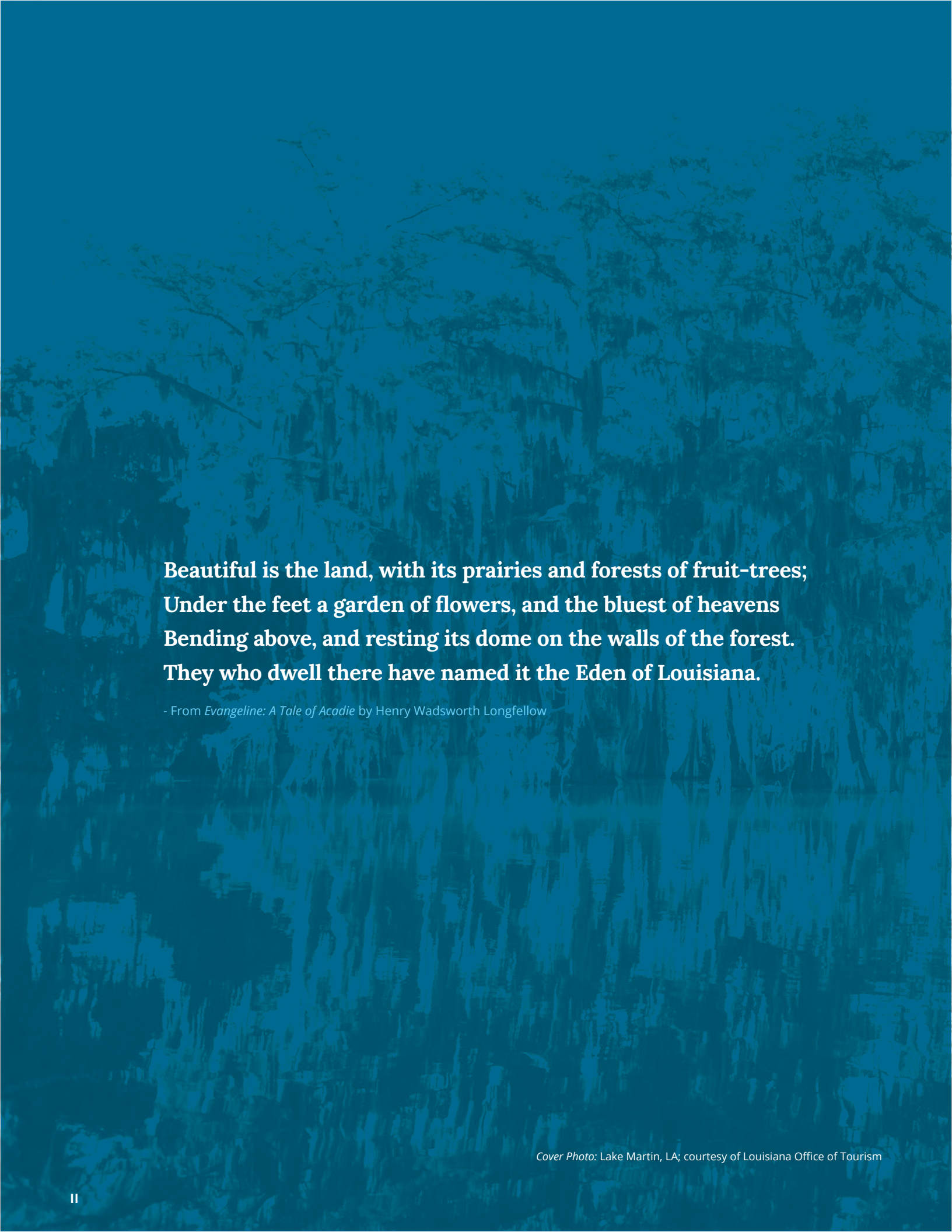




Atchafalaya

NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2026



**Beautiful is the land, with its prairies and forests of fruit-trees;
Under the feet a garden of flowers, and the bluest of heavens
Bending above, and resting its dome on the walls of the forest.
They who dwell there have named it the Eden of Louisiana.**

- From *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Cover Photo: Lake Martin, LA; courtesy of Louisiana Office of Tourism

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

LIKE NO PLACE ON EARTH

The vast expanse of land that surrounds the Atchafalaya River is home to some of the most unique cultures in the world. This region, with its abundant natural resources, is inextricably connected to the water that has built and continually reshapes Louisiana. Water has played a role in cultivating the very aspects of our region that set it apart from any other – sustaining our livelihoods while helping to preserve such defining traits as our multi-cultural heritage and unique French language identity.

The concept of the heritage area has its roots in the early 1990s when a grassroots group envisioned a way to highlight the majesty of the Atchafalaya Basin. In the late 1990s, the area was designated a State Heritage Area and in 2006 the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area Act was passed, setting a course for preservation and enhancement of the cultural and natural resources in the region.

Since 2006, ANHA staff, along with commissioners representing the 14 parishes that comprise it, have worked tirelessly to establish and perpetuate an identity for the region, protect important cultural

resources, and carry on the traditions that make this place we call home so unique. The 2011 Management Plan set forth a broad strategy for how to identify and enhance these assets, and this 2021-2026 Strategic Plan plots a course for advancing the goals established in the Management Plan over the next five years.

We are extremely grateful for the work that was done before us and are energized by the volumes of stakeholders who stepped up to help us craft this vision for the future of ANHA. Our hope is that by continuing to be deeply engaged with our partners across the heritage area, we can lead the preservation of the cultures that make South-Central Louisiana a true national treasure: America's Foreign Country.

Thank you for the passion and commitment you hold for this extraordinary place.

Sincerely,



Justin K. Lemoine, PLA, ASLA
Executive Director, ANHA

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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

With the guidance and support of new leadership and a representative Atchafalaya Trace Commission (ATC), Atchafalaya National Heritage Area (ANHA) embarked on a strategic planning process in 2021 to further define its mission and goals for the future of the region and to plot a course for meeting those goals over the next five years. The strategies outlined in this plan are meant to support the original vision and the four goals of the heritage area as established in the *Atchafalaya National Heritage Area Management Plan/ Environmental Assessment* published in September 2011 (Management Plan):

This strategic plan is separate but complementary to the Management Plan – fitting within the framework and operational direction outlined in the management plan, but with guidance and strategic activities specific to the next five years. This plan has been born out of a deliberate process of engaging, collaborating with, and listening to key stakeholders in the region to understand their challenges and build a collective vision for the future. These stakeholders represented different aspects of ANHA’s interpretive themes as defined in the Management Plan – “Adaptation and Survival”, “Identity Through a Cultural Blend”, and “Influence of the Water on the Land and the People”.

