



# I-RURAL TOOLKIT



## RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Plan, develop, and implement rural tourism projects with evidence-informed processes that support local entrepreneurship, foster collaboration, and develop local workforce opportunities.

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UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

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# Rural Development Toolkit

## I-Rural: Reimagining Illinois Rural Tourism Through Community and Extension Collaboration



### Introduction

The goal of the I-Rural project, “I-Rural: Reimagining Illinois Rural Tourism through Community and Extension Collaboration”, is to design and implement a model that rural communities in Illinois can use to guide tourism development. To do this, we developed an understanding of the challenges and opportunities present in several Illinois communities that desire to develop rural tourism as well as investigated tourists’ motivations and constraints to engaging in Illinois rural tourism.

By integrating insights from both tourists and community stakeholders, we designed an evidence-informed process for rural communities to reimagine tourism and develop tourism strategies that advance local workforce development, support local entrepreneurship, and foster collaboration in several regions of Illinois.

This toolkit provides resources to help rural communities plan, develop, and implement their own tourism projects. To develop this toolkit, a community-participatory approach was used to examine rural tourism development by exploring the perspectives of visitors, business owners, local government leaders, residents, and tourism and natural resource professionals. We adopted an interdisciplinary approach based on a collaboration among Extension professionals, research faculty, local government officials, entrepreneurs, and tourism and natural resources professionals.

This toolkit was designed to provide a template for community leaders when designing their own tourism experiences. We have provided resources that highlight the importance of tourism to rural communities, resources for holding planning meetings and brainstorming ideas, ways to gather data on potential visitors and opportunities for funding tourism projects.

Each section includes a template that can be tailored to meet the needs of your community.

In addition to these resources, we suggest that you reach out to your local Illinois Extension agent for their insights and support.

**Connect with a local extension agent:**  
[go.illinois.edu/ExtensionOffice](https://go.illinois.edu/ExtensionOffice)

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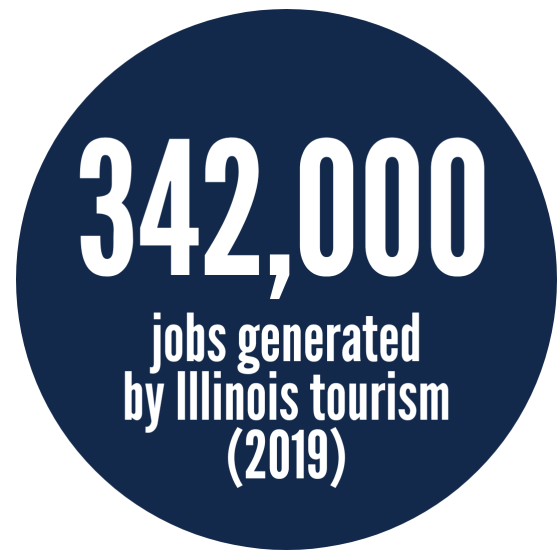
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## Importance of Tourism to Rural Communities

Tourism represents a significant part of Illinois' economy. In 2019, Illinois tourism brought in \$3.3 billion of state and local tax revenues and generated over 342,000 jobs, and tourist spending totaled \$41.7 billion<sup>1</sup>.

Simultaneously, many rural Illinois communities are struggling with issues such as out migration<sup>2</sup>, economic distress, and limited capacity to engage in thorough planning necessary to achieve long-term community and tourism development goals<sup>3,4</sup>.

Developing rural tourism experiences in Illinois is crucial as rural tourism activities foster entrepreneurship, job creation, and cultural revival<sup>5</sup>. A recent report reveals that rural tourism is highly marketable to tourists – particularly after the COVID-19 outbreak – and encompasses 31% of recent leisure trips<sup>6</sup>.



The report also suggests that rural tourism is a viable and sustainable form of tourism development as U.S. tourists have expressed a surge in interest and participation in outdoor recreation activities.

## Planning and Gathering Support for Tourism Development

Before developing any potential community tourism attractions, it is important to understand the current assets and the future vision of the community for tourism development.

We suggest hosting community tourism planning workshops that consist of three key parts:

1. Perform asset mapping.
2. Create a vision for the future.
3. Brainstorm strategies for tourism development.

These stages will allow community leaders to think through tourism in their community and prevent them from wasting time and resources developing projects they don't need or want or don't fit their community's need.

