

August 25, 2021

To: Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority

From: Vic Isley

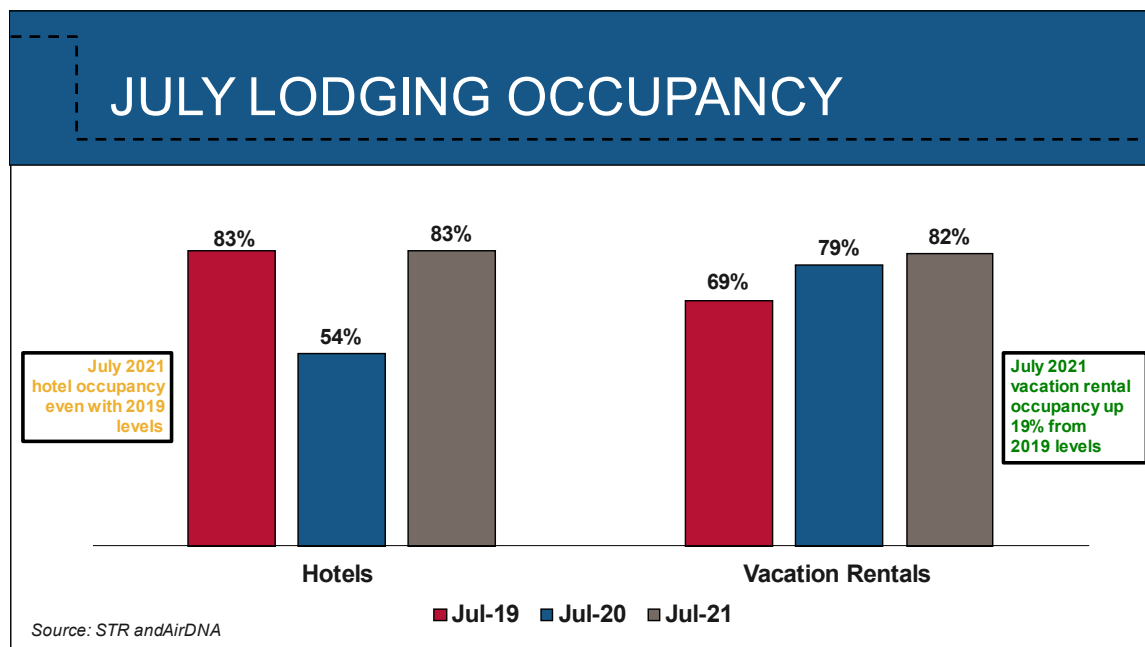
Subject: President & CEO's Report of July 2021 Activities

Starting with this month, the monthly Recap will be categorized by our strategic pillars:

- **D**eliver Balanced Recovery & Sustainable Growth
- **E**ncourage Safe & Responsible Travel
- **E**ngage & Invite More Diverse Audiences
- **P**romote & Support Asheville's Creative Spirit
- **R**un a Healthy & Efficient Organization

Hotel occupancy for the month of July 2021 reached 83%, nearly double that of July 2020, and on par with July 2019 levels.

Short-term vacation rentals reached 82% in July 2021, up 19% from the benchmark year of 2019. This continues to be good news for local residents owning vacation rentals and earning more and benefiting from the return of visitors to our community. It marks the third month since the pandemic that hotel occupancy eclipsed vacation rental occupancy.



