



**FY 2019-2021**  
**Strategic Plan**  
for the  
**Leon County Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee**

Facilitated by  
**ZEITGEIST CONSULTING**  
**DMO**  
**PRÖZ**  
DMOproz.com

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# Destination Vision and Organizational Mission

The Leon County Tourism Development Council (TDC) and the Leon County Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee, the County's official Destination Marketing Organization (DMO), exist to increase and enhance the region's visitor economy.

When TDC members met on the 9th of April, 2018, to discuss and ideate the future growth and direction for the destination and the Leon County Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee, they first reviewed the existing Vision and Mission statements to ensure they remained accurate and relevant. Thoughtful discussion and evaluation followed and the revised statements below are being presented for the TDC's consideration:

## **EXISTING Vision for the Destination:**

The Tallahassee Region will be an innovative and sustainable year-round destination that is recognized as a place to visit for historic, nature-based and cultural tourism as well as a hub for meetings, conferences, film and sports related activities as a means to enhance the Region's economy and quality of life.

## **Proposed NEW Vision for the Destination:**

**The Tallahassee Region will be recognized and appreciated  
as one of the most diverse and vibrant destinations in the Southeast.**

## **EXISTING Mission for the Destination:**

To spearhead and coordinate the tourism related marketing and management of the Destination through the coordination of the hospitality industry, local governments and the business community to sustain and grow visitor spending and job creation in the Tallahassee Region.

## **Proposed NEW Mission of the Leon County Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee:**

**To enhance the region's economic growth and quality of life  
by collaboratively inspiring the vitality of Tallahassee's Visitor Economy.**

The destination Vision is what Leon County aspires to be in the eyes of the TDC. The Mission statement identifies how the Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee works to achieve that Vision.



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TDC Members have committed themselves to the three year goals and objectives in the FY 2019-2021 Tourism Strategic Plan in order to inspire innovative growth of the community and provide expert counsel to the Leon County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC). The goals align with Leon County priorities, economic goals, community desires and industry needs to create a synergistic plan to grow the region's visitor economy and enhance the quality of life for all residents of Leon County.

The goals and strategic initiatives on this page are included in the Leon County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) FY 2017-2021 Strategic Plan. Each year, the County updates its Strategic Plan as the County continues to evolve, engage and execute the strategies.

## Leon County BOCC 5-Year Tourism Target Goals

- Realize \$5 billion in Visitor Spending between FY 2017 & FY 2021
- Attract 80 State, Regional or National Sports Championships between FY 2017 & FY 2021
- Host 100,000 attendees as part of the Amphitheater Concert Series between FY 2017 & FY 2021

## Leon County BOCC Tourism Initiatives

Responsibility: **Leon County Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee**

- Host 2021 NCAA Cross-Country Championship
- Explore NFL Pre-Season and Other Events at Doak Campbell Stadium
- Enhance Competitiveness by Investing in Apalachee Regional Park
- Support Choose Tallahassee's Retirement Marketing

Responsibility: **Leon County TDC (*addressed in this Strategic Plan*)**

- Work with FSU on the potential Convention Center development
- Work with stakeholders to revise State Statute 125.0104 to include Leon County in the High Tourism Impact Tax designation



## FY 2019-2021 Strategic Plan **Executive Summary**

### The Strategic Planning Process

In developing the new three-year Strategic Plan, the Leon County Tourism Development Council (TDC) designed a collaborative process to gather a broad understanding of resident needs and expectations to ensure that its future work would increase visitor spending consistent with the County's priorities, economic goals, community desires and industry needs.

Working through DMOproz, the TDC reached out through online surveys, face-to-face interviews with community and governmental leaders and focus groups of industry stakeholders. Almost 300 points of view were registered in the intelligence gathering portion of the strategic planning process - more than 190 individuals responded to the online survey and over 100 interfaced directly with Mr. Bill Geist, president of DMOproz, the principle consultant on this project. This level of community input was invaluable in the TDC's ultimate decisions on its recommended path forward with this Strategic Plan

The TDC met on the 9th of April, 2018, to discuss and ideate the future growth and direction for the destination and the Leon County Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee. During their time together, TDC members considered research that identified the realities of the present and the visions for tomorrow, as they considered new ways to increase visitor spending throughout the county.

