

West Virginia Cultural Heritage Development Program

Background and Accomplishments

Program Mission

The West Virginia Cultural Heritage Development Program's (WVCHDP) mission is to utilize the state's historic, cultural, agricultural and natural resources to establish a sustainable statewide cultural heritage program serving community and multi-county efforts with the dual purposes of creating economic opportunities for businesses and communities, and preserving and conserving heritage resources.

What is Cultural Heritage Tourism Development?

From grassroots' research, cultural heritage tourism includes the following:

- Historic places such as house museums, battlefields, historic districts and certain events.
- Architectural resources such as architectural landmarks, historic districts or vernacular structures.
- Natural places including rural landscapes, cultural landscapes, and natural landmarks.
- Traditions of our region, which includes oral history, certain industries, music, foods, folklore and heritage-related events.
- Appropriate recreational venues such as land and water trails.
- Communities that represent unique local assets and atmosphere.
- Businesses that provide cultural heritage related products and services, including restaurants, shops, crafts, lodging, tour services, attractions, etc.
- Rural heritage tourism defined by the countryside in which tourism businesses or activities are found including the villages, landscape, wildlife, community and cultural life, built and natural heritage as important assets which attract visitors and visitors revenue.
- Agri-tourism is a subset of rural tourism that includes farm stays, off-site farmer markets, non-profit agricultural tours and other hospitality businesses that attract visitors to the countryside.

Cultural Heritage Development refers to the development of assets that will attract and serve Cultural Heritage Tourists, as differentiated from the end-product marketing that attracts tourists to the attractions once they are developed. We are increasingly referring to our efforts as Cultural Heritage Development, because that better describes the services we are providing that have not been met by previously existing marketing programs.

Cultural Heritage Development Impact

Cultural Heritage travel to visit and appreciate local heritage -- is growing at twice the rate of regular travel in the United States. These travelers spend more than other travelers, an average of \$623 per trip versus \$457 for other travelers. From an institutional view, a majority of states have formal Cultural Heritage programs while most others incorporate it into overall tourism directions. The National Trust, Smithsonian and other national entities continue to invest into this form of travel as significant engagement and financial strategies.

Cultural Heritage Development Benefits include:

- Increasing the value of historic resources
- Creating jobs and businesses
- Increasing tax revenues via non-residents
- Diversifying the local economy
- Creating opportunities for partnerships
- Attracting visitors interested in heritage, history and preservation.
- Increasing historic attraction revenues
- Preserving local traditions and culture
- Generating local investment in historic resources
- Building community pride in heritage

There are lots of cultural tourists nearby. Pennsylvania, Virginia and North Carolina are three of the top ten states visited by cultural heritage tourists, plus Maryland invests around a million dollars per year in developing its heritage areas. Cultural heritage tourism *is* economic development. Due to the state's proximity to the DC/Baltimore heritage markets, it can be a significant strategy to provide economic value to historic and nature-based resources

The report from the first year of "West Virginia Cultural Heritage Tourism: Measuring Success, Building Community," the WVCHDP impact assessment effort working with 5 pilot communities, concluded: "While the overall economic impact is still modest in real dollar terms, measures of future visitor, business, and attraction plans are optimistic, characterizing cultural heritage tourism as a maturing industry in West Virginia, one providing a range of economic and social benefits to West Virginia communities."

Core Values

1. Provide authentic and entertaining cultural heritage tourism product that attracts visitors.
2. Retain a preservation/conservation ethic in order to maintain, protect and celebrate the assets that make for a successful heritage tourism program.
3. Assist the state, communities and regions in incorporating cultural heritage tourism as part of their economic development strategies.
4. Incorporate strategies that provide the best opportunities for sustainable cultural heritage tourism programs.
5. Encourage partnerships and regional cooperation to provide a stronger product.
6. Seek to partner with existing organizations or agencies that are already offering programs that will meet heritage tourism needs in order to jointly improve access and effectiveness.
7. Work with others to utilize heritage resources as a teaching platform in West Virginia schools and other institutions.
8. Establish, implement and monitor measurements of success for heritage tourism including indicators of economic stimulus, organizational growth and leadership development.

