

# *adirondack wayfinder toolkit*





# acknowledgments

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In 2015, the Adirondack Trail Towns Strategic Plan was prepared by River Street Planning & Development through funding provided by New York State Department of State (DOS) under Title 11 of the Environmental Protection Fund. The strategy was prepared on behalf of Hamilton County, NY and Adirondack Partnership.

In 2016, Hamilton County was awarded a Smart Growth Grant from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to advance the strategy by implementing an Adirondack Trail Towns “pilot program.”

The Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism (ROOST) was contracted by Hamilton County to implement this grant and Adirondack Wayfinder was born. In conjunction with ROOST, River Street Planning & Development developed the following toolkit.



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***“Visitors want the local experience! An engaging and authentic tourism theme makes them feel like part of local life.”***

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***Photo credit: All photos provided courtesy of ROOST.***



***adirondack wayfinder local business/organization toolkit***





## ***table of contents***

<b><i>adirondack wayfinder .....</i></b>	<b><i>1</i></b>
<b><i>getting underway .....</i></b>	<b><i>4</i></b>
<b><i>identifying potential wayfinding partners .....</i></b>	<b><i>5</i></b>
<b><i>building a route &amp; an inventory .....</i></b>	<b><i>6</i></b>
<b><i>understanding your market, customers &amp; audience ...</i></b>	<b><i>7</i></b>
<b><i>collaboration &amp; marketing .....</i></b>	<b><i>10</i></b>
<b><i>coordination &amp; management of the itinerary .....</i></b>	<b><i>15</i></b>
<b><i>bringing it together: writing up the itinerary .....</i></b>	<b><i>17</i></b>
<b><i>appendix: toolkit worksheets .....</i></b>	<b><i>19</i></b>











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***Thematic itineraries bundle businesses, services and attractions under a unifying topic***

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## **adirondack wayfinder**

Adirondack Wayfinder is a road-based itinerary builder aimed at promoting regional touring and connecting multiple communities. Businesses, attractions and community champions can develop these “itineraries” based on a particular theme or interest that is relevant and interesting to the traveler.

### **WAYFINDER PROGRAM**

**The Wayfinder program is designed to:**

- Attract new visitors
- Build from strength along itineraries with the best odds of success
- Act regionally to maximize crossover impacts
- Enhance collaboration through ongoing partnerships
- Maximize economic impact through longer stays and level of spending

### **WAYFINDER TOOLKIT**

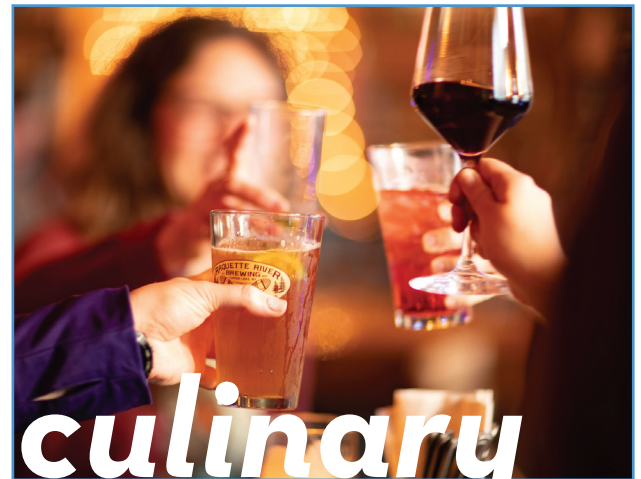
**This toolkit is designed to help local businesses, organizations and communities to:**

- Complete an asset inventory
- Identify possible themes
- Determine a customer profile and target markets
- Advance a common brand with shared messaging
- Open new communication and information channels



# tourism trails

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**Using a thematic approach will align with trends that show travelers “touring.”**

