



LAKES TO LOCKS PASSAGE HERITAGE CENTER STRATEGY

A program to rejuvenate communities along North America's first interconnected waterway

The economic future of rural Upstate New York rests upon delivering a unique tourism experience. The network of Lakes to Locks Passage “Heritage Centers” will link the existing community museums, libraries, sites and attractions along North America’s first interconnected waterway of the Champlain Canal/Upper Hudson River, Lake George, and Lake Champlain in New York to deliver an authentic, place-based tourism experience and foster the development of 21st century technology and multimedia skills.

We seek partnerships with public agencies, non-profit organizations and private sector interests to help us refine the strategy, develop specific methodologies, and implement the strategy to fully utilize the creative, intellectual and physical resources of the region. This grassroots program has identified key elements to guide implementation:

- The program must serve two audiences – **the resident and the visitor**.
- **Build pride in place** – the fundamental element for community revitalization.
- **Create a great place to live** – which is also a great place to establish a business, invest public resources, and to visit.
- Provide **educational opportunities for 21st century technology and multimedia skills**.
- Provide a venue that encourages **civic engagement** by all members of the community.
- **Respect and utilize local management** to ensure maximized economic benefit for the community, while the environmental impact is minimized.
- Define and deliver the product with **real people, in real places**, for a unique and authentic experience that will attract national and international visitors.
- Build public **awareness, appreciation, participation, and a commitment to the stewardship** of the historic, natural, and cultural resources for future generations.
- Invest in **building capacity for the sustainable operations** of small museums, libraries and community organizations through strong organizational leadership, efficient operation of facilities, and the cultivation of volunteers and community support.
- Establish techniques to **measure and evaluate community benefits and economic impacts** of the program.

BACKGROUND AND FRAMEWORK

Lakes to Locks Passage was established in 2002 by the New York State Legislature as a New York State Byway, and in the same year received the Federal Highway Administration's premiere designation as an All-American Road. The corridor follows an interconnected waterway that consists of four regions -- Champlain Canal/Upper Hudson River, Lake George, and Lake Champlain in New York and the Richelieu Valley in Quebec. The bi-national quality of the region not only fully integrates the shared heritage and resources, it strengthens the appeal of the entire region as a national and international destination for travelers.

However, the size of the region, distinct sub-regional characters, and complex interpretive story creates a challenge to unify the corridor and provide a "seamless experience" for the visitor. To address this challenge, Lakes to Locks Passage (LTLP) has developed a "Heritage Centers" strategy to deliver an authentic visitor experience through a hierarchy of visitor information and interpretive facilities -- providing a window to the communities, their stories, society and culture.

The key feature of the system is the network of **LTLP Waypoint Communities**, the cities, villages or hamlets that have the ability to "meet and greet" the visitor. They all offer lodging, dining and shopping opportunities and are developing infrastructure for visitor information and interpretive centers, as well as intermodal transportation connections, encouraging visitors to stop, walk, bike, and boat the Byway. Waypoint Communities serve as a "hub" for surrounding towns, hamlets, and countryside. Each Waypoint Community provides:

- A physical or functional relationship to the LTLP "experience" and resources
- Access to cultural attractions, natural and historic resources, recreation opportunities
- Lodging and dining opportunities
- Shopping and access to local products
- Interpreted walking, biking, hiking and/or boating experiences

The primary delivery point for building the emotional and intellectual connection between the traveler and the place they have come to visit is through the **LTLP Heritage Centers** located in each Waypoint Community. They are the "stage" for the community to express pride in their heritage. The managers of the Heritage Centers are "keepers of the community culture," often the local museum or library. The LTLP Heritage Centers are prominently located on the byway, ensuring that they are one of the first physical stops people will make when entering the community. When linked together, they provide connectivity within the byway corridor.