History of the Program Efforts

The Preservation Alliance of West Virginia has been working for the preservation of our state's historic resources for 25 years. One of our main efforts has been development of a West Virginia Cultural Heritage Development Program (WVCHDP). The effort grew out of a 1996 Economic Impact study by PAWV and Main Street West Virginia, that found that heritage tourism had great potential for the state but no coordinated development effort. A "Steering Committee" was formed then to seek funding and program options. The Heritage Tourism program began with funding in 1998. To date, this effort has been primarily funded by the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation, with other funding from a HUD Rural Housing and Economic Development Grant, Small Business Workforce grants, ARC FlexEGrant, state Governor's Partnership and Budget Digest funding, Certified Local Government grant from SHPO, and substantial in-kind contributions. Main Street West Virginia has been a co-sponsor of the program, providing substantial assistance and supervision, including office support for two years.

1998 – 2002 The **initial Heritage Tourism Initiative** focused on two goals:

1. Develop a demonstration program to assist local communities in the creation and implementation of heritage tourism development programs in order to build local capacity and provide economic development benefits. Frontiers to Mountaineers was the demonstration area selected with five counties participating in this program being: Monongalia, Preston, Marion, Harrison and Lewis. Results included:
 - Preservation plan for heritage sites
 - Survey of cultural resources
 - Installation of a series of branded interpretive signs
 - Aggressive marketing campaign
 - Analysis of impact and visitor expenditure patterns
2. Make recommendations on a statewide organizational structure and work towards establishing a statewide heritage development program to benefit the West Virginia economy.
 - Statewide Steering Committee, in consultation with state agency heads, determines that the best location for the permanent statewide program would be the WV Development Office, Community Development Division with the Main Street Program.
 - The Steering Committee also participated in planning workshops and sub-committee work to develop the program.

The Steering Committee developed work plans and strategies that would lead to a smooth transition to the Development Office. Unfortunately because of extreme economic conditions at that time, followed by a change of administration and department reorganization, our advocacy efforts to establish a state-funded program has not yet been fulfilled.

2002 – 2007, **The West Virginia Cultural Heritage Development Program** has continued growing the program and providing heritage development services around the state through additional grant funding. Under leadership from Potomac Heritage Partnership (through

spring 2006) and growing staff capacity, WVDHDP has been working with the state's historic, cultural and natural resources to establish sustainable heritage programs for regions and communities for the purpose of stimulating economic opportunities. Program goals have been accomplished by workshops, conducting research, sharing information, providing technical assistance and seeking funding for creative regional/local efforts.

Specific activities have included:

1. Planning and measurement process to reflect Benedum's *Logic Model System*.
2. A number of workshop series have been provided. Small Business Workforce Grants providing partial funding for many of these workshops:
 - 8 "Overview Cultural Heritage Tourism" workshops
 - 4 Agri-Tourism Workshops in February 2004
 - "Increasing Profits for Destination Businesses" in April 2004
 - 6 "Capturing the Cultural Heritage Tourism Dollar" workshops held in June of 2005
 - 3 "Engaging the Visitor" workshops held in Sept. of 2005.
3. Awarded a Rural Economic Development Capacity Building (RHED) HUD grant to foster economic development through cultural tourism by strengthening businesses knowledge of and techniques for capturing the cultural heritage tourism market.
4. Planned, developed and implemented a series of focus groups analyzing the average cultural heritage tourist, which resulted in material for various workshops and presentations and a final report that provided a foundation for future projects
5. Provided long-term technical assistance as a part of the RHED grant to five "transition pilot communities" who were at different stages of their Cultural Heritage Tourism development.
6. Assisted counties in the eastern panhandle of the state on developing an Eastern Panhandle Rural Tourism Partnership effort with focus on agri-tourism businesses.
7. Worked with WV Department of Agriculture and Division of Tourism in the development of an inventory of agri-tourism operations within the state.
8. Played a significant role in the Appalachian Forest Heritage Area with 16 West Virginia Counties with their feasibility study, seeking National Heritage Area status.
9. Assisted Frontiers-to-Mountaineers in helping them further develop their initiative into a more permanent organization by securing funds to pay for SCA intern.
10. Utilizing a CLG grant, worked with Frontiers to develop an architectural guide/brochure of landmark architecture in these counties.
11. Assisted Coal Heritage Highway Authority in developing a cultural heritage tourism plan and interpretation project for Big Creek spur.
12. Assisted Clay County in the development of a nature based cultural heritage tourism effort.
13. Worked with the West Virginia National Road organization to plan and implement a Cultural Heritage Tourism collaborative in Wheeling.
14. Utilized a Flexi-E-Grant to develop and test a structure and process for connecting vacant buildings to potential cultural tourism related businesses through the West Virginia Tourism Business Sites Locator web site (www.wvtourismbusinesssites.org).

