

GO GREAT, TOGETHER



Strategic Recovery **Plan** 2023 – 2025

Great Lakes Bay Regional Convention + Visitors Bureau





Let's Go Great, Together

What a fascinating few years we've all had. When the COVID-19 pandemic effectively shut down our industry in March of 2020, we knew we would all have a tough go. Then, in May 2020 our community faced a devastating 100-year flood that, compounded with the pandemic, changed visitation to our region.

Through it all, our communities have worked closely to help each other and our visitors, collaborate and find innovative responses to the challenges facing us. Our GLBRCVB team has been so proud and inspired by you - our partners - and your unwavering commitment to our region.

Through the pandemic and flooding challenges, our organization adapted and responded to the changing needs of the community and travelers to ensure that the visitor economy in Michigan's Great Lakes Bay Region had a consistent presence and voice. We pivoted programming and shifted resources into ensuring our industry was supported through the darkest days of the pandemic and flood.

Thankfully, travel is returning. The borders have reopened, traveler confidence is returning, air service is restoring, and the visitor economy is seeing a rebound. To be consistent with our organization's ambition of inspiring others by sparking joy, boosting nostalgia, creating lasting memories, and our purpose of aligning resources to maximize the travel sector's contribution to our region's economic advancement, we will not be complacent in recovery. That's why we've undertaken a three-year strategic recovery plan, to ensure our recovery is deliberate, enduring, and takes our region to new heights.

As we plan for a strategic recovery that ensures the visitor economy rebuilds and becomes stronger than ever, we know that we can't do it alone. Feedback from our industry partners, residents, and other stakeholders supported the development of this recovery plan, and just as we weathered the storm of the pandemic and flood together, we will emerge and successfully recover together.

We invite you to join us as we **Go Great, Together**.

Annette M. Rummel, Ph.D.
CEO + Travel Trailblazer

Derek Grimaldi
Chair, Go Great Lakes Bay Board of Directors

Recent Factors Impacting The Visitor Economy In Michigan's Great Lakes Bay Region

Michigan’s Great Lakes Bay Region (MGLBR) continues to feel the residual impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. While significant progress has been made toward recovery, this plan focuses upon the destination’s efforts to overcome massive disruption caused by the pandemic and the effects of the 100-year flood from 2020 and achieve an even higher threshold of success for our visitor economy.

Research clearly outlines the region’s strong reliance upon drawing visitors from within Michigan. A targeted campaign aimed at residents will continue building back the visitor base from within the state. Customized messaging focused on out of state visitors will expand market development opportunities spurring future growth.



Recent Visitor Market Share Change

When comparing the proportions of recent visitors from 2018 to 2022, MGLBR can see the affects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The reduction in recent visitors is strongest among Michigan residents, which MGLBR is more dependent on than key competitors.

● Traverse City was the only destination to not see a decrease in out-of-state visitation.

● MGLBR as a whole saw just a slight decrease from out-of-state visitors in 2022.

Michigan Market % that Visited Recently

Destination	2018	2022	Change
	75%	63%	-12%
Ann Arbor	58%	51%	-7%
Traverse City	54%	47%	-7%
Grand Rapids	62%	49%	-13%
Holland	41%	29%	-12%

Out-of-State % that Visited Recently

Destination	2018	2022	Change
Michigan's Great Lakes Bay Region	22%	21%	-1%
Ann Arbor	24%	17%	-7%
Traverse City	13%	14%	1%
Grand Rapids	26%	16%	-10%
Holland	18%	14%	-4%



Recent Visitors: Visited a destination within 3 years at the time the respondent were surveyed.

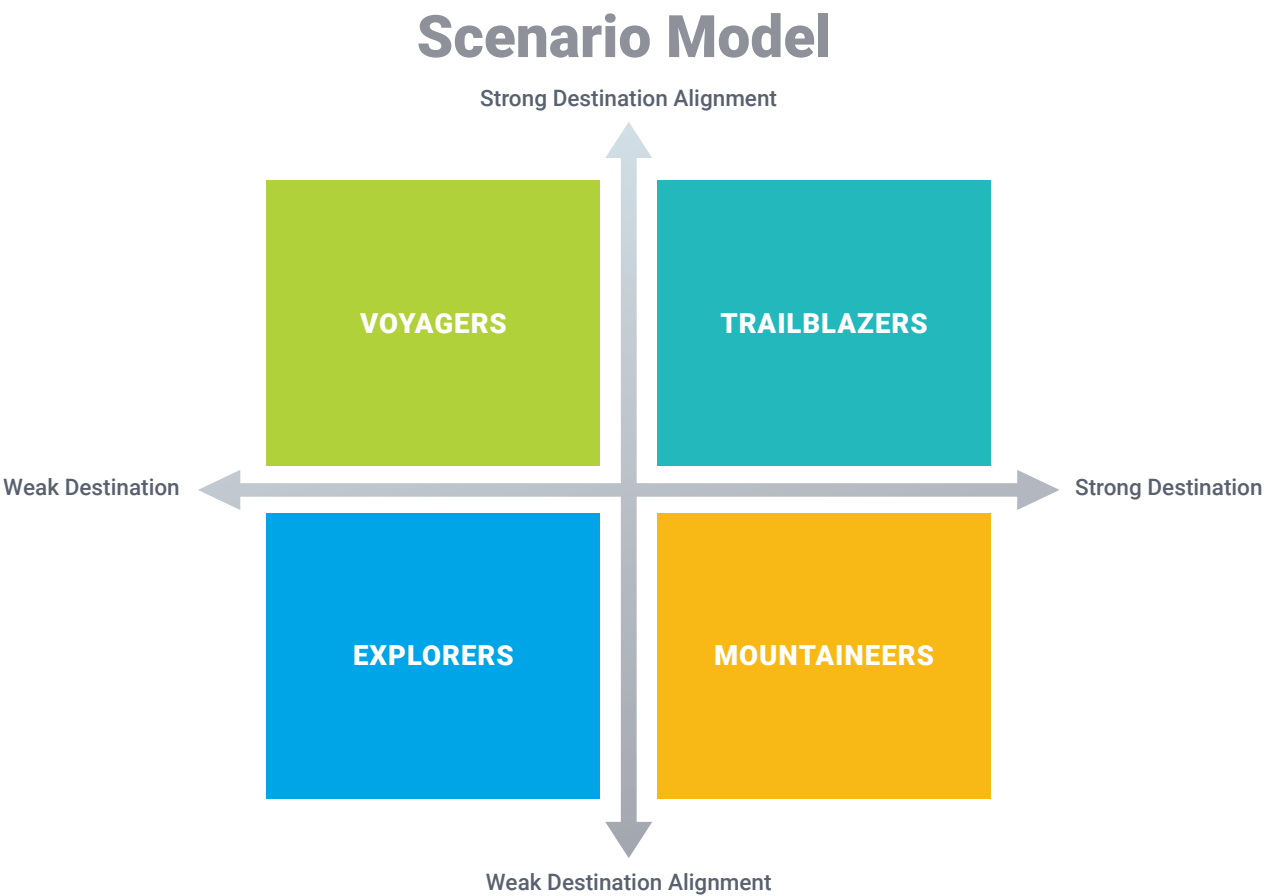
* MGLBR: A respondent is classified as a visitor if they visited at least one community in Michigan’s Great Lakes Bay Region.

** Out-of-State proportions exclude Canadian visitors due to a small sample in the study conducted in 2018.

Assessment of Michigan’s Great Lakes Bay Region as a Destination

DestinationNEXT is the only self-assessment tool that combines the most wide-ranging industry research available with community and stakeholder input, to provide destinations with strategies for sustainable growth.

The online diagnostic tool is designed to assist Destination Marketing Organization’s in conducting an objective self-assessment which will help them determine priorities and strategies for the future. The tool presents a framework that DMO leaders and communities can use to critically assess the destination. It also helps to start a conversation and provide focus on what needs to be done in the future.

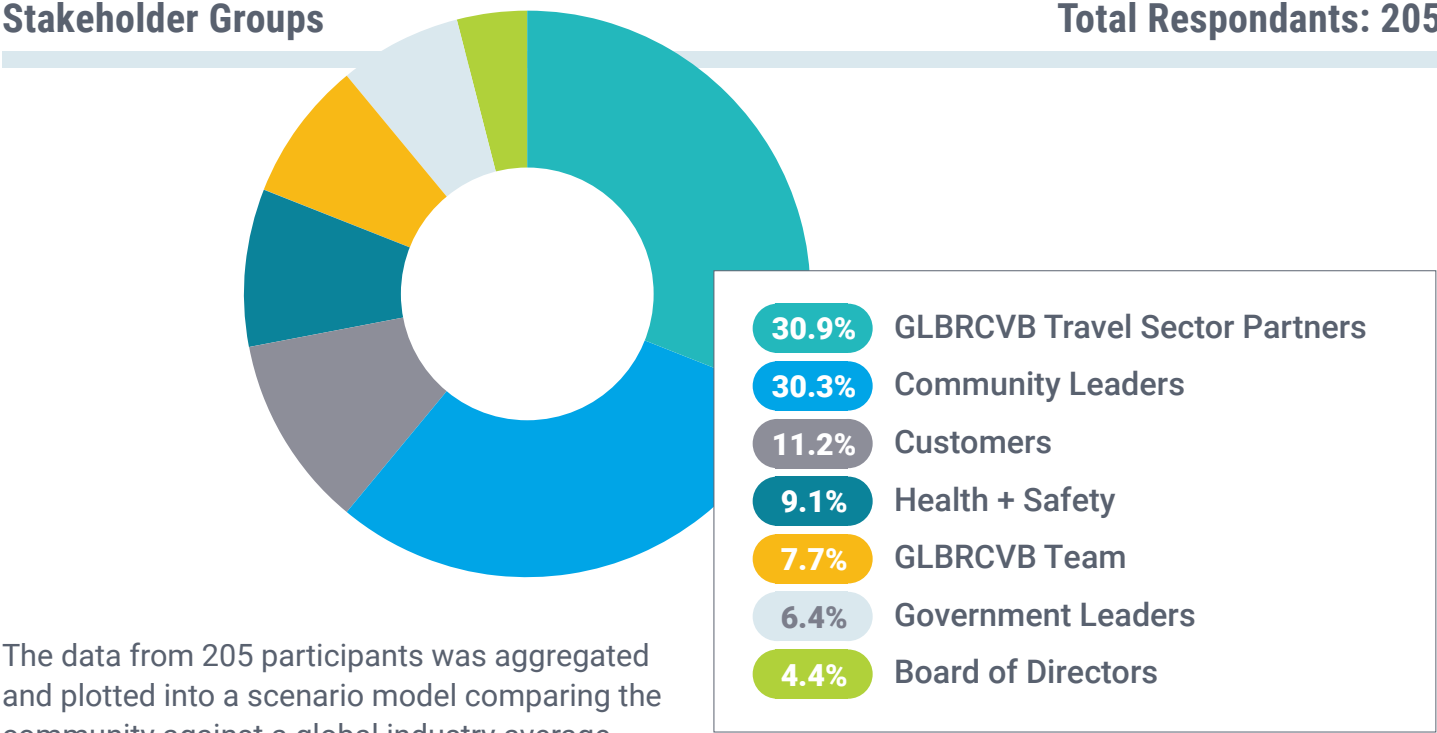


The DestinationNEXT tool is based on 24 variables: 12 variables related to Destination Strength and 12 variables related to Destination Alignment. Within each variable, a series of metrics are also identified which offer the opportunity for DMOs to gather data and provide a more in-depth look at the variable.

