

Texas Plains Trail Region • Focus on our FUTURE • August 2015

At the 2015 Texas Plains Trail Tourism & Preservation Roundup, we asked participants to collaborate in small-group discussions, responding to specific questions. Our aim was to gather insights from as broad a representation as possible of our region and its partners, and to use these insights to inform our strategic planning. The following information is especially helpful as we make critical decisions about where to place our energies and our (reduced) financial resources. **Group responses are in blue.**

1. Heritage Tourism: Power and Potential. We all know tourism is big business in Texas—to the tune of \$67.5 billion in 2014—and one out of every 8 of those dollars comes from heritage tourism, bringing visitors to stay longer and spend more in our communities. But what other benefits do communities, destinations, and partners experience? In breakout groups at individual tables, participants will offer ideas.

Besides economic benefit (direct, such as hotel-motel tax and sales tax revenues, admission fees, and jobs; and secondary, such as housing and local purchases by residents working in tourism industries), what other benefits do your communities, destinations, and partners experience from the existence of the Texas Plains Trail Region, and/or your participation in it? Be as specific as you can, and list all that you can think of in the time allowed.

At individual tables, choose a discussion leader and a recorder. Please fill out your worksheets individually, but the recorder should note all items that come out of the discussion.

• The biggest question: What's there to do?

1. LARGE CITIES: What benefits do your city and county experience from the Texas Plains Trail Region?

- Networking
- Sharing and marketing at a low cost to us

2. SMALL CITIES: What benefits does your city experience from the Texas Plains Trail Region?

- Exposure
- No
- Fills the needs of a Tourist Bureau (being there is not one available)
- Forces communities to market their history
- Seeing marketing ideas and examples; partnering with other towns to help with cost of marketing

3. SMALL TOWNS AND RURAL COMMUNITIES: What benefits does your community experience from the Texas Plains Trail Region?

- Website; marketing \$
- Exposure or education
- Unity, resources, and networking; gives credence and relevance to what we are doing.
- Exposure, marketing, help & opportunities
- Education, Events, Maps!
- Plains Trail brings to the forefront assets of the communities in the county and bringing together various venues

4. TOURIST DESTINATIONS AND ATTRACTIONS: What benefits do you experience from the Texas Plains Trail Region?

- Unity
- Quanah Parker arrows—brief history of Quanah
- Exposure to outside area

5. OTHER TOURISM PARTNERS (such as Convention & Visitor Bureaus, Chambers of Commerce, Retail Businesses): What benefits do you receive from the Texas Plains Trail Region?

- **Bringing in outside tourists**

6. As a TRAVELER, what benefits do you receive from the Texas Plains Trail Region?

- **Information**
- **Museum trips: loop among Borden, Scurry, Mitchell, Garza Counties**
- **Telling what is there to do?**
- **Seek loop itinerary**
- **Network, marketing, maps, events, education, unity**
- **Seeing marketing material**

7. BONUS QUESTION: How would you measure the economic impact of heritage tourism (or all tourism) on your community?

- **Tourism affects every business, whether it is good, fuel, housing, and businesses of all kinds.**
- **Credit card transactions**
- **Hotel/motel tax**

2. Value: Tips for Maximizing Your Texas Plains Trail Region Partnership. Are you getting the biggest bang for your community's investment? Here are some practical pointers for making it go even farther.

Worksheet for taking your own notes:

1. COME TO THE ANNUAL ROUNDUP.
2. TEXAS TIME TRAVEL WEBSITE: MAKE SURE YOUR LISTINGS ARE COMPLETE AND CURRENT.
3. ADD YOUR COMMUNITY'S HERITAGE EVENTS TO THE TEXAS TIME TRAVEL WEBSITE.
4. SEND US YOUR PRESS RELEASES WITH GRAPHIC FOR RE-POSTING.
5. SEND US YOUR HERITAGE-RELATED TOURISM LITERATURE FOR FREE DISTRIBUTION.
6. SCHEDULE US TO PRESENT TEXAS FRIENDLY HOSPITALITY TRAINING IN YOUR COMMUNITY.
7. INVITE US TO DO A PROGRAM FOR YOUR CIVIC GROUP, ORGANIZATION, OR SCHOOL.

3. Voice: What's at the Top of Your Wish List from the Texas Plains Trail Region? Small groups. We want to hear from you—to identify programs and promotions that will benefit you most in 2015–2017.

You've had a chance to see the broad spectrum of what the Plains Trail Region contributes to education, promotion, leadership, and networking.

What we want to hear from you now is what programs and promotions you feel will benefit you most in 2015–2017. If we must trim back our budget for the next two years, what things are most essential? Which ones do you consider optional? Which ones haven't benefited you?

At individual tables, choose a discussion leader and a recorder. Please fill out your worksheets individually, but the recorder should note all items that come out of the discussion.

1. Of all the benefits that you receive from the Texas Plains Trail Region, which do you consider *essential*?

- **Contacts**
- **Marketing, Exposure, Networking**

- Networking leadership
- Exposure: media, networking, being a presence
- Leadership
- Literature distribution
- Unity of purpose
- Annual Roundup is essential for networking and meeting those with like interests

2. Of all the benefits that you receive from the Texas Plains Trail Region, which do you consider *optional*?

- Window decals
- N/A
- TPTR products and some ads

3. Of all the benefits that you receive from the Texas Plains Trail Region, which affect you *the least*?

4. What programs, products, projects, services, or marketing/promotional activities would you like to see us add, resources permitting?

