



Hamilton County Tourism, Inc.

Vision 2025

HAMILTON COUNTY TOURISM VISION 2025

Not long ago, Hamilton County cities and towns focused primarily on providing infrastructure and services that come with unprecedented growth in population. Highly valued school systems, exceptional quality of life and smart growth management attracted residents, businesses and investors in record numbers.

As rapid growth finally stabilized, it allowed leadership to catch their breath. They looked at their communities through a longer lens. They dreamed and asked, "What if?"

What if we build an acoustically perfect concert hall and performing arts center to attract world-renowned artists? What if we position ourselves as an incubator of entrepreneurial talent to fuel innovation for generations to come? What if we invest in gateways and roadways to streamline traffic and serve as a national model? What if we build the largest sports complex in the United States and then invite the world to play? What if we are the nation's experts at how technology is fusing with agriculture to feed the planet?

Hamilton County is doing all that and more. Towns are becoming cities. Cities are leading change. And change is being held to the highest of standards. Hamilton County's model for work, play, live and visit serve as an example for others to emulate. With community leaders establishing identity, determining unique market position and formulating vision, it is

essential that Hamilton County Tourism provide support for those goals.

In 2015-2016, the Hamilton County Tourism visioning process took place to determine our role in the coming decade. Leaders across Hamilton County were asked to provide input to shape the future for Hamilton County as a destination and Hamilton County Tourism, Inc. (HCT) as an organization. A comprehensive process of interviews, surveys and analysis culminated in the framework for a long-range vision to identify dreams and desires for an ideal future.

What follows is Hamilton County Tourism Vision 2025, a 10-year vision put to paper with practical steps toward execution. However it is not just a white paper idea that gets adopted and forgotten. Given the explosive growth and dynamic nature that has characterized Hamilton County over its history, Hamilton County Tourism Vision 2025 also includes an annual planning process to allow HCT leadership the flexibility to revisit, adapt and pivot while forging forward in collaboration with its public and private partners. Since its inception, Hamilton County's tourism agency has operated under the guidance of strategic plan. This new plan is different. It is a vision for strategic direction.





Outcomes from this visioning process include:

- + A 10-year big picture plan that focuses efforts for greater impact.
- + Recommendations for leadership, product development, marketing, sales and new business development, sport tourism, visitor experience, and workplace technology and operations.
- + An internal system that allows for annual adaptive plans that respond to new opportunities.
- + Recommendations for reporting used to apply research and knowledge to business decisions and make for a fiscally sound, socially responsible and environmentally sensitive organization.

Vision

The thing that gets us up each morning

Hamilton County will be nationally known as an innovative, diverse, vibrant and attractive tourism destination.

HAMILTON COUNTY TODAY



Discernment for a long range tourism plan included a high-level review of vision and purpose along with practical assessments of goals and objectives. An examination of Hamilton County's current situation provided a number of revelations:

- + Hamilton County and Hamilton County Tourism, Inc. continue to be pacesetters in the state and the nation. We are Trailblazers.
- + Hamilton County is in a hotel growth phase with projected growth of up to 50% in the next three years.
- + Grand Park is a game changer for central Indiana tourism, including how Hamilton County Tourism, Inc. operates.
- + New potential conference and event facilities could be additional game changers over the next 5-10 years.
- + Digital communication, internet use, and technology advances change the tourism industry daily.
- + Investments in wifi and wired connectivity are as crucial as investments in place.
- + Hamilton County cities and towns are maturing in identity, investing in place, and understanding the need for market share within many segments.
- + The need for arts leadership is growing in importance across the county.
- + Hamilton County Tourism must determine its role in regional tourism growth.

HAMILTON COUNTY TODAY continued

Destination Next

The discernment process also included a national comparative study called Destination Next which gave us insight into a greater understanding of Hamilton County's place among peers

Few industries are the subject of such widespread conversation and analysis as tourism management and destination marketing. More than 1 billion people travel each year globally. Visitors to Hamilton County alone spend \$389 million each year on lodging, food and beverage, shopping, entertainment and more.

