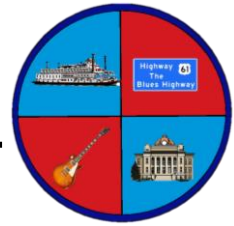


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The City of Osceola

Strategic Plan

Musical Heritage and Tourism Development

2020-2025

Prepared by:

The Delta Center for Economic Development

Arkansas State University

And

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D/B/A

Omega Consulting Group, LLC

June 2020



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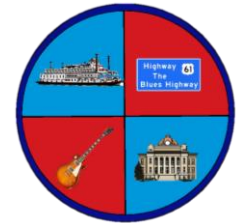


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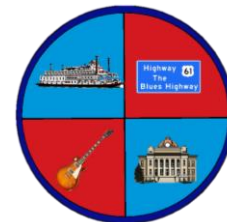


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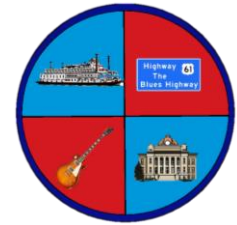


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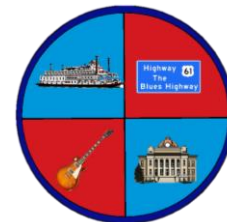


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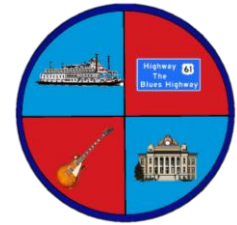


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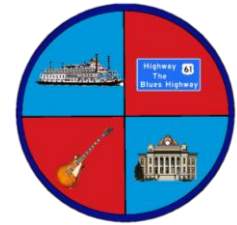
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





Executive Summary

The City of Osceola was founded in 1837 and was incorporated in 1853 and is a dual county seat of Mississippi County. Osceola's important location on the Mississippi River resulted in significant economic growth due to increasing steamboat traffic on the Mississippi. Sitting within rich Arkansas Delta lands, timber and cotton production fostered rapid growth and development throughout the early 20th Century but the economy has since diversified industrially. However, in recent years, Osceola has been experiencing declining population, erosion of its tax base due to outmigration, and rising crime rates, all of which have created a perception among outsiders that Osceola is an undesirable place in which to live. The recently elected Mayor of Osceola, Sally Wilson, is a visionary whose goal is to improve the overall economic and social well-being of the city, and to help accomplish this goal Mayor Wilson has contracted with the Delta Center for Economic Development at Arkansas State University to develop a strategic plan focusing on the development of Osceola's rich blues music and cultural heritage in an effort to establish a sustainable tourism industry for the city.

To assist Osceola in this endeavor, the Delta Center for Economic Development, under the lead of Dr. C. William Roe, Professor of Management at Neil Griffin College of Business, Arkansas State University (D/B/A Omega Consulting Group, LLC) has prepared a strategic plan, primarily focusing on a five-year plan horizon, but with realization that some aspects will have a longer period of time to achieve some socioeconomic changes for the city. The strategic plan is comprised of the following:

- A mission statement has been created for the City of Osceola;
- Core Values that support the accomplishment of Osceola's mission have been developed;





- A SWOT analysis consisting of the internal strengths and weaknesses of Osceola, as well as the opportunities and threats from Osceola's external environment has been conducted;
- Planning Assumptions derived from research into the economic, social, political, legal/regulatory, technological, and competitive environments in which Osceola exists have been developed;
- Strategic Issues that arise from Osceola's internal and external operating environments have been identified; and
- Objectives and Strategies have been formulated to address each strategic issue.

The mission of Osceola encompasses commitment to using resources wisely in providing high quality services, supporting the health and economic well-being of the community, and fostering a welcoming atmosphere for all who visit the city. The core values consist of proactive, comprehensive planning, being good stewards of physical and financial resources, transparency, inclusiveness, teamwork, hometown spirit, treating stakeholders with dignity and respect, and ethics and integrity in all behaviors and activities.

Some relevant strengths of Osceola are Mayor Wilson being a visionary leader and passionate about the economic development of the city, a core of dedicated leaders, rich blues music heritage, a passionate and dedicated chamber of commerce, and a core of dedicated volunteers. Weaknesses include failure to capitalize on its blues music heritage in the past, lack of an effective website and social media platforms, failure to enforce some local property ordinances, lack of an effective logo and tag line for branding, streets in disrepair and lacking adequate lighting, and deteriorating properties. Some opportunities focused on are increasing population of the U.S., increasing U.S. median household income, increasing number of users of the Internet and social media platforms





and smartphones in the U.S., the Great River Road and the blues heritage along it, the relatively high traffic count on I-55, lifestyle segments throughout the U.S. that favor music and cultural events and activities and possess the income to consume them, and the existence of grant programs which may help support development of heritage sites. Threats include such areas as the decreasing population of Osceola, a relatively high percentage of Osceola's population with incomes below the federal poverty level threshold, decrease in number of housing units along with a decrease in homes owned and an increase in rental units, apparent apathy among many residents toward change, distrust for politicians, high crime rate, and increasing competition for grant funds which is currently exacerbated by COVID-19 with government expenditures to fight the pandemic, as well as declining revenues to state and federal governments. Planning assumptions in the economic environment address increase in the number of U.S. households with incomes of \$75, 000 and of \$200,000 and up, and expected continued low cost of living index for Osceola. The social environment includes increasing visitor registrations at Arkansas Welcome Centers, including increasing high percentage of those numbers registering at the Blytheville Welcome Center, increasing population of the U.S., and continuing decreasing population of Osceola. Political environment factors pertain to the sensitivity of the tourism industry to political issues, particularly where safety and security issues are concerned, President Trump's visa restriction program and the subsequent travel ban. Legal/regulatory environmental factors focus on President Trump's cutting funding to Brand USA, the Tax Cut and Jobs Act in which tax filers' standard deductions were increased, and reduction in funding of several federal grant programs. The technological environment includes increasing digital technology utilization, the increasing use of Customer Relationship Management Systems (CRM), and the increase in use of data analytics. Factors that pertain to the competitive



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environment are the dominance of major tourist destinations, the power of consumers of tourist products, the fragmented tourist market, and the intense rivalry among competing tourism sites.

Omega Consulting Group, LLC has identified 7 strategic issues which Osceola must address to achieve its goal of becoming a destination for blues and cultural heritage sites. These are Shared Vision, Marketing and Promotion, Website and Social Media, Infrastructure, Funding, Tourist Attractions, and Volunteer Program. Objectives and strategies have been developed to address each of these strategic issues.



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MISSION STATEMENT AND CORE VALUES



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Mission Statement

We are committed to using our resources wisely in providing high quality services, supporting the health and economic well-being of our entire community, and fostering a welcoming atmosphere to all who visit here.



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Core Values

To facilitate the accomplishment of our mission, we embrace the following core values:

- Engaging in proactive, comprehensive planning for the future of our community;
- Ensuring that we are good stewards of the physical and financial resources entrusted to us;
- Being open and transparent in our actions and endeavors;
- Assuring inclusiveness of all members of our community and engaging them as partners in our growth and development;
- Developing teamwork, collaboration and partnerships to achieve community participation;
- Inspiring a hometown spirit and a sense of pride for our community among all constituencies;
- Treating all stakeholders, internal and external alike, with the utmost dignity and respect; and
- Conducting ourselves and all activities in which we engage with the highest level of ethics and integrity.



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S.W.O.T. ANALYSIS

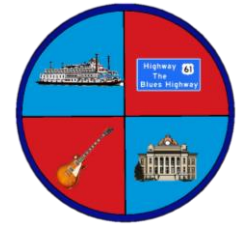


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STRENGTHS





Strengths

Strengths are internal attributes of an organization which can help it accomplish its objectives and grow and develop over future periods. The city of Osceola has several strengths which can help support its blues heritage development initiatives by capitalizing on these strengths.

1. Sally Wilson, Mayor of Osceola, is a visionary leader and is both passionate and committed to the economic development of the city. This can help establish a strong foundation upon which to grow tourism in the area.
2. Osceola is fortunate to have a core of dedicated leaders who are also committed to the development of the community, which can further serve to establish and grow the city's tourism and economy.
3. Osceola owns its city utilities which not only helps provide local control, but also helps keep utility customers' dollars in the community, creates jobs and supports the local economy. This in turn can help Osceola support its long-term goal of establishing and growing tourism sites in the city.
4. Osceola has a rich music heritage with such performers as Albert King, Son Seals and others who grew up or lived in the city (Table I). In addition, such famous performers as Johnny Cash and Elvis Presley frequently visited the area and would put on spontaneous performances when passing through. This can help support Osceola's development of blues heritage sites to attract tourists.





Artists Born/Raised in Osceola

Artist	Active	Genre & Styles
Calvin Fraizer	1930s-1970s	Blues, Detroit Blues, Regional Blues, Pre-War Country Blues
Cameron Ross	2010s	Religious, Instrumental Gospel, Praise & Worship, Contemporary Christian, Gospel
Essie Barbara Whitman	1890s-1920s	Gospel, Jazz
Frank Junior "Son" Seals	1970s-2000s	Electric Blues,
Harvey Scales	1970s-1980s	R&B
James "Pee Wee" Madison	1960s-1970s	Blues, Electric Chicago Blues, Regional Blues, Chicago Blues
Lefty Dizz	1960s-1990s	Blues, Holiday, Electric Chicago Blues, Regional Blues, Christmas, Holidays

Table I: Artists Born/Raised in Osceola, Arkansas

Source: AllMusic.com

- Osceola has six historic music markers designating the names and descriptions of musicians who performed in the city which can be utilized in helping attract music fans to the area and increase tourism revenue (Figure 1).

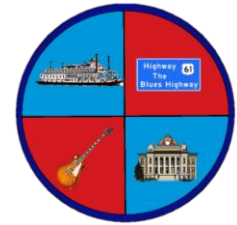




Figure 1: Albert King, One of 6 Historic Music Markers in Osceola

Photo taken by Ammi Tucker

6. The Osceola Chamber of Commerce is both passionate about, and dedicated to, the continuing economic development of Osceola and aggressively markets and promotes the activities, events and historic sites of the area. This can further help attract visitors to help grow tourism and increase revenue.
7. Osceola has an A&P Commission which collects a 2.5% tax on hotel/motel rooms rented. Revenue generated from this tax can be used to help the city support its goal of increasing tourism and tourism spending.
8. Osceola is located in Mississippi County, which is a “wet” county. Being a “wet” county may help Osceola attract more tourists.
9. Osceola owns a park called Sans Souci Landing, which contains picnic tables, a sizable area for parking, and/or a temporary stage (Figure 2). The existence of this



park can help Osceola host events which help attract visitors to the area and increase tourism revenue.



Figure 2: Sans Souci Landing

Photo taken by Ammi Tucker

10. Osceola was the site of a historic gunboat battle and hosts Civil War reenactments connecting the area and its role in the Civil War. These reenactments can help Osceola attract tourists and increase revenue.
11. Osceola has a Pocket Park where outdoor musical performances are held, which can help the city attract visitors and generate revenue (Figure 3).

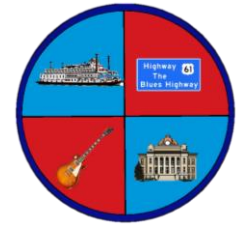
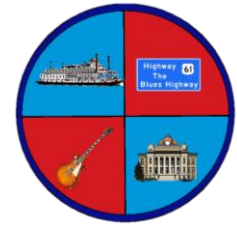


Figure 3: Osceola's Pocket Park

Photo taken by Ammi Tucker

12. The City of Osceola holds several events, activities and festivals throughout the year which it can use to help establish itself as a tourist destination and increase revenue.
13. Osceola has a historical museum directly across the street from its historic courthouse which contains many items of historical significance about people, places and events in Osceola and Mississippi County which the city can feature to help it attract visitors.
14. The Osceola Chamber of Commerce places several of its marketing and promotion pieces at tourist information centers, including the one at Blytheville, which is 14.3 miles from Osceola. These marketing and promotion pieces can help Osceola attract tourists and tourism spending in the city.



15. The Mississippi County Courthouse, located in Osceola, is listed on the National Historic Register, is an architectural beauty and is a centerpiece of the city (Figure 4). This building can help Osceola attract visitors through marketing and promoting this aggressively, along with its other heritage sites.



Figure 4: Mississippi County Courthouse in Osceola

Source: MississippicountyAR.org

16. The City of Osceola was one of only 8 communities to receive the prestigious 2019 Arkansas Volunteer Community of the Year Award which recognizes communities that exemplify the spirit of service by participating in city-wide volunteer initiatives and making a positive impact in local areas of need. This recognition may help attract both volunteers and visitors.

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WEAKNESSES





Weaknesses

Weaknesses are internal factors of an organization that it is lacking or is not doing well and can prevent it from achieving desired outcomes. The city of Osceola currently has several weaknesses, or areas that it must overcome, improve upon or eliminate to help it achieve its goals.

1. Osceola currently lacks programs and activities for youth of the city, which can create an overall negative affect on the quality of life in the city, contributing to negative perceptions and potentially adversely affecting the city's ability to not only engage the community in supporting its economic development initiatives, but possibly hindering its ability to attract visitors and generate revenue.
2. The city's utility rates are relatively high for both residential and commercial customers which can adversely affect its ability to attract residents and businesses, further hindering revenue generation.
3. The city has apparently not fully capitalized on its rich music heritage and other possible tourist attractions which has hindered its ability to reap the full potential these can provide to the city.
4. The City of Osceola currently lacks a comprehensive, integrated marketing and promotion program which hinders its ability to attract tourists to the area, causing it to miss out on revenue it could generate from tourist sites.
5. The City of Osceola currently lacks a comprehensive strategic planning process to provide direction for the economic growth and development of the area, especially as it relates to becoming a tourist destination.
6. The Osceola sign at the exit off I-55 is faded and is difficult to read what the message is at the top of the sign which can cause the city to miss out on visitors stopping, potentially resulting in lost revenue to the city.





7. The city has not enforced local ordinances holding property owners accountable for maintenance and upkeep of land and buildings which has resulted in run-down, deteriorating and unsightly areas in the city. This can create negative perceptions and hinder its efforts to attract visitors and spending in the area.
8. The city lacks an effective volunteer recruitment and recognition program which hinders its efforts to attract a sufficient volunteer base to help it carry out or implement the programs to attract visitors and spending in the area.
9. The city of Osceola has levied its A&P Tax at 2.5 cents, .5 cents below that allowed by the state of Arkansas, and has no processed food tax (Hamburger Tax) which results in less revenue than what the city could be collecting, causing it to miss out on funds it otherwise might have to promote tourism.
10. The city currently lacks a logo and tagline, which at one time it did have. This can hinder its efforts to create a high level of brand awareness and help attract visitors to the area and hinder revenue generation for the city.
11. Osceola has many areas within the city where buildings once stood but are now vacant and some with weeds growing through the cracks in the cement, giving the appearance of a dilapidated “ghost town.” These areas can create negative perceptions and be a deterrent to potential visitors and hinder revenue from visitors’ spending (Figures 5 and 6).





Figure 5: Weeds Growing in a Vacant Lot

Photo Taken by Brittany Roe



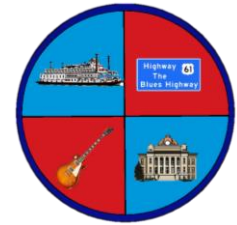


Figure 6: Weeds Growing in a Vacant Lot

Photo Taken by Brittany Roe

12. Many of the streets in the city center are in disrepair, resulting in poor driving conditions on them. Such streets can deter visitors and result in lost revenue.
13. Osceola currently lacks adequate street lighting on many city center streets and the lights that do exist are old and outdated looking, potentially further adding to a depressed, deserted area and further hindering the city's ability to attract visitors and generate revenue.
14. The history museum on the historic courthouse square in Osceola's city center does not currently have a regular schedule of hours of operation, is staffed with





elderly volunteers, is inadequate in size to display items, and information about items is too small to read, or non-existent in many cases, and there is no charge for admission to the museum. These problems with the museum and the failure to charge admission not only limits the ability to attract visitors but also results in loss of potential revenue (Figure 7).



Figure 7: Inside of Osceola History Museum

Photo taken by Ammi Tucker

15. Currently it appears there are no major investors in Osceola or Mississippi County who have the funds, or are willing, to invest in Osceola's heritage sites, and efforts to reach out to potential investors, if any, in other parts of the U.S. or the world have not been successful in attracting investors. The lack of



investors/groups who are willing/able to invest in the city adversely affects Osceola's ability to develop as a tourist destination and generate revenue from tourism spending.

16. Osceola currently lacks an arts council which can hinder the city's ability to develop and promote cultural interests, ultimately hindering tourism and development as well.
17. The City of Osceola's website is not well-designed, contains text format issues, poorly written text containing grammatical errors, not easily navigable, contains few photos, and is lacking in information that might be important to those seeking tourist visits. These issues with its website may make it difficult for Osceola to attract repeat visitors to the site and also hinder its ability to interest tourists to visit Osceola, resulting in lost tourism dollars.
18. Osceola is currently limited in its use of social media, having only a Facebook page with few photos and few followers. This limited use of social media may hinder Osceola's ability to create identity and awareness and engage with potential tourists.
19. The City of Osceola has, in the past, scheduled some of its events at the same time that some higher profile events have been scheduled, such as the Johnny Cash Music Festival in Dyess, which adversely affects Osceola's ability to attract visitors to its events, resulting in fewer attendees and lost revenue.
20. Currently, the City of Osceola lacks well-organized and high-profile events that might interest visitors from other parts of the country, limiting the number of attendees to these events and resulting in lost revenue.





21. Currently, Osceola lacks an active music scene, which hinders its ability to attract fans who like blues, bluegrass, country and gospel music genres, resulting in lost tourism and revenue.
22. Osceola has not done a good job of communicating its activities and events both within the community and outside the community, which adversely affects its ability to gain awareness, attract attendees and generate revenue.
23. The City of Osceola currently lacks a formal structure or organized group to proceed with the development of its heritage sites which hinders its efforts to do so, resulting in an inability to attract tourists and tourism spending.
24. The City of Osceola currently lacks an organized marketing function or group to carry out an effective marketing and promotion program, hindering any efforts to promote tourism, resulting in lost revenue.



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OPPORTUNITIES





Opportunities

Opportunities are external environmental factors or occurrences that are taking place or exist outside an organization, but which may make it possible for an organization to achieve positive results. The City of Osceola is presented with several opportunities that can help it achieve desired outcomes by utilizing its strengths and overcoming its weaknesses to capitalize on these opportunities.

1. According to the Osceola Chamber of Commerce (2020), there are 6 hotels/motels within the city limits of Osceola with a total of 167 rooms (Table II). While this is a relatively small number of both hotels and rooms, the presence of these, nonetheless, may create an opportunity for Osceola to help attract visitors by indicating this in its marketing and promotion materials.

Hotels/Motels in Osceola, 2020

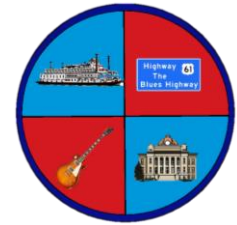
Hotel/Motel	Rooms
Rodeway Inn	60
Deerfield Inn	30
Days Inn	45
Fairview Inn	6
The Judge Motel	16
TOTAL	167

Table II: Hotels/Motels in Osceola 2020

Source: Osceola Chamber of Commerce

2. According to the U.S. Travel Association County Impact Report (2018), tourism spending in Mississippi County in 2018 was \$120.88 million which generated \$7.63 million in state sales taxes and \$346,654 in A&P taxes. These numbers indicate that





- Mississippi County attracts tourism which may create an opportunity for Osceola to attract tourism and revenue for the city through development of tourist events and venues, and marketing and promoting them aggressively.
3. According to tourist registration information provided by Sandra Brand, manager of the Arkansas Tourism Welcome Center at Blytheville, the number of tourists registering at the welcome center has trended upward from 109,412 in 2012 to 143,992 in 2019, with the only years not showing year-on-year increases being 2016 and 2018 (Figure 8). In addition, the number of visitors registering at Blytheville was second only to Texarkana every year during this period of time. This trend in the number of visitors registering at Blytheville may create an opportunity for Osceola to attract visitors and increase tourism revenue through establishing Osceola as a destination site and marketing and promoting this aggressively.



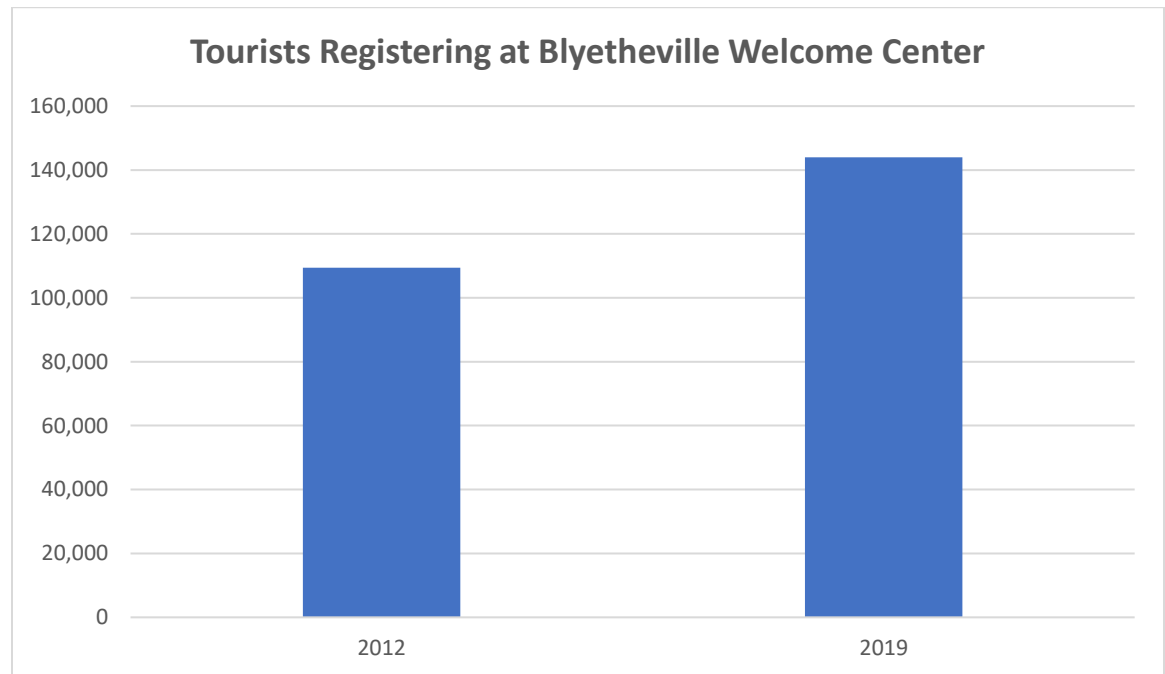
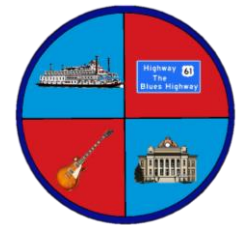


Figure 8: Tourist Registrations at Blytheville Welcome Center, 2012 and 2019

Source: Sandra Brand

4. According to information from Brandy Flowers, Research Analyst for Department of Arkansas Tourism (2020), the estimated number of visitors registering at all 13 of Arkansas' welcome centers indicates a general upward trend in the number of visitor registrations from 865,147 in 2012 to 1,071,821 in 2019 with the percentage of visitor registrations in Blytheville continuing in the 12% to 14% range during this period (Figure 9). Both the relatively continuous strong number of visitor registrations at all Arkansas welcome centers combined and the consistently significant percentage of visitors registering at the Blytheville Welcome Center may create an opportunity for Osceola to attract tourists and tourism dollars by capitalizing on its rich heritage and marketing and promoting this aggressively.



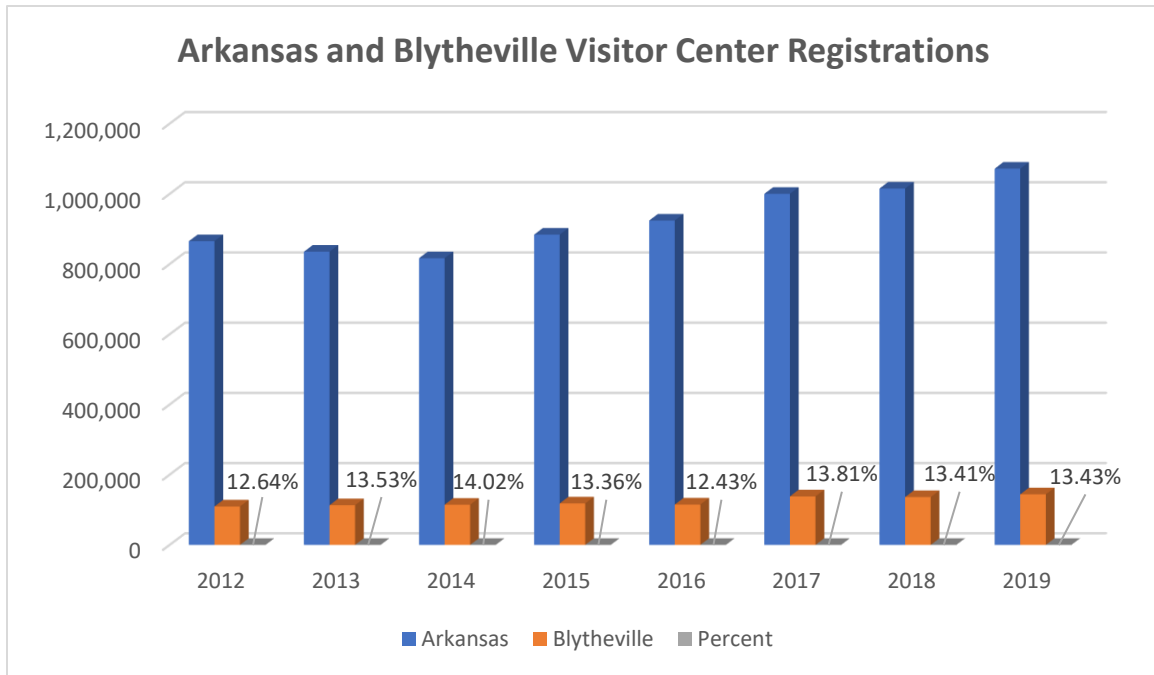


Figure 9: Tourist Registration for All Arkansas Welcome Centers Combined and Blytheville Numbers as a Percentage of the Total, 2012-2019

Source: Brandy Flowers, Arkansas Tourism

- Arkansas State University owns the Boyhood Home of Johnny Cash (JCBH) in Dyess which is approximately 20 miles from Osceola and conducts tours throughout it as well as an administrative building which is operated as a museum (Figure 10). The presence of these two venues and the relatively close proximity of Dyess to Osceola may create an opportunity for Osceola to attract visitors from Dyess and increase tourism by forming an alliance with the JCBH as part of music heritage and market and promote these venues aggressively.

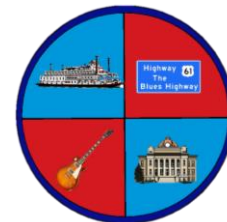




Figure 10: The Boyhood Home of Johnny Cash in Dyess, Arkansas

Source: <https://www.arkansas.com/dyess/attractions-culture/historic-dyess-colony-johnny-cash-boyhood-home>

6. According to the study conducted by the American Alliance of Museums in partnership with Oxford Economics (2018), museums are economic engines and museums in Arkansas resulted in a \$385 million financial impact on the state, generated \$258 million in income, supported 7,250 jobs, and produced \$89.4 million in local, state and federal taxes in 2017. This significant economic impact of museums in the state indicates that the relatively high popularity of such venues may create an opportunity for Osceola to attract visitors and generate revenue by developing a high-quality museum attraction focusing on the area's rich heritage, creating high brand recognition and marketing and promoting effectively.
7. According to Bloomberg Business Week (2012), in determining America's Best Places, it placed the greatest weight on "leisure amenities" (including density of museums). According to Time (2017), Money Magazine's annual "Best Places to Live" survey incorporates the concentration of accredited museums. The importance



of museums as components of “quality of life” amenities results in them being community anchors, potentially creating an opportunity for Osceola to not only attract visitors and create a significant economic impact on the area, but also to help enhance the overall quality of life in Osceola and positively enhance the perception of outsiders toward Osceola by developing and marketing a high-quality, accredited museum.

8. According to esri® Market Profile (2020), the median household income in the U.S. increased from \$42,148 in 2000 to \$60,548 in 2019 (Figure 11) which can result in an increase in expendable income and may create an opportunity for Osceola to increase tourism and revenue through the development of tourist sites, including music heritage sites.

