



Economic Development and Tourism

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To: Honorable Mayor and City Council Members
From: **Kevin Burke Senior Director of Economic Development & Tourism**
Date: 1/26/2026
Subject: Tourism Strategic Plan

Scottsdale's economy is strongly influenced by tourism and events. Recent tourism studies prepared for the city report that in 2024 visitors generated an estimated \$3.7 billion in total economic impact, supporting more than 36,000 local jobs in hospitality and related industries and producing more revenue for the city than the cost of providing visitor-related services (approximately \$1.42 in revenue for every \$1 in services).

Scottsdale has a successful track record of using five-year strategic plans to guide tourism efforts. The current Tourism & Events Strategic Plan was approved by City Council in January 2023 and began Year 1 implementation in FY 2023/24, with activity slated to continue through FY 2027/28. The current plan is included in these materials as Attachment 1.

Best practice in the tourism industry suggests updating the strategic plan on a roughly 3-to-5-year cycle, supported by robust stakeholder engagement, detailed market analysis, and clear implementation frameworks. Given the pace of change in the regional economy, tourism trends, and visitor expectations, it is timely to begin development of the next iteration of the strategic plan. Absent an updated framework, the City risks relying on assumptions and tactics that may no longer accurately reflect current market conditions or community expectations.

Advancing the Tourism & Events Strategic Plan update prior to the formal end of the current plan will allow the City to proactively respond to emerging market dynamics, capture momentum from recent tourism growth, and better align tourism priorities to maximize economic impact and operational efficiency. In addition, several of the plan's foundational assumptions related to visitor behavior, event demand, digital marketing practices, and resident expectations have evolved materially since the current plan was adopted, reinforcing the value of initiating an update at this time.

The Tourism & Events Strategic Plan will provide a focused, action-oriented roadmap for Scottsdale's Tourism & Events Department. It will reaffirm the City's tourism vision, analyze visitor and lodging trends, and evaluate the balance and performance of the City's event portfolio. The plan will identify opportunities to strengthen anchor events, enhance coordination across venues, and incorporate modern destination-marketing practices such as digital engagement, and experience-focused storytelling. It will also address tourism's relationship to resident quality of life and establish goals and key performance indicators related to visitor spending, event outcomes,

satisfaction and sentiment, and brand reach, supported by a coordinated implementation framework across City departments and external partners.

Expected Deliverables

At the conclusion of the planning process, the City Council can expect to receive a Five-Year Tourism & Events Strategic Plan, which will include an executive summary and plan document focused on tourism, events, and destination-marketing strategies. The plan will incorporate event and visitor analysis with key performance indicators and benchmarking, and it will provide an implementation roadmap that is coordinated with the Economic Development Strategic Plan. A companion performance-measurement and reporting framework will track metrics such as visitor volumes, economic impact, event outcomes, and satisfaction indicators.

In addition, staff will prepare a crosswalk/integration summary that highlights how the plan aligns with the city's broader policy framework, including General Plan 2035, tourism-related agreements, and major capital investments.

Timeline and Next Steps

Subject to City Council approval of the FY 2026/27 budget, the planning effort is anticipated to be completed within a six-month period. The process would begin by engaging consultants from the city's approved vendor list and finalizing a detailed scope of work. This would be followed by data collection, stakeholder engagement, and an initial assessment of trends, opportunities, and challenges. Staff and the consultant would then develop preliminary findings and draft goals and strategies for both plans, after which the draft plan would be released for internal and external review. Feedback from that review would be incorporated and recommendations refined, leading to compilation of final drafts of the plan and presentation to the City Council for consideration and possible adoption. Staff anticipates providing periodic updates to City Council at key milestones during the planning process.

Attachments:

1. Scottsdale Tourism and & Events Strategic Plan – January 2023

COMMISSIONED BY



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Scottsdale Tourism & Events Strategic Plan

January 2023



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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has been the most significant disruption to global travel and tourism in our industry's history. Profound changes in travel patterns, significant changes in the economics of the industry, and shifts in consumer behavior have been witnessed as a result, which has created new market opportunities and an uneven recovery across various segments of the industry. Some destinations are recovering faster than others, including Scottsdale. Tourism represents a significant share of the Scottsdale economy and supports the betterment of the community. While residents recognize the importance of the industry, the growth of the industry is central to improving the quality of life of residents and visitors.

While household savings have historically declined after a crisis, the COVID-19 crisis is unique as household savings in the United States increased, with travelers eager to spend on leisure trips, leading to a rebound of this segment in open destinations. The affluent travel boom is one of the clearest signs of a spending surge

by the wealthy that is likely to tilt the balance of recovery in luxury destinations despite the rising concerns of inflation.

Scottsdale is a desirable destination that benefits from an attractive image both nationally and internationally, supported by a unique product offering and visitor experience. The future brings enormous opportunities for tourism to take center stage considering its significant contribution to economic growth and development – \$3.3 billion in economic impact and 26,627 jobs in 2019, and \$2.5 billion in economic impact and 21,258 jobs in 2021. The growing consumer demand for travel also brings added challenges locally increasing pressure on communities and the environment.

A clear and shared vision of tourism is a unique opportunity for Scottsdale to grow sustainably as one of the country's most recognized and desirable destinations—a luxury destination in the heart of the Sonoran Desert.



Project Background

To guide the recovery and growth of the industry over the next five years, the Tourism & Events Department of the City of Scottsdale engaged [Resonance](#), in partnership with [Experience Scottsdale](#), in the development of a Tourism & Events Strategic Plan for the [City of Scottsdale](#). It is designed to help stakeholders articulate and share a clear vision for the future—because when people share a vision of the future, it gives them shared belief, shared purpose, and shared passion. The Tourism & Events Strategic Plan provides a roadmap for the management and marketing of tourism in Scottsdale based on an analysis of key trends, an assessment of tourism assets and experiences, a market analysis to identify target visitors, and an engagement plan to better understand community aspirations.

The development of the vision was informed by more than 100 stakeholder interviews to respond to industry aspirations, opportunities, and challenges. To identify future target audiences, a visitor study was developed in partnership with Experience Scottsdale to better understand current perceptions and future aspirations. The study was designed to assess the demographic and psychographic characteristics of previous visitors to Scottsdale and identify the motivating factors that drove previous visitors to select

Scottsdale as their destination of choice. A survey of residents also was conducted to explore how the City of Scottsdale can responsibly grow a tourism industry for the benefit of all, including the local community. It also identified opportunities to align resident and visitor aspirations in the development of the destination.