Community workshop participants should consist of local stakeholders who are knowledgeable about the community and can contribute to the future vision of tourism in your community.

Below you will find a template of a community workshop workbook as well as general descriptions for each step needed to facilitate your own community workshop.

<sup>1</sup> Illinois Office of Tourism, "Year in Review – 2019," Enjoy Illinois, Official Guide to Illinois Travel, Accessed September 15, 2020. <https://www.enjoyillinois.com/assets/PDF-Docs/IOT-Year-in-Review-2019.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Carr, Patrick J., and Maria J. Kefalas, *Hollowing out the middle: The rural brain drain and what it means for America*, Beacon Press, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Soulard, Joelle, Whitney Knollenberg, B. Bynum Boley, Richard R. Perdue, and Nancy Gard McGehee, "Social capital and destination strategic planning," *Tourism Management* 69 (2018): 189-200.

<sup>4</sup> Payne, Laura L., and Nathan A. Schaumleffel, "Relationship Between Attitudes Toward Rural Community Parks and Recreation and Rural Community Satisfaction," *Journal of Park & Recreation Administration* 26, no. 3 (2008).

<sup>5</sup> Soulard, Joelle, Nancy Gard McGehee, and Marc Stern, "Transformative tourism organizations and glocalization," *Annals of Tourism Research* 76 (2019): 91-104.

<sup>6</sup> "Coronavirus Travel Sentiment Index Report", Destination Analysts, accessed September 14, 2020, <https://www.destinationanalysts.com/covid-19-insights/coronavirus-travel-sentiment-index-report>.



The first stage of the workshop involves mapping a community's existing assets. Assets can be broken down into strengths and weaknesses, in addition to various types suggested in the Community Capital Framework (Figure 1).

Includes opportunities for loans and credit, investment opportunities, hotel/motel tax, grants, tax credits, and other business-friendly structures.

Includes numerous opportunities for professional, educational and skill-building.

Includes buildings, roads, public facilities, telecommunications, internet, main streets, water, and sewer systems, etc.

Includes environment, rivers, lakes, forests, wildlife, soil, plant, animals, weather, and natural beauty.

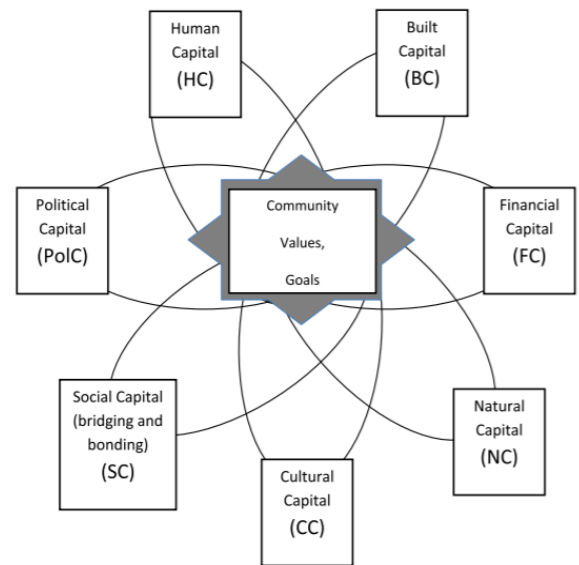
Includes history, art and craft forms, traditional foods and ways of preparation, festivals, and heritage.

Includes the ability of to turn its values into agreements, rules, and regulations.

Includes social networks, collaborations, and groups.

Includes what makes you proud of your community.

After developing an inventory of community strengths and weaknesses, create a vision of what future tourism development should look like. Proper planning is important in tourism development; it supports long-term success and minimizes impacts to local ecosystems. Start with an understanding of what the image of the destination is and explore what each participant's ideal image of that destination looks like.



### STAGE 3: Brainstorm Strategies for Tourism Development

Once participants have created current and ideal visions for community tourism, consolidate the team's ideas to create a future vision of tourism in the community. Once the group has a shared ideal vision of tourism, begin thinking of strategies to help the community reach the vision.

Some things to think about include:

- What areas need to be addressed first?
- What key resources will help your community progress from the current to future image?
- How can you leverage identified strengths to get there? What strategies should you consider?
- What are the top three actions that will help your community to reach your future image?