GOALS OF ANHA

Enhance interpretation and awareness of the heritage area’s key stories

Support sustainable cultural economic development opportunities in the heritage area

Increase appreciation for cultural resources

Increase appreciation for natural resources

ANHA ORGANIZATION

ATCHAFALAYA TRACE COMMISSION

- Charles Caillouet, Ascension Parish
- Darrel Rivere, Assumption Parish
- Wilbert Carmouche, Avoyelles Parish
- Linda Gardner, Concordia Parish
- Christine A. DeMyers, East Baton Rouge Parish
- Chris Burton, Iberia Parish
- Clifford LeGrange, Iberville Parish
- Steve R. Pellessier, Lafayette Parish
- J.A. Rummler, Pointe Coupee Parish
- Herman Fuselier, St. Landry Parish
- Carol Patin, St. Martin Parish
- Carrie Stansbury, St. Mary Parish
- Mart J. Black, Terrebonne Parish
- Angelique Bergeron, West Baton Rouge Parish
- Charles "Chuck" Hunt, Ex Officio – Jean Lafitte National Park representative

ANHA STAFF

- Justin K. Lemoine, PLA, ASLA, Executive Director
- Caroline Byrne, Assistant Director

THE HERITAGE AREA

ANHA is a 14-parish stretch of land in Louisiana (roughly illustrated at right) that is home to rich cultural heritage and diverse ecological landscapes. In 2006, Congress designated it as a region with natural, scenic, cultural, historical and recreational resources that should be preserved and celebrated throughout the area and beyond. With a historical mission of building identity, awareness, economic development opportunities, and support of ecological preservation efforts, ANHA serves as a connector and facilitator for the region.



METHODOLOGY & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to all of our participants and to the Louisiana State Museum and Division Director Rodney Hart for the use of museum facilities for our strategic planning workshop.

Photo: Chauvin Shrimp Company; courtesy of Louisiana Office of Tourism

RESEARCH AND PLANNING PROCESS

The process that informed the development of this strategic plan included research, collaboration, and synthesis phases that led to the development of key focus areas for the organization. The following methods were utilized to develop a region-wide strategy.

DESK RESEARCH

- Review of existing ANHA organizational materials and documentation, including:
 - » Management plan
 - » Legislation
 - » Historical grants information
 - » Recent budgets
 - » Marketing materials

PRIMARY RESEARCH

SURVEYS

- Surveys of key ANHA stakeholders and partners with a total of 84 responses from:
 - » ATC Commissioners
 - » Stakeholders and Grantees
 - » State and Federal Partners
 - » Atchafalaya River Basin Restoration & Enhancement (ARBRE) Task Force Members

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

- 19 in-depth interviews with a total of 23 heritage area stakeholders from the ATC, the Louisiana Office of Cultural Development (OCD), local organizations across the heritage area, and current and potential partner organizations:

- » Avoyelles Parish - Wilbert Carmouche
- » Avoyelles Parish - Jacques Goudeau
- » St. Mary Parish - Carrie Stansbury
- » Terrebonne Parish - Jonathan Foret
- » Terrebonne Parish - Mart Black
- » West Baton Rouge Parish - Angeliq ue Bergeron
- » East Baton Rouge Parish - John Spain and Lauren Crapanzano Jumonville (Baton Rouge Area Foundation)
- » East Baton Rouge Parish - Anne Mahoney Fontenot
- » East Baton Rouge Parish - Phil Frost, Robyn Lott, Jim Fleshman (Baton Rouge Zoo)
- » Lafayette Parish - Ray Cloutier
- » Lafayette Parish - Josh Caffery and John "Pudd" Sharp
- » Lafayette/St. Martin Parish - Ben Pierce
- » St. Martin Parish - Katrina Collette
- » St. Martin Parish - Brandy Serrette
- » St. Martin Parish - George Marks
- » Statewide - Kelsea McCrary
- » Statewide - Kristin Sanders
- » Statewide - Carrie Broussard
- » Lafayette Parish - Sam Oliver

THREE TOPICAL ROUNDTABLES

- ATC Commissioners

- » Ascension Parish - Charles Caillouet
- » Assumption Parish - Darrel Rivere
- » Avoyelles Parish - Wilbert Carmouche
- » Concordia Parish - Linda Gardner
- » East Baton Rouge Parish - Christine A. DeMyers
- » Iberville Parish - Clifford LeGrange

- » Lafayette Parish - Steve R. Pellessier
- » Pointe Coupee Parish - J. A. Rummler
- » St. Martin Parish - Carol Patin
- » St. Mary Parish - Carrie Stansbury
- » Terrebonne Parish - Mart J. Black
- » West Baton Rouge Parish - Angélique Bergeron
- » Jean Lafitte National Historical Park Preserve Superintendent Charles 'Chuck' Hunt
- » Louisiana Office of Cultural Development Assistant Secretary Kristin Sanders
- » Louisiana Office of Cultural Development Deputy Assistant Secretary Carrie Broussard

- ANHA grantees

- » Ben Pierce, Swamp Base
- » Hallie Coreil, Town of Washington
- » Kim Neustrom, Baton Rouge Blues Festival and Foundation
- » Marcia Patout, Bayou Teche Museum
- » Michelle Haj-Broussard, Louisiana Consortium of Immersion Schools
- » Pam Wall, BREC
- » Celeste Gomez, Association for the Liberty Theatre of Eunice

- Regional creative economy representatives

- » Brandon Ballengee, Atelier de la Nature
- » Randy Roth, Bayou Regional Arts Council
- » Trey Godfrey, Baton Rouge Area Chamber
- » Marlee Pittman, Mid City Redevelopment Alliance
- » Erin Bass, The Teche Project
- » Ed "Tiger" Verdin, City of Franklin
- » Ferin Jones, West Baton Rouge Museum

- » Melanie LeBoeuf, City of Opelousas
- » Jonathan Foret, South Louisiana Wetlands Discovery Center
- » Rodney Hart, Louisiana State Museum

COLLABORATIVE PLANNING

- Interactive strategic planning workshop with representatives of ANHA, the ATC, and OCD:

» **ANHA Staff**

- Justin K. Lemoine, PLA, ASLA, Executive Director
- Caroline Byrne, Assistant Director

» **ATC Executive Committee Members**

- Wilbert Carmouche, Executive Director at Avoyelles Commission of Tourism
- Mart J. Black, Executive Director at TPCG, Office of Coastal Restoration & Preservation
- Angélique Bergeron, Director at West Baton Rouge Museum

» **OCD Representatives**

- Kristin Sanders
- Carrie Broussard
- Ray Scriber

- Development of a strategic plan with review and collaboration from ANHA leadership and adoption by the Atchafalaya Trace Commission



The federal government does not acquire land, manage land, or impose land use controls through the establishment of a national heritage area. Rather, national heritage areas accomplish their goals through partnerships with governments, organizations, businesses, and individuals.

- From the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area Management Plan / Environmental Assessment

Photo: Alligator in Henderson, LA; courtesy of Louisiana Office of Tourism

VISION & MISSION

VISION STATEMENT

A place where Louisiana culture and wilderness collide to create an American experience like no other, drawing people worldwide for adventure, wonder, and indulgence.



MISSION STATEMENT

To enhance the identity of our unique American landscape by preserving and promoting our heritage and by fostering progress for local champions that create authentic, powerful connections between people, culture, and the environment.

Photo: Berwick Lighthouse; courtesy of Louisiana Office of Tourism

THE PLAN



Education
NAME/DESC: *Small Town Assistance*

GOAL: Provide general knowledge
Make...
ACTION STEPS + RESOURCES
- Find out what is really needed?
- Hire LPOE, others, then fill the gap
- Identify consultant
- Develop plan/paper

TIMELINE: ongoing
BUDGET: \$10K/yr



Supporting the underserved
NAME/DESC: *Small Town Assistance*

GOAL: Make resources (financial, technical, capital, human, reservation, grants) available to small town tourism/destination organizations

ACTION STEPS + PARTNERS
1. Identify local issues in this community
2. Seek assistance from...
3. Develop program/strategy to...
4. Develop metrics/Report...
PARTNERS: local business, government, community

TIMELINE: 3-4 years
BUDGET: plus start time

NAME/DESC: *Small Town Assistance*

GOAL: Identify...

