

2022 Governor's Conference on Tourism

Notes from sessions attended by Jonnie Helfrich

Projects Designed for the Future

- It's important that what we offer stays relevant to our visitors and guests. We may have to change our metrics to make that happen.
- Before starting a project, decide if it is really worth doing. 1) Know our key partners and connect and ask questions before presenting the project. 2) Be patient; folks may not like the idea for that moment in time. 3) Be ready, though, when green light is given. 4) Projects need locals support; we can't ramrod things through.
- The job is probably always bigger than we think it is.
- Turn challenges into solutions. We might need partnerships to succeed.
- Collaboration is key.
- Our annual river clean-up days fall into the regenerative tourism realm. Maybe we can build on this more.
- "Just Say Yes" and sort out the details later.

Innovative Strategies to Maximize Economic Impact and Livability for Rural Destinations

- See the big picture; embrace change and collaboration.
- Have a vision (the big picture) and involve everyone for an active and thriving community. A solid vision leads to stronger partnerships. Find those partners by telling the story of the vision. We may have to be flexible with the vision as new information and partners come in.
- Always share the Why for a project and how the project connects to the vision (the big picture).
- Make places where people want to be ... like Blue River Park. Light those places in the winter to keep them bright and welcoming.
- Some things show people that we care about them ... wayfinding signs, accessibility, restrooms.
- Create a space for local vendors and artisans. Combine it with Chamber/Tourism information location.
- Share stories of success ... success breeds success.
- Don't overthink things ... DO. Even small completed projects that advance the vision are positive successes. Start small; have success; build on it.
- All of this takes time and consistent effort over that long period of time.
- We must find the balance between the positive effects of the visitor economy and protecting the region. Bring in all partners to gain different perspectives.
- Choose top three project ideas, present them to all parties, get feedback, reassess and fine tune the top three projects (they might have changed). Ideas must meet overall vision.
- Think of the story, Stone Soup. We start with what may seem like nothing, but as different members of the community add ideas, information, labor, something wonderful is created for the whole community.
- Don't reinvent the wheel. Use ideas, publications, anything else that already exists to make it easier. Travel Oregon, Willamette Valley Visitors Association and Eugene Cascades & Coast already have toolkits we can use.
- Issue coordinated messages; keep people informed, so they feel more involved.
- Address accessibility issues.
- Have members of different action teams work together on projects to expedite completion.

Oregon's Visitor Profile Data

- 70% of travelers want continued Covid protocols.
- Top reasons for travel: 1) outdoor/nature/exploration of new places and 2) fun, relaxation, happiness, escaping stress. They are looking for scenic beauty, relaxing environments, affordability, safety and inclusiveness, food and beverage options and outdoor adventures. We are pretty well positioned for most of this.
- Folks are environmentally conscientious; how can we tie into that? Sustainable practices are important to many of our visitors.
- Most visitors have been to Oregon before. ~32% come to the Willamette Valley. ~43% are looking for outdoor recreation opportunities. ~17% want to fish.
- Most visitors to Oregon are highly satisfied with their visits.