



Unincorporated SLO County CBID

2022-2023 STRATEGIC MARKETING PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the new fiscal year approaches, the focus on refining the successful programs of the past continues, along with testing and developing new ideas that could become cornerstones for the future. The Unincorporated SLO County CBID marketing strategy, developed for implementation in 2019-2022 has driven our programs and success and will be revisited in the fall of 2022 to create a road map for the future. Research from Visit SLO CAL and other travel trends continue to provide guidance. Changes in the digital world, from the Consumer Privacy Act to augmented reality, provide both challenges and opportunities. As a result, the board decided to pivot the visitor facing brand from Highway 1 Discovery Route to Highway 1 Road Trip. This new direction will provide more opportunity to integrate our ten communities as a united experience for visitors.

2021 YEAR END SYNOPSIS - EXPERIENCE IS EVERYTHING

While restrictions have limited travelers over the past two years, data has shown that many have learned to live with COVID and continued creating experiences through travel. Restrictions have only encouraged committed travelers to adapt by taking domestic trips and seeking rural escapes.

Recent research also points to an optimism and a resilience in committed travelers who are more than ready to get back to seeing the world and creating memorable experiences. Building on this momentum, the year ahead, and the future of the travel industry, has the potential to build back better than ever and we've already seen signs of that growth in San Luis Obispo County.

HIGHWAY 1 CONTINUES TO BUILD SUCCESS

Website users in 2021 increased by 61 percent to more than **700,000 individual users**. Contributing to this increase were:

- **70 new pages** of new content added to the website
- More than **8,000 photos** and **240 videos**
- 81 articles published in top travel outlets
- Organic social media users and sessions were up over **50 percent**
- Paid media drove an increase in average session duration by **18 percent** and 1+ minute sessions were up **77 percent** on the same investment
- The map lead generation effort continues to drive email sign ups and the engaged database is now **over 80,000**

OVERALL TRAVEL TRENDS

MAJOR PENT-UP DEMAND FOR TRAVEL IN 22-23: While there remains uncertainty, most experts are still expecting big things for travel in the year ahead. Following are some key trends that will impact how (and where) Americans travel in the year ahead.

TRAVELERS WILL BE MORE WILLING TO SPLURGE: After putting things on hold for so long, travelers will be willing to spring for extras to make those milestone birthdays or bucket-list adventures feel special. A AAA study shows that people are spending more money, staying longer, booking nicer rooms, and really treating themselves to extras.

TRAVELERS WILL KEEP HEADING OUTSIDE: A lot of travelers who headed to state and national parks during the pandemic found that getting out into nature makes for a memorable trip. And it's a trend that shows no signs of slowing down.

FAMILY AND FRIENDS WILL BE PREFERRED TRAVEL COMPANIONS: Family vacations, multigenerational trips, and small group travel will be popular ways to see the world. Families will also turn to travel as a way to reconnect. Multigenerational travel and skip-gen vacations were a growing trend even before the pandemic, and that's expected to continue in the years ahead.

U.S. ROAD TRIPS STILL A GO: The huge demand for leisure is set to continue, but rising gas prices may influence road trippers – and if ongoing, they could potentially dampen the overall record pace of U.S. travel recovery. A survey of more than 1,000 U.S.-based travelers conducted by AAA in March, 2022, found 52% plan to take a vacation this summer. Of those travelers, over half (58%) said they would consider changing their plans if gas prices got “high enough.”

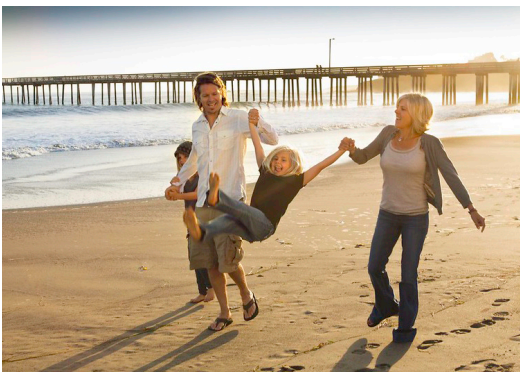
TRAVELERS CARE ABOUT SUSTAINABLY: 87% of travelers care about visiting locations that care about themselves. From hoping to reduce their own environmental impact to having a locally relevant experience, travelers are increasingly wanting to feel good about the footprint they’ve left behind.

