



Tourist Development

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Business Plan

Fiscal Year 2013-2014



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2. Executive Summary

Travel and tourism make an essential contribution to the Marion County economy. Dollars from group and leisure travelers flow throughout our entire community, supporting thousands of employees in tourism-related businesses. The ongoing infusion of visitor funds into local sales tax collections also supports vital programs that enhance the quality of life for all citizens. Truly, tourism is everybody's business.

The Visitors and Convention Bureau (VCB) will develop and use a structured, methodical planning process and disciplined method of execution to benchmark progress and establish efficient and effective operations to generate economic impact through tourism initiatives.

In alignment with our mission, the VCB focuses on three major purposes for the organization and County:

- Maintain the destination as the primary attraction (Management)
- Take a leadership role in addressing issues that affect tourism (Leadership/Administration)
- Strengthen the position of the Ocala/Marion County brand (Marketing)

The VCB funding is secured through bed tax collections and therefore paid directly by tourists. State Statute 125.0104 strictly regulates the spending of bed tax funds, ensuring appropriate use and fiduciary responsibility.

The VCB's mission is carefully aligned to State Statute 125.0104 spending guidelines. Therefore, the strategic plan is formatted according to the Tourist Development Council's (TDC's) three primary purposes, as noted above, that also correspond to appropriate spending guidelines outlined in the State Statute.

The VCB is at a critical juncture. To further explore our future opportunities and areas for economic growth, the VCB is moving forward with a strategic plan that will steer our future initiatives through a methodical and community-centric process. This blueprint will work to advance future goals and strive to achieve even greater economic impact through tourism as we build an integrated marketing strategy that revitalizes and innovates our brand, website, public relations, social media and all in-market and out-of-market sales strategies.

Our 2013-2014 strategic plan and direction details short and long term goals, while providing a clear vision for the destination and the path of the organization that were developed by the Board of County Commission (BCC), TDC, Marketing Committee, tourism industry and the community, as a whole, to advance Ocala/Marion County. This clear and concise strategic plan will advance economic impact

for Marion County through innovative and proactive tourism initiatives and advance the opportunities that lay ahead.

As we forge forward, we will work to benchmark and measure our results in tourism and communicate its long term economic impact by:

- Documenting the relevance of the tourism industry as a whole and the benefits the growing results can bring to Marion County
- Investigate each of the key market segments that will move us forward as the main drivers in the economy, and
- Stress the need for continued support from the tourism industry and community to further ensure a pragmatic approach at providing top-quality deliverables that truly can be achieved to meet our long term business goals so all can prosper and grow for years to come through these innovative opportunities.

History of Ocala/Marion County VCB

In 2004, a County Ordinance created the 2% Tourist Development Tax (*TDT or "bed tax"*) on transient accommodations that is used to support and grow the local tourism industry. The Marion County Board of County Commissioners formed a nine-member volunteer Tourist Development Council (*TDC*) to oversee the application of these funds to attract leisure and business travel to our community. Functioning as the TDC's operational arm, the Ocala/Marion County Visitors and Convention Bureau has had a full-time staff of three professionals for most of its history.

The VCB officially formed the Ocala-Marion Sports Commission in late 2009 to further sports marketing and event cultivation within Marion County. Since that time, the Sports Commission has played a key role in supporting the local event industry and attracting more sports-related travelers to the area. A wide range of sales and marketing efforts, industry networking, trade show attendance and community outreach are some of the key tactics employed to achieve the Sports Commission's objectives.

The VCB was headquartered in an Ocala business park until early 2008, when it moved to Ocala's historic district. Recently, the VCB offices and official Visitors Center have moved to a highly visible, active and convenient location at 112 North Magnolia Avenue in downtown Ocala. Here, the Visitors Center is providing record amounts of literature on County accommodations and attractions, helping guests with travel recommendations and serving as the point of welcome for travelers arriving in the area.



3. Business Description & Vision

Mission Statement:

The mission of the Ocala/Marion County Visitors and Convention Bureau is to lead, market and grow our County’s travel and tourism industry, cultivating greater prosperity for the entire community.

Vision:

Our vision is to serve with excellence using the highest industry and professional standards. By continuing to use research-backed marketing solutions, friendly visitor assistance and targeted salesmanship, we will continue to lead in our industry and outperform destinations with similar budgets and amenities.

Values:

The core values that guide us in our mission and vision are memorably summarized as:

- **Honesty**
- **Originality**
- **Teamwork**
- **Excellence**
- **Leadership**

Guiding Principles:

Quality	<i>We strive for the highest quality in everything we do.</i>
Preservation	<i>We are committed to the protection and preservation of our natural resources.</i>
Fiscal Responsibility	<i>We will manage our financial resources wisely in a way that provides direct benefit to tourism.</i>
Leadership	<i>We recognize and accept our responsibility for providing leadership in preserving the quality of life in Marion County.</i>
Research	<i>We employ a research based, data driven approach to the way we plan to operate the VCB.</i>



4. Definition of the Markets and Research

At the Ocala/Marion County VCB, our goal is to enhance the local economy by using intelligent, innovative and efficient methods to attract more visitor dollars and grow our local tourism industry. A primary objective of the VCB is to continue to raise awareness of the County as a viable vacation destination alternative, which we have accomplished in each year of operations. Additional objectives include infusing fresh dollars into the local economy and contributing to Marion County's overall prosperity through strategies, programs, tools and tactics that currently include:

Visitor Categories

The great diversity of visitors to Ocala/Marion County—our target customers—can be broadly organized into the following industry-standard categories:

- LEISURE TRAVEL MARKETING — To vacationers, the VCB markets the County as a great place to see horse farms, enjoy outdoor and nature-based activities, simply relax, visit local attractions, historic sites and more. Consumer print ads, special promotions, direct and e-marketing, collateral distribution and other tactics round out the leisure-travel marketing mix. The VCB works to gain consideration from qualified prospective guests through innovative marketing techniques, with fewer marketing dollars than competing counties.
- SPORTS MARKETING — The VCB operates an effective sports marketing program that brings youth, amateur and professional events to the area. To achieve this, the VCB works with an agency of record to attract, manage and promote sports events at all levels—youth, amateur and professional. A few of the organizations that have held sports events in our County in 2012 include the American Junior Golf Association, Florida High School Athletic Association, Florida Professional Golf Tour, National Golf Association Tour and United States Specialty Sports Association Soccer.
- GROUP MARKETING — The VCB promotes and sells Marion County as a place to hold conventions, meetings, conferences and reunions. We also work to attract the (*social, military, educational, religious and fraternal groups*) SMERF market. In addition, we market to professional meeting planners, offering free planning assistance and special incentive programs.
- COMMUNITY EDUCATION — Share information regarding the benefits and importance of our tourism industry with local groups, targeted media and more.
- DAY TRIPPERS — This group is composed of those people who reside near Marion County and therefore do not require overnight accommodations when they visit the area.

- **TRANSIENT** — These are guests who are passing through the area and stay overnight on their way to another destination for leisure or business. An example of one of the ways that the VCB attracts transient travelers to entice them to stay overnight is through our outdoor advertising campaign posted along the Interstate and the Florida Turnpike.

State Research

Research provided by our local industry, as well as the State of Florida, and our own primary studies confirm the geographic origin markets of our guests to be the Southern drive market (especially Georgia); the Northeast (primarily New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania); and the I-75 corridor of the Midwest (especially Michigan and Ohio). Of course, our renowned equine industry has its own set of origin markets, which tend to be throughout the Southeast, although we attract national and international guests.