## **JULY BY THE NUMBERS**

- During July, the sales team posted 717 personal contacts (down 12%). July sales activities generated 80 sales leads (up 158%) and 31 convention bookings (up 11%), representing 4,124 rooms (up 115%). One month into the fiscal year, year-to-date bookings are down 21 percent and room nights represented are down 25 percent.
- CVB sales leads generated 32 group events in July (up 191%), with corresponding revenue of \$634,828 (up 269%). The services team assisted 32 groups (up 191%).
- The PR team landed 23 significant placements in July (down 12%), with 46 media touchpoints (up 84%). The publicity value of print and broadcast placements totaled \$1.1 million with reach of over 5.2 million (up 263%). Online placements added \$2.4 million in value and reach of more than 1.3 billion (up 152%).
- ExploreAsheville.com attracted 947,689 visits (up 140%), including 709,652 to the mobile site (up 159%). Our Facebook fan base total is 303,477 (up 2%) and video views totaled 87,016 (up 54%).
- In July 2021, there were 2,554 Asheville Visitor Guide requests compared to 2,058 the previous year.
- Online hotel reservations totaled 57 room nights (up 36%) with total room revenue of \$11,312 (up 50%).
- The Asheville Visitor Center welcomed 20,887 visitors (up 361%), and the Pack Square Park Visitor Pavilion remains closed. The Black Mountain Visitor center welcomed 5,579 visitors (up 108%).

## **LODGING & AIRPORT RESULTS**

- Buncombe County Finance reported lodging sales totaling \$56,425,903 in June (up 155%).
- Smith Travel Research reported hotel occupancy of 81 percent during June (up 93%). The average daily room rate was \$178.28 (up 55%), and RevPAR (revenue per available room) was \$144.40 (up 200%). Room demand increased 103 percent with 212,728 rooms sold.
- AirDNA reported short term rental occupancy of 74 percent (up 17%), ADR of \$113.98 (up 20%), and RevPAR of \$84.30 (up 40%). Total demand for short term rentals increased 41 percent to total 154,940 rooms sold.
- Passengers at the Asheville Regional Airport increased 290 percent to total 154,749 in June.

## **Deliver Balanced Recovery & Sustainable Growth**

### President & CEO

- Meetings & Tours w/ Elected Officials: In July, Vic met with five local elected officials and went on tours of Asheville to learn about challenges and opportunities from their perspectives.

### Community Engagement

- BCTDA Annual Meeting: Planning is underway for the event to be held on September 15; the agenda will focus on the theme "The Heart of Hospitality."

- Earned Revenue Events Funding: The Festivals & Cultural Events Support Fund Grant Cycle will be offered this fall for events taking place in the 2022 calendar year; applications are due September 29, 2021, and grants will be announced October 27, 2021. An Information Session will be held at Explore Asheville on September 1. Sponsorship funding also available for community events in alignment with the strategic pillars; applications accepted year-round but will be reviewed on a quarterly basis.

#### Sales Activities

- 48-Hour FAM: Planning began in earnest for the November 16 – 19, 2021 Asheville 48-Hour Experience, or 48-Hour FAM. Due to the pandemic, this will be the first FAM hosted since November 2019.
  - Host Hotel: Renaissance Asheville Hotel committed to hosting the FAM.
  - Attendees: 10 meeting planners from across the country are confirmed attending so far.
  - 2022 Dates: Three FAMs are slated for 2022 and applications are now open.
- Tradeshows: Sales staff attended the following tradeshows in July.
  - Association Executives of North Carolina (AENC): Kathryn attended the Annual Meeting in Wilmington.
    - Sponsorship: Explore Asheville was a Silver Sponsor with an exhibitor table and donated a silent auction Asheville Basket.
    - Industry Partner Attendance: Partners that attended were Biltmore Farms and Crowne Plaza.
  - Spotlight on the Southeast: Beth attended this regional group travel show where she met with 20 tour companies through a mini-tradeshow and itinerary planning sessions.
  - Destination Southeast: Connie attended the tradeshow and networked with 70 planners in Marco Island, Florida.
    - Sponsorship: Explore Asheville sponsored the opening luncheon during the tradeshow, where Connie gave a presentation on Asheville, gifted Asheville branded cutting boards to attendees, and presented a piece from the NC Glass Center as the Bright Spot Award to a top meeting planner in recognition of the number of RFPs they've sent to Asheville.
    - RFPs: Five RFPs have been received so far as a result.
- Industry Meetings and Events: Sales staff attended the following industry meetings and events in July.
  - Meeting Professionals International – Carolinas Chapter (MPI-CC): Kathryn and Connie attended this industry meeting at Crowne Plaza in Asheville.
    - Sponsorship: Explore Asheville sponsored a breakfast where Kathryn welcomed the group and spoke about Explore Asheville partnership opportunities.
- Site Visit: Conducted a site visit with Mid-American Research Chemical (MARC) Incentive Trip September 2022 for 188 rooms. Toured five hotels and Biltmore.
- Client Meetings: Sales staff engaged with clients to discuss future events and partnerships.
  - Goodwill Industries: Met with Goodwill Industries of NW NC about 2022 MAGIC Conference with attendees from SC, NC, VA, GA, KY, WV, and MD.
  - iDaph Events: Meeting with iDaph Events owner (a local sports planner) to discuss future sports events and future partnerships.
  - Southern Conference: Attended Southern Conference (SoCon) Media Day Luncheon at Biltmore.
  - North Carolina Ultrasound Society: Met with North Carolina Ultrasound Society. They are looking at 2023 in Asheville. The Have More Fun on Us Meeting Development Fund is a game changer for them and their ability to return to the area. They have not met here since 2017.
- Planner Engagement: Asheville gift boxes were prepared to be sent in partnership with the Omni Grove Park Inn's Asheville campaign targeting 16 Omni National Sales Managers throughout the US.

