

# **COLLABORATIVE ACTION PLAN**

**SCOTTS BLUFF COUNTY TOURISM**

**2026-2027**





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

JNW Consulting is honored to have facilitated a Strategic Collaboration session for Tourism Leaders, Stakeholders, and Partners in Scotts Bluff County. The details of this meeting can be found within this Strategic Report.

## **Strategic Collaboration: April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2026**

Hosted by the Scotts Bluff County Visitor's Bureau, a strategic collaboration session was held on April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2026. This meeting brought together the Staff and Board of the Scotts Bluff County Visitor's Bureau, along with County Tourism Leaders, Officials, and Strategic Partners. The aim of this meeting was to discuss opportunities to leverage relationships, communication, and organizational areas of focus that can positively-impact the future of tourism in Scottsbluff County.

Within this meeting, the Scotts Bluff County Visitors Bureau presented their newly developed high-level Strategic Action Plan, defining core purposes and priorities for the next three years. The presentation of this data opened opportunity for discussion that could maximize the impact of Tourism through a more-strategic collaborative effort among all partnering entities. The discussion items covered within this session can be found within the Appendix of this report.

## **Findings**

This consultant-facilitated session resulted in key findings aimed to support clarity, cohesiveness, and collective impact among the participating entities. A summary of these findings, along with suggested action items developed within the session, can be found within this report. For reference, critical areas of collaborative focus have been identified as the following:

1. **Establish a Unified Regional Brand & Identity**
2. **Improve Communication & Information Flow Between Organizations**
3. **Define & Differentiate Organizational Roles to Eliminate Duplication**
4. **Strengthen the Visitor Experience Through Proactive Outreach & Accessibility**
5. **Build a Culture of Ongoing Collaboration & Accountability**

continued

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY, CONTINUED

Following the identification of these priorities and high-level opportunities, the group concluded the meeting with a commitment to the following:

1. Review the data collected
2. Consider ways in which each entity can contribute to the overarching success of Regional Tourism
3. Reconvene for a follow-up Action Planning Session within the next 3-6 Months.

In summary, it is our hope that the outcomes of this meeting will support future collaborative partnership efforts, promote tourism-related opportunities offered within Scotts Bluff County and the region, and maximize the impact of collaborative tourism efforts.

This deeply passionate and committed group has been a pleasure to work with. We wish them great success as they continue to enhance our region's tourism impact and inspire the next generation of County Leaders, Community Members, and Visitors.