From a product perspective, Scottsdale was benchmarked in terms of both the quantity and quality of experiences grouped in 10 categories (attractions, connectivity, culinary, culture, lodging, meetings, nightlife, outdoors, shopping, and sightseeing) to assess the performance of the destination. The list of cities included Tempe, Tucson, Sedona, Palm Springs, Santa Barbara, Newport Beach, Santa Fe, Albuquerque, Asheville, St. Petersburg-Clearwater, and Fort Lauderdale.

The project process brought together leaders from the City of Scottsdale, Experience Scottsdale, and other key stakeholders through a series of workshops and consultations to align under a common vision and to identify and prioritize key focus areas for the development, management, and stewardship of Scottsdale and the corresponding strategies and actions required in each of these areas.



Vision

As one of the country's most recognized and desirable luxury destinations, Scottsdale welcomes visitors from around the world who come to enjoy an exceptional Sonoran Desert experience.

From hiking trails to shopping, sports to arts and culture, Scottsdale offers a wealth of experiences that attract active adventurers, urban enthusiasts, business meetings, and world-class events throughout the year.

As stewards of the destination, Experience Scottsdale promotes its unique characteristic while the City of Scottsdale develops and manages the facilities, programming, and events required to enrich both the visitor and resident experience in a manner that seeks to minimize the impact of tourism on our environment while maximizing its economic benefits for everyone involved.



Target Audiences

A key approach to the development of this Strategic Plan was to identify and analyze the perceptions, needs, and interests of residents, prior visitors, and business and leisure travelers to understand who visits Scottsdale and why.

But the visitor of the future may be different than the one we've seen in the past. As such, a trends analysis also was conducted by Resonance to identify emerging new consumer and business travel trends that the Strategic Plan should also consider and respond to. This research was paired with an assessment and benchmarking of Scottsdale's tourism infrastructure, assets, and experiences against competing destinations to identify Scottsdale's current strengths, areas where we need to improve, and potential

opportunities we can develop. Based on this analysis and our vision for the destination, four key target audiences were identified that have the greatest future market potential for Scottsdale.

Leisure

- Active Adventurers
- All-in Enthusiasts

Business

- Bleisure Travel
- Conferences & Meetings

By looking at Scottsdale from the perspective of these audiences, strategies and actions were then identified to cater to the needs and interests of these specific groups. This market-driven approach provides focus to the planning process and also will help inform future marketing efforts.



Active Adventurers

Active Adventurers share a keen interest in outdoor sports, engaging with nature, and health and fitness activities. They take fewer vacations per year to farther destinations, and they aren't particularly interested in family or multi-generational vacations. Active Adventurers also enjoy athletic competitions and more extreme forms of leisure.

LEISURE



All-In Enthusiasts

All-in Enthusiasts are interested in taking most types of vacations, and everything is important when deciding on a destination. They're more likely to participate in a variety of activities, and they go on vacations for many different reasons. Sightseeing, fun attractions, and learning new things are the top activities that they enjoy while on vacation. Shopping, nightlife, and attending events are most preferred by All-in Enthusiasts compared to other types of travelers.

LEISURE



Bleisure Travelers

Bleisure, or 'business and leisure travel,' refers to travelers that extend work trips (i.e., conferences, meetings, and staff retreats) to include leisure time—whether before or after the work event. Extended leisure time typically averages two or more additional days, allowing bleisure travelers to immerse themselves in a range of experiences and activities, depending on their personal interests. Although Gen X-ers still make up a large proportion of bleisure

travelers, fast-growing age groups consist of Millennials (25-34-year-olds) who are now advancing in their careers. The rise of remote work has evolved the concept into blended trips, where work and pleasure are mixed daily.

BUSINESS



Conferences & Meetings

The pandemic has reshaped the size and format of conferences and meetings, with the introduction of hybrid formats. Based on market trends and meeting space capacity in Scottsdale, small to medium conferences and meetings organized by specific businesses or industries offering professional learning and development, as well as networking opportunities, represent the largest market opportunity.

BUSINESS



Experience Principles



Scottsdale is many things to many different people and will always attract a wide variety of visitors from across the nation and around the world. But based on the vision we are seeking to achieve and the audiences we are seeking to attract, eight key experience principles have been prioritized to guide and inform our planning, management, and marketing of Scottsdale as a destination. These include:

1

Community Well-Being

Scottsdale is a place where people live well, get well, and where well-being is defined by not only our own personal physical, spiritual and mental health, but also the health and well-being of the environment and our community.



2

Culture & Creativity

Scottsdale isn't just a place where arts and culture are consumed but created, celebrated, and developed as one of the West's most vibrant arts and culinary scenes.

3

Festivals & Events

Already home to world-class outdoor events, Scottsdale develops and offers indoor facilities to host and welcome the world throughout the year.

4

Meetings & Events

With more than 25% of professionals working remotely in the future, Scottsdale is the destination of choice in the West where companies bring employees and clients together for corporate gatherings, meetings, and events.



5

Outdoor Pursuits

Our natural environment is our most valuable resource. Scottsdale enhances and improves access to these natural assets while reducing the environmental footprint of the tourism industry to protect our natural resources for generations to come.

6

Placemaking & Entertainment

Old Town is the beating heart of the Scottsdale experience – a center for shopping, dining, culture, nightlife, and community gatherings. Old Town and other community centers welcome celebrations throughout the year.

7

Sports Tourism

Scottsdale is a place where people love to play – from amateur sports to collegiate and professional sports, as well as competitions year-round.



8

Travel & Hospitality

As much as Scottsdale cares for its residents and visitors, we care for the people that invest and work in our industry too.

Strategies & Actions

Based on the vision, target audiences, and experience principles developed, a total of 33 corresponding strategies and 115 actions have been identified along with relevant partners. Some of these can be implemented and acted on immediately while others will be pursued and implemented over the long term, and others yet will evolve and be revised over time.

The goal of this Strategic Plan is not to provide a definitive checklist, but rather a living, working document that will focus our energies, resources, and collective action on those areas that have the

potential to generate the most significant impact on the quality of the visitor experience, resident's quality of life, and the contribution of tourism to Scottsdale's economy over time.

In the pages that follow, each experience principle is elaborated on, and an overview of each corresponding strategy is explained with a list of actions identified. These strategies and actions are the basis of an accompanying working Action Plan that recommends what organization should take the lead on each action item, with a timeframe for implementation/completion.



EXPERIENCE PRINCIPLE: CW

Community Well-Being

Scottsdale is a place where people live well, get well, and where well-being is defined by not only our own personal physical, spiritual and mental health, but also the health and well-being of the environment and our community.

As a tourism-centric destination, Scottsdale aspires to engage and consult with residents to ensure tourism-driven investments are aligned with community priorities and improve quality of life. When unchecked, rapid tourism growth can lead to significant impacts on the day-to-day lives of residents, often resulting in negative perceptions or even resentment towards visitors. In 2022, nearly half of Scottsdale residents surveyed (46%) by Resonance believe tourism has a positive impact on their life as a resident, while 1-in-4 (26%) have a negative impact, including overcrowding—a new benchmark to track community perception of tourism over time.

