Study Objective
Randall Travel Marketing, Inc. (RTM) of Mooresville, North Carolina was hired to conduct a comprehensive travel and tourism research and strategic planning study to develop recommendations for regional tourism marketing involving 11 Virginia jurisdictions including:

- Charles City County
- Chesterfield County
- City of Colonial Heights
- Dinwiddie County
- City of Emporia
- Greensville County
- City of Hopewell
- City of Petersburg
- Prince George County
- Surry County
- Sussex County

This study was conducted during the time period of January through June of 2005.

Statement of Methodologies
1. Inventory of current tourism products by jurisdiction:
   - RTM, with input from each jurisdiction, developed an inventory documenting all tourism-related products by jurisdiction. This included lodging, attractions, dining, retail, and tourism services. This list was sent to each jurisdiction for approval.

2. Reconnaissance and mystery shopping:
   - RTM conducted a comprehensive mystery shopping study including site evaluations, gateways, airports, state welcome centers, signage and wayfinding, front-line training, typical visitor experiences at attractions, lodging, etc. for each jurisdiction.

3. Lodging property survey:
   - A survey was sent to every lodging property in the 11 jurisdictions to determine market mix (percentage of total lodging booked for business, convention, group, leisure, etc.), monthly occupancy, top feeder markets, and average daily rates (ADR).
   - Response rates varied by jurisdiction. RTM is satisfied that the final results are reliable as a basis for our recommendations.
   - This data has been compiled by jurisdiction to allow for comparisons.
   - RTM also obtained Smith Travel Research STAR Report data for each jurisdiction (as was available).
   - A written report was prepared with analysis of the comparative data.

4. Community leader interviews:
   - A minimum of five (5) executive interviews were conducted with tourism industry and community leaders in each jurisdiction that supplied contact information.
   - A total of 55 formal interviews are documented in this report.
   - An analysis of their responses is included in the final report.
5. **In-depth analysis of current status of tourism in each jurisdiction:**
   - An outline was prepared to cover the information listed below.
   - Follow-up meetings were held with each jurisdiction to review and modify the findings once initial data was collected and compiled into an analytical report.
   - After final development, each jurisdiction report was sent to local contacts for approval.
   - This document outlines for each jurisdiction:
     - Growth of tourism revenues over the past 5 years
     - Growth of tourism infrastructure over the past 5 years
     - Agencies or entities tasked with tourism marketing responsibility
     - Listing of tourism occupancy tax, meals tax, and sales tax related to tourism for the past 5 years
     - Allocation of funding for tourism promotion
     - Brief outline of current tourism marketing activities
     - Listing of primary tourism products

6. **Evaluation, by jurisdiction, of current tourism marketing efforts and materials:**
   - RTM analyzed and outlined, for each jurisdiction, the following:
     - Tourism strengths and weaknesses
     - Markets and audiences served
     - Existing marketing tools
     - The jurisdiction’s anticipated role in a regional tourism group
     - Initial strategies for each jurisdiction

7. **A comprehensive final report with strategic marketing plan was developed based on research results.** This report includes:
   - Executive Summary
   - Study Objectives and Methodologies
   - Project Team
   - Jurisdictional Reports
     - Current Status of Tourism
     - Community Leader Interviews Findings and Analysis
     - Lodging Survey Findings and Analysis
     - Tourism Marketing Assessments
     - Reconnaissance and Mystery Shopping
     - Product Inventory
   - Recommendations and Strategies
     - Marketing Objectives
     - Targeted Audiences
     - Organizational Recommendations
     - Funding Recommendations
     - Marketing Recommendations

**DELIVERABLES:**
- Two (2) comprehensive final report notebooks with all jurisdiction sections.
- Eleven (11) jurisdictional final report notebooks including a regional summary and all data specific to the individual jurisdiction.
Study Findings

Tourism Product Inventory Report
RTM documented for each jurisdiction a complete inventory of attractions, lodging, unique dining, and unique shopping, as well as sources of visitor information. While there are significant major “attractors” for the area, the number of attractions is fairly limited overall, with most clustered in the “Tri-Cities” area anchored by Petersburg. Also, desired lodging and other amenities are not necessarily found in the same jurisdiction where the major attractions are located. No one jurisdiction has enough quality and quantity of lodging, attractions, dining and shopping to stand on its own. A combination of the jurisdictions is required to achieve the necessary balance of attractions and amenities.

Reconnaissance and Mystery Shopping Report
The RTM team visited all eleven jurisdictions on multiple occasions over a three-month period to document a typical visitor experience. Reconnaissance helps the research team become very familiar with the product mix and customer service in the area so that strategies are based on more than an academic knowledge of the tourism inventory and statistical trends. Overall, the team found that there is a great need for visitor orientation and facilitation upon arrival in the area. There is little information available that “connects the dots” among all attractions, lodging, dining, shopping, etc. Overall, there is little “sense of place” for the region. The result is that the visitor typically finds that this region has a few major attractions, and then a scattering of amenities, with nothing that creates an overall image. It is difficult to find one’s way around the region. Also, all attractions are listed and promoted equally, which can cause great visitor frustration when attractions are not open as expected, or interpretation is weak. The region is very fortunate to have major interstates and feeder routes delivering a consistent volume of potential visitors. Thus, RTM finds that there is a substantial volume of potential visitors, and what is missing is the “packaging” of the existing products and strategic development of additional products that will allow for greater visitor satisfaction and spending.

Lodging Survey and Smith Travel Research Lodging Data
Every lodging property in each of the eleven (11) jurisdictions was contacted by email, fax, and/or telephone to obtain information regarding the type of visitors occupying lodging rooms in the region. Survey response was received from varying percentages for each jurisdiction. Additionally, RTM purchased statistical data collected in each jurisdiction by Smith Travel Research (STR). STR is the leading provider of lodging industry statistical data in the United States with all data provided by individual lodging properties. A review of the findings in this research segment revealed that most lodging properties rely heavily on individual business travelers, interstate transient travelers, or government lodging-generators such as Fort Lee. Additionally, smaller percentages of meeting, sports and leisure segments put heads in beds. It is clear for the most part the lodging properties do not consistently work together, nor do they partner with the jurisdiction destination marketing agencies for tourism growth. Occupancy, ADR (average daily rate), and RevPar (revenue per available room) statistics are reasonable but indicate the need for greater occupancy. Thus, there should be interest on the part of lodging properties in a regional marketing effort. The lodging properties in Northern Chesterfield County (Richmond suburbs) have little in common statistically with the remainder of the Crater Planning District lodging properties.
Community Leader Executive Interviews
RTM conducted over 55 interviews with community leaders throughout the region. These interviews revealed that overall, the community leaders want more focused and aggressive tourism marketing. They understand the value of tourism’s economic impact and it is a relatively high agenda item for the jurisdictions that are recommended for the regional agency. In RTM’s analysis, community leaders are well aware of the tourism strengths and weaknesses of the region, there is great consensus as to what specific jurisdictions should be included in a regional program, and there is clear understanding of what results are needed. There are some differing opinions on how to strategically accomplish these results. RTM anticipates that the strategies recommended in this report will satisfy the majority of these community leaders by addressing the concerns and desires they expressed in their interviews.

In-depth Analysis of Current Status of Tourism in Each Jurisdiction
RTM conducted an in-depth analysis of the current state of tourism in each jurisdiction. This process included:

- Documentation of existence of tourism marketing agencies, and staffing and budget allocations for each
- Total taxes (occupancy, sales, meals) collected from visitors in each jurisdiction
- Documentation of stated tourism objectives for each jurisdiction
- Evaluation of current tourism marketing efforts and materials for each jurisdiction
- Strengths and weaknesses of tourism marketing and development in each jurisdiction
- Marketing assessment for each jurisdiction

Overall, RTM learned in this process that the jurisdictions appreciate tourism and recognize its potential in the region. Most of the jurisdictions have very informal marketing programs with a few having more detailed marketing programs in place. While the jurisdictions know they have potential, strategies are not in place that will drive those potentials by partnering across jurisdiction boundaries to provide the visitor with a complete travel experience. Most jurisdiction representatives are interested in regional tourism marketing and development and are enthusiastic about anticipated results.
Strategic Direction
Randall Travel Marketing (RTM) made detailed, specific recommendations in this report for each of the eleven (11) jurisdictions who helped fund this study. This deliverable ensured that each participating jurisdiction received value from the study. At the conclusion of the study, each jurisdiction received a written report tailored exclusively for them containing the following sections:

- Current Status of Tourism, Marketing Assessment and Recommendations
- Report on Community Leader Executive Interviews
- Lodging Survey and Analysis
- Reconnaissance and Mystery Shopping Report
- Comprehensive Product Inventory Report

The definition of tourism is “putting visitors in front of cash registers.” The Crater District has an excellent opportunity to increase the revenues and resulting economic impact generated by tourism, while not overburdening its existing infrastructure. RTM recommends the following strategies to achieve this balanced growth:

1. Recommendation for Regional Tourism Partnerships
Randall Travel Marketing (RTM) investigated the eleven (11) jurisdictions in the State of Virginia that comprise this study group. The jurisdictions in this region have common heritage and history yet there are significant distinctions between each jurisdiction and between groupings of the jurisdictions. One of the primary purposes of this study was to examine these jurisdictions to determine which ones would make appropriate marketing partners and would most likely create a successful tourism marketing partnership. RTM’s recommendations follow:

Jurisdictions recommended as partners for Crater District regional tourism marketing:
- Chesterfield (southern area)
- Colonial Heights
- Dinwiddie County
- Hopewell
- Petersburg
- Prince George County

The primary reasons these jurisdictions are a match for marketing partnership include:

- Relatively close proximity to each other resulting in good “touring scale” that is manageable by the visitor. This region is logical geographically.
- Complimentary attractions and amenities. Some jurisdictions within this group have more attractions, while others have more amenities, but together they achieve a good balance and create a total destination.
- Similar and complementing histories and “sense of place.”
- Multiple matching historic patterns, particularly with the Civil War. Working together these jurisdictions can tell an awesome story of the development of the United States from pre-Colonial to present day.
- Transportation linkages: Rivers, railroads, highways, etc. since Colonial times have established this region as one of the original inter-modal transportation hubs in the United States.

Thus, marketing these areas together makes sense geographically, they achieve a good balance of tourism products, and their natural historic partnership and transportation linkages make this collection of jurisdictions the most similar as a marketing group.
1. (Continued)

Jurisdictions that would be better served partnering with Williamsburg:
- Surry County
- Sussex County**

These two counties have much in common with each other as well as with the Colonial heritage of Williamsburg. RTM’s reasons for this recommendation include:
- Plantations and agriculture are one of the primary features of both these counties. These are more of a match for the Tidewater and James River areas.
- The English and Colonial rural heritage in these two counties make them similar to each other, but dissimilar to the other jurisdictions that are more urbanized and heavily linked to the Civil War.
- Many of the visitors to Surry and Sussex Counties are overnighting in Williamsburg. This is where most of these visitors learn about the plantations, restaurants, peanut outlets, etc. Thus, partnering with Williamsburg is already proving successful.
- RTM encourages these two jurisdictions to partner with Williamsburg and other similar destinations to establish awareness for the James River Plantations and the peanut heritage as well as other agrarian heritages.
- While it is possible that these two counties may participate in various co-marketing initiatives with the larger region, overall they should not be considered an integral part of the Crater District.
**Sussex County also has an opportunity to partner with Emporia and Greensville as is outlined below.