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# Rural Development Toolkit

## Community Workshop Workbook Template

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### Participant Workbook

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Workshop Moderator: \_\_\_\_\_

Assistant Moderator: \_\_\_\_\_

Small Group Facilitators: \_\_\_\_\_

Workshop Agenda		
10:30 to 10:40 AM	Welcome and Ice-breaker Activity	Whole Group
	<b>PART 1: WHERE ARE WE NOW?</b>	
10:40 to 10:45 AM	Introduction of Part 1	Whole Group
10:45 to 11:20 AM	Community Assessment for Tourism Development	Small Group
11:20 to 11:30 AM	Reporting and Full Group Discussion: Strengths and Improvement Opportunities	Whole Group
11:30 AM to 12:00 PM	Early Lunch/Break (30 minutes)	
	<b>PART 2: WHERE WOULD WE LIKE TO BE?</b>	
12:00 PM to 12:05 PM	Introduction of Part 2	Whole Group
12:05 to 12:35 AM	ZMET Activity: Establishing Tourism Image and Vision	Small Group
12:35 to 1:05 PM	Brainstorming: Visions of Our Community	Small Group
1:05 to 1:15 PM	Reporting and Full Group Discussion: Visions	Whole Group
1:05 to 1:20 PM	Break (30 minutes)	
1:20 to 1:40 PM	Brainstorming: Strategies	Small Group
1:40 to 1:55 PM	Reporting and Full Group Discussion: Strategies	Whole Group

## PART 1: Community Assets (45 minutes)

### Identify Strengths and Opportunities

*Timeframe: 15 minutes | 10:45 to 11:00 a.m.*

Utilizing the Community Capital Framework and the table on the following page, brainstorm and identify strengths and improvement opportunities in each asset category for your community's tourism development. It is okay if you do not fill the whole table – fill out the strengths and opportunities that come easily to you.

### Small Group Discussion

*Timeframe: 20 minutes | 11:00 to 11:20 a.m.*

Discuss identified strengths and opportunities within your small group as the facilitator takes note on a flip chart. Then use ten sticky dots to indicate top five strengths and top five improvement opportunities on the flip chart.

### Whole Group Discussion

*Timeframe: 10 minutes | 11:20 to 11:30 a.m.*

Report the top five strengths and the top five improvement opportunities to the whole group.



## Types of Assets

### *Financial Asset*

Includes opportunities for loans and credit, investment opportunities, hotel/motel tax, grants, tax credits, and other business-friendly structures.

### *Human Asset*

Includes opportunities for professional, educational, and skill-building.

### *Built Asset*

Includes buildings, roads, public facilities, telecommunications, internet, main streets, water, and sewer systems, etc.

### *Natural Asset*

Includes environment, rivers, lakes, forests, wildlife, soil, plant, animals, weather, and natural beauty.

### *Cultural Asset*

Includes history, art and craft forms, traditional foods and ways of preparation, festivals, and heritage.

### *Political Asset*

Includes the ability of to turn its values into agreements, rules, and regulations.

### *Social Asset*

Includes social networks, collaborations, and groups.

### *Narrative Asset*

Includes what makes you proud of your community.

## Community Capital Framework

Asset Type	Strength	Improvement Opportunity
Financial 		
Human 		
Built 		
Natural 		
Cultural 		
Political 		
Social 		
Narrative 		



## Lunch Break (30 minutes)

### PART 2: Where Would We Like to Be? (30 minutes)

#### Instructions

*Timeframe: 30 minutes | 12:05 to 12:35 p.m.*

Using materials provided by facilitators, create two collages with the pictures from the marketing brochures. Use scissors to cut the images out from the provided materials and tape or paste them onto the following pages.

#### Collage 1: Current Tourism

Select images to show what you think best represents the current tourism situation in your community.

#### Collage 2: Future Tourism

Now consider what you would like your community to become in the next 10 to 20 years. While selecting future images, imagine that one of the following circumstances has happened in your community:



The town receives significant funding to carry out a tourism development project from a donor, a successful grant, or another funding source.

What would this project be?

The media (e.g., NPR, PBS, CNN, FOX News, or the New York Times) gets ahold of an attraction or community-based tourism event happening in your community and run a story.

