



BLOWING ROCK  
TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

# Partner Programs

2024-2025

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**The mission of the Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority is to provide leadership and primary funding for promoting, developing, and supporting year-round travel and tourism to and within the Town of Blowing Rock to increase lodging sales, extend overnight stays, and boost visitor spending.**



## Welcome From the Executive Director

At the Blowing Rock TDA, we appreciate the unique challenges and incredible opportunities within the tourism industry today. And tourism is vital here in Blowing Rock, supporting nearly all our local businesses and improving the quality of life of our residents through enhanced recreation, dining, and shopping options. Annual visitor spending in Watauga County reduces the tax burden for each county resident by an average of \$646.86.



Our mission is to increase that visitor spending and overnight stays in Blowing Rock; to boost business, in other words. We are here to support your tourism-related business every step of the way, providing tools, resources, and guidance that can help you thrive in today's competitive market. It's about more than just the money, though. Local business thrives when our community thrives. A strong community is realized through cooperation and engagement by all stakeholders- working together. We're excited to work with you and be a connection for our local business owners, our residents, the Town, and our visitors.

Our staff has years of industry experience and a deep understanding of sustainability and the latest trends and technologies. Marketing and promotions is a big part of that, and we can also provide insights into tourism trends and opportunities to help you enhance your customer experience. In these pages, you'll find details on how your business can take part in our ongoing promotional efforts, and how we are already working to promote local experiences and educate our guests in various ways.

Want help getting the word out about new features at your business or attraction? Learn about travel trends to apply to your planning? Looking for local information and resources for your staff? We can assist with these and more. We are happy to help you elevate your business and create unforgettable experiences for your guests. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me or any of our staff for assistance.

Warm regards,  
Tracy Brown  
Executive Director,  
Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority

# Meet the Staff



**Tracy Brown**  
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The Blowing Rock TDA offices are located inside the Robbins House with the Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce. The two organizations maintain a close partnership!

If you have questions about about Partner Programs or information included in this guide, please contact Amanda Lugenbell.

## Blowing Rock TDA Board Members

2023-24 Fiscal Year:

- Dean Bullis - Chairman, Tourism seat
- Kevin Walker - Vice Chair, Lodging seat
- Pete Gherini - Town Council seat
- Zika Rea - At-large seat
- Greg Tarbutton - Lodging seat

Ex-Officio Members:

- Tasha Brown- Finance Officer
- Shane Fox- Town Manager



# Let's Start at the Beginning

## What is a TDA?

A Tourism Development Authority (TDA) is created by the NC Legislature. It allows municipalities and counties to collect occupancy taxes which are to be spent on tourism development and promotion to visitors from outside their boundaries.

## How is the TDA funded?

The BRTDA is funded by the 6% occupancy tax collected from overnight stays by visitors at hotels and short-term accommodations inside the town-limits of Blowing Rock. The BRTDA does not receive funding from property taxes or any other government support.

## What is the Blowing Rock TDA's job?

The BRTDA is the official destination marketing organization (DMO) for Blowing Rock, created to increase overnight stays and visitor spending in Blowing Rock. This is accomplished by promoting Blowing Rock to potential visitors through paid advertising, travel media, and our own media channels. The BRTDA also spends funds on projects to reduce the impacts of tourism, like sidewalk improvements, increased public parking, and responsible travel programs.

## How does the Blowing Rock TDA do its job?

The BRTDA works to increase awareness of Blowing Rock and build connections among visitors. Through advertising, promotions, and public relations, we tap into travelers' curiosity and desire to explore new places while also reinforcing the loyalty of long-time visitors. We work with industry partners to inspire travelers to experience the things that make Blowing Rock unique.



## Why is this work important?

The \$501 million per year that visitors bring into Watauga County boosts our local economy from top to bottom. Promotion drives visitors to book at hotels, buy tickets to activities, and dine at restaurants- all businesses that sustain local livelihoods. Tourism sustains more than 3,000 jobs within the county- that represents about 1 out of every 6 employees here. Watauga County currently ranks 15th among NC's 100 counties for visitor spending.



## How do I become a BRTDA Tourism Partner?

Tourism-related businesses in the Town of Blowing Rock are automatically partners! These are businesses that serve visitors on a regular basis: accommodations, restaurants, most retailers, & attractions. Nearby regional attractions and events, even if they are outside town limits, are also partners to the BRTDA because Blowing Rock visitors often plan trips around regional attractions and activities.