STRATEGY CW.1

Establish Scottsdale as a Well-Being Community & Destination

Scottsdale has long been recognized as a high-end leisure destination, with the Sonoran Desert – the most biologically diverse of the four U.S. deserts – as an identifying feature by residents and visitors. Scottsdale is a spiritual, healing, and purifying place attracting residents for its

unmatched quality of life and visitors for its unique wellness experiences. The positioning of Scottsdale as a well-being destination is a natural evolution based on supporting products and amenities, and its natural surroundings.

ACTIONS

1. Support the implementation of community well-being assessments and practices to improve population health and economic vitality
2. Promote Scottsdale as a well-being destination
3. Expand and promote opportunities to provide input into city planning initiatives involving transit, land planning, parks, and recreation where a potential tourism impact exists



STRATEGY CW.2

Focus on Community Quality of Life

Scottsdale is described as beautiful, clean, safe, and providing a high-level quality of life according to the community survey. At the same time, residents recognize the major economic contribution, jobs, and tax benefits that the tourism industry brings to the economy.

Scottsdale residents also realize the impact that tourism can sometimes have on the level of traffic, cost of housing, cost of living, road/street quality, safety and crime, cleanliness, and crowds. The monitoring of perception and resident priorities about tourism and its impact on quality of life is necessary to inform how Scottsdale is managed as a destination.

They acknowledge that these same activities and experiences are key contributors to their local quality of life, from arts, entertainment, and culture to retail and restaurants, events and festivals, sports and outdoor recreation, and parks.

ACTIONS

1. Balance visitor and resident access to city-owned facilities and public spaces for events, and align festivals and events with resident and visitor aspirations
2. Expand communications about the benefits of tourism on the local economy through local media and news reporting

STRATEGY CW.3

Develop Unique Wellness Experiences

While traditional wellness experiences are widely known and recognized as a luxurious Scottsdale experience, the expansion of wellness into well-being experiences is an opportunity to combine other types of activities to help foster and

establish Scottsdale’s identity and reputation as a leading well-being destination. More wellness programming shows how the city not only embraces well-being but also celebrates it across communities.

ACTIONS

1. Engage with private-sector stakeholders to increase wellness product development efforts
2. Create unique and customizable wellness packages
3. Connect wellness experiences to other types of activities to make these more accessible and connected to the surrounding environment
4. Develop and support a signature wellness event

STRATEGY CW.4

Position Scottsdale as a Thought Leader in Sustainable Tourism

Following the United Nations Climate Change Conference COP26, the United States committed to reducing emissions by 50-52% from 2005 levels by 2030. In Scottsdale, recent environmental events have accelerated the development of new programs and solutions to face growing challenges. With local best practices, advanced certification standards,

and new sustainability programs, Scottsdale is well-positioned to be a thought leader in sustainable tourism. To reinforce sustainable commitments, consistent integration of sustainability in all aspects of communication is particularly important to set a standard and address the issue actively and consistently with visitors, residents, and stakeholders.

ACTIONS

1. Commit to a sustainable transition pledge for the industry supported by the United Nations World Tourism Organization Sustainable Development Goals, which seek to balance environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development
2. Support the city's Sustainable Plan, and create and implement a sustainable tourism program for Scottsdale
3. Promote sustainable practices within the city and amongst industry partners, particularly with water management, as well as energy, heat, light, and land management
4. Support the adoption of existing international/national sustainable tourism certification standards
5. Evaluate opportunities to certify professional staff in Sustainable Tourism Destination Management
6. Promote environmental sustainability at events, attractions, and venues, and include sustainability themes



STRATEGY CW.5

Support New Connectivity Options

Connectivity to and within Scottsdale is important to serve the community and connect visitors to Old Town, especially given the city's official limits and natural geography. According to recent surveys, residents and visitors enjoy the

value of Scottsdale's proximity to activities and experiences. The improvement and development of active transportation options is a critical investment to limit congestion, increase hosting capacity, and improve accessibility.

ACTIONS

1. Support the Transportation Action Plan to improve active transportation between key areas and districts
2. Advocate for additional active transportation improvements on key streets/corridors within the community



EXPERIENCE PRINCIPLE: CC

Culture & Creativity

Scottsdale isn't just a place where arts and culture are consumed but created, celebrated, and developed as one of the West's most vibrant arts and culinary scenes.

Scottsdale is a must-visit destination for travelers looking to learn about Native American, Southwestern, and Western history. Scottsdale has evolved as a destination and has quickly become a center for art in the United States where culture and creativity are celebrated around signature events.

STRATEGY CC.1

Position Scottsdale as a Center for Artists, Art & Design

Arts and culture are part of Scottsdale's identity. Both visitors and residents recognize the access and quality of cultural experiences, including Canal Convergence and the Scottsdale ArtWalk. Scottsdale has an opportunity to further promote

artists, art, and design and program Old Town districts to attract affluent travelers. The maintenance, investment, and accessibility of cultural experiences all support such a positioning.

ACTIONS

1. Continue to support, plan for, and manage Scottsdale's arts and culture programs and facilities, including increasing visitor experiences
2. Launch a cultural assessment of the destination to identify gaps, strengths, and growth opportunities
3. Support the expansion of arts and cultural organizations efforts and initiatives and increase visitor experiences
4. Expand public art citywide to connect existing and new public art installations into an art circuit for both visitors and residents
5. Utilize art and placemaking to create places that demonstrate local culture – celebrating the desert character, Native American heritage, and architecture – both citywide and within Old Town
6. Create a network of champions to explore the application process to become a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization City of Design



STRATEGY CC.2

Grow the Scottsdale Culture Corridor

Cultural tourism has been rapidly on the rise, especially among affluent travelers, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization. Affluent travelers seek attractions and products that enable them to experience historic, culinary, and cultural features of destinations; whether within the four walls of a museum/institution or

across the fabric of the city. The concentration of anchor cultural institutions in Old Town is a unique opportunity to expand the Scottsdale culture corridor and further connect arts and culture to the visitor experience. The integration of these assets makes Old Town an authentic and complete destination.