In 2021, MMGY NextFactor conducted a comprehensive DestinationNEXT assessment survey with local elected officials, community leaders and industry stakeholders within Michigan’s Great Lakes Bay Region. The survey asked participants to rank the overall strength of the destination’s experience and the level of community alignment around 24 key variables.

Stakeholder Groups

Total Respondants: 205



The data from 205 participants was aggregated and plotted into a scenario model comparing the community against a global industry average.

Michigan’s Great Lakes Bay Region plotted in the **Trailblazers** category, slightly above the industry baseline for overall strength, as well as above average relating to community alignment.



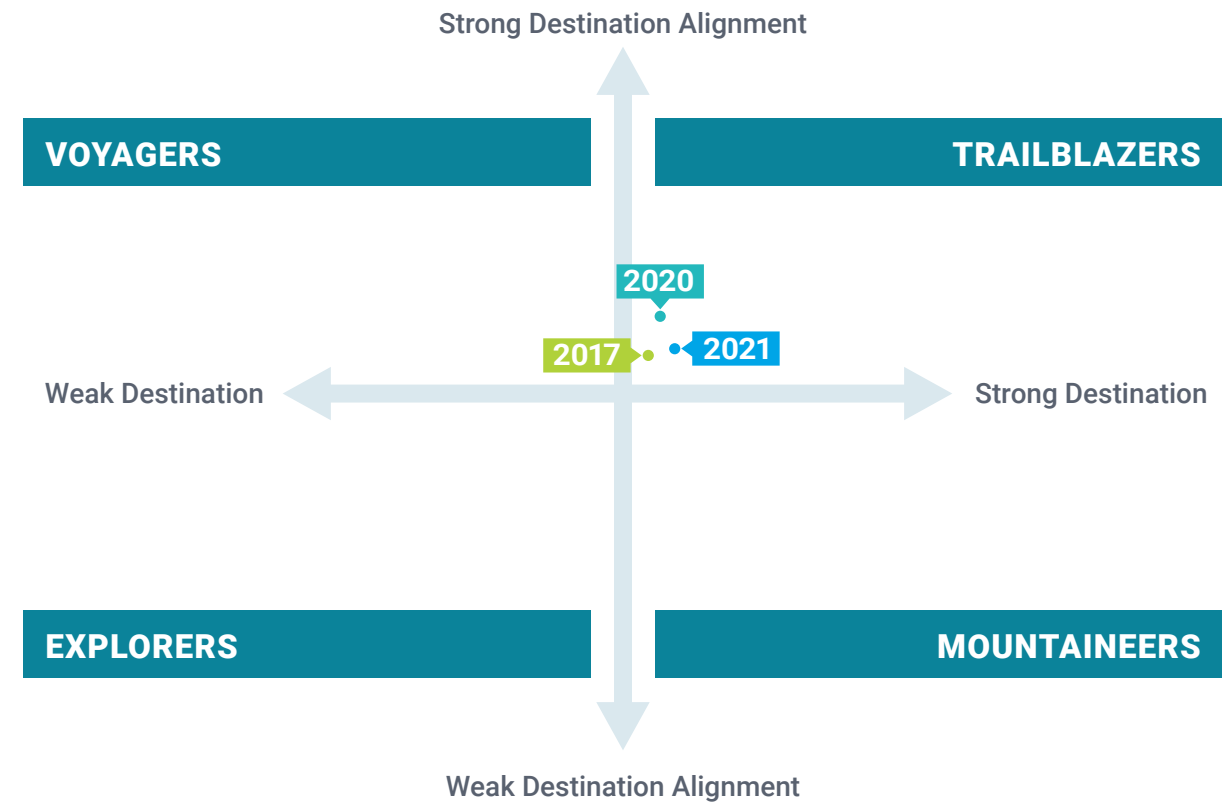
Despite the extreme challenges posed by the 100-year flood and Covid-19, MGLBR experienced an increase in destination strength and community alignment over the previous assessment in 2017. This remarkable achievement reflects the GLBRCVB team’s commitment to guiding the MGLBR through these crises and as a result, emerging as a stronger destination.

Destination Strength

This perception assessment showcased MGLBR’s strengths, which include variables that scored higher than the industry average, such as Outdoor Recreation, Arts, Culture & Heritage, Accommodation Availability, as well as Economic Development, Sustainability & Resilience, and Funding Support. The data results also showed stakeholders felt the biggest challenges were related to four specific variables out of the 24: Mobility & Access, Destination Access, Communication Infrastructure and Workforce Development.

As perceptions of the region’s strengths indicate, MGLBR is ranked nearly on par with the industry average overall. Of the twelve categories, half perform above industry average and half slightly below. The first phase of the strategic recovery plan focuses efforts around tangible objectives the organization directly influences such as communicating health and safety initiatives, highlighting unique events, outdoor experiences and niche marketing opportunities to move the region beyond recovery onward to growth and sustainable development.

Phase two of this plan addresses long range opportunities to improve local mobility and access, air service, meeting and convention venues/capacity plus a targeted approach to expand promotion into new markets and a broader audience.



This data provides the baseline for informing strategies that continue moving the destination forward. The GLBRCVB team has identified opportunities to work with local businesses and entrepreneurs to develop new experiences that capitalize on the region’s abundant outdoor experiences, natural resources, and agritourism. These offerings will appeal to new audiences and niche markets and ultimately strengthen the destination’s position as a premier getaway.

In addition, through enhanced engagement such as sales meetings, industry updates, networking events and detailed reporting, the GLBRCVB team will continually strive to strengthen their relationships with stakeholders and between industry peers throughout MGLBR.

SCENARIO: EXPLORERS		Relative Importance (0-100%)		Perceived Performance (1-5 scale)	
Variable		Industry	Destination	Industry	Destination
Outdoor Recreation		8.64%	8.79%	4.02	3.96
Attractions + Experiences		9.03%	8.78%	3.69	3.69
Dining, Shopping + Entertainment		9.01%	8.57%	3.83	3.51
Arts, Culture + Heritage		7.98%	8.51%	3.77	3.84
Health + Safety		8.56%	8.51%	3.67	3.58
Local Mobility + Access		8.32%	8.46%	3.19	3.09
Events + Festivals		8.27%	8.34%	3.78	3.66
Accommodation		8.77%	8.33%	3.69	3.81
Sporting Events		7.98%	8.22%	3.55	3.56
Conventions + Meetings		8.02%	7.95%	3.40	3.59
Destination Access		8.01%	7.85%	3.50	3.40
Communication Infrastructure		8.38%	7.68%	3.26	3.41
DESTINATION STRENGTH		Industry Average: 3.67		Destination: 3.60	

Green indicates client performance above industry average; orange indicates below.

This chart summarizes the changes from prior scores in each category, and the four variables that were added in 2021 to provide a more in-depth overview of a destination’s assets and strengths.

Destination Strength: Data-Driven Opportunities

Within the Destination Strength category, the lowest-scoring variables provide us with insight regarding the opportunities for improvement in the MGLBR.

Both Local Mobility and Access and Destination Access are perceived as the lowest scoring variables by local stakeholders within the 12 Destination Strength metrics. However, in terms of importance, more weight is given to Local Mobility and Access. Some of the biggest areas for opportunity within the variable are providing adequate public transportation as well as ride sharing options for both residents, improving walkability and bikeability within each community, as well as advocating for infrastructure reinforcement of roads and highways. Similarly, within the Destination Access variable, stakeholders doubled down on the importance of public transportation improvements to and from the region’s cores and the airport.

In terms of communication infrastructure, MGLBR falls significantly behind the industry averages. Increased advocacy is needed regarding broadband and mobile coverage in the region, as well as the availability of free Wi-Fi connections in public areas.

Within the metrics that relate to tourism drivers, including Attractions & Experiences, Dining, Shopping & Entertainment, and Events & Festivals, stakeholders see a need for more iconic attractions and events which lead to increased visitation and economic impact for the region, resulting in future development of new and diverse dining and entertainment experiences.

