

**DUVAL COUNTY TOURIST DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL
&
VISIT JACKSONVILLE BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

TOURISM STRATEGIC PLAN PRESENTATION

**Monday, June 16 2025, 3:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.
City Hall - Lynwood Roberts Room**

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|--|---|
| I. Welcome & Call to Order | TDC Chair White
City Council President |
| II. Self-Introduction of TDC & VJ Board Members | TDC Chair White |
| III. Comments from Visit Jacksonville | Michael Corrigan, CEO
Visit Jacksonville |
| IV. Tourism Strategic Plan Presentation | Joseph St. Germain, President
Erin Dinkle, Director of Research
Downs & St. Germain Research |
| V. Discussion + Q&A | Joseph St. Germain
Erin Dinkle |
| VI. Next Steps | TDC Chair White |
| VII. Public Comment as Time Permits | TDC Chair White |
| VIII. Closing Comments & Adjournment | TDC Chair White |



JACKSONVILLE TOURISM STRATEGIC PLAN

PREPARED FOR:

Duval County Tourist Development Council
& Visit Jacksonville

PREPARED BY:

Downs & St. Germain Research

Special thanks to Clarity of Place for added strategic
consultation

ENGAGEMENT & RESEARCH OVERVIEW

This strategic plan was designed to provide clear, feasible, and community-informed recommendations to answer the question:

Which types of investments by the TDC and Visit Jacksonville will have the greatest impact on growing tourism in Jacksonville?

- To ensure this strategic plan reflects the authentic needs and opportunities of Jacksonville’s tourism ecosystem, a collaborative and inclusive engagement process was used.
- Perspectives were gathered through in-person stakeholder focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and a comprehensive stakeholder survey distributed across the tourism sector.
- This integrated approach allowed for a 360-degree understanding of how Jacksonville is perceived, experienced, and supported, providing a strong foundation for the investment strategies outlined in this plan.



7

Stakeholder Focus Groups



140+ Responses

Stakeholder Survey



400+ Responses

Visitor Perception Survey



80+

Focus Group Attendees



400+ Responses

Resident Sentiment Survey

OVERVIEW OF STRATEGIC INVESTMENT CATEGORIES

The resulting recommendations reflect priorities that deliver clear value for visitors, stakeholders, and the Jacksonville tourism economy.

Each investment category was selected based on:

- Strong validation from stakeholders and visitor research
- Alignment with Jacksonville's unique opportunities and gaps
- Feasibility within the statutory and operational roles of the TDC
- Potential to create immediate and long-term improvements to the visitor experience

Destination
Marketing &
Messaging

Event
Development
& Support

Tourism
Infrastructure
& Capital

Meetings,
Conventions &
Group Tourism

Neighborhood
& Business
Engagement

Visitor
Experience
Enhancements

DESTINATION MARKETING & MESSAGING

Visit Jacksonville's strongest core function, marketing, remains its most powerful tool for shaping perceptions and inspiring visitation.

Stakeholders overwhelmingly affirmed that continued and **expanded marketing efforts should be a central investment priority**. At the same time, research revealed that non-visitors lack clarity on what Jacksonville offers, and many are unaware of its diverse neighborhoods and cultural identity.

Key Themes from Findings:

- Stakeholders called for continued investment in marketing as the most actionable TDC function
- 76% of stakeholders said promoting unique neighborhoods was “extremely important”
- 54% agreed Jacksonville's neighborhood diversity is a unique appeal
- Strategy must shift from passive promotion to pre-arrival engagement

Recommendations:

- Expand campaign focus beyond sports and beaches to neighborhoods
- Create engaging tools (e.g., trip matchers, personalized itineraries)

Brand Expansion & Storytelling Strategy: Shift toward a neighborhood-based storytelling framework that introduces Jacksonville's diverse districts and identities before arrival. Focus on showing how visitors can experience Jacksonville through its communities, not just its coast.



Content Development & Personalization Tools: Develop itineraries by interest and traveler type. Launch discovery-based tools (e.g., trip matchers, curated guides) that promote unique experiences aligned with visitor motivations.