### SAMPLE THEMES FOR THE ADIRONDACK PARK

THEMATIC GROUP	VISITOR ASPIRATIONS
Landscapes & Nature	Beautiful sites, landscapes, and natural forces that form exceptional places
Wellness	Healthy lifestyle practices activities (spas, yoga, meditation, etc.)
History and Heritage	Understanding history through buildings, sites, artifacts, and traditions
Traditional Industry	Past and present industries like forest products, health, mining etc.
Food & Drink	Restaurants, farms, vineyards, breweries, farmers markets, etc.
Outdoor Sports	Year-round outdoor sports
Arts & Culture	Visual and performance arts, festivals and events

## thematic itineraries

Thematic itineraries bundle businesses, services and attractions under a unifying topic to promote physical assets and amenities while focusing on the visitor experiences. One theme may reach across many Adirondack communities. Individual themes are built on routes, itineraries and stops defined by partners that appeal to visitor interests:

- **Routes** are specific roadway(s) that connect the business/organizations and communities. They might create a looping tour or be linear with strong gateway business/organization and service clusters at entry points.
- **Stops or waypoints** consist of the various businesses, organizations and complementary services along each itinerary. Itineraries are complete routes and stops a visitor can elect to follow.
- **Align with trends** showing that travelers are “touring” more than choosing a single destination.
- **Enable visitors** to use customized itineraries and enhance their travel planning experience.
- **Utilize geo-targeted marketing efforts** that loop tours from specific starting and ending points.
- **Enable fine tuning** by visitors to add specific amenities (e.g., performance, lodging, dining, recreation).

## getting ready

People power the process. To get started consider recruiting:

- **Wayfinder Community Champions** who are public, nonprofit and private business and tourism organizations who lead the planning effort.
- **An informal Exploratory Committee** that tests the waters by reaching out to potential partners to collect input that helps tailor themes and routes.



# getting underway

To get you started here are a few suggestions for the initial meetings to explore the Adirondack Wayfinder program:

## MEETING ONE

### what is the adirondack wayfinder program agenda?

The first meeting should orient partners and review core components and possible themes.

- What is the Adirondack Wayfinder Program?
- Connection to economic and tourism initiatives
- Possible themes, itineraries and stops
- Business/organization and community interest (form exploratory committee)
- Expectations of participating business/organizations
- Common goals
- Community champions



**consider:** *Thematic tourism appeals to our emotions, intellect and senses. The Park's attributes (nature, artisans, craft food and beverages, culture, heritage, the arts, etc.) highlight its character.*

*A theme can be summarized in a few words that speak directly to the market and convey shared understanding. Consider if a theme is:*

- **Inspirational** (shares stories about local people, customs, culture, heritage)
- **Engaging And Authentic** (makes visitors feel part of local life)
- **Surprising** (offers unexpected experiences, connections or amenities)
- **Memorable** (the experiences visitors will share online and with friends)

## MEETING TWO

### evaluating themes and itinerary agenda

Meeting two should explore themes more fully and outline a preliminary inventory.

- Choose theme(s) you wish to advance
- Identify potential businesses and organizations that align with the theme
- Outline route and itineraries
- Plan next steps





***Business and organizations should critically assess whether the Adirondack Wayfinder Program is right for them at the current time.***



## ***identifying potential wayfinding partners***

The Adirondack Wayfinder Program will offer advantages to partners who invest time to select a theme and stops that are integrated and promoted as part of an itinerary. Businesses and organizations should critically assess if the program is right for them at the current time. Potential partners should assume that the program will require 6+ hours of planning over the first 3-6 months.

In preparation for the second meeting, interested businesses and organizations should consider key questions and be willing to share their conclusions with other partners. It's up to each Exploratory Committee to decide how formal the evaluation of possible stops needs to be and if criteria should be used in selecting participants. See the Appendix on page 20 for the related worksheet "Is the Adirondack Wayfinder Program Right for Me?"





