



Client:	Southern Indiana Regional Marketing Coop
Purpose:	Strategic Session
Facilitator	Steven Stump
Date:	January 31, 2025

Participants

Melissa Arnold, Spencer County Visitors Bureau
Janice Barniak, Vincennes-Knox County Visitors & Tourism Bureau
Megan Glenn, USI/Historic Southern Indiana
Eric Heidenreich, Gibson County Visitors & Tourism Bureau
Jill Hyneman, Pike County Chamber
Katerina Koehler, GoSoIN
Kori Peterson, Visit Indiana
Kate Reibel, Explore Evansville
Shari Sherman, Visit Warrick County
Leslie Townsend, USI/Historic Southern Indiana
Amber Warden, Daviess County Economic Development Corporation
Heather Weyer, Visit Dubois County

SIRMC Mission

The mission of SIRMC is to develop and promote Southern Indiana as the Midwest’s premier destination, celebrating the region’s unique natural beauty, heritage and culture.

Fulfilling our Mission – Meeting Agenda Items

Part of the discussion resulted in a quick review of the organization’s mission and then asking the group how they felt their time was best spent in fulfilling that mission. The list below shows the items and priority that the group identified to help structure future meeting agendas:

- Networking/camaraderie/peer support (10)
- Buy-downs and collective investing (Pay-to-play) (7)
- Brainstorming/sharing different themes of travel (6)
- Advertising regionally (SIRMC Campaigns) (3)
 - Billboards, digital campaigns,
- Familiarity with other counties (3)
 - Hosting meetings, presentations, profile sheets
- Training (3)

Serving our Audience(s)

Through the above agenda items, how do we fulfill our mission and best serve our audience(s)?

- Web presence/social media presence
- Identify “face-to-face” marketplaces
 - Trade shows
- Working with media/content creators (“training” topic at future meeting – do's and don'ts)
- E-newsletter (on hold until Next Steps are answered)



“Where We’ve Been” (History/Accomplishments)

The first exercise was to share accounts of the history of SIRMC for those who were unaware, and to build a rough timeline of activities, citing previous initiatives that might bear revisiting.

- Began around 1996-97
- Many regional counties were forming their own visitor/tourism groups
- Innkeeper’s tax prompted this activity
- Began with ~15 counties
- Indiana Tourism set regions; this was Southern (also have South Central, about 7 total)
- SIRMC and the northern part have continued; there is an East region
- Each region had a tourism representative
- Have some documentation from 2009 forward
- Did FAM (Familiarization) trips with different themes, actively marketed for a while
- 2008 - Indiana Tourism was IOTB, spent \$13,000 on ads and listings
- 2012 – State Travel Guide ad \$6,800
- Explore Southern Indiana
- SATW coffee break to get into media side
- 2013-14-15 – Fruits and Flowers program (like a “trail” program)
- 2012 to last year – with Propeller
- 2016 – redesigned website with grant from State Tourism, redesigned logo to Southern Indiana – See More. Stay More.
- 2017 – performed redesign, focusing on regional anchors
- 2018 – shifted to “down home” messaging, targeting the 50+ crowd
- 2021 – benefit list of why you should join SIRMC
- 2022 – outdoor recreation passport
- 2023 – went back to family audience
- Have gotten away from a lot of print materials as digital has become more prominent
- “Discover” is another group where there is some overlap; be mindful of how these interact

Over the years, SIRMC has tried different things, Propeller (website maintenance vendor) is no longer in existence. We need to hone in on what we want to do, shifting audience targets and tactics. Every county has a different approach; it’s time to refigure what we want to be.

Benefits of Member Dues

The second discussion topic was to capture the individual members’ perceived value of the annual \$2,000 membership dues.

