



# TOURISM PROMOTION LEGISLATIVE ACTION PLAN AND TOOLKIT

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>PROBLEM</b> .....	2
<b>SOLUTION</b> .....	2
<b>TACTICS</b> .....	3
<b>BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR LEGISLATORS</b> .....	5
<b>TEMPLATE EMAIL MEETING REQUEST</b> .....	8
<b>TDT TEMPLATE THANK YOU LETTER</b> .....	9
<b>TDT TALKING POINTS</b> .....	10
<b>TDT TEMPLATE OP-ED</b> .....	11
<b>TDT FACT SHEET</b> .....	12
<b>RESOURCES</b> .....	14



## PROBLEM

In general, Florida residents do not recognize the value of tourism and tourism promotion to their communities. It is not considered a shared community value and is not perceived as important to the health of the community in the same ways as education and public safety are. Unfortunately, this disconnect extends to the state and local elected officials who are making public policy and funding decisions.

State lawmakers do not always understand how important tourism is to the state and how much it impacts their district. They may not realize that tourism is a major source of revenue for local communities and the state, and the industry is one of Florida's largest employers. In many communities, especially coastal communities, tourism puts more people to work than any other industry. It may not be clear in their minds that the revenue generated by visitors pays for critical services residents rely on, such as public safety, education and infrastructure needs.

There also exists a lack of understanding and recognition that equally important to tourism is tourism promotion. There is a disconnect between understanding the importance of tourism and also understanding that tourism promotion is the driver of a successful tourism industry – that the two must go hand-in-hand in order to provide visitor-generated revenue needed at the local and state levels. Misconceptions that visitors will come to Florida no matter what and without tourism promotion efforts continue to permeate.

There are a lot of demands on government resources with constituencies each lobbying their elected officials to promote their priorities as an urgent need. When state and local elected officials do not understand the value of tourism and tourism promotion, and how interconnected they are, they may choose to mollify these constituencies by diverting tourism promotion dollars away from tourism promotion.

## SOLUTION

Elected officials must see it with their own eyes and hear it from their own constituents in order to fully understand and appreciate that it is visitors who produce the revenue their communities rely upon, and the positive impact tourism promotion has in attracting those visitors to their communities.

It is up to us to help state and local leadership realize the connection between tourism and tourism promotion and how important they are to our state's economic vitality and the creation of jobs for Floridians. Not only must we share this message directly with our local and state elected officials, we must also do so in a way that uses local examples, makes emotional connections and ensures our passion for our communities shines through.

These communication touchpoints also provide an opportunity to educate lawmakers and other influencers about Tourist Development Taxes, how they were established, how they work and the role they play in Florida's tourism engine. It is vital that we create awareness that tourism is one of the state's top economic drivers, that tourism promotion drives tourism growth and success, and that Tourist Development Taxes are the key to ensuring continued tourism success and growth for Florida.

The *[Destination Promotion: Empowering Florida's Growth](#)* report provides a thorough resource outlining the value of tourism and the positive return on investment tourism promotion provides Florida.