This document was developed after a substantive discussion of present environments, threats and opportunities that followed online surveys of industry partners and stakeholders, as well as individual conversations and focus groups with community and government leaders, to better understand the expectations of and opportunities before the Leon County Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee and the destination. The subsequent goals developed in this document are designed to power future discussions and actions of the TDC, community leaders and industry stakeholders to develop collaborative opportunities to enhance the impact of visitor spending in the region.

## FY 2019-2021 Tourism Strategic Plan Contains Four Main Goals:

- Advocate for destination enhancing development
- Enhance the awareness, interest and support of Leon County's visitor economy
- Work to enhance the visitor experience throughout Leon County
- Analyze opportunities to increase the marketing budgetary resources of the Leon County Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee

## Abbreviated Destination Assessment of Leon County

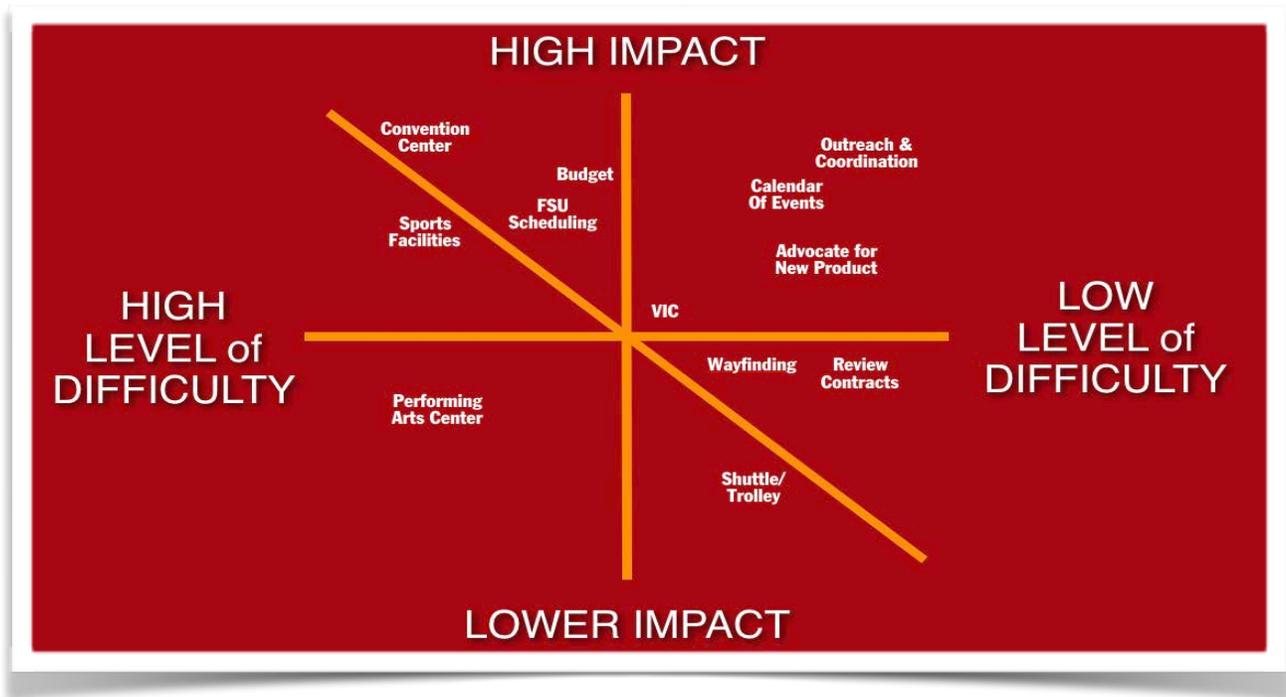
Lead consultant Bill Geist toured the area in April to better understand the changes in the destination from his previous visit to Leon County in 2009 as the consultant that developed Leon County's initial Tourism Strategic Plan. Significant enhancements to the destination have since occurred – with many new hotels and restaurants, and thriving new “districts” (i.e. Gaines Street/College Town, Midtown, Uptown, etc.) have been established providing enhanced entertainment and dining options throughout the community, each with unique qualities targeting different market segments. Success in the Sports marketing area continues to grow exponentially, especially hosting Cross Country championship events, and has elevated the destination profile. Additional hotel developments are currently planned, a Convention Center is again in discussion with \$20 million in public funds committed, along with numerous enhancements to parks and outdoor amenities are in various stages of implementation. Further, extensive stakeholder feedback indicates the tourism industry, community organizations, and local leadership have a favorable view of the Leon County Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee as the Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) and illustrates a very effective transition from a non-profit DMO in 2009 to a successful government DMO. One comment received in the feedback fully encapsulated the overall thought of community stakeholders: **“We are at a Tipping Point. This is our Moment.”**