Best Regards,

Jamie N. Weingart



*Jamie Weingart*  
Jamie Weingart  
Principal Consultant  
JNW Consulting

# COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSION INSIGHTS

POTENTIAL COLLABORATIVE PRIORITIES	ACTION NOTES FROM GROUP DIALOGUE
<p><b>1. Establish a Unified Regional Brand &amp; Identity</b></p> <p>Our Region needs a cohesive, recognizable brand that encompasses all communities (Scottsbluff, Gering, Mitchell, and surrounding areas) and conveys an active, inviting experience — not just a destination. A unified brand should span signage, marketing, digital presence, and visitor-facing materials across all partner organizations.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Evaluate existing brand (e.g., “Landmark Country”) and explore expanded regional identity</li> <li>2. Align all partner organizations behind a shared visual and messaging standard</li> <li>3. Ensure the brand is reflected consistently at hotels, restaurants, visitor centers, and events</li> </ol>
<p><b>2. Improve Communication &amp; Information Flow Between Organizations</b></p> <p>Communication is the most critical gap among entities. Organizations are often unaware of each other's events, causing missed opportunities for cross-promotion, resource sharing, and visitor preparedness.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Launch a monthly email distribution list for event organizers to share upcoming events</li> <li>2. Establish a representative from each entity to meet regularly (quarterly at minimum)</li> <li>3. Create a shared, up-to-date community event calendar that all partners contribute to and promote</li> </ol>
<p><b>3. Define &amp; Differentiate Organizational Roles to Eliminate Duplication</b></p> <p>Organizations may be duplicating marketing efforts and funding pursuits. Clearly defining each organization's lane — local, regional, and statewide — will maximize ROI and reduce friction.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Document and share each organization's primary mission, budget focus, and geographic scope</li> <li>2. Align marketing tiers: attractions/venues (local), Visitors Bureau (regional leisure), state (broad awareness)</li> <li>3. Coordinate grant and funding processes so organizations aren't competing for the same dollars or duplicating support for the same events</li> </ol>
<p><b>4. Strengthen the Visitor Experience Through Proactive Outreach &amp; Accessibility</b></p> <p>Visitors — especially those coming for sports tournaments or events — often arrive without knowing what else the region has to offer. Frontline staff, hotel teams, and event organizers need to be equipped to extend the visitor's stay and deepen their experience.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide event organizers with a tourism welcome packet/newsletter to distribute through their registration systems</li> <li>2. Equip hotels and campgrounds with current event listings and local guides</li> <li>3. Revisit the physical accessibility and visibility of the Visitors Bureau for walk-in visitors</li> <li>4. Explore embedding tourism info into existing sports and event apps (rather than building a new standalone app)</li> </ol>
<p><b>5. Build a Culture of Ongoing Collaboration &amp; Accountability</b></p> <p>Sustaining momentum requires structured follow-through, including regular convenings, shared metrics, and a commitment to moving from planning to action.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reconvene in 3–6 months to review progress against the strategic plan</li> <li>2. Institute an annual collaborative retreat or summit - Use after-action reviews following major events to capture learnings and improve</li> <li>3. Track shared metrics (e.g., visitor spending, hotel occupancy, event attendance, length of stay)</li> </ol>

# CONSULTANT RECOMMENDATIONS

As the collaborative discovery phase for Regional Tourism reaches its conclusion, it is suggested that the team involved in this project continue to develop and execute on their findings to achieve the best possible outcome for all relevant parties.

To maximize the impact and potential in this spirit of partnership and collaboration, JNW recommends the following:

1. Reconvene in 3-6 Months to Collectively Review, Modify, and Finalize Action Plan
  - a. Ensure that all relevant stakeholders are invited to this session
2. Formalize Responsible Parties and Timelines
3. Establish a Formal Agenda for Future Meetings.

## Sample Agenda: Quarterly Regional Tourism Collaborative Meeting

Part One: Introductions

Part Two: Round Robin Discussion (Successes, Challenges, Upcoming Events)

Part Three: Strategic Action Planning (Review Priorities 1-5) - Formalize Plans with Accountability Measures Such as Responsible Parties, Timelines, and Measures of Success

Part Four: Establish Next Steps, Schedule Next Meeting, Dismiss

# APPENDICES

Participant Roster

Collaborative Notes

Fellow Note-Taker Meeting Transcript



# Scotts Bluff County Tourism

## Meeting Participants

<b>Brenda Leisy</b>	brenda.leisy@scottsbuffcountyne.gov
<b>Lanna Hubbard</b>	manager@scottsbuffcountyfairgrounds.com
<b>Marvin Floyd</b>	marvin@marvinfloyd.com
<b>Bekah Gorsuch</b>	Bekah.gorsuch@hilton.com
<b>Jessica Wasson</b>	jessica.wasson20@gmail.com
<b>Amanda LeMay</b>	hiefrontdesk.sb@yahoo.com
<b>Melissa Price</b>	mlprice1954@gmail.com
<b>Kelly Kiraly</b>	kelly.kiraly@gmail.com
<b>Sharaya DeSersa</b>	sdesersa@scottsbuff.org
<b>Tina Worthman</b>	tina@visitgering.com
<b>Jodi Lewellen</b>	office@scottsbuffgering.net
<b>Kevin Spencer</b>	kspencer@scottsbuff.org
<b>Lisa Betz Marquez</b>	lisabetzmarquez@gmail.com
<b>Ken Meyer</b>	kenmeyer@gmail.com
<b>Matt Parsley</b>	mattrparsley@gmail.com
<b>Dave Wolf</b>	director@legacyoftheplains.org
<b>Betsy Vidlak</b>	bvidlak@capwn.org