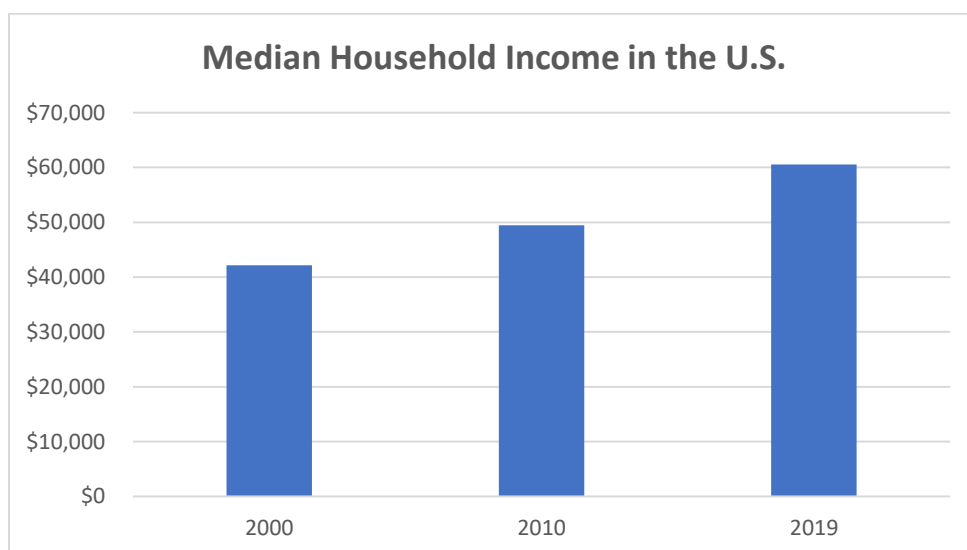


Figure 11: Median Household Income in the U.S. 2000-2019

Source: esri® Market Profile





9. According to esri® Market Profile (2020), the population of the U.S. increased from 281,421,906 in 2000 to 332,417,793 in 2019 (Figure 12) resulting in an increased demand for consumer goods and services, which can create an opportunity to Osceola to increase tourism and revenue by developing high quality tourism venues and marketing and promoting them aggressively.

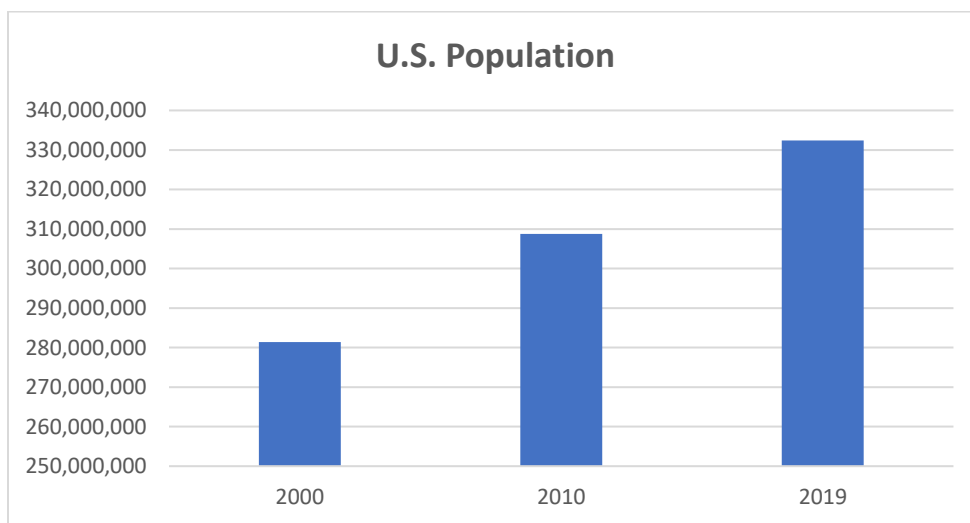


Figure 12: U.S. Population 2000, 2010, 2019
Source: esri® Market Profile

10. According to Statista (2019), the number of Internet users in the U.S. has increased from 264.6 million users in 2017 to 293.9 million users in 2020 (Figure 13). This steady increase in the number of Internet users creates an opportunity for Osceola to promote tourism sites and attract tourists and increase tourism spending through maintaining an effective Web presence.



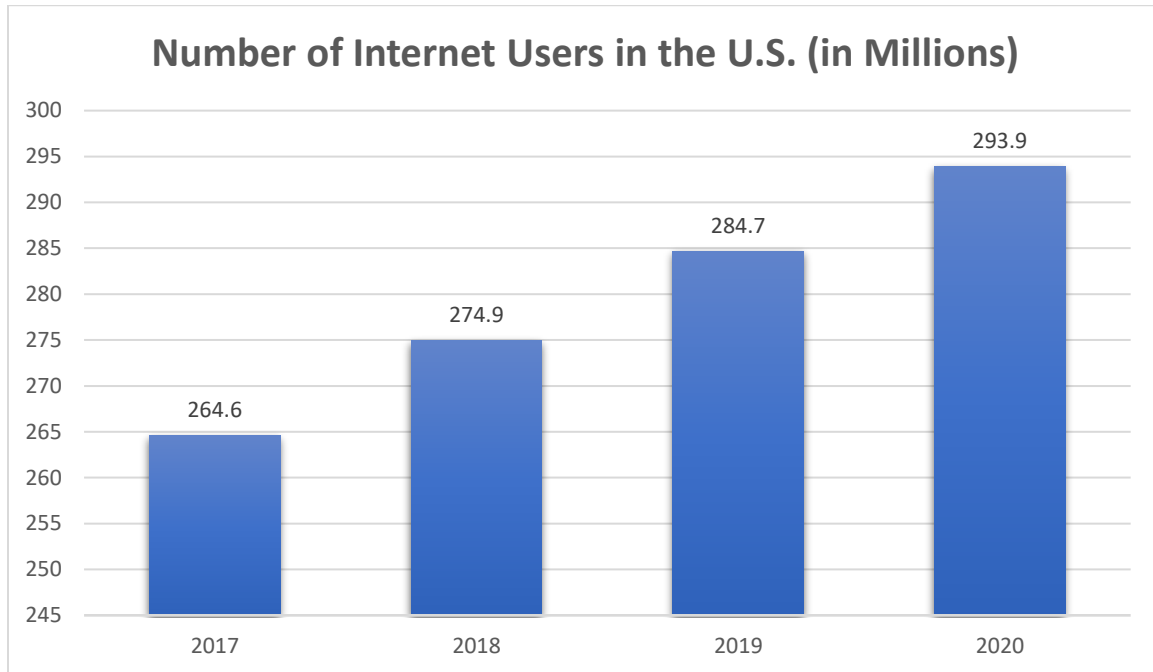
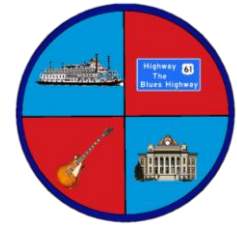


Figure 13: Number of Internet Users in the United States (in millions) 2017-2020

Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/276445/number-of-internet-users-in-the-united-states/>

11. According to Statista (2019), the number of smartphone users in the U.S. increased from 62.6 million in 2010 to 272.6 million in 2019 (Figure 14) which creates an opportunity for Osceola to more cost-effectively and efficiently promote tourism through the development of a mobile app.





Smartphone Users in the United States (in millions)

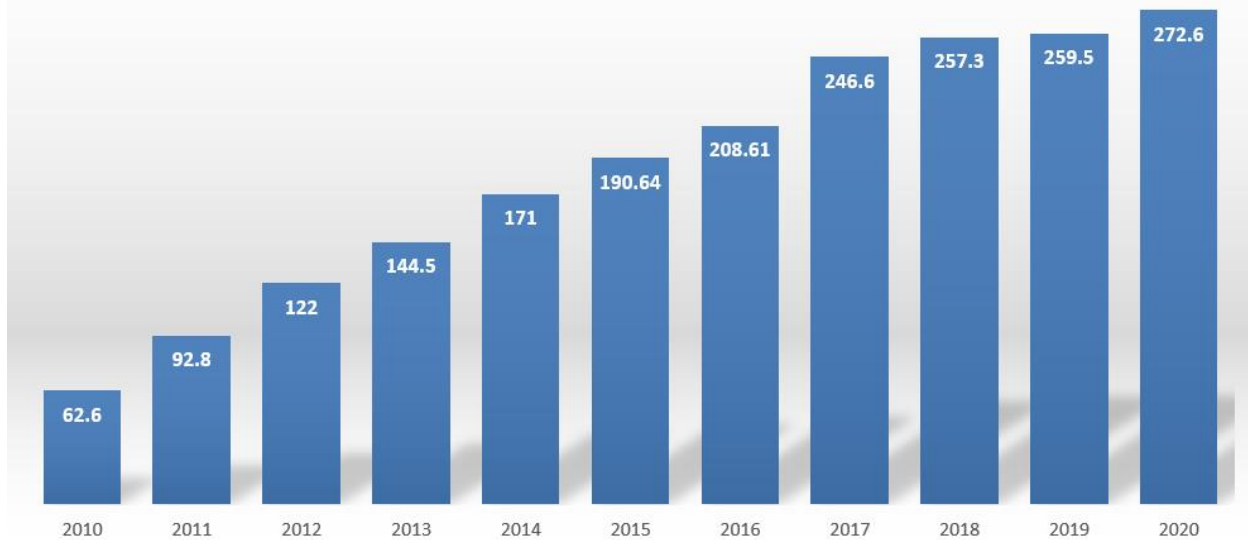
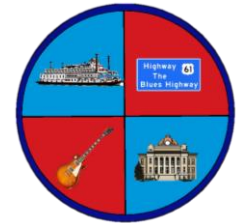


Figure 14: Number of Smartphone Users in the United States (in millions) 2010 to 2020

Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/276445/number-of-internet-users-in-the-united-states/>

12. According to MindSea (n.d.), time spent per adult per day with digital media increased from 2.7 hours to 5.6 hours on all devices and from 0.3 hours to 3.1 hours on mobile phones between 2008 and 2016 (Figure 15). An article on Medium.com (August 2019) states that time spent on social networks and messaging per day increased from 1.5 hours in 2012 to 2.38 hours in 2019 (Figure 16). The longer time spent on digital devices creates an opportunity for the City of Osceola to attract





visitors and potential visitors and reach the community through high-quality marketing content on different digital platforms.

Time Spent on All Devices and Mobile Phones (in hours)

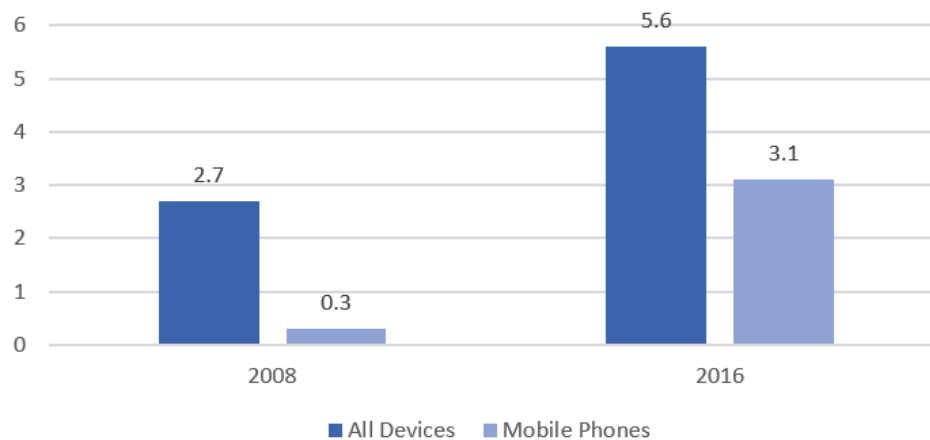


Figure 15: Time Spent on All Devices and Mobile Phones (in hours) 2008 and 2016

Source: <https://mindsea.com/app-stats/>





Time Spent on Social Networks and Messaging per day (in hours)

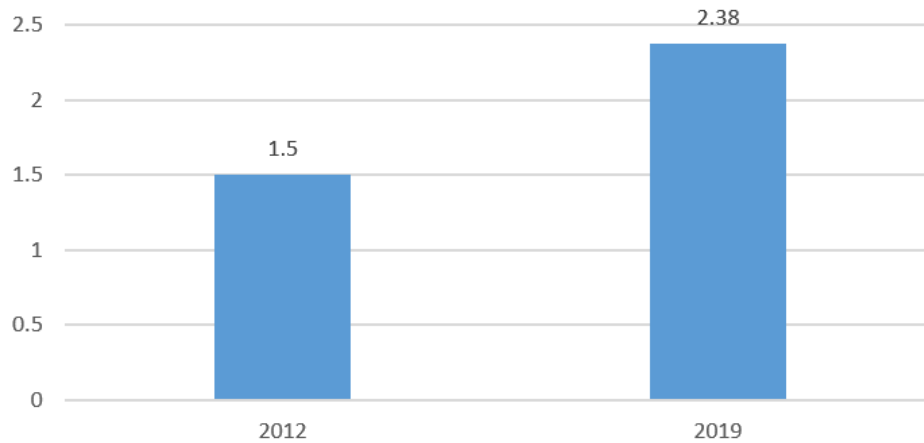


Figure 16: Time Spent on Social Networks and Messaging (in hours) 2012 and 2019

Source: <https://medium.com/@JBBC/how-much-time-do-people-spend-on-social-media-in-2019-infographic-cc02c63bede8>

13. According to Statista (2019), the number of social media users in the United States increased from 240 million in 2017 to 246.7 million in 2019 (Figure 17) and the social media penetration in the United States was 70% in January 2020. The large number of social media users creates an opportunity for the City of Osceola to connect with potential tourists and communicate information about its tourist sites through frequent posts on social media platforms.



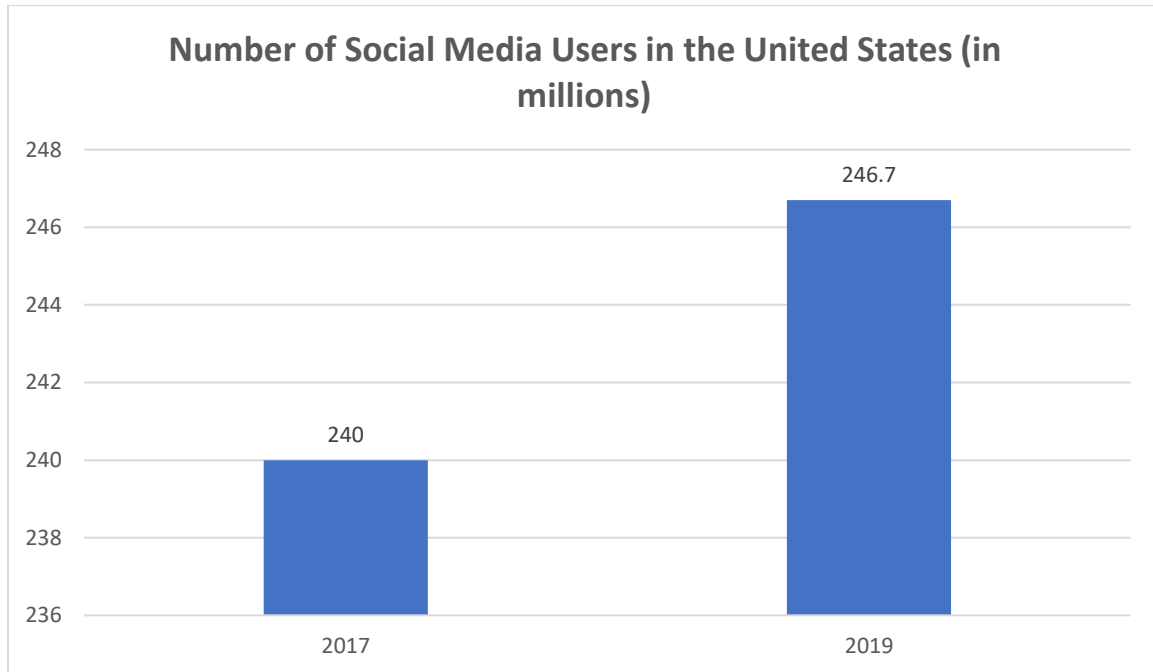
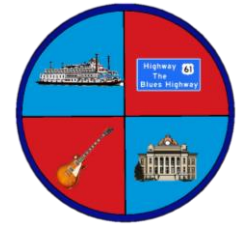


Figure 17: Number of Social Media Users in the United States (in millions), 2017 and 2019

Source: Statista

14. According to dataportal.com (February 2020), the most popular social media platforms are Facebook with 2.449 billion users, YouTube with 2.0 billion users, WhatsApp with 1.6 billion users, FB Messenger with 1.3 billion users, WeChat with 1.151 billion users, Instagram with 1.0 billion users, and TikTok with 0.8 billion users (Figure 18). This large number of users of these social media creates an opportunity for the city of Osceola to gain more attention and enhance its brand visibility through high-quality marketing content utilizing the most popular social media platforms.





Users on Popular Social Media (in millions)

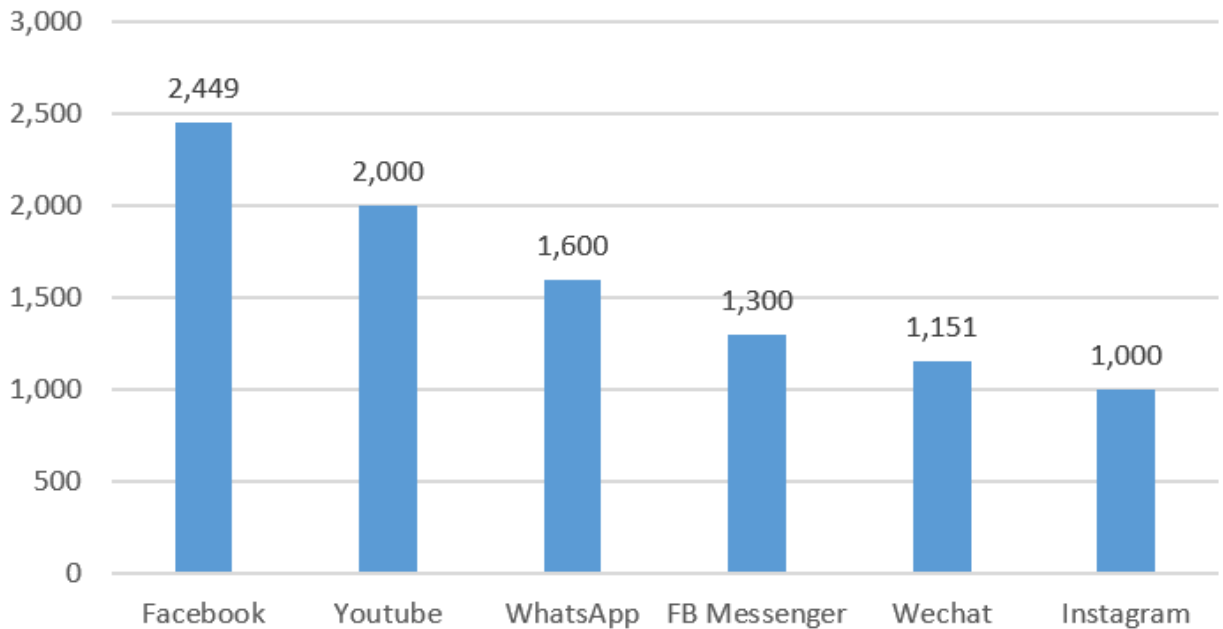


Figure 18: Users on Popular Social Media (in millions)

Source: <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-united-states-of-america>

15. According to Statista (November 2019), the number of apps in Apple’s AppStore increased from 15,300 in 2008 to 3,062,240 in 2019 (Figure 19). Also, according to BusinessofApps.com (November 2019), the worldwide number of downloads on Apple’s AppStore increased from 26 billion to 29.6 billion, and 57.8 billion to 75.7 billion in Google Play between 2016 and 2018 (Figure 20). The app usage increased 50% from 2016 to 2018 globally, which may create an opportunity for the City of Osceola to efficiently and effectively promote tourism by using a mobile app to connect with mobile-centric seekers of tourist destinations.





Number of Apps in Apple’s AppStore (in thousands)

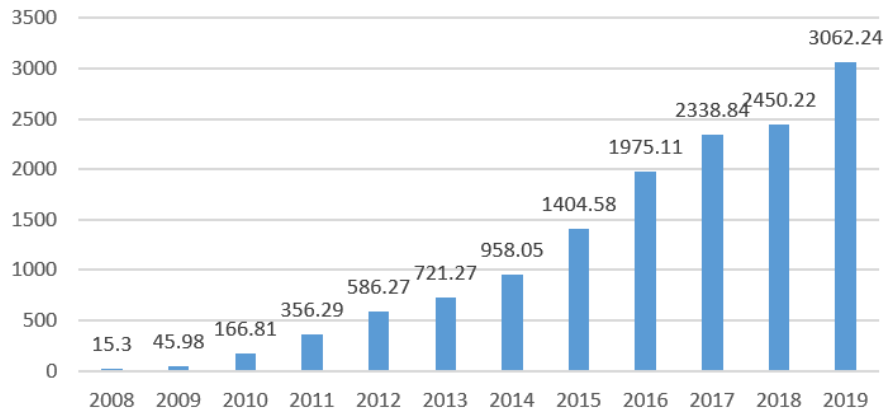


Figure 19: Number of Apps in Apple’s AppStore (in thousands) 2008 to 2019

Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/268251/number-of-apps-in-the-itunes-app-store-since-2008/>

App Downloads on AppStore and Google Play (in billions)

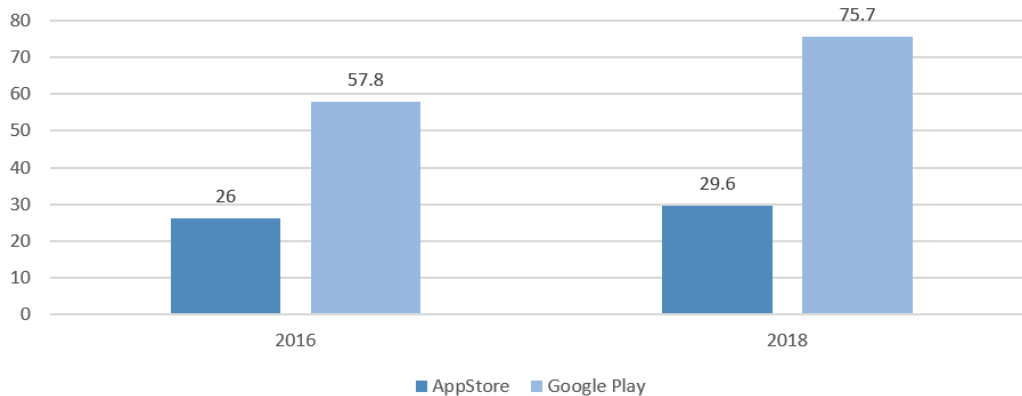
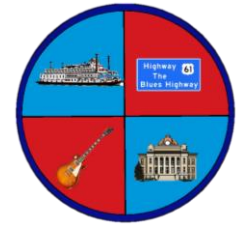


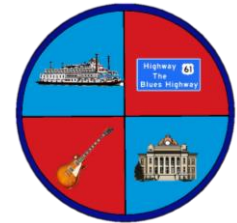
Figure 20: Number of App Downloads on AppStore and Google Play (in billions) 2016 and 2018

Source: <https://www.businessofapps.com/data/app-statistics/>





16. According to MappingRide.com (2020), there are 11 bike trails in and around Osceola, including the levee bike trail, with trails ranging from 1.09 miles to 72.45 miles. These bike trails may create an opportunity for Osceola to increase visitors and spending at local restaurants and other retail establishments, as well as tours of historic sites, by promoting its trails and sites to cycling groups and/or organizations that organize cycling tours.
17. According to communityheartandsoul.org, the Orton Family Foundation through its Community Heart and Soul Program works with cities and towns across the country with populations less than 50,000 people to bring them together to chart a course for how they can become a stronger, healthier, and more economically vibrant community based on what matters most to everyone in the town. This foundation may create an opportunity for Osceola to enhance its economy, as well as the overall quality of life for its residents through reaching out to form a partnership to become one of the Heart and Soul communities.
18. According to information provided by Ammi Tucker (2020), former Executive Director of the Osceola Chamber of Commerce, there are several festivals and events held in Osceola on an annual basis by a number of different organizations/groups (Table III). These already-existing events can create an opportunity for Osceola to attract visitors and build tourism through partnership with those holding these events and marketing them aggressively along with other destination sites.



Osceola, Arkansas Events

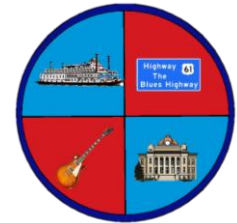
Event	When	Description
Osceola Heritage Music Festival	Mid-May	Music and food in Historic Courthouse Square
Car Show and Fall Festival	Third Saturday in October	Food and craft vendors; kids’ activities and music
Arts in the Square	Monthly during warm seasons	Food and retail booths and music
Farmers Market	Saturday mornings during season	Vendors sell produce, fruit and small prepared foods
Christmas Parade	December	Holiday parade with floats
Christmas in the Square	Saturdays in December	Decorations, pictures with Santa, a Living Nativity
Youth Activities	Seasonally	T-ball, baseball, softball, flag football
Easter Egg Hunt	Spring	Free community Easter egg hunt

Table III: Activities and Events in Osceola

Source: www.osceolasmcchamber.com

19. According to Ruth Hawkins (2017), former Executive Director of A-STATE Heritage Sites, the Boyhood Home of Johnny Cash and the museum featuring interesting displays has attracted thousands of visitors from over 30 different countries and 40-45 states. This large number of visitors who have shown an interest in Johnny Cash and the music genre creates an opportunity for Osceola to attract visitors by developing music heritage sites and events and aligning with A-STATE to market and promote both areas with special bundling and packaging prices.
20. Jonesboro has two public radio stations, KASU 92.5 FM on the campus of Arkansas State University and KLEK 102.5 FM, a minority owned radio station in town. Both stations are constantly seeking guests to appear on their talk programs, Arkansas Roots and Morning Edition at KASU and Community Conversations at KLEK. These





- radio stations and their talk programs geared toward public events create an opportunity for Osceola to promote its local activities, events and tourism through contacting Mark Smith at KASU and Laganzie Klek at KLEK to be guests on their respective community talk segments.
21. According to Dr. Adam Long, Executive Director of Arkansas State University Heritage Sites (2020), for years 2017, 2018, and 2019, an average of 10,000 people per year have visited the Boyhood Home of Johnny Cash in Dyess and 20 large group tours, including 5 commercial coach tours, came in 2019. Additionally, in 2018, the Johnny Cash Heritage Music Festival in the cotton field attracted 2,461 attendees and in 2019 it had 3,012 attendees. Dr. Long stated that due to being understaffed they are not fully able to market group tours effectively but once they are, he expects about 30,000 visitors annually to the home and an increase in the number of large groups. These positive numbers indicate the popularity of the genre of music of this era, which may create a significant opportunity for Osceola to attract these same types of music fans by developing its music heritage sites with high-quality venues and marketing and promoting aggressively, especially to commercial coach tour groups.
22. According to Memphis Travel (2020), Memphis is home to the Memphis Music Hall of Fame Museum, Memphis Rock'n'Roll Museum, Stax Museum of American Soul Music, the Blues Hall of Fame, Sun Studio and Graceland. These museums attract millions of visitors annually with Graceland topping the list at an average of 750,000+ visitors a year, Sun Studio with an average of 150,000 per year, Memphis Rock'n'Roll Museum with an average of 74,000 visitors annually, and the Stax Museum of American Soul Music (Table IV). These very popular music museums coupled with the proximity of Memphis to Osceola may create an opportunity for Osceola to benefit from visitors to Memphis museums also visiting Osceola by the



city developing high-quality music heritage sites and marketing and promoting effectively, including targeting commercial tour coach companies.

Music Heritage Sites, Attractions and Museums in Memphis

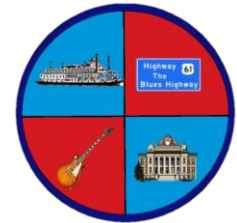
Museum	Number of Visitors Annually
Memphis Music Hall of Fame Museum	Unknown
Memphis Rock’n’Roll Museum	74,000
Stax Museum of American Soul Music	60,000+
The Blues Hall of Fame	Unknown
Sun Studio	150,000
Graceland	750,000+

Table IV: Music Heritage Sites, Attractions and Museums

Source: Museum/attraction websites

23. According to Bridgingtheblues.com and DeltabluesMS.org (2020), Helena, Arkansas, Clarksdale, Mississippi, Greenwood, Mississippi, and Indianola, Mississippi are homes to blues museums and festivals including the Greenwood Blues Heritage Museum and Gallery, the B.B King Museum and Delta Interpretive Center in Indianola, the Deep Blues Festival in Clarksdale, the Delta Blues Museum in Clarksdale, the Delta Roots Music Festival and the world-famous King Biscuit Blues Festival held annually for 3 days in October in Helena (Table IV). These museums and festivals attract thousands of visitors annually and may create an opportunity for Osceola to attract some of these visitors by developing and promoting effectively high-quality music events and sites, within the blues genre’s heritage and cultural content.





