Regional Cooperative Tourism Program FY2016-2017

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FOR CENTRAL OREGON

INTRODUCTION:
The tourism region of Central Oregon lies on the eastern side of Oregon’s Cascade Mountains, consisting of Deschutes, Jefferson, Crook and So. Wasco Counties. Leadership representatives from Central Oregon Chambers of Commerce and Destination Marketing Organizations within these counties comprise the region’s RCTP Stakeholders Committee, representing the depth of the Central Oregon tourism industry. Central Oregon Visitors Association (COVA) has been appointed by Central Oregon’s RCTP Stakeholders as the tourism entity to contract with Travel Oregon, representing the region.

RCTP grant funds complement, and are completely supported and leveraged by COVA’s larger ($2.4 million) investment strategies dedicated to Central Oregon destination marketing. As approved by RCTP Stakeholders, Central Oregon’s FY2015-16 plan was designed to accommodate the biennial budget implemented by Travel Oregon, so the primary objectives and strategies of the FY16 regional plan will carry forward for the second year of execution in FY17.

These objectives include regional efforts with our tourism and economic development partners (but are not limited to) International Sales & Marketing, Generation of Domestic & International Earned Media, Destination Marketing & Commercial Air Service Development, and Domestic & International Visitor Inquiry Fulfillment. In addition, RCTP grant funds support Central Oregon’s alignment with Travel Oregon by supporting the role of COVA’s Industry Relations Manager, facilitating the Regional Convene & Communications requirements for Travel Oregon.

MARKETING:
COVA’s comprehensive marketing plan is a combination of cutting edge messaging strategies combined with traditional advertising, digital development, social media and outside-the-box, custom-tailored marketing and promotional opportunities. Each strategy is designed to leverage the others to fully maximize our reach to potential visitors, engaging in a two-way conversation to inspire them to take action.

Whether that be stimulating the trial process, sharing their Central Oregon experience in real time, or keeping visitors engaged so they want to return for a future visit; COVA’s strategy is designed to keep our target market actively connected by constantly asking “what do we want them to do next?”...no matter the stage in vacation planning they are in.

COVA will continue to focus and leverage resources to develop destination ‘reach’ markets that the smaller communities within our region, and individual association members cannot, or do not, market to on their own. In priority order: California Bay Area, Southern California, Phoenix-Scottsdale, AZ; Washington and Oregon (social media engagement, in-state).
New daily direct commercial air service via American Airlines between Redmond Municipal Airport (RDM) and Sky Harbor International Airport (PHX) in Phoenix, AZ, will begin June 2, 2016. As a founding member of the Central Oregon Air Service Team (COAST), COVA will leverage RCTP grant funds, supporting expanded P/R and marketing efforts in this new non-stop flight market, in addition to and existing primary non-stop markets serving RDM.

Targeting air travelers - specifically in niche audiences of family travel, golf, winter/ski and outdoor enthusiasts - are a priority for Central Oregon, as research indicates visitors flying into our destination stay an average of 5-8 nights, and spend 34% more, while on vacation.

SALES:
To optimally leverage COVA’s domestic & international sales efforts towards lead generation, catalog placement and increasing visitation into the region, alignment with Travel Oregon and local Stakeholders will continue to focus on the countries that utilize RDM (or PDX) as a gateway into the state. (Canada; Europe - UK, Germany, Netherlands; Asia – Japan, China, So. Korea; Oceania – Australia, New Zealand.) RCTP grant funds allow the valuable opportunity for building regional awareness by providing funding for hosting in-region research & familiarization tours, and participation at Travel Industry trade shows as a member of Travel Oregon’s state-wide delegation - reputed in this environment as extremely cohesive and progressive. FY2016-17 includes attending Go West Summit, International Association of Golf Tour Operators (IAGTO), International Pow Wow (IPW), and National Tour Association (NTA) Travel Exchange. Regional sales efforts are additionally supported by COVA’s membership and engagement within Meeting Professional’s International (MPI) and Oregon Tour and Travel Alliance (OTTA).

An emerging international opportunity includes taking advantage of the momentum and exposure from the Sister Park Agreement between neighboring Crater Lake National Park & Wuyishan National Scenic Area (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) in China, announced Feb. 2016. Now Oregon’s No. 1 overseas travel market, China has also surpassed Germany among the Top Origin Markets for Int’l Travelers in the U.S., and showed the highest % of increase YoY than any other international market according to the Office of Travel & Tourism, U.S. Department of Commerce. Additionally, 2016 is the U.S. Department of Commerce and the China National Tourism Administration’s (CNTA) official “U.S. – China Tourism Year”. In collaboration with Travel Oregon, Central Oregon will be host to Chinese travel trade and media groups, and attend Active America – China, taking place in Portland in March 2017.

DEVELOPMENT & TRAINING:
Central Oregon’s burgeoning “Newberry Country” (La Pine, Sunriver, Three Rivers South, Crescent, Gilchrist and Fort Rock) is the fortunate recipient of Travel Oregon’s Rural Tourism Accelerator Program. COVA’s Industry Relations Manager will continue to play an active and ongoing support role throughout this process, as this valuable program will be pivotal for the economic viability and sustainability of Newberry Country, and the entire Central Oregon tourism industry.
Additionally, we hope that the suggestion to piggy-back the Travel Oregon/ORLA “Gold CGSP” training workshop to Newberry Country’s RTS Accelerator Program is being strongly considered. By doing so, we believe there will be higher participation from the Central Oregon, and Eastern Oregon if the opportunity is opened to them, due to less travel time and optimal seasonal being scheduling.

NEXT STEPS
As introduced in this summary, Central Oregon’s FY17 plan will carry forward for the second year of execution as approved by the region’s RCTP Stakeholders, accommodating the biennial budget presented by Travel Oregon. Once Travel Oregon policies and guidelines are set for HB 4146 implementation of the Regional Cooperative Tourism Program and budget, the Central Oregon stakeholders will convene to develop the FY18 biennial plan.

Some items of discussion include:

- Digital Development map project for all of Central Oregon’s scenic bikeways, key attractions, activities and geologic landmarks
- Regional support for Central Oregon Film Office
- Regional support for a feasibility study exploring the tourism potential for a year-round sports complex at the Fair & Expo Center
- Continuation of building “rights free” content and videos/photo library for regional & membership free access
- Collaborative, in-market focus groups
- Address regional “on the ground” management issues

In the interim, Central Oregon RCTP Stakeholders have also been encouraged to begin their Central Oregon regional “Opportunities Wish List” for review and discussion. Additionally, in agreement with the request to make RCTP documents easily accessible to all Stakeholders, COVA has created a Central Oregon Regional Stakeholders Dropbox link to place and retrieve regional planning and reporting documents.

On behalf of Central Oregon’s RCTP Stakeholders – THANK YOU!