The key customers (guests) served by the Ocala/Marion County VCB reside outside of our County. Our job is to bring them here, and to put “heads in beds,” as the expression goes. These guests then spend their monies in each of our communities. As a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO), we employ a broad array of sales and marketing tactics to attract guests to stay in local accommodations.

National Research

Based upon recent research through the U.S. Travel Association, most economists and consumers are expressing greater optimism, which will hopefully translate into renewed strength in travel during the upcoming summer season. Economic and travel trends seem quite positive in the U.S. so far this year, and forecasts have been generally reflecting increasing industry optimism. While that has been true for the past few years, the situation remains somewhat tenuous and vulnerable to whatever the latest challenges the economy and other world events have in store. Right now, the concern seems to be about rising gas prices.

Economic Trends

Underlying consumer fundamentals seem to be improving. Personal spending rose by a greater-than-expected 0.8% in February, the largest monthly rise since July, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce, causing some leading economists to raise forecasts for first-quarter growth. On an annual basis, Oxford Economics expects growth of 2.7% in 2013.

In the housing market, while long-term improvement continues to take hold in a growing number of local markets, recent data suggests the housing industry recovery took a breather in February. Many of the industry metrics were down from January. Lagging incomes also thwart growth. Based on a special monthly analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey, Sentier Research estimates that real median annual household income in January 2013 (\$51,584) was statistically unchanged from the December 2012 median income. Real median annual household income in January was higher than in 2012, which demonstrates how figures have fallen over the past decade.

One Billion Passengers Expected on U.S. Airlines by 2024

Total domestic passenger enplanements on U.S. carriers decreased 0.3%, year-to-date, for second quarter comparisons, according to Airlines for America. Industry restructuring has paved the way for four major national networks: Delta, United, Southwest and American Airlines.

Demand for aviation is interrelated to economic activity and the 2013 Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) forecast projects U.S. carrier passenger growth over the next 20 years will average 2.2% per year.

The industry was forecasted to grow from 731 million passengers in 2011 to one billion passengers in 2024, three years later than projected last year. A total of 1.2 billion passengers are projected in 2032.

Over the next 20 years, larger airports and regional jets will continue to grow faster than their smaller counterparts in the U.S.

Hotels: "Near-Term Nirvana"

According to STR, leisure travel has recovered better than business travel. Increases in room demand and rates, and consequently RevPAR, stemmed from solid growth in leisure travel. Between 2006 and early 2012, transient demand increased 18.4% from start to endpoint, while group demand dropped 6.4%. While overall ADR bottomed out in early 2010, group rates continued to decline throughout that year, reaching the lowest point in Jan 2011. 4.4% in 2013.

Ever since U.S. hotel industry performance bottomed-out around January 2010, demand has led a slow-but-steady recovery, but the rate is now leading recovery. Smith Travel Research (STR) reported that 2013 occupancy is expected to rise 0.8%, Average Daily Rate will increase 4.9% to \$111.27 and Revenue per Available Room (RevPAR) is expected to grow 5.7% to \$68.86.

Meetings & Conventions reports that 2013 should prove to be an improvement from last year. While hotel rates will continue on their upward trajectory, this partially reflects an increase in group demand, a trend that portends a greater number of meetings and attendees. Incentive programs are growing again, and the trade show industry, which saw some modest growth in 2012, is geared to rise further in 2013.

Technology Tidbits

The trend to book travel online will continue in 2013 - especially in emerging economies such as China, India and Brazil. The share of the online segment compared to the total travel market is expected to increase to almost one third worldwide.

Tourism Remains an Economic Bright Spot: International Traveler Spending on Pace for a Record Year

On March 14, 2013, the U.S. Department of Commerce released information regarding services receipts increasing to \$630.4 billion from \$606.0 billion, with the largest increases in travel and other private services. These numbers indicate while business, professional and technical services increased, travel correlated as a byproduct. If these trends continue, international visitors could end up injecting close to \$170 billion into the U.S. economy.

The U.S. Departments of Commerce and Interior are currently implementing the National Travel & Tourism Strategy, in which Brand USA plays an essential role. Released in May 2012, The National Strategy is a blueprint for expanding travel to and within the U.S., setting out the goal of attracting over 100 million international visitors annually by 2021. Last year, 62 million international tourists

visited the United States and spent \$153 billion in local economies to support 7.6 million jobs in the travel and tourism industry, which make tourism America's number one service export.



5. Description of Products and Service Processes

The Ocala/Marion County VCB represents all of Marion County in its tourism marketing efforts. In that sense, we therefore have a 100% “market share” within our own community. The VCB team remains dedicated to promoting all of Marion County’s tourism amenities.

The Ocala/Marion County VCB is a revenue-generating marketing organization. Whether through purchased ads, direct and e-marketing, positive press, trade show attendance or helping guests at the Visitors Center, our job is to put “heads in beds” and dollars in the local economy. Working with our marketing/communications agency, every sales and marketing communications tactic and vehicle is examined each year and weighed against the overall budget, target demographics and the Bureau’s objectives.

The market share of the Marion County travel industry, as a whole, versus the VCB as an organization, can be analyzed many ways. One useful basis of comparison is lodging gross sales (using tax receipt data from the Florida Department of Revenue). Using this measurement, Marion County represented approximately 0.18% (in the amount of \$400,819) of the statewide total (in the amount of \$216,832,661) from July 2012 to June 2013.

This percentage is disproportionate, compared to similarly sized counties, such as Lake County (\$864,440) and Citrus County (\$277,257), which have much higher TDT rates and marketing budgets. This reveals that it is the reduction in accommodators’ ADR (*Average Daily Rate*) that is most negatively impacting revenue, versus visitation.

Market share in tourism largely correlates to the positive awareness of the product and the amenities and activities being offered. Awareness for the Marion County Visitors and Convention Bureau has grown to the level that it keeps pace with counties that outspend us—and we plan to continue growing our awareness and prospect consideration.

Key Products and Services

Nature Based Activities

Nature-based activities and amenities constitute a primary portion of our tourism appeal. And as this exciting form of tourism is rising—even during these challenging times—there is an opportunity to attract even greater numbers of guests to Marion County. Today’s vacationers increasingly seek out nature-based activities. VISIT FLORIDA’s report on “Culture, History and Nature-Based Travel” (05/09) states that 66.7% of survey respondents who had visited Florida in the past 12 months had participated in nature-based activities during their trip—an increase of 11.5% over the previous year. With our Ocala National Forest, world-famous springs, beautiful rivers and lakes, and hundreds of hiking trails, we are well poised to take advantage of the rising interest in nature-based tourism.

Equine Activities

We are known as the “Horse Capital of the World” for good reason, as we have become an international center for equestrian events and activities. Major events like the Horse Shows in the Sun series (HITS) at the Post Time farm, plus the many competitions held at the Florida Horse Park and other venues, among profits from horse sales draw visitors from across America and around the world. Marion County is also well known for its horse trails, tack shops and other venues and activities for the visiting equestrian enthusiast.

Sports Activities

Our steady increase in events is placing us prominently on the national stage, with major players such as the National Golf Association and the United States Specialty Sports Association selecting Marion County to host key events. In the sports marketing arena, as in most business situations, the axiom holds true that “nothing succeeds like success.” Therefore, while we continue to successfully host major events, we are also building our reputation and better positioning ourselves to attract even more sports events to Marion County and grow market share.