*\*2022 visitor spending data from Visit NC / Tourism Economics*



## Partner Opportunities Partner Resources & Education

### **Free One-on-one Assistance**

The Blowing Rock TDA's skilled staff members stand ready to help our tourism industry partners make use of all our organization has to offer! From social media tips for your business, to ideas for promotions, we are happy to help. Whether your business is new or well-established, we invite you to schedule a meeting to review all the programs offered by the BRTDA and find those that fit your needs. We love to brainstorm and share what we have learned from other businesses and organizations! It's a wise investment of your time.

### **How does this help me?**

This is the easiest way to get expert guidance on your promotions, or learn about useful programs, all paid for by occupancy taxes. Plus, developing a relationship with the BRTDA is a great way to get connected to others in the industry who can become effective partners.

### **What do I need to do?**

Contact Amanda Lugenbell and schedule a meeting. If you have particular interest in a specific area, you may be meeting with a different member of our staff.



## Partner Resources & Education

### The Village Tattler Tourism Industry E-newsletter

The Village Tattler is a weekly, business-to-business newsletter from the Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority. It includes locally-relevant tourism news, updates on Blowing Rock TDA activities, event reminders, and promotional opportunities. The Tattler newsletter is useful for those working in hotels, shops, attractions, and restaurants along with local volunteers, county and municipality leaders, BRTDA board members, and other members of the community who want to stay up-to-date on the local tourism industry.

#### How does this help me?

The newsletter is full of information that you will find helpful. You will always be able to answer guests and customers when they ask “what’s going on in town this weekend?” It will also keep you in-the-know about ways you can get more involved with the BRTDA, such as participating with media, when to update guide & website listings, and more. If your business has been featured in the media, won an award, or has special events, the Tattler is a great way to share your news with your industry partners.

#### What do I need to do?

To receive the newsletter, let us know you’d like to be added to the mailing list, or sign up on the Resources & Education page at [blowingrock.com/partner-resources](http://blowingrock.com/partner-resources).

### Research & Data Resources

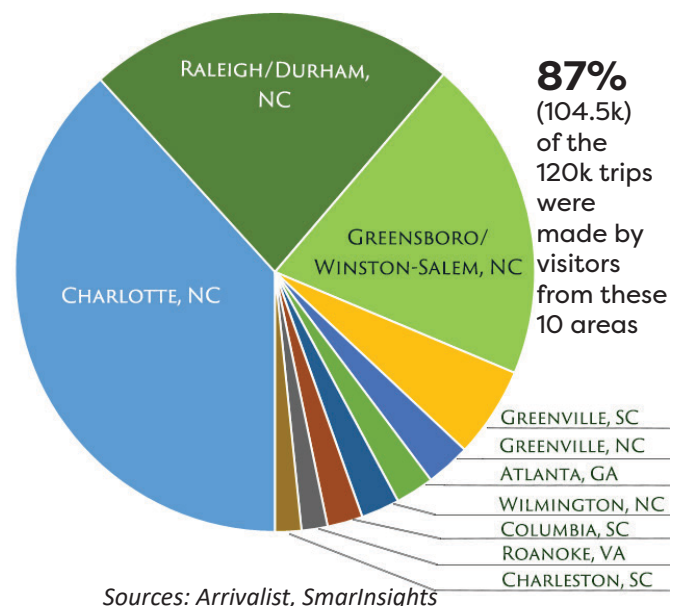
The BRTDA maintains data on local occupancy tax revenue, which shows seasonal trends and changes in visitation over time. Additionally, collected data from Arrivalist and AirDNA gives insights on our travel markets and where our visitors spend their time. The BRTDA also participates in and occasionally commissions visitor studies.

#### How does this help me?

As a tourism partner of the BRTDA, you have access to these valuable industry insights and research resources. These can help you understand your potential customer base, make marketing decisions, or confirm staffing levels needed for various seasons.

#### What do I need to do?

If you are looking for a particular set of data or want to know which research can help you find the answer to specific questions, give us a call. Find local annual revenue reports on the Tourism page on [blowingrock.com](http://blowingrock.com). Links to relevant market research & results of BRTDA commissioned studies are coming soon.



