

VISIT **Buffalo**

2026 COMPREHENSIVE BUSINESS PLAN

A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR TOURISM EXCELLENCE

INTEGRATING FIVE PILLARS OF ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESS:

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

SALES & SERVICES

DESTINATION EXPERIENCE

RESEARCH

ADMINISTRATION

APPROVED BY VISIT BUFFALO BOARD OF DIRECTORS: -----

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Buffalo's 2026 Comprehensive Business Plan outlines a strategic roadmap to position Buffalo and Erie County as a leading tourism destination and to encourage sustainable economic growth and community well-being. This integrated plan combines efforts from five core organizational pillars, Marketing & Communications, Sales & Services, Destination Experience, Research, and Administration, into a cohesive framework designed to increase visitor engagement, promote industry collaboration, and achieve measurable results.

ORGANIZATION PURPOSE STATEMENT

We Champion America's Greatest Reimagined City.

ORGANIZATION 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.

2026 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The 2026 business plan is built around several transformational initiatives that will shape the future of tourism in our region:

- Continue implementing the Strategic Plan (2025-2027) by integrating DestinationNEXT standards and the Ten-Year Master Plan into organizational operations.
- Hosting NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament Rounds 1 & 2 and NHL Draft, as well as promotion of FIFA World Cup activations – Showcasing Buffalo's sports infrastructure and hospitality capabilities on a national stage.
- Website Redesign Initiative – Reorganizing digital content around core pillars (Architecture, Food, Music, Outdoor Recreation) and geographic areas.
- Expansion of Accessibility Initiatives – Partnership with Wheel the World to position Buffalo as an inclusive destination.
- Establishment of Cultural Tourism Advisory Group – Ensuring community voices influence tourism development.
- Activation of the Buffalo Visitor Center at Canalside – A year-round visitor information hub offering exceptional service, destination insights, and curated merchandise.
- Advanced Research Platforms – Integration of Zartico Media Attribution and Longwoods Visitor Profile Report for improved data insights.

KEY MILESTONE CELEBRATIONS

2026 offers unique opportunities to celebrate key milestones that boost Buffalo's national profile.

- America's 250th Anniversary
- 125th Anniversary of the Pan-American Exposition
- Opening of the new Highmark Stadium
- Milestone celebrations at Shea's Performing Arts Center, Our Lady of Victory Basilica, Miss Buffalo, and Graycliff
- Anniversary of the National Buffalo Wing Festival
- Opening of Phase 1 of Ralph Wilson Centennial Park
- Opening of Hispanic Heritage Cultural Center
- Reopening of the Colored Musicians Club & Museum
- Inaugural visits from Great Lakes Cruise lines

ORGANIZATIONAL BUDGET & ECONOMIC IMPACT

The 2026 plan reflects a larger organizational budget supporting increased programming and strategic initiatives. Visit Buffalo operates through hotel and short-term rental bed tax collections managed by Erie County, with regular monitoring and forecasting conducted in partnership with the County Comptroller and Budget staff. Our economic development impact is measured through:

- Hotel room night production from conventions and meetings, amateur sporting events, and domestic and international tour and travel
- Visitor spending at local restaurants, attractions, and businesses
- Economic impact of amateur sports events and competitions
- Rise in bed tax revenue
- Job creation and workforce growth in the hospitality sector

INTEGRATED APPROACH

Success in 2026 relies on seamless coordination across all departments. This business plan illustrates how each pillar supports and strengthens the others.

- Marketing & Communications develops authentic stories and campaigns that Sales & Services leverage to attract meetings and groups.
- Research provides data-driven insights that inform marketing strategies and assess sales ROI.
- Destination Experience ensures workforce readiness through training programs that enhance service delivery for Marketing and Sales initiatives.
- Administration promotes operational excellence, strategic planning, and advocacy that enable all departments to achieve their goals.
- All pillars collaborate on major initiatives like the Visitor Center, accessibility programs, and cultural tourism development.

LOOKING FORWARD

The 2026 Comprehensive Business Plan positions Visit Buffalo for continued growth and leadership in destination marketing. By investing in infrastructure (Visitor Center), technology (Zartico, website redesign, AI integration), workforce development (Certified Tourism Ambassadors), accessibility (Wheel the World), and community engagement (Cultural Tourism Advisory Group), we are building a sustainable foundation for long-term success.