Each sub-region of Lakes to Locks Passage has a long tradition as a tourism destination on its own, so some Waypoint Communities have made significant investments for marketing and infrastructure as a "gateway" to their sub-region. Lakes to Locks Passage capitalizes on this by developing **LTLP Gateway Visitor Centers** in several communities:

- Troy
- Schuylerville
- Lake George Village
- Whitehall
- Crown Point
- Elizabethtown
- Plattsburgh

PLACE-BASED TOURISM

Lakes to Locks Passage has begun to assemble the key components of community-based destination stewardship, also called place-based tourism. Each Waypoint Community has the opportunity to deliver an authentic tourism experience that is designed to spread benefits beyond individual attractions; it will encourage visitors to stop, stay and spend money in a manner that benefits the entire community. Place-based tourism engages all members of the community and develops ownership of the byway experience by:

- employing a grassroots management structure to foster civic engagement;
- expressing community pride through a venue that serves as the “stage” for community culture;
- establishing a byway identity that is pervasive throughout the corridor;
- building awareness and appreciation of the intrinsic resources;
- encouraging intermodal transportation;
- promoting LTLP “Waypoint Communities” and
- creating an authentic tourism experience.

This approach builds community awareness and pride in the place they live as the basis for a stewardship of the intrinsic historic, natural and cultural resources for future generations, community revitalization and a sound local economy.

LTLP recognizes that a visitor seeks help with “wayfinding” – information that helps them efficiently reach their travel objective. Therefore, a successful LTLP Waypoint Community can practice “wayshowing” – a systematic and consistent delivery of information that will guide the traveler’s decisions while realizing the community’s desires for the benefits of tourism. LTLP achieves “wayshowing” through the network of Gateway Visitor Centers and Heritage Centers in the Waypoint Communities.

The visitor gains travel information through seeing, reading, hearing and learning. The LTLP Heritage Centers experience, delivered through drawing, writing, speaking and teaching, will help the visitor create a cognitive map. They will know where they are going, what they are looking at, and feel good knowing that the community through which they travel cares that they have a positive experience.

LTLP Gateway Visitor Centers provide an overview of the byway, the sub-region’s Waypoint Communities, and regional partners. At these Centers visitors learn about the byway resources, communities and people. They will find that the region is unified not by arbitrary political boundaries, but by the interconnected waterway and a community ethic that demonstrates pride of place and is committed to stewardship of the Lakes to Locks Passage resources for future generations.

LTLP Heritage Centers serve as a thematic hub to the Waypoint Community, its neighboring smaller communities and attractions, going beyond traditional visitor information by providing access to the LTLP “experience.” This unique venue allows for an authentic, theme-based experience highlighted by one-on-one interactions with people who are passionate about the byway. Heritage Center staff respond to the traveler’s needs and interests, providing the unique Waypoint Community story and information about nearby sites, attractions and activities.

DELIVERING AUTHENTICITY

Consumers of place-based tourism crave authenticity¹. With an understanding of how people perceive authenticity, we can incorporate the principles of “wayshowing” to provoke the audience to learn, and engage them in a personal way, thereby rendering an authentic travel experience. Through various methods of drawing, writing, speaking and learning we entice the traveler to come visit the byway, provide a level of comfort while they are here, and create experiences that prompt visitors to share with others and encourage a return visit. There are several ways in which authenticity can be rendered²:

- **Natural** -- people tend to perceive things in their natural state as being authentic, such as organic food, natural settings.
- **Original** -- people tend to perceive things that are original as being authentic, such as one-of-a-kind, never seen before by human eyes.
- **Exceptional** -- people tend to perceive things that are exceptionally well done as being authentic, when they are executed by an individual, demonstrating human care and consideration.
- **Referential** -- people tend to perceive things that are drawn from human history as being authentic; experiences that are iconic or ritual, tapping into shared memories and longings.
- **Influential** -- people tend to perceive things that are inspiring or influence positive human behavior as being authentic, such as activities that contribute to a sustainable environment.
- **Ordinary**³ -- people tend to perceive things that are simple and unpretentious as being authentic, such as traditional activities of family and community life.

