



# Strategic Action Plan

2024 - 2028



The Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation is the nonprofit fundraising partner of the Blue Ridge Parkway, helping to ensure cultural and historical preservation, natural resource protection, educational outreach, and visitor enjoyment.



The mission of the Blue Ridge Music Center is to preserve, interpret, and present the evolving musical traditions of the Blue Ridge Mountains, to highlight the influence of American roots music, and to act as a gateway to cultural opportunities in Blue Ridge Parkway communities.



**Fourth Economy designed and supported the development of this publication for the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation.**

Fourth Economy is a national community and economic development consulting firm. Powered by a vision for an economy that serves the people, our approach is centered on principles of competitiveness, equity and resilience. We partner with communities and organizations, public and private, who are ready for change to equip them with the tools and innovative solutions to build strategic, equitable, and resilient organizations and economies.



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## *Executive Summary*

Spanning 469 miles, the Blue Ridge Parkway is the most visited national park unit and links Shenandoah National Park to Great Smoky Mountains National Park. At milepost 213 on the Parkway, the Blue Ridge Music Center, near Galax, Va., is nationally recognized as a musical and cultural asset. The Music Center also serves as a catalyst for regional travel and tourism. By promoting bluegrass, old-time, and American roots-based music and artists, the Music Center defines a shared regional identity, provides a place of common interest, and contributes to regional economic vitality.

The continued growth of the Music Center relies on understanding the interests of its visitors and changing trends in music consumption. To accomplish this, the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation developed a comprehensive strategic action plan to identify opportunities for enhancing, leveraging, and marketing the Music Center's existing facilities. The plan also informs the development of programs to better serve its visitors and nearby Parkway communities. Through data analysis, extensive engagement with regional stakeholders, and a guided process to co-create solutions, this strategic action plan sets forth 10 strategies across five key themes that accomplish four goals.



## KEY THEMES

- 1 Programming and Impact**  
Enhance programs and their impact to engage larger and more diverse audiences.
- 2 Visitor Amenities and Facilities**  
Increase and expand programming that prioritizes authenticity and connection to place, while also emphasizing diversity and accessibility.
- 3 Messaging and Marketing**  
Refine and expand marketing efforts to engage wider and more diverse audiences.
- 4 Community Connections**  
Expand the Blue Ridge Music Center's role as a connector, convener, and community leader.
- 5 Internal Excellence**  
Optimize internal operations and systems to advance long-term mission delivery.

## GOALS

- 1. Create a strategic action plan** that will enable the Music Center to pursue sustainable financial growth, efficiency, and stability.
- 2. Increase and expand programming** which prioritizes accessibility and diversity, and explores new types of programs.
- 3. Expand the reach of the Music Center** to diverse audiences as it continues to showcase and share the living musical tradition of the region.
- 4. Leverage regional partnerships and assets** to advance the economic and cultural vitality of the Blue Ridge Parkway corridor.



# Introduction

## Methodology

### Analysis

As part of the planning process, visitorship and ticket trends were analyzed and compared to peer organizations across the region and country. Additionally, demographic analysis of the Music Center and the larger region was conducted to better understand which populations are currently served by the Music Center and support attracting diverse audiences. Music Center and Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation employees also conducted an in-depth internal review of staffing, facilities, procedures, operations, and other behind-the-scenes considerations to identify a variety of strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities.

### Engagement

Ensuring the representation of varied community voices was a priority throughout this project's engagement activities. As such, communities were engaged through multiple avenues.

**One-on-one Interviews** allowed interviewees to confidentially discuss their experiences with the Music Center as well as its strengths, assets, and opportunities for improvement. Additionally, interviewees were able to ideate metrics of success for this planning process and the Music Center's growth. Representatives from music-minded organizations and local tourism organizations as well as long-time passholders, musicians, local residents, and economic development professionals were interviewed.

**Case Study Interviews** allowed interviewees of similar organizations or with similar expertise to discuss their experience with the Music Center. Like one-on-one interviews, interviewees were able to discuss the Music Center's strengths, assets, and opportunities for improvement. Interviewees were prompted to discuss topic-specific questions relevant to their expertise as performing musicians, representatives of major tourism or economic development bodies, and representatives of other music-minded organizations. Additionally, leadership from identified peer sites was invited to discuss ongoing pandemic-related changes and challenges to live music.

**Community Engagement Sessions**, also known as "**Build Sessions**" were conducted in the last months of the project. The first Build Session was conducted virtually and brought together advisory committee members to (1) discuss the project's process and (2) think through how to expand amenities and programming to appeal to more diverse audiences, how to rethink the Music Center's role as a tourism leader and portal to Parkway communities, and how to better market the Music Center to potential visitors. The second Build Session took place at the Music Center and asked participants to think through the same aforementioned topics with the addition of thinking through how to sustain, diversify, and grow the Music Center's revenue streams.

**Survey** deployment allowed for additional feedback from a larger audience. The development and deployment of the Music-Minded Survey garnered nearly 1,000 responses across a wide geographic area and supported an in-depth understanding of how respondents were originally exposed to bluegrass and American roots music, how they became familiar with the Music Center, and what additional amenities and services they would like to see offered.

## Establishing a Baseline

### Early Takeaways

In the earliest stages of this project, an Ecosystem Scan was conducted in which prior plans, reports, visitor logs, and financial documents were reviewed. Key challenges and strengths mentioned throughout the Ecosystem Scan include:

#### Key Strengths

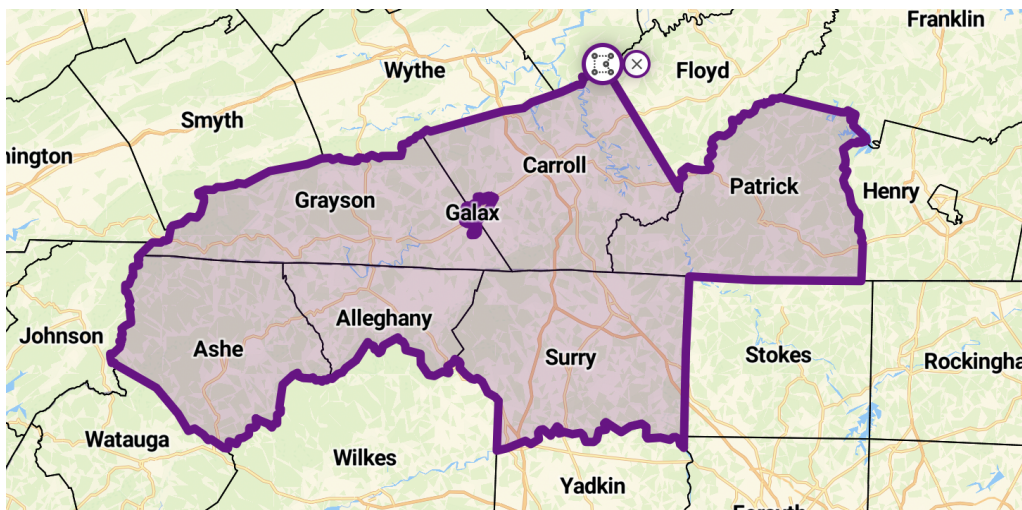
- **Tourism Economy** – The location of the Music Center on the Blue Ridge Parkway favors expansion of the tourism economy in towns along the Parkway.
- **The Music Center Experience** – Across visitorship logs, one thing was abundantly clear: the Blue Ridge Music Center consistently exceeds expectations—a testament to the skills of those working behind the scenes.
- **Industry Influence** – The Music Center is a visible and relevant entity in the music community, often influencing the opening of new music venues and events across the region.
- **Passholder Commitment** – Passholders, both local and from a wider geography, use their passes frequently – demonstrating sustained interest in the Music Center.

## Key Challenges

- **Weather** – The Music Center’s programming is particularly susceptible to inclement weather. Additionally, the Music Center’s profitability is highly dependent on seasonal changes and weather conditions during its short open season, making the window for capturing revenue onsite quite narrow.
- **Location** – The Music Center’s location is only accessible via the Blue Ridge Parkway, which limits access by those exploring the area via different routes.
- **Facilities** – The lower capacity of on-site indoor facilities limits the ability to respond to inclement weather by moving outdoor events inside.
- **Demographics** – As the Music Center continues to seek diverse visitorship, recognition that the majority of the Music Center’s visitors are older adults who identify as white is essential.

## Defining the Blue Ridge Region

This plan defines the region using the towns and counties outlined in the 2015 strategic action plan as directly benefiting from the Blue Ridge Music Center. The counties included are Grayson, Carroll, and Patrick in Virginia, and Surry, Alleghany, and Ashe in North Carolina. Key places or towns include Galax, Independence, Hillsville, and Stuart in Virginia, and Mount Airy, Dobson, Elkin, Sparta, and West Jefferson in North Carolina. To avoid duplication, the following data uses county-level data to define the region relative to other geographies. Below are key takeaways from the initial data analysis of the region and Music Center.



Source: PolicyMap 2020

Notably, Grayson County is growing for the first time since the 1990s. In both Grayson County and Galax, growth is due to migration (newcomers) rather than natural population growth (births). Much of this growth is likely retirees rather than younger families. However, this growth, as well as that in nearby Winston-Salem, N.C., is promising for growing and diversifying visitorship.



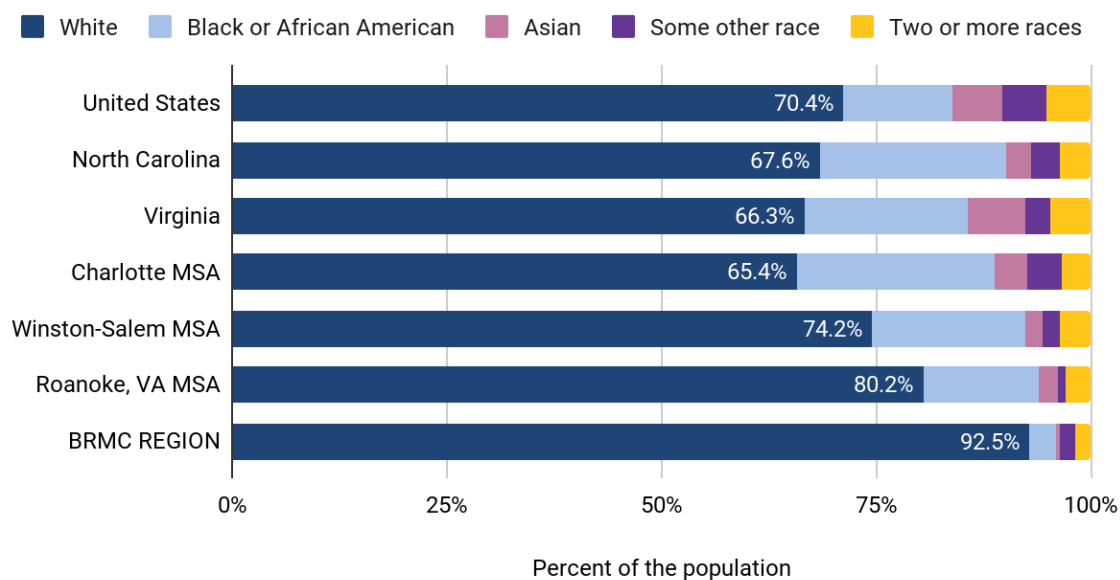
## COMPARATIVE MEDIAN AGE OF REGION

Geography	Total population	Median age (years)
United States	326,569,308	38.2
North Carolina	10,386,227	38.9
Virginia	8,509,358	38.4
Charlotte MSA	2,595,027	37.6
Winston-Salem MSA	671,156	40.6
Roanoke, VA MSA	313,289	42.9
BRMC REGION	173,220	46.9

The **median age of the BRMC region is several years older** than the national average. While the median ages of Winston-Salem and Roanoke are closer to the Blue Ridge Music Center Region than state medians, the region remains the oldest of comparable geographies.