Destination Management Organizations (DMO) like HCT are called to not only capture market share but also develop product within the community to stay relevant. Today's destination leaders are charged with collaboratively activating community vision for tourism in a high-stakes, hyper-competitive global marketplace with an incredible pace of change.

Destination Next is an online assessment tool conceived by Destination Marketing Association International to benchmark communities and their official tourism agencies against opportunities, standards and ideals. The model measures tourism on two underlying areas of focus—strength of destination and level of community support. The final analysis then plots the destination in one of four quadrants helping the DMO understand gaps and priorities.

Hamilton County placed in the upper right quadrant as a Destination Trailblazer, the strongest ranking possible. And all audiences—Board of Directors, Partners and Stakeholders, Government Leaders and Community Leaders—agreed. This is not to say HCT can rest on its laurels. Quite the opposite, tourism in Hamilton County is strong and well-positioned to respond to opportunity and build for the future.



A COMPASS FOR THE NEXT DECADE

It is easy to dream big. Ideas are cheap and in no short supply. The challenge—and yet the immense and fortunate opportunity—in Hamilton County is the remarkable intelligence behind the ideas. Hamilton County’s brain bank yields strong dividends, and prudent investment involves prioritizing, timing and applying enough resources to make a difference.

Synthesizing community input, dreams, a myriad of plans and our mission proved to be both inspiring and overwhelming. We are a county of four cities and four progressing towns. Collectively, Hamilton County is the second most populated community in the state directly across the street from the first most populated community in the state. Paring the opportunities that will lead us to our vision of a nationally recognized and highly desired diverse, vibrant and attractive marketplace is important.

The following areas of focus that emerged from our research provide HCT with a direction for the next decade and many opportunities for collaboration. Joint collaboration in these areas will align HCT’s efforts and resources with our strategic partners and provide a pathway to greater return.

Areas of Focus

Wise Investments and Fiscal Responsibility

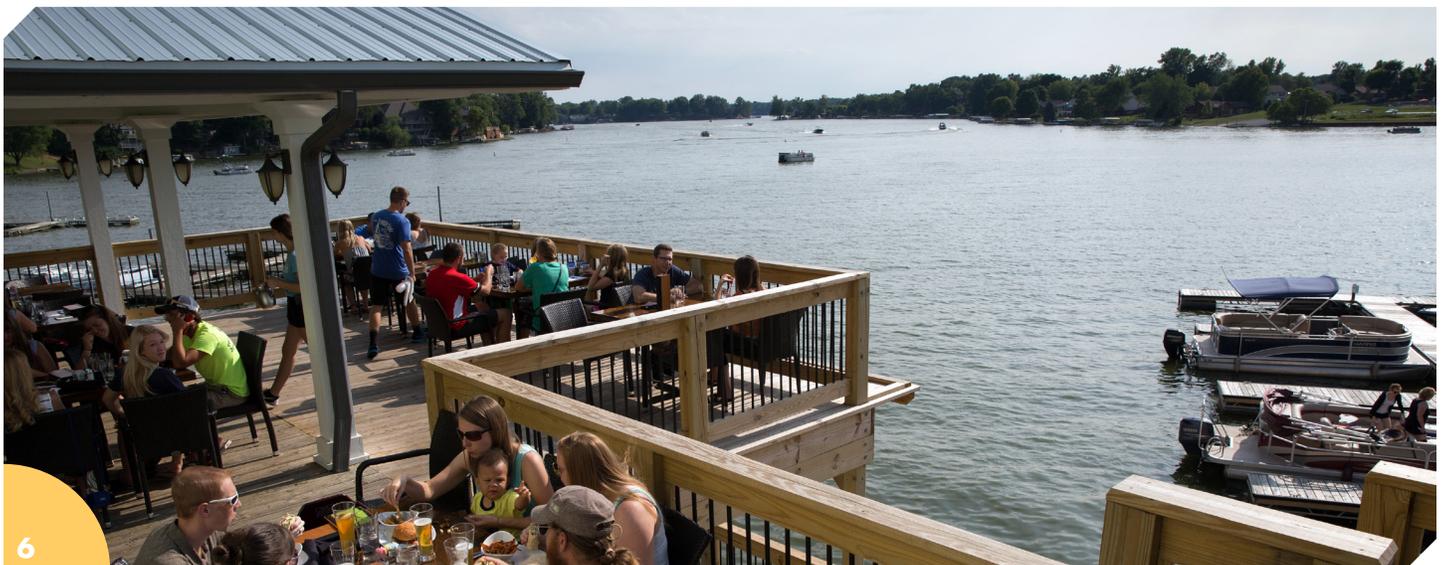
Over the last two decades, HCT has made significant impact on the county through destination marketing and

