



Ohio Travel
ASSOCIATION

2022-23 Annual Report

Together, we inspire, champion and power the advancement of Ohio's \$53 billion travel industry.

We believe travel is all about the story. And today, we're excited to share OTA's story. Our grand mission, summed up in a single word, is *Together*. As we poured over committee reports ahead of our October annual meeting, we were amazed by the number of unique organizations we collaborated with over the past year. We're talking about the go-getters who sat at the table, threw around big ideas, and shaped the future of our association and industry. The power of collaboration is truly amazing, and we're grateful for everyone who played a part.

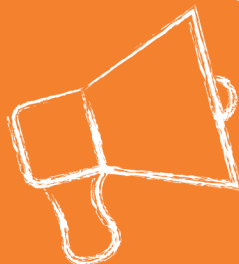
Our mission is a three-pronged attack: to Inspire, Champion, and Power. We keep our members informed with industry news and provide top-notch education. We also work to ensure our member businesses have the resources they need to excel, such as pro-business policies and connections with emerging programs and wholesale buyers.

So sit back, relax, and dive into our story. And if you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out. We couldn't have done it without your support, and we're grateful for the role you play in keeping OTA and Ohio's travel economy soaring high.

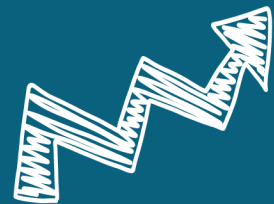
Thank you!



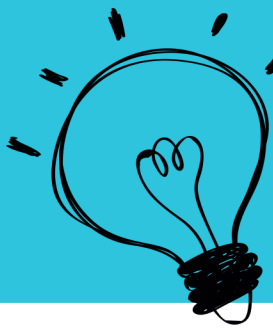
When we say "inspiring," we're not just talking about keeping our members and industry in the loop. It's also about sharing insights, knowledge, and tips with each other, a collective force of awesomeness! Our goal is to spark your creativity and inspiration, giving you what you need with the space to create.



Whether we are collaborating with local stakeholders or elected officials, OTA is committed to amplifying the message of the travel industry. We value your input and analyze policy decisions carefully, weighing their potential to either facilitate or impede businesses in the industry. We believe in building a broad coalition for driving change and strive to advocate for the industry as a cohesive and united force.

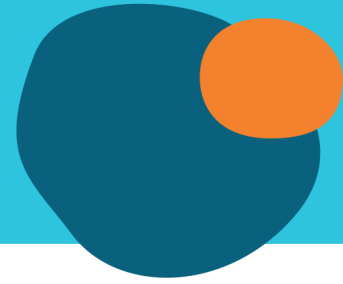


OTA is like a bridge-builder. We're your go-to for introducing you to suppliers that'll make your audience go wild with excitement. We're always on the hunt to level-up the Ohio experience, whether that means shining the spotlight on a hidden gem, or bringing an entire region to life. Whether we're plugging you into a network of movers and shakers or tapping into our wealth of industry know-how, we're all about helping you rise to the top.



INSPIRE

Educate. Inform. Coach.



Making sure our members stay ahead of the game with the hottest news and trends in our industry is our goal. We're on a mission to keep you in the know with exciting opportunities like webinars, online discussions, the Ohio Conference on Travel, RUBY Awards and the Ohio Tourism Leadership Academy. Plus, our weekly newsletter is jam-packed with must-know happenings.

Attendance at OTA events grew 18% in 2022-23. This includes travel marketing webinars, informal Let's Talk About online chat sessions, the Ohio Conference on Travel and the Ohio Tourism Leadership Academy.

event participation grew 18%

More than 150 businesses and organizations joined forces with OTA to share their talents with others. This includes those serving on the OTA board; volunteering on committees; partnering with us on significant projects; serving as a speaker; or mentoring others.

more than 150 partners in the past year

Our members-only **Let's Talk About chat sessions** sparked exciting discussions and traded insider tips on hot topics in 2023 - *earned media, digital best practices, solar eclipse, America 250-Ohio, board governance and visitor experience accessibility*:

participation grew 34%

A trio of **Travel Marketing webinars** were packed with the trending topics you crave - *understanding and engaging residents, reaching and converting meeting planners and elevating your social media*.

participation grew 8%

The **Ohio Tourism Leadership Academy** rolled out the red carpet for 28 new faces, bringing our squad of up-and-coming tourism leaders to more than 220 alumni! We beam with pride, seeing our alumni soar to new heights in their careers and take the reins of leadership all across the state. It's what keeps us fired up and ready to go!

participation grew 39%

The **Ohio Conference on Travel** is like the Super Bowl of events for us, a time when travel industry professionals come together to learn, grow and network. Last year's conference was held at the Kalahari Resorts and Conference Center. Attendees learned about *research insights, TikTok tips, influencer partnerships*, and more.

participation grew 21%

Before the conference, we hosted a one-day **outdoor recreation and tourism learning lab**. We rolled up our sleeves and got everyone involved with hands-on activities. We even brought along personas, painstakingly crafted from data about outdoor enthusiasts, to guide us. The lab armed attendees with a start on killer marketing plans to reel in those nature-loving adventurers!