- If not a member, you can be a “black hole” where your county gets very overlooked by other regional efforts/campaigns
- The resources of this group are very beneficial to have support from surrounding partner counties (Shari)
- Able to get ideas from surrounding counties, especially when starting from scratch (Jill)

- It makes a lot of sense to cross-promote the neighboring counties; this makes visitors aware of all the different options (Leslie)
- People don't travel by county lines; you're going to an attraction. Promoting the *whole* region benefits everyone (Melissa)
- Smaller counties get a place at the table or resources we wouldn't normally have (Eric)
- Being a stop is just as important as being a destination
- Perks of membership – participation is key
 - E-newsletter
 - Blog
 - Facebook
 - Website
 - Event listings
 - Banner ads
- Buy-down of the State Travel Guide
- *We used to* do a more “pay-to-play” or menu-based cost structure; difficult to manage
- Training programs / lunch-and-learns

“What do we want (or not want) to be?”

- There is a great opportunity to **market our entire region**, particularly to a more affluent audience on national platforms
- We have a lot to offer in terms of the **variety of experiences** throughout the region
- The regional website has been a great help for promoting all of us
 - Examine Search Engine Optimization / traffic numbers – **how to improve?**
- Our group allows the promotion of the entire organization; not specific attractions
- Membership structure makes sense; do we need to re-examine the membership *cost*?
 - We could scale the cost model based on the size of the member organization

What sets us apart

- What sets us apart is that this region is made of the tourism entities rather than the businesses
- Limited resources compared to “[Explore Southern Indiana](#)” (which is all attraction-focused and based on business buy-in)
- Discover Indiana – owned by Radius, DMO buy-in, only allow so many counties (not all of our counties would be eligible to join)

Challenges/Opportunities

- Limited staff to populate all of the different calendars
- SEO, participation, and traffic through site



GOALS

From the above discussion, several goals were identified that the group felt were priorities:

- Website/SEO updates (incorporating more value-add content)
- Track/Review metrics on email, website, and social media
- Automation/consolidation of calendars (currently too time intensive to manage multiple)
- What is/are the right portal(s) to connect with our audience(s)?
- Who are our target audience(s)?

Action Plan #1 – Research calendar automation options (Megan)

- Need to reduce the number of steps
- Locable is a platform that can help with automating posts
- Secretary of State has a platform called “What’sUp24/7”
- Simple View could be a viable option
- Should we stop posting events if we’re just duplicating?
- ***Megan is revamping the event promotion process***
 - The focus will be social, as many events are being posted there already
 - Megan will compile a monthly event post
 - Each county will have an opportunity to provide content for this post
 - Megan will send reminders to provide content each month

Action Plan #2 – Cooperation with Radius/Discover Southern Indiana (Jill/Amber)

- Radius is responsible for a site called “[Discover Southern Indiana](#)” – a tourism site into which counties can purchase membership and promotion
- Conversation with Crystal about what collaboration/cooperation looks like?
 - Are they willing to work with us?
 - What costs are involved?
 - How do we differentiate?

Website Metrics (Kat)

2023 – 82,000 sessions

2024 - 104,000 sessions (77% mobile, 20% desktop, 5 sessions from Smart TV)

Average session = 41 seconds

1.73 pages per session

20.4% returning visitors

Organic search – 72.7%



Action Plan #3 – Website Updates (dependent upon Radius/DSI conversation)

PURPOSE: Umbrella of Showcasing Destinations Together

- Map function has been removed
- Replace Events with Megan’s new monthly process
- Ability to build Itineraries?
- Pushing nearby activities
- Blog (with plan to support – phase 2?)
 - Members can submit their own – pay-to-play?
- Could we buy in to be included in [Discover Southern Indiana](#) and/or [State Tourism](#) and keep our social media?
 - Minimize duplication
 - Save resources
 - Focus on distinct regional strategies
- IDDC
 - Represents all counties
 - SIRMC *could* advertise on their website

NEXT STEPS

- Who is our audience? - Collect demographic/GA4 data from each county and compile (Kat)
 - Organic GA4 data from SIRMC site (Kat)
- Cooperation with Radius/Discover Southern Indiana (Jill/Amber)
- Refine meeting agenda based on priorities above (President)
- New event promotion process, turn off web page, etc. (Megan)

FUTURE PROJECTS

- Website revamp