## Partner Resources & Education

### Photo Sharing & Resources

The BRTDA has a selection of free, high-resolution destination & event photography available for partners to use on their websites or in promotions. It's important for us to have up-to-date images of your business, too, so we invite you to send us any professional-grade images you have of your business. We use current images of local tourism-related businesses to tell specific and engaging stories on our website and social media, and we also send photos of local businesses to the media in response to inquiries. We can also take high-resolution photos of your business for use in your materials and in our promotions!

#### How does it help me?

The BRTDA's image library and photo services saves our partners the time and expense of creating their own images. And when we have good images of your business, we can promote you more specifically and effectively.

#### What do I need to do?

Request use of destination & event images or schedule a time for staff to visit your business to take photos by contacting Amanda Lugenbell. You may email existing photos you have of your businesses directly to us. Details on the photo program are available on the Resources & Education page at [blowingrock.com/partner-resources](http://blowingrock.com/partner-resources).



### Industry Familiarization (FAM) Tours

The BRTDA currently offers one annual tour in early June, open to tourism-related business management and frontline staff, to familiarize them with our various industry partners. These fun tours help to increase participants' awareness of the many things the Blowing Rock area has to offer. These experiences are open to anyone in our local tourism industry, but they're particularly effective at educating lodging partners' frontline staff so they can inform guests of the great things to do while in town.

#### How does this help me?

This is a great, FREE way for you and your staff to discover all there is to do in Blowing Rock, which you can in turn share with your guests. Happier, more informed visitors are more likely to stay longer and make a return visit.

#### What do I need to do?

Watch for information on the Industry FAM Tours in our weekly Village Tattler newsletter. You are required to register yourself or your staff for these free events, as space is limited. Be sure you are signed up for the newsletter!



## Partner Resources & Education

### Printable Calendars

A monthly/weekly (depending on season) printable calendar of special events and activities that take place in and around Blowing Rock is available to post for guests.

#### How does this help me?

Your guests will appreciate this item! Accommodations can leave this in their guest rooms or in a common area, such as a front desk. Other businesses may find it beneficial to have copies available as well.

#### What do I need to do?

Let us know if you'd like the weekly calendar in your inbox- email Lindsay Garcia.

### Outdoor NC Resources

As a member of the Outdoor NC Partner Alliance, the BRTDA has access to great educational resources from Visit NC. From the 7 Principles of Leave No Trace to the financial benefits of sustainability, there's a lot to learn about and apply!

#### How does this help me?

Applying sustainability principles can make your business more resilient and appealing to customers. As more members of our community join the movement, this helps us all!

#### What do I need to do?

Access resource lists and links, printable posters, an online training lab and more at [BlowingRock.com/partner-resources](http://BlowingRock.com/partner-resources).

### Student Employment Connection

The BRTDA hosts fall tours for Hospitality & Tourism Management students at Appalachian State University. Students visit various businesses to learn firsthand about what it takes to manage a hospitality operation, and to connect with potential employers. The BRTDA also shares potential internship hosts and employer info with Hospitality & Tourism Management program contacts at AppState.

#### How does this help me?

Local college students can fill employment positions at your business, particularly seasonal or part-time. As students who want to build careers in tourism, these can be excellent employees.

#### What do I need to do?

Let us know what kind of positions are available at your business for university students or interns and we'll share those positions with contacts at Appstate. Keep us updated on changes! If you would like to host the student tour group in November, contact Amanda Lugenbell at the BRTDA.



## Marketing Your Business

### **BRTDA Website**

BlowingRock.com is the official visitor information website for Blowing Rock. Qualifying tourism-related businesses in Blowing Rock, such as accommodations, restaurants, and shopping, are listed on the website free of charge. High Country attractions within a 15 mile radius are also eligible for listing on the website free of charge. Each business is listed with eye-catching photos to attract visitors, and has a link to that business's website. We rely on industry partners to keep their information on the website current and relevant.

### **How does this help me?**

A listing on the BRTDA's website provides additional exposure for your business thanks to the 478,000 unique users who visit the website each year. Having your business listed also increases your own website's search engine optimization (SEO).

### **What do I need to do?**

Contact Lindsay Garcia with your business details if you are not currently listed on our site! Some businesses are automatically added to the website. Accommodations need to confirm occupancy tax compliance with the Town of Blowing Rock Finance Department (located at Town Hall) before being listed. Each listing needs an image, description, contact information, and a web link.

### **Visitor Guide**

This brochure-style publication helps visitors plan their trip to and within Blowing Rock. Local attractions, activities, restaurants, and accommodations are listed for free.

