



EXPERIENCE BORREGO
Sustainable Destination Management and Marketing

PROGRAM ACTION PLAN 2019 - 2020

“Utilizing a community stakeholder engagement process designed to develop and strengthen destination partnerships to support economic development, celebrate local culture, conserve natural and cultural assets, and enhance the well-being of residents through sustainable tourism management and marketing”

James Dion
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In February, 2018 the BVA began implementing the Geotourism Program strategic planning methodology designed to develop and strengthen destination partnerships and identify actions that will catalyze economic development, celebrate local culture, conserve natural and cultural assets, and enhance the well-being of residents through sustainable tourism management and marketing.

The following list of program deliverables were detailed in the *INSIDE ANZA-BORREGO Sustainable Destination Management Plan - "PROPOSAL"* that was submitted to the BVA in January, 2018. Funding for these activities have been achieved in 2018 – 2019 from a combination of private donor, San Diego County and Federal grants. The funding cycle for these activities are on a cash basis spread over the timeline from March 2018 through October 2019.

2018 – 2019 Program Deliverables

1. Inception Report
2. Tourism Visioning Workshops
3. Tourism Strategic Plan
4. Inside Anza-Borrego Website
5. Destination Management Organization – Economic Development and Community Enhancement Program

All the above activities are reported to the BVA Board of Directors and funders as being on time and on budget.

Based on what we have learned over the previous 12 months implementing the program what follows here is a detailed explanation of the rationale, measures of success and costs for implementing our next round of activities. These are time-lined for the funding cycle January 2019 through August 2020. We will be seeking funding to implement the following activities as a “follow on” from 2018 – 19 with funding anticipated from a mix of San Diego County CEP / NRP and USDA RBD grants.

2019 – 2020 Program Deliverables

1. Product Development / Investment Promotion
2. Interpretive Master Plan – On site interpretation / Tourism Information Center
3. Managing and Maintaining *EXPERIENCE BORREGO* website
4. Marketing – Communications and Social Media
5. Work Force Development - Hospitality Skills Training

2019 – 2020 PROGRAM DELIVERABLES - ACTIVITIES AND IMPELMENTATION

1. PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT / INVESTMENT PROMOTION

BVA should be involved in tourism product development and part of this role is really a form of investment promotion. BVA becomes active in seeking out investors for selected new tourism development projects in Borrego. This will help differentiate the role of BVA in and set BVA apart from the traditional Chamber by taking the lead as the region's tourism sector center for innovation and development.

BVA can provide different roles in investment promotion ranging from:

- Providing information and advice for tourism stakeholders who wish to engage in product development.
- Take an active role in identifying opportunities for product development and find strategies to realize these opportunities.
- Make financial, staff, or other resource investments in product development, leading strategic partnerships with other tourism stakeholders.
- Organize a special committee for tourism product development and to engage with potential investors and developers in various ways and through different communication channels. For example, BVA could create a special section on the website devoted to attracting new investment in tourism.

Action Item: Experiential Travel - Develop and promote one day / multi day themed itineraries, guides and resources

To guide potential travelers between points of interests in the Borrego Springs and Anza-Borrego Desert State Park (ABDSP), develop self-guided thematic cross cutting routes that inspire visitors to visit the region in ways that will maximize their visitor experience. Offer visitors an “insiders” opportunity to experience “Borrego” as a holistic destination that couples the Park and the Town. The traveler may choose these tour products as “packaged” examples they can mix from a diverse variety of suggested itineraries, researching and choosing among the suggested points of interest along themed itineraries, or as information points of departure that help them customize their own personal journey to Borrego.

These sample itineraries will productize the asset inventory of Borrego by showing travelers how they can connect the dots between points of interest while also informing and inspiring them of things they can do, stay, dine and experience.

Themed itineraries can be one day, weekend, 3-days, 7 – 10 days in length. Itineraries can also include features and the towns amenity's as well as festivals events and special people.