SCENARIO: TRAILBLAZERS		Relative Importance (0-100%)		Perceived Performance (1-5 scale)	
Variable	Industry	Destination	Industry	Destination	
Hospitality Culture	8.43%	8.74%	3.75	3.60	
Workforce Development	8.43%	8.73%	2.97	3.20	
Business Support	8.44%	8.61%	3.93	3.72	
Sustainability + Resilience	8.28%	8.57%	3.50	3.91	
Regional Cooperation	8.24%	8.35%	3.74	3.75	
Economic Development	8.36%	8.35%	3.97	4.01	
Government Support	8.43%	8.34%	3.71	3.60	
Equity, Diversity + Inclusion	8.21%	8.24%	3.67	3.64	
Funding Support + Certainty	8.52%	8.21%	3.44	3.85	
Emergency Preparedness	8.16%	8.02%	3.40	3.82	
Organization Governance	8.04%	7.96%	3.66	3.77	
Community Group + Resident...	8.31%	7.87%	3.49	3.59	
DESTINATION ALIGNMENT		Industry Average: 3.60		Destination: 3.70	

8 Green indicates client performance above industry average; orange indicates below.

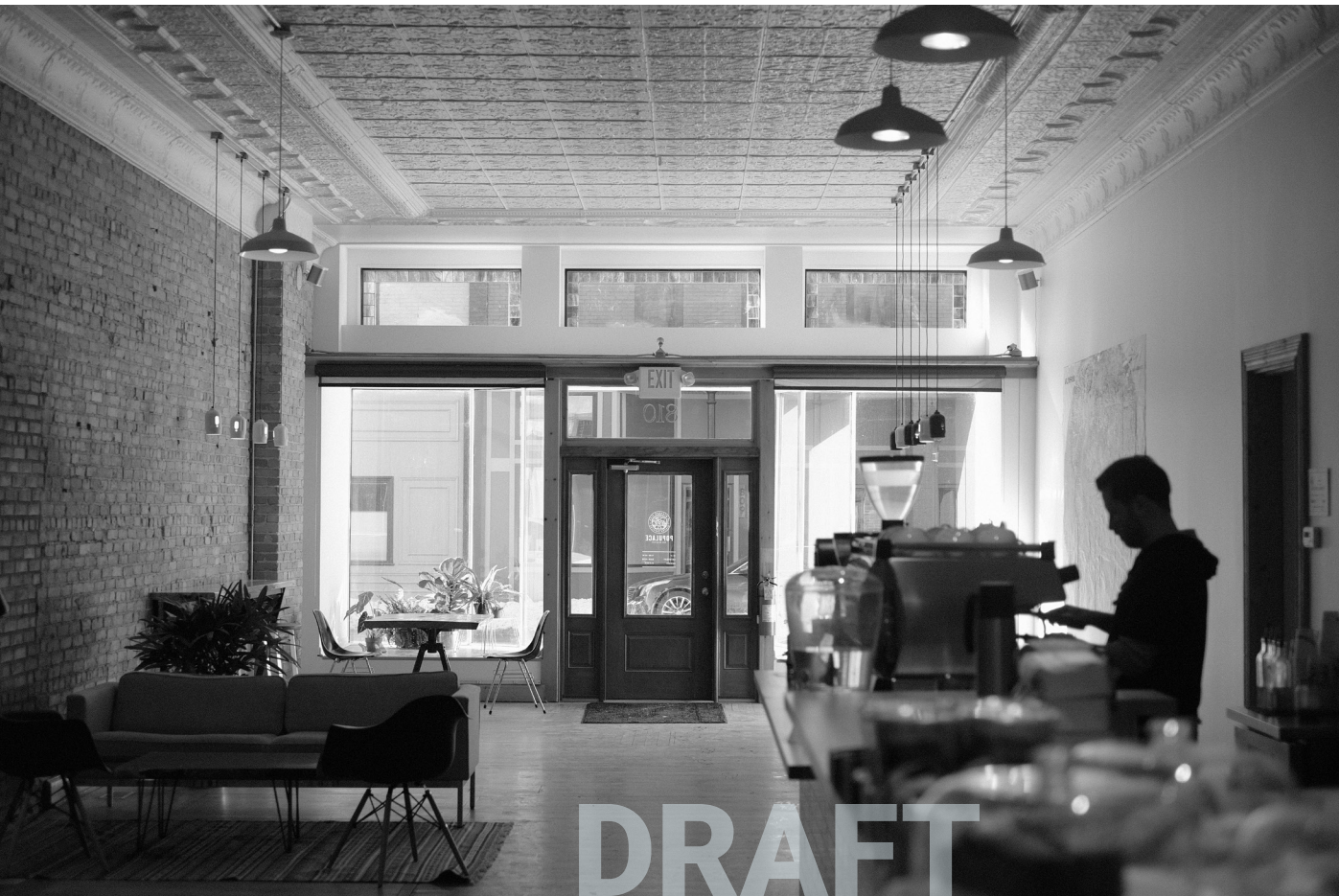
Destination Alignment: Data-Driven Opportunities

Michigan’s Great Lakes Bay Region scored higher than the DestinationNEXT industry average in the Destination Alignment category.

Despite scoring higher than industry average, Workforce Development is the lowest scoring variable in MGLBR’s Destination Alignment category. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, many destinations have been facing workforce shortages, especially in the hospitality industry. Within the Workforce variable, MGLBR’s areas of opportunities mainly include advocacy for providing public transportation, healthcare, and daycare options for workers, as well as promoting the increase of affordable housing for workers and residents. Similarly, the Hospitality Culture variable scores emphasize the need for worker training programs, especially in the hospitality industry, which can complement workforce development initiatives.

Community and Business Support is another area with opportunities for improvement. Educating community groups, residents, and businesses about the importance of the travel and tourism industry and its significant impact on the local economy can improve the perception of tourism in MGLBR. This can further align the various stakeholder groups in Michigan’s Great Lakes Bay Region.

Overall, significant attention should be given to advocacy for Workforce Development initiatives and Local Mobility & Access improvements, as both variables contain the lowest scoring statements in MGLBR’s 2021 DestinationNEXT report.



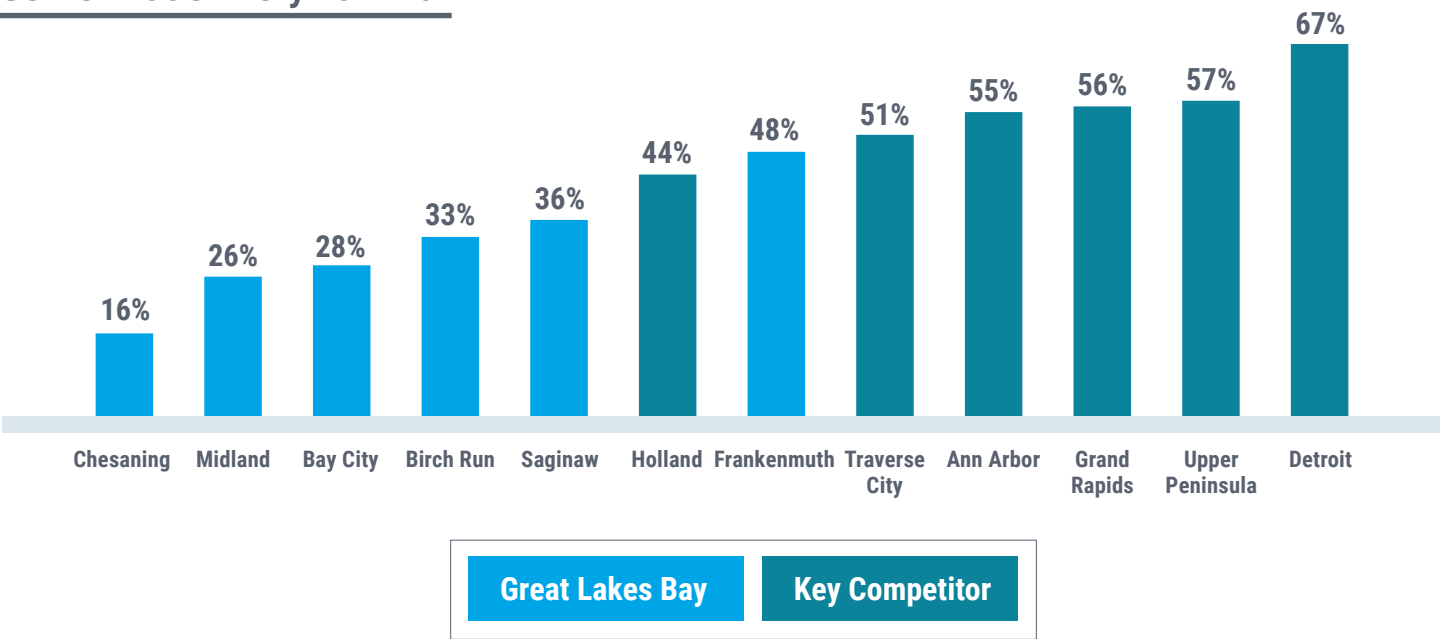
Competitive Analysis

Market Awareness

Market analysis identified opportunities to enhance destination awareness and develop new audiences by building upon familiarity of communities within the region and leveraging to create a greater awareness of lesser-known portions of the area. Highlighting the distinct differences between each community will appeal to a broader audience and assist with creating a more diverse visitor base.

- MGLBR’s communities are generally less familiar to visitors than their competitors.
- Frankenmuth is more familiar than Holland and within a few percentage points of Traverse City. This suggests that Frankenmuth can anchor attraction to the region.

Somewhat or Very Familiar



Website analytics reinforce these findings with top ranked searches centered around unique experiences such as the Nation’s Longest Canopy Walk, events, and outdoor recreation. Data indicates website and social media audiences continue to increase year-over-year, but engagement has declined. This trend reflects a significant opportunity to tell captivating stories that feature authentic experiences unique to each community. Targeting itineraries and trip planning tools to capitalize upon well-known attractions while showcasing “hidden gems” will introduce these original experiences to repeat visitors and new audiences alike.

With ongoing air service disruptors impacting MBS and other regional airports, MGLBR is well-positioned to leverage the drive market within Michigan and surrounding states. Customized messaging tailored to visitors based on their market and demographic will require specialized content. Michigan residents are most familiar with the region while Canadians and out-of-state visitors will need more detailed information to inspire travel.

Familiarity by Market

- The table below shows the percent of respondents that are somewhat or very familiar with each destination by origin market.
- All of the MGLBR communities have higher familiarity in Michigan.
- Frankenmuth is very competitive within the state and only trails Detroit. Birch Run is also fairly competitive in Michigan.

