

# Visit Golden

## Tourism Strategic Plan



# GOLDEN COMMUNITY MARKETING PROGRAM STAKEHOLDER COMMITTEE

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# TOC

Introduction	5
Executive Summary	7
Stakeholder Engagement	12
Objectives	15
SWOT Analysis	17
Strategic Pillars	21
Brand Strategy	21
Consumer Marketing Strategy	23
Group Travel Market	28
Special Events	31
Visitor Capture	34
Visitor Experience	35
Lodging Tax	38
Budget Recommendations	39
The Role of the Community Marketing Program	41
Appendix	43

# INTRODUCTION

The Golden Community Marketing Program, Visit Golden, is a cooperative marketing effort between the City of Golden and the local retail business community, funded by a "Vendors' Fee" to directly benefit retail sales, restaurants, lodging, entertainment venues, cultural entities and area attractions through increased awareness, visitation and patronage.

The program is now 20 years old and has evolved from one that strictly used contractors to provide services, to one that now has a three-person staff, manages many aspects of the marketing program internally and welcomes more than one million visitors per year.

Faced with an ever-changing travel and tourism industry increased competition from cities and towns throughout Colorado and the uncertainty of post-COVID travel, the Community Marketing Program hired Blakely + Company to help develop a Strategic Plan for the next 5-10 years.

Even in the shadow of COVID, this is an exciting time for tourism in Golden. Several new hotels have opened recently, restaurant options have expanded, there are now nine craft breweries to complement Coors and long-time local events and attractions have remained popular with residents and visitors.

Looking ahead, there are dynamic projects in development, including Heart of Golden and the Peaks to Plains Trail that will only add to the city's appeal. One key to successful, sustained tourism is keeping the experience fresh and these projects help ensure that for Golden.

Whether you were part of this process, or are reading this a few years later, you will find a thorough, informed strategy that sets Visit Golden up for success well into the future.







## MISSION STATEMENT

Through collaborative marketing efforts, we position Golden as a premier destination in Colorado by promoting its unique attributes to residents, regional visitors and out-of-state travelers.

## VISION STATEMENT

A strong, year-round tourism industry driven by Golden's position as a great place to visit.

## VALUES

**Fun** – Visiting Golden should be exceptionally fun and we should have fun promoting this incredible community.

**Diversity** – We support the city's diversity, equity and inclusion goals and work to make Golden a welcoming place for all visitors through our outreach and marketing campaigns.

**Communication** – We aspire to communicate effectively with our key target audiences and our industry stakeholders.

**Value** – We understand the impact of what we do and strive for it to benefit visitors, residents and our local economy.

**Collaboration** – The local tourism industry is stronger when we work together toward a shared vision.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Golden, its Community and Economic Development Department and Community Marketing Program initiated the Tourism Strategic Plan process in late 2020 with a goal of having a final plan in early Summer 2021. The process identified nine primary objectives related to brand strategy and positioning, increasing off-season visitors, identifying key target audiences and revised strategies and building consensus among stakeholders and communicating better with local residents.

Research to inform the plan included stakeholder interviews, focus groups, a consumer intercept survey and online survey for residents, along with studying dozens of reports and articles. Strategic planning sessions were also held with the Golden Community Marketing Program Stakeholder Committee.

After analyzing the research and input, seven Strategic Pillars were identified to help achieve the objectives. They are:

- Brand Strategy
- Consumer Marketing Strategy
- Group Travel Market
- Special Events
- Visitor Capture
- Visitor Experience
- Lodging Tax

The **Brand Strategy** for Visit Golden is driven by its nearly perfect location (centrally located along the Front Range, less than 30-minutes from most of the Denver Metro Area, in the foothills) and strong name recognition. That dynamic combination makes it the ideal day trip destination for the 4.9 million residents who live between Cheyenne, Wyoming and Pueblo, Colorado.

The new, long-term Brand Objective for Visit Golden is to become the #1 preferred day trip destination for those individuals and that objective is supported by the new Brand Position, "The Perfect Day." Along with the new Brand Position, it is recommended that Golden update its Brand Identity with a new logo and supporting visual elements that reflect the Brand Personality of fun, active, adventurous, peaceful and relaxing.

The **Consumer Marketing Strategy** identified the geographic and demographic audiences and outlined recommendations for the media strategy to make it more efficient and effective. The geographic markets were segmented into four areas – Golden and surrounding areas, Denver Metro Area, Front Range Urban Corridor and Out-of-State Visitors.

Locals were added to the target audiences to ensure Visit Golden is capturing the immediate market better, and communicating more effectively with residents. The Denver Metro Area was segmented out from the rest of the Front Range because it is less than 30-minutes from Golden and the Front Range audience was expanded to Cheyenne and Pueblo because each of those cities is less than two-hours from Golden, which research has shown to be about maximum time people want to drive for a day trip.







Media recommendations include increasing digital advertising (Programmatic Digital, Pay-Per-Click (PPC) and Facebook/Instagram) and adding a direct mail component targeted at families of Colorado School of Mines students. It is also recommended that Visit Golden reduce the advertising at DIA and allocate some of that money into the new marketing plan and strategies to reach the Group Travel Market.

One area of opportunity for Visit Golden is the **Group Travel Market**. For many of the same reasons Golden is attractive to consumers, it's also perfect for small meetings – easy access, beautiful location, quaint downtown, unique attractions and great lodging. Implementing a

coordinated, strategic approach to this market has the potential to generate millions of dollars in revenue for the community and fill unused hotel rooms in the off-seasons.

Recommendations for the Group Travel Market include hiring a full-time Group Sales Coordinator, developing an annual marketing plan, creating a Meeting Planner's Guide and establishing a more collaborative relationship with Colorado School of Mines, which has several spaces that would expand the options for incoming groups.

**Special Events** are another way to increase visitors in the off-season and help balance the year for local businesses. Research shows that





Golden has many popular events and there are numerous ideas and opportunities for new events that fit with the culture and goals of the community.

Being strategic about which events get added and when – quality over quantity – will be important, along with updating the city’s special event application and providing promotional support for key events to help attract more visitors.