ACTION STEPS + PARTNERS
1. List resources...
2. Map these...
3. Identify gaps...
4. Add to ANHA...

TIMELINE: 12/21 - 5/22
BUDGET: \$100,000

Photos (background and at right): ANHA Strategic Planning Workshop

FOCUS AREAS AND INITIATIVES

The strategic planning process sought to identify the top priorities for advancing the region towards ANHA's future vision in meaningful ways. Throughout the process, key themes emerged as strategic focus areas for ANHA, along with a framework for developing organizational strategies for each area. The following plan represents key actions that respond to stakeholder input, maximize ANHA resources, and move the needle in the focus areas that emerged.

FOCUS AREAS

- 1 Focusing Investments and Grants
- 2 Cultural Growth and Storytelling
- 3 Tourism and Experiencing ANHA
- 4 Strengthening the Network
- 5 Supporting Rural Communities
- 6 Financial Sustainability
- 7 Education



The following pages lay out a series of strategic initiatives to address ANHA's focus areas and advance the vision and mission. This plan is meant to serve as a guide for ANHA operations over the next five years but should also adapt to changes within the heritage area and other external or internal factors that may cause shifts in priorities. These types of factors could include but are not limited to talent and partner availability, financial capacity (including reauthorization), and disasters occurring in the area, natural or otherwise.

For each initiative, this plan defines a few guiding assumptions:

Goal: The overall purpose of the initiative – if the goal is achieved, the initiative is a success

Action Steps: High-level tasks to be carried out for initiative execution – these are the aspects of this plan most likely to evolve as ANHA learns and adapts

Performance Metrics: Categorical measures at varying levels of quantifiability that will help track progress towards each initiative's goal – these will need to be made more specific during plan implementation (e.g. annual targets in ANHA operating plans)

Timeline: Planning participants' best educated guesses at the appropriate effort and calendar timing for each initiative – subject to re-evaluation and change

Resources: Planning participants' best educated guesses at the appropriate human and financial resources need for each initiative, and in some cases specific sources of said resources – subject to re-evaluation and change

At Left: ATC Executive Committee members and ANHA and OCD staff participate in a day-long workshop to develop vision, mission, and initiatives for the strategic plan

FOCUSING INVESTMENTS AND GRANTS



ANHA's grant program has successfully provided needed resources to many grantees that execute cultural and natural resource-related heritage work in the region. The organization's future vision for its grant program is targeted at making a bigger impact and building a network of partners.



Above: Wedell-Williams Aviation and Cypress Sawmill Museum in Patterson, LA; courtesy of Louisiana Office of Tourism

1-A PARTNERSHIPS TO MOVE THE NEEDLE

GOAL

Increase impact of ANHA funds while still serving each community's needs; convert grantees into partners

ACTION STEPS

1. Small Grants

- » Identify Small Grants pool budget
- » Identify focus and criteria for small grants
- » Establish an increased maximum request amount
- » Develop and distribute communications about the revised small grants program

2. Partnership Grants

- » Identify Partner Grants budget
- » Create guidelines and rubric for a new "Partnership Proposal" model
 - Revolving annual focus
 - Larger grant amounts
 - Larger match requirements
- » Replace current large grants process with new model
- » Conduct marketing and community outreach to raise awareness of the revised program

3. Solicit, review, and select proposals with commission based on revised rubric

TIMELINE

Plan in Q4 2021 and Q1 2022, launch in Q2 2022

RESOURCES

Staff and Commissioner time and commitment

PERFORMANCE METRICS

- Larger scope, higher impact grants
- Increased federal financial match ratio
- Step-change in organizational capacity throughout region
- Positive results in grant reporting
- Meeting of annual programmatic goals

CULTURAL GROWTH AND STORYTELLING



Preserving ANHA's cultural heritage and the stories that breathe life into its traditions is important, not only for current and future generations of residents but also to be able to demonstrate the uniqueness of the region to visitors.



Above: Keith Frank and the Soileau Zydeco Band performing at the Breaux Bridge Crawfish Festival; courtesy of Louisiana Office of Tourism

2-A

THE ATCHAFALAYA BIBLE™

GOAL

Collect our comprehensive stories and put them in a usable, communicable format

ACTION STEPS

- 1. Identify and research examples where other locales or interest groups have built a comprehensive and accessible set of stories**
- 2. Work with regional partners and subject-matter experts to develop a story capture and storytelling strategy**
 - » Tour the heritage area to consult with local stakeholders on an inventory of story opportunities, existing stroytelling initiatives, and potential uses for a collection
 - » Identify partners with overlapping missions and capabilities in capturing and sharing cultural stories (e.g. the Louisiana Folklife Program, Center for Louisiana Studies, LSU Libraries, State archiving resources, etc.)
 - » Hold a workshop for partners to share respective initiatives and capabilities and to set a shared vision for how ANHA can accomplish this goal with partners
 - » Include ANHA's cultural asset inventory (see initiative 2-B) as a potential guide for story identification
 - » Include ways to identify what already exists and how to include/synthesize into "Bible" concept vs. the need for new story-gathering efforts
- 3. Execute a multi-year plan that aligns with resources (including partners and third-parties) and goals to gather stories from across the region to an appropriate level of depth based on a thorough framework that addresses:**
 - » Audience understanding
 - » Collection techniques
 - » Story formats
 - » Storage and continuity
 - » Sharing/story telling experience(s)
 - » Marketing
 - » Utility for regional stakeholders
- 4. Brand, publish, and publicize the collection**
 - » Communicate with stakeholders/partners on how they can utilize the collection
 - » Work with state and national cultural partners on how they can help maintain and utilize the collection

TIMELINE

Develop Q4 2021 – Q4 2024 (estimated 3 years), maintain ongoing

RESOURCES

Estimated \$150k budget, consider LEH or NEH grants, corporate funding

PERFORMANCE METRICS

- Story coverage of the heritage area
- Audience numbers accessing stories
- Number and efficacy of partners
- Story exposure through regional stakeholders
- New cultural programming that results from "Bible"
- Awareness and understanding of the region's heritage

2-B CULTURAL ASSETS INVENTORY

GOAL

Identify and build a database of cultural assets in each parish

ACTION STEPS

- 1. Develop an assets inventory database framework including but not limited to:**
 - » Category (e.g. cultural, water-focused, food/culinary, events, French language, etc.)
 - » Asset type (e.g. museums, theaters, boating facilities, outfitters, festivals, etc.)
 - » Location
 - » Contact information
- 2. Flesh out inventory with participation by ATC Commissioners and local and state tourism, arts, and cultural partners who may already have inventories**
- 3. Work with website consultant to implement a form on the ANHA website for people to submit their own local assets for consideration in the inventory**
 - » Provide clear guidelines on what constitutes an asset to avoid confusion
 - » Send out a call for submissions
- 4. Develop a series of virtual trail maps with the Louisiana Office of Tourism (LOT) based on inventory:**
 - » Cultural trail map (including cultural experiences as well as physical assets)
 - » Recreational water trail map
 - » Food trail map
 - » Festival trail map (in collaboration with Louisiana Association of Fairs and Festivals)
- 5. Validate maps with partners (CVBs, Economic Development organizations, etc.)**
- 6. Create and implement a plan for updating maps regularly that engages and relies on local CVBs, commissioners, parish leaders, cultural leaders, etc.**
- 7. Create and implement a plan for tracking map usage (e.g. cut-out coupons, QR codes on maps, analytics, etc.)**
- 8. Integrate into ANHA website, allow for inclusion on local websites**
- 9. Integrate with the LOT trails and overall tourism strategy for the region**
- 10. Add to commercial GPS-driven mapping systems (e.g. Google, Apple, etc.)**
- 11. Implement awareness campaign for virtual trails utilizing fliers, QR codes/URLs, and visible presence on site with local partners (e.g. Atchafalaya Welcome Center)**

