



Visit Brookings
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February 24, 2025

Economic Development Merger Committee
Nick Wendell, Co-Chair
Tom Fishback, Co-Chair
520 3rd Street
Brookings, SD 57006

Dear Merger Committee Members,

Visit Brookings plays a crucial role in driving economic development within our community. Our core objective is to attract visitors to Brookings, increasing visitor spending and enhancing the quality of life for our residents. We appreciate the city's continued investment in tourism development as we work to bring new dollars into the local economy. The following illustrates a few key achievements from our efforts:

- In 2024, the Visit Brookings event grant program awarded funds to thirty-seven organizations, with eight supporting new events. These initiatives attracted over 91,000 visitors, generating a record \$11.2 million in economic impact. This translates into an impressive return of \$84.51 cents for every dollar invested.
- In 2023, visitors spent \$124.7 million in Brookings County and generated \$9.2 million in state and local tax revenue. This revenue directly supports vital public services like parks, infrastructure and public safety. We anticipate even greater visitor spending and tax revenue when 2024 economic impact figures are finalized.
- The Visit Brookings website and social media platforms are increasingly effective resources for reaching potential visitors and residents alike. We are actively shaping perceptions of Brookings and showcasing the diverse experiences our community offers, influencing travel decisions and welcoming new residents who call Brookings home.
- Tourism is a vital lifeline for many local businesses including restaurants, hotels, retail stores and attractions. By attracting visitors, we help these businesses thrive, creating jobs and strengthening our local economy.

DMOs (Destination Marketing Organizations) have experienced a transition over the years as people across the state and country have begun to realize the significant economic power and impact of the travel industry. Many CVBs (Convention & Visitor Bureaus) started as part of the chamber of commerce. Communities are now looking at the local DMO to play a larger role in destination management, especially when it comes to enriching quality of life, attracting and retaining talent, cultivating culture and sense of community, and supporting public services. The Visit Brookings Board of Directors and staff are interested in the opportunity to play an even larger role within the merged organization, bringing innovative ideas and strategies to benefit both residents and visitors.

There are still unanswered questions and concerns previously articulated by the four organizations, specifically the retention of core programming, the need for clear and timely communications, the need to stay agile and responsive, and the ability to operate independently from city government.

While these concerns remain valid, the Visit Brookings board believes the merger could present a unique opportunity focusing efforts on enhancing the overarching goals of visiting, living, working and investing in Brookings. To maximize this potential, we offer the following recommendations:

Use data to define the “why” of the new organization

Visit Brookings supports the exploration of the Destination Next Diagnostic Tool. This comprehensive assessment provides valuable insights into 24 key variables including visitor assets, regional cooperation, economic development and business support. This assessment could present a framework the new organization can use to provide focus for the future. It can help answer the question of why this may be the right time for the merger and bring people together with defined outcomes to complement any goals we will carry over from our individual organizations and the city’s economic development master plan.

Invest in staff development

Every employee of the merged organization should be encouraged to pursue certification in their respective field (e.g. CDME, IOM, CCE or CeCD). This commitment to excellence will ensure a high standard of professionalism while encouraging team members to stay engaged and informed on emerging trends and issues affecting all levels of economic development.

Leverage the Visit Brookings brand within the merged organization

In 2020 we became a separate 501c6 organization and upgraded our name to better explain our purpose. We recommend retaining the Visit Brookings brand, website, visitor guide, event grant and marketing activities within the new organization. These established assets are proven drivers of tourism and enhance the visitor experience while bringing revenue into the community. Furthermore, we advocate for the creation of a dedicated sales position focused on attracting more meetings and events to Brookings. We welcome opportunities to play a bigger role in destination development and growth as part of the merged organization.

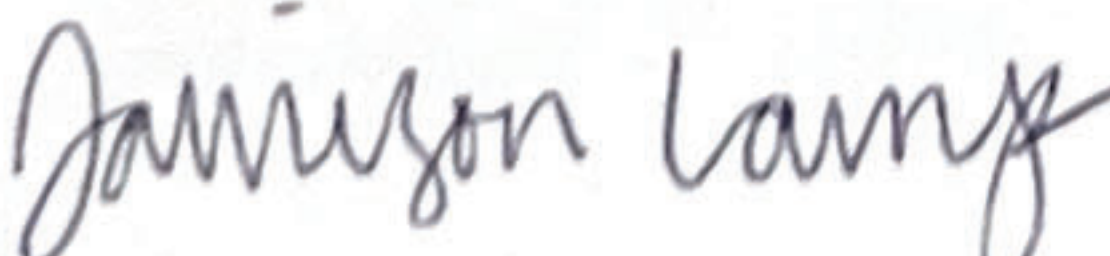
A unified vision and mission

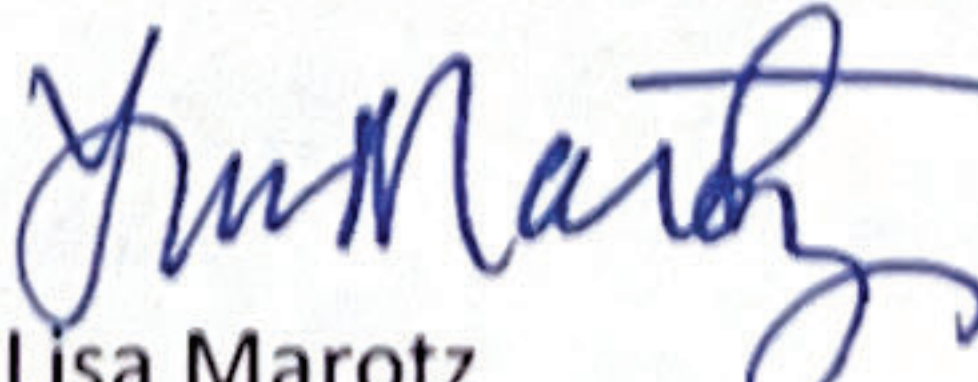
For the merged organization to be successful, it must operate with a single, unifying mission, a single board and complete alignment across vision, budget, leadership and staff. The mission should be broad enough to encompass all areas of economic development and the board should represent a diverse perspective comprised of individuals who embrace a holistic and forward-thinking perspective.

Visit Brookings views the upcoming merger as a chance to build an organization bigger than the sum of its parts. We realize structures of the past are not designed to meet the challenges of the future. We encourage the merger committee to be visionary, inclusive and committed to building an organization that utilizes the strengths of all the economic partners to provide solutions to emerging needs.

On behalf of the Visit Brookings board and staff, thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback and ideas.

Sincerely,


Jamison Lamp
Visit Brookings Co-Chair


Lisa Marotz
Visit Brookings Co-Chair