management strategies. In those years, a steady advancement in marketing programs increased return from \$20 to \$225 for every \$1 invested. Community investments supported large destination-changing attractions including Conner Prairie exhibits, Nickel Plate Arts Campus, The Center for the Performing Arts, and Grand Park. With no end in sight for continued opportunity and additional hotel room supply, HCT will partner with a financial consulting firm to evaluate future projects and incorporate more in-depth financial analyses to determine sustainability and best course of action. Future, important investments include: an office that will support a growing staff and project load since we are currently at capacity, a budget that will sustain larger fluctuations in cash flow, a reduction in bond debt to free up funds for new community investments, a fund to support large visionary destination development enterprises.



Digital Marketing and Connectivity

Digital is where it’s at and where it’s going, and we need to stay ahead of the curve. HCT will apply effective digital responses to a variety of situations including marketing and communications, place making, visitor experience and an efficient work environment for staff. We will engage digital marketing solutions to increase our reach among targeted consumers and segmented markets. With a broader view of who our Hamilton County consumer is—leisure visitor, competitive athlete, group convener, business influencer—



A COMPASS FOR THE NEXT DECADE continued

we will apply the most cost-effective solutions for the highest conversions, which means effective digital marketing strategies.

Digital also includes connecting with consumers in market. How can we inspire consumers, communicate opportunities and package the Hamilton County experience? “Look to Book to Brick” is a mantra that looks holistically at the entire consumer booking and visiting process by applying a consistent and branded communications strategy from the time someone searches online to the time they hit the sidewalks in Hamilton County. We will implement a complete digital strategy to include local visitor information solutions accessible to all and especially where large groups gather.

Groups and the Visitor Experience

New, large gathering facilities require us to respond to a quickly growing group segment of our business. The Grand Park Event Center opens for business to, not only sporting events, but also general consumer events and activities. The facility touts 375,000 square feet of playing and exhibiting space which when activated could potentially hold 20,000 people or more. (*Hotel Planner*) A new Embassy Suites hotel and 20,000 square foot conference facility opens at Exit 210 in Noblesville. And existing banquet facilities and attractions, such as Klipsch Music Center, Conner Prairie and The Paladium, continue to expand services to meet demand. We will build a business development and sales team to uncover new opportunities in group market segments as an immediate priority.



Purpose

The reason we exist

We maximize the Hamilton County experience through tourism innovation and marketing expertise.

Mission

The core of what we do

We message. We move. We make it fun.

- + We are experts at messaging and communicating ideas to engage and influence others.
- + We move people to travel, and sometimes we create movements along the way.
- + We make our work, our communities and our visits fun and easy to access.

Along with applying a digital visitor experience to in-market consumers, we know that an increase in group business also means an increase in servicing those groups. We will build a visitor experience team that will enhance all aspects of the group visitor experience by way of a more robust hospitality and services department. This is also an immediate priority.

Development



Our holistic approach to marketing includes all four P's—price, place, promotion and product. Viewing our organization's value to our communities to include product development is our hallmark for sustainable tourism practice, and remains a core principle. Immediate new or enhanced product opportunities exist in agriculture, bike and water routes, distinctive placemaking through art and architecture, packaging and sport. We will apply market research, collaboration and investor support in early development phases followed by a quick path to marketing and promotions in order to scale upwards in the market place.



