

3/19/2025



Re: 2024/2025 yearly report

To Braxton County Commission, Town of Sutton, Town of Burnsville, West Virginia State Auditor, Joint Committee on Government and Finance, and the West Virginia Association of Convention and Visitors Bureau:

In accordance with West Virginia state code (§7-18-13a), please find attached the yearly report of the Braxton County Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB). The report includes:

An income statement and balance sheet showing all amounts of hotel occupancy tax appropriated and all expenditures of hotel occupancy tax made by the CVB for the prior fiscal year; (Financial Report)

A marketing plan targeting markets outside of a 50-mile radius of CVB location; (2025 Advertising Plan, and 2025 Marketing Plan)

An annual operating budget allocating approximately 40 percent of annual revenues to advertising and marketing, approximately 40 percent to salaries and personnel, and approximately 20 percent to other operating expenses. (2025 Budget)

We have also included accomplishments for 2024.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Smith". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping "A" and a cursive "S".

Andrew Smith  
Executive Director  
Braxton County CVB

**Braxton County Convention and Visitors Bureau**

Jan. 1 thru Dec. 31, 2024 Financial Report

**Revenue**

Hotel/Motel Tax (Braxton County)	\$	90,940.37
Hotel/Motel Tax (Town of Sutton)	\$	3,318.78
Hotel/Motel Tax (Town of Burnsville)	\$	172.08
Sales	\$	114,167.10
Rent	\$	2,150.50
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>210,748.83</b>

**Expense*****Staffing***

Net Salaries	\$	39,733.44
Unemployment	\$	335.68
US IRS Withholdings	\$	8,345.42
WV Withholdings	\$	1,364.00
<b>Total Staffing Expenses</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>49,778.54</b>

***Office/Administrative***

Building Expenses	\$	22,633.62
Office Expenses (Includes Adobe)	\$	1,023.03
Utilities	\$	10,912.05
Meetings	\$	140.02
Mileage/Fuel	\$	1,474.44
Legal & Accounting	\$	2,125.00
Property Tax	\$	962.32
Dues/Education	\$	1,069.01
Insurance	\$	3,450.00
<b>Total Office/Administrative</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>43,789.49</b>

***Promotion of Braxton County***

Grant Partnerships / Sponsorships	\$	9,100.00
Inventory	\$	54,473.13
Phone, Internet, email	\$	2,916.34
Marketing / Advertising	\$	17,700.48
Postage	\$	126.22
Website, hosting and maintenance	\$	786.37
<b>Total Promotion</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>85,102.54</b>

**Total Expenses****\$ 178,670.57**



# **BRAXTON COUNTY CVB 2025 MARKETING PLAN**

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## **BRAXTON COUNTY CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU MISSION STATEMENT:**

**THE BRAXTON COUNTY CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU  
WILL MARKET BRAXTON COUNTY AS A TOURISM  
DESTINATION IN-STATE, ACROSS THE US, AND  
INTERNATIONALLY USING APPLICABLE UNIQUE MESSEGING  
DESIGNED TO CAPTURE THE ATTENTION OF THE INTENDED  
MARKET AND DRIVE TRAFFIC TO THE BRAXTON TOURISM  
WEBSITE AND TO OUR TOURISM PARTNERS WHILE FEULING  
CURIOSITY IN OUR TARGET MARKETS.**

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## INTRODUCTION

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Braxton County Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) is a private, non-profit marketing organization representing Braxton County, West Virginia as a meeting, event, recreation, and vacation destination.

The CVB strives to create a positive and lasting image of the county and its attractions through all publications, promotional materials, and advertisements. Promotional outlets and programs are chosen based on value and effectiveness. The effectiveness of outlets and programs are continually analyzed throughout the year to help determine whether they are successful and if they should be repeated in the future.

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## STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, THREATS

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### Strengths:

- Located in the geographic center of West Virginia. Ideal for state-wide organizations;
- Easily accessible via five exits along I-79;
- Sutton Lake / Burnsville Lake / Rivers;
- Outdoor recreation activities; such as fishing, swimming, hiking, boating;
- Ample conference and event facilities, both indoor and out;
- History/Civil War/Heritage attractions such as Flatwoods Monster, Battle of Bulltown, Downtown Sutton, Civil War Trail stops, and “ghost towns”;
- Small town atmosphere: Burnsville, Flatwoods, Sutton, Gassaway;
- Various regularly scheduled fairs, festivals, and events;
- Quality, diverse, and numerous lodging options;
- Unique shopping options including outlet stores, many independent specialty and general stores, Flatwoods Monster Museum, WV Bigfoot Museum;
- Many high quality and diverse dining options available;
- Unique entertainment options: Landmark Theater for the Arts, Elk Theatre, Braxton Jamboree, plenty of live music;
- Low crime rate;
- scenic beauty;
- affordability/cheap or free parking;

Weaknesses:

- Lack of outdoor activities and attractions during winter seasons;
- Lack of regularly scheduled evening entertainment options;
- Some areas of Braxton need rejuvenation, visually unattractive;
- Lack of quality hospitality employees/high turnover rate;
- Land access/use issues;
- Located in the geographic center of the state. Difficult to attract out of state visitors. Out of state visitors may find WV destinations just over the boarder rather than venturing well into the state to find us.