TIMELINE

Q4 2021 - Q2 2022 (6 months)

RESOURCES

Staff time, design and printing of trail map fliers (3-4) - estimated \$2-5k

PERFORMANCE METRICS

- Map distribution and utilization
- Analytics for digital/web-based maps
- Tracking of increased visitation due to maps

TOURISM AND EXPERIENCING ANHA



While there is an abundance of organizations within the region whose products and experiences target tourists, ANHA has the unique ability to promote the region's assets in a more integrated way to potential visitors from Louisiana and beyond – audiences who seek authenticity and appreciate places for their real stories, not just superficial tourist traps. The diverse fabric of cultural and ecological experiences available in the heritage area deserves a systemic, multi-layered suite of promotional partnerships and formats to create a rich, cohesive tourism destination.



Above: Paddleboarding on False River; courtesy of Louisiana Office of Tourism

3-A INCREASED TOURISM IN ANHA

GOAL

Leverage relationships with local and state partners to develop and promote a destination identity

ACTION STEPS

- 1. Work with regional partners to solidify a cohesive destination story and experience through a layered approach**
 - » Support landmark assets that represent large visitor draws
 - » Develop connections between landmark assets, welcome centers (Atchafalaya WelcomeCenter and those at steel lines), and smaller/less visible assets (e.g. local – dining options, B&Bs, etc.) across the region
 - » Educate regional CVBs, hospitality workers, welcome center employees, and other stakeholders on the broader story and identity of the region and how they can plug into it for marketing and tourism purposes and help support/promote cultural, recreational, and environmental assets throughout the heritage area.
 - » Coordinate and/or develop marketing materials and products for the broader heritage area tourism brand (e.g. trail maps, digital tours, audio content, signage, etc.)
- 2. Define and solidify ANHA role in Louisiana statewide tourism with a focus on being a rural tourism partner**
 - » Work to formalize partnership with LOT
 - Identify key staff/positions at various levels to manage relationship
 - Provide regular proactive communications/reporting to LOT
 - Collaborate on marketing with LOT
 - Partner with LOT and local CVBs to track and measure tourism and regional brand success

TIMELINE

Begin Q4 2021, ongoing

RESOURCES

Time and commitment from ANHA staff, commission, and local and statewide partners

PERFORMANCE METRICS

- Tourism revenues
- Utilization of tourism products/ assets produced or coordinated by ANHA
- Success of partnerships with local tourism organizations
- Regular communications and collaboration with state partners
- Increased familiarity with the region's brand inside and outside of Louisiana

3-B

PRIMARY BRAND ACCESS POINT: SIGNAGE

GOAL

Send a clear, impactful message about the heritage area and its identity through smart, strategic signage design

ACTION STEPS

1. Develop a signage budget and timeline for signage replacement
2. Engage a signage designer
3. Design signage system based on size and visibility of sign locations to meet DOTD/MUTCD standards for roadway signage and include all or a subset of the following elements:
 - » ANHA logo
 - » Tagline
 - » Iconic/simplistic visual of the region's geographical boundaries within the state
 - » Call to action (e.g., website, phone number, radio station, etc.)
4. Implement interactive signage for visitors at Atchafalaya Welcome Center

TIMELINE

Begin with inventory in Q4 2021, implementation to begin in Q1 2022 and continue for 2-3 years

RESOURCES

Staff time, signage designer, printing and signage implementation budget (large signs are roughly \$12,000 each)

PERFORMANCE METRICS

- Completed roll out of new signage system
- Visitor actions tracked back to signage (e.g. GPS tracking, traceable URLs, actions/experiences only accessible via signage CTA, surveys, workers trained to ask)
- Positive public/stakeholder feedback



Above: Existing large-scale signage; Photo credit: flickr user Auvet

STRENGTHENING THE NETWORK

As a region-wide organization, ANHA is uniquely positioned to convene and connect local organizations to facilitate learning, provide connections to funding, and develop regional champions.



Above: The Cajun Village in Sorrento, LA; courtesy of Louisiana Office of Tourism

4-A

ATCHAFALAYA COMMUNITY AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

GOAL

Develop community capacity and leadership to promote ANHA and spur economic development through effective local environmental and heritage-oriented programs

ACTION STEPS

1. **Survey regional and local entities for comparable ambassador programs to emulate or partner with; look beyond tourism ambassador programs to leadership and professional development initiatives**
2. **Develop program framework and year 1 pilot**
 - » Course plan with monthly workshops/lectures as well as networking and knowledge-sharing opportunities
 - » Budget, including stipends for speakers
 - » Engage state agencies to provide educational resources and trainers
 - » Application process, including selection criteria
 - » Benefits program for participants
 - » Include fast-tracked/preferred participation in grants/partnerships program (see Initiative 1-A)
3. **Develop a strategy for identifying and recruiting a potential pool of participants**
 - » Work with current contacts to identify next level of passionate, up-and-coming candidates – not just the “usual suspects”
 - » Seek people with potential and a desire to volunteer
 - » Require participants to make a one-year commitment
 - » Implement a referral program so ambassadors can help with identification and recruitment of future participants

TIMELINE

Develop in Q4 2021 and Q1 2022, launch in Q2 2022, repeat annually

RESOURCES

WAE \$25,000, estimated expenses \$15,000

PERFORMANCE METRICS

- Number of certified ambassadors
- Positive participant feedback surveys
- Increased capacity within communities
- Organic local and intra-regional partnerships
- Tangible progress within ambassador communities (may be measured by a report card approach)

4-B

FOUNDATIONAL SENSE OF PLACE FOR THE ATC

GOAL

Develop a shared understanding of ANHA and its “sense of place” for commissioners and their local contacts and stakeholders

ACTION STEPS

- 1. Create a schedule of commission meetings to rotate through each of the 14 parishes**
 - » Consider including a remote/video meeting option for commissioners who cannot make the trip and requiring a minimum number of in-person meetings per year rather than requiring that all commissioners travel for every meeting
- 2. Implement a regular familiarization day for commissioners to visit each parish**
 - » Meet with local stakeholders and tour assets
 - » Organized by individual commissioner
 - » Include a combination of presentation and tour to cover more ground especially in larger parishes
 - » Invite appointing entity to visit, share, and learn
 - » Visits occur twice a year and align with commission meetings in that location
- 3. Create a program for required semi-annual commissioner one-on-one “shadowing”**
 - » Commissioners paired by staff
 - » Shadowing days organized and exchanged by pair of commissioners
 - » Shadowing days occur twice a year during opposite quarters from familiarization days
- 4. Facilitate regular commission discussion of “sense of place” for ANHA at meetings**
- 5. Continue to have a visible ANHA presence at events and enlist commissioners to volunteer and actively participate**

TIMELINE

Begin Q4 2021, ongoing

RESOURCES

Commissioner commitment, commissioner in-kind and out-of-pocket participation

PERFORMANCE METRICS

- Parishes visited
- Increased ability of commissioners to be ambassadors and storytellers for the heritage area
- Increased commissioner involvement with ANHA and event participation
- Increased connections/awareness between ANHA and local entities



There are parts of America that are special, unique, unlike anywhere else. Cultures all their own, kept close, much loved but largely misunderstood. The vast patchwork of saltwater marshes, bayous, and prairie land that make up Cajun Country is one of those places.