VISIT SLO CAL EDI / VISTOR RESEARCH OVERVIEW

In late 2021, Visit SLO Cal commissioned two pieces of research, one focused on overall visitor trends, and one focused on the area’s diversity and inclusivity. Below are some highlights and an overview of the visitor profiles:

- SLO CAL’s current competitive position is driven by lower familiarity and awareness of its assets compared to the comp set.
- There are no major negatives associated with the destination and no barriers to visitation.
- Visitors and potential visitors share a similar image of the area; it is just stronger among visitors.
- The challenge simply is that SLO CAL has strong competitors, which generally are more established with the audience. Increased marketing and education will address this challenge.
- Key attributes that are important for motivating travel are also highly rated by consumers. These include relaxing, authentic, a good value for the money, and welcoming.
- Messaging could be strengthened by communicating that the destination is a fun place that is friendly and accepting.
- SLO CAL is known as a place with wide open spaces – an attribute that was more important during the pandemic but remains so today.
- SLO CAL’s current image is more relaxed, small town and natural.
- While it is highly rated for its scenic beauty, the competitive destinations all offer scenic beauty. And while it is important to reinforce the scenery – having that type of beauty is the price of entry to even be considered - it is not enough to differentiate SLO CAL.
- Lake Tahoe has the most similar image - relaxed, small town and beauty. However, there is opportunity to gain ground as Tahoe is currently receiving attention for crowds and traffic.
- The activities that motivated the most trips to SLO CAL are:
 - Visited a beach
 - Drove a scenic highway
 - Dined in an independent restaurant
 - Went to a winery/brewery/distillery
 - Visited a park or nature area

The research further identified some current and potential target audiences:



OUTDOOR FAMILIES: The largest percentage of current visitors, Outdoor Families travel to bond and recharge. The most motivating activity for this group is the beach, and they enjoy outdoor pursuits. These upscale families have children at home and established careers. With an average age of 45.6, they are the second-youngest segment, and are active and participate in a wide variety of activities. Outdoor Families are frequent visitors to SLO CAL. With an average of 5.2 trips in the past 5 years, these visitors are likely taking an annual trip to SLO CAL. Larger travel parties and longer stays make this group the highest overall spending segment, with average trip expenditures of \$1,284.



BEACH AND WINE COUPLES: Beach and Wine Couples make up a quarter of overall visitors. They want to spend time together and escape from everyday stresses. Both the beach and wineries/wine country are strong motivators for choosing their destination. They are upscale, educated couples who come for a short trip – 3.2 nights. They participate in a variety of activities on their trip. In addition to a visit to the beach and wine tasting are scenic drives, park and nature areas, independent restaurants, and historic landmarks. Many of the trips are part of a larger trip that includes areas like Santa Barbara, Monterey and Carmel. They are most likely to stay overnight in San Luis Obispo, Cambria, or Pismo Beach.



EXPLORERS: Explorers make up just 14 percent of current visitors. They are motivated by unique experiences and are more interested in connecting with the destination and less about connecting with each other. This segment is mostly male (71%) and has the highest LGBTQ+ representation (10%). They are well educated and less likely to have children at home. They have the highest representation of Asian travelers (20%) and are the highest earning segment even though they are not the oldest. Their party size and length of stay are similar to the high-spending Outdoor Families, but they are the second-lowest spenders, a dynamic that is driven by frugal spending on accommodations and meals. The beach is a top activity for this group, but less so than the other segments, and they are the most likely to engage in nightlife and entertainment.



YOLOS (YOU ONLY LIVE ONCE): Also contributing to 14 percent of current visitors, YOLO's are motivated by excitement, thrills and living life to the fullest. They are the youngest segment with an average age of 43. They are highly educated and high earners, but they have the lowest household income of the segments – a function of their age. They have diverse interests and are willing to try a wide variety of activities. YOLOs are motivated by the beach, driving the scenic highway, nature, historic sites/landmarks, and wineries. They are the most likely to camp at the beach, visit an art gallery or museum, and watch a space launch.. They are also the second highest overall spenders, despite a relatively small party size. Their spending is concentrated on meals, shopping and entertainment rather than lodging.