Marketing Intelligence

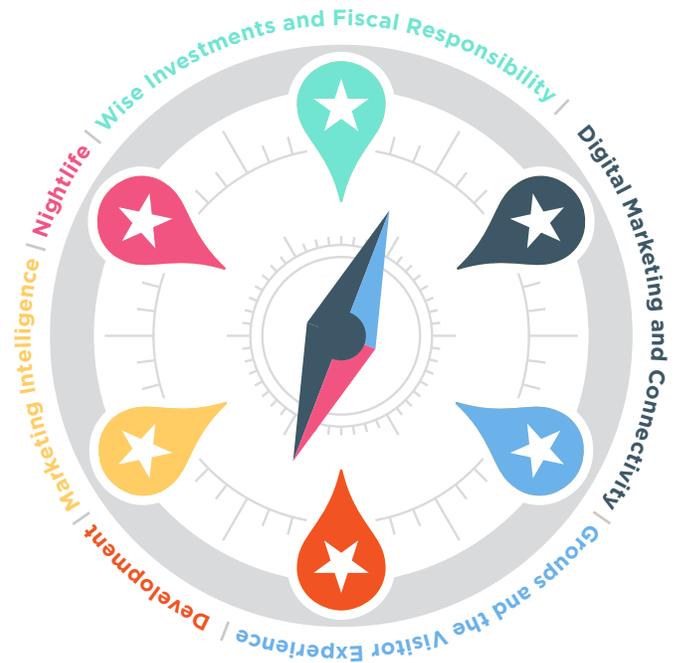
For the tourism industry, data is not so much big as it is wide. There is an endless stream of data sets and analyses offered for sale and perusal. But which can help maximize business value? HCT has partnered with the Hamilton County Economic Development Corporation to manage a Business Intelligence Center that provides initial testing and intelligence gathering for ideas and opportunities. The Center has become an invaluable asset

A COMPASS FOR THE NEXT DECADE continued

for our communities and will become a focus across all lines of HCT business moving forward through expanded stakeholder reporting, increased funding for market research and segmentation, and best practices for insightful decision making.

