



Bedford County Economic Development Marketing Study

Executive Summary Supplement to the Comprehensive Report

Submitted by

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November, 2024

Executive Summary

This document serves as an executive summary to the full [Bedford County Development Marketing Study](#) and contains information about the study's goals, methodology, key findings, and recommendations.

Goals

The Bedford County Economic Development Marketing Study aimed to provide actionable insights to help Bedford County fuel its economic growth and improve the quality of life of (future) residents by enhancing its regional appeal and attracting more visitors. Through leveraging a combination of primary data and existing secondary sources, we identified key marketing strengths and weaknesses, and uncovered opportunities to boost economic growth in the region. In particular—and by leveraging a combination of primary data and existing secondary sources—we set out to:

- Identify and profile Bedford County traveler segments in order to build a solid understanding of each segments' behaviors, preferences, and satisfaction.
- Understand what makes Bedford County a uniquely compelling destination for visitors in order to differentiate it from surrounding and/or competing counties.
- Identify marketplace gaps in Bedford County in order to address unmet visitor needs and strategically enhance existing tourism offerings.

Methodology

In order to identify key marketing strengths and weaknesses and uncover opportunities to boost tourism in the Bedford County region, we relied on the following sources of primary and secondary data:

1. **Tourism market research** to identify trends in local tourism
2. **A Visitor profile survey** to understand Bedford's visitors
3. **Community roundtables** to learn about tourism strengths and challenges from stakeholders in Bedford
4. **Existing tourism assets** in Bedford to define what makes Bedford unique
5. **Case studies** to compare marketing in Bedford to that of relevant competitors.

Key Findings

Our key findings from this bank of research and our [Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats \(SWOT\) analysis](#) of Bedford County are:

1. Promoting nature is Bedford's largest opportunity

Visitors and stakeholders alike see nature as a key opportunity

Many of the visitors we surveyed want to return to Bedford because of its beautiful nature and the outdoor recreation opportunities it offers.

In fact, several believe that Bedford can attract more visitors by showcasing what it has to offer—including its nature—and continuing to grow outdoor recreation.

Bedford's stakeholders—which included local business owners, officials, and community leaders—gave similar feedback:

One of the key themes shared was that they would like to see Bedford focus on nature and outdoor recreation when marketing the region.

As one stakeholder commented, *"We have miles of trails, rivers and freshwater streams. We have woods and farms and natural beauty. Our nature is better than everybody else's. We just need more publicity."*

Publicly available data support visitor & stakeholder feedback

Outdoor recreation in PA has been noticeably [on the rise](#) in recent years—a trend that is only expected to continue.

National data shows a similar pattern; for example, the [2024 Outdoor Participation Trends report](#) reveals that 22M more Americans participated in outdoor recreation in 2023 compared to 2019.

Aligning with this growing trend, other research¹ has shown that outdoor recreation is among the top 3 activities travelers seek when they visit PA. Our own research among Bedford's travelers also shows this to be the case, as does [recent large scale research](#) among American travelers.

Outdoor recreation tourism is profitable

In fact, recent research shows that a quarter of American travelers are so-called [Outdoor Enthusiasts](#): They enjoy and specifically seek out activities involving nature and outdoor recreation during their travel. We found a similar percentage of these travelers in our own research among Bedford's travelers.

What makes these travelers especially interesting is that they: a) travel more often, b) are better off financially, and c) have a higher travel budget compared to other travelers. Moreover, about half of them combine their outdoor focused trips with more urban-type activities, including shopping and dining—activities that Bedford excels at.

Current branding focuses on Small-Town America

¹ Proprietary research conducted on behalf of Red House for the PA Tourism Office in 2022.

Bedford's current branding does not include nature and outdoor recreation. As a result, Bedford is likely missing an opportunity to attract travelers who value these experiences.

2. Expanded marketing will be essential to attracting more visitors

Visitors and stakeholders recognize the need for more marketing

Most visitors enjoyed their trip to Bedford and expressed a desire to return.

However, many noted they were unaware of everything Bedford had to offer until they visited. They believe that increased marketing could attract more visitors.

Stakeholders emphasized digital and social media marketing

Stakeholders, including local business owners and community leaders, echoed the need for improved marketing.

They especially saw an opportunity to target younger visitors, including Millennials, through digital and social media channels.

Available [research](#) supports digital marketing as an opportunity: Travelers, and especially those from the Gen-Z and Millennial generations, rely heavily on social media for trip planning.

Current marketing efforts are limited

Our review revealed that Bedford has little social media presence and that current marketing primarily targets Turnpike drivers.