Delta Music Events/Venues

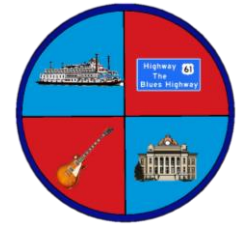
Event/Venue	Location
Greenwood Blues Heritage Museum and Gallery	Greenwood, Mississippi
B.B. King Museum and Delta Interpretive Center	Indianola, Mississippi
Deep Blues Festival	Clarksdale, Mississippi
Delta Blues Museum	Clarksdale, Mississippi
King Biscuit Blues Festival	Helena, Arkansas
Delta Roots Music Festival	Helena, Arkansas

Table V: Delta Music Events/Venues

Source: Bridgingtheblues.com

24. According to AllMusic.com (2020), such music artists as Calvin Frazier, Cameron Ross, Essie Barbara Whitman, Frank “Son” Seals, Harvey Scales, James “Pee Wee” Madison and Lefty Dizz are from Osceola, and while not born there, Albert King grew up in Osceola. In addition, many other performers such as Johnny Cash and Elvis Presley frequently dropped in to play. Also, Dale Rogers, famous Western movie star, hailed from Osceola. These performers from Osceola create an opportunity for the city to become a tourist destination through the development of its rich music and cultural heritage with activities and events and museums and marketing these aggressively.
25. According to ARDOT traffic count maps and the Missouri Department of Transportation (2020), the average daily traffic count on I-55 around Osceola is 19,000 vehicles. Annualized, this is approximately 6,935,000 vehicles, and of this





- number, according to David Wyman of MODOT, approximately 40%, or 2,744,000, are semi-trailer trucks, leaving about 4,191,000 other vehicles that include passenger cars, tour buses, motor homes, and pickup trucks. This number of vehicles traveling north and south on I-55 around Osceola may create an opportunity for Osceola to attract visitors through the development of its heritage sites and market and promote them aggressively, including implementing signage on I-55.
26. According to a Neilson report (2018), 52% of the U.S. population attends some sort of live music event which translates to roughly 116,000,000 persons. This relatively significant number of people attending some type of live music event may create an opportunity for Osceola to attract visitors through the development of high quality music heritage sites along with holding live music festivals and promoting these aggressively in an effort to attract tourists and generate revenue.
27. According to St. Louis FRED (February 2020), the unemployment rate in Mississippi County decreased from 12.0% in 2010 to 5.0% in December 2019 but increased to 6.0% in January 2020. The unemployment rate for Arkansas decreased from 8.4% in 2010 to 3.5% in December 2019, and was at this level in January 2020, while the unemployment rate for the U.S. decreased from 9.3% to 3.5% during the same period and is currently at the same level (Figure 21). These lower unemployment rates normally signal increasing demand for goods and services, but the current COVID-19 pandemic has a significant negative effect on such things as travel and travel destinations, about which organizations are basically helpless to control with any strategies to change it other than to continue to maintain a high level of communication and connect with potential customers in order to help keep Osceola on their minds.



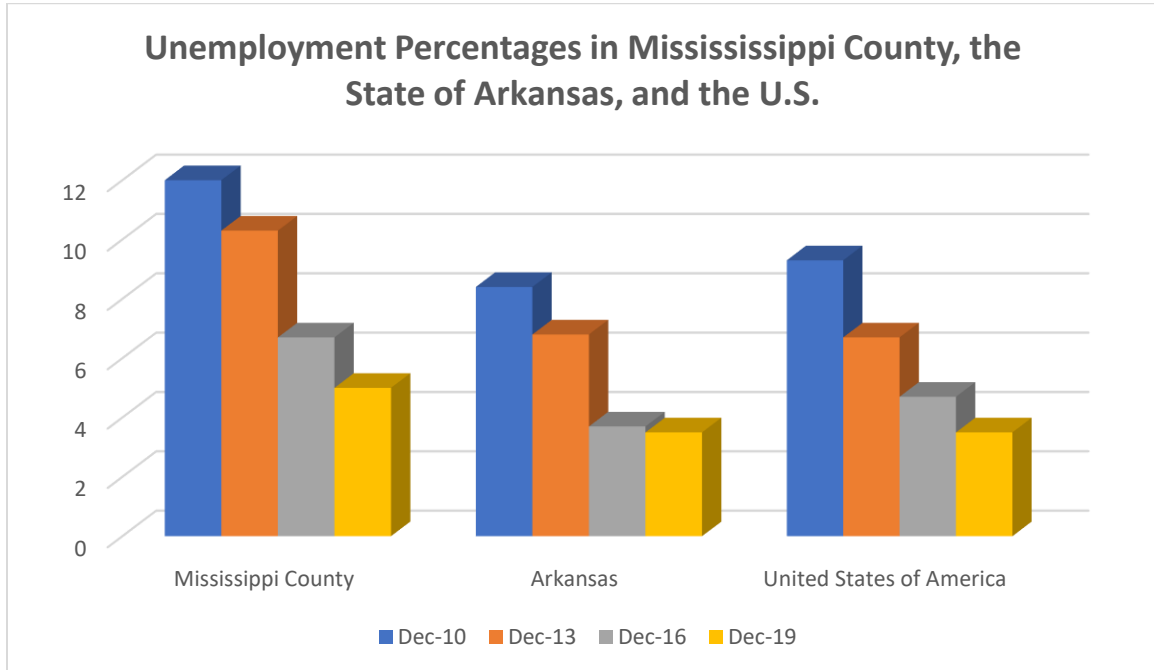
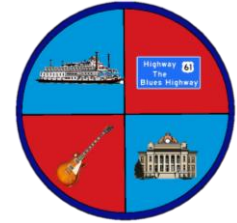


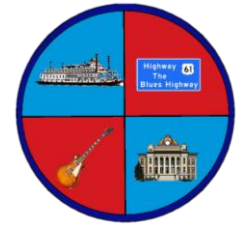
Figure 21: Unemployment Percentages in Mississippi County, the State of Arkansas and the U.S.

Source: St. Louis FRED

28. Lifestyle Tapestry Segment Reports align segments of the population of the U.S. based on a number of demographics, economic factors and patterns of behavior (esri® Market Profile, 2019). While information provided by all segments can be helpful, selected lifestyles presented below are notable (Table VI):

- Green Acres—The Green Acres Segment consists of 3,993,400 households with a population of 10,695,900 and has a median household income of \$76,800. This group has a Spending Index (SI) of 120 for entertainment which means it spends 20% more in this category than the national base of 100. This group prefers country, blues and gospel genre music. While this segment has pockets of population throughout the country, the greatest density is the





Northwest, Midwest and Pacific Northwest. People in this segment are comfortable with technology and rely heavily on the Internet when gathering information for decision making.

- Southern Satellites—This segment is made up of 3,856,800 households with a population of 10,404,500, has a median household income of \$47,800, is primarily concentrated in the Southeast and Mid-South, prefers country music, and has an SI of 86 for entertainment and recreation. This group obtains a disproportionate amount of their information from Television compared to other media.
- Savvy Suburbanites—Savvy Suburbanites make up 3,664,200 households and a population of 10,509,300. This group has a median household income of \$108,300 and is primarily concentrated on the Northeast Coast. It has an SI of 185, the highest in the nation, on entertainment and recreation, particularly on travel and cultural enrichment, but demonstrates no particular music genre preference. This group is digitally savvy, well connected consumers who appreciate technology and make liberal use of it for everything from shopping and banking to staying current and communicating.
- Up and Coming Families—This segment consists of 2,901,200 households and has a population of 9,115,600, and it is the fastest growing group and most affluent group among the Generation Xers. This group has a median household income of \$72,000 and an SI of 108 for entertainment and recreation. It has no preference for any music genre but likes music concerts and arts. It is represented all throughout the country, widely disbursed, but mostly living in cities with high population density. This group is well connected, and is mobile-centric, relying heavily on smartphones and other





mobile devices for communication and information. Members of this segment seek discounts and package deals for travel and accommodations.

- Bright Young Professionals—This segment is comprised of 2,750,200 households and 6,690,700 people, and it has a median household income of \$54,000. The most densely populated areas of Bright Young Professionals are the Midwest, Mid-South and Southeast. This group has an SI of 75 for entertainment and recreation and enjoys a wide variety of music concerts. Members are well connected and rely heavily on digital media for information and communication.
- Exurbanites—These are mostly empty nesters living in suburbs of urban communities with high density in the Southwest, Midwest, Northeast and the West Coast. This segment is made up of 2,398,200 households and a population of 6,092,100 and has a median household income of \$103,400 and an SI of 183 for entertainment and recreation, preferring a variety of music, concerts and cultural interests. This group is highly connected and makes heavy use of the Internet for Information gathering and communicating.
- In Style—Represented by 2,764,500 households and a population of 6,623,00, this segment has a median household income of \$73,000 and an SI of 121 for entertainment and recreation. Members demonstrate a preference for various music genres, concerts and museums. They are highly concentrated in the Midwest, Mid-South, Northeast, Southeast and Southwest. They rely heavily on the Internet for information and communication.





U.S. Lifestyle Tapestry Segments 2019

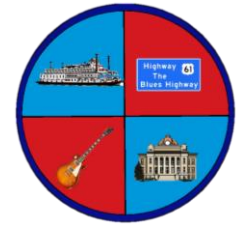
Segment	Household	Population	Median Household Income	Geographic Location	SPI	Music Preference	Information Source
Green Acres	3,993,400	10,695,900	\$76,800	NE, NW, MW, PNW	120	Country	Internet
Southern Satellites	3,856,800	10,404,500	\$47,800	SW, SE, MS	86	Country	Television
Savvy Suburbanites	3,664,200	10,509,300	\$108,300	NE Coast	185	None	Internet
Up and Coming Families	2,901,200	9,115,600	\$72,000	Widely Distributed	108	None	Internet
Bright Young Professionals	2,750,200	6,690,700	\$54,000	MW, MS, SE	75	All music concerts	Internet
Exurbanites	2,398,200	6,092,100	\$103,400	SW, MW, NE, W Coast	183	Variety of music, culture	Internet
In Style	2,764,500	6,623,000	\$73,000	MW, MS, NE, SE, SW	121	Variety of music concerts, museums	Internet

Table VI: Tapestry Lifestyle Segment Summaries for the U.S. 2019
 Green Acres, Southern Satellites, Savvy Suburbanites, Up and Coming Families, Bright Young Professionals, Exurbanites, and In Style Segments
 Source: esri® Market Profile Tapestry Segments

The market profiles and behavior patterns of these various lifestyle segments may create an opportunity for Osceola to attract tourists and tourism spending through the development of heritage sites and utilization of multimedia approaches to target market to specific segments.

29. Both Arkansas State University and Arkansas Northeastern Community College have internship programs whereby students can receive college credit for doing an





internship for an organization, either a for-profit or a nonprofit. These internship programs can create an opportunity for Osceola to obtain help from tech-savvy college students in such areas as website and social media updates and the development of marketing and promotional pieces.

30. There are several buildings in the center of Osceola on which murals could be painted depicting images of the city’s music and representations of other aspects of its rich history (Figures 22 and 23). These buildings create an opportunity for Osceola not only to help beautify the area but to help residents take pride in their city by getting sides of buildings painted with such murals. There may be local talent which can help with this, as well as perhaps art students at A-STATE or ANC, who could help with these as projects for their classes. These murals can also help support Osceola’s efforts to attract tourists to the area and generate tourism spending.





Figure 22: Opportunities for Osceola Murals Downtown
Photo taken by Ammi Tucker

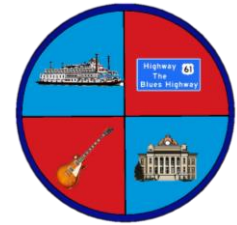




Figure 23: Example of Current, Faded Mural

Photo taken by Ammi Tucker

31. There are several state agencies/organizations such as Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism, Arkansas Department of Heritage, A-STATE's Heritage Studies Program and heritage sites, the Arkansas Delta Byways Tourism Association, as well as others that promote tourism throughout Arkansas, including the Arkansas Delta. These organizations create an opportunity for Osceola to attract tourists through working with these agencies/organizations and providing them with information and materials to promote what Osceola has to offer.
32. U.S. Highway 61, also known as The Great River Road, as well as the Blues Highway and is part of the Delta Byways, connects the City of Wyoming, Minnesota to New Orleans, Louisiana and features many historic sites and areas of interest to tourists. Since this historic route passes through Osceola, it ties in with the city's



- efforts to develop its blues music heritage and attract tourists by aggressively marketing its heritage and its prominence on the Blues Highway.
33. The music department at Osceola High School, and the one at A-STATE, may create an opportunity for Osceola to grow more interest in the area and its blues heritage through working with them to develop blues music as part of their music studies programs.
34. Bret Sparks, a native of Osceola who has a wealth of information and knowledge about Osceola's blues music heritage, is opening a music hall in the city and will feature live blues music events on Fridays and Saturdays throughout the year. This can be a stimulus for generating greater interest in blues music and create an opportunity for Osceola to develop its blues music heritage by capitalizing on Bret's initiative.
35. The Americana Music Triangle (www.americanamusictriangle.com) is an area encompassing Memphis, Nashville and New Orleans and its website connects people to the artists, locations and stories of the number one music destination in the country (places within the triangle) and posts a calendar of music festivals and events throughout the area. This may create an opportunity for Osceola to gain greater exposure and attract tourists by contacting this organization to have its music festivals and events posted on its calendar.
36. Culturalheritage.org (www.culturalheritage.org) is an online platform which provides information on the following for its partners:
- Cultural studies and statistics
 - Resources and toolkits to promote cultural tourism
 - Best practices to promote cultural tourism
 - Technical assistance





- Funding assistance
- Identification of heritage areas by state
- Promotion of National historic landmarks
- Listing of the National Register of Historic Places
- Map of National heritage areas.

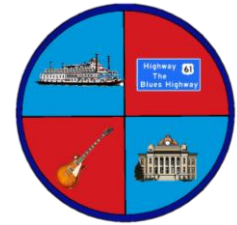
This organization creates an opportunity for Osceola to attract tourists by joining as a partner for assistance in promotion, technology and sources of funding.

37. There are several grants available through the Arkansas Department of Heritage (www.arkansasheritage.com/grants/home) to aid communities in heritage development including the following:

- Arkansas Arts Council Grant Programs
- Arkansas State Archives, Sykes Program Grant
- Arkansas Historic Preservation Program Grants
- Arkansas Heritage Grants
- Arkansas Small Museum Grants
- National History Travel Grant Program

These grants may provide an opportunity for Osceola to obtain funds to help support its development of music heritage and other historical sites through applying for funding for specific projects.

38. According to the Arkansas Economic Development Commission Rural Services Funding Resource Guide (2020), there are several grant programs, which while not directly related to heritage and/or tourism, may help the city of Osceola by getting infrastructure or other support grants, allowing it to use its funds for tourism development (Appendix B).



39. The Blues in Schools Program (Blues Foundation, 2020) is “committed to preserving blues heritage, the biographies of the people who formed this music, and the cultural history behind their personal stories.” The Blues Foundation website details how this program works, how it can be tailored to the needs of the different schools, the various program structures, connections with individuals who can help schools get started with the program and suggestions on how to go about funding the program. The Blues in Schools Program may create an opportunity for Osceola to create greater interest in and cultural awareness of its blues heritage by joining the Blues Foundation and working with it to implement some variation of the program into Osceola Public Schools. This in turn can help generate greater local interest in helping the city develop its blues music heritage into tourist attractions and help the local economy.
40. According to Facebook (2020), KOSE 860 AM, a Gospel, Blues and Country radio station in Osceola, was the first radio station in Arkansas to play an Elvis Presley record. The KOSE disc jockey, who had been a classmate of Elvis’s, was visiting Memphis in early July 1954 and was given a copy of Elvis’s brand-new single, “That’s All Alright,” and returned to Osceola and played the record that evening. The building which KOSE occupied has historic significance in blues music and may create an opportunity for Osceola to enhance its music heritage for developing tourism through the acquisition and restoration of this building (Figures 24 and 25).



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Figure 24: Exterior of KOSE 860 AM Radio Station

Photo taken by Ammi Tucker





Figure 25: Elvis Presley’s “That’s All Right” Record, First Played in Osceola

Source: Facebook

41. Osceola’s close proximity to the heavily trafficked I-55 makes it convenient to stop in Osceola and can help Osceola promote its tourist sites to travelers on the main highway.
42. Osceola is only 19.3 miles from Dyess, Arkansas, the location of the Boyhood Home of Johnny Cash, and only 11.5 miles from Wilson, Arkansas, and only 55.2 miles from Memphis, Tennessee. This may create an opportunity for Osceola to attract visitors to these sites by developing its own heritage sites and festivals and marketing them aggressively.

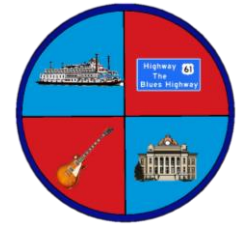


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THREATS





Threats

Threats are external factors or occurrences that are taking place or exist outside an organization, generally over which an organization has no control. The city of Osceola is confronted with several threats which it may be able to mitigate or eliminate significant adverse effects of by playing off its strengths, overcoming its weaknesses, and capitalizing on its opportunities.

1. According to esri® Market Profile (2020), the population of Osceola has decreased from 8,846 in 2000 to 7,062 in 2019 (Figure 26) which has resulted in a decrease in revenue for the city by way of sales and property taxes as well as revenue from utilities. This decrease in population, and erosion of its tax base can pose a threat to Osceola's efforts to develop tourism sites to become a tourist destination, requiring the city to aggressively pursue economic development grants as well as partnerships with private investors in order to do so.



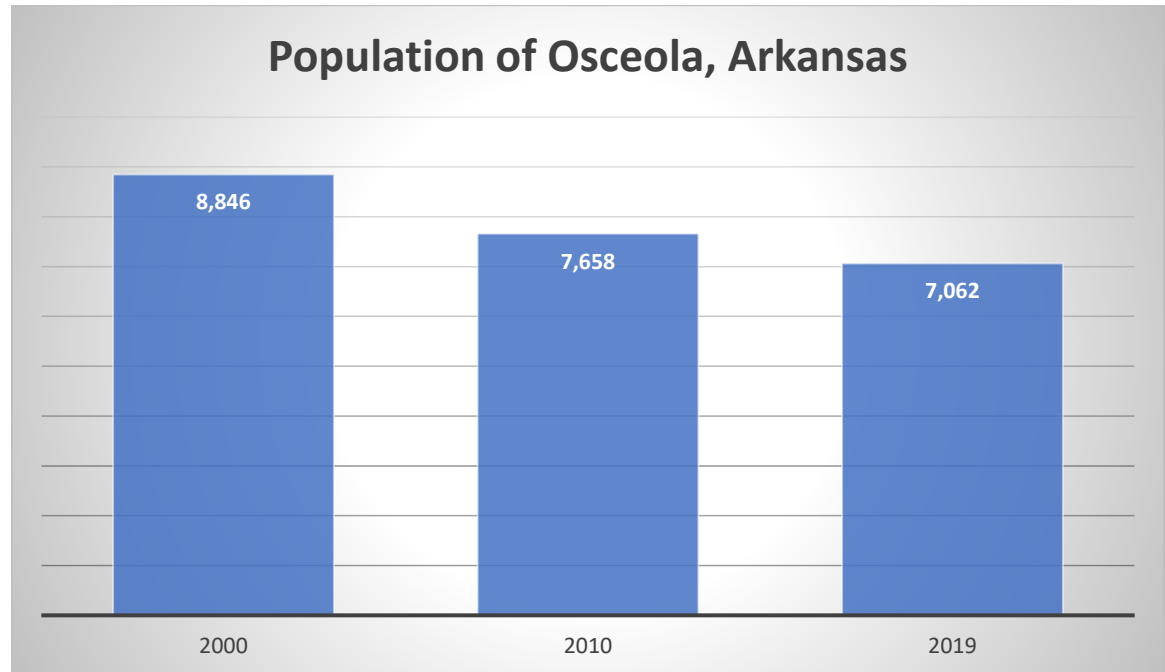
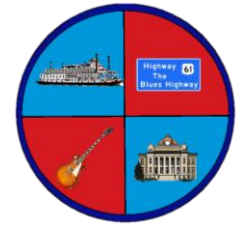


Figure 26: Population of Osceola, Arkansas, 2000, 2010, 2019

Source: esri® Market Profile

2. According to esri® Market Profile (2020), the federal poverty level of income in 2019 for a family of 3 was \$21,330 and the average family size in Osceola was 3.13 with 32.8% of the households earning less than the poverty level threshold income. Additionally, only 28.6% of households had incomes of \$50,000 and up. This relatively high percentage of households below the federal poverty level and relatively low percentage of households with incomes of \$50,000 and over poses a threat to Osceola’s ability to gain tax revenues and thus can hinder its efforts to support tourism development. This will require Osceola to be more dependent on grants and alliances with potential partners in an effort to achieve its goal of becoming a tourist destination.





3. According to esri® Market Profile (2020), the number of households in Osceola decreased from 3,171 in 2000 to 2,698 in 2019 (Figure 27), further underscoring the decline in Osceola’s revenue base and posing a significant threat to the city’s ability to develop tourist sites, again requiring it to secure other funding sources in order to be able to do so.

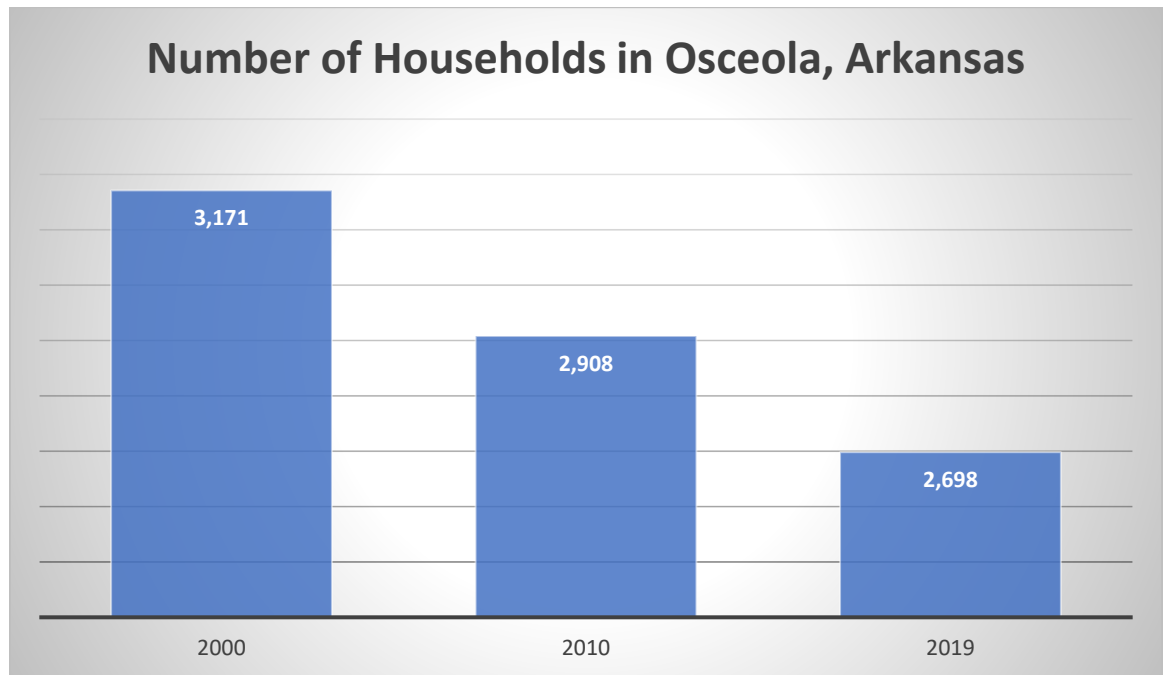


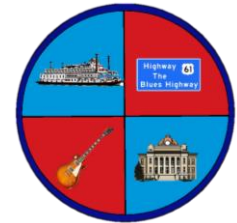
Figure 27: Number of Households in Osceola, Arkansas—2000, 2010, 2019

Source: esri® Market Profile

4. According to esri® Market Profile (2020), the number of housing units in Osceola decreased from 3,534 in 2000 to 3,229 in 2019 (Figure 28). Additionally, the percentage of owner-occupied housing units decreased from 45.8% to 36.6%, while the percentage of renter-occupied housing units increased from 44.0% to 47.0%, and the percentage of vacant housing units increased from 10.3% to



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16.4% during the same period. The decreases in the number of housing units and percentage of owner-occupied housing units and corresponding increases in renter-occupied and vacant housing units are further evidence of the dramatic erosion of Osceola's tax base as well as, in this case, number of vacant properties subject to abandonment and deterioration. The first issue poses a threat to the city's ability to develop tourist sites from lack of funds, and the second contributes to the negative perceptions of the city, which can deter visitors. Osceola will find it necessary to develop other sources of funding as well as hold property owners accountable for maintaining and/or destroying abandoned houses in an effort to develop as a tourist destination as well as create more positive perceptions about the community to attract tourists.



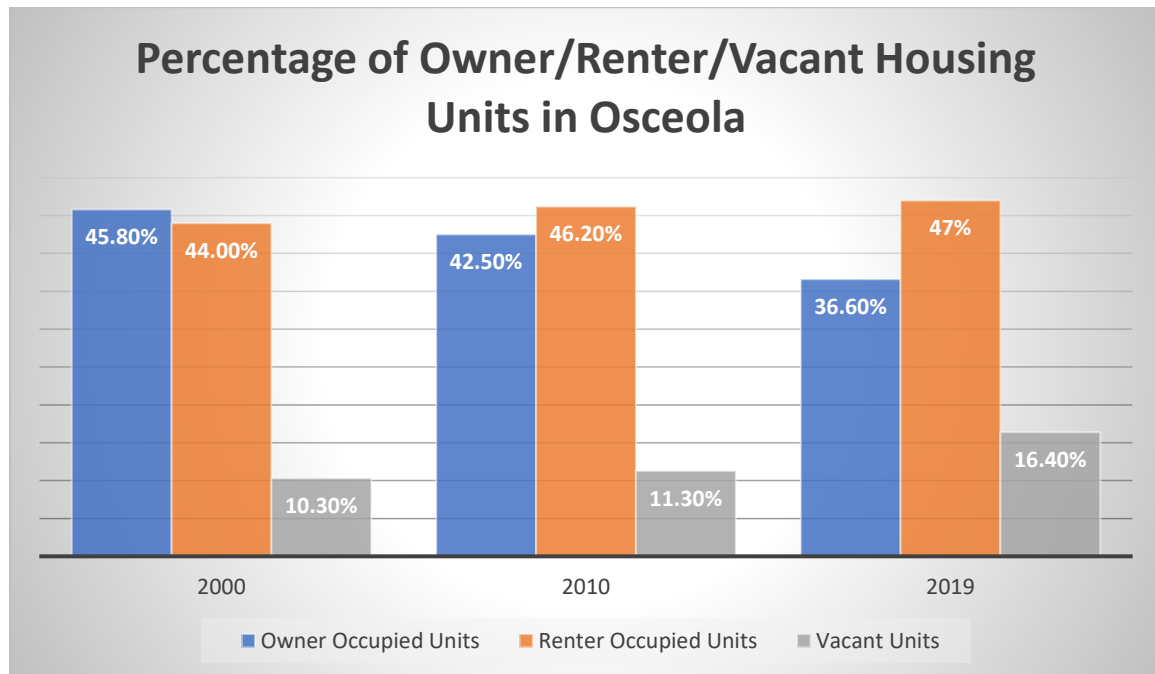
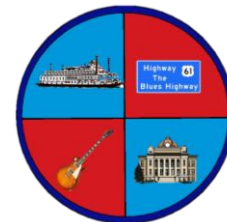
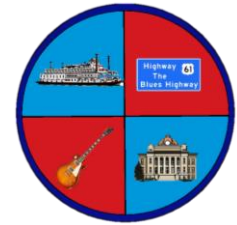


Figure 28: Percentage of Owner/Renter/Vacant Housing Units in Osceola, Arkansas—
2000, 2010, 2019

Source: esri® Market Profile

5. According to The Osceola Times (March 4, 2020), in a letter to the editor, a former resident of Osceola blasts Main Street Osceola for “promoting and evidently subsidizing out-of-state food trucks which compete with locally-owned food trucks and restaurants.” This support of out-of-state food trucks may adversely affect the ability of local food truck vendors, as well as restaurants, to generate sales, potentially contributing to unemployment and hindering spending in the area, leading to lower sales tax collections.
6. According to HYPEBOT (2019), data from Pollstar in 2019 confirmed that concert ticket sales were down 29% from 2018 largely due to what many experts

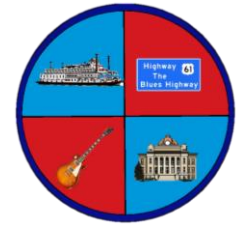




believe is increased ticket prices for concerts, almost 21% higher. Added to this, the money generated from the top 50 touring acts was down by \$1.87 billion and ticket sales were the lowest on record. This decline in ticket sales and revenue may pose a threat to Osceola’s ability to attract visitors to music events and will require that ticket prices are compatible with, if not lower, than those of like events, and market this aggressively in an effort to attract visitors and generate revenue.