- Partner Meeting: The hotel meeting space Directors of Sales were invited to a presentation by Meetings Database Institute (MDI) highlighting the data being used to guide sales prospecting efforts.
- Convention Service Highlights: Major services executed for groups in July.
  - Group Deliveries: Visitor information, attendee giveaways, and VIP welcome amenities were delivered to the NC Association of Zoning Officials conference, Southern Conference Football Media Day, Golf Course Builders Association of America, and Marcus Anderson Jazz AND Coffee Escape.
  - Microsite: The microsite for the 2021 Asheville Championship was drafted.

#### Advertising

- MMGY: Began onboarding process and transitioning campaign components to the MMGY team.
- Nonstop Flights: Paid social campaign to drive awareness for nonstop flights generated 50 million impressions and reach of 9.3 million from May 1 – July 31.
- August/September Campaign: Worked with MMGY to refine a media plan for August/September (built on the base plan from spring/summer campaign) that reflects campaign optimizations based on performance of March – June media.
- Visitor Guide: Hosted content kick off meeting to begin content planning with SagaCity for the 2022 edition. Story lineup will be finalized in mid-August. Finalized media kit for advertising sales launch in early August.

#### Content/Web

- Social: Finalized content playbook from Destination Think for social media audit and strategy project.
- Neighborhoods/Towns Dispersal: Finalizing new interactive map for EA.com homepage to direct visitors to interior Neighborhoods/Towns pages on website.
  - River Arts District Microsite: Goal is to develop new microsite for RAD by end of Q1 that will incorporate new promo video of the district.

#### Public Information

- Local Media:
  - WLOS-TV: [Get ready: People will be pouring into Asheville this weekend](#) (Marla interviewed)
  - Asheville Citizen Times: [Airbnb's most hospitable host: Asheville woman receives more than 600 perfect reviews](#) (Vic quoted)
  - [Press release](#) sent on the relaunched BCTDA Festivals & Cultural Events Fund highlighting past grant recipients mentions support of Sourwood Festival in Black Mountain and Eliada Corn Maze in west Buncombe (dispersal). News coverage included: [WLOS-TV](#), [AVL Today](#), [Capital at Play](#)
  - *Mountain Xpress*: [BCTDA approves \\$15.3 million for tourism marketing](#). Picked up by several other media outlets and the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce newsletter; also drew letters to editor
  - *Asheville Citizen Times*: [Buncombe TDA adopts \\$20M budget; \\$15M for marketing spurs calls for change](#)
  - *Asheville Citizen Times*: [Asheville Tourists seek millions for McCormick Field upgrades; MLB driving some requirements](#) (Vic interviewed re: TPDF); follow up sent by a readers to 'Answer Man'.
  - *Mountain Xpress*: [Canton and Maggie Valley consider additional occupancy tax](#) (comments and info provided by Vic)
  - *Asheville Citizen Times* (opinion column): [Yes, it's time to tamp down — and redirect — Asheville tourism spending](#) (BCTDA mentioned). Picked up by *Business NC's* daily newsletter, [Daily Digest](#)