This presents a significant opportunity to increase Bedford's reach and attract more visitors by diversifying and expanding marketing strategies.

3. Strengthening internal collaboration will support marketing success

Visitors want better access to comprehensive information

Visitors expressed a need for easier access to information about Bedford, including places to eat, stay, activities, and events.

They suggested that having all this information available in one place, including digitally, would significantly enhance their experience.

Many visitors also requested more activities, even though several of these already exist, indicating a gap in awareness rather than offerings.

Stakeholders agree on the need for improvement coordination

Stakeholders echoed the visitors' sentiments, highlighting the importance of better communication and collaboration to ensure information is easily accessible—ideally in a single place—and up-to-date.

Collaboration among key stakeholders could be improved

Currently, different entities in Bedford mostly work independently to accomplish similar goals (e.g., multiple event calendars).

However, Bedford could enhance the visitor experience by working together to provide essential information and resources.

Marketing Recommendations

With these findings in mind, we outlined six key marketing recommendations for Bedford County Development Association (BCDA) in order to drive increased visitation and attract potential businesses and future residents to Bedford County:

1. Establish a core identifiable market position

Establishing a strong position and identity is at the foundation of any successful marketing strategy. More than just a logo or tagline, a position is about creating a distinctive personality that speaks to your target audience. In our agency's experience, destinations do this successfully when they:

Lean into their strengths: Rather than having "something for everyone," destinations that market themselves successfully know what their strengths are and highlight these.

Understand their (desired) audience: Successful destinations understand what their visitors seek and build their messaging around this.

Are consistent: Whether on a billboard, pamphlet, or social media, a strong brand is recognizable. And to be recognizable, it needs to have a unified look so that your target audience will recognize your brand regardless of where or how they see it.

Baseline Recommendation: At baseline, determine the best market position to attract visitors, potential businesses, talent, and future residents. Based on our research, we strongly recommend that Bedford County also focuses on nature and outdoor recreation while spotlighting other desired assets (including the Omni Bedford Springs, its authentic main streets, shopping and dining, etc.).

Aspirational Recommendation: Ideally, BCDA and other key entities in Bedford County—including the County itself and its Visitors' Bureau—would build consensus on the county's market position and convey it in unison.

2. Build (digital) content that matches this position

Once a market position has been established, it's essential to support it with content that communicates effectively and resonates with the target audience. Content should go beyond mere promotion; it should reflect the destination's personality, values, and strengths in a way that engages and adds value for visitors. In our agency's experience, successful content strategies include:

Tell an authentic story: Done right, storytelling highlights what makes a destination truly special. Instead of generic messaging, sharing authentic stories from locals or spotlighting unique assets can create an emotional connection with visitors.

Tailor content to each platform: Destinations that resonate with their audiences don't just create one-size-fits-all content. They build dynamic, visually engaging content—like photos, videos, or interactive tools—that suit the platform and appeal to users' interests.

Leverage SEO and user experiences: Successful destinations ensure their content reaches people actively searching for specific experiences by optimizing for search engines. They focus on keywords that align naturally with their brand identity, rather than attempting to rank for everything. These destinations also prioritize genuine engagement by integrating user-generated content—such as visitor photos, reviews, and testimonials—building authenticity, enhancing relatability, and fostering trust through real experiences.

Baseline Recommendation: To start, we recommend using existing BCDA-owned channels, like the website, current collateral (presentations, video content), and (online) engagements, to showcase Bedford County's attractions.

Aspirational Recommendation: To level up, we recommend developing a dedicated “Discover Bedford County” landing page and social media presence, supported by high-quality photography, videography, and tailored content that brings the area's unique offerings to life.

3. Leverage media to drive volume

To generate awareness and increase visitor engagement, a well-executed *data-driven* media strategy is key. Paid media takes it to the next level and connects directly with target audiences, driving immediate visibility and volume. Destinations that successfully leverage paid media tend to:

Define and target key audience segments: Rather than reaching broadly, successful destinations focus on audiences most likely to engage with their offerings and tailor ads to these groups.

Leverage different channels: Effective campaigns use a layered approach combining digital tactics (e.g., paid social, programmatic ads) with outdoor placements (e.g., billboards) and more to create a cohesive multi-channel experience.

Use platform-specific content: Destinations that resonate across platforms develop content that aligns with the strengths of each—crafting eye-catching visuals for social, engaging storytelling for display ads, and clear calls-to-action for search.

Monitor performance: Marketing is strategic and measurable and successful destinations track key performance indicators (KPIs)—impressions, clicks, and conversions—to quantify paid media's effectiveness. By analyzing these metrics, they identify what's working and make real-time adjustments to optimize reach and engagement.