Planning for place-based tourism recognizes that a tourism product is what you buy, what we want to do is create a tourism experience – that is what you remember. The purpose of LTLP Heritage Centers is to have the people who live here tell their stories, and deliver authentic experiences. The stories need to focus on what is natural, original, exceptional, inspirational, influential or ordinary. These “LTLP Ambassadors” can speak with passion, and render authenticity in a meaningful, lively and engaging way. Direct personal interaction strikes an emotional chord, so the visitor will remember the experience and share it with others.

Most importantly, service as a LTLP Ambassador stimulates civic engagement by all members of the community. By sharing their stories, residents build awareness – appreciation – participation – leadership – and ultimately, a commitment for stewarding the community’s historic, natural and cultural resources for future generations.

There is an authenticity about Lakes to Locks Passage that offers genuine visitor experiences delivered by “real” people in “real” places, which serves to differentiate the region from competitors. Much of the LTLP landscape retains purity in its character; it has not been homogenized as “Anywhere, USA.” The challenge is to deliver a tourism product that packages the unique, and authentic, qualities into thematic experiences – and build pride in the community. More than any other factor, this establishes LTLP as a unique visitor destination – with all the necessary elements to support place-based tourism.

¹ Gilmore, James H. and Pine, B. Joseph II; **Authenticity**, Harvard Business School Press, 2007.

² The first five examples are provided by Gilmore and Pine.

³ This is not an example of rendering authenticity provided by Gilmore and Pine, but is a key element of the vernacular landscape that reflects a region’s cultural values and social behaviors.

GATEWAY VISITOR CENTERS

Lakes to Locks Passage Gateway Visitor Centers are not under LTLP ownership. They are discrete facilities that partner with Lakes to Locks Passage to provide the “big picture” about the byway and an introduction to the stories and experiences that can be found in the surrounding region. Gateway Visitor Centers are to be open year-round and staffed with people who are familiar with the entire byway corridor.

Exhibits are designed to inform the visitor about all the Waypoint Communities in the region. Because the exhibits feature numerous partners, many opportunities exist to share in the cost for design, fabrication and maintenance of the exhibits.

Purpose:

- Gateway to the LTLP sub-region
- Direct visitors to sub-region Waypoint Communities & Heritage Centers, their sites and attractions
- Provide an introduction to the key partners and interpretive themes of the sub-region
- Provide interpretation of key features of the site

Exhibit venues can include:

- Multi-media presentation of Lakes to Locks Passage
 - Waypoint Community experiences
 - LTLP sites and attractions “advertorials”
 - Passage minutes
 - Fun-factoids
 - Featured itineraries
 - Upcoming events of sub-region & other LTLP sub-regions (3:1 ratio)
- Diorama of Gateway region
 - Illustrate topographic features, waterways, Waypoint Communities, key sites of interest
 - Show interface with other Byways
 - Illustrate thematic itineraries for driving, biking and boating
- Graphic panel exhibits on Waypoint Communities and regional partners
- Computer station with printer for limited Web access to get more information about LTLP, download LTLP itineraries, LTLP partner activities and events, and limited outbound email for visitors using an electronic postcard with a Heritage Center “postmark” and a link to the LTLP Web site.
- Items of regional interest – artifacts, local products.
- Exterior Gateway Kiosk that provides information on a storyline to “explore” (Birding Trail, Underwater Preserves, etc).
- Walking tour of site with interpretive wayside exhibits (LaChute Walking Trail)
- Brochure racks for walking, driving, biking and boating guides
- Brochure racks for traveler information

WAYPOINT COMMUNITY HERITAGE CENTERS

Waypoint Community Heritage Centers are a partnership with existing local museums, libraries, or organizations that have a commitment to delivering the Lakes to Locks Passage experience through place-based tourism. Facilities do not need to be open year-round, but should have regular operating hours during the visitor season. How a community provides a Heritage Center experience depends upon the scope of available physical and fiscal resources. LTLP invests project funding and technical assistance in the existing organizations and facilities that steward the historic, natural, cultural and recreational resources of the byway, serving as “keepers of the community culture.”

