Project Name: C&O Canal Experience - Scenic Byway, Trails, and Water Trails

Project Manager: Heather Ersts
Project Management: [Link to Smartsheet]

Purpose: What is the purpose of the project? For OTD, Montgomery County DMO, Frederick County DMO, Washington County DMO, and Allegany County DMO to work together to:
- increase customer awareness and engagement with the experiences around the C&O Canal Scenic Byway, Trails, and Water Trails;
- investigate conducting pre- and post- economic impact research (consumer and economic investment) about the C&O Canal Scenic Byway, Trails, and Water Trails;
- develop a unified marketing message for the C&O Canal Scenic Byway, Trails, and Water Trails;
- promote the C&O Canal Scenic Byway, Trails, and Water Trails, with the unified marketing message, through a media relations and advertising campaign, SEO, and other owned communication assets.
- maximize the opportunities of existing and emerging assets and leverage partnerships between OTD, local DMOs, NPS, Canal Trust, and the Canal Towns to encourage transactionable opportunities, particularly overnight stays; and
- produce tourism products for a variety of experiences and audiences to facilitate additional and longer visitation to the C&O Canal Scenic Byway, Trails, and Water Trails.

How does this project encourage someone from outside of Maryland to visit? The C&O Canal is an international and domestic attraction. This project will showcase the experiences along the C&O Canal Scenic Byway, Trails, and Water Trails; assist visitors get the information they need to plan a trip; and provide inspiration and information that encourages visitors to stay longer and do more.

NPS does not have funds to market the C&O Canal Trail, while OTD, with our regional DMOs and CRUSA, has the infrastructure and the ability to effectively market this unique attraction, and the surrounding region, domestically and internationally.

How does this differentiate Maryland in the marketplace? The C&O Canal is already a differentiator for Maryland. This project will pull together the experiences of the C&O Canal Scenic Byway, Trails, and Water Trails and enhance them and provide marketing assets about them.

Background: Describe how the project came about and how it will proceed. The project came about from the Canal Towns Partnership Forum on November 7, 2018 where canal partners talked about new strategic plans for NPS C&O Canal, Canal Towns Trust, and the Canal Towns Partnership and the group helped identify strategies and specific topics to re-invigorate and re-energize the Canal Towns Partnership and the individual canal towns. At that meeting the need for effective marketing came to the forefront, as well as the series of major anniversaries (see Delivery Dates) that provide the “why now.”

This multi-year project has multiple projects within it that include research, strategic partnerships, stakeholder engagement, video production, product development, advertising, media campaign, and PR.

Situational Analysis: Why is the project important? The project is important because it will:
• Increase visitor awareness, inspire travel, and effectively provide information that will impel visitors to stay longer, and thus spend more;
• Amplify DMO, NPS, and private sector efforts by linking together public and private sector tourism experiences throughout the entire region;
• Maximize the opportunity of major anniversaries to promote the region and attraction;
• Provide information about visitors to the region so that there can be more effective marketing;
• Provide a model project of OTD and DMO cooperation for the benefit of all.

What need does it fill?  This project fills the need for:
• A unified marketing message for all tourism partners about the C&O Canal Scenic Byway, Trails, and Water Trails;
• Enhancing customer service by improving information about travel to the region;
• Differentiating and presenting the state as a fun and exciting overnight destination by effectively marketing Maryland’s C&O Canal Scenic Byway, Trails, and Water Trails; and,
• Baseline research and measurable results.

Who benefits from the project?  Customers benefit from increased awareness of experiences around the C&O Canal Scenic Byway, Trails, and Water Trails and a better understanding of the region as an overnight destination. Businesses benefit because of increased marketing and the State benefits from the increase in tourism tax codes due to an increase and expanded visitation.