### **How does this help me?**

Your business may be listed or featured in the Visitor Guide, giving you added exposure. Approximately 75,000 printed Blowing Rock Guides are distributed annually, with additional digital copies downloaded from our website. Additionally, these Guides are available (in any quantity) without charge for you to display and give to your guests.

### **What do I need to do?**

Make sure your business is listed on our website and up-to-date. We will announce in the Village Tattler e-newsletter as we update the Visitor Guide, so double check your listing then as well. For copies, come to the TDA offices on Park Avenue.

## Marketing Your Business

### Online Calendar of Events

As a service to visitors and the community, the BRTDA maintains a listing of events happening in the area on our website. We encourage all our partners to submit special events and upcoming activities for listing. Events must meet certain guidelines, like being open to the general public.

#### How does this help me?

In addition to putting your event in front of potential visitors, the online calendar is how the BRTDA learns about your events. We use the online calendar to develop the calendars that are distributed in other communications and in the Information Center. It helps us know what to promote on our social media channels, too.

#### What do I need to do?

You can find the criteria for being included on the calendar and a submission form by visiting [blowingrock.com/partner-resources](http://blowingrock.com/partner-resources). Submit your events as far in advance as possible, giving as much information as possible.

### Glow Time and Other Seasonal Promotions

The BRTDA coordinates “Glow Time” promotions from Thanksgiving to Christmas. This features festive activities and holiday shopping with free listing opportunities for a “favorite thing” from each participating store. The Glow Time theme is promoted in seasonal paid ads and many social media features, all directed to a special web page that highlights seasonal activities. Similar promotions have been coordinated for Valentine’s Day and other special events.

#### How does this help me?

For retailers in particular, the Glow Time promotions can help increase visibility, especially on social media as we use our web content to build features. Lodging and attractions partners can also list specials or packages, all free of charge. Holiday travel and messaging is always a great theme to gain extra promotion for any business.

#### What do I need to do?

Keep an eye on announcements in The Village Tattler Newsletter to learn when seasonal promotions are happening. Retailers should choose an item to feature as their “favorite thing” and send us details. All businesses should send their holiday features to us around the beginning of November. We will find the best fit for promoting it!

## Marketing Your Business

### Information Kiosks in Blowing Rock

The Blowing Rock TDA maintains the four information kiosks in town. Local businesses are marked on the maps, and a bulletin board is available for event posters

#### How does this help me?

Having a presence in the kiosks boosts visibility and knowledge of businesses. These kiosks are located in the center of town and at three main parking areas. Lots of visitors see these and stop to check them out!

#### What do I need to do?

Businesses are listed on the maps automatically, but keep us notified of location changes for your business. To post an event poster, the event must be open to the public and of potential interest to visitors. Contact Amanda or Tracy to inquire about current space on the bulletin board, and provide copies of the poster for posting.

### Social Media Shares & Features

The Blowing Rock TDA has 82,000+ followers on Facebook, 41,000+ followers on Instagram, and a growing following on Tiktok and Pinterest. Fresh content is posted multiple times a week, and we love to highlight our local businesses!

#### How does this help me?

Being included in our social media posts can increase your reach on social media platforms. We regularly reshare business posts on Facebook and Instagram. We will also create original content that features businesses, from announcing big news at that business, to including them in seasonal promotions.

#### What do I need to do?

Tag us in your posts so we can find your content to share and repost those that will interest our audience. Reach out to our social media manager, Tyler Graves, via email or direct message on social platforms to ask about collaborating on a new feature. Also, **participate in our other opportunities** to stay on our radar for inclusion in roundups or features on social media!

### Social Media Event promotion

Invite Blowing Rock, North Carolina to co-host your event on Facebook! Any event geared to attract visitors and located in Blowing Rock may be eligible. (Please note, not all will be approved.)

#### How does this help me?

If your event is approved, this will help it reach a larger audience: the 82,000+ followers of Blowing Rock, North Carolina on Facebook.

#### What do I need to do?

When creating an Facebook event, add Blowing Rock, North Carolina as a co-host.

## Marketing Your Business

### **E-newsletter Spotlights**

The BRTDA's monthly eblast goes out to a mailing list of over 8,000 people who are interested in news from Blowing Rock. We use this publication to keep people up-to-date on events and activities, but also new businesses and unique local stories. Local businesses may be spotlighted with their events, in the "New around town" section, or in a feature if they have a special story to tell.