Jurisdictions that would be better served marketing together aside from the Crater District:
- Emporia
- Greensville County
- Sussex**

These jurisdictions form the southern border for the Crater Planning District. RTM’s analysis includes:
- These jurisdictions are approximately one hour away from any other commercially developed areas. This distance forms a geographic barrier that will frustrate travelers. If an area had exceptional scenery this distance might be accommodated, but as it is RTM sees it as problematic for regional promotion.
- These jurisdictions are better served by working closely together to capitalize on transient traffic generated by Interstate 95 and U.S. Highway 58. Improved signage, billboard and travel advertising will drive visitors to the growing volume of cash registers in these jurisdictions as opposed to marketing programs that the Crater District should consider.
- Further, RTM recommends that these jurisdictions consider working together to establish an identity as the southern gateway into Virginia’s “peanut country”. The Emporia area should consider erecting a bold and memorable peanut shaped water tower to create a sense of place and get people off the interstate and in front of local cash registers.
Tourism Study Recommendations

1. (Continued)

   • **Note that RTM is recommending that Sussex County consider marketing with both this area and the Tidewater area. Sussex County's best tourism potentials are guided agricultural and farm tours, and outdoor recreation. This makes it a potential partner for more than one marketing group.**

Jurisdictions that need to market tourism with others:

   • Charles City County

   This jurisdiction is somewhat similar to Surry and Sussex Counties in that it has a rural setting and plantation attractions. However, its location on the north side of the James River makes for transportation issues with one bridge and ferry connecting it to the rest of the Crater Planning District. RTM recommends that Charles City County form marketing partnerships with others such as Williamsburg, this area matches as a plantation destination; or Richmond, this area complements the urban Richmond environment by offering a tranquil rural setting with plantations and quiet scenic beauty.

2. Recommended Name of the Primary Marketing region:

   

   **Petersburg Area**

   *Where the Appomattox and the James Rivers meet to form the best of American history*

   In the Petersburg Area you’ll find an amazing story of American history. From ancient times to the modern era this is the story of rivers, roads and railroads, Pre-Colonial heritage, Revolutionary War, Native Americans, Civil War, Spanish conquerors, WWII, agriculture and farms, the famous Virginia peanuts and more.

   Come see where American history happened!

   We must “connect the dots” and tell the overall story. This turns the entire region into one well-interpreted story and destination. Currently, it is too disjointed. One must treasure hunt without an effective map or guidebook to find the entire story in the region. No materials currently available explain what the agricultural heritage has to do with the Civil War. Or, what the Spanish have to do with the Revolutionary War. This is a great story waiting to be told.

3. Funding for the regional initiative

   RTM recommends that funding for this initiative include the following sources:

   • **ISTEA – Intermodal Transportation Efficiency Act funds**: The heritage of rivers, roads and railroads, as well as the multi-jurisdictional approach to telling that story makes this source of funds a good potential.

   • **State of Virginia Regional Tourism grants**: This is a newly told story of American history which will lure people to Virginia. The State of Virginia would be a viable source of grant funds for this program.

   • **Cameron Foundation**: This foundation can provide support funds for this program that develops the entire region.
3. (Continued)

- **National Park Service:** The National Parks have a strong presence and are an integral part of this overall story. Their partnership will be sought to support the overall vision with updated exhibits, interpretation, etc.

- **State of Virginia economic development grants:** This program will create new jobs and new tourism revenues. The State of Virginia provides grant programs for which this program can be considered. Additionally, there may be funds available to support a hospitality training program involving Fort Lee spouses/family members that can benefit the entire region.

- **Jurisdiction Partners:** Each jurisdiction partner would be expected to contribute funds annually for the program. RTM recommends the following general funding schedule:
  - **Chesterfield County:** Commit primarily the occupancy tax funds generated in the southern part of the county whose lodging would most likely benefit from this Petersburg region marketing program, approximately $300,000 - 500,000 annually.
  - **Colonial Heights:** A portion of their occupancy tax and their tourism-related sales and meals tax revenues, approximately $400,000 annually.
  - **Dinwiddie County:** A portion of their occupancy tax and their tourism-related sales and meals tax revenues, approximately $250,000 annually.
  - **Hopewell:** A portion of their occupancy tax and tourism-related sales and meals tax revenues, approximately $250,000 annually.
  - **Petersburg:** Funds generated from an additional 2% occupancy tax, plus a portion of their tourism-related sales and meals tax revenues, approximately $250,000 annually. In addition, Petersburg will be asked to contribute other services and amenities for the regional effort as outlined further in this report.
  - **Prince George County:** A portion of the occupancy tax, plus a portion of their tourism-related sales and meals tax revenues, approximately $250,000 annually.

It is the intention of this recommendation that annual partnership funds of no less than $1,500,000 be contributed annually.

4. **Petersburg Area Regional Tourism Leadership Group**
RTM recommends that the jurisdictions form a regional leadership force to drive success for this initiative. Participants for this group need to be strategically selected to accomplish the group’s mission of strong legislative relations, commercial development contacts, financial support contacts, and jurisdiction leadership. Simply put, this group needs to be comprised of those with the power and the clout to get this job done. RTM strongly cautions that this group must not be burdened with territorial or political agendas. The primary agenda for this group includes:
  - Establish a regional, private, non-profit organization.
  - Establish a funding agreement with each jurisdiction.
  - Seek grants.
  - Develop a regional tourism development plan.
  - Obtain commitment from each participating jurisdiction.
  - Oversee the implementation of the regional tourism development plan.
4. (Continued)
This group is not intended to serve as a Board of Directors for the new regional partnership. It is intended to get the organization focused, funded, and supported. When this initial mission is accomplished, this group would serve as an on-going Advisory Group to ensure continued success of the organization.

5. Recommended Name for the Regional Marketing Organization:
RTM recommends that the regional tourism marketing organization be named:

**Petersburg Area Regional Tourism**

This name establishes the geographic region and the mission of the organization so that it is easily identified by travelers and residents alike. "Tri-Cities" is not an effective name because travelers cannot find it on a map.

6. Organizational Structure for Petersburg Area Regional Tourism
RTM recommends the following organizational structure for the new regional tourism marketing program:

- **Board of Directors:** RTM recommends a 15-seat Board comprised of (6) members representing each participating jurisdiction, representatives from lodging (2), attractions (2), shopping/dining (2), and (3) business community members who can help ensure the organization continuously works to the benefit of the entire region.

- **Executive Director/President:** Primary responsibility is program results and the continued enrollment and satisfaction of participating jurisdictions.

- **Sales Director:** Primary responsibility is direct sales to recruit leisure individual travelers, group tours, small meetings, and to partner with lodging properties and attractions within the region. Track visitation, shifts in market mix, identify successful sources of business, etc., in order to drive increase in revenues and per-visitor spending.

- **Marketing Director:** Primary responsibility is public relations and marketing material development and management, and to understand and satisfy the tourism information needs of existing visitors. This includes press FAM tours, media solicitation, advertising planning/placement, print material development, and jurisdictional communications.

- **Research and Technology:** Primary responsibility is to develop and maintain a dynamic website, develop continuous research methods to track and monitor the success of the program, and provide results reports to participating jurisdictions.

- **Outsource:** RTM recommends that this new organization utilize outsource services for things such as fulfillment, brochure distribution, advertising design and production, etc.

7. Budgeting for Petersburg Area Regional Tourism
RTM recommends that the budget for the new regional marketing group be structured as follows:

- 5 -10% Overhead
- 25 -30% Salaries and Benefits
- 60%+ Direct Marketing Outreach
8. **Signage, Wayfinding, and State Map**

Part of the marketing program will include development of a regional signage program, gateways, and coordination with state DOT maps in order to establish regional name awareness, identify the general borders of the region, and to provide signage that links the “attractors” and those things that will get travelers off the interstate. Additionally, wayfinding will be reviewed and corrections coordinated with local and state agencies. This regional group will work with the state to ensure that official state maps indicate the region and identify the location of major attractors.

9. **Market Segmentation Marketing Approach**

In a tourism marketing group, it is easy to shift focus to leisure travel and lose track of the overall market mix that must be served. Many segments drive lodging occupancy including corporate, group, meeting, convention, military, leisure, etc. RTM strongly encourages the new Petersburg Area Regional Tourism group to utilize the lodging information by jurisdiction in this report and continue to track market mix on a regular basis in order to be aware of any market shifts and resulting marketing needs.

10. **Promotional Marketing Recommendations**

Detailed, specific marketing recommendations are included in this report. The general outline of these recommendations is:

   A. **Self-Guided tour with CD, booklet, and maps:** This tour is designed to become a tourism product in itself. This tour will allow a visitor access to “the whole story” and enable them to find effective interpretation of that story. This product will be sold at a reasonable price to offset production costs and generate additional marketing funds.

   B. **Petersburg Area Tourism website and technology marketing:** This website will provide all the “teaser” information for the above referenced CD/Booklet Tour Guide and it will direct website visitors directly to cash registers (lodging, dining, shopping, attractions, throughout the region). Again, the mission is to put visitors in front of cash registers. Also, the website is intended to collect visitor data and develop outreach technology tools to establish relationships with visitors and earn repeat visits and viral marketing support.

   C. **Visitor Guide:** This is a 4x9 print piece that is intended to serve as a teaser and “lure” piece, as well as to provide information promoting lodging, dining, shopping, attractions, and amenities in the Petersburg Area. This guide is to be distributed in all state welcome centers, and throughout the region. This is the lure piece that gets people in front of cash registers and also encourages them to purchase the CD/Booklet Tour Guide.

   D. **Padded “tear-off” Map:** This map needs to become the most in-demand visitor tool used throughout the region. Thus, it must be very visitor friendly and useful for lodging, dining, attractions, and others who will distribute this map within the region. The map will provide excellent wayfinding, identify tourism sites, and provide information on lodging, unique dining, and unique shopping.

   E. **Advertising:** Ads will be developed and placed in the Virginia State Travel Guide and website as well as priority media; billboards will be developed along the ingress and egress routes for the region. Civil War publications may also be targeted.

   F. **Public Relations:** Earning media story coverage will be one of the most critical aspects of this marketing program. This can be the most powerful marketing tool of the entire program.
Tourism Study Recommendations

11. Visitor Centers
   A critical aspect of this marketing program is to have visitor centers to attract visitors from the north and south. RTM proposes that these visitor centers be nothing like existing visitor centers. Their purpose is to be regional product showcases with personal trip planning guides whose job it is to sell travelers on staying in the region, extending their stay, and spending more money. This is a selling showroom!

   When travelers enter these visitor centers, they will be enthusiastically welcomed by staff, proactively engaged in trip planning, and tempted with visuals, an orientation film, and product samples that will compel them to visit.

