

## ABSTRACT

POST, HAILEY ADARE. Strategies for the Creation of Tourism Advocates Among A Diverse Set of Stakeholders (Under the direction of Dr. Whitney Knollenberg).

Tourism is an industry vulnerable to crises. While the tourism industry is making strides in its ability to plan for and respond to a number of different crises, such as natural disasters, acts of terrorism, recessions, or the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, it remains susceptible to policy changes. Despite the value tourism brings to communities, it is often not recognized for its contribution to economic development and quality of life. This lack of understanding extends to policymakers, making the tourism industry vulnerable to policy changes that have the potential to create crises for tourism stakeholders. One potentially effective tool in combating these crises is advocacy. Advocacy can take many forms, but at its core for tourism are efforts to educate stakeholders, including policymakers, on the value of tourism and the potential impacts of policy changes on the industry. To maximize the influence of advocates, the tourism industry needs to cultivate them from a diverse range of stakeholders. A diverse set of advocates provides multiple spheres of influence (e.g., access to social networks), thereby increasing the audiences that can be reached through advocates.

By educating stakeholders, advocates can aid in limiting negative policy impacts on the tourism industry. However, their development and engagement require strategic action. There is limited understanding of how the tourism industry can effectively develop and engage advocates.

Co-management Theory provides a framework to design strategies that engage tourism stakeholders in collective advocacy efforts. Such strategies can be implemented by destination marketing/management organizations (DMOs), who engage with all sectors of the tourism

industry to manage and promote tourism destinations. This research aims to identify strategies DMOs can utilize to develop and engage a diverse set of advocates.

Research for this study was conducted in partnership with the Greater Raleigh Convention and Visitors Bureau (GRCVB) the DMO for Wake County, NC. This study includes two manuscripts, one intended for an academic audience and the other for a practitioner audience. Interviews were conducted with 31 stakeholders to measure their level of understanding of tourism's role in the community. Findings from the study indicate a need for expanded partnerships throughout the community, improved and personalized communication strategies, a more nuanced story showcasing how tourism contributes to Wake County residents' quality of life, and specific advocacy asks with actionable information. By incorporating suggestions from participants and the constructs of Co-Management Theory, the GRCVB can develop strategies to educate and empower a diverse set of advocates.

These suggestions from stakeholders along with the constructs of Co-Management Theory were used to identify which strategic actions should be taken to improve strategies to reach a more diverse set of advocates. Ultimately, findings will provide DMOs with effective strategies to expand their community engagement to a diverse set of stakeholders and create greater support for the tourism industry and contribute to the tourism advocacy literature.

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Strategies for the Creation of Tourism Advocates Among A Diverse Set of Stakeholders

by  
Hailey Adare Post

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
North Carolina State University  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science

Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management

Raleigh, North Carolina  
2021

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## **BIOGRAPHY**

Hailey Post was born and raised in Greensboro, North Carolina. She attended the University of North Carolina-Greensboro to study Sustainable Tourism and Hospitality where she was motivated to enact sustainable change as a tourism professional. Upon graduation, she pursued a career with Walt Disney World and as a recreation manager at the Greensboro Science Center. Her experiences in the professional sector inspired her to attend graduate school to expand her knowledge on sustainable tourism management and community development.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the substantial support and resources the GRCVB dedicated to this project. Specifically, I would like to highlight Andrew Baker, Karen DeSollar, Jonathan Freeze, and Loren Gold for their considerable time and dedication to making Tourism U a reality and to their demonstrated commitment to community engagement during a particularly challenging time.

A sincere thank you to my incredibly supportive committee chair Dr. Whitney Knollenberg for her invaluable guidance and inspiration. Thank you to my committee members Dr. Erin Seekamp, Dr. Ashley Schroeder, and Dr. Amanda Stewart for their invaluable insight and dedication.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the love, encouragement, and patience of my family; my mom, Terri Moss-Post; my partner, Keisei Sugahara; my step-father John Moore; and my partner's parents Hidetomo and Teruko Sugahara. Thank you all for your unwavering support.

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## CHAPTER 1: Thesis Overview

### *Executive Summary of Topic*

During this time of recovery in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism crisis management is a prominent topic of conversation within tourism scholarship and management. While efforts are being made to improve tourism's resilience against environmental, social, and cultural crises, it remains susceptible to policy changes. Despite the value tourism brings to communities, it is often not recognized for its contribution to economic development and quality of life. This oversight extends to policymakers, leaving the tourism industry and all who benefit from its sustainability, vulnerable to policy changes. This vulnerability has the potential to create crises for tourism stakeholders.

One potentially effective tool in combating these crises is advocacy. Advocacy can take many forms, but at its core for the tourism industry are efforts to educate stakeholders, including policymakers, on the value of tourism and the potential impacts policy change can have on tourism. To maximize the influence of advocates, the tourism industry needs to cultivate them from a diverse range of stakeholders (e.g., community residents, local businesses, associations, policy makers). A diverse set of advocates provides multiple spheres of influence (e.g., access to social networks), thereby increasing the audiences that can be reached through advocates.

By educating stakeholders, advocates can aid in limiting negative policy impacts on the tourism industry. However, their development and engagement require strategic action. There is limited understanding of how the tourism industry can effectively develop and engage advocates.

Co-management Theory provides a framework to design strategies that engage tourism stakeholders in collective advocacy efforts. Such strategies can be implemented by destination

marketing/management organizations (DMOs), who engage with all sectors of the tourism industry to manage and promote tourism destinations. This study aims to identify strategies DMOs can utilize to develop and engage a diverse set of advocates.

This study was conducted in partnership with the Greater Raleigh Convention and Visitors Bureau (GRCVB). As the DMO for Wake County, NC they aim to strengthen their connection with diverse stakeholders through community engagement strategies (CES). The CES include presentations and one-on-one meetings with tourism stakeholders (e.g., retail business owners, community development leaders) to cultivate advocates and increase awareness of the GRCVB and the benefits tourism brings to Wake County. To maximize the number of participants and align with the GRCVB's CES timeline, data were collected in two rounds, with some interviewees participating in both rounds. Co-management Theory is used as a guiding framework to identify which strategic actions are effective in tourism advocate development and engagement. Ultimately, findings will provide DMOs with effective strategies to expand their community engagement to a diverse set of stakeholders and create greater support for the tourism industry.

### *Impact of COVID 19*

While the pandemic presented challenges and constraints (including rapid changes in scheduling, communication difficulties, and time constraints), this study remained flexible to the changing times and was successful in collecting significant data despite these limitations. I acknowledge that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a significant paradigm shift in the current world and therefore is likely to influence different perspectives and opinions. Now, more than ever it is critical to educate others on the value of the tourism industry. Tourism, along with the rest of the

world, has experienced an unprecedented crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic leading to severe job loss and a worldwide halt on tourism. While devastating to all sectors of the tourism industry, this unique time of crisis allows the space to critically observe tourism's value and work toward building resilience for the future. Though the tourism market and world will inevitably be forever changed in the wake of COVID-19, the tourism industry shows a great deal of optimism that it will recover.

### *Anticipated Outcomes*

The anticipated outcomes for this study include contributions to tourism field and tourism scholarship. This research aims to contribute to existing scholarship on tourism crisis management, tourism leadership and management, Co-management theory, and tourism advocacy. While there is existing literature on tourism and the public policy process, tourism crisis management, and building relationships with stakeholders, literature on strategies to cultivate diverse stakeholders as advocates for tourism is limited.

### *Thesis Structure*

To disseminate the findings of this study, this thesis consists of two outputs. Chapter 2 consists of a manuscript that will be submitted as a peer reviewed article with the purpose of providing a contribution to the tourism advocacy literature and tourism scholarship. In addition to contributing to the literature on tourism management, advocacy, and community engagement, the manuscript in Chapter 2 intends to address this gap in knowledge and provide recommendations for creating diverse tourism advocates. Due to the emphasis on strategies for DMOs, the target journal for the manuscript in Chapter 2 is *Tourism Management*, as it seeks to publish articles with managerial outcomes. The current format of Chapter 2 reflects the standards for *Tourism*

*Management*, which has a word limit of 10,000 words. While there are no strict formatting requirements for *Tourism Management*, formatting should remain consistent throughout and must contain the essential elements and clearly defined sections including an introduction, materials and methods, results, and conclusions.

In addition to contributing to tourism scholarship, this study strives to translate findings for industry professionals. Chapter 3 is comprised of a technical report for the GRCVB, that will serve as a call to action for tourism industry professionals by highlighting actionable strategies to improve tourism advocate development and engagement. An element of this report will be the summary report, a 3 page document summarizing the main takeaways from the study (Page 76, APPENDIX B: Summary Report). The goal of this report is to provide a concise but compelling dissemination of the study's findings and strategies for effective community engagement to strengthen DMO's advocacy efforts. This report is intended for the GRCVB's use and will be shared with their industry partners, board members, and other industry leaders.

The final chapter, Chapter 4, concludes the thesis with a synthesis where the author discusses and contextualizes their relationship and experience with study. This synthesis highlights the overall contributions of the study, implications and challenges due to the timing of the study, recommendations for future reach, and personal reflections.

## **Chapter 2: Peer Reviewed Manuscript**

### **Strategies for Building Diverse Tourism Advocates**

#### ***Introduction***

Tourism is an industry vulnerable to crises. A tourism crisis includes any situation that has the potential to affect long-term traveler confidence in a destination and interferes with the destination's ability to continue operating normally (UNWTO, 2005; PATA, 2003).

While the tourism industry is making strides in its ability to plan for and respond to a number of different crises, such as natural disasters, acts of terrorism, recessions, or the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, it remains susceptible to policy changes. Tourism can be impacted by a variety of policy decisions including, but not limited to, changes in funding models and implementation of social or environmental policies that impact destination image and visitation. Many states such as Texas, Florida, and Missouri, all with flourishing and economically significant tourism industries, have experienced major state tourism office budget cuts due to legislative action (Bailey, 2018; Watson, 2018). Washington's State Tourism Office was eliminated altogether in 2011 (Yardley, 2011). Most recently, a widely successful campaign, Travel Michigan lost their \$36 million annual budget when legislative action resulted in a significant loss in tourism funding (Walker, 2019). Social policy changes also have the potential to create tourism crises. In 2016, North Carolina tourism stakeholders found themselves in a crisis in the wake of North Carolina's House Bill 2. Considered discriminatory against the transgender community, this policy required individuals to use public restrooms that match the sex on their birth certificate. This led to numerous travel bans, cancelled events, business boycotts, and a significant blow to the state's reputation. The repercussions from HB2 resulted in

a tourism crisis for the state of North Carolina and ultimately lost over \$37 billion in tourism revenue and continues to reckon with the impacts of the policy (Dalesio et al., 2017).

Policy changes such as these can create a crisis for the tourism industry in myriad ways including elimination or reduction of tourism marketing budgets as well as subsequent changes to social, economic, or environmental policies that directly impact destination's reputation, image, and visitation. The impacts of policy change affect not only the sustainability of the tourism industry itself, but also the resilience of communities that depend on tourism's continued success. Like any crisis, it is critical to proactively plan to take action to avert or mitigate the risks of policy-related consequences (PATA, 2003). Creating and implementing advocacy plans to mitigate crises caused by policy change should be a priority for the tourism industry to sustain the benefits tourism brings to resident quality of life.

Advocacy is a proactive action that can be a powerful solution to address the threat of policy-related crisis (Baumgartner et al., 2009). To successfully advocate, the tourism industry must work collaboratively with its stakeholders to communicate the value of tourism to decision-makers who craft and enact the policies that can impact the industry. Yet, communicating the value of tourism to demonstrate the potential impact of policy changes on the industry is challenging. The long-standing metric to define tourism's value has been its economic impact, such as direct revenues, taxes generated, or jobs created (USTA, 2018). However, the value of tourism is not exclusively economic as tourism plays a critical role in cultural sustainability, conservation of natural resources, and enhancement of quality of life for millions of Americans (USTA, 2018).

As destination marketing/management organizations continue to transition their focus to destination management (Destinations International, 2017), they take on a new role in not only communicating with potential visitors, but also communicating with potential tourism advocates in their own communities. In taking on this new role, destination marketing/management organizations (DMOs) have the opportunity to educate community stakeholders about the revenue, job generation, and tax dollars that tourism brings to communities to sustain and enrich the quality of life of its residents. They can also illustrate how tourism directly contributes to the quality of life of residents in destination communities through events and improved transportation networks, as well as investment in local resources (e.g., restaurants, retail, and the arts).

Despite the benefits tourism can bring to destination communities, most tourism stakeholders, those whose livelihood depends on tourism's continued prosperity and growth, are not aware of them (Alonso & Nyanjom, 2015). This lack of understanding extends to policymakers, which increases tourism's vulnerability to policy change. It is vital for tourism stakeholders to be informed of the value of tourism in order to communicate with policymakers and be advocates for the tourism industry. To combat negative impacts of policy change on the tourism industry and the communities that rely upon it, DMOs need effective strategies for building a diverse set of dedicated advocates within these communities.