This integrated approach ensures that Buffalo and Erie County continue to grow as a welcoming, inclusive, and culturally vibrant destination that benefits both visitors and residents.

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

PURPOSE

The Marketing Department connects travelers to Buffalo and Erie County by highlighting the area's most genuine, surprising, and meaningful experiences. We reach potential visitors where they are, digitally, socially, and emotionally, by using insights, storytelling, and new technology to motivate year-round travel. In partnership with our collaborators, MMGY and Lou Hammond Group, our marketing and public relations efforts position Buffalo as a lively, welcoming, and constantly evolving destination, generating impact for our community and partners through increased visitation and visitor engagement.

2026 HIGHLIGHTS

- Align efforts toward the 2026 milestones, including the reopening of the Colored Musicians Club & Museum, milestone celebrations at Shea's, OLV Basilica, and Graycliff, and notable anniversaries of the Pan-Am Exposition, National Buffalo Wing Festival, Pierce Arrow, America's 250th, and more.
- Highlight historic dining spots with a new Historic Restaurants directory and storytelling campaign.
- Produce a new destination video
- Expand accessibility marketing initiatives in partnership with Wheel the World.
- Expand the Neighborhood Mural Program with new installations and greater community participation.
- Begin a two-year process on a full website redesign.
- Update campaign creative to advance the 'That's Buffalo For You' campaign.
- Integrate GuideGeek, an AI-powered visitor tool, into VisitBuffalo.com for enhanced and personalized trip planning.
- Launch a new destination/organization podcast.
- Begin initial work on developing a new Buffalo Architecture Trail.

GOAL #1: DRIVE YEAR-ROUND VISITATION THROUGH AUTHENTIC STORYTELLING

OBJECTIVES

- Showcase Buffalo's unique stories, experiences, and neighborhoods through targeted campaigns.
- Deepen engagement with Buffalo's main pillars: Arts & Culture, Outdoor Recreation, Food, and Music.
- Leverage milestone moments and events that enhance Buffalo's visibility as a destination.

STRATEGIES

- Launch a short-form interview-style podcast that explores the unexpected origins of Buffalo's most iconic landmarks, artifacts, and traditions.
- Create the Historic Restaurants directory to showcase 50-, 75-, and 100-year culinary landmarks, supported by photo and video storytelling.
- Create a new destination video that promotes the "That's Buffalo For You" campaign, along with a 30-second commercial and versions for meetings and sports.
- Continue the Neighborhood Mural Program with new community engagement and early-year site coordination.
- Partner with the Buffalo AKG Art Museum for a spring incentive campaign with Expedia.
- Collaborate with local organizations to begin establishing a Buffalo Architecture Trail.

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS - CONTINUED

GOAL #2: ENHANCE DIGITAL AND PRINT ENGAGEMENT

OBJECTIVES

- Design an intuitive, inspiring, and accessible visitor experience across digital platforms.
- Improve social media storytelling and expand short-form video content.
- Ensure consistent, high-quality print materials that match the destination brand.

STRATEGIES

- Oversee a complete website redesign for a 2027 debut.
- Develop the Sports & Entertainment District Map for online access, highlighting key venues and visitor facilities.
- Use GuideGeek to improve visitor trip planning with conversational AI.
- Create a detailed content calendar that produces content optimized for web and social media platforms.
- Expand short-form video creation by collaborating with local creators, including capturing B-roll for PR and social sharing.
- Create new long- and short-form videos: Freedom's Footsteps, sports, meetings, and winter-focused stories.
- Publish redesigned print materials, including the 2027 Buffalo Visitor Guide, Buffalo Wing Trail brochure, Beer in Buffalo brochure, and Visitor Map.

GOAL #3: ADVANCE ACCESSIBILITY, INCLUSION, AND REPRESENTATION

OBJECTIVES

- Make sure Buffalo's story is inclusive and welcoming to everyone.
- Improve visibility for accessible and adaptive experiences.
- Expand storytelling that highlights Buffalo's cultural and demographic diversity.