   RTM recommends three sites for these showcase visitor centers:
   A. Petersburg Interstate 95 Visitor Center (Exit 45 northbound)
   B. Hopewell Visitor Center (at Route 36 and Interstate 295). This visitor center would serve in partnership with current Hopewell Visitor Center and continue to feature Hopewell.
   C. New location (Interstate 95 at Route 10 southbound)

   Two of these visitor centers are already in existence and would require only minimal updating in order to serve the new purpose. The Interstate 95 at Route 10 location would need to be secured.

12. Portable Information Kiosks
   RTM also recommends the Petersburg Area Regional Tourism agency design portable informational kiosks. For concept purposes, these would resemble a 4-sided column with brochure holders on each side and tempting visuals at the top of each side. They can be disassembled and moved relatively easily. The purpose of these information kiosks is to provide information to existing visitors regarding the regional program and area cash registers. Simply put, the purpose is to drive those already visiting the area to cash registers and increase per-visitor spending. These kiosks would be placed in targeted lodging, highly visited regional sites such as national parks, unique restaurants, historic sites, etc.

13. Front Line Hospitality Training
   Hospitality training is critical to the success of this program. Consider the potential of this regional group investing huge amounts of money in marketing outreach, only to have visitors approach front line staff at hotels, restaurants, attractions, etc. and inquire about "Petersburg Area Tourism" only to find the front line staff knows nothing about the program and little about the region. As we learned repeatedly in the mystery shopping portion of this study, most existing front line employees recommend that visitors go to Richmond for meals, shopping, lodging, etc. This is the back door we must close in order for this program to be successful.

   RTM recommends that this training be accomplished by recruiting Fort Lee spouses and family members to serve as hospitality trainers. These military family members can appreciate the discipline needed for a hospitality training program, and they are looking for good jobs that last as long as they are in the region. The turnover among personnel also ensures limited "burnout" and a consistent source of new recruits. RTM recommends that a grant be sought to implement this strategy.
**14. Priority Product Development:**

RTM’s primary recommendation in this report is to market the Petersburg region as a single tourism product. During the course of this study, several additional tourism product needs were identified by the RTM team. These include

A. **Development of downtown Petersburg:** Petersburg has been making good strides in revitalizing the historic downtown and the continued development is critical to the success of the long-term regional marketing program. This must be accomplished and RTM predicts that a revitalized downtown Historic district will become the next hot bedroom community for Metro-Richmond.

B. **Development of downtown Hopewell:** Hopewell’s development plans for its riverfront downtown area offer significant potential for the entire region. Hopewell has a good core of historic product, a Petersburg National battlefield site and the potential to be the region’s only downtown with deep water access. When completed, this area will be one of the top tourist “attractors” in the region.

C. **Additional village-style shopping, dining and entertainment venues:** These village environments are very popular with visitors and tend to make the difference in choice of lodging location. In other words, give them the dining, shopping, and entertainment and they will more likely stay in the area.

D. **Destination wedding, family reunion, and events venues:** All eleven (11) jurisdictions in this study have an opportunity to develop attractive, rustic, and perhaps historic settings for destination weddings, family reunions, and events. This region is perfect for family reunions as it provides something of interest for everyone. The lodging and retail revenues would be ample reward for site development!

E. **Outdoor recreation niches:** As the urban areas in the larger region continue to grow and develop, the more rural areas beyond the Petersburg area have an opportunity to package outdoor recreation niche products including cycling trails, birding, river recreation excursions, equestrian trails, “volksmarches”, etc.

F. **Niche marketing:** Niche marketing can be developed for a host of target niches. RTM recommends that Petersburg Area Regional Tourism look to its participating members, as well as other jurisdictions to test market niche products including peanut trails, motorsports, African American heritage, equestrian trails and events, craft/handmade studios, antiquing trails, wildlife self-guided tours and excursions, scenic driving tours, hunting and fishing excursions, photo trails, Native American heritage, agriculture/farm tours, Route 58 military trail, etc. In marketing these trails, RTM recommends a “pay as you play” funding structure.

G. **Unique destination dining:** RTM encourages the development of additional niche dining. This will help to continue to draw in regional residents and visitors alike. Unique food served in a unique setting can become a destination!

**15. Conduct on-going research to determine efforts earning the best return-on-investment.**

- Monthly lodging market mix survey
- Visitor profile and conversion research every three years
- Annual evaluation of inquiry point-of-origin
- Website visitor interest and conversion analysis
- Inquiry database “data mining”
Positioning and Recommended Name For Region

1. **Recommended Name of the Region:**

   **Petersburg Area**

   *Where the Appomattox and the James Rivers meet to form the best of American history*

   In the Petersburg Area you’ll find an amazing story of American history. From ancient times to the modern era this is the story of rivers, roads and railroads, Pre-Colonial heritage, Revolutionary War, Native Americans, Civil War, Spanish conquerors, WWII, agriculture and farms, the famous Virginia peanuts and more. Come see where American history happened!

   We must “connect the dots” and tell the overall story. This turns the entire region into one well-interpreted story and destination. Currently it is too disjointed. To find the entire story one must treasure hunt without an effective map or guidebook. Nothing available explains what the agricultural heritage has to do with the Civil War. Or, what the Spanish have to do with the Revolutionary War. This is a great story waiting to be told.

   Also, one must realize that travelers look for destinations on maps. If the name is not on a map potential visitors become annoyed and frustrated.

   Simply put, Petersburg is the core of this region and it can easily be found on every map of Virginia. Thus, this is the name RTM recommends.

   Additionally, RTM feels it is necessary to create a sense of place and a “hook” to lure visitor interest. This can be done by using the positioning statement, “*Where the Appomattox and the James Rivers meet to form the best of American history.*”

   The longer pay-off paragraph would be used in addition to the name and positioning statement. It would appear in ads, brochures, the website, and other promotional materials.

2. **Recommended name for regional tourism marketing organization**

   RTM recommends the following as the name for the regional tourism marketing organization:

   **Petersburg Area Regional Tourism**
Recommended Governance and Organizational Structure for Petersburg Area Regional Tourism

3. **Board of Directors**
   Tourism marketing and development boards work best when they sincerely represent the interests of the industry and the communities they serve. RTM strongly recommends that the Board of Directors for Petersburg Area Regional Tourism aggressively recruits *stakeholders*, meaning local travel industry professionals to sit on the Board, as well as business and community leaders who can appreciate the economic impact generated by the tourism industry and support its mission. Those whose livelihoods depend on the economic health of the travel and tourism industry serve well the needs of the industry. Similarly, those with broad business and community vision understand the importance of protecting and supporting tourism as an economic development catalyst.

RTM recommends a manageable board size of approximately 15 members with the following structure:

- 6 seats - 1 representative from each of the 6 jurisdictions that comprise PART
- 2 lodging properties
- 2 attractions
- 2 visitor services (restaurants, shopping, etc.)
- 3 business leaders chosen for their ability to ensure that the work of PART will benefit the entire community

The International Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus (IACVB) is a membership organization of CVB organizations. The IACVB maintains extensive research that provides communities with excellent resources for determining effective staffing, promotion, and funding options for tourism development. RTM recommends that as PART continues to grow, their practices be continually measured against the standards established by IACVB for appropriate development.
4. **Recommended committees for PART Board of Directors**

PART committees should be created only on an as-needed basis to perform specific tasks. Any committees created should be chaired by Board members and made up of PART Board and non-Board members who are actively involved in tourism promotion. Effort should be made to include representation from tourism entities on each committee.

- Executive Committee
- Funding and Finance Committee
- Legislative Committee
- First Impressions Committee
- Research and Results Measurement Committee
- Product Development Committee

**NOT Recommended:**
- Marketing Committee: This is the job of PART staff. No oversight should be required other than the Executive Director.
Staffing and Offices for Petersburg Area Regional Tourism

5. Staff structure for Petersburg Area Regional Tourism

The role of PART is to be “the voice of tourism” within the region. As such, the Executive Director and staff of the organization need to understand the trends driving the industry. The staff needs to continue to be aggressive in attaining awareness of the role of tourism in the community within the local industry, with business and government leaders and with residents.

In addition to its leadership roles, PART is the marketing/advertising agency for tourism in the region. They exist to promote and advertise the area to the traveling public to generate maximum economic impact.

Additionally, a critical role for PART is in direct sales for leisure and group business. Similarly, PART needs to be proactive in educating its industry partners (lodging, attractions, etc.) on current research findings and other data, which will assist in tourism marketing.

RTM recommends the following staff structure for the new regional tourism marketing program:

- **Executive Director/President:** Primary responsibility is program results and the continued enrollment and satisfaction of participating jurisdictions.
- **Sales Director:** Primary responsibility is direct sales to recruit leisure individual travelers, group tours, small meetings, and to partner with lodging properties and attractions within the region to track visitation, shifts in market mix, identify successful sources of business, etc., in order to drive increase in revenues and per-visitor spending.
- **Marketing Director:** Primary responsibility is public relations and marketing material development and management, and to understand and satisfy the tourism information needs of existing visitors. This includes press FAM tours, media solicitation, advertising planning and placement, print material development, and jurisdictional communications.
- **Research and Technology:** Primary responsibility is website development, technology project implementation, and to develop continuous research methods to track and monitor the success of the program, and providing results reports to participating jurisdictions.
- **Outsource:** RTM recommends that this new organization utilize outsource services for things such as fulfillment, brochure distribution, advertising design and production, etc.

The IACVB recommends that budget allocations for staff fall in approximately the 25-40% range of total occupancy tax collections. To determine when it is time to add new staff, a CVB looks at the ccounty tax collections and percentages of expenditures. If it finds staff costs are in the 25% or less range of total occupancy tax collected, it can reasonably be determined that there is more workload than the current staff can handle.
Tourism Study Recommendations

6. **Have Crater District Planning Commission serve as incubator for offices until permanent office space can be determined.**
As the Petersburg Area Regional Tourism organization is developed, it will need an incubator for support until the organization can function on its own. RTM recommends that the Crater District Planning Commission serve this incubator function.

Ideally, RTM recommends housing the PART offices in the one of the visitor centers identified elsewhere in this document. The closer staff can be to daily contact with the customer, the better.
Funding and Budgeting For Petersburg Area Regional Tourism

One of the most critical aspects of this new regional tourism promotional program is establishing a sound and reliable funding structure. RTM recommends that this be examined in terms of grants and jurisdictional partner allocations.

7. Seek grants for establishing initial “seed” funds as well as for on-going programs. RTM recommends seeking grants from the following sources:

   - ISTEA – Intermodal Transportation Efficiency Act funds: The heritage of rivers, roads and railroads, as well as the multi-jurisdictional approach to telling that story makes this source of funds a good potential.
   - State of Virginia Regional Tourism grants: This is a newly told story of American history which will lure people to Virginia. The State of Virginia would be a viable source of grant funds for this program.
   - Cameron Foundation: This foundation can provide support funds for this program that develops the entire region.
   - National Park Service: The National Parks have a strong presence and are an integral part of this overall story. Their partnership will be sought to support the overall vision with updated exhibits, interpretation, etc.
   - State of Virginia economic development grants: This program will create new jobs and new tourism revenues. The State of Virginia provides grant programs for which this program can be considered. Additionally there may be funds available to support a hospitality training program involving Fort Lee spouses/family members that can benefit the entire region.