The Greater Raleigh Convention and Visitors Bureau (GRCVB) is charged with the promotion and development of tourism in Wake County, NC. Wake County is home to the state capital, Raleigh, and 11 other communities. Resulting from recent DMO strategic planning efforts, the GRCVB is expanding its connection with stakeholders across Wake County using community



engagement strategies (CES). These strategies include one-on-one meetings with stakeholders, public relations campaigns, and public meetings with a variety of stakeholders from different sectors of tourism, other industries, non-profit organizations, economic development offices, and others. By utilizing CES the GRCVB aims to increase stakeholders' knowledge of tourism's value in Wake County and encourage them to become advocates for tourism. Through this commitment to building relationships with stakeholders and educating the public on the importance of tourism, the GRCVB and its CES initiatives are a prime subject to identify strategies for DMOs to educate and empower a diverse set of advocates.

The main objective of this study is to identify strategies for DMOs to educate and empower a diverse set of advocates. Guided by Co-Management Theory and using the activities of the GRCVB as an example, the research questions designed to address this objective include:

1. Who are the stakeholders with whom GRCVB currently works to advocate for tourism?
2. Which communication strategies are perceived to be effective in maintaining relationships between the GRCVB and their advocates?
3. What message or story shared by the GRCVB do advocates use to articulate the value of tourism in their community?
4. What resources should the GRCVB develop to strengthen shared advocacy commitment and action from their stakeholders?

### ***Literature Review***

Tourism is vulnerable to crises brought on by changes in policy due to the public and policymakers' limited knowledge of the positive benefits of tourism and the negative impacts of policy change (Laws et al., 2007). Stakeholders, including policymakers, must have better

knowledge of tourism's benefits and the consequences of policy change to reduce the impacts of policy change on the tourism industry and the communities it supports (McGehee, 2006; Swanson & Edgell, 2013). Tourism advocates, community members who work to build relationships within the tourism industry to better understand the issues and build industry consensus, must be developed and activated to act on the industry's behalf (Knollenberg, 2020). This important role of destination management has had limited exploration in the tourism literature but is a growing area of activity for DMOs (Destinations International, 2017).

### *The importance of advocacy in tourism*

Advocacy, efforts to influence policy decisions through means such as education of policymakers and voters, provides an avenue to reduce or eliminate the negative impacts of policy change on the tourism industry (Baumgartner et al. 2009). Advocacy has been used as an opportunity to influence policy change in multiple fields including health care, climate change, education, and social justice (Baumgartner et al., 2009; Payán et al., 2017). Often associated exclusively with lobbying, advocacy can take many forms including coalition building, legislator communication, and political activism. At its foundation, advocacy is an effort to educate decision-makers on the impacts of a decision (Baumgartner et al., 2009). Understanding the fundamentals of advocacy allows industries to take steps to strengthen their sustainability and resilience against the negative impacts of policy change (Baumgartner et al., 2009).

While advocacy for individual sectors within the tourism industry (e.g., lodging, transportation) has long been active (Anastasiadou, 2008), there have been limited efforts to develop advocates for tourism at a destination-level. The increasing threat of political crises suggests DMOs have an opportunity to take further steps to improve the tourism industry through advocacy

(Destinations International, 2017). Limited knowledge of the tourism industry and its impacts creates many challenges for those operating in the industry, particularly for DMOs as they are frequently funded through a combination of general tax funds and excise taxes (e.g., lodging or food and beverage). The distribution of these funds is directly determined by policymakers.

DMOs play a vital role in driving this essential economic development through tourism by increasing visitation, attracting new tourism enterprises, and maximizing the positive impacts of tourism in the destination communities where it occurs. When unpredictable events such as a change in state legislation or extreme budget cuts occur, communities and the DMOs who serve them are left vulnerable (Laws et al., 2007). The potential impacts of policy change in the form of alterations in the distribution of lodging tax revenues on DMOs is just one of the many ways that policy change can impact the tourism industry. Despite the considerable need for increasing advocacy efforts among DMOs, there is little literature to inform best practices for developing and activating tourism advocates (Knollenberg, 2015).

### *The role of the DMO in tourism advocacy*

Current literature on tourism advocacy focuses on the role of existing industry advocacy associations and suggests that it is the responsibility of individual tourism advocates, within these associations, to influence policymakers (Anastasiadou, 2008; Stevenson et al., 2008; Swanson & Brothers 2012). These advocacy associations are composed of members representing various industry sectors and operating at both informal and formal levels (Anastasiadou, 2008). The tourism industry is composed primarily of competing businesses, leading to market fragmentation (Anastasiadou, 2008). This fragmentation challenges industry leaders to develop the collective strategy and coalitions needed for effective advocacy (Anastasiadou, 2008). Yet,

evidence shows that for the tourism industry to gain political influence through advocacy, leadership from all sectors and DMOs must speak to policymakers with a single unified voice (McGehee & Meng, 2006; Ruhanen & Reid, 2014; Swanson & Brothers, 2012).

Because they serve a destination, rather than a single business, DMOs have the opportunity to establish relationships with a wide variety of stakeholders including leaders and employees in tourism sectors, as well as industries adjacent to tourism (e.g., real estate, health care), and community residents (Gunn, 1994). DMOs can sustain these relationships with stakeholders by equitably distributing resources and promoting inclusive community participation (Bramwell et al., 2007; Khazaei et al., 2017). These relationships serve as the foundation for creating advocates for tourism. DMOs can educate those stakeholders about the value of tourism and activate them as advocates for tourism to help influence other stakeholders and policymakers. As Beritelli and Pietro (2011) noted, the relationships DMOs have with their stakeholders can be leveraged to form coalitions. Coalitions, alliances for combined action, are considered a powerful and effective tool within the public policy process and particularly for advocacy efforts (Pierce et al., 2017). Diversity among individual stakeholders and within coalitions is crucial to the success of advocacy efforts, as each advocate possesses a social and professional network with whom their opinion holds weight (Weible & Ingold, 2018).

This social network represents an individual's sphere of influence. Through these spheres of influence stakeholders have the potential to educate others about the impacts of tourism. The more stakeholders reached, the social network will broaden and the expanse of influence will widen. Though advocacy strategies, such as communicating with stakeholders and coalition building, have been successful when implemented by other industries (Baum et al., 2007),

knowledge related to the strategies that are most impactful for creating tourism advocates remains limited.

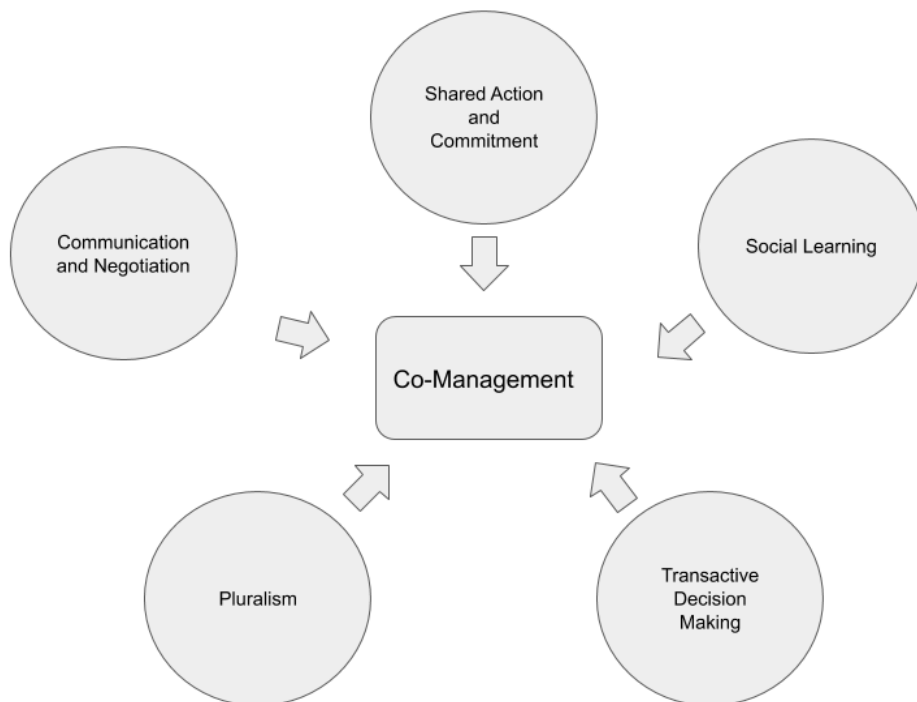
### *Co-Management Theory*

Co-Management Theory (CMT), often applied in natural resource management, provides a theoretical understanding of the various characteristics of participatory management and coalition building. The key characteristics of co-management (*Figure 1*) include *pluralism, communication and negotiation, transactive decision making, social learning, and shared action and commitment* (Meadowcroft, 1998). *Pluralism* includes politics and decision-making operating mostly within policy making, but many non-governmental groups can use their resources to exert influence (Meadowcroft, 1998). *Communication and negotiation* are processes by which education, compromise, and while avoiding argument, and can result in resolving any differences that arise between two parties (Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000). *Transactive decision making* includes trading and exchanging of ideas in the process of decision making (Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000). *Social learning* is the idea that new behaviors can be acquired by observing and imitating others (Selin & Chavez, 1995). *Shared action and commitment* include a collaborative and joint responsibility for impactful action (Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000).

Co-management emphasizes the importance of collaborative management between multiple actors operating within different sectors (Berkes et al. 2012; Plummer et al. 2004). Successful co-management involves an exchange of knowledge and resources to form linkages and teamwork between actors working within different sectors and from various hierarchical levels (Carlsson & Berkes, 2005). When used in the context of tourism crisis management, CMT

emphasizes collaboration between actors from both inside and outside of the tourism industry (Pennington-Gray et al., 2014).

CMT's emphasis on collaboration and a sharing of resources between actors at different levels of power can be applied to a number of contexts and is deployed when a negative change occurs unexpectedly or is imminent (Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000). Successful CMT application has shown that there is value in having a range of different stakeholders in the midst of conflict (Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000). This provides an opportunity for advocacy coalition efforts among a diverse set of stakeholders within the context of tourism.



*Figure 2.1:* Theoretical model demonstrating the five characteristics of CMT.

CMT has been applied to a variety of contexts including public service delivery (Brandsen & van Hout, 2006), natural resources management (Brewer & Moon, 2015) and tourism environmental

crisis response (Pennington-Gray et al., 2014). Though co-management applications have previously focused on natural resources or protected areas and tourism disaster response (Pennington-Gray et al., 2014) this study proposes the application of co-management to facilitate the process by which DMOs can effectively plan in the event of a policy crisis.

Following the characteristics of CMT, responsibilities must be shared, both in commitment and action, by stakeholders and DMOs in order to successfully advocate for tourism. CMT has shown that organizations frequently focus on involving stakeholders from larger, often wealthier and more politically influential communities, while smaller emergent communities experience less engagement (Berkes, 2009). This same power dynamic can be observed in tourism destinations, leading to limited advocacy engagement from diverse stakeholders (Soulard et al., 2018). By leveraging the principles of CMT to advance efforts to engage diverse stakeholders this research intends to help DMOs improve their strategies to educate and build advocates and create greater support for the tourism industry.

### ***Methods***

Given the limited information available on the most effective strategies for DMOs to educate and empower a diverse set of advocates, this research utilizes qualitative methods of inquiry to capture a nuanced understanding of stakeholder awareness of the GRCVB and stakeholder advocacy intention. An interpretivist paradigm was used to ensure the research process of data co-generation and analysis expresses the diverse knowledge and views of both the participants and researchers (Bailey, 2007). It is important to acknowledge the potential biases of the researcher conducting analysis. The primary researcher for this study has a professional and academic background within multiple sectors of the tourism industry. As a resident and taxpayer,

the primary researcher is a stakeholder of the community of Wake County, where the research was conducted. Due to these inevitable biases, interpretations for this study were peer reviewed by a second researcher with differing experiences and expertise.

Multiple criteria were used to ensure the trustworthiness of the data including transferability, credibility, and dependability, and confirmability (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). The transferability of the findings was ensured by applying purposive sampling and participant triangulation. Prolonged engagement with the study setting, participation, and peer debriefing provided data credibility and dependability of the findings. To ensure confirmability, an audit trail was created throughout the research process.

### *Study Site*

Wake County, the second-most populous county in North Carolina. The county thrives in a number of different industries including education, technology, hospitality, and health care (NC Department of Commerce, 2020). The vitality of these industries requires a highly skilled and committed workforce, stakeholder partnerships, investment in entrepreneurial initiatives, and consistent communication between stakeholders and policymakers. Wake County has also seen growth in its tourism industry, reporting 16.8 million visitors in 2018, which was an increase of 4.8 percent over 2017 (GRCVB, 2019). Tourism continues to be one of the largest employment sectors in Wake County. As of 2019, tourism supported 27,101 jobs with a payroll of \$785.2 million and 5% of all jobs in Wake County being sustained by tourism, including indirect and induced employment impacts (GRCVB, 2019).