Golden is not only a beautiful community, it’s also home to, and strategically located near, some very popular attractions. Enticing visitors to those attractions to spend more time in Golden can easily generate incremental business for restaurants, attractions and retailers. A good example is the Coors Brewery Tour, which sees more than 300,000 visitors per year. Visit Golden does a good job of enticing those visitors to explore the town through the Golden Ticket Program.

The **Visitor Capture** initiative is designed to extend that approach with other area attractions, such as Red Rocks Park and Amphitheatre (1.5 million visitors annually), Colorado School of Mines (7,000+ students and their families), Bandimere Speedway (70+ events), and local attractions such as the Colorado Railroad Museum (80,000+ visitors annually) and Buffalo Bill Museum & Grave. Expanding the Golden Ticket Program, deploying digital geo-fencing ads, developing partnerships with the attractions and creating special promotions are all strategies to consider.

Any Tourism Strategic Plan should analyze the **Visitor Experience** and identify ways to make it better. Based on visitor research, there are several initiatives that could improve the experience for visitors, including better

Wayfinding Signage, Digital Guidance Signs for public parking locations, scheduled Shuttle Bus Service, and Interpretive Signage. The recommendation also includes working with tourism stakeholders and businesses to train employees and make them ambassadors for the community.

Some or all of the projects to improve the visitor experience could be funded through the implementation of a **Lodging Tax**. Based on 2019 occupancy and room rate figures, a 5% tax could generate approximately \$1.5 million per year. That revenue could be used for a Visitor Impact Fund, along with adding some community amenities that benefit both visitors and residents.

Following the Strategic Pillars, the plan outlines recommended changes to the Marketing Budget, representing consumer media strategy, new emphasis on the Group Travel Market, and the development of the new Brand Identity. Overall, the budget increased by \$12,500, but was still below the \$535,000 threshold, leaving a reserve fund of just more than \$30,000.

The final section of the Strategic Plan looks at the role of the Golden Community Marketing Program and the Stakeholder Committee. The by-laws outline the roles clearly, with staff responsible for day-to-day activities and the committee acting in an advisory role. This distinction is consistent with standard staff/committee relationships. The plan recommends some additional responsibilities to help achieve some of the plan’s objectives, including the development and distribution of an Annual Report each year, the development of a Tourism Economic Impact report and having all parties – staff and committee members – become stronger advocates for the tourism industry within Golden.



## STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

- 2** Planning sessions with Visit Golden Steering Committee members
- 10** Focus Groups with business owners, residents and visitors - 45 total participants
- 25** Stakeholder Interviews with 45 total participants
- 50+** Reports, studies and articles reviewed as part of the Secondary Research
- 100** Consumer Intercept Surveys - 40 with local residents and 60 with out-of-town visitors
- 264** Respondents to the Golden Resident Survey



# STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The Stakeholder Engagement phase of the project utilized a variety of strategies to engage a broad cross-section of the Golden tourism industry and residents. The process revealed insights, opinions and facts that formed a base for the plan and helped shape the final recommendations (summaries from the various Stakeholder Engagement processes can be found in the Appendix).

## GOLDEN COMMUNITY MARKETING PROGRAM PLANNING SESSIONS

Two planning sessions were conducted with members of the Golden Community Marketing Program Steering Committee. The project kick-off meeting included members of the Strategic Plan Sub-Committee and shortly thereafter a focus group was conducted with the remaining members of the Steering Committee.

## STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

The Stakeholder Interview process included 25 interviews with a total of 45 participants. The interviewees included the Mayor and City Council, key city staff, and tourism industry stakeholders from a variety of organizations and businesses. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes.

### Mayor and City Council

- Mayor Laura Weinberg
- Casey Brown, Mayor Pro-Tem
- Jim Dale
- Bill Fisher
- Paul Haseman
- Robert Reed
- JJ Trout

### City Staff

- Jason Slowinski, City Manager
- Carly Lorentz, Deputy City Manager
- Steve Glueck, Former Director, Community & Economic Development
- Megan Pinson, Community Marketing Manager
- Diane Tiberi, Special Events Coordinator

### Community and Tourism Industry Stakeholders

- Nola Krajewski, Golden Chamber of Commerce, Executive Director
- Lora Knowlton, Golden Chamber of Commerce, Program & Events Manager
- Daniel Schlegle, Colorado School of Mines Museum of Earth Science, Operations Director
- Barb Warden, Golden Today
- Bill Litz, Golden Cultural Alliance, President
- Bob Chimbrel, Brain Needle, Owner
- Joy Meadows, Meadows PR, Owner
- Rich Grant, Meadows PR
- Mary Gomez, Golden Visitors Center, Executive Director
- Jerry Devitt, Golden Visitors Center, Board President

- Dave Shuey, Golden Visitor Center and GCMP Board Member
- Heather Schneider, Golden Civic Foundation, Executive Director
- Julie Bartos, Golden Civic Foundation, Communications & Development Director
- Sandra Llanes, Golden Civic Foundation, Board President
- Hassan Najjar, Foothills Arts Center, Executive Director
- Kristie Brice, Public Art Commission, Chair
- Michelle Aldava, Molson Coors, Guest Relations Manager
- Renee Rinehimer, The Golden Hotel, Director of Marketing and Public Relations
- Dean Valdez, Business Owner, GCMP Board Member, Chamber Board President
- Aimee Valdez, Business Owner
- John Drugan, The Eddy Taproom & Hotel, General Manager
- Nicole Schutz, The Eddy Taproom & Hotel, Sale Manager
- Amber Winston, Table Mountain Inn, Senior Marketing & Communications Manager
- Elizabeth Battilla, Adventure West
- Mitchell Battilla, Adventure West
- Bob Vermeulen, Former City Council Member
- Jason Hughes, Colorado School of Mines, Chief Marketing Officer
- Julie Ann Williams, Colorado School of Mines, Campus Events, Assistant Director
- Dave Anderson, Downtown Development Authority, Chair
- Jackie Greiner, Downtown Development Authority, Board Member
- Paul Hammond, Colorado Railroad Museum, Executive Director
- John Payne, Table Mountain Inn, General Manager
- Justin, Table Mountain Inn, Director of Sales & Operations







## FOCUS GROUPS

A total of 10 focus groups were conducted, with a total of 45 participants. The audiences interviewed included local Business Owners, Residents and Visitors. Due to COVID, the groups were conducted virtually. The groups lasted from 60-90 minutes.