8. Establish a formula for annual funding from jurisdictional partners

In addition to the grants, RTM recommends that Petersburg Area Regional Tourism look to its jurisdictional marketing partners as its primary source of annual operational funding.

In investigating this potential it may appear that each jurisdiction should put in an equal amount of funds. However, tourism promotional funding nationally tends to come from those taxes generated by visitors. This includes lodging and meals taxes, as well as sales taxes to some degree. The standard in the tourism industry is that all occupancy taxes generated by the visitor are reinvested into tourism marketing. Further, the percentage of the meals tax collections generated by those who visit should be estimated and considered. The jurisdiction should retain the sales taxes as the “tax relief” that is used for general fund purposes.
Tourism Study Recommendations

If one were to apply this general funding template to the Petersburg Area Regional Tourism jurisdictions, it might be surprising to see the total of these taxes. These taxes were outlined for each jurisdiction that participated in this overall study. Those estimates are a part of the report that was delivered to each individual jurisdiction.

In developing the recommended funding structure below, RTM analyzed the total visitor-paid taxes in each jurisdiction, as well as the ability of each jurisdiction to allocate funds for the organization. Below is an outline of RTM’s recommendations for funding for the new regional tourism marketing organization.

- **Chesterfield County:** Primarily the occupancy tax funds generated in the southern part of the county whose lodging would most likely benefit from this marketing program, approximately $300-500,000 annually.
- **Colonial Heights:** A portion of their occupancy tax and their tourism-related sales and meals tax revenues, approximately $400,000 annually.
- **Dinwiddie County:** A portion of their occupancy tax and their tourism-related sales and meals tax revenues, approximately $250,000 annually.
- **Hopewell:** A portion of their occupancy tax and tourism-related sales and meals tax revenues, approximately $250,000 annually.
- **Petersburg:** Funds generated from an additional 2% occupancy tax, plus a portion of their tourism-related sales and meals tax revenues, approximately $250,000 annually. In addition Petersburg will be asked to contribute other services and amenities for the regional effort as outlined further in this report.
- **Prince George County:** A portion of the occupancy tax, plus a portion of their tourism-related sales and meals tax revenues, approximately $250,000 annually.

It is the intention of this recommendation that annual partnership funds of no less than $1,500,000 be contributed annually.
Tourism Study Recommendations

Signage, Gateways and Wayfinding

This new regional tourism program will require signage, gateways, and wayfinding tools in order to create a sense of place. One wants the visitor to know when they have arrived in the region, that they are welcomed, and where to go for visitor information.

Gateways
Gateways inform the traveler when they have arrived in a destination and that they are welcomed. Gateways should establish a sense of place. The most critical aspects of a gateway according to visitors include:
1. Prominent location upon entering the community
2. Attractive and architecturally pleasing (something that is personalized to the destination)
3. Directions to visitor information
4. Landscaping
5. Lighting (important at night)
6. Includes positioning (why should I stop here?)

Interestingly, many gateways RTM encounters contain information about the various civic clubs and community groups. Few gateways provide directions to visitor information and this is unfortunate…a missed opportunity!

Signage and Wayfinding
Wayfinding is one of the most frequent complaints RTM documents in numerous tourism research studies. When one is new or unfamiliar with an area, finding the way from attraction to attraction can be frustrating and tiresome. It can actually shorten visitor trips and encourage travelers to leave. RTM has documented once a visitor becomes lost three times, they are likely to give up and leave. Thus, it is incumbent upon Petersburg Area Regional Tourism to ensure wayfinding is as easy as possible throughout the region.

Visitors report they need an accurate user-friendly map and written directions to help them find their way. Also, they want signage leading them to attractions and visitor information sources. In downtown areas they want signs placed so they have the time necessary to negotiate their way into the proper turn lanes, etc. If the route they must travel is long, they also want “reassurance” signage confirming they are on the right path. Wayfinding and signage is a constant challenge and. It becomes one area that is easy for a destination marketing organization such as PART to ignore or forget about. After all, all the employees know their way around, and there are always many priorities for time, so this is inherently easy to ignore.

RTM recommends the following for the PART region:
9. **Develop a unified signage program to identify sites throughout the Petersburg Area Regional Tourism jurisdictions and create a trail.**
   - RTM recommends that a signage program be developed with one consistent visual/graphic, and placing signs depicting that image at historic sites and recommended stops along the entire region. Doing this will result in visitors quickly learning to look for those signs.
   - The signs could be numbered and have a corresponding number in the CD/booklet that is recommended elsewhere in this report.

10. **Develop major new gateways at the Interstate 95 and 295 entrances to the region**
    - These are the primary routes into the region
    - Gateway sign should be added:
      - Large enough to be easily noticed
      - Architecturally composed of materials that “match” the area
      - Landscaped for curb appeal
      - Nighttime lighting
      - “Welcome” wording
      - Directions to visitor information center

11. **Outstanding maps**
    - Outstanding maps are critical to encourage visitation and prevent wayfinding frustration. Partner with the state, AAA, Rand McNally and any other companies producing maps to ensure accuracy of all maps that include the area. Make sure all critical sites of visitor interest are included in the map.

12. **Task force for annual wayfinding evaluation**
    - RTM recommends that PART address this need for a continued excellent signage program by appointing a task force that will work with local officials and city/county departments to annually review existing wayfinding and signage and make specific recommendations for upgrades, changes, and additions.
Visitor Information Centers

In this report, RTM recommends establishing three visitor centers in the region. The purpose of these visitor centers is to be a selling showroom and proactively engage visitors in trip planning.

RTM proposes that these visitor centers be nothing like existing visitor centers. Their purpose is to be a regional product showcase with personal trip planning guides whose job it is to sell travelers on staying in the region, staying longer, and spending more money. This is a selling showroom.

When one enters this center, they will be enthusiastically welcomed by staff, proactively engaged in trip planning, and tempted with visuals, an orientation film, and product samples that compel them to visit.

RTM recommends the following for visitor centers:

- Highly visible signage. RTM recommends using the bright blue color that travelers have universally been trained to identify as the official visitor information center color.
- Open 7 days a week.
- Handicap accessibility.
- Lighted, exterior informational brochure racks to provide information when center is closed. Make sure those who visit after hours can find cash registers!
- A clean well-maintained exterior with curb appeal.
- Conveniently located parking, including motorcoach parking.
- Readily available, accessible restrooms.
- The look of the exterior of the center must communicate this is a fun place to find great information. It must be irresistible.
- A large help desk is actually a barrier between the staff and the visitor. It would be so much more helpful to have smaller trip planning kiosks located in two or three locations throughout the center. This will encourage planning and interaction rather than requiring visitors to approach a counter to request information. It also makes it much less likely that a visitor will be ignored upon entry into the center. Each kiosk should have highlighters, maps, brochures, and other trip planning tools readily available.
- The “must-sees” need to be clearly and prominently promoted in this center. This can be accomplished with display panels and exciting visuals. One should have the feeling after entering that it is important to stay and see all these “must-sees” or plan a return visit.
- Brochure racks for specific attractions, hotels, etc. need to be conveniently located in order to encourage visitors to browse through the brochures. Be sure the most visible racks focus on the Petersburg Area and the immediate area. Again, the goal is to provide so many interesting things to see and do while overnighting in the Petersburg Area the decision to stay overnight or stay longer is compelled.
- A board is needed for posting current festivals and events and ideal seasonal activities. The goal here is to create the awareness that one must stay several days to see and do everything in the area.
Tourism Study Recommendations

- Additional visual displays are needed to sell the dining and the shopping in the Petersburg Area. Make visitors drool with tempting photos of food and drink. Similarly for shopping, provide visuals that tempt.
- Information for directly offering hotel reservations is a requirement of a good visitor center. Provide direct dial access if possible. EVERY visitor needs to be asked if assistance can be provided in lodging reservations.
- Remember to capture email addresses, zip codes, names and addresses and other contact information at every opportunity. A “Register For A Free Trip To The Petersburg Area” box and sign is critically important.
- The visitor center needs to provide a great introduction and serve as a teaser to compel visitors to want to know and find out more about the area. In addition to providing an overview of the Petersburg Area, it must place equal emphasis on showing visitors how they can have fun while visiting. It should be clearly understood by PART and the staff the entire goal of this visitor center is to compel overnight visitation to the Petersburg Area and to drive economic impact.

Thus, RTM recommends the following specifically for the Petersburg Area:

13. **Visitor Centers:**
A critical aspect of this marketing program is to have visitor centers to attract visitors from the north and south.

RTM recommends three sites for these showcase visitor centers:

A. **Petersburg Interstate 95 Visitor Center (Exit 45 northbound)**

B. **Hopewell Visitor Center (at Route 36 and Interstate 295). This visitor center would serve in partnership with current Hopewell Visitor Center and continue to feature Hopewell.**

C. **New location (Interstate 95 at Route 10 southbound)**

Two of these visitor centers are already in existence and would require only minimal updating in order to serve the new purpose. The Interstate 95 at Route 10 location would need to be secured.
Tourism Study Recommendations

14. **To augment visitor information, place information kiosks at hotels/motels on Interstate 95 and 295 and at sites around the Petersburg Area**
   - Simple, free-standing kiosks with brochure racks, such as a free-standing column with brochure racks found on each side, need to be added to provide visitor information to those who do not stop into the visitor center. The top part of the column would have the positioning statement for the Petersburg Area.
   - The purpose of these informational kiosks is to provide information to those already staying in the Petersburg Area who might not go to a visitor center. PART wants to reach these people and make sure they know about the attractions and cash registers in the region.
   - A grant should be sought to develop these kiosks since they are basically a one-time intensive cost.
   - These kiosks would be maintained by PART staff.
   - Recommended locations:
     - Petersburg National Battlefield Sites
     - Downtown Petersburg, Hopewell, and other towns in the Petersburg Area
     - Pamplin Park
     - Virginia Motorsports Park
     - Targeted hotels
     - City Point
     - Southpark Mall
     - Fort Lee
     - Other popular sites

15. **Continuous training and enhancement for Visitor Center staff**
   - Continuous training for visitor center staff is recommended. The visitor center staff’s role in the conversion process is absolutely crucial. Also, this is a job where burnout is a constant threat. It is quite challenging to answer the same questions repeatedly while remaining cheerful and helpful. The staff needs constant reinforcement and support to consistently deliver an excellent performance.
   - Upon entry, each visitor should be greeted with a friendly “Welcome to the Petersburg Area. Come on in and let’s help you plan a great visit.” If a store such as Blockbuster can greet every person entering the building, so can a visitor center such as this.
   - Specific training in conversion is recommended. The staff needs to be constantly coached to be proactive in conversion by asking visitors if they can help with lodging reservations. Their primary goal is to create economic impact by getting people to stay overnight, extend their stays, or get them in front of more cash registers.
Tourism Study Recommendations

Marketing, Advertising and Public Relations

16. Design a visitor guide to serves as a lure piece and also a fulfillment guide

   RTM recommends developing a compelling visitor guide to be distributed along feeder routes into the Petersburg Area, to inform visitors about the attractions and amenities in the region, and as a fulfillment piece for inquiries. This new lure piece should include:

   RTM recommends this piece be a 4” x 9” finished size, and contain the following information in the order we have presented it here:

   - **“Hook” on the top, front one-third page of guide.** This is the hook that will generate interest. This must be based on the positioning statement (branding) adopted by PART. Again, RTM recommends, “Petersburg Area” “Where the Appomattox and the James Rivers meet to form the best of American history.”