ACTIONS

1. Engage with Arts District stakeholders to align on objectives, support ongoing economic activity, and support rapid industry recovery
2. To anchor the arts and culture experience, expand connections among the Arts District, Scottsdale’s Museum of the West, Scottsdale Artists’ School, and Scottsdale Civic Center that includes Scottsdale Center for Performing Arts and the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art
3. Package and coordinate arts experiences in Old Town

STRATEGY CC.3

Bring Museum Events & Experiences Outdoors

Scottsdale’s culture is about much more than what can be housed within the walls of our museums. It lies within the architecture of our built environment, our city’s artists, creators and makers, and the stories performed throughout the city. The display

of art in public is key to supporting Scottsdale’s reputation as an art and design destination. New formats and innovative technologies are introducing new mediums to present art in unusual places and activate communities.

ACTIONS

1. Work with local institutions to expand cultural programs outdoors and democratize art
2. Develop an ‘arts in the desert’ program
3. Introduce a museum collection digitization program that enables interactive audience engagement

STRATEGY CC.4

Position Scottsdale as a Leading Culinary & Wine Destination

As competition between destinations increases, uniquely local and regional cultural heritage has become increasingly important to attract visitors. Culinary tourism and agritourism have flourished in the metropolitan Phoenix area to celebrate authenticity by preserving local traditions and diversities. Communities have the ingredients to grow culinary tourism by leveraging the history, heritage, and culture behind the experiences.

Scottsdale's culinary scene is growing into a foodie oasis in the Sonoran Desert. Its Southwestern, Mexican, Native American, and Sonoran Desert influences are a revelation for many visitors. With more restaurants than any other competing destination, according to the destination assessment, Scottsdale is home to talented and passionate chefs and owners celebrating Arizona produce every day. The city has a unique opportunity to develop and promote Scottsdale as a year-round culinary tourism destination for visitors and residents by structuring new experiences.

ACTIONS

1. Leverage Scottsdale's inventive and thriving culinary industry to develop a fully integrated culinary tourism experience and showcase Arizona cuisine
2. Provide technical assistance that enables current food and beverage establishments to develop new types of experiences
3. Focus attention on local and regional food production, breweries, and wineries in Arizona, including expanding culinary events that spotlight local restaurants and businesses
4. Explore ways to expand the promotion of culinary routes and tours in Scottsdale
5. Evaluate a year-round farmers market



STRATEGY CC.5

Celebrate Native American, Southwest & Western Heritage

Scottsdale's heritage features a diversity of cultures to celebrate and embrace in the development of the destination. Learning new things and visiting cultural attractions are generally popular activities while on vacation, and the desire to participate in Native American experiences has grown rapidly to reach 40% of U.S. affluent travelers.

With a growing interest and awareness from travelers to discover local cultures, the celebration of Native American, Southwest, and Western heritage is an opportunity to develop new types of experiences and grow the share of minority-owned businesses. With domestic travel on the rise, the introduction of new types of experiences will build stronger connections with Native American communities and cultures.

ACTIONS

1. Encourage the celebration of Native American heritage and culture past and present as well as Southwest and Western heritage
2. Support the development of unique and authentic Native American tourism experiences and activities through a destination development fund
3. Promote Native American tourism businesses that showcase the unique and immersive experiences offered in Scottsdale



EXPERIENCE PRINCIPLE: FE

Festivals & Events

Already home to world-class outdoor events, Scottsdale develops and offers indoor facilities to host and welcome the world throughout the year.

With a rich heritage, Scottsdale hosts a diversity of annual events and festivals, which residents and visitors enjoy according to both surveys. Festivals highlight Scottsdale's unique characteristics and attributes, and several signature events are recognized nationally and internationally from equestrian to sports, and arts and culture.

As key drivers of visitation, the expansion of existing events and the development of new events is an opportunity to strengthen Scottsdale's vibrant image and diversify the types of programming to attract new audiences. Clement temperatures in fall, winter, and spring have allowed for extensive outdoor programming across the city. Indoor facilities play a key role in attracting major events year-round and growing Scottsdale's hosting capacity.

STRATEGY FE.1

Increase the Positive Impact of Existing Events & Attract New Year-Round Events

Scottsdale is home to a variety of festivals and events that entertain and attract residents and visitors alike, offering music, retail, art, dining, and entertainment that have attracted hundreds of thousands of attendees and contribute to the brand of Scottsdale. Supplementing these existing events, which are outdoor and limited by weather to the fall, winter, and spring, with a new

signature indoor event would enable Scottsdale to further define its brand as a city, attract new out-of-town event attendees, and fill a hole in the city-wide events calendar in summer. Attracting new festivals and events, as well as retaining the existing festivals, are crucial to maintaining the high-level experience that Scottsdale residents and visitors expect.

ACTIONS

1. Encourage and facilitate the development of a world-renowned indoor signature event
2. Focus on developing or attracting events that will increase hotel stays, especially during the summer
3. Concentrate on attracting festivals supporting the Scottsdale brand
4. Expand, diversify, and extend Canal Convergence
5. Review and consider restructuring the special event application process and guide information



STRATEGY FE.2

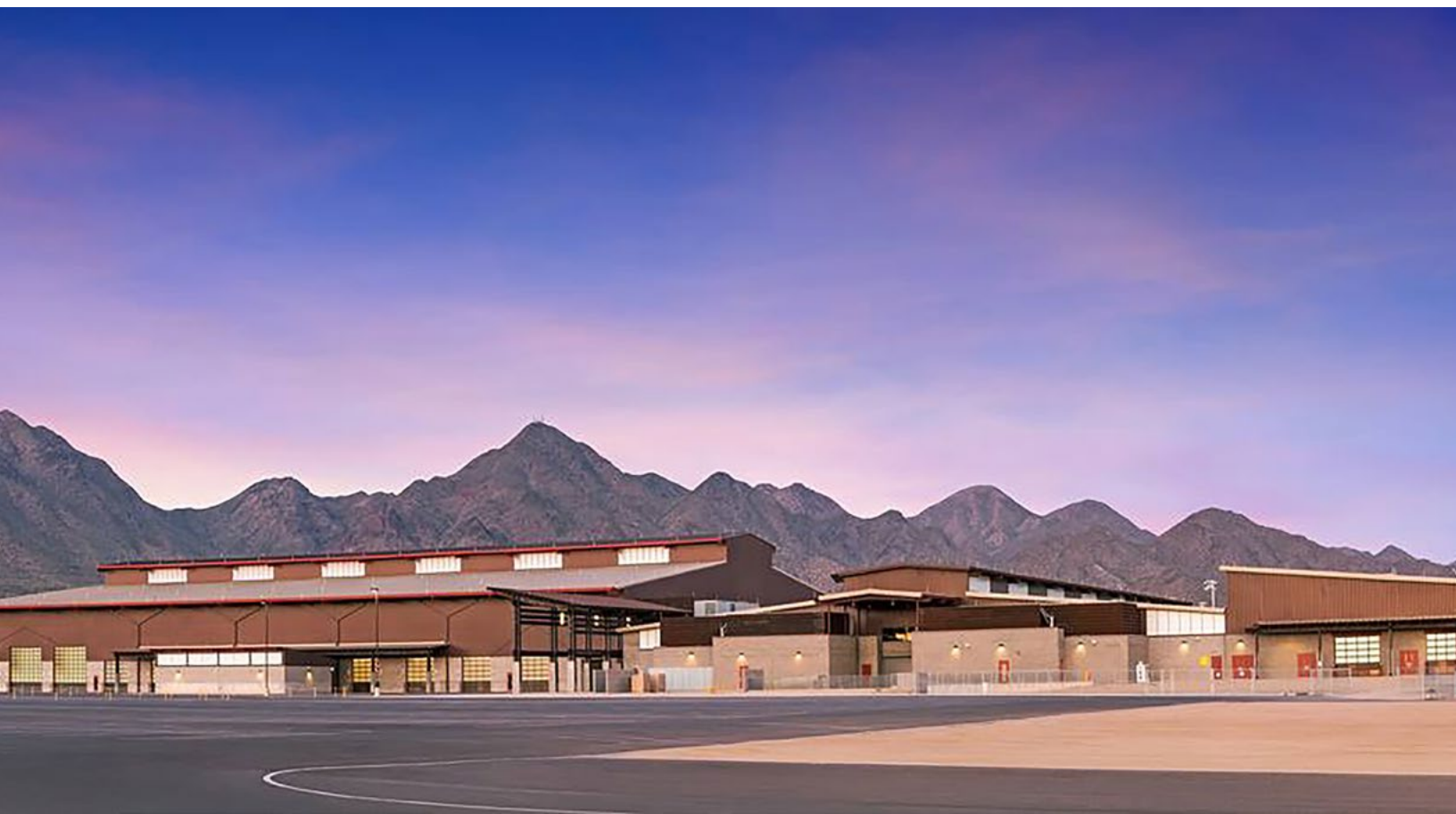
Improve & Diversify WestWorld's Hosting Capacities