## TDC Review of Opportunities

TDC discussions during the first half of the Strategic Planning Workshop focused on potential opportunities expressed during the extensive intelligence gathering and were developed for further consideration in the list below in no particular order. This list of opportunities served as a guide for discussion with prioritization indicated on the following page.

- Convention Center
- Performing Arts Venue
- Shuttle/Trollies
- Increase Leon County Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee Marketing Budget
- Further develop the Destination's Calendar of Events
- Increase Outreach & Coordination with Tourism Industry and Residents
- National Tournament-Grade Sports Complex and developing emerging sports leagues
- Advocate for New Product Development
- Visitor Information Center on I-10 / Mobile Visitor Information Center
- Wayfinding Signage/Entryway Enhancement
- Work with FSU/ACC and FAMU/MEAC on Event Scheduling
- Review all vendor and grantee contracts for upgrades and ROI

Using a prioritization tool designed by Stanford researcher B.J. Fogg, the TDC then ranked each opportunity based upon impact and difficulty. After averaging the responses, the following visual representation was created.



The point of the exercise was to identify those opportunities that were deemed too difficult or not important enough (ideas that would fall to the left of the diagonal line) in order to focus on those things of more importance (those ideas to the right of the diagonal).

In this instance, one of the identified opportunities (Performing Arts Center) ended up to the left of the diagonal. While such a venue could significantly enhance the magnetism of the destination, TDC members collectively agreed that much like the Convention Center, the County did not have the resources to take the lead on this initiative. The TDC will encourage other interests to take the lead on enhancing Leon County’s Arts and Cultural offerings.

The need for an additional National Tournament-Grade Sports Complex and supporting emerging sports was seen as very important by the TDC. However, the perceived level of difficulty at this point in time, given other priorities, resulted in the TDC choosing to explore various options rather than taking the initiative on as a goal and will defer to the Tallahassee Sports Council for recommended actions to move ahead.

# HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

This document is divided into three main sections. The first section is the Executive Summary of the TDC's Strategic Plan. This section can be shared to partners and stakeholders, as appropriate.

The second section, beginning on Page 7, contains the full Strategic Plan and identifies the program of work for the TDC and senior organizational management for its long-range future and includes suggested tactics. As some of these are competitively and politically sensitive, this section is not expressly intended to be actively distributed outside the organization.

The final section, beginning on page 14, contains a recap of the Board and Stakeholder surveys, community leader interviews, public meetings/focus groups and the discussions from the Strategic Planning Session, laying the groundwork for the Plan's Goals and Objectives. This section can be utilized for clarification or rationale for particular opportunities.

Once the TDC and BOCC has reviewed and adopted the final version of the Strategic Plan, the TDC may consider establishing a Work Group or Task Force for deeper analysis and implementation on any of the goals. This working document, reflecting the ideas and opportunities before the organization and the destination, can be used as a roadmap to guide the TDC's future work on behalf of Leon County.