Communities with Southern Hospitality

The County has a total area of 1,663 square miles, of which 84 square miles are water. Ocala is the County seat and other incorporated cities and towns include Belleview, Dunnellon, McIntosh and Reddick. Unincorporated communities include Fort McCoy, Marion Oaks, Silver Springs Shores and Salt Springs. Each community has its own special features and history awaiting exploration.

Great Location

Event planners, tour operators and vacationers alike love Marion County’s convenient location. Interstate 75 and U.S. Highways 27, 41, 301 and 441 each connect to the area, while the Florida Turnpike meets I-75 just to the south. The area is close in proximity to major airports in Orlando, Tampa and Sanford and the regional airport in Gainesville. Local shuttle services are offered from various accommodations to the airports, making it even easier to travel here. Plus, the Ocala International Airport at Taylor Field provides private, charter and air cargo services.

Sponsorship Grant Program

The Sponsorship Grant Program will be elevated to accommodate more participants and ensure a fair and consistent process. Applicants will be afforded the opportunity to apply twice a year to help event organizers grow signature opportunities for Ocala/Marion County.

Visitor Center

The visitor center is staffed five days a week and provides information and directions to visitors, encouraging first-time and repeat visitation. The center displays and distributes information of potential interest to visitors including accommodations, dining, shopping, outdoor activities and current events.



6. Organization & Management

Principal Staff

- LORETTA SHAFFER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Loretta manages the VCB as a Destination Management Office (*DMO*) and the Tourism Office. She receives direction from the BCC, TDC and handles government and community relations functions for both organizations. Solicits group business in key markets and manages the relationship with the County's tourism marketing agency.
- SKY WHEELER, SALES AND OPERATIONS MANAGER
Sky holds a high level of responsibility with an emphasis on group tourism for the purpose of attracting conferences, seminars, corporate meetings, leisure travel, reunions and other related group business to the greater Marion County area generating business for the hospitality industry within Marion County.
- ASHLEY DOBBS, SALES AND MARKETING COORDINATOR
Ashley assists the Executive Director and the Sales Manager in the coordination, creation, and maintenance of Marion County tourism industry partners, special events and advertising. She also supports management with the development of sales database programs for cultivating and tracking current and potential sales clients as well as electronic marketing needs.
- CASSANDRA LI, ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF ASSISTANT
Cassandra manages the Visitor Center and its volunteers on a daily basis, serves as liaison between the VCB and the Clerk of the Court and responds to tourism industry and visitor requests. Cassandra has 6 years of relevant administrative experience.



7. Marketing and Customer Service

Key Challenges

To take our local tourism efforts and industry to an even higher level of success, the VCB recognizes that we must work on the below issues:

I. Management

- Develop strategies that continue to advocate for tourism and issues that affect tourism while remaining aligned with our core mission.
- Investigate the enforcement and collection of the bed tax and implement strategies to maximize total bed tax collection.
- Access the Grant and sponsorship process to identify and reward high quality events and festivals that promote the desirability of visitation during the shoulder season and increase occupancy through a refined process that methodically allocates annual marketing dollars to organizations and businesses that meet established marketing criteria and are in alignment with State Statute 125.0104.
- Generate awareness within the community about the TDC's purpose funding, as well as the benefits of tourism to further gain broad-based involvement of community and key constituents.

II. Leadership / Administration

- Continue to engage our local tourism community in the planning of our destination's future.
- Implement Human Resources and a Leadership Plan to maximize staff performance through development.
- Develop effective advertising agency leadership and operations allowing the VCB to provide superior programs and services to deliver results. Work with our new advertising agency to advance our branding/marketing, website, public relations and social media initiatives to increase our economic impact for the community.
- Advance our sports marketing initiatives locally, regionally, nationally and internationally with our agency of record.
- Develop gateway opportunities and destination signage to advance Ocala/Marion County quality of life and advance the County's brand recognition.

- Hire and develop proactive and innovative staff members at the tourism office to reach more group sales prospects and advance our in-market and out-of-market opportunities.

III. Marketing

- Establish research that benchmarks Economic Impact (return visitation, # of visitors to area - trend data and competitive sets).
- Develop strategic planning that defines 1 year, 3 year, 5 year, 10 year goals and objectives for increasing economic impact from tourism.
- Define Mission Statement, Vision, Guiding Principles, SWOT Analysis, Critical Success Factors and KPI (key performance indicators) that have correlating measurement systems.
- Elevate and grow a cohesive brand in concert with destination stakeholders and constituents.
- Develop a proactive and effective marketing plan that creates year-round tourism with local support.
- Develop nature, arts, cultural-based resources and experiences that are promotable and help enhance the visitor experience.
- Investigating secondary and niche markets to strengthen shoulder seasons with new customer groups.
- Increase visitor service opportunities to further advance and enhance the experience, provide a sense of place and communicate the destination brand, while providing an exceptional experience with each guest contact to encourage and prolong overnight visitation in Marion County.
- Analyze our current brand through a brand culturalization process that clearly defines identity development through customer analysis, competitor analysis, self-analysis and stakeholder validation, ultimately resulting in strategic implementation of a consumer generated confirmation of effective creative program development initiatives.
- Launching of a new destination website that communicates a clear and visible path for visitors and industry partners that generate a return on investment (ROI) and economic impact.
- Develop a strategy to evolve the visitors' guide regarding County Parks and Recreation and the abundance of new product development offerings, such as experimental, agri- and equine tourism activities.
- Advance the VCB's internal and external group sales strategies to focus on bringing new, qualified leads to its lodging partners.
- Develop Certified Nature-Based Outfitters (CNBO) to better meet eco-interested visitor needs.
- Elevate strategic alliances with the local municipalities, including the cities of Belleview, Dunnellon and Ocala.
- Elevate alliances with Visit Florida, FADMO (Florida Association of Destination Marketing Organizations) and DMAI (Destination Marketing Association International).

SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unique destination – beautiful destination with natural beauty • Revitalize downtown architecture • Diverse inventory of accommodations • Diverse destination offering throughout county • Brand Awareness with center of state and equine industry • Loyalty • Land in preserve • Staff • Advancement in Sporting Industry • Advancement of key differentiators i.e., Caving, Ziplining, Motor Cross, Eco, Adventure, Equine and Agri-Tourism opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse inventory • Air Accessibility • Lack of venues (sports, meetings) • Premier infrastructure with equine facilities • Immature meeting and events market • Lack geographical recognition • Retail development and promotion • Availability of services • Seasonality
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultivate Marion County as the first stop for vacationing versus a pass through destination approach • Gateway and Destination Signage • Create advanced brand awareness on the map • Redevelopment • Develop brand promise (clearly defined, universally adopted) • Identify core values of community to preserve while we grow • Promote pristine, preserved land • Central Accessibility with Transportation • Visitor amenities off interstate/highways/State Parks/Silver Springs • Promote Nature, History, Art and Culture, Heritage. • Build events that can leverage county i.e. Bike Week, Motor Sports activities • Film Commission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key market pull from neighboring destinations for nature and sports opportunities • Over development • Labor market • Gaming • Perception of U.S. in foreign markets

2013-2014 MARKETING PLAN

Brand Marketing

The Ocala/Marion County VCB will work to have a more holistic approach to marketing. We will use research and data acquired to build the foundation for our strategic approach, which will clearly establish our key markets and audiences, thus allowing Marion County to fully realize its potential for brand development and elevated awareness.

Through this research, the Ocala/Marion County VCB will develop a more robust and customized advertising strategy with insights and messaging that speak specifically to our laser targeted audiences.