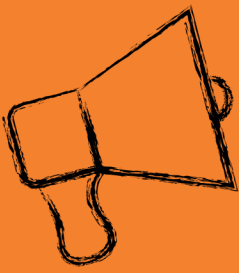
100% would recommend

OTA crafted a module for Ohio State University Ohio Sea Grant's new **Erie PROH charter captain certification**. Our segment highlights how *sustainability and genuine experiences* are key to winning over anglers' hearts.



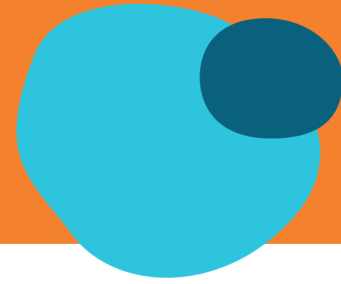
Our PR/Marketing Committee rockstars gave **OTA's weekly eClips newsletter** a stunning makeover this past year. We've pumped up all the key elements you love, like juicy research summaries, hand-picked news straight from the hottest sources, and a list of can't-miss events and career opportunities.

Average open rate of 42%, a 6% increase over 2021-22



CHAMPION

Influence. Advocate. Communicate.



Travelers spend money at Ohio businesses. From locally-owned shops on Main Street to Ohio-headquartered brands traded on Wall Street, businesses rely on sales, and a healthy travel economy makes sales happen. Travel brings visitors to their doors, admission gates and front desks. This visitor spending supports jobs that launch careers and provides a necessary introduction to the workforce. That trip to Ohio could also be the start of a whole new chapter - it's a sneak peek into what could be a visitor's future home sweet home.

The travel industry's growth or decline often rests in the hands of policy decision-makers, and they can come at us from every angle. From the local level to the state and national level, these decisions can either make or break the travel economy. And, it's not just elected officials who have a say. Choices within city management or state agencies can also determine whether the travel economy (and subsequently local businesses and communities) prosper.

State Budget Wins and Losses

The budget season was a bumpy ride and not without disappointment. There were many different issues throughout all phases of the process.

- The attempt to change the name of TourismOhio was defeated. This is important for ensuring tourism considerations remain in future budgets and administrative changes.
- TourismOhio ended up with a reduction in budget.
- There was also a reduction in the budget to the Ohio Department of Development All-Ohio Futures Fund which was committed to promote the work, live and visit message.

OTA takes a birds-eye approach at understanding what's important to many working in Ohio's travel economy. We supported restoration of a \$16 million cut to Ohio State Parks and adequate funding for America 250 Ohio.

Expanding the Troops

There's no way one group or organization can conquer all tasks, so OTA brought together all sectors of the industry into a collaboration for future work. By building on each other's strengths and representing what's important for all sectors, our collective voice as the Ohio Travel Coalition is amplified.



OHIO LOCAL HISTORY ALLIANCE
Inspire. Connect. Educate.



Establishing Local Support for Travel Initiatives

Local buy-in and support impacts your ability to carry out your work, and state and federal policymakers often take cues from local decisions. Through our strategic planning facilitations with community organizations, OTA has compiled a database that outlines common concerns among board members. This serves as a baseline and highlights opportunities to cultivate further support. The following measures are cause to pause, and OTA will work on tools for you to score higher in these areas. We also included two eClips articles about these issues with words of advice, and hosted an online session to discuss.

40% of board members don't feel like their talents are put to use

43% don't fully understand the mission of your organization

40% don't feel able to explain your work to others

Establishing Priorities for Outdoor Recreation

OTA Executive Director Melinda Huntley was named to the advisory board of the **Ohio Department of Natural Resource's outdoor recreation plan** in 2023. This plan is revamped every six years and is a lifeline for those who count on outdoor recreation as a valuable market. It's vital to make sure that the plan's priorities include both product enhancement and promotional capacity, as the plan sets the tone for funding for the next six years.

**Final priorities
for outdoor
recreation**



*Advance the trail network
Improve, enhance and adapt existing recreational facilities
Emphasize recreation opportunities and access to Ohio's waters
Improve awareness and access to outdoor recreation opportunities
Protect and sustain the natural environment*

Influencing Education Policy

OTA is all about molding the next generation of industry professionals. The following are just a few examples of our work in 2023 to ensure students are developing the skills most needed by our industry:

- With a seat on the **Industry-Recognized Credentials** committee for the Ohio Department of Education, OTA is part of the team that reviews, approves or denies applications for high school credentials.
- Ensuring **high school curriculums** (especially vocational studies) focus on what matters most to the industry is the reason OTA also provides industry members with the opportunity to share thoughts through monthly ExecNet surveys.
- OTA Executive Director Melinda Huntley serves as a member of the national **Business Advisory Board** for MBA Research, a Columbus-based firm that designs curriculum for 14 states.
- Melinda also serves on the **Ohio DECA** board, a program for emerging leaders and entrepreneurs in marketing, finance, hospitality, and management.

