

visit
Buffalo
Niagara



Visit Buffalo Niagara Strategic Plan

2025-2027

Tourism Impact on Buffalo and Erie County



Number of Visitors

9.5
MILLION



Visitor Spending

\$2.4
BILLION



Regional Investment

\$5.6
BILLION

Strategic Plan

In November 2024, Visit Buffalo Niagara developed a new 3-year strategic plan for the organization. The plan provides a new purpose statement, and new strategic goals, actionable initiatives and KPIs.

MMGY NextFactor engaged Visit Buffalo Niagara's leadership and board members to collect the broadest possible range of input to develop the plan.

The process included:

- 20 interviews with Buffalo Niagara community and industry leaders
- A comprehensive DestinationNEXT stakeholder assessment survey
- Several board and management sessions

This strategic plan was produced by:

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Strategic Plan Elements

Purpose

Unique mission and identity for the organization

Goals

Required to achieve purpose

Initiatives

Actions to achieve goals

KPIs

Objective performance indicators

Values

Core principles

Community Engagement

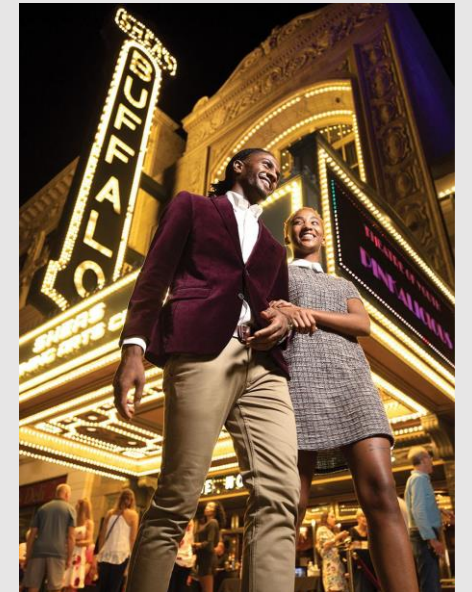
Interviews

20 interviews with key industry & community leaders



Topics of Discussion

- Key destination opportunities
- Key destination challenges
- Feedback for Visit Buffalo Niagara



1. What are the biggest opportunities to increase tourism in the next 3 years?

1. Cultural and Heritage Tourism: Buffalo's rich culture, architectural heritage, and art institutions are prime opportunities to boost tourism.

2. Marketing and Outreach Expansion: Expand marketing efforts to target untapped markets, especially nearby feeder markets like Ohio, Ontario, and Pennsylvania. Additionally, utilizing community champions to tell Buffalo's story is seen as key to increasing visitor engagement.

3. Waterfront Development: The waterfront is an underutilized asset with great potential to increase tourism. Stakeholders advocate for comprehensive development plans to create more visitor experiences.

4. Winter and Seasonal Tourism: Buffalo's winter is an opportunity to create unique experiences that celebrate the season rather than seeing it as a drawback. Stakeholders suggest promoting winter activities and capitalizing on Buffalo's seasonal offerings, like winter festivals and outdoor saunas.

5. Addressing Perceptions and Local Pride: Changing negative perceptions of Buffalo and instilling local pride are seen as critical to reshaping the city's image. Promote Buffalo's unique qualities and dispel outdated views as part of a broader effort to attract more visitors and retain local talent.

2. What are the biggest challenges that need to be addressed?

- 1. Infrastructure and Public Space Issues:** Aging and unattractive infrastructure, poor public spaces, and lack of proper maintenance are barriers to tourism. Improving convention center, revitalizing downtown, and addressing homelessness are critical for enhancing the visitor experience.
- 2. Perception and Branding Challenges:** Several contributors point to persistent negative perceptions of Buffalo, particularly around its winters, “rust belt” identity, and overall image.
- 3. Urban Development and Transportation Barriers:** Urban sprawl, poor transportation infrastructure, and urbanism issues (like the 198 freeway and Elmwood Drive) are major obstacles for developing tourism. The lack of a regional planning approach and outdated transportation further hinder Buffalo’s growth.
- 4. Social and Economic Challenges:** Poverty, education gaps, vacant lots, abandoned buildings, and safety concerns in certain areas are significant issues impacting tourism and economic development. Addressing these problems is essential for creating a vibrant and welcoming environment for visitors.
- 5. Lack of Central Attractions:** The absence of a major central hub with anchor attractions is a hindrance to tourism development.