STRATEGIES

- Collaborate with Wheel the World to create new adaptive and accessible content.
- Create a new Accessibility landing page with MMGY that features links to adaptive resources and itineraries.
- Work with the Destination Experience team to deliver sensitivity and accessibility training for hospitality partners.
- Broaden cultural heritage storytelling by emphasizing Hispanic Heritage content to coincide with the opening of the Hispanic Heritage Cultural Center.
- Foster collaborations with local creators and organizations to ensure authentic representation in campaigns.

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS - CONTINUED

GOAL #4: SUPPORT SALES & SERVICES INITIATIVES

OBJECTIVES

- Boost Buffalo's image as a premier spot for meetings, sports, and group travel.
- Improve the visitor experience during major hosted events
- Develop collaborative initiatives that link brand storytelling with economic results.

STRATEGIES

- Collaborate with the Sales and Sports Department on event activations for the NCAA Tournament, including Random Acts of Kindness initiatives at host hotels and visitor engagement.
- Capture new video and photo assets from Buffalo's sports venues and events, including KeyBank Center, Sahlen Field, RiverWorks, and others.
- Create new videos for sports and meetings that match MMGY's print and digital creative.
- Create updated tradeshow materials and sales collateral.
- Partner with the Lou Hammond Group to secure trade coverage that highlights Buffalo as a top meetings and sports destination.

GOAL #5: GENERATE MEDIA COVERAGE AND BRAND AWARENESS

OBJECTIVES

- Strengthen collaboration with Lou Hammond Group to secure top-tier national and international coverage.
- Enhance collaborations with content creators and influencers in the main feeder markets.
- Align PR and influencer storytelling with destination campaigns and brand voice.

STRATEGIES

- Develop thematic story arcs with Lou Hammond Group to direct media pitching around Buffalo's culinary, cultural, and outdoor attractions.
- Host and attend media events, one-on-one meetings, and receptions in key markets.
- Continue earned media efforts tied to milestone moments, such as releasing our new digital Hiking Guide, Accessibility Initiative, Historic Restaurant directory debut, and more.
- Curate B-roll and asset libraries for media use, ensuring consistent brand visuals and accessibility.
- Track and measure media placements, impressions, and engagement metrics in coordination with Lou Hammond Group.

SALES & SERVICES AND SPORTS COMMISSION

PURPOSE

The main goal of the Visit Buffalo Sales & Services Department is to promote Buffalo and Erie County as a top destination for conventions, group tours, and amateur sports events, generating measurable economic benefits by increasing hotel stays and supporting local restaurants, attractions, and transportation businesses.

2026 HIGHLIGHTS

- Host NCAA Men's Basketball Rounds 1 & 2 and NHL Draft.
- Attend the International Inbound Travel Association Conference (IITA).
- Welcome and host Great Lakes Cruises during inaugural visits.
- Host citywide meetings and conventions.
- Hold the 13th Annual Customer Advisory Council Meeting.
- Coordinate and host collaborative international inbound FAM Tours with I Love NY.
- Focus on identifying future need dates for the convention center and reaching out to planners.
- Collaborate with Erie County departments and economic development partners to identify regional business and industry strengths, experts, thought leaders, and intellectual capital.
- Partner with local experts and thought leaders to identify and bid on their related association and industry meetings and conventions.
- Continue growing sales efforts in both domestic and international inbound tour markets through focused in-market sales missions, partnerships, and marketing campaigns.
- Identify and book amateur sporting events that can be hosted in Erie County
- Organize Visit Buffalo's Book Club and create themed itineraries based on selected books.
- Lead efforts in updating the 10-year strategic plan for the Buffalo Sports Commission.

GOAL #1: IDENTIFY, PURSUE, AND CONFIRM BUSINESS

OBJECTIVE

- Exceed definite bookings over 2025 productivity.

STRATEGIES

- Analyze, sustain, and oversee a healthy and active pipeline.
- Qualify potential planners and advance through the sales process until an event is booked.
- Focus marketing and sales on key meeting and event planners, tour operators, and sports rights holders.

OBJECTIVE

- Increase and develop prospective business leads and pipeline.