Destination	Michigan Markets	Secondary Markets	Prospective Markets	Canadian Markets
Detroit	83%	58%	61%	64%
Frankenmuth	79%	29%	36%	37%
Upper Peninsula	78%	50%	45%	30%
Traverse City	78%	42%	37%	8%
Grand Rapids	76%	51%	46%	33%
Ann Arbor	73%	47%	47%	30%
Birch Run	65%	20%	16%	19%
Holland	60%	41%	34%	14%
Saginaw	48%	34%	28%	20%
Bay City	44%	21%	22%	15%
Midland	41%	20%	18%	13%
Chesaning	22%	14%	12%	2%

Markets are defined as the following:
Michigan: Detroit, Grand Rapids, Flint, Lansing and Other Michigan
Secondary: Chicago, IL; Toledo, OH; and Ft. Wayne, IN
Prospective: Indianapolis, IN; Columbus, OH; and Cleveland, OH
Canadian: London, ON and Hamilton, ON

Competitive Differentiators

Ample Access to Water

The MGLBR is perfectly positioned between Lake Huron, Saginaw Bay and multiple rivers to provide memorable experiences. River access is ideal for kayaking, stand up paddleboarding (SUP) and miles of scenic waterfront trails. The serene waters of Saginaw Bay are ideal for sightseeing cruises, hands-on Tall Ship excursions, charter fishing and the largest contiguous freshwater coastal wetland system in the U.S. The Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge features an abundance of wildlife and birding in a natural setting. Soft adventures provide visitors with mobility or neuro-sensitivity issues the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors and make lifelong memories.

Proximity to Population

The drive market remains as a primary focus for promotion and Michigan’s Great Lakes Bay Region is uniquely positioned to capitalize on accessibility to major metropolitan hubs. Proximity to first tier cities such as Detroit and Toronto provide a significant base of visitors with diverse interests to draw from. Grand Rapids and Toledo offer secondary target markets all within a few hours’ drive. Touting an easy journey as part of the adventure sets MGLBR apart from the competition.

Unexpected Experiences

Insight gained through SMARI’s market analysis indicated perceptions of MGLBR are neutral or positive, primarily due to lack of familiarity with the amenities and experiences available for visitors. Opportunities to share the diverse attributes of each community through storytelling serves to inform visitors, inspire travel to the destination and distinguish their individual identities within MGLBR. Engaging visitors to share unexpected moments or capture their favorite experiences generates a library of user generated content with authentic messaging that will resonate with followers. Utilizing influencers and travel writers will further expand reach to broader audiences.

Keen on Cannabis

Until federal legislation exists, Michigan and MGLBR stand to benefit from the growing popularity surrounding cannabis tourism. Neighboring Ohio legalized possession of small amounts of marijuana but recreational use is still prohibited, and Indiana is currently exploring the possibility of legalization, but statutes prohibit possession, which provides an opportunity for promoting local access and responsible consumption to this niche market. This differentiator reinforces proximity as a distinction for MGLBR.

Access to Agriculture

The agricultural sector threads its way throughout MGLBR offering ample opportunities to showcase farm-to-table dining, hands-on harvesting, educational tourism, and sustainability best practices. Desire for one of a kind experiential travel and voluntourism is anticipated to continue rising well into the future.

Affordable Options

Increasing cost of goods and inflation are impacting future travel bookings, however, MGLBR stands out as an affordable destination, particularly when compared with other Michigan communities where lodging, dining, and attractions are significantly more expensive. Visitors originating from larger cities or Canada will find the significant cost savings appealing. Venue pricing and catering services for meetings, conventions, and sports competitions could also be enticed with the ability to stretch their budgets further.

Assessing The Impact of Flooding and COVID-19 on the Local Tourism Economy

Overall, most visitors rank their post-COVID experience in the MGLBR as positive or unchanged. This trend presents an opportunity to build upon positive sentiment and continue building momentum through user generated content and earned media focused on MGLBR’s resilience.

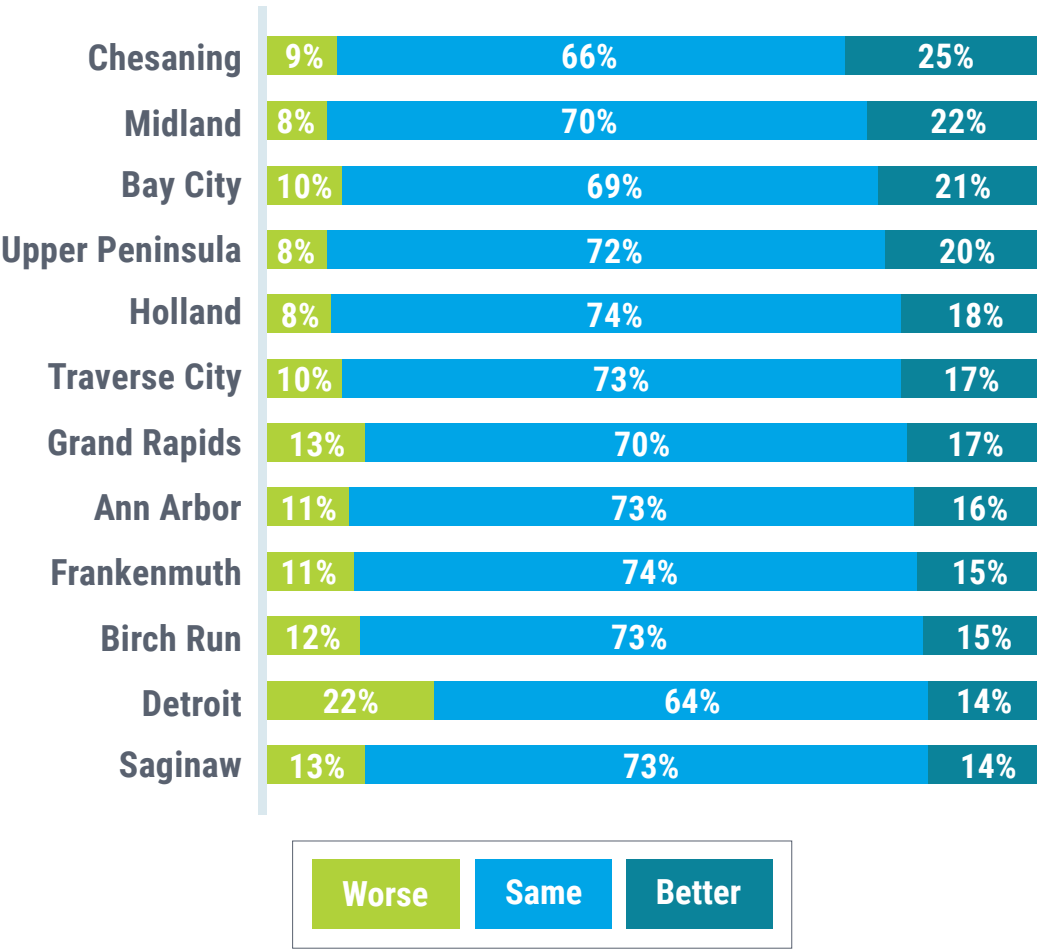
COVID and the Destination Experience

The pandemic has undoubtedly affected travel. For GLBRCVB and a majority of their key competitors, many people were either positive or neutral when asked about changes in their experience at each destination.

Saginaw and especially Detroit were more negatively impacted than other destinations.

Chesaning, Midland, and Bay City had the most positive change in perception.

How does today’s visitor experience compare to the pre-COVID-19 experience?



Question: Based on whatever you know about each Michigan destination, how do you think the visitor experience today compares to before the COVID-19 pandemic?

Recent Visitor Market Share Change

Economic indicators continue to show signs of improvement across most sectors. While the average daily rate (ADR) and revenue per available room (RevPar) have rebounded, occupancy has yet to achieve pre-pandemic levels. However, lodging tax collections have exceeded pre-pandemic levels due to rate increases. Hospitality and leisure workforce shows signs of improving year-over-year. Yet with 12,500 people working in the tourism industry, it remains more than nine percent behind 2019 employment figures. Despite these challenges, implementing data-driven strategies for growth will drive the visitor economy to a full recovery.

When comparing the proportions of recent visitors from 2018 to 2022, MGLBR can see the affects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The reduction in recent visitors is strongest among Michigan residents, which MGLBR is more dependent on than key competitors.

Traverse City was the only destination to not see a decrease in out-of-state visitation.

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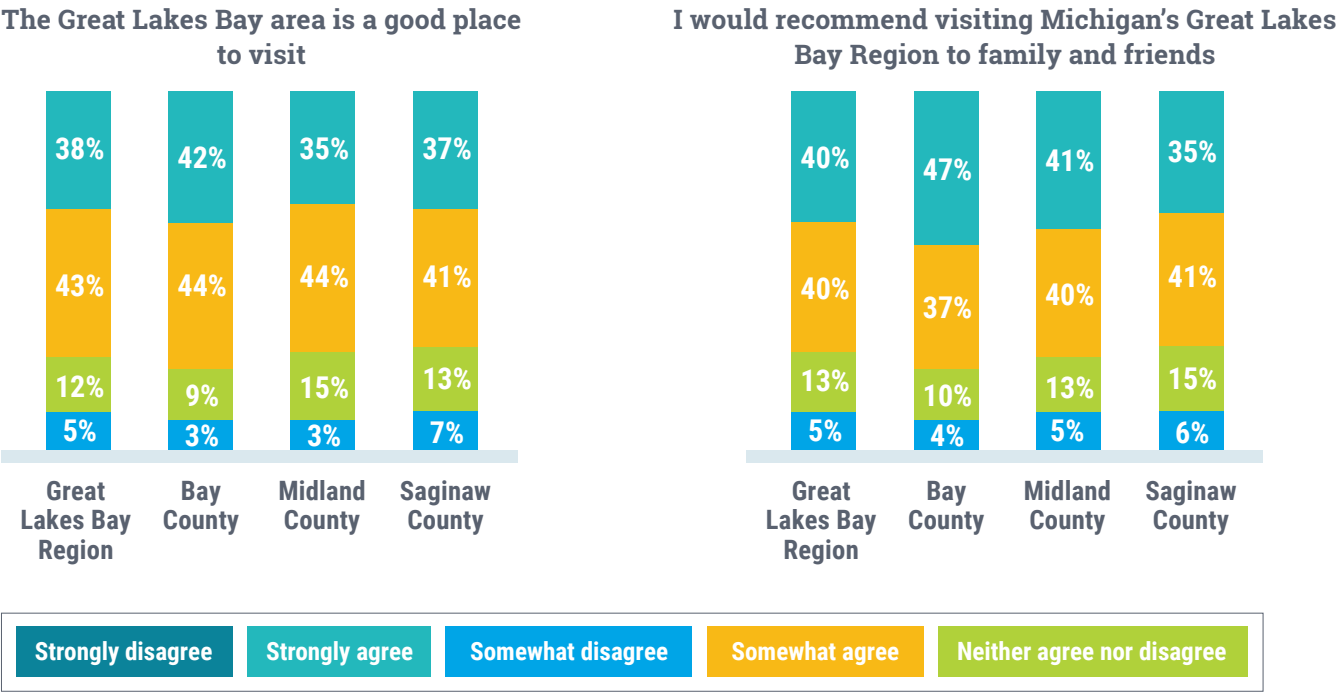
** Out-of-State proportions exclude Canadian visitors due to a small sample in the study conducted in 2018.