### *Data Collection*

The study population consisted of 40 community stakeholders that the GRCVB was targeting as a part of their CES efforts. These stakeholders represented all 12 Wake County communities and a wide variety of interests including various tourism sectors (e.g., lodging, transportation), adjacent industries (e.g., real estate, health care), community interests (e.g., arts, sports), economic development (e.g., Chambers of Commerce, Business Development Districts), and municipal governments. Each of these stakeholders were invited via email to join the study. This yielded 31 participants who engaged in one-hour long semi-structured interviews conducted in person, over the phone, and via Zoom (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1  
*Interview Participants*

Stakeholder Category	Communities with Participants from Stakeholder Category (number of participants)
Tourism Sector: Attraction	Morrisville (2)
Tourism Sector: Transportation	Wake County
Economic Development	Wake County; Wake Forest; Raleigh; Morrisville; Apex (2); Zebulon
Sport	Raleigh
Tourism Sector: Hospitality	Raleigh (3)
Entrepreneurship	Raleigh
Retail	Raleigh (2)
Other Industry: Health Care	Raleigh
Higher Education	Raleigh
Arts	Raleigh (5)
Municipal Government	Wendell; Rolesville; Garner
Tourism Sector: Food and Beverage	Raleigh
Other Industry: Real Estate	Raleigh
Other Industry: Insurance	Rolesville

To maximize the number of participants and align with the GRCVB's CES timeline, data were collected in two rounds. Some interviewees participated in both rounds. Round 1 interviews were conducted in July - September of 2019 by one research team member. Round 2 interviews were conducted in September - November of 2020 by another research team member. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic caused a significant delay in the implementation of the CES timeline; however, it also presented an opportunity to capture stakeholder perceptions of tourism value, their communication preferences, and willingness to advocate both before and after the pandemic. While the purpose of this work is not to compare longitudinal changes, findings include crucial information on how a crisis (i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic) could influence efforts to build a diverse set of tourism advocates.

### *Data Analysis*

Interview questions elicited stakeholder perceptions of the role of tourism in Wake County economic development, knowledge of the impacts of tourism in Wake County, and perceptions of the GRCVB's engagement in advocacy for tourism in Wake County. Interviews were audio-recorded and conducted at a location of the participant's choice. The audio recorded interviews were transcribed and NVivo12 was used to manually organize the thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews. Thematic analysis began with open coding to allow themes in the data to emerge (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) related to stakeholder understanding and advocacy interest, communication preferences, successful narrative frameworks, and resources needed for advocacy. Once all themes were exhausted in the transcripts (as determined by no additional themes emerging in the data), themes were organized manually into axial codes based upon the constructs of CMT (*collaboration, shared action and commitment, pluralism, communication and negotiation, and transactive decision making*).

## Findings

Findings from in-depth interviews revealed how the GRCVB can effectively build and diversify their advocacy efforts among Wake County stakeholders. Several contextual elements emerged through open coding of the data, indicating that there is a strong level of interest in advocacy among stakeholders and that opportunities for improvement exist. The constructs of CMT provided a valuable guidepost for interpreting the data findings and creating recommendations. Additionally, findings reveal how associations can utilize the CMT constructs to engage more effectively with a diverse set of stakeholders as potential advocates.

### *Stakeholders as advocates*

Interviews revealed that there are three types of stakeholders with whom the GRCVB is working: current partners, interested partners, and potential partners. Each group has a different level of commitment to engage in advocacy for tourism in Wake County. First are their current supporters, who they work with on a consistent monthly or bi-monthly basis through meetings and direct communication. Interviews with current supporters revealed that existing engagement between stakeholders and the GRCVB is direct and receptive. This indicates that the GRCVB has an existing base of stakeholders who are currently engaging in advocacy or can be readily activated.

*“[The GRCVB is] a great resource, and they also understand the value of [my organization]. I feel like we're always great partners in whatever we're trying to accomplish. I've invited folks from CVB to be speakers... [A staff member] came over and talked about the airport as an amenity for us, and as a driver for that economic development activity that we see.” - Economic Development, Morrisville*

The second group of stakeholders the GRCVB currently works with are interested stakeholders. These are individuals who are not consistently engaged with the GRCVB but participate in advocacy efforts to some degree. While these stakeholders may not be communicated with on a regular basis, they are interested in more engagement and acknowledge the work that the GRCVB contributes to the community.

*“Collaborations are always good. I would love to have more creative ways to share in their successes, to share in tourism events. I would like to hear from them more.” -  
Economic Development, Zebulon*

Findings also revealed that while participants may personally have productive engagement with the GRCVB, they recognized there are other stakeholders who have limited awareness of the GRCVB and tourism’s value. This is an indication of the final type of stakeholder with whom the GRCVB works - the potential partners. These are stakeholders who may not even be aware of the work the GRCVB contributes but can be seen as capable future partners.

*“You have some businesses who know [GRCVB staff] personally and are really engaged, and some who have barely any awareness that they exist other than most cities have one, but don't have a connection.” - Economic Development, Raleigh*

Participants encourage the GRCVB to go even further with their stakeholder engagement, particularly as it relates to geographic distribution. There is a clear desire to see engagement between the GRCVB and stakeholders in the greater Wake County community. Wake County is home to 12 different communities, all of whom hold power and potential with their various spheres of influence. Participants specifically recommended a more evenly distributed level of engagement across the county as opposed to focusing singularly on downtown Raleigh area.

*“How are you doing more just outside of downtown? How is the greater community getting more from what they do?” - Retail, Raleigh*

Activating potential partners by expanding knowledge of tourism’s benefit across all municipalities in the community will create a domino effect among stakeholders’ spheres of influence. Spheres of influence are used commonly in advocacy when seeking to broaden a pool of advocates. Findings from the data provide evidence for why diverse categories of stakeholders are so valuable when developing advocates. By communicating effectively with stakeholders, the GRCVB will be able to develop them as advocates who can, in turn, amplify an advocacy message to other stakeholders. Current supporters demonstrated the dedication they have to being partners with the GRCVB, highlighting the potential for more stakeholders to be active advocates as well.

*“I depend a lot on [the GRCVB’s] success... I make sure that they're getting the tools and the resources that they need in whatever way I can...I want to make sure that I'm involved with the rest of the businesses in the community and making sure that we're all supporting their effort because it is important to not just my hotel, but to the people that work for me and the other hotels, the people of the community.” - Tourism Sector: Hospitality, Raleigh*

Expanding information on tourism’s value through effective communication can create an advocacy “ripple effect” that will increase awareness of tourism’s value across Wake County. This ripple effect can stretch through a stakeholder’s sphere of influence until it makes its way to decision makers.

*“When the elected officials are aware of that it usually trickles down. If the elected officials know something, then they know the advocate [and the] staff will end up knowing... When [the elected officials] tell their story, if they are able to communicate something about GRCVB, then without doubt it's for the citizens... [This] creates a funnel that is not one way, but they're an element to disperse the information on multiple paths.”*

*- Economic Development, Apex*

Evidence from the data shows that stakeholders are primed and ready for increased engagement and shared action. Stakeholders identified a need for the GRCVB to continue to foster strong relationships with current supporters and capitalize on interested stakeholders’ appetite to build relationships with the GRCVB.

#### *Communication Strategies*

Data from the findings suggest that the GRCVB is currently working to communicate with a variety of stakeholders through several methods including newsletters, emails, meetings, and phone calls. Some are communicated with directly, such as sitting on the board of directors, and feel they have a good sense of the work the GRCVB provides. This example is from a stakeholder who would be considered a current partner, with consistent engagement and communication.

*“I currently sit on the board of directors. I meet on a monthly basis at the board meeting. It's some pretty good updates from what the staff is actually working on, what the leadership is working on, and the direction of the board of directors in terms of where they're going to organizational standpoint.”- Tourism Sector: Transportation, Wake County*

One piece of communication and engagement found consistently in the data was the mention of the GRCVB's annual meeting. Participants highlight this as an accessible and useful event to learn more about the work of the GRCVB and connect with the GRCVB's staff on a more personal level. These events are seen as an enjoyable venue to absorb information and network.

*"I did go to their annual banquet before COVID happened. That was a nice event. I've been to those in the past for different CVBs. They're always a lot of fun and very informative." - Municipal Government, Wendell*

While annual meetings and large events may be helpful for some stakeholders, others indicate that they need more direct and consistent communication. Multiple stakeholders recognized that the first step to strengthening communication strategies is keeping them informed through direct communication.

*"Keep us informed on what's happening, continue sharing those stories. I think that's very important to maintain relationships. That one-on-one outreach. Just say, 'Hey, you all still on our minds. How's your facility coming along?' Update it, opening day. I think those work really well." - Municipal Government, Garner*

Several stakeholders indicated interest in greater reciprocal communication with the GRCVB, providing evidence of the CMT construct of *communication and negotiation*, which focuses on the conducive conversations of education, compromises, and agreements between actors. For example, a stakeholder suggests focus groups and collaborative opportunities as opposed to relying on a newsletter:

*“I'd love to be involved in focus groups and to be more aware of what they're working on. I think that's the real disconnect currently. I get the newsletters and all, but I need a little bit more that's more in tune with the town.” - Municipal Government, Wendell*

This presents an example of wanting an exchange in communication rather than relying only on a one-way communication. Stakeholders are seeking communications from the GRCVB that are tailored to their needs and interests. This begins with understanding and adapting to each stakeholder's communication preferences.

*“There's not one best way to communicate with everyone. Everybody has their own separate way of receiving information.” - Municipal Government, Garner*

Communicating directly with stakeholders and keeping them well informed on the GRCVB's and community's needs, should also elicit reciprocal sharing of information. This is the space where stakeholders and the GRCVB can build trust and comfortably exchange ideas and make decisions for shared success. Establishing this reciprocal communication, customized to the stakeholders' preferences sets the foundation for the CMT construct of *transactive decision making*, wherein collaborative conversations focus on an exchange of ideas and needs. Evidence from the interviews suggest that establishing these effective communication strategies will help to set up more successful decision making. Participants recognize that there are opportunities for the GRCVB's communication with stakeholders to lead to shared success, or a win-win for all parties.

*“[Communicating] would give [the GRCVB] an opportunity to get an update on our communities and how we think. We could work together...It's like a win win. The [organization] executives find out what's going on but then also [the GRCVB] gets that*



*pulse on what's going on in the community. I think that would be really helpful and maybe even start at once a year initially.” - Economic Development, Apex*

### *Messages Used by Tourism Advocates*

Evidence from the data shows that the current story the GRCVB uses to articulate the value tourism brings to Wake County focuses primarily on economic impact and quantitative data. Participants suggest that while a quantitative message can be beneficial for some stakeholders, others need it contextualized with further information. Contextualizing data through anecdotes and qualitative examples helps to not only guide stakeholders through data, but also improves their understanding of the message the GRCVB is trying to present.

*“[The GRCVB] talks about the numbers and that helps some people understand what they do. It does. The quality of it is great too. But on the qualitative side, a lot of times helps tell the story. Sometimes [qualitative] is a lot better.” - Arts, Raleigh*

Simply focusing on numbers alone does little to tell the whole story of tourism’s value to the community. Participants suggest that stakeholders may become lost in the economic impact numbers presented because they do not have the context for how the funds will benefit the community. For the message to resonate with a wider audience, the GRCVB needs to focus on what story will help stakeholders connect economic impact and the resources they support.

*“I don't think that people know all the connections, particularly the economic connections [to tourism...what does that pay for? How does it get funded? What are the amenities that are beneficiaries of all that? What do they do? How does that help me? What's the benefit to me? If you asked the rest of people that, obviously, there's a gap in*

*understanding where you would ideally want people and where they actually are.”-*

*Tourism Sector: Attraction, Wake County*

Participants shared their excitement for further communication and collaboration to generate a more powerful message. While the current message is helpful for some stakeholders, evidence from the findings indicates an interest in further *shared action and commitment* in the messages’ development. Collaboration between the GRCVB and diverse stakeholders to craft the story of Wake County tourism, can lead advocates to be empowered to share it with others in the community. Participants from all across Wake County have a keen appetite to be involved, indicating their interest in being active participants in crafting an improved message and story around tourism’s value:

*“I think I need to be more in touch with them more on projects. I would love to be involved a lot more with them and kind of see that effort moving forward... Being involved on committees, boards, emailing me with project ideas, or if they wanted to collaborate on something, being more involved in that.” - Municipal Government, Wendell*

This appetite for *shared action and commitment* is demonstrated by participants’ interest in communicating and collaborating with the GRCVB to generate a more compelling message to share with others. Participants suggest reframing the narrative about tourism’s impacts to encapsulate all stakeholders of Wake County:

*“Let me tell you how it's impacting all of our community. We all share the success of that tourism. We can all benefit from it. Again, how do we help people understand the benefits and then have those discussions about what are some of the needs in the community that*

*we can help. Maybe there's a way that tourism can assist in some way.”- Tourism Sector: Hospitality, Raleigh*

Integrating tourism’s direct benefits to the community, through economic impacts and quality of life, is essential for strengthening the GRCVB’s message for potential advocates. One constant throughout the interviews, was a sense of pride in the uniqueness and character of Wake County. Participants recognize the social and cultural resources such as the plethora of restaurants, museums, and events as examples for what makes Wake County special. Articulating the connection between tourism and the community’s local resources, not only as a marketing draw for tourists but as a point of pride for residents, can help residents understand the value tourism brings to the community. Many encourage the GRCVB to reshape their message to reflect these points of pride. Contextualizing the story of Wake County tourism for residents with these resources allows for improved *communication and negotiation*, as the GRCVB teaches potential advocates on the direct benefit tourism has on their lives.