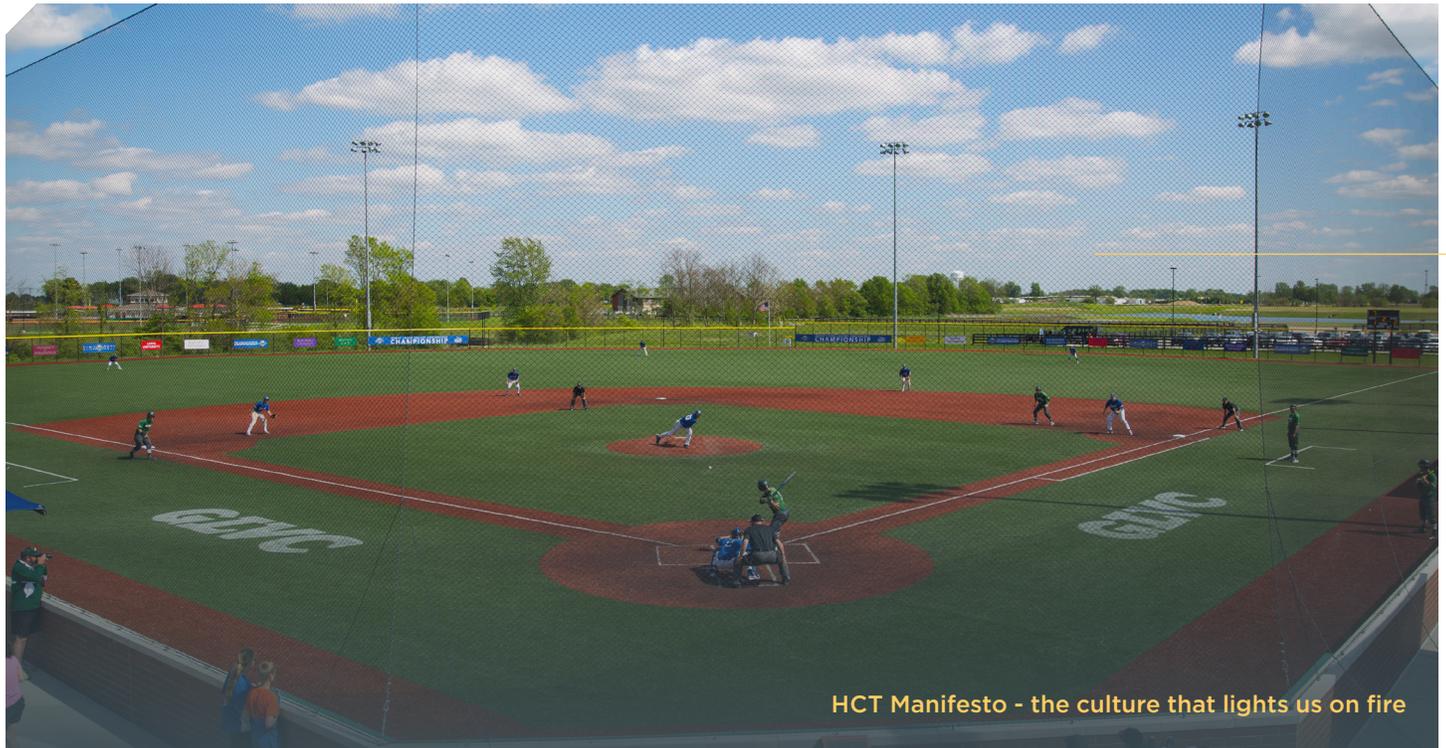
Nightlife

An interesting finding shared among communities is a perception that Hamilton County could use more nightlife. This is not to say we lack evening entertainment. Klipsch Music Center continues to enjoy top rankings as one of the country's premier concert venues. The Center for the Performing Arts continues to grow in prominence offering performances from music legends and renowned artists. There are free community concerts featuring local bands most nights of the week throughout the summer. We have a wide variety of ticketed and scheduled evening events. However, could we expand our sense of nightlife to include attractions or locations that help extend the day into evening as a spontaneous decision rather than a planned ticket purchase? It could be a stargazing lookout that is walkable from a downtown. It could be street performers or buskers that provide delightful entertainment. It could be digital and artistic light exhibits that offer a sense of wonder. Extending day activities into the evening encourages a longer visitor stay. We will collaborate on and invest in projects that enrich the nighttime experience in Hamilton County.



Our Compass *for the* **Next Decade**





HCT Manifesto - the culture that lights us on fire

WE ARE

- CHANGE AGENTS

- TRAILBLAZERS

- COMMUNICATORS

- DEVELOPERS


We dream
without fear
and scale
with purpose.

We travel the world



for *inspiration*
& *knowledge*.

We bring
PEOPLE + IDEAS
TOGETHER.

We *spark* movements
and **ride** momentum.

WE ARE MARKET
STRATEGIC WATCHERS

We talk to people and listen

Listening
...IS VERY IMPORTANT

We embrace
FUN.
We like to make people
SMILE.

We ♥ our community.
We care. We give.

We share
our
strengths
and

learn from our failures.

We want to be better,
ALWAYS.
We want to leave this Earth
BETTER
than we found it.

DEFINING OUR WORK

Hamilton County Tourism's vision and plan would not be complete without also an investment in our people. Staff training and development will continue to be key factors as we grow. This organization moves quickly and produces substantially. And because we have high standards for our staff to respond, grow and contribute, we will invest in their professional development and capacity.

A day-long staff retreat started this visioning process, and many of the ideas here surfaced from that session. Staff identified five core values that define how we get things done. Those are Communication, Collaboration, Stewardship, Intelligence and Growth.

HCT's executive team created a list of criteria by which to measure so that our plans stay focused and on track. When considering new ideas and projects, we ask.