   Then the pay-off line would be added at the bottom.

   - **Emotional connection.** RTM recommends having words, graphics and images that create a strong emotional connection and place the reader in the experience of visiting the Petersburg Area. Appeal to the senses with the sights, sounds, relaxing and fun experiences one can enjoy in the area. Refrain from using any form of “Welcome to The Petersburg Area” type wording. Readers seldom read this page as they are speed reading to find any reason why they should visit. Simply put, they are looking for the “good stuff” and what possible experiences they can have in this destination. Use this space to deliver on the positioning found on the front cover and provide a simple color coded Table of Contents.

   - **“Must Sees.”** This includes those things that have the highest visitation and test highly in visitor research. If possible, include these on the same layout as the emotional connection. Lead with your strong suit!

   - **Suggested activities.** Help adults traveling without children and families plan a day of fun. Combine the must-sees with lesser known activities to best enjoy the area. Sell the Petersburg Area first and the surrounding region as add-ons.

   - **Listing of attractions.** This is an actual listing of attractions that provides the detail visitors need in order to plan a trip. Include driving directions, hours of operation, costs and contact information. Include the same map code (B-3, G-6) and color-coding as found on the map (recommended in this section).
16. (Continued)

- **Listing of accommodations.** Do not use a typical phone book listing. Travelers tell us repeatedly they prefer the grid format because it is easier to compare and see which properties offer the amenities that are of most interest to them. Use a grid format and include map codes (B-3, G-6) and rating codes similar to AAA. Also, it is good to separate the grid into sections to segment hotels/motels, Bed and Breakfast Inns, RV parks, etc.

- **Idiot-proof map for planning.** An effective map is one of the most critical and important marketing tools PART will utilize. Therefore, it must be as perfect as is possible. RTM recommends adding an alpha-numeric border code (numbers along the top and letters down the side) to help with locating places. Geometric figures (squares for hotels, circles for attractions, etc.) work very well and they work when the map is reproduced in black and white as well as color. The wording on the maps needs to be large enough for aging Baby Boomer eyesight! Further along in this document, RTM also recommends reproducing these maps onto one large sheet of paper to use as handouts at hotels, restaurants, etc. Facilitating visitors and helping them find their way to the good cash registers is a top priority for PART.

- **Listing of unique restaurants and shopping.** Feature those restaurants offering unique experiences and list the national chain restaurants that are open seven days a week. A full listing of restaurants, shopping opportunities, etc. should be available in lodging rooms throughout the area and at local visitor centers, not to mention PART’s website. The goal in this visitor guide is to compel visitation by showing off your unique reasons to visit. Make them drool! To make sure every restaurant receives promotion, PART can produce a two-color comprehensive dining guide that should be placed in lodging and attractions throughout the region. RTM particularly likes the “B, L, D” codes and the “$, $$, $$$” codes. This provides excellent information at a glance for the reader.

- **Nighttime entertainment.** Nighttime entertainment is absolutely critical to attract and keep visitors. Use the same listing criteria as in restaurants and remember that nighttime entertainment doesn’t always involve nightclubs and alcohol. Make it easy for guests to know what their entertainment options are in the evening hours.

- **Shopping.** Feature the unique and popular shopping in the area, then identify the malls and popular retail spots and you are more likely to drive increased shopping expenditures. Don’t forget to include map codes and directions to help visitors locate these shopping spots.

- **Events.** Feature only the top events of the year then drive the reader to the website for a comprehensive listing of all the festivals and events. Place this near the end of the guide.
16. (Continued)
   • **Contact for more information.** Include a toll-free phone number, fax, email address, visitor center locations, as well as website address. Put the toll-free number at the bottom of every odd-numbered page and the website URL in big bold letters print at the bottom of each even-numbered page.

17. **Padded maps with information on reverse side**
   The purpose of these maps is to help facilitate visitors in finding places to see, things to do, and places to spend money! If this is truly the best map of the region, it will easily be used by front desk staff at lodging, restaurants, shopping, visitor centers, etc. as a primary marketing tool. The design needs to be highly effective and affordable to print. The format needs to include the following:
   • Two color format, 11 x 14, white uncoated paper stock
   • Design needs to resemble the look of all other new marketing materials
   • Same icons as visitor guide map (cross reference) - feature “must-sees”, attractions, lodging, dining/shopping
   • Sell ads on perimeter to defray costs if needed
   • Printed in glued-edge pads so that they can be used easily at hotels, restaurants, etc.
   • Information printed on the backside of the map can prominently promote the “must sees” and amenities that will help these visitors have a good time and spend their money doing so!

18. **Advertisement design**
   All ads must reflect the positioning and design elements of all other PART materials to create a brand image. Design of ads must feature the most compelling reasons to visit the area.
   • Ads need to be simple, consistent, clean and highlight the positioning and attractors. Logos are not important in tourism ads. The headline message is everything……and it must be based on the recommended positioning.
   • For initial ads, RTM recommends the following:
     • Developing one powerful image for the front and include an insert photo depicting a village style shopping and dining image
     • On the top, front 1/3, use the recommended positioning statement identified in this report.
     • On the bottom include the pay off line as outlined in this section.
   • Once advertising imagery is created around the primary positioning, it should be used consistently with content changing based on the placement and topic.
   • To build initial awareness of the region, RTM recommends designing smaller, quarter-page or smaller ads and placing the ads in a substantial
19. Advertising planning and placement
PART will need to establish an initial placement plan based on budget allocation, and following the placement rank order identified below. It would be advisable to have the Virginia Tourism Corporation review the placement plan to obtain any benefit from their experience as well. PART will need to plan future annual advertising investments based on research, objectives, and previous year evaluations and conversion rates. Potential placements need to be analyzed against cost-per-inquiry documentation by PART. Based on RTM’s experience in research for similar destinations, the following advertising placements are recommended:

- VTC tourism website
- VTC State Travel Guide
- Southern Living
- AAA Book of Values
- AAA Go magazine
- Reader’s Digest
- Women’s Day
- Arthur Frommer’s Budget Travel
- Williamsburg Visitor Guide
- Civil War publications
- Pull out special advertising sections in the Interstate 95 and 85 Corridors

20. Pay as you play advertising campaigns
RTM does not recommended that PART be a membership program. However, RTM does recommend “pay as you play” cooperative advertising campaigns. These allow for marketing partners to invest in specific advertisement placements and tools that will benefit those that participate. This might include niche markets such as birding, or antique trails, craft trails, cycling, etc.

In this type of program, PART would identify which promotions would be desirable and then enroll participants to pay for the design and placement of media. This way the project benefit goes to those who pay for the effort.
21. **Billboards**

With the Petersburg Area’s location including Interstates 85 and 95 and other major routes, billboards deserve consideration. PART must remember that these major routes are “rivers of money” that are continuously flowing through the region. What is needed is some way of luring travelers off of these routes and into attractions and cash register locations.

Billboards can be a very valuable component of the overall marketing program for PART. RTM recommends that PART investigate available billboard locations along the ingress routes into the region.

Billboards work well to:
- Create name awareness for the region
- Provide directions to specific amenities such as visitor centers, major attractions, etc.

RTM advises PART to consider billboards for establishing name awareness for the region. RTM recommends utilizing a “pay as you play” process for marketing of specific businesses and attractions.

22. **Inquiry and fulfillment procedures and e-blasts**

PART will need to establish fulfillment procedures as well as protocol for tracking of inquiries. Inquiry data will be very useful for future marketing efforts. The key goals to be addressed in fulfillment are:
- Outsource fulfillment to allow for speed and efficiency in processing if the workload becomes too much to process inquiries speedily;
- Efficient cost of the fulfillment package including printing, labor and postage.
- Speed of fulfillment (potential visitors want it in five days or less).
- Contents of the package; ideally it includes additional information at the inquirers request. Custom tailored packages are hot!
- Make a distinction between “leads” and “inquiries.” Leads are contacts who have inquired about a broader area than the Petersburg Area, such as those who request a Virginia State Visitor Guide, but have not specifically asked for information on the Petersburg Area. Inquiries are those who have specifically asked for information on the Petersburg Area. These are what PART is most interested in capturing and analyzing for future marketing efforts.
- Be absolutely sure to include a source code on all inquiries places into the database. This indicates which media placement produced the inquiry.
22. (Continued)

- All bulk inquiries (magazine, newspaper, etc.) must be received in electronic format (disc or email) and be processed within three days of receipt.
- All inquiries from various sources must be merged into one master database and maintained permanently. Trends must be tracked from these records so they will never be purged or destroyed.
- The most important data to record regarding inquiries includes:
  - Source of inquiry
  - Point of origin for inquiry (where they live)
  - Month and date
  - A code that identifies which ad/media produced the inquiry
- Develop email address data mine for future marketing.

23. Public relations efforts

Public relations efforts are among the most powerful, affordable tourism marketing tools. This should be considered one of the most critical marketing elements for PART. RTM has found the most effective public relations programs for destinations are supervised and driven by a destination marketing organization (such as PART) staffer who knows the destination intimately and can effectively place stories with contacts within the travel media. Thus, RTM recommends this be handled in-house as opposed to outsourcing. However, PART might want to utilize the services of a PR consultant to help with initial focus of the program, creating FAM tours, and obtaining story placement with travel writers. For the public relations effort, RTM recommends:

- Press kit with same image as other materials that can be filed easily in a hanging file folder. Limit brochures and inserts to avoid overloading the travel writer. Include story ideas with a brief paragraph on each unique angle. Reference website for information and photos on demand.
- PART must host regular FAM tours for travel writers focusing on the positioning theme. A public relations consultant can assist with this.
- In-house maintenance of media/press page on the website.
- In-house preparation of annual PR plan based on specific objectives, strategies and tactics to attract new visitors to the area.
- In-house annual “return-on-investment” study for public relations efforts that accurately tracks coverage earned and its corresponding value in advertising placement.
Tourism Study Recommendations

24. **Group tour, meetings and event planner’s guides**

Planners of all types of events tell us in repeated studies they only want information for their type of event. Comprehensive four-color publications are out. Group tour planners do not want a meeting guide filled with data on meeting facilities. In essence, the contents are produced at desktop with covers that are tailored to the specific market or client, creating a tailor made piece for the Group Tour, Sports Planner, Reunion Planner, Wedding Planner, Meeting Planner, etc.