KEY EDI RESEARCH TAKEAWAY: Feeling welcomed is more important to these travelers than being in a diverse place.

LOOKING TO THE NEXT YEAR

As we look ahead to 2022-23, we will remain aggressive and focused on our key marketing imperatives, utilizing key learning from 2021:

MARKETING IMPERATIVES & INITIATIVES

- Evolve Marketing Leadership with LFAs
 - Provide marketing bridge opportunities
 - Support LFAs through educational and technical assistance opportunities
- Pursue Excellence and Efficiency of Owned Media
 - Refine and leverage the CBID database
 - Align on web strategy



- Develop and execute social strategies
- Increase Consideration to Visit Highway 1 and our Ten Communities and Assets
 - Partner with Visit SLO Cal to drive awareness
 - Pursue partnerships that drive awareness to our unincorporated communities
 - Develop effective and targeted content

MARKETING STRATEGIES AND TACTICS OVERVIEW

LFA PROGRAMS

Continue to grow LFA Imperative Programs designed to provide access to coattail marketing opportunities and focus on developing visitor planning tools to drive consideration at the lower end of the marketing funnel:

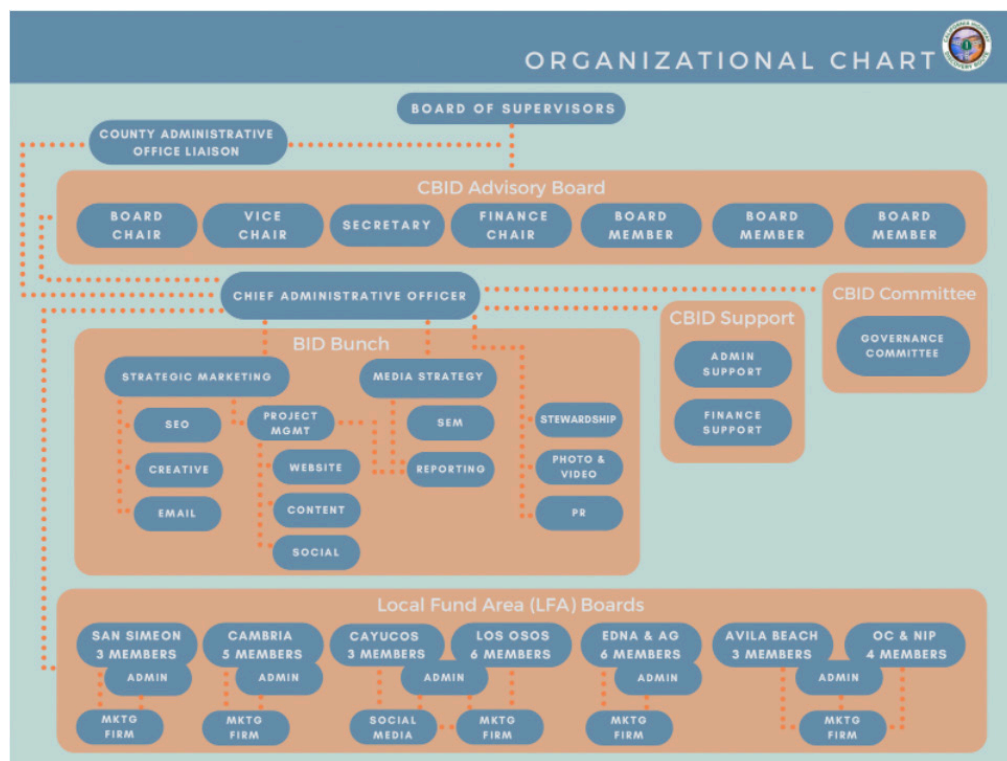
- Develop additional local content pages on Highway 1 website for each of the LFAs
- Provide funding for individual LFA paid search efforts and Google Discovery ads
- Increase paid media co-funding opportunities at varying tiers for the LFAs, including expanding both Google Search impressions and Discovery Ads; continue to provide matching funds for an LFA Paid Media campaigns; and negotiate special pricing for paid media opportunities and content creation and distribution.
- Support asset curation through CrowdRiff UGC platform
- Produce area photos and videos for use by the LFAs
- Compile campaign tool kits for each of the LFAs to use in efforts to support the overall messaging
- Investigate creation of a cooperative social influencer program
- Consider ways to integrate lodging carousels throughout the social media programs
- Support public relations activities and LFA awards, i.e., best beaches in California, throughout paid and social campaigns
- Coordinate All-Agency calls to collaborate and share information