*“Visitors want to understand the essential character of a place.”*

## ***building a route and an inventory***

Based on the communities participating and stops selected the next step is to build a preliminary route and itinerary. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

- **Keep things simple.** Start with one itinerary and, little by little, enrich the itinerary to better interpret the selected theme.
- **Build a time or distance-based itinerary and experience.** Most visitors are bound by time in some way. Try to construct ‘a great day out’ along your route that feels manageable to a visitor with activities that balance the day. If the itinerary would take multiple days to complete, consider breaking the “trip” into multiple linked routes under the same theme. Also consider how well your itinerary operates in all seasons.
- **Be honest with yourselves.** Starting with an initial assessment of the preliminary itinerary, take an honest look at the businesses and organizations. There will be opportunities to add other business/

organizations in the future, but it’s important to start by building from strength. Analyzing strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats (SWOT) is an easy way of understanding your local environment, the geographic area and issues business and organizations face or will face in the local marketplace.

- **Begin with the distinctive elements.** Local distinctiveness is the composite of a place’s assets; the landmarks and landscape, wildlife, built heritage, and traditions. Visitors want the local experience. They want to understand essential character of a place, meet ‘real’ people, learn something and have something to share with others when they return home. Distinctive itineraries slow people down, resulting in longer stays and increased local spending. Don’t forget to highlight local events like concerts in the park or farmers’ markets.
- **Consider community support.** Successful itineraries depend on the active support of many stakeholders (‘real’ people) to gain traction and stir enthusiasm.

See the Appendix beginning on page 22 for the related worksheet “Adirondack Wayfinder Program: Route and Itinerary Planning.”





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***Your existing customers are  
the base to build upon.***

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## ***understanding your market, customers and audience***

### ***understanding your market***

Successful itineraries target distinct market segments, understanding that they may change over time. Independent market analysis is expensive so most local groups will rely on secondary analysis about market trends and visitor profiles from tourism organizations like ROOST, the Adirondack Regional Tourism Council (ARTC) or ANCA; anchors like the Adirondack Experience, The Museum on Blue Lake and the Wild Center; business groups (Chamber of Commerce, SCORE, etc.), trade associations and educational institutions.

### ***understanding your customers and audience***

You can't be everything to everyone. But if you understand visitor preferences, interests and what motivates them to travel you can help travelers engage with the destination, before, during and after their trip. Your existing customers are the base to build on. Although each stop is unique, marketing of the route and itinerary means reaching consensus about target audiences including visitors who are not coming currently. You can understand audience by considering:

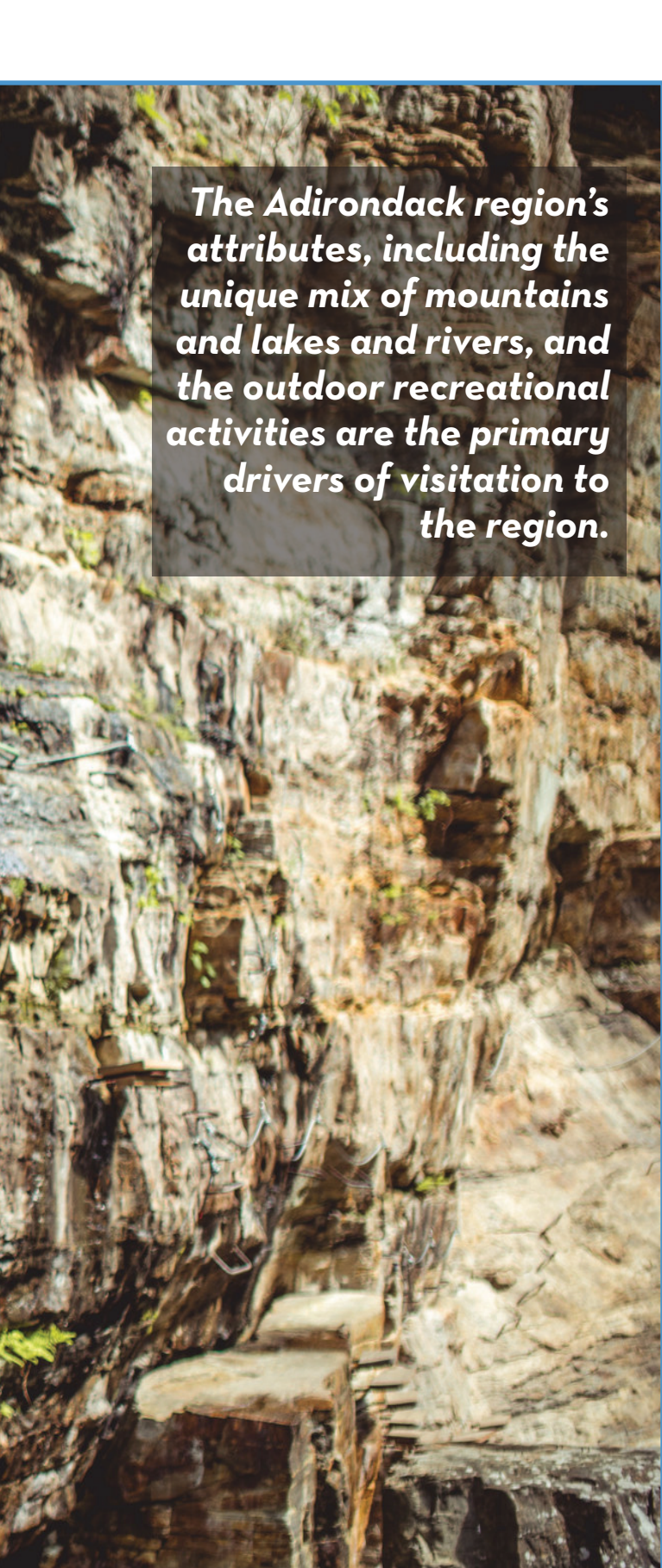
- **Demographics:** How old are visitors? Will they be in couples, family groups, solo, etc.? Consider the large groups of baby boomers and millennials.
- **Point of origin:** Where do your visitors come from?
- **Length of stay:** Is it a brief sojourn or is it a longer vacation?





**outdoor adventure trails**





*The Adirondack region's attributes, including the unique mix of mountains and lakes and rivers, and the outdoor recreational activities are the primary drivers of visitation to the region.*

- **Spending:** How much do they spend locally per visit?
- **Reason for travel:** Are they visiting friends and family, shopping, passing through, etc.?
- **Interests:** What interests do they have? What experiences are they seeking?
- Why choose your business or organization? What **unique aspects** draw visitors?
- What are their **expectations**? What do they want or need you to provide?
- Who is easiest to **communicate** with? How will you reach them?
- What groups will spend time and money **year-round**?
- Who will find **testimonials** relevant and appealing?
- Who is most likely to recommend you? Which audiences will use online sites to **review the experience**

### ***plan to address seasonality***

Ideally all businesses and organizations would be open and successful year-round and offer different products or services based on the season and draw of different audiences throughout the year. If some stops along your itinerary are seasonal – it's absolutely essential that your regional business listings (e.g., Adirondacks, USA; VisitAdirondacks) be updated to reflect that reality. Participating businesses and organizations should brainstorm different opportunities for extending the seasons and addressing the quieter periods.



# collaboration and marketing

Adirondack Wayfinder can promote collaborative promotional efforts and link together existing and future tourism promotion initiatives. For example, your group may be developing a culinary trail, while a nearby group is working on an arts trail. Wayfinder can tie both efforts together in a larger promotion, which enriches the traveler experience.

Once the itinerary is set the group should develop a marketing plan that summarizes the message you want to send, your target audience and the methods you want to use. The plan should:

- Identify a few clear objectives you feel will position the itinerary for success.
- Encourage activities that directly support sales such as customer service training or online booking.
- Promote the itinerary's products or services and raises awareness.
- Identify the costs for each activity including current and forecasted expenses.
- Establish key indicators (e.g., new visitors, conversion rates, average visit value).