Source: Census American Community Survey 2020 5 Year Survey

## COMPARATIVE RACIAL COMPOSITION OF REGION



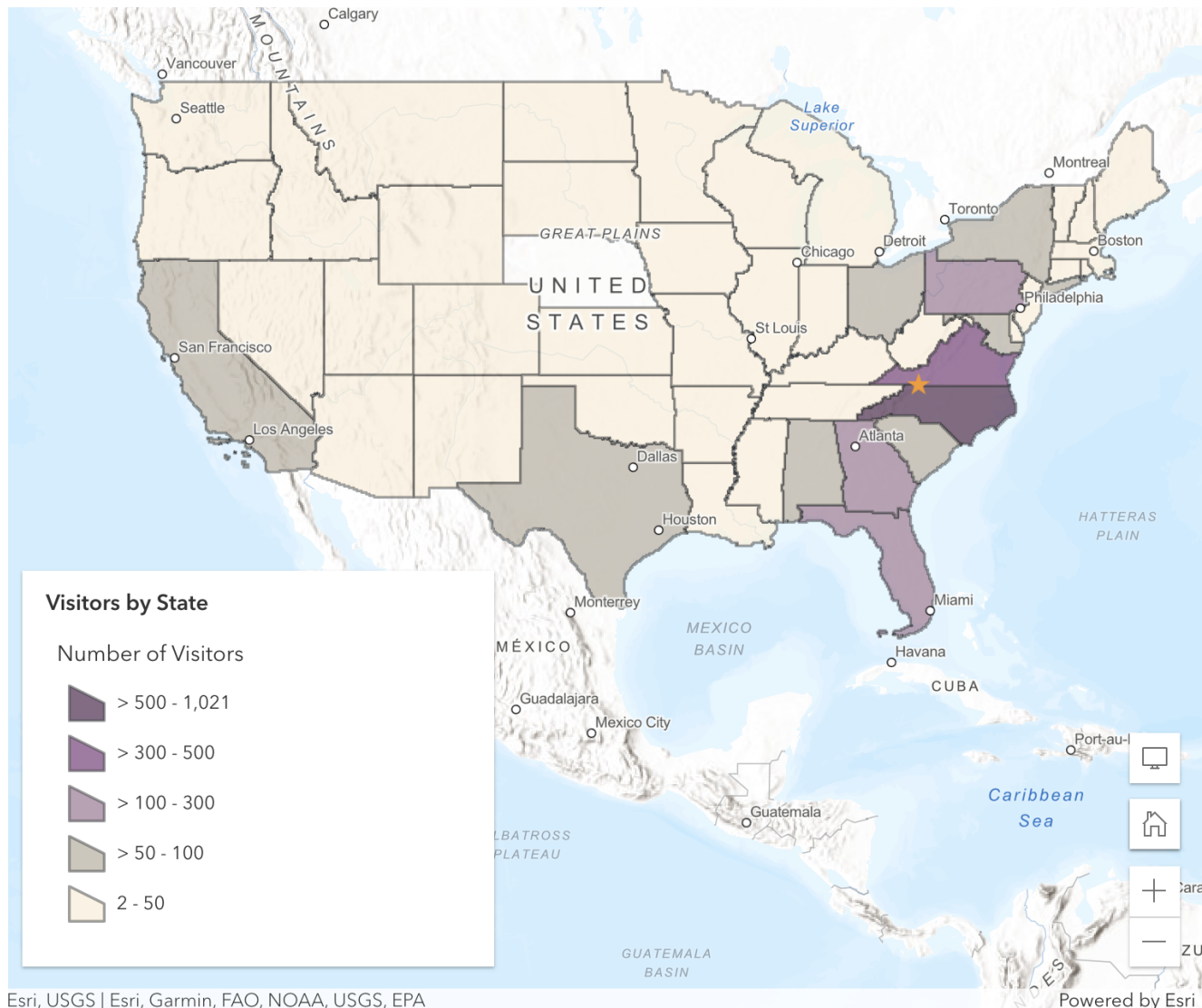
Source: Census American Community Survey 2020 5 Year Survey

The **region is significantly less diverse than Virginia or North Carolina**. When considering the region relative to several of its major-market metropolitan areas, it remains less diverse but resembles Winston-Salem and Roanoke more than Charlotte.

## Audience

In order to grow regional tourism, it is essential to understand the characteristics of the existing audience of the Blue Ridge Music Center as well as general area visitors.

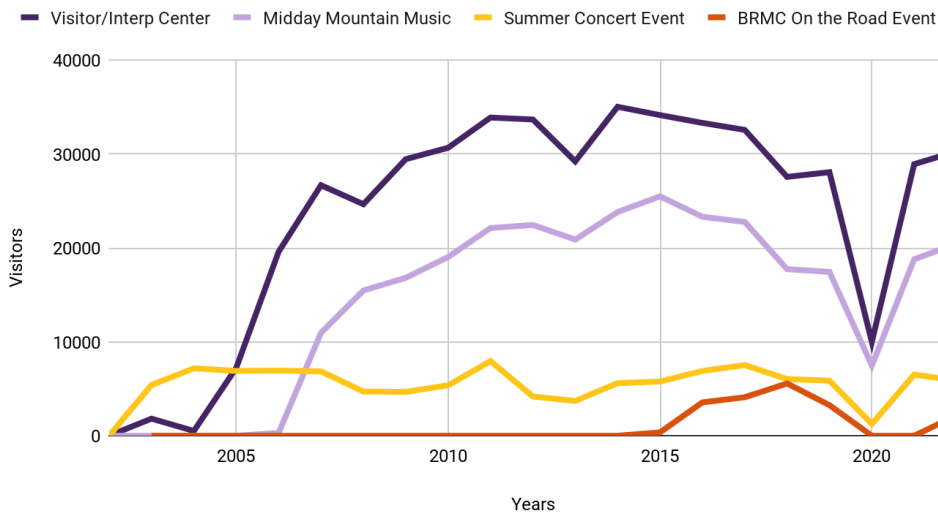
### MAP OF VISITORS



**Visitors are largely from the region.** By far, the most Blue Ridge Music Center visitors are from North Carolina, followed by Virginia. After this state and commonwealth, which the Parkway passes through, Georgia and Florida produce a notable number of visitors. Music Center staff note the trend of “snowbirds” who, after spending summers proximate to the center, head south for the winter.

## Music Center Attendance and Ticket Sales

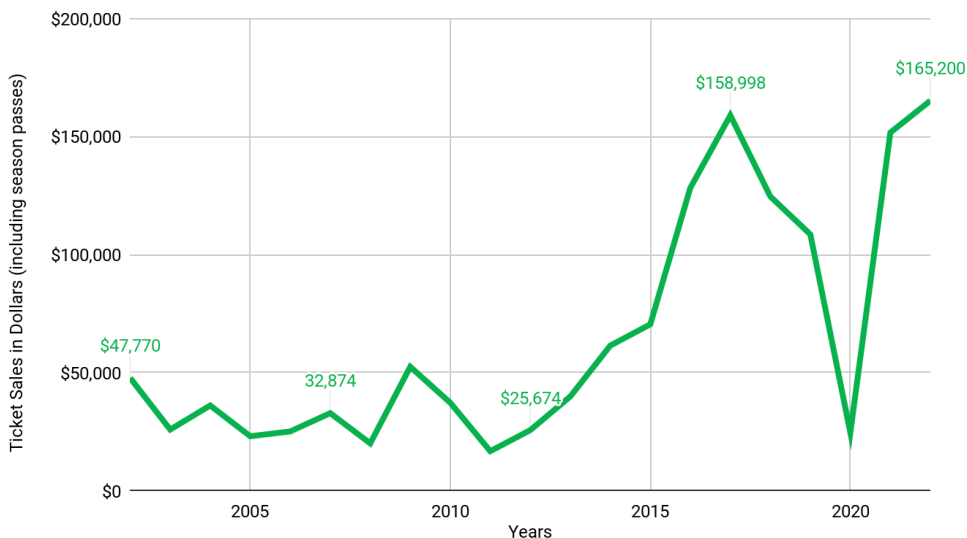
### Blue Ridge Music Center Attendance 2002-2022



Source: Blue Ridge Music Center

After pandemic related disruptions in 2020, **Blue Ridge Music Center attendance is rebounding**. The visitor center receives the most visitors, followed by the Midday Mountain Music series.

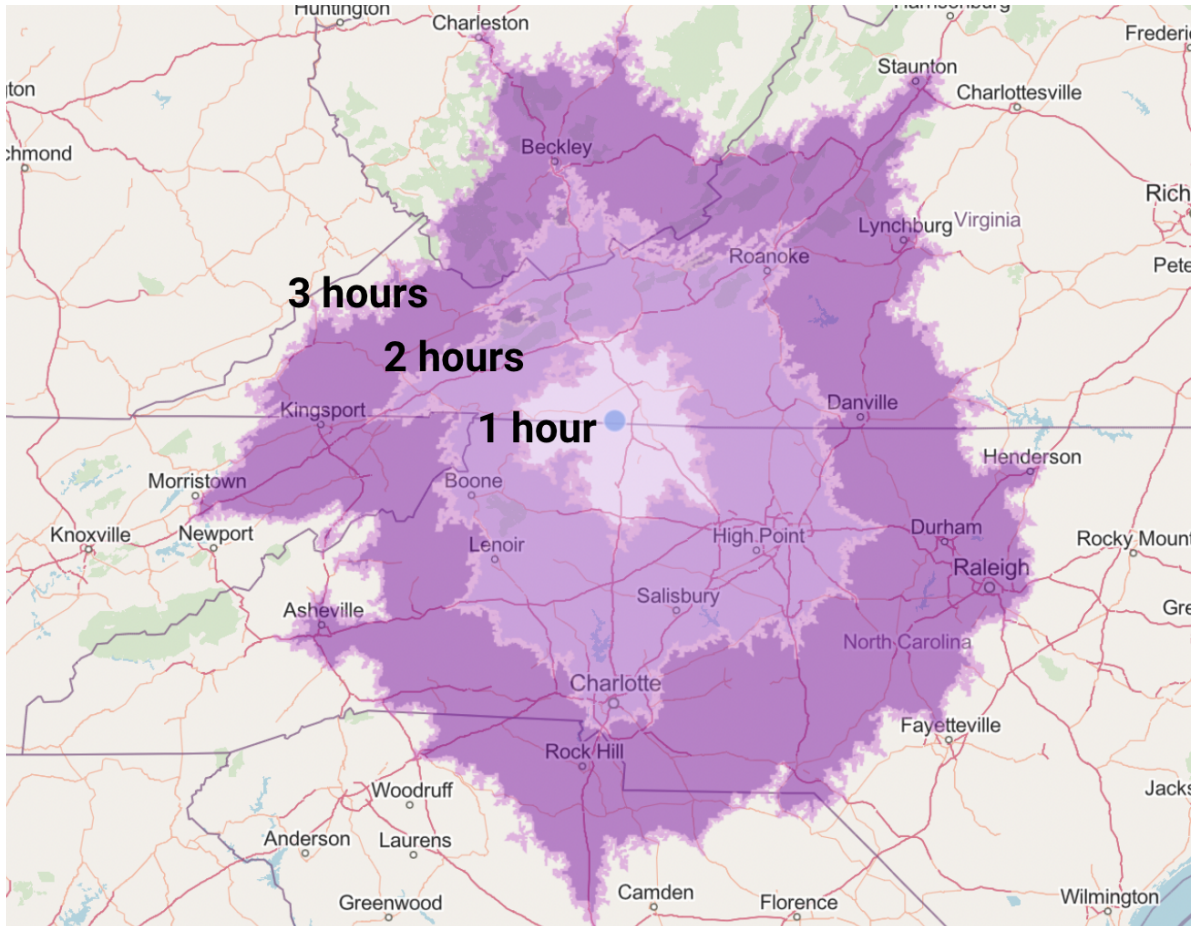
### Total Ticket Sales 2002-2022



Source: Blue Ridge Music Center

While Music Center attendance is still rebounding, **ticket sales reached an all time high in 2022**. Ticket sale revenue began steadily increasing after a low in 2011. Revenue steeply increased from 2015 to 2017. Special events and a selection of highly attended concerts in 2016, 2017, and 2018 helped to fuel this increase. Even before the pandemic, however, 2019 marked a reduction in revenues, largely due to wet weather during the performance season.

## THREE-HOUR DRIVE SHED



**There is further opportunity to engage those within a three-hour drive.** Major population centers, including Winston-Salem, Greensboro, High Point, Asheville, Charlotte, Raleigh-Durham, Charleston, W.V., and Blacksburg, Va., are located within a three-hour drive. Several colleges fall within or just outside the three-hour radius, making them relevant areas for marketing and recruitment.

Of particular importance to both the Blue Ridge Music Center and its surrounding communities is the Piedmont Triad area of North Carolina (Winston-Salem, Greensboro, High Point). For more than a century, the connection between Northwestern North Carolina and Southwestern Virginia (especially Sparta, Jefferson, West Jefferson, Elkin, Mount Airy, and Galax) and the Triad area has been strong and flowing in both directions. Many Triad residents vacation and/or have second homes in the mountains and along the Blue Ridge Parkway, and many mountain residents travel to Winston-Salem, High Point, and Greensboro to work, shop, attend sporting and cultural events, trade goods, and acquire health care services.

It is not surprising that the Piedmont Triad is the Music Center's largest urban market and currently provides approximately 35 percent to 40 percent of the Music Center's audiences. That area will likely continue to serve as a strong base for the Music Center—and should not be ignored or taken for granted, even as efforts are made to cultivate other population centers in the wider region.





# Building the Plan

## Engagement

As mentioned, engagement was conducted via three avenues: one-on-one interviews, focus group interviews, and community engagement sessions (also known as "Build Sessions"). Key themes from each engagement type are discussed below.

### Key Themes from One-on-one and Case Study Interviews

Across individual interviewees and focus groups, it was clear that the Music Center's programming is highly lauded. Guests consistently commented that programming, such as the Midday Mountain Music Series, is a great way to attract those traveling along the Parkway. Guests also complimented the user-friendliness of the ticketing system, especially as it relates to purchasing season passes; and praised the wide range of musical experiences offered at the Music Center. Meanwhile, musicians commented on the musician-venue relationships they have developed with the Music Center and praised its leadership for cultivating these relationships.

Interviewees and case study participants also discussed opportunities for growth and improvement, specifically citing the need for increased signage to (1) make finding the Music Center easier and (2) let those traveling along the Parkway know the Music Center exists. Interviewees also provided feedback that suggested that the Music Center needs to actively dismantle stereotypes surrounding who American roots music is meant for. In other words, interviewees stressed the Music Center needs to make it clear that traditional music is open to all audiences, not just those who are older adults identifying as white. Interviewees also recommended cross-promoting, partnering with other music-minded venues and organizations, and partnering with local colleges—strategies which are further discussed in this plan. Finally, interviewees called for more efforts to address the needs of people with disabilities.