- Business Owners (3 groups)
- Residents (4 groups)
- Visitors (3 groups)

## CONSUMER INTERCEPT SURVEYS

During the first week of May, interviews were conducted with 100 individuals in various locations throughout downtown Golden. A total of 60 out-of-town visitors and 40 residents were interviewed during the study.

## GOLDEN RESIDENT SURVEY

On May 15, we deployed an online survey for Golden residents. The survey was stopped on June 4, with a total of 264 responses.

## OTHER INTERVIEWS

In addition to the research conducted above, we interviewed others in an effort to gather information and insight about the tourism industry in Colorado and opportunities in the Group Meeting market.

- Interview with Doug Price, President & CEO of the Colorado Springs Convention & Visitors Bureau and Vice Chairman of the Colorado Tourism Office Board of Directors
- Interviews with Director of Conference Services at four Denver hotels

## SECONDARY RESEARCH REVIEW

Throughout the process we read and analyzed more than 50 studies, reports and articles relative to the tourism industry in Golden, the state of Colorado and across the United States. We looked for statistics and trends to help us better understand the current market, potential long-term changes due to the pandemic, how travelers make decisions and what they want from their leisure travel experiences.

# OBJECTIVES

THE FOLLOWING OBJECTIVES WERE ESTABLISHED TO GUIDE THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS PLAN

1. Develop a Comprehensive Evaluation and Strategic Plan for Golden's 20-year-old community marketing program.
2. Determine an updated strategic positioning for a long-term sustainable program and community.
3. Evaluate baseline trends, the current situation and possible future scenarios to determine necessary changes in brand position, target markets, value proposition and strategic goals and messaging.



4. Build consensus among the stakeholders about the strategic direction of the program.
5. Improve communication with Golden residents to build consensus around the value of tourism.
6. Develop strategies to increase the number of visitors in the off seasons – Fall, Winter and Spring.
7. Determine and update the strategic role of the Golden Community Marketing Program.
8. Identify key target audiences and how best to communicate with them.
9. Develop recommendations on how best to utilize the marketing budget.





# SWOT ANALYSIS

A SWOT Analysis – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats – was used early in the planning process to help focus the discussions and overall analyses. Strengths and Weaknesses are related to the internal organization and Opportunities and Threats are related to the external environment. This process helped identify some of the project objectives, along with areas to address in order for the Strategic Plan to be successful.

	Helpful to achieving the objective	Harmful to achieving the objective
Internal origin (attributes of the organization)	<b>S</b> Strengths	<b>W</b> Weaknesses
External origin (attributes of the environment)	<b>O</b> Opportunities	<b>T</b> Threats

## STRENGTHS

- Outdoor recreation – a variety of options – hiking, mountain biking, tubing, kayaking
- Coors Brewery – history and tours – 300k+ visitors per year
- Cultural attractions – several museums, Foothills Art Center
- Golden’s rich history
- Special Events – wide variety of fun events for residents and visitors
- Proximity to Denver and the Front Range – closest mountain town to Denver
- Unique, locally-owned shops
- Colorado School of Mines
- Beautiful downtown that is clean and safe
- Growing restaurant scene – becoming more destination-oriented
- Name recognition – Golden has strong awareness nationally and internationally
- Strong financial resources for the Community Marketing Program
- Proximity to nearby attractions – Coors, Colorado Railroad Museum, Red Rocks
- Easy accessibility by car
- Walkable community
- The Golden Welcome Arch
- Lariat Loop Scenic Byway
- A collaborative community
- Talented Community Marketing Program Steering Committee and people who participate
- Climate – many outdoor activities are possible year-round
- Unique and charming community
- American Mountaineering Center
- Home to national brands, such as Yeti Cycles, Spyderco and Kong









## WEAKNESSES

- Disparate views among stakeholders on the best strategies to attract visitors
- Residents are unhappy with the traffic from out-of-town visitors during peak season
- Distinct seasonality – strong summer and parts of the shoulder season, but weaker in the Winter, especially first quarter
- No Lodging Tax – could provide benefits for residents and the visitor experience
- Limited meeting space – can't accommodate large groups
- Confusion among the groups involved in community marketing – who is responsible for various efforts
- The Community Marketing Program is siloed – being less so would be beneficial
- Light rail stops on the edge of town – no consistent transportation from the stop

into town

- Staffing for restaurants and hotels is harder because the cost of housing in Golden is high and there isn't public transportation from surrounding communities
- Air quality is getting worse
- Public transportation within Golden is not great
- Businesses not located on Washington Avenue find it harder to attract shoppers

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Colorado residents traveling closer to home this year
- Attracting more overnight visitors from outside the Metro area – now have more hotels and growing restaurant scene
- Peaks to Plains Trail being developed
- Friends & Family market (reach locals)





- Celebrating “Golden” Birthdays
- National Renewable Energy Laboratory for meetings
- Continued congestion on I-70 into the mountains
- Grow visitation during the shoulder seasons
- Passing a Lodging Tax
- The local market north and south of Golden is growing
- Group Meeting business – small groups
- Visitor Center is repositioning itself as a community hub
- Targeting nearby communities that are bedroom communities for Denver
- Collaboration in re-opening from the pandemic – opportunity for a stronger community
- Red Rocks visitors – more than 1.5 million per year – how to attract them into Golden?
- Stronger relationship with Colorado School of Mines

## THREATS

- Continuing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on travel and the economy
- Increase in competition from other communities
- Community understanding of the value of tourism
- The possibility of Coors no longer offering tours
- Big attractions closing
- Environment – Clear Creek and air quality
- Businesses closing
- Success and what that does to resident perceptions/feelings
- A bad visitor experience – poor customer service



# STRATEGIC PILLARS

## BRAND STRATEGY

An organization's brand is a combination of reputation and perception, so having a strong Brand Strategy is critical to successful marketing. What visitors think about Golden, and the emotional relationship they have with you, should be cultivated and nurtured through every step of the visitor experience, from initial advertising and communications to the conversation they have in the car on their way home. It drives loyalty, which ultimately makes your marketing program more efficient.