POSITIONING JACKSONVILLE THROUGH ITS NEIGHBORHOODS

Strategic opportunity to position Jacksonville’s neighborhoods as the primary storytelling framework for the destination.

Rather than a static list on a website, the neighborhoods can become a front-facing organizing principle, used to define trip types, event ideas, marketing segments, and experiential itineraries. Jacksonville’s diversity should be a core part of how the city is introduced.

This approach also strengthens the impact of other recommendations in this plan:

- In the **event grant program**, events hosted in distinctive neighborhoods can be supported, even if they don’t immediately generate hotel stays, because they contribute to the city’s long-term brand value.
- With the **unique venue strategy**, meeting and event planners can be encouraged to explore lesser-known districts, giving attendees a more authentic and distributed experience of the city.
- For the **capital improvement program**, neighborhood-specific enhancements can support walkability, signage, and visual identity, improving the visitor journey at a micro level.

Future investments, whether in marketing, events, infrastructure, or partnerships, should ask:

“How does this help reveal, connect, or elevate the unique neighborhoods that define Jacksonville?”

Making this a central lens of destination development will not only align branding with reality, it will create a more engaging, inclusive, and sustainable path for growth.

EVENT DEVELOPMENT & SUPPORT

Events were consistently cited by stakeholders and visitors as a powerful motivator for travel and a key opportunity to improve the city's tourism appeal. Survey data also revealed strong interest in an updated event grant model, one that values not only economic impact but community enrichment and geographic inclusivity.

Key Themes from Findings:

- Events rated by residents as having a high positive impact on quality of life
- Stakeholders support new criteria for event grants beyond heads-in-beds
- 82% support for event evaluation that includes dispersal and cultural value

Recommendations:

- Evolve event grant scoring to reward dispersal, neighborhood impact, and local partnerships
- Encourage use of unique venues in underserved areas
- Invest in new, identity-driven iconic events
- Provide scalable support to help producers and organizations





INVESTING IN SIGNATURE EVENTS THAT DEFINE JACKSONVILLE

Jacksonville currently lacks a consistent lineup of high-profile events that reflect its unique culture, waterfront setting, or creative community. To address this gap, this plan recommends a twofold investment strategy:

1

Reimagine and restructure the TDC's event grant program to support a wider range of event types, with funding criteria that go beyond hotel room nights to include cultural relevance, geographic dispersal, seasonality, and community impact. This would allow for:

- Multi-year grant commitments for recurring events that demonstrate strong return potential
- Support for neighborhood-based and equity-focused festivals that may not drive immediate room nights but contribute to broader destination appeal
- A clear scoring framework that rewards innovation, inclusion, and off-peak programming

2

The TDC should consider supporting the **development or incubation of one or more new iconic events.**

- These might take the form of a waterfront light festival, a music and food celebration, or a multicultural arts event that can be branded as uniquely Jacksonville.
- Stakeholders expressed openness to this kind of start-up effort, particularly if the event is developed in partnership with local creatives, venues, and businesses, and is positioned to grow over time.

TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE & CAPITAL INVESTMENT

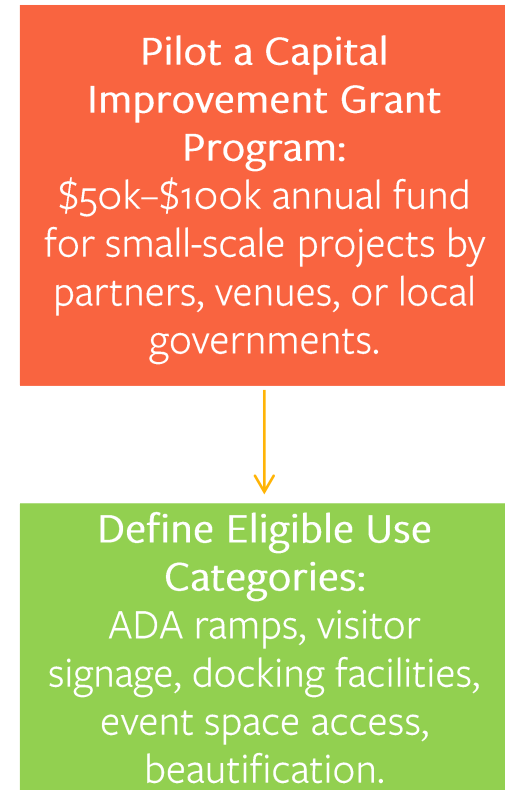
Improving baseline visitor infrastructure emerged as one of the most widely supported opportunities among stakeholders. Gaps in downtown walkability, riverfront access, restrooms, and lighting were all cited as deterrents. Additionally, there is no formalized capital grant program, despite strong interest among stakeholders to see one implemented.