*“What the CVB is trying to do is promote things that are authentic and unique, or people first tourism's, those kinds of initiatives. They're trying to encourage people when they come here. If you must eat at a chain restaurant, but even better, eat at a local restaurant that is locally owned, you'll have a more unique experience. Then it benefits us because the dollar stays here as opposed to going to wherever the corporate headquarters are of the restaurant chain.”- Economic Development, Raleigh*

Participants recognize that the resources that set Wake County apart, also contribute to the economic stability of the community. Participants recognize tourism’s role in the economic development and sustainability of Wake County through events, conferences, and those

employed directly in the sector. In turn, this economic impact also raises the profile of Wake County attracting more residents to the area and should be emphasized when sharing the message that the GRCVB is sharing the value of tourism.

*“Economic impact, the impact of having people that may not have been here before that come [and] decide, ‘You know what? That’s a great city, I want to go live there’.” -  
Tourism Sector: Hospitality, Raleigh*

This recognition of “great place to visit is a great place to live” indicates that participants have a solid understanding that tourism’s role in economic stability directly contributes to the quality of life in Wake County. Participants see tourism as raising the value of the community for both tourists and residents.

*“Tourism raises the value of a destination in everyone’s eyes. It gives the locals a reason to value and cherish the things that they have and give them an opportunity to build, whether infrastructure or murals, to create more spaces with the tax money from tourism.” - Economic Development, Zebulon*

Findings indicate that stakeholders recognize tourism’s direct impact on the individuals at the heart of the industry, specifically service workers. In this time of recovery, it is essential to showcase the individuals at the heart of the industry and how they impact the tourism industry. Stakeholders also encourage the GRCVB to communicate the story of Wake County residents at the heart of the tourism industry, specifically those working as frontline workers.

*“[Front line employees] put a face on Raleigh. They market our culture, our environment, the people of the city, the hospitality.” - Tourism Sector: Hospitality, Raleigh*

### *Resources Needed for Tourism Advocacy*

Findings suggest that DMOs can successfully sustain advocacy relationships with stakeholders through equitably distributing resources and promoting inclusive community participation (Bramwell et al., 2007; Khazaei et al., 2017). Understanding exactly what resources stakeholders need to be successful advocates lays the foundation for these equitable relationships with an exchange of information and commitment moving forward. Fostering these equitable and reciprocal relationships results in *shared commitment and action*, allowing for collaborative and joint responsibility for impactful action from all parties involved.

This *shared action and commitment* begins with understanding what resources stakeholders need in order to feel comfortable and confident as advocates. Findings indicated that while many stakeholders are primed and ready to advocate for the GRCVB, they recognize that they need more specific asks with actionable information (i.e., talking points, bulleted thoughts, and detailed fact sheets) to feel equipped as advocates. Specific asks should be supported with actionable information and should align with the consistent message being delivered by all advocates:

*“We need talking points. We need actionable information if we're going to be partners if we're going to get anything out of this.” - Arts, Raleigh*

These specific asks should be tailored to each stakeholders' strength and align with their ability and potential audience within their sphere of influence. To do this successfully, participants suggest the GRCVB should evaluate their partners to understand their personal and professional network and advocating abilities. Once the GRCVB has a good understanding of each individual stakeholder's advocating ability, interest, and their sphere of influence, they need to craft a

specific ask for the stakeholder. Participants indicate they want to know exactly what the GRCVB needs from them and how they can assist them in passing a message on to the right individual.

*“[The GRCVB] should probably evaluate all their different partners ... and try to figure out where do they best support the organization. Are they a spokesperson for economic development activity? Are they behind the scenes working with elected officials regarding investment strategies that need to be made to support the CVB? Is it advocacy at the grassroots level... as to why they need to vote for a referendum?” - Tourism Sector: Transportation, Wake County*

Crafting specific asks and actions for stakeholders to share empowers stakeholders to speak directly to policymakers, paving the way for successful *pluralism*. While the framework of government may prevent the GRCVB from speaking directly with policymakers themselves, many of their stakeholders can speak directly to policy makers to influence decisions that have an impact on tourism. To achieve powerful and sustainable *pluralism*, the GRCVB must work with their stakeholders to build one unified voice. Participants indicate that sharing one effective story with a unified voice, fuels advantageous advocacy.

*“If [the GRCVB has] taglines or stories, please share those...I always think we need to have one voice, or one message. It could be in different voices, but share the same message.” - Business Development, Raleigh*

Participants indicate that while they are anxious to hear what the GRCVB needs from them, they also have advocacy asks of their own. *Shared action and commitment* and *pluralism* go both ways and require equal dedication and reciprocity. Findings show that this reciprocal advocacy

begins with the GRCVB giving specific asks and anticipating asks from the stakeholder in return.

*“I think when they're [making an advocacy ask], at the exact same time, the CVB should do the same exact thing back to the business partner and describe to them, ‘Here's how we think we can help you.’” - Tourism Sector: Transportation, Wake County*

**Discussion**

These findings address the guiding research questions by illustrating which stakeholders the GRCVB current engages with as advocates, the strategies used to maintain relationships with those advocates, the message used to share the value of tourism with those advocates, and the resources needed to increase commitment to advocacy. The CMT provided a valuable framework for conceptualizing the findings and illustrating how principles of co-management can be used by DMOs to advance advocacy efforts (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2  
*Application of CMT to Address Research Questions*

Research Question Focus	Finding	CMT Constructs
RQ1: Engagement	Build coalitions throughout the community to activate their spheres of influence	Social learning; Pluralism
RQ2: Communication	Communicate more directly and personally with stakeholders	Transactive Decision Making; Communication and Negotiation
RQ3: Message	Craft a more compelling story by contextualizing and humanizing the message	Transactive Decision Making; Pluralism
RQ4: Advocacy Resources	Provide actionable information, specific asks, and reciprocity to speak with a more unified voice	Shared Action and Commitment; Pluralism

Findings indicate that the GRCVB has earnest advocacy interest from the stakeholders with whom they currently work, but there are opportunities to expand their network to others in the community. The literature on tourism advocacy emphasizes the importance of DMOs recognizing their responsibility as coalition-building facilitators (Knollenberg, 2020). Building

coalitions creates ample space for *social learning* (Table 2.2) where the GRCVB can learn from existing stakeholders and vice versa (e.g. DMO can learn from real estate stakeholder on how they effectively advocate). Capitalizing on interested stakeholders' desire to engage with the GRCVB could convert them to supporters who are ready to advocate for tourism in Wake County. Building more diverse coalitions and partnerships will be instrumental in reducing or eliminating the negative impacts of policy change on the tourism industry (Baumgartner et al., 2009). By building relationships with stakeholders already primed for advocacy and expanding partnerships to include those who represent different communities, interests (e.g. tourism-adjacent industries, municipalities, economic development, cultural or natural resources), and roles (e.g. industry leaders, employees, residents) the GRCVB can address these stakeholders' needs, create enduring partnerships and lay the foundation for activating a diverse network of advocates for tourism in Wake County.

One important component of these spheres of influence are policymakers. Stakeholders hold a great deal of policy influence purely because of their ability to communicate directly with policymakers. Therefore, the construct of *pluralism* (Table 2.2) needs to be fundamental in expanding the GRCVB's stakeholder partnerships and activating them as coalition members. Though the GRCVB may not always be able to speak directly to policymakers, they can expand their network of advocates throughout the community, capitalizing on each stakeholder's personal sphere of influence, for advocacy needs to reach policymakers (Table 2.2).

Communicating the value of tourism to potential advocates must focus on expanding stakeholder knowledge of tourism's benefits and the consequences of policy change to reduce the impacts of policy change on the tourism industry and the communities it supports (McGehee, 2006).



Participants who are currently in communication with the GRCVB are enthusiastic and primed for further communication and collaborative negotiations in the future. In their efforts to further diversify their tourism advocates, the GRCVB needs to ensure they communicate with those stakeholders both directly (e.g. one-on-one calls) and indirectly (e.g. annual meetings). In order for the GRCVB to effectively maintain existing relationships and expand their network with more stakeholders throughout the community, they must first listen to the desired communication strategies of their stakeholders.

Literature shows that DMOs now hold a great responsibility to facilitate communication with their stakeholders and build them up as advocates (Knollenberg, 2020). Improving communication can be an instrumental foundation for building those relationships and creating partnerships to advocate for tourism (McGehee, 2006; Swanson & Edgell, 2013).

Communication strategies should be tailored to stakeholders' communication preferences as well as their level of readiness and ability to advocate (Table 2.2). Implementing improved communication strategies should be guided by the CMT construct of *communication and negotiation*, allowing the space for education, compromise, and agreement to be reached (Table 2.2).

Opening the door to more constructive, reciprocal communication has the potential to lead into all other constructs of co-management but is especially important for the exchanging of ideas with *transactive decision making* (Table 2.2). Creating spaces that encourage collaboration and an exchange of ideas will also allow stakeholders the opportunity to express their own advocacy needs from the GRCVB to reciprocate in advocacy. The GRCVB has the opportunity to improve

communication strategies by catering to the specific needs of the stakeholders. In doing so, they can strengthen their partnerships, create trust between them and instill a readiness to advocate. Literature on tourism advocacy emphasizes the importance of coalition building through communication strategies in order to combat tourism's segmented nature (Anastasiadou, 2008). Through their effective communication strategies, the GRCVB and other DMOs can share the stories of tourism's value that their advocates can use. In the case of the GRCVB, most stakeholders see the current message as heavily focused on the economic value of tourism. The use of this message has led to the GRCVB's current stakeholders possessing a baseline knowledge and comprehension of the role of tourism in economic development within Wake County. Stakeholders also see a clear connection between the economic benefits of tourism and the impact that has on their quality of life in their community. Participant recognition of tourism as an economic driver and key contribution to the quality of life in Wake County indicates that the message from the GRCVB is resonating.

While participants recognize the importance of connecting tourism to economic impact, they recommend the need to contextualize and expand the GRCVB's message to help stakeholders gain a more nuanced understanding of the value of tourism. Participants acknowledge that the average Wake County resident may not connect tourism jobs and revenue to the benefits they see on a daily basis. These findings suggest that the GRCVB needs to increase efforts to show residents the connection between their quality of life and tourism. While participants were clear that the story the GRCVB is telling has many positives, they also recognized opportunities to craft a more powerful message to communicate the value of tourism in Wake County.

A crafted message on tourism's value needs to include more nuanced and contextualized data. Contextualizing data is an important element of educating stakeholders on the impacts of tourism, particularly for residents of Wake County who would likely be unfamiliar with trends in tourism data over time. One recommendation from participants is to showcase individuals working at the heart of tourism (i.e., service and front-line workers). Humanizing the message shared by putting a face to the tourism workforce and integrating those more personal stories into the narrative around tourism's benefit assists stakeholders develop a deeper understanding of how tourism impacts their quality of life (Table 2.2).

For all DMOs, crafting a powerful story to communicate the value of tourism will be a significant component in effective *transactive decision making* where an exchange of ideas leads to more effective decision making (Table 2.2). This story should be molded by the suggestions stakeholders contribute and continuing to ask them would resonate and what they would like to hear. While tourism's fragmented industry presents challenges to develop collective strategies and coalitions needed for effective advocacy (Anastasiadou, 2008), establishing a powerful message and story can assist in developing a unified voice. Research shows that for tourism to gain political influence through advocacy, leadership DMO leadership must find strategies to speak with a single unified voice (McGehee & Meng, 2006; Ruhanen & Reid, 2014; Swanson & Brothers, 2012). By crafting a poignant and singular message the GRCVB has the opportunity to raise awareness of tourism's value to more stakeholders and collaborate with stakeholders to speak to policymakers with a unified voice (McGehee & Meng, 2006) (Table 2.2).

In addition to empowering advocates to tell the story of tourism's value, the GRCVB and other DMOs need to provide the resources that stakeholders need to be effective as advocates.

Findings revealed that there are specific resources the GRCVB should consider to improve stakeholder commitment as advocates. Participants recognized the need for a shared and consistent message paving the way for a strengthened and unified voice (McGehee & Meng, 2006; Ruhanen & Reid, 2014; Swanson & Brothers, 2012). Supported by the tourism advocacy literature, speaking with a unified voice allows for bolstered advocacy building and success (Knollenberg et al., 2020). Giving stakeholders the tools to speak with a unified voice about tourism in Wake County and other destinations will be a critical step in empowering them to be more effective advocates primed and ready to participate in *pluralism* and speak directly to policy makers (Table 2.2).

Participants recognized that in order to feel more equipped as advocates they need actionable information, specific asks, and the space to communicate their own needs to the GRCVB (Table 2.2). DMOs can sustain these relationships with stakeholders by equitably distributing resources and promoting inclusive community participation (Bramwell et al., 2007; Khazaei et al., 2017). Participants asked for actionable information to support the unified message they are given. This actionable information can include data to support the consistent message, clear talking points, or bulleted information to guide advocates' efforts in communications with decision-makers or other stakeholders. Participants also identified the need for a specific ask to know exactly how they can be productive advocates. Asks given directly to stakeholders should be supported with actionable information in alignment with the consistent message being delivered by all advocates. These targeted asks should also align with actions they have the ability and power to take, which could enable them to feel comfortable and confident in influencing members of their social network.