- The late Anthony Bourdain on South Louisiana from his show *Parts Unknown* on CNN

Photo: Boiled crawfish; courtesy of Louisiana Office of Tourism

SUPPORTING RURAL COMMUNITIES



While ANHA encompasses some urban areas, most of the region is made up of rural landscapes and small towns. ANHA seeks to ensure that leaders and organizations in small towns have access to the resources they need to support their own cultures and economies.



Above: Liberty Center in Eunice; courtesy of St. Landry Parish Tourism Commission

5-A SMALL TOWN ASSISTANCE

GOAL

Develop capabilities of local leaders to identify and pursue funding for strategic investments that strengthen their community’s place within the heritage area

ACTION STEPS

1. Conduct analysis of small towns in ANHA needing such assistance

- » Identify and consult with existing rural programs and partnerships with local, statewide, and national partners that can be incorporated into the initiative (e.g., USDA Rural Development, regional economic development entities)
- » Plan activities in cooperation with other agencies in OCD, leveraging their capabilities and ANHA’s relationships
- » Identify data required to assess need: economic data and trends, revenues and resources, poverty levels, population data, economic capture/growth potential, cultural and environmental assets, etc.
- » Work with partners to gather data
- » Develop rubric for quantifying and evaluating need and opportunity to inform prioritization of communities for engagement

2. Develop training/workshops to take to these communities

- » Include technical assistance in identifying and capitalizing on strengths
- » Include training on how to assess investments in technology, infrastructure, and the built environment
- » Include gap analysis for success and strategy development for overcoming challenges

3. Contact current and newly elected local officials and community leaders

4. Hold leadership workshops with local, proactive champions (not just government officials) in identified communities

5. Connect participants to representatives in other communities from which they can learn as well as technical resources at the state and parish levels

- » Aim to make financial, tourism, cultural, historic preservation, and grant resources available to small town tourism/stakeholder organizations

6. Develop metrics and reporting methods for accountability and follow up

TIMELINE

Q3 2022 – Q4 2025

RESOURCES

Estimated \$5k annually plus staff time

PERFORMANCE METRICS

- Rural community participation
- Noted increase in capabilities in grant writing, strategic project implementation, and placemaking
- Increase in number and diversity of grants applied for and won with ANHA and partner agencies

FOCUS AREA 6

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

While ANHA has historically been financially stable thanks to dedicated federal funds, it is still important long-term to begin planning for a diversified, sustainable financial future that will help ensure the heritage area's vitality for generations to come.



Above: Delcambre Marina; courtesy of Louisiana Office of Tourism

6-A DIVERSIFIED FINANCIAL STRATEGY

GOAL

Diversify and grow reliable revenue streams beyond federal funds to ensure financial sustainability for ANHA

ACTION STEPS

- 1. Research best practices in sustainable heritage area business models such as:**
 - » Foundation development or partnership
 - » "Friends of" nonprofit sister organizations
 - » Grant opportunities
 - » Other public funds
 - » Profit generating tourism products
- 2. Engage a consultant to build a feasible financial model**
- 3. Identify funds for one-time capital investments to hire talent, build the needed organization, and create the underlying infrastructure needed to start generating revenue**
- 4. Execute sustainable financial strategy**

TIMELINE

Plan and implement in Q3 2023 – Q4 2025, maintain ongoing thereafter

RESOURCES

Estimated \$30-40k for consultant, unknown implementation costs, commissioner and staff time

PERFORMANCE METRICS

- Net revenues generated
- Other metrics to be identified by financial consultant

EDUCATION

ANHA's diverse cultural and ecological resources represent ample educational opportunities both for the general public as well as in academic settings. Connecting to partners such as the Louisiana Department of Education and promoting the learning opportunities in the area to educators and tourists will allow a greater appreciation for the area's cultural and natural resources.



Above: The Juke Joint at the West Baton Rouge Museum in Port Allen, LA

7-A

ANHA ANIMATED VIDEO SHORTS FOR YOUTH

GOAL

Provide plug and play educational video shorts covering various aspects of ANHA's environmental and cultural characteristics

ACTION STEPS

- 1. Consult with established educational entities in the state to understand what kind of resources are needed that ANHA can provide for childhood STEAM and cultural education**
 - » Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE)
 - » Louisiana Consortium of Immersion Schools (LCIS)
 - » French Language Curriculum programs
 - » Local school systems and community-based education organizations
- 2. Identify a creative consultant with experience in educational content development**
- 3. Work with consultant to develop a sustainable framework and plan for the video shorts**
 - » Include an immersion content focus
 - » Aim for a multi-layered approach, with physical activities and worksheets that accompany and interact with the video for enhanced enrichment (consider QR codes, augmented reality, other methods of interaction between media and experience)
- 4. Develop videos, publish to accessible platforms**
- 5. Market videos to regional educational entities and stakeholders**
 - » Incorporate into general ANHA presentations
 - » Present to LDOE, teacher's organizations
 - » Create and distribute brochures (print and digital) to those who can utilize

TIMELINE

Begin Q1 2023, publish in Q2, maintain ongoing from there

RESOURCES

Estimated \$20k initially, then identify how often to update, add to them, staff time to plan and manage

PERFORMANCE METRICS

- Levels of sharing in schools
- Digital viewership analytics
- Educator feedback on materials

IMPLEMENTATION

A PRIORITIZED APPROACH

The prioritization and timing of the seven focus areas and associated initiatives are based on ANHA adopting this plan in October of 2021 and commencing implementation in the fourth quarter. Within each initiative, there are action steps that may require minimal effort and others that represent substantial commitment. With limited staff and commission capacity, attempting to implement all initiatives at once would result in lower success rates and levels of positive impact. It will be the responsibility of ANHA staff and ATC Commissioners to create and execute more granular operational plans and timelines based on available resources and partners. Moving forward, ANHA leadership should continually review plans and priorities as conditions evolve and resources become more or less available to support implementation.