Key Themes from Findings:

- Stakeholders cited bathrooms, lighting, and walkability as major friction points
- 91% support for a formal capital improvement grant program
- Riverfront cited as underutilized outside of programmed events

Recommendations:

- Create a formal Capital Improvement Grant program for larger infrastructure projects
- Launch a micro-grant program for rapid, small-scale improvements
- Prioritize walkability, signage, connected pathways, and restroom access
- Invest in amenities that support extended visitation and evening use





TARGETED INVESTMENTS FOR IMMEDIATE IMPACT

While major infrastructure projects such as hotels, convention centers, or large attractions often dominate tourism development conversations, stakeholders across Jacksonville emphasized the importance of **smaller-scale, capital improvements that directly shape the day-to-day visitor experience.**

These improvements, though often lower in cost, can deliver outsized **benefits in terms of comfort, safety, and perception, particularly in high-traffic areas or event corridors.**

Given these recurring themes, this plan recommends that the TDC consider launching a **Tourism Enhancement Capital Micro-Grant Program** or set aside a flexible line item within its budget to support **low-cost, high-impact improvements** in public spaces tied to tourism activity. Priority categories might include:

- Lighting improvements along key pedestrian routes
- Completion of sidewalk gaps or connections between venues, parking, and riverfront assets
- Visitor-centric signage and wayfinding
- Restroom access and maintenance enhancements
- Visitor seating, shade, and basic comfort infrastructure in activation zones



CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT GRANT

Jacksonville’s long-term competitiveness also depends on the ability to **co-invest in more substantial tourism-related capital projects**.

Although the Tourism Development Council (TDC) has historically contributed to capital initiatives, there is currently **no formal grant mechanism or structured evaluation framework** guiding these investments.

- **91% of stakeholders reported that they would be “very” or “somewhat” supportive of a formal capital improvement grant program**
- **28% of stakeholders identified capital improvement grants as one of the top three investment areas that would most benefit tourism in Jacksonville, placing it in the top half of all priorities listed.**

This support aligns closely with the types of improvements stakeholders said would most enhance the visitor experience. These included:

- New attractions and activities along the riverfront
- Enhanced safety and cleanliness infrastructure in public areas
- Functional docking areas and accessible water-based transportation (e.g., boat tours)

A well-designed capital improvement grant program would allow the TDC and Visit Jacksonville to **proactively shape tourism development** by supporting strategic infrastructure and placemaking projects that fall outside the scope of traditional city services, but are essential to a positive and marketable visitor experience.

MEETINGS, CONVENTIONS & GROUP TOURISM

Jacksonville has the opportunity to grow its group and meetings sector without solely relying on expanded convention infrastructure. Stakeholders emphasized that showcasing non-traditional, community-based venues could simultaneously disperse visitors, reduce pressure on core facilities, and enhance the overall attendee experience.

Key Themes from Findings:

- Visitors value authentic, place-based experiences, meetings can deliver that
- Stakeholders asked for tools to help promote nontraditional meeting space inventory

Recommendations:

- Develop a central partner portal for alternative venues
- Encourage grant scoring that rewards creative venue use
- Provide plug-and-play itineraries for offsite meetings
- Promote group tourism tied to community assets and dispersal





COMMUNITY-BASED VENUE STRATEGY

Jacksonville's size and diversity also offer an opportunity to rethink the traditional meetings recruitment model entirely, shifting from a centralized convention focus to a more distributed and community-integrated strategy.