#HIGHWAY1DREAMING



ALIGN AND INTEGRATE MARKETING TACTICS

Integration between marketing tactics breaks through the clutter. We continue to test and refine our efforts while maintaining our focus on the channels and messages that have proven to engage. Highlights of ongoing programs include:



PUBLIC RELATIONS

Public relations efforts continue with a focus on key travel publications with messaging focused on content visitors want. The media landscape continues to shift with an elevated emphasis on online content and individual media press trips are back in full force. Editorial themes trending that align with our destination attributes include:

- Travel with Impact: People will be more conscious about how they travel and are looking for ways to give back while on vacation
- Sustainability will continue to be a key trend and drive media visits
- Wellness - people are looking beyond the typical wellness offerings to destinations that offer true wellness activities
- Nature and rural escapes
- “Slow” travel and immersive experiences
- Culinary with farm-influenced experiences will be key to creative pitches designed to highlight a variety of coastal experiences
- Road trip-themed coverage is anticipated to be strong
- The reopening of Hearst Castle will also be a key theme
- Continue to support placements in the Top 50 publications with a focus on the following:
 - Departures
 - Eating Well
 - Food & Wine
 - Hemispheres
 - Martha Stewart Living
 - Matador Network
 - Men’s Journal
 - National Geographic Traveler
 - New York Times

+ Recent Press Coverage

HIGHWAY 1 FEATURED IN



TRAVEL-LEISURE

Traveler

Smithsonian

Forbes

Sunset

Outside

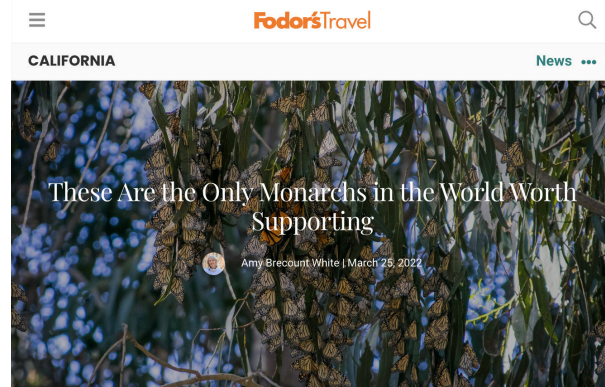
USA TODAY

Parade

Reader's digest

[SEE THE ARTICLES >](#)

- Organic Spa
- Phoenix Magazine
- Pop Sugar
- Purewow
- SB Independent
- Town & Country
- Uproxx
- Wall Street Journal
- Westways
- Wine Enthusiast
- 7x7



PAID MEDIA

Over the past year, paid media drove an increase in average session duration by 18 percent and 1+ minute session were up 77 percent on the same investment. In addition, paid media generated thousands of map downloads. For the next fiscal year, we will focus on three main key performance indicators:

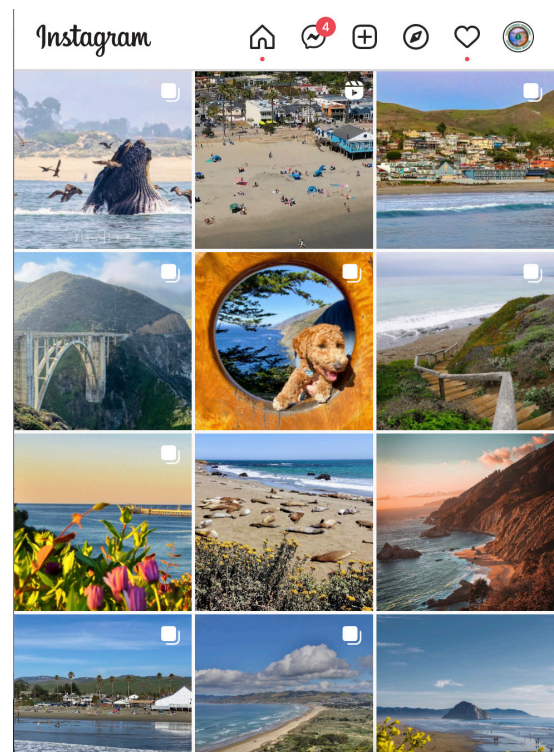
1. Drive improved efficiencies of 1 minute + users
2. Focus on growing and measuring Cost per New Name (CPNN) for our lead generation campaigns designed to increase our database with engaged users
3. Continue optimizing campaigns to overall engagements such as video views, shares, and comments