## Key Themes from Community Engagement Sessions

In community engagement sessions, participants were invited to brainstorm multiple "How Might We Questions." The questions included:

1. How might we **modify and/or expand Music Center programming** and amenities to appeal to a wider and more **diverse audience** and/or encourage current patrons to visit on a more regular basis?
2. How might we rethink and/or expand the Music Center's (and Foundation's) **role as a tourism leader** and facilitator, and as a gateway and portal to Parkway communities and other regional cultural and recreational opportunities?
3. How might we **better market the Music Center's offerings** to potential visitors and supporters?
4. How might we **sustain, diversify, and grow revenue streams** to achieve the Music Center's mission, goals, and strategies?

While build session participants split into groups to discuss specific questions, unifying themes emerged. Specifically, participants prioritized the potential for off-site programming and partnerships with the community, the need to expand the role of the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation and Music Center, and the need to cultivate stories that represent and resonate with the Music Center's history, as well as the larger history and evolution of American roots music.

When discussing how to **modify or expand Music Center programming in hopes of appealing to more diverse communities**, participants centered around one particular strategy: partnering with other presenting organizations in the surrounding region as a means to tap into a wider audience. Identifying key partner organizations and locations by recognizing potential service overlaps and opportunities to leverage existing operations was a key discussion point in this brainstorming activity. Identifying partners also allows for the consideration of increased financial support.

Additionally, participants recognize that different actions are needed to achieve **diversity on stage and diversity in audiences**. The strategies necessary to achieve an audience of larger geographical diversity might be different than those needed to attract an audience of racial and ethnic diversity, and engaging different groups will require specific, intentional strategies that span the entire Blue Ridge Music Center experience. As such, participants discussed how the region features countless valuable musical traditions alongside those of American roots and bluegrass music, and showcasing these diverse musical traditions might prove fruitful in attracting more diverse audiences. Participants also discussed the possibility of "edu-tainment" programming composed of traveling exhibits, as well as the creation of a digital archive library to document local musicians preserving the region's musical traditions.





Photo by Mike Duncan

Finally, participants discussed the need for **expanded food and beverage options** (namely, alcoholic beverages and food trucks); **low-cost amenities** like disc golf and corn hole to encourage families to spend more time at the Music Center; **camping options like RV lots and campground spaces**; and **shuttle transportation**.

When considering the Music Center's role as a **tourism leader and facilitator**, participants discussed their hope that the Music Center would continue to uphold its founding mission and focus on being a place for communities to tell their stories. Participants discussed how the Music Center is a respected authority within the music industry and a leader in the cultural preservation of bluegrass and American roots music, further stating that the Music Center could leverage this standing as a means to bring together other music-minded organizations and individuals to tell their stories. Participants discussed how partnerships with academic institutions that have existing programs on bluegrass and American roots music could feature additional stories, while also opening up the Music Center to more grant opportunities that support cultural storytelling. Additionally, participants discussed how the facilities within the Music Center could be utilized as convening spaces for the larger community, a strategy that would invite a larger and potentially more diverse audience to the experience and benefit from the Music Center, while not compromising its founding mission.

When brainstorming **how to better market the Music Center and its offerings**, participants discussed the potential for collaboration with festivals, venues, and tourism organizations to offer vacation packages or seasonal giveaways. Additionally, participants discussed hiring a designated social media staff member, launching a marketing campaign, and harnessing and investing in the power of social media through influencers and other avenues. Finally, intentionally diversifying programming, expanding amenities, and developing a social media presence all emerged as revenue-increasing strategies discussed by participants.

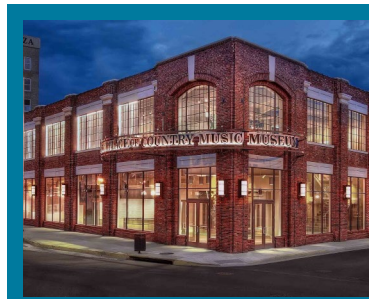
## Case Studies

Case studies were selected by Blue Ridge Music Center, Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation, and Fourth Economy staff based on several factors including location, program provision, National Park Service affiliation, attendance numbers, etc. Cases include permanent venues and festivals/rotating shows. Most cases are within the same region as the Music Center. Additional non-direct peer cases were used to learn from larger venues (Red Rocks) as well as non-music venues (North Carolina Museum of Art). Including these cases allowed for outside-the-box thinking. More information on case studies is available in the appendix.

Site/Program	Location	Annual Visitorship	Is there lodging nearby?	Is transportation provided to lodging?	Is there food on site?
Blue Ridge Music Center	Galax, VA	40,000	Hotels, Campgrounds, and RV Parks	No	Food trucks, The Galax Smokehouse provided food
Wolf Trap	Vienna, VA	Park Receives 402,580	Preferred hotel near site	Shuttle operated by Fairfax Connector	Yes, also spotlight local restaurants
Birthplace of Country Music Museum	Bristol, TN/VA	75,000	Hotels, Camping at Thunder Mountain	Shuttles for festivals	Link to Downtown Bristol restaurants
Red Rocks Park & Amphitheater	Morrison, CO	1,320,000	Preferred hotel	Shuttles	Yes
The Floyd Country Store	Floyd, VA	-	Website directs to visit Floyd	No	Yes
Leaf Global Arts	Asheville, NC	9,300	Camping on site during festivals, hotels nearby	No, all at one site	Food trucks
PineCone	Raleigh, NC	-	Varies	-	Dependent on venue
North Carolina Museum of Art	Raleigh, NC	60,000	Hotels	No	Yes



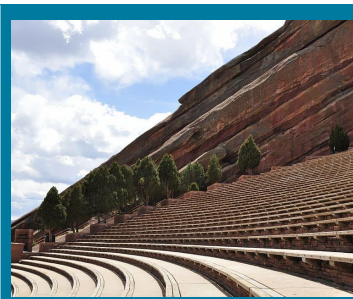
Considering select case study venues and festivals helped inform the discussions and recommendation process. For this project, the primary case study subjects included:



**The Birthplace of Country Music Museum**  
Bristol, VA



**LEAF Global Arts**  
Asheville, NC



**Red Rocks Park and Amphitheater**  
Morrison, CO



**Wolf Trap**  
Vienna, VA



**Floyd Country Store**  
Floyd VA

These cases offer a variety of programming options, amenities, and other opportunities that illustrate potential avenues of growth and development for the Blue Ridge Music Center. In conducting this research, it was quickly noted that all of the venues had similar throughlines and experiences. To best organize the resulting information, we identified four major categories: programming and impact, amenities, marketing, and community connectivity.

- **Programming and impact** seeks to demonstrate to what extent the case study venue attracts a diverse audience and/or showcases diverse performances; has programming with educational value; and hosts festivals or multiday events.
- **Amenities** considers whether the case study venue provides on-site lodging or recommends local hotels; offers food and beverage options; allows visitors to host other events on-site (including weddings and other celebrations); and provides transportation service to shows, like a shuttle or dedicated bus system.
- **Marketing** evaluates whether the case study venue has an active social media presence; if it exists on other media platforms, like radio; and if it consistently promotes other local cultural attractions.
- Lastly, **community connectivity** includes examples in which the case study venue offers connection or easy access to other recreation activities, like hikes or virtual programming; and ways in which the organization offers programming aimed at fostering community impact and connection.

## PROGRAMMING

Programming varies widely across cases, but all share an interest in culture and community. While the Blue Ridge Music Center already offers a significant amount of programming, particularly given the staff size, other sites show how programming can be incorporated into regional efforts:

1. The Birthplace of Country Music Museum in Bristol, Va., emphasizes the significance of the region's musical heritage and the city's role in its history through an **interactive museum with permanent and rotating exhibits**.
2. LEAF Global Arts in Asheville, N.C., puts on **LEAF Fest, summer camps, and retreats**, presenting global music at a local level.

## AMENITIES

All or most of the case study venues provide or partner with others to offer amenities such as lodging, food and beverage options, and transportation to shows from local lodging.

1. Red Rocks Park & Amphitheater in Morrison, Colo., has an official hotel, which offers **round-trip shuttle service** on show nights and includes **links to nearby camping sites** on its website.
2. Wolf Trap performance venue in Vienna, Va., another National Park Service venue, offers refreshments with an **on-site restaurant and concession stand** and also promotes local restaurants and lodging options on its website.

Photo by Mike Duncan







## COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Accessibility includes the ability to engage with a venue or festival as well as its integration into the wider community. Particular attention was paid to examples that overlap between music and outdoor recreation:

1. Wolf Trap performance venue in Vienna, Va., integrates its **connection to outdoor recreation** into the performance space, with the Wolf Trap Trail Loop beginning close to the performance area.
2. Red Rocks Park & Amphitheater offers year-round **recreational programming**, ranging from yoga classes to film showings.

## MARKETING

As with amenities, all or most of the case studies reviewed here have an active social media presence and maintain a frequent marketing schedule. Although Instagram is a popular option among all of the case studies, we also found several examples of alternative media.

1. The Birthplace of Country Music Museum in Bristol, Va., broadcasts an **independent radio station** from its site, allowing for a wider reach and promotion of its programming.
2. Floyd Country Store's location on a busy main street in Floyd, Va., integrates itself into, and helps promote, the larger Floyd Artisan Trail allowing for **regional cross-marketing**.

## Survey Results

Surveys serve as tools to quantify feedback. Along with the client team, Fourth Economy created two surveys to engage regional audiences and music-minded audiences. The purpose of the regional survey was to gauge local familiarity with the Music Center as well as garner suggestions on programming and amenities. The client team as well as Fourth Economy distributed the regional survey through network channels such as tourism and economic development organizations. In all, not enough responses were captured to create a representative sample and thus were not generalizable. Results were folded into engagement feedback. However, the second survey, centered around a music-minded audience, received a substantial response.

### MUSIC-MINDED SURVEY

The purpose of the music-minded survey is to understand how audiences find information on bluegrass, old-time, and/or American roots music venues as well as their experience with the Music Center. The survey begins with general questions about music habits, such as annual concert attendance and listening mode preferences. The second half of the survey asks about respondents' knowledge of and experience at the Blue Ridge Music Center.

A common theme throughout Fourth Economy's work with the Music Center was an interest in engaging with wider and more diverse audiences. As such, the survey begins with demographic questions centered around age and race. General demographic questions allow Fourth Economy to provide cross-tabulations and analyze patterns across questions.

Fourth Economy drafted questions with Music Center staff and an advisory council. Several questions included skip logic. For instance, if respondents indicated that they had visited the Music Center, they received an additional question about where they stayed during their visit.

The Music Center and Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation staff shared the survey throughout their network as well as through an ad with Bandsintown. This method of outreach means the survey was not random, and thus not generalizable to the public.

In all, the survey received 996 completed responses in the two weeks it was live. Partial or blank responses were not included in the analysis. Respondents skewed demographically older than the region and very few identified as non-white. As a result, Fourth Economy was able to perform cross-tabulations by age but not race.

In the music-minded survey, we asked respondents what programs and events would make them more likely to visit the Blue Ridge Music Center.

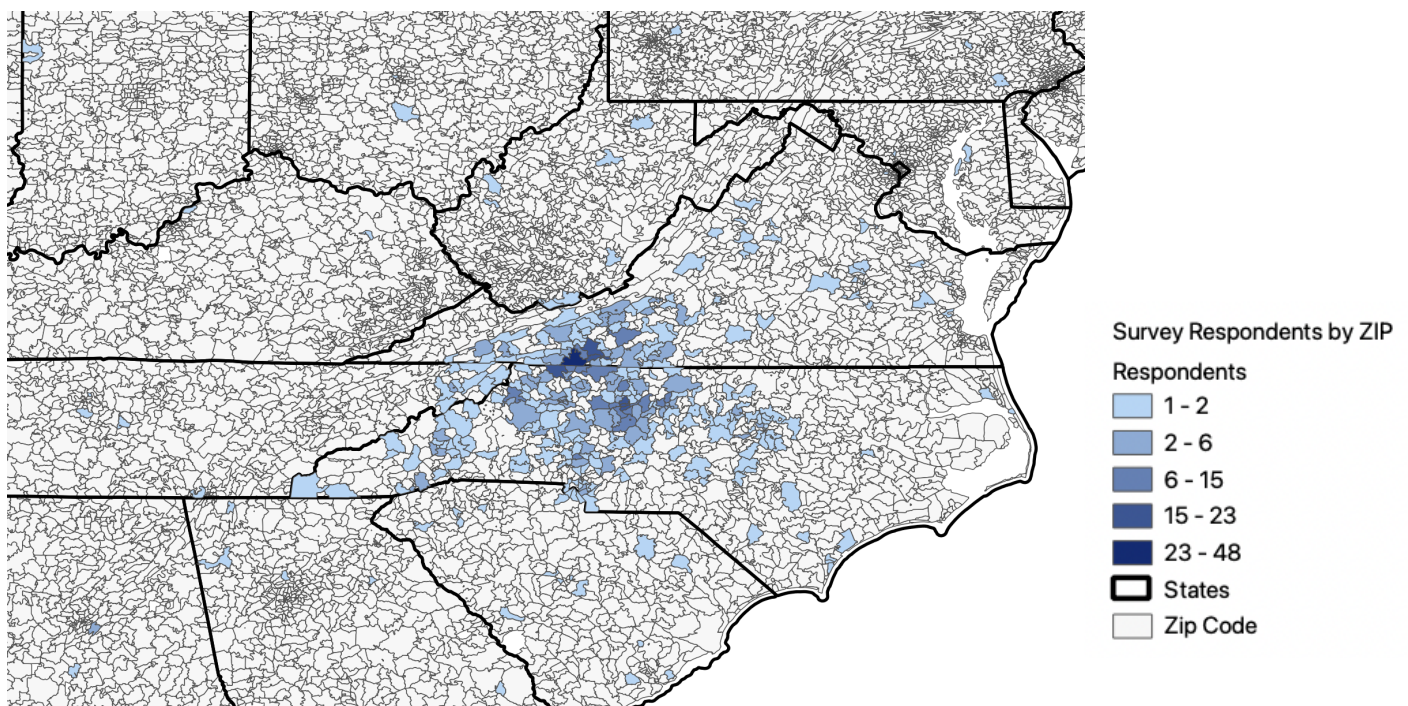




## COMMUNITY CONNECTIVITY

Consistent with visitor log analysis, most respondents were located in western Virginia or North Carolina, surrounding the Music Center. Respondents are represented by shades of blue at the zip code level, where darker blue represents a larger concentration of respondents by zip code.