3. What are your aspirations for Visit Buffalo Niagara in the next 3 years?

- 1. Partnerships and Collaboration:** Increase collaboration between Visit Buffalo Niagara and other organizations, including cultural entities, neighborhood groups, economic development agencies, etc.
- 2. Economic Development and Tourism Synergy:** Strengthen links between tourism and economic development with a unified approach for branding, messaging and investment to benefit both sectors.
- 3. Destination Development:** Continue to develop Buffalo as a more compelling destination by building on its authenticity and expanding visitor experiences around key assets related to art, history and culture.
- 4. Marketing and Promotion:** Expand Buffalo's reach through national and international media, travel magazines, and other outlets. Stakeholders see media exposure as key to enhancing Buffalo's reputation and increasing tourism.
- 5. Cultural and Community Involvement:** Increase engagement with local communities, particularly underrepresented groups and neighborhood organizations, to enrich the visitor experience and reflect the diversity of Buffalo.

DestinationNEXT Assessment



Multi-User Diagnostic Assessment

Visit Buffalo Niagara

Jul 29, 2024



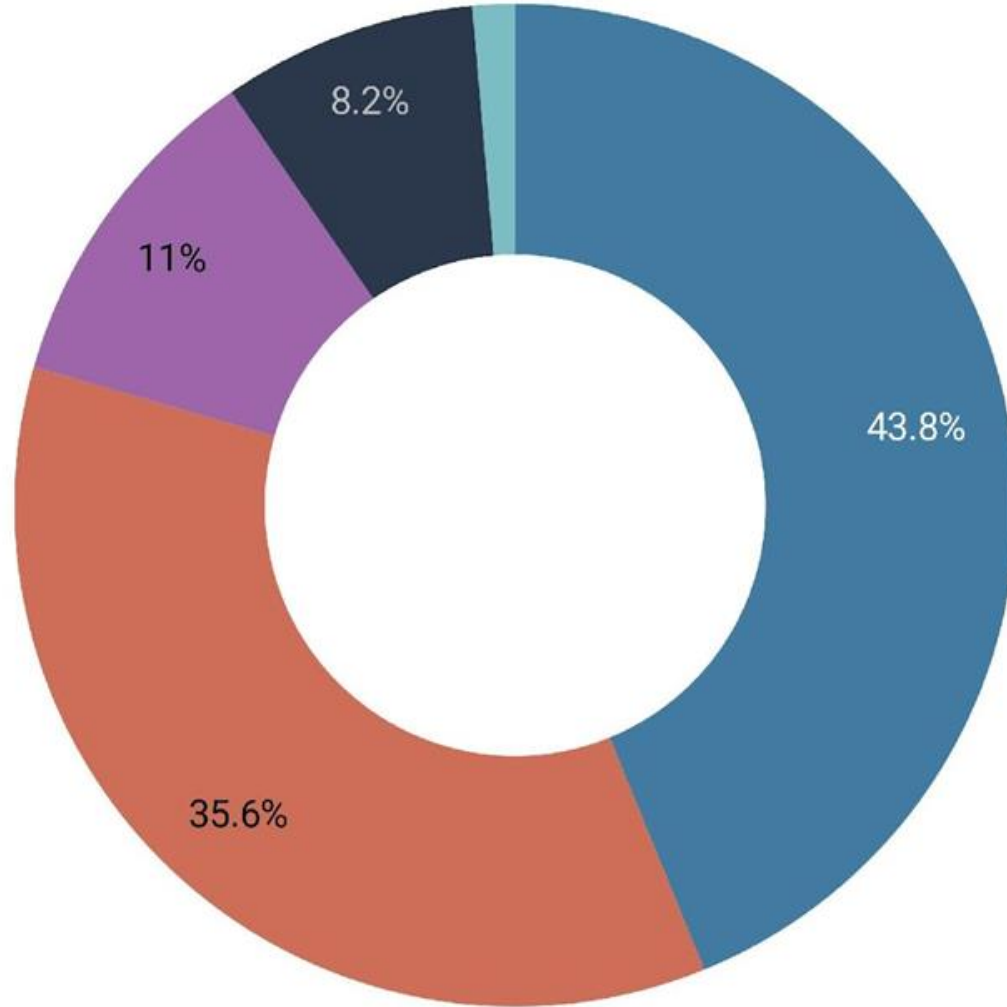
DESTINATIONS
INTERNATIONAL



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- Buffalo and Erie County Tourism Partners
- Visit Buffalo Niagara Team
- Visit Buffalo Niagara Board of Directors
- Community Leaders
- Customers