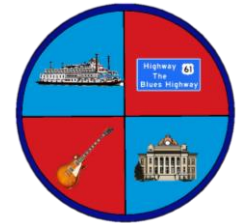
7. Based on information gathered from a strategic planning focus group meeting held at the Osceola Chamber of Commerce (2020), those in attendance believe there is much apathy among many of the citizens of the community relative to embracing change and/or being interested in the affairs of the community. Such apathy among Osceola residents can pose a threat to any efforts on the part of the city to develop tourism, requiring the leadership of the city and various supporting entities to communicate the economic and social benefits to everyone in an effort to engage them in helping Osceola grow and develop economically and socially.
8. While there are some hotels/motels in Osceola, there is currently only a total of 167 rooms for overnight accommodations and there are no bed and breakfast establishments in the area. Additionally, a Google search did not bring up any Airbnb properties available in Osceola, the closest ones being in Wilson. The limited number of places for overnight accommodations in Osceola may pose a threat to the city’s ability to attract visitors to its tourism sites and festivals, making it necessary that it works not only with property developers outside the area, but also with local property owners to develop hotels and motels as well as perhaps bed and breakfasts and Airbnb properties in an effort to support tourism and generate revenue.





9. According to annual crime data provided by the city of Osceola Police Department (2020), neighborhoodscout.com (2019), AreaVibes.com (2019) and citydata.com (2019), there are many statistics and relevant information which illustrate the alarming rate of crime in Osceola itself and in some cases compared to the state of Arkansas and the U.S. This information is presented below:
- a. With a crime rate of 70 per 1,000 residents, Osceola has one of the highest crime rates in the U.S. compared to all communities of all sizes—from the smallest towns to the largest cities. One’s chance of becoming a victim of either violent or property crimes in Osceola is 1 in 14 (neighborhoodscout.com 2020).
 - b. In 2018, a total of 472 incidents of crime per 100,000 in Osceola were reported with 159 thefts, 158 violent crimes, 127 burglaries and 28 vehicle thefts making up 314, or 66.5% (shown as property crimes) of the total number of crimes (AreaVibes, 2020).
 - c. The crime rate in Osceola is 100% higher than the average of the entire state of Arkansas and 168% higher than the national average. When looking at violent crimes, Osceola has a 326% higher rate than the average of Arkansas and a 509% higher rate than the national average, and while taking property crime into consideration, Osceola is 58% higher than the average for Arkansas and 109% higher than the average for the U.S. (AreaVibes, 2020).
 - d. Based on the metrics of crimes per 100,000 population (the standard measurement), Osceola has 18.96 crimes daily compared to 9.47 daily crimes in Arkansas and 7.07 daily crimes in the U.S.



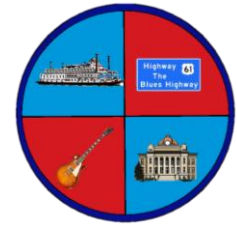


- e. Despite the alarming incidents of reported crime and the crime rates per 100,000 population being higher than both the state of Arkansas and the U.S., Osceola has more police officers per 1,000 civilians at 4.5 than Arkansas at 2.9 and the U.S. at 3.3 (citydata.com, 2020).
- f. According to the incidents listing provided by the Osceola Police Department (2020), there were 1,574 incidents of crime in Osceola from March 19, 2019 and March 19, 2020 (see Appendix E for detailed list).

These crime statistics and related information illustrate the seriousness of crime in Osceola which can pose a significant threat to the city’s ability to attract visitors for tourism, requiring it to not only find ways to make Osceola a safer place, but also engage in positive publicity and marketing to dispel perceptions which people have about the unsafe situation in the city.

- 10. According to KAIT Region8 News (February 19, 2020), the American Greetings Plant in Osceola, the largest employer in Osceola, Arkansas, announced that it was laying off 268 employees, amounting to a reduction of about 15% of its workforce. The layoffs could result in residents leaving the area, and certainly will negatively impact sales and property tax revenue for the city, further posing a threat to Osceola’s financial health and hindering efforts to develop and market tourism sites. Osceola will need to focus on other sources of funds such as grants, investors, and possible private-public partnerships in order to capitalize on its rich blues music heritage and other possible tourist sites.
- 11. Farming in the Mississippi Delta region surrounding Osceola results in the town experiencing a major mosquito problem during the warmer months largely from irrigation of crops. This issue with mosquitos may pose a threat to the city’s ability to attract visitors to outdoor festivals and other activities during the warmer

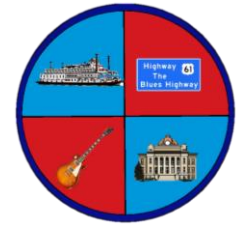




months, which is the primary tourist season, requiring the city to have an extensive mosquito control program, which can be quite costly.

12. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in many businesses shutting down, hopefully only temporarily, resulting in layoffs of millions of people and a significant decline in tax revenue at both the state and federal level. Additionally, President Trump has extended the federal income tax filing deadline to July 15, and Governor Asa Hutchinson has followed suit by extending the deadline for filing Arkansas taxes to July 15. The extension of federal and state tax filing deadlines which has resulted in significant revenue shortfalls at both levels, combined with lower tax revenue generation, has resulted in a \$350 million revenue shortfall for Arkansas in fiscal year 2020 alone and billions of dollars for the federal government. Compounding these issues is the millions of dollars being spent at the state level and billions of dollars being spent at the federal level to fight the pandemic. This will result in significant reductions of funds allotted to grant funding organizations, likely posing a threat to Osceola's ability to obtain certain grants to support economic development and preservation and development of its music and other heritage sites, making it necessary that it aggressively seeks private investors in an effort to do so.
13. According to Towncharts.com (2019), 2,218 people, or 32.8% of the population of Osceola, is earning less than the poverty level of income, 27.6% of households have public assistance, 20% of those in the poverty group are between ages 12-17, 20.7% of families have no one working, 71% of those in poverty are unmarried with children, and 43% of those are male, and the largest ethnic group at the poverty level is Hispanics, accounting for 63% of those in poverty. These statistics are alarming from an economic standpoint and can pose a threat to





Osceola’s ability to not only generate resources internally to develop heritage sites, but also to engage a significant proportion of the population in the process, creating challenges for it to do so and making it necessary to acquire resources from outside in the form of grants and private investors.

14. It seems that there is very little support from the local community for local small businesses, perhaps indicating that a significant number of people spend their dollars outside of Osceola, not only resulting in lower tax revenue, but also jeopardizing the existence of small businesses and their ability to also support the city. This poses a threat to Osceola’s ability to increase revenue, making it necessary that it actively promotes shop-at-home campaigns in an effort to help small businesses survive as well as generate tax revenue for the city.
15. While there are no readily available numbers, it is a well-known fact that there are many towns and communities seeking grant funding for economic development and infrastructure enhancements which results in an intense level of competition. This high level of competition poses a threat to Osceola’s ability to obtain grant funding to support its tourism initiatives, making it necessary to seek some type of public-private partnership to help it do so.
16. There are many abandoned buildings in the downtown area of Osceola as well as several vacant plots of land, both giving the appearance of deterioration and neglect which may make it difficult for the city to attract visitors. This may require massive cleanup and restoration to make the area more appealing and help attract tourists and tourism spending (Figure 29).



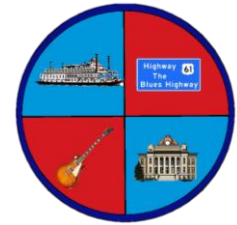


Figure 29: Downtown Osceola

Photo Taken by Ammi Tucker

17. Based on information gathered from the focus group held at the Osceola Chamber of Commerce, there appears to be a great deal of negativity and pessimism about Osceola's economic situation and the feeling that the status quo is what it is and there is nothing we can do about it. This contributes to somewhat of a self-fulfilling prophecy that can prevent residents from doing anything to make it better, essentially contributing to a worsening of the situation. This can pose a threat to the city's ability to improve the community and lives of its residents through development of tourist attractions, making it necessary that Osceola's administration and community leaders join forces to instill a sense of pride among residents and a vision of what can be by everyone working together to make positive things happen for the betterment of all.



18. According to the city of Osceola’s Book of Ordinances (2020), Ordinance 7.12 titled Itinerant Merchants, generally prohibits the operation of food truck vendors, but requires them “to pay a fee of \$250 per day to the Chief of Police of the City of Osceola, plus enter into a bond with good and sufficient surety to the City of Osceola to ensure performance of service, delivery, or merchandise.” This ordinance may discourage operators of food trucks from providing food to potential customers, which, in turn, can pose a threat to the city’s ability to adequately provide food to visitors, thus potentially adversely affecting its ability to fully capitalize on development of its heritage sites. The city council of Osceola may need to change the ordinance in the spirit of helping tourism spending in the area.



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PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS

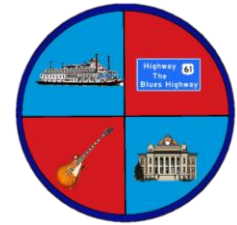


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ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT





Economic Environment

Economic Environment assumptions are based on an analysis of information gathered from external factors such as income, cost of living, Consumer Price Index, Spending Potential Index of consumers, interest rates, unemployment and overall business activity. Organizations must understand the trends and changes taking place in the Economic Environment as they impact the industry segment in which they operate to help make educated assumptions about the future in which plans are implemented to aid in making the best strategic decisions for the organizations.

1. According to esri® Market Profile (2020), the median household income in the U.S. increased from \$42,148 in 2000 to \$60,548 in 2019 and is projected to increase to \$69,180 by 2024 (Figure 30). It is expected that the median household income of the U.S. will continue to increase over the plan horizon and beyond, resulting in an increase in spending on all goods and services, including spending for visits to tourist sites. This will require areas that feature tourist sites to ensure high quality experiences for visitors and market and promote them effectively in an effort to attract visitors and repeat visitors and generate revenue.



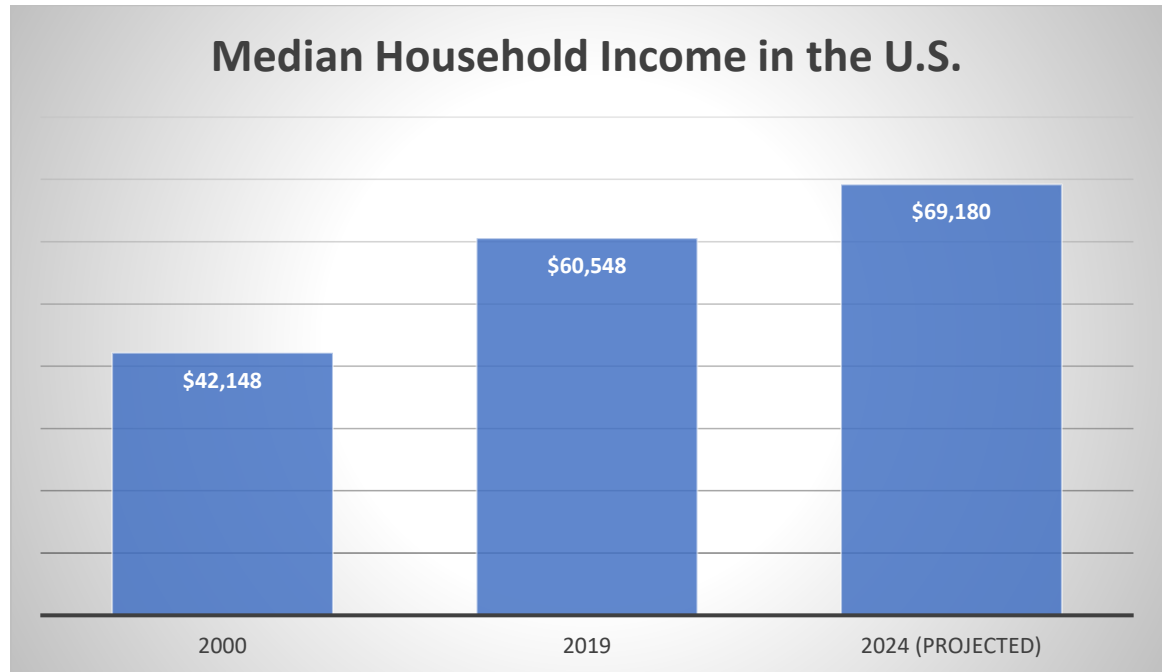


Figure 30: Median Household Income in the U.S.—2000, 2019, 2024

Source: esri® Market Profile

2. According to esri® Market Profile (2020), there were 125.17 million households in the U.S. in 2010, 41.5% or 51.9 million of which had incomes of \$75,000 to \$200,000 plus, and 13.8% or 17.3 million had incomes of \$150,000 to \$200,000 plus. It is projected that the number of households in the U.S. will increase to 129,920,518 by 2024 and the percentage of those with incomes of \$75,000 to \$200,000 plus will increase to 47% or 61.1 million while 16.9% or 22.0 million will have incomes of \$150,000 to \$200,000 plus (Figure 31). It is expected that the number of households in the U.S., as well as the percentages of households with incomes of \$75,000 to \$200,000 and up, and households with incomes of





\$150,000 to 200,000 and up will continue to increase for the foreseeable future, which will likely bode well for providers of non-essential goods and services, including entertainment and tourism, but will require them to market and promote aggressively using multi-media approaches in an effort to attract tourists and gain revenue.

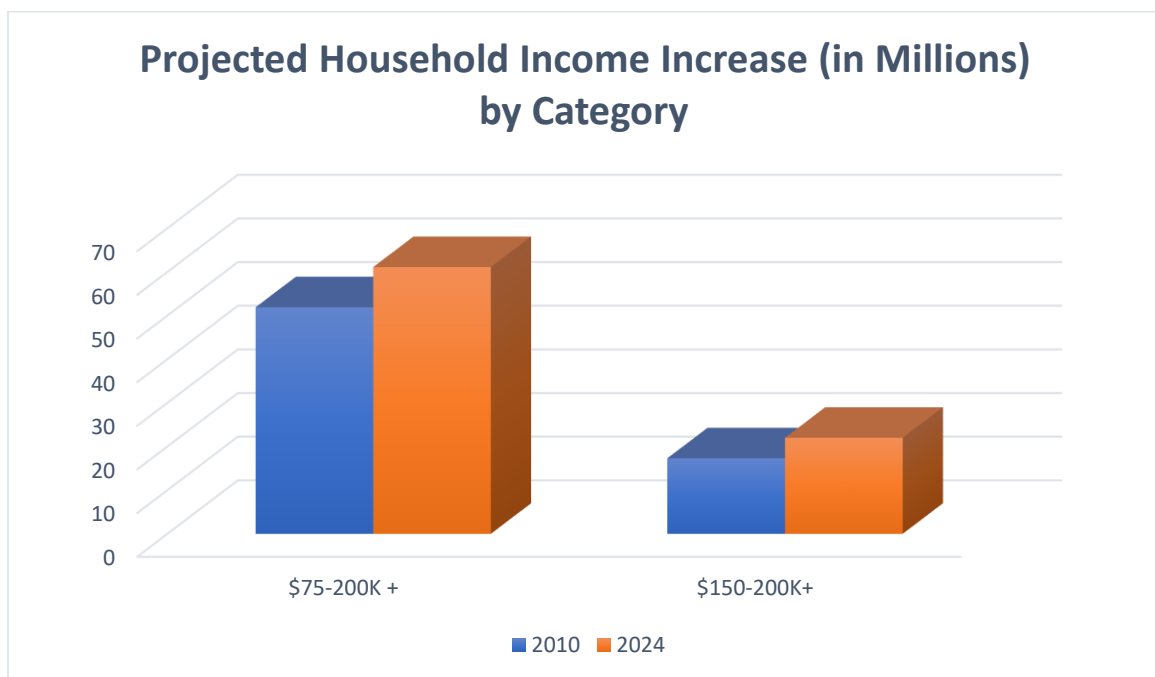
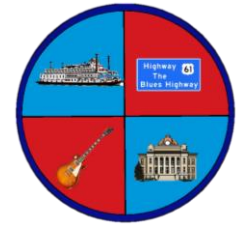


Figure 31: Projected Household Income Increase by Category, years 2010 and 2024

Source: esri ® Market Profile

3. According to St. Louis FRED (February 2020), the unemployment rate in Mississippi County decreased from 12.0% in 2010 to 5.0% in December 2019 but increased to 6.0% in January 2020. The unemployment rate for Arkansas decreased from 8.4% in 2010 to 3.5% in December 2019, and was at this level in January 2020, while the unemployment rate for the U.S. decreased from 9.3% to





3.5% during the same period and is currently at the same level (Figure 32). It would normally be projected, based on the trend of decreasing unemployment rates, that the unemployment rates for Mississippi County, Arkansas, and the U.S. would remain at least at these relatively low levels throughout the plan period, resulting in an increase in consumption of all goods and services. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in massive business closings and layoffs or reductions in force, with projections that the U.S. unemployment rate will reach 20% in 2020 (Congressional Budget Office, April 2020). While it cannot be predicted how long the pandemic will last, or what the total impact on jobs, employment and income will be over the complete plan horizon, at least during part of the plan period, it is reasonable to expect a downturn in consumption of non-essential goods and services, including travel, tourism and entertainment. However, it will be important for providers of these to continue to maintain a high profile, create high brand awareness and stay connected to potential consumers through multi-media marketing and promotion in an effort to attract tourists and revenue at such time as the economy returns to some normalcy.



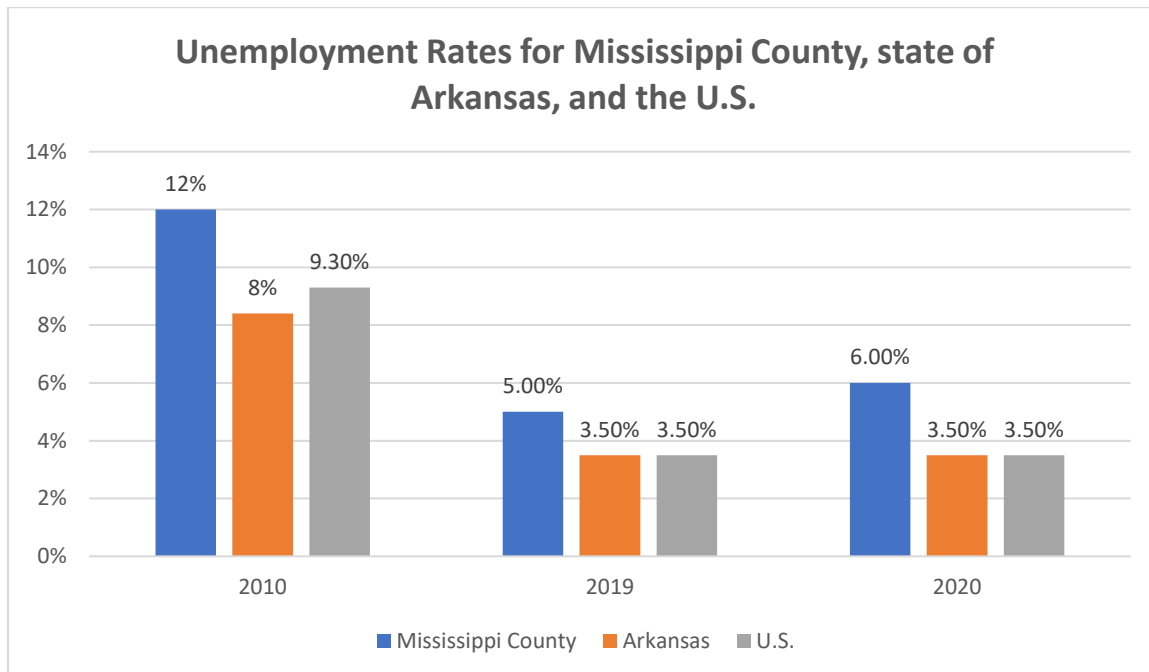
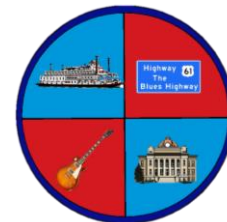


Figure 32: Unemployment Rates for Mississippi County, the State of Arkansas, and the U.S. in 2010, 2019 and 2020

Source: St. Louis FRED

4. According to esri® Market Profile (2020) Tapestry Lifestyle Segments, there are 22.33 million households with average median household income of \$75,043 and an average Spending Potential Index of 124 for entertainment, many of which demonstrate a preference for country, gospel, and blues music and live concerts, as well as travel. Further, it is projected that the numbers of households in each segment will continue to increase over the plan period, along with projected increases in income. These positive economic factors may bode well for communities desiring to develop tourism, especially for blues music festivals and heritage sites, and other heritage sites, requiring them to create high quality sites and festivals that appeal to broad interests and preferences, and promote them

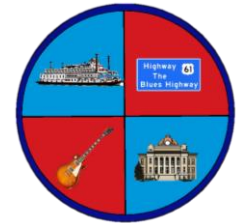




aggressively using a multi-media approach in an effort to attract visitors and generate revenue.

5. According to Areavibes.com (2020), the cost of living index for Arkansas is 88.7 while the cost of living index for Osceola is 85.5 on the U. S. base of 100 (Table VII). It is expected that the cost of living indices for Arkansas and Osceola will remain at, or about, this level during the plan period, resulting in an increase in purchasing power for all goods and services, including purchases of non-essential goods and services, potentially making the state of Arkansas and the city of Osceola attractive tourist destinations, but requiring the development of high quality venues and events, and marketing them aggressively in an effort to benefit from this positive situation.





Osceola Cost of Living Index

Index	Osceola	Arkansas	National
Cost of living	75	84	100

Index	Osceola	Arkansas	National
Goods & Services	86	95	100
Groceries	89	90	100
Health care	77	86	100
Housing	49	65	100
Transportation	87	83	100
Utilities	88	91	100

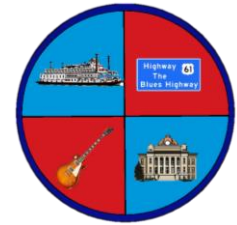
The cost of living index is based on a national average of 100. If the amount is below 100, it is lower than the national average. If the amount is above 100, it is higher than the national average. The breakdown for each index is as follows: goods and services (33%), groceries (13%), health care (5%), housing (30%), transportation (9%) and utilities (10%). In the event that the cost of living data was unavailable for this city, estimates based upon nearby cities were used.

Table VII: Osceola Cost of Living Index, Compared to Arkansas and National

Source: Area Vibes, <https://www.areavibes.com/osceola-ar/cost-of-living/>

- According to Brookings.edu (March 27, 2020), both federal and state funding in such areas as economic development has suffered as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, due to a number of factors on both the revenue side and the expenditure side. From a revenue perspective, President Trump extended the filing of income taxes to July 15, resulting in significant reductions in tax





revenue. Following suit with the extension of the federal income tax deadline, most states have also extended their tax filing deadlines to July 15, losing significant income tax revenues. At the same time both the federal government and the state of Arkansas are expending significant amounts on fighting the pandemic, putting further strains on budgets at both levels, with the federal government also providing funds to small businesses and individuals to help them survive the economic fallout of the pandemic. While it cannot be predicted how long the pandemic will last, or how long it will take for the economy to restart its economic engines at all levels, at least for a period of time the dire economic situation will likely result in cuts to both federal and state funding of grant programs adversely affecting communities' abilities to obtain grants for such areas as tourism, making it necessary that they seek other avenues such a public-private partnerships and other sources of funds, including crowdfunding initiatives in an effort to acquire funds for such initiatives.

7. According to Brookings.edu (March 27, 2020), while state and local governments are on the front lines of the coronavirus pandemic confronted with increased spending on public health and Medicaid which is of utmost importance, economically, the larger source of stress may be the effects of the expected recession. According to this source, social distancing will reduce consumer spending and workers' wages and, in turn, cause sales, income and property taxes to plummet, potentially hurting rural communities the hardest as they are less insulated already against economic downturns. This will result in many communities not even having the ability to provide basic services to their residents, but also not being in a financially strong enough position to undertake



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any economic development initiatives, making necessary to seek other sources of funds with which to do so.

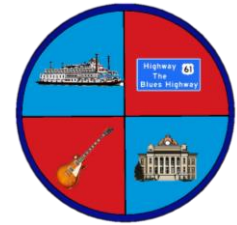


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SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT





Social Environment

Assumptions about the Social Environment are derived from an analysis of such external factors as population demographics, social values, customs, consumer lifestyles and patterns of behavior as well as crime rates. Organizations must understand past and current trends shaping factors in the Social Environment and use this information to help project or forecast future aspects to aid in formulating strategies to help them achieve their goals.

1. According to tourist registration information provided by Sandra Brand, manager of the Arkansas Tourism Welcome Center at Blytheville, the number of tourists registering at the welcome center has trended upward from 109,412 in 2012 to 143,992 in 2019 with the only years not showing year-over-year increases being 2016 and 2018 (Figure 33). While the number of visitors for future years cannot be predicted, normally it would seem reasonable to expect that the number of visitors would continue on a generally upward trend based on increasing population and both the location of the welcome center on the I-55 corridor between St. Louis and Memphis, and the popularity of attractions Arkansas has to offer. However, it is likely that the Coronavirus will negatively impact non-essential activities, including tourist travel, at least during part of the plan period, making it difficult, if not impossible for providers of tourism venues to attract tourists. Since this is a situation over which organizations and entities have no control, there is no immediate action they can take to offset these negative issues other than to plan for ways to recover from the effects of the Coronavirus at some point during the plan horizon.



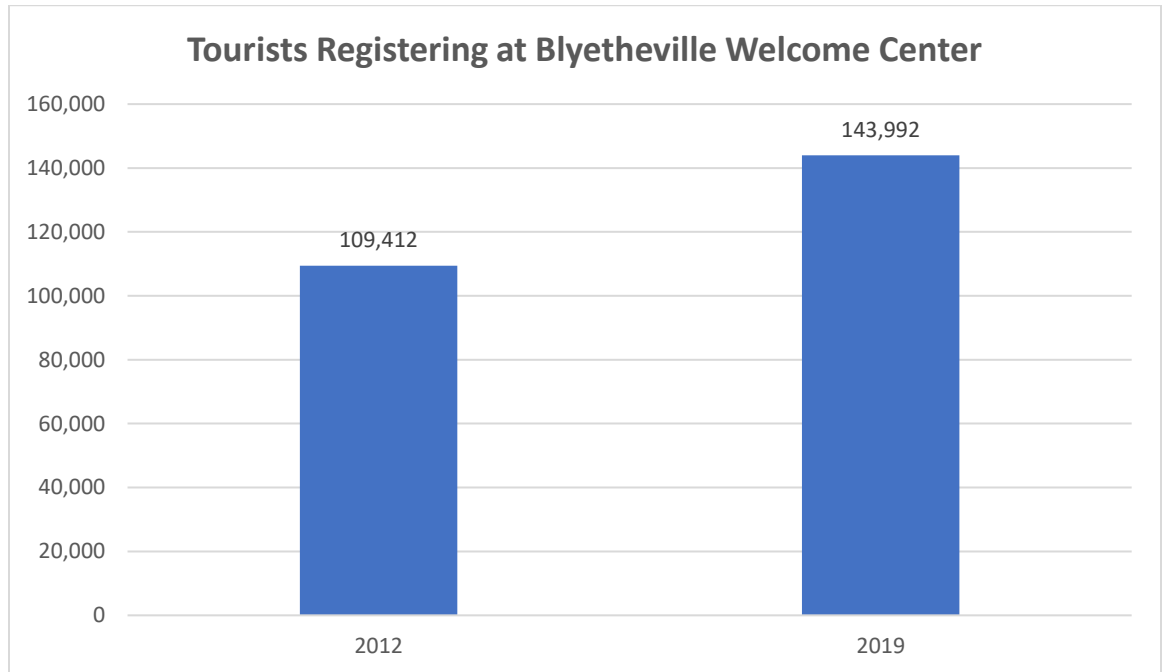
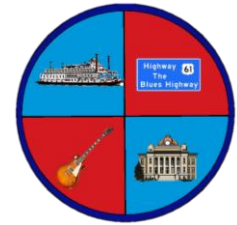


Figure 33: Tourist Registrations at Blytheville Welcome Center, 2012 and 2019

Source: Sandra Brand

2. According to information provided by Brandy Flowers, Research Analyst for the Department of Arkansas Tourism (2020), the estimated number of visitors registering at all 13 of Arkansas’ welcome centers indicates a general upward trend of visitor registrations from 865,147 in 2012 to 1,071,821 in 2019 with the percentage of visitor registrations at the Blytheville Welcome Center being consistently in the 12%-14% range during this period (Figure 34). Similar to point 1, it cannot be predicted how long and to what extent the Coronavirus will negatively impact such social behavior as non-essential travel, including tourism. At least for the near-term, it will no doubt result in a significant decrease in tourism and will require providers/potential providers of tourist attractions to plan





accordingly to benefit from an up-tick in tourism, hopefully at some point during the plan horizon.