STRATEGIES

- Increase prospecting efforts and continue strengthening partnerships with major third-party sourcing companies to further promote Buffalo as a leading convention, sports, and tour destination.
- Build relationships with planners, tour operators, and sports rights holders through both direct and indirect sales strategies.
- Attend trade shows and conferences throughout the year as a lead-generation tool across market segments.
- Provide attractive booking incentives for organizations hosting multi-day conventions, meetings, and amateur athletic events.
- Conduct targeted site visits and FAM tours in key industry sectors.
- Continue developing key relationships with the regional business community, hospitality industry, and economic development partners through quarterly sales initiatives, meetings, and attendance at local business events.
- Reactivate the Bring It Home campaign in cooperation with activations with the University of Buffalo Alumni Association and Invest Buffalo Niagara.

SALES & SERVICES AND SPORTS COMMISSION - CONTINUED

GOAL #2: ELEVATE DESTINATION AWARENESS

OBJECTIVE

- Amplify industry presence and advance marketing initiatives.

STRATEGIES

- Develop and implement strategic advertising and marketing campaigns across all target markets using MMGY and new campaign assets.
- Create and market a comprehensive meeting package for the Buffalo Convention Center.
- Utilize and continually enhance the use of the DigiDeck software platform to create customized proposals and presentations.
- Update and maintain the accuracy of online profiles on PlayEasy, MINT, ESSAE, Cvent, LamontCo, and other microsites.
- Successfully host the NCAA basketball tournament, NHL Draft, and begin a two-year partnership to host the Huddle Up rights holder familiarization event.
- Successfully host site visits for potential customers throughout the year, resulting in secured future business.
- Assist in organizing the Buffalo Book Club.
- Explore sponsorship or other hosting opportunities to promote the destination brand to target audiences.
- Draw international soccer fans to visit and stay in Buffalo during World Cup matches.
- Hold the 13th Annual Customer Advisory Council Meeting.

GOAL #3: PROVIDE EXEMPLARY SERVICES

OBJECTIVE

- Deliver highly satisfied experiences for planners, organizers, and operators.

STRATEGIES

- Increase engagement with the Event Service Professionals Association (ESPA) to identify and share current best practices in servicing.
- Develop relationships with planners and event rights holders during the shift from sales to services.
- Welcome attendees and provide essential information on events, restaurants, and pre- and post-activities to enhance the visitor experience.
- Coordinate the deployment of volunteers with mobile visitor centers and information tables for meetings, conventions, sporting events, and tours.
- Conduct site visits to evaluate potential planners and support planning and coordination efforts.
- Hold a local family-reunion seminar to increase the frequency of reunions in Buffalo.
- Create customized collateral and signage to welcome groups alongside the marketing team.

OBJECTIVE

- Leverage technology to improve service delivery.

STRATEGIES

- Utilize digital planning tools so clients can view available services and pricing options online.
- Keep industry partners informed about meetings, conventions, sporting events, and tour dates.
- Assess satisfaction with destination and services through post-event electronic surveys.
- Help groups find housing using the MeetingMax digital app as needed.

SALES & SERVICES AND SPORTS COMMISSION - CONTINUED

GOAL #4: IMPROVE CLIENT SATISFACTION AND RETENTION

OBJECTIVE

- Enhance client experience with personalized services.

STRATEGIES

- Collect client feedback via surveys, interviews, and reviews year-round. Use the insights to improve services and solve challenges.
- Develop a loyalty program for long-term clients that provides exclusive benefits.
- Design a simplified new-client process that warmly greets and educates them about destination options.
- Maintain a database of planners willing to share testimonials about their experience working with Visit Buffalo.
- Collaborate with the marketing team to create social media posts that increase recognition and boost event exposure.
- Recognize and celebrate Erie County hotel partners during National Celebrate Services Week, August 3-7.

DESTINATION EXPERIENCE

PURPOSE

The Destination Development Department promotes sustainable growth by enhancing the region's tourism infrastructure, workforce, and visitor experiences while prioritizing community well-being and environmental responsibility. Through strategic initiatives and close collaboration with local partners, the department seeks to balance tourism development with community needs, ensuring Buffalo remains welcoming, inclusive, and culturally vibrant. By anticipating long-term challenges and opportunities, the department supports economic strength, improves the visitor experience, and helps foster a thriving quality of life for residents.