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## FY 2019-2021 Strategic Plan

### **GOAL 1 - Advocate For Destination Enhancing Development**

#### **Objective A**

**Serve as the Voice of the Visitor and the Hospitality Industry in development discussions**

*Suggested Tactics:*

- Regularly monitor and support progress on the region's Blueprint Intergovernmental Agency project plans
- Review consumer research for potential asset development opportunities that would make the destination more attractive to visitors
- Serve as the County's trusted expert on tourism and destination marketing
- Communicate and collaborate with OEV, Chambers, Blueprint, Tallahassee Sports Council, COCA, etc.
- Continue to serve the public as the voice of the region's hospitality industry, explaining the positive impacts of tourism on the county

#### **Objective B**

**Serve as a Trusted Resource to potential developers of destination enhancing public assembly facilities**

*Suggested Tactics:*

- Provide research and information about the Leon County visitor economy to assist developers to meet the needs of the destination, such as (but not limited to):
  - Meeting space that is required to effectively compete with other Florida or regional destinations
  - Sports facility design that qualifies for NCAA-level competition
- Advise FSU on their interest in Convention Center development

## **Objective C**

### **Advocate for new and expanded Festivals and Events that position Tallahassee as the Event Capital of the Southeast**

#### *Suggested Tactics:*

- Analyze the potential ROI of events that can effectively power visitation during shoulder seasons, such as (but not limited to):
  - America's First Christmas Event (not necessarily at the historic site) and the Site when it is ready
  - The city's upcoming Bicentennial (2024)
  - Others, as identified
- Continue to review and enhance the guidelines behind all Event grants funded by TDT to ensure the highest possible ROI

## **GOAL 2 - Enhance The Awareness, Interest and Support of Leon County's Visitor Economy**

## **Objective A**

### **Develop Messages that resonates with Policy Makers, the Business Community, Tourism Industry and Residents**

#### *Suggested Tactics:*

- Promote the "traditional" impact statistics (e.g., jobs, taxes generated, spending totals)
- Identify other impacts made by tourism businesses
  - Connect visitation to the health of restaurants, nightspots, retail and attractions that residents enjoy
  - Communicate the property and sales taxes generated by tourism businesses (and what the residential tax burden would be without the Visitor Economy)
  - Communicate the percent of local residents that derive a paycheck from the Visitor Economy
  - Establish the relationship between destination image, visitation and corporate investment (utilize Longwoods International's "Halo Effect" Study)
  - Develop talking points for the TDC and Staff that translates the direct connection to the average citizen's quality of life
- Develop a series of videos to better explain the importance of the Visitor Economy and Visit Tallahassee's role in its maintenance and growth
  - Identify and utilize multiple distribution channels for the videos (Social Media, local Cable Channel, etc.)

## **Objective B**

**Work with area media outlets to tell the broader story of how the destination is evolving, highlight hidden gems, and the connection between the Visitor Economy, Economic Vitality and Quality of Life**

### *Suggested Tactics:*

- Schedule regular visits with Owners, Managers and Editors of local media outlets
  - Encourage an understanding of the community's need for media to be part of the solution in creating the kind of pride that will attract investors
- Build relationships with Social Media influencers in the community
- Share more impact and success stories through news conferences and media releases (more than just the announcements of "big wins")
- Use "real life" stories to connect the dots for local media, bloggers and businesses
- Continue to work with the local media (i.e. Tallahassee Democrat) to establish a regular column and/or coverage on destination products, the TDC and the Visitor Economy

## **Objective C**

**Utilize TDC Members and Leon County Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee Staff as Destination Brand and DMO Ambassadors to Communicate the Importance of the Visitor Economy**

### *Suggested Tactics:*

- Stage celebratory events for Visitor Industry workers and Economic Development leaders
  - Service Industry events
  - Breakfasts and Lunches for Community Leaders
- Look for opportunities to co-op events with other Community Development Organizations, including the Office of Economic Vitality and Chambers of Commerce.
- Encourage individual TDC Members to accompany staff when briefing elected officials, the media and others on the importance of the Visitor Economy