WestWorld is one of the premier equestrian venues in the country and is less competitive in convention and banquet events. Unlike most convention and event facilities nationwide, WestWorld operates to maximize operating profit, or limit the operating loss, as opposed to maximizing the number of room nights or the economic and fiscal impact that it has on Scottsdale. Shifting how WestWorld is evaluated

to align with traditional convention centers would enable the operators to host larger events that attract attendees from a wider area and generate more room nights in Scottsdale. This shift in operations could require the addition of a new multipurpose ballroom space, a new catering facility, and improved landscaping and signage. And it repositions WestWorld as a premier equestrian and events facility in the country.

ACTIONS

1. Modify the city's evaluation/performance metrics for WestWorld
2. Upgrade existing facilities and landscaping to optimize efficiencies and performance of WestWorld
3. Study the feasibility of developing a new ballroom facility, a new catering facility, and a new performance venue



STRATEGY FE.3

Expand Civic Center Activities & Performing Arts Capacity

The redeveloped Civic Center offers an opportunity for Scottsdale to plan more events, activities, and activations in the heart of the city that improve the resident and visitor experience. Programming the space with local art, entertainment, retail, or performance activities, both on weekdays and weekends, will attract residents and visitors to Old Town, and enhance the liveliness of the

area. Fully developing the master plan for the Civic Center will make it an even more attractive destination and increase the number of events and activities that can occur. Exploring additional venue developments for the Civic Center should be considered to further Scottsdale's brand as an arts destination.

ACTIONS

1. Allow existing events to expand on the redeveloped Civic Center
2. Attract and plan Civic Center events that will take advantage of the newfound capacity provided by the ongoing capital improvements
3. Explore additional funding to fully implement the Civic Center Master Plan
4. Study the long-term feasibility of a new and larger performing arts venue



STRATEGY FE.4

Increase Off-Season Visitation to Scottsdale Stadium

Scottsdale Stadium is a primary event space for the city, and it needs to be used as such. Leveraging the baseball facilities for non-spring training baseball, like the Pac-12 Baseball Tournament, is an effective way to increase the use of the stadium, but there are only so many baseball events of that size. The types of events the stadium hosts need to diversify.

The development of the indoor event space enhances the types of events that the stadium can host, but it needs staff that can sell and operate the space effectively. Other Phoenix area cities use their stadium space, including parking lots and field space, year-round to host home shows, festivals, and car shows, among other events that do not generate a large amount of noise.

ACTIONS

1. Streamline the booking process and develop a marketing and sales strategy to attract events that best fit the venue
2. Attract baseball league play outside of spring training
3. Consider the use of the stadium as part of city-wide festivals and events
4. Expand city's marketing and sales efforts to attract both tourism- and community-driven events in indoor venues at the stadium
5. Explore potential uses of the outdoor space and the baseball field for events that do not create significant noise pollution



EXPERIENCE PRINCIPLE: ME

Meetings & Events

With more than 25% of professionals working remotely in the future, Scottsdale is the destination of choice in the West where companies bring employees and clients together for corporate gatherings, meetings, and events. Indeed, virtual events don't connect communities in the same way that in-person events do, and the role of in-person meetings will evolve to become more valuable and meaningful.

STRATEGY ME.1

Develop More Offsite Venues

Scottsdale offers numerous venues for group meetings and events, primarily in hotel and resort properties. Event planners choose these venues because they offer high-quality conferencing services at an appropriate price point. But event planners also are seeking to improve the experience of attendees to multi-day conferences and meetings by scheduling activities outside the selected venues. Offsite

venues can provide entertainment, education, and team-building experiences to event attendees. Offsite activities may include shows, sightseeing tours, outdoor adventure, food and wine offerings, spectator sports, participatory sports as well as visits to museums and other attractions. The successful sale of new and repeat group business depends on renewing the destination appeal of Scottsdale.

ACTIONS

1. Identify opportunities to develop new and existing venues for offsite events in areas throughout Scottsdale based on external input from the Experience Scottsdale Customer Advisory Board
2. Expand partnerships with museums and other unique venues to be adapted for corporate offsites
3. Expand the inclusion of tourism as part of the development process of key infrastructure projects



STRATEGY ME.2

Align Meetings & Events with Target Industries

The often-overlooked value of group meetings is the benefit of the information exchange, trade, and relationship building among attendees. These intangible benefits can be profound and long term, extending well beyond the length of the events. The Scottsdale business community can benefit from innovations and learning that may

emanate from events targeted at their industries. Attendee familiarization with Scottsdale may foster employee attraction and retention. Business leaders can become Scottsdale ambassadors who invite industry associations and trade groups to meet in Scottsdale.