2026 HIGHLIGHTS

- Expansion of the Certified Travel Ambassador Program
- Visitor Center Development and Activation
- Wheel The World Accessibility Partnership
- Cultural Tourism Advisory Board Formation
- Enhancement of destination culinary programs

GOAL #1: CREATE SUSTAINABLE VISITOR EXPERIENCES

OBJECTIVE

- Deliver outstanding visitor information at the new Buffalo Visitor Center.

STRATEGIES

- Finalize staffing, training, hours, and service standards according to actual visitor needs.
- Track visitor counts, demographics, and key questions to guide future planning.
- Develop solid relationships with local attractions, businesses, and cultural organizations.
- Test merchandise, optimize product assortment, and add locally made products.
- Collaborate with the marketing team to promote the center through PR, social media, and partner channels.
- Develop a second-year plan using data and operational insights.

DESTINATION EXPERIENCE - CONTINUED

GOAL #2: ENHANCE SKILL-BUILDING PROGRAMS

OBJECTIVE

- Strengthen and expand the Certified Tourism Ambassador program.

STRATEGIES

- Create a targeted recruitment and training plan to certify at least 300 ambassadors by the end of the year.
- Boost engagement across the tourism ecosystem, with a focus on new sectors.
- Enhance curriculum and training quality by including new developments, cultural assets, and brand messaging.
- Launch the first CTA networking event to maintain connections among ambassadors.
- Collaborate with attractions, small businesses, schools, and workforce programs to grow CTA pathways.
- Monitor enrollment, retention, satisfaction, and visitor experience metrics to guide program upgrades.
- Promote CTA stories and ensure program messaging aligns with the destination's new brand identity.

OBJECTIVE

- Support the African American family reunion travel market.

STRATEGY

- Support the Sales Department in hosting an Open House that attracts local reunion planners, highlights key venues and cultural attractions, and establishes Visit Buffalo as a reliable planning partner.

OBJECTIVE

- Reimagine the annual Tourism Summit.

STRATEGIES

- Align the summit agenda with key insights from the 2025 Empire State Development Economic Impact of Visitor Spend report.
- Revive the Tourism Awards to recognize outstanding industry accomplishments.
- Work with stakeholders to choose relevant topics and secure engaging speakers.
- Boost summit attendance with targeted marketing.
- Gather and assess attendee feedback to improve upcoming events.

OBJECTIVE

- Equip local restaurant owners with professional development.

STRATEGY

- Develop and deliver a targeted training workshop on culinary skills, menu innovation, and hospitality best practices tailored to the needs of local restaurant owners.

DESTINATION EXPERIENCE - CONTINUED

GOAL #3: SUPPORT DESTINATION ACCESSIBILITY POSITIONING

OBJECTIVE

- Amplify partnership with Wheel the World.

STRATEGIES

- Host educational webinars for hospitality partners to inform and guide them through the Wheel the World verification process.
- Raise awareness, assist hospitality partners in getting verified, and promote the region as an inclusive destination.
- Provide hands-on support to assist at least five venues in achieving Wheel the World verification by 2026.

GOAL #4: DEVELOP CULTURAL TOURISM ADVISORY GROUP

OBJECTIVE

- Form a cohort to guide cultural tourism initiatives.

STRATEGIES

- Identify and invite representatives from cultural organizations, local leaders, and stakeholders.
- Establish clear roles and responsibilities for advisory group members.
- Hold an initial meeting to set goals and priorities.
- Utilize the advisory group to guide cultural tourism initiatives.
- Hold regular meetings to gather input on tourism development projects.
- Collaborate to recognize and support valuable cultural assets.
- Integrate feedback into the planning and execution of cultural tourism campaigns.

RESEARCH

PURPOSE

The Research Department at Visit Buffalo plays a crucial role in supporting the organization's strategic goals by collecting and analyzing data to provide actionable insights. This 2026 business plan builds on the strong foundation set in 2025, improving our capabilities with new platforms and methods. By adding Zartico Media Attribution, the Longwoods Visitor Profile Report, and advanced industry benchmarking tools, the Research Department will deliver deeper insights to support informed, data-driven decisions across marketing, sales, and operations.