Participants indicated their engagement with the GRCVB concerning advocacy should be consistent and provide space for stakeholders to share opportunities and challenges that they want the GRCVB to address. Building reciprocal relationships creates the groundwork for impactful *pluralism* (Table 2.2) where all interests among actors are included in decision making (Meadowcroft, 1998). Achieving *pluralism*, where stakeholders share tourism's policy needs directly to policy makers, should be the ultimate goal when developing advocacy resources for stakeholders (Meadowcroft, 1998). At the heart, advocacy is an effort to educate decision-makers on the impacts of a decision (Baumgartner et al., 2009). Without this component, it will be difficult for tourism to sustain through a policy crisis. By developing the resources recommended by stakeholders and facilitating reciprocal conversations around policy, GRCVB and stakeholders can extend their collaboration to joint responsibility for impactful action. This demonstrates *shared action and commitment* and a causal effect, wherein stakeholders can communicate with others in the community and feel empowered to speak directly to policymakers (Table 2.2).

## **Conclusion**

Tourism continues to be vulnerable to policy crises brought on by a lack of nuanced understanding of the value of tourism by policymakers (Laws et al., 2007). Advocacy provides an avenue to reduce or eliminate the negative impacts of policy change on the tourism industry (Baumgartner et al. 2009). Stakeholders hold a great deal of influence for the industry when they have the resources and knowledge of tourism's benefits to prevent such crises from occurring (McGehee, 2006; Swanson & Edgell, 2013). With the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic dissipating, the industry is entering an unprecedented period of recovery and renewal. This is a particularly crucial time for DMOs to effectively transition from destination marketers to

destination managers, and to prioritize community engagement and advocacy (Destinations International, 2017).

To make this transition to destination managers the GRCVB and other DMOs can draw upon managerial implications from this study. For the GRCVB and other DMOs, one such implication begins with diversifying and empowering their stakeholders to become dedicated advocates for tourism. Findings from this study indicate that there is a strong level of interest in advocating for the GRCVB from Wake County tourism stakeholders, but opportunities exist for improvement and future success. Participants of the study indicate a need for expanded partnerships throughout the community, improved and personalized communication strategies, a more nuanced story showcasing how tourism contributes to Wake County resident's quality of life, and specific advocacy asks with actionable information. By incorporating suggestions from participants and the constructs of CMT, the GRCVB and other DMOs can develop strategies to educate and empower a diverse set of advocates.

This research provides both theoretical implications in terms of the use of CMT in the context of tourism policy crisis and tourism advocacy building. CMT has never been used in the context of tourism advocacy; however, its emphasis on collaboration between actors operating in different sectors efforts (Pennington-Gray et al., 2014) can provide a guide for improved tourism advocacy. Successful CMT application has shown the value of collaborating and partnering with a diverse range of stakeholders in the midst of crisis (Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000). By leveraging the principles of CMT to advance efforts to engage diverse stakeholders, this research reveals how DMOs can envision advocacy as a form of co-management to provide additional

policy support and, thereby, enhance the sustainability of tourism benefits. (Berkes et al. 2012; Plummer et al. 2004).

Enhancing the sustainability of tourism benefits, begins with developing strategies to improve relationships between DMOs and their community stakeholders. Future research on this topic should work aim to develop those relationship strategies further to foster collaboration and advocacy empowerment in order to mitigate policy crises. One recommendation to strengthen these strategies, would be to implement quantitative data collection methods. Implementing a survey would help to obtain insight from a more diverse population of stakeholders who could be activated as advocates. A population for this survey-based data collection could be established by sending a social network analysis with the existing GRCVB partners. Survey findings should help to develop further strategies to diversify tourism advocates and allow for an improved understanding of what resources stakeholders needs in order to become dedicated advocates.

There are a number of limitations within this research. CMT, while an effective tool for contextualizing current advocacy strategies and opportunities for the future, may not fully capture the nuances of this context. The constructs are dynamic and present a great deal of overlap and intersection. For example, effective communication strategies can integrate both communication and social learning simultaneously. The intersecting nature of the CMT constructs can challenging, but allows for opportunities to think critically when developing nuanced strategies.

Another limitation of this study was the limited access to participants, who consisted of a partners list provided by the GRCVB. The list provided by the GRCVB, while providing a wide range of stakeholders, was outside of the control of the researchers. Those who were interviewed

were already in communication and partnering with the GRCVB, thus creating a limitation in the scope of who was interviewed. As aforementioned, future research on this topic should expand to stakeholders outside of the GRCVB's existing network, in order to gain a more critical understanding of how they can expand their advocacy partnerships.

The COVID-19 pandemic also created challenges for this research, including significant external stressors, difficulty with communication with participants, and challenges with maintaining a schedule during a rapidly evolving and unexpected time. However, this particular crisis has also contextualized the value of tourism for a number of participants. With the loss of tourism revenue and jobs, the general public is conceptualizing tourism in a way they may have never before, thus allowing for an opportunity to educate them further on the value of tourism as the industry recovers from tragedy. This study aims to be an active element in that recovery process, providing industry professionals who may be struggling through the pandemic with evidence of how they can engage all of their stakeholders to maximize their future advocacy efforts.



### **Chapter 3: Technical Report**

**Title: Measuring the Impact of Community Engagement Strategies with GRCVB**

#### **Stakeholders**

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Acknowledgements: We appreciate the considerable time and resources the GRCVB dedicated to this project. Andrew Baker, Karen DeSollar, and Jonathan Freeze deserve considerable recognition for the time they committed to implementing Tourism U and addressing the research team's questions throughout the project.

## INTRODUCTION

A great place to visit is often considered a great place to live, and the greater Raleigh area is no exception. Tourism directly contributes to economic stability, job generation, and quality of life in Wake County. As of 2019, tourism was a significant economic generator contributing to over 28,000 full-time within the community and bringing in \$2.9 billion in direct spending (GRCVB, 2020a). Tourism also directly contributes to the quality of life of Wake County residents through attracting unique events, contributing to transportation networks, and generating investment in local resources (e.g., restaurants, retail, and the arts). These benefits extend to all Wake County residents.

Despite all of the benefits tourism brings to Wake County, tourism—and the work of the Greater Raleigh Convention and Visitors Bureau (GRCVB)—is not recognized for the value it brings to all Wake County residents. This lack of knowledge extends to residents, industry leaders, and decision-makers. Without knowledgeable and impactful advocates communicating the value of the tourism industry, the businesses, employees, and benefits supported by tourism remain vulnerable to decisions made at the local and state levels. Decisions such as changes in policy (e.g., short term vacation rental regulation) or reduction of tourism promotion budgets can directly impact a destination's reputation, image, and visitation levels. Wake County needs knowledgeable and dedicated advocates to ensure decision-makers understand the value of tourism and prevent detrimental decisions before they create challenges for the industry.

The COVID-19 pandemic has proven how critical it is for communities to recognize the impacts of tourism. COVID-19 has introduced unprecedented challenges for all Wake County residents, and the tourism industry saw record losses with tourism tax collections down \$20 million and a

loss of \$150 million in tourism spending as of December 2020 (GRCVB, 2020b). But with restaurants closing, businesses struggling, and event cancelations, residents are recognizing the benefits tourism brings to Wake County and the positive impacts that it has had on the community. Now is a uniquely opportune time to communicate the value of tourism to stakeholders and empower them to continue to be advocates for the industry even after the COVID-19 pandemic ends.

Through proactive education, committed collaboration, and compelling communication the GRCVB can empower stakeholders to become dedicated tourism advocates. Community engagement strategies (CES) are one effective way to engage directly with stakeholders. These strategies include one-on-one meetings with stakeholders, PR campaigns, and public meetings with representatives from different sectors of tourism, other industries, non-profit organizations, and economic development offices. The GRCVB has recognized that CES can be an effective tool in building relationships with Wake County stakeholders. In 2020 they implemented Tourism U, a presentation to educate Wake County stakeholders on the GRCVB's work and tourism's impact on Wake County. This community engagement strategy is designed to cultivate tourism advocates among community stakeholders by increasing their awareness of the GRCVB and the benefits tourism brings to Wake County. However, the impact of CES have on stakeholder knowledge of tourism and activation as advocates is not known. This study will determine the degree to which CES created awareness of tourism and its benefits in Wake County and empower stakeholders to advocate for tourism.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of this study were to understand community stakeholders’:

- 1.) *Perceptions* of tourism’s role in Wake County economic development;
- 2.) *Knowledge* of the impacts of tourism in Wake County; and,
- 3.) *Engagement* in advocacy for tourism in Wake County.

Interviews were conducted before (pre-CES) and after (post-CES) the implementation of Tourism U to address how CES can influence these three community stakeholder attributes. Identifying differences in these attributes before and after implementing Tourism U will reveal its impact on stakeholders’ knowledge and perceptions of tourism in Wake County and their intention to advocate for tourism in Wake County.

## **METHODS**

### *Data Collection*

The GRCVB identified 40 community stakeholders who the research team invited to participate in the study via email and/or phone. These stakeholders were selected to represent a variety of sectors within and adjacent to the tourism industry (Table 1). Pre-CES interviews were conducted July - September of 2019 with 22 stakeholders (Table 1). From September-November 2020 the GRCVB invited a wide range of stakeholders to participate in Tourism U. GRCVB staff members Andrew Baker, Karen DeSollar, and Jonathan Freeze delivered the Tourism U presentation to a total of 45 stakeholders. Within one week of their participation in Tourism U these stakeholders were invited via email to participate in a post-CES interview. Post-CES interviews were conducted from September-November 2020 with 12 stakeholders (Table 1) (across 10 interviews, some interviews included multiple participants). Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed to generate data for thematic analysis.

### *Impacts of COVID-19*

COVID-19 presented a number of challenges for this study, most notably the attrition of participants from pre-CES interviews to post-CES interviews. Pre-CES interviews were conducted from before the beginning of the pandemic. Many pre-CES interview participants were unable to attend Tourism U, had left their position due to the pandemic, or could not commit to a second interview. While this presented challenges and constraints, the study remained flexible to the changing times and was successful in collecting nuanced data despite these limitations. The research team acknowledges that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a significant paradigm shift in the current world and therefore is likely to influence different views in the post data.

### *Data Analysis*

To address the research objectives the data were analyzed to reveal themes associated with stakeholders': *Perceptions* of the tourism's role in Wake County economic development; *Knowledge* of the impacts of tourism in Wake County; and *Engagement* in advocacy for tourism in Wake County. To assess the influence of Tourism U on these stakeholder attributes all of the pre-CES data were analyzed in aggregate as were the post-CES data. Rather than comparing pre/post data on an individual basis, the use of aggregated data revealed changes in themes related to the attributes across the entire sample. This provides a more comprehensive picture of how Tourism U influenced these stakeholder attributes.

Analysis was conducted using the pre-CES interview data first, revealing a variety of themes associated with these three stakeholder attributes. Analysis was then conducted using the post-CES interview data using both the themes identified in the pre-CES data and new themes that

emerged from the post-CES data. These new themes in the post-CES data were also applied to the pre-CES data to ensure that all aspects of the three community stakeholder attributes were accountable. Ultimately, themes from the pre-CES data and post-CES data were compared to reveal whether differences in community stakeholders' attributes.

## **FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

The following subsections provide evidence of themes related to each of the three study objectives. Themes of findings are presented for pre-CES interviews or post-CES interviews, as well as themes that were represented in both interviews. Key findings are bolded and supporting evidence from the interview data is included as direct quotes beneath the findings. A conclusion subsection is provided for each objective where key conclusions are bolded based upon the comparison of pre-CES and post-CES findings.

### *Objective 1: Stakeholders' perceptions of tourism's role in Wake County economic development*

#### ***Pre-CES Findings***

Data from pre-CES interview participants revealed that **stakeholders perceive tourism as a positive economic driver** for Wake County (Quote 1). This indicates that there is a baseline knowledge and comprehension of the role of tourism in economic development within Wake County.

Quote 1: "All of us experience some level of benefit from tourism as a community. Again, the tourism dollar goes a long way across the community... Our restaurants and small businesses, in close proximity to these large assets, see a lot of that impact." - Economic Development, Wake Forest

**Stakeholders recognize specific economic development actions** led by the GRCVB (Quote 2).

These actions included attracting, marketing, and/or sustaining cultural events, sporting events, conferences and conventions, restaurants, and the downtown areas of the 12 Wake County communities.

Quote 2: “[The GRCVB is] intimately involved in working with NC State on NCAA bids...

They attend a lot of conferences to recruit people, whether it be event planners or whoever, to bring their events our way” - Sport, Raleigh

Beyond promoting these specific actions for economic development, many stakeholders emphasized the **importance of marketing** Wake County to encourage economic development directly and indirectly related to tourism (Quote 3).

