

NACDEP 2025 Conference
Charleston, West Virginia

Developing The Rural Tourism Institute

Ann Savage, NC State University
Doug Arbogast, West Virginia University



Presentation *overview*

1

Getting to know who is here

2

Before we get started....
Destination crash course

3

What & Why of RTI

4

Introduce Partner Communities

5

Curriculum & Review Process

6

Your Thoughts

We want to learn who is in the room!



Or type in:
[Mentimeter.website](https://www.mentimeter.com)

Code: 2905 5445

Before we get started.... So what even is tourism?



Before we get started... Where do destination organizations fit in here?

DO

DMO

CVB/CB/VB

TDA

Entities charged in being a community leader in tourism marketing and development, and typically mandated to bring more meeting, convention and leisure/VFR (visiting friends & relatives) travelers to destinations.

Before we get started... What do these entities actually do?



Shifting the M in DMO (marketing to management)

Requires engagement with stakeholders

Awareness of impacts

Tools to measure impacts

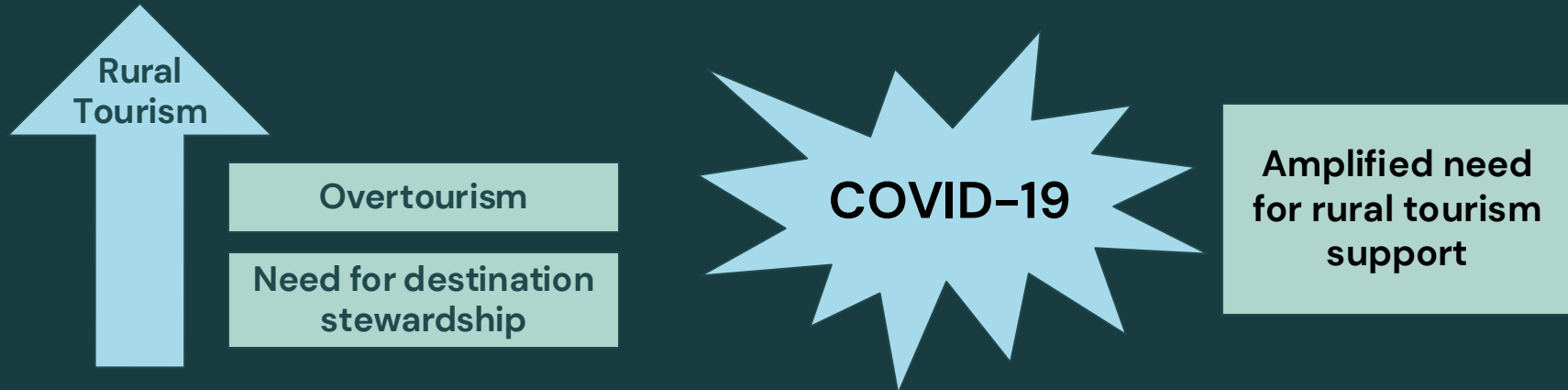
Prioritizes roles like advocacy for DMOs

Which brings us to...

Why Rural Tourism?

Rural tourism emerged as a distinct form of tourism for those seeking respite from urban and mass/resort tourism and as travel increase so has rural tourism.

➡ Yet a formal support structure does not exist



What is the Rural Tourism Institute?

- Designed to **prepare** rural **destination leaders** for the development and sustainable management of their destinations and communities.
- With support from university experts, consultants, and industry peers, destination leaders will **identify** the roles and responsibilities for sustainable destination management.
- The curriculum will offer participants a foundational **understanding** of sustainable destination management and the tools to use with local and regional partners to achieve this shared goal.

What is the Rural Tourism Institute?



Appalachian
Regional
Commission

The institute is in a planning phase with an ARC
ARISE multi-state planning grant.



Blueprint
Kentucky

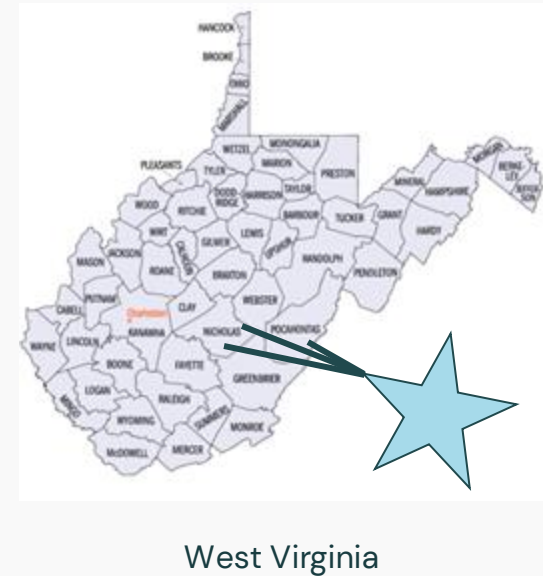


What is the Rural Tourism Institute process?