What is happening in town?

What will the media be covering?

## Current Tourism Collage

*Timeframe: 15 minutes | 12:05 to 12:20 p.m.*

TO DO ON YOUR OWN: Place images cut from provided materials that represent your community's present tourism circumstances.

## Future Tourism Collage

*Timeframe: 15 minutes | 12:20 to 12:35 p.m.*

TO DO ON YOUR OWN: Place images cut from provided materials that represent how you imagine your community's future tourism.

### **Brainstorming: Current Visions of Community**

*Timeframe: 15 minutes | 12:35 to 12:50 p.m.*

SMALL GROUP: Each group member shares their collage that represents the CURRENT images of tourism in the community, describes the main themes of the image, and explains why they selected the images.

Those listening should look for common themes and characteristics of all the selected images.

As a group, discuss and determine together a list of keywords that best describe the current destination image of the community and the feelings and emotions of visiting the community.

Use the space below to brainstorm and record keywords generated by your group.

#### **Keywords for Current Vision**

### **Brainstorming: Future Visions of Community**

*Timeframe: 15 minutes | 12:50 to 1:05 p.m.*

SMALL GROUP: Each group member shares their collage that represents the FUTURE images of tourism in the community, describes the main themes of the image, and explains why they selected the images.

Those listening should look for common themes and characteristics of all the selected images.

As a group, discuss and determine together a list of keywords that best describe the current destination image of the community and the feelings and emotions of visiting the community.

Use the space below to brainstorm and record keywords generated by your group.

#### **Keywords for Future Vision**

### **Keyword Summary**

*Timeframe: 10 minutes | 1:05 to 1:15 p.m.*

WHOLE GROUP: Report keyword findings to the whole group.



## Brainstorming: Strategies for Success

*Timeframe: 20 minutes | 1:20 to 1:40 p.m.*

SMALL GROUP: Compare the final current and future images of your community's tourism and refer to the discussion results of PART 1. Now discuss the following questions within your group to generate a list of actionable strategies:

- What areas need to be address first to get started?
- What factors and/or resources are instrumental in helping the community to progress from the current image to the future image?
- How can the community leverage its strengths to get there? What strategies should the community consider?

As a group, discuss and determine the top three specific strategies/actions that will help the community progress from the current image to the future image.

Use the space belows to brainstorm strategies for success that can help make your vision for the future a reality.

### Strategy Summary

*Timeframe: 15 minutes | 1:40 to 1:55 p.m.*

WHOLE GROUP: Report keyword findings to the whole group.

### Strategies For Success

# Rural Development Toolkit

## Stakeholder Interview/Protocol Guide Template



In addition to establishing the current assets and future goals of your community's tourism development, it is important to garner support for a potential tourism initiative from community members early. Support for tourism by local stakeholders will be dramatically important for maintaining a tourism destination that is sustainable.

One way to gather support from community members is through interviews with local stakeholders. Stakeholders can range from elected officials, local or regional destination management/marketing professionals, business owners, government employees (i.e., park managers), chamber of commerce, and residents. Multiple participants from each of these stakeholders' groups should be invited to participate in the workshop and given the opportunity to share their knowledge and opinions.

We have provided a color-coded interview guide template that can be adapted to interviews that involve various stakeholder groups, ensuring that their concerns and opinions are heard. It is important to understand their opinions of tourism's impact on the economic development of the community, and how they believe tourism influences the community.

### Interview Guide Template

#### Introduction

- Thank you!
- Objective of the interview.
- There are no right or wrong answers.
- As much detail as possible.
- Audio-recorded.
- Questions?

#### Warm-up/ice-breaking questions

##### *Everyone*

- Where do you live?
- How long have you lived in your community?
- Why did you or your family move here?

##### *Business Owners*

- Please tell me about your business. What led you to create a business?
- Where do you hire? Where do your employees from? Where do you purchase supplies for your business?

##### *Natural Resources*

- Can you tell me about your background and your role in [natural resource organization]?
- Why did you decide to work in conservation/natural resource management etc?
- Can you tell me why conservation/natural resource management, etc is important to you/to the world?

##### *Elected Officials*

- Please tell me what led you to decide to be politically involved in your community?