Brand Discovery

The Ocala/Marion County VCB will conduct community meetings in each of the 5 Marion County districts to best determine goals and objectives for tourism opportunities. The TDC, BCC, staff and contracted agencies will work to then develop a long-term blueprint for identifying a 1, 3, 5 and 10 year tourism vision. Included in the final report be:

- Executive Summary
- Situation Overview
- Business Objectives & Goals
- Trends and Issues Among the Industry
- Evaluation of Competitive Landscape
- Target Audience (Demographics/Psychographics)
- SWOT Analysis
- Evaluation of Current Branding Assets
- Stakeholder Exploration
- Progressive Brand Position and Messaging for Communication Elements
- Planning Considerations

Brand Development

Marion County will use the conducted research to unveil the Marion County brand and history to create a standard that will define a contextual understanding of the brand value for our various clients. The overarching brand strategy will pinpoint and highlight key differentiators to further communicate a consistent and accurate portrayal of our brand with a strong emphasis of our core values, mission and personality.

Once the brand standard is set, it will be the benchmark against which all activities and communications will be measured. This commitment to a clearly identifiable brand promise will establish and bring the brand's personality to life, creating a tone of voice and ensuring clear and consistent messaging. Deliverables will include:

- Brand Consultation from Advertising Agency
- Brand Communication Elements
- Visual Identity System

- Logo Design
- Primary Logo Usage
- Positive and Negative Logo Versions
- Logo Usage Restrictions, Safety Area and Exceptions
- Color Palette
 - Primary and Secondary Brand Colors
 - Brand Usage within a Grayscale Environment
- Typography
 - Fonts
 - Font Weights
- Iconography
- Body Copy
- Graphic Elements
- Photography and Imagery
- Voice
 - Voice Characteristics
 - Voice Elements Characteristics
 - Associate Voice
- White Paper Usage Templates
- PowerPoint or Keynote Design Templates

Website Redesign and Development

With the above research, The Ocala/Marion County VCB will work to refine the current website to improve navigation and architecture in order to ensure robust content to elevate the user experience and raise the Ocala/Marion County brand in the marketplace.

The process for redesigning and developing a revised Ocala/Marion County VCB website will include a strategic process whereby the entire user experience is carefully mapped out through design and programming. Using tools such as heat mapping and user testing, we can ensure that the site's user interface is designed to guide the user on a desired path. Additionally, the website will be responsive to most browser-enabled devices (i.e. computers, laptops, tablets, smartphones, etc.)

The website development plan will include:

- Redesign the website to be the main marketing hub for Ocala/Marion County VCB according to our brand standards, appearance and experience.
- Achieve a more contemporary, sophisticated appearance, in line with other VCB's.
- Design and build as a responsive site that will resize and function smoothly on desktop, tablet and mobile browsers.
- Incorporate a more streamlined navigation and architecture.
- Establish a hierarchy of content flow, based on important information such as Where to Stay, What to Do and Where to Dine.
- Create sections for important targets including leisure visitors, groups, sports and others with pertinent information and deep resources for each segment.
- Include email capture for database building and target marketing.

- Develop a strong, easy-to-use content management system and train staff on how to update and edit copy, photos and videos.
- Create “Partner Pages” for industry partners.
- Provide password-protected back-end access for specific pages to each partner for easy updating and editing of copy, photos, and videos.
- Build the media resources section with all necessary and important assets and information.
- Continue to add and revise content, copy, photos and videos for marketing and search engine relevance.
- Monitor and report site activity and results.
- Incorporate other innovative functions and features as they arise.

User Experience Planning will include:

- Target Audience Research
- Target Audience Personas
- Behavioral Map
- Measurement Plan
- Database Marketing Plan

Design Planning will include:

- UX Plan/Creative Brief
- Mood Boards
- Concepts
- Layout
- Final Art
- Style Guide

Technology Analysis will include:

- Development Environment Landscape
- Specifications
- CMS Integration Plan
- Alpha Test Plan
- Beta Test Plan
- Quality Assurance & Control

Information Architecture will include:

- Conceptual Map
- Site Map
- Wireframes
- Feature Descriptions
- Usability Testing
- Implementation Standards

Content Development will include:

- Audit & Inventory

- Outline
- Copy Documents
- Publishing Model
- SEO Plan

Public Relations

To compete in today's marketplace, it is more important than ever to effectively tell a story of an attraction or destination. The public relations aspect of Ocala/Marion County VCB integrated communications plan will provide the tools and programs to establish, maintain and repair the reputation of our destination. The PR strategy will work to add and build relationships that will achieve, not only in tourism, but also most importantly, our business objectives.

Relationships matter more than ever and trust is the currency for which they are acquired and maintained. Reputation is the manifestation of how people will trust Marion County, and as its most valuable asset, it is critical that we get our message – and story -- to the right people in a crowded and competitive marketplace.

Video will be an integral part of the Ocala/Marion County VCB public relations plan. Video content garners greater exposure, significantly higher click-through rates, and far greater circulation than traditional e-mails or press releases. More importantly, web-videos get results. The experience of watching a short message is often more engaging than the experience of reading it—making our targets more likely to receive the Ocala/Marion County message and act upon it. Video content will be produced and delivered as part of our broader communications strategy.

To achieve success for our destination, the Ocala/Marion County VCB will work to build the strongest reputation and provide the most effective public relations through 7 key strategies:

1. *Trust*

Relationships are the channel through which Marion County will work and trust is the foundation for fulfilling, productive and profitable relationships. Our work must first help Marion County earn, cultivate, build, restore, and repair trust.

2. *Research*

Before any campaign begins, the right research must be commissioned, conducted and reviewed to determine the correct priorities, audience, message and metrics.

3. *Story*

The core to any successful campaign is a powerful story and effective messages. Messages reflect Marion County's values and priorities and are in line with stakeholder priorities and expectations.

4. *Candor*

To ensure that the right thing is done, Marion County will fight for a culture of candor.

5. *Advocacy*

In the new marketplace, it is no longer enough to cultivate "loyal customers". Marion County must work to build a base of "advocates" who are raving fans, constantly promoting, supporting and even defending our brand.

6. *Results*

Marion County is about results. Coupled with an intense commitment to ethics and a deep understating of business and consumer markets, we aspire to exceed expectations and deliver results.

7. *Communication*

The best and most effective campaigns are ones that first consider those closest to and within the organization, particularly in times of change or great transitions.

Development of Media Platform Plans will include:

- Earned Media and Publicity
- Social Media Integration
- Blog Integration
- Email 2.0

Development of Media Relations Plan will include:

- Relationship Building and Regular Engagement
- Develop Media Pitches for Specified Outlets
- Facilitate Media Training and Education Sessions for Executive Leadership
- Deliver Appropriate Materials for Media Pitches
- Time and Engagement for Pitching Stories
- Opportunities to Engage a Satellite Media Tour, Video News Releases or Related Opportunities to Engage Broadcast Outlets

Development of Special Groups and Community Engagement Plan will include:

- Identification of communities that influence the business and marketplace
- Development of an activation/engagement plan
- Trade Groups and Associations

Media Monitoring:

It is important to use the best technology and resources to track and maintain presence in media for both competitive analysis and advancing client initiatives. Ocala/Marion County VCB will develop reports and procedures that help the County and industry stay abreast of the important issues to make better strategic decisions.

Traditional Media

Ocala/Marion County VCB will develop, plan, place, manage and post all paid-media activity. The right media mix is based on research and strategic planning. Before any Ocala/Marion County messaging is released to the market, we will thoroughly research the audience to ensure we are reaching the target with the greatest opportunity for ROI.