## Overview

In analyzing the research done for this study, along with a recent study done for Golden among Front Range residents, it is clear that Golden's place in the Colorado tourism landscape is as a premier day trip destination. Proximity to the 4.9 million people who live between Cheyenne, Wyoming and Pueblo, Colorado, along with the beautiful setting, quaint historic atmosphere, dining and shopping, numerous cultural attractions and variety of outdoor recreation, means someone can get to Golden easily and have an incredible day – the perfect day – away from their everyday lives.

A detailed Brand Strategy can have several components and the ultimate structure should be fitting to the organization or, in this case, community. Following is the recommended Brand Objective, Brand Position and Brand Personality for Visit Golden, along with a recommended tagline and some key messages relative to the positioning.

### Brand Objective

Become the #1 preferred day trip destination for people who live along the Front Range Urban Corridor.

### Brand Position

The perfect day.

### Brand Personality

Brand Personality is an important part of how you communicate with your key audiences. Assigning human characteristics helps you identify the voice and tone of your communications and facilitates consistency throughout all marketing and branding efforts. It is through that consistency that you create authenticity, which is the key to matching your brand aspirations with actual perceptions.



The Brand Personality for Golden overlaps two segments within the Brand Personality Framework – Sincerity and Ruggedness. The attributes are compatible, but also speak to the variety of visitors who love Golden – those wanting the quaint, relaxing experience and those wanting to take on the vast array of outdoor recreation opportunities.

For Golden, the key personality terms are:



## Tagline

The Perfect Day is Closer Than You Think

## Key Messages

The messages used to promote Visit Golden should reflect the brand and positioning, Golden's unique attributes, what visitors are looking for most and the Brand Personality.

- *If you're looking for the perfect day trip, Golden is the place to go.* For residents along the Front Range Urban Corridor, Golden is only a two-hour drive each way, putting it within the preferred limits of a day trip destination. The message is even stronger in the Denver Metro Area, as Golden is within a 30-minute drive for the vast majority of residents, and no more than a 40-minute drive for all of them.
- *Golden has incredible outdoor recreation opportunities, close to home.* Hiking and mountain biking are part of the day trip experience, but the plethora of options in Golden make it a marketable destination for this alone. Options abound for the beginner or expert.

- *A relaxing getaway awaits you in Golden.* A quaint, historic downtown, leisurely walks along the creek, unique shopping and dining options, comfortable hotels and several local breweries means you can take it easy and recharge before heading back to work after your day trip, weekend or vacation.
- *Fun for the whole family.* There is something for every member of the family in Golden such as hiking, Clear Creek, great museums and cultural attractions and historic attractions (Buffalo Bill Museum, Colorado Railroad Museum).
- *A mountain town experience without the drive.* Tucked away in the foothills, Golden is the first taste of the Rocky Mountains for visitors along the Front Range and from out-of-state.
- *Beer.* With Coors and nine craft breweries, Golden is a beer-lover's paradise.

## Brand Identity

A strong visual brand is an important part of a successful brand strategy. Your identity sets the tone for your communications, is a visual representation of your values and should reflect your brand personality.

Now that you are embarking on the next phase of branding and marketing Golden, it is important to have a strong visual brand that matches the new vision and strategy. We recommend creating a new logo for Visit Golden that uses the extensive research from this study to help inform a new, dynamic image. The elements of the Brand Identity should include:

- New Logo
- Fonts
- Tagline
- Photography
- Colors

The process for creating the new identity should take place in the last half of 2021, with a goal of launching it with the 2022 Marketing Plan.

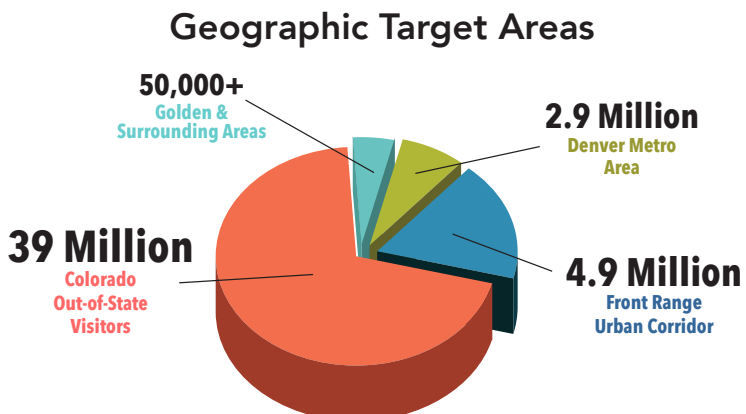
## CONSUMER MARKETING STRATEGY

Visit Golden has a robust marketing strategy with a strong budget for a community its size. Several elements of the current strategy are effective, so this strategic plan does not outline a complete, all new marketing strategy. Rather, it provides recommendations for adjusting the strategy in certain areas, based on the new brand strategy and other strategic pillars outlined in the plan.

Colorado residents and visitors have many of the same desires for their leisure travel, whether it's a day trip or longer vacation. Our visitors cherish the environment, nature, outdoor recreation, mountain getaways, art culture, history, small towns, slow pace, and locally owned shops. All of these are relevant to Golden, reinforcing the position of being the perfect day trip for Front Range residents, but also the perfect stop on a statewide tour for out-of-state visitors.

### Geographic Target Audiences

The geographic consumer audiences for Visit Golden have been segmented into four areas – Golden and Surrounding Areas, the Denver Metro Area, the Front Range Urban Corridor, and Out-of-State Visitors who come to Colorado.