Examples of potential themed itineraries and guides that can be developed:

- Discover Borrego - Three Perfect Days; an introduction to the recommended best of ABDSP and Borrego Springs for the first-time visitor
- One day tour to the best of Borrego
- Arts, Culture and Cuisine
- Suggested dates can focus on already scheduled Festivals and Events;
- Birders Borrego – focus on the spring and fall migration seasons. Opportunity to couple ABDSP and the town’s easily accessible birdwatching sites seamlessly. Opportunity to connect the town and Park experience.
- History and Places – Blair Valley / Emigrant Trail / Butterfield Stagecoach Route / Pony Express / DeAnza Trail / Native American settlements and migration routes / Mining and mine sites / WW II training sites / Pioneers / Settlers / Farmers
- Dark Skies – Stars / Stargazing / Astronomy / meteor showers. “How to” with experts / photography / Summer Star Gazing
- Nature Hoods – Explore local biodiversity and ecosystems. Big Horn Sheep / Volunteer with the seasonal sheep count / Water / Palm Canyons / People on the land, how we sustain our sense of place by sustaining our ecosystem. Include Cuyamaca, Agua Caliente and Vallecito County Parks in itineraries
- Science Happens Here; “Learning Journeys”– Paleontology; Geology; Geography; Botany; Biology; Bio Blitzes
- Relax, Rejuvenate and Refresh – Spa, Health and Wellness, Yoga, meditations – a how and where to guide of health and wellness opportunities.
- Quality of Life in Borrego Springs - Shop, Dine, Play, Rejuvenate
- Family focused (easy to moderate) interpretive bicycle tours utilizing the paved roads in the valley; short (couple of hours to half day) interpretive bicycling tours of (could also be self-guided with interpretive material).
- Electric cycle tours – Fish Creek; Coyote Canyon; Pinyon Wash; Blair Valley
- Overland cycle tours for more serious bicyclists. Can include the State Park; routes that link the Park and the Villages; road riding scenic tours and routes
- Road Races; Triathlons; 6K walks; half marathons
- Borrego Springs walking tours – self guided with interpretive material
- Sky Art interpretation and routing materials; step on guides; local informal guides
- Geo-caching; as component to any of the above or as a “stand alone” activity
- Mid-Century Modern Architecture - guided half day tours

Product Idea:

Guided by Locals - Take advantage of Borrego's trove of local experts as a resource for visitors. Retirees could offer half day "Expert" tours in their special area of interest. Anthropology, American Studies, Environmental Studies, Biology, Art History, Geography, Music, Theatre, Film.

Itineraries can be as simple as a focused conversation "Dinner with a Local"; a guided tour of ABDSP with a local naturalist; a half day tour of the Architecture, History and Style of Borrego Springs with a student. (High school / Soroptimists)

Needs

To develop tour products and inspire investments into them BVA will need to reach out to a broad segment of local stakeholders from multiple sectors including hospitality, ABDSP, County Parks, agriculture, guides and outfitters, "clubs" and affinity organizations, NGO's and individuals; Festival and Events organizers and promoters. Each of these stakeholders will benefit from enhanced product development to better serve visitors, and inspire prospective visitors.

Measures of Success:

- Six new tour products are developed, promoted, and marketed by the end of 2019.
- Two itinerary packages are sold directly to visitors.
- 100 visitors are traveling on an itinerary inspired about what they found on the website, social media or promotion by Spring 2020

Cost:

\$35,000 for BVA staff time, travel, promotion, materials, marketing, advertising (outside of owned platforms)

2. INTERPRETIVE MASTER PLAN - ON SITE INTERPRETATION / TOURISM INFORMATION CENTER PLANNING

INTERPRETIVE MASTER PLAN

According to the National Association for Interpretation (NAI) an interpretive plan is *“considered the documentation of a thoughtful decision-making process that blends management needs and resource considerations with visitor desire and ability to pay to determine the most effective way to communicate the message to targeted markets. An interpretive organization is considered an agency or organization that manages a site or company that employs methods of interpretation in their daily business.”*

According to NAI an Interpretive Plan has the following objectives:

- Advocacy - Interpretive organizations must have advocates and be advocates for their resources.
- Audience Analysis - Understanding the audience is critical to the success of the plan.
- Civic Engagement - Successful interpretive plans usually include stakeholder involvement and/or public input.
- Evaluation should be built into the planning process at multiple stages
- Management Objectives - Interpretation methods and content should align with management objectives.
- Marketing Factors Understanding the market climate and niche can help in achieving success.
- Media Descriptions-The interpretive plan clearly indicates the mix of media required to convey the message(s) to specific audiences
- Message Elements- include central theme, subthemes, and storylines.
- Operational Commitment - The best plan cannot be implemented without support.
- Partnerships - Most interpretive organizations require partners for cost-effective operations.
- Staff / Volunteer Training - Staff and volunteers are usually responsible for implementation of the plan.
- Stakeholder Involvement - Stakeholders may include partners, volunteers, staff, governance, user groups and others
- Terminology - Consistent vocabulary helps avoid costly misunderstandings.
- Visitor Experience - Ultimately, the interpretive plan defines the visitor experience.