##### *DMOs*

- Please tell me about your DMOs?
- What are some of the visitors you are targeting?
- What is your source of funding?

### ***Residents***

- What are some things you do in your community? (Work? Eat? Drink? Other activities?)
- How involved are you in your community? (Volunteering? Member of community group(s)?)
- What do you like the most about your community? How about the least?

## **Tourism Development**

### ***Everyone***

- How do you feel about the future of tourism development in your community ...worried, excited, nervous?
- Why do you feel that way?

### ***Business Owners***

- How involved are you in your community's tourism sector and development? In what ways, if any, do you work or collaborate with others in tourism?
- What would make it easier for you to collaborate with others?
- How do you feel you can encourage others to support tourism development?

### ***Natural Resources***

- In what ways is [natural resource organization] involved with tourism and/or tourism development?
- What would you like the visitor to learn about the natural resources around [name of town]?
- Does the presence of visitors help to protect natural resources? Can you tell me more about why you think that?
- In what ways, if there is any, do you work with others to foster tourism development?
- What would make it easier for you to collaborate with others?

### ***Elected Officials / Government Employees***

- In what ways is your office involved with tourism development?
- How do you feel business owners collaborate with each other to support tourism development?
- How are you encouraging collaborations between business owners regarding tourism development? What would make it easier for you to encourage collaborations between business owners to boost tourism?

- In what ways, if any, do you work with other communities to foster tourism development? What would make it easier for you to collaborate with other towns/communities regarding tourism development?
- Do you have access to the resources your community needs to develop tourism (e.g., grants, data, connections, knowledge)? What could help you access resources related to tourism development?

### ***DMOs***

- How do you feel business owners collaborate with each other to support tourism development?
- How are you encouraging collaborations between business owners regarding tourism development?
- In what ways, if any, do you work with other communities to foster tourism development? What would make it easier for you to collaborate with other towns/communities regarding tourism development?
- What would make it easier for you to encourage collaborations between business owners to boost tourism?
- Do you have access to the resources your community needs to develop tourism? (e.g., grants, data, connections, knowledge). What could help you access resources related to tourism development?

### ***Residents***

- In your opinion, what is the role of tourism in your community? How do you feel about tourists coming to your community?
- How involved are you in supporting tourism development in your community?

### ***Everyone***

- How do you want your community to be perceived by visitors?
- In what way do you feel that diversity is important for tourism development in your community? Why or why not?

## Narrative Capital and Economic Empowerment

Let's talk about your business/community and its links to tourism development:

### *Everyone*

- In what ways do you feel tourism has a positive impact on your community? Have you seen any impact from tourism tax revenue on the community? How about economic benefits (e.g., job opportunities)?
- In what ways do you think [natural resource organization] can expand tourism in your community or vice versa?
- How sustainable do you feel are the economic benefits of tourism? How much do you think these tourism economic benefits leak out of your community (e.g., non-residents working in the tourism industry; non-local tourism businesses purchasing supplies outside of the community)?
- To what extent do you think everyone benefits equally in your community? Are you concerned about any groups being left out of the benefits of tourism? Do you think we should include any other groups in our discussions about tourism?
- How has [your business/the economic structure of your community] changed over time due to tourism development? How do you feel about these changes? Positive or negative?
- What are some examples of things related to tourism development [visitor education/management] that you are proud to have accomplished as a [business owner/elected official or govt. employee/DMOs/natural resources specialist]? What about things that your community has done related to tourism that you feel are great and that you are proud of? What about things that your community has and that you are proud of (e.g., downtown area, friendly people)? What is a project you led or were involved in that you feel made a difference in your community in terms of tourism development? Or if newly elected: What are some of the things that you are most excited to see happening regarding tourism development?
- What is one of the greatest challenges/difficulties that you have [your community has] overcome as a [business owner/elected official or government employee/DMOs/natural resources specialist]? What happened? How did you come up with a solution? How has this experience impacted you?

- How about challenges faced by your community in terms of tourism development? What happened? How did your community come up with a solution? How has this experience impacted you?
- How much control do you feel you have to expand the positive impacts of tourism?
- How about increasing your community's economic benefits from tourism? How about increasing your own economic benefits from tourism? In what way does it impact [your constituents' interest and support for tourism/your involvement in tourism development (e.g., becoming part of committee and volunteering)?