The methodology for identifying the appropriate media target for Ocala/Marion County starts with defining the target's mindset and behavior patterns. Demographics make up a small proponent of media planning. Psychographics, attributes relating to personality, values, attitudes, interests or lifestyles, make up a much larger portion of determining the appropriate traditional media channels.

Working with our Advertising Agency, the Ocala/Marion County VCB will effectively and efficiently target and plan the best media channels for the right message at the best price. In addition, the

Ocala/Marion County VCB will be diligent in negotiating added value such as online listings, editorial mentions, bonus spots, free space and more.

Digital Media

Technology has fundamentally changed how brands and their audiences communicate, not just with digital, but across all channels. Consequently, interactive thinking needs to be at the heart of all marketing strategy while interactive channels are core for all marketing delivery.

The Ocala/Marion County VCB will work with our Advertising Agency to deliver the highest quality campaigns on premium inventory structured to optimize the conversion funnel to produce ROI for Ocala/Marion County. Our integrated campaign will enable Ocala/Marion County to deliver effective Display Advertising, PPC (pay-per-click) Search, Search Engine Optimization (SEO), Mobile Marketing and Social Media campaigns to manage all aspects of the our online brand presence.

The Ocala/Marion County VCB digital media campaign will be based on consumer web habits, psychological needs, demographics, geographics, steps of the buying process and ultimately how they interact with the brand's website based on Google analytics. 24/7 monitoring will allow us to adjust campaigns in real-time to better produce higher lifts in conversion rates.

Landing page optimization will be imperative to the success of our digital ecosystem. Our new online media strategy will allow us to follow the consumer from the moment their eye catches an Ocala/Marion County VCB ad to the engagement of the click and ultimately through to the website visit. Strategic landing page development will enable the Ocala/Marion County VCB to make it as easy as possible for our visitors to convert to a qualified lead.

Strategic Digital Media Portfolio Elements will include:

- Display Advertising
- Custom Channels
- Behavioral Targeting
- Site Re-targeting
- Search Re-targeting
- Video
- Mobile

Pay-Per-Click Advertising

- Ocala/Marion County VCB will use desktop and mobile search to ensure consumers actively seeking information are served to deliver key messages. Creative direction will be versioned by keywords, allowing Marion County to precisely target, attract and redirect potential visitors to the most appropriate landing page.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

- Marion County will work to maximize our organic search rankings and content potential through onsite and offsite optimization tactics. A complete SEO audit inclusive of Keyword Research, Competitive Analysis, On-Site Search Engine Architecture, Content Optimization, Press Distribution, Blogging and Manual Link Building will determine the key areas of opportunity on the website and within the marketplace.

Monitoring and Reporting will include:

- Clicks and Impressions to Detailed, Custom Engagement and Video Metrics
- CPA Conversion Tracking
- Call Tracking
- Google Analytics and Insights
- Optimization

Social Media

Ocala/Marion County VCB will create and maintain and build our online reputation in order to meet our guests' travel goals. Consumers will be inspired at an emotional level by Marion County, which will ultimately improve brand loyalty, increase word-of-mouth marketing and result in higher leads.

Ocala/Marion County's strategic approach to planning, executing and monitoring social media efforts will follow a strategy built on SMART (Specific, Measureable, Accurate, Relevant and Timely) goals and innovative thinking:

Steps in that strategy will include:

- Discovery research
- Industry research
- Competitive analysis
- Goals and objectives setting
- Review of the past and present marketing portfolio
- Content development
- Audience analysis
- Customer life-cycle identification
- Emotional keyword trigger point identification
- Year-long content strategy plan, including rich media elements

Implementation will include:

- Strategic selection of social media platforms
- Posting schedules
- Consumer interaction, social reach and connection growth promotions

Evaluation will include:

- Qualitative analysis based on engagement, consumer feedback, website features and testimonials
- Quantitative analysis related to the established SMART goals
- Optimization recommendations
- ROI analysis in dollar values

Adjustment will include:

- Optimization and improvement of success metrics
- Implementing new content, innovative ideas and ROI driven tactics focused on meeting established goals

Customer Service:

Whether guests are planning a major event or a simple getaway, the friendly and knowledgeable team at the Ocala/Marion County VCB is eager to assist individuals and groups.

The team responds to inquiries that we receive in several ways: online inquiries are promptly followed up with emails (or mailed a visitors' guide if requested); postal mail or information requests from print publication leads are mailed visitors' guides by our fulfillment company. Visitors who call or stop by our downtown Visitors Center receive personalized vacation planning assistance and activity suggestions from staff and our team of friendly, helpful volunteers. Throughout all of these methods, we serve our customers well by making timely, appropriate and useful responses.

The VCB team can be reached at 1-888-FL-OCALA or www.OcalaMarion.com for more information and free planning assistance.



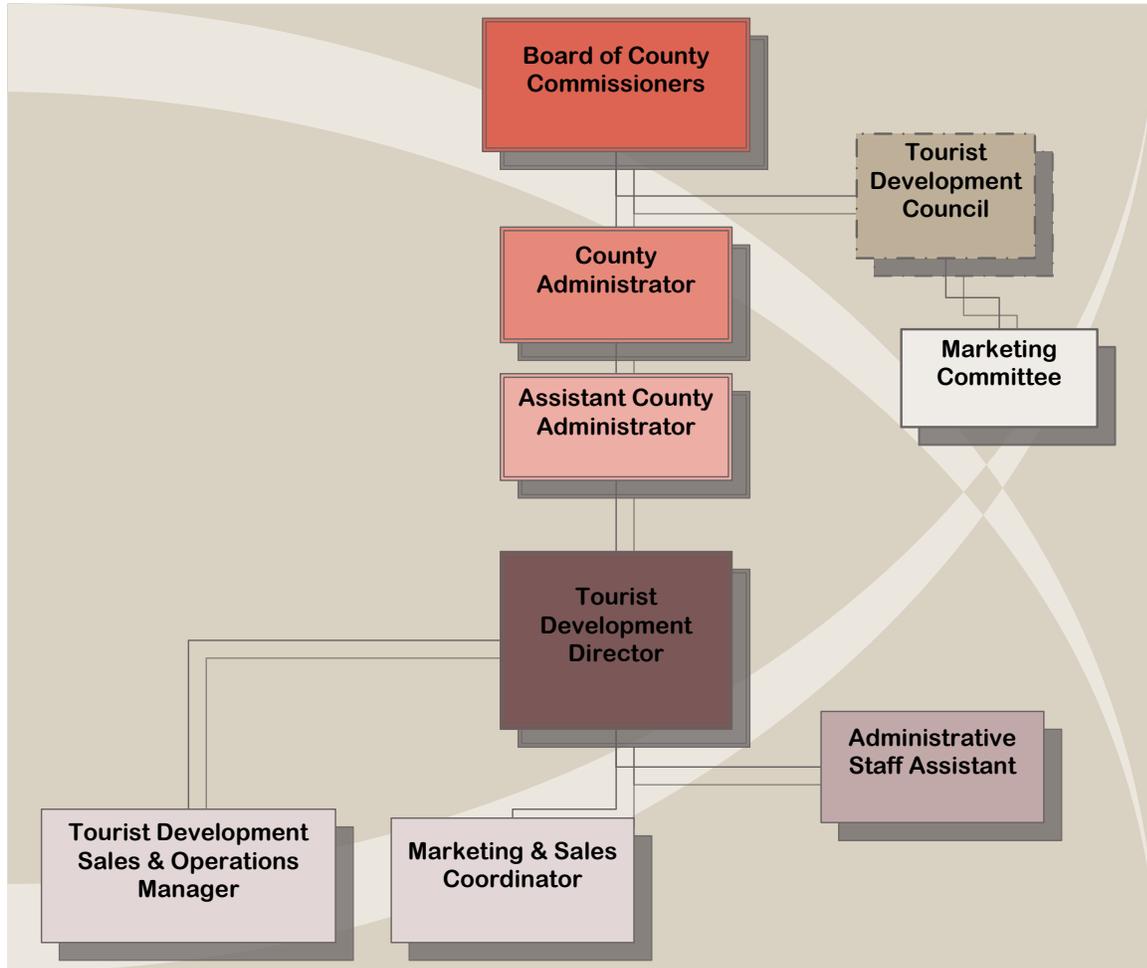
8. Financial Management, Performance Measures, Benchmarks and Comparatives

