

Visit Elizabeth City

2020-2021 Marketing Plan



VISIT
Elizabeth City
NORTH CAROLINA



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Introduction

The Elizabeth City-Pasquotank County Tourism Development Authority (TDA) is a North Carolina Public Authority under the Local Government Budget and Fiscal Control Act. The official name of the Authority is the Elizabeth City-Pasquotank County Tourism Development Authority, but the TDA does business as Visit Elizabeth City.

This 2020-2021 marketing plan defines the goals, strategies and methods designed to attract new visitors while maintaining our welcoming, friendly reputation to continue to encourage an influx of return visitors for both leisure and business. Since this is our first official marketing plan as an organization, the results of this FY will serve as a baseline for years to come.

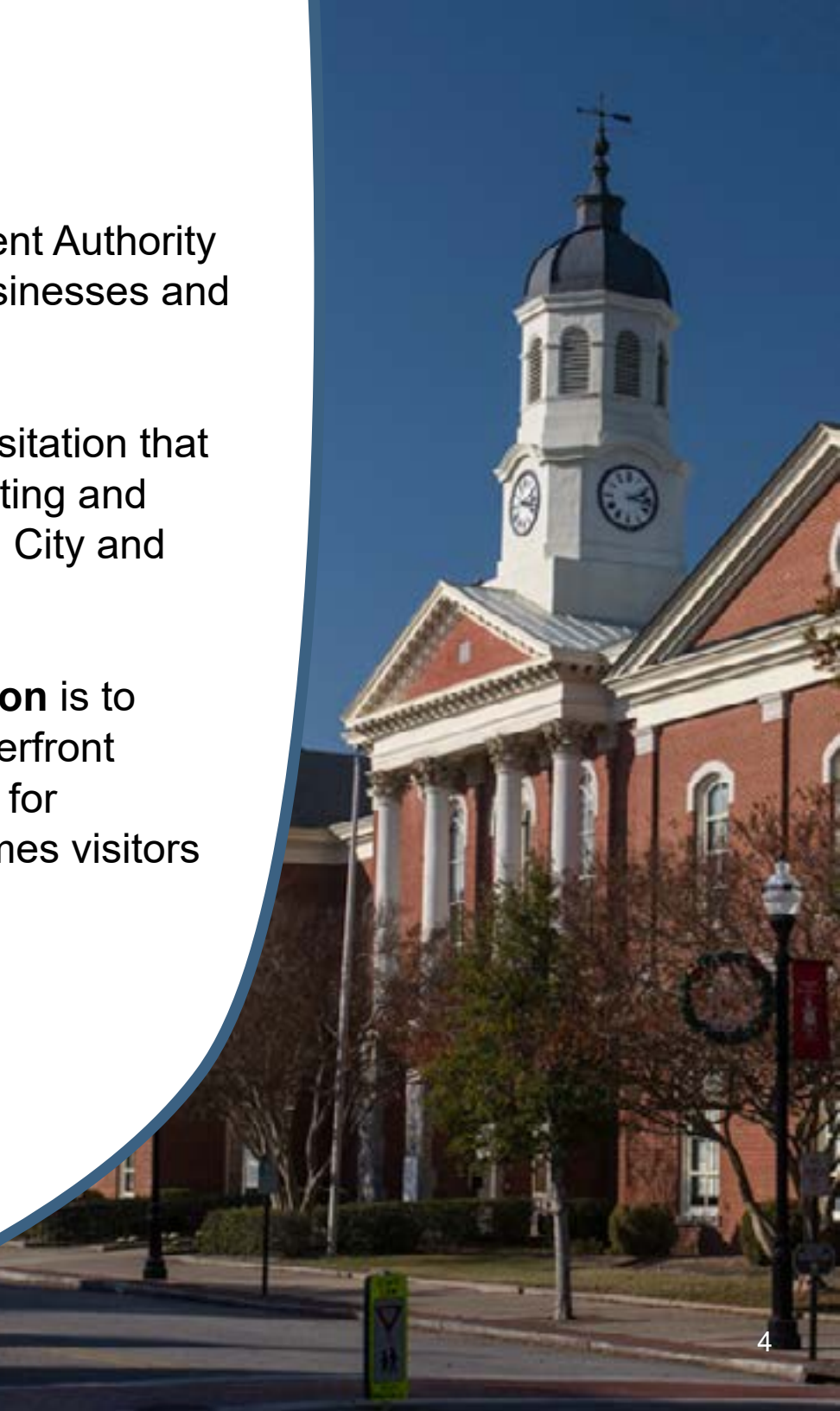
The COVID-19 pandemic in the last fiscal year brought changes and unprecedented challenges to the entire tourism and travel industry. This plan acknowledges these new challenges and uses our destination's strengths and opportunities to overcome them in 2020-2021.