ACTIONS

1. Explore additional alignments between Experience Scottsdale's convention sales strategy and Choose Scottsdale's economic development strategy, and build on communication and collaboration efforts
2. Continue to target business meetings and events in the following industries: IT Services and Software, Financial and Insurance Services, Technology, Healthcare Services and Innovation, Logistics Management, Corporate Headquarters, and Tourism



EXPERIENCE PRINCIPLE: OP

Outdoor Pursuits

Our natural environment is our most valuable resource. Scottsdale enhances and improves access to these natural assets while reducing the environmental footprint of the tourism industry to protect our natural resources for generations to come.

According to past Scottsdale visitors, the city's nature and parks are the most important drivers for choosing the destination to visit. As travel becomes more accessible and visitors continue to seek outdoor recreational pursuits at record-breaking rates post-pandemic, especially amongst "Active Adventurer" traveler segments, Scottsdale will need to develop new ways to address capacity pressures and support responsible travel practices.

STRATEGY OP.1

Elevate the McDowell Sonoran Preserve as a Premier Outdoor Destination

Scottsdale's McDowell Sonoran Preserve is an anchor outdoor adventure attraction welcoming more than a million visitors annually. The 30,500-acre preserve offers over 225 miles of recreational trails for visitors of all abilities and has widely been recognized for its environmental excellence.

As it grows in popularity and recognition, the Preserve has an opportunity to increase year-round

access for a range of visitors through expanded product offerings, activities, and targeted marketing and promotion. Balancing this growth sustainably, however, will require the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy to further mobilize its large network of volunteers to manage the Preserve's carrying capacity and visitor experience.

ACTIONS

1. Expand collaboration with the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy to increase welcome capacity and safety training
2. Expand the promotion of hiking, biking, and other activities allowed within the McDowell Sonoran Preserve
3. Promote Scottsdale as a unique desert recreational experience, including easy access to the wider desert recreational network around Scottsdale



STRATEGY OP.2

Expand Outdoor Active Programming

Wellness tourism, including trips for spa retreats and yoga and meditation training, has dominated North America as consumers continually seek to restore their health and well-being as part of travel experiences. Surveys of past travelers to Scottsdale also found that a large share would like to try health and wellness experiences as part of their trips.

To differentiate Scottsdale's health and wellness events and programming from those in competitive markets, the city will need to find and build on unique and authentic products and experiences; and work closely with national organizations with existing networks in the health and wellness industry to bring quality programs and events to the market.

ACTIONS

1. Create additional lifestyle events, activities, and business opportunities focused on health, fitness, and living well
2. Attract internationally recognized outdoor, recreation and wellness event series to connect the city to similar active audiences

STRATEGY OP.3

Activate the Arizona Canal

The Arizona Canal, which measures more than 50 miles between Mesa and Peoria, is a regional utility waterway steeped in rich history dating back more than 100 years. While it currently serves predominantly as a key recreation amenity for residents in each community, including Scottsdale, the canal has the potential to become a year-round visitor attraction given its scenic vistas and ongoing investment and revitalization of sections of the canal.

While comprehensive wayfinding and connected multi-use paths and trails will increase access and visibility of the canal, creative placemaking and programming at key nodes and intersections where canal-side shops and restaurants are clustered will extend visitor dwell time, offering more opportunities for visitors to interact with the canal.

ACTIONS

1. Encourage the use of the canal system network – including the Arizona Canal and the Crosscut Canal – as a connective network to tie together Old Town districts, adjacent neighborhoods, and other city and regional multi-use path and trail systems
2. Utilize creative and collaborative programming to bring residents and visitors along the canal

STRATEGY OP.4

Promote Easy Access to Outdoor Recreation Attractions

Today, the path to purchase for travelers is complex, crossing various platforms, media, and devices. Travelers are researching online using myriad sources, and planning and booking are increasingly done through online platforms well in advance of a visit.

To successfully capture the spending potential of visitors, outdoor recreation attractions and tours

will need to be highly visible online and will need to feature calls to action to effectively convert travelers to participants at outdoor recreation attractions – including golf courses. A survey of past visitors found that golfing remains an untapped competitive advantage among the many available outdoor recreation activities in Scottsdale with 69% of visitors rating golfing in Scottsdale as ‘Excellent’.

ACTIONS

1. Evaluate the development of a physical and/or a digital hub to book outdoor activities
2. Endorse and create a network of public and private partners specialized in delivering quality outdoor experiences and activities
3. Develop thematic sites of interest along key sections of multi-use paths and trails to encourage outdoor recreation and exploration
4. Strengthen industry collaboration between the golf and tourism sectors to reach target audiences, optimize efforts, support product development and innovation, and increase access



STRATEGY OP.5

Promote & Grow Scottsdale as a Bicycling Destination

The regional expansion and investment in cycling infrastructure over the last few decades has not only increased resident access to parks and open spaces but also supported the growth of bicycle tourism, or any travel with the intention to include bicycle trips – whether on- or off-road, competitive, or recreational, linear or looped.

Across Arizona, good weather and variable terrains and slopes have created favorable

conditions for year-round bicycling races and events, and the Cactus Cup is one example of a marquee event near Scottsdale drawing thousands of visitors to the region. To continue building on this momentum, Scottsdale should work to expand programs/events beyond marquee races so that the outdoor recreational activity remains accessible to a broader range of visitors and residents and fosters an image of bicycle-friendliness across the city.

ACTIONS

1. Identify opportunities to position Scottsdale as a road and mountain bicycling destination and improve facilities and infrastructure
2. Support road and mountain bicycling for all ages and abilities and expand touring circuits that connect city neighborhoods and the Indian Bend Wash
3. Develop a comprehensive interactive multi-use paths and trails map
4. Hold annual bike events/races on various multi-use paths and trails outside the Preserve to promote quality and amenities in the destination



EXPERIENCE PRINCIPLE: PE

Placemaking & Entertainment

Old Town is the beating heart of the Scottsdale experience – a center for shopping, dining, culture, nightlife, and community gatherings. Old Town and other community centers welcome celebrations throughout the year.

From Scottsdale ArtWalk and the Old Town Farmers Market to the widely anticipated Canal Convergence, Old Town and its distinct districts are a must-visit attraction in its own right.

To build on Scottsdale's performance in the category of 'attractions', it is important to ensure Old Town not only offers a diverse set of places and attractions to visit but also things to do upon arrival to extend visitor dwell time – whether attending free outdoor programs/events, participating in historic tours, or exploring historic structures on foot.

STRATEGY PE.1

Expand Placemaking Initiatives in Old Town

Increasingly, the success of downtowns is dependent on far more than the sum of its anchor institutions and businesses. Visitors today expect a vibrant public realm that not only knits disparate attractions together through multiple modes of travel but also enables them to immerse themselves in local cultural experiences through free outdoor activities and events, and creative art installations.