Photo: Old rail wheel at the Atchafalaya Welcome Center found sunken in the Atchafalaya Basin

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

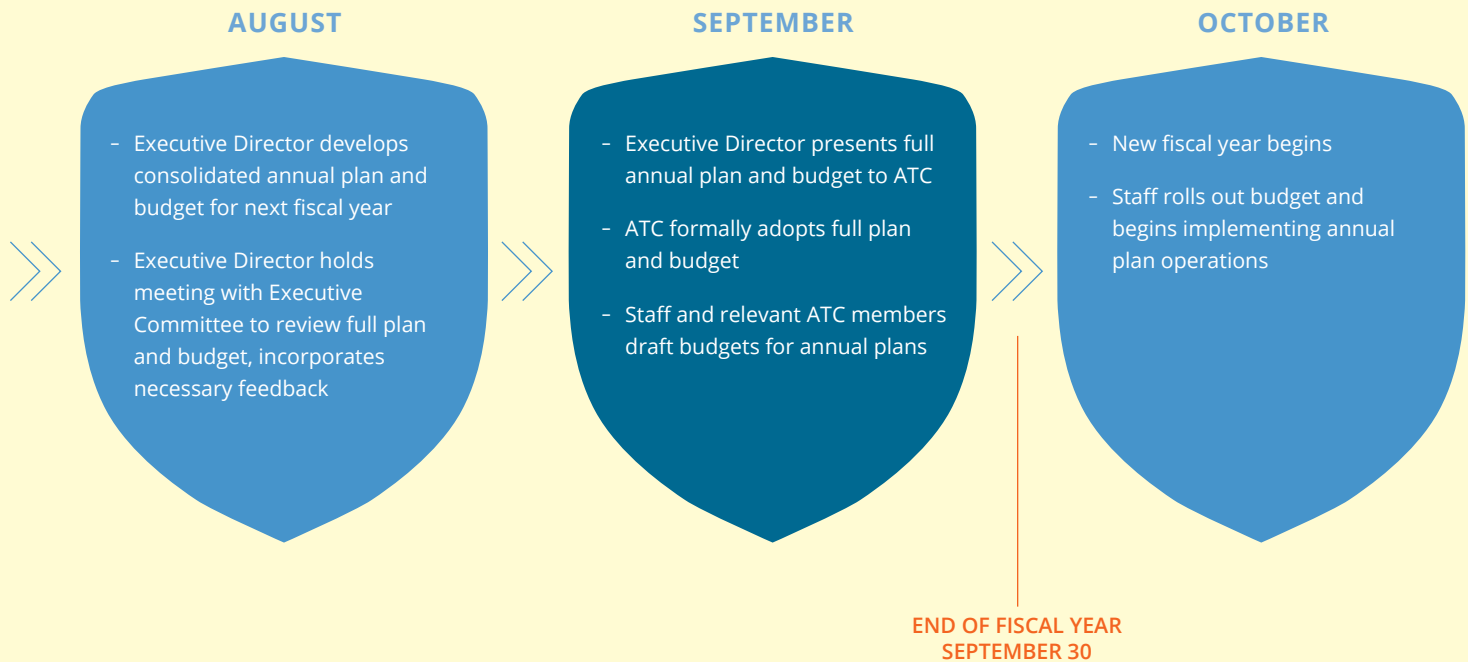
Focus Area	Strategy	'21	'22				'23				'24				'25				'26			
		Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	
1 FOCUSING INVESTMENTS AND GRANTS	1-A: Partnerships to Move the Needle			◆ LAUNCH PROGRAM																		
2 CULTURAL GROWTH AND STORYTELLING	2-A: The Atchafalaya Bible™													◆ COMPLETE DEVELOPMENT				MAINTAIN				
	2-B: Cultural Assets Inventory			◆ COMPLETE DEVELOPMENT										MAINTAIN								
3 TOURISM AND EXPERIENCING ANHA	3-A: Increased Tourism in ANHA																					
	3-B: Primary Brand Access Point: Signage																					
4 STRENGTHENING THE NETWORK	4-A: Atchafalaya Community Ambassador Program			◆ LAUNCH PROGRAM					REPEAT ANNUALLY													
	4-B: Foundational Sense of Place for the ATC																					
5 SUPPORTING RURAL COMMUNITIES	5-A: Small Town Assistance																					
6 FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY	6-A: Diversified Financial Strategy																			◆ IMPLEMENT MODEL		MAINTAIN
7 EDUCATION	7-A: ANHA Animated Video Shorts for Youth								◆ PUBLISH CONTENT													MAINTAIN

THE ANNUAL PLANNING PROCESS



ANNUAL OPERATIONAL PLANNING

Annual planning activities will begin in May to ensure ANHA is prepared to adopt a budget and plan before the end of the fiscal year on September 30, and October will mean the launch of ATC-approved operations. The goal of this process is to help ANHA staff and commissioners regularly evaluate performance against the strategic plan, keep operations aligned with organizational goals, and review the continued relevance of the plan and know where to adapt over time as conditions change.



THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

- Staff and any relevant ATC committees meet regularly (possibly the months in between commission meetings) to discuss progress according to the strategic plan and annual plans
- At each ATC meeting, the Treasurer's update includes a review of where finances stand against any relevant annual plan financial targets
- Quarterly, a staff or committee member is designated to report progress on annual plan activities to the ATC and entertain discussion
- According to ATC feedback and discussion on annual plan progress, plans may be revised throughout the year to accommodate changing conditions
- Likewise, aspects of the strategic plan and implementation timeline may be updated to accommodate annual plan changes

RESEARCH SUMMARY

STAKEHOLDER DRIVEN

The strategic planning research methodology represented an in-depth approach to understanding the perspectives, challenges, and hopes of key partners and stakeholders within ANHA. The following research summary includes key findings that informed the focus areas and initiatives in this plan.

Photo: Boiled seafood, courtesy of Louisiana Office of Tourism

SURVEYS

The results of the survey process drove the design of the subsequent interviews and roundtables and are available in a comprehensive report in *Attachment A: Stakeholder and Commission Survey Results*. The key takeaways that stood out within each group are included in this summary. These insights led to assumptions and hypotheses that were challenged through the course of the research and planning process.

The bar charts below show a cross comparison of how different survey cohorts rated ANHA's performance against the four goals set out in the Management Plan. While there were no overwhelmingly bad reviews, stakeholders across the region either felt performance was weaker or else they were not aware of the work ANHA did in some areas – especially with regard to cultural economic development.

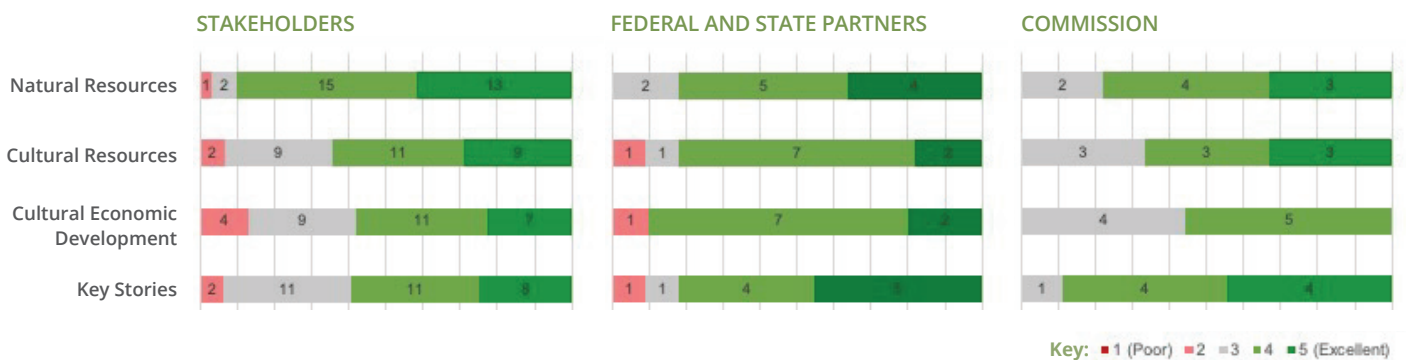
KEY INSIGHTS

Across stakeholder and partner groups, survey respondents indicated several strengths of ANHA including its efforts to increase appreciation of natural resources, its grant program, and for federal and state partners in particular, ANHA's cultural economic development work.

A key opportunity for future ANHA work as highlighted by stakeholders is additional cultural storytelling and historical documentation.

