

An aerial photograph of a large lake with several islands. A road winds through the islands, which are covered in dense green and yellow trees. The water is a deep blue.

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# **SDG Counties & Cornwall Tourism Strategic Action Plan**

**Summary for SDG Counties Council**

Tuesday April 22, 2025

# Overview

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# Project Purpose

The strategy development project has been created as a partnership between SDG Counties and Cornwall Tourism, with a focus on community engagement and collaboration.

## **Key guiding principles:**

- // To provide a clear vision, mission, and goals for the organizations
- // To help demonstrate the value of tourism to local communities and stakeholders and how best to measure success
- // To establish key opportunities and challenges as part of a forward-thinking approach to destination development
- // To identify specific opportunities/direction for product and experience development including the Historic SDG Jail
- // To provide a detailed “path of action” that will assist organizations and stakeholders with the implementation and execution of the plan



# Project Approach

The project was delivered in four phases:

- // Phase 1: Research & Discovery
- // Phase 2: Consultations & Workshops
- // Phase 3: Draft Strategy Development
- // Phase 4: Final Strategy & Action Plan Delivery



# Tourism Strategy Working Group

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Cathy Winter  
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Anne Drouin  
Robert Prowse  
Bobbie Latour  
Dale Allen  
Terry Muir

# Stakeholder Interviews

One-on-one, 30-minute phone interviews were completed with individuals across a range of sectors, business types, geography.

The interview list included:

Bob Peters: Cornwall Economic Development  
Karina Belanger: SDG Counties  
Lisa Van de Ligt: Raisin Region Conservation Authority  
Krista Doyle: SLPC  
Randi Barreiro: Akwesasne Travel  
Vincent Pilon: Gray's Creek  
Donnie Bowes: Upper Canada Playhouse  
Lourens Joubert: The Priest Mill Art Centre  
Etienne Saint-Aubin: Cornwall Tourism Development Corp  
Flora Cynthia Kra: Afro Diversity

Farhana Meghji: Cornwall Culture Fest  
Elliot Luijkenaa: Phantoms of Yore  
Norene & Marc Gervais: StoneCropAcres Winery  
Stephanie Allen & Jacob Vogul: Fields of Gold  
John Wright: Lost Villages Brewery  
Brett Lauzo: Big Ben Ski Centre  
Vic Bakker: Cannamore Orchards  
Bonnie Ruddock: RTO9  
Kevin Lajoie: St. Lawrence Seaway Authority

# Visioning Workshops

Three in-person, 90-minute Visioning Workshops led by Richard Innes were held on October 28 and 29, 2024. Attendees represented a range of businesses and organizations including attractions, events, food & beverage, accommodation, service providers, and marketing organizations. One in-person meeting was held in Akwesasne with Mohawk Council economic development & tourism.

## Cornwall

October 28  
Saunders Hydro Dam  
25 attendees

## Williamstown

October 28  
Sir John Johnson Manor House  
10 attendees

## Morrisburg

October 29  
McIntosh Country Inn  
8 attendees

## Akwesasne

November 7  
St. Regis Mohawk Council Office  
7 attendees

# Other Research

Additional research conducted included:

- // Competitive scan
- // Review of tourism trends
- // Asset inventory





# Strategic Pillars



# SDG Counties Tourism Vision & Mission Statements

## Vision

To bring together the people, places, and heritage of our region to create a strong, progressive tourism sector.

## Mission

We will serve as a positive force working with our community and tourism partners to develop, enhance, promote, and preserve our natural and cultural assets to foster continued and responsible growth in tourism visits and spending.

# Strategic Pillars

This strategic action plan identifies elements and key themes for tourism development and unique differentiators of the SDG Counties and Cornwall area, broken down into three pillars.

**Organizational  
Tourism Management**

**Destination  
Management & Product  
Development**

**Destination Marketing**

# Strategic Pillars

Each pillar contains a number of initiatives that should be undertaken over the next five years. Timing has been identified as short-term (0-1 year), medium-term (2-3 years), and long-term (4-5 years) This list should be revisited annually with activities and timing updated as required.

Recommendation	Action	Role	Timeframe
1. Continue to build and nurture <u>an ongoing</u> tourism working partnerships with operators	Recruit members of tourism working <u>group</u> with local operators	SDG /CT	Short
	Create agendas for quarterly meetings, meeting summaries <u>and</u> reports  <b>KPIs:</b> # of partner meetings/visits # of events/meetings hosted	SDG	Short



# Key Themes





## THEME 1

### **The River: Connecting Nature & Culture**

// Our strongest connector between urban and rural communities, cultures and experiences – we all have a connection to the River

// Active experiences; cycling, walking, scuba, paddling, fishing, SUP, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing

// Experience nature; birding, trails

// Parks, campgrounds & public sites; beaches, scenic drives

// Built heritage; Saunders Hydro Dam Visitor Centre, Iroquois Locks

// Future waterfront development opportunities; operators, experiences, events

## THEME 2

### Farm Forward: The Next Gen Countryside

// Modern version of farm experiences: Fields of Gold, wellness retreats, farmers markets and pop-ups

// Local culinary experiences

// Local arts experiences:

Visual arts (local artisans – makers, studios, galleries)

Performing arts (Upper Canada Playhouse, Aultsville Theatre, the Port, musicians)

// Local culture/heritage events: Akwesasne Pow Wow, Glengarry Highland Games, County Fairs, community museums

// Connecting to nature: walking, cycling, hiking, water

// Low key lifestyle, relaxing and rejuvenating

## **THEME 3**

### **Families at the Heart: Creating Memories**

// Easy to get to and close to home

// Camping and connecting with nature activities

// Beaches & waterfront activities

// Unique Indigenous experiences

// Welcoming multicultural communities

// Established family friendly events & attractions - Upper Canada Village

// Opportunity for integration with Great Wolf Lodge -pre/post stays

A group of children are playing in a large body of water, likely a lake. Several children are running and jumping into the water, creating large splashes. One child is on a surfboard in the foreground, and another is on a surfboard further back. The background shows a shoreline with trees and houses under a clear blue sky.

**Pillar #1**

# Pillar #1

## Organizational Tourism Management

The Action Plan will support the clarification of the current tourism organization model and the roles and responsibilities of SDG Counties Tourism and Cornwall Tourism.

There is an opportunity to strengthen connections with Akwesasne community builders for mutually beneficial economic development and tourism growth.



# Organizational Tourism Management



## Pillar #1

### **Continue to build and nurture ongoing partnerships with tourism operators**

- Welcome, meet and recruit members of tourism community to participate and share
- Create opportunities for collaboration and support

### **Collaborate on Funding**

- Work collaboratively on funding opportunities for DMOs and operators with Ontario Ministry, RTO 9, and other programs
- Support opportunities for Indigenous funding and grant programs working with Akwesasne
- Track and report all funding activities annually – key measure of success
- SDG Counties to explore the feasibility of implementing a Municipal Accommodation Tax

# Organizational Tourism Management



## Pillar #1

### **Continue shared delivery of visitor Information services**

- Introduce an online info service on SDG Counties and CT websites (AI chatbot service)
- Create a shared calendar of events
- Visitor Guide – continue combined approach for the printed guide
- Continue to deliver in-person visitor information services

### **Sector Development: Sport, Business, Film, Group Travel**

- Create a 3-5 year forecast calendar that identifies booked group/event business as well as gaps where new group/event business can be secured
- Continue sales and marketing efforts to build sport and event tourism when business is needed
- Develop a target list of business events/conferences that align with supporting venues and services
- Ensure that film location listings are complete and up to date, reinforce strong connections with the Kingston and Ottawa Film Offices to supplement their appeal with our unique locations
- Explore implementing a pilot regional travel trade strategy

# Organizational Tourism Management

## Pillar #1

### **Continue to enhance Industry & SDG County Council Communications**

- Continue to promote the tourism sector within available industry channels including email, social and events
- Create a monthly “Destination Highlights” report for County Council (KIR Report) with tourism news, events and grant/funding opportunities etc.

### **Establish an annual tourism research plan**

- Leverage existing data available through RTO9, Destination Ontario and Destination Canada
- Deploy a mobile/digital visitor survey tool that can be shared with all destinations and operators and build an annual reporting process. Consult with RTO9 to access project support/funding

# Organizational Tourism Management

A

## Pillar #1

### **Review & update current tourism staffing cohort within SDG Counties Economic Development**

- Assess existing staff capacity against strategic action plan execution
- Evolve roles and responsibilities of the department to reflect a blend of sector alignment and engagement, product/experience development, and marketing responsibilities

A romantic scene of a couple walking away from the camera along a grassy riverbank. The woman is on the left, wearing a light-colored dress and a crossbody bag, and the man is on the right, wearing a dark t-shirt and khaki pants. They are holding hands. The river is calm, reflecting the soft, orange and pink light of the sunset sky. In the background, there are dense green trees and a small industrial building with a chimney. A paved path runs parallel to the river on the right side. The overall mood is peaceful and intimate.

## Pillar #2



# Pillar #2

## Destination Management & Product Development

Research identified the potential for enhanced tourism experience development.

Culinary, agritourism, Indigenous heritage, nature, local culture, and water-oriented features represent the majority of existing tourism assets.

These are the assets where new and enhanced visitor experiences can attract increased visitation and help differentiate SDG Counties/Cornwall from other Ontario destinations.