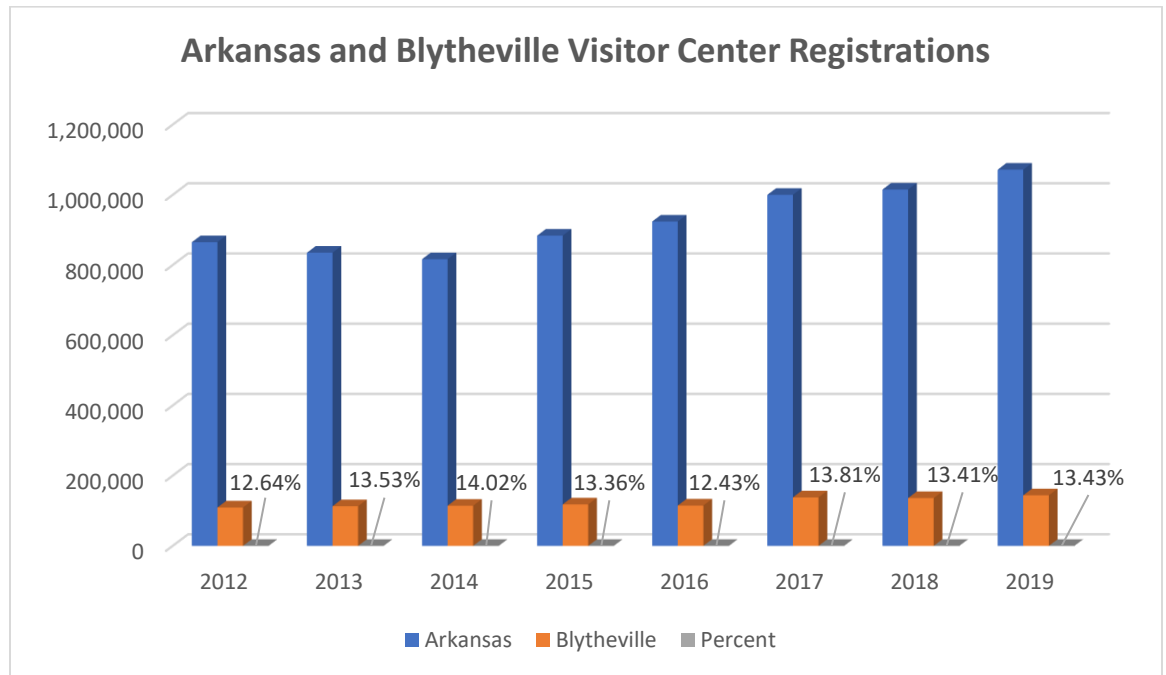


Figure 34: Tourist Registration for All Arkansas Welcome Centers Combined and Blytheville Numbers as a Percentage of the Total, 2012-2019

Source: Brandy Flowers, Arkansas Tourism

3. According to esri ® Market Profile (2020), the population of the U.S. increased from 281,421,906 in 2000 to 332,417,793 in 2019 and is projected to increase to 345,487,602 by 2024 (Figure 35). It is expected that the population of the U. S. will continue to increase for the foreseeable future, resulting in an increase in consumption of all goods and services, including leisure/recreational/cultural travel, and requiring providers of recreational and cultural venues and attractions to





maintain a high level of identity and awareness through marketing and promotion via multiple media in an effort to capitalize on this expected growth.

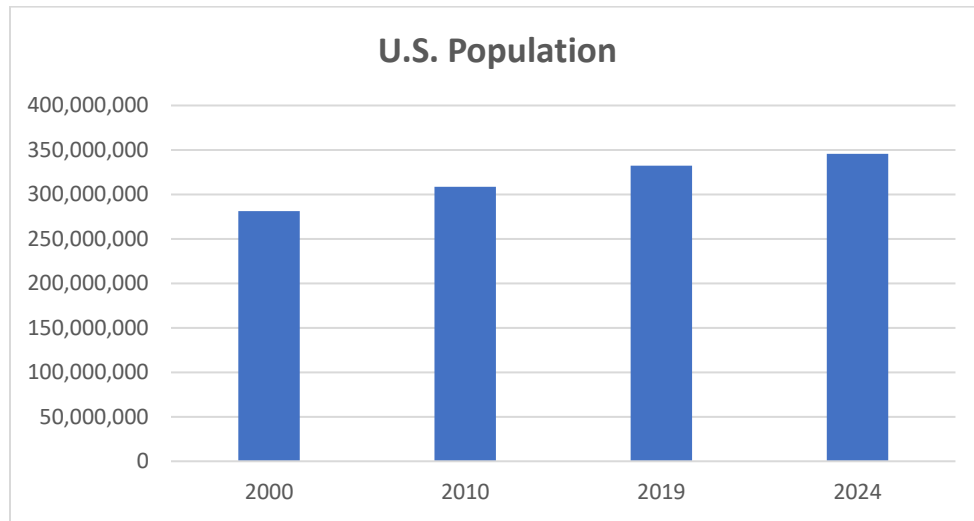


Figure 35: U.S. Population 2000, 2010, 2019 and Projected 2024
Source: esri® Market Profile

4. According to Lifestyle Tapestry Segment Reports (esri® Market Profile, 2019), there are six (6) lifestyle segments consisting of Green Acres, Southern Satellites, Savvy Suburbanites, Up and Coming Families, Bright Young Professionals, Exurbanites, and In Style, the members of which demonstrate such behavior patterns as preferences for a variety of live music concerts, including blues, gospel, country and others, as well as museums and cultural attractions and cultural enrichment. The combined population of the members of these Tapestry Segments was 22.3 million in 2019 and is expected to increase by an average of 3% year-over-year to 24.5 million in 2022 and 26.7 million in 2025 (Figure 36). It is expected that the combined population of these Tapestry Segments will continue to grow for the foreseeable future, leading to an increase in consumption of all goods





and services, including cultural, leisure, entertainment, and tourist activities, events and venues, but will require providers of these to ensure high quality and enriching services, as well as market and promote them in a variety of media formats in order to capitalize on this growth.

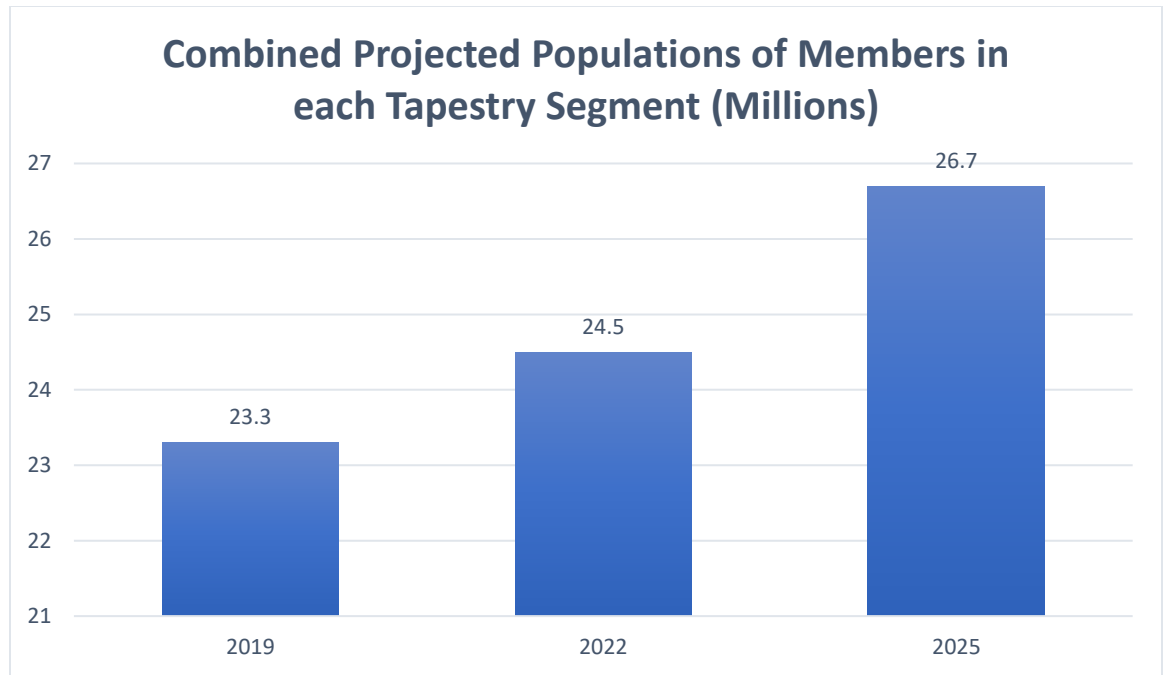


Figure 36: Combined Projected Populations of Members in Each Tapestry Segment in the Millions for Years 2019, 2022, and 2025

Source: esri ® Market Profile

5. According to Adam Long, Executive Director of Arkansas State University Heritage Sites (2020), the Boyhood Home of Johnny Cash in Dyess has averaged 10,000 visitors annually from 2017 to 2019 and the Johnny Cash Music Festival has seen growth from 2,461 attendees in 2018 to 3,012 attendees in 2019, indicating significant popularity of the genre of music played by Johnny Cash and many of his contemporaries. While the numbers attending these and similar venues





and events is difficult to predict, it is reasonable to expect they will continue to be popular over the plan period and beyond, making it necessary for providers of these to market and promote them aggressively in an effort to take advantage of this positive situation.

6. According to esri® Market Profile (2020), the population of Osceola has decreased from 8,846 in 2000 to 7,062 in 2019 and is projected to decrease to 6,776 by 2024 (Figure 37). It is expected that, barring any unexpected significant change in the trend, the population of Osceola will continue to decrease for the foreseeable future, not only resulting in a decline of the city’s tax base, but also potentially a shortage of labor to support growth of businesses/attractions, requiring a concerted effort on the part of all constituencies to work together in an effort to reverse this downward trend.



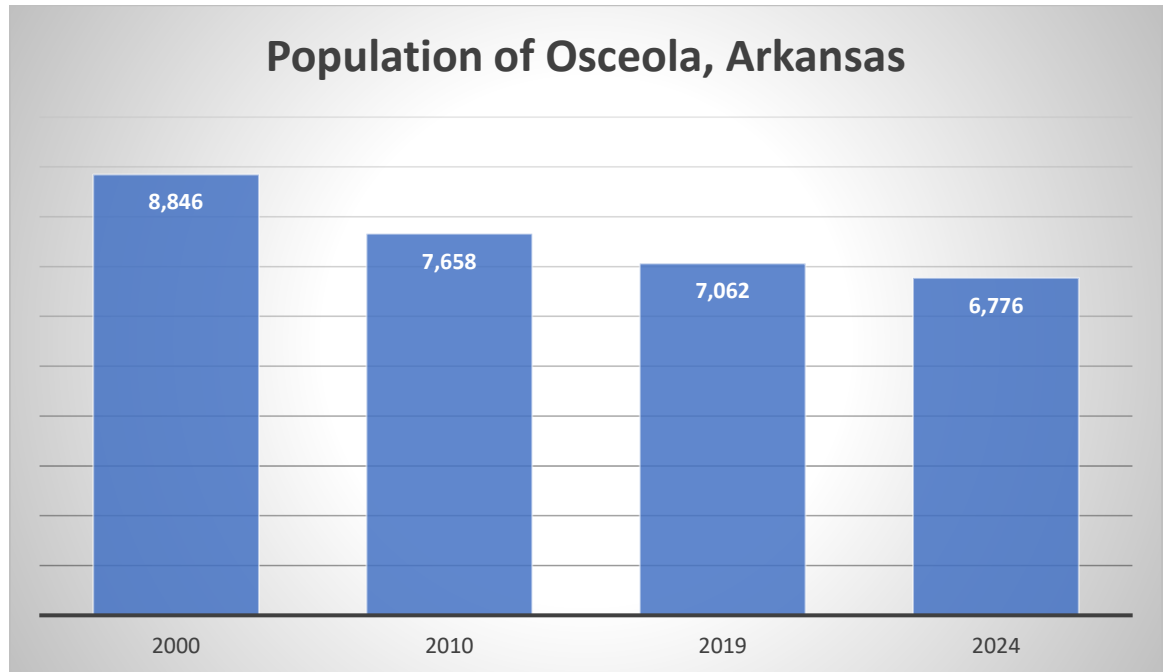


Figure 37: Population of Osceola, Arkansas, 2000, 2010, 2019, and Projected 2024

Source: esri® Market Profile

7. According to annual crime data provided by the City of Osceola Police Department (2020), as well as information gathered from neighborhoodscout.com (2019), AreaVibes.com (2019), and citydata.com (2020), Osceola has one of the highest crime rates in the U.S. compared to all communities of all sizes, with a crime rate of 70 per 1,000 residents, and a chance of 1 in 14 of being a victim of a violent or property crime. While the incidence of such crime in Osceola cannot be predicted for future periods, it is reasonable to expect that as long as socioeconomic factors such as unemployment, single parent households, lower high school graduation rate, and low income levels remain, which are significant contributing factors to crime, the crime rate will continue to be at, or about this level over the plan period and





beyond. This can potentially result in fewer people wanting to live in Osceola, or even to visit Osceola, creating challenges in trying to attract residents and visitors, requiring the leaders of the city to work with all constituencies in an effort to achieve a higher overall quality of life in an effort to make Osceola a more attractive living and destination area.

8. According to the U. S. Census Bureau (2020), the population of Arkansas increased from 2,916,031 in 2010 to an estimated 3,017,804 in 2019 and is projected to increase to 3,232,747 by 2024 (Figure 38). It is expected that the population of Arkansas will continue to increase for the foreseeable future resulting in an increase in consumption of goods and services, including leisure, recreational, cultural, and entertainment goods and services. This will require providers of these to target their marketing and promotion toward Arkansas residents in an effort to attract residents to the venues, activities, and events they provide.



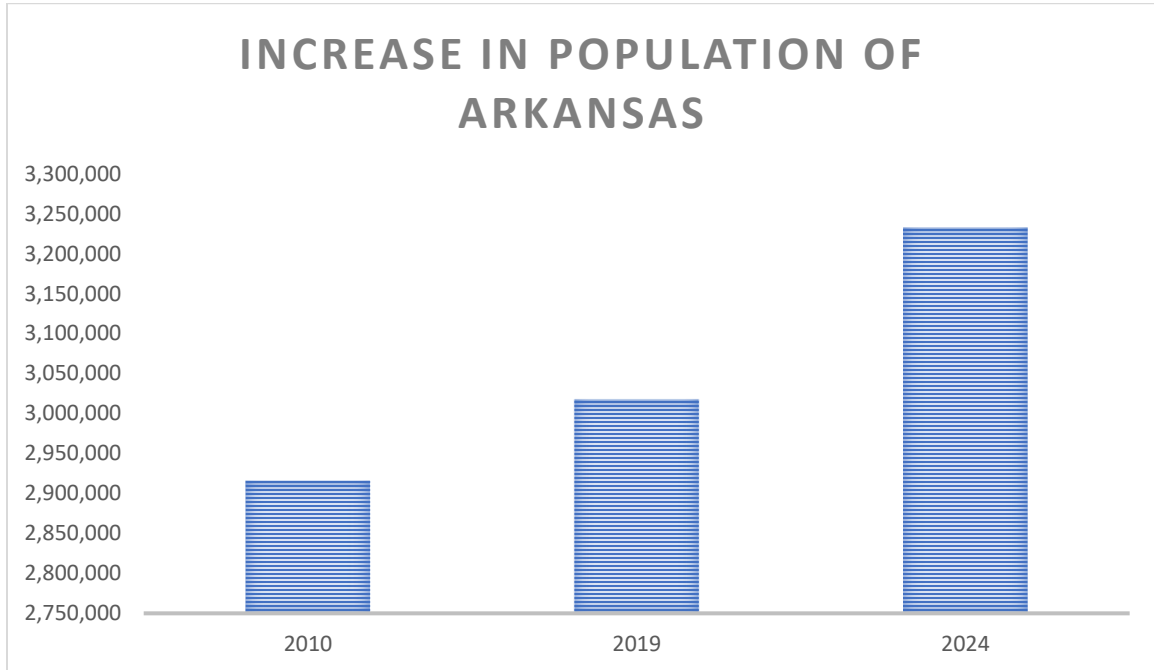


Figure 38: Increase in Population of Arkansas, years 2010, 2019, and Projected 2024

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

9. According to information gathered from a focus group meeting in Osceola (2020), many people who work in Osceola commute from other areas and do not live in Osceola. While it cannot be predicted whether this situation will persist in the future, it is reasonable to expect that, given the socioeconomic factors previously mentioned, many workers will continue to commute, resulting in an erosion of Osceola’s tax base and making it more difficult to change this trend. The leadership of Osceola and various constituencies will find it necessary to address these issues and come up with a long-range plan to create a more wholesome community in an effort to attract not only residents, but also visitors.

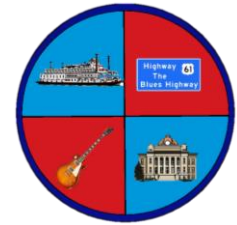


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POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT





Political Environment

Planning assumptions of the Political Environment center around past and current philosophies of different political parties, discussions regarding political action, proposed legislation, and the activities of lobbyists and special interest groups which attempt to influence laws and regulations. These may exist at the local, state, or federal level, as well as in the international arena. When formulating strategies to provide future direction, organizations must understand what is taking place in the Political Environment and use this information to help them understand what impact the anticipated Political Environment may have upon their decisions.

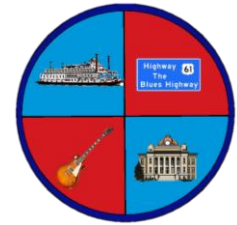
1. According to pestleanalysis.com (2020), the tourism industry is a fragile industry and subject to political influences such as open or closed borders, and general political unrest of an area. While such things as the level of political stability or unrest cannot be predicted, organizations/entities that rely on tourism must monitor the political environment and be prepared to adapt to any changes or occurrences that may impact them positively or negatively.
2. According to the Travel and Tourism Research Association (TTRA) (2020), safety and security are significant factors in individuals' decisions to visit a destination, and the TTRA further states that the safety and security of an area are closely related to the politics of an area in terms of how community leadership addresses the safety and security aspects of their respective communities. It is expected that safety and security issues will remain dominant factors in tourists' destination decisions over the plan period and beyond, requiring leadership of areas desiring to attract tourists to work diligently and incorporate into their plans a program focusing on ensuring their communities provide visitors a sense of safety and security.





3. According to Ruth Hawkins, former Executive Director of A-STATE Heritage Sites, the Boyhood Home of Johnny Cash has attracted visitors from at least 30 different countries (2017). According to travel.state.gov. (2019), President Trump issued Proclamation 9645 on September 24, 2017, restricting the issuance of visas under the provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act banning visitors/immigrants from several countries while making it more difficult for visitors from other countries to obtain visas. This proclamation was upheld by the Supreme Court of the U.S. on June 18, 2018 and many industries, including the tourism industry, have been adversely affected by this proclamation. While it cannot be predicted how long Presidential Proclamation 9645 will remain in effect, or whether President Trump will be re-elected or the apparent Democratic nominee, Joe Biden, will ascend to the Oval Office, all organizations/entities in the tourism industry, as well as those pursuing tourism initiatives, must monitor the situation and be prepared to adjust or adapt accordingly in an effort to deal with any changes which may affect them positively or negatively.
4. According to travel.state.gov (2020), President Trump issued Presidential Proclamation 9983 on January 31, 2020, under the Immigration and Nationality Act banning travel from other countries to the U. S. as well as from the U.S. to other countries in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. While there were a few exceptions included in this travel ban, it effectively eliminated travel for tourism. How long this travel ban will remain in place is difficult to predict, or how long and to what extent the COVID-19 pandemic will affect all organizations cannot be predicted. At the same time, it cannot be predicted whether President Trump will be re-elected or whether Joe Biden will be elected to the Presidency, the latter of which could alter any travel bans as well as reductions in issuance of visas in





general as Democrats favor open borders. Organizations and entities in the tourism business or those pursuing the development of tourism must monitor this situation closely and adjust any areas they can in an effort to offset any negative or positive aspects developing during the plan period.

5. In February 2020, President Trump mandated the closure of non-essential businesses and/or required businesses to ensure their employees were working remotely rather than in the organizations themselves. At the same time, governors of different states have issued state lockdowns, closing public spaces, and requiring isolation and social distancing. According to the Wall Street Journal (State Lockdowns 2020), this will not only disrupt thousands of businesses as well as potential business startups and the lives of millions of people. While states have begun reopening in phases based on guidelines issued by President Trump’s Coronavirus Task Force and his Economic Recovery Task Force, it is not possible to determine how long it will take for a complete reopening of the overall economy, if ever. At the same time there are fears that removing the lockdowns will lead to spreading of the Coronavirus, and that there could be a new wave of it even worse than before. While it cannot be predicted how reopening states and the economy will impact hopes of economic recovery, it is generally agreed by most experts that the “new normal” will be many people continuing to work remotely, that some businesses will never come back and that people in general will alter their modes of behavior, including travel, gathering in public spaces or in venues. This can have a devastating impact on all organizations/entities, including those in tourism or tourism development, requiring them to find ways to address any concerns consumers may have in an effort to survive in what many see as the “new normal.”



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LEGAL/REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT





Legal/Regulatory Environment

The Legal/Regulatory Environment consists of such factors in an organization's external environment as local ordinances, state and federal laws and regulations as well as international trade agreements and industry specific rules. Organizations must understand the laws and regulations that impact them as well as monitor the Legal/Regulatory Environment for any changes on the horizon that may impact them positively or negatively in order to adapt or adjust to remain in compliance, thus aiding organizations in making strategic decisions in their best interests.

1. According to the National Travel and Tourism Office (2010), the U. S. Congress passed the Travel Promotion Act, which was signed by President Obama on March 4, 2010. The Act created Brand USA, a public-private partnership, a national destination marketing organization, made up of many tourism and travel organizations and participated in by several countries, with significant funding from the U. S. Government. According to Travel Weekly (July 23, 2014), the U. S. House of Representatives approved an extension of the Act with new legislation called the Travel Promotion, Enhancement and Modernization Act (H. R. 4450) by a margin of 347 to 57, all the negative votes being cast by Republicans. The bill became law in late 2014, and while it made some technical changes to the original law, Brand USA and the funding source were unchanged and was reauthorized through 2020. Between 2009 and 2016 International travel to the U.S. increased by 40%.

However, according to The Hill (May 23, 2017), President Trump's proposed new budget immediately after taking office included eliminating funding to Brand USA. While funding to this public-private corporation currently still is in place, it cannot predicted whether it will be cut due to the trillions of dollars being spent to





support businesses and employees in light of COVID-19, or whether or not President Trump will be re-elected or Joe Biden will be the next President, the outcome of these issues will have a dramatic impact on all tourism and travel organizations, as well as those in the development stages, requiring them to monitor the situation closely and be prepared to respond to any impacts of either a positive or negative nature.

2. According to taxpolicycenter.org (2020), the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act included, among other things, a decrease in the income tax rate at all levels of taxable income, and increased the standard deduction from \$6,000 to \$12,000 for single tax filers and from \$13,000 to \$24,000 for joint filers of Federal Income Taxes. These tax laws effectively put more money in the hands of consumers for spending, including tourism and travel spending. While it cannot be predicted whether President Trump will be re-elected in 2020 and these tax laws will remain in place, or if Joe Biden will be elected to the Presidency and these tax laws will be changed, organizations in the tourism and travel industry, as well as those pursuing the development of tourism and travel, will find it necessary to stay current with the tax laws over the plan period and beyond in order to be able to address how they can take advantage of existing tax laws or how they may need to adapt to any changes in tax laws.
3. According to nytimes.com (2020), President Trump's Fiscal 2021 Budget proposes a 15.2% decrease in discretionary funding from 2020 and eliminates several block grant programs such as Community Development Block Grants and the Choice Neighborhood Program. While it cannot be predicted if this proposed budget will be approved and implemented during President Trump's Administration, communities will find it necessary to monitor this situation





closely during the plan period and find alternative sources of funds for community development initiatives.

4. According to Mentlaw.com (2020), “sellers of travel laws” are laws that have been enacted by states requiring registration programs and financial and security requirements for organizations selling tourism services in those states. Currently only 5 states have seller of travel requirements—California, Florida, Hawaii, Iowa, and Washington. While it cannot be predicted if, or when, other states will enact sellers of travel laws, any organization or entity engaged in the selling of tourism to residents of states must ensure compliance with the laws currently in place, as well as stay up to date on potential regulations and requirements in other states in order to remain in compliance and avoid fines and other penalties.
5. Some cities have strict building requirements to ensure a consistent and uniform look for all buildings and public spaces which not only promote a hometown spirit, but also create an appeal to visitors. One such community is Madison, Mississippi, a community of approximately 27,000 people in a suburb of Jackson, Mississippi. Madison City Officials enacted a long-term vision to ensure that certain planning and zoning ordinances were followed in order for any building permit to be approved. Such factors as exterior lighting, landscaping, signage, building facades and other ordinances must be adhered to, all of which have resulted in an attractive community that residents take pride in and people want to visit, and Madison is one of the safest communities in Mississippi. Communities may find it important to develop ordinances similar to those of Madison over the plan period and beyond in an effort to attract both residents and visitors.



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TECHNOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT





Technological Environment

The Technological Environment consists of such factors in the external environment as computer hardware and software, social media, mobile smart devices, mobile apps, and the Internet of Things. Changes occur rapidly in the Technological Environment, making it that much more important for all organizations to be aware of the trends and possible future directions for this environment and analyze them relative to their impact on the organizations to aid in identifying strategic decisions for the best interests of them going forward.

1. According to Statista (2019), the number of Internet users in the U. S. increased from 264.6 in 2017 to 293.9 million in 2020 and is projected to increase to 317.1 million by 2023 (Figure 39). It is expected that the number of Internet users in the U. S. will continue to increase for the foreseeable future, requiring all organizations, including those pursuing tourism development, to develop and maintain a strong, effective Internet presence in an effort to connect with and promote to target markets and generate tourists visits.



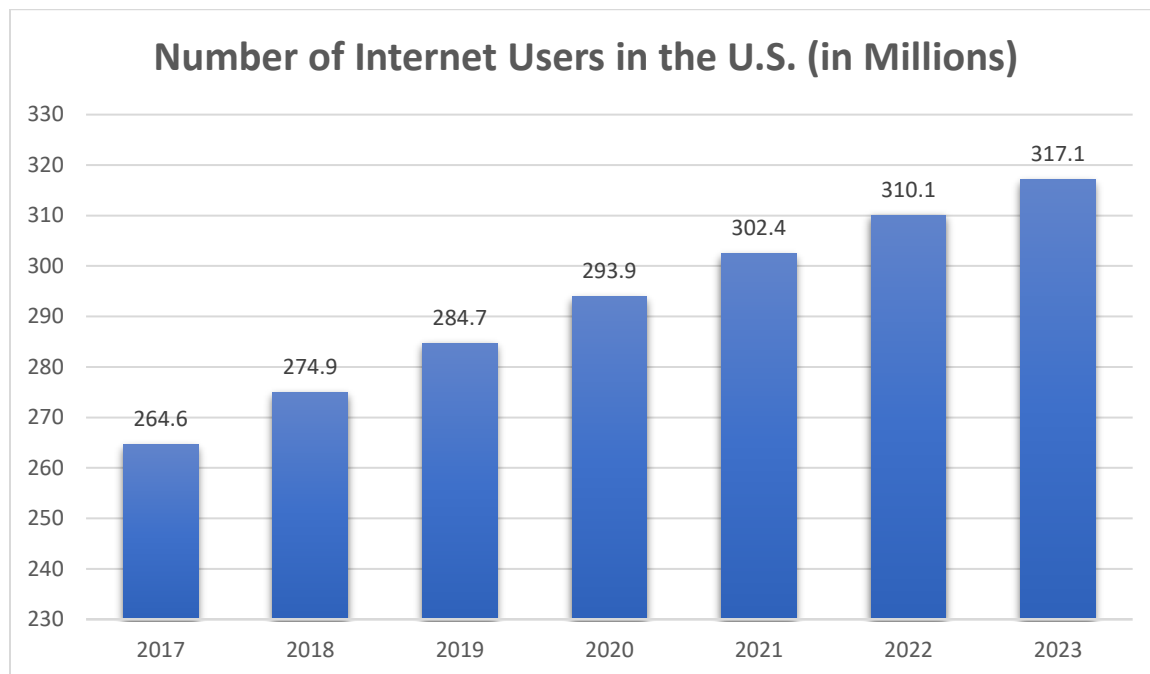
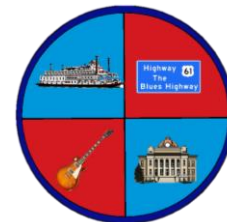


Figure 39: Number of Internet Users in the United States (in millions) 2017-2023
(Projected)

Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/276445/number-of-internet-users-in-the-united-states/>

2. According to Statista (2020), the number of smartphone users in the U. S. increased from 62.6 million in 2010 to 272.6 million in 2020 and is projected to increase to 285.3 million in 2023 (Figure 40). It is expected that the number of smartphone users in the U. S. will continue to increase over the plan period and beyond, due to an increase in the number of people switching from traditional computing equipment to mobile technology and applications, requiring all



organizations and entities to develop mobile-centric apps and mobile optimized websites to connect with tech-savvy consumers.