2026 HIGHLIGHTS

- Implementation and optimization of the Zartico Media Attribution platform for evaluating campaign performance.
- Integrating the Longwoods International Visitor Profile Report to enhance market intelligence.
- Enhance extranet partner engagement with targeted activation strategies and clear KPIs.
- Activate the digital data collection initiative for the Visitor Center to gather first-party visitor insights.
- Develop a structured professional development program to improve Business Intelligence Coordinator skills.
- Exploration and utilization of industry dashboards (U.S. Travel, Simpleview) for national benchmarking.
- Improving tradeshow ROI measurement through detailed conversion tracking and economic impact analysis.

GOAL #1: ENHANCE DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

OBJECTIVE

- Broaden data collection framework using advanced platforms.

STRATEGIES

- Implement the Zartico Media Attribution platform to track campaign performance, visitor engagement, and conversion paths.
- Implement the Visitor Center digital data collection system within Simpleview CRM to capture first-party visitor data.
- Continue using mobile geolocation data, visitor surveys, and social media analytics.
- Conduct quarterly visitor satisfaction surveys to gather insights on demographics, behaviors, and motivations.
- Incorporate new data sources from industry platforms to enhance tourism insights.

GOAL #2: DELIVER ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS

OBJECTIVE

- Provide timely insights to support marketing, sales, and operational strategies.

STRATEGIES

- Generate monthly, quarterly, and annual reports on visitation trends, market performance, economic impact, and campaign attribution.
- Utilize dashboards in Zartico and other platforms to provide real-time access to key performance metrics.
- Conduct ad hoc analyses to address specific departmental needs.
- Improve tradeshow ROI reporting by analyzing conversion rates, estimated economic impact, and show performance comparisons.

RESEARCH - CONTINUED

GOAL #3: STRENGTHEN MARKET RESEARCH AND TREND FORECASTING

OBJECTIVE

- Identify industry trends and emerging opportunities.

STRATEGIES

- Incorporate findings from the Longwoods International Visitor Profile Report (Activating Spring 2026).
- Analyze Visitor Center data to identify emerging visitor segments, seasonal trends, and shifts in travel preferences.
- Explore and utilize industry dashboards from U.S. Travel Association and Simpleview to compare Buffalo with national trends.
- Conduct yearly market analysis to identify growth opportunities in emerging visitor segments and geographic locations.
- Monitor travel industry reports, consumer behavior trends, and economic indicators.
- Collaborate with regional and national tourism organizations to share insights and benchmark performance.

GOAL #4: OPTIMIZE REPORTING ACCESSIBILITY AND PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

OBJECTIVE

- Enhance accessibility and usability of research data.

STRATEGIES

- Utilize interactive dashboards in Zartico and other platforms for easy stakeholder access.
- Standardize report templates to ensure consistency and clarity across all research outputs.
- Maintain a tailored extranet partner engagement approach with Quick Start guides and virtual training sessions.
- Establish extranet partner engagement as a measurable KPI, targeting 15% year-over-year growth (from 400 to over 460 active accounts).
- Launch targeted campaigns for specific partner segments to increase platform engagement.
- Utilize data visualization tools to create clear, engaging graphics.

GOAL #5: BUILD DEPARTMENT CAPACITY THROUGH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

OBJECTIVE

- Enhance Business Intelligence Coordinator skills.

STRATEGIES

- Develop a structured mentorship program with consistent check-ins and skill-building tasks.
- Attend the Simpleview Summit together to enhance platform knowledge and network with DMO peers.
- Provide continuous report ownership opportunities with mentorship and feedback.
- Utilize existing CRM expertise and build skills in related areas such as Google Analytics and data visualization.
- Track professional development milestones and achievements to support career growth.

ADMINISTRATION

PURPOSE

The main goal of the Administration and Finance Department is to offer leadership to all Visit Buffalo departments on staffing, management, operational efficiencies, strategic organizational planning, education, and community initiatives that position Visit Buffalo as the leader in hospitality and tourism-driven economic development for Erie County.