Resident Sentiment

Tourism is a positive aspect of Michigan’s Great Lakes Bay Region with 66 percent of residents agreeing that tourism is good for the area and tourism promotion is a good use of money. Residents agree that marketing MGLBR is generally a good idea and will result in more customers to their local businesses. Research indicates residents desire more visitors, even in the peak summer season, where there is capacity for more visitors to the area. Residents want visitors who are respectful, care for natural resources and travel with family.

Great Lakes Bay as a Place to Visit

Few residents are negative about MGLBR as a place to visit, but only one-third strongly agree that it is a good place to visit, and 40% strongly agree that they would recommend visiting MGLBR to family and friends.



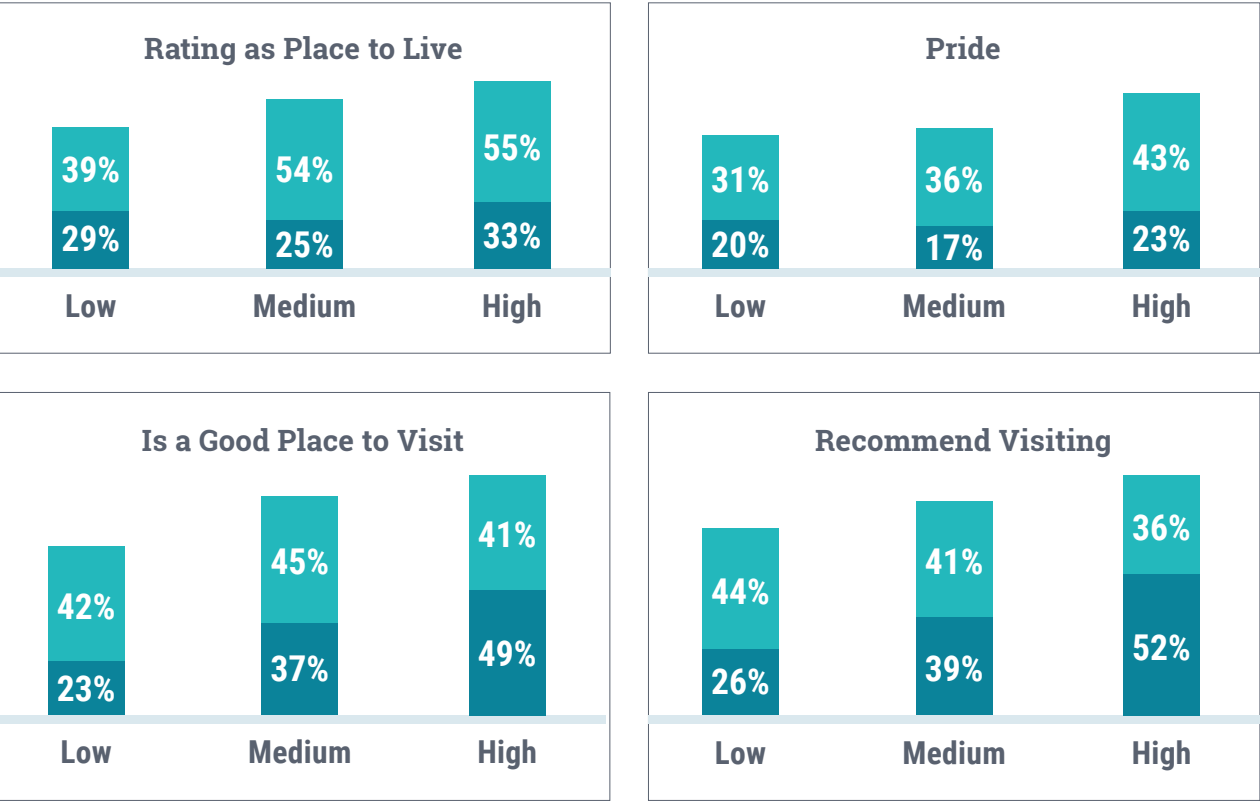
Residents view MGLBR as being naturally scenic, defined by bodies of water and ideal for families. They would prefer visitors who respect nature and share these local values.

Attraction Participation Impact on Community Attitudes

Residents with high rates of attraction participation give higher ratings to the community as a place to live, and they report higher levels of pride.

They are also much more likely to rate MGLBR as a good place to visit and recommend visiting the MGLBR to friends and family.

These are compelling reasons to encourage community residents to participate in area attractions.



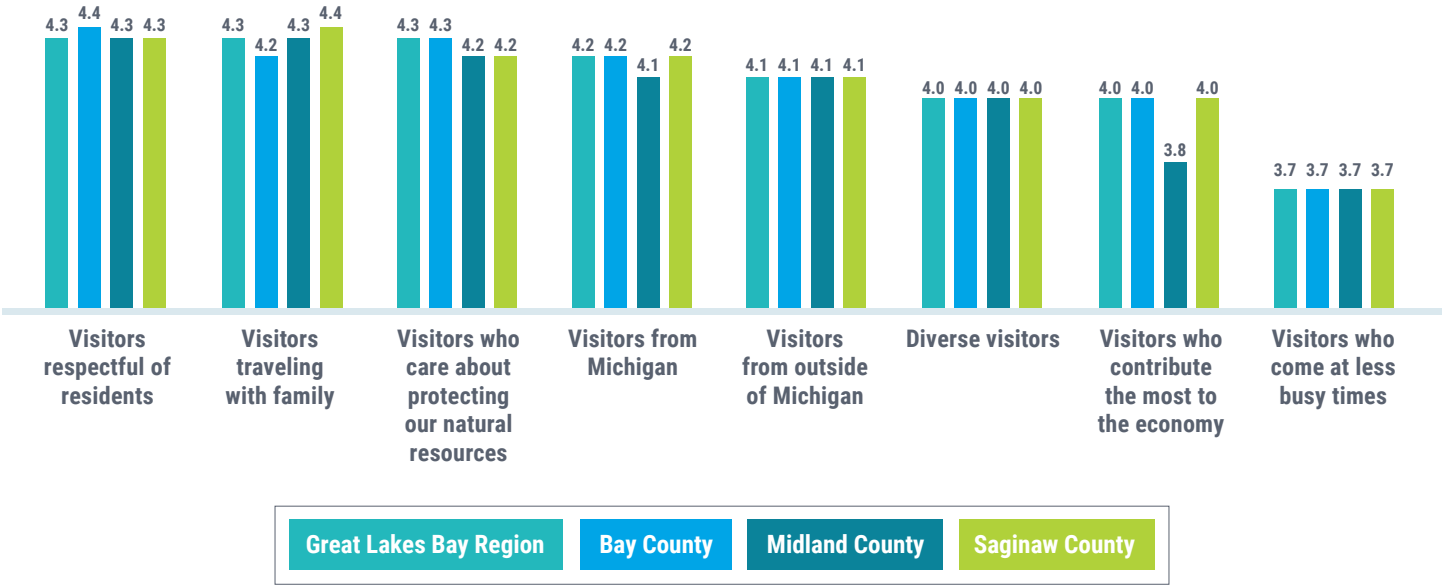
Strongly agree Somewhat agree

Low = 1-5
Medium = 6-13
High = 14+

Preferred Visitors

Every type of visitor is seen as a positive for the community. Residents think that more tourism is good for the community, and seasonality (shown below) is not a concern.

To generate tourism that is positive for the area, the focus should be on (5-point scale)...



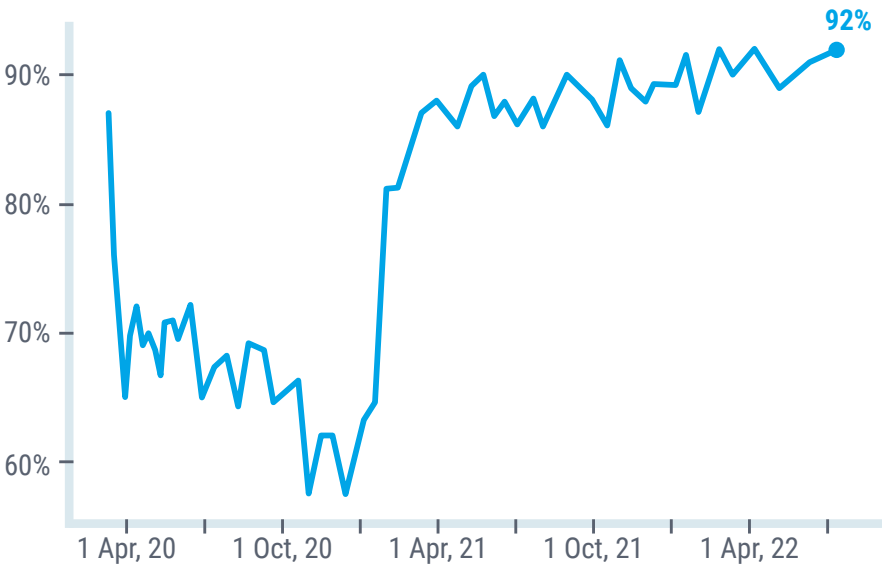
Forecasting the Future of Economic Recovery

According to research conducted by Longwoods International and compiled by Tourism Economics, national travel spending fully recovered by second quarter 2022. However, this analysis identified four obstacles with potential to negatively impact national, state and local recovery. These four elements pose the greatest risk to slowing economic recovery efforts: Inflation, Air Capacity, International Inbound Travel, and Workforce. These factors have been taken into consideration while developing strategic initiatives designed for the GLBRCVB team to address these issues as recovery efforts continue throughout MGLBR.