Opportunities:

- Further development and establishment of community relationships in our service area to make the CVB the hub of information.
- Development of new promotions and itineraries that emphasize and curate activity already possible in the area.
- Development of new promotions/exhibits/monuments based around famous residents/natives of Braxton, history, and lore.

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## **BRAXTON COUNTY'S TOURISM PRODUCT DEFINITION**

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- Heritage / History Tourism: Bulltown historic area, Sutton Downtown Historic District, Civil War Trail signs in Sutton and Burnsville, Windy Run School, Gassaway Depot, and Historic Elk Theatre;
- Paranormal Interests: Flatwoods Monster, haunted houses, Big Foot, ghost towns, cemeteries;
- Culture / Entertainment: The Landmark Studio for the Arts, Braxton Jamboree, special events in Gassaway, Sutton, Burnsville and Flatwoods; numerous fairs and festivals;
- Outdoor Recreation: fishing, hiking, kayak and canoeing, boating, hunting, camping, swimming;
- Shopping: Everything Fiesta, other Flatwoods Center stores, Bear Heaven, Sister's Antiques, Mountain Laurel Country Store, Flatwoods Monster Museum;
- Dining: Woods and Waters, Waffle Hut, The Spot, Stancattis, El Gallo, Braxton Bistro, a wide variety of chain quick-service and set-down restaurants;

- Lodging: Day's Inn and Suites, Microtel, Elk Hotel and Cafe, Elk Motor Court, The 79 Hotel, Several Air BnB options, Over 300 total rooms/rentals, totaling nearly 500 beds;
- Meetings and Conference facilities: Flatwoods Conference Center, Microtel, We're Family Park, Elk River Hotel and Cafe;

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## **COMPETITON**

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- Lewis County: Stonewall Jackson Resort and lake;
- Summersville: Large conference center, lots of similar outdoor recreation;
- Pocahontas, Tucker and Randolph Counties: outdoor recreation; resorts, scenic beauty;
- Eastern Panhandle: civil war and heritage tourism; upscale lodging; gaming; meeting facilities, shorter drive time from D.C.;

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## **POSITIONING**

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- Braxton County Convention and Visitors Bureau office is located in Downtown Sutton, which helps to drive traffic deeper into the county from the interstate.
- Work with the West Virginia Division of Tourism and area tourism partners whenever possible in various advertising opportunities.
- Offer co-op advertising opportunities to area tourism partners to stretch marketing dollars for both the CVB and area businesses.
- Partner with other "Paranormal" attractions in the state, as the Flatwoods Monster Museum, to help draw more people into the state to enjoy all WV attractions in one trip.
- Continue to work with area governing bodies, businesses, civic groups, individual members of community to work together to when goals dovetail.
- Require events, that request sponsorship from the CVB, to supply the CVB with passes to the event in order to offer them as promotion for the events as well as boost CVB visibility.

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## **CONSUMER MARKET ACTION PLAN:**

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- Gain brand recognition and initiate engagements by advertising to specific markets with specific interests. Drop generic messages to stand out. Utilize the Flatwoods Monster whenever appropriate to catch viewer attention.

- Utilize more internet advertising, including: Google, Facebook, YouTube.
- Create and/or recreate brochures for specific activities or subjects. Examples include: The Flatwoods Monster, Bigfoot, motorcycling, “Best Of”s.
- Advertise in specific interest driven publications that have highly interested and engaged readers. Example subjects include: Motorcycling, Fishing, Paranormal, etc.
- Advertise with podcasts who are emerging/ mid-level audience sizes.

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## **PUBLICATION DEVELOPMENT/ DISTRIBUTION**

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- Brochures: distribute printed material to WV Welcome Centers, area tourism attractions, other like attractions nation-wide, nearby interstate rest areas, CVB office or via mail (when requested)
- E-Newsletter: Newsletter is e-mailed to interested persons, media outlets, and CVB partners monthly or when applicable.
- Continuing the expanded use of electronic publications. e.g. Website upgrades, Facebook, YouTube, other social media.