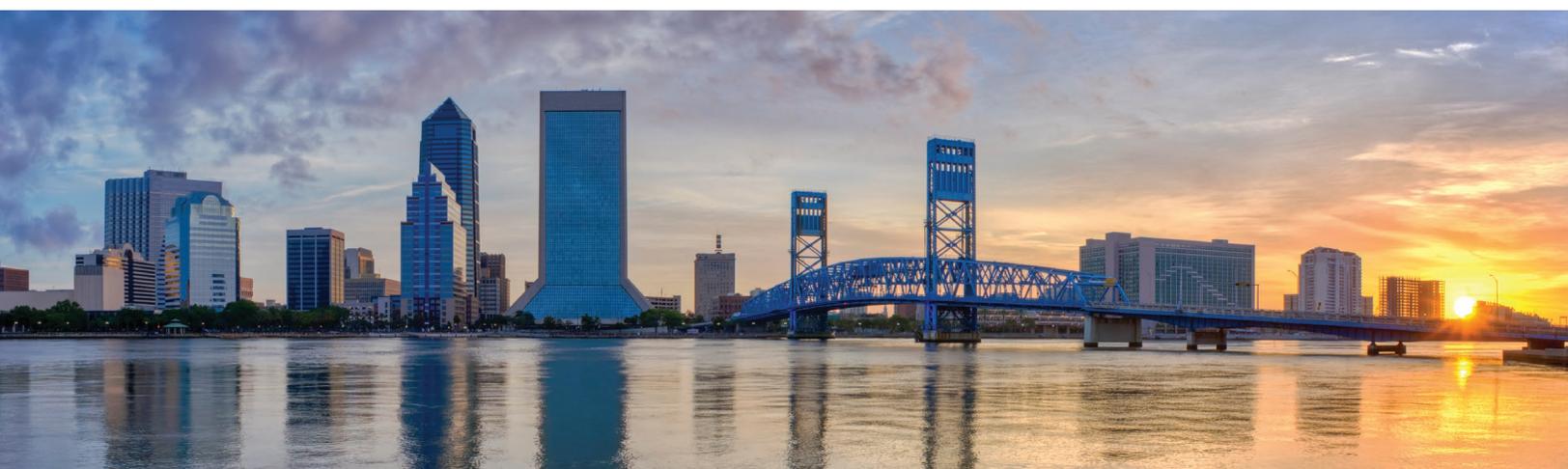
# TACTICS

To support our efforts to communicate the benefits tourism brings the State of Florida and its local communities, we suggest employing a mix of the following tactics:

- **Share copies** of the *Destination Promotion: Empowering Florida's Growth* report with state and local elected officials.
- If permissible in your county/counties, **request in-person or virtual meetings** with your state and local lawmakers to share information about how tourism impacts their district/community. If you are not able to have direct contact with state or local elected officials, recruit industry advocates who can request meetings and share your messages with these critical audiences.
- **Invite state and local elected officials** to meet with you in your office so they can see your efforts and the efforts of your team in action.
- When meeting with statewide elected officials, **partner with other tourism promotion organizations** that are part of the same legislative district as you in order to show the regional impact of your tourism promotion efforts.
- If you are able to meet with your state or local lawmaker, afterwards, send her/him a **thank you letter** that outlines what you discussed during the meeting and reinforces key points about the value of tourism, value of tourism promotion and the importance of tourism to his/her district/community.
- **Engage your local tourism industry** in this conversation and ask them to serve as advocates who can also conduct outreach to state and local elected officials on issues related to Florida tourism and their district/community.
- **Invite state and local elected officials to your annual meeting** or partner events. If big events are happening in your community, such as the opening of a new hotel or attraction, be sure your state and local elected officials are on the VIP list.
- **Create collateral materials** for state and local elected officials that break down local tourism data (number of hotels, number of restaurants, number of residents employed by the tourism industry, revenue generated by tourism) by their district or community (see example by Discover the Palm Beaches at the end of the toolkit). Be sure to include more than just facts and create emotional connections by adding human interest stories. For instance, describe the impact the pandemic had on tourism and hospitality businesses in their districts, especially when they were forced to shut down. Mention what it would mean for your community if a major tourism or hospitality employer that they are familiar with closed.
- **Publish annual reports** that highlight your organization's tourism promotion efforts over the last year and share those reports with state and local elected officials.
- **Provide state and local elected officials with research reports** that demonstrate the impact of your recent tourism promotion efforts and also share these reports with state and local elected officials.



- **Interview hospitality industry stars** and create short videos highlighting these industry stars that can be shared at your meetings, on social media and with state and local elected officials in order to connect emotionally.
- **Create infographics that highlight the various benefits tourism provides** the community and the results of tourism promotion efforts.
- **Create graphics or infographics that demonstrate the breakdown of how Tourist Development Taxes are allotted** in your community. For example, X percent goes to tourism promotion, X percent goes to beach renourishment, X percent goes to sports (see example by Visit Sarasota at the end of the toolkit). Free programs that can be used to create infographics include [Canva](#) and [Venngage](#).
- **Mail hard copy letters to state legislators** regarding the negative impacts of any proposed legislation that would change the current permissible uses of Tourist Development Taxes. Ask local industry leaders, advocates and friends to do the same.
- **Send emails to state legislators** regarding the negative impacts of any proposed legislation that would change the current permissible uses of Tourist Development Taxes. Ask local industry leaders, advocates and friends to do the same.
- **Utilize your social media platforms** to communicate key messages regarding the benefits tourism provides Florida, the need for tourism promotion and the importance of preserving the current permissible uses of Tourist Development Taxes.
- **Serve as the author of an opinion-editorial** or letter to the editor (or help identify potential authors of an opinion-editorial or letter to the editor) that spotlights the need for tourism, tourism promotion and Tourist Development Taxes.
- **Request a meeting with the editorial board of your local newspaper(s)** to discuss the benefits tourism provides Florida, the impacts of tourism on the local community, the need for tourism promotion and the importance of preserving the current permissible uses of Tourist Development Taxes.
- **Provide testimony at state legislative committee meetings** regarding the benefits tourism provides Florida, the need for tourism promotion and the importance of preserving the current permissible uses of Tourist Development Taxes. Help identify other local industry leaders, employers and advocates who are willing to do the same.





# BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR LEGISLATORS

## FINDING CONTACT INFORMATION FOR YOUR LEGISLATORS

### **Find your elected officials:**

<https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/FindYourRepresentative>

### **Members of the Florida Senate:**

<https://www.flsenate.gov/Senators>

### **Members of the Florida House of Representatives:**

<https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/representatives>

### **Finding Local Delegation Members (2023):**

[https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/api/document/house?Leaf=HouseContent/Lists/FP\\_Reference%20Materials/Attachments/19/2023%20Local%20Legislative%20Delegations%20List.pdf](https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/api/document/house?Leaf=HouseContent/Lists/FP_Reference%20Materials/Attachments/19/2023%20Local%20Legislative%20Delegations%20List.pdf)

## ASKING FOR A MEETING WITH YOUR LEGISLATORS

- Determine if you want to meet with your legislator at his/her district office or at his/her office in the capitol in Tallahassee. Legislators will typically only be in Tallahassee during committee weeks and during the legislative session. All other times of the year, you should try to meet with them at their district office.
- Schedule meetings rather than “dropping in” on legislators’ offices.
- Make your request for a meeting in writing and follow-up with a phone call to the district or capitol office staff.
- Let the legislator’s office know what issue and legislation (specify a bill number if there is one) you would like to discuss.
- Be sure they know you are a constituent and a tourism industry leader in their district.

## PREPARING FOR A MEETING WITH YOUR LEGISLATORS

- Decide who will attend the meeting and if you want to bring any industry representatives with you to the meeting. Keep the group small with no more than four or five people.
- Do your research. Know what committees your legislators serve on, what political party they represent, their background and what positions they generally take on issues.
- Review your talking points and practice your “elevator speech” in advance of the meeting.

## MEETING WITH YOUR LEGISLATORS

- Be on time for your meeting and be prepared to be patient. It is not uncommon for legislators to have schedule changes or for meetings to be interrupted.
- Keep the meeting on topic and be brief. You may only have 10 to 20 minutes to meet with your legislator or his/her staff.
- Start the meeting by introducing yourselves and thanking the legislator for any votes he/she has made in support of your issues and for taking the time to meet with you.
- Bring up any personal, professional or political connections to the elected official that you may have.
- Stick to your talking points.
- Provide personal and local examples of the impact of the legislation. This is the most important thing you can do in a lobby visit.
- It’s OK to tell a legislator that you did not have an answer to a question he/she may ask. If you can get that information, tell them you will get it to them later and be sure to follow-up.
- Be respectful, positive and informative.
- Provide brief leave-behind materials on your issue.

## **AFTER THE MEETING**

- Follow up your visit with a thank you letter. Thank the legislator for their support, if support was indicated, or for the opportunity to present your view. Also, send any additional information that may have been requested about your issue or your organization.
- Share your experience with others to help them prepare to meet with their legislator.

## **DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR LEGISLATORS**

- Offer to be a resource for your legislators on the ever changing and important tourism industry in their district.
- Provide your mobile number for immediate access in case your legislators have any questions and try to get theirs or a key staff member's so that you can keep them updated in an emergency.
- Suggest dates to follow up with your legislators.
- Take your legislators to a key hotelier, attraction, and/or restaurant that's important to the tourism industry in their district.
- Work to create relationships before they are elected to office by reaching out to candidates for office on both sides of the political aisle. Engage stakeholders who may have influence with these candidates to help educate them on the value of tourism promotion to their community.

## **TIPS FOR VIRTUAL MEETINGS WITH YOUR LEGISLATORS**

- Speak to staff in your legislator's office to determine if your legislator has a preferred virtual meeting platform (i.e. Microsoft Teams, Zoom).
- Offer to host the meeting, but be sure you are familiar and comfortable with the agreed upon platform.
- Test your Internet connection and/or phone signal before starting the meeting.
- Make sure your background is not distracting.
- If multiple advocates plan to join the call, assign a leader who will open and close the meeting and keep things running on time.
- Before the meeting begins, silence your cell phone and place it out of view.
- When you begin the meeting, ask permission to take a screen shot of everyone on screen and ask if you can post it on social media

## TEMPLATE EMAIL MEETING REQUEST

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Dear [Representative or Senator] [last name]:

My name is [name] and I am the [title] of [name of local tourism promotion organization]. I am writing to request the opportunity to meet with you in your [district/capitol] office regarding any legislation that would impact the current permissible uses of Tourist Development Taxes [add bill numbers here if available].