Baseline Recommendation: As a starting point, we recommend investing in some professional content creation (e.g., a one-day outdoor photoshoot). Then, use this content in a campaign in Pennsylvania and select neighboring markets to promote your content directly to target audiences. Based on our research, the focus should be on key audience segments including visitors from the [Open-Minded Explorer and Enthusiast segments](#).

Aspirational Recommendation: Consider investing in professional photography and videography. Then use this content in a fully integrated campaign combining digital, outdoor, lifestyle, and influencer content across a wider geographical footprint. This could include TV commercials and a blend of paid, owned, and earned media to attract, engage, and retain visitors effectively.

4. Solidify mutually beneficial partnerships

Building strong partnerships with key stakeholders across Bedford County is essential for enhancing community engagement and resource sharing. By collaborating effectively, stakeholders can support each other through website links and content contributions, such as event promotions, special offers or collaborations.

Baseline Recommendation: Coordinate with local stakeholders—including local business owners—to enhance visibility. Encourage them to link their websites to your landing page and share relevant content on social media, including event announcements, dining specials, and other local activities.

Aspirational Recommendation: Establish a dedicated task force representing a diverse group of local businesses, attractions, amenities, and hotels. This partnership would formalize existing community collaboration, creating a united front that amplifies Bedford County's offerings and fosters a sense of shared purpose.

5. Lean into funding opportunities

Continue leveraging a combination of funding sources to drive visibility and visitation of Bedford County. Some especially promising ones include:

- [Marketing to Attract Tourists Program](#): A program that supports marketing initiatives aimed at attracting visitors to Pennsylvania.
- [Creative Communities Initiative](#): Provides funding for creative projects that enhance community vitality.
- [Main Street Matters Grants](#): These grants support revitalization efforts in local communities, including implementation grants for specific projects. Funding guidelines can be found [here](#).
- In addition, below is a list of organizations that regularly offer funding opportunities that may be relevant to BCDA's work: [DCNR](#), the [Department of Environmental Protection](#), the [Appalachian Regional Commission](#) (see [also](#)) and [America Walks](#).
- Finally, some organizations could benefit from public-private partnerships. For example, collaborating with (local) organizations willing to invest financially in exchange for a seat

on this new entity's board and using these funds to create impactful outdoor initiatives could position Bedford County as a leader in outdoor recreation.

6. Measure, refine, repeat

To ensure the ongoing success of your marketing strategy, it's essential to continuously measure the effectiveness of your initiatives.

- a. **Define key performance indicators (KPIs):** Identify metrics that would ultimately help you understand whether visitation to Bedford County is changing and why (not).

Baseline Recommendation: Some metrics are easier to obtain than others. For example, if BCDA decides to create a homepage about visiting Bedford County and/or its great outdoors, we would recommend tracking visitation metrics through Google Analytics. Google Analytics is free and can help you understand overall traffic volume, what pages visitors visit most, key visitor behaviors (e.g., clicks on a specific button or link), where your traffic comes from, and more.

Aspirational Recommendation: Ideally, we recommend tracking a combination of metrics and then using the starting values of these metrics as benchmarks against which to track future success. We highly recommend [Zartico's Destination Operating System](#) for some KPIs: in one place, Zartico provides access to, among others, visitors' DMO of origin, their spending while in Bedford, hotel revenue, and more. You could also leverage some of these metrics in an advanced statistical analysis to identify the return on investment of your paid media efforts. We recommend doing this with a trusted research and data analytics partner, approximately once or twice a year.

- b. **Collect visitor feedback:** In addition to tracking progress against your KPIs, visitor feedback can help you understand what is working in the county and why.

Baseline Recommendation: Regularly monitor visitor feedback to understand their experiences and identify opportunities for improvement. You can gather feedback continuously in small batches for a "pulse check" or plan larger-scale efforts periodically. One effective approach is convenience sampling—partnering with local lodging and accommodation providers in Bedford County to reach their guests. For instance, include a link to a brief feedback survey in their welcome materials. At a minimum, ask the Net Promoter Score (NPS) question: "Would you recommend Bedford to others looking for a getaway? Why?" This simple measure can provide valuable insights into visitor satisfaction and loyalty.

Aspirational Recommendation: Conduct an annual survey of a *representative* sample of Bedford County visitors through a trusted research partner. This investment will allow you to gather deeper insights by including a broader range of questions. We recommend incorporating at least one open-ended question to uncover what visitors appreciate most and identify areas for improvement. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of visitor experiences to guide strategic decisions.