Needs

A qualified practitioner to develop an integrated Interpretive Master Plan.

BVA proposes to engage Tustin, California based *The Acorn Group* to develop a comprehensive Interpretive Plan. The resulting Interpretive Master Plan will be implemented and managed by the BVA and associates.

The Acorn Group offers a range of services in interpretive and educational master planning, exhibit design, curriculum development, and evaluation.

The Acorn Group and the catalog division, Acorn Naturalists, are long established firms in the fields of education and interpretation. They are incorporated in the State of California and certified as a Small Business and Women's Business Enterprise.

About The Acorn Group

From: <http://www.acorngroup.com>

Bringing together the skills of interpretive planners, writers, and designers, The Acorn Group offers award-winning services creating panels, exhibits, and print media that bring your stories to life. For over 28 years, we have helped our clients create engaging and inspiring experiences for their visitors.

Our capabilities include interpretive master planning, panel and exhibit design, visitor studies, and management of large scale environmental education projects. Our clients are diverse, ranging from governmental agencies to private and non-profit institutions. Project sites include interpretive centers, ecological reserves, museums, botanical gardens, zoos, parklands, and educational institutions.

The Acorn Group was established in 1990 and incorporated in California in 1995. Our team is dedicated to the field of interpretation and actively involved in the National Association for Interpretation, as well as other complementary professional organizations. We are passionate about our work. Our greatest satisfaction comes from seeing plans and drawings become reality and watching visitors take delight in new experiences.

For a list of projects of The Acorn Group, please [click here](#).

ON SITE INTERPRETATION / TOURISM INFORMATION CENTER PLANNING

The Interpretive Master Plan informs a Borrego Springs Geo-Tourism information center (TIC), both as a physical location and / or an online customer service through the website and social media, to perform multiple roles for the destination and tourism stakeholders including the following:

Tourism Information Center (can be installed in an existing facility such as the Chamber of Commerce's Welcome Center)

- Encouraging higher per capita spending: The TIC should try to “up-sell” the destinations, encouraging tourists to spend more money on their visit.
- Handling requests for pre-visit information: People will contact the TICs for information prior to leaving for the destination. The TIC will respond to information requests received by phone, e-mail, social media service, or online messaging service.
- Interpreting local history, culture and nature: The TIC could include displays or show videos that interpret the most important tourism-related resources of the destination.

- Merchandising hub for tourism stakeholders: TIC are the one place where tourism stakeholders can publicize their products and services.
- Providing information during visits: This is the traditional role of TIC and tourists expect them to provide accurate, detailed, and up-to-date information on all aspects of the destination.
- Recommending itineraries: TIC staff can recommend customized itineraries based on people's particular interests and time constraints.
- Selling travel-related literature and local souvenirs: Many TICs' include retail operations where tourists can buy maps, guidebooks, clothing, and local souvenirs.

On site Signage / Wayfinding and Routes

engagement and local endorsement of the process and the final Plan from private and public sector stakeholders

- Signage – display boards; interpretive panels. Design and color palate should be complimentary to what is displayed in the TIC. Printed guide to the interpretive signage and panels
- Develop paths, biking routes and walkways that connect POI's within the community of Borrego Springs, the Borrego Valley and Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. These routes can be signed using existing byways or may require, at relative high cost of investment in appropriate infrastructure.