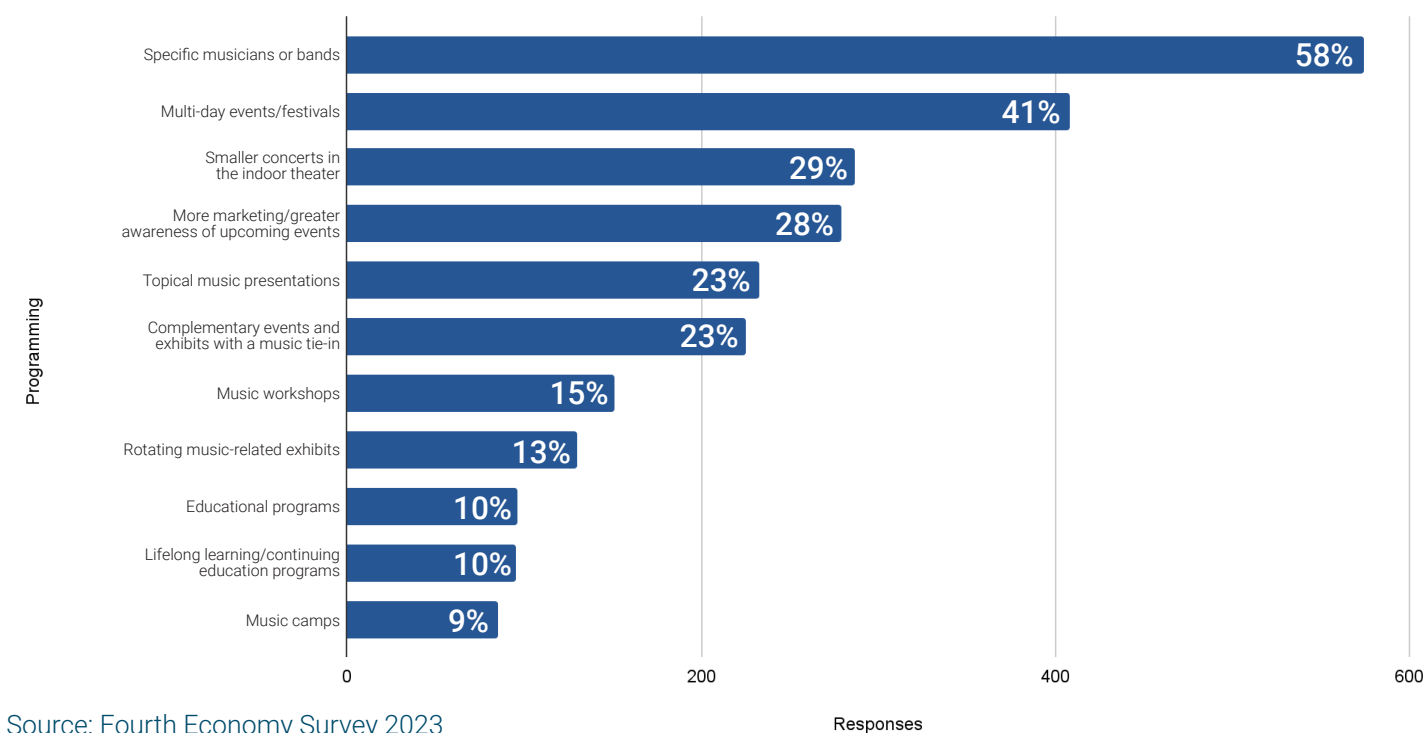
### Survey Respondents by Zip Code



Respondents hailed from nearly all states. The top home states of respondents include North Carolina (504), Virginia (187), South Carolina (26), Tennessee (20), Georgia (16), and Florida (14). Regional representation is visible in the top cities and town responses: Winston-Salem (82), Greensboro (37), Charlotte (35), Galax (32), Charlottesville (23), and Sparta (22).

# PROGRAMMING AND IMPACT

What programs and events would make you MORE likely to visit the Blue Ridge Music Center (again)?

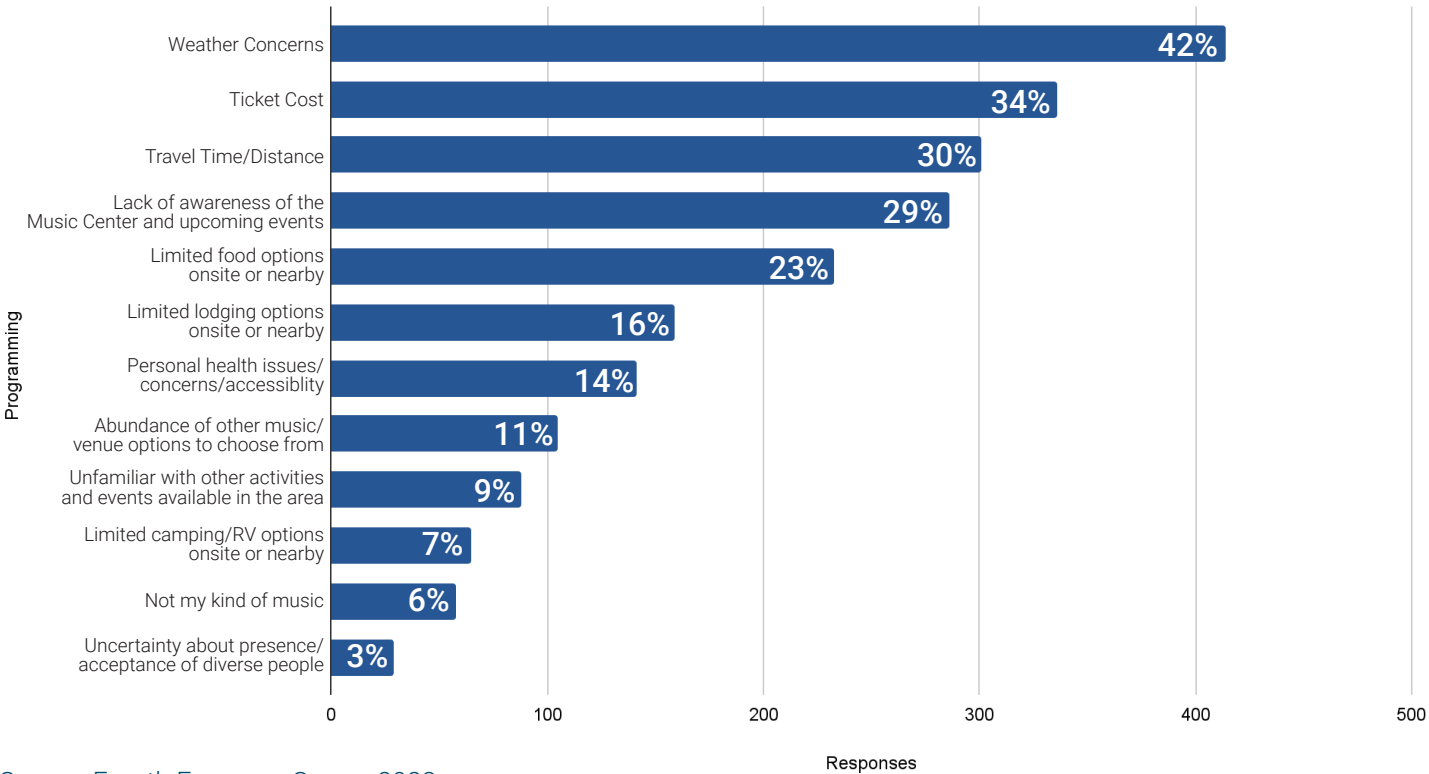


Music-centric programming that builds on existing offerings, rather than focusing on complementary non-music programming, was preferred by survey respondents. Specific musicians/bands and multiday events/festivals would be more likely to engage the largest number of survey respondents. More than 28 percent of respondents stated they would be more likely to engage with more marketing and promotion.

When analyzing those who have never visited the Music Center, programming preferences were consistent. All top answers were shared between those who have visited the Music Center and those who have not. Respondents who have not visited the center ranked music workshops and camps slightly higher than those who have visited. Rotating exhibits were the least popular option among non-visitors.



What would make you LESS likely to visit the Blue Ridge Music Center (again)?



Source: Fourth Economy Survey 2023

After weather, cost, and travel were top factors that would negatively influence potential visitors. Similar to program preferences, more than 250 respondents stated lack of awareness (through a lack of marketing/promotion) would make them less likely to visit the Music Center.

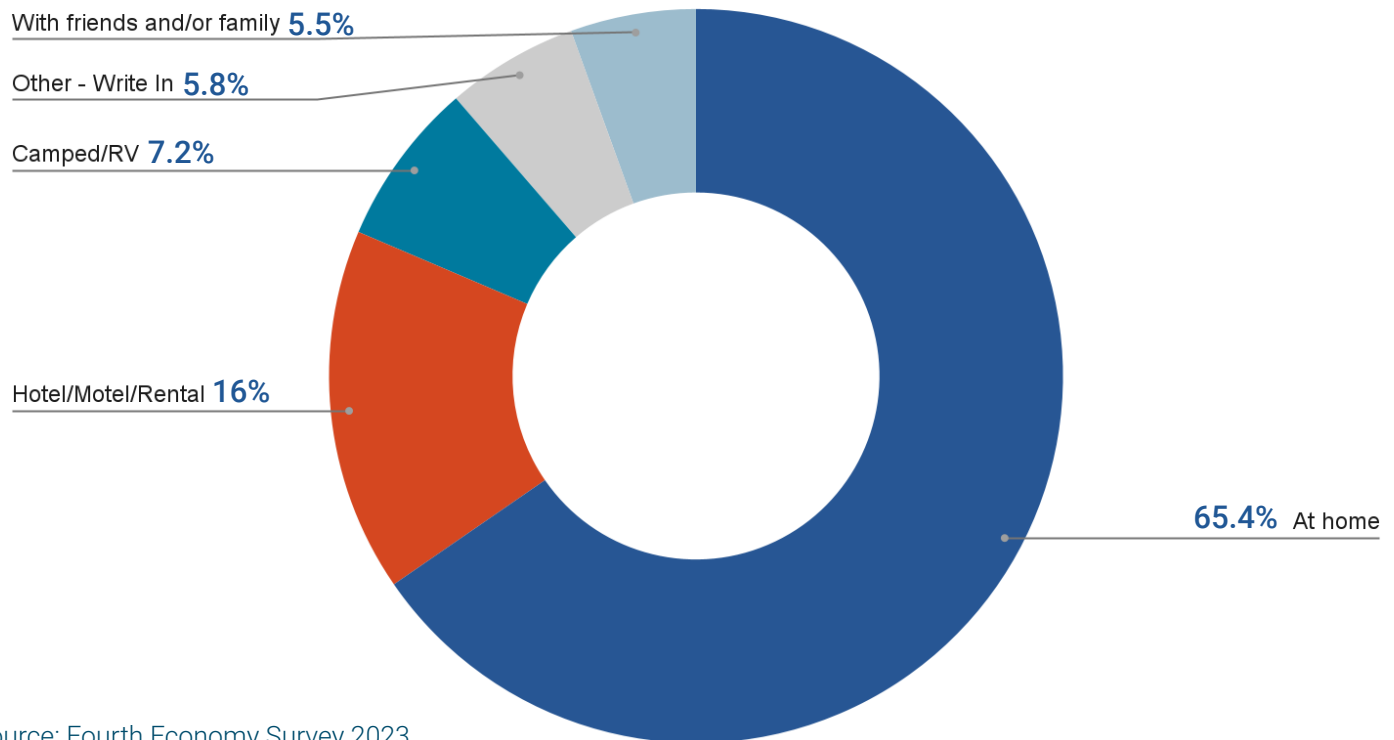


Photo by Mike Duncan

## AMMENITIES

Given the lack of on-site lodging and the variety of lodging models found through case studies, Fourth Economy surveyed music-minded respondents on their stay habits during visits as well as other facility change preferences.