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## **PUBLIC RELATIONS**

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- The Braxton County CVB has taken the lead on marketing Braxton County by fostering relationships in the service area to expand communication and ensure all affected parties are working for the same goals as well as have a voice in the direction of the CVB.
- Sponsor and co-sponsor events with possible tourism draw. Funds help events offset expenses and allow for the event to reoccur year after year in the hopes that they will become self-sufficient. The sponsorship process emphasizes the importance of outside area interest and overnight stays. Sponsorship also requires organizers to take part in tracking and reporting the success of their event which in turn helps the CVB decide if future sponsorship is warranted.
- Provide press releases to news outlets to illustrate CVB effectiveness and purpose.
- Send Newsletter via e-mail that promote special events and attractions in Braxton County.
- Speak with area business owners, event planners, and taste makers to ensure they are familiar with the CVB and its efforts, and to find ways to partner.

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## ADVERTISING CONTENT SUMMERY

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The Braxton County CVB will structure content in advertising opportunities, depending upon desired market attempting to be reached in any given advertising opportunity. In the strategies given below the terms “general advertising” means any application where the CVB will be marketing to a general audience with no particular market segment in mind. The term “specific or target market” means any application where the CVB will be advertising to a particular market segment which will relate to a particular interest or activity. “Market” refers to a segment of the population which we are advertising toward:

- As an attempt to grab and hold attention, the CVB will utilize advertising content (graphics, text, spoken word) which feature the Flatwoods Monster lore in most general advertising opportunities. The CVB has found through extensive testing that this course of action yields a high return on investment of advertising dollars when compared to other general advertising pursuits that have ever been attempted by the organization. Net return on investment generates four to ten times the return on general advertising opportunities.
- In any advertising where a specific market is being targeted, the CVB will utilize advertising content (graphics, text, spoken word) which will feature the subject matter pertaining specifically to the target market we are attempting to reach. For example, if the CVB is attempting to reach fishermen through a channel that is specifically fishing related, we will utilize content which related specifically to the interest of fishing. The CVB has found through extensive trial and error that advertising to specific markets using specific content delivers a high return on investment by focusing targeted content to an already target market. Marketing to highly targeted markets tend to be less expensive than marketing to a general audience when compared 1 to 1, scaled to compensate for dollars spent and audience reached.



Braxton County Convention and Visitors Bureau	
2025 Budget	
Revenue	
Hotel/Motel Tax (Braxton County)	\$ 85,000.00
Hotel/Motel Tax (Town of Sutton)	\$ 3,000.00
Hotel/Motel Tax (Town of Burnsville)	\$ 100.00
Rent	\$ 10,000.00
Sales	\$ 110,000.00
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$ 208,100.00</b>
Expense	
Staffing	
Net Salaries	\$ 50,000.00
Unemployment	\$ 420.00
US IRS Withholdings	\$ 12,000.00
WV Withholdings	\$ 2,000.00
<b>Total Staffing Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 64,420.00</b>
Office/Administrative	
Building Expenses	\$ 7,500.00
Office Expences (Includes Adobe)	\$ 1,125.00
Utilities	\$ 11,000.00
Meetings	\$ 150.00
Mileage/Fuel	\$ 2,000.00
Legal & Accounting	\$ 2,500.00
Property Tax	\$ 1,000.00
Dues/Education	\$ 1,250.00
Insurance	\$ 4,000.00
<b>Total Office/Administrative</b>	<b>\$ 30,525.00</b>
Promotion of Braxton County	
Grant Partnerships / Sponsorships	\$ 10,000.00
Inventory	\$ 55,500.00
Phone, Internet, email	\$ 3,000.00
Marketing / Advertising	\$ 24,000.00
Postage	\$ 150.00
Website, hosting and maintainence	\$ 800.00
<b>Total Promotion</b>	<b>\$ 93,450.00</b>
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 188,395.00</b>

## 2024 Accomplishments - Braxton County Convention and Visitor's Bureau (CVB)

**Advertising:** In 2024 the CVB continued efforts in **paid digital marketing** across social media and display ad networks, which resulted in **88,394 impressions, and 6,263 unique trackable website visits**. The number of visits, or “clicks”, as compared to the number of impressions is known as “click thru rate” or CTR. The **CTR** for these efforts is **7.1%** which is higher than the national average of **6.6%** for similar tourism marketing.

The CVB created and re-printed various **rack cards** highlighting the **Flatwoods Monster, Bigfoot, Motorcycling**, and a general **Braxton County** info piece. In total, **generating 110,000 printed pieces** to distribute to the traveling public via interstate rest areas, WV Welcome Centers, mail, local tourism destinations, related tourism destinations all over the United States, and our office.

In June of 2024, the CVB partnered with a printed material distributor to distribute **40,000 racks cards** to promote Braxton County, WV to the **DC and Pittsburg areas**. In total, those printed materials are hosted at over **170 locations** in key travel areas and are checked and stocked weekly by the distributor.