Financial Management

The successes of the Ocala/Marion County VCB have been many this past year, especially in this tough economic environment for tourism. Using the most conservative figures and the most recent STR Report data, the total economic impact from our overnight guests in 2012 was approximately \$283 million. Using more aggressive estimates, the impact was \$326+ million. That is a \$30 million to \$36 million increase over 2011 and does not include expenditures by day-trippers, which account for a substantial percentage of our revenue. Additionally, Occupancy was up 9% (18.2% in two years); RevPar was up 12.2% (22.1% in two years); Demand (or Rooms Sold) was up 7.4% (16.1% in two years); and Revenue was up 10.5% (19.9% in two years).

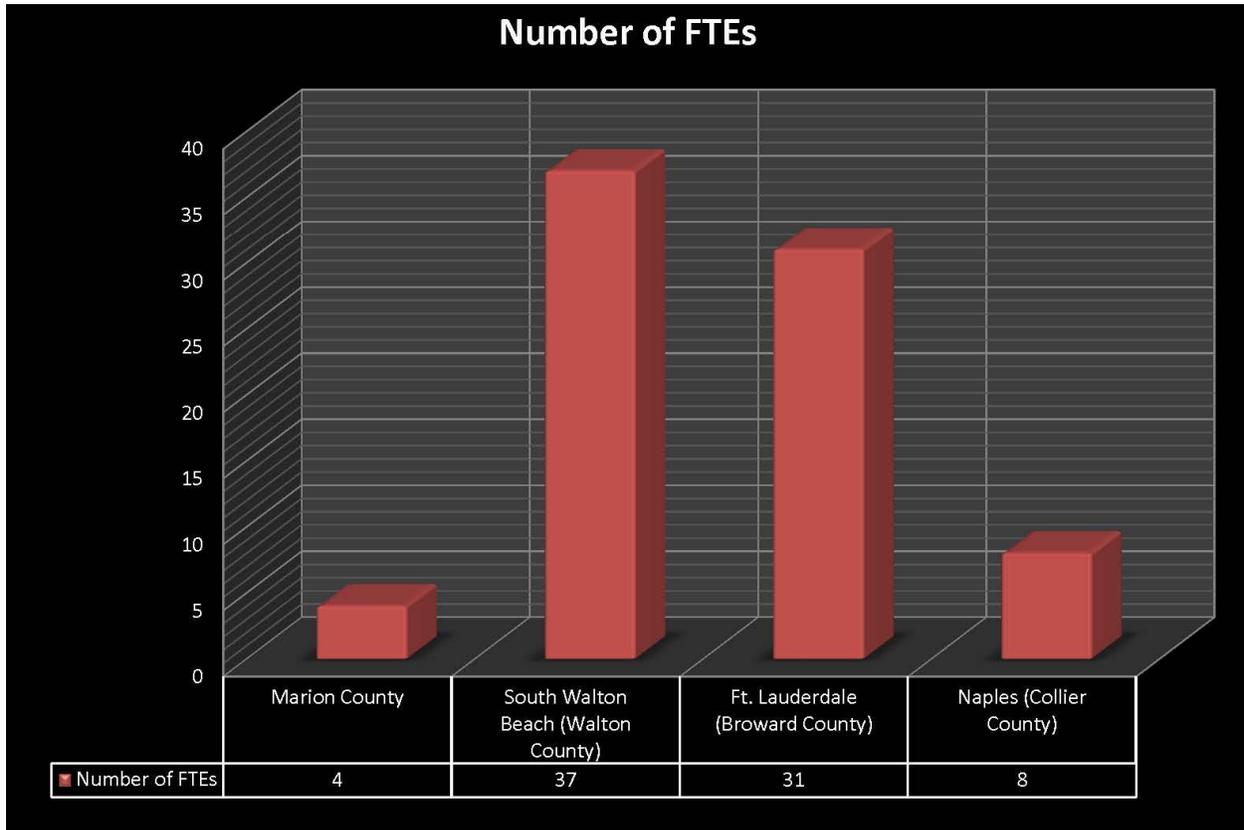
Organizational Chart and Comparisons

Our organizational chart shows the VCB to be a small team, but this Business Plan shows our dedication to leading the State in sales and marketing effectiveness.



Performance Measures and Benchmarks

The number of full-time equivalents (FTE) that compare to successful VCBs are shown below:



Performance Measures & Benchmarks

This section focuses on statistical comparison with competing counties that are doing the same initiatives in key and emerging market segments.

Marion County Board of County Commissioners							
Business Plan Performance Measures and Benchmarks							
Fund number:	117000						
Department number:	2870						
Department name:	Visitors & Convention Bureau						
Place completed worksheet in business plan template section eight.							
Performance Measure	Type of Measure: Workload, Efficiency, or Outcome	Enter Calculation formula	Marion County	South Walton Beach (Walton County)	Ft. Lauderdale (Broward County)	Naples (Collier County)	
Number of FTEs			4	37	31	8	7
Current Tax Rate			2.0%	4.5%	5.0%	6.0%	4.0%
Maximum Potential Tax Rate			5.0%	6.0%	6.0%	6.0%	5.0%
County Unrealized Tax Rate			3%	2%	1%	1%	1%
Estimated Tax Revenue @ 1% Tax Rate			\$ 436,982.00	\$ 3,423,292.00	\$ 8,706,503.00	\$ 3,474,837.00	
Countywide Unrealized Tax Revenues		Tax Revenue @ 1% x Unrealized Tax Rate	\$ 1,310,945.00	\$ 5,134,938.00	\$ 8,706,503.00	\$ 3,474,837.00	
Countywide Realized Tax Revenues			\$ 873,963.00	\$ 15,404,813.00	\$ 43,532,515.00	\$ 13,899,348.00	
revPar (Revenue Per Available Room)			38.25	56.37	61	56.6	

Revenues by Account

Carefully accounting for every dollar is an essential component of the VCB's work, for only when we have an accurate understanding of our revenues can we apply the same to our stated mission of "leading, marketing and growing our County's travel and tourism industry."

Account Object Revenue Budget Summary Report grouped by Fund, Department

Marion County Board of County Commissioners

Fiscal Year 2014

FY 2012 Actual	FY 2013 Adopted	FY 2013 Amended	FY 2014 Budget
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117000 Tourist Development Tax

2870 Tourist Development Tax Department

31210010 Tourist Development Tax	934,625	873,963	873,963	980,000
36100010 Interest - Board	2,826	2,000	2,000	3,000
36600045 Florida Sports Foundation	70,000	70,000	70,000	70,000
2870 Tourist Development Tax	1,007,451	945,963	945,963	1,053,000

R117000 Tourist Development Tax - Unassigned

37999999 Less 5%	0	-47,298	-47,298	-52,650
39999991 Balances Forward - Cash	901,997	568,179	568,179	797,313
R117000 Tourist Development Tax -	901,997	520,881	520,881	744,663
117000 Tourist Development Tax	\$1,909,448	\$1,466,844	\$1,466,844	\$1,797,663

Report Grand Total	1,909,448	1,466,844	1,466,844	1,797,663
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Expenditures by Account

As with revenues, expenditures are carefully tracked and monitored to ensure the best possible return on investment. Only by spending wisely can we carry on our work of “cultivating greater prosperity for the entire community” through greater success in travel and tourism.