In the new fiscal year we plan to continue and expand the tactics that contributed most to this, utilizing top digital channels including search engine marketing and paid social media, while exploring and testing other new tools and tactics, including Amazon video and display, connected TV, Foursquare, TikTok, and other opportunities where California travel content aligns. The detailed media plan will be presented in June, 2022 and included within this report upon approval.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Organic social was up 54 percent over prior year as emphasis was placed on utilizing user generated content to communicate authentic experiences and drive engagement. An ever-changing environment, social media continues to provide us with opportunities:

- Develop and post more short form vertical videos. Videos are being favored in the algorithms across platforms. Facebook recently rolled out reels as well, can use content across TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram.
- Integrate with paid media. Continue to study ad spending on other platforms such as YouTube, and Pinterest.
- Watching Augmented Reality and how we can integrate it into our social mix as it continues to develop.
- Hosting Influencers who are on brand and have a large following. Also working with micro-influencers for specific niches.
- Continue to utilize CrowdRiff and UGC to build trust and engage with followers.
- Message Inclusivity reiterating that Highway 1 welcomes everyone.



EMAIL

Our 80,000+ email database is more engaged than ever before, yet work continues to secure ongoing interest. In 22-23 we will focus on:

- Developing new email templates with a stronger call to action to improve the clicks to take people to the website
- Create new email content attached to landing pages such as:
 - Wildlife Checklist for visitors (like a scavenger hunt)
 - Little-Known History of the Central Coast (a list of fun historical facts)
 - Road Trip Top Stops Checklist
- Consider a tool like Mapbox to build interactive maps
- Investigate guided audio tours of the Central Coast

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

Efforts continue in the next fiscal year to improve the quality of the website to drive engagement and provide information travelers are searching:

- Overall improvement/updates to the Dining and Lodging pages
- Development of new templates and link building, including a backlink strategy for new content around other Highway 1 communities
- Identifying a better approach for how to market non-Highway 1 activities on the site
- Investigate some small redesign/navigation changes on the destination pages, including incorporating more pictures and video
- Work on updating existing pages with fresh and interesting content
- Refresh Hearst Castle content
- Explore additional content related to Highway 1 Road Trips

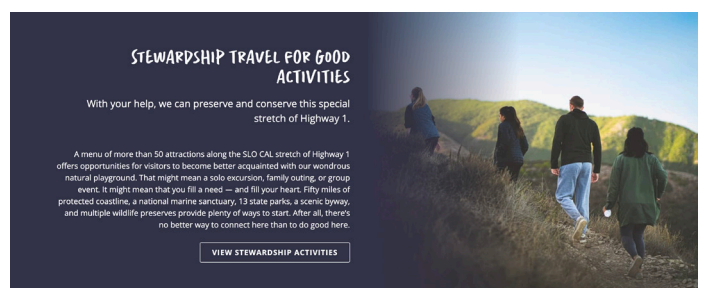
CONTENT & ASSET CURATION

Content and asset curation continues to play a large role in the ongoing success of all of our programs – from email to social to creative assets used by paid media. Content includes website pages enhanced for search, blogs that are posted on both the CBID and Visit SLO CAL's website, and photography/video that is broadly shared and helps support LFA efforts. Over the past 3 years, more than 8,500 photos and 240 videos were created. Creation of these assets will continue in 22-23.