- + Does it grow tourism through distinction and innovation?
- + Does it consider the integral relationship between tourism and economic development?
- + Will it support a growing group travel niche?
- + Will it contribute to the master planning efforts by our stakeholders?
- + Does it encourage fiscal responsibility and flexibility?
- + Does it align with our strategic areas of focus?
- + Does it enhance the visitor experience?

Staff also helped apply context to the extensive input gleaned throughout the year of visioning. The following are vision statements adopted by each department and a parking lot of strategies to explore.

Vision for Leadership

HCT provides leadership and expertise on tourism and community development business decisions across the region.

1. Serve as a convener, clearing house and accelerator for pivotal county and regional issues in an organization that brings the public, private, non-profit and philanthropic sectors together for civic improvements.
2. Act with the interests and perspectives of the



total HCT enterprise in mind including any networks or alliances. Simply put, support a 360-degree view of our collective efforts.

3. Bring the central Indiana DMO group through the process of building a new region-wide tourism product to market.

Vision for Product Development

HCT has a robust research and development program that successfully grows new and maximizes existing tourism product.

1. Become the Midwest's center for agricultural and life scientific discovery at every age level.
2. Attract the curiosity-seeker by applying digital connectivity to place making.
3. Join central Indiana in being known nationwide as a premier

DEFINING OUR WORK continued

place for trail/town connectivity by way of our bike route and waterway experiences.

4. Support the creation of distinctive and iconic architecture and art installations that will serve to gather people together for enjoyment and inspiration.
5. Support artistic, whimsical, fun and inspiring street art and art spaces throughout the area where people will want to come together, take selfies or snap pictures, and share their experience with friends.
6. Award grants to organizations actively improving the Hamilton County experience.
7. Establish a process that not only tests and grows new product but also provides a path toward packaging and marketing.

Vision for Marketing

HCT builds and manages the Hamilton County brand by consistently adjusting to new environments and by marketing through segmentation and experimentation.

1. Build the Hamilton County brand through successful and innovative ways and with high design standards. Defy tradition and innovate. Use messages that are witty, interesting and make the world pay attention.
2. Scale new and enhanced product through testing, segmentation, promotions and packaging.
3. Become a marketing strategy source to our partners using a pool of independent contractors and marketing experts to

help partners create successful and measurable marketing plans.

4. Invest in digital assets and digital programs that will create a seamless online Hamilton County visitor experience from Look to Book to Brick.
5. Build a digital marketing advertising co-operative with the goal of maximizing the identity of key strategic partners under a Visit Hamilton County brand.
6. Apply market research and data analysis to business decisions in order to gain insight and close gaps. Use Adaptive Intelligence as a guide—a real-time, multi-directional sharing of data in order to derive contextually appropriate, authoritative knowledge that helps maximize business value.

Vision for Sales, Sports and New Business Development

HCT is widely known for delivering meetings and events with group travelers to Hamilton County businesses and is a world destination for sport tourism.

1. Create a group business development and sales department with staff that succeeds in carving out new markets, new market extensions and provides qualified leads and opportunities to partners.
2. Develop an extension to the sports market beyond tournaments to include sports meetings, clinics, workshops, medicine, exhibition and innovation. Do the same with bridal and golf markets.



DEFINING OUR WORK continued

3. Research and develop new market segments that have the capacity to mature into active and sustainable commerce. This includes the agriculture and life-related science and technology group meeting market, performing arts events and competitions ideal for performing arts venues, and consumer event and trade shows.
4. Work with the marketing staff to build a measurable marketing program that will support sales and development activity goals through advertising and promotion.
5. Work strategically with Grand Park to book sport and group business in the facilities and support efforts to improve the fan experience so that Grand Park is known nationally as the premier location for sportsmanship through competition, training and family.
6. Build a larger community-wide focus on the efforts of the Hamilton County Sports Authority and how that office can help increase sport tourism through locally created and owned events or by leveraging major events.