For commissioners and federal and state partners, a key area of focus for ANHA is community engagement and education. These groups also mentioned raising awareness of the heritage area and driving an increase in tourism as crucial to success.

RATING ANHA'S PERFORMANCE AGAINST MANAGEMENT PLAN GOALS



INTERVIEW THEMES

Large amounts of qualitative data resulted from the 19 in-depth interviews with a total of 23 heritage area stakeholders from the ATC, OCD, local organizations across the heritage area, and current and potential partner organizations. To make sense of the data, the planning team undertook a process of clustering data points into thematic categories, describing the meaning derived from feedback within each theme. These themes, highlighted below, helped guide reflection and planning during the strategic planning workshop.

THE BROAD SCOPE OF ANHA

With a focus that spans both natural and cultural resources across a large geographic area, ANHA is tasked with a substantial mission. Working with a small staff currently and limited funds, it must ensure that it is selective in its investments and grant distributions to focus on topics and projects that can make a tangible impact. Interviewees noted that it will be worth it to spend the time and efforts now to identify the heritage area's key assets and strategies in preparation for the truly impactful work ahead. Housed within OCD but not state-funded, ANHA should take advantage of its ability to be dynamic and build a new organizational culture as it rebrands and promotes the Atchafalaya area.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSETS

The natural environment of the heritage area is incredibly unique and offers an immersive way to learn about the region's culture. There is ample opportunity to support eco-tourism and to work with the organizations that are connecting visitors and residents alike to the landscape. ANHA is uniquely able to connect the appreciation for and preservation of the environment to the deeply rooted cultural traditions found within the area. In addition to educating residents about caring for the environment, ANHA has a voice and role to play in the coastal restoration space – as land is built and lost across the coast, old and new traditions will be impacted, reshaping culture as it is known today.

CULTURAL STORYTELLING – THE “BIG STORY”

Because the heritage area is diverse in its environment, culture, and economic practices, each parish has a unique, living culture and story to tell. ANHA has the opportunity to connect stakeholders across the region who understand the greater story of the heritage area by focusing on the common threads that unite it – water, land loss, language, food, historical stories, diversity, and local economies. Part of this solution may involve focusing on the connection between people and the most accessible, visible, important cultural and environmental assets across the region.

CULTURAL STORYTELLING – UNIQUE, LOCAL, INTERTWINED

Each community has unique, local stories to tell. ANHA should support them as they tell their stories first-hand, allowing their passion and love for the area to be understood. Visitors and residents alike should be able to hear stories in small doses that make them want to return and learn more. Organizations are already capturing these stories – for example, the Louisiana Folklife Program and the Bayou Culture Collaborative – and ANHA can partner to support these efforts.

CULTURAL STORYTELLING – FRENCH LANGUAGE

The French language is a common thread that ties the heritage area together and a key point of interest for tourists. With various dialects at risk of being lost, an opportunity exists for ANHA to capitalize on the recent resurgence of interest in the traditions.

CULTURAL STORYTELLING – ARCHIVES AND CONTINUITY

Organizations archiving cultural recordings are in need of support with data continuity. ANHA is positioned to connect them to resources such as Folklife in Louisiana, Louisiana Digital Library, and university databases (e.g., the Center for Louisiana Studies at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette). Another opportunity for ANHA is represented in the need for a library of imagery, video, drone footage, audio, other media and content that can be utilized by tourism organizations and other storytelling entities in the heritage area.

BRANDING, MARKETING, AND TOURISM

Branding, marketing, and tourism are areas where ANHA has an opportunity to maintain strong partnerships with tourism organizations and attractions. These partnerships can lead to the development of new products as well as ensuring that informational content is available at every tourist location, both physical and digital. With well-established credibility as a cultural organization, ANHA also has the ability to connect tourist attractions for cross-promotional opportunities, which will be key for engaging locals as well as tourists in multi-location visits. ANHA should be present at events such as festivals and conferences to promote and curate the heritage area's cultural and environmental content.

BRANDING, MARKETING, AND TOURISM: DIGITAL

Digital channels, including social media, will be a crucial method of promoting the heritage area both in and outside of Louisiana. Social media content has been drastically improved over the last year, thanks to the talents of new staff. Video should be considered as an engaging tool to tell regional and local stories, helping to connect the dots between various areas and traditions within the heritage area. To help meet target audiences where they are, opportunities with social media “influencer” partnerships and digital marketing options such as Google ads, targeted display ads, and geo-fencing should be explored.

BRANDING, MARKETING, AND TOURISM: EXPERIENCES

Supporting the creation and promotion of enriching, memorable experiences will be key to driving an increase in tourism. ANHA's role in this area could involve engaging content producers and connecting experiences through media (e.g., GPS-driven tourism platforms like GyPSy, radio, podcasts) and supporting new physical connections between destinations such as bike and pedestrian trails and vehicular accommodations. By connecting locals and visitors to the various immersive, multi-sensory experiences and excursions being developed by regional stakeholders, ANHA can provide a cohesive, unforgettable destination experience within the heritage area.

SIGNAGE

ANHA's current signage has been successful in its high visibility at piquing interests of locals and visitors alike. The signage should ideally bring thoughts of the region's history, art, music, language, and culture for locals and spark a new interest and desire to learn more about this special place for visitors. Future changes to signage could include a call to action – to a website, radio station, or other source of information, a simple, iconographic representation of the geography of the heritage area within Louisiana, and identifying stories unique to the parishes or local communities.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: ANHA AS CONNECTOR

A strength and remaining opportunity for ANHA is to play the role of convener in the economic development space, empowering key stakeholders from across the 14 parishes by connecting them to each other and to ideas and learning opportunities. With the mission overlap between ANHA, its partners and grantees, and OCD program participants such as Main Streets and Cultural Districts, there is a chance to help stakeholders come together, learn best practices in other areas, and replicate successful ideas in their own communities. One concept generated through the interview process included holding a region-wide conference hosted in a different location within the region each year. This event would host speakers and attendees from organizations who can come to share, learn, and collaborate as a community.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: ANHA AS BROKER

Along with its role as connector between stakeholders in the region, ANHA can also act as a broker between traditional businesses, the economic development community, and the arts and culture community. ANHA can use its current strength of being present in communities and building local relationships to facilitate new, valuable connections between stakeholders that are doing important work in the region but may not otherwise have strong relationships. Part of this work will be helping to connect the importance of placemaking efforts to workforce talent attraction and retention. In the same vein, ANHA can bring new economic development resources and training to cultural businesses.

OUR UNDERSERVED RURAL COMMUNITIES

Throughout the country and within the heritage area, the majority of arts and culture funding typically finds its way to urban areas rather than rural areas and small towns. Interviewees recognized the need of small-town organizations for economic development help and advice on establishing themselves as a cultural heritage-based business. There is an opportunity for ANHA to provide leadership, advice, and resources for rural areas that do not have access to the same funds and workforce options of larger population centers.

THE EDUCATION ROLE

While there is an abundance of learning opportunities within the heritage area, interviewees noted that ANHA will be able to make the biggest long-term impact by creating strong partnerships to support learning experiences for students. Organizations and attractions can be connected to universities and school systems to facilitate field trips and hands-on learning experiences for students of all ages through local partners. However, ANHA's role should stop short of being an educational entity driving curricula, and instead capitalize on relationships with universities and the Louisiana Department of Education to supplement and be a resource for their efforts.