While inflation remains a significant concern, current data shows U.S. household income remains strong and hourly wages are still outpacing inflation over the past two years. Consumer spending shows no signs of slowing, intention to travel remains elevated and indicators reflect fuel consumption has not been impacted by higher costs and MGLBR’s continued emphasis on attracting the drive market is well positioned for growth.



Consumer Travel Sentiment
Travelers with Travel Plans in the Next Six Months



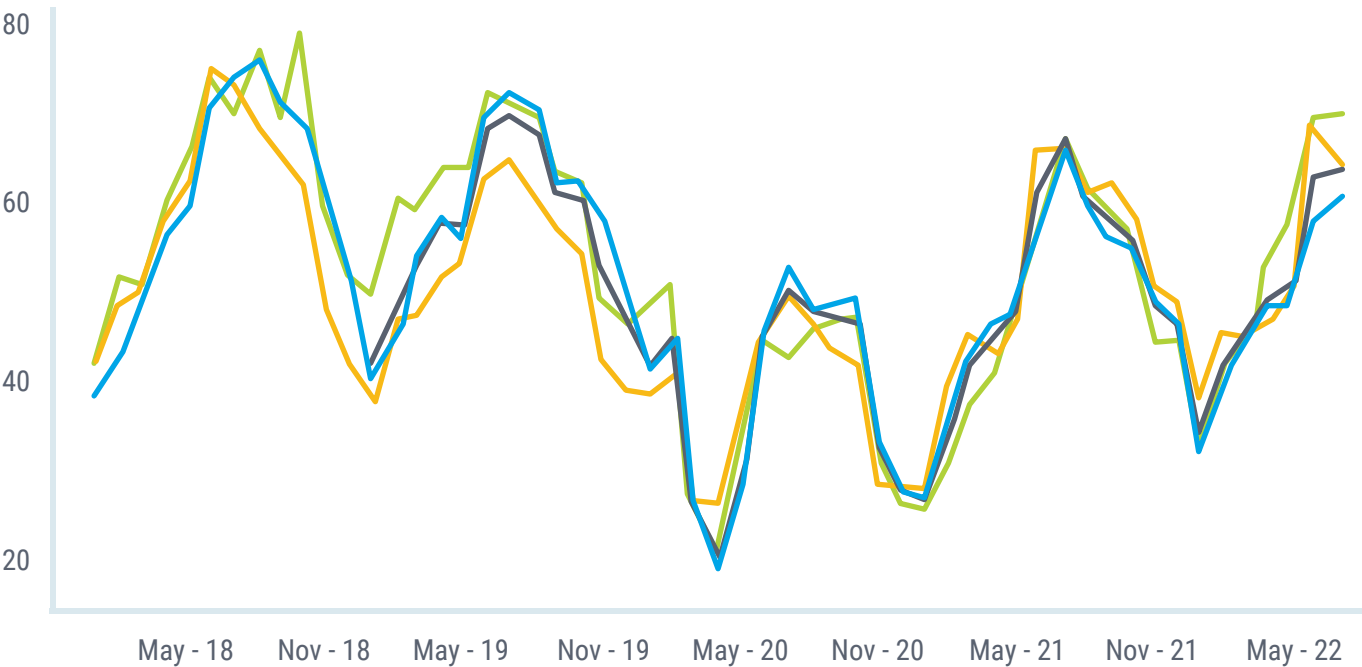
Consumer Travel Sentiment
% of U.S. travelers that are currently ready to travel



Forecasting the Future of Economic Recovery

According to Smith Travel Research, hotel occupancy is more evenly distributed across MGLBR than ever before, however variances exist in average daily rate depending upon location. For the first time since the pandemic, RevPAR exceeded 2019 levels and lodging tax is outpacing previous record-setting collections. Opportunities for collaborating with hotel partners to attract additional group business, expanding promotion into new niche markets, and growing special events in off-peak seasons will continue the momentum of recovery within the lodging sector.

Hotel Occupancy – Great Lakes Bay Region, MI

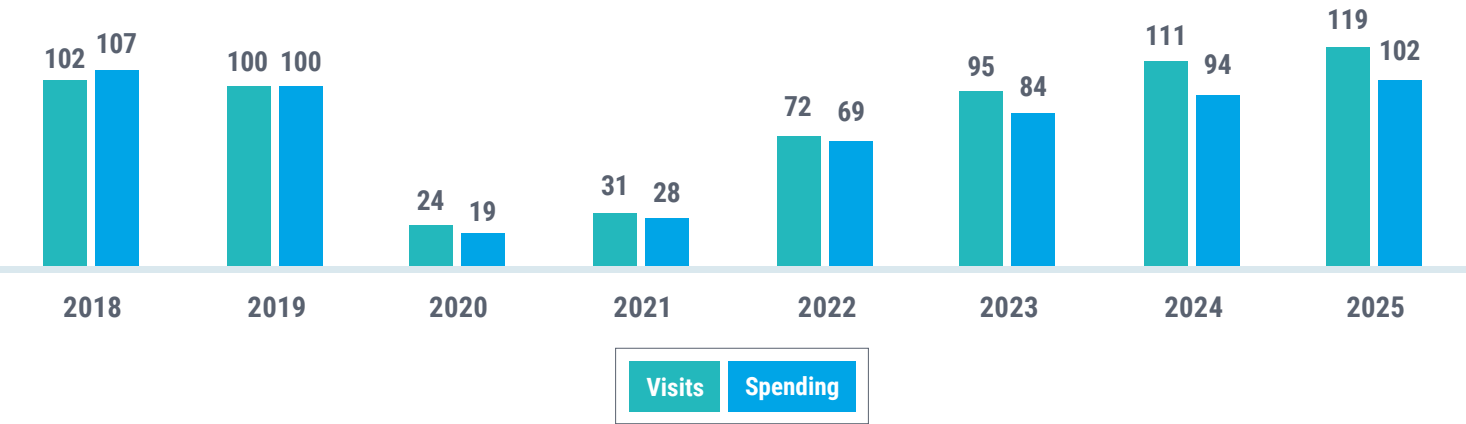


Meanwhile, air capacity remains a challenge across the state with the majority of destinations struggling to regain pre-pandemic passenger volume. The ongoing pilot shortage has resulted in additional schedule reductions at MBS, but visitor arrivals, excluding residents, has rebounded to 60% of 2019 levels. The GLBRCVB team could collaborate with MBS to pursue an additional carrier or expand service through an existing carrier by applying for a U.S. Department of Transportation Small Community Air Service Development Grant (SCASD) and creating a “fly local” campaign encouraging residents and local businesses to prioritize flying MBS International Airport. Inbound data for the first half of 2022 shows international arrivals on par with 2019 levels, but it now has the top market of origin. Chicago dropped to the second highest market of origin and Detroit rose more than six percent to move into third place. Customized campaigns in top markets of origin have the potential to bolster passenger traffic to MBS.

	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22
Detroit Metro Wayne County	-20%	-17%	-15%	-16%	-19%	-19%
Gerald R Ford International Airport	-7%	-10%	-7%	-9%	-14%	-8%
Cherry Capital	22%	42%	14%	-13%	9%	2%
Bishop International	13%	33%	12%	9%	7%	4%
Capital City	-49%	-43%	-45%	-49%	-50%	-52%
MBS International	-42%	-43%	-43%	-43%	-42%	-48%
Kalamazoo Municipal	-48%	-54%	-54%	-59%	27%	-60%
Pellston Regional	32%	32%	4%	-2%	15%	-3%
Sawyer International	13%	-10%	-5%	-21%	-30%	-40%
Chippewa County International	-3%	8%	1%	30%	17%	35%

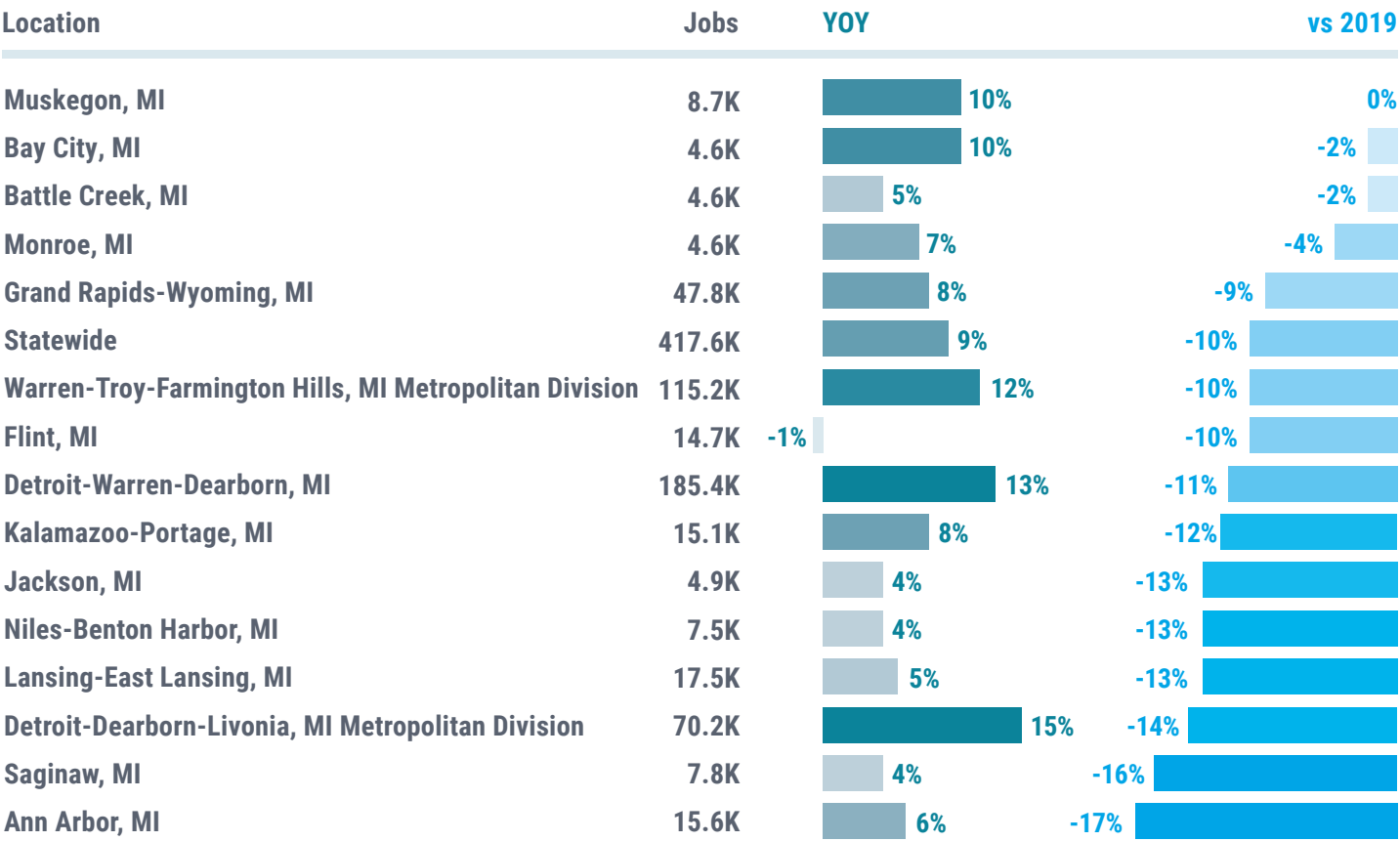
International travel forecasts from Tourism Economics indicate this sector will take longer to recover, with visitation to Michigan anticipated to reach pre-pandemic levels by 2024 and spending lagging an additional year. Strong demand and higher airfare trends are expected to continue through year end 2022 but have started showing signs of relief which will make international travel more affordable.