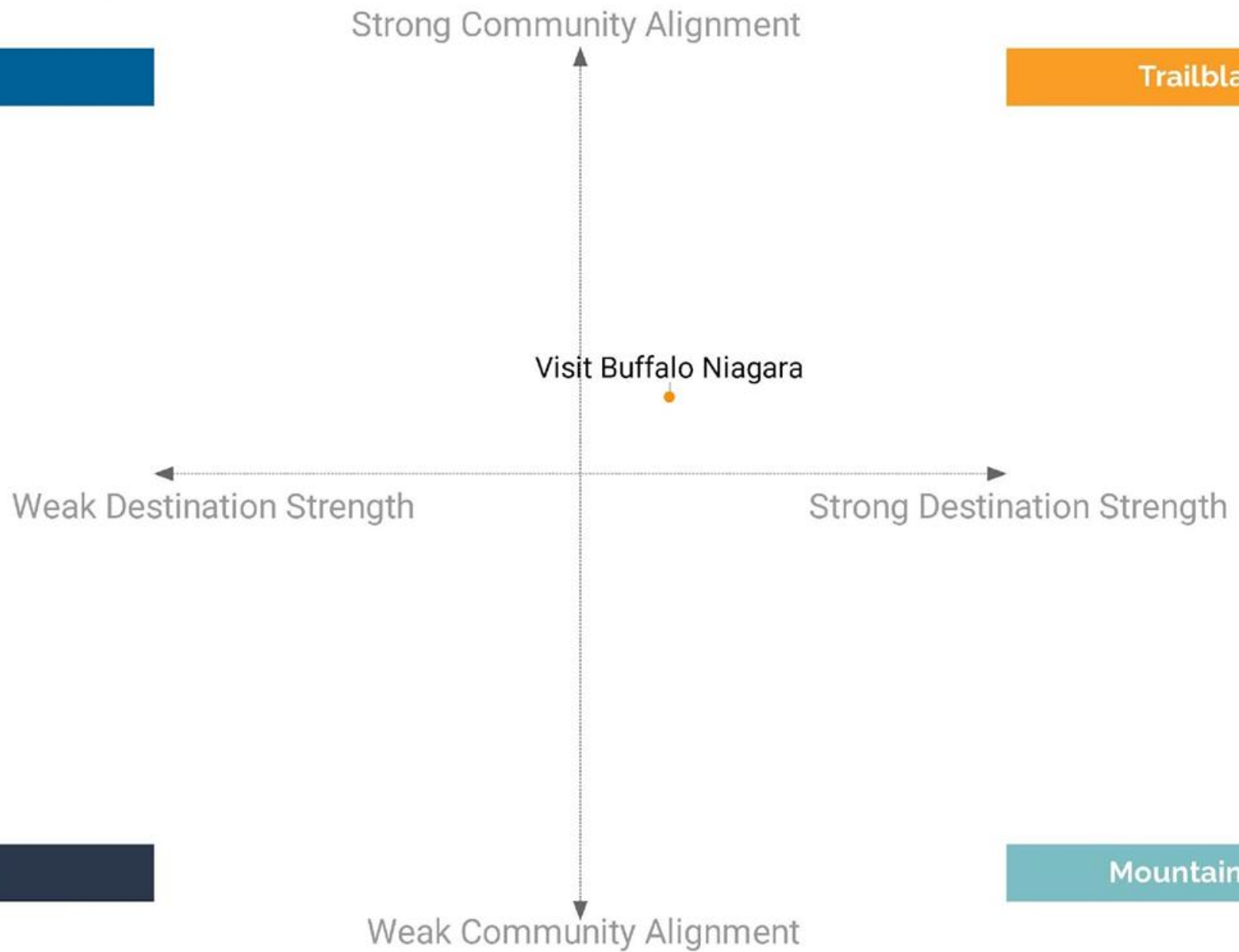
DestinationNEXT Assessment



Overall Assessment

Voyagers

Trailblazers



Explorers

Mountaineers

Change Since Last Assessment

Voyagers

Trailblazers



Explorers

Mountaineers

Destination Strength

Variable	Relative Importance (0-100%)		Perceived Performance (1 - 5 scale)	
	All Communities	Buffalo Niagara	All Communities	Buffalo Niagara
Attractions & Experiences	8.99%	9.15%	3.72	4.16
Arts, Culture & Heritage	8.32%	8.86%	3.67	4.49
Sporting Events	7.99%	8.53%	3.42	4.01
Communication Infrastructure	8.23%	8.51%	3.27	3.70
Dining, Shopping & Entertainment	8.74%	8.42%	3.50	4.03
Health & Safety	8.13%	8.40%	3.35	3.53
Outdoor Recreation	8.65%	8.21%	3.75	4.16
Destination Access	8.10%	8.16%	3.24	3.75
Conventions & Meetings	7.89%	7.98%	3.37	3.61
Accommodation	8.70%	7.98%	3.60	3.68
Events & Festivals	8.28%	7.96%	3.63	3.96
Local Mobility & Access	8.24%	7.81%	3.00	3.43

Green indicates destination performance +5% above industry average; red indicates -5% below.

	Industry Average	Destination
Destination Strength	3.48	3.85

Scenario: Trailblazers

Community Alignment

Variable	Relative Importance (0-100%)		Perceived Performance (1 - 5 scale)	
	All Communities	Buffalo Niagara	All Communities	Buffalo Niagara
Organization Governance	8.01%	9.59%	3.80	4.30
Funding Support & Certainty	8.39%	9.20%	3.32	3.11
Government Support	8.48%	8.71%	3.71	4.04