Mission and Vision

Visit Elizabeth City is the city's Tourism Development Authority (TDA) dedicated to promoting local attractions, businesses and events.

The **mission** of the TDA is to promote overnight visitation that drives economic impact through destination marketing and enhancement of the visitor experience in Elizabeth City and Pasquotank County.

Through innovative destination marketing, our **vision** is to become a nationally-recognized, model historic riverfront destination that drives significant economic impact for Elizabeth City and Pasquotank County and welcomes visitors with world class hospitality and experiences.



About Elizabeth City

Elizabeth City, lovingly dubbed the “Harbor of Hospitality™”, is a quaint, coastal town full of southern charm. Located mid-way down the East Coast with a mild climate, we’re fully equipped to welcome visitors year-round. With our unique location in Northeast North Carolina, we are a short drive full of waterways and woodlands to the beaches of the Outer Banks and the nearby big cities of Hampton Roads.

In addition to being a friendly, waterfront community, we’re proud to be a designated Coast Guard City and home to three institutions of higher learning: Elizabeth City State University, Mid-Atlantic Christian University, and College of the Albemarle. Elizabeth City has something for everyone to enjoy.



What is the ^{*}DMO's role?

*Destination Marketing Organization

The primary role of Visit Elizabeth City is to tell the story of Elizabeth City by informing, educating, and advising potential visitors in collaboration with our community partners. For the community, the role of Visit Elizabeth City is to support and promote. We are here to provide services and promotion for all events and businesses that encourage tourism including but not limited to restaurants, lodging, events, state parks, museums and more.

Tourism = Tax Relief

Tourism boosts our economy as a key contributor to cash flow by providing tax dollars, an increase in income for local businesses, and jobs for over 500 people in Elizabeth City and Pasquotank County.

Pasquotank County's overnight lodging guests pay a 6% Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) per room per night. This visitor-paid tax is the sole source of funding for Visit Elizabeth City. Per our enabling legislation, 12.5% of the collections are allocated for the County to spend on tourism-related expenditures and another 12.5% is allocated for the City to spend on tourism-related expenditures. The remaining 75% makes up the Visit Elizabeth City operating and marketing budget.

Introducing the Tourism Development Authority

Visit Elizabeth City Staff

Corrina Ferguson – Executive Director
Breanna Brower – Marketing Specialist
Susan Hartley – Administrative Assistant
Carrie Barker – Event Coordinator

Marketing Committee

Rhonda Twiddy – Committee Chair
Abel Sutton
Andy Montero
Annya Soucy
Maureen Donnelly
Michelle Ball

TDA Board of Directors

Gwen Sanders – Chair
Rhonda Twiddy – Immediate Past Chair
Phil Mays – Vice-Chair
Arthur McPherson – Treasurer
Abel Sutton
Andy Montero
Maureen Donnelly
Jeff Dixon
Johnnie Walton
Sheri Small



Strengths

Water

The first asset that comes to mind when visitors think of Elizabeth City is the picturesque and easily accessible waterfront. Between Waterfront Park, Mariners' Wharf, and the multiple parks, there are many ways to enjoy the unique geography of the area.

Walkable Downtown

This historic, revitalized area is the heart of the city. Restored alleyways and buildings along with new and expanded businesses have made downtown a hub of socialization and entertainment.

Proximity to the Beach

Only an hour from the beaches of the Outer Banks, Elizabeth City visitors can take a quick day trip to the coast. For some visitors heading to the beach, it is an ideal location to begin their vacation a few days early to avoid the traffic and large crowds.