Quote 3: “The GRCVB has done an incredible job of marketing our city. More so, I think it is probably more important than any efforts by [the County’s] Economic Development [office].

It's getting the word out. [The County’s] Economic Development [office] is not getting the stories written in the Financial Times every week about Raleigh.” - Tourism Sector:

Attraction, Morrisville

While such findings suggest that the GRCVB has already cultivated considerable knowledge about tourism’s role in economic development among stakeholders there was evidence that greater efforts are needed to expand this understanding to others. Pre-CES interview participants felt that **increased support from the GRCVB for existing economic development activities** could achieve this broader understanding by expanding existing activities’ impact (Quote 4).

Quote 4: “Maybe that could be a partnership with the local [organizations] and the towns... working together to figure out if we want the GRCVB to help us define our area to make it, like I said, the crown jewel.”- Economic Development, Apex

A strategy to diversify stakeholders who recognize the role of tourism in economic development would be to **expand promotional efforts in Wake County’s smaller communities** (Quote 5). Pre-CES interview participants felt that the GRCVB could build upon the promotional strategies used for Raleigh and Wake County (as illustrated in Quote 3) to feature smaller communities in the county that would benefit from increased economic development through tourism. By playing a more active role in promoting these communities the GRCVB could illustrate the role of tourism in economic development to a more diverse range of stakeholders.

Quote 5: “I would like to see more of that [support with promoting events and attractions] and maybe if they were hosting, say, journalists that didn't just want to focus on Raleigh, I'd be very happy to be included in that, and offer some activities if they wanted to travel a little bit.”- Municipal Government, Wendell

### ***Post-CES Findings***

Data from post-CES interview participants revealed that stakeholders understand that **a great place to visit is also a great place to live** (Quote 6). They see that tourism generates opportunities for visitors to see the quality of life in Wake County, which attracts them to relocate or open businesses in the area. These businesses in turn, create sustainable job options for the residents of the community.



Quote 6: “Economic impact, the impact of having people that may not have been here before that come [and] decide, ‘You know what? That's a great city, I want to go live there’.” -

Tourism Sector: Hospitality, Raleigh

**Tourism is seen as vital to the health of the community** (Quote 7). This demonstrates there is a broader understanding of tourism's role in the overall strength of the county's economy and the vitality of the community.

Quote 7: “Tourism is vital to our community...It's a huge part of our economic growth, our ability to sustain ourselves. It's part of the blood that keeps us going.”- Tourism Sector:

Hospitality, Raleigh

While the interviewed stakeholders could identify the connection between tourism and economic development, they recognized the need to **help residents understand the full economic value of tourism**. Participants pointed out that residents may not connect tourism jobs and revenue to the benefits they see on a daily basis (Quote 8). They suggest the GRCVB needs to increase efforts to show residents the connection between their quality of life and tourism.

Quote 8: “I don't think that people know all the connections, particularly the economic connections [to tourism]...what does that pay for? How does it get funded? What are the amenities that are beneficiaries of all that? What do they do? How does that help me? What's the benefit to me? If you asked the rest of people that, obviously, there's a gap in

understanding where you would ideally want people and where they actually are.”- Tourism Sector: Attraction, Morrisville

Data can effectively communicate and quantify tourism's contribution to Wake County's economic development. But post-CES interview participants pointed out the **importance of contextualizing data** (Quote 9).

Quote 9: "In some ways, what's more compelling than just the data points that 2019 was a year of record tourism, and those households saved X number of dollars, is that over the last 10 years because tourism has grown by X because the tax base has grown by Y, people are now saving X dollars versus what they used to save." - Arts, Raleigh

Contextualizing data was seen as an important element of educating stakeholders on the impacts of tourism, particularly for residents of Wake County who would likely be unfamiliar with trends in tourism data over time.

### ***Conclusions***

A comparison of the pre-CES and post-CES findings related to Objective 1 revealed that Tourism U contributed to a **deeper understanding of tourism's role in economic development in Wake County**. Pre-CES interview data revealed that stakeholders could identify the relationship between tourism and economic development in Wake County. Furthermore, they saw GRCVB's role in advancing that relationship through marketing efforts and stewardship of various events in the county. After participating in Tourism U stakeholders demonstrated a more nuanced comprehension of the tourism's role in economic development. They emphasized the importance of tourism's role in the area's excellent quality of life and credited tourism to attracting future residents and business owners.

Tourism U also generated a **broader view of how GRCVB should improve knowledge of tourism's role in economic development in Wake County**. In pre-CES interviews stakeholders

described strategies for the GRCVB to improve knowledge of tourism's role in economic development in Wake County that focused specifically on their organization or community. In post-CES interviews there was more conversation about strategies to spread knowledge of tourism's role in economic development in Wake County to different types of stakeholders, namely Wake County residents. This suggests that Tourism U communicates the value of increasing knowledge of tourism's role in economic development in Wake County.

*Objective 2: Stakeholder knowledge of the impacts of tourism in Wake County*

***Pre-CES Findings***

Pre-CES interview data illustrates that **stakeholders have a good understanding of how tourism benefits the quality of life in Wake County**. They recognize that tourism supports the resources unique to Wake County (e.g., small businesses, universities, sports, events, culinary arts) and demonstrates that a great place to visit is a great place to live (Quote 10).

Quote 10: "It's part of attracting people to live here as well eventually. You come see everything. You'll love it. Then people decide to live here... We're getting about 60 or so new residents in the county every day. Having those events, conventions, helping to create that sense of place here, having amenities for people to experience."- Economic Development, Rolesville

While pre-CES stakeholders could identify positive impacts of tourism (Quote 10), they also recognized negative impacts related to transportation challenges like limited public transit connectivity between communities in Wake County and traffic congestion. **Stakeholders see a need to move towards more sustainable transportation options** (Quote 11) to address these challenges.

Quote 11: “It doesn't even occur to me to use the bus because it's just not part of the culture of the city. To me, I think the GRCVB could play a big role in shifting that mindset and shifting that culture, so that is something we all do. It's not just their job but I think they could have a lot to do with it.” - Arts, Raleigh

### ***Post-CES Findings***

Post-CES interviews expanded upon what was discussed in the post-CES interviews, with stakeholders voicing a **clear connection between quality of life in Wake County and tourism**. They articulate this by speaking more explicitly about the value of tourism to the community (Quote 12).

Quote 12: “Tourism raises the value of a destination in everyone's eyes. It gives the locals a reason to value and cherish the things that they have and give them an opportunity to build, whether infrastructure or murals, to create more spaces with the tax money from tourism.”- Economic Development, Zebulon

This represents a change from a ‘heads in beds’ mentality often used to one that embodies tourism as the heartbeat of the community. In fact, multiple post-CES participants used language to describe tourism as the “heart” of the community (Quote 13).

Quote 13: “Tourism is almost like the heart, and then everything goes back out into the other appendages. It's the heartbeat.” - Business Development, Zebulon

While there is evidence of greater recognition for the positive impacts of tourism after the Tourism U presentation, stakeholders also raised concerns about potential for negative impacts of tourism, specifically **challenges around gentrification and affordable housing** (Quote 14).

Quote 14: “A lot of people will see growth as negative... Specifically with the African American business community... [people] say ‘This used to be this kind of business.’”

- Municipal Government, Wendell

Stakeholders’ emphasis on these potentially negative impacts of tourism expansion in Wake County represents a topic that the GRCVB should be mindful of and address in communications with stakeholders.

Post-CES interviews also revealed a noticeable **emphasis on highlighting how tourism impacts service workers** (Quote 15).

Quote 15: “[Front line employees] put a face on Raleigh. They market our culture, our environment, the people of the city, the hospitality.” - Tourism Sector: Hospitality, Raleigh

Stakeholders recognize that tourism directly impacts those at the heart of the industry, specifically service workers. They recommend the GRCVB actively put a face to the tourism workforce and integrate those more personal stories into their narrative around Wake County tourism. With the magnitude of jobs lost during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is especially important to showcase the people who make tourism possible (Quote 16). In this time of recovery, it is essential to showcase the individuals at the heart of the industry and how they impact the tourism industry.

Quote 16: “Especially now, enlightening and lifting [tourism employees] up through marketing... We're not marketing the uber-successful or the big business...we're also supporting our community and this is what makes the community, the people who live here. I'd like to see more marketing around that in the future. Everyday person who lives in

Raleigh, everyday Wake County residents know that's what makes us, us.” - Municipal Government, Wendell

### *Findings Consistent Across Pre and Post-CES interviews*

Across both the pre-and post-CES interviews stakeholders expressed **the need to improve resident understanding of tourism’s impacts**. This goes beyond communicating the economic value of tourism to residents, described in Objective 1, reflecting that stakeholders want residents to recognize how tourism positively impacts their quality of life (Quote 17).

Quote 17: “The average citizen sees the least benefit [of tourism], just because they don't understand. I don't know that they don't receive the benefit, but I don't think that they probably recognize the value that, in terms of the offset of their taxes and quality of lives, that they get as a result of it.” - Tourism Sector: Transportation, Wake County

Residents may not recognize the tourism impacts they experience (both economically and with quality of life). This indicates a need to **develop strategies for how to effectively educate residents** on why tourism is so essential to their quality of life (Quote 18).

Quote 18: “[The GRCVB has] the story, and they've got the content in terms of the economic impact to local citizens or why it's beneficial in terms of infrastructure they're building as well. They tell a big story. The bigger question is what's the strategy to reach the average citizen at the end of the day?” - Tourism Sector: Transportation, Wake County

### *Conclusions*

A comparison of the pre-CES and post-CES findings related to Objective 2 revealed that Tourism U contributed to **stakeholders making a more direct connection between tourism quality of life in Wake County**. Pre-CES interview data revealed that stakeholders had a good

understanding of how tourism benefits residents of Wake County by highlighting many cultural resources such as events, restaurants, and small businesses. They emphasized that generating tourism is not only beneficial for raising the profile of Wake County as a destination but also contributes to making Wake County a great place to live. After participating in Tourism U, stakeholders demonstrated a more comprehensive understanding of the positive impacts of tourism and a more explicit understanding of what tourism brings to residents of the community.

Tourism U led stakeholders to first think more deeply about positive impacts, shifting their emphasis on tourism as good for quality of life to tourism as the heart of the community. There is also expanded knowledge about the potential negative impacts of tourism such as gentrification and affordable housing. This shift demonstrates that **stakeholders are thinking actively about tourism's impact in a more nuanced way**. These challenging impacts present an opportunity for the GRCVB to communicate to stakeholders, particularly Wake County residents, the strategies they use to maximize tourism's positive impacts and minimize its negative impacts. Data showed that stakeholders continue to recognize the importance of expanding resident's understanding of tourism impacts. This suggests that the GRCVB should draw upon this suggestion from stakeholders to expand their efforts in educating residents about tourism impacts.

Tourism U and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic **primed stakeholders to think about the individual members of the tourism industry**, specifically frontline employees. They see a clear connection between how tourism industry workers within the community are directly impacted by the tourism industry's success. Evidence from the post-CES interviews suggests that the GRCVB should continue to consider frontline employees important stakeholders.

*Objective 3: Stakeholder engagement in advocacy for tourism in Wake County*

***Pre-CES Findings***

Pre-CES interviews revealed three stakeholder groups that the GRCVB can cultivate as advocates for tourism in Wake County. There are current supporters, interested stakeholders, and potential partners, each group has a different level of commitment to engage in advocacy for tourism in Wake County. Pre-CES data revealed that **current supporters of the GRCVB are ready to advocate for tourism** (Quote 19).

Quote 19: “[The GRCVB is] a great resource, and they also understand the value of [my organization]. I feel like we're always great partners in whatever we're trying to accomplish. I've invited folks from CVB to be speakers... [A staff member] came over and talked about the airport as an amenity for us, and as a driver for that economic development activity that we see.” - Economic Development, Morrisville

This indicates that the GRCVB has an existing base of stakeholders who are currently engaging in advocacy (as seen in the example of inviting GRCVB staff members to speak in quote 20) or can be readily activated. In pre-CES interviews stakeholders identified a need for the GRCVB to continue to foster strong relationships with current supporters and **capitalize on interested stakeholders’ appetite to build relationships** with the GRCVB (Quote 20).

Quote 20: “I think I need to be more in touch with them more on projects. I would love to be involved a lot more with them and kind of see that effort moving forward... Being involved on committees, boards, emailing me with project ideas, or if they wanted to collaborate on something, being more involved in that.” - Municipal Government, Wendell



Capitalizing on interested stakeholders' desire to engage with the GRCVB could convert them to supporters who are ready to advocate for tourism in Wake County. While Quote 21 shows evidence of there being untapped interest in engaging with the GRCVB among some stakeholders, there is also evidence that **greater efforts should be made to educate potential partners**, those stakeholders who may currently be unaware of tourism's value but who could be activated as advocates for tourism in Wake County with greater knowledge of the GRCVB's role and tourism's impact on Wake County (Quote 21).

Quote 21: "You have some businesses who know [GRCVB staff] personally and are really engaged, and some who have barely any awareness that they exist other than most cities have one, but don't have a connection." - Economic Development, Raleigh

Actively engaging with different types of stakeholders, like leaders in the county's communities outside of Raleigh (as seen in Quote 20) or industries adjacent to tourism (e.g., health care, real estate) (as seen in Quote 21), will diversify the GRCVB's base of supporters who can be activated as advocates for tourism in Wake County.