### Where do you stay during your visit?



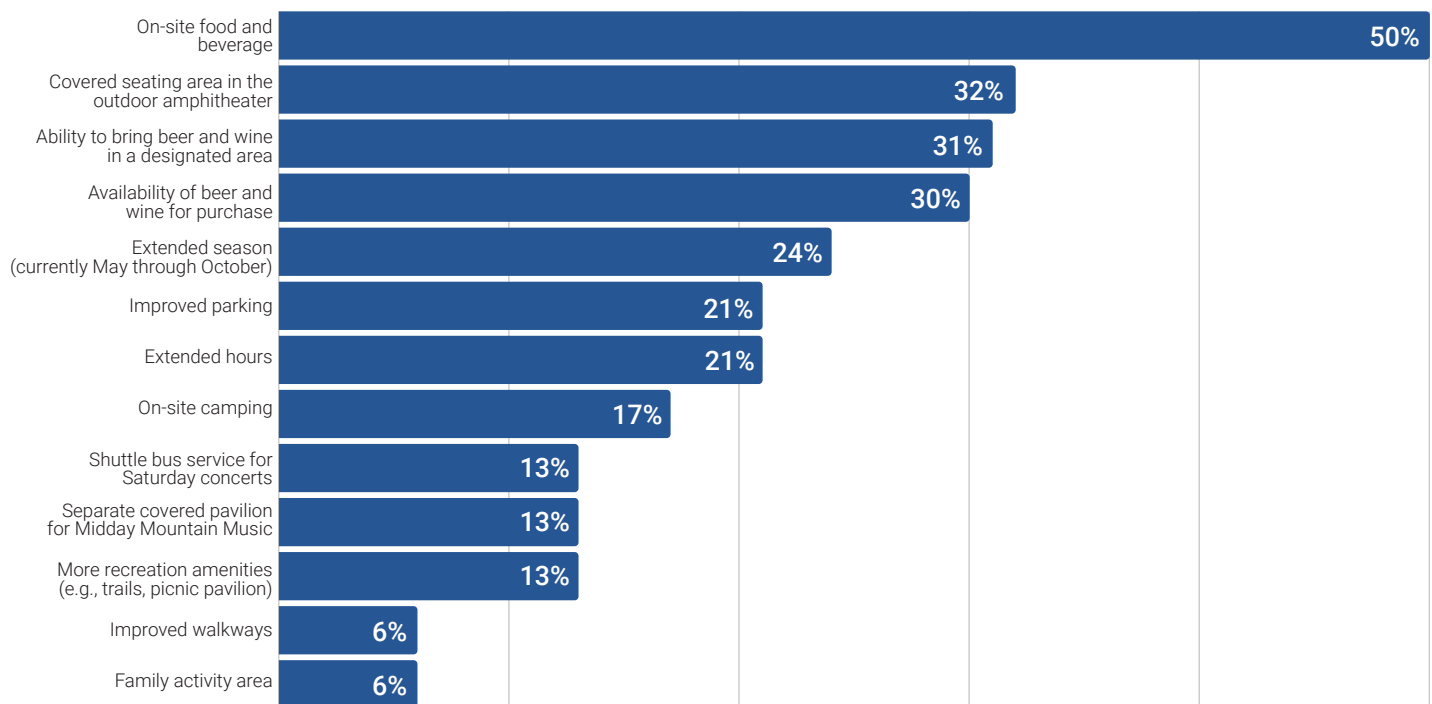
Source: Fourth Economy Survey 2023

Almost two-thirds of respondents stay at home after visiting the Music Center, again positioning the center as a regional asset. It should not be overlooked that almost one quarter of respondents either stay in a hotel/motel/rental or camp/RV despite no existing formal connections between the Music Center and lodging.





## What changes would you like to see at the facility?



Source: Fourth Economy Survey 2023

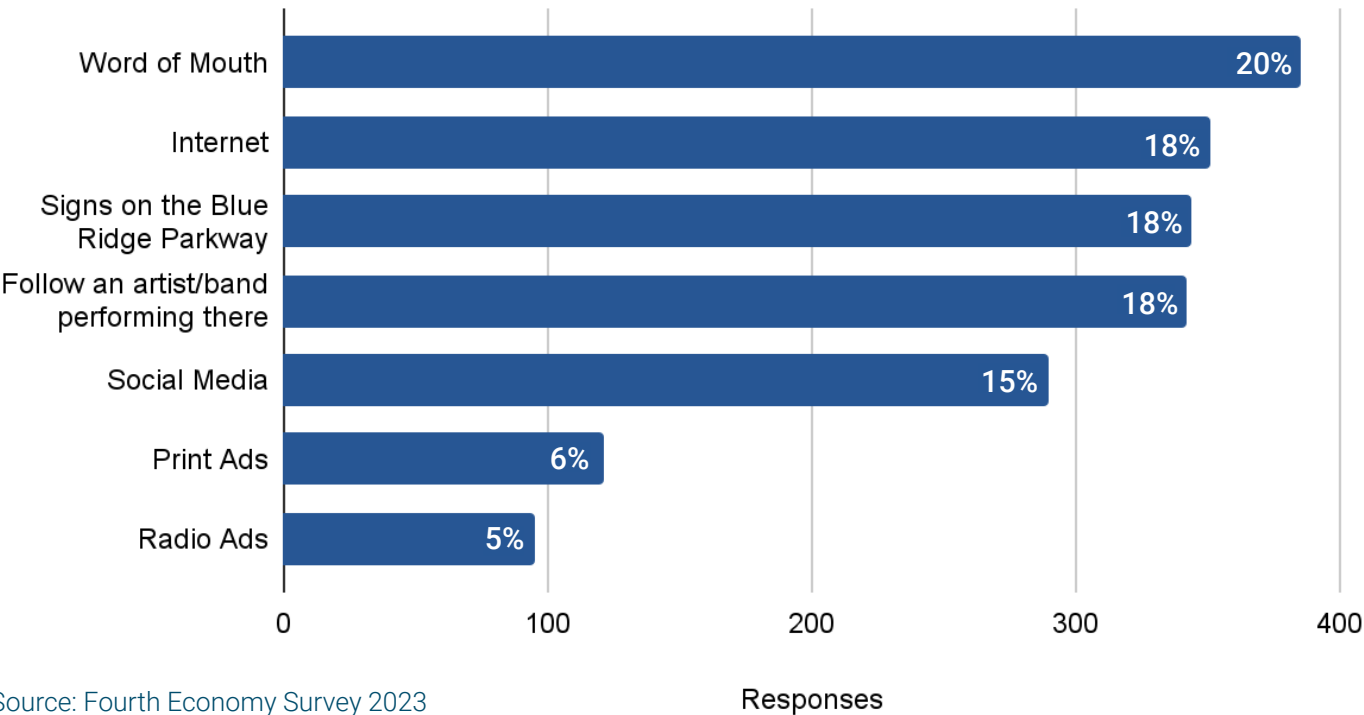
Ideas for facility improvements differed by age. Preference for a covered seating area was driven by respondents 65 years and older (45%) compared to 27% of 25 to 44-year-olds. More than one-third of respondents age 25 to 44 supported camping on site compared to 10% of those 65 or older.



MARKETING

Due to the methods of connection-based outreach, the vast majority of respondents (92%) were familiar with the Blue Ridge Music Center. Respondents familiar with the Music Center often heard about it from a variety of sources.

How did you hear of the Blue Ridge Music Center?

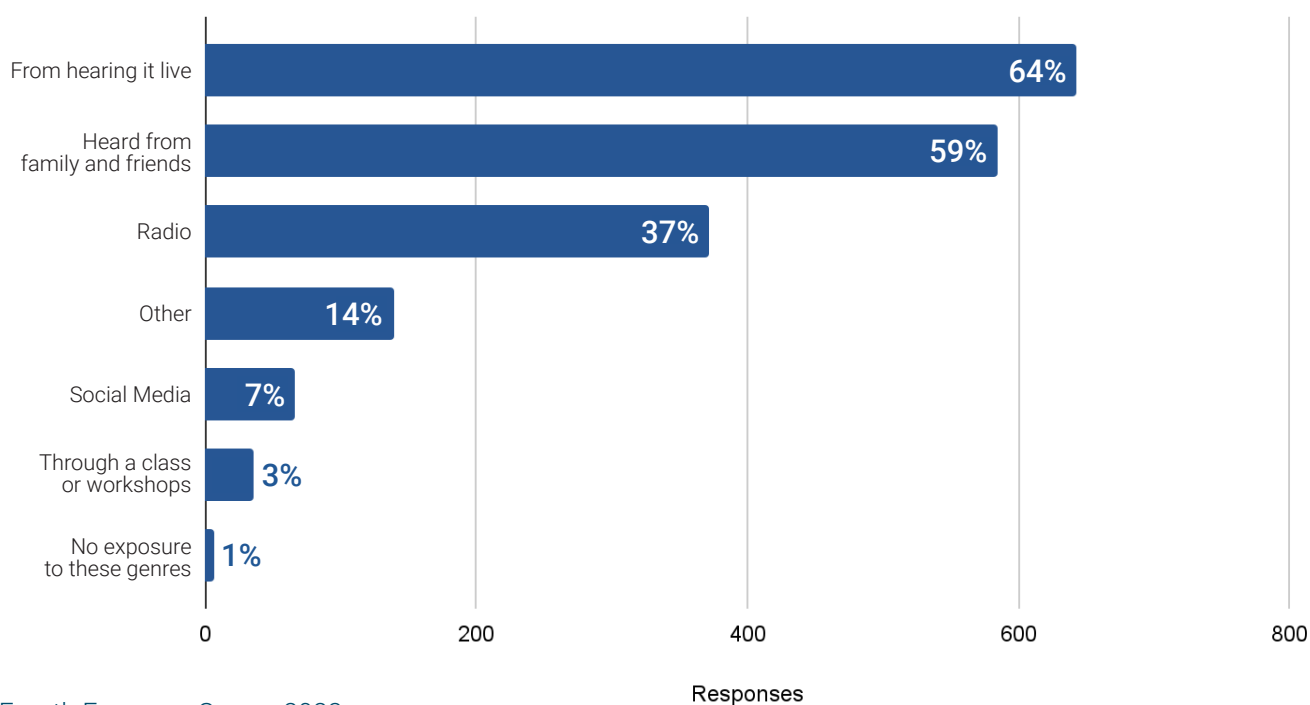


One in five responses cited word of mouth as a way of hearing about the Music Center, a pattern that was shared across all but the youngest (18-24) age group. Of media methods, internet and social media posts reached larger audiences than print or radio ads. Connections to the Parkway as well as the overall music community also promote knowledge of the Music Center as seen through signs on the Blue Ridge Parkway and connection to artists' existing fan bases.

Findings about Music Center communications share some similarities with how respondents were introduced to bluegrass, old-time, and/or American roots music.



## How were you first exposed to bluegrass, old-time, and/or American roots music?



Source: Fourth Economy Survey 2023

Nearly 70 percent of respondents ages 25 to 44 were exposed to this genre of music from hearing it live. Unsurprisingly, the largest differences in age were seen across media sources. Almost 45 percent of respondents 65 years and older were exposed to the genre through the radio compared to 27 percent of respondents ages 25 to 44.

## Internal Analysis

The data analysis and public engagement activities provided a great wealth of information to inform this plan. Some of those results confirmed existing perceptions, while other input provided fresh information and perspective. To complement the objective data and input from external audiences, employees from the Blue Ridge Music Center and Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation spent time conducting a thorough internal analysis of the many behind-the-scenes issues and observations that aren't easily revealed by demographics or public surveys.

A partial listing of these internal review topics includes: equipment inventories and needs, a review of existing facilities, visitor comments and complaints, staffing levels, staff and volunteer training programs, volunteer recruitment and retention, parking logistics, and financial reviews of existing operations and potential avenues for growth, as well as some out-of-the-box brainstorming. Most, but not all, of the recommended actions resulting from this internal review are included in the fifth theme of the strategic action plan: **Internal Excellence - Optimize internal operations and systems to advance long-term mission delivery.**





# Strategic Action Plan

## Overview

The Strategic Action Plan for the Blue Ridge Music Center combines insights from data analysis, community engagement, and ongoing conversations with the Music Center and Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation teams. It is based on **four primary goals**:

1. Create a strategic action plan that will enable the Music Center to pursue sustainable financial growth, efficiency, and stability.
2. Increase and expand programming that prioritizes authenticity and connection to place, while also emphasizing diversity and accessibility.
3. Expand the reach of the Music Center to diverse audiences as it continues to showcase and share the living musical tradition of the region.
4. Leverage regional partnerships and assets to advance the economic and cultural vitality of the Blue Ridge Parkway corridor.

As discussed above, **five key themes** emerged:

1. **Programming and Impact** - Enhance programs and their impact to engage larger and more diverse audiences.
2. **Visitor Amenities and Facilities** - Improve the amenities available at the Blue Ridge Music Center to create a more robust visitor experience.
3. **Messaging and Marketing** - Expand marketing efforts to engage wider and more diverse audiences.
4. **Community Connections** - Expand the Blue Ridge Music Center's role as a connector, convener, and community leader.
5. **Internal Excellence** - Optimize internal operations and systems to advance long-term mission delivery.



## Recommended Actions

The five themes provide the framework for the recommended actions that will advance the work of the Blue Ridge Music Center over the next three to five years. While some actions address more than one theme, each action is listed only once, under the theme it supports the most.