## **Objective D**

### **Strengthen collaboration with other Community Development and Tourism Promotion agencies throughout the region**

#### *Suggested Tactics:*

- Search for opportunities to build support and advocacy for each other's agendas
  - Be willing to take a stand for what is right for the region
- Build integrated local communications strategies for coordinating priority messages among partner agencies
- Identify ways that the Leon County Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee's marketing and sales efforts could complement the work of others
  - Continue to support the marketing efforts of Choose Tallahassee
  - Work with OEV to coordinate messaging in their target markets with the Leon County Division of Tourism / Visit Tallahassee convention sales targets
  - Work with FSU, FAMU and TCC to place students in hospitality industry work environments

## **Objective E**

### **Enhance Networking with and between Industry Partners**

#### *Suggested Tactics:*

- Consider staging meetings between Industry Partners and the TDC in months in which the TDC does not meet (e.g., Attractions in February, Hotels in April, Arts & Culture in June, etc.)
- Analyze opportunities to bring all partners together for a Tourism Summit in addition to the Annual Marketing Roll-out.

## **Objective F**

### **Search for mutually beneficial Partnerships with education and businesses**

#### *Suggested Tactics:*

- Identify messages and market segments in which local companies have a mutual interest (e.g., Healthcare companies and the support of a healthy lifestyle through marketing of Trailahassee.com)
- Work with FSU (and the ACC) and FAMU (and the MEAC) on the critical need for more collaborative scheduling
- Consider ways to partner with Business and Hospitality Schools

## **GOAL 3 - Work To Enhance The Visitor Experience Throughout Leon County**

### **Objective A**

**Analyze the most effective ways to personally deliver Visitor Information**

#### *Suggested Tactics:*

- Consider the future of Visitor Information Centers
  - Along I-10
  - At high traffic areas such as Cascade Park
  - A Mobile Visitor Center at events and on the road
  - Partnering with other organizations to provide service on the weekends
  - Evaluate highest and best use of current Tourism building
- Work to engage those that directly interact with visitors to be Destination Ambassadors and distribute Leon County Division of Tourism / Visit Tallahassee information
  - Hotel Front-Desk
  - Servers and Bartenders
  - Uber and Taxi Drivers
  - Airbnb Hosts
  - Others, as identified

### **Objective B**

**Enhance the comprehensive destination-wide Calendar of Events**

#### *Suggested Tactics:*

- Build partnerships between entities that are currently producing online Calendars of Events to gain wider use for the calendar posted on VisitTallahassee.com
- Identify ways to enhance the Calendar for expanded use by consumers and benefit to businesses, events rights holders, etc.

### **Objective C**

#### **Suggest opportunities to enhance the region's infrastructure to better welcome visitors and investors**

##### *Suggested Tactics:*

- Support efforts to develop the numerous Districts (i.e., Gaines Street, Midtown, Uptown, etc.) throughout the destination
- Advocate for more effective destination wayfinding signage
  - Destination Welcome Signs
  - Directions to Attractions, Major Parks/Greenways & Neighborhoods/Districts
  - Trailhead Signage
  - Parking Signage

### **Objective D**

#### **Work to enhance the Service Culture of the Destination**

##### *Suggested Tactics:*

- Consider ways to offer Customer Service training to employees of industry partners
  - Analyze opportunities to develop partnerships with area Hospitality programs (FSU's Dedman School, Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association)
  - Investigate National Training programs
- Consider developing a video series for front-line staff to better educate them on all the attractions and experiences Tallahassee has to offer

## **GOAL 4 - Analyze Opportunities To Increase The Marketing Budgetary Resources**

### **Objective A**

**Work to revise State Statutes to include Leon County in the High Tourism Impact Tax Legislation for the proposed Convention Center**

*Suggested Tactic:*

- Work with the area's Legislative Delegation to support efforts to expand the Leon County Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee Budget

### **Objective B**

**Review new revenue streams being successfully utilized across the nation**

*Suggested Tactics:*

- Consider developing programs for destination businesses to secure enhanced visibility
- Expand sponsorship opportunities, especially in the Sports Market
- Consider ways to monetize the Leon County Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee Website and Visitor Center