Account Object Expenditure Budget Summary Report grouped by Fund, Department

Marion County Board of County Commissioners

Fiscal Year 2014

FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2013	FY 2014
Actual	Adopted	Amended	Budget

117000 Tourist Development Tax

2870 Tourist Development Tax Department

512101 Regular Salaries & Wages	135,017	156,104	157,004	186,389
521101 FICA Taxes	9,921	11,943	12,012	14,259
522101 Retirement Contributions	6,769	8,679	8,679	10,362
523101 Health Insurance	20,782	25,440	25,440	25,440
523401 Life, AD&D, LTD	946	1,091	1,091	1,303
524101 Worker's Compensation	1,008	1,069	1,069	1,277
534101 Contract Serv - Other - Misc	13,953	7,300	14,300	179,929
540101 Travel & Per Diem	12,221	12,532	12,532	8,952
541101 Communications Services	1,968	2,320	2,320	2,320
542201 Postage & Freight	6,232	11,119	11,119	8,000
543101 Utility Services -	6,351	4,172	4,172	4,172
544101 Rentals & Leases -	4,000	3,781	3,781	3,781
545101 Insurance - Premiums	3,960	5,867	5,867	5,867
546101 Repairs/Maint - Buildings &	813	1,000	1,000	2,500
546257 Repairs/Maint - Fleet	51	500	500	500
547101 Printing & Binding	137	500	500	500
548101 Promotional Activities	649,193	868,926	857,426	788,666
549185 Charges - Central Services	21,601	42,657	42,657	42,657
551101 Office Supplies	2,374	950	3,450	6,000
552101 Gasoline, Oil & Lubricants	222	2,600	2,600	2,600
552106 Computer Software	0	511	2,511	511
552108 Operating Supplies	2,082	2,192	2,192	4,475
552116 Operating Supplies -	1,752	0	0	0
554101 Books, Publications &	0	2,060	2,060	7,350
554201 Dues & Memberships	5,090	6,518	6,518	5,023
555501 Training & Education	750	3,100	3,100	22,330
564101 Machinery and Equipment	3,439	32,406	32,406	2,500
582101 Aid to Private Organizations	26,430	50,000	50,000	260,000
599101 Reserve for Contingencies	0	100,000	100,000	100,000
599199 Reserve for Cash to be	0	100,000	99,031	100,000
599201 Reserve for Pay for	0	1,507	1,507	0
2870 Tourist Development Tax	937,062	1,466,844	1,466,844	1,797,663
117000 Tourist Development Tax	937,062	1,466,844	1,466,844	1,797,663
Report Total	937,062	1,466,844	1,466,844	1,797,663

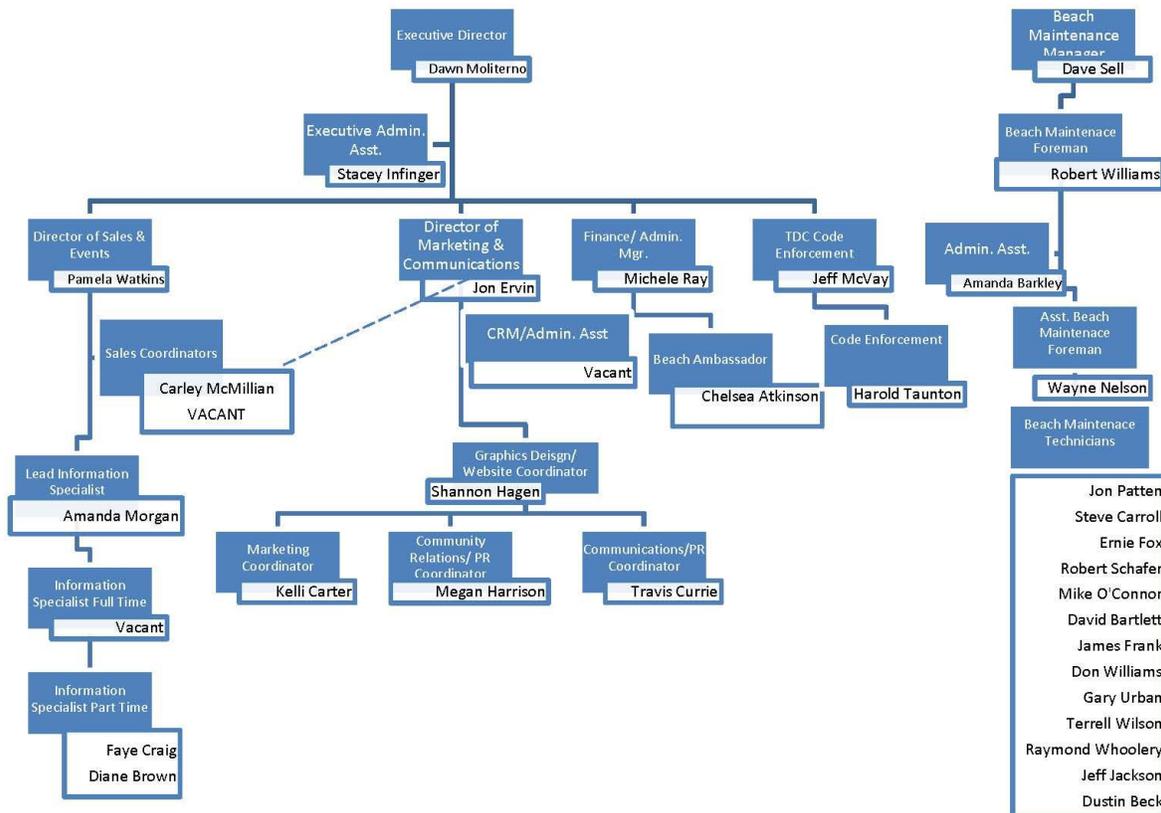
Comparisons

Three successful VCBs in the State of Florida were chosen for comparisons, with organizational charts that provide an accurate illustration of their internal structure.