- Golden & Surrounding Areas
  - This audience includes Golden residents, county residents with a Golden address and some of the smaller communities in mountains west of Denver, near Golden. In addition to encouraging local residents to do things in town, this audience is also important because a large number of residents have family and friends visit them throughout the year and they are often looking for activities to entertain their guests.
  - The recommended strategies for this audience include social media, local print and digital advertising such as the Golden Informer and GoldenToday.com, public relations, email marketing and the Visit Golden website.
  - We recommend the Community Marketing Program dissolve the Good to Be Golden website and social media and use the Visit Golden website and social media to communicate with local audiences. The transition should take place in 2021 and should include two- to three-weeks of social media messages on the Good to Be Golden Facebook page, letting followers know about the change and encouraging them to follow Visit Golden's Facebook page if they don't currently.
  - The messages for this audience should focus on the specific, fun things to do in Golden such as special events, dining, shopping and specific promotions.
- Denver Metro Area
  - According to the United States Office of Management and Budget, the Denver-Aurora-Lakewood Metropolitan Statistical Area includes ten Colorado counties: City and County of Denver, Arapahoe County, Jefferson County, Adams County, Douglas County, City and County of Broomfield, Elbert County, Park County, Clear Creek County and Gilpin.









- As of 2019, there were approximately 2.9 million people living in the Denver metro area.
- Parker, on the southeast edge of the metro area, is only 40 miles from Golden, putting the vast majority of the metro area within a 30-minute drive of Golden.
- The recommended strategies for this audience include a strong digital advertising strategy, supporting traditional advertising during key times of the year, along with social media, public relations and email marketing.
- The messages for this audience will focus on the close proximity to Golden – “minutes away, worlds apart” – and the unique variety of activities, which make it the perfect day trip from Denver.
- Front Range Urban Corridor
  - The Front Range Urban Corridor goes from Cheyenne, Wyoming (110 miles away) to



the north and Pueblo, Colorado (127 miles away), putting the entire corridor within a two-hour drive from Golden. As of 2018, there were more than 4.9 million people living in this corridor.

- The recommended strategies for this audience will be similar to those for the Denver Metro Area, with digital advertising being key and supported by social media, public relations, and email marketing.
- The messages will focus on Golden being the perfect day trip and showing them the variety of activities and events they can enjoy while here.
- Out-of-State Visitors
  - Visitors to Colorado come from all 50 states, with the top states being California, Texas, Florida, Arizona, Illinois, New York, New Mexico, Kansas and Nebraska.
  - In 2019, Colorado welcomed a combined total of 39 million out-of-state visitors, with total expenditures from overnight and day trip visitors reaching a record \$20.6 billion.
  - Marketing to out-of-state visitors where they live is cost-prohibitive, but the Colorado Tourism Office and Visit Denver offer strategic ways to communicate with out-of-state visitors as they are making plans for their vacation. We recommend continuing to use these strategies as they are very cost-efficient. Developing relationships with major hotels in Denver can also reach this audience, as their guests often ask for recommendations on what to do and see in the area.
  - The one change we are recommending with regard to this audience is no longer advertising at DIA, or significantly cutting back on the \$48,000 annual commitment there. We feel this budget can be used more effectively in other areas, such as the Group Travel market.

## Demographic Target Audiences

Within the targeted geographic areas, the audiences should also be segmented demographically. Though visitors to Golden cut across many age groups and demographic segments, we have identified three audiences that we feel are particularly important to Golden.

- Millennials
  - Born between 1981 and 1996, the oldest Millennials are turning 40 this year and the youngest are turning 25.
  - Millennials have the highest percentage of day trip travelers of any age group, making it an important audience with the new brand positioning.
- Families
  - A large number of visitors to Golden are families with school-age children, especially from the Denver Metro Area. The age range for this group is approximately 25-54 years old.
  - The messages to this audience should focus on it being the perfect day trip with kids, plus the many activities and attractions available for families.
- Empty Nesters
  - The younger part of this group overlaps slightly with the older segment of the Families audience. Empty Nesters begin at around age 50 and go up to retirement age.
  - Research among Empty Nesters shows they plan to travel more and are looking for a wide variety of experiences.
  - This is a great audience for the off-season marketing efforts because they don't have children in school.

## Media Recommendations

The strategic recommendations in this plan have expanded the geographic target audiences and further defined the demographic audiences for Visit Golden. Based on those recommendations, it's important to look at the current media strategy and see what adjustments can make it more effective.

The original 2021 budget includes \$193,000 for Paid Media, or about 40% of the total annual budget. The Paid Media section includes traditional and digital media, DIA advertising, Visit Denver and Colorado Tourism Office advertising, paid social media and direct mail.

With the additional targeting that includes local residents, the Front Range from Cheyenne, Wyoming to Pueblo, Colorado, plus the goal of capturing more visitors at area attractions and events, we recommend increasing the paid media portion of the budget and revising the media mix slightly. There is also an expected increase in travel post-COVID, so a stronger budget can help attract those regional residents looking to travel again.

For timing, continue to put the majority of the budget into off-season advertising. With summer months being strong, using the available budget to impact the off-seasons is the right approach.

### Specific recommendations include:

- The most important part of your media strategy is digital marketing, with Programmatic Digital being the most important piece within that strategy. Programmatic allows for very specific targeting, allowing you to effectively reach your key demographic audiences within your targeted geographic areas.

Additionally, the Visitor Capture strategy includes digital geo-fencing to reach visitors at key area locations, including Red Rocks Park and Amphitheatre, Bandimere Speedway. Geo-fencing is cost-effective and doesn't require large budget increases to add it to the mix.

Recommendation – increase Programmatic Digital from \$32,000 to \$42,000.

- Though the number of keywords being targeted is important to look at, it appears the Pay-Per-Click (PPC) advertising could be strengthened with a small increase. With the focused day trip positioning, adding keywords in that area could help improve the overall reach of the PPC.

Recommendation – increase PPC advertising from \$21,000 to \$25,000.

- Facebook and Instagram advertising are very effective for tourism strategies and should also be increased based on the branding and audience recommendations in this plan. It will also be effective for promoting key special events, especially any new events in the off-seasons.

Recommendation – increase Social Media Boosted Posts and Ads from \$10,000 to \$15,000.