A LTLP Heritage Center facility is managed by an organization with staff and volunteers devoted to delivering an authentic, place-based tourism experience through interpretation, programs and events. Each LTLP Heritage Center provides an aura of professionalism achieved through implementation of best practices for management, exhibits and staff:

- governance of the organization and management of the facility,
- stewardship activities that include education, interpretation, conservation and restoration
- recruit and retain staff and volunteers with an ability to provide “authenticity” to the visitor experience through storytelling,
- the facility has LTLP Heritage Center signage and clearly credits appropriate funding sources
- exhibits that portray the community theme and send visitors to places they can do something,
- information on nearby sites, attractions and other LTLP Waypoint Communities,
- information on upcoming events, lodging, dining, and shopping in the Waypoint Community.

LTLP Heritage Centers are located within the Waypoint Community, convenient to the traveling public. Their main function is to provide byway information and “wayfinding” services, and showcase the region’s hospitality. The goal is to give every visitor personalized service. The centers will allow the visitor to explore the unique stories, immediately engaging them with the community’s “real people”. These people have a special affinity for the area, and serve as “ambassadors” for the Heritage Center and the community. The ambassadors help with a wide range of activities, from staffing heritage centers to setting up and running events, and providing hospitality training for local businesses.

Steps for Heritage Center Development:

1. Develop Regional Interpretive Scenario for all LTLP Waypoint Communities and environs creating a “fabric” of interconnected threads of the “Four Lives of Lakes to Locks Passage:”
 - Secure Waypoint Community and Heritage Center resolutions.
 - Identify interpretive theme for each Waypoint Community
 - Identify sites, attractions, activities and existing interpretive resources of the community
 - Select the “Community Stories” for each Waypoint Community’s authentic experience
2. Develop interpretive scenario for the “front-story” of the Heritage Center and Waypoint Community – usually three key concepts for the visitor to grasp – and details of the natural, original, exceptional, referential, influential and ordinary “back-story,” implemented through:
 - Exhibits, programs and activities that engage the visitor
 - A dominant feature in each Center that creates interest and initiate conversation
 - Multi-media presentations and audio/video narration
 - Guidebooks for interpretation of the landscape through thematic routes and itineraries
 - Personal stories with one-on-one delivery
3. Develop “Ambassadors” program – recruit, train and retain volunteers and guides:
 - Identify Ambassador passions, their personal “back-story,” linked to interpretive venues
 - Develop community binder with “100 commonly-asked questions” and volunteer handbook
 - Deliver trainings for hospitality and interpretation skills

LAKES TO LOCKS PASSAGE HERITAGE CENTERS SUSTAINABILITY

Lakes to Locks Passage recognizes the need to invest in the sustainable operations of existing community organizations and infrastructure in order to implement a successful place-based tourism strategy. The challenge that all small museums, libraries and community organizations face is how to build strong organizational leadership, maintain operations of facilities, and cultivate volunteers. Through an Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) grant, the Essex County Historical Society worked with Lakes to Locks Passage, Inc., and the Champlain Valley Heritage Network (CVHN) to develop a **Heritage Centers Sustainability Program** to build capacity and sustainability of the LTLP Heritage Centers. The IMLS-funded professional trainings addressed the needs of the eight Heritage Centers in the Lake Champlain region, recognizing that each community has unique needs for developing a facility, but they all share the challenges of how to sustain operations and establish high quality services.

The result of that project is a skills and capacity building program which gains sustainability through a support network that expands the base of civic engagement, number of professionals that are trained, and knowledge base of best practices for management and operations. It encourages all members of the community to participate in the Heritage Center's sustainability through a continuum that builds an awareness – appreciation – participation – leadership – and ultimately, a commitment for future generations.