# Visioning Exercise: Aspirational Accomplishments

<p><b>Imagine it's five years from now and Western Nebraska is being recognized as a model for regional tourism collaboration.</b></p> <p><b>What are people saying about how this region works together?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One-Community</li><li>• Consistent, Welcoming Informative Experience</li><li>• Pride in Community</li><li>• Recognizable Brand</li><li>• Experience of Brand</li><li>• "Landmark Country"</li><li>• Welcoming to New Partners</li><li>• Growing and Inclusive of Ancillary Niches</li><li>• Expertise-Driven Decision Making</li><li>• Flexibility in Decision-Making</li></ul>
<p><b>What would success look like—not for one organization—but for the region as a whole?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• New Events</li><li>• Should Season Events</li><li>• Outdoor Activities</li><li>• Diversity in Opportunities</li><li>• Generational Tourism</li><li>• Utilization of AI Data</li><li>• Maximization of Small Town Appeal</li><li>• Attractions Beyond Standard Experiences</li><li>• Promotion of Success for All Businesses</li><li>• Prove Tourism's Impact to Community</li><li>• "Tourism Looks Good on Scotts Bluff County"</li><li>• Community Buy-In</li></ul>

# Opportunities to Maximize Impact

<b>Collective Expectations for Scotts Bluff County Visitor's Bureau</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cascaded Information</li> <li>• Knowledge of Upcoming Events</li> <li>• Promotion of Businesses / Events</li> <li>• Resource Support / Funding</li> <li>• Collaboration on Community Projects</li> <li>• Expertise and Knowledge of Industry</li> <li>• Knowledge of How Entities Work Together</li> <li>• Teaching, Training, Education</li> <li>• Building Bridges Between Offerings</li> <li>• "One Calendar"</li> <li>• Accessibility and Visibility</li> <li>• Advocacy and Marketing</li> </ul>
<b>Opportunities for Collaboration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teamwork - "We Are All In This Together."</li> <li>• Referrals Through Front-Line, Customer-Facing Members</li> <li>• Clarity on Where to Go for Funding</li> <li>• Define Roles for Each Organization</li> <li>• Reduce Duplication of Efforts</li> <li>• Clear Messaging Across Organizations</li> <li>• Representation from Each Entity - Consistent Connection</li> <li>• Maximize ROI on Marketing</li> <li>• Focus on Specific Niches Amidst Group</li> <li>• Collectively Support Local Projects</li> <li>• Maximize Stewardship of Resources</li> <li>• Promote Tourism as Economic Development</li> <li>• Beautify Area</li> <li>• Collectively Answer               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ "Where Do We Send Tourist Eyes?"</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>All-Entity Partnership in Action</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration on Technology, Data, and Information</li> <li>• Communication of Events</li> <li>• Attendance at Each Other's Meetings</li> <li>• Intentional Communication</li> <li>• Email List</li> <li>• Focus on Each Entity's Strengths</li> <li>• Recognize and Promote Each Other</li> <li>• Hold Post-Event Debriefs and Share Data After Large Events</li> <li>• Unify Approach to Tourism</li> <li>• Be Present for One Another</li> <li>• Share Complimentary Projects</li> <li>• Proactive Communication (Newsletter)</li> </ul>

# Meeting Transcript

## Regional Tourism Vision and Branding

- First group emphasized creating a **consistent, welcoming, and informative visitor experience** across all touchpoints (hotels, restaurants, visitor centers), which requires more than training—it needs community buy-in and pride. 01:23
- Success involves establishing a **recognizable regional brand** that represents a promise to customers, where visitors can see marketing and then experience that exact promise when they arrive. 02:08
- Groups identified the need to **welcome new partners and stakeholders** (like sports division stakeholders suggested by the huddle up group) and expand to include ancillary industries beyond just attractions, hotels, and restaurants. 03:08
- The vision includes presenting as **one unified community** where visitors don't feel separation between different towns, with small-town appeal and family-friendly events as core differentiators. 06:08
- The region aims to become a destination **beyond just Scottsbluff National Monument**, where visitors extend stays by multiple days due to enhanced experiences and improved tourism infrastructure. 07:17
- A **'Trail Land' branding concept** was proposed to unify Gering, Mitchell, and Scottsbluff with cohesive signage, leveraging Oregon Trail heritage and the idea of trails as movement and pathways. 1:16:16
- The rationale emphasized that trails suggest **movement and journey**, encouraging visitors to explore multiple destinations rather than just stopping briefly for photos at landmarks. 1:18:12