Small Town Charm

Rural Elizabeth City has the small town charm of the south at its disposal. Past visitors have noted its quaint, small town feel as a welcoming and “homey” asset to the region.



Challenges

Resources

The DMO's resources are limited. The infrastructure of Elizabeth City's tourism is still small-scale which means the TDA must be very strategic with existing resources and staff.

Finances

With the COVID-19 crisis, revenue for Q2 of 2020 decreased drastically, forcing the TDA to use reserves and revisit the 2020-2021 FY budget. Less funding calls for decreased marketing and a lack of funding for destination improvements.

Destination Assets

Like many other destinations, many events and attractions in Elizabeth City have been severely and permanently impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. Events, including the Coast Guard Half Marathon, have had to be postponed or canceled altogether.

Partner Communication

To fully and effectively promote the city's events, attractions, restaurants, and shops, the TDA must be in contact with all partners, relaying and receiving information in a timely fashion.



Opportunities

Digital Marketing

With the additional time spent at home and in quarantine due to stay-at-home orders, the demographic of people using digital media has broadened, providing more opportunities to reach potential visitors.

Social Media

Social media is a great source of user-generated content as well as a means of communicating with all audiences. Opportunities to encourage and nurture public relations include Facebook and Instagram Live, the use of stories, sharing highlights of our destination, and engaging with followers.

Frontline Staff & Ambassadors

The friendly residents of Elizabeth City are one of our most memorable assets. The TDA can train and educate frontline staff as well as introduce members of the community as “Rose Buddy” ambassadors to serve as amicable concierges of the community.

Capturing a New Kind of Traveler

In light of COVID-19, people are planning on travelling differently in 2020-2021. Travelers who previously planned vacations to far away or larger destinations are now looking at staycations, day trips, and close by overnight stays in small towns and places near the beach - like Elizabeth City.



Visitor Profile Research

Based on research provided by SIR, September 2019



Insight 1

The top 3 words past visitors use to describe Elizabeth City are small, quaint, and friendly.



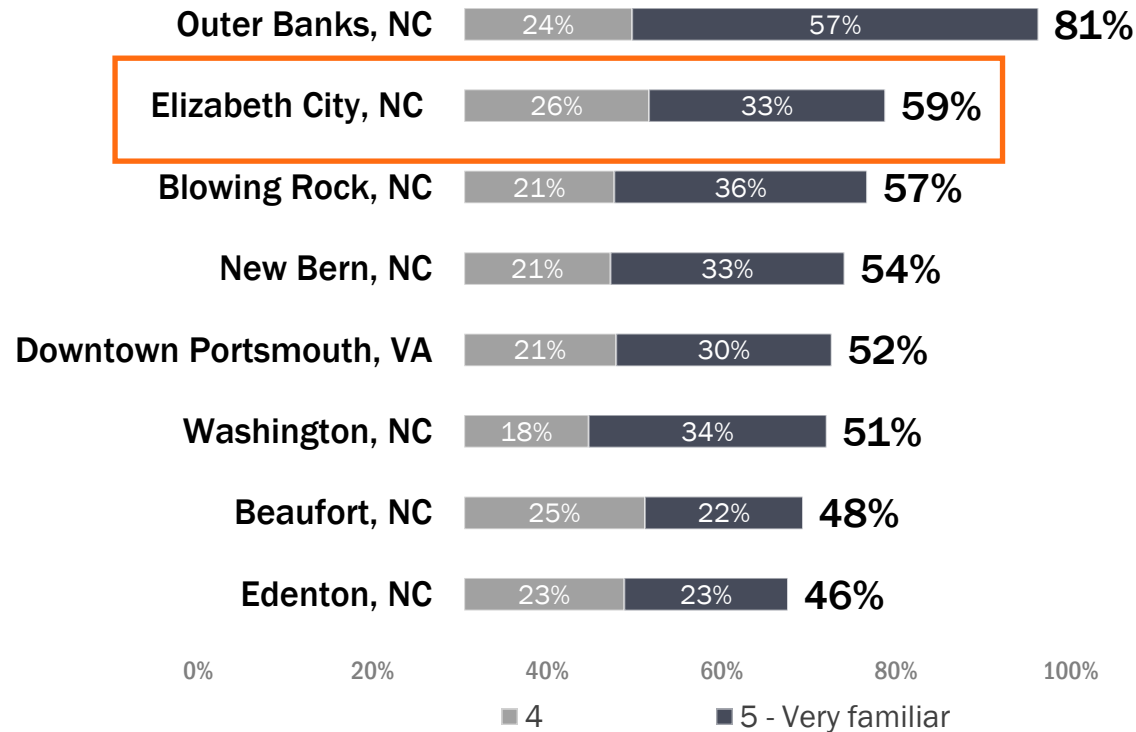
Marketing Action

Our marketing efforts should reflect this brand image of being a small, quaint, and friendly place to visit.