The overarching need for the Heritage Centers is to establish and maintain a three-pronged approach for on-going training and technical assistance:

- professional trainings for **operations and management** and an administrative circuit rider to implement and reinforce the trainings;
- refinement of the byway **visitor information and interpretation** with the services of an interpretive circuit rider to develop the cultural heritage infrastructure through programs, exhibits, and education;
- a toolkit for Heritage Center **“Ambassador” trainings** to provide the “care and feeding” of volunteers, hospitality skills, and expression of community pride that will be embraced by residents and visitors alike.

The Heritage Centers Sustainability Program has employed statements and standards for best practices developed by the American Association of Museums (AAM) and American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) in this training. Workshops for organizational leadership, planning, collections stewardship, education and interpretation, financial stability, and facilities management have improved the public trust and accountability of the Centers. Topics for trainings include:

- Vision, Mission and Planning for Organizational Growth
- Responsibilities of Trustees, Ethics and Standards
- Succession Planning
- Financial Stability
- Fundraising Techniques
- Grant Writing
- Collections Stewardship
- Building Relationships with the Press
- Event Planning
- Exhibition Techniques
- Interpretive Use of Collections
- Photo Digitization and Storage
- Community Scholars Training: Interviewing and Oral History
- Training for Volunteer/Staff Heritage Center “Ambassadors”
- Examine how museums and libraries reflect the current community needs and resources

MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION

Lakes to Locks Passage recognizes the need to understand and evaluate the outcomes of the Heritage centers strategy in terms of community benefits and economic impacts. Evaluation can be used to communicate with a variety of stakeholders to:

- Track and measure progress on strategic goals and objectives
- Identify emerging needs and issues for on-going strategic planning
- Measure effectiveness of program management
- Support grant and funding reports
- Justify investment of time and money

Numerous public and private entities have made significant investments in tourism development and promotion for many years, creating a significant challenge for measuring and evaluating the impact and progress of the Heritage centers. Therefore demonstrating community benefits and economic impacts of the Lakes to Locks Passage Heritage centers actions and investments depends on establishing a baseline of conditions, defining specific outcomes and measuring indicators of success.

We have used an outcomes based “logic model” to express how we expect to bring about the desired results. At the outset of the IMLS project specific outcomes and indicators of success were defined to provide a way to measuring progress over time, demonstrating the relationship between those outcomes and the operation of the program. Elements of the logic model include:

- Define program partners and stakeholders
- Define needs, solutions, and results
- Define program purpose
- Define program elements—inputs, services, activities and output (counts)
- Define expected outcomes and indicators

Indicators for measuring success of the LTLP Heritage Centers demonstrates progress along the continuum of awareness – appreciation – participation – commitment to the Heritage Center, its organization, community revitalization and the stewardship of the historic, natural, and cultural resources have included:

- Increased leadership, energy, and vision of the organization
- Increased efforts to strengthen the organization’s leadership and management
- Increased efforts for ongoing management such as grant writing, board membership, program development and Heritage Center management.
- Independent initiative to create a product or acquire new skills
- Increased outreach and publicity to engage diverse members of the community
- Increased public participation in programs and events
- Increased readiness to partner with other organizations and entities
- Increased activities to steward the historic, cultural and natural resources
- Increased involvement by elected officials and public agencies
- Increased technical assistance from outside sources
- Increased investments from the public and private sectors
- Increased recognition and credibility within the community and region
- Increased public perception that the Heritage Center is an essential element of the region’s identity and quality of life

LAKES TO LOCKS PASSAGE HERITAGE CENTERS ELEMENTS

Lakes to Locks Passage Gateway Visitor Center

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Lake George Visitor Center Exterior



Waypoint Community Exhibits



Regional Partners Exhibits

Waypoint Community Heritage Center

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Lake Champlain Diorama



Ticonderoga Heritage Museum