STEWARDSHIP TRAVEL FOR GOOD

Stewardship/Travel for Good continues to align with our county's wide open spaces, outdoor activities, and efforts to preserve and protect our area and connects us with one of the biggest travel trends – People and Places that Care. Travel for Good efforts for the next year include:

- Develop content focused on back to nature itineraries
- Communicate “caring” for the traveler and the destination they visit
- Focus and connect visitors to our non profit partners and encourage hands on learning and volunteer opportunities
- Develop and communicate individual LFA itineraries
- Continue to integrate the Coastal Discovery Trail, Wildlife Viewing & Stewardship Travel Tips, History & Heritage Trail, and Secret Beaches in overarching campaigns
- Research and create a “Back to Nature” tour



MEASURING SUCCESS

Closely tied to the overall strategic direction, we have focused on being a planful and data-driven organization. There is a continuous improvement culture in place which focuses on measuring results, testing new ideas, and optimizing each program for maximum efficiency.

This strategic direction and marketing strategy, first implemented in 2019, will be updated in the fall of 2022 to create a road map for the future.

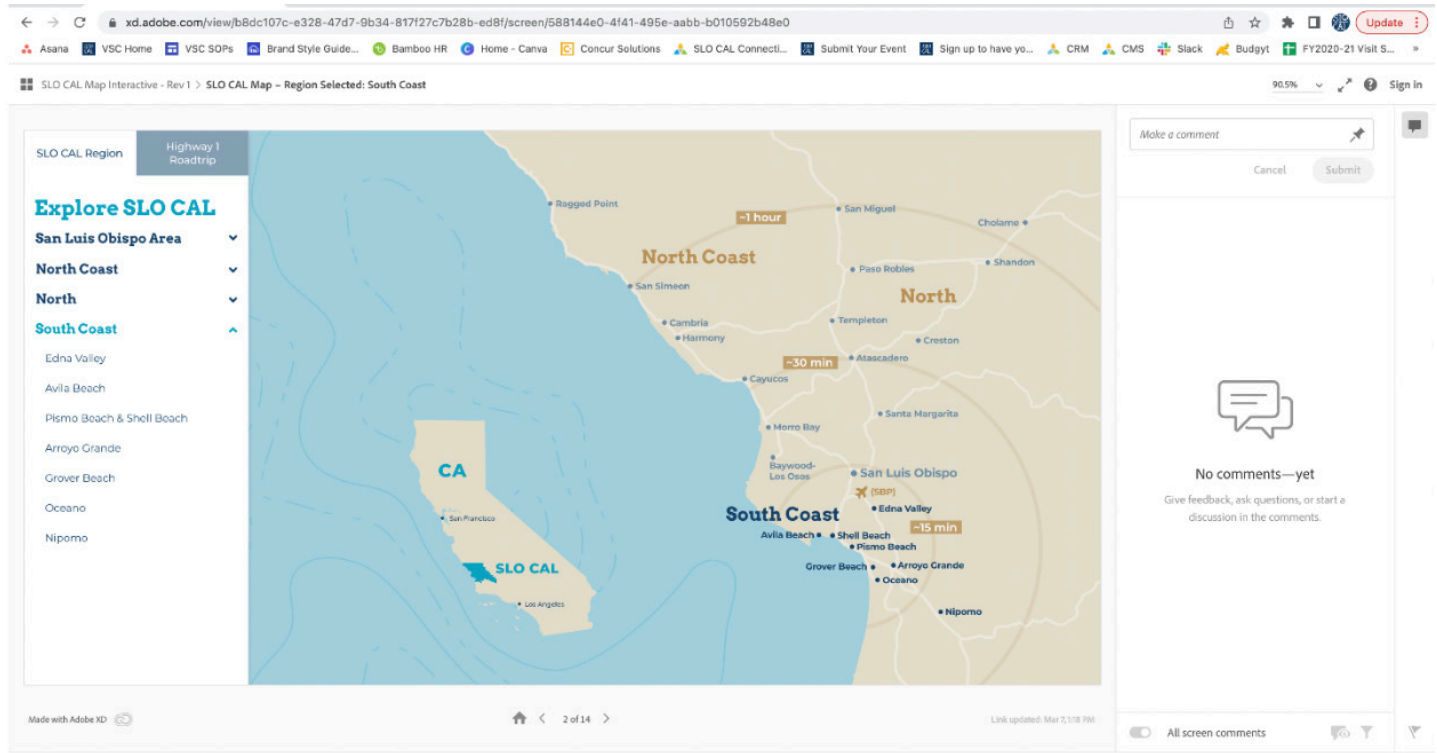
Unincorporated SLO County TBID: Strategic Direction 2017/18-2019/20