Measures of Success:

- Stakeholder
- First Draft Interpretive Master Plan in six months
- Final version in 12 months
- Develop proposal for on-site interpretation and wayfinding – 6 months
- Complete a needs assessment for trails and route development program – 10 months
- Develop proposal for trails and route development program – 10 months
- Achieve funding for the programs – 10 to 14 months
- Complete a needs assessment for the TIC – 14 to 18 months

Cost:

- Master Interpretive Plan - \$40,000
- On Site and TIC Research and writing the proposals can be done by BVA staff. Level of effort materials - \$20,000.
 - The Cost for implementing will be discovered during the research and writing phases. These programs one site and interpretation should be expected to require upwards or \$150,000 - \$250,000. Substantially higher funding requirements would be necessary should a “stand alone” Borrego Springs TIC be selected as a program component and / or significant investments be suggested for Trail and Route development.

3. MANAGING AND MAINTAINING *EXPERIENCE BORREGO* WEBSITE

San Diego County’s Neighborhood Reinvestment Program funded Geotourism themed website *Experience Borrego* is scheduled to be operationally and content ready to be “rolled out” to the public in August 2019.

There are certain activities that are required for the ongoing maintenance of the Geotourism program website and ensure there is added value to the program.

These activities include:

- Payment of the annual hosting fee and periodic technical and maintenance
- 2-days per month for a program coordinator (editor) to:
 - Review new or pending nominations that are submitted to the website
 - Help partner sites with their content and activate content as needed
 - Upload or update events and festivals on the website
 - Answer comments or enquiries to the website
- Organizing and hosting periodic website related meetings and stakeholder workshops

Operational Activities for Maintaining the Website

Basic maintenance of the website is relatively simple, it just requires that it is on someone’s work-plan and regularly checked and updated. The following information provides the basic steps and useful hints in managing the website.

What	When
• Check/approve pending nominations	1x week
• Review/approve any public comments	1x week
• Review updates to existing nominations	1x week
• Review/upload/approve featured content and events	1x month
• Circulate announcements	1x quarter
• Organize Geotourism Meetings and Workshops	4x year (minimum)

Operational Activities for Maintaining the Website

1. Once per week log into the website and check to see if there are any pending nominations. Also check the inactive nominations to see if there are new additions that people have added.

2. Review new nominations to determine that they have all the required information and that they meet the editorial guidelines for the Geotourism Program.
 - The nomination should have at least the following:
 - Good descriptive text with limited spelling and grammatical errors (edit if needed) Two good photos (four to six better)
 - Basic contact information
 - Accurately pinpointed on the map
3. Follow up with new or past nominations that have content or edits pending or that you have communicated with previously to check on their progress.
4. Check/approve pending nominations (weekly)
5. Review/approve and public comments (weekly)
6. Review updates to existing nominations (weekly)
 - Once each week run a report of content that has been recently updated or edited by nomination authors.
 - Review the report and do a quick audit (open these entries and review the changes) to ensure that there were no fundamental changes to these nominations that would disqualify them from the site.
7. Review/upload/approve featured content and events (monthly)
 - At least once each month, review the content that you have selected as ‘Featured.’ This is content specially selected to appear on the home page of the website.
 - Make adjustments and updates to reflect seasonality and key events that Experience Borrego would like to highlight or highlight sponsors/advertisers if appropriate. For example, if there is a big event or festival that is upcoming, feature content related to that.
 - Make sure the home page featured content has the most compelling and interesting images.

8. Circulate Announcements (At least Quarterly)

There are two sets of contact information that the website gathers; “Users” who have nominated sites and created a profile on the website and “Subscribers,” who have signed up to receive updates from the website. These people are those directly engaged with the Geotourism program, which include partners as well as sites, attractions and businesses in the region.

An announcement should be sent at least every quarter, but can be more regularly if there is information to share.

Announcements may include, but are not limited to:

- Updates on the activities of the BVA and the Geotourism Program
- Updates on newsworthy events, activities, etc. that effect tourism in the region.
- Reminders to update content on users nominations, etc.
- Highlighting new sites, events or stories that have been posted to the website

Announcements should be short and to the point and can include links to the website or other pages as well as documents.

9. Organizing and hosting periodic BVA meetings and stakeholder workshops

The BVA and select stakeholders should meet at least quarterly to review new nominations since the last time they met to ensure they are appropriate, review new content, suggest fresh content and ideas, review financial and management issues, review activities being implemented and develop a plan for the upcoming period.