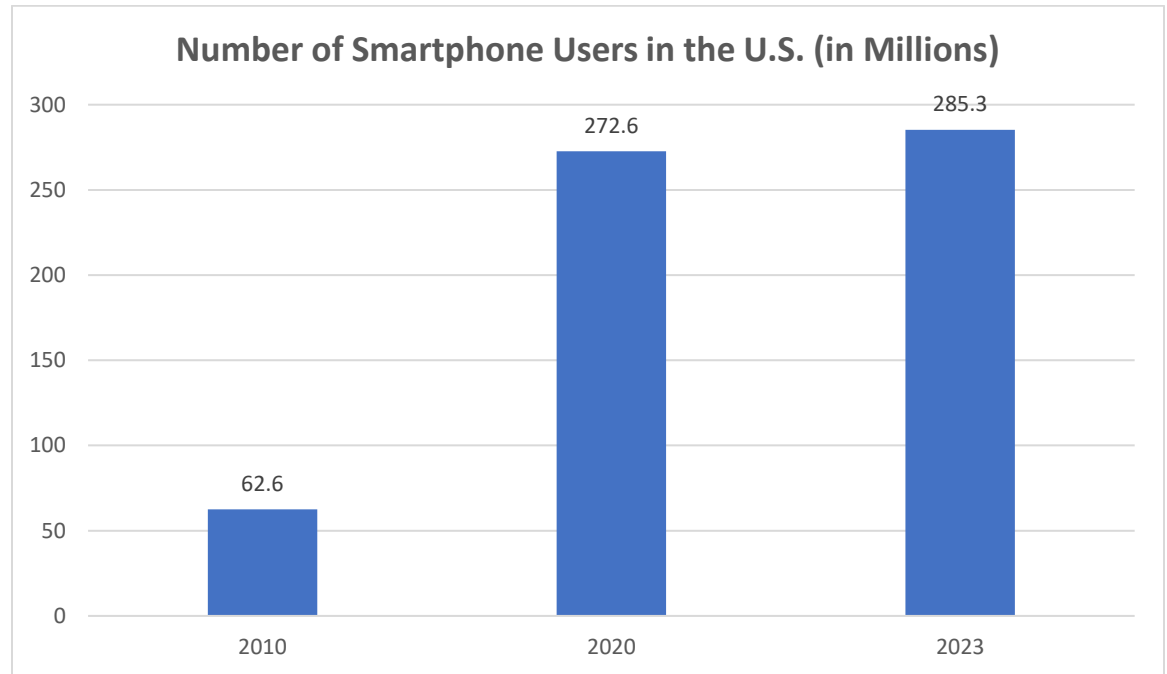


Figure 40: Number of Smartphone Users in the U.S. in Millions, 2010, 2020, and 2023 Projected

Source: Statista

3. According to Statista (2019), the number of social media users in the U.S. increased from 240 million in 2017 to 246 million in 2019 and is projected to increase to 257.4 million in 2023 (Figure 41). It is expected that the number of social media users in the U.S. will continue to increase for the foreseeable future making it essential that all organizations and entities create and maintain active social media platforms in an effort to market and promote to tech-savvy consumers.



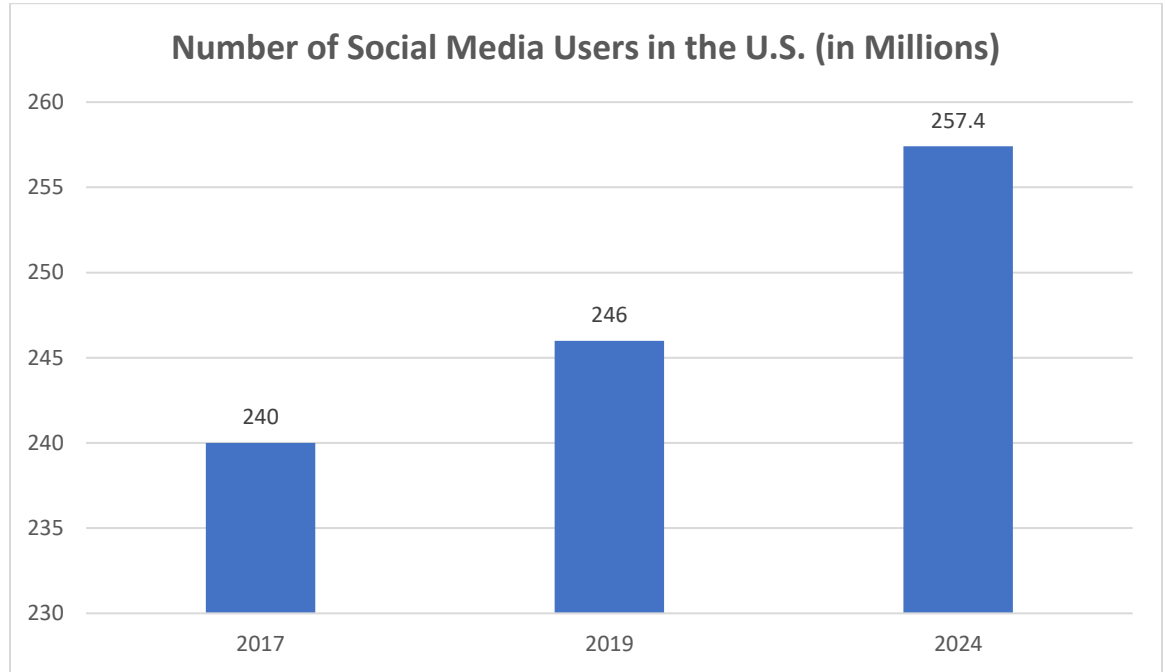


Figure 41: Number of Social Media Users in the U.S. in Millions, 2017, 2019, and Projected 2024
Source: Statista

4. According Statista (2020), The U.S. daily average engagement in social media increased from 1 hour and 44 minutes in 2014 to 2 hours and 24 minutes in 2019 (Figure 42). Out of the 12 most popular social media platforms Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Pinterest account for nearly 70% of active social media users. While popularity may shift among the current social media platforms, social media usage is projected to continue to increase for the foreseeable future, requiring organizations and entities to make effective use of multiple popular social media platforms to market and promote, and engage with consumers and potential consumers in an effort to increase both consumers and revenue.



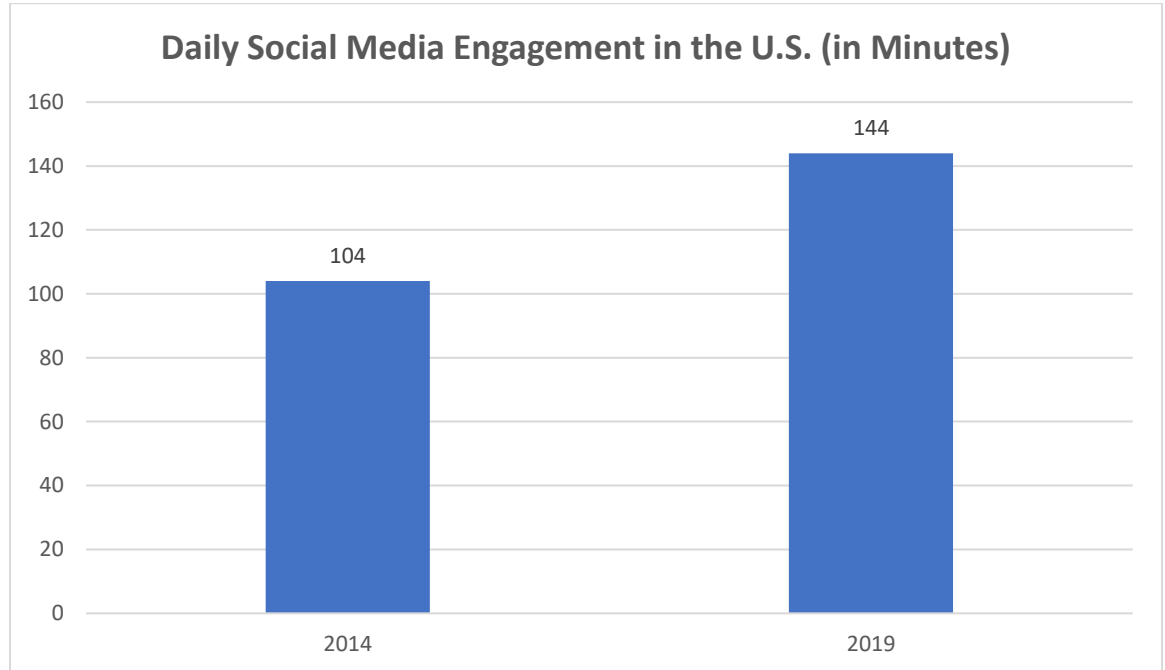


Figure 42: Daily Social Media Engagement in the U.S. (in Minutes), 2014 and 2019

Source: Statista

5. According to Statista (2019), the number of smartphone application downloads was 178.1 billion in 2017 to 205.4 billion in 2018 and is projected to increase to 258.2 billion in 2022 (Figure 43). It is expected that the number of smartphone application downloads will continue to increase for the foreseeable future largely due to increasing use of smartphones, and will require organizations and entities to develop and effectively utilize mobile apps to connect with mobile-centric seekers of all products and services including tourism.



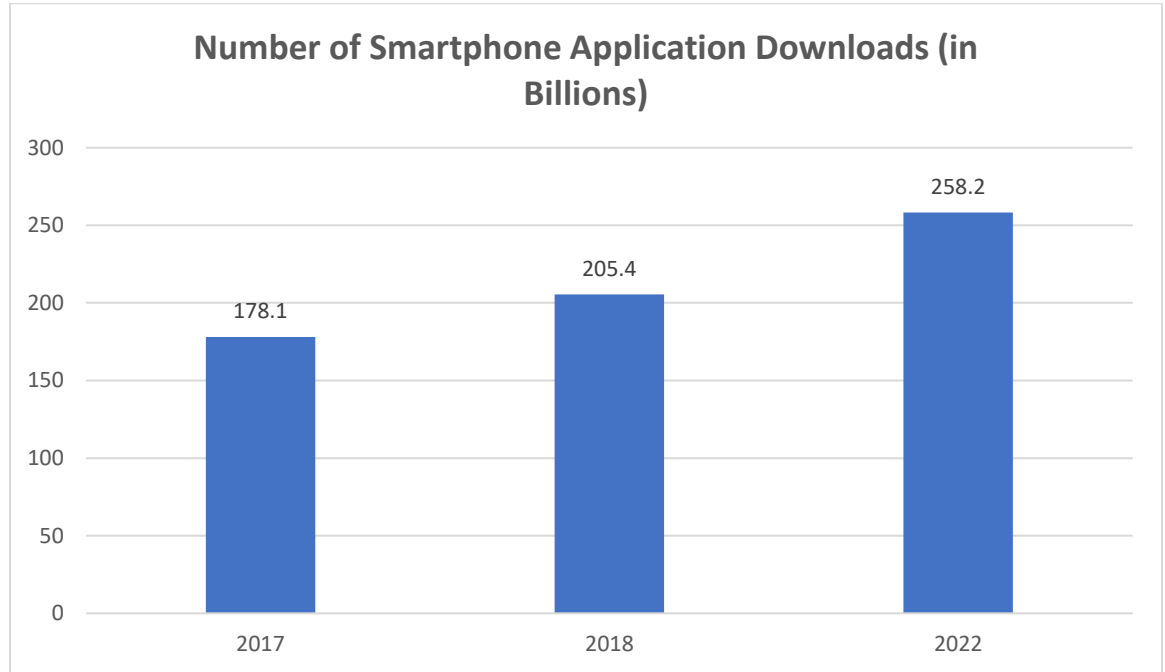


Figure 43: Number of Smartphone Application Downloads in Billions, 2017, 2018 and Projected 2022

Source: Statista

6. According to Fanseca of Stellaxius (2019), Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software allows organizations to improve efficiency, manage customer data, forecast and analyze statistics and performance metrics. CRM software revenue was \$27.2 billion in 2017 and is projected to increase to \$82.0 billion by 2025 (Figure 44), indicating increasing adoption of this technology across all organizations. It is expected that CRM will continue to increase in popularity as an increasing number of organizations realize the benefits they can gain from its adoption.



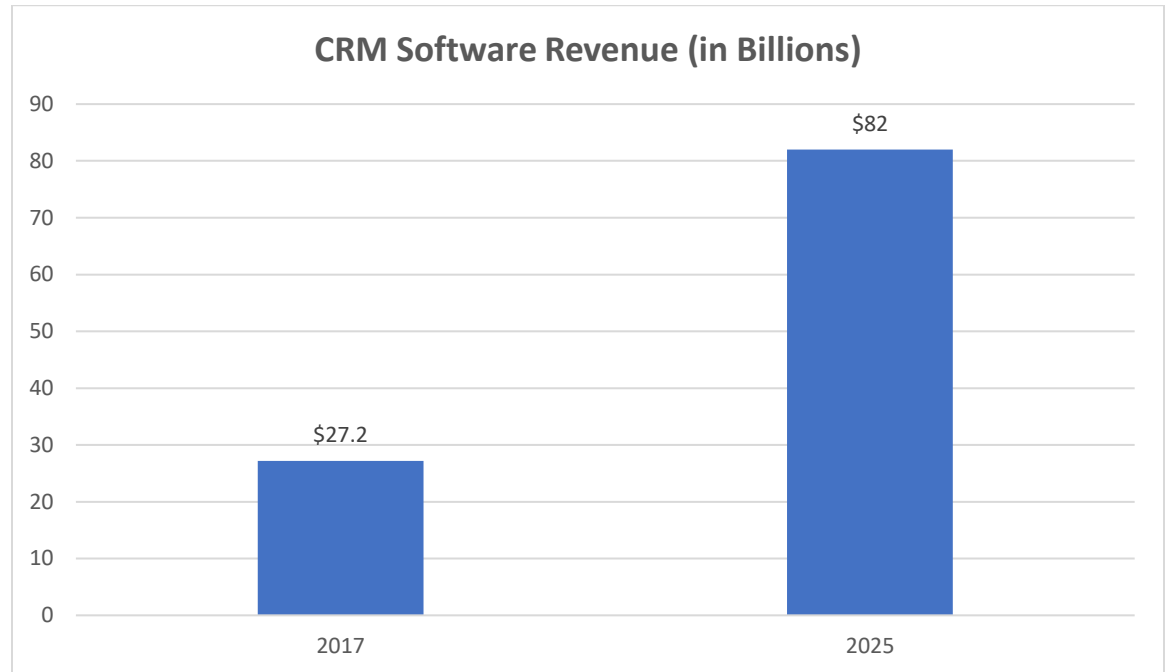
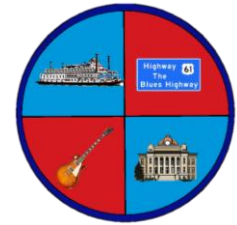


Figure 44: CRM Software Revenue, 2017 and Projected 2025

Source: Stellaxius

7. According to Meridian Kiosks (2020), interactive kiosks are self-service solutions that provide audiences with engaging digital content and information through a user-friendly interface. According to LamasaTech (2020), organizations, including museums, from very large to very small, are increasingly turning toward kiosk technology, leading to increasing numbers of visitors across a wide age spectrum, capturing the interest of older generations who may be overwhelmed by traditional written information to younger generations who have grown up with digital information sources. It is expected that interactive kiosks will be increasingly used across a wide range of organizations, including museums and other tourist venues, requiring providers of these to adopt

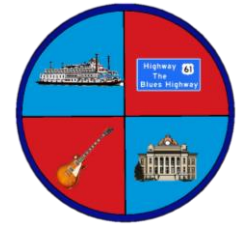




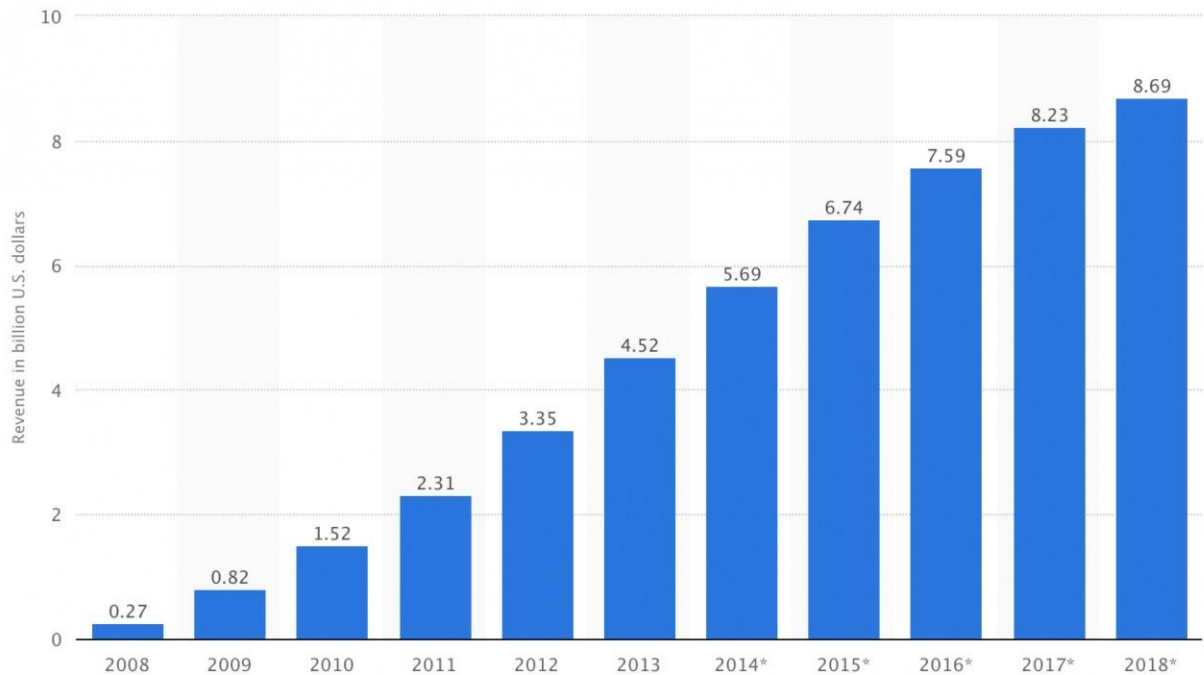
interactive and engaging kiosks in an effort to attract visitors and create more informative, interesting and satisfying experiences, leading to increased revenue.

8. According to Electric News (2019), revenues from e-book sales in the U.S. have dramatically increased annually, primarily due to a higher supply and demand of e-book devices and applications. In 2008, total e-book sales revenue amounted to 274 million U.S. dollars. In 2013, revenue was expected to increase by approximately 17 times compared to 2008 and should amount to approximately 4.52 billion U.S. dollars. Based on current trends, it is estimated that revenue from e-book sales in the U.S. will rise to approximately 8.69 billion U.S. dollars in 2017 (Figure 45). Thus, it is expected that the popularity of e-books will continue to increase over the plan period and beyond and will require organizations that sell books, including museum gift shops, to offer books in this format to gain customers and increase sales.





Revenue from e-book Sales in the U.S. from 2008 to 2018 (in billion U.S. dollars)



© Statista 2015

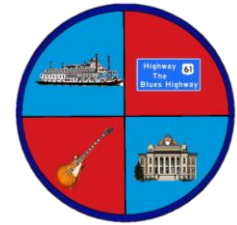
Figure 45: Revenue from e-book Sales in the U.S. from 2008-2018

Source: <https://electricnews.fr/us-e-books-statistics/>

8. According to Alexandra Twin (Investopedia, 2019), data mining is a process used by organizations to turn raw data into useful information. By using data analytics software to look for patterns in large batches of data, organizations can learn more about their customers and their consumption patterns to develop more effective marketing strategies, increase revenue, and decrease costs. The use of data mining has grown exponentially over the past 5 years across all industry segments, including organizations and entities in the tourism segment where data mining to



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conduct detailed analysis to have a better understanding of visitors' profiles and offer special personal promotions to visitors or arrange seasonal promotions, increase service quality, meet their needs and improve overall satisfaction and relationships (academia.edu, 2019). It is expected that data mining will become increasingly used by providers of tourism for the foreseeable future, making it important that those organizations/entities wanting to attract tourists adopt data mining techniques in an effort to help them increase visitors and revenue.

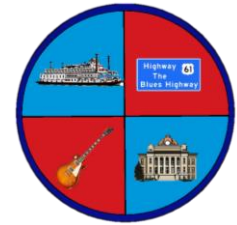


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COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT





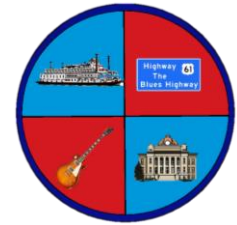
Competitive Environment

The Competitive Environment is made up of all direct and indirect competitors in a specific industry or market segment, including products and services and the availability of substitutes for them, as well as entry/exit barriers for the industry or market.

Organizations must be aware of existing and potential competitors in order to develop strategies to help them gain a competitive advantage and sustain it over future periods.

1. Former Harvard Professor Michael Porter started a revolution in the strategy field with the development of his now widely used Five Forces Model of Competitive Position which he wrote about in the Harvard Business Review (Porter, 1979). Porter's model is based on the concept that Rivalry Among Existing Competitors, Threat of New Entrants, Bargaining Power of Buyers, Bargaining Power of Suppliers, and Threat of Substitute Products (Figure 46), help identify where power lies in a business situation and is useful both in understanding the strength of an organization's current competitive position, and the strength of a position that an organization may look to move into. Porter's model is applicable to every market segment or industry, including the tourism market.





PORTER'S FIVE FORCES MODEL

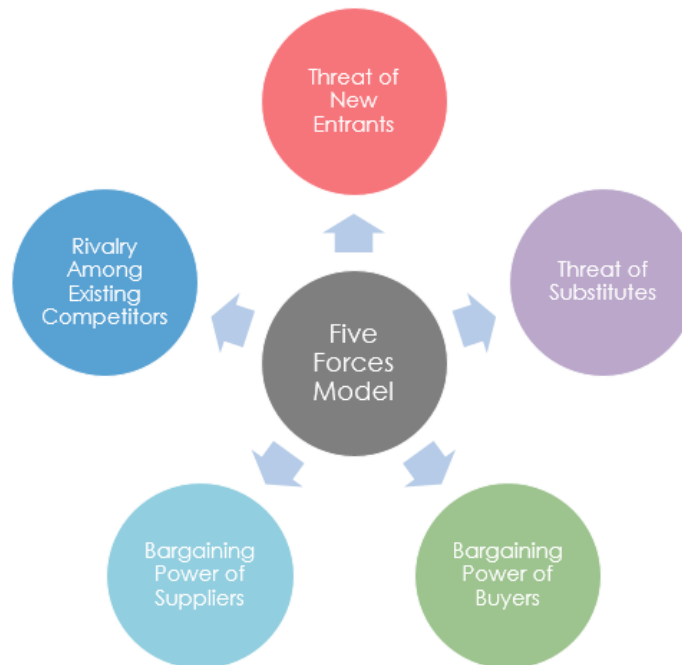


Figure 46: Porter's Five Forces Model

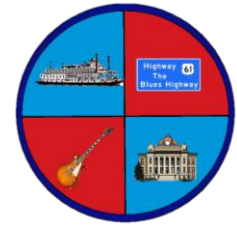
Source: <https://www.visual-paradigm.com/tutorials/five-forces-analysis-tutorial/>

- Threat of New Entrants—this pertains to how high barriers are to enter into the market and are usually dictated by large providers that are firmly established and enjoy economies of scale that allow them to “bully” potential newcomers through strength in reputation, pricing and/or large budgets for marketing and promotion. New entrants may find it difficult to compete, especially if they are smaller scale providers.



- Threat of Substitute Products—this pertains to the ease with which customers can replace products or services with other products or services and is usually determined by switching costs (how much it costs the customer to switch from products/services to other products/services), and the relative quality or ability of substitute products/services to provide a desired level of satisfaction and the relative price of substitute products/services.
- Rivalry Among Existing Competitors—this refers to the level of competition existing among existing providers of goods/services and is determined by the size and number of existing competitors. The more providers there are and the larger they are the more intense the competition is, and potentially the more difficult it is to gain market share or find a niche in the market in which to gain customers and gain market share and revenue.
- Bargaining Power of Buyers—this refers to the power consumers of good/services have in the buying process. Relative to tourism products and services, the consumer has extremely high buying power since there are many available substitute products/services similar in nature from which to choose, and there are very little or no switching costs to make substitute selections. Moreover, due to the Internet and social media, the buyer has adequate knowledge of the market and, as has been previously noted, the market is very fragile and susceptible to disruptions in the economy, the political environment, and safety and security issues.
- Bargaining Power of Suppliers—this refers to the power of suppliers of goods/services to influence buyers. Suppliers of tourism products/services have very low bargaining power due to the high number of suppliers resulting in a fragmented supply. However, large suppliers may capitalize on their





brand reputation to influence buyers.

Based on Porter's model, it can be surmised that the tourism industry is very fragmented, there are many substitutes available to buyers, suppliers of tourism have very little power (except large suppliers), while buyers of tourism have high buying power, and the intensity of rivalry among suppliers is very high, resulting in high barriers to enter the market and gain market share and revenue. It is expected that this situation will persist for the foreseeable future, requiring an organization or entity pursuing entrance into the tourism market to provide high quality products and services focusing on unique or focused customer experiences, and differentiate themselves with lower costs, as well as market and promote aggressively in an effort to compete for buyers and revenue.

2. While there is no immediate way to determine the number of tourist sites, venues, activities or events, suffice it to say that when it comes to consumers making decisions on spending their money on tourism, travel, recreation and entertainment, they have thousands from which to choose. This results in a highly fragmented and intensely competitive market which requires providers of these to offer high quality and satisfying experiences over the plan period and beyond, market and promote aggressively, and engage with consumers on a frequent basis in an effort to attract consumers and compete for revenue.
3. There are numerous tourism and heritage sites and entertainment venues in relatively close proximity to Osceola and Helena, Arkansas, as well as in Memphis and in Greenwood and Indianola, Mississippi, resulting in a relatively high level of competition for tourism. This will require both existing suppliers of tourism products/services across a broad range, as well as organizations/entities

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wishing to further develop tourism products and services to not only create high quality venues, activities and events, but also ensure safety and security of visitors along with appealing infrastructure, and market and promote aggressively in an effort to attract visitors and compete in this fragmented and intensely competitive market.



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STRATEGIC ISSUES





Strategic Issues

Strategic Issues, also referred to as Critical Success Factors, are issues which have been identified through an analysis of both the internal and external environments of an organization or entity and which it must address in order to achieve success. The major Strategic Issues facing the City of Osceola in becoming a sustainable tourist destination for its blues heritage and other historical sites are:

4. Marketing and Promotion
5. Website and Social Media
6. Shared Vision
7. Infrastructure
8. Funding
9. Tourist Attractions
10. Volunteer Program



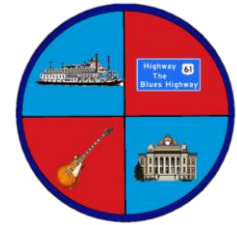


Marketing and Promotion

Marketing is defined as an activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large (AMA, 2017). Promotion is defined as the media and non-media marketing pressure applied for a predetermined, limited period to stimulate trial of products and services, increase consumer demand, or improve product and service availability (AMA, n.d.). Effective marketing and promotion are both vital to the success of every organization or entity. Those with effective marketing and promotion programs can set themselves apart from their competitors and create high brand awareness, retain existing customers and attract new ones, and compete more effectively for both customers and revenue. Those which lack effective marketing and promotion programs may find it difficult to communicate the value of their products and services, create a positive image and gain and sustain customers and market share.

Currently, Osceola lacks an effective marketing and promotion program. While it does have some promotional materials, these seem to be mostly distributed at the Blytheville Welcome Center and other welcome centers or may be picked up at the Chamber of Commerce. However, Osceola lacks branding and appears not to be aggressively marketing and promoting in other markets and through other channels, limiting its ability to attract visitors and generate revenue. In order to address these issues, Osceola must develop and implement a comprehensive, integrated marketing and promotion program.



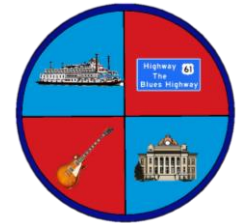


Website and Social Media

According to dictionary.com (n.d.), a Website is defined as an online space or platform that is established on the World Wide Web, while social media are applications that allow people to create and share content or to make virtual connections. Both websites and social media are critical to the success of every organization and entity in today's digital environment. Those that have an attractive, well organized, easily navigable and up-to-date website, as well as multiple popular social media which are posted to frequently are more likely to attract customers, while those that are lacking such a website and social media may have difficulties in promoting themselves, creating brand visibility or developing positive impressions on viewers.

Currently, Osceola has a website, but it appears to be poorly designed, not well maintained, not easily navigable, has many errors, and is lacking information that would be important to potential visitors. Also, Osceola is not using social media effectively, having limited social media accounts which are not updated frequently. In order to attract more visitors to its website and social media, as well as effectively utilize these as marketing tools to create brand identity and attract visitors, Osceola must develop an attractive, informative and easy to navigate website, create attractive and informative social media content on multiple platforms, and ensure all its online content is accurate and up-to-date on a consistent basis.





