

Getting Started in Cultural Corridor Development

What is a cultural corridor? A cultural corridor is a linear region linked together by similar cultural or heritage resources, and offering a visitor experience that showcases those resources.

How does a cultural corridor get started? While there is no one way to develop a successful and sustainable cultural corridor, the following checklists will help ensure that you have covered the basics.

Step 1: Assess the Potential

- ❑ **Inventory the resources along the corridor.** Consider visitor attractions and visitor services (lodging, restaurants, shopping, etc.) that could contribute to the visitor experience. Are the resources ready for visitors? If not, what needs to be done?
- ❑ **Take stock of the human and financial resources** that are—or could be—available to assist in the cultural corridor development process. Involving key individuals early on in the process ensures a broader buy-in for the overall cultural corridor concept.

Step 2: Plan and Organize

Now that you have a sense of the resources along the byway, it's time to step back and begin the planning process. Determining who should be involved in the planning stage can be tricky. If you involve too many people, the process can be bogged down. If you involve too few, you risk alienating potential corridor supporters that weren't involved from the outset. Identify key stakeholders whose support you will need to make the cultural corridor a success, and be sure that they are involved in the process. Asking other stakeholders to review the draft plan before it is put into action is one way to allow other stakeholders to have a say in creating the plan without making the planning process overly cumbersome.

- ❑ **A SWOT (Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats) analysis** is a good way to begin looking at the internal and external forces that may help or harm your cultural corridor efforts.
- ❑ **Hold public meetings.** By keeping the public informed of your efforts and asking them for input before or during the strategic planning process, you can build broader support for your corridor efforts and ensure that you are finding the fit between the community and the tourism efforts of the cultural corridor.
- ❑ **Consider your audience.** In order to develop a strategic plan that is grounded in reality, consider who the visitors are who already come to the corridor region. Identify the audience(s) that make the most sense for you, and keep that in mind as you shape the cultural corridor experience.

- ❑ **Identify the answers to key questions such as:**
 - ❑ Where does your cultural corridor begin and end?
 - ❑ Who is the lead organization for the cultural corridor?
 - ❑ What are you trying to accomplish through the cultural corridor?
 - ❑ Who are the key players that need to be at the table in developing the cultural corridor?
 - ❑ Are there other players that don't need to be as actively involved, but whose buy-in you need?
 - ❑ What are the expectations of the players along the cultural corridor, and can the corridor meet those expectations?
 - ❑ What kind of financial resources can be leveraged to enhance the cultural corridor?
 - ❑ What sort of ongoing staffing or coordination will the cultural corridor require, and how will you ensure that the corridor is sustainable?
- ❑ **Establishing a vision** for your cultural corridor is an important part of getting all the players on the same page. Do you envision a self-guided visitor experience with a guidebook? With interpretive signage along the corridor? Do you envision tour packages that are sold to individual travelers? Or guided group tour experiences? As you consider different tour products, keep in mind that each one takes a different kind of development effort. Don't try to do everything at once. Choose *one* tour product to focus on first.
- ❑ **Develop a strategic plan.** Develop a mission, goals, objectives and action steps to help you create a cultural corridor that provides the visitor experience you identified in your vision.

Step 3: Prepare, Protect and Manage

Armed with your approved strategic plan, you are ready to prepare the cultural corridor for visitors. The specific actions taking place under this step will vary for every new cultural corridor. Focus first on those action steps that will ensure that visitors coming to the cultural corridor will have a positive experience. These steps may include:

- ❑ **Making sites and programs along the corridor come alive** for visitors by telling the story of the corridor. This could be through signage along the corridor, printed materials such as guidebooks or brochures, guided tours, special programs or events, or other interpretive and educational programs.
- ❑ **Preserving and protecting irreplaceable resources** along the cultural corridor. In order to ensure that the corridor is sustainable, it is important to identify and address any potential threats to important landscapes, historic buildings or districts, collections or local traditions that contribute to the visitor experience.
- ❑ Ensuring that interpretive programs along the corridor provide **high quality and authentic experiences.**
- ❑ Build **partnerships** with other organizations and individuals that can contribute to the cultural corridor.
- ❑ Continue to **reach out to the public** along the corridor to keep them informed about the cultural corridor's progress, and to identify and address any concerns the public may have.

Step 4: Market for Success

Once you feel that the experience offered by the cultural corridor is ready for visitors, it is time to launch your marketing efforts. Often, the very first marketing efforts of a cultural corridor are to the people who live and work along the corridor. As the experience offered by the cultural corridor is enhanced over time, marketing efforts can be expanded to reach potential visitors from further away. If you did not develop a marketing plan as a part of your strategic planning effort, it would be a good idea to put in place a multi-year marketing strategy to direct your efforts.

Marketing efforts can include:

- Public Relations.** Through press kits or press releases, educational tours, a speakers bureau or community awareness programs, public relations can provide a cost-effective way to get your message across.
- Advertising.** While more costly, placing ads ensures that your message is placed exactly when and where you want it. You can place paid ads in print or electronic media, and if costs are a concern, you might want to consider “co-op” advertising to share costs or “bartered” ads if you have advertising opportunities of your own to trade.
- Graphic Materials.** Printed materials can include brochures, maps, guidebooks, directories or signs.
- Promotions.** Promotions can include sales missions, trade shows or other creative promotions such as contests to draw attention to your cultural corridor.
- Evaluation.** Don’t forget to evaluate the effectiveness of your marketing efforts.