Rather than competing directly with larger convention destinations, Jacksonville can differentiate itself by promoting the city as a place where **meetings become immersive experiences, shaped by the people, neighborhoods, and cultural assets that make the city unique.**

This includes **actively encouraging the use of nontraditional venues**, from university auditoriums to local museums, galleries, etc. A community-based meetings strategy not only helps expand capacity and improve event quality, it also **supports local businesses and encourages attendees to engage with the city more meaningfully.**

Recommendations:

- Visit Jacksonville create a centralized meetings and events venue hub within the existing partner portal.
- Serve as a planning tool for event organizers and include an inventory of unique meeting spaces throughout the city, along with venue specifications, imagery, and contact information.
- Allow for easy comparison and connection between planners and neighborhood-based partners
- TDC's event grant program should be updated to reward events that foster community integration

NEIGHBORHOOD & LOCAL BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

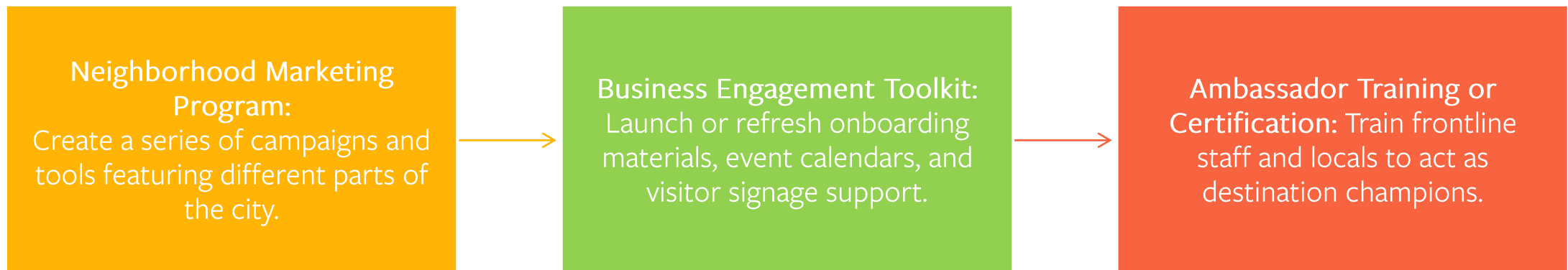
Stakeholders repeatedly expressed a desire to be more connected to tourism promotion. Many cited tools and guides they'd like to use for guests, some of which already exist but are underutilized. This points not to a resource gap, but to a communication and engagement opportunity.

Key Themes from Findings:

- Stakeholders want to be engaged and equipped
- 50% expressed interest in a formalized partner program
- Existing Visit Jacksonville tools are strong, but underutilized

Recommendations:

- Improve packaging and distribution of visitor-facing resources
- Develop **customizable guest-facing print collateral**, such as one-sheets tailored by location or visitor type (e.g., family, couples, outdoor enthusiasts)





DEEPENING PARTNER INTEGRATION AND VISIBILITY

The opportunity now is to **broaden access to existing tools**, fine-tune how they are distributed, and proactively engage new partners, especially small businesses and neighborhood-based organizations.

50% of stakeholders expressed interest in a formalized partner program, reflecting a desire not just for materials, but for a stronger **sense of membership and belonging** within the tourism ecosystem, one that could include training, recognition, co-marketing, and shared data or performance tools.

To further this work, this plan recommends:

- Continuing and enhancing outreach efforts to raise awareness of the existing partner tools.
- Creating tiered or thematic collateral packs segmented by visitor type, business location, or season.
- Expanding tourism ambassador-style outreach to small business owners in neighborhoods undergoing tourism growth.
- Evaluating the development of a formal partner program that goes beyond service access to include branding, training, and recognition.
- Integrating business participation into broader destination marketing campaigns—ensuring partners see a tangible link between tourism promotion and their bottom-line success.

VISITOR EXPERIENCE ENHANCEMENTS

Downtown perception remains a challenge, and stakeholders underscored that green space alone isn't enough to activate the riverfront. Targeted investments in activities, access, and amenities can make these areas feel welcoming and dynamic.