### **Objective C**

**Continue to ensure that TDT revenues are targeted toward the highest possible ROI**

*Suggested Tactics:*

- Continue to review all facets of the uses of TDT
- Regularly review Grant guidelines for ROI
- Explore opportunities to achieve higher ROI through policy changes

# SUMMARY OF TOPICS DISCUSSED AT THE PUBLIC MEETINGS

With almost 300 points of view registered in the preliminary intelligence gathering phase, two comments from the online survey stood out as the call to action for the TDC and Leon County:

**“We are at a Tipping Point. This is our Moment.”**

**“Tallahassee is Hungry to Win; Hungry to Love Itself; Hungry to Show Off.”**

## ***Destination Opportunities:***

- To develop a “Sense of Place” that is a source of pride for residents.
- Convention / Conference / Full-Service Hotel complex.
- More culinary and nightlife options.
- The Programming of Cascades could be so much more than it currently is.
- Encourage better Customer Service.
- Put a Visitor Center on I-10.
- Creation of a more comprehensive online Calendar of Events.
- Market our Neighborhoods / Districts as an asset.
- We need more pedestrian friendly areas; an Arts & Heritage District.
- Can we be the Festival Capital of the Southeast? Can we be America’s First Christmas?
- Can we turn our 70,000 students into Brand Ambassadors.
- How to maximize 400,000 FSU Alumni. 500 Campus visits/day in Summer.
- How to get parents & graduates to return.
- Expand efforts to build a Tournament economy to Student-run and non-traditional sports events.

## ***Destination Weaknesses:***

- Lack of Airlift
- Transportation, Congestion and Parking in and around the county
- The trolley system is invisible to visitors and doesn’t stop at several attractions.
- Lack of a Convention Center
- Destination Wayfinding and Welcome points are a huge issue.
- Lack of a higher concentration of Full-Service Hotels
- Blight (and a lack of zoning enforcement) along the major corridors into our city.
- A perceived lack of things to do to retain Young Professionals.
- A Downtown that is designed for business and not as a gathering place.
- A Downtown Visitor Information Center that is closed on weekends
- A Destination Website that doesn’t tell the Tallahassee Story; doesn’t inspire.
- The lack of growth in the Leon County Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee Budget while being faced with increasing expectations

**Community Challenges:**

- The community operates in a myriad of Silos, both relational and informational.
- We don't network well. We need to get the hospitality industry more unified
- We are a community that still struggles with Segregation and Diversity.
- We are socially and economically divided.
- We could be a hotbed for Music...but existing venues don't pay performers well enough.
- Lack of Performance venues. We are losing our top talent to other cities for lack of a place to perform.
- Local Media hurts our efforts. Hurts FSU's efforts. Hurts everybody. Our image impacts everyone.
- High rents are killing the entrepreneurial spirit here.
- Getting past our traditional attitude that everything here is "good enough."

**The Leon County Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee:**

- Needs a more robust budget and additional professional staff.
- Needs more local visibility. Locals don't have a clue as to the importance of its work.
- The Hospitality Industry needs and wants more interaction with Professional Staff.
- Hotels need more communication on Group Status, Lost Business, ROI, IDSS, etc.
- Needs better coordination with OEV.
- Needs to be more entrepreneurial.
- Needs to be included in all community development conversations.
- Needs to be more of a "story-teller" and less of a list of things to do.
- Needs to provide assistance to develop better hotel packaging.
- Needs to better highlight the region's Arts, Cultural and Heritage offerings.

**The Sports Market:**

- A concern that the destination is facing a capacity issues with hotels that may block further growth in this market
- A suggestion that the Leon County Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee should focus on emerging and non-traditional sports such as Disc-Golf, Mountain Biking and Student-run Tournaments are a huge opportunity.
- Could Leon County become the "Outdoor Sports Capital of Florida?"

**Requests of the TDC:**

- The TDC should be an Advocate for Destination Development
- Be more engaged in the current conversations surrounding branding but from a tourism destination perspective.
- Continue to review and update Event Grant rules and guidelines to achieve the highest ROI
- Fight harder against any use of the TDT that does not produce a higher ROI.