## Partnership and Collaboration Framework

- All groups emphasized that **everyone must work together** in regional tourism efforts, with frontline and customer-facing staff learning to make effective referrals to businesses, restaurants, and activities that match visitor preferences. 16:05
- Organizations should focus on **complementary projects rather than competing** initiatives. The consolidated Christmas parade and Santa's Village event was cited as a successful example, though change remains difficult for some community members. 17:34
- One group proposed establishing **quarterly or monthly meetings with representatives from each entity** to discuss ongoing projects, identify collaboration opportunities, and share time, money, and expertise. 18:41
- Groups discussed how **redundant funding requests** occur when entities approach multiple organizations separately. More strategic collaboration could make resources go further when supporting local tourism projects. 21:29
- **Tourism walks hand-in-hand with economic development**, requiring well-developed workforce support, business development, community beautification, parks maintenance, and clean, attractive communities that visitors want to experience. 22:16
- Over **25 years**, the stakeholder group evolved from **competition to collaboration**, where events are now seen as benefiting everyone rather than competing for visitors. 1:03:51
- All discussion groups identified **communication as the primary solution** to partnership challenges, with emphasis on transparency about events, mutual understanding of missions, and willingness to listen. 1:05:26

## Information Sharing and Coordination

- Kelly noted that restaurants need advance notice when tournaments are coming to ensure proper staffing, citing an Ogallala tournament where understaffed restaurants couldn't serve lunch between games. 31:15
- The campground owner requested collaboration to distribute lodging information to out-of-town visitors, noting they often receive last-minute calls because they weren't aware tournaments were happening. 31:48
- The sports council plans to add **hotels and campsite information to their webpage** since the major softball tournament sells out all lodging in Scottsbluff, Gering, surrounding campgrounds, and even the YMCA. 32:22

- Hotels only know about sports tournaments because they're getting room bookings, not because anyone informs them directly about upcoming events. Front-line businesses remain largely reactive rather than informed. [42:02](#)
- Multiple businesses requested email communication about upcoming events (similar to what Tevye posts on Facebook) so they could better prepare and display information at front desks for visitors. [41:37](#)
- The group acknowledged **having the same conversations about communication and coordination for over 20 years**, with persistent assumptions that locals automatically know what's happening. [43:15](#)
- One participant volunteered to serve as a central receiver for event information and send **monthly compilation emails** to the stakeholder group. [1:07:39](#)

## Visitor Services and Access

- Ken expressed frustration that **the tourism office moved from the Legacy building to the second floor of an administration building** that's closed on weekends, making it inaccessible during Saturday baseball games when visitors need information. [37:45](#)
- The group advocated for a **collaborative website with an interactive calendar** that includes all area events, noting that many visitors research destinations before arriving rather than seeking information on-site. [38:30](#)
- Calendar maintenance is difficult across multiple organizations (Chamber, TCD, and others), with the challenge being that organizations don't consistently submit event information even when requested. [39:17](#)
- Lisa advocated for creating a **mobile app with a QR code** that travelers could download for visiting the area, noting people prefer apps on their phones and delete them after leaving rather than using websites. [39:44](#)
- The group discussed **branding challenges** - people don't search for 'Gering' specifically but might search 'Scottsbluff National Monument' or 'western Nebraska,' making it difficult to market the region cohesively. [40:27](#)
- The facilitator summarized needs from the visitors bureau: cascade information, promote businesses and events, provide resources and funding, collaborate on projects, offer industry expertise, bridge entities, support digital tools, ensure accessibility and visibility, and provide advocacy and marketing. [45:20](#)