CLARITY		FOCUS		ACTION	
	Vision People and places, engaged and enriched through tourism.	Mission Promote memorable visitor experiences while being stewards for thriving and cohesive communities.	Values Moxie We bring strength of purpose and direction to everything we do. Collaboration We seek out and foster relationships rooted in mutual respect. Accountability We are a transparent organization responsible for delivering results.	Reputation The CBID will be known as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsible & Responsive Strategic & Proactive Collaborators & Connectors 	Position In order to best support our lodging constituents in ten unincorporated areas of San Luis Obispo County, the CBID: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a funding stream and professional marketing guidance to promote tourism. Connects local communities and provides a collective voice. Supports stewardship and the enhancement of tourism-related infrastructure and beautification.
	Imperatives Strengthen Strategic Partnerships	Objectives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Year-over-year increase in reciprocal scorecard ratings for CBID, Visit SLO CAL, promotional partners, and local fund areas (LFAs) Annual increase in total Earned Partnership Value (EPV) Annual increase in number of LFAs utilizing CBID's standardized planning and reporting tools 		Initiatives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create an annual process to identify, evaluate, and activate constituents, tourism stakeholders, and promotional partners. Collaborate with LFAs to evaluate, inform, and improve their working relationships with each other and the CBID. Enhance our partnership with Visit SLO CAL, including marketing plan alignment, advocacy, and infrastructure. 	
	Maximize Efficiencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Year-over-year increase in reciprocal scorecard ratings for CBID, Visit SLO CAL, promotional partners, and local fund areas (LFAs) Annual improvement in ratio of total operational budget to awareness score across all LFAs and CBID Annual decrease in cost per engaged user on CBID website Overall reduction in LFA website costs 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarify current roles and scope for CBID and LFAs. Develop a plan to reduce duplicative efforts with LFAs and external partners. Assess options to evolve our organization to meet future needs. 	
	Drive Measurable Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Growth in awareness of CBID communities in target markets Annual increase in scores on influence survey Economic impact measure identified and agreed to by July 1, 2018 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Become a planful and data-driven organization. Develop impactful marketing plans informed by strategic planning. Identify optimal brand architecture for CBID. Design a method to measure and communicate impacts of beautification, infrastructure, and stewardship efforts. 	

Visit SLO CAL Partnership

Visit SLO CAL is continuing work toward a “House of Brands” strategy and linking the communities of SLO CAL utilizing a mapping strategy to show time and distance with the message that you can do it all in SLO CAL – meaning you can spend your morning at the beach, go wine tasting in the afternoon, and be somewhere else for dinner.

Specifically related to our areas, Visit SLO Cal refers to each community as a place to visit, but refers to Highway 1 as a thing to do. In addition, Trip Advisor ranks Highway 1 as the #1 thing to do in our county.



PIVOTING OUR BRAND TO HIGHWAY 1 ROAD TRIP

Highway 1 Discovery Route has been the visitor facing name of our website since 2016. Discovery Route was a way to tie the communities together. Over time, however, the reference has moved toward Highway 1 in SLO Cal, or just Highway 1 in most of our content and in public relations efforts.

Highway 1 Road Trip as a thing to do evokes a journey and is a stronger and easier to remember moniker for our area. With 4,000 to 10,000 searches in Google each month, Highway1RoadTrip.com offers us a new avenue to attract even more travelers. And with uncomplicated migration and porting of analytics, the board decided to venture in this direction for the future.



Additionally, it opens an array of new opportunities including a strategic partnership with the Land Rover car dealership in Los Angeles. The plan is to have 3-4 influencers take a road trip in a Land Rover visiting the Hidden Gems of Highway 1. They will create and share several videos to use on both paid and social channels. The partnership includes Highway 1 being featured in the dealer's paid, social and email. Many other road trip opportunities will also be explored, including the ongoing efforts of Visit California who is also promoting road trips: Endless sunshine, incredible outdoor experiences—discover why California is the ultimate road trip destination.

As the new fiscal year approaches, we continue to focus on refining the successful programs of the past, along with testing and developing new ideas to create a road map for future success.