15. Participated in a “Tourism Job Fair” by the Gear-Up program in nine counties by providing a cultural heritage tourism component.
16. Presented at a variety of conferences and events including West Virginia Entrepreneurial Conference, West Virginia Museums Annual Meeting, training for the state’s Main Street Program, the first joint conference of Preservation Alliance and Main Street, the Industry of Culture symposium, and more.
17. Worked with WVU to develop and implement economic models to measure both short and long term economic impact of Cultural Heritage Tourism in seven communities around the state.
18. Working closely with the new state administration to seek staff funding within the Main Street program for the Cultural Heritage Development program. Although substantial support has been promised, no dedicated funding for this purpose has yet materialized. These efforts continue.

2007 – 2008 Heritage Business Development is the primary focus of the newest grant from the Benedum Foundation. The three key program areas under this grant are:

- A. *Forming Business-to-Business Relationships: Made In/Grown In West Virginia.* Expand on current efforts to encourage business-to-business partnerships between producers of West Virginia foods, arts and crafts and West Virginia retailers and tourism outlets. This project would occur utilizing several techniques to increase availability and sales to tourists of WV Made products in local businesses, State Parks and attractions.
- B. *Locally-Initiated Business Development Project Opportunities.* Provide opportunities for locally-initiated heritage business development projects through the availability of mini-grant opportunities for business-development projects within those communities to develop and promote cultural heritage tourism.
- C. *Coordinating Statewide Cultural Heritage Development.* Serve as a coordinating entity for a variety of cultural heritage tourism-related efforts on-going in the state. Coordination would occur through meeting facilitation, meeting attendance, offering leadership, and/or networking opportunities. Educate the public and lawmakers about benefits to build support for state funding for the program.

Within this program effort the program has three continuing goals:

1. Achieving state recognition and funding for the program within the next two years.
2. Continued efforts to leverage additional funding and in-kind services as match and to demonstrate broad support for the program.
3. Continued monitoring of impact assessment and demonstration of outcomes of cultural heritage tourism development.

Organizational Capabilities:

- West Virginia Development Office through its Main Street program provides leadership on the intersection of community and economic development by linking the heritage tourism program to existing technical assistance and funding programs. Of course they also have community contacts throughout the state, especially in the business community.
- Preservation Alliance of West Virginia continues to provide the staffing, expertise, contacts and assistance on efforts related to historic preservation and authentic

interpretation at the local, state and national level, as well as connections with local community efforts across the state.

- The consultant relationship with Potomac Heritage Partnership, which provided critical leadership and expertise in the earlier stages of the CHD program development, has now been mutually concluded, as the CHD Program staff has developed the capacity to take over those roles. Dedicated staff supported by both PAWV and Main Street will carry out future implementation of the CHD Program, with selected consultant expertise as needed.
- The previously mentioned Steering Committee, now known as the Cultural Heritage Development Advisory Committee, provides access to a wide range of expertise and services, and helps connect cultural heritage tourism efforts to other key state agencies, non-profits, existing heritage tourism programs, and local entities such as convention and visitor bureaus and historic sites.