Shared Vision

According to author Peter Senge (1990), a shared vision is what you and the other members want to create or accomplish as part of the organization. A shared vision is not imposed by one or a few people as an organizational mandate, but is derived from the members of the organization, creating common interests and a sense of shared purpose for all organizational activities. Thus, a shared vision is necessary for an organization or any entity as a first step in establishing what it wants to accomplish. This is just as important for a community as it is for any other type of organization or entity—for-profits and nonprofits alike. Any of these in which its members have a common goal or goals are more likely to succeed in the accomplishment of their goal or goals, while organizations that lack a shared vision among its leaders and members may fail to not only have a common goal or goals, but may fail to achieve success in any of their initiatives.

Currently, there appears to be a lack of shared vision among the leadership of Osceola and all constituencies and stakeholders throughout the community. While there is a core of community leaders who seem to share a common vision for the economic health and well-being of the city and its residents, it seems there is widespread apathy among others relative to embracing change and/or interest in the affairs of the community. In addition, it seems there is a great deal of distrust of leadership among some residents, as well as a significant amount of negativity and pessimism about Osceola's current socioeconomic status and that little can be done to change it. These issues can prevent Osceola from pursuing its development of blues heritage and other sites, making it difficult, if not impossible to become the tourist destination leadership desires it to be, requiring it to create a shared vision among all stakeholders in an effort to do so.



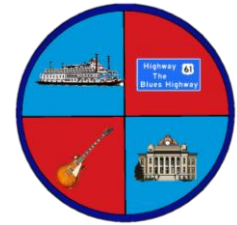


Infrastructure

Infrastructure is the basic physical and organizational structures and facilities needed for the operation of a society or enterprise (Investopedia) such as roads, streets, lighting, public spaces and other physical assets and may be funded publicly, privately, or through public-private partnerships. All organizations, especially perhaps in the case of communities, must have the infrastructure needed not only to support the basic needs of the community, but also to support growth and development, including economic growth and the overall enhancement of quality of life of residents as conditions change over time. Communities which have such infrastructure in place not only enhance the wellbeing of their residents, but can also position themselves as attractive, appealing communities in which to live and visit, and, thus, may grow and develop economically and socially. Communities lacking such infrastructure may stagnate, and even deteriorate, limiting their ability to not only retain residents, but also to attract residents and visitors.

Currently Osceola suffers from several infrastructure issues that may be contributing to a sense of apathy and negativity previously mentioned, as well as perhaps its high crime rate. Examples of this issue include several roads and streets in need of resurfacing or repaving, streets without adequate lighting, as well as outdated lighting fixtures, unsightly vacant properties, abandoned and deteriorating buildings, and neighborhoods with run down, deteriorating and unkept dwellings. It is imperative that Osceola develops and implements a long-range comprehensive infrastructure improvement plan in order to create an overall nicer community for its residents as well as to attract residents and visitors.



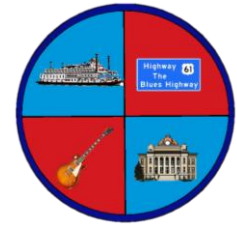


Funding

According to BusinessDictionary.com (2020), Funding is defined as providing financial resources to finance a specific need, program, or project. While businesses rely on revenue from sales of products and services, nonprofits typically rely heavily on funding from grants from different sources to support programs and projects. Nonprofits which are successful in attracting funds to augment or supplement their other sources of funds, such as taxes in the case of municipal governments, may be able to carry out special projects outside the services they provide to the community. Those organizations which fail to acquire the needed funding for special projects and programs may not be able to achieve their goals of making these projects and programs a reality.

The City of Osceola lacks the financial resources needed to realize its goal of developing its heritage sites and other tourist attractions and events. In order to position itself as a tourist destination, Osceola must develop and implement a long-term funding program.





Tourist Attractions

A tourist attraction is a place of interest where tourists visit, typically for its inherent or an exhibited natural or cultural value, historical significance, natural or built beauty, offering leisure, entertainment, educational and/or cultural enrichment, and relaxation (Investopedia). The main purpose of tourist attractions is to grab customers' attention, so they come to a certain place and explore, attend, or participate in an area's different attractions, festivals and events, thus creating positive economic impact for the area. Tourists' expectations for their chosen destinations are related to culture, architecture, food, infrastructure, landscape, events, shopping, friendly, welcoming and helpful staff, and safety and security, all of which can contribute to satisfying experiences. Tourist attractions/destinations which meet or exceed these expectations are likely to be successful in attracting large numbers of visitors, potentially creating significant economic and social benefits to the area. Tourist attractions which do not meet or exceed tourists' expectations are likely to receive negative word-of-mouth publicity, making it difficult to attract new visitors as well as repeat visitors, and failing to support the growth and development of the area.

Currently, Osceola hosts some music festivals that attract some visitors, and it offers an opportunity for visitors to "dip their toes" in the Mississippi River, and its courthouse is an architecturally beautiful building listed on the National Historic Register. There is also a museum of local history. However, these, alone are not enough for Osceola to attract large numbers of tourists. The museum, while interesting, is too small to accommodate many people at one time, artifacts are not well displayed and descriptions of them are difficult to read or are non-existent, and it has no paid staff and hours of operation are variable. In addition, the old Rebel Club is in disrepair, as is the Albert King home and the historic radio station. Furthermore, all of these are in areas that may not be



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appealing to visitors. In order to position itself as a tourist destination, it is imperative that Osceola develops and implements a plan to make these heritage sites attractive and appealing in an effort to attract tourists and generate revenue.



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Volunteer Program

According to Dictionary.com (2020), a volunteer is a person who voluntarily offers himself/herself for a service or undertaking. Volunteers are vital to nonprofits as they help carry out daily operations, helping nonprofits accomplish tasks or carry out projects at little cost to the organization, thus helping the organization apply its financial resources to other areas of need. Nonprofits, including municipal governments, which have a pool of dedicated volunteers on an on-going basis are in a better position to carry out their special programs and projects, while those which fail to sustain an adequate number of volunteers may not succeed in accomplishing these programs and projects.

Currently, it seems that Osceola lacks an effective volunteer recruitment program which hinders its ability to carry out aspects of various programs which can assist in tourism development. In order to address this issue, Osceola must develop and implement an effective volunteer recruitment and recognition program.



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OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

Shared Vision

Marketing and Promotion

Website and Social Media

Infrastructure

Funding

Tourist Attractions

Volunteer Program

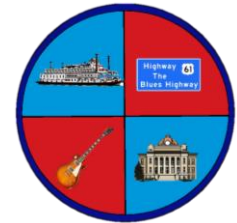


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MARKETING AND PROMOTION





Marketing and Promotion

Objective: The City of Osceola will develop and implement a comprehensive, integrated marketing and promotion program to create high brand awareness and market and promote its tourism in an effort to attract visitors and generate revenue.

Begin: August 2020

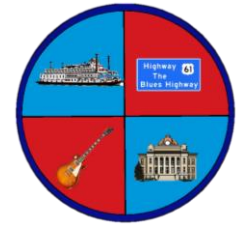
Complete By: March 2021 and ongoing

Responsibility of: Mayor Sally Wilson
City Council
Marketing Director or Task Force

Strategies:

1. Osceola will develop a marketing budget to support the level of marketing and promotion needed to create brand awareness, and make Osceola stand out as a destination, thus increasing the number of visitors to the area.
2. Mayor Wilson and the City Council will hire a marketing director, or develop a marketing committee which could be comprised of members of city government, the Executive Director of the Osceola Chamber of Commerce, members of various segments of the business community, representatives from Northeast Arkansas Community College, possibly a faculty member in Marketing in Neil Griffin College of Business, and other key leaders of the community whom Mayor Wilson may appoint. This committee would meet at frequent intervals initially, but the number of meetings could be reduced after a period of time, and it will periodically report its





progress to the City Council. It is suggested the committee be given a name such as the Osceola Destination Marketing Organization (ODMO) or some similar catchy name that members could be proud to be associated with and which may develop cohesion among the group.

3. As branding is vitally important in attracting tourists, the ODSO will rebrand Osceola with a new logo and tag line that will capture the essence of Osceola's heritage which can help create greater identity and awareness, differentiating Osceola from other destinations. A proposed logo and tag line is presented below and is used throughout the plan (see Figure 47).
4. The City of Osceola will replace its existing signs on I-55 both on the Northbound and Southbound sides of the interstate with attractive signs that feature its name, logo and tag line with a welcome. Welcome to Osceola should appear at the top, and the logo and tag line should be under this message (Figure 47). The sign should be durable and attractive to withstand the weather with very little maintenance while being upscale looking, creating a positive image of the city to passersby. This sign should also have lighting for attracting the attention of night travelers.



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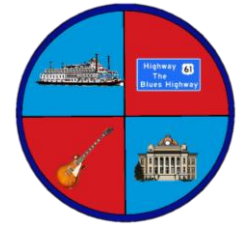
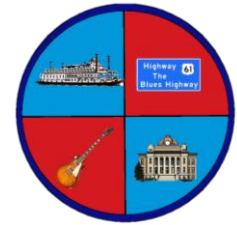


Figure 47: Welcome to Osceola Example Sign

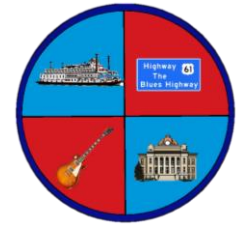
Source: Brandon Roe, Graphics

5. Osceola will replace existing street signs with more modern and aesthetically pleasing signs, as well as install directional signs in the city to make it convenient for visitors to find its historic sites.
6. Once its heritage sites are developed and ready for tourists, Osceola will implement an outdoor advertising campaign (referred to as out-of-home or OOH advertising) with multiple messages featuring the different attractions and place these strategically on I-55 for both Northbound and Southbound travelers. According to Curbed.com (February 2019), there has been a resurgence of the use of outdoor billboards for marketing across all demographics, including Millennials. Most people in the 54 and up age range like reading billboards when they travel, and Millennials like them as they do not have to worry about ad blocking on digital media. Even



Netflix has launched a \$150 million outdoor campaign. According to effortlessoutdoormedia.com (2019), 71% of billboard viewers say they remember the ads they see, 31% visit an establishment the first week they viewed a billboard, and 24% report they visited an establishment the same day they saw its billboard. It must be kept in mind that to be most effective billboards must be strategically placed, have bright, but pleasing colors, and the messages must be concise. Augmentation with visual images is also effective, and billboards must be well maintained.

7. At the appropriate time, members of the Marketing Director, or Chair of the ODMO, and the Executive Director of the Osceola Chamber of Commerce will attend at least one trade show for travel and tourism to begin pitching Osceola as a tourist destination to travel and tourism organizers. According to Tradefest.io (2019), the IMEX America is the leading travel and tourism trade show in the U.S. It takes place in Las Vegas and has as many as 3,500 exhibitors and is attended by about 6,500 people in addition to those exhibiting. It might be feasible to contact Amy Taylor at the Johnny Cash Boyhood Home to see about a joint exhibit. A nice exhibit featuring heritage sites and other attractions should be developed as a means of marketing the area.
8. The City of Osceola will develop collateral marketing items such a caps, t-shirts, stainless water bottles, thermal travel cups, standard coffee cups, refrigerator magnets, stress relievers (perhaps in the shape of a guitar) and other items which might be effective in promoting the heritage sites. These can be distributed to those who visit the exhibit at trade shows and fairs. Specialty advertising firms can assist in the development of items.
9. It is suggested that at any trade show or fair that Osceola exhibits in, a “fishbowl” drawing be held. A fishbowl, or some container will be placed at the exhibit where



visitors to the booth will place their business card or fill out a slip of paper with their name and contact information with a drawing held toward the end of the event, giving away a nice gift as an incentive to attract visitors. Typical gifts for such drawings are iPads, cell phones, or some similar item. The registrations for the drawing can provide a list of contacts for the Marketing Director or other representative to follow up with which may help attract tourists/tour groups.

10. Osceola's collateral marketing items will be placed in the Chamber of Commerce Office for sale which can help promote Osceola's heritage sites and may provide a small amount of revenue to cover the cost at least of developing these items.
11. There are two nonprofit public radio stations in Jonesboro—KASU on the campus of A-STATE and KLEK in town. Each of these stations is always looking for guests to be on their talk programs, Arkansas Roots for KASU, and Community Connections for KLEK. It is suggested that the Marketing Director or Chair of the ODMO, make arrangements to be a guest on these two shows at periodic intervals when the time is appropriate. These programs provide free advertising for Osceola and may serve to help attract visitors from the local area.
12. The Marketing Director, or the ODMO, will conduct a thorough review of all of the current marketing literature and evaluate it in terms of its design and content and develop fresh literature that might be more appealing to broader segments of the market. It is suggested that contact be made with both the Neil Griffin College of Business and the College of Communication to see about students in Marketing classes and students in Creative Design classes taking this on as class projects.
13. The City of Osceola will ensure that updated off-line marketing materials are made available at the Chamber of Commerce Office, Welcome Centers throughout the state, at racks in hotels in Osceola, Blytheville, Wilson, Jonesboro and other areas in

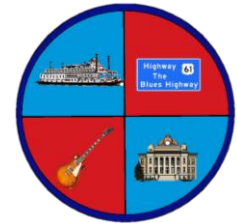




close proximity, as well as possibly racks at local restaurants. This can help create greater awareness of what Osceola has to offer and can help attract visitors.

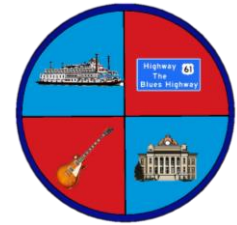
14. The Marketing Director, or the ODMO, will contact Amy Taylor about collaborating on jointly marketing and promoting Osceola's heritage sites and the Johnny Cash Boyhood Home, the Southern Tenant Farmers Museum, and Lakeport Plantation, offering special packaging and prices for tours of all these areas combined or in some various combinations at different special prices in an effort to attract more tourists for all with multi-site visitation in the area.
15. In addition to the above, Osceola will create and advertise bundling of packages and prices between heritage sites, festivals, hotels, and other cultural tourism experiences in an effort to attract more tourists at different seasons with special promotions.
16. Osceola will see that it has ads in publications such as the AAA Traveler magazine, either as a stand-alone, or in conjunction with a bigger ad placed by Arkansas to appeal to this segment of the population. The ad might include a coupon for discount off ticket prices as an incentive to purchase. Additionally, Osceola's festivals and events should be included in the section of the publication announcing such items and their dates by state.
17. Osceola will develop a QR code on all printed materials and business cards so people can easily access its website with smartphones to easily obtain information about cultural heritage attractions and events in Osceola.
18. The City of Osceola will develop a bumper sticker imprinted with its name, logo, and tag line. This should be a white sticker with color imprint, and it should be distributed at the Chamber of Commerce Office, City Hall and at tourist sites when they are open. These bumper stickers not only help advertise Osceola, helping create brand awareness, but also can help instill a sense of pride in the community.





19. Whomever is in charge of marketing and promotion, and parties responsible for scheduling of events, must coordinate with each other and communicate with other communities which host major festivals and events, such as, but not limited to, the Johnny Cash Music Festival in Dyess, well in advance of posting their schedules to ensure there are no conflicts of dates in an effort to assure maximum attendance.
20. The chair of the ODMO will connect with any local talent as well as with students at Northeast Arkansas Community College and A-STATE in an effort to get murals depicting Osceola's blues heritage painted on the sides of buildings. This will not only help beautify the area, but murals can serve as a marketing piece to attract visitors.
21. The beautiful Mississippi County Courthouse is on the National Historic Register, and there may be other properties that are as well or that may be able to be listed on the National Historic Register. The City of Osceola should place signs on I-55 indicating to travelers that a historic landmark or landmarks are ahead, identifying what the landmarks are. According to erilandmark.com (2020), a significant number of travelers are attracted to an area as a result of seeing such signs on highways. Having historic landmark signs on the interstate helps market Osceola and can help attract visitors to the city.
22. Highway 61, known also as The Great River Road, as well as The Blues Trail, or Blues Highway, because of its long history with the birth of the blues music genre, rivals Route 66, if not for its historical importance, certainly for its musical significance (Mike's Road Trip, July 12, 2017). As this historic highway passes through Osceola, the city should install signs both on I-55, and directional signs within the city to attract those who are fans of blues music.





23. The City of Osceola will work with organizers of the Osceola Music Heritage Festival to rebrand the festival with a more marketable and attention-getting name to create greater brand awareness and help attract greater attendance. Some suggested names for consideration are:

- Great River Road Blues Festival
- Gettin’ Down with the Blues Music Festival
- Boogie with the Blues Festival
- Feeling the Blues Music Festival
- Blues and Chews Music and Food Festival
- The Rhythm of the Blues Music Festival
- Feel the Rhythm—Hear the Blues Festival (brands with proposed tagline)
- Blues on the River Music Festival
- Blues Power Music Festival (tie-in with one of Albert King’s song titles)
- I Got the Blues Music Festival (based on an Albert King song title)
- Playing the Blues For You Music Festival (based on an Albert King song title)
- All About the Blues Music Festival
- Roadhouse Blues Festival
- Mississippi River Blues Festival

Of course, there are other possibilities, but these are mentioned just to start the process of rebranding the Music Festival.

24. The City of Osceola will contact the American Music Triangle to get its music festival listed on its calendar of events, as well as list it in The Annual Blues Festival Guide ([blues festival guide.com](http://bluesfestivalguide.com)) which is both an online and physical copy guide to music festivals. This can help attract visitors to the area.



25. The City of Osceola will consider also rebranding the Pocket Park, giving it a name that attracts attention and creates excitement in attending events which can also help attract visitors. A possibility might be to get an individual or company to donate money for naming rights to the park, thus helping perhaps with funds to build a better venue similar to the one in Helena where music performances are held at the King Biscuit Blues Festival in Helena.
26. Should Osceola develop a blues heritage park, which is strongly suggested, this should also be given a name, again possibly branded by the name of an individual or company providing funds to acquire naming rights for the park, also helping with funding to develop the park.
27. Town twinning is a concept started in Europe after WWII as a means to repair damaged relationships between France, Germany, and the UK (Rob Self-Pierson, 2012). Over the years this concept has spread throughout the world, and many towns and cities in the U.S. now have official twinning arrangements with other towns and cities not only in Europe, but also throughout other countries. One of the benefits of twinning is a better understanding of the different cultures of the areas. But, perhaps more significantly, twinning encourages tourism between the twin towns and cities. It is suggested that Osceola thoroughly research towns and cities, particularly in Western Europe, that may have a similar music heritage and work to develop an official twinning agreement with it, publicizing the agreement and target marketing to that area which may help attract tourists to Osceola. It could be even more helpful for tourism if Osceola's twin town had an attraction or venue that could be replicated in Osceola. Signage should be placed on I-55 indicating Osceola's twin town.



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28. The City of Osceola will assess its marketing and promotion program on an ongoing basis and adjust it as may be needed to ensure it is effective in growing tourism and revenue.



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WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA





Website and Social Media

Objective 1: The City of Osceola will work with professional web developers to develop a highly professional, easily navigable and informative website in order to create greater identity and brand awareness with its online presence in an effort attract visitors to its tourist sites and activities.

Begin: January 2020

Complete by: June 2020 and ongoing

Responsibility of: Mayor Sally Wilson
City Council
Marketing Director

Strategies:

1. The City of Osceola will outsource the design, format, analytics , and features of its website to ensure it is user friendly, and that all internal and external stakeholders will be able to navigate it easily and logically, and that it drives value through creation of awareness of all aspects of Osceola.
2. The City of Osceola will assign responsibility to either the Director of Marketing or appoint a digital marketing manager with creative talents to interface with web developers in the design of the website to ensure a high quality professional look, a logical layout, attractive pages, and that all information of value to internal and external stakeholders is included and is well written to gain and hold attention of visitors to the website.





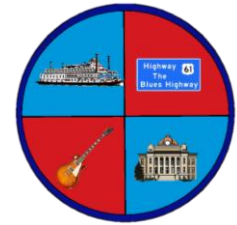
3. The individual, or individuals, working with web developers will ensure that the landing page of the website has a picture of Mayor Wilson, along with a welcome message that stresses the vibrant environment of the city and its hometown spirit. This message can be modified to include exciting comments about Osceola's cultural heritage sites and activities and events. This can develop a personal connection with visitors to the website and can help attract visitors to the city.
4. Pictures of other city officials, along with their titles and any external organization affiliations, will also be included, along with a brief comment about some positive aspect of Osceola, again helping foster relationships with internal and external stakeholders, and helping develop a spirit of cohesion throughout the community. This can help create positive images of the city and can serve to help attract visitors to it.
5. The City of Osceola will ensure that its website includes its mission and core values, as well as its vision statement, which will communicate the dedication, commitment, and passion about Osceola and all that it has to offer, thus helping create interest in attracting visitors, as well as, again, developing cohesion among constituencies throughout the community.
6. The City of Osceola will ensure that its website landing page features a picture of its iconic courthouse on the landing page, and that all pages have attractive and pleasing colors to attract and hold the attention of visitors to the website, potentially generating repeat visitors to the website.
7. The City of Osceola will see that its website has sufficient tabs with drop-down menus that each contain useful and helpful information in a logical format so that visitors to the website can access all information easily.





8. The City of Osceola will ensure that its web pages are not dense, but have the right balance of pictures of the area and verbiage so that visitors to the website are not “turned off” when they click on a page as most visitors to websites do not want to read through a great amount of material, and will typically leave the website and not return. Having attractive pictures and limited descriptive material can attract visitors to the website and possibly serve to attract visitors to the city as well.
9. The City of Osceola will ensure that its website is capitalizing on Search Engine Optimization (SEO) to make itself easier to find via Internet searches.
10. The City of Osceola will feature each of its current attractions on its website, and as they are developed, each of its blues heritage sites along with attractive photos and a brief description of the historical and cultural significance of each.
11. The website will contain a list of musicians and other celebrities from Osceola, or who lived in Osceola, as well as those who performed in Osceola, with photos and a brief bio of each. This can help generate interest and can help attract visitors to the area.
12. The City of Osceola will ensure that its website contains a variety of useful, helpful, and interesting information in addition to information about its heritage sites, activities, and events, such as the history of Osceola, the famous gunboat battle during the Civil War, trivia quizzes about a variety of topics with small prizes such as branded t-shirts, caps, coffee mugs, and water bottles or other collateral marketing items awarded to the first five providers of the correct answers, a recipe of the week or month asking visitors to the website to submit their favorite recipes and giving them recognition for submitting them, or other information that may help attract visitors and repeat visitors to the website, thus





helping develop positive relationships. This, in turn, may help attract visitors to the city.

13. As increasing numbers of people are using mobile phones to access the Internet, Osceola will ensure that its website is a mobile-optimized website so people can surf through it easily with their smartphones.
14. Osceola will ensure that its website contains links to its social media accounts so that visitors to the website and potential visitors can easily navigate to its social media through its website.
15. Osceola will see to it that its website contains a calendar of festivals, activities and events and that this calendar is updated and accurate with the current information to keep information “fresh,” as “stale” information is an immediate turnoff to visitors to websites. This can help increase visitors and repeat visitors to the website and potentially increase tourists as well.
16. Osceola will utilize analytics and click-through data from its developer to understand website traffic, which sections receive the most visitors, and the average amount of time spent on the tabs to enable the city and its web developer to prioritize the information to attract the most traffic to the website.
17. Osceola will include on its website a “testimonials” tab that will allow visitors to Osceola to post reviews about their experiences visiting cultural heritage sites or other areas in the city, as well as attendance at concerts, festivals and other activities and events. This can help build Osceola’s brand and can help increase visitors to the area.
18. Osceola will ensure its website contains links to the Osceola Chamber of Commerce’s website as well as list area hotels and links to the websites of these hotels or reservation information, as well as links associated with each festival or





event, thus, in effect becoming a “one-stop-shop” for visitors to the website to access information easily which can aid in building Osceola’s brand and its tourism.

19. Osceola will have a FAQ page that will address common questions those thinking about visiting Osceola may have, as well as allow them to ask specific questions, and ensure that someone responds to these in a timely manner.
20. Osceola will create a free Google My Business page and profile. This allows an organization to register what it has to offer and information associated with it with Google and creates a listing profile which helps organizations more easily connect with those interested in their products and services. This feature also provides users with access to Google Analytics and enables customers to leave informative reviews.
21. Those responsible for managing Osceola’s digital media will familiarize themselves with Google Analytics and data interpretation. Google Analytics will provide Osceola with various pieces of information, including the number of views its listing has received, how many times it was searched for and quantity of website clicks. This information allows organizations to track and understand their customers’ behavior, what they are looking for, and if what you offer is of interest to them, thereby helping organizations to cater to customers’ needs.
22. Osceola will include on its website a place for it to list projects it is undertaking and needs for volunteers and how they can be involved, and a place for them to sign up to volunteer. This can help increase Osceola’s volunteer base.
23. Osceola will list on its website blues and cultural heritage sites it is developing or has plans to develop, along with budgets and needs for funding to support their development and/or to help sustain operations once they are developed, and a





“donate now” button to allow individuals and organizations to donate to help Osceola in its tourism development efforts. This will also include a secure page with listing of credit cards for use in making donations.

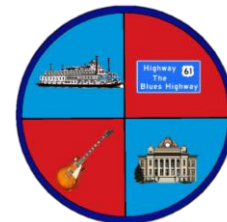
24. Osceola will create a database of information on visitors to the Chamber of Commerce, the museum or other places where visitors register or may register in the future, and follow up with personalized emails from the Mayor and/or Chamber of Commerce thanking them for visiting Osceola, hoping they enjoyed their visit, and asking them to come again. This could also include a response link for these visitors to comment on their experiences and what, if anything, Osceola can do to make future visits more enjoyable.
25. Osceola will engage in a process called “retargeting” or “clickback” by which it can “see” who has visited its website and send them an email with a message like “did you see something of interest” or some similar message, and ask them if someone could help them. This can help stimulate interest and could help increase visitors to the city.
26. Osceola will create a virtual store on its website and sell branded items such as t-shirts, caps, travel coffee mugs, coffee cups, water bottles and other branded items. This can help spread awareness of Osceola and can generate some revenue. This will also provide a list of contacts by which Osceola can market and promote to these individuals through follow-up emails. Osceola will ensure a secure page and list credit cards accepted for people to make purchases.
27. Osceola will make it possible for people to purchase tickets to visit its heritage sites as well as to attend festivals and musical performances, providing a secure page and listing credit cards accepted, which can help increase revenue as well as a list of contacts for follow-up marketing and promotion.

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28. Osceola will have a blog tab giving visitors the opportunity to share their experiences visiting Osceola with the public which can help enhance Osceola's brand and may help attract more visitors.
29. Osceola will ensure that all information on its website is well maintained and updated frequently to keep visitors returning to the website.





Website and Social Media

Objective 2: The City of Osceola will develop and implement a comprehensive, integrated social media marketing plan, providing a planned approach and appropriate platforms to increase engagement on various platforms, create brand awareness, and attract visitors to the city.

Begin: July 2020

Complete by: November 2020 and ongoing

Responsibility of: Mayor Sally Wilson
City Council
Director of Marketing

Strategies:

1. The City of Osceola will ensure it is present and active all popular social media platforms, including, but not limited to, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, TikTok, and LinkedIn. Osceola will see that content shared on these pages is recent, engaging, and presents a positive brand image.
2. Mayor Wilson will appoint the Director of Marketing, or a person assigned to manage the city's digital marketing efforts to be the primary manager for all digital media platforms as giving limited control over the pages ensures a consistent tone and decreases the chances of double-posting, or a failure to post.
3. Osceola will ensure its social media manager fully understands the algorithms on which various social media platforms operate to help him/her know what type of content is prioritized on timelines and more engaging to different users.





