



VISIT OCONEE
SOUTH CAROLINA

Strategic Plan for A Sustainable Tourism Economy 2024 - 2030

Located in the northwestern “Upstate” or “mountain lakes region” of South Carolina, Oconee County is blessed with lush forest landscape (over 85,000 acres), four lakes surrounded by the Blue Ridge Mountains, trails to 29 waterfalls, two free flowing rivers (one of which is the Wild and Scenic Chattooga), waterfront state and county parks, mountain bike trails and more!

Mission Statement

Visit Oconee SC promotes sustainable visitation to all parts of the County by highlighting our spectacular natural assets and promoting our communities, local events, entertainment venues, museums, shops, restaurants and lodging.

The following Strategic Plan for a Sustainable Tourism Economy is research-based including input from 59 community, civic and travel industry leaders in Oconee County who completed a strategic planning survey/SWOT analysis. The planning workshop and Strategic Plan were facilitated and developed by Berkeley Young, President of Young Strategies, Inc.

Organization Structure

Visit Oconee SC is a destination leadership organization focused on the sustainable growth of the travel industry in Oconee County, SC. A thriving travel industry diversifies and improves the local economy while respecting and preserving our natural resources for the benefit of future generations.

Visit Oconee SC is committed to promoting and building awareness of Oconee County as a leisure and group destination with the highest caliber staff in the industry providing leadership and innovation to drive:

- Increased overnight and day-trip visitation
- Longer average length of stay
- Increased spending per travel party
- Increased visitor satisfaction

Visit Oconee SC Board Focus

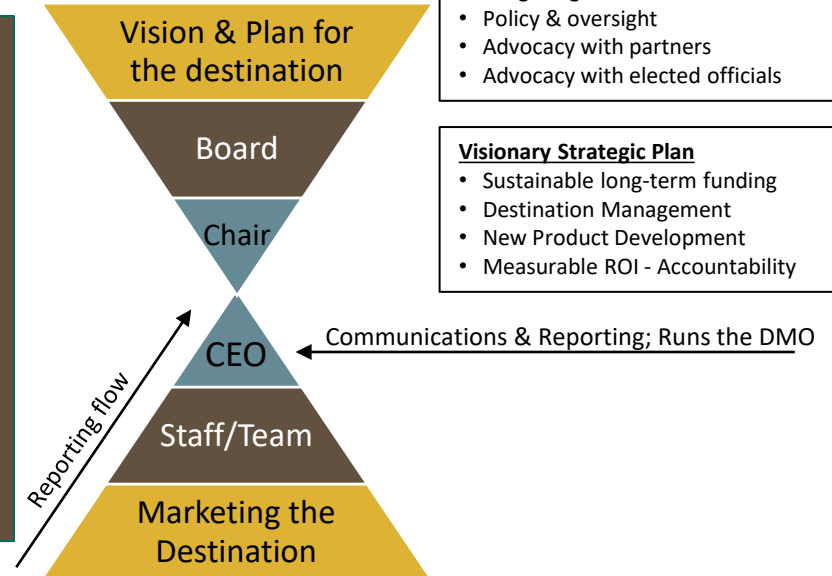
The VOSC Board of Directors will be engaged in two primary functions:

- 1) **Providing proper oversight** related to the function and ROI of the staff's research-based marketing of the County as a destination.
- 2) **Fulfill the vision for Visit Oconee SC in 2030** in partnership with County/City Officials and other economic development groups. VOSC will foster, facilitate and encourage the growth and development of the County's tourism assets for the benefit of all residents.

Visit Oconee SC Staff Focus

- 1) Marketing Oconee County to visitors.
- 2) Coordinating the implementation of the Board Vision for the destination.