Measures of Success

- Hosting and maintenance of the website
- Organize and host periodic BVA and stakeholder workshops
- Develop annual work plans
- Review, edit and update new nominations, stories, events and other content on the website in accordance with the principles of the Geotourism program
- Promote attractions, activities, events and businesses
- Publish a periodic e-newsletter for program partners, supporters and sites
- Promote the website and implement programs to market the tourism product of the region through stories and other content about the region, social media, blog, e-newsletters and marketing.
- Support the sites, attractions and business that are nominated on the site
- Fundraising
- Other communication and outreach activities to support the program objectives
- Support work force development, education, and entrepreneurial initiative

Cost

Costs for managing and maintaining the website as outlined above can be estimated as a about one third to one half of a full-time position for someone at a skill and experience level at mid-level management assuming the individual(s) would have some prior relevant experience in website management, destination marketing and NGO management.

Based on past Geotourism programs we estimate an average of a minimum of \$50,000 per year to cover personnel and expenses to manage the website and BVA stewardship partners.

4: MARKETING – COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The goal of a social media communications plan is to organize an expanded social media presence by:

- providing regular periodic updates of BVA’s Geotourism website
- organizing and managing a blog that encourage interaction with the website’s visitors
- managing off platform social media tools (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) that underspin the communications plan on BVA’s own website that also provides a platform for influencers to expand dialogue between the global on line community that opens up new and, perhaps, unexpected markets.

Print Media; Newspapers and Magazines

After many years of change in the Newspapers and magazines communication industries, that have seen the demise of many mid-market print media brands, big city newspapers have reinvented themselves as important website based “newspapers”, with limited print runs, (Houston Chronicle, Dallas Morning News, Chicago Tribune, Miami Herald, Oregonian, Seattle Times.) while others have actually experienced national, and in some cases, global expansion of their brand (New York Times, Washington Post, Chicago Tribune). Getting a mention in the New York Times Travel section is still a quite effective way to reach broad audiences. At the same time “small town” newspapers have seen a revitalization, and in many cases, growth, over the last few years as consolidation and shutting down of newspapers in mid to small markets has driven demand for people seeking the news close to where they live.

Magazines have likewise consolidated platforms to the point that many printed magazines are advertising “flags” for their online content. (Outside Magazine, Conde Nast Travel, Nat Geo Traveler). Likewise having a mention on their online platforms is an effective way to market Experience Borrego.

While the platform shifts from print to digital the traditional Press Release is still an effective way to draw attention to your message and content.

BVA should develop a “Press Kit” Folder branded with Experience Borrego.

Inserts include one page (double sided “handouts”

- BVA Geotourism FAQ Sheet
- About the Program
- Experience Borrego Info Sheet
- Project Supporters Info Sheet
- Press Releases and Advisories (as needed)

Social Media

The leading global social network, Facebook boasts more than a billion active users. Facebook should be Experience Borrego’s “flagship” social network due it

its versatility, ease of use, advertising opportunities, and seamless integration with smaller social networks.

Borrego's ongoing activities will focus on showcasing the region's unique cultural and environmental assets as well as activities and news from the region to drive traffic to the Geotourism website.

Experience Borregos's promotions and sweepstakes will occur through the brand page, with syndication to other partner pages as applicable. In order for someone to enter Facebook sweepstakes or redeem promotions, they will have to "like" the page, regardless of whether they access the promotion through other partners pages. In this way, Borrego's brand page will benefit from exposure with growth.

Objectives

- Showcase Experience Borrego product portfolio through strong brand representation
- Expand social media audience
- Convert social media audience into newsletter subscribers
- Drive website traffic

Status and Timeline:

Set up Facebook page and content feeds for a simultaneous launch for when the Experience Borrego website goes live to the public

Requirements

- Social Media Manager
- Content Specialist

Measures of Success

- 5,000 Experience Borrego Facebook "likes" in year one
- 500,000 media impressions

Cost \$25,000

Blog Posts / Influencers

Experience Borrego will embed a blog feature into their website and publish one post each week.

A blog is a platform that allows the user to post timely, topical information to a website. Blogs supplement static website content that does not change and is descriptive of a product or service. Blog posts are generally 300 - 500 words and

include several images and videos. They are full of rich links that drive users to other posts or important information on the website.

Blogs can include content developed by BVA, shared content (generated by other partners) and visitor content (telling the stories or highlighting the comments from visitors).