- More marketing, presentations to organizations, training and education to partners and people
- Outreach to schools for promotion to involve youth and college-age young adults
- Build college outreach and involvement.
- Education opportunities—connecting kids to their past.
- Have-A-Hoot Trip
- Empower folks to use PowerPoints that Barbara has developed
- Listserv options (via THC)

4. **Vision: Focusing on the Future of the Texas Plains Trail Region.** Groups. What spheres of influence and opportunities for funding would be most beneficial to our organization—to achieve the goals we've just set?

- Grants for nonprofits

The Texas Heritage Trails Program, working in collaboration with our parent agency the Texas Historical Commission, has engaged in discussions and analysis to determine the most feasible and desirable option(s) for short-term and long-term sustainability, and to yield the most effective service to our state and our visitors.

We have openly discussed pros and cons of the options below. While these summaries are simplifications, and not all factors are under our control, we'd like to know your thoughts: which approach do you feel might best serve your community or organization? Which approach do you feel might best serve the traveling public? Which do you feel might be most likely to succeed? Which do you feel might yield the best return on investment for the state of Texas?

1. Heritage Trails Regions **continue as independent 501(c)(3) organizations working under agreement with Texas Historical Commission.** (Each region has one paid staff member and a volunteer board.) Requires that **Heritage Trails Program finds additional funding** from region, from partners, from foundations, or from corporate sources to supplement reduced or no agency funding.

- **Most important!**
- **A Texas Heritage Trails Trust**

2. Heritage Trails Regions **continue as independent 501(c)(3) organizations working under agreement with a different state agency, such as the Office of the Governor for Economic Development and Tourism; Texas Department of Agriculture GoTexan; TxDOT.** Requires the **Texas legislature to approve such a move** and might still require **Heritage Trails Program finds additional funding** from region, from partners, from foundations, or

from corporate sources to supplement reduced or no agency funding.

- **Consider this option**
- **Office of the Governor for Economic Development and Tourism**

3. Heritage Trails Regions remain together as a program but **operate independently from the Texas Historical Commission or any state agency**. Would require **Heritage Trails Program to find additional funding and/or revenue streams**, from partners, from foundations, from corporate sources to supplement reduced or no agency funding, or from revenue-generating activities.

- **No**

4. Heritage Trails Regions **operate separately and independently from the Texas Historical Commission or any state agency**. Would require **Heritage Trails Program to find additional funding and/or revenue streams**, from partners, from foundations, from corporate sources to supplement reduced or no agency funding, or from revenue-generating activities.

- **Should already do and should**

5. Heritage Trails Regions **dissolve operations** and leave heritage tourism activities to centralized, in-house administration of Texas Historical Commission.

- **No**

Now let's look at some possible spheres of influence, funding sources, and champions the Texas Plains Trail Region should cultivate.

6. With what **spheres of influence and organizations** should the Texas Plains Trail Region establish or strengthen relationships? (For example, the Texas Heritage Trails already work closely with Preservation Texas and GoTexan, for great benefit.)

- **Large tourism groups; partners with Amarillo/Lubbock and if they want exposure in Hill Country we would help them, marketing through our avenues**
- **Organizations for judges, historical organizations**
- **Connect better with local/area media**
- **Corporate support for 52 counties (i.e., United Supermarkets; help TPTR and get name on all of our brochures)**

7. What **government, public, private, and corporate funding opportunities** should the Texas Plains Trail Region pursue? Be as specific as you can with regard to a suitable connection to a specific part of our mission with a specific funding source, or a suitable project, program, etc. (For example, the Texas Plains Trail Region has successfully applied for a grant from the Amarillo Area Foundation to support a specific project.)

- **Gov. Office of Tourism. They are only outside Texas but would assist with inside Texas.**
- **Lottery Commission**
- **Form Texas Heritage Trails Trust or Foundation and seek public involvement**
- **Ranch owners that have land that is located in the Texas Plains Trail Region?**
- **The Working Ranch Cowboys Association that have interest and land owners who have direct contact with Texas Plains Trail**
- **I think this is already a part of TPTR and should continue**

8. Which **individuals might we approach to help champion our cause** leading up to and during the 2017 legislative session? Be as specific as you can with regard to influence or visibility, known causes, personal connections. (For example, Laura Bush, a former librarian and a founder of the Texas Book Festival, is known to support literacy in Texas.)

- **Harrington, Arrington, and other large personal donors (Amarillo)**
- **Don Powell**
- **John Nau (new/returning chair of THC)**

Would you be willing to share contact information and/or helpful background, if asked?

- **Yes, absolutely**
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5. **Vitality!** We'll share top results from each group. Let's look forward to a great year of tourism, education, and preservation service—and pledge to secure full statewide support of our program in 2017.

- **County funding has to step up.**
 - **Texas Plains Trail Trust. Grants, donors to be shared equally by all Regions**
 - **Market events by event type vs. community (i.e., Plains Trail Rodeo events, wine tour/festivals; heritage celebrations, etc.)**
 - **Create value for the larger cities/all towns by educating/marketing/promoting/preserving our locations. "We help you by doing this . . . } (answer this)**
 - **Friends of the TPTR**
 - **Brochure with application and info + donation (\$25 first tier, 52 backward; \$52 2nd tier, 52 counties)**
 - **What is new director [i.e., board chair] of THC going to do, if anything?**
 - **Time to take up the cause!**
 - **Time with legislators at every opportunity**
 - **Champion our cause!**
 - **To find a person that will be a spokesman for you, and a champion for your own cause**
 - **Finding a champion**
 - **Championing our own cause**
 - **Seeking corporate sponsors and building that relationship**
 - **Build education opportunities**
 - **Get a champion to represent Texas Plain Trail in the future**
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