To effectively maintain existing relationships with stakeholders and develop new ones the GRCVB needs to **actively engage with stakeholders to understand their needs**. Pre-CES interview participants indicated this engagement should be consistent and should provide space for stakeholders to share opportunities and challenges that they want the GRCVB to address. In Quote 22, an interview participant provides an example of this engagement strategy by proposing an annual meeting between the GRCVB and their members.

Quote 22: "It would give [the GRCVB] an opportunity to get an update on our communities and how we think. We could work together...It's like a win-win. The [organization] executives find out what's going on but then also [the GRCVB] gets that pulse on what's

going on in the community. I think that would be really helpful and maybe even start at once a year initially.” - Economic Development, Apex

Pre-CES interview participants noted that these engagement efforts must **reflect the diversity of Wake County’s tourism industry**. Participants acknowledge the challenge the GRCVB faces with having to represent multiple communities across Wake County as well as all the sectors of tourism and tourism-adjacent industries. But there was evidence that efforts to ensure all communities and interests were given equal opportunities to engage with the GRCVB would yield further commitment to advocate for tourism in Wake County (Quote 23).

Quote 23: “Only because [economic impact data are] mostly Wake County and not necessarily Garner... If there's a way that we had someone on staff, or through the CVB, to be able to communicate the economic impact that happens with parks and recreation events, festivals, tournaments and what that generates in the local community... We don't have anybody to say we do that. If that's something that they could help us communicate, I think that'd be a great tool for us to continue advocating.” - Municipal Government, Garner

Quote 23 comes from one of the county’s smaller communities and reflects interest in engaging with the GRCVB in efforts to communicate the impact of tourism in that community. By providing resources to assist with this communication, as well as other requests similar to this from other stakeholders who represent the diversity of Wake County, the GRCVB can build or maintain the relationships with stakeholders needed to activate them as advocates.

### ***Post-CES Findings***

Post-CES data revealed that after participating in Tourism U stakeholders have an improved understanding of why they should advocate for tourism in Wake County. Post-CES interview

participants demonstrated an **understanding that the success of tourism and of the GRCVB generates benefits for stakeholders** throughout Wake County (Quote 24).

Quote 24: “I depend a lot on [the GRCVB’s] success... I make sure that they're getting the tools and the resources that they need in whatever way I can...I want to make sure that I'm involved with the rest of the businesses in the community and making sure that we're all supporting their effort because it is important to not just my hotel, but to the people that work for me and the other hotels, the people of the community.” - Tourism Sector: Hospitality, Raleigh

In addition to motivating stakeholders to advocate for tourism in Wake County there is evidence that Tourism U prompted participants to think about what resources they needed to be successful advocates. Post-CES interview participants described a need for a **consistent message for advocates to share** (Quote 25).

Quote 25: “If [the GRCVB has] taglines or stories, please share those...I always think we need to have one voice, or one message. It could be in different voices, but share the same message.” - Business Development, Raleigh

Participants felt that speaking with a unified voice about tourism in Wake County would make them more effective advocates. They also noted a need for **actionable information to help advocates communicate the value of tourism in Wake county**. This actionable information includes data to support the consistent message and clear talking points to guide advocates efforts in communications with decision-makers or other stakeholders (Quote 26).

Quote 26: “We need talking points. We need actionable information if we're going to be partners if we're going to get anything out of this.” - Arts, Raleigh

Post-CES interview participants who recognize their potential advocacy role also expect the GRCVB to provide them with a **specific ask that aligns with stakeholders' strengths and potential audience** (Quote 27).

Quote 27: “[The GRCVB] should probably evaluate all their different partners ... and try to figure out where do they best support the organization. Are they a spokesperson for economic development activity? Are they behind the scenes working with elected officials regarding investment strategies that need to be made to support the CVB? Is it advocacy at the grassroots level... as to why they need to vote for a referendum?” - Tourism Sector: Transportation, Wake County

As described in quote 27 the ask (i.e., the specific message to deliver/action to take) needs to be tailored to the stakeholder and their sphere of influence (i.e., who they can access in their personal network). These asks should be supported with actionable information and should align with the consistent message being delivered by all advocates.

Post-CES interview participants also pointed out that **advocacy requires reciprocity**. There was evidence that if a stakeholder acts as an advocate for tourism in Wake County, they will seek reciprocal support from the GRCVB (Quote 28).

Quote 28: “I think when they're [making an advocacy ask], at the exact same time, the CVB should do the same exact thing back to the business partner and describe to them, ‘Here's how we think we can help you.’” - Tourism Sector: Transportation, Wake County

### *Findings Consistent Across Pre and Post-CES interviews*

A common theme across both pre and post-CES data was the benefits of effective communication with tourism stakeholders. This begins with understanding and **adapting to each stakeholder's communication preferences** (Quote 29).

Quote 29: "There's not one best way to communicate with everyone. Everybody has their own separate way of receiving information." - Municipal Government, Garner

By communicating effectively with stakeholders, the GRCVB will be able to develop them as advocates, who can in turn amplify an advocacy message to other stakeholders. Thus, **effective communication creates an advocacy "ripple effect"** that will increase awareness of tourism's value across Wake County (Quote 30).

Quote 30: "When the elected officials are aware of that it usually trickles down. If the elected officials know something, then they know the advocate [and the] staff will end up knowing... When [the elected officials] tell their story, if they are able to communicate something about GRCVB, then without doubt it's for the citizens... [This] creates a funnel that is not one way, but they're an element to disperse the information on multiple paths." - Economic Development, Apex

### *Conclusions*

A comparison of the pre-CES and post-CES findings related to Objective 3 revealed that Tourism U **activated stakeholders to consider the specific resources they need to be successful advocates** for tourism in Wake County. Pre-CES interviews revealed that stakeholders are at different stages of readiness to engage in advocacy for tourism (i.e., some are currently ready, some are interested, and some have potential but need greater education). In

post-CES interviews most participants went beyond describing their readiness to advocate for tourism to describe what was necessary for them to be effective as advocates. Specifically, they are seeking: a consistent message to share, actionable data to support the message, and a targeted ask that aligns with actions they can take to influence members of their social network. The noticeable shift in the focus of participants' conversations about advocacy—from interest to action—indicates that Tourism U was effective in garnering greater commitment to advocacy for tourism in Wake County.

Evidence from both the pre- and post-CES interviews indicates that the GRCVB needs to actively sustain relationships with potential advocates. In order to encourage advocacy for tourism among stakeholders the **GRCVB needs to develop targeted stakeholder engagement strategies**, which are tailored to the stakeholders' level of readiness to advocate. These strategies should focus on listening to stakeholders needs, seeking an understanding of how they may expect the GRCVB to reciprocate in advocacy efforts, and assessing the spheres of influence for each stakeholder in order to match the appropriate advocacy ask with their strengths. These engagement strategies also need to align with the stakeholders preferred methods of communication.

Lastly, the pre- and post-CES interviews emphasize **the importance of diversifying advocates for tourism in Wake County**. By sustaining relationships with stakeholders who represent different communities, interests (e.g., tourism-adjacent industries, municipalities, economic development, cultural or natural resources), and roles (e.g., industry leaders, employees, residents) the GRCVB can not only address these stakeholders' needs but also lay the foundation for activating them as advocates for tourism in Wake County. A diverse set of advocates will

generate diverse spheres of influence, meaning advocates can educate a wider audience on the value of tourism.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations were developed based upon a synthesis of the findings and conclusions for each of the study objectives. Collectively these recommendations are designed to help the GRCVB: improve stakeholders' perceptions of tourism's role in Wake County economic development; increase stakeholders' knowledge of the impacts of tourism in Wake County; and encourage stakeholder engagement in advocacy for tourism in Wake County.

Recommendations 1 - 3 focus on additional CES (beyond Tourism U) the GRCVB can utilize to diversify and expand the pool of stakeholders who can be activated as advocates for tourism in Wake County. Recommendations 4 - 6 are management actions that the GRCVB can take to create an infrastructure that supports CES including Tourism U.

**Recommendation 1: Focus stakeholder engagement efforts on one Wake County community (outside of Raleigh) each month, communicating with their local leaders, hosting events to connect with partners, and showcasing their assets in internal and external GRCVB communications.** Study findings reveal that activating advocates for tourism requires consistent relationship building efforts. Potential advocates want the chance to communicate their needs to the GRCVB and hear updates on how tourism is impacting their communities and advancing economic development. While it is crucial to have mechanisms available for stakeholders to connect with the GRCVB throughout the year, dedicating one month to each of the County's twelve communities (outside of Raleigh) to dive deeper into relationship-building efforts will ensure that there are equal opportunity for these communities to

connect with the GRCVB. Focusing on community leaders, tourism sector partners, and members of tourism-adjacent industries (e.g., real estate, health care) in each of these communities will help the GRCVB educate potential partners and convert them to supporters who are ready to advocate for tourism in Wake County. This will diversify the pool of advocates for tourism and generate more opportunities to create an advocacy “ripple effect,” meaning more stakeholders will be educated about the value of tourism in Wake County.

**Recommendation 2: Expand efforts to educate residents about the value of tourism in Wake County by implementing programs to reach younger residents and their parents as well as new residents.** Study findings revealed that current stakeholders—particularly those in different tourism sectors, economic development, or municipal government—see a need to expand knowledge of tourism’s impacts and role in economic development to Wake County residents. Educating residents could take many forms but one that could reach two audiences—specifically, young residents and their parents—would be adapting Tourism U to a classroom setting. Teaching young residents about tourism’s impacts can allow that knowledge to “trickle up” to their parents. This could be augmented with additional educational campaigns focused on long-term and new residents which communicate not only the economic benefits of tourism (e.g., tax savings) but also the impact tourism has on quality of life in Wake County.

**Recommendation 3: Amplify the importance of tourism workforce members.** Evidence from post-CES interviews revealed that stakeholders recognize the value of the tourism workforce, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. By highlighting tourism workforce members’ value to the industry, through promotional campaigns or recognition events, the GRCVB can demonstrate that they support these individuals and establish the relationships



needed to activate them as advocates for tourism in Wake County. Having tourism workforce members as advocates for the industry would provide valuable insight into how policy changes or decisions will impact those whose livelihoods depend on tourism.

**Recommendation 4: Establish and maintain an Advocate Relationship Management**

**system.** Study findings revealed the importance of sustaining relationships with stakeholders in order to activate them as advocates. Sustaining these relationships requires that GRCVB staff to account for attributes such as stakeholders' level of readiness to advocate for tourism, communication preferences, expectations for advocacy reciprocity, and sphere of influence (i.e., who they can access in their personal network). The GRCVB can maximize their ability to sustain these stakeholder relationships by treating them the same as a customer relationship.

Akin to a Customer Relationship Management system, an Advocate Relationship Management (ARM) system would allow the GRCVB to document stakeholders' attributes, their participation in/exposure to CES, and past advocacy efforts. An ARM would allow the GRCVB to maximize the effectiveness of their communication with stakeholders and track when stakeholders should be invited to participate in additional CES.

**Recommendation 5: Charge a committee with creating an annual advocacy plan.**

Comprised of GRCVB staff and board members, this committee should annually identify advocacy needs, create an “ask” for those needs (e.g., speak directly to city council members about improving transportation networks), and organize the resources (e.g., data, talking points) for advocates to act on those asks. Committee members can use the ARM to determine the best strategy for communicating with each stakeholder about their assigned ask and needed resources. By establishing a plan that works in conjunction with the ARM the GRCVB can ensure that their

advocacy needs are being addressed by advocates who have the most potential to be successful. The creation of an advocacy plan and assigning resources (i.e., staff and board members' time) also formalizes the GRCVB's commitment to proactive advocacy efforts.

**Recommendation 6: Maintain and expand Tourism U as a Community Engagement**

**Strategy.** A comparison of the pre- and post-CES interviews revealed that Tourism U, in conjunction with the current challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and social justice movements, influences stakeholders' perceptions of tourism's role in economic development, knowledge of tourism's impacts, and intentions to engage in advocacy for tourism. This suggests that the GRCVB should maintain their commitment to delivering Tourism U. They should seek to deliver the 100-level presentation to new stakeholder groups and should follow up with the 200-level presentation to those who are ready to engage with more complex issues and engage in conversations about their advocacy potential. It should be noted that the 200-level of Tourism U may be a better context for discussion of topics such as the interlocal funds, as there was very little change in knowledge or discussion of this in post-CES interviews. The implementation of an ARM and annual advocacy plan will also help to tailor the Tourism U presentation to different stakeholder audiences. For example, the 100-level presentation could focus on impacts for a specific community and conclude with basic asks for members of the audience to initiate their advocacy efforts. A capstone Tourism U discussion (300-level) could entail the stakeholder inviting elected officials, decisions-makers, or other stakeholders to participate in small discussions about the value of tourism in Wake County.