Insight 2

The most important attributes people look for in a vacation destination are: quality and variety of lodging opportunities, quality and variety of dining options, and a variety of activities. However, of past guests surveyed, only 59% felt familiar with Elizabeth City and what the destination has to offer.



Marketing Action

Messaging should consistently reinforce the quality and variety of lodging, dining, and things to do in Elizabeth City.



Insight 3

Residents are a huge driving force in bringing visitors to Elizabeth City. As a matter of fact, the number one reason past visitors come here is to see friends and family.



Marketing Action

Educating residents is key to ensuring that when friends and family do come to visit, residents are good ambassadors of our downtown, lodging, dining, shopping and more.

PAST VISITORS

53%

Learned about Elizabeth City through "word of mouth"

The number **ONE** reason for their visit was to see **friends and family**

Say **friends and family** are the most important information source when planning a trip.

63%



Insight 4

When asked about product development, respondents across the board are most interested in opportunities for new **dining** options and **activities on the waterfront**.



Marketing Action

Ensure that our messaging highlights the dining and waterfront activities that do exist, and when funding opportunities present themselves, consider helping facilitate waterfront and dining initiatives.





Insight 5

Based on data from Past Visitor Research and 2019 web traffic, most of Elizabeth City's visitors come from zip codes in these target regions:

Top States

1. North Carolina
2. Virginia

Specific Designated Market Areas (DMAs)

1. Norfolk-Portsmouth-Newport News
2. Raleigh-Durham
3. Charlottesville, VA
4. Greenville-New Bern-Washington
5. Greensboro-High Point-Winston Salem
6. Roanoke-Lynchburg, VA



Marketing Action

We will focus our advertising efforts and resources specifically on the NC and VA markets, highlighting the 6 referenced DMAs.

U.S. Travel Trends

This marketing plan is being written during the height of the most complicated time for travel we have known. The Coronavirus pandemic has caused a significant decrease in springtime travel and the data tells us to continue to expect drastically lower numbers in the coming months compared to last year.

This section highlights some data trends about the current state of the travel industry.





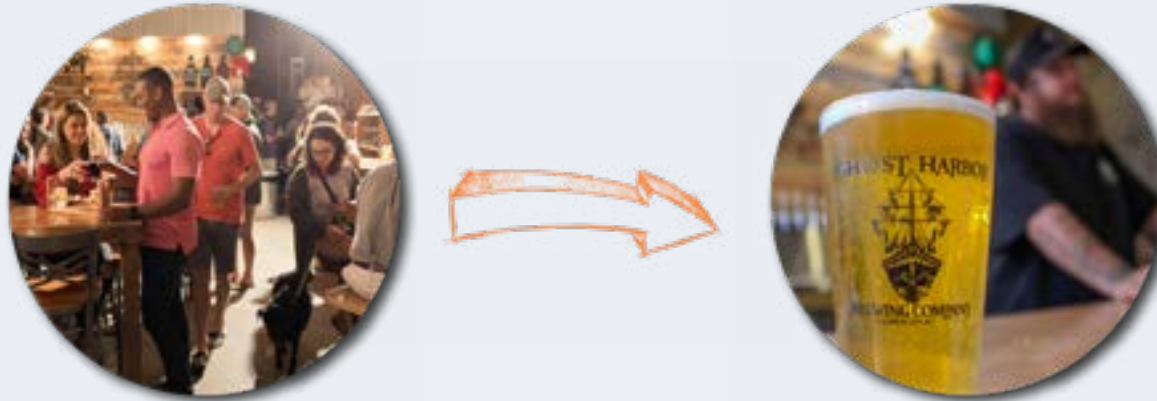
Trend 1

Consumers want to visit small, rural destinations rather than cities.