### *Business Owners*

- How has being a tourism entrepreneur impacted you? Impacted your interaction with others business owners? With residents? With tourists? With elected officials?
- Has being a business owner changed the way you perceive tourism?
- How do you and your family benefit from tourism in general? How about economic benefits? How the money earned from tourism impacted you and your family's life? In what ways do you think the money earned from tourism has opened up more doors for you (e.g., education, personal growth, career development)?
- Do you feel like you can influence the way tourism is being developed in your community? Why?
- Do you feel you have what you need to expand your business (e.g., acquire tourism or business knowledge, access to critical tourism resources)? Have your feelings about this caused you to become more involved in tourism decision-making in your community? In what ways does it impact your involvement in tourism development (e.g., becoming part of a committee and volunteering)?
- How fair is the competition among tourism businesses around you? How is your business impacted by it?



### ***Elected Officials / Government Employees, Natural Resources, and DMOs***

- Has [being an elected official/ working to protect natural resources/working for a DMO] changed the way you perceive tourism? Perceive business owners? Residents?

### ***DMOs***

- How do you develop the narrative, image, and storytelling for community?
- Residents:
- In what ways has tourism hurt your community?
- How do you and your family benefit from tourism in general? How about economic benefits? How has the money earned from tourism impacted you and your family's life? In what ways do you think the money earned from tourism has opened up more doors for you (e.g., education, personal growth, career development)?

### **Conclusion**

- Is there something else you would like to add, maybe something that I did not ask but that you feel is important?
- Would you have recommendations about somebody else to interview? Someone who would have ideas/opinions to share about rural tourism?
- Mention that they will receive [incentive]
- Mention that they will receive a copy of the interview transcript to review/check.
- Thank them for taking the time to do the interview.

## Knowing Your Visitors

It is important to know who your current and/or potential visitors are. The best way to do this is to conduct visitor surveys to better understand who is visiting your community, what their interests are, what your target markets should be, and anything that made them satisfied or dissatisfied with about their visit.

In the summer of 2022, we conducted a rural tourist survey to obtain insights into rural tourists' decision-making and behaviors. This survey targeted rural tourists from eight states within the Midwest (Illinois, Kentucky, Iowa, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, Tennessee, and Wisconsin), totaling 1015 completed responses. Key findings can be found at:

[go.illinois.edu/iRuralCommunityReport2022](https://go.illinois.edu/iRuralCommunityReport2022)

### Visitor Surveys

While there is a collection of data here for you to utilize, you may wish to collect visitor data specific to your community. We have provided a survey instrument template for you to utilize when designing your survey. Using this survey instrument will allow you the confidence that your data is accurate and reliable. Here are a few decisions you need to make when planning data collection:

#### *Identify questions*

Start by identifying the questions you want to answer. The survey instrument template provided in this toolkit includes a list of frequently-used visitor survey questions.

#### *Determine sample size*

As a general rule, a sample size between 100 and 300 will provide an acceptable margin of error (between 5% and 10%) and meaningful results.

#### *Determine timing*

The ideal timing should be during tourism peak seasons to ensure a high response rate.

#### *Determine data collection platform*

There are two main options for data collection: online or in person. When collecting data online, it is common to use a survey hosting company, such as Qualtrics, Survey Monkey, or Google Forms. Collect in-person survey data via paper surveys, orally, with a surveyor filling out a survey for respondents on paper, or via offline technology.

#### *Determine a distribution plan*

Survey sites with high visitor traffic volume are best. Sites can be offline, such as popular tourism attractions, visitor centers, restaurants, events, and festivals, or online, such as tourism business and DMO websites and social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram). If budget allows, you can consider place an advertisement on social media to promote the survey.

#### *Determine Incentives*

Consider offering incentives, such as a \$100 gift card or a drawing, to increase response rate.

### Survey Template

Our survey template was designed for a selection of communities in Illinois; however it can be adapted with questions designed for your community.

Access the template: [go.illinois.edu/iRuralSurvey](https://go.illinois.edu/iRuralSurvey)

### Dark Sky Tourism

Depending on the location of your community, you may have the opportunity to develop dark sky tourism – or astrotourism – tourism involving visitors visiting places with limited light pollution. Over the past decade, Astrotourism has become increasingly popular in rural communities that lack the light pollution present in urban areas.