## Chapter 4: Synthesis

### *Overall Contributions*

This research intends to provide both theoretical and practical implications for the development and engagement of a diverse set of advocates for the tourism industry. This study aspires to aid in DMO's development of and engagement with stakeholders to enact strategic action and change. By educating stakeholders on the value of tourism and empowering them to become advocates, DMOs can maximize their potential to limit negative policy impacts on the industry.

This study has implications beyond the tourism industry and its findings are applicable to other contexts, particularly non-profit organizations and associations. Like DMOs, non-profit organizations face challenges advocating due industry segmentation, funding structures, and advocacy limitations (Anastasiadou, 2008). One recommendation from this research that can be applied to the non-profit sector, is conceptualizing advocacy beyond lobbying, and expanding advocacy networks to community stakeholders. Non-profit managers can learn directly from this research to develop strategies that broaden their advocacy networks through effective communication and messaging. By leveraging the findings from this research and communicating with DMOs on the success of advocacy strategies, non-profit managers can learn directly from the tourism industry, an example of *social learning*, and apply strategies in their one sectors.

While there is existing literature on tourism and the public policy process, tourism crisis management, and building relationships with stakeholders, literature on strategies to cultivate diverse stakeholders as advocates for tourism is limited (Anastasiadou, 2008; Stevenson et al., 2008; Swanson & Brothers 2012). This research fills these gaps by identifying strategies to diversify tourism advocates who can aid the tourism industry in mitigating policy crisis. Findings

from this study revealed that the GRCVB is currently making strides to manage tourism advocacy in Wake County. This addresses the need to understand how DMOs can develop and manage their own community's advocacy network and speak with a unified voice with their diverse stakeholders (McGehee & Meng, 2006; Ruhanen & Reid, 2014; Swanson & Brothers, 2012). By utilizing CMT to establish recommendations for the development of tourism advocates, this research provides avenues for the implementation of co-management beyond environmental crisis management (Pennington-Gray et al., 2014). Leveraging the constructs of CMT proved fruitful within the context of tourism crisis literature, and this research provides evidence that CMT can be applied to address tourism policy crisis as well.

#### *Future Research*

Future research on this topic should work to expand on developing strategies for improving relationships between DMOs and stakeholders and empowering stakeholders to be advocates. Future research should implement a quantitative measurement and mixed methods approach to gain a wider understanding of this topic. A quantitative measurement and mixed methods approach, that incorporates a range of stakeholders from all across Wake County, would be recommended for future research. This would include a survey, sent to stakeholders beyond just the GRCVB's current partners, but expand to stakeholders throughout the community. Access to more potential partners within the community can be found through a network analysis using current community partner's networks.

Future research should also extend beyond tourism scholarship and disseminate findings to tourism leaders and professionals across the industry. While this research uncovered strategies for the GRCVB to develop their Wake County stakeholders, future research should attempt to

find commonalities across different community contexts. To do so, a nationwide exploration of advocacy efforts in tourism organizations should be conducted. Future research should work to understand how advocacy strategies should be implemented, what the impact of these strategies will have, understand how these strategies can be applied to different communities nationwide, and uncover measurable success of these strategies across different contexts.

Policy crises will continue to develop and present new challenges for the tourism industry in the future. The ever-present threat of policy crisis is why developing strategies to broaden tourism advocacy coalitions is so essential for tourism's sustainability. Future research should continue to integrate both tourism professionals and scholarship and be an active component in developing tourism's resilience against unpredictable policy crises.

#### *Implications of Study Timing*

Conducting this study during in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and social unrest has not only illuminated the need for educating stakeholders on the importance of tourism, but has also created a unique opportunity to discuss tourism's fragility. While the industry has undoubtedly weathered an unprecedented crisis, the pandemic has allowed the space to help communities see what happens when tourism goes away. Stakeholders are connecting the importance of tourism to their quality of life not only because of CES like Tourism U, but because of the challenging year service industry workers have faced. As the vaccine brings us one step closer to normalcy and tourism attractions begin to open once more, DMO's must take this opportunity to communicate tourism's benefit while it is on the forefront of many stakeholder's minds. The findings and recommendations presented within this study can be used as a guide for developing strategies to empower stakeholders during this time of recovery and revitalization.

### *Personal Reflections*

On a personal level, due in part to my experience working in tourism in both the professional and academic sectors, I can recognize the value and implications of this study. As a stakeholder of Wake County, who understands and respects the nuanced value of tourism, I consider myself a tourism advocate. My responsibility as a dedicated tourism advocate includes continually educating others on the benefits of tourism and maintaining active participation in the public policy process. Because of my particular position as a researcher with a professional background, I spend a great deal of time disseminating research among both my academic and professional peers. Despite my passion and how critical conversations around advocacy are, industry professionals continue to be wary of the topic. Many industry professionals continue to associate advocacy exclusively with lobbying, but my hope is that persistent communication and research around the layers of tourism advocacy can have a positive impact and lead to improved understanding of how advocacy is operationalized. In my career, I plan to hone the suite of skills I developed from this research, and intend to implement strategies for how to diversify and empower stakeholders to learn, connect, and support the value of tourism. This study is only the first step in enacting positive change in the industry, and I look forward to seeing future research on this topic.

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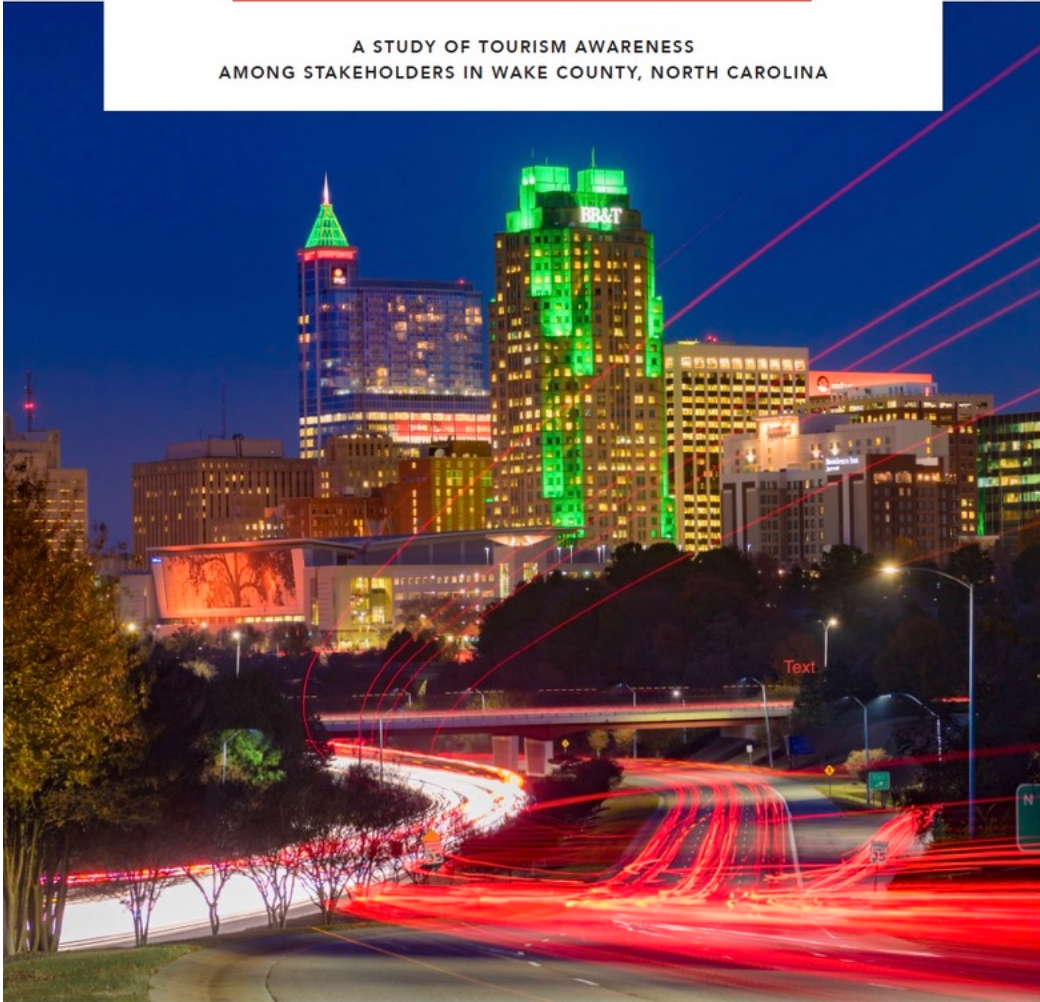
## APPENDICES

## **APPENDIX A: Summary Report**

The following report is designed to be a summary of key study findings that can be shared as a stand-alone material. It was written to appeal to a public audience so that the findings of this study can be shared more widely.

# Building Tourism Advocacy

A STUDY OF TOURISM AWARENESS  
AMONG STAKEHOLDERS IN WAKE COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA



NC State research study sponsored by and conducted for Greater Raleigh Convention and Visitors Bureau





## Tourism needs advocacy

The tourism industry contributes to economic stability, job generation, and quality of life. These benefits extend to residents, sectors of the tourism industry, and adjacent industries. Yet, tourism is not recognized for its value among all stakeholders and the destination communities it serves. This lack of knowledge extends to residents, professionals working in different sectors, and decision-makers. Stakeholders can be empowered through education to become advocates for tourism.

Through proactive education, committed collaboration, and compelling communication, destination marketing/management organizations (DMOs) can empower their community stakeholders to become advocates for tourism. Community engagement strategies (CES) are one effective way to engage directly with their stakeholders.

The Greater Raleigh Convention and Visitors Bureau recognizes CES can be an effective tool in building relationships. *Tourism U*, a presentation to educate Wake County stakeholders on the work of the GRCVB and tourism's impact on Wake County, is one of these CES strategies. The goal of this study was to assess stakeholder knowledge of tourism's value and provide a baseline measure of their potential for engaging in tourism advocacy.

Through these findings, this study aims to provide evidence of how CES can be used to help improve advocacy for the tourism industry, and recommendations for the future.

## Study methods

Interviews were conducted with over 25 stakeholders representing various sectors (i.e., hospitality, healthcare, real estate, transportation, local government, retail). A total of 22 interviews were conducted before *Tourism U* was implemented and a total of 12 interviews were conducted after *Tourism U* was implemented.

Post-CES interviews were conducted following the stakeholders' participation in *Tourism U*. Some post-CES interviews were with stakeholders who participated in the pre-interviews, others were new. Interview data were analyzed to determine the impact of CES on stakeholder knowledge of tourism's value and advocacy engagement.



## Identifying the impacts of CES

Perceptions of the role of tourism in Wake County economic development

### Pre-CES Perception

*"All of us experience some level of benefit from tourism as a community...the tourism dollar goes a long way across the community."*

—Retail Stakeholder

### Post-CES Perception

*"Tourism is vital to our community... it's a huge part of our economic growth, our ability to sustain ourselves. It's part of the blood that keeps us going."*

—Hospitality Stakeholder

Knowledge of the impacts of tourism on the community

### Pre-CES Knowledge

*"I don't think residents are aware. If I wasn't in the job that I was in I would have no idea."*

—Retail Stakeholder

### Post-CES Knowledge

*"The average citizen sees the least benefit [of tourism], just because they don't understand."*

—Transportation Stakeholder

Engagement in advocacy for tourism in Wake County

### Pre-CES Engagement

*"I think I need to be more in touch with [GRCVB] more on projects. I would love to be involved a lot more with them and kind of see that effort moving forward."*

—Community Leadership Stakeholder

### Post-CES Engagement

*"If [the GRCVB has] taglines or stories, please share those... I always think we need to have one voice, or one message. It could be in different voices, but share the same message."*

—Business Development Stakeholder



Brian Strickland



Brian Strickland

NC State research study sponsored by and conducted for Greater Raleigh Convention and Visitors Bureau





## Findings

### CES change perceptions of tourism's role in economic development

Stakeholders perceive tourism as a beneficial economic driver but recognize opportunities to expand these benefits to smaller communities.

### CES increase knowledge of the impacts of tourism in Wake County

Stakeholders connect how tourism benefits quality of life in Wake County but recognize that not all residents understand this relationship.

### CES encourage engagement in tourism advocacy

There is strong support from stakeholders, but they need a specific ask (e.g., speak to policymakers) and strengthened communication.

## Recommendations

- Improve stakeholder perceptions of tourism...highlight one community outside of Raleigh to focus on each month. Communicate with their local leaders, host events to connect with partners, and showcase their assets.
- Increase knowledge of tourism impacts...expand efforts to educate residents about the value of tourism by implementing programs to reach younger residents and their parents as well as new residents. Educating residents could take many forms such as an adapted *Tourism U* presentation for young residents. These efforts should focus on long-term and new residents to communicate both the economic and social impact tourism has on quality of life in Wake County.
- Encourage engagement in tourism advocacy...charge a committee with identifying annual advocacy needs, creating an "ask" for those needs (e.g., speak directly to city council members about improving transportation networks). Then communicate each ask to the appropriate advocate.

**Further Questions?** Contact Hailey Post ([hapost@ncsu.edu](mailto:hapost@ncsu.edu)) or Whitney Knollenberg ([wgknolle@ncsu.edu](mailto:wgknolle@ncsu.edu)) at North Carolina State University.

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