Walton County Tourist Development Council 2012-13

Administrative / Marketing & Visitor Information – 18

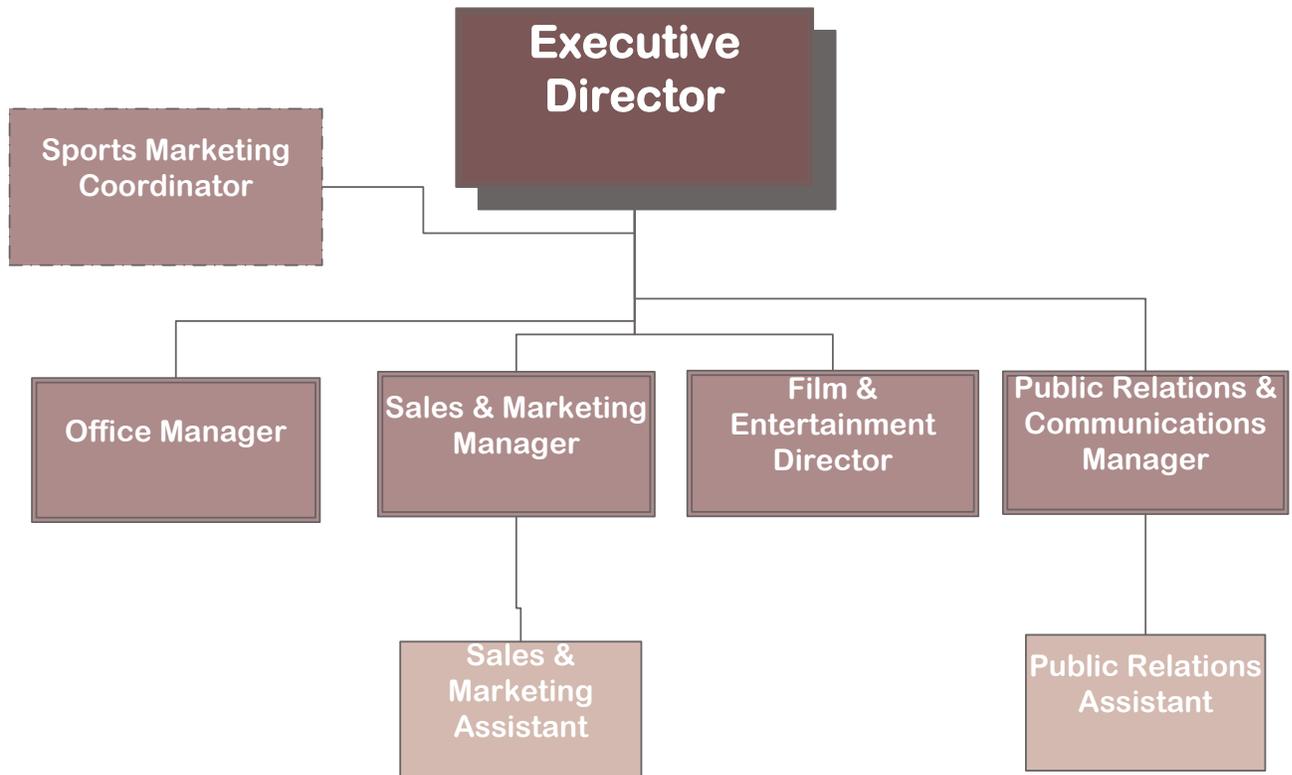
Beach Maintenance /Beach Ambassador/ Code Enforcement - 18



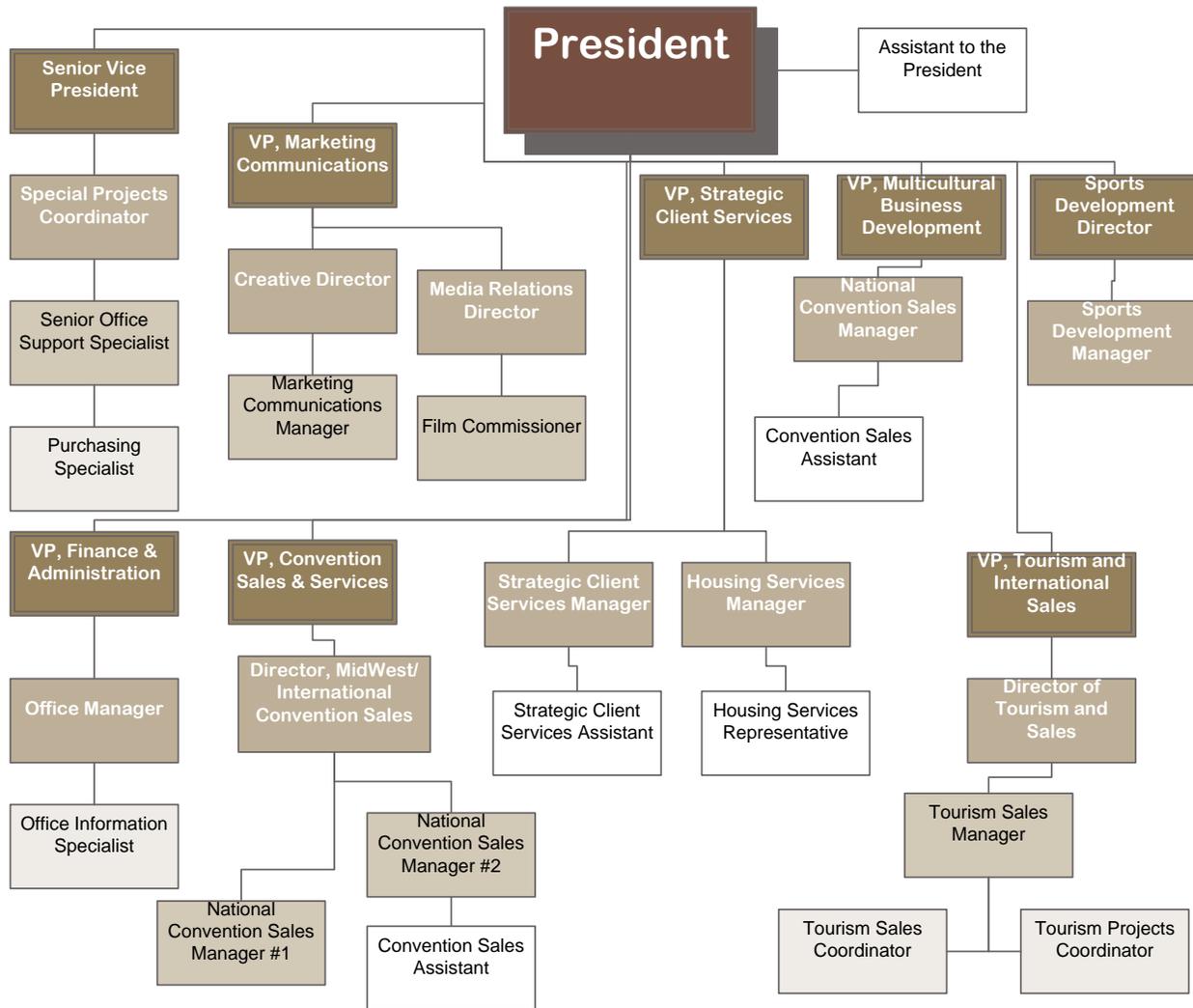
***Attempts were made to contact the Ft. Lauderdale (Broward County) and Naples (Collier County) Visitors & Convention Bureaus, but results were unsuccessful in obtaining comparative organizational charts of their departments. ***

The following are depictions of what we perceive as to the organization of the departments:

Naples (Collier County)



Ft. Lauderdale (Broward County)



RESULTS/FINDINGS

The significant commonalities and differences between Marion, Collier and Broward are very unique and show how bureaus can grow to create significant impact and growth to communities.

One advantage that the other two counties have is the tourist development tax is higher and allows for them to have a stronger regional, national and international reach further empowering the destinations to compete not only nationally, but globally.

We had made great progress through Sports Marketing initiatives over the year, but there are still many more market segments and audiences we could potentially reach to increase visitation and bring in a more affluent customer to help with the direct and indirect economic impact of the county.

The VCB is at a critical juncture and just like the comparative destinations above, through a clear, concise long-term strategic plan and vision to define goals, staff will be able to further advance the destination to gain market share. In order to do this, the VCB will work to develop goals that are defined and outlined through the BCC, the TDC, the Marketing Committee and the community, altogether, to advance the Ocala/Marion County brand. Staff will work towards achieving the goals in order to advance economic impact through tourism initiatives by evaluating the destination, the brand and the opportunities that lay ahead.