## Public Relations

- Media Site Visit Support
  - *Sophisticated Living* via Bridget Williams seeking info for a fit travel angle, including recommendations on hikes and ways to stay active while in Asheville. Multi-pillar support insights provided from all four pillars.
  - *The Gentleman Racer* via Michael Satterfield information and local contacts for a road-trip piece and potential site visit.
- Story Support
  - *Afar* via Tanvi Chheda query re: family travel adventures. Drafted pitch in support of dispersal featuring family adventures in Black Mountain - story below.
  - Photo Support : *North Georgia Living* covering Blue Ridge Parkway.
- Recent Clips
  - *Shape* | [Summer Adventures Await!](#) #CVBClip
  - *Afar.com* | [9 Last-Minute Summer Family Getaway in the U.S.](#) #CVBClip
  - *The Sophisticated Life* | [The Ultimate Guide of Things to Do in Asheville](#) #CVBClip
  - *U.S. News & World Report* | [23 Top Things to Do in North Carolina](#) #CVBClip

## Research

- Experian: Reviewed initial findings of audience analysis and provided input for additional modeling.

## Encourage Safe & Responsible Travel

### Community Engagement

- Partner Webinar: Planning continues for sustainability-focused webinar from 10-11:15am on Tuesday, August 3, from 10-11:15am. Webinar agenda to feature a presentation by Jessica Flores from Tourism Cares, an update from Explore Asheville's sales and marketing teams, and a panel discussion showcasing tourism community partners leading by example with sustainability efforts. Confirmed panelists include Jessie Dean of Asheville Tea Company, Shelton Steele of Wrong Way River Lodge & Cabins, J Smilanic of WNC Photo Tours, Leah Ashburn of Highland Brewing, and Peter Pollay of Mandara Hospitality Group (Posana, Bargello, and District 42).
- Summer Social: Planning continues for 2021 Summer Social on Tuesday, August 3. The event will take place at Highland Brewing Company from 4-6pm and will also serve as an environmental sustainability resource fair for tourism community partners. Confirmed organizations participating in the resource fair include Asheville Greenworks, Pisgah Area SORBA, Conserving Carolina, Friends of the Smokies, Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation, and Blue Horizons Project.

### Sales Activities

- Educational Conference: Tina attended Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) EduCon in Phoenix, Arizona.
  - Conference Content: Conference content highlighted how to hold safe meetings by utilizing hybrid formats, amongst other topics.
- COVID Resources for Groups: COVID testing and healthcare facilities resources were updated by the convention service team and shared with meeting planners with upcoming events in Asheville.

### Leave No Trace

- Content: Launched new Leave No Trace landing page on EA.com as part of statewide campaign with VisitNC, Leave No Trace and NC Outdoor Recreation Industry Office.
  - Created new video highlighting Leave No Trace principles.
  - Created two new blog stories focused on dispersal and responsible recreation tips for novice hikers.
- Park2Park: Worked with production company to finalize shoot locations for each episode. Oversaw production July 27-30. Episodes will launch on October 3 and 17 on Outside TV.

### Public Information

- Publicity for “Responsible Travel and Sustainability in Tourism” webinar and Summer Social & Sustainability Resource Fair included several e-alerts and CVB and BCTDA monthly newsletters (details under last pillar, below), posting on social media and CVB website; also picked up by *Capital at Play* weekly newsletter.