REPORTING STRUCTURE



Board:

- Long-range vision
- Policy & oversight
- Advocacy with partners
- Advocacy with elected officials

Visionary Strategic Plan

- Sustainable long-term funding
- Destination Management
- New Product Development
- Measurable ROI - Accountability



OVERALL STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Visit Oconee SC advocates for a sustainable visitor economy by providing leadership and innovation from the Board of Directors and staff. We are focused on the following three strategic initiatives to provide a better and expanding visitor experience that also enhances the quality of life for our residents:

- 1. SMART MARKETING** to drive growth in visitation during slow periods of the year when the occupancy in lodging dips below 60%. We promote an active, outdoors, scenic destination to high value visitors who will respect and sustain our spectacular natural environment.
- 2. AN EVER-IMPROVING VISITOR EXPERIENCE** – We support and encourage the preservation and expansion of unique activities that provide memorable experiences for our residents and visitors alike. Our top priorities are: outdoor/recreation-trails, rentals/outfitters & guides, etc.; signage and wayfinding; ride sharing for evening dining; trails and bicycle lanes; disability access; indoor climbing/sports.
- 3. A SUSTAINABLE TOURISM ECONOMY** – The Board of Directors at Visit Oconee SC is dedicated to: fiscal management of our tax-based funding; nurturing our staff/team; supporting our hospitality industry businesses and workers; and advocating for a sustainable tourism economy.
 - a) Visit Oconee SC Team** – We recruit, retain and support the highest caliber team to lead our travel industry and market the County as a unique travel destination.
 - b) Workforce** – The development of a qualified and abundant workforce for Oconee County hospitality businesses is critical to future success and growth. Our businesses are understaffed and need our support.
 - c) Advocacy for travel industry issues** – We are the collective voice for the travel industry and we speak out in support of our partners in hospitality, tourism, events and recreation.



STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Annual reviews of this five-year strategic plan will take place in lieu of annual retreats. The annual review takes place with staff and Board leadership. There is no need for a retreat if the plan implementation is on track and there are no external factors that change overall strategies and goals. If significant changes are needed, the Board/staff may schedule a retreat to adjust the plan. VOSC invests in market research to guide future sales and marketing efforts and track ROI of programmatic work.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

1. SMART MARKETING to drive growth in visitation during slow periods of the year (October – March, and Sundays/Mondays year-round) when the occupancy in lodging dips below 60%.



We promote an active, outdoors, scenic destination to high value visitors who will respect and sustain our spectacular natural environment. National Geographic described Oconee County as, "One of the world’s last great places, a destination of a lifetime". Visit Oconee SC staff meet the highest standards of professionalism and performance (research driven ROI) with measurable results as a research-based DLO (destination leadership organization).

A. External Marketing – inviting visitors to stay overnight in the County to maximize economic impact.

- 1) Deliver on the **authentic and engaging outdoors** brand and expand the outdoor adventure destination to include small scale team sports and meetings based on facilities to host groups. Broaden reach into new geographic territories and increase the drive market to Oconee County to increase overnight visitation from high-value visitors.
- 2) Focus marketing on **Attractors** – scenic beauty, lakes, rivers, boating, kayaking, fishing, state and County parks, charming towns, and events while continuing to promote other reasons to visit.
- 3) Promote **active lifestyles by day and evening**. Focus evening and weekend promotions on events, music, performing arts, craft beverages, farm-to-table/local dining and shopping.
- 4) Provide **dynamic visitor information services** for individual, group and event visitors to drive increased spending in-market.
- 5) An aggressive **PR strategy targeting outdoor and lifestyle publications** will deliver travel press stories about Oconee County as destination for fall, winter and spring travel.
- 6) **Tracking and accountability** to demonstrate highest possible Return-on-Investment (ROI) – Lodging market segmentation research of key performance metrics (KPIs) and lodging revenue tracking/analysis

B. Internal Marketing – building awareness of the impact of travel with the citizens and elected officials within Oconee County.

- 1) **Provide leadership** to the Oconee County travel industry through training, co-op sales/marketing programs, and maintaining a community events calendar. VOSC leadership from the Board and staff will foster job growth and new business development.
- 2) **Host events** within the County and speak at Civic meetings about the positive impacts of travel impact. NTTW – National Travel and Tourism Week (May) promotions and events to raise awareness of tourism impact.