Downtown Jacksonville is in transition. Stakeholders recognize its current limitations but see the opportunity to turn this narrative into a strength. Visitors expressed interest in seeing updates about improvements and found the concept of a “city in transformation” appealing

Key Themes from Findings:

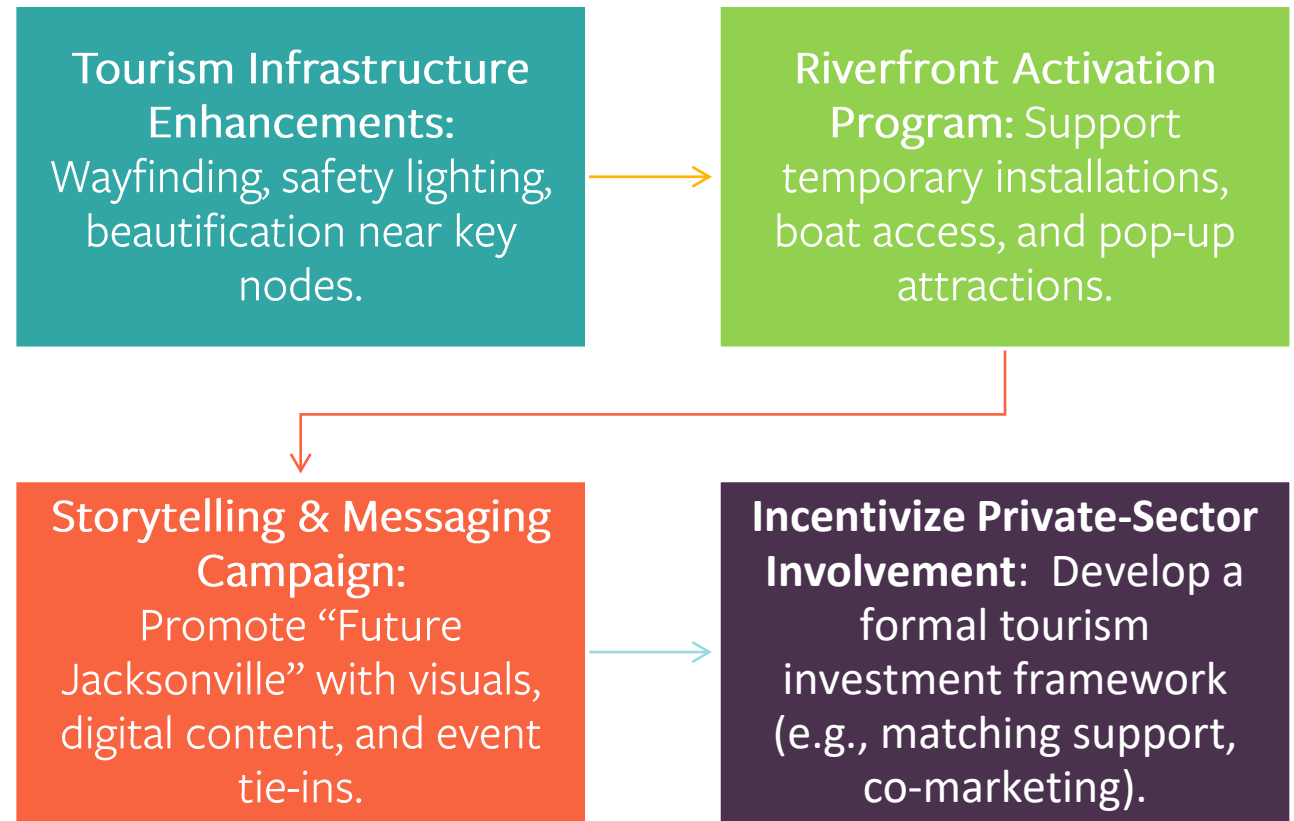
- High demand for improved lighting, safety, riverfront access, and walkability.
- Visitors showed interest in learning about and exploring downtown improvements.
- 98% of stakeholders said revitalizing and activating the riverfront is somewhat or extremely important for Jacksonville's tourism future.
- 71% cited new attractions and activities along the riverfront, 42% cited enhance safety and cleanliness measures, 35% cited accessible docking areas and boat tours.