### Public Relations

- Media Site Visit Support: Freelancer Cortney Fries (*Chicago Parent*, *AAA Go*, *SATW*) accommodation and local insight support. Provided partner sustainability insights.

## Engage & Invite More Diverse Audiences

### Community Engagement

- African American Heritage Trail: Plans underway for a round of community input sessions to be held out the YMI’s Community Impact Center (corner space formerly known as The Block off Biltmore), kicking off during Goombay Festival on the weekend of September 3. Working with Aisha Adams of Equity Over Everything to develop an advisory committee to help shape the project.
- Black Wall Street: Planning underway with J Hackett and Bruce Waller for a meet & greet with the business members of Black Wall Street.

### Sales Activities

- Educational Conference: Tina attended Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) EduCon in Phoenix, Arizona.
  - Conference Content: The conference featured many discussions about diversity, equity, and inclusion, including a keynote from Janet Stovall with the NeuroLeadership Institute.

### Content/Web

- Black Businesses in Asheville: Updated “Celebrating Black-owned Businesses in Asheville” blog story on EA.com with the addition of From the Ashes LLC.

### Public Information

- Local Media:
  - *Mountain Xpress*: Interviewed for [Black Wall Street 2.0: New Black owned businesses populate The Block](#) Article also picked up by AVL Today.
  - *Asheville Citizen Times*: [Asheville segregation-era refuge for Black residents struggles with millions in repairs](#) (BCTDA mentioned as financial supporter of YMI)
  - [Press release](#) sent on the relaunched BCTDA Festivals & Cultural Events Fund highlighting past grant recipients mentions support of Blue Ridge Pride Festival, Hola Asheville and Goombay.

## Public Relations

- Media Site Visit Support: Supported writer Lindsey Danis with LGBTQ+ beat (outlets include *CNT*, *Time*, *Eater* and *TripSavvy*).
- Story Support:
  - *Thrillist* via freelancer Matt Kirouac covering Best Drag Brunches.
  - *O Magazine* for fall color story.
  - Freelancer Caroline Eubanks (*Medium*, *Lonely Planet*, *T+L*, *SATW*): Shared update on the timing of the SoundSpace @ Rabbit's restaurant for potential future story.
- Media FAM Support: Cambria FAM: Supported Cambria PR team on itinerary development, contacts, and newsy insight as well as welcome gifts for media fam including Mariette Williams (*Essence*, *T+L*, *Vice*) and Ed Salvato (*Business Insider*, *USA Today*, *Huffpost*, LGBTQ+ focus).
- Media Strategy: Meeting with IGLTIA Conference VP of Communications LoAnn Halden to discuss media FAM opportunities associated with September event. Exploring a curated LGBTQ+ FAM outside of conference when Explore Asheville PR team can fully leverage.
- Influencer/Creator Connections: Follow up with Black Travel Alliance contacts from content and PR team marketplace attendance.
- Recent Clips
  - *Travel With Annita* | [Asheville Summer Vacation, One-Tank Destinations](#) #CVBClip
  - *Thrillist* | [Get Out, Drink Up and Celebrate in These Gay-Friendly Honeymoon Destinations](#) #CVBClip

## **Promote & Support Asheville's Creative Spirit**

### Community Engagement

- Partner Updates: Two new partners were added: Ryan Ashley the Poet and Ukiah Japanese Smokehouse. Two accounts were cancelled: 2 on Crescent and Contemporary Ikebana.
- One-on-One Wednesdays: Eight sessions were held, seven with existing partners and one with a potential new partner.
- Listing Updates: 246 calendar event listings were processed, and 109 partner listings were updated including 30 Attractions, 22 Food & Drink, 44 Lodging, 9 Retail, 3 Venue, and 1 Wedding Service.
- Visitor Guides: Distribution included 2,554 Individual Out-of-Market requests fulfilled; and 2,640 books or 60 cases of In-Market delivered to 15 industry partners; and 6,908 books or 157 cases of Out-of-Market delivered to 40 welcome centers/AAA offices/etc.
- Wayfinding: As part of the current effort to update interpretive content and maps on the kiosks, information on busking will be added in support of the Asheville Buskers Collective.