Vision for Visitor Experience

Visitors to Hamilton County are satisfied and delighted by the ease in which relevant travel information and hospitality surround their visit.

1. Inform and welcome visitors from “Look to Book to Brick” by combining new technologies with genuine warmth and service and by adding digital Visitor Information Center experiences in key locations where people gather.
2. Scale hospitality efforts as the group market grows to bring visitor experience welcome packages to hotels and meeting and sports facilities.
3. Delight and surprise the visitor using the 15 minute/\$15 equation which incorporates personalized touches at low costs and that go beyond the package formula.

Vision for Workplace

As stewards of the innkeepers tax collections, HCT sustains a fiscally sound, socially responsible and environmentally sensitive workplace.

1. Apply a more strategic financial assessment to annual business planning, including but not limited to bank loans and bond investments, growth and revenue forecasting, stability and viability of new projects and new lines of business, and best business practices.
2. Facilitate the employee workspace through comprehensive assessments, recommendations and

execution of computer device and software usage and technology planning.

3. Invest in a work culture that inspires a passion for HCT’s vision and enthusiasm for fulfilling its mission—one that encourages excellence and innovation and promotes an environment of growth and learning.
4. Identify an office space that will meet the needs of HCT for a minimum of 10 years.
5. Transition Nickel Plate Arts into independence so that the group can grow into its own organization that will serve to enrich Noblesville and the Nickel Plate Corridor through artistic programming and bring contracted artistic advisory services to county tourism projects.



ANNUAL PLANNING

Part of HCT's march toward organizational growth and vision includes an annual planning process designed for intentional collaboration across departments that match resources with vision—enterprise management. The plan relies more heavily on executive team input into strategy and outcomes than in the past, while also allowing for as much flexibility as possible.

	<i>Governing Leaders</i>	<i>Executive Team</i>	<i>HCT Staff</i>
January			Staff Meeting
February	Annual Bureau Board Meeting Tourism Commission Meeting	Directors Huddle General Agenda	Staff Meeting
March	Bureau Board Meeting		Staff Meeting
April		Directors Huddle Big picture budget input for next year focusing on large projects.	Staff Meeting
May	Bureau Board Meeting Tourism Commission Meeting		Staff Meeting
June	Bureau Board Meeting Budget Request Due to Treasurer's Office	Directors Huddle General agenda Desk Side Visits with Stakeholders	Staff Meeting
July			Staff Meeting Midyear Check-in Guided quality conversations between supervisors and staff on goals
August	Bureau Board Meeting Tourism Commission Meeting	Directors Huddle General agenda	Staff Team Building Activity Department Retreats
September	Budget Hearings	Directors Budget Meeting Allocations for activity lines. Marketing focus discussed and prioritized. Sales goals identified and formalized. Operations needs identified and prioritized. Special projects prioritized.	Staff Meeting
October	Bureau Board Meeting and Retreat		Staff Meeting
November	Bureau Board Meeting Budget Approval Tourism Commission Meeting		Staff Meeting
December		Directors Huddle Department Plans Presented	Staff Meeting Staff Reviews and personal goal setting

Reports

Establishing HCT as the leading expert in tourism marketing and development, and maximizing our value to stakeholders and the public includes regularly reporting of tourism intelligence, statistics and research through the following:

- + Tax Collections Chart and Forecast
- + Lodging Tax Revenue Forecast 2017-2025
- + Tourism Intel Market Watch
- + New Facility Development Calendar
- + Hotel Economy Backgrounder
- + Department Planning Worksheet
- + Annual Budget
- + Annual Business Plan
- + Sport and Event Bid Report Card
- + Major Events Calendar
- + KPI Dashboard
- + Digital Campaign Report
- + Pace Reports—against goal and against average
- + Project Portfolios—project briefs that plan and track existing projects and future projects, regarding budget size, calendar year, business line, active, inactive



Adopted June 2016
Hamilton County Tourism, Inc.
37 East Main Street
Carmel, IN 46074
VisitHamiltonCounty.com