#### **How does this help me?**

This is a great, free way to get the word out about your business to people who are already interested in visiting Blowing Rock. Plus, it keeps you on the BRTDA's radar for other ways to promote an event you are hosting, or a story about your business.

#### **What do I need to do?**

If you would like to be featured, send your content or idea to our content manager, Lindsay Garcia, to get the conversation started. Note that time-sensitivity is a big consideration for events since this is a monthly publication, so get us your event details as soon as possible so you don't miss out on inclusion!

### **Visit NC Listings and Connection**

The official tourism marketing organization for the state, Visit North Carolina, relies on local tourism contacts to maintain information on their visitor information website. The BRTDA is the local tourism contact for Blowing Rock. In addition to maintaining local listings on VisitNC.com, we serve as a point of contact for relaying new and exciting activities and pastimes for visitors. The staff at Visit NC use this information to craft pitches and plan trips for visiting travel writers and influencers.

#### **How does this help me?**

If your business qualifies for listing on Visit NC, this can increase your reach to new audiences, and the listing is free! Additionally, being included in pitches from our friends at the state tourism office can sometimes lead to mentions in national media or publications.

#### **What do I need to do?**

Make sure your listing on [blowingrock.com](http://blowingrock.com) is up-to-date as we use this information to maintain other online listings! Keep us up to date on any new features or special interest stories at your business so we can promote it to Visit NC among other outlets. Contact Lindsay Garcia for changes to your listings on [BlowingRock.com](http://BlowingRock.com) or [VisitNC.com](http://VisitNC.com).

## Marketing Your Business

### **Public Relations Efforts**

The BRTDA frequently pitches ideas and story concepts to writers and editors, both freelance and at publications. Keeping us up-to-date on news at your business increases your likelihood to be featured on social media, online news outlets or in print publications created by the influencer, blogger, or journalists that we contact. We invite all our partners to participate in this free, valuable, and effective method of promoting our destination.

### **How does this help me?**

Having someone else talk about your business in a positive light is always more effective than promoting yourself. This is also a great way to get more eyes on your business and attract visitors.

### **What do I need to do?**

Keep our staff up to date about innovations, new experiences and opportunities visitors can have at your business- this can be through events & specials (send to Lindsay) or frequent updates (send to Amanda). We will pitch your information to media and reach out to businesses as opportunities arise.

### **Hosting Media Guests**

As a tourism partner, you can offer discounts, free meals, tickets to experiences, or overnight stays to travel writers, bloggers, or influencers when they visit. The BRTDA provides our partners with the opportunity to get involved with regional, national, and international media as we work with influencers, bloggers, or travel writers.

### **How does this help me?**

By offering your good or service, you are likely (but not guaranteed) to be featured in the writer's work. Travel writers typically want their accommodations and the places they visit to reflect the audience of the publication or their social media followers. Doing so increases the likelihood that your business will resonate with their readers/followers. This means that not every business is right for every writer.

### **What do I need to do?**

Let Amanda at the TDA know if you are interested in hosting travel writers, influencers, or bloggers so you are in our contacts for these opportunities. This hosting would need to be complimentary or deeply discounted- be open about what you can do or don't want to offer. We will reach out when we are working with a media guest that may be a good fit with your business!



## **Destination Enhancements**

### **Destination Enhancement Funding**

The BRTDA is empowered to allocate grant funding to tourism-related projects and infrastructure under the authority granted by its enabling legislation. Our bylaws state “the Authority shall use two-thirds of the funds remitted to it by the Town Council to promote travel and tourism in Blowing Rock and shall use the remaining one-third of the funds remitted for tourism-related expenditures.” Tourism-related expenditures are defined as “expenditures that, in the judgment of the Tourism Development Authority, are designed to increase the use of lodging facilities, meeting facilities, and convention facilities in the town by attracting tourists or business travelers to the town. The term includes tourism-related capital expenditures.” The BRTDA Board determines the eligibility of expenditures and approves all investments of funds.

### **How does it help me?**

BRTDA funds can underwrite the investment in capital projects designed to attract visitors and boost tourism in Blowing Rock.

### **What do I need to do?**

Any inquiry must be presented to the BRTDA Board. You must represent a project that will enhance public areas in Blowing Rock. Funding is not available for private businesses or corporations. Begin this process by contacting the BRTDA Executive Director, Tracy Brown.