Content considerations for these guides include:

- Design a folder that is easy to file in a hanging file folder.
- Avoid boilerplate “Welcome” pages and other filler information.
- Design the cover to print the client’s name on it and let the client know you have compiled it just for them...customize!
- Include a table of contents if there are multiple sections.
- Keep it lean and factual. Avoid filling it up with stuff. Big is bad!
- Include only the information directly relating to the needs of the planner.
- A basic handout format (list of contents) can be developed for distribution at meeting planner association trade shows.
- Use the visitor guide and padded map for general information.
- A chart-style listing for lodging and facilities specific to the type of event is good and allows the planner to efficiently determine which options work best. Again, show proximity to the event facility for each lodging and dining property.
- Including the listing of Group Tour, Meetings, and Event support services is important in this economy. This clearly positions PART as a full-service organization that is ready and willing to do everything possible to serve the planner.
- Meetings - Do not forget to add a list of potential local speakers and their topics, as this can make having a meeting in the Petersburg Area more cost effective. Local colleges are sure to have a host of good speakers on a wide range of topics.
- Include a pocket in the back where additional information can be provided (i.e. PART Visitor Guide).
25. Marketing partnerships with Petersburg Area Middle Tennessee State University tourism businesses
RTM recommends that PART hold regular meetings with marketing partners to address specific marketing and sales opportunities cooperatively. RTM recommends:
• Hold regular meetings with attractions, lodging, and overall marketing partners.
• This is NOT intended to be a “Marketing Committee” where participants tell PART where and how to advertise.
• Every PART initiative will NOT benefit every tourism business.
• Discuss what marketing initiatives are planned and results from previous efforts.
• Solicit data from each participant as to what they have done and how it has worked. This allows PART and its marketing partners to benchmark with each other to find the most effective methods of marketing.
• Brainstorm potential test marketing projects.
• Brainstorm cooperative marketing projects (pay as you play)
• Make regular on-site calls to local lodging properties to determine their marketing successes, find out what they need, share leads and update them on PART program of work.
• Be a leader in distributing research findings and creative strategies to empower progress for constituents.
• Be a leader in promoting “packaging” co-op opportunities for these groups.

26. Website and technology strategy
Nationally, travel research reflects continuing dramatic growth in Internet use for planning. One can be certain that potential travelers to the Petersburg Area will become increasingly reliant on the Internet for travel planning. The website is where you MUST become a “cruise ship on land” and make travel planning effortless for the reader. RTM recommends that a website be designed in a format similar to the recommended visitor guide and it should provide navigation that will make it easy for the travel planner to find the activities that will compel visitation. Specific recommendations include:
• A staff person must be assigned to the website, technology and e-marketing program to focus on the maintenance and smooth function of the website and resulting email marketing. PART must make e-marketing a number one priority and thus dedicate a staffer to this effort and overall research.
• The website imagery will have to be designed to match the new marketing materials.
• The home page should feature the primary positioning and emotional connection.
Tourism Study Recommendations

- Site needs “WOW” photography and bullet points, avoid lengthy narrative. Planners are impatient.

26. (Continued)

- Maps need to be interactive and easy to print.
- The navigation bar needs large buttons that are easy to read and click. Build the navigation bar around what to do, where to stay, where to eat, group tour, media, meetings/events and request information.
- “Request Information” needs to be easily visible on every page of the site. Information request should collect traveler profile and demographic data.
- Meeting planning page must have complete planning information. There must be an option to request additional information.
- Small fonts are hard to read by travel planners over 40, many of whom require reading glasses.
- Lodging and attractions information needs to be detailed. Again, a grid format is preferred by the customer. Local businesses should co-op with PART to receive an access code to be able to update their rates, hours of operation and other information on the site.
- An events page should feature unique local events packages with lodging.
- Shopping is one of the top activities mentioned by visitors in the research and it is possible for the website to increase shopping expenditures. Do a good job of selling the unique items that can be bought at the shops.
- Avoid listing dining options like a phone book in alphabetical order. Potential travelers to the Petersburg Area want to know what great dining is available. Feature the unique local fare and provide a comprehensive listing of all dining that can be sorted by type, price and geographic area.
- Be sure to include a questionnaire and offer a free visitor guide for providing site visitor data. The rank order of information to request includes:
  - Zip code
  - Source of information that led to site visit
  - Anticipated number in travel party (adults and children)
  - When planning to visit
  - Primary trip purpose
  - Interests and activities
  - Permission to be placed in e-marketing database
- Be sure to include a telephone number website visitors can call for more information. Make this easy to find on the home page.
- Include a listing of visitor centers and other visitor information sources.
- Have a separate press page with story ideas and downloadable photos as well as public relations media contact information.
27. **Guide book with CD**

One of the priority recommendations in this report is to turn the entire Petersburg Area into one large, well interpreted product. As referenced earlier, currently one must literally go on a treasure hunt in order to “connect the dots” between all the various historic sites and products. Thus, RTM recommends that PART develop a guide book with CD and make this available for purchase. This can be an exciting and dynamic way to tell the overall story and create a satisfying interpretive experience for visitors to the Petersburg Area.

Grants should be sought to pay for this project as it is primarily a one-time production cost. Maintenance can be self-funding as this is a product that will be sold.

28. **Trade and consumer shows**

Trade and consumer shows are an important part of outreach efforts for PART. It allows the organization the opportunity to present its message to large numbers of group, meeting, and leisure trip planners. The trade shows RTM recommends PART attend include:

- Glamer – regional shows
- Regional shows for meeting and group tour planners - MPI, ASAE, USTOA and SGMP

RTM recommends that PART look for consumer shows in prime locations along the Interstate 85 and 95 corridors.

RTM recommends PART employ the following principals for attendance to trade and consumer shows:

- Be prepared with visitor guide.
- Booth display should be visually exciting and utilize the same imagery recommended in this report for brochures, ads, etc. The Petersburg Area must look unique when compared to other Virginia and Interstate 85 and 95 corridor destinations.
- Solicit support of local tourism “partners” for expenses, promotions, giveaways, etc. Specifically partner with lodging and attractions and go to these shows to sell!
- Encourage participation with local tourism “partners.”
- After attendance to the trade show, an evaluation should be conducted (on an annual basis) to determine which shows generated sufficient return-on-investment and which did not. The next year’s plan of trade show attendance should be based on this analysis.
Promotional Efforts

29. Front line information at lodging properties
   - As mentioned in the Strategic Direction section of this report, one of the most critical audiences for PART to reach is the existing overnight guest. The goal is to increase the awareness of the unique visitor opportunities that exist and increase expenditures.
   - A key aspect of this strategy can best be accomplished by informing existing guests about what there is to see and do, as well as what unique dining, shopping and entertainment can be found.
   - RTM recommends that PART place the previously mentioned informational kiosks in as many lodging properties as possible.
   - Additionally, RTM recommends the front desk in every lodging property have a display for PART and area maps and the front-line personnel be coached in using these maps to help patrons with wayfinding and locating entertainment and dining options. This should be considered a top priority. Then, the map will do the rest of the work by indicating the “must-sees” and the compelling information that enhance the image.

30. In-room extend-the-stay promotion
   - Existing overnight markets for PART include business, meeting, or transient travelers, as well as leisure destination visitors. Those already visiting the Petersburg Area are one of the best targets for future leisure visitation.
   - RTM recommends a strategy of enticing existing travelers to stay a day longer or come back another time to experience the Petersburg Area as a tourist.
   - This strategy would be implemented by having either tent cards or informational pieces in each lodging room which identify the “must sees” and other attractions and activities to be enjoyed in the Petersburg Area. Bound in-room information books are often placed in the drawers by housekeepers and are not as effective for this purpose as a tent card.
31. **Visiting friends and relatives (VFR), reunions, weddings, and funerals promotion**
   - As we learned in this research study, the primary trip purpose for approximately 5% of the total visitors to The Petersburg Area is to “visit friends and relatives.”
   - The smart destination CVB will provide trip planning information and resources to assist these travelers, with the goal of hopefully increasing the number of overnight stays. This is another built-in market PART can capitalize upon.
   - Have an annual pull-out special section in the local newspaper with tips for planning a reunion, where to find resources (flowers, cards, gifts, etc.) for weddings and other eventsfunerals. Further, this section would contain the “Things to See and Do” and amenities in the area visitors will want to enjoy during their stay.
   - Produce a small, inexpensively printed brochure exclusively for planning a family reunion. Have these available at all hotels, restaurants, short-term rental agencies, visitor information centers and any other visitor points. Residents will appreciate the assistance and the area will gain overnight stays.

32. **Create seasonal reasons to visit The Petersburg Area**
   - In some months visitation is less than desired (November, December and January). This is an issue that can be addressed with marketing.
   - There are activities and events scheduled in the Petersburg Area for each season of the year. RTM recommends PART prepare a detailed calendar of seasonal events and activities which can be enjoyed by visitors and distribute this to all lodging properties, restaurants and other visitor points. Also, sending monthly or even weekly faxes to lodging properties would be beneficial. This would make very good information for front desk staff at local lodging properties. This can be accomplished with a WinFax software application that allows PART to produce the weekly update and automatically have it sent to all lodging properties.
   - RTM recommends PART strategically evaluate its current offering of events and festivals with the intention of increasing promotion of events and activities that boost visitation in the winter months. Further, RTM recommends PART champion the development of specific events that will drive visitation in these slower months.
33. **African-American, Hispanic, Gay and other minority segment promotions**
African-Americans, Hispanics, Gays and other minorities often report to RTM that they tend to visit only those areas where they are sure they are invited. For instance, African-Americans look for advertising that features photography including African-Americans, and special packages targeted to African-Americans. The same is true for other minority segments. Thus, RTM recommends that PART:
- Conduct pinpoint research with African-American and other major minority market segment inquirers who contact PART for visitor information. Determine what type of products and packages each market segment most desires related to the Petersburg Area. Minority inquirers are quick to respond when they are sincerely asked to help identify products and promotions that offer the most appeal.
- After a period of time conducting inquiries, test market potential packages and promotions. Determine feasibility of more resource commitment to these markets.

34. **Packaging with attractor partners such as Virginia Motorsports, Pamplin Park, etc.**
- Packaging is hot in current tourism trends. PART is fortunate to have several major attractions with which packages would be ideal. This includes Virginia Motorsports Park, Pamplin Park, Petersburg National Battlefield, Cité of Henricus, and others.
- RTM recommends PART identify potential test market packages that would likely be successful based on market trends and likely participation by marketing partners.
- PART wants to only pursue a limited number of package promotions, testing them prior to major investment of time and resources. Only those that prove successful would then be developed further.

35. **Test for success – test market a variety of potential product promotions.**
- RTM recommends that PART conduct a series of market tests to determine the potential for more serious promotional efforts for niche markets such as cycling, birding, hunting, etc. One wants to determine if a market offers successful results before committing heavily in resources.
- Test marketing techniques include public relations story placement, e-marketing tools, direct mail and Internet website promotions.