2026 HIGHLIGHTS

- Oversee a growing organizational budget and associated departmental programs.
- Continue to update and integrate the strategic plan into organizational initiatives.
- Manage the budget and financial operations of the new Canalside visitor information center.
- Perform the organization's biennial salary review using Destinations International's salary and compensation survey.
- Continue implementing organizational best practices and standards regarding AI.
- Implement and train the senior management team on the new human resources onboarding program and standards.
- Develop and deliver a toolkit for establishing advocacy agendas at local, state, and national levels for the tourism industry.

GOAL #1: PROVIDE EFFICIENT, ETHICAL, AND PROFESSIONAL DIRECTION

OBJECTIVE

- Sustain strong organization control and support systems.

STRATEGIES

- Maintain accurate and current organizational financials.
- Monitor and improve internal controls and policies within the organization
- Secure a thorough third-party financial audit.
- Continue to implement the expense reporting system.
- Oversee office facilities, equipment, technology, supplies, and inventory.
- Meet regularly with Erie County Comptroller and Budget staff to oversee hotel and short-term rental bed tax collections.
- Support reaccreditation for the Destinations International Destination Marketing Accreditation Program.

OBJECTIVE

- Ensure a highly trained, motivated, efficient, and respected professional staff.

STRATEGIES

- Oversee employee relations, collaborate with external HR consultants, and handle recruiting and hiring as needed.
- Ensure employee policies and procedures are consistently updated to incorporate recent laws and legislation.
- Communicate all updates to staff clearly.

ADMINISTRATION - CONTINUED

GOAL #2: INSPIRE ORGANIZATIONAL CONFIDENCE AND RESPECT

OBJECTIVE

- Achieve an end of year industry partner score of 80% or higher on Visit Buffalo in leadership, expertise, and trust.

STRATEGIES

- Achieve alignment between the industry and the county.
- Continue to provide transparent reporting.
- Communicate openly.
- Serve the destination stakeholders.

OBJECTIVE

- Represent and advocate for the Erie County tourism industry.

STRATEGIES

- Develop a comprehensive advocacy agenda covering local, state, and national issues.
- Keep industry partners involved and active in legislative efforts.
- Advocate for issues facing the tourism and hospitality workforce.

GOAL #3: REIMAGINE AND PLAN THE DESTINATION'S FUTURE

OBJECTIVE

- Develop strategies using the Tourism Master Plan and Strategic Plan.

STRATEGIES

- Prioritize destination experience, organizational function, and relevance by using the Visit Buffalo Ten-Year Master Plan as a guide.
- Proceed with the implementation of the 2025-2027 strategic plan.
- Proceed with assessing destination tourism requirements.

GOAL #4: MAINTAIN STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIPS

OBJECTIVE

- Collaborate with economic development partners for tourism-related input.

STRATEGIES

- Ensure Visit Buffalo sustains a presence and continues expanding its network of supporters and partners.
- Engage proactively in partnerships and advocacy with economic development allies.
- Utilize stakeholder relationships to collect input on executing the Destination Master Plan and Strategic Plan.

ADMINISTRATION - CONTINUED

GOAL #5: ENSURE BOARD ENGAGEMENT AND EXCELLENCE

OBJECTIVE

- Deliver destination marketing professional development to executive board leadership to strengthen governance and strategic alignment.

STRATEGY

- Two executive board members, the CEO, and one department head attend the Board Leadership For DMOs Symposium.

OBJECTIVE

- Earn an outstanding score on an end of year Board of Directors survey

STRATEGY

- Make sure board members are ready and engaged in organizational activities and governance.

ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT FRAMEWORK

Visit Buffalo's 2026 success will be measured through comprehensive metrics aligned with organizational priorities:

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS METRICS

- Website traffic, engagement rates, and conversion metrics
- Social media reach, engagement, and follower growth
- Media impressions, placement quality, and advertising value equivalency
- Campaign-specific metrics
- GuideGeek utilization and user satisfaction
- Video view counts and engagement across platforms
- Accessibility content reach, and partner participation

SALES & SERVICES METRICS

- Definite bookings exceeding 2025 performance
- Hotel room nights generated
- Economic impact from conventions and meetings, sporting events, and tour and travel
- Pipeline health and lead conversion rates
- Client satisfaction scores from post-event surveys
- FAM tour participation and conversion to definite business
- Tradeshow lead generation and ROI
- Repeat business from previous clients