## Visitors Bureau Strategic Identity

- The facilitator emphasized that **visitor experiences shape beliefs about communities**, which in turn shapes actions (return visits, referrals, extended stays), and equally important is how tourism entities experience working with one another. [24:32](#)
- The Visitors Bureau's **strategic clarity work** (detailed in the meeting addendum) defines their organizational identity, including why they exist, how they behave, what they do, and their short-term and long-term success measures. [24:47](#)
- Core purposes include **driving economic impact**, providing best possible visitor experiences, generating community pride, acting as referral partner, leading as a visible visionary, providing advocacy, and effectively managing resources for stakeholders. [26:13](#)
- A key focus is **driving measurable economic impact while improving quality of life for residents**. Events like the balloon festival serve both tourists and local residents, creating community pride while generating tourism revenue. [28:44](#)
- Marketing roles should be defined by **geographic radius**: local marketing by attractions, Visitors Bureau focusing on **leisure travel beyond 100-mile radius**, and Western Nebraska Tourism Coalition covering the broader region. [19:34](#)

## Strategic Plan and Priorities

- **Four strategic priorities** were presented: (1) evolving organizational framework and board engagement, (2) marketing Scottsbluff County as a destination, (3) marketing organizational identity/services/impact, and (4) relationship building and collaborative partnerships. [1:11:23](#)
- Marketing Scottsbluff County includes objectives of providing **grant funding and financial support**, supporting regional marketing efforts, education and training, and enhancing visitor experience and accessibility as an entity. [1:11:49](#)

- The strategic plan includes **100+ action items** (approximately 5-10 per goal) with associated timelines and responsible parties to support the four priorities over the next 3-5 years. [1:12:19](#)
- Key tactics include sharing performance data, utilizing ambassadors (experienced grant recipients mentoring newcomers), and enhancing outreach to demonstrate organizational impact. [1:13:01](#)
- The facilitator recommended the stakeholder group **reconvene in 3-6 months** to revisit key collaboration topics, with potential for an annual conference or retreat to maintain alignment and monitor progress together. [1:19:43](#)
- The tourism board is developing a **proactive information program** for large event organizers, providing newsletter-format materials with lodging, dining, and activity information. [1:09:15](#)

## Grant Funding and Support

- **Monetary support for sporting events** (like paying for referees) was identified as very helpful since running tournaments is expensive and exhausting for organizers. [33:54](#)
- Kelly raised concerns about **missing grant deadlines** because event organizers don't know team counts, referee needs, or housing requirements when applications are due, particularly for first-time events like the inaugural AAU tournament in Nebraska with **58 teams**. [1:13:50](#)
- Suggestion made to offer **more than two grant application periods per year** to accommodate uncertainty in event planning, with the option to submit estimates based on prior years and reconcile with receipts. [1:14:25](#)
- The **ambassador program** concept was clarified: experienced grant recipients and event organizers would mentor newcomers through the application process and share expertise about running successful events, promoting programs to interested parties. [1:15:30](#)
- Participants noted that **funding is available from both cities** but many don't know where to access it or how programs work, creating a need for better information sharing. [17:06](#)

## Other Discussion Topics

- Key growth areas include **developing new events, strengthening shoulder season events, and expanding outdoor activities** to attract visitors year-round. [04:24](#)
- Marketing approaches should target **different generations** with diverse preferences, leverage **AI for analyzing trends** and popular activities, and emphasize the region's natural beauty and land usage. [05:08](#)
- **Tourism Week is being planned in collaboration with Creative Beat district** in Scottsbluff, built around a mural being created on a historic granary in downtown Scottsbluff for placemaking and unification. [35:01](#)
- Betsy noted that having the right people in the right roles (specifically mentioning Kent and Brenda) significantly increased awareness and involvement in tourism efforts after 21 years at the fairgrounds. [36:13](#)
- The facilitator observed that the group is **'more united than you think and much healthier than many communities'**, encouraging pride in progress while acknowledging remaining work on trust-building. [1:20:25](#)



Jamie N. Weingart  
[jnwconsulting.org](http://jnwconsulting.org)

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