36. **Jamestown 2007**
- Any opportunity to connect The Petersburg Area to this celebration and reinforce PART’s positioning should be a priority.
Direct Sales Efforts

As this regional marketing program is formed, it is important for leaders of the organization to realize that the tourism industry nationwide has experienced its first major downturn in decades. Lodging properties have really felt the pinch since a lodging building boom took place in the years prior to the decline that began in early 2001. That means lodging properties all over the country are coming to their local destination marketing organizations and asking “What have you done for me lately?” This economy demands aggressive direct sales efforts and a destination’s best potential partner for this can be found in the lodging properties that have sales departments in place. A planned coordinated sales effort must be utilized to target specific market segments and drive increased overnight visitation. There is no time for duplication of efforts so the lodging properties, PART and any other sales organizations in the region should have regular meetings to coordinate their direct sales efforts. The bottom line here is getting out and selling aggressively or risk continuing to lose market share to those destinations who are selling. The following strategies are focused on specific market segments.

37. Leisure tourism sales
   - Leisure tourism is a critically important market and currently comprises a disappointing portion of the entire overnight occupancy in the region.
   - RTM recommends that printed materials be developed, that trade shows be a priority, and that there is a defined program of sales calls to AAA offices, travel agents, etc.
   - RTM recommends PART investigate leisure trade shows for possible attendance.
   - RTM recommends PART develop a database of all sales call contacts, do everything possible to collect the email addresses for these contacts, and prepare a continuous series of e-blasts to these contacts to present packages and travel itineraries.

38. Group tour and motor coach sales effort strategy
The central geographic location of the Petersburg Area provides advantages for group tour promotion. This can be a very lucrative market for PART as it provides significant economic impact. According to the survey of lodging in the region group tour is currently only a small portion (approximately 2-3%) of the total lodging occupancy. Comparable destinations to the Petersburg Area typically average 5-10% or more of their total lodging occupancy in group tour and motorcoach business. Thus, the Petersburg Area has some room for improvement in producing its share of motorcoach overnight business.
Thus, RTM recommends PART plan an aggressive effort in researching and recruiting group tours. Doing this will require direct sales efforts, direct marketing and promotion to potential group tour customers, attendance at appropriate trade shows with stringent tracking of leads and follow-up and analysis of best practices and best return-on-investment. The goal is to either sell a group tour operator on bringing a group to the area or to capture them as an overnight on a longer trip.

Group tour planners have, in numerous interviews, reported to RTM their criteria for choosing a destination to overnight includes:

- A nice, mid-priced meal and evening entertainment.
- A clean and updated mid-range hotel with an interior corridor in a quiet area.
- A destination organization that will work with them to provide special amenities and items that will make their group participants feel special.
- Unique itineraries that appeal to their specific audiences (whether seniors, youth groups or other specific niches).

- Develop appropriate solicitation materials, including a desktop publishing template that can be tailored to each contact with suggested itineraries and reasons to choose to overnight in the PART region as an exclusive trip or while in route to other locations. These materials should go hand-in-hand with all other PART promotional pieces (see specific recommendations for print materials elsewhere in this document).
- Partner with regional attractions to identify group tours that may be visiting. Research should be conducted with those overnighting in the Petersburg Area and those choosing not to overnight in the Petersburg Area. One wants to determine which group tour groups provide the best potential for overnight business recruitment.
- Appropriate step-on guides need to be identified and recruited for this effort. Many group tours demand the availability of step-on guides and PART must ensure that this is available.
- Identify a list of most likely tour operators and trade shows.
- Plan trade shows based on selection of those most likely to match target decision-makers.
- Have a booth for trade shows that is dynamic, matches the image of the revised primary marketing materials and works to capture the attention of trade show participants. You must stand out and be memorable so make that booth dramatic!
- Contact your area tourism marketing partners, attractions, etc. to obtain give-aways and promotional items.
38. (Continued)

- Follow-up with all trade show leads for maximum results.
- Develop a consistent annual e-marketing and direct mail program that focuses on the primary appeal of the Petersburg Area and offers unique trip planning itineraries.
- Make personal sales call missions at least every six months to targeted group tour operators in the Petersburg Area target market areas. Produce reports following every sales mission to document who was called upon, what follow-up action is required and what result is expected.
- Follow up all group tours with an evaluation form that allows you to determine the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the Petersburg Area as a group destination. By analyzing these results, PART can continuously improve its group tour products.
- Produce an annual report with the total number of trade shows attended, sales missions made, contacts made, the total number of follow-up activities and the number of group tours served by PART. Bear in mind that there will be group tours that occur that are not tracked by PART. Perhaps include an estimate in the annual report of the number of total group tours, as well as those that can be specifically traced by PART.

39. Convention and meeting recruitment

Smaller conventions and meetings are a good target market for PART. Currently the Association, Government, and Corporate meetings segments total approximately 6% of the lodging in the Petersburg Area. The area is well positioned geographically along a major interstate and is relatively affordable. Thus, it is a good location for the small and governmental meeting market, in-state and regional business conventions, association conferences and other meeting groups.

- RTM recommends PART establish an aggressive effort for meeting and convention recruitment. Meetings and groups offer a good potential for increasing visitation to the Petersburg Area.
- Additionally, PART must work with local lodging properties to identify potential for this convention and meeting market. RTM recommends that PART take a leadership role in partnering with these lodging properties to prepare effective marketing materials for mailings and other contacts. RTM suggests holding quarterly brainstorming sessions, hosted by PART with area lodging representatives. The purpose of these meetings is to brainstorm new conference and meeting leads and to determine what can be done to target new leads.
39. (Continued)

- Prepare desktop print materials that can be tailored to each contact to sell the attributes of the Petersburg Area as a destination for convention and meeting planners.
- Identify possible convention and meeting decision makers and support lodging properties in contacting these.
- Follow up with lodging properties to determine the success of promotional efforts and what is needed for continuous improvement.
- Prepare monthly reports documenting PART’s sales efforts and results. These results should be shared with local lodging properties to encourage support for PART’s sales efforts. If the local lodging properties perceive they are receiving great value from the sales efforts of PART, they will be more willing to partner with PART.
Recommended Product Development

RTM's primary recommendation is to establish the entire region as a single tourism product. During the course of this study several other tourism products that will enhance the overall visit to the region were identified by the RTM team.

The volume of leisure visitors to the region now demonstrates that tourists enjoy the attractions and tourism products already in the Petersburg Area. However, it is important to note the national trends in tourist behavior. In national research and in specific research studies conducted by RTM we have learned that visitation to historic attractions is declining while interest in shopping and dining is increasing. It appears that tourists are seeking unstructured leisure time activities. Therefore it is critically important to consider every attraction carefully, enhance those that are in danger of visitation decline, and add new products that may encourage travelers to stay longer in the area.

In the strategies following in this section, RTM recommends specific new products and programs that will speak to these needs and support growth of a stronger tourism market for the Petersburg Area. At the same time, it is critical the community understands the role of PART is to promote rather than to build specific attractions. It is inappropriate for occupancy tax funds or PART funds to be used to build what might be considered competition for existing attractions. However, PART should play a leadership role in identifying unmet visitor needs and encouraging development of new tourism products.

RTM's recommendations include:

40. **Continue the development of downtown Petersburg into a lively village style shopping, dining and entertainment district**
   - This development is critically important to the success of the long-term regional marketing program. This must be accomplished.
   - RTM anticipates a more animated and lively Downtown Petersburg shopping, dining and entertainment district would have immense appeal for business travelers, those attending meetings, sports visitors and leisure visitors. This would definitely help the Petersburg Area be selected as a destination by travelers, and speed the growth of residential infill in the downtown area.
   - The only caution RTM would add to this is to ensure the voice of the customer is closely monitored. In numerous studies RTM has learned such a shopping and entertainment district needs to include the following:
     - An easy walking scale, preferably with hotels attached
     - Well-lit at night
     - Lively and exciting (translates to having a good number of people visible and colorful, animated surroundings)
     - Fine and unique dining
40. (Continued)
   • Entertainment options (movies, theater, fun activities)
   • Good resting places, weather protection and shade
   • A relaxing atmosphere
   • Fun shopping options

41. Continued development of Downtown Hopewell
   • Hopewell’s development plans for its riverfront downtown area offer significant potential for the entire region. When completed, this area will be one of the top tourist “attractors” in the region.
   • Again, it is the village style setting that has the most appeal to travelers. RTM encourages Hopewell to review the recommendations throughout this document for recommendations for layout and amenities as this development continues.

42. Additional village-style shopping, dining and entertainment venues
   • These environments are very popular with visitors and tend to make the difference in choice of lodging location. In other words, give them the dining, shopping, and entertainment and they will more likely stay in the area. One of these villages is currently under construction in Chester.

43. Enhance Petersburg Area attractions
   • Most travel and tourism products have a “life cycle” meaning that over time they move from being a new product everyone is eager to visit, to a product that most people have already visited and see no need to re-visit. The way most attractions overcome these life cycle issues is to add something new or reinvent their product somehow. A typical example of this would be theme parks who every year add an exciting new ride in order to encourage repeat visitation.
   • RTM strongly recommends that the attractions in the Petersburg Area consider adding something new or to somehow provide a new experience at the site in order to reinvigorate visitation.

44. Destination wedding, family reunion, and events venues
   • All eleven (11) jurisdictions in this study have an opportunity to develop attractive, rustic, and perhaps historic settings for destination weddings, family reunions, and events. This region is perfect for family reunions as it provides something of interest for everyone. And, the lodging and spending would be ample reward for site development.
   • RTM recommends private entrepreneurs develop these event venues and for initial marketing contact wedding and event planners in Richmond and Washington.
45. Outdoor recreation niches
As the urban areas in the larger region continued to grow and develop, the more rural areas in the Petersburg Area have an opportunity to package outdoor recreation niche products including:
- Cycling trails
- Birding
- River recreation excursions
- Equestrian trails,
- Volksmarchs
- Etc.

46. Niche marketing
Niche marketing can be developed for a host of target niches. RTM recommends that Petersburg Area Regional Tourism look to its participating members, as well as other jurisdictions to test market niche products including:
- Motorsports
- Peanut trails
- African American heritage
- Equestrian trails and events
- Handmade craft studios
- Antiquing
- Watchable wildlife self-guided tours and excursions
- Scenic driving tours
- Hunting and fishing excursions
- Photo trails
- Native American heritage
- Agriculture/farm tours
- Route 58 military trail, etc. In developing these trails RTM recommends a “pay as you play” funding structure.

47. Recruit new fine and unique dining
Experiencing fine and unique dining is one of the great joys of travel. This is consistent with national research that tells us “restaurants” are the first major decision a typical visitor makes once they have arrived at the destination. Similarly, RTM has learned from numerous studies that it is unique dining that these visitors most actively seek. Whether it is local flavor style restaurants or fine dining, travelers enjoy finding dining options that differ from what they normally find at home.
- RTM recommends the Petersburg Area establish a priority of recruiting and encouraging development of new restaurants. This can be accomplished as a cooperative effort between PART, the Chambers of Commerce and other economic development interests in the area.
47. (Continued)

- For example, RTM has worked with several destinations that have made this a priority and sought to recruit owner/chefs to relocate to their towns. Sometimes incentives were offered, although most simply seek potential candidates, and then ensure promotion of the new restaurant until it has become well established.
- RTM encourages the development of additional niche dining. This will help to continue to draw in regional residents and visitors alike.