Preserving the current permissible uses of Tourist Development Taxes is not only essential to our county's tourism promotion efforts, but also critical to our state's and local community's economies. Tourism promotion attracts visitors whose spending creates jobs and generates local tax revenue that help fund critical services that benefit your constituents, such as public safety, education, affordable housing and infrastructure.

[include county-specific information here if possible]

Visitors support [number of jobs] jobs in [county name] County. In [year of most recent data], tourists spent \$[dollar amount] in [county name] County on everything from lodging, food and beverage, retail, attractions, recreation and transportation. The county's total economic impact from tourism in [year of most recent data] was \$[dollar amount]. That is all thanks to Tourist Development Taxes.

During our meeting with you, we would like to talk about any legislative proposals that would sweep Tourist Development Tax funding away from local tourism promotion.

I will contact your office to confirm receipt of this email and to speak with your scheduler about a specific meeting date and time. Thank you in advance for the opportunity to meet with you.

Sincerely,

[name]

[tourism promotion organization name]

[mailing address]

[telephone number]

# TDT TEMPLATE THANK YOU LETTER

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Date

The Honorable [Name of Legislator]

[Florida Senate/Florida House of Representatives]

[street address]

[city], Florida [zip code]

Dear [Senator/Representative] [last name]:

Thank you for meeting with me on [date]. I greatly appreciate the opportunity to meet with you and am grateful you made time to talk with me about the importance of preserving the current permissible uses of Tourist Development Taxes.

As you may recall, we discussed year-after-year attempts to sweep Tourist Development Taxes away from local tourism promotion funding. Voters in your district approved Tourist Development Taxes because they wanted to ensure there was a stable source of funding for tourism promotion. Tourism promotion brings visitors to our community and those visitors' spending creates jobs for our residents and pays for our children's education, the police who protect our neighborhoods and the infrastructure on which we rely.

This is a system that has worked for Florida and altering it would do irrevocable harm to the state's top industry.

[add any additional key points that were discussed during the meeting and any follow-up information you agreed to provide]

Again, I thank you for taking the time to meet with me. I hope that you found this discussion beneficial when addressing Tourist Development Taxes during legislative committee meetings and during the 2024 Legislative Session. And, I hope we can count on your support and you standing with Florida's tourism industry by voting against any bill that would raid Tourist Development Taxes.

Should you require any further information or insight on this issue, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

[name]

[tourism promotion organization name]

[mailing address]

[telephone number]

[email address]

## TDT TALKING POINTS

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- Florida is tourism. It's our top industry. It's our lifeblood. And, it's absolutely vital to our state, our local communities and every single resident.
- Tourism does so much for us. It pays for our children's education, keeps our communities safe, builds new roads, protects our environment, provides for affordable housing and inspires art and culture.
- Tourism creates jobs and puts Floridians to work.
- Tourism works for Florida.
- To keep tourism working for Florida's future, we have to fuel it. That fuel is in the hands of every single Florida county. That fuel is local tourism promotion.
- Local tourism promotion brings visitors to every part of Florida. They stay for a short time, but the dollars they leave behind have a lasting effect.
- Thanks to them we have great schools, high quality healthcare, a strong police force and ways to preserve the beauty and wonder of our state.
- Visitors are the gift that keeps on giving. Our overnight visitors also pay for our local tourism promotion efforts through Tourists Development Taxes. Today's visitors pay to attract tomorrow's visitors.
- It's a system that's working for Florida.
- Sweeping Tourist Development Taxes away from local tourism promotion efforts and applying those dollars elsewhere – whether within the county or outside of it – would break the system.
- We need tourism in Florida.
- We need to let local tourism promotion and the Tourist Development Taxes do what they were designed to do – attract visitors whose spending puts people to work and generates local revenue for services benefitting local residents.



## TDT TEMPLATE OP-ED

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Tourist Development Taxes were approved by voters to ensure there would always be money set aside for a county to conduct tourism promotion efforts. Tourism promotion is essential to attracting visitors who spend money in our communities, generate tax revenue and create jobs for Floridians. Without the tax revenue tourism brings, Florida residents would be spending more out of their own pockets to fund critical services, such as public safety, infrastructure maintenance and improvement, and public education.

Unfortunately, the Florida Legislature is once again considering legislation that would sweep Tourist Development Taxes away from voter approved uses and redeploy those funds to other uses. Any changes to the current permissible uses of locally generated Tourist Development Taxes would harm our community's ability to promote our unique travel offerings and bring visitors to our piece of Florida.

Florida's tourism industry was responsible for welcoming 137.6 million visitors in 2022, the highest number of visitors in the state's history. Each of those visitors brought jobs and revenue to our state and local community. In 2021, Florida visitors contributed \$101.9 billion to Florida's economy and supported more than 1.7 million Florida jobs.