### Procurement

- Local Vendor: After exploring local coffee options, Explore Asheville staff will now use [Bean Werks](#) coffee in the office and for partner events and meetings.

### Sales Activities

- Partner Engagement: Sales staff reached out to Mountain Metalworks Asheville to learn more about their group offerings and potential for group business, taking a tour of their jewelry making studio.

## Web/Content

- South Slope Mural Trail: Finalizing content/imagery for new South Slope Mural Trail hosted on EA.com in partnership with Asheville Downtown Association and South Slope Neighborhood Association. Trail features 17 different murals/stops.
  - Shot new imagery of the murals and finalizing logo with graphic designer.
  - Digital trail should be finalized in August.

## Public Information

- Pre- and post-publicity for “Optimize Your Presence on ExploreAsheville.com” partner salon included several e-alerts and CVB monthly newsletter (details under last pillar, below).

## Public Relations

- Story Support:
  - Good Morning America: Assisting with insight, contacts and video footage for *Good Morning America* ahead of scheduled filming in Asheville in September for their “Rise and Shine” series. The planned segment will be touching on the recovery of Asheville’s wedding market and featuring Biltmore, among other “N.C. returns to travel” storylines.
  - Additional support for *Upstate Lake Living* (covering Fringe Arts, Local Cloth, No Taste Like Home, others).
- Site Visit Support:
  - *Travel + Leisure* via Alisha Prakash personal trip enhancement with local connections including Biltmore, culinary news, and Blue Ridge Parkway insights.
  - *Sophisticated Living* via writer Bridget Williams covering fit travel angle.
  - *The Point Guy* via Tracy Block covering dog friendly getaways and road trips.
  - Photo/Asset Requests: *TravelAwaits*, story below.
- Media Materials: Refreshed press sheet on Asheville’s art scene and creative spirit.
- Media FAM Support: Supported Cambria PR team on itinerary development and local insight as well as media welcome gifts for Sarah Lyon (*Apartment Therapy*, *Arch Digest*, *Country Living*) and Tamara Gane (*Readers Digest*, *WaPo*). Other attendees featured in diversity pillar.
- Recent Clips
  - *Oprah Daily* [20 Breathtaking Places to See Fall Foliage](#) #CVBClip
  - *Thrillist* | [The Right 2021 Destination for Every Type of Traveler](#) #CVBClip
  - *TravelAwaits* | [5 Fantastic Restaurants to Try in Asheville](#) #CVBClip

## Run a Healthy & Efficient Organization

### Exec Office

- Return to the Office: The Explore Asheville team fully returned to the office on July 6, 2021, following 16 months of most staff members primarily working remotely since March 2020.
- BCTDA Board Meeting: At the July 28 in-person BCTDA meeting, incoming Chair Kathleen Mosher was welcomed, outgoing Chair Himanshu Karvir was recognized with a print/plaque, a group sales strategy presentation was shared by Vic, Marshall, Colleen Swanson with MDI, and Clark Duncan with the EDC, and new public comment protocols were adopted. The meeting was streamed via Zoom and a video is posted on [AshevilleCVB.com](#).
- Public Comments at BCTDA Meetings: In advance of the first in-person BCTDA meeting since February 2020, staff developed new [Rules of Decorum and Processes & Protocols for Public Comments](#) for in-person BCTDA meetings, allowing members of the public the ability to sign up to call into live meetings, and also provide public comment when attending meetings in-person.