# Destination Management & Product Development

## Pillar #2

### **Build and strengthen connections among tourism experience operators**

- Create a networking and training plan for operators, leveraging existing webinars and events for education
- Create a series of informal (5-7) networking events across the area including farm visits to introduce new culinary offerings and local gems
- Conduct an Operator Satisfaction survey to identify ideas and areas of support from SDG Counties/Cornwall Tourism offices
- Host a local ½ day tourism summit for SDG Counties/Cornwall/Akwesasne
- Build a “recognition” program to recognize successful local operators and business
- SDG Counties/Cornwall Tourism support operators in writing national and provincial tourism award submissions (TIAO, TIAC, Attractions Ontario, Travel Writers etc.)

# Destination Management & Product Development

## Pillar #2

### **Build and strengthen collaboration with Akwesasne tourism groups**

- Co-create an annual cooperative development and marketing plan between Akwesasne, Cornwall Tourism and SDG Counties
- Review regional, provincial, national, and Indigenous funding opportunities together and partner on applications where possible
- Create a 2025/6 pilot program with Akwesasne Travel to provide a shuttle to/from Cornwall Island – approach a local motorcoach operator as transportation/reseller with support from a cooperative marketing program
- Discuss the implications the current toll process has on economic growth for both U.S. and Canada
- Meet with SIBC Seaway International Bridge Corp to discuss improved wayfinding at the bridge (promotional billboard)

# Destination Management & Product Development

## Pillar #2

### **Optimize the introduction of Great Wolf Lodge to the area**

- Investigate how any local elements might be included in the Cornwall Great Wolf Lodge Experience
- Create ancillary experiences/packages for visitors to GWL – things to do before or after their stay, things to do on the way, reasons to stay in the area longer
- Identify operators with family-centred products who could create itineraries/packages, the St. Lawrence Parks Commission and others, for example

### **Commit to a regenerative tourism approach**

- Ensure all future tourism development:
  - Has an equal focus on economics and the well-being of people
  - Preserves and celebrates heritage and local culture and traditions
  - Respects natural surroundings, rural and waterfront landscapes
  - Brings industry, community, and government together



**Pillar #3**



## Destination Marketing

SDG Counties Tourism and Cornwall Tourism have demonstrated success in working together on a regional promotional approach including the development of the annual Visitor Guide.

Based on asset analysis, unique narratives and themes, and the understanding of key motivators and influences for travelers, this approach should be enhanced.

The unique combination of urban and rural experiences in one place is a positioning strength for the destination and wherever possible a “one voice” approach will maximize effectiveness and generate positive results for all.

# Destination Marketing

## Pillar #3

### **Establish common use of place names in destination marketing**

- Name familiarity drives awareness and visitation; research notes that SDG Counties and Cornwall have low awareness among travelers - there is an opportunity to enhance awareness through use of a consistent place name/identifier
  - Recommended approach: Cornwall & SDG Counties

### **Focus on family market is a priority**

- Leverage Destination Canada's recently released [Traveller Segmentation Program](#) that identifies segment size, top travel activities, emotional travel motivations and trip planning behaviour
  - Two segments are recommended:
    - Purpose Driven Families
    - Fun & Sun Families

# Destination Marketing

## Pillar #3

### **Focus on near drive markets; Ontario, Quebec, and U.S. as primary opportunities for growth**

- Introduce new ways to experience the region through itineraries/routes; mirror the Visitor Guide themes; waterfront, culinary, outdoor, family
- Collaborate with Akwesasne on cross-border marketing and promotional initiatives
- Consult with Destination Ontario and Indigenous Tourism Ontario for possible partnerships

### **Digital marketing - build a “one voice” approach**

- Undertake a comparative SEO performance review of tourism web properties; Identify search volumes of keywords and traffic sources to optimize marketing approach
- Establish a shared/common website performance report for SDG Counties and Cornwall to enhance future effectiveness
- Adopt a consumer-first approach to a shared website as a core asset for one stop trip planning

# Destination Marketing

## Pillar #3

### **Continue investment in marketing asset development**

- Ensure an annual budget for marketing asset development including photography and video
- Explore the use of CrowdRiff platform and other marketing tools as a shared investment to increase overall awareness and bookings

### **Engage local voices**

- Local Engagement: Friends and relatives are the primary source of information for travel – they carry influence and are the top motivator for tourism
- Encourage locals to contribute to social channels and content development
- Highlight local insiders wherever possible – consider incentives for participation from local businesses

A man and a woman are walking away from the camera on a dirt path through a dense, green forest. The woman, on the left, has long brown hair and is wearing a dark blue tank top and a black cowboy hat with a silver band. The man, on the right, is wearing a blue and white checkered short-sleeved shirt and a blue fedora with a brown band. The path is slightly overgrown with grass and small plants. The background is a thick wall of green trees and foliage, with some light filtering through the canopy.

**Thank You!**