Workforce Development	8.55%	8.57%	2.92	3.35
Hospitality Culture	8.51%	8.46%	3.65	3.96
Regional Cooperation	8.30%	8.33%	3.76	4.03
Equity, Diversity & Inclusion	8.01%	8.26%	3.63	4.08
Economic Development	8.34%	8.24%	3.94	4.24
Community Group & Resident S...	8.28%	7.96%	3.57	3.83
Emergency Preparedness	8.20%	7.89%	3.50	3.67
Business Support	8.52%	7.75%	3.86	4.08
Sustainability & Resilience	8.34%	6.93%	3.67	4.06

Green indicates destination performance +5% above industry average; red indicates -5% below.

	Industry Average	Destination
Community Alignment	3.59	3.86

Scenario: Trailblazers

PURPOSE STATEMENT

**We Champion America's Greatest
Reimagined Destination**

Core Values

We Are Proud

Tireless dedication and love for our community and its people is where we find the most incredible sense of accomplishment.

We Are Good Neighbors

Here, there is something for everybody—and everyone is welcome. There's a reason they call us the City of Good Neighbors.

We Are Resilient

We carry out our mission with unwavering focus through times of uncertainty and momentous achievements.

We Lead the Way

Driven by forward-thinking practices and boundless creativity, we motivate locals to share their stories and inspire visitors to discover something unexpected.

We Are Home

Buffalo is forever our home. And our guests will feel like family when they're here. That is our promise.