Action

Messaging about Elizabeth City should embrace this, and steer clear of portraying crowds.



Trend 2

The top 3 places travelers want to visit when it is safe are:

1. Park

2. Restaurant/Bar

3. Beach



Action

We have access to and should promote the three key opportunities.



Trend 3

Travelers are becoming more eager to travel – but by car and closer to home, meaning our visitors will come from closer regions.



Action

To capture this audience, we should spend money on ads targeting closer markets than in years past. This is a good opportunity to capture visitors who otherwise may have traveled to further, busier destinations.



R O A D T R I P



Trend 4

The first trip travelers do want to take when it is appropriate to travel again will be to visit friends and family domestically.



Action

We need to raise awareness among locals of things to do, places to eat, places to stay, etc.





Trend 5

People will not travel again until they feel it is safe to do so, and they will continue to avoid crowds when they do.

Businesses must **embrace** and consistently **communicate** their new safety measures.



Action

Elizabeth City needs to promote how our restaurants, lodging properties, attractions and more are working to keep visitors safe.



“
*The 5 P's of marketing are now
Product, Price, Promotion, Place and Purell*
”

Travel Intentions Pulse Survey (TIPS): Impact of COVID-19, U.S. Travel Association, MMGY Global, April 22, 2020

Marketing Goals



Goal 1

Increase demand for lodging, attraction visits, retail sales, restaurant receipts, and other events and activities that positively affect the economic impact of the local tourism industry.



Goal 2

Expand partnerships with local businesses through strategic advertising, promotional opportunities, and special events aimed at cultivating relationships and educating partners about the value of using the DMO as a resource and partner.



Goal 3

Build on the relationship with the region's tourism organizations to include Elizabeth City in the coast's messaging and capitalize on messaging and awareness that "we're just an hour away".



Goal 4

Create a wedding campaign that promotes local vendors for catering, photography, venues, and more to encourage overnight visitation, generate revenue, and increase exposure for Elizabeth City as a destination.



Goal 5

Launch and capitalize on the existing reputation of the Rose Buddies with an ambassador program to improve the visitor experience and leverage community members.

Primary Target Audiences

Leisure Traveler



Women

Ages 35-65

Household Income \$70k +
Interests: travel, relaxing, beach, culinary, craft beer, art, history, music

Target Geography per Insight 5, page 14

Local Consumer



Men and Women

Ages 21+

Interests: shopping, art, restaurants, dining out, education, Coast Guard, ECSU, Sentara, history, music, exercise, hiking, biking, boating, fishing

Living in Pasquotank, Camden, Perquimans, Chowan, Currituck Counties

Brides



Women, ages 21 to 40

Single, but in the wedding-planning process

Typically college educated, employed, no children

Current interests: beauty, clothing, interior decorating, DIY crafts, weddings

Focus on Albemarle region + Norfolk & Greenville DMAs – affordable wedding options

Business Partners



Owners or Managers of hospitality businesses such as lodging, restaurants, retail stores, attractions

Event producers, including facility owners, tour companies, rental companies

Community leaders and elected officials

Located in Pasquotank County

Strategies

To reach potential visitors who are unfamiliar with Elizabeth City and past visitors, we must meet them where they are. Exposure on multiple channels will be key in creating awareness, driving interest, and attracting visitors from local drive markets.