## partnerships for success

Since 2008, consumer research has consistently confirmed that the Adirondack region's attributes including the unique mix of mountains and lakes and rivers, and the outdoor recreational activities are the primary drivers of visitation to the region. Recent research indicates that new visitors are looking to balance outdoor access with unique and immersive travel experiences enjoying cultural resources, and local food and craft beverages.



**Wayfinder can tie efforts together in a larger promotion, enriching the traveler experience.**







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## *The **adirondacks, usa** brand ties communities and destinations to the Adirondacks.*

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### **why use Adirondack Wayfinder to promote your trail?**

Your work – inventorying business/organization; assessing interest; choosing themes, routes and itineraries; and targeting your audience will be implemented digitally and “live” on [adirondacksusa.com](https://www.adirondacksusa.com). Being integrated into this digital hub offers each route:

- **Strong Content:**

Each trail developed will have access to a critical mass of business/organization, content, and event listings, blogs, video and photography assets, etc. This database is managed by a collaboration between ROOST, area chambers of commerce, and other tourism partners across the region on a daily basis. This collaborative effort makes it one of, if not the most comprehensive and current databases of the Adirondacks. Additionally, having a critical mass of trails/itineraries in one place will increase search engine rankings over having your trail as a standalone website.

- **Build Off Momentum:**

By integrating your trails/itineraries into Adirondack Wayfinder, your itinerary gains access to an established audience and traction from larger promotional efforts.

- **Sustainable:**

It is not uncommon to see tourism initiatives launch with great intentions, but without a long-term sustainability plan. As a result,









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***By integrating your trails into Adirondack Wayfinder, your itinerary gains access to an established audience and traction from larger promotional efforts.***

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information becomes dated and travelers who stumbled on these resources are often misinformed. Adirondack Wayfinder will be self-sustaining, as the database that feeds the trail is actively managed and continually updated.

- **Use Resources Efficiently:**

New content created will enhance Wayfinder efforts and each new route and itinerary will be easily integrated, saving time, energy, and financial resources that can be allocated to additional marketing and implementation efforts.

### ***what role should social media play?***

Social media is popular with billions of people across the world of all ages. We use various tools to communicate with friends and family, help visitors to find out about places to go and then share their experiences with others. In considering how social media can play a role ask questions like:

- Are your target audiences users of social media? How? Which platforms?
- What kind of relationship do you want with them?
- What do your competitors do on social media that's working?
- Can you generate enough interesting and relevant content for ongoing conversations? If so, what?
- What kind of resources do you have (time to commit and budget for advertising)?





## other ways to get the word out

- **Printed promotional materials** are expensive to produce and need regular updating. In this case, a simple itinerary map with a succinct description of each stop may appeal to some visitors. When considering other materials ask yourself:
  - What is the publication designed to do?
  - When in the visitor journey will it be read?
  - What resources do you have to distribute it?
  - What are the time constraints on distribution?
- **Email updates or E-newsletters** can deliver a specific message directly to a customer. You can use them to follow-up after a visit or to alert a visitor to offers that may entice them to come back.
- **Press releases** to local and regional media are still appropriate if you have a specific newsworthy event.
- **A press or media pack** can be useful if you need to provide editors, journalists or other influencers such as bloggers with useful and relevant information.
- **Word of mouth**, whether face to face or through social media from your customers, especially about the quality of their experience, is a fundamental way that visitors learn about your itinerary.






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***The quality of facilities defines first impressions and are make-or-break considerations.***

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## ***coordination and management of the itinerary***

### ***determine how partners will manage the itinerary***

Your organizing group should agree on the decision-making process it will use. This could include a steering group with work groups developed as needed or other approaches that make sense to you. Whatever form is chosen, the group should reach agreement about:

- Expectations and role of business and organization partners
- Role of community champions (usually a mix of public agencies, tourism organizations and business groups)
- How new businesses and organizations would be added over time
- How your market and audiences will be tracked
- What standards will you put in place regarding quality of operations and facilities, staff training, etc.