- In interviews with Colorado School of Mines officials, they expressed a desire to partner with Visit Golden on ways to connect with the families of their 7,000+ students, 55% of which are in Colorado. A couple of opportunities include providing a supply of Visitors Guides for the college to hand out to families when they come to campus, plus they are open to creating a page on their



website that talks about the community and directs users to the Visit Golden website.

Recommendation: add \$3,000 to the budget for 7,000 additional Visitor Guides.

- Several strategies appear to have adequate budgets, including Radio, Pre-Roll Video and Connected TV, Visit Denver, Colorado Tourism Office and Print-Magazines.

Recommendation – leave the budget amounts as they are for these strategies.

- DIA Advertising – While DIA provides a large audience of out-of-state visitors, we feel the amount being spent there is very high in relation to the overall budget and expanded strategies. The CTO and Visit Denver advertising are doing a good job of reaching out-of-state visitors, so the DIA investment can be reduced significantly and the dollars saved allocated to more potentially effective media.

Recommendation – reduce DIA advertising from \$48,000 to \$24,000.

## GROUP TRAVEL MARKET

The meetings industry generates more than \$330 billion annually in the United States and small group meetings (50 persons or less) make up almost half of that market. The small meeting market in Colorado is also very strong, both with in-state groups looking for a convenient location and out-of-state groups looking for a great Colorado experience.

For many of the same reasons Golden is the perfect destination for consumers, it is also

a great location for small group meetings – ease of access, beautiful foothills setting, quaint downtown, great lodging and dining options – plus there is more than adequate meeting space options for small groups.

The key to taking advantage of this opportunity is a coordinated, strategic sales and marketing strategy that brings Golden to the attention of meeting planners in Colorado and adjacent states.

Based on approximately 700 hotel rooms in Golden and an 80% occupancy rate in 2019, there are more than 50,000 room nights available throughout the year. The small meeting market offers a great opportunity for filling a significant number of those rooms, especially in the off-seasons, when occupancy rates are lower.

Using the 2019 average room rate of \$144.00, every 5,000 additional room nights would generate an additional \$7,200,000 in room revenue, with additional revenue for food and activities adding to the economic impact.

### Recommendations:

- Focus on meetings with between 30 and 150 attendees.
- Hire a full-time group sales coordinator to provide added emphasis on this market opportunity.

Note: With a 3% city sales tax, each 5,000 additional room nights sold would generate \$216,000 in additional revenue for the City of Golden, more than justifying the added cost of one additional full-time employee funded out of the General Fund.

Other ways to fund this position include using revenue from the Lodging Tax (if it passes), having it be part of the Visit Golden annual budget, or through a combination of these three sources.

- The types of meetings to target should include:
  - Business Meetings
  - Association Meetings
  - Government Meetings
  - Retreats
  - Seminars
  - Weddings
  - Reunions
  - Bus Tours
  - Denver Convention Day trips
  - SMERF – Social, Military, Educational, Religious and Fraternal groups
- Develop an annual marketing plan and budget for this market segment. Strategies to consider are digital display advertising, paid search advertising, social media, email marketing and trade shows. The marketing strategies should be coordinated with the direct sales efforts to take advantage of the increased awareness of Golden with meeting planners.
- Develop an annual Meeting Planner's Guide that includes lodging options, available venues for meetings and receptions, dining, caterers, attractions, plus other unique and interesting venues that would be attractive for small groups.
- Re-activate the Meetings sub-committee to enhance collaboration among meeting industry stakeholders. For larger meetings, cooperation will be important since it could likely require the participation of more than one hotel.

- Establish a collaborative relationship with Colorado School of Mines, which has several venues on campus that are available for rent to incoming groups. This added inventory, including larger room options, can make Golden appealing to more groups.
- Increase participation in Destination Colorado.
- Participate with Meetings Industry Council of Colorado (MIC). MIC's annual conference in 2021 included more than 150 meeting planners. The associations that are active in MIC include the Society of Government Meeting Professionals, Global Business Travel Association, Colorado Society of Association Executives, Christian Meetings & Conventions Association and several others.
- Planning for the Group Travel Market should begin in 2021, with implementation beginning in 2022.

#### **Long-Term Recommendations:**

- As the Heart of Golden is being developed, look at adding meeting rooms and facilities to the project to round out the offerings in the community. For example, a lecture-hall or theater-style venue with tiered seating.
- As the small meeting market grows in Golden, we recommend you consider a small convention center or conference center that could increase the size of groups the city can accommodate.







## SPECIAL EVENTS

Golden has a strong culture of special events, with several each year that attract thousands of visitors from around the region. There are also many events throughout the year that appeal primarily to residents, increasing their engagement in the community. Expanding this strategy, with emphasis on the off-seasons, can help achieve the goal of adding visitors during slower times.

In our research with business owners, residents and visitors, we asked them to identify the events they like most – and why – in order to get an idea of what is most appealing and what fits best in the community. The most popular events with residents are the Candlelight Walk, ArtsWeek and Buffalo Bill Days, with numerous other events receiving mention. ArtsWeek was also popular with business owners because the event promotes local restaurants and shops, rather than bringing in vendors from out of town.

Several residents wrote in the Farmers Market as their favorite event, and we heard the same in the focus groups. Of those who mentioned the Farmers Market, we also heard requests to do it all year.

The other former event we heard mentioned throughout all of our interviews and focus groups was First Fridays, where Washington Avenue was blocked off in the evening on the first Friday of the summer months. Residents loved the event and said it should be restarted.

The least popular events with residents were Supercruise and Buffalo Bill Days. In both cases, the lack of appeal has to do with the size of the crowds and impact on residents. Business owners also mentioned Buffalo Bill Days because they do bring in vendors from out-of-town, cutting into potential support for local businesses.







### Event Ideas:

Throughout our research process we heard several good ideas for new events and we discovered some that are popular in other cities that might work well in Golden. Most, if not all, of these ideas could be held in the off-season.