Media Relations

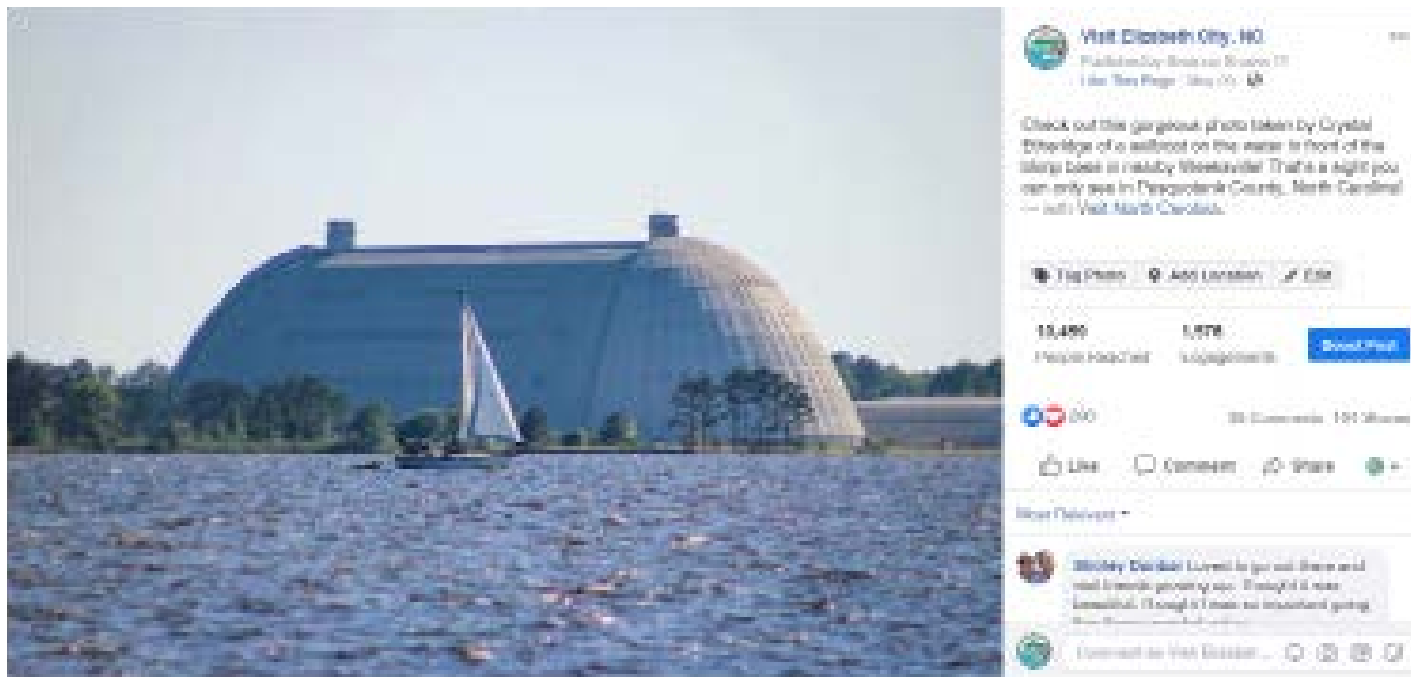
The intent of Visit Elizabeth City is to create content and experiences that inspire journalists and other media outlets to share information and stories about Elizabeth City with their audience. This earned media offers third-party credibility to the fact that Elizabeth City is a great place to visit, reaches new audiences, and serves as a form of free advertising.



Social Media

Social media has a powerful influence on travel decisions. In addition, social media usage increased by a significant 44% in the initial 6 weeks of the COVID-19 crisis. Visit Elizabeth City will continue to use Facebook and Instagram to share website content, communicate and build trust with consumers and partners, and inspire travel to Elizabeth City.

Social media is the ideal place to **share short, simple messages with compelling visuals** that target a myriad of travelers from different demographics, geographic regions, interests, and behaviors. It also offers an affordable platform for paid advertisements to reach targeted audiences to drive website traffic, brand awareness, and meaningful conversations.





Email

Email allows targeted messaging to all three of Visit Elizabeth City's key audiences: travelers, media, and partners. We can share specific messages with each of the three audiences that is relevant to them with measurable objectives.



Audience 1: Travelers

Messaging:

- New dining, lodging and attractions
- Events
- Things to do

Objective:

Inspire travel and inform them of everything Elizabeth City has to offer by creating rich content and driving traffic to the website to learn more.

Audience 2: Media

Messaging:

- New dining, lodging and attractions
- Events
- Things to do

Objective:

Using our own media on the Visit Elizabeth City blog and sending press releases with the intent of establishing relationships and obtaining media coverage of attractions, events, and activities that will drive overnight visitation.

Audience 3: Partners

Messaging:

- Industry information and news
- Tips and tools to help partners promote their own businesses
- Funding opportunities
- Advertising opportunities

Objective:

To increase partner participation and communication so that we can better promote our destination's restaurants, lodging, attractions, and events.