2025-2027 Strategic Plan Goals





PURPOSE STATEMENT

We Champion America’s Greatest Reimagined Destination

DESTINATION MARKETING INITIATIVES	LEAD	2025 TARGETS	2026 TARGETS	2027 TARGETS
Launch and integrate a new organization-wide destination brand strategy	Marketing Destination Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch brand training for staff and Certified Travel Ambassadors by Q3. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete brand integration, including visitor guide, by Q1. • New brand to be fully reflected on website. • Measure brand awareness/clarity in a year-end survey with a 60% goal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure three national media features on Buffalo's new brand. • Establish Buffalo as a top-five Northeast destination with 30% boost in visitor interest.
Increase awareness of how to explore/navigate the region more effectively for both visitors/locals	Marketing Destination Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a small local advertising campaign to promote downtown visitation. • Add more mapping functionality for the mobile version of website. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boost brochure / collateral downloads by 25%. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore the next generation of destination development opportunities.
Expand engagement in growth potential markets	Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run digital campaigns in emerging markets. • Host two press trips for media that contributes to international media outlets. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement a measurable campaign with a specific OTA. • Expand ads to two new channels per target market. • Measure the success of new branding and advertising campaigns in growth potential markets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the media placements by 20% in Buffalo's growth markets. • Grow target market visitation volume by 25% year over year.
Increase promotion of the region's lifestyle experiences	Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host three lifestyle-focused press trips for media placements. • Identify influencers with national and growth market audiences for content creation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure 15 media placements on Buffalo's lifestyle attractions. • Secure eight national lifestyle media features. • Reposition Buffalo as a top cultural destination, with a 30% boost in visitor interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure three lifestyle travel award nominations. • Increase lifestyle visitation volume by 50% over year one.
Develop shoulder season marketing strategies	Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch a shoulder season campaign, increasing shoulder season visitation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch an integrated winter-specific campaign to increase awareness and visitation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feature Buffalo as a year-round destination in two national media pieces. • Achieve a measurable increase in shoulder-season visitation by volume, year over year
Reposition Buffalo's reputation in national & international media	Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a destination sentiment survey to establish to measure new destination brand and advertising campaigns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase target market visitation by 15%. • Implement an initial destination sentiment survey. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure two national travel publication features.



PURPOSE STATEMENT

We Champion America’s Greatest Reimagined Destination

DESTINATION SALES INITIATIVES	LEAD	2025 TARGETS	2026 TARGETS	2027 TARGETS
Increase presence at industry tradeshows, including meetings & conventions, sports events and tour & travel	Sales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend two international travel trade events. Create standout booth designs and marketing materials, aiming for destination/organization boost in tradeshow interactions. Track tradeshow ROI, targeting a measurable increase in qualified leads. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend three new key tradeshows across meetings, sports, and tour segments. Host networking events at three major tradeshows, with at least 25 attendees each. Secure three high-profile speaking or sponsorship slots at tradeshows. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend three new key tradeshows across meetings, sports, and tour segments. Generate 30% more qualified leads annually from tradeshows. Launch a Buffalo-specific multi-city roadshow, securing qualified leads.
Host more customer in-market events, familiarization tours and site visits	Sales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop an in-market hosting program for planners and operators, hosting qualified group leaders. Offer personalized Buffalo FAM Tours, achieving 75% satisfaction. Engage five local stakeholders in customer-hosting events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Double in-market hosted groups to 20, with a 25% conversion rate to new business. Launch an annual “Discover Buffalo” event for 50 prospective clients. Achieve 85% satisfaction in post-visit surveys for in-market hosting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Host 30 groups in-market, achieving a 30% conversion to new business. Add ten local partners for FAM Tours and customer hosting. Establish Buffalo as a preferred destination for ten key accounts through repeat hosting.
Increase group sales personnel and training	Sales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement a sales training program for improvement in outreach. Set baseline sales metrics with new personnel by Q4. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand the sales team by adding a Chicago-based sales director. Boost group sales metrics by 30% with additional resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build a fully staffed, specialized group sales team for meetings, sports and tours. Implement quarterly sales reviews, with 95% of the team meeting targets. Increase group sales revenue by 50% by Year 3 through team expansion.
Increase international engagement and strategy	Sales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop an international sales strategy targeting three markets. Partner with two international tour operators for inbound group travel. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create multilingual sales and FAM materials for international clients. Increase international bookings by 20% through targeted campaigns and partnerships. Pending new direct service, develop a comprehensive sales strategy with international airline and in-market tour operators. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Host an annual international “Experience Buffalo” event for 100 clients/partners. Boost international bookings by 50%, positioning Buffalo in two new markets. Secure five new international partnerships to drive inbound group travel.



