

Texas Department of Agriculture

Proposed Plan for Rural Tourism Workshops

Overview: The goal of the workshop model below will be to not only empower rural communities with the tools they need to plan and promote tourism, but also to arm them with an ongoing source of resources and feedback. Workshop topics will focus on the issues, opportunities and challenges unique to rural Texas, and will offer solutions, ideas and hands-on approaches. To provide continuity and longevity, a pilot mentoring program will also be introduced at the workshops. This program will partner smaller communities with mentors from the 21 Texas Yes! Hardworking Rural Communities as a resource to call on for information, advice and ideas throughout the year. Mentors will provide quarterly updates to TDA to share the services they have provided through this effort and track the impact.

Day One/Tier 1

(tailored for communities just beginning to consider rural tourism)

Tourism – Uniquely Rural Texas

Morning:

- 1) Discuss the unique tourism opportunities and strengths facing rural Texas, along with some of the challenges. Look at what other states are doing successfully for rural tourism. Discuss the rural tourism workbooks that attendees completed before attending the workshop. The workbooks will help analyze local offerings and resources and will be mailed to attendees before the workshop. Attendees can return the workbooks ahead of time and have them reviewed and mailed back with experts' comments before the workshop.
- 2) Identifying and tapping into niche markets for rural tourism (historical, cultural, arts, nature, agriculture, athletic/sports, etc.). Worksheet to identify existing opportunities and future possibilities. Have a top-notch attorney review land liability issues.
- 3) Partnering effectively with the big cities for tourists' dollars. Pooling regional resources.
- 4) Getting the most for your promotional buck (what's the most effective way to spend \$2,000? \$5,000? \$10,000? etc. – invite a top advertising expert in to discuss the best way to promote on a smaller budget).

Afternoon:

- 5) Resources for rural Texas tourism projects (funding, information, etc.). Fundraising tools and strategies.
- 6) TDA's Hometown STARS program and how it can help leverage your dollars (worksheet walk-through for project proposal creative blueprint).
- 7) Success stories from rural communities that have blazed a trail – How they did it.
- 8) Mentoring pilot program introduction and explanation.

Evening: Mentor meet and greet

Day Two/Tier 2

(tailored for communities already conducting successful tourism projects)

Building on Tourism Success for Rural Texas

Morning:

- 1) The best sources for market research and how to find them.
- 2) Expanding on your niche – in-depth exploration of rural tourism facets (historical, cultural, arts, nature, ag, athletic/sports, etc.).
- 3) Taking advertising to the next level (in-state and out-of-state). Beyond the fundamentals: joint advertising, honing your message, etc.
- 4) One more meal, one more night: Turning day trips into weekend excursions and real tools and approaches to encourage visitors to spend more time and dollars in your community.
- 5) Getting community buy-in – community psychology and how to motivate everyone for success. Creating real regional alliances.

Afternoon:

- 6) Review of mentoring pilot program and how to be the best mentor for other rural communities.
- 7) Peer to peer roundtable: sharing success stories and ideas.

TDA is proposing an MOU with Texas A&M University for the following:

- Developing and overseeing a diverse and thorough workshop curriculum based on TDA's outline. Will include conducting active activities that provide attendees with hands-on learning experiences.
- Identifying and scheduling renowned speakers with proven expertise in the subject area. Negotiate pricing and handle speakers' expenses.
- Creating well-designed notebook materials and coordinating speakers' notes and presentation pieces to provide to TDA for printing.
- Developing and mailing out a pre-workshop rural tourism workbook to participants to be graded and returned to attendees before the workshop is held.
- Developing and collecting attendee surveys on economic impact to create quantitative and qualitative reports tracking the impact of the workshop content and activities.
- Developing and collecting follow-up surveys to attendees to track long-term impact of the workshop program.
- Ensuring all audiovisual equipment needed by speakers is provided and available at workshops.