4. Osceola will create a unique and consistent brand across all social media platforms, beginning by using uniform profile pictures, banners, handles, and bios, all in an effort to create a reliable and friendly brand and build and maintain relationships in an effort to attract visitors.
5. Osceola will embed links to each social media site it utilizes into its website, as previously mentioned and, conversely, embed links to its website on each social media platform in order to maximize traffic on each site and increase brand awareness, visitors and revenue.
6. Osceola will create and grow a YouTube account where it will post videos of its heritage sites and other tourist attractions. YouTube videos will then be shared on other social media accounts such as Facebook and Instagram, where they can be viewed, enjoyed, and shared, perhaps by visitors to Osceola or residents, further increasing brand awareness, and word-of-mouth advertising, which can help attract visitors to the city.
7. Osceola will develop an Instagram account to share information about sites, events and activities with followers by posting photos and videos about blues heritage sites, festivals, and other activities and events, as well as posts of any visually stimulating features of the area, which can be especially appealing to Millennials and other tech-savvy consumers who receive information and connect to others using this social media platform.
8. Osceola will create a social media calendar to help it post more consistently and ensure variety in all its content. It is suggested that Osceola utilizes a social media management tool, such as Hootsuite, or some similar tool, to create scheduled posts, post to multiple sites simultaneously, monitor social media mentions, increase social media engagement through quick responses, and increase SEO. By



- creating a social media calendar and utilizing a social media management tool, Osceola will save time and effort in creating a fun, interactive, and attractive social media presence which can help bring more visitors to the city.
9. Osceola will post to each social media site at least once every weekday, focusing on posting more content on Facebook and Instagram in order to consistently deliver content to customers and become a reliable, interactive persona online, potentially increasing tourist numbers.
 10. Whomever is responsible for posting on the social media platforms must be aware of and abide by social media prime times in order to ensure Osceola's social media are generating engagement and enhancing brand awareness.
 11. Osceola will connect with visitors, potential visitors and other followers by ensuring that those in charge of its social media respond to comments within a reasonable time and interact with followers in an effort to create interest in the city, potentially increasing visitors.
 12. Osceola will periodically conduct small-scale giveaways on its social media sites, such as Facebook and Instagram, giving away branded items such as t-shirts, caps, travel coffee mugs, water bottles or other such items. To enter these giveaways people must follow Osceola and like and share the post which will increase followers and brand exposure and possibly help increase visitors to the city.
 13. Osceola will use social media to stay informed about what other areas with similar tourist attractions are doing in an effort to differentiate itself, gain a competitive advantage and increase visitors.
 14. Osceola will consider periodically conducting larger giveaways on Facebook and Instagram, such as perhaps a complementary weekend package consisting of





tickets to its heritage sites or a concert plus hotel accommodations. This can increase followers, likes, comments, and overall brand exposure and help collect contact information for future promotions. Winners will likely share their experiences with friends and family, growing word-of-mouth marketing and penetrating the Millennial market. The giveaway might include the following conditions to enter:

- Follow @Osceola;
 - Enter up to once per day via a link in Osceola's bio;
 - Earn extra entries by sharing the link with friends and family, having them enter the giveaway; and
 - Earn an additional 10 entries when posting a photo or story with an Osceola giveaway-specific hashtag, such as #Osceolabluesgiveaway (a maximum of 5 posts is allowed for this option).
15. Osceola will encourage followers to tag it in their posts about visits to Osceola and utilize a hashtag unique to Osceola, which will create organic advertising for the city and allow it to share these posts, enabling the city to generate a wider variety of digital content and showcase its cultural heritage sites, thereby potentially increasing visitors.
16. Osceola will use data analytics to understand how each social media post with a URL website drives activity to its website which can help increase visitors.
17. Osceola will assess its social media marketing program on an ongoing basis and adjust it as needed in an effort to ensure its social media are creating high brand awareness and helping attract visitors to the city's cultural heritage sites, festivals and events.

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SHARED VISION





Shared Vision

Objective: The City of Osceola will implement a visioning process in order to achieve a shared vision inclusive of all segments of the community to help ensure buy-in for the development not only of its cultural heritage, but also for the economic development and wellbeing of all residents.

Begin: July 2020

Complete by: November 2020

Responsibility of: Mayor Sally Wilson

City Council

Visioning Task Force

Strategies:

1. Mayor Wilson will develop a Visioning Task Force with the charge of developing a long-range vision of Osceola's future focusing not only on the development of its cultural heritage sites, but also all aspects of enhancing the overall quality of the community and the quality of life of its residents. It is suggested that this task force be titled something like Osceola Vision 2030 or some similar name to act as somewhat of a cohesive focus on Osceola's long-rang future. It is also suggested that the Mayor appoint a visionary leader to champion the initiative.
2. Mayor Wilson will ensure that the Visioning Task Force is represented by all segments of business, real estate, education, health, industry, communication, city departments, and economic development entities, as well as any others who should be included that were not mentioned here. It is vitally important that the Visioning Task Force is inclusive of all segments of the community in an effort to

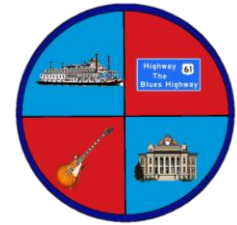




achieve a sense of common purpose that what is being focused on is for the good of all constituencies and not just a few groups.

3. It is suggested that the Visioning Task Force meetings be facilitated by a neutral third-party facilitator. This takes the focus off of one or a few interest groups and emphasizes objectivity in the approach taken and assures the vision is “our vision.”
4. It is suggested that the first collaborative meeting be scheduled for a full day, but subsequent meetings can be shortened to half-day segments.
5. Mayor Wilson, City Council Members and the Chair of the Visioning Task Force will prepare members of the task force in advance of the initial meeting by providing them with information about the areas that will be addressed by the group such as crime rates, housing, economic growth, development of tourism as a part of economic growth, that all are partners in the outcome and all entities such as restaurants, hotels and other service providers are part of what will make it work and are not competitors, property issues, enforcement of ordinances, competing communities, areas for synergy, and any other areas that should be addressed to achieve a common goal.
6. The Mayor, and/or facilitator will set the stage for the first collaborative meeting of the Visioning Task Force by providing a review of desired outcomes, the agenda, the process to be followed and ground rules, all of which can help the meeting flow smoothly and be productive.
7. It is helpful to have a visual of how things can be with everyone collaborating and developing a shared vision about common goals. In that light, it is suggested that perhaps Mayor Wilson and some members of the Visioning Task Force visit some other communities to see what they have achieved through shared vision, how





they went about implementing action to accomplish a common goal, and to benchmark against those communities' best practices and outcomes. One such community might be Madison, Mississippi which appears to be full of "hometown spirit," or nearby Wilson, Arkansas as well.

8. Open communication and complete transparency is essential for the visioning process to succeed and get buy-in from all constituencies. To that end, Mayor Wilson and members of the task force will have open meetings to update the community on what is taking place, and information will be presented in the local newspaper as well.
9. Once the visioning process is complete, the task force will create a vision statement to guide the city toward the accomplishment of its common goal.

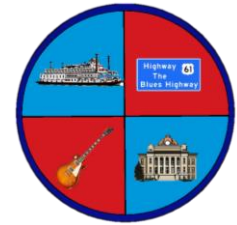


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INFRASTRUCTURE





Infrastructure

Objective: The City of Osceola will develop and carry out a long-range infrastructure improvement, enhancement, and modernization program in order to not only create a higher quality of life for its residents, thus instilling greater pride among them, but also to help attract visitors, thus helping the economic growth and development of the community.

Begin: January 2021

Complete by: January 2030 and ongoing

Responsibility of: Mayor Sally Wilson

City Council

City Department Heads

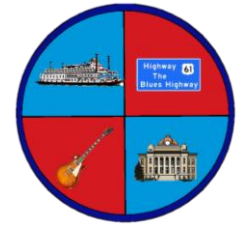
Heads of City Commissions

Constituent Groups of the Community

Strategies:

1. The Mayor, along with the City Council, will create and convene a task force to address the infrastructure issues of the city for the purpose of enhancing, improving and modernizing all aspects of infrastructure for the betterment of the community in general, and for support of developing its rich blues heritage and other cultural heritage. This is a long-term proposition which not only requires significant long-term vision and foresight, but also the engagement of all aspects of city government and the community at large. The task force should be given a





name that becomes a “rallying cry” or a “touchstone” that builds cohesion throughout the community. Some suggested names might be:

- “Our Town—Our Future”
- “Building Our Future—Together”
- “Taking Pride in Osceola”
- “Together We Make It Happen”
- “Building Tomorrow’s Osceola Today”

11. Major undertakings of this nature require a champion. Therefore, it is vitally important that the Mayor select a chair of the task force who is not only a visionary, but also one who champions the cause and can provide the leadership necessary to motivate and energize all constituencies.

12. The task force should hold meetings to discuss areas of improvement for the community and prioritize projects to be undertaken. Since there are many projects needing attention this may be a difficult task—yet it is an imperative one as all cannot be undertaken at the same time. While not a complete list, some areas which must be addressed are:

- Clearing of abandoned and deteriorating structures
- Low income housing development
- Enforcement of codes for maintenance of properties
- Resurfacing/repaving streets
- Ensuring properties are cleared of junk and trash
- Painting of buildings
- New lighting for streets
- Repair or replacement of sidewalks to make them safe for all to travel on





- General cleanup of neighborhoods
- Repair or refurbish deteriorating buildings that are still inhabited
- Creation of green spaces
- Development of walking and/or bike lanes
- Street signage

The task force will ensure continuous open communication of the work of the task force and hold open forums for community discussion and input.

13. When the task force has a plan for the future of Osceola, the city should create a large, attractive model of Osceola incorporating all the changes and improvements and proudly display it in a public area for all to see. This can help build spirit and commitment to making the plan a reality.

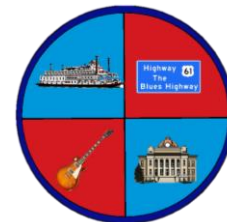


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FUNDING





Funding

Objective: The City of Osceola will develop and carry out a comprehensive funding program to obtain/acquire the funds with which to develop its tourism products as well as to address infrastructure needs.

Begin: July 2020

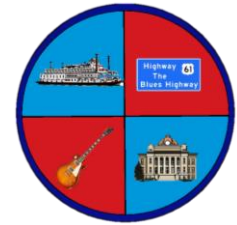
Complete by: Ongoing

Responsibility of: Mayor Sally Wilson
City Council
Community Development Corporation
Blues and Cultural Heritage Committee
Grant Writer
Osceola Vision 2030 Task Force

Strategies:

1. Mayor Wilson will work with all groups to develop a consortium focused on acquisition of funds to support the development of tourism and associated infrastructure issues, including the development of a Community Development Corporation (CDC), if it does not currently have one. CDCs are 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations that are created to support and revitalize communities. They can be involved in a wide range of community services, including small business development and reconstruction, which could include tourist properties. They can receive unlimited donations and grants from any public and/or private sources and as tax-exempt entities do not have to pay taxes. The

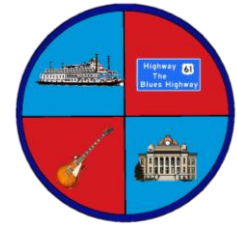




CDC will need to be set up and run by community members or local groups, such as civic associations, but should be inclusive of community members, and can also include members from outside the community. It is suggested that Osceola access community-wealth.org which houses the most up-to-date collection of resources focused on CDCs and their role in community wealth building, focusing on support organizations, best practices from across the country, research resources, publications, tools to help CDCs to promote their work to a diverse range of stakeholders, and a policy guide that provides an overview of related federal initiatives and programs that can help leverage resources and increase impact.

2. The City of Osceola will take a holistic approach in acquiring funds with the coordinated and collective action of all constituencies possible. The coordinator of all these groups must be a visionary who can champion the overall goals and provide leadership, motivation, commitment and tenacity to other stakeholders to remain committed and focused. There are relevant leadership training resources available for such situations, some examples of which are The Rockwood Leadership Institute, The Neighborhood Institute, a 12-week course offered by Louisville's Center for Neighborhoods, and other cities' leadership development programs such as St. Louis (Focus St. Louis), and the branch cities of the Eighth Federal Reserve District (Leadership Memphis, Leadership Greater Little Rock, and Leadership Louisville). These programs, and others, provide training in leadership and collaboration, and building sustainable and attractive neighborhoods through engaged, informed and committed neighbors. It is suggested that one or more members of the group attend such a program.





3. There are many sources of information that can be drawn upon to assist Osceola such as the Small Business Administration Development Center and several web-based sources including:

- Community Commons
- Corporation for Enterprise Development
- Federal Reserve Community Development Resources (FedCommunities.org)
- Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Center for Household Financial Stability
- Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Community Development Outlook Survey
- Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Economic Data (FRED)
- Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Geographical Economic Data (GEOFRED)
- National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership
- Opportunity Index
- Policy Map
- United States Census Bureau

Individuals should be assigned to research each of these as well as an Internet search specific to the projects for Osceola

4. Through the work of these groups, Osceola will finalize its priorities and work with architects and contractors to establish a budget for each category, and use this information to determine the funding gap based on any funds which the city



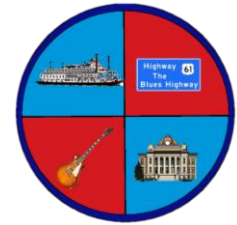


may be able to commit over a period of time and how much additional funding will be needed.

5. Based on its priorities and its funding gap analysis, Osceola will begin searching for funding/financing of its projects. Sources of funds could include, but not limited to the following:

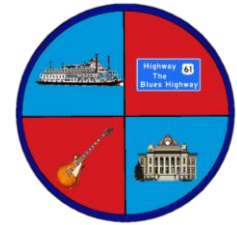
- Grants through the Arkansas Department of Heritage (as noted in Opportunity 37 in the SWOT Analysis)
- Grant Programs as may be found in the Arkansas Economic Development Commission Rural Services Funding Resource Guide
- Debt Financing in which there are unique forms of debt that are advantageous for community development (Coming Up With the Money, 2017)
- Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) which aggregate capital from banks, foundations, and individuals and is certified by the U.S. Department of the Treasury. The Reinvestment Fund, IFF and the Low-Income Fund are examples of CDFIs. To find any examples of CDFIs operating in this area, visit the U.S. Treasury's Community Development Financial Institutions Fund Website.
- Foundations typically focus on grant-making, but it is becoming increasingly common for foundations to invest a portion of their assets (non-grant-making funds), known as Program Related Investments (PRIs) in the form of interest-free or below-market rate loans to nonprofit organizations, purchase of a promissory note of a nonprofit, and a participatory loan to a nonprofit. The Gates Foundation and the F.B. Huron Foundation are pioneers in making PRIs.





- Individuals through crowdfunding (also referred to as peer-to-peer platforms) are playing an increasingly important role in community development finance. Some of the more commonly used platforms that individuals can use to specifically fund community development initiatives include Kiva Zip, Causes, and ioby (for more information on crowdfunding, search ioby on FedCommunities.org).
- Equity, since 1986, has been applied to the social sector engaged in start-up ventures as well as in the form of tax credit investments, which developers sell to individuals or corporation that have a tax liability. In return the buyer receives an equity stake in the development. Both individuals and corporations have invested in thousands of community development projects throughout the country, and as co-owners, these investors tend to take a more active role in the operations of a project than do lenders. Once the tax credit compliance period ends, ownership interest in the project is typically sold or donated to the co-owner of the development or a third party.
- Grants are typically the lifeblood of any nonprofit. The four categories of philanthropic giving are individuals, corporations, foundations, and bequests, but over 70% of the total amount has come from individuals. For more information on grants and philanthropy check The Foundation Center.
- In addition to the above Osceola should investigate other forms of public-private partnerships in an attempt to find investors who may be willing to invest in specific projects that Osceola is wanting to develop, especially the tourism related projects.





- The National Park Service has provided funds for communities to fund projects, an example of which is the \$175,000 to a town in Minnesota to develop a park to help the economic development of the community. This is credence to the suggestion of creating a Blues Heritage Park for which Osceola may be able to acquire funds from the National Park Service.
6. Osceola will contact owners of abandoned properties to see if they would donate these properties to the city. Depending upon where these properties are located, the city might auction them off for revenue, or, in the case of buildings, demolish them and use the land for development of tourist attractions or assets to support the attractions, an example of which might be relocation and expansion of the pocket park or some other outdoor music event/festival venue similar to the King Biscuit Blues Festival venue in Helena, Arkansas (Figure 48).



Figure 48: The King Biscuit Blues Festival venue in Helena, Arkansas

Source: <http://bridgingtheblues.com/schedule/>

7. Osceola will conduct extensive searches for other funding sources which may not be included here in an effort to acquire funding for its tourism development.



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TOURIST ATTRACTIONS





Tourist Attractions

Objective: The City of Osceola will develop and implement a comprehensive plan to develop tourist sites, focusing on its rich blues music and cultural heritage in an effort to position the city as a desirable tourist destination, attract visitors and help contribute to the economic health of the community.

Begin: August 2020

Complete by: March 2024

Responsibility of: Mayor Sally Wilson

City Council

Blues and Cultural Heritage Tourism Committee

Strategies:

1. Mayor Wilson will create a Blues and Cultural Heritage Tourism Committee (BCHTC) to guide the development of tourist sites to attract visitors to the area.
2. The BCHTC will conduct an asset inventory of its blues heritage sites that could be developed into “tourism products” and promoted to attract tourists. The BCHTC will prioritize the order in which these assets such as those listed below should be addressed:
 - The Albert King Home
 - The Rebel Club
 - Radio Station KOSE
 - The Museum



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- Pocket Park
- Sans Souci Landing
- The Home of Dale Evans (if there is any institutional memory of it)
- Others that may not be included here, such as perhaps the historic building in the city center
- Activities such as music festivals and other events

The BCHTC will keep in mind that both culture and heritage of the area can be place-based activities and events that can serve to help attract visitors.

3. The BCHTC will conduct an assessment of the community's potential cultural and heritage with a focus on what needs to be done to transform them into tourism products taking into consideration such factors as the following:
4. The Albert King home is in such a state of deterioration that it will be both costly and difficult to restore it, and its location and surrounding area is not conducive to attracting tourists (Figures 49 and 50).



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Figure 49: Exterior of the Albert King Home

Photo Taken by Ammi Tucker





Figure 50: Interior of the Albert King Home

Photo taken by Ammi Tucker

5. The Rebel Club is also in such a state of dilapidation that it will be extremely costly to restore and repair, and it, too, is in an area that is not attractive for tourism (Figures 51 and 52).





Figure 51: The Rebel Club
Photo taken by Ammi Tucker



Figure 52: The Rebel Club's Surrounding Area
Photo taken by Ammi Tucker





6. Radio Station KOSE 860 AM is in need of significant repair and restoration and the area surrounding it is cluttered with abandoned vehicles and other unsightly areas, which will require extensive cleanup in order to make it an attractive tourism product (Figures 53-58).



Figure 53: Abandoned Gas Station Near the Radio Station

Photo Taken by Brandon Roe





Figure 54: Old Car Dealership Near Radio Station

Photo Taken by Brittany Roe





Figure 55: Old Car Lot

Photo Taken by Brittany Roe





Figure 56: Abandoned Vehicles Near Radio Station

Photo Taken by Brandon Roe



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Figure 57: Abandoned, Vacant Lot Near the Radio Station

Photo Taken by Brandon Roe



Figure 58: Radio Station KOSE 860 AM and Surrounding Area

Photo Taken by Ammi Tucker

7. The museum, while possibly being perceived as quaint, is small and does not allow for many visitors at one time. The artifacts are not well-displayed, and information about them is difficult to read or nonexistent (Figures 59 and 60).



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Figure 59: Exterior of the Osceola History Museum

Photo Taken by Brittany Roe





Figure 60: Inside of Osceola History Museum

Photo taken by Ammi Tucker

8. The area behind the Historic Mississippi County Courthouse is unsightly and has buildings that are not only abandoned but are dilapidated which takes away from the visual attractiveness of the Courthouse Square (Figures 61-64).





Figure 61: Abandoned Building Behind Courthouse

Photo Taken by Brittany Roe





Figure 62: Dilapidated Lot Behind the Courthouse

Photo Taken by Brandon Roe



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Figure 63: Abandoned Former Hotel

Photo Taken by Brittany Roe





Figure 64: Abandoned Building and Lot

Photo Taken by Brandon Roe

9. Some buildings in the downtown area are abandoned, in need of refurbishing and repair (Figures 65-69).





Figure 65: Abandoned Building Downtown

Figure Taken by Brittany Roe



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Figure 66: Coston Building Downtown

Photo Taken by Brittany Roe





Figure 67: Abandoned Building Downtown

Photo Taken by Brittany Roe





Figure 68: Abandoned Building Downtown

Photo Taken by Brittany Roe



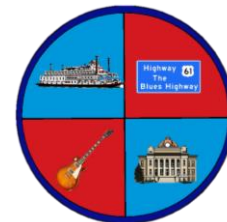


Figure 69: Abandoned Historical Building

Photo Taken by Brittany Roe

Compounding the issues with the sites mentioned above is the fact that the Albert King home, The Rebel Club, the Museum, and the radio station are geographically separated by a considerable distance, which would be very inconvenient for tourists to visit all.





10. It is suggested that the City of Osceola and the BCHTC designate a Blues and Cultural Heritage Park on which it can replicate the Albert King home, the Rebel Club, Radio Station KOSE 860 AM, and build a new museum and administrative center in a central location, ensuring attractive spaces, green space and parking, along with decorative and attractive street and parking lighting. There may be already existing vacant properties and other buildings which could either be destroyed to use the space for this park, or perhaps serve as a structure within the park.
11. Placing a Blues and Heritage Park as mentioned can put it in close proximity to the historic and iconic courthouse, as well as Pocket Park, thus creating a centralized cultural and heritage area that could be effective in attracting tourists. Consideration might be given to creating a pedestrian mall blocking off other streets with parking nearby, which will allow visitors to park closely and stroll the historic Blues and Heritage Park at their leisure. Such a park and pedestrian mall can be significant in attracting visitors to the area. It will be necessary to market and promote this effectively as outlined in Marketing and Promotion Strategies, as well as Website and Social Media Strategies.
12. The BCHTC will have to draw upon the institutional memory of residents or perhaps any family members or publications in an effort to replicate artifacts, especially in the Albert King home as the home currently has nothing in it. Tourists are drawn to the way life was inside such structures and it will be necessary to recreate this feeling for it to be a draw for tourists.
13. Similarly, the BCHTC will ensure that the museum/administrative building contains interactive kiosks with videos of Albert King and others who performed in the Rebel Club and/or the Pocket Park. Commentary either by those who knew



any of these performers, performed with them or by family members or other individuals add interest and will help attract visitors. It may be necessary to engage in a significant amount of research relative to this, perhaps engaging college students at NEACC and A-STATE or the Music Department at Osceola High School for help with this.

14. The BCHTC will see that the museum/administrative building sells souvenirs featuring the celebrities, as well as Osceola branded items, books about the performers or books about blues music (hard copy, paperback, audio and e-books), which can help generate revenue. It is also suggested that a small restaurant be included in this building.
15. It will be important to implement strategies noted in Marketing and Promotion, and Website and Social Media to attract tourists including bundling and packaging of sites and events, including possibly A-STATE heritage sites, and or other museums and festivals along the Great River Road, cross-marketing a variety of sites, venues, activities and events utilizing multi-media approaches which might provide synergies for all providers of these.
16. The BCHTC will ensure that there are staff on hand who are not only knowledgeable about historical information so they can answer questions tourists may have, but who are trained in sales and customer relations to ensure satisfying experiences for tourists. The Delta Center for Economic Development typically offers such programs at reasonable registration fees.
17. As tourism begins to develop, the BCHTC, the Chamber of Commerce and/or other group will work with hotel chains to attract other hotels to the area, as well as seek a developer for a bed and breakfast. It may be possible to get some owners



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of dwellings to renovate them and list them with Airbnb. These can help position Osceola as a more attractive tourist destination.

18. The BCHTC will continue to work on further development of its inventory of tourist products to enhance Osceola's ability to attract tourists, providing economic benefits to the community.

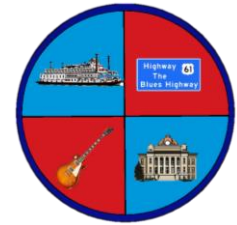


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VOLUNTEER PROGRAM





Volunteer Program

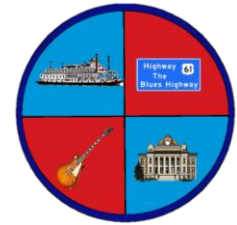
Objective: The City of Osceola will develop and implement a volunteer recruitment and recognition program in an effort attract and sustain a pool of dedicated volunteers to help the city in various areas of need, thereby helping the city use some of its revenue in other areas of need.

Begin: July 2020
Complete by: December 2020 and ongoing
Responsibility of: Mayor Sally Wilson
City Council
Volunteer Committee

Strategies:

1. Osceola will initiate a volunteer committee with the charge being to recruit and retain volunteers in an effort to sustain a pool of dedicated and committed volunteers.
2. The volunteer committee will utilize both the city's website and multiple social media platforms to recruit volunteers, posting areas of need or projects in which volunteers can be of assistance, including specific tasks volunteers can perform with which the city needs help. This can be done effectively by creating a profile for each slot to be filled by a volunteer.
3. The chair of the volunteer committee will contact local civic organizations such as the Rotary Club and the Kiwanis Club with a request to appear on their programs to make a presentation and an appeal for volunteers, providing information on

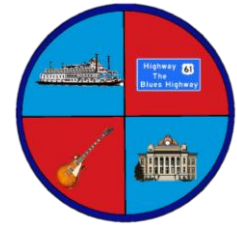




why volunteers are needed, areas in which volunteers can help and what specific tasks they would perform in each area, along with a volunteer registration form for members to fill out to volunteer for specific roles.

4. The chair of the volunteer committee will contact whoever is in charge of managing the city's website and social media to see that there is a self-scheduling volunteer link for volunteers to sign up to volunteer for specific tasks and roles at designated times. The social media platforms will have a Call-to-Action (CTA) to allow social media users to sign up for available volunteer opportunities and times.
5. The volunteer committee will establish a student volunteer group and appeal to high school student as well as college students to volunteer for specific roles.
6. Many organizations at A-STATE, as well as some classes, require students to engage in service-learning activities for nonprofits. The chair of the volunteer committee could reach out to various colleges and organizations, including Greek Life, to try to get volunteers for different projects.
7. The volunteer committee will create criteria and guidelines by which volunteers could be evaluated on such things as hours volunteered, types of work performed and exceeding expectations for what volunteers are normally required to do. Each month a "Volunteer of the Month" could be chosen by the committee and presented a gift certificate to a local restaurant, have their picture on the wall in City Hall, and be featured in the Volunteer of the Month section on the website and on Facebook. An article and a picture should be published in the local newspaper as well.
8. Osceola will hold an annual volunteer recognition and rewards event, such as a luncheon or dinner or picnic, depending upon its budget, and award certificates of

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appreciation to all volunteers, plaques for specific years of volunteer service (five years, and so on), and recognize a Volunteer of the Year with a larger gift certificate, picture in City Hall, and a press release in the local media. It might be possible to get a local business to sponsor the volunteer recognition event.

9. Osceola will assess its volunteer program at periodic intervals to determine if it is effective in attracting and retaining a pool of dedicated volunteers and adjust it as necessary to ensure it is effective in doing so.



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APPENDICES



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APPENDIX A

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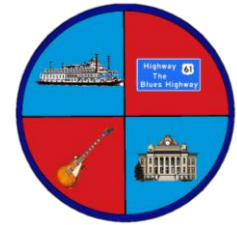
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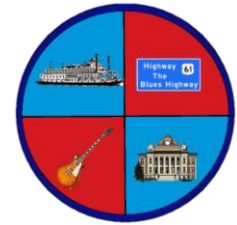
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APPENDIX B

OPPORTUNITIES



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APPENDIX C

THREATS



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APPENDIX D

ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT



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APPENDIX E

SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT



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APPENDIX F

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT



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APPENDIX G

TECHNOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT



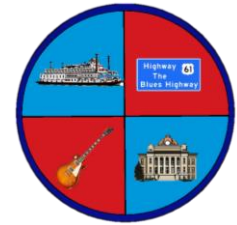
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TEAM MEMBERS



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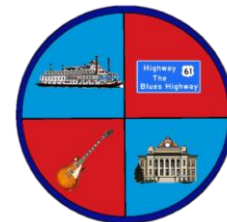


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The Delta Center for Economic Development

Arkansas State University

And

C. William Roe, Professor of Management

Neil Griffin College of Business

Arkansas State University

D/BA Omega Consulting Group, LLC

June 11, 2020

The Honorable Sally Wilson

Mayor of Osceola

303 W. Hale Avenue

Osceola, Arkansas 72370

Dear Mayor Wilson,

The Delta Center for Economic Development is pleased to provide you with this strategic plan prepared for the City of Osceola focusing primarily on the development of its blues music and cultural heritage sites for tourism and economic development of the city.

The foundation for this strategic plan is a thorough analysis of the city's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats based on information gathered from various stakeholders and analysis of the external environments in which the city operates, providing us with additional insights into opportunities for the city in developing its tourism, as well as threats with which the city may be confronted in its attempts to do so. This research also enabled us to make educated assumptions about these environments based on the best information available to better understand future implications pertaining to strategic decisions. Based on our analyses, we identified 7 key strategic



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success factors for Osceola in achieving its goals, and we developed objectives and strategies to address each strategic issue.

We believe the successful implementation of this strategic plan will help Osceola achieve its goal of becoming a tourist destination and enhancing the economy and overall well-being of the community. This will require dedication and commitment on the part of the leadership and constituencies across all segments.

We commend you, Mayor Wilson, on your vision for tourism development through Osceola's blues music heritage and other cultural heritage which we believe can be transformative for the city and its residents. It is our understanding that a next step is the conducting of a study of the feasibility of this initiative which we are looking forward to carrying out, should you desire us to do so.

Sincerely,

Andrea Allen, Executive Director
The Delta Center for Economic Development
Arkansas State University

C. William Roe, Ph.D.
Professor of Management
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