Qualitative and Quantitative Goals of the project:
• For OTD, Montgomery County DMO, Frederick County DMO, Washington County DMO, and Allegany County DMO to successfully work together to maximize the opportunities of existing and new assets, and leverage partnerships between OTD, local DMOs, NPS, Canal Trust, and the Canal Towns to encourage transactionable opportunities, particularly overnight stays.
  o Develop and promote with a unified marketing message for all tourism partners about the C&O Canal Scenic Byway, Trails, and Water Trails through media relations and advertising campaigns, SEO/SEM, and other owned communication assets.
    ■ Marketing & Advertising
      • Develop marketing toolkit for tourism partners
      • One unified fact sheet for media consumers
      • Develop an unified branding of marketing collateral
      • Measure response to (planned) spring digital co-op ad campaign; number of click-thrus to the webpage
    o Conduct pre- and post- economic impact research (consumer and economic investment) about the C&O Canal Scenic Byway, Trails, and Water Trails
      o Establish a baseline research and evaluate the economic impact along the C & O Canal.
      o Obtain an audience profile.
      o Assess the effects of the project upon the number and type of visitors and their economic impact to the region in 3-5 years.
  o Increase visitor awareness of C&O Canal Scenic Byway, Trails, and Water Trails experience and the region as an overnight destination.
    o Produce tourism products for a variety of experiences and audiences to facilitate additional and longer visitation to the C&O Canal Scenic Byway, Trails, and Water Trails.
      ■ Produce high-quality videos, b-roll, and photos about C&O Canal Scenic Byway, Trails, and Water Trails experiences for delivery by May 28, 2021.
      ■ Update website / add more to Scenic byway site / C&O Experience site
      ■ Include C&O Experience in DMM
    o Develop C&O Experience Certified Host Program
Project Memo for CHP:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1dTYNMEwCnlaQY5v_JgnULXazN6O05S7jkCmcSKbjDU/edit?usp=sharing

- Public Relations & Social Media
  - PR: Support DMOs and industry partners media/editorial initiatives surrounding the C&O Canal Experience
  - PR: Host at least three virtual and/or in-person desksides with a journalist/editor, along with DMO partners that focuses on the C&O Canal Experience
  - PR: Secure at least two in person media fams within the C&O Canal Region
  - PR: Secure local, regional, national and international media coverage surrounding the C&O Canal Experience
  - PR: Secure coverage in at least one outdoor recreation media outlet
  - PR: Develop C&O Canal Experience collateral for a media tool kit
  - SM: Create engaging and informative social posts for Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram leading up to and on the notable dates (below)
  - SM: Create a paid ad for Facebook and Instagram to increase brand awareness and travel inspiration to the C&O Canal leading up to Spring 2021
  - SM: Assist DMOs and industry partners with social media efforts
  - Measure engagement with social media posts

**Partners on the project:** DMOs in Montgomery, Frederick, Washington, Allegany Counties. National Park Service, Canal Towns Trust, and Canal Towns Partnership. Maryland Main Streets in Brunswick, Frederick, Hagerstown, Williamsport, Frostburg, and Cumberland. A&E District in Hagerstown, Frederick and Cumberland. Heritage Areas including Montgomery County Heritage Area, Heart of the Civil War, and Canal Place.

**Delivery Dates (Pending Available Funds):** ***more milestones to be added by sub-committees

- **August 2019** Film C&O Canal Scenic Byway Video #1 (West Section)
- **Spring 2020** Launch C&O Canal Scenic Byway Video #1 (West Section) and website
- **Oct. 10, 2020** 170th of complete C&O Canal opening
- **Nov 20, 2020** Planned delivery of C&O Canal Economic Impact Analysis by Rockport Analytics.
- **Jan. 2021** 50th anniversary of C&O Canal National Historical Park
  - 60th anniversary of the C&O Canal designated a National Monument
- **April 2021** Film C&O Canal Scenic Byway Video #2 (Central Section, Brunswick to Hancock) and #3 (Capital Section, DC to Brunswick)
- **Spring 2021** Grand Opening of new Williamsport Visitor Center
- **May 28, 2021** Planned delivery of C&O Canal Scenic Byway videos #2 and #3
- **Aug 30-Sept. 2 2021** World Canal Conference in Hagerstown
- **2025** 175th anniversary of the completed C&O Canal
- **July 4, 2028** Bicentennial of the beginning of the C&O Canal--added October 2020