While there have been recent investments to enhance the public realm in Old Town, the area continues to face challenges around pedestrian connectivity and year-round vibrancy. As a must-see attraction in Scottsdale, Old Town will need to leverage its stronghold in arts and culture to bring to life its public realm through a mix of tactical placemaking projects that animate public and private spaces, foster year-round day and nighttime activity and traffic, and create safe and enjoyable streetscapes.

ACTIONS

1. Create a dedicated portion of the community arts grant program for alley mural and programming projects
2. Incorporate digital placemaking and lighting initiatives in Old Town to promote nighttime activity, including lighting projections, gateway lighting, and festival/holiday lighting
3. Incorporate the Old Town Character Area Plan guidelines into the design/redesign, programming, and maintenance of public places



STRATEGY PE.2

Enhance Walkability & Access to/within Old Town

Scottsdale boasts favorable year-round weather; however, despite having good weather, the city still ranks sixth in its competitive set for outdoor activities. While building upon outdoor recreation product offerings in nearby parks and preserves may be one obvious way to compete, another untapped opportunity lies in ensuring areas within Old Town also support outdoor visitor activity – mainly walking and biking.

As outlined in the Old Town Character Area Plan, there are several strategies that the city can implement to begin creating people-oriented streets that support a park-once-and-walk practice amongst residents and visitors; improve overall mobility and circulation to, from, and within Old Town; and create a distinct sense of place.

ACTIONS

1. Implement streetscape and pedestrian amenity recommendations identified in the Old Town Character Area Plan
2. Develop and implement a wayfinding strategy in Old Town to anchor and connect the districts, Arizona Canal, and Scottsdale Fashion Square, and to support exploration and enhance visitor experiences
3. Continue to support programs/initiatives to improve residents' and visitors' sense of safety and security
4. Develop a transportation demand management plan for Old Town to evaluate capacity, manage traffic and improve overall access



STRATEGY PE.3

Strengthen the Positioning of Character Districts in Old Town

Old Town consists of nine distinct districts – Historic Old Town, Arts District, Civic Center, Fifth Avenue Shopping District, Scottsdale Fashion Square, Entertainment District, Brown & Stetson District, Scottsdale Waterfront, and Southbridge. However, without an Old Town management entity, most stakeholders in the various districts have not been engaged in visioning processes and there is limited coordination of events

and marketing across each district, leading to the inconsistent brand recognition of districts within Old Town. While Experience Scottsdale has taken the initiative to identify each district in its marketing tools for Old Town, there are still other untapped opportunities to elevate the distinct identities of each district with the support of business and property owners.

ACTIONS

1. Set forth a clear vision and direction for the development of Old Town's districts
2. Explore changes to the city department to better support Old Town districts, including improving communications and liaisons with business and property owners
3. Consider opportunities to improve gateways for each district
4. Create opportunities for districts to market their unique character



STRATEGY PE.4

Position & Market Scottsdale as a Premier Luxury Destination

Scottsdale is one of the world's most exciting destinations for luxury travel with a unique collection of high-end hospitality experiences from shopping to arts, dining to well-being. With such a rich collection of amenities, Scottsdale is already positioned to welcome affluent travelers.

As consumers continue to place more value on experiences, it is critical for both the product and the marketing to match changing consumer behaviors to anchor Scottsdale's position as a premier luxury destination.

ACTIONS

1. Align the vision of Scottsdale as a luxury destination with key stakeholders in retail, arts, hotels, and more to increase awareness and reach new audiences
2. Encourage programming in key shopping areas to increase visitation
3. Explore opportunities to expand the promotion of retail in Old Town



EXPERIENCE PRINCIPLE: ST

Sports Tourism

Scottsdale is a place where people love to play – from amateur sports to collegiate and professional sports, as well as competitions year-round.

Sports events and competitions play an increasingly important role in tourism as sports tourism is a significant and growing market for destinations in the U.S. The lodging and restaurant industries currently benefit from the demand generated by events at major league sports venues in and around Scottsdale. Amateur sports activities also have grown dramatically in the region as major new venues have been added in neighboring communities. Amateur sports activities may continue to grow as the propensity of families to spend on youth sports increases. Scottsdale can increase the positive impact of professional and amateur sports by working with neighboring communities to attract more events and increasing sports programming.

STRATEGY ST.1

Expand Amateur Sports Participation Year-Round

All sports have their seasons. Attracting a wider variety of sports tournaments and events can provide more consistent support for the hospitality industry. This can be accomplished through

increased coordination among the public-sector entities that operate venues, destination sales staff that work to attract events, and tournament and event organizers that sponsor events.

ACTIONS

1. Develop a sports strategy in partnership with Scottsdale Parks & Recreation to define capacity, growth potential, and new development opportunities for sports tourism
2. Advocate for tourism improvements as part of Parks & Recreation strategies
3. Evaluate the opportunity to invest in e-sports facilities as a potential alternative during summer months
4. Seek multi-year contracts with tournament organizers and improve the booking process at city-owned facilities
5. Capitalize on sports as an important driver for visitation through participation in room blocks for large tournaments in the Phoenix metropolitan area

STRATEGY ST.2

Increase Outdoor Sports Programming

In addition to attracting events that are sponsored by outside organizations, Scottsdale can actively program outdoor sports events. This can include running and cycling events that use routes

through the city as well as events that may be at specific outdoor venues. These events can range from cornhole tournaments to eating contests and include many non-traditional events.

ACTIONS

1. Support year-round sports programming
2. Market a year-round calendar of free sports events on existing platforms
3. Promote the development of community sports events from a local to a regional scale

STRATEGY ST.3

Anchor Scottsdale as a Basecamp for Collegiate & Professional Sports

While few major leagues and college stadiums and arenas are in Scottsdale, the city offers a lodging supply and tourist amenities that make it an ideal location for associated activities such as media events, hosting teams, and other events

surrounding national and international sports events. Scottsdale can build on its past success in seeking more opportunities to serve as a base camp for collegiate and professional sports.

ACTIONS

1. Build on Scottsdale's strength for attracting sporting entertainment opportunities and signature special events
2. Increase city-based sports tourism marketing efforts to bid for and deliver sports conferences
3. Collaborate with regional destinations to better connect and develop more tourism products and experiences



EXPERIENCE PRINCIPLE: TA

Travel & Hospitality Advocacy

As much as Scottsdale cares for its residents and visitors, we care for the people that invest and work in our industry too. However, too often, the tourism and hospitality industry (and the processes and tactics by which the city fosters its sustainable growth) are misunderstood and undervalued by community leaders and residents. A strategy for better communicating the significant opportunity that the visitor economy brings to the region's quality of life and economic prosperity is required.