### ***maintaining quality***

A quality stop is important year-round – but for tourists these components define first impressions and are make-or-break considerations. Clear expectations about the quality of facilities and experiences among the business and organization partners is essential. Typical standards address quality expectations related to:

- business/organization operation (consistent quality product, days/hours, seasonality, etc.)
- continually excellent physical facilities and locations
- organization and staff training and quality management



## evaluating progress

Measuring success is critical. It builds stakeholder support, increases the base of partners, generates new champions and, as a result, attracts more visitors. Each group may put value on different measures but certain foundation metrics and services should be tracked and measured:

- **Booking:** Is pre-visit contact efficient, friendly and informative? Do you offer online booking with instant email confirmation, directions, etc.?
- **Welcome and Arrival:** Visitors expect to be welcomed on arrival, have access to parking, and see signs that communicate key information. Does this happen consistently at every stop?
- **Customer Service:** Are visitor requests addressed promptly, politely and accurately? Can staff answer questions about the itinerary? Do staff have access to regular training?
- **Facilities:** Are all buildings and property well maintained (whether visitors have access to them or not)? Is Wi-Fi available free to visitors? Are clean bathrooms available?

The only way to know if the itinerary and its partner stops are reaching the agreed upon goals is to measure results as accurately as possible and then make informed decisions about how to move forward. Since the Adirondack Wayfinder program is focused on increasing effectiveness, exposure and revenue flowing to small businesses and organizations outside of the main tourist centers, basic measures of small business/organization success makes sense. These include:

- **Bottom Line Business/Organization Revenue:** At the end of the period of measurement – perhaps two years in this case to account for start-up - business/organization partners need to compare

profits to the years before they participated in Adirondack Wayfinder Program.

- **Cost of Goods Sold:** Members should consider the value of the products they offer by tracking expenses directly related to providing a service (salaries, insurance, purchased food, etc.)
- **Marketing the Itinerary:** Understanding customer acquisition costs – or what business/organizations and the itinerary as a whole are spending to attract each visitor.



- **Visitor Retention:** Once a visitor discovers your itinerary and business/organization, do they come back? Bring friends? Tell family? Do they spread positive reviews on sites like TripAdvisor and Yelp? One way to measure this is to offer customer rewards for those who come back or spread the word.
- **Referral Rate:** Try to quantify the number of travelers you attract based on referrals from other visitors or local customers.
- **Customer Satisfaction:** Having more customers only matters if they are very satisfied with the experience and will share good reviews. Negative reviews will hurt every stop on the itinerary.





## Tips and guidelines for building your trails and itineraries

**Name it** - The trail should have a name that is both meaningful (says what it is) and engaging (catches their attention).

**Be realistic** - Don't try to cram everything someone can see and do into one trail. Doing so will not only become overwhelming to the traveler, but you are essentially setting them up for disappointment when they can not successfully complete the itinerary.

### Number of stops

Minimum: 3 stops

Maximum: 21 stops

Recommended: 5-12 stops

### Length of time

Minimum: 2 hours

Maximum: 15 hours

Recommended: 4-8 hours

*The ideal number of stops will vary based on the distance between stops and time allocated at each stop.*

## bringing it together: writing up the itinerary

Once the partners agree on all the components, putting the plan on paper is very important. Don't skip this step. Whatever format works for you is fine as long as it's readable, clear and succinct. It should include:

- Name of the route and itinerary
- Description of theme(s) being explored
- How the itinerary interacts with other routes along the same theme
- List of stops with a description of their business/organization, products and services, schedule of operation and web links
- Evaluation of future partners' interests and ambitions
- Summary of tasks related to branding, marketing, and implementation
- Ideas to extend or customize the itinerary further
- One-year action plan addressing short term goals for:
  - Cultivation of Champions
  - Community support
  - Reaching initial target audiences
  - Initial marketing methods
  - Measures of success
- Strategy matrix/table summarizing actions to be taken over the first five years reflecting:
  - Phased in program enhancements
  - Partnerships
  - Funding
  - Marketing efforts
  - Events
  - Measures of success
- Ways to measure successes identifying the specific metrics and sources of data available. A goal that is too complicated or time consuming to measure won't help you achieve success.
- Next steps





## ***Try it yourself!***

***Before you launch a trail we suggest that you try it out for yourself and answer the following questions.***

### ***Is the trail MANAGEABLE?***

- How long did it take?
- Did you feel rushed?
- Should the trail be broken into sections?

