), Helotes
 - [La India Packing Company](#), Laredo