- Liquid Arts Festival (beer, wine, spirits, kombucha, coffee – local and Colorado-based)
- A fall event with a pumpkin patch, hayrides, etc.
- Temporary Skating Rink in the park over the holidays
- Music Festival with several venues around town
- Trail Race and Mountain Bike Race on back-to-back days, or a Trail Duathlon
- Restaurant Week (Spring or Fall)
- Oktoberfest, or Novemberfest to not compete with the other Oktoberfests in Colorado
- First Fridays – we heard a lot of residents say they would like these to come back

### Recommendations

- Quality over quantity – look at adding a few strategic events, rather than a lot of new events. Planning should begin in 2021, with a goal of adding two new events in 2022, one in the Spring and one in the Fall. More events can be added in subsequent years.
- In addition to events that attract out-of-town visitors, be conscious of adding events that appeal to local residents.
- Update the city's application process for new events to ensure they are compatible with community values and goals. As part of this process, consider eliminating some events that don't fit with community values.
- Do a Request for Proposal (RFP) for two new large events, one in the fall and one in the Spring. The RFP process will ensure these events meet the community criteria and values.
- Increase promotion of special events from Visit Golden. In the budget, the line item for Promotions/Events/Training has been increased from \$22,150 to \$32,150.







## VISITOR CAPTURE

In addition to Golden's strategic location in the Denver metro area and Urban Front Range Corridor, the city is also home to stand-alone destinations and is located near other popular areas and attractions. This represents a cost-effective opportunity for reaching potential visitors.

The obvious example is the Coors Brewery, which hosts more than 300,000 visitors each year on its tours. Visit Golden already has a strong partnership with Coors through shared advertising and distribution of the Golden Tickets, providing an example of what might be possible with other attractions.

Red Rocks Park and Amphitheatre is located just outside the Golden City limits and hosts 160+ events and more than 1.5 million visitors each year. Attracting a portion of those visitors to spend more time in Golden is a significant opportunity for restaurants, hotels and attractions.

Within Golden, Colorado School of Mines has more than 7,000 students, just over half of which are from Colorado. Golden already benefits from Mines' presence, but a stronger strategic relationship could add incremental visitors and spending in the community. Based on interviews with the school's marketing leadership, they are interested in a stronger relationship with Visit Golden because they are actively promoting the city in their recruitment advertising.

Bandimere Speedway is located just south of Golden on Highway C-470, making it close and very convenient for getting into town. The speedway hosts more than 70 events annually, bringing tens of thousands of more visitors within minutes of Golden.

Other major attractions in town and nearby, such as the Colorado Railroad Museum and the Buffalo Bill Museum & Grave, attract visitors on their own each year and offer additional opportunities for partnerships.

### Recommendations:

- Contact the organizations referenced here – and others that might be applicable – to discuss partnership opportunities.
- Continue using the Golden Ticket in partnership with Coors and consider expanding the program to other nearby attractions.
- Utilize digital advertising, specifically geo-fencing, to promote Golden to nearby visitors at these attractions.
- Look at implementing special promotions, for example a dinner and shuttle service package for Red Rocks concertgoers.
- Implement an annual direct mail package to the families of Colorado School of Mines' students. Done in early-August, this would reach them prior to bringing their child to campus for the school year. The package could include a Visitor Guide, coupons from businesses who wanted to provide them, and possibly even a Golden Ticket for each family.

## VISITOR EXPERIENCE

When you think about the visitor experience, it typically includes the full spectrum of the travel process, from wishing and planning through visiting and departing, and even remembering the experience later. Other elements of this plan look at impacting the early phases of that process by connecting with visitors as they are thinking about a day trip, weekend away or longer vacation. This section focuses on the experience in Golden and ways to make it more convenient and enjoyable for the visitor, which creates brand loyalty.

From our research with out-of-town visitors we learned their plans mostly centered on general activities, rather than a specific destination in Golden. Eating, visiting a brewery, hiking, biking, strolling along the creek, shopping and “wandering around” were referenced, creating the picture of an active, but casual visit.

By putting yourself in the visitors’ shoes you can see what is important to make their experience enjoyable and one they want to repeat in the future. Wayfinding, parking, in-town mobility, reliable information and friendly service are all ways to reduce stress and allow visitors to focus their time on the activities they enjoy.

### Recommendations:

- Wayfinding Signage
  - Coordinate and improve the wayfinding throughout town, especially in the downtown core, to more easily direct visitors to key areas and destinations. The city is currently working on this project.
- Shuttle Bus Service
  - The current FlexRide system operates on a scheduled route from 5:30 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. on weekdays. To make it more convenient for visitors, we recommend expanding the service to include Saturdays and having it operate until 9:00 or 10:00 p.m. during the peak tourism season.
  - Having scheduled service to the Light Rail station on the east edge of town would also enhance the experience for visitors coming from the Metro Area.
- Digital Guidance Signs for Parking
  - Many communities have installed digital guidance signage that direct drivers to public parking areas and give them an idea of how many open spaces are available. This would be especially beneficial on busy summer weekends when car traffic is heavier and parking spaces are limited. The city is currently working on this project.
- Interpretive Signage
  - The heart of Golden’s history is in the downtown core and visitors feel the area is very walkable. Adding interpretive signage, that explains Golden’s rich history, will add to the visitor experience and promote mobility throughout downtown.
- Employee Training
  - Employees of local businesses are some of the most important ambassadors for Visit Golden. The Visit Golden G-Team currently provides training for these employees, including an annual, in-person event where the participants learn what the community has to offer visitors. This program should continue and, if necessary, be augmented through additional materials and resources.











## LODGING TAX

Almost every community has some version of a Lodging Tax (also known as a stay tax, occupancy tax, room tax, bed tax, or hotel tax), which adds a fee to hotel rooms and properties reserved through home-booking sites such as Airbnb or VRBO. The main benefits of these taxes is that they are mostly paid by visitors, the tax isn't a major factor in determining where to visit, and the community adds valuable resources.

Golden is one of the few communities that doesn't have a Lodging Tax and is missing out on an opportunity for additional funding that can be used to offset physical impacts of tourism and enhance the visitor experience, which will benefit residents also.

Establishing a Lodging Tax requires a vote of Golden residents. We are recommending the City of Golden put an issue on the November 2021 ballot, asking residents to approve a 5% Lodging Tax. At this rate, with around 700 hotel rooms and an 80% occupancy rate, the tax would generate approximately \$1.5 million per year. With additional strategies to increase the number of overnight visitors, that number could increase significantly.