**Print advertising** included several ads placed in lower priced yet highly targeted printed media, such as *Hidden Ohio*, *Map in Black*, and a Motor Sports Touring map; to name a few. These publications combined represent over **40,000 pieces, nationwide**.

The CVB advertised with several **podcasts** in 2024. These efforts resulted in an estimated **125,000 impressions** and **84** tracked clicks/visits to the CVB’s website. The CVB estimates that for every **one** person who used a traceable method there were **five to ten** others who used more direct and untraceable routes.

The CVB owns two sets of attraction signs on **I-79 at exit 62**. The average daily traffic is around **19,400 vehicles**. The signs produce a possible 19,400+ impressions per day. This number could skew more or less since we cannot account for multiple passengers, etc. In a year these signs could generate **10,940,000 or more impressions**.

**Earned Media:** The CVB worked with several production companies in 2024 to create an estimated **9 pieces of entertainment content** for various media outlets. YouTube, Instagram, and magazines were chief among these media outlets. In total these projects have earned Braxton County about **350,000 free impressions** internationally. This exposure was given at no cost to the CVB. The value of these impressions would equal roughly **\$3,500** in advertising spending.

**Social Media:** The CVB actively markets on social media through many platforms including Facebook, X(Twitter), Instagram, and YouTube. All of these platforms are utilized to make users aware of attractions and events in the Braxton County area. On all platforms, the CVB has a combined audience of **over 30,000 followers**. On **Facebook** alone, in 2024, the CVB has generated **419,938 Impressions** and **2,670 link clicks** to our website.

**Website:** The Braxton County CVB website saw visitation increase by **30%**, compared to 2023, with **66,900 visitors** who generated **157,690 page-views in 2024**. The webpage dedicated to the Flatwoods Monster was the most viewed, followed by the page dedicated to the Flatwoods Monster Museum, then 2024 Bigfoot Festival, the Home page, then Events. The website also generated **over 1,000** outbound clicks to **partner** websites and social media accounts.

Having a state-of-the-art website is key in an age where web search algorithms not only assess content relating to a search, but also website functionality and security. Much of CVB marketing efforts drive traffic to this website, it must be the CVB’s strongest asset in order to perform well for Braxton County tourism partners, many of whom have little to no web presence themselves.

**Events:** The CVB sponsors several events in 2024. These events included the **WV Bigfoot Fest, Braxton County Fair, Burnsville Freedom Fest, WV Emergency Management Conference, Flatwoods Monster Convention, Christian Motorcycle Association's Annual Rally, Elk River Float, and Kings of the Lake**. These events attracted over **10,000 visitors** to the area, most for more than one day.

**Education:** The CVB's executive Director, Andrew Smith, attended continued education at the **West Virginia Governor's Conference on Tourism** in 2024. At the Governor's Conference on Tour Smith learned several cutting-edge and budget-friendly marketing and content creation techniques to utilize for Braxton County.

**Special Projects:** The CVB partnered with **area citizens** and the **WV Division of Tourism** to build and erect an **Almost Heaven swing** near the **Gassaway Train Depot** along the **Elk River Rail Trail**. This small investment adds value to the depot and the Elk River Trails. The swing adds a new tourism destination for the Town of Gassaway. Finally, the swing allows Braxton County to be mentioned anytime the Department of Tourism promoted all the swings that exist throughout the state. The amount of added earned media value far exceeds the swings costs (*\$5,000 split 50/50 with the Division of Tourism*) and the scope of coverage will reach farther and wider than the CVB could possibly track.

**Accreditation/Membership:** In 2023 the Braxton County CVB successfully applied for and received accreditation from the **West Virginia Association of CVBs (WVACVB)**. The process of accreditation is highly involved and takes place once every three years. In order to become accredited by the WVACVB an applying CVB must illustrate best practices for CVB's. In 2023 the Braxton County CVB also became a member of **West Virginia Association of Museums**. The CVB did this in order to receive the benefit of the experience of that organization and its other members. The Braxton County CVB has operated the Flatwoods Monster Museum as one of its special projects for over six years. Through its efforts with the Flatwoods Monster Museum, the CVB and director Andrew Smith, was awarded **2024 Museum Impact Service Award** by the West Virginia Association of Museums.

**CVB Office/Flatwoods Monster Museum:** The CVB office and Flatwoods Monster Museum greeted many visitors to Braxton County In 2024. The visitation led to significant traffic throughout Braxton County, especially to downtown Sutton. In the calendar year of 2024, **visitation totaled 11,875**. Additionally, the CVB made **over \$110,000 in sales of souvenirs**, \$20k more than in 2023. This additional revenue helped further bolster the CVB's efforts in marketing Braxton County as an ideal West Virginia destination.