48. Light up downtowns

In this project, the cities in the region would engage a designer to develop a dramatic nighttime lighting program that lights up specific architectural features of the downtown areas. Macon, Georgia has a similar program in its successful “Lights On Macon.”

- A lighting designer is selected by the city.
- Once a lighting designer has established a plan, then the individual businesses and homes that are featured pay for the lighting and the electricity to have the lights on daily. Thus, the only cost to the cities is that of the designer and the time required in recruiting the individual participating properties.
- The result is a tourism product that provides a significant level of community pride, gives visitors something to do in the evening hours and creates economic impact with visitors from the region stopping in to eat, shop, and see the lights.

49. Develop seasonal festivals and events to build slow lodging periods

- Although occupancy is fairly stable year round in the Petersburg Area, RTM sees room for improvement especially in the weaker winter months. During this study, RTM noted that there is less than desired occupancy during the winter, namely November, December, and January. This can be remedied with events that compel people to travel to this area during those shoulder and off-season times.
- RTM recommends to begin by closely examining events held in the region to determine if more aggressive promotion would likely result in greater visitation. The question to ask is “Would more aggressive promotion result in increased overnight lodging during this event?” If an affirmative answer can be provided, then PART should help with promotion. However, PART should also follow up all festivals and events with a quick telephone poll to determine how many room nights were generated by each event. This provides the best guidance for continued allocation of promotional resources.
49. (Continued)

- Further, RTM encourages PART to look at seasonal events that can be packaged to help increase visitation during weaker months. Some possible suggestions might include doing a "Great Chefs of the Petersburg Area" promotion in January, a Chocolate Lovers Escape in February, a Girlfriends Getaway (fashion, makeup, hair and spa treatments) in March, etc.

50. Sports marketing and development of sport and tournament facilities

Another major new product category to examine is the sports marketing field. In this study we learned that sports-related visitation comprises approximately 3-5% of the total lodging in the Petersburg Area. There is also a volume of daytrip sports visitors. Unfortunately, we do not have a way to quantify this volume. Although this market segment has been growing overall for the past few years, it has become highly competitive. It has literally become a high stakes game in which the destination that offers the best facilities and incentives wins the business.

- RTM recommends that if the Petersburg Area desires to become more active in sports marketing that PART hire a sports marketing consultant to visit The Petersburg Area and do an in-depth assessment of the current facilities and the competitive environment for this destination. In today’s highly competitive sports environment it will be very important to strategically pick only the precise sports niches that promise the best return on both the time and money investment that will be required in pursuit of sports travel.

51. Development of new meeting facilities

An additional market segment to evaluate is the convention/meetings segment. This has become one of the most highly competitive segments in the past few years as companies and organizations reduced their travel budgets and encouraged alternative ways of conducting business. Thus, this has become “top-down” market in which larger destinations continually go to smaller destinations and take business away. In this environment, any destination would be foolish to build meeting facilities that have not been thoroughly researched to ensure market willingness and satisfaction with planned facilities. In other words, before you build it, make sure they will come.

- RTM recommends conducting a thorough customer use study that, prior to the development of any new meeting facilities, captures the voice of the customer and documents intentions of use and facility design preferences.
Hospitality Training

RTM recommends enhancing hospitality training in the Petersburg Area to support hospitality workers in understanding and communicating the unique positioning for tourism in the region.

Hospitality training is a challenge for the tourism industry. The “front line” at state and local visitor centers, hotels, restaurants and attractions tends to have a high turnover. Finding and recruiting a sufficient number of employees is often a problem. Additionally, managers of these front lines may or may not have in-depth knowledge of best practices in tourism hospitality training. Thus, the industry has trouble in motivating what may be an already overworked and fluctuating work staff.

As documented in the mystery shopping portions of this study, RTM found that most front line employees, when asked, recommend that travelers go to Richmond area restaurants, shopping venues, and lodging properties. Obviously, this is problematic. Thus, RTM recommends PART work to provide the following support to the local tourism industry:

52. Partner with Fort Lee to establish a hospitality training program for Fort Lee personnel spouses and family members.
   - There is a need for more training at local front lines throughout the Petersburg Area to support staff in being more proactive in engaging visitors and encouraging them to stay in the area.
   - RTM recommends that PART seek a grant to allow for development of an on-going “train the trainer” program with Fort Lee personnel spouses and family members. The purpose of this is to train these recruits in how to go out and train front line staff at restaurants, lodging, attraction, and shopping places.
   - This is a never-ending program. Turnover at the front lines is frequent, thus the continued need for this program.
53. **Recommended hospitality training**

- Short (30 minute) on-site workshops for any local hotel, restaurant or attraction that requests hospitality training.
- Seasonal half-day or daylong workshops to which the entire base of local industries are invited.
- A package of training materials that can be utilized by local area managers to provide on-going staff training.
- Small laminated cards “The Must Sees of The Petersburg Area” which identify the top things to see and do in the area. To increase the use and remembrance of these cards by local hospitality industry workers, we further suggest that a representative of PART periodically walk up to front line employees and ask “What do you say when asked, what is there to see and do around here?” Any respondent who can name all the things highlighted on the laminated card from memory receives $25 on the spot. Be sure to also take their photo and send a news release and photo to the local newspaper for coverage of the ambassadors of tourism.
- Periodic faxes and e-blasts sent to the local tourism industry highlighting the seasonal benefits of visiting the Petersburg Area that have been mentioned earlier in this report, will also help the local industry enthusiastically suggest fun things to do and see.
Local Education

RTM also recommends an annual educational effort designed to inform the local public regarding what tourists find most appealing about visiting the Petersburg Area. It is often hard to appreciate one’s own area due to familiarity. When asked, we often find local people are likely to tell us “There’s not really much to do around here.” Because they see it everyday and they know more elaborate tourism attractions are located in other areas, they may not appreciate the local tourism options as much as a visitor. By reminding local residents what tourists tell researchers they like about the area, it helps them to keep the perspective and to understand that the area is truly desirable as a vacation destination.

54. **Recommended education for local population**
   - RTM recommends a one-time pullout special section in the newspaper that identifies the PART program, what it covers, how it works, and why it is being done. Also, this piece can highlight all the wonderful aspects of the Petersburg Area. Residents can then read this and hopefully become better informed as to the importance of tourism to the area, as well as being able to file this away for future reference.

55. **“Be a Tourist in Your Own Hometown”**
   - PART may benefit from an event such as Macon, Georgia’s annual “Be a Tourist in Your Own Backyard” event that takes place on two consecutive evenings. The event is publicized locally and residents are invited to visit participating area sites and attractions free of charge on the two evenings. By increasing local awareness of the sites and attractions, the CVB has seen an increased number of tourism “ambassadors” whom are better informed about what their town has to offer. Participating sites have realized increased year-round visitation as result of this promotion.
Additional Research and On-going Evaluation

Walt Disney said it best: “You don’t build it for yourself, you find out what the customer wants and you build it for them.” This is the essence of tourism success. Gone are the days when “if you build it they will come” worked in tourism. Today, there are simply too many choices already competing for the customer’s time and money. A destination who does not listen to the voice of the customer runs the risk of losing that customer to someone who does. That unfortunate scenario has been experienced in many industries. One only has to recall when American automobile manufacturers were so sure they knew what was best for the customer they neglected to do their homework. The Japanese listened intently to what the customer wanted and the rest, as they say, is history.

RTM recommends continued evaluation, research and measurement of tourism success, unmet needs and marketing efforts for PART. The specific components of this research strategy include the items listed below:

56. Monthly lodging market mix survey
   • Monthly tracking of lodging market mix.
   • Results will ONLY be shared with those lodging properties that participate in monthly survey.

57. Niche analysis
   • Determine niches to be studied.
   • Determine how many visitors fall into each niche.
   • Determine average expenditures of each niche.
   • Analyze which niches provide the greatest profit potential.

58. Conduct visitor profile and conversion research every three years
   • Benchmarks and changes in visitor profile and conversion need to be documented periodically. Therefore, RTM recommends conducting a visitor profile and conversion study every three years. It is not likely to change significantly any more frequently than the three-year period.

59. Annual evaluation of inquiry point-of-origin
   • Annually, RTM recommends evaluating the point-of-origin (where inquirers live) of inquirers who respond to PART advertising program. This reaffirms for PART it is targeting its advertising outreach placement to the most appropriate markets. This can be accomplished by maintaining a comprehensive database of all inquiries received throughout the year.
Tourism Study Recommendations

60. **Website research form analysis**
   RTM recommends PART make a “request information” page on its website and it be highly visible throughout the site. Include a “request for information questionnaire” on the website and request for the following information which will allow the organization to better track visitor characteristics and needs:
   - Point of origin for inquirers.
   - Primary visitor interest(s).
   - Most likely travel party size.
   - When planning to visit the Petersburg Area.
   - Analyze the information frequently to continuously confirm other research results.

61. **Annual documentation and analysis of current status**
   - RTM recommends that PART annually request from each partner jurisdiction updated information for the Current Status section of this report. This needs to be repeated annually and monitored for changes. PART staff can implement this. The important things to measure include:
     - Increases/decreases in occupancy tax collections and tourism revenues.
     - Changes in tourism product infrastructure (number of lodging properties and room counts, new attractions, etc.)

62. **Inquiry database “data mining”**
   - PARTRutherford County will receive inquiries and it will have to continuously refine its methods of database development and storage to insure all inquiry data is easily accessed and reported. Enhancements to current database methods include:
     - All reader response inquiries received electronically and stored as an accessible electronic database.
     - All bulk brochure requests retained and stored in a separate database.
     - All telephone inquiries not requiring fulfillment should be tracked as such and included in the database system.
     - All databases should be designed to be integrated for year-end reporting of total inquiry information from all sources.
     - Quarterly reviews of data and data mining procedure to make sure errors are caught before going unnoticed for too long.
63. **Research comparability with Virginia**
   - RTM also encourages PART to maintain regular contact with the Virginia Commission of Tourism and compare research findings to those of the state. This will ensure comparability of data over the long term.

64. **Convention and meeting segment research**
   - Although PART will not be aggressively recruiting conventions and meetings, the organization needs to practice good skills if this becomes part of the mission.
   - RTM recommends holding regular meetings with Directors of Sales at regional hotels to determine what groups are being successfully recruited so as to help identify potential successful targets.
   - Benchmark with other destinations with similar meeting facilities to determine which groups they are successful in recruiting. This may provide new insight into which groups might successfully be recruited to The Petersburg Area.
   - Further, conducting executive interviews with the meeting decision makers of likely groups will help to determine likelihood of use and inducements required to recruit to the Petersburg Area.

65. **Group tour research in partnership with major attractions**
   - Determine which groups are visiting national battlefield sites and other major attractions and then segment into which ones overnight in the Petersburg Area and which ones do not.
   - Conduct executive interviews with group tour planners to determine profile of most likely group tours to overnight in the Petersburg Area.