Though public opinion polling hasn't been conducted yet, the Resident Survey implemented for this plan showed that support for a Lodging Tax could be strong. More than 80% of respondents supported the idea outright and another 14+% supported it after hearing the funds would be used for maintenance and improvement to areas most impacted by visitors.

CITY	TAX RATE
Denver	10.7%
Estes	10.7%
Aurora	9.0%
Boulder	7.5%
Grand Junction	6.0%
Black Hawk	6.0%
Northglenn	5.0%
Pagosa Springs	4.9%
Evans	4.5%
Pueblo	4.3%
Breckenridge	3.4%
Lakewood	3.0%
Ft. Collins	3.0%
Loveland	3.0%
Longmont	2.0%
Colorado Springs	2.0%
Aspen	2.0%
Steamboat Springs	2.0%
Arvada	2.0%
Vail	1.4%

The 5% tax would be in the upper half of the rates in the chart above, but is still below what nearby cities charge, such as Denver, Boulder, Aurora and Black Hawk.



# BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

Following is an updated budget that reflects the recommendations made throughout this Strategic Plan. The Paid Media recommendations were mentioned in the Marketing Strategy section, the new logo was recommended in the Brand Strategy section, and the Group Travel Market strategies were outlined in the recommendations toward reaching meeting planners and creating awareness for Golden as a small group destination.

We have used the 2021 Proposed Budget as a starting point, the second column reflects changes to some of the specific line items. In some instances, where there weren't any changes, the categories have been combined into one total amount to make the budget more concise.





	<b>2021 Proposed Budget</b>	<b>2021 Recommended Budget</b>
REVENUE	\$535,000	\$535,000
EXPENDITURES		
<b>Creative</b>		
Strategy & Account Management	32,400	32,400
Production	25,000	15,000
New Logo & Visual Brand Elements	0	10,000
Photography/Video Costs	20,000	20,000
Account & Project Management	2,000	2,000
<b>Public Relations</b>	55,800	55,800
<b>Golden Ticket</b>	20,000	20,000
<b>VisitGolden.com</b>	69,200	69,200
<b>Promotions/Events/Training</b>	22,150	32,150
<b>Printing Projects</b>	27,450	27,450
<b>Downtown Banners Program</b>	5,100	5,100
<b>Paid Media</b>		
Radio	20,000	20,000
PPC Campaign	21,000	25,000
Programmatic Digital	32,000	42,000
DIA	48,000	24,000
Pre-Roll Video/Connected TV	14,000	14,000
Visit Denver	17,000	17,000
Colorado Tourism Office	12,000	12,000
Print-Magazines	12,000	12,000
Social Media Boosted Posts & Ads	10,000	15,000
Direct Mail (Golden Rules Postcards)	7,000	0
Visitor Guides for CSM	0	3,000
<b>Group Travel Market</b>		
Meeting Planners Guide	0	7,000
Meeting Industry Council Trade Show	0	2,000
Additional Marketing Support	0	10,000
<b>Memberships</b>		
iStock	100	100
Mail Chimp	1,800	1,800
Destination Colorado	695	695
Critical Mentions	2,500	2,500
Bandwango	14,500	10,000
Misc. Memberships	600	600
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$492,295</b>	<b>\$507,795</b>
Reserves	\$42,705	\$27,205

# THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY MARKETING PROGRAM & STAKEHOLDER COMMITTEE



The Golden Community Marketing Program, Visit Golden, was established in the early-2000s to lead the tourism marketing efforts for the city. The program is managed through the city's Community and Economic Development Department, with the Community Marketing Manager responsible for the day-to-day management of the program, in conjunction with a Stakeholder Committee.

The committee is comprised of members representing specific stakeholder interests related to the retail, restaurant, entertainment, lodging, cultural and attraction interests in the community that benefit from the community marketing program. The committee also includes staff representation, with the Director of Community and Economic Development, the Community Marketing Manager, and Golden Greeter Coordinator.

As part of their day-to-day management of the program, the Community Marketing Manager manages the budget, meets regularly with agency representatives and consultants, represents Visit Golden at stakeholder meetings and serves as liaison with the City of Golden communications department.



The role of the Stakeholder Committee is outlined in the by-laws and includes:

- Make annual budget and policy level strategic recommendations for preparation of the annual community marketing program.
- In coordination with the Community Marketing Manager and any contract marketing agency, the committee will prepare the annual marketing strategy, including distribution of resources between various programs.
- Based upon the adopted annual marketing strategy, the committee will approve the detailed marketing plan for the year.
- The committee will select consultants for recommendation to City Council.

The roles of the Community Marketing Manager and Stakeholder Committee are well-defined based on the mission of the program and represent a clear distinction between the day-to-day management role of staff and advisory responsibility of the committee. This relationship and separation of roles should remain as is.

In addition to these clear roles, we recommend additional responsibilities for staff and the committee, to further the mission and vision of Visit Golden and the objectives outlined in this plan.

- Visit Golden staff should develop a brief Annual Report each year, outlining the strategic use of the budget, plus highlights of successful strategies and analyses of strategies that need to be improved or replaced.
- Within the next two years, develop a Market Analysis & Tourism Economic Impact report that outlines the benefits of tourism and what it provides the City of Golden and its

residents. The report should be updated every 3-5 years.

- All parties – staff and the committee – should be advocates for the value of tourism throughout the community. This can be supported through the development of talking points, distribution of the Annual Report, and speaking on behalf of the industry to community groups when possible.
- Consider the implementation of an Annual Awards program for the industry that brings to the light the strong commitment of the stakeholders and further highlights the industry's value to the community. For example, the awards could include Best Owner/Manager, Best Staff Member, Best Event, Best Attraction and Best Advocate. Nominations would come from industry members and winners selected by the Stakeholder Committee.



# APPENDIX

Secondary Research Summary

Stakeholder Research Summary

Focus Group Research Summary

Consumer Intercept Research Summary

Resident Survey Summary

Visit Golden Perception and Branding Survey, April 2018