[insert information about how the tourism industry positively impacts your county]

The facts are the facts. Tourists generate revenue and jobs. Tourism promotion, at both the state and local levels, brings in the tourists that create those revenue streams and put Floridians to work. But, rather than seeking opportunities to bolster the state's top industry, legislators are proposing policies that will only hurt the industry.

Maintaining the current permissible uses of Tourist Development Taxes – for expenditures related to local tourism promotion – ensures that Florida communities can continue to attract visitors and reap the benefits of the local sales tax revenue they generate and the jobs they create.

This is a system that is working for Florida, and we need to keep it that way.



# TDT FACT SHEET

## PURPOSE

- Tourist Development Taxes (TDTs) – also known as “bed taxes” – are a tax on overnight visitors to [county name] County. They generate revenue specifically earmarked to promote [county name] County to potential visitors.
- They are paid by visitors to [county name] County and are not paid by residents.
- This tax revenue indirectly pays for critical services important to every [county name] County resident, including schools, road maintenance and public safety.
- TDTs are the primary source of funding for promoting [county name] County to potential visitors so that we can continue to generate the funds needed to pay for these critical services that benefit everyone in the community.

## HISTORY

- Hoteliers in Florida asked the legislature for a state law that would allow counties to levy TDTs.
- In [year], [county name] County voters approved the creation of TDTs by county-wide referendum.

## PROCESS

- TDTs are collected on any unit rented or leased for six months or less, including hotels and vacation rentals. Overnight guests at these properties pay a [percent amount] percent tax, and that money is then used to attract more visitors to [county name] County through tailored tourism promotion.
- The Tourist Development Council oversees the use of TDTs, with additional oversight from the Board of County Commissioners.
- The revenue from TDTs can be spent on any tourism-related project, including marketing and the arts, beaches, stadiums and convention centers.



## IMPORTANCE

- Local tourism promotion efforts, such as those conducted by [local tourism promotion organization], are tailored to the specific needs of our community. We are able to promote our specific travel assets directly to the markets we typically draw visitors from – [list feeder markets] among others.
- Potential visitors who live in those places and others such as Chicago, the United Kingdom or Germany, may only think of Florida in terms of Disney and beaches. Many have never even heard of [county name] County. To get visitors to our community and our beaches specifically, we've got to make potential visitors aware we are an option. Specifically targeting our feeder markets to attract more visitors to our area is the solution, which is why TDTs are so important.
- Without funds dedicated to tourism promotion, [county name] County won't be able to attract more visitors, or even retain our current customer base for future stays. Using TDT revenue on anything other than promoting our destination would significantly weaken the local tourism industry, costing [county name] County jobs and critical sales tax revenue.
- TDTs lessen the tax burden on our residents. Without them, every [county name] County resident would have to pay an additional \$[dollar amount] in taxes every year.

## ECONOMIC IMPACT

- The TDT is a direct economic driver for [county name] County – it stimulates the local economy by enabling us to tell the story of [county name] County to potential visitors around the world.
- In [year of most recent data], visitors spent \$[dollar amount] in [county name] County on everything from lodging, food and beverage, retail, attractions, recreation and transportation.
- Visitors support put [number of jobs] people to work in [county name] County. The hospitality industry offers the ability to move up the ladder to leadership positions. For example, many General Managers at top resorts started as a bellhop or housekeeper. Without TDTs, our local tourism industry will be jeopardized and our residents will be deprived of a lifelong career in Florida's number one industry.
- In [year of most recent data], TDTs generated a \$[dollar amount] for [county name] County. Those funds help continue driving visitation to our county bringing with it additional tax revenue.
- The total economic impact from tourism in [year of most recent data] surpassed \$[dollar amount], which clearly indicates a significant return on investment in the TDTs.



# RESOURCES

**Destination Promotion: Empowering Florida's Growth report**  
[EmpoweringFloridasGrowth.com](https://www.empoweringfloridasgrowth.com)

## VISIT FLORIDA 2024 Strategic Plan

<https://www.visitflorida.org/media/89804/2021-strategic-plan.pdf>

## Visit Sarasota County infographic

<https://destinationsflorida.org/legislative-toolkit>

## Discover the Palms Beaches' How Tourism Provides Jobs and Opportunity for Palm Beach County Florida Senate and House Districts report

<https://destinationsflorida.org/legislative-toolkit>

## Destinations International *Becoming a Community Shared Value* report

<https://destinationsflorida.org/legislative-toolkit>

## Experience Kissimmee Industry Stars video

<https://destinationsflorida.org/legislative-toolkit>