Our recommendations for developing astrotourism are still developing. Currently, interviews are being conducted to understand the certification steps from the International Dark-Sky Association, as well as challenges that various entities have faced within their communities. Preliminary results thus far have suggested:

#### *Find a core group of passionate people*

The certification process involves many steps that can be overwhelming to a person seeking designation in addition to their full-time job. Splitting the workload allows for the process to always be moving, even when the project lead is busy.

#### *Consider a dual audience*

Design your astrotourism experiences to cater to both the diehard astronomers and the more casual stargazers. While amateur astronomers prefer solitude and quiet when stargazing, more casual visitors prefer some small level of human evidence.

### *Solicit community support through economic benefits*

To ensure limited light pollution, time and energy will need to be spent on the outdoor lighting of the community and local businesses. While some may be resistant to this for a variety of reasons (financial and safety are commonly cited), it is important to highlight the economic benefits of astrotourism. The changing of light fixtures can reduce community energy costs in addition to increasing incoming tourism revenue<sup>7</sup>.

## Funding Your Project

Once you have a well developed plan from your community workshop, support for your plan from community member interviews and visitor data to understand your incoming visitors, the time has come to fund your new tourism project.

The I-Rural Grant Guide includes resources for funding that cover proposal writing as well as places where you can acquire funding. While this grant guide is updated regularly, it is not an exhaustive list of available funds.

View the guide at: [go.illinois.edu/iRuralGrantGuide](https://go.illinois.edu/iRuralGrantGuide).

## Digital Marketing

Our rural tourist survey shows that more than 40% of rural tourists rely on search engines and social media to look for information when planning a trip, implying the significant role of digital marketing in promoting your destination. While digital marketing is a large and ever-changing landscape, two digital marketing strategies, destination websites and Google My Business listing, can be fruitful for rural communities.

### Destination Websites

A good destination website serves as a hook as well as an information hub for prospective tourists. Get tourists interested and excited about visiting by using high-quality photos of your community. Include tourism-related businesses information (e.g., activities, accommodation, food, and dining) and provide links for visitors to get more information. Here are two good examples:

- Historic Havana Illinois: [bit.ly/Havanall](https://bit.ly/Havanall).
- Explore Savanna: [bit.ly/Savannall](https://bit.ly/Savannall).

When designing a destination website, it is important to focus on a few key aspects to enhance the user's experience.

1. First focus on the first impression that your homepage will provide a visitor. Stunning photos of your destination can act as an initial hook that encourages further exploration of your website and destination.
2. Make your site easy to navigate. This can be accomplished by ensuring that your website does not try to pack in too much information on each page.
3. Finally, it is important to be constantly innovative on your website. Use analytics to improve the performance of your site, drawing in more visitors.

LinkedIn articles provide additional information on designing your website: [bit.ly/44UBshq](https://bit.ly/44UBshq).

### Google Business Profile

A free Google Business Profile is a must for every business, particularly small business, to enhance their online presence. It allows prospective tourists to find you on Google Search and Google Maps. Begin the process: [google.com/business](https://google.com/business).

- How to Add or Claim Your Business Profile on Google: [bit.ly/3MladFu](https://bit.ly/3MladFu).
- How to Edit Your Business Profile: [bit.ly/3MiJ9Xt](https://bit.ly/3MiJ9Xt).
- How to Improve Your Local Ranking on Google: [bit.ly/42KBQ0f](https://bit.ly/42KBQ0f).

### Closing Remarks and Other Resources

Tourism is an incredibly large part of the Illinois economy. By following these steps, we hope to help clarify the process of starting tourism in your community. In addition to the steps above, we suggest the following resources to help facilitate your tourism development process.

- Planning and Leading Effective Meetings: [go.illinois.edu/EffectiveMeetings](https://go.illinois.edu/EffectiveMeetings).
- Outdoor Recreation Participation Trends Report: [bit.ly/OutdoorRecTrends](https://bit.ly/OutdoorRecTrends).

<sup>7</sup>“Light Pollution Wastes Energy and Money”, International Dark Sky Association, Accessed January 5, 2022, [darksky.org/light-pollution/energy-waste/](https://darksky.org/light-pollution/energy-waste/)