PURPOSE STATEMENT

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DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES	LEAD	2025 TARGETS	2026 TARGETS	2027 TARGETS
Advocate for new hotel development and improvements for existing hotels	CEO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete hotel market assessment and development feasibility study by Q3. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborate with hotels to promote renovation projects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase large group bookings by 15% with improved accommodations.
Increase public beautification and storytelling throughout Buffalo and Erie County	Destination Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launch Erie County storytelling campaign through a county-wide mural program. Collaborate and assist in securing funding for entertainment district beautification. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launch long-term beautification initiative. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include quantifiable measurements of resident sentiment regarding efforts to beautify and enhance community initiatives.
Increase advocacy for new amateur sports facility development	CEO Sales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify three priority sports facilities by Q2. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the future opening of new sports facilities while increasing leads for future years' events. Host a sports rights holder fam event. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report secured future definite bookings utilizing new sports facilities.
Increase advocacy for expanding cruise tourism	CEO Sales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partner with two cruise companies and host a cruise fams/site visits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure inaugural Great Lakes cruise for Buffalo. Create cruise KPIs for Buffalo as a port city and a port of call. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grow cruise business for Buffalo as a port of call and port city. Measure cruise passenger satisfaction with port facilities.
Expand new heritage product development	Destination Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launch Freedom’s Footsteps experience in cooperation with African American heritage partners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a Hispanic heritage experience in conjunction with the opening of the Hispanic Heritage Cultural Institute. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launch “Buffalo Heritage Week” event.
Increase support for air service	CEO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate for new direct flights from domestic growth potential markets. Advocate for new International direct flight 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partner with airlines for a co-branded campaign. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partner with airlines for a co-branded campaign.
Enhance accessibility: Increase multilanguage wayfinding; develop multilanguage tours/experiences	CEO Destination Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a task force to create a coordinated countywide wayfinding program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand multilingual tours to three languages at major attractions. Create multilingual materials for top attractions and partner on pilot multilingual tours. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish Buffalo as an accessible, multilingual destination with wayfinding in all tourist areas. Achieve 90% satisfaction in accessibility Present a comprehensive wayfinding system to community leaders and stakeholders.



PURPOSE STATEMENT

We Champion America’s Greatest Reimagined Destination

ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE INITIATIVES	LEAD	2025 TARGETS	2026 TARGETS	2027 TARGETS
Develop advocacy strategy to increase local understanding of the value of tourism and maintain/expand adequate, long-term funding.	CEO All Departments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host inaugural “Visitor Impact Summit” in Q3 while revitalizing annual tourism industry awards. • Launch the “Value of Tourism” campaign by Q3, increasing resident sentiment in future follow-up studies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve community tourism awareness. • Launch a “Tourism Champions” campaign with ten local ambassadors. • Maintain bed tax funding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase positive tourism resident sentiment by 50%. • Maintain bed tax funding. • Secure additional partnership project and special imitative funding.
Increase regional engagement by convening community, government, and industry leaders more often and effectively.	CEO Destination Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribute the “In The BUF” weekly newsletter with a 10% annual increase in subscribers. • Using industry best practices, create a comprehensive local, state, and national advocacy agenda related to travel and tourism issues. • Hold a U.S. Travel Association Travel Talk event in Buffalo. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish an advocacy task force and encourage participation in NYSTHTA and U.S. Travel advocacy events in Albany and Washington, DC. • Schedule forums or roundtable discussions focusing on regional challenges and opportunities to ensure diverse perspectives and foster shared ownership. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain the organization’s seat at the table and voice with community organizations, boards, and committees. • Hold a tenth-anniversary Visit Buffalo Niagara Tourism Summit to host Buffalo industry CEOs and C-Suite tourism industry leaders, including a session with local and state government officials.
Enhance collaboration with community leaders to address social and safety challenges while promoting beautification initiatives in the downtown business district.	CEO Destination Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete Destinations International Social Impact Assessment. • Contribute staff volunteer hours to community projects, including Gail Wells Memorial Garden. • Engage with county and city law enforcement regarding social and safety messaging. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete year-over-year DI Social Impact Assessment Comparison. • Release an annual “Community Impact Report.” • Explore the expansion of tourism partnership funding for projects and initiatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch annual service day with 80% staff participation.
Capitalize on opportunities with AI; Invest in AI experiences and tools.	CEO Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train 50% of staff in AI, with two pilot projects. • Monitor industry best practices related to AI. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand AI to visitor trend forecasting, raising conversion rates by 15%. • Establish AI benchmarking measures through industry best practices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fully integrate AI, boosting operational efficiency. • Achieve a 50% increase in visitor satisfaction with AI-driven support.
Advance our role in training front-line staff and community workforce.	Destination Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch the “Buffalo and Erie County Certified Travel Ambassador (CTA)” program, certifying 150 participants in year one. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train 200 participants in CTA program with a 75% retention rate of previous year participants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train 200 participants in CTA program with a 75% retention rate of previous year participants.



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