### ***Is the trail ENGAGING?***

- Was there enough to do?
- Was there a variety of experiences or was it all very similar activities?
- What can be added or removed in order to enhance this trip?

### ***How would you DESCRIBE the trail?***

- How would you describe the trip to a friend?
- Does your marketing description match this?
- Does the name of the trail seem fitting?



## ***appendix:*** ***toolkit worksheets***



## *Is the Adirondack Wayfinder Program Right for Me?*

### **BASIC INFORMATION**

Your Name:	Business/Organization Name:
Address:	Email Address:
Telephone Number:	Website Link:
The best way to reach me is...	

### **WHO ARE YOUR VISITORS?**

What do you offer to travelers?

What are your hours/days of operation? Do your hours/days vary by season? Please explain.

What percentage of your customers would you estimate are visitors? Please describe your visitors: age, individual, family, etc.

What "experiences" do you think your visitors are interested in?

### **IS THE ADIRONDACK WAYFINDER PROGRAM RIGHT FOR YOU?**

Why would you like to participate in the program?

What advantages do you feel it will bring to your business/ organization?



### ***Is the Adirondack Wayfinder Program Right for Me?***

What ambitions do you have for your business/organization? What would you like to provide in the future?

What are the biggest challenges you face (maintaining property, hiring seasonality, etc.)?

How do you market and promote your business/organization?

How do you train your staff? What training would you like to offer?

Is your business/organization currently listed on your regional promotion website(s)? Please identify which sites.

Are you ready to commit the time it will take to get the program up and running?

Are you prepared to track visitor trends and experiences?

**COMMENTS**

## ADIRONDACK WAYFINDER PROGRAM - ROUTE AND ITINERARY PLANNING

Name and description of theme and route:

PLEASE LIST POTENTIAL STOPS FROM A LOGICAL STARTING POINT TO ENDING POINT

*Add an additional page as needed to list all potential stops.*

Business Name	Address	Business Type	Miles from the Previous Stop	Average Time Required at Stop



## QUESTIONS ABOUT THE POTENTIAL ROUTE

### Describing Your Trail

How long is the route (miles)?

List communities and counties along the route.

Describe targeted visitors for this route (age, family, etc.)

Does it link to other routes of the same theme? Please explain.

Does it link to other routes of a different theme? Please explain.

How does seasonality affect the route?

What makes this route memorable?

## QUESTIONS ABOUT THE POTENTIAL ROUTE

### Improving the Visitor's Experience

What goals do the participating "stops" hope to achieve through developing and promoting the route?

How will these goals each be measured?

How would the experience of "visiting" differ for someone visiting as part of the "itinerary" vs. someone simply patronizing one business/attraction?

What are the biggest challenges?

What measures could be implemented to address challenges?

How do you plan to let people know about the trail?



## QUESTIONS ABOUT THE POTENTIAL ROUTE

### Identifying Add-On Amenities to Enhance the Trail

What tourism services are available along the route?	YES	NO	List Resources or Explain
<i>Eating and Drinking</i>			
<i>Lodging</i>			
<i>Visitor Information</i>			
<i>Comfort Facilities</i>			
<i>Places to Shop</i>			
<i>Major Attractions Along the Route</i>			
<i>Convenience Shops (snacks, coffee, etc.)</i>			
<i>Fuel/ Electric Charging Stations</i>			

### How distinctive is the trail?

<i>Does it offer hands on exploration?</i>			
<i>Is it unique for the area?</i>			
<i>Can it be done outside of the main visitor season?</i>			
<i>Can visitors learn something?</i>			
<i>Is it realistic and practical for visitors to try?</i>			