DESTINATION EXPERIENCE METRICS

- Visitor Center foot traffic, service interactions, and merchandise sales
- Certified Tourism Ambassador training sessions and new trainees
- Wheel the World verified venues
- Tourism Summit attendance and satisfaction
- Cultural Tourism Advisory Group meeting frequency and initiative impact
- Restaurant workshop participation and feedback
- Accessibility training completion rates

RESEARCH METRICS

- Extranet active accounts
- Zartico platform utilization and insights generated
- On-time delivery rate for scheduled reports
- Longwoods Report integration into strategy discussions
- Visitor Center data collection completeness and quality
- Dashboard engagement by internal stakeholders
- Business Intelligence Coordinator professional development milestones achieved

CONCLUSION

The Visit Buffalo 2026 Comprehensive Business Plan presents a unified vision for tourism excellence in Buffalo and Erie County. By aligning the strategic efforts of our five core pillars—Marketing & Communications, Sales & Services, Destination Experience, Research, and Administration—we have created a cohesive roadmap that positions our organization for sustained growth and impact.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

This plan illustrates how Visit Buffalo's departments collaborate to achieve shared objectives. Marketing develops compelling stories that Sales leverages to attract meetings and groups. Research supplies data insights that inform Marketing strategies and verify Sales ROI. Destination Experience ensures our community is ready to provide excellent visitor services that fulfill the promises Marketing makes. Administration offers operational support, strategic guidance, and advocacy to help all departments succeed.

INVESTMENT IN INFRASTRUCTURE AND INNOVATION

The 2026 plan includes significant investments in both physical and digital infrastructure. The opening of the Buffalo Visitor Center at Canalside creates a year-round destination for visitors. Our website redesign, integration of AI tools such as GuideGeek, and deployment of advanced research platforms like Zartico demonstrate a commitment to leveraging technology to enhance the visitor experience and organizational efficiency.

COMMITMENT TO INCLUSION AND ACCESSIBILITY

Across all pillars, this plan demonstrates Visit Buffalo's dedication to creating a destination that welcomes everyone. Our partnership with Wheel the World, the formation of a Cultural Tourism Advisory Group, our Freedom's Footsteps campaign celebrating African American heritage, and our support for the Hispanic Heritage Cultural Center all reflect our commitment to authentic, inclusive storytelling and accessible experiences.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The expansion of our Certified Tourism Ambassador program, culinary training workshops for restaurant owners, and professional development initiatives for our team members demonstrate our commitment to developing a skilled, knowledgeable tourism workforce. By investing in people, we ensure that Buffalo's hospitality industry can deliver the exceptional experiences that turn first-time visitors into lifelong supporters.

ECONOMIC IMPACT AND MEASURABLE RESULTS

This plan aims to deliver measurable economic benefits by increasing hotel room nights, visitor spending, and bed tax revenue. Our Research Department has set clear KPIs to track progress, including growth in extranet partner engagement, tradeshow ROI, and campaign attribution analysis. These metrics will help us show value to stakeholders and continually improve our strategies.

LOOKING TO 2027 AND BEYOND

While this plan emphasizes 2026 priorities, it positions Visit Buffalo for long-term success. The implementation of the strategic plan (2025-2027), the website redesign (activating in 2027), the ten-year strategic plan for the Sports Commission, and the integration of DestinationNEXT standards all showcase our commitment to sustainable growth and continuous improvement.

A DESTINATION THAT BENEFITS ALL

At its core, this business plan aims to create a destination that benefits both visitors and residents. By balancing tourism growth with community priorities, investing in accessibility and inclusion, celebrating our diverse cultural heritage, and maintaining environmental responsibility, we are building a Buffalo that is welcoming, vibrant, and prosperous for everyone.

CONCLUSION - CONTINUED

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This comprehensive business plan highlights the collaborative effort of the entire Visit Buffalo team, our Board of Directors, industry partners, community stakeholders, and economic development allies. We value the support from Erie County government, the funding from hotel and short-term rental bed taxes, and the many hospitality professionals who help make Buffalo a welcoming destination.

Together, we will make 2026 a transformative year for tourism in Buffalo and Erie County.

THAT'S 
Buffalo
 FOR YOU