Traditional Media

Aligning with the state brand and large print publications like Our State gives Visit Elizabeth City access to their large audience of travelers who are interested in similar destinations. Traditional media is vital to our marketing plan to reach travelers who are not on social media or other digital media outlets along with creating consistent branding.



Digital Media



We will continue using digital marketing to share information, ideas, images and original content while engaging with and inspiring past, present, and future visitors. Our digital media marketing will also include making website improvements to help users navigate information easier, improving **Search Engine Optimization (SEO)**, **Search Engine Marketing (SEM)**, **display ads** and **Google Ads**. The wide variety of digital channels creates opportunities to reach a wider audience of consumers in a variety of ways keeping us top-of-mind and creating the necessary brand awareness.





Content Creation

The blog section of our website is the perfect opportunity to cover all the bases on what the Elizabeth City region has to offer. We will continue to write new articles and update older ones, that can then be used in other forms of marketing. These content pieces will serve as a base for social media posts, emails, display ads, publicity opportunities, and adding to the SEO of our website.





Travel Endemic Sites

Travel endemic sites like TripAdvisor are an ideal place for Visit Elizabeth City to host appealing photos and display advertising. Visitors to these sites are looking for things pertaining to travel. By taking advantage of these marketing opportunities, we are meeting the consumer where they are with content they are actively looking for.