Measurable Success:

- *Annual plan with trackable ROI
- *Longer lengths of stay
- *Increased visitor spending
- *Increased visitor satisfaction
- *Increased Oct- Mar visitation
- *New travel industry businesses
- * Growth in lodging room demand & ADR

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STRATEGIC INITIATIVES



2. AN EVER-IMPROVING VISITOR EXPERIENCE – We support and encourage the preservation and expansion of unique activities that provide memorable experiences for our residents and visitors alike.

Oconee County is an active-lifestyle destination allows visitors and residents to easily walk, hike, cycle and paddle throughout the area. Improvement and expansion of outdoor and indoor recreation/fitness facilities will appeal to individuals and groups who will love coming to Oconee County to get active. Our top priorities are outdoor/recreation-trails, river/lake access through rentals/outfitters & guides, etc.; signage, wayfinding; ride sharing for evening dining; trails and bicycle lanes; disability access; indoor climbing/sports.

- a) **Focus on that which drives visitation**, developing and expanding upon existing experiences, while branching into new experiences that complement the outdoor brand of Oconee County.
- b) **Improve and add new hiking and bicycle trails** making it easier for visitors to travel from hotels to dining, shopping, sports venues and activities without a vehicle. Add bicycle lanes to roadways. A walkable/cycle-friendly community makes it easy to get outside and get active.
- c) **Recruit outfitters** to support existing businesses that provide access to outdoor experiences.
- d) **Develop October - March activities** to drive off-season growth. Indoor/outdoor facilities such as a climbing/pickleball center.
- e) **Host recreation events** to build recognition as an active-lifestyle destination—runs/races, fishing and pickleball tournaments, etc.
- f) Improve and expand **team sports facilities for the October – March months only**. New venues could include facilities for indoor/outdoor sports, pickleball, archery, basketball, multipurpose facility for a wide range of competitions and events.
- g) Work with elected bodies and economic development groups to lobby the **cellular and wi-fi providers for expanded service** throughout Oconee County particularly in the rural northern County areas where outdoor activities abound. Focus on the most heavily traveled roads and visitor gathering areas around the rivers and parks.
- h) **Support development of new activities within Oconee County towns** by promoting dining, shopping and events that drive visitation.
- i) Coordinate a **county-wide tourism master plan** that coalesces all plans and agencies on tourism related planning and development.

Measurable Success:

*Development of an Outdoor Recreation Committee	*Development of a tourism master plan	*New trails for kayaks and bikes
*New businesses - outfitters and guides	*New winter activities	*Growth in off-season visitation
*New recreation events to drive visitation	*Creation of new activity venues	*Expanded cellular service in the north

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STRATEGIC INITIATIVES



3. A SUSTAINABLE TOURISM ECONOMY – The Board of Directors at Visit Oconee SC is dedicated to: fiscal management of our tax-based funding; nurturing our staff/team; supporting our hospitality industry businesses and workers; and advocating for a sustainable tourism economy.

- a) **Visit Oconee SC Team** – We recruit, retain and support the highest caliber team to lead our travel industry and market the County as a unique travel destination. We support the staff in achieving the highest standards of excellence and performance through on-going education, certifications, measurement and accountability. We maintain competitive wages/benefits and foster a creative and supportive work environment where the team thrives and continues to produce award winning sales and marketing programs.
- b) **Workforce** – The development of a qualified and abundant workforce for Oconee County hospitality businesses is critical to future success and growth. Our businesses are understaffed and need our support. The VOSC will coalesce the travel industry businesses with schools, governments and workforce organizations on a long-term plan to inspire younger generations to seek out careers in hospitality, to provide training/education for those entering the workforce and to address competitive pay and benefits to retain a qualified workforce.
- c) **Advocacy for travel industry issues** – We are the collective voice for the travel industry and we speak out in support of our partners in hospitality, tourism, events and recreation. Create a policy/action committee of travel industry leaders and conduct regular listening sessions and surveys with travel industry leaders to identify issues that affect their growth and success. Possible issues of concern are workforce/wages, taxation, travel industry disruptors, crime, regulations, signage, etc.

Measurable Success:

*Increased applicants for hospitality jobs	*Higher visitor satisfaction ratings with service	*Minimal staff turnover
*Part-time jobs converted to full-time jobs	*No vacant travel industry jobs	*Priority list of policy initiatives

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