STRATEGY TA.1

Steward Diversity & Inclusion in the Industry

As diversity, equity, and inclusion are core values for today’s communities and de-stinations, the city will commit to identifying strategies to ensure that all voices will be heard and valued

and all residents will have opportunities to join the tourism and hospitality community in meaningful ways.

ACTIONS

1. Represent the diversity in the community and travelers through all marketing and communication channels
2. Communicate diversity and inclusion best practices with industry partners, which could include training programs and an industry toolkit
3. Engage partners in the creation of diversity and inclusion initiatives and goals

STRATEGY TA.2

Advocate for Tourism in the Region

One of the reasons that the visitor economy and destination marketing are not valued in some communities is that professionals in the field have traditionally used industry measures to make their case. Hotel profitability and

non-resident tax revenues mean little to many community leaders and residents. A new communication strategy needs to be developed to explain how tourism improves the lives of citizens in ways that are meaningful to them.

ACTIONS

1. Engage with City leaders and stakeholders to communicate to residents the importance of Scottsdale’s tourism industry to the economy
2. Act as spokesperson for the development of the industry to potential investors, visitors, and industry stakeholders
3. Engage with regional municipalities to align Tourism & Events Strategic Plan strategies
4. Ensure the visitor perspective is considered in city and regional planning and alignment occurs with the recommendations of the Tourism & Events Strategic Plan

STRATEGY TA.3

Support & Advocate for Tourism Labor Force Development

The tourism and hospitality workforce has been the sector of the U.S. economy that has experienced the slowest recovery in the wake of the pandemic. To succeed in such a competitive

environment for talent, Scottsdale must develop an intentional plan to attract and retain workers in the tourism and hospitality sector.

ACTIONS

1. Study and assess the Scottsdale tourism workforce including needs, requirements, forecast of labor supply and demand, skills, education and training, and career pathways
 2. Support labor attraction efforts for the hospitality industry, including advocating for additional changes to immigration policies to address industry labor shortages
 3. Engage with economic, community, and educational partners to launch a tourism talent task force to lead a workforce development strategy, including the exploration of ways to promote tourism careers, upskill and retain talent, and support scholarship programs
 4. Cross-promote existing tourism employment hubs and career centers to increase the visibility of industry opportunities
-

STRATEGY TA.4

Advocate for Labor Standards & Talent Well-Being

Beyond attracting top talent, Scottsdale will seek to address the root causes behind why the

tourism workforce has been slow to return to the workplace in innovative new ways.

ACTIONS

1. Advocate to improve labor standards in the industry and share best practices with industry partners
2. Advocate for more affordable housing requirements as part of new developments in the city
3. Engage with industry partners to facilitate, deploy, and support alternative transportation options to mitigate this barrier to entry for some workers

STRATEGY TA.5

Invest in Destination Digitization

As today's (and tomorrow's) travel consumers will be analyzing, choosing, and experiencing destinations in new and increasingly digital

means, Scottsdale can share its story in more innovative ways.

ACTIONS

1. Utilize alternative models for delivering visitor information through digital kiosks, which inspire visitors and help them discover more of Scottsdale
2. Utilize innovative, new approaches and technologies to deliver real-time visitor servicing and engage with visitors at the right time, in the right place with the right information



COMMISSIONED BY



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



Tourism & Events Strategic Plan

Staff Presentation

Kevin Burke

Sr. Director of Economic Development and Tourism

Tuesday, February 10, 2026



Action

Presentation, discussion, and possible direction regarding updates to the Tourism & Events Strategic Plan.



Background

Tourism efforts in Scottsdale are guided by the Tourism & Events Strategic Plan, approved by City Council in January 2023 and running through FY 2027/28.

Eight key experience principles are prioritized in the plan:

1. Community Well-Being
2. Culture & Creativity
3. Festivals & Events
4. Meetings & Events
5. Outdoor Pursuits
6. Placemaking & Entertainment
7. Sports Tourism
8. Travel & Hospitality



In 2024, visitors generated an estimated **\$3.7 billion** in total economic impact

Analysis & Assessment

Updating the Strategic Plan prior to the formal end will help Scottsdale respond to market changes, build on recent tourism growth, and better align priorities.

The new plan will:

- Provide a focused roadmap for Scottsdale's Tourism & Events
- Establish goals and key performance indicators
- Deliver performance tracking framework



Next Steps

Subject to City Council approval of the FY 2026/27 budget, next steps include:

- Consultant engagement & scope development
- Research, data analysis & stakeholder input
- Draft plan for internal & external review
- Final recommendations presented to City Council





Lane, Benjamin

From: notifications@cognitofrms.com on behalf of City of Scottsdale
<notifications@cognitofrms.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 10, 2026 1:49 PM
To: Lane, Benjamin
Subject: City Council Public Written Comment Form - David N. Smith
Attachments: 02102026 Comments.docx

⚠ External Email: Please use caution if opening links or attachments!

City of Scottsdale

Web Scottsdale City Council Meeting Written Comment Form

[Open Form](#)

Entry Details

Agenda Item

MEETING DATE	2/10/2026
WHICH AGENDA ITEM WOULD YOU LIKE TO COMMENT ON?	WS. Public Comment

Name

FULL NAME	David N. Smith
NAME OF GROUP OR ORGANIZATION	self

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CITY

Scottsdale

Comment

COMMENT

see uploaded document

Attachments

FILE UPLOAD

02102026 Comments.docx

Mayor and members of Council...

I offer the following considerations for tonight's Work Study session Revisiting the Tourism & Events Strategic Plan:

First: To ensure "the visitor perspective is considered in city planning" (see page 3 of Plan), add a section to every Council Agenda staff report to describe the "probable impact on tourism." This would be required for every agenda item including new development, liquor licenses, etc. etc.

Second: Reiterate the importance of Old Town as (page 21) "a unique cultural institution to expand the Scottsdale culture corridor and further connect arts and culture to the visitor experience" as well as (page 38) the area that "knits disparate attractions together."

Third: Support this belief with actionable **marketing plans** (page 41) that position and expand the promotion of Old Town to reinforce "Scottsdale's position as a Premier Luxury Destination."

Fourth: As you actively encourage the development of events in new year-round air-conditioned venues (page 25) consider, again, the importance of marketing Old Town venues, including the Museum of the West, as the fulfillment of this goal.

Fifth: As you study the long-term feasibility of a new and larger performing arts venue (page 27), consider obtaining the collaborative input from all performing arts organizations in the city that attract the largest audiences: Arizona MusicFest and Scottsdale Arts; to those with the smallest audiences including, for example, Ravenscroft, Don Bluth Theater, Desert Stages and the Kerr Cultural Center.

David N. Smith