- Building the Team: Recruitment continues for six Explore Asheville staff positions. Hiring managers are in various stages to fill these roles: Administrative Assistant, Group Sales & Services Coordinator, PR Manager, PR Coordinator, Research Analyst, and Partner Support Coordinator. Onboarding planning is underway to include restructuring the orientation process and ordering technology.
- ABRSC MOU: Progress is being made on establishing an MOU between the Asheville Buncombe Regional Sports Commission and the BCTDA/Explore Asheville.
- Staff Retreat: Plans are underway for a facilitated all-team retreat scheduled in October. Pre-retreat work will begin in August.
- Budget: The new FY22 budget became effective on July 1, 2021.

#### Sales & Service Recognition

- Award: Explore Asheville is in the running for Best CVB/DMO in the Southeast Region in the Stella Awards, an awards program in the meetings industry that combines public, planner voting and third-party, objective planner judging. In order to be considered an initial award entry, an additional finalist entry was submitted by staff.

#### Public Information

- Communications re: BCTDA Board (in addition to Tourism Community Update – see below) included a media advisory on new public comment protocols. Resulting coverage included Mountain Xpress ([BCTDA to allow remote public comment, prepares for board changes](#)) and AVL Today.
- CVB/BCTDA Newsletters/Event Alerts
  - [Monthly CVB Newsletter sent on August 11](#) (stats at ~ 24 hours in: delivered to 1,834; open rate 30.6% or 562 unique opens). Lead story on Festivals & Cultural Events grant program. Content addressed all four pillars with specific mentions of Pillar 2. Newsletter also posted on CVB website and social media.
  - July Analysis: 11,866 emails delivered with average open rate of 35.6%. *Key: CVB = CVB Monthly Newsletter; TCU = Tourism Community Update (BCTDA); EA = Event Alert; CVA = Covid Alert; O = Other*

Message Subject [Pillar(s) Addressed]	Date Sent	Deliveries	Unique Opens	Total Opens	Unique Open Rate
EA: Coming July 21: Explore Asheville's First In-Person Partner Event! [#4]	07/01/21	1,354	542	1,151	40.03%
EA: You're Invited: Explore Asheville's First In-Person Partner Event! [#4]	07/07/21	1,352	522	1,087	38.61%
CVB: In-Person & Online Events Coming Up - Make Plans Now! [all]	07/15/21	1,829	590	1,192	32.26%
EA: Last-Minute Reminder: Explore Asheville's First In-Person Partner Event! [#4]	07/19/21	1,832	579	1,167	31.60%
EA: Coming Aug 3: Sustainability & Responsible Travel: Webinar + Summer Social & Sustainability Resource Fair [#2]	07/23/21	1,826	570	1,251	31.22%
EA: Summer Social! Join Explore Asheville & Fellow Partners at Highland Brewing on August 3 [#2]	07/26/21	1,837	576	1,585	31.36%
TCU: Introducing a New Chair for Buncombe County TDA & Meetings Return to In-Person [all]	07/28/21	1,836	813	1,563	44.28%
		<b>11,866</b>			<b>Avg 35.6%</b>



**Deliver Balanced Recovery & Sustainable Growth**

Balance resident and visitor needs, recognizing the necessary role that sustainable, long-term growth of travel has in achieving a healthy, collective economy.

Focus on the quality of each visit to our community – balancing growth across the seasons, business and leisure travel, and throughout Asheville and Buncombe County.



**Engage & Invite More Diverse Audiences**

Extend a genuine invitation to Black travelers and other diverse audiences including LGBTQ visitors – connecting them with local neighborhoods, businesses and entrepreneurs – creating more opportunities for all to win.

Support product development, place making and community connections, enabling new experiences and business opportunities throughout our community.



**Encourage Safe & Responsible Travel**

Engage residents and visitors with shared values to care for and respect natural, cultural and human resources vital in delivering quality guest experiences.

Collaborate with community organizations, local businesses and environmentally focused partners to support the sustainability and growth of our outdoor economy.



**Promote & Support Asheville's Creative Spirit**

Share stories of creators and makers who help differentiate our destination through food and drink, visual and performing arts, experiences and more.

Support product development, place making and community connections, enabling new experiences and business opportunities throughout our community.