Recommendations:

- Improve lighting, signage, and walkability in key tourism zones
- Activate riverfront with attractions, tours, and accessible docking
- Explore river cruise partnerships
- Tie improvements to TDC-supported programming and event use



VISITOR EXPERIENCE ENHANCEMENTS



QUICK WINS & IMMEDIATE NEXT STEPS

These are practical, visible, and low-barrier actions the TDC and Visit Jacksonville can take in the next 12 months to begin activating this strategic plan.

Destination Marketing & Messaging

- Launch targeted campaigns emphasizing Jacksonville's unique neighborhoods
- Create downloadable trip types or themed itineraries on the website (e.g., "Family Fun in Riverside" or "Art Lovers in San Marco")
- Begin design of "Which Jax Are You?" interactive tool or simplified version
- Integrate storytelling into existing email and social content calendar

Event Development & Support

- Update scoring criteria for event grants to prioritize cultural impact and dispersal
- Host an information session to attract new event partners and walk them through application updates
- Develop an "event grant success story" highlight campaign
- Identify underrepresented neighborhoods to target with future grant opportunities

Tourism Infrastructure & Capital Investment

- Begin a pilot Capital Improvement Grant round with small, visible projects (bathrooms, lighting, signage)
- Partner with the City to identify tourism-priority infrastructure upgrades in downtown
- Add wayfinding signage or event-specific banners in key pedestrian corridors (especially riverfront)

Meetings, Convention, & Group Tourism

- Inventory available unique venues and load into a shared partner portal
- Update group sales materials with neighborhood-venue highlights
- Test 1-2 meetings using a neighborhood venue + offsite reception format

Neighborhood & Local Business Engagement

- Package and distribute 1-sheet visitor guides segmented by visitor type (families, couples, business)
- Conduct a partner training blitz on tools available via Visit Jax's site and app
- Expand the Tourism Ambassador Program with a focus on hotel front desks and key attractions

Visitor Experience Enhancements

- Map lighting and walkability gaps downtown and along the riverfront
- Provide portable or upgraded public restrooms at event-heavy locations
- Coordinate riverfront activation during signature events using placemaking elements (temporary installations, games, food carts)

INVESTMENT TIMELINE

Investment Area	Short-Term (0–12 months)	Mid-Term (1–3 years)	Long-Term (3–5 years)
Destination Marketing & Messaging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch updated storytelling tools • Begin neighborhood campaign content • Deploy trip itineraries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand influencer and digital reach • Introduce trip-matcher personalization tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deepen segmentation by audience type and travel behavior
Event Development & Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise grant scoring criteria • Host outreach sessions for producers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot new event formats tied to brand/identity • Track post-event impact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scale grant funding • Develop new signature events tied to seasonality
Tourism Infrastructure & Capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch micro-grant pilot • Identify shovel-ready projects (e.g., lighting, restrooms) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish formal capital grant process • Co-invest in walkability or riverfront upgrades 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support large-scale tourism infrastructure through phased partnerships
Meetings, Conventions & Group Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inventory and publish unique venue portal • Update meeting planner tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentivize venue dispersal in event grants • Package “Meet in the Neighborhood” itineraries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support hotel/venue feasibility studies in underserved areas
Neighborhood & Business Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relaunch visitor-facing toolkits • Distribute 1-sheets by traveler type 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand Tourism Ambassador outreach • Formalize partner tiers/programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build stronger B2B digital partner ecosystem (CRM or communications platform)
Visitor Experience Enhancements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit downtown lighting, wayfinding, and restrooms • Activate short-term amenities at riverfront events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate inter-agency upgrades • Deploy small-scale improvements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for longer-term wayfinding and pedestrian infrastructure investments

Wish you were here!

JACKSONVILLE TOURISM STRATEGIC PLAN



downs & st. germain
R E S E A R C H

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