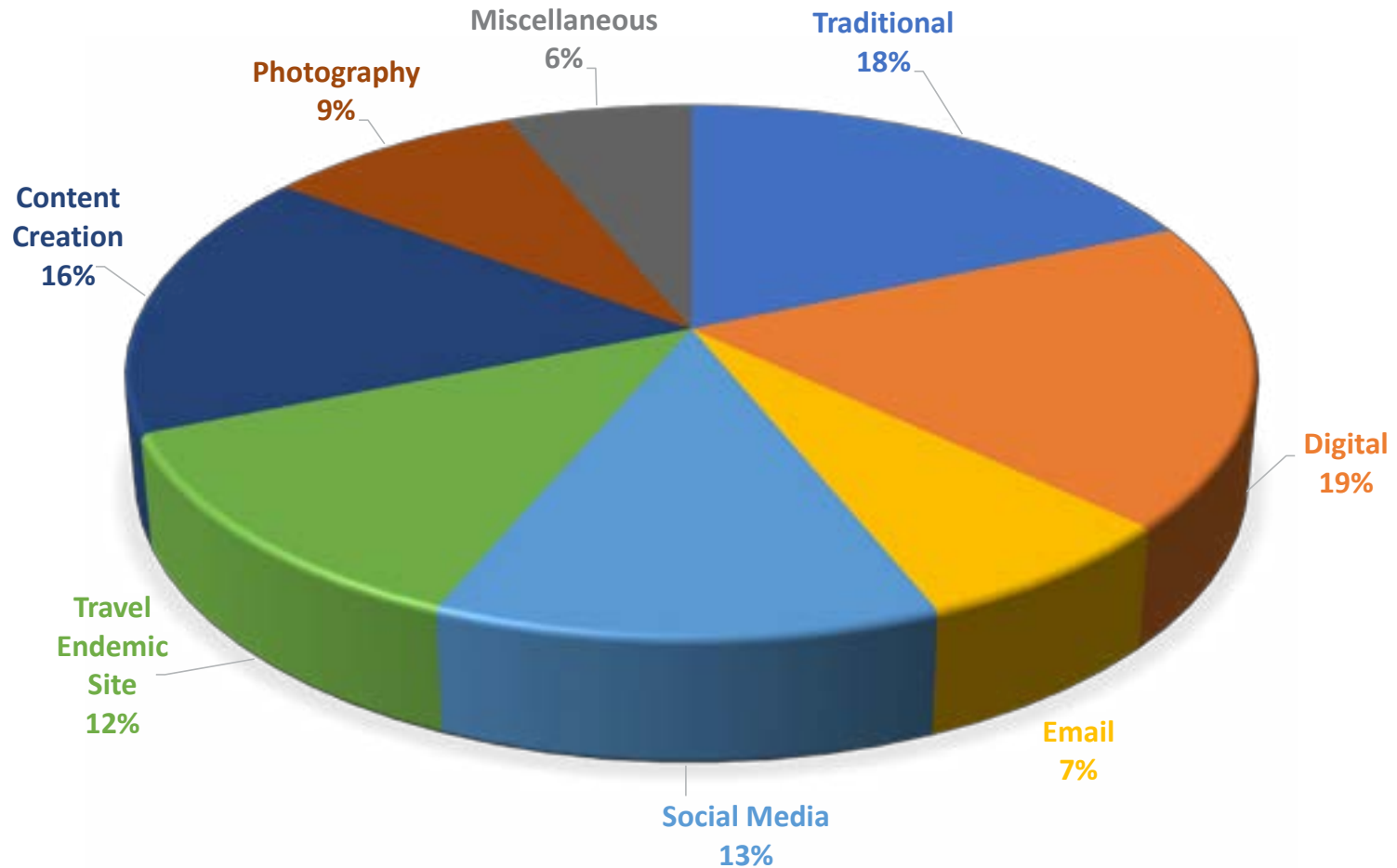


Photography and Videography

To support all marketing efforts, new photography and videography remain essential. Both print and digital media require compelling visual elements that represent why Elizabeth City is the place people should visit, and video reigns supreme on digital platforms compared to photos alone. In particular, given the tourism industry's new climate, travelers don't want to see crowds or groups of people in photos. To align our messaging with the new norm and what travelers want to see, updated visuals are necessary.

Budget

The \$175,000 budget for the FY 2020-2021 Marketing Plan encompasses an all-important cross-channel, multi-platform advertising campaign, broken down as indicated in the pie chart.



Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Why? A Key Performance Indicator is a measurable value that demonstrates how effectively we are achieving key marketing objectives. We will actively track and report on the following KPIs for FY 2020-2021.

Since this is our first official marketing plan as an organization, the data collected this FY will serve as a baseline for the following years.



Media / Public Relations

GOALS

Write and issue at least 12 press releases

Grow distribution list by 15%

Host 3 journalists or influencers in the destination

Measurement



Awareness

Total number of press releases sent (releases x recipients)



Engagement

Open emails/ requests for additional information



Action

Content published based on a release

Content Development

GOAL

Develop 12 new and update 12 existing blogs or videos

Measurement



Awareness

Total views of content pages/ blogs



Engagement

Time on site (within this section)



Action

Clicks from a content piece to additional information

Email

GOALS

Grow consumer email database by 10%

Grow partner email database by 20%

Measurement



Awareness
Number of campaigns delivered



Engagement
Number of opened emails



Action
Number of clicks and forwards

Social Media

GOALS

Increase engagement rates by 10%

Increase audiences on all channels by 5%

Measurement



Awareness
Total impressions



Engagement
Likes and comments



Action
Website visits



Advocacy
Mentions

Destination Performance Indicators

In addition to specific marketing KPIs, we will track the following overall destination performance indicators. It is important to note that in a typical year, we would seek an increase over last year's performance indicators, but as we know, this year will be anything BUT typical. Regardless, these numbers remain important in understanding the health of our regional economy and will become a baseline for us as we move into recovery.





Lodging Industry Metrics

Calculated monthly by STR, we can review monthly and annual performance of our lodging industry – specifically hotels and motels.

Occupancy = The relative amount of rooms booked by visitors. Occupancy is calculated by dividing the total number of rooms sold by the total number of rooms available.

ADR = Average daily rate is a measure of the average rate paid for rooms sold. This is calculated by dividing rooms revenue by rooms sold.

RevPar = The gold standard metric around the industry, revenue per available room is calculated by dividing total room revenue by total number of available rooms. RevPAR is a function of both occupancy and ADR.



Economic Impact of Tourism

Calculated annually by the U.S. Travel Association, these numbers provide a rear view look at visitor spending, industry jobs, state and local tax receipts from travel to Pasquotank County. Numbers released late in 2020 will be for the calendar year 2019 and so will not reflect the effects of the pandemic crisis.

Occupancy Tax Collections

The actual amount of monthly revenues received from visitors paying the 6% occupancy tax when they spend the night in any of our overnight accommodation locations.