### Programming and Impact

Enhance programs and their impact to engage larger and more diverse audiences.

- 1.** Enhance programming, with more emphasis on educational content (“edu-tainment”), to engage larger and more diverse audiences.
  - a. Develop one or more signature events, such as all-day or multiday events featuring music, presentations/talks, demonstrations, and more. One possible idea would be a gathering of local, regional, and/or Appalachian mountain luthiers.
  - b. Develop additional events/programming highlighting specific topics in the form of special concerts, presentations, talks, and more. Sample topics include musical styles, particular instruments, and instrument making.
  - c. Encourage collaboration and interaction between performers on the amphitheater and on the indoor theater stage (e.g., between opening act and main act).
  - d. Collaborate with professors and students from area colleges and universities regarding musical programming, talks/presentations, etc.
  - e. Facilitate curriculum-based lesson plans and field trips for K-12 students (public, private, and home school) - especially if able to extend the facility season into April and November.
  - f. Create and launch one or more traveling exhibits that can help advance the Music Center mission off-site.
  - g. Host more visiting exhibits that relate to the mission.
  - h. Develop a clear vision and list of partners to expand On the Road musical programming to more Parkway corridor communities, more diverse audiences, and larger urban areas within a three-hour driving distance.
- 2.** Expand virtual and online programming.
  - a. Record and share brief interviews with performers and guest presenters regarding their connection to Blue Ridge Mountain music, how they are maintaining traditions, and/or how they are incorporating new elements into these musical genres.
  - b. Create video snippets highlighting different aspects of mountain music, e.g., musicians, types/styles of music, influence and impact.
  - c. Create a virtual programming archive, including Music of the Milltowns, A Place in the Band, Deep Roots Many Voices, other artist interviews, and future programming.
  - d. Host a radio show or podcast.

## Visitor Amenities and Facilities

Increase and expand programming that prioritizes authenticity and connection to place, while also emphasizing diversity and accessibility.

**1. Parking** - Explore options for additional parking on-site or nearby to take complete advantage of the outdoor amphitheater's capacity, such as expanding or paving the B lot and hardening the grass lots.

- a. Engage a consultant to identify the most cost-effective ways to expand parking capacity.
- b. Implement recommended and approved parking changes as resources allow.

**2. Camping** - Investigate options for partnerships with off-site campgrounds to accommodate campers, and perhaps through shuttles, bring in more concert goers who don't use up limited parking space.

**3. Shuttles** - Explore options to offer shuttle services to serve visitors who don't want to drive on the Parkway and nearby winding roads at night AND to reduce pressure on limited parking capacity.

- a. Conduct research and surveys to determine possible shuttle locations (e.g., Galax, Sparta, I-77/I-74 interchange, Route 89), available vendors and expenses, possible price points, and profit/loss calculations.
- b. Test any viable shuttle options, and expand those options as appropriate.

**4. Existing facilities** - Improve existing facilities, especially in the short-term during discussion, analysis, fundraising (as appropriate), and approval for new or expanded facilities.

- a. Indoor theater - Upgrade the sound and A/V systems.
- b. "Luthier shop"
  - i. Pursue upgrades to the facility to maximize its potential to host Music Center-curated or traveling exhibits, including AC/humidity control, improved lighting, electrical enhancements, insulation, and security.
  - ii. Pursue facility upgrades to provide opportunities for food and beverage service and sales. These upgrades would likely include all of the changes required for an exhibit space, as well as changes to accommodate some level of food and beverage storage, preparation, and sales. Appropriate research and surveys regarding visitor and vendor interest in on-site food and beverage service and sales should guide any such activity
- c. Amphitheater concert merchandise sales area - Purchase and install a portable structure to provide a larger, safer, and more weatherproof venue for selling merchandise, with better orientation toward the audience in the amphitheater.

**5. New facilities** - Establish new facilities to expand programming opportunities.

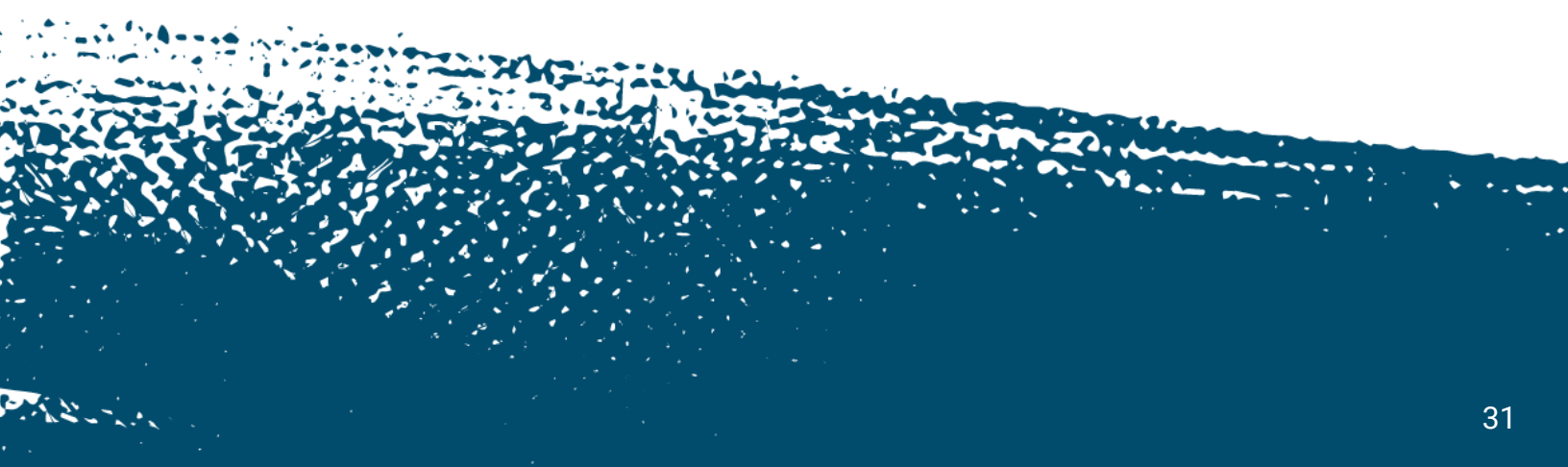
- a. Separate, covered pavilion for Midday Mountain Music - Work with National Park Service to determine a location for and build a new covered pavilion to house Midday Mountain Music. Relocation from the breezeway would reduce programming and sound conflicts between Midday Mountain Music and the indoor theater; provide a permanent and more appropriately designed venue for Midday Mountain Music performances. It would also provide additional space for visitors to shelter during adverse weather events.

**6. Food and beverage services** - Offer a wider variety of food and beverage options during concerts and possibly during regular daytime hours. Beverage options could include wine and beer. Food and beverage sales could take place in tents, in the visitor center breezeway, and/or in the luthier shop space.

**7. Longer season of operation** - Review costs and benefits of extending the season to start as early as April and to end as late as November, in order to increase the windows of time to serve the public generally and school groups specifically.

**8. Activities for children and families** - Test low-cost activities to entertain younger visitors, in turn helping to attract more families to the Music Center. Mission-themed activities could include instrument “petting zoos” and demonstrations, while corn hole, sidewalk chalk, and bubble machines can entertain the youngest visitors.

*(Special note regarding possible facility improvements: 32% of survey respondents indicated support for creating a covered area in the outdoor amphitheater space. Covered seating would help mitigate weather events that delay or cancel concerts and soak visitors. On the other hand, other people have expressed concerns about the financial costs of such a structure, how safe it would be during high winds, the potentially lengthy timeline for National Park Service review and approval, and how the structure would impact what makes the venue so unique: an outdoor setting with unobstructed views of the surrounding mountains. As a result of these competing concerns, there is no consensus to move forward with this idea, so it is not included here as a recommended action.)*



## Messaging and Marketing

Expand marketing efforts to engage wider and more diverse audiences.

1. Refine and amplify messaging to improve public understanding of and interest in BRMC and its mission.
  - a. **More than Bluegrass** - Emphasize that the Music Center is much more than bluegrass music. It celebrates the full diversity of American Roots music. Many people believe—incorrectly—that bluegrass and Blue Ridge Mountain music are synonymous, and/or that the Music Center only focuses on bluegrass—to the exclusion of blues, gospel, country, old-time, folk, and Americana. Through its website, social media posts, concert lineups, press releases, and other media content, the Music Center must consistently emphasize the diversity inherent in Blue Ridge Mountain music and its programming.
  - b. **More than history** - These musical genres have and celebrate rich histories, but they also have a rich present and future. The Music Center has a solid track record of highlighting the living and constantly adapting traditions of Blue Ridge Mountain music, especially the racial and ethnic diversity in this tradition, but the Music Center needs to incorporate the “living tradition” idea more consistently in its messaging, video content, etc.
  - c. **More than music** - The Music Center offers much more than concerts, but that is not evident to many travelers or regional residents. From trails and picnic areas to a *USA Today* Readers Poll Top 10 free museum to new and improved facilities and amenities, the Music Center offers one of the Parkway’s most complete destinations, with something for nearly everyone. Music is the mission, but marketing the other features can help draw in new audiences.
  - d. **More social media** - Expand social media channels and activity to reach new and younger audiences with more video content, e.g., TikTok, Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, boosting posts



Photo by Mike Duncan





**2.** Expand marketing to specific audiences/groups. These groups represent not only opportunities for growth, but also opportunities for efficiency. Many of them are already organized as large groups (e.g., group sales vs. individual ticket sales) and some have group transportation (e.g., buses) available, which takes up less parking space. These groups include:

- a. **Colleges and universities** - students, faculty, areas of study (e.g., music)
- b. **Senior citizens** - retirement communities, assisted living facilities
- c. **Diverse and underserved audiences** - especially through partnerships with organizations that represent, include, emphasize, and/or attract diverse populations
- d. **Travel writers, bloggers, and other social media influencers** - Connecting with the right people will help the Music Center connect to all its followers as well.
- e. **Group tours** - i.e., a group tour destination; not Music Center-organized group tours
- f. **Local tourism-related businesses and organizations** - Be receptive to hotels, restaurants, and related organizations and venues (e.g., theaters, museums) that want to offer their patrons vacation packages that include Music Center visits and/or concerts

**3.** Increase the volume and frequency of concert ticket giveaways and promotions (e.g., buy one get one free). Unsold tickets, especially in a venue with a capacity of 1,500+, should be converted into a marketing asset to increase awareness, visitation, and concert sales.

**4.** Market the Music Center through tabling, emceeing, and similar activities at Blue Ridge heritage events, music festivals, conferences, and similar events, in order to increase target audiences' awareness and interest.

## Community Connections

Expand the Blue Ridge Music Center's role as a connector, convener, and community leader.

1. As an organization with a significant and growing role in the Blue Ridge mountain music community, seize opportunities, in-person and virtually, to convene the region's music-related organizations. Take advantage of the Music Center's location at the nexus of The Crooked Road in Virginia and the Blue Ridge Music Trails of North Carolina. Share information. Identify challenges and solutions, including engagement of diverse individuals and organizations. Highlight best practices.
2. Engage community and music industry leaders to develop a way for the Music Center to recognize and support people, groups, or agencies making significant contributions to the living traditions of Blue Ridge Mountain music (e.g., artist-in-residence program, fellowship(s), musician of the year, rising star award).
3. Expand offerings of regional tourism information on the website and at the visitor center, similar to how the Parkway's Asheville visitor center serves the larger region.
4. Engage community and industry leaders to tell authentic stories about Blue Ridge Mountain music.
5. Support the social media presence of partner organizations and request similar support.

## Internal Excellence

Optimize internal operations and systems to advance long-term mission delivery.

1. Staffing - Align organizational structure, division of duties, hiring, goal-setting, and training to maximize staff potential to implement the strategic plan.
2. Musicians - Determine and address obstacles to attracting younger musicians to replace retiring musicians for Midday Mountain Music (e.g., financial issues, scheduling issues).
3. On-site Blue Ridge Music Center partners (i.e., NPS, Eastern National/America's National Parks)
  - a. Ensure regular communication and coordination to maximize the contributions of each partner and to minimize conflict and disruption.
  - b. Where opportunities or needs arise with the National Park Service or others, investigate possibilities to expand the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation's on-site role(s) at the Music Center, and move forward as appropriate.