GRANTS APPROACH

ANHA's funding, although consistent, is limited. To make the biggest impact, stakeholders would like to see ANHA narrow its priorities to identify the best opportunities to "move the needle" through grants, possibly in a way that evolves and builds every year or every few years. Further, grantees should help to fulfill ANHA's vision and ultimately become meaningful partners and collaborators who understand their role in the broader vision of the region and can help to tell a cohesive story.

COMMISSION

Stakeholders felt that ensuring continuity of knowledge and skill sets on the commission will be crucial to the future of ANHA's vision and success. New commissioners should be selected by local entities with the right skill sets in mind and should be prepared to represent their parish to the organization and the organization to their parish. Ideas for future commission development included budgeting for a couple of commissioners to attend an important event or trip each year and an annual self-evaluation and executive director evaluation.

Below: ANHA Stakeholder George Marks discusses economic growth for the small rural towns near his town of Arnaudville



ROUNDTABLES

In addition to surveys and interviews, the planning process included three stakeholder roundtables – one with the ATC, one with ANHA grantees, and a third with local stakeholders connected to the region’s creative and cultural economy. Full recordings of the roundtable sessions have been provided to ANHA in *Attachment B: Roundtable Discussion Recordings*. Each roundtable yielded a key framework that informed the planning process, and those frameworks are illustrated here.

ATC ROUNDTABLE

The commission survey and subsequent roundtable featured a facilitated “RASCI” activity (results illustrated below), in which commissioners voted on and discussed ANHA’s role with regard to a variety of potential tasks according to the following framework of responsibilities:

- **Responsible:** in charge of completing the task
- **Accountable:** endorses the result of the task and must see that it is completed
- **Supporting:** delivers input that can help the responsible body achieve the task
- **Consulted:** provides feedback, which should be taken into account
- **Informed:** needs to be kept up to date with the progress of the task

RESPONSIBLE			ACCOUNTABLE		
MEDIA APPEARANCES	GRANT SELECTION AND DISTRIBUTION	IMPLEMENTING HERITAGE-BASED INTERPRETATION PROJECTS	EDUCATIONAL LESSON PLAN DEVELOPMENT	EDUCATIONAL CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT	SPEAKER EVENT ORGANIZATION
REGIONAL BRAND DEVELOPMENT	MARKETING AND PROMOTING REGIONAL ASSETS	TOURISM PROMOTIONS	MEDIA APPEARANCES	EXISTING TAX CREDIT ASSISTANCE FOR BUSINESSES	NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION PROJECTS
CULTURAL RESOURCE PRESERVATION PROJECTS	DOCUMENTATION OF KEY STORIES AND TRADITIONS OF THE REGION	COLLECTING COMMUNITY FEEDBACK	HERITAGE-BASED RECREATION DEVELOPMENT OR IMPROVEMENT		
SUPPORTING			CONSULTED		
NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION PROJECTS	COMMUNITY EVENT ORGANIZATION	VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND ORGANIZATION	NEW TAX CREDIT CREATION		
NO CLEAR AGREEMENT					
SCHOOL FIELD TRIP OR EVENT ORGANIZATION	ADMINISTERING/ DEVELOPING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS/ PRODUCTS	TOURISM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT			

GRANTEES ROUNDTABLE

ANHA grantees built consensus on the following themes during their discussion:

- Common story threads of ANHA

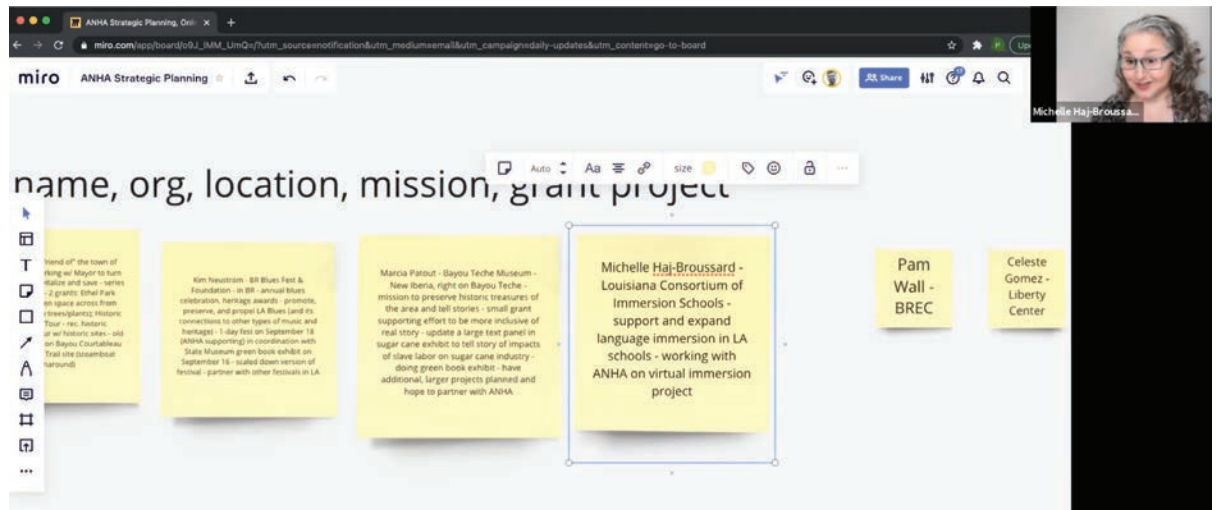
- » Water and its influence on lifestyles
- » Cuisine and its relation to the land
- » Hard work of the people in the parishes
- » Building our lives, utilizing the environment
- » Joie de vivre – hospitality, fun

- ANHA grants process

- » Agreement that it is a great process
- » ANHA staff: “they want you to succeed”
- » ANHA grants open doors to other funding

- Signage

- » Agreement that the visibility and quantity of signage is great
- » Lets people know that they are in a place that celebrates its culture
- » There is not a call to action on the signage but it “makes you want to look it up”
- » Even just a logo draws on collective curiosity
- » Gives us the chance to tell a story: “Why is this area special?”
- » Signage instills pride and excitement
- » It makes you “pause for a second” – this is right in our backyard
- » Signs could include factoids about local area, water thread



Above: Michelle Haj-Broussard of the Louisiana Consortium of Immersion Schools participates in the virtual grantees roundtable

CREATIVE ECONOMY ROUNDTABLE

Participants in the creative economy roundtable shared thoughts on the heritage area's cultural and creative economic position utilizing the S.O.A.R. framework. Through this discussion of strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results, the group helped inform a blueprint for how ANHA can support sustainable cultural economic development - the area where ANHA performed lowest in the stakeholders surveys.



ATTACHMENTS

The following attachments represent additional diligence conducted in support of this planning process and are available upon request:

- *Attachment A: ANHA Stakeholder and Commission Survey Results*
- *Attachment B: ANHA Roundtable Discussion Recordings*
- *Attachment C: ANHA Strategy Workshop Research Presentation*
- *Attachment D: ANHA Strategy Workshop Raw Data Outcomes*

This Strategic Plan was adopted by the Atchafalaya Trace Commission on October 6, 2021. It was developed and published for ANHA by LaFargue. For more information, visit lafargue.co

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ATCHAFALAYA.ORG | (225) 342-8164 | P. O. BOX 44243, BATON ROUGE, LA 70804-4243



Atchafalaya
NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2026