International Visitation and Spending Forecast
State of Michigan, % recovered vs 2019



Nationwide, statistics from Haver Analytics reflect more than two job openings exist for each unemployed person. Despite leisure and hospitality wage increases nearly 15% higher than other sectors, the tourism industry is particularly hard hit by workforce shortages in restaurants and accommodations with 1 in 9 jobs remaining unfilled. Communities within MGLBR have been impacted to varying degrees across the region and in comparison with the rest of the state. This suggests opportunities for the GLBRCVB team to collaborate with economic development to brand the region as an ideal location to work, live, and play.

Leisure and Hospitality Jobs in Michigan
Job Levels, % Change YOY, % Change vs. 2019



Organizational Considerations

The GLBRCVB team, led by CEO Annette Rummel, has traditionally followed a flat structure, allowing the GLBRCVB team to be nimble to react and respond quickly to opportunities and challenges, including the 100-year flood and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The strength and capabilities of the GLBRCVB team are a significant asset to the organization and to the industry in the Region. Appropriately, the GLBRCVB team redirected much of its focus to respond to the 100-year flood and the pandemic, and unfortunately had to downsize to stay afloat. Now, to fully recover and effectively respond to the changed needs of the industry and visitors, new organizational roles are recommended. These roles will broaden the bandwidth of the existing GLBRCVB team, bring new skills to the organization, and prepare the GLBRCVB team for the implementation of this Strategic Recovery Plan and future Destination Master and Experience Development Plans.

These roles include a lead for Destination Development, a lead for Community Engagement (both ideally Director-level or higher) and a lead for corporate / industry communications (Coordinator-level or higher).

The Destination Development lead will be responsible for championing the implementation of the upcoming Destination Master Plan and Experience Development Plan, collaborating with community partners in ensuring the plans are enacted, progress is tracked, and success is measured. The ideal candidate will have a great level of trust amongst influential community members who have the authority to move destination development initiatives forward.

The Communication Engagement lead will also have a high degree of respect and trust in the community and will work closely with the Destination Development lead and the Marketing team. This role will be responsible for making connections within the industry, community, and organization, being an ambassador for the organization amongst stakeholders, expanding the reach of the organization to include non-traditional and diverse audiences and ensuring the internal GLBRCVB team is collaborating with the industry effectively.

Finally, the Communications lead will be responsible for effectively communicating with the industry, community stakeholders, government partners and media on a regular basis about the organization, its progress against key initiatives and how it is supporting the industry and the community. These communication channels may include newsletters, townhall meetings, media releases, progress reports, etc. and must be fully integrated with all aspects of the organization.

Until the recommended roles are filled, the CEO will assume oversight and responsibility for the strategic initiatives that will be tasked to these portfolios.

Strategic Recovery Vision: Go Great, Together

From 2016 to 2020, MGLBR had a roadmap to guide their way to becoming a trailblazing Destination Marketing Management Organization of the future. In 2020, the region suffered both a 100-year flood event and the immediate and devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Overnight, travel stopped causing occupancy to drop off, businesses were forced to close and strategic efforts were halted. The visitor economy was essentially closed.

Since the gradual reopening of the visitor economy, the region has seen a modest recovery in the visitor economy. With room to go to reach full pre-pandemic levels and to guide that growth in a meaningful manner that is responsive to new trends and lessons from the pandemic, the focus of this three-year strategic plan is rooted in collaboration and partnership. If the pandemic taught us anything, it’s that as a region, we’re better together and we have the drive, capability, and community to emerge even better than before. From that, our focus of Go Great, Together was formed.

The basis of this Strategic Recovery Plan is rooted in stakeholder engagement. To understand the impacts of the pandemic and flood, it was important to go beyond the numbers, and talk to those affected. To that end, five interviews were conducted, 1,183 resident sentiment surveys were completed, 41 stakeholder surveys completed, 205 DestinationNEXT assessments were submitted, and 17 stakeholders participated in six focus groups. A detailed economic analysis was also completed for the region.

Several key themes that emerged from all the analysis included the critical roles of:

- Develop the destination, place brand and experiences available
- Collaborate with industry and non-traditional stakeholders
- Grow the capacity and offerings of the organization to support industry in a post-pandemic environment
- Include new and diverse audiences and demonstrate inclusion, accessibility, belonging and environmental stewardship

These themes, along with considerations for restoring consumer confidence and for building a more resilient visitor economy are reflected in MGLBR’s strategies for 2023-2025:

- Create a collaborative brand identity that reflects the region
- Develop the Great Lakes Bay Region as a (more) desirable destination for visitors
- Adopt a comprehensive and inclusive stakeholder engagement focus
- Build the capacity of the internal GLBRCVB team
- Support industry capacity building
- Grow the visitor economy through event and business attraction opportunities

Strategy #1: Create a Collaborative Brand Identity That Reflects the Region

To expedite recovery in the Great Lakes Bay Region, a strong brand identity is needed that reflects the values of the region and articulates what the Great Lakes Bay Region is, and what visitors can expect.

Indicators	Strategies (CEO to lead until new positions are hired)	Lead	Support	Timeline		
				2023	2024	2025
<div>- Brand effectiveness scores</div> <div>- Community buy-in to brand</div> <div>- Support of brand and use by industry partners</div> <div>- Engagement in brand process by non-traditional and diverse stakeholders</div> <div>- Increase in marketing metrics</div>	Evaluate current brand to determine effectiveness / gaps	Creative Director	CEO, full team, BrandScape	○		
	Use visitor perception and sentiment research to understand gaps in brand message / promise	Creative Director	CEO, full team, BrandScape	○		
	Work with stakeholders and residents to articulate regional values and differentiators	CEO	Director Community Engagement	○		
	Engage non-traditional and diverse stakeholders to get their input and buy-in	CEO	Director Community Engagement	○		
	With community leaders, industry members and input from residents, develop / enhance a regional brand that highlights regional values and differentiators	CEO	Creative Director, BrandScape	○		
	Engage leaders from each region and community to be champions for the brand	Director Meetings + Conferences	CEO, Director Community Engagement		○	
	Develop messaging, visual assets and tools to support industry partners to live the brand	Creative Director	CEO, full team		○	
	Work with Mayors / community leaders to share brand message / promise with residents	CEO	Creative Director, BrandScape		○	
	Engage industry partners to adopt the brand promise	Travel Experts	CEO, full team, BrandScape		○	
	Develop a comprehensive, multi-platform marketing campaign targeted at key markets / audiences	CEO	Full team, BrandScape		○	○
	Celebrate diversity in the region by highlighting businesses operated by LGBTQ+, BIPOC, veterans, etc	Director of Social Media	CEO, full team, BrandScape	○	○	○
	Leverage relationships with local businesses and attractions to become brand ambassadors and expand reach across social platforms and broad range of demographics	Director of Social Media	CEO, full team	○	○	○
	Continue to evaluate effectiveness of brand articulation	Creative Director	CEO, full team, BrandScape		○	○

Strategy #2: Develop the Great Lakes Bay Region as a More Desirable Destination for Visitors

Continuing to develop the destination and its assets will support continued recovery and the ongoing strength of the visitor economy by developing experiences, supporting business development and growing the offerings of the region.

Indicators	Strategies (CEO to Lead until new positions are hired)	Lead	Support	Timeline		
				2023	2024	2025
- Development of Destination Master Plan	Prioritize implementing and reporting on progress of the Destination Master Plan	CEO	Full team	○	○	○
	Prioritize implementing Experience Development Plan	CEO	Full team	○	○	○
- Development of Experience Development Plan	Create a stakeholder engagement strategy to ensure the appropriate stakeholders are engaged and actively participating in destination development	CEO	Full team	○		
- Organizational resources dedicated to implementation of destination development plans	Clearly articulate and communicate roles of Go Great Lakes Bay and other stakeholders in destination development and gain buy-in	CEO	Full team	○	○	○
	Deploy Recovery Communications Strategy to ensure all stakeholders are aware of progress	CEO	Full team	○		
- Number of stakeholders regularly engaged and actively collaborating in implementation of plans	Utilize social media to improve perceptions of the region. Create a contest or digital scavenger hunt focused around all there is to love throughout the area, incorporating the brand story	Director of Social Media	CEO, full team	○	○	○
- Progress against goals in plans	Use media exposure and public facing communication (email distribution list, story pitches, etc) to tell the story of the GLB region, incorporating brand story	Director of Social Media	CEO, full team, BrandScape	○	○	○

Strategy #3: Adopt a Comprehensive and Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement Focus

By engaging stakeholders in a meaningful and ongoing manner that emphasizes collaboration, engagement and partnership, the GLBRCVB team will be able to share the impacts of the visitor economy and continue to grow it with traditional and non-traditional partners. This type of focused, collaborative engagement will support recovery and the long-term health of the destination.