**4. Financial growth and strength** - the Music Center has made great progress over the last 10 years in terms of increasing and diversifying its revenue sources. However, the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation continues to supplement operations, and many of the strategies and tactics detailed in this plan will require additional financial resources. Therefore, the Foundation, Music Center, and National Park Service and others should continue to look for additional opportunities to grow and diversify revenue. Some of the strategies mentioned on the following pages are new to the Music Center, while others build on the strategies previously listed by simply making sure that every aspect of operations are reviewed to maximize income and impact and also minimize direct and indirect costs. (continued on



Photo by Mike Duncan



- a. Investigate options to charge for on-site parking at create a new revenue source; pay for enhancements (including but not limited to parking upgrades); encourage carpooling and use of shuttles.
- b. Determine options to reserve/rent out on-site facilities to outside groups and events (e.g., weddings, award ceremonies), including potential fees and expenses. Pursue options as appropriate.
- c. Launch a regular annual campaign to gather funds for specific needs (e.g., sound-system upgrades and lighting conversion/upgrades). Incorporate an annual fundraising event (e.g. a gala) as appropriate.
- d. Test and analyze wine and beer sales at concerts as a revenue generator.
- e. Expand corporate sponsorship program and concert program guide sponsorships. Offer concert ticket upgrade options (e.g., meet-the-musician events) as appropriate to attract new and higher-level sponsors.
- f. Monetize On the Road events (e.g., grants, ticket sales, event sponsors).
- g. Develop tiered pricing for season passholders by offering additional benefits for those willing to pay at higher rates (e.g., preferred parking, early entry, bring-a-friend tickets for lower-demand concerts, early access to single-concert ticket upgrade options - see next item).
- h. Develop higher ticket tiers/packages for single concerts (e.g., meet the musicians, ticket + merchandise, ticket + meal package).
- i. Eliminate the small membership program, which has not achieved sufficient scale to become a meaningful revenue generator. Convert existing members to season passholders and/or annual campaign donors.
- j. Explore discounted group sales tickets and packages for large groups. These bulk sales offer certain efficiencies (e.g., higher vehicle occupancy rates and less demand on parking) and may help entice large groups to choose the Music Center as a travel/entertainment option (e.g., colleges, senior living facilities, organizations - see item 2.b., page 33 regarding marketing to large groups).
- k. Fund a study/analysis of various food and beverage options to determine which expansion model might be best to pursue in terms of potential vendor interest, revenue, staff time required, etc. (e.g., hosting food trucks, or different levels of food and beverage service out of the current luthier shop space). Pursue preferred options as appropriate.
- l. Leverage archives to create sellable products, provided there is a clear market for such products, and the projected revenues exceed the total costs.

**Many of the recommended actions listed will require more detailed plans. The project consultants, Fourth Economy, created several detailed examples of such plans in their final report to the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation. Two of these sample plans are included in Appendix B, and the complete final report from Fourth Economy remains available for periodic staff review and consultation.**

# Setting Priorities

The following chart offers a relative positioning of all of the recommended actions in terms of both time frame and expense. The potential impact of each action must also be considered, especially with regard to mission delivery, revenue generation, and opportunity costs. These factors should guide annual budgeting, annual work plans for staff, fundraising, and other activities for the effective life of this action plan.

Availability of funding (e.g., grant funds for a specific project, a large bequest) and other internal and external factors (e.g., staff experience and training, partner resources) will likely influence the positioning of many items in this chart over time, so the placements should be reviewed and adjusted periodically.

The color coding reflects the major theme to which each action belongs, though many actions will support more than one theme.

- Blue = Programming and Impact
- Pink = Visitor Amenities and Facilities
- Orange = Messaging and Marketing
- Yellow = Community Connections
- Green = Internal Excellence





# Appendices

## Appendix A: Case Studies

Case studies were selected by Blue Ridge Music Center, Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation, and Fourth Economy staff based on several factors including location, program provision, NPS affiliation, attendance numbers, etc. Cases include both permanent venues and festivals/rotating shows. Most cases are within the same region as the Blue Ridge Music Center. Additional non-direct peer cases were used to learn from larger venues (Red Rocks) as well as non-music venues (North Carolina Museum of the Art). Reviewing these case studies encouraged outside-the-box thinking.



# Blue Ridge Music Center

**LOCATION:** Galax, Va.

**ANNUAL VISITORSHIP:** 40,000

## DESCRIPTION:

The Blue Ridge Music Center celebrates music, musicians, and traditions of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Open seasonally, the center offers programming and concerts across traditional music, including bluegrass, old-time, folk, Americana, country blues, and gospel. Guests can enjoy performances, museum exhibits, jams, and additional experiences.

Admission to the visitor center and museum is free. The grounds are home to an outdoor amphitheater and an indoor interpretive center. The indoor center features a theater, gift shop, and museum that highlights Blue Ridge Mountain music still thriving in the region.

## NPS AFFILIATION & STRUCTURE:

The Blue Ridge Music Center is operated by the National Park Service, and musical programming is coordinated through a partnership with the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation.

## STAY LOGISTICS:

There is no lodging on-site at the Blue Ridge Music Center. There is lodging nearby, ranging from campsites, RV sites, and hotels. However, there is no dedicated transportation between lodging and the site.

The Music Center offers food on-site from The Galax Smokehouse and food trucks. Alcoholic beverages are not currently permitted on the site.

## PROGRAMMING:

Programming centers around bluegrass and traditional music. Signature events include the Summer Concert Series, Midday Mountain Music, Milepost Music, and exhibits.

Additional programming includes events such as the Deep Roots, Many Voices Symposium, and A Place in the Band conference centered around equity in the music industry.

## PARTNERS:

Current sponsorships include W.L.A Trucking, Yadkin Arts Council, Galax Smokehouse, Triad City Beat, WFDD Radio. The BRMC is also affiliated with the National Park Service, National Endowment for the Arts, National Council for the Traditional Arts, Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation, Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, and America's National Parks.

## STAFFING/OTHER RESOURCES:

Relative to other venues, the Music Center has a small staff that manages programming. National Park Service rangers manage the facilities.

## STANDOUT FEATURES:

The Music Center is a beloved place for its natural beauty and curated programming. The staff accomplishes an impressive amount of programming given their size and capacity.

## Wolf Trap

**LOCATION:** Vienna, Va.

**ANNUAL VISITORSHIP:** National park receives 402,580 visitors, Filene Center - 7,028 capacity, year-round

### **DESCRIPTION:**

The mission of Wolf Trap is to present and create excellent and innovative performing arts programs for enrichment, education, and enjoyment of diverse audiences and participants. From May through September, multiple amphitheaters in the park present performances such as musicals, dance, opera, jazz, and popular and country music.

Wolf Trap is an important relationship:

“The only national park dedicated to presenting the performing arts” - NPS.

### **NPS AFFILIATION & STRUCTURE:**

The private, nonprofit Wolf Trap Foundation and the public National Park Service are partners in a unique marriage of arts and nature. The National Park Service manages the pristine 117-acre park, as well as the grounds and building patrons enjoy when they come to see performances at the Filene Center. The Foundation oversees programming.

Wolf Trap operates as a nonprofit foundation

### **STAY LOGISTICS:**

While there is no lodging on-site, there are nearby hotels, including a preferred hotel identified on the website. There is also an Express Shuttle operated by the Fairfax Connector to transport patrons from lodging to the site.

Refreshments are available at Wolf Trap through At The Barns restaurant as well as a concession

stand. Wolf Trap also promotes proximate local restaurants on its website. Visitors are allowed to

### **PROGRAMMING:**

Programming centers around concerts from artists of a variety of genres: chart toppers, legendary fan favorites, classical and jazz greats, multicultural acts, opera, and original performances.

Given the setting and status as a national park, Wolf Trap is also connected to outdoor recreation. The Wolf Trap trail loop begins close to the performance area and follows the Wolf Trap Creek.

### **PARTNERS:**

Wolf Trap's top giving partner in 2021-2022 was the Lincoln and Therese Filene Foundation. In terms of public partnerships, the National Park Foundation was also a major contributor. Major (\$100K+) corporate contributors include PNC, Boeing, Capital One, KPMG, Northrop Grumman, and Tickets.com.

### **STANDOUT FEATURES:**

National Affiliate network

# Birthplace of Country Music Museum

**LOCATION:** Bristol, Tenn./Va.

**ANNUAL VISITORSHIP:** 75,000, open year-round

## DESCRIPTION:

The Birthplace of Country Music is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that seeks to perpetuate, promote, and celebrate Bristol's rich musical heritage; to educate and engage audiences worldwide regarding the history, impact, and legacy of the 1927 Bristol Sessions from which it derives its name; and to create recognition, opportunities, and economic benefit for our local and regional communities. BCM accomplishes this mission through its three primary branches (Museum, Festival, and Radio), special projects and events, and a multitude of community and educational outreach programs.

## NPS AFFILIATION & STRUCTURE:

Independent from NPS, nonprofit with staff and board.

## STAY LOGISTICS:

Hotels, Camping at Thunder Mountain.

## PROGRAMMING:

Bristol Rhythm & Roots Reunion started in 2001 and has been hosted at the Birthplace of Country Music since 2012. The festival brings 130 bands and 45,000 visitors to downtown Bristol. A 2015 Economic Impact Study found the festival resulted in a \$16.1 million impact on the region.

Radio Bristol went live in 2015, bringing three channels of streaming music and one of video to listeners across the country and the globe. This media is used to uphold the Birthplace of Country Music's mission and vision.

Museum resources are also accessible online.

These resources are for a range of ages:

Museum Video Highlights, Student Activity Sheets, Virtual Speaker Series, Virtual Story Time, and Archived performances.

The Birthplace of Country Music is connected to downtown Bristol.

## PARTNERS:

Smithsonian affiliate.

## STAFFING/OTHER RESOURCES:

Substantial support including 21 Staff made up of four in administration, three in marketing, one in operations, three in development, seven in museum, and three radio staff. The Birthplace of Country Music's board is made up of 22 members. Additionally, the museum offers

## STANDOUT FEATURES:

Run a blog that includes listicles, playlists, book clubs, etc.



## Red Rocks Park & Amphitheater

**LOCATION:** Morrison, Colo.

**ANNUAL VISITORSHIP:** 1.32 million

### DESCRIPTION:

Part of Denver's Theatres & Arenas Division, Red Rocks Amphitheatre is a naturally formed, world-famous outdoor venue just 15 miles west of Denver. Red Rocks is recognized for its star-studded concert roster, natural acoustics, and ambiance, as well as its awe-inspiring hiking and biking trails. The Visitor Center features interactive educational displays, a short film on its geologic and musical history, a Performer's Hall of Fame, and delicious food at Ship Rock Grille. Daily Tours: 10 a.m. (June 1-Oct. 1) or by appointment.

Red Rocks was the most attended music venue of any size in 2021.

### NPS AFFILIATION & STRUCTURE:

Red Rocks Amphitheater is owned and operated by the City and County of Denver. Denver Arts & Venues manages Red Rocks and many of Denver's other major cultural assets. In this way, the site falls within overall cultural planning and can be used to facilitate greater community education and engagement.

### STAY LOGISTICS:

Red Rocks names an official hotel, Origin Red Rocks. The hotel offers a \$25 round-trip shuttle service on show nights. The Where to Stay guide on Red Rock's website also lists nearby campsite information.

### PROGRAMMING:

The 9,500-capacity amphitheater features concerts by major acts from a variety of music genres. In 2021, Red Rocks hosted 233 ticketed events.

Additional programming includes yoga and film showings. Film on the Rocks programming has been a programming staple for more than 20 years. During the height of COVID, Film on the Rocks transitioned to a drive-in format. Now back to amphitheater seating, Film on the Rocks programming is intended to be more accessible and inclusive of local audiences: "This awareness of accessibility is the reason why, even today, Film on the Rocks tickets remain some of the most affordable on the eclectic Red Rocks calendar. Similarly, Film on the Rocks gives local artists and performers an opportunity to play on the iconic Red Rocks stage and connect with Colorado audiences."

While performances are seasonal, from April to November, the park offers year-round recreation. The amphitheater is open to runners and those seeking high-altitude workouts. In the winter months, professional trainers run Snowshape Winter Fitness programming for winter sports

### **PARTNERS:**

Complimentary programming relies on partners and sponsors. Denver Film partners on Film on the Rocks. Yoga on the Rocks is sponsored by a mix of food/beverage companies and healthcare providers including White Claw Seltzer, Visible, King Scoopers, Colorado Threads, Southwest, Delta Dental, Table Mountain Grill Caintinia, Kaiser Permanente, Brumate, and NuLeaf. Yoga on the Rocks is facilitated through partnerships with yoga studios and Denver Arts & Venues.

### **STAFFING/OTHER RESOURCES:**

Denver Arts & Venues maintains a Venue Director staff position, in addition to offering financial, marketing, communications, and administrative support.

Concession and security workers are contracted through third-party providers.

### **STANDOUT FEATURES:**

Nationally known, Red Rocks balances its brand between music and natural features to draw in more visitors than any other public venue in the country.

## LEAF Global Arts

**LOCATION:** Asheville, N.C.

**ANNUAL VISITORSHIP:** 9,300

### DESCRIPTION:

LEAF Global Arts' mission centers around connecting cultures and creating community and through world music, arts education, preservation, and experiences. LEAF now offers year-round classes and programming.

### NPS AFFILIATION & STRUCTURE:

No NPS affiliation. Follows a nonprofit structure, including a board of directors and board emeritus.

### STAY LOGISTICS:

LEAF offers a variety of lodging options on-site for festival weekends. These offerings also serve as income streams. Options include:

#### Private Camp Cabins:

Set amongst the woods, 30 very rustic campy cabins with bunk beds, screen windows, outlets & nearby shower houses.

Cabin Pricing: Private Cabin \$540, sleeps 9 (Cabins 19-44); Large Private Cabin \$592, sleeps 12 (Cabins 13-18)

#### Lodge Room:

Two big camp lodges with rooms for families or large groups. The small 5-person lodge rooms downstairs are semi-private sharing a dressing area, sink, and private toilet with an adjacent room. Upstairs Large 16-person rooms have a private toilet/sink. The bathhouse is between the lodges.

Lodge Room Pricing: Small Lodge Room \$540; Large Lodge Room \$1,522; Individual Bunk in Room 12 – \$155

LEAF organizes these stays through a reservation system and survey on their website.