When embedded in a website, blogs improve SEO by allowing the user to create content around specific keywords and key phrases, intended for very specific audiences at very specific times. By writing and publishing content strategically, Experience Borrego will position itself to capture a significant increase in website traffic among target markets.

To reach and attract target markets, Experience Borrego will post articles that address frequent traveler questions, highlight the region's attractions and showcasing site contributors. Blog posts will link to specific landing pages where appropriate.

Requirements

- Blog Editor
- Content contributors (volunteer)
- Influencers (professional)

Measures of Success (example targets)

- 24 new original blog posts
- Improve website search engine ranking for 30-40 new keywords or phrases

Cost \$ 10,000.00

4. WORK FORCE DEVELOPMNET – HOSPITALITY SKILLS TRAINING

The National Association for Interpretation Certified Interpretive Host (NAI CIH) category is designed for staff and volunteers at interpretive sites who have public contact but don't usually deliver interpretive programs. Receptionists, maintenance workers, law enforcement officers, campground hosts, greeters, and sales clerks are among the individuals who may find the program helpful. CIH training combines customer service with informal interpretation to help participants improve their responses to guests in general while helping achieve stewardship goals of the Borrego Village Association.

The program builds the capacity of local residents, enhance their ability to support the businesses that employ them, develop skill sets for local residents more employable, inspire young people about the opportunities in the travel and tourism trades and develop a cadre of local ambassadors to represent Borrego both in and outside of our destination

In May 2018 local people from the BVA (2), Anza Borrego Desert Natural History Association (2) and local retail store Borrego Outfitters (2) residents received NAI Certification as Interpretive Hosts.

Afterwards the Hosts Committee organized a locally adapted "Introduction to Hospitality" workshop for key stakeholders in Borrego on October 22nd, 2018 that was attended by 39 local people from the private business sector, ABDSP, other public and NGO sectors.

The BVA sponsored Hosts Committee then organized with NAI a CIH Train the Trainers Course in Borrego in December 11 – 14 that was advertised by NAI nationally. Five local people Anza-Borrego Foundation, Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, Borrego Arts Institute, Borrego Village Association, including one bilingual speaker from Borrego's Hispanic community became NAI Certified Trainers.

In 2019 the Hospitality Skills Training Program will implement the following activities:

- Advertise in the community and Invite the 35 plus participants from the October workshop to take a "tuition free", two-day Certified Interpretive Hosts training here in Borrego
 - Course led by qualified NAI Trainer Ramani Arce, assisted by our newly Certified Interpretive Host Trainers (CIHT)
 - Course will allow the CIHTs to get experience in leading a course and benefit from Ramani's expertise
 - Course planning will allow our CIHT and Certified Hosts to plan a course curriculum specifically for Borrego
 - Propose weekend April, 27 – 28 or May, 4 – 5, 2019

- Organize a three hour “Introduction to Hospitality” workshop for Anza-Borrego Unified School District high school aged students, 16 and up, and school staff
 - Develop curriculum to create a for credit “Hospitality Skills” course for Anza-Borrego Unified School District High School
 - Implement school based program TBD 2019 - 2020

- Organize a three hour “Introduction to Hospitality” workshop in Spanish language for local Hispanic community
 - Target audience are members of the Hispanic community already working in the hospitality / services industry, the ABDSP, NGO’s, or other business where they have contact with visitors. Assumption is they may be functional in English but will more readily absorb the course concepts and materials in their native language.

- Promote and Implement NAI-CIH two-day course on the NAI website
 - Course “tuition free” for BVA sponsored local people (6 spaces)
 - Outside participants pay NAI tuition
 - August – Dec. 2019

Measures of Success

- Ten local people become NAI-CIH certified in Spring time course
- Twenty High School (ages 16+) attend three our “Introduction to Hospitality Workshop)
- Submit school district curriculum to offer NAI-CIH certification as course at BSHS
- Ten local people take Spanish language “Introduction to Hospitality” workshop
- Six local people become NAI-CIH certified in July / August course

Cost

- \$20,000 for BVA staff time, course tuition supplements and certification costs for NAI, venue rental, materials, trainer contracts, travel and Certification
- \$10,000 youth program NAI – CIH tuition and Certification