Indicators	Strategies (CEO to Lead until new positions are hired)	Lead	Support	Timeline		
				2023	2024	2025
- Number of stakeholders engaged on a regular basis	Develop a stakeholder map that can be updated monthly to understand stakeholder needs, priorities and partnerships	CEO	Full team	○		
	Engage with non-traditional stakeholders/ community members to build relationships, understanding and collaboration	CEO	Full team	○	○	○
- New relationships developed and fostered with diverse communities	Engage diverse business owners, local champions, accessible businesses, etc to forge new relationships and collaborations	CEO	Full team	○	○	○
	Implement an annual stakeholder engagement survey to ensure the priorities of stakeholders are understood	CEO	Full team	○	○	○
- Annual stakeholder survey results	Develop a stakeholder engagement strategy that aligns with Destination Master Plan and Experience Development Plan	CEO	Full team	○		
- Number of partner events participated in	Create engagement opportunities for CEO, Director of Community Engagement, Director of Marketing and Director of Destination Development	Operations	CEO, full team	○	○	○
- Number of collaborative sessions hosted	Continue to foster relationships with public safety to remain informed of trends, share visitor sentiment and keep emergency preparedness plan current	CEO	Full team	○	○	○
	Establish standing meetings (monthly or quarterly) with lodging GM/DOS to provide sales updates on leads, lost business and definite bookings. Discuss meaningful ways to collaborate more closely on client events, sales missions and FAM tours	Director of Meetings and Conferences & Director of Sports	Director of Groups	○	○	○
	Identify community partners to develop new signature event(s) in shoulder seasons to drive visitor traffic and increase overnight stays	Director of Meetings and Conferences & Director of Sports	Director of Groups	○	○	○
	Align all stakeholder engagement priorities with strategic communications (industry newsletters, media relations, social, etc)	Creative Director & Director of Social Media	BrandScape	○	○	○
	Continuously monitor and evaluate success of engagement and include new stakeholders where appropriate	CEO	Full team	○	○	○

Strategy #4: Build the Capacity of the Internal GLBRCVB Team

For the region to recover and grow, the GLBRCVB team will need to adapt to the new environment, and support the industry in doing the same. By expanding the capacity of the organization, it will also allow for diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB) to become a more significant focus, which will support MGLBR in attracting new audiences.

Indicators	Strategies (CEO to Lead until new positions are hired)	Lead	Support	Timeline		
				2023	2024	2025
- DEIB training opportunities for staff and programs incorporated into work and culture	Engage a partner to deliver DEIB training and skill development to all team members	CEO, Operations	Full team	○	○	○
	Hire new positions: Directors of Destination Development, Community Engagement and Communications Coordinator	CEO	Full team	○		
- New positions recruited for, and onboarded	Ensure the GLBRCVB team authentically understand the gaps, barriers, opportunities and successes of diversity, accessibility, fairness and inclusion	CEO	Full team	○	○	○
- Onboarding updated to include inclusion practices						
- Sustainability and stewardship training opportunities for staff and programs incorporated into work and culture	Ensure the GLBRCVB team authentically understand the gaps, barriers, opportunities and successes of environmental sustainability and stewardship	CEO	Full team	○	○	○

Strategy #5: Support Industry Capacity Building

As the industry recovers from the impacts of the pandemic, it is important for the GLBRCVB team to lead, guide and support industry partners in both adapting to the “new normal” and developing ongoing practices and approaches that address reduced workforce, inclusion and sustainability, amongst other things.

Indicators	Strategies (CEO to Lead until new positions are hired)	Lead	Support	Timeline		
				2023	2024	2025
- DEIB training opportunities and development of programs for industry	Offer DEIB business support like training, guidance and best practices to industry partners	CEO, Operations	Full team	○		
	Offer workforce development support to industry partners, including training and connecting partners who may consider sharing staff and/or best practices	CEO	Full team		○	○
- Sustainability and stewardship training opportunities and development of programs for industry	Work closely with economic development agencies and workforce development organizations to create inspirational campaigns that entice people to work here	CEO	Creative Director		○	○
- Workforce development partnerships with industry and economic development agencies	Partner with higher education and businesses to implement incentive programs targeting recent graduates (i.e. signing bonus, tuition reimbursement)	CEO	Full team		○	○
- Success of advocacy initiatives	Offer sustainability and stewardship business support like training, guidance and best practices to industry partners	CEO	Full team		○	○

Strategy #6: Grow the Visitor Economy Through Event and Business Attraction Opportunities

One of the first sectors to return to pre-pandemic levels was the events sector. Both leisure and sporting events have experienced strong demand and business meetings continue to grow. The MGLBR has an opportunity to strategically capitalize on this market to expedite the recovery of the industry in a collaborative way.

Indicators	Strategies (CEO to Lead until new positions are hired)	Lead	Support	Timeline		
				2023	2024	2025
- Updating sport attraction strategy to include non-traditional opportunities	Undertake an analysis of sport event attraction opportunities for the region against current infrastructure	Director of Sports	Director of Meetings and Conferences, Director of Groups, Director of Tourism	○		
	Analyze non-traditional competitions and tournaments such as robotics, e-sports/gaming, chess, academics and their match for the destination	Director of Sports	Director of Meetings and Conferences, Director of Groups, Director of Tourism	○		
- Updating meetings attraction strategy that incorporates strong alignment and partnership with corporate and community stakeholders	Develop a detailed sport and event sales / attraction strategy	Director of Sports	Director of Meetings and Conferences, Director of Groups, Director of Tourism with CEO approval		○	
	Develop a detailed meetings / business sales / attraction strategy	Director of Meetings and Conferences	Director of Meetings and Conferences, Director of Groups, Director of Tourism with CEO approval		○	
	Work closely with universities to attract professional/ academic meetings, conventions and sports competitions	Director of Meetings and Conferences and Director of Sports	Director of Groups and Director of Tourism		○	○
	Collaborate with economic development organizations to identify entrepreneurial opportunities for start-ups that enhance the visitor experience and activate vacant spaces (i.e. guide services, equipment rentals, artisan/hand-crafted)	CEO	Operations		○	○
	Target niche markets and highlight individual businesses serving those sectors through earned media and across social platforms	Director of Social Media	CEO		○	○
- Development of niche market strategy and campaign						

Scenario Modeling

Based on economic forecasts, website analytics, resident sentiment surveys and input from stakeholders, each strategy has the potential to enhance the visitor economy in the Great Lakes Bay Region. The degree to which each strategy is implemented and resourced will impact the potential upside for the region.

Strategy 1: Create a collaborative brand identity that reflects the region

Full Implementation

Full implementation will have a positive impact on all measures in the long-term, leading to consistent messaging, expectations, and awareness. Will give community something positive to rally around.

Partial Implementation

Partial implementation of brand development will not serve the region in a positive way and may cause adverse impacts to visitor economy metrics.

No Action

Will have an adverse effect on region in the long-term due to lack of awareness.

Recommendation

Prioritize this strategy and move to full implementation by end of 2023.

Strategy 2: Develop the Great Lakes Bay Region as a (more) desirable destination for visitors

Full Implementation

Ideal state, ensuring destination and experience development with a shared vision is a priority for the community, with tangible impact to businesses and the visitor economy.

Partial Implementation

Partial implementation will still have a positive impact on the visitor economy of the region. This work is long-range, so partial implementation by the completion of this recovery strategy is appropriate.

No Action

In the long-term, no action will have a negative impact on region as reasons for visitors to return will diminish.

Recommendation

This work is long-range, so partial implementation by the completion of this recovery strategy is an appropriate goal.

Strategy 3: Adopt a comprehensive and inclusive stakeholder engagement focus

Full Implementation

Full implementation is ideal based on feedback from stakeholders. Adopting this strategic focus will result in many tangible benefits including industry engagement and participation in destination development.

Partial Implementation

Partial implementation is desired by end of 2023 to ensure alignment and progress against regional visitor economy initiatives.

No Action

Lack of action may cause adverse impacts to alignment and collaboration.

Recommendation

Begin to move forward with this work as soon as possible and aim for partial implementation by end of 2023.

Scenario Modeling Continued...

Strategy 4: Build the capacity of the internal GLBRCVB team

<p>Full Implementation</p> <p>Full implementation is ideal as it will ensure the organization's ability to move forward with destination development initiatives.</p>	<p>Partial Implementation</p> <p>Prioritizing the recruitment of the Destination Development and Community Engagement leads will have a strong impact.</p>	<p>No Action</p> <p>No action will have an adverse effect on the internal GLBRCVB team and their ability to effectively manage strategic initiatives.</p>	<p>Recommendation</p> <p>Begin with the recruitment of the Destination Development and Community Engagement leads in 2023.</p>
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Strategy 5: Support industry capacity building

<p>Full Implementation</p> <p>Full implementation is ideal and should flow once Community Engagement lead has been hired and onboarded.</p>	<p>Partial Implementation</p> <p>Partial implementation will demonstrate to industry a willingness but not a full commitment to these initiatives.</p>	<p>No Action</p> <p>No action on this strategy will very quickly cause a large gap in the industry and in the perception of the CVB as the leading destination organization for the region.</p>	<p>Recommendation</p> <p>Aim for partial implementation by end of 2023 and full implementation by end of 2024.</p>
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Strategy 6: Grow the visitor economy through event and business attraction opportunities

<p>Full Implementation</p> <p>Full implementation will have significant positive economic and brand impacts for MGLBR with new business and gain new visitors to the area.</p>	<p>Partial Implementation</p> <p>Partial implementation is ideal by the end of 2023. Even with partial implementation, the visitor economy and the brand will benefit.</p>	<p>No Action</p> <p>No action on this strategy will cause for stagnation in new audiences visiting the region and in subsequent economic impact.</p>	<p>Recommendation</p> <p>Aim for partial implementation by end of 2023 and full implementation by the completion of this strategic cycle.</p>
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Crafted in partnership with MMGY NextFactor and your GLBRCVB Team

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