### PROGRAMMING:

LEAF's signature program, LEAF Festival, runs every spring and fall. Fall of 2022 marked the 50th LEAF festival.

During COVID, LEAF developed LEAF ReTreats to capture an old-school essence of festivals and connection with space. Tickets are limited to 1,500 people, leaving lots of room across the 300+ acre site. Stages are open-air, smaller, more intimate with meet and greets, and a focus on local and regional artists, several of whom are helping to design the weekend. Retreats focus on LEAF's community, specifically members, and fulfilling their mission of building more connections.

During LEAF Fest, LEAF provides space for local entrepreneurs and makers through booth applications. Spaces cost a menial fee, creating more engagement points for visitors and connection to the community.

### PARTNERS:

Founding partners include: Bank of America, ecomountain, Celebrate the World with Putumayo, Dan Lucas Memorial Fund, Ben Gradison Memorial Fund, Sunnyside Trading Company, and Togar Rugs.



### **STAFFING/OTHER RESOURCES:**

The year-round LEAF team includes approximately 10 people spanning positions of executive director, global engagement, education, grant, and volunteer directors. LEAF also engages international culture keepers and teaching artists for programming and classes.

LEAF addresses extra capacity demands for events through the Festival Work Exchange (WeX). Hours equate to ticket access across scales: 10 volunteer hours earn a weekend ticket, 15 volunteer hours earn a weekend plus ticket, and 20 hours of volunteering covers a personal and guest ticket and meals.

### **STANDOUT FEATURES:**

LEAF has created Virtual-LEAFs (V-LEAF) to create new opportunities, access, and continued engagement. "Each experience is exciting and unique, offering you an escape to focus on reconnecting, building new connections, learning about the world, and being the best of yourself."

## PineCone

**LOCATION:** Raleigh, NC area

**ANNUAL VISITORSHIP:** The World of Bluegrass event in partnership with IBMA brought 856,000 visitors.

**DESCRIPTION:**

Unlike BRMC or other cases, PineCone does not center around a singular physical space. PineCone brings its programming to a variety of venues in the Raleigh region.

**NPS AFFILIATION & STRUCTURE:**

No NPS affiliation. Nonprofit structure.

**STAY LOGISTICS:**

Varies by venue.

**PROGRAMMING:**

PineCone's signature programming centers around performance. PineCone events are often interactive - such as jams or square dances. They keep an up-to-date calendar of events, searchable by category, on their website.

Due to their interest in engaging more players in the music they love, PineCone hosts workshops for amateur and emerging musicians. PineCone particularly focuses on teaching and engaging youth through youth councils, bluegrass camps, youth jams, and school programs.

PineCone also presents a bluegrass radio show where DJs and playlists educate and uphold bluegrass traditions.

**PARTNERS:**

Raleigh Arts, North Carolina Arts Council, PNC Bank

**STAFFING/OTHER RESOURCES:**

PineCone largely relies on volunteers, reporting 450 volunteers in 2019.

**STANDOUT FEATURES:**

PineCone remains community-oriented by offering programming that is low/no cost and for a variety of skill levels.

In reference to accessibility, they state "Many of our programs are free to attend or pay-what-you-can/suggested donation. Your questions, concerns, and suggestions can help us ensure that you will have the best experience possible at our events. PineCone does not own a venue; instead, our programs take place in a variety of venues in and around Raleigh."

# North Carolina Museum of Art

**LOCATION:** Raleigh, NC

**ANNUAL VISITORSHIP:** 718,102 (2019)

## **DESCRIPTION:**

The North Carolina Museum of Art (NCMA) stewards and shares the people's art collection and inspires creativity by connecting our diverse communities to cultural and natural resources. It is the vision of the museum to be a vital cultural resource for the entire state and a national leader in creating a welcoming experience of belonging and joy.

## **NPS AFFILIATION & STRUCTURE:**

Nonprofit structure

## **STAY LOGISTICS:**

Proximate to downtown Raleigh, NCMA is surrounded by hotels that serve a wide audience. Unlike many of the music venue cases, NCMA does not include stay logistics or recommended accommodations on their website.

## **PROGRAMMING:**

NCMA offers standing and rotating exhibits. Additionally, the museum includes public amenities such as a library and theater. As in Red Rocks, the theater is used for film shows for the public. Different programming is targeted to adults, college students, teens, and families. The museum also offers slow art sessions, recognizing that multisensory experiences vary by visitors.

NCMA offers an online educational platform, NCMA Learn, that includes classes, interactive galleries, and lesson plans.

## **PARTNERS:**

In addition to philanthropic contributions, NCMA has a membership program for patrons that want to financially support programming. NCMA offers several levels of membership, ranging from \$50 to \$10,000 annually. Members receive: "free admission to exhibitions, invitations to special events, discounts in the Museum Store, and so much more! Memberships are good for one year, beginning when the membership is purchased and lasting 12 consecutive months. For Patron level and above memberships, you may waive your benefits; in that case, your membership becomes 100 percent tax-deductible, and no sales tax will be charged."

## **STAFFING/OTHER RESOURCES:**

On their IRS Form 990, the museum cites nearly 200 employees, which likely range from docents and curators to contracted employees and workshop instructors.

## **STANDOUT FEATURES:**

NCMA performs an annual report that tracks both the demographics of visitors and artists displayed within the collection. This practice could be used by venues to better track who is attending events as well as the characteristics of the artist.





# Appendices

## Appendix B: Sample Recommended Action Plans

Many of the recommended actions will require more detailed plans. The project consultant, Fourth Economy, created several detailed examples of such plans in its final report to the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation. Two of these sample plans are included here for reference, while the complete final report from Fourth Economy remains available for periodic staff review and consultation.

## Sample #1: Social Media Action Plan

### Recommended Action:

Pilot additional social media and marketing strategies to reach new audiences.

### DESCRIPTION AND KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Strategic marketing is one of the primary ways in which the Music Center can accomplish its goals of increasing and expanding visitorship to a more diverse audience. Consistently, those who are familiar with the visitor center were hard-pressed to provide constructive criticism when asked how the Music Center could improve; instead, they commented that **more people need to be made aware of** the unique asset. Exploring targeted marketing through different channels, **especially social media**, that highlights the many draws of the Music Center can **augment the reach of the center** and **draw more people** in for programming and events.

There are a number of ways to approach a targeted marketing campaign through traditional and social media channels. Social media has been highlighted as the greatest opportunity for accomplishing the goals of the Music Center. Channels such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook are great ways to reach different kinds of audiences; while Instagram and TikTok are generally used by younger generations, Facebook appeals to an older audience. Crafting and sharing **consistent** and relevant content for specific channels can gain loyal followers while promoting specific posts can reach new audiences. Hiring influencers to post about their experiences with the Music Center could massively increase the reach of the center.

Each message that is crafted and shared, whether through social or traditional channels, should **relate to the Music Center's mission and showcase the authentic Blue Ridge Music Center experience**. However, **social media in particular is also a chance to experiment**. Sharing the intentional planning of certain concerts that juxtapose different genres of music and types of musicians, for example, is an excellent way to highlight diversity-centric programming that is already happening at the Music Center.

Key considerations as the teams explore this opportunity include:

- As programming and amenities potentially expand in the future, so too could social media coverage, sharing the planning of new strategies, asking for feedback and ideas, and showcasing the final results as a draw for future visitors. Promoting certain posts in specific geographic areas or target audiences is a way to reach new viewers and attract a diverse audience.
- Social media is a chance to experiment with different channels and types of content, recording and learning from the results. The teams could try posting content at different times of the day to understand when the greatest reach is possible. Experiment with photo, video, and text-based content to share authentic Music Center experiences.

- Explore promoting certain posts to understand potential reach. The teams can utilize insights from each social media channel to document results and change social strategy with the results. Ask people purchasing tickets how they heard about the Blue Ridge Music Center and have “social media” as one option to understand the effectiveness of test strategies.
- The integration of social media strategy can be done in a number of ways:
  - Hiring a social media intern from a local university who is studying communications and marketing would allow existing staff to focus on their primary job descriptions, supervising the intern rather than executing the social media strategy themselves. It would also be relatively inexpensive.
  - Hiring a social media and marketing professional for the Blue Ridge Music Center team who can craft and execute social media strategy effectively. This person can develop a more robust social media strategy and utilize additional tools to track and understand the impact. This avenue would be more of an expense, but would also likely yield better results.

## WHY

- Attract more diverse audiences to the Music Center.
- Increase revenue generation through an expanded audience.

## WHO LEADS AND SUPPORTS

- **Lead:** Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation and Music Center teams, a marketing professional
- **Support:** NPS team, partners, and advocates

## FUNDING

- **Cost:** Staff time to plan and execute social media strategy when done in-house; the added cost of hiring a marketing professional in the future; cost to promote social media posts; cost to engage influencer(s).
- **Revenue Generation:** If done well, a robust marketing campaign and social media presence can boost ticket sales and increase event attendance, leading to an increase in earned income.





Mike Duncan  
PHOTOGRAPHY

## Sample #2: College/University Engagement Action Plan

### Recommended Action:

Explore partnerships with academic institutions to engage students and faculty as audiences and programming partners.

### DESCRIPTION AND KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Connect with faculty, staff, and students at local and regional academic institutions, with a particular emphasis on those schools with a strong music program (especially those that focus on traditional mountain music) and/or an Appalachian studies program.

Key considerations when exploring this strategy include:

- Exploring which institutions to partner with, through parameters like geography, those with musical and/or cultural programs, and those with an emphasis on Blue Ridge Mountain traditions.
- Partnerships with academic institutions could also benefit from a marketing outreach plan designed to attract students from nearby colleges and universities.
- As with other strategies, testing different ideas and variables could help narrow in on what will be most successful moving forward. Programming to pilot could include a speakers' series, instructional workshops, class field trips to the Music Center, and/or volunteer events with college organizations.
- Metrics to measure could include overall attendance and participation in the programming, especially among students, and level of success with building partnerships with academic institutions (like number of institutions engaged and how involved they become as partners).

### WHY

- These collaborations can help engage, cultivate, and support the next generation of musicians and historians, in turn benefiting the students, their academic programs and institutions, and regional cultural preservation and innovation.
- Partnering with academic institutions would lead to more programming opportunities for the Music Center, such as featuring faculty experts in programming like a speakers' series or instructional workshops. This programming could occur on-site at the Music Center or be hosted by the college or university.
- Collaboration with local academic institutions, especially those with an existing focus on regional music, culture, and history, could yield a wider audience of students and faculty.



## WHO LEADS AND SUPPORTS

- **Lead:** Blue Ridge Music Center and Foundation teams, NPS teams
- **Support:** Local academic institutions and their faculty, staff, and students

## FUNDING

- **Cost:** Staff time to plan, perform outreach, develop additional programming through resulting partnerships, execute, and evaluate this strategy
- **Revenue Generation:** Deeper relationships with academic institutions would expand the Music Center's audience, increasing attendance and generating increased revenue.







# Acknowledgements

## DESCRIPTION AND KEY CONSIDERATIONS

To ensure that the voices of community members and community leaders were represented throughout this process, an Advisory Committee was assembled. The Advisory Committee consisted of residents in the area, music lovers, leaders and representatives of music-minded organizations, and others identified by the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation as necessary to obtain consistent feedback and insight. We thank the members of the Advisory Committee for their dedication to this plan. The members of the committee include:

### **Aubrey Arrington**

National Park Service, Blue Ridge Parkway

### **Roberts Bass**

Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation

### **Amy Boucher**

Midday Mountain Musicians

### **Leesa Brandon**

National Park Service, Blue Ridge Parkway

### **Amy Grossman**

North Carolina Folk Festival

### **Katy Klune**

Virginia Humanities

### **Elisa Kunz**

National Park Service

### **Jon Lohman**

Center for Cultural Vibrancy

### **Wayne Martin**

North Carolina Arts Council Foundation

### **Tracy Swartout**

National Park Service, Blue Ridge Parkway

### **Zoe Van Buren**

North Carolina Arts Council Foundation

### **Alexa Viets**

National Park Service, Blue Ridge Parkway

## BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY FOUNDATION AND MUSIC CENTER TEAMS

The insight and direction offered by the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation and Music Center teams was essential to the formation of this plan, and the continued support of the board of directors is necessary to ensure the effectiveness of this plan. Members of the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation and Music Center teams include:

**Kevin Brandt** | Project Manager, Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation

**Richard Emmett** | Program Director, Blue Ridge Music Center

**George Ivey** | North Carolina Development Director, Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation

**Marianne Kovatch** | Associate Program Director, Blue Ridge Music Center

**Adam Lowe** | Associate Program Manager, Blue Ridge Music Center

**Carolyn Ward** | CEO, Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation

## FOURTH ECONOMY TEAM

As the consultant team leading the creation of the Strategic Action Plan, Fourth Economy created and executed the work plan, analyzing data, conducting engagement with stakeholders, and synthesizing findings into this action plan. The Fourth Economy Team includes:

**Rich Overmoyer** | Principal in Charge

**Eve Critton** | Project Manager

**Maura Kay** | Analysis Lead and Engagement Support

**Anne Jensen** | Analysis and Engagement Support

**Andrea Negrín** | Project Support



## **Blue Ridge Music Center**

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