- By the end of the year the team will:
 - Develop and test curriculum with partner communities
 - Outline steps for a research component to the institute
 - Identify opportunities for networking among institute

- Why is Extension involved?
 - Positioning in these communities
 - Familiar with the communities and their leadership
 - Connection to researchers at institution
 - Ability to connect across institutions

Who are the partner communities?



Who are the partner communities?

Budget	Employees	Funding (outside of occupancy tax)	Mission Statement <i>Mentions something beyond marketing</i>
	0	Allocated county govt. budget	
Under \$100k	1 FTE; 1 PTE	1) Grants; 2) Sponsors; 3) Vendors; 4) Festival Merchandise 5) Ad shares	Community
	1 FTE; 2 PTE	1) Event tix/merch; 2) Small grants	Planning
	3 FTE; 1 PTE		
	1 FTE		
Under \$1 mill	3 FTE; 1 PTE		
	5 FTE; 4 PTE	1) District Assessment	Community & Cultural Preservation
Under \$2 mill	4 FTE;		
	4 FTE; 6 PTE	1) Restaurant tax; 2) Conference Center; 3) Arts Center 4) Visitor Center Gift Shop	Planning

So with these communities in mind, and their feedback on an initial form about:

- Challenges they are facing
- Things keeping them up at night
- Training needs
- Opportunities

We outlined a Core Curriculum that we will develop over the coming months.

+ Elective courses



The Curriculum

Kicks off with Introducing Rural Tourism and Destination Management

Then goes into The CORE Courses below:

01

Knowing Rural
Tourism Strategic
Directions

Breaking down
rural tourism
Typology,
trends, issues
and challenges

02

Executing Effective
Destination
Marketing, Sales &
Services

Priority segments,
strategies and best
practices

03

Understanding
Rural Destination
Sustainable
Product
Development
Product/event
experiences
support and
placemaking

04

Activating Rural
Destination
Advocacy and
Communications

Priority audiences,
strategies and best
practices

05

Recognizing Rural
Destination
Leadership,
Partnerships and
Team Building
Integrated DMO
and partners'
efforts and internal
resource
strengthening

06

Embracing Rural
Destination Research
& Planning

Data Literacy and
Applications for
Rural Destinations



Curriculum Delivery

- Delivery will be a hybrid approach based on feedback from community partners.
- Will include actionable steps (homework) for destination leaders to apply in their own communities.
 - Partnerships with community leaders are necessary for successful implementation of activities

Where does your role in extension fit here with Destination management? How?

Productive development

(current and future destination offerings)

Dest.
Architect
(1)

Dest.
Partner
(5)

Leadership, Partnerships & Team Building

(DMO visitor industry team development & leveraged marketing)

Destination
Management Roles

Dest.
Seller
(2)

Dest.
Planner
(4)

Research & Planning

(visitor needs understanding, policy formulation, performance measures and strategic marketing plans development)

Community Relations

(tourism/DMO advocacy to stakeholders and residents)

Dest.
Advocate
(3)

Tourism Management & Community Development Extension

Overlapping Destination Management topics with sessions at this conference

- Science meets community
 - Building capacity & resilience
 - Foster inclusive ecosystems
 - Entrepreneurship, rural entrepreneurship
 - Local food value chains
 - Creative districts for rural communities
 - Intergenerational opportunities
 - Constructive partnerships
 - Broadband
 - Rural leadership
 - Storytelling
 - Land use planning – affordable housing
 - Others?

Tourism Management & Community Development Extension

Overlapping Destination Management topics with sessions at this conference

- Science meets community
- Building capacity & resilience
- Foster inclusive ecosystems
- Entrepreneurship, rural entrepreneurship
- Local food value chains
- Creative districts for rural communities
- Intergenerational opportunities
- Constructive partnerships
- Broadband
- Rural leadership
- Storytelling
- Land use planning - affordable housing
- Others?

With this in mind...

What expertise or support would you want your destination leaders to know you can offer?

Next Steps of Rural Tourism Institute Team



Develop Curriculum Content & Test

Now – December 2025

Identify Key Areas for the Lab to Focus

Now – December 2025

Apply for Implementation Funds

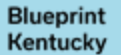
Fall into 2026

Thank you

Questions?



Ann Savage, aesavage@ncsu.edu
Doug Arbogast,



The Rural Tourism Institute will include three components:

Rural Tourism Academy

The Rural Tourism Academy will develop the industry's first Rural Tourism Executive Certification program that will train rural tourism industry leaders and Extension educators on the principles of sustainable destination management

Rural Tourism Lab

The Rural Tourism Lab will be established in order to leverage land-grant university academic faculty and students to fill critical data and intelligence gaps and provide planning and research support necessary to help destination leaders understand the economic, social, and environmental impacts of tourism to make informed decisions.

Rural Tourism Peer Learning Network

The Rural Tourism Peer Learning Network will be established to provide facilitated networking and information sharing among destination leaders eager to share best practices and lessons learned and support each other as they embrace the opportunities and challenges in shifting from a marketing to a management approach and learn from each other.