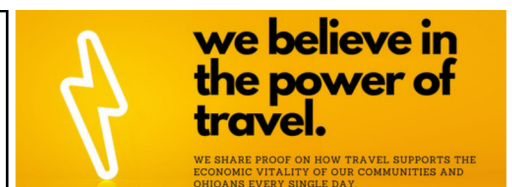
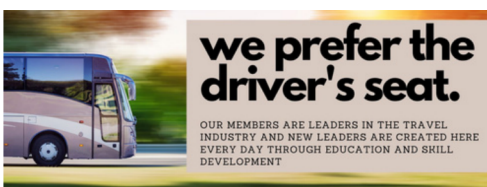
Creating America 250-Ohio Opportunities

The nation celebrates its 250th year in 2026, and Ohio has created a commission to guide the state's commemoration. OTA Executive Director Melinda Huntley sits on the commission. She co-chaired a tourism committee that ensured the initial plan incorporated opportunities for highlighting travel opportunities and has since been named one of the chairs for the Signature Events and Programming Committee. This committee provides oversight for a number of planned activities including an Ohio Trails and Tales initiative and a statewide Ohio Goes to Movies series of film festivals. A grants program launched recently to help fund community and regional projects that elevate the **America 250-Ohio** priorities.



Sharing the Power of Travel Message

OTA shares the **power of travel** message across the state. This past year, the message was shared with more than 500 individuals through speaking engagements. This included presentations for Adventures in NE Ohio, Heritage Ohio (webinar and annual conference speaker), Local History Alliance, Cincinnati Regional Tourism Network, Ohio Museum Association, Trumbull County Tourism and at the Ohio Department of Natural Resources State Parks and Watercraft All-Managers Meeting. We participated as a panelist on an advocacy webinar for the Ohio History Connection and Ohio Museum Association, sharing the need for TourismOhio funding message. We also created talking points regarding TourismOhio funding that were distributed at the Ohio Tourism Legislative Day event coordinated by OACVB and Ohio Statehood Day.





POWER

Connect. Facilitate. Activate.



OTA is the ultimate matchmaker and bridges gaps in the industry. Count on us to link you to media suppliers that'll send your message straight to the heart of your target market. We're all about making things awesome, whether it's in a quaint little town or a region. Our game plan is simple: we're here to give you the best of the best, whether it's linking you to industry experts, facilitating conversations to bring out creative solutions, or flexing our problem-solving muscles to crack even the toughest of nuts.



HOPEWELL CEREMONIAL EARTHWORKS

WITNESS ANCIENT BRILLIANCE



OTA has been proudly seated at the **World Heritage** table for more than a decade, and we're ecstatic about the opportunities this brings to Ohio! But we know that success is all about what we do with it, which is why we're gathering regional DMOs and others in November to keep pushing the envelope.

We teamed up with Ross, Warren, and Licking counties to prep their local businesses for the big announcement and the opportunities inscription brings. OTA created a resource guide for local businesses, as well as talking points managers can use during staff trainings. We even created tips on how to talk respectfully about these culturally significant earthworks.

The bureaus were experts on their own sites, but few had visited those elsewhere. OTA coordinated a FAM tour of all eight Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks sites. It was a joy to witness these teams come together, learn about each other's sites, and gain a deeper appreciation for these marvels of humanity.

Our work with **Ohio State Parks** continues. With help from our advisory team, we listened carefully, put on our thinking caps and cracked the code on some major challenges and opportunities. Result? Two decks of flashcards, packed and ready to roll inside a backpack (no toolkits here, folks!). These tools will help park managers and local tourism crews create strong strategies and partnerships.



Heartland Travel Showcase, produced by the Ohio Travel Association, is a hot ticket for group travel wholesalers and buyers. This year, the Cincy Region put on a show-stopping event that had everyone talking. OTA makes sure you get connected to group travel buyers from across the nation, but it's up to you to fan the flames of those relationships all year long.



And don't underestimate the power of the group travel market. One of our Ohio suppliers booked a whopping 100 group tours this year, with a third of them spanning multiple days. We move the showcase around the Midwest to keep things fresh and attract new operators. The show is being held in South Bend in 2024.

Being an OTA member is packed with perks, including a hotline when you need a helping hand. OTA has **personally assisted** more than 112 businesses and organizations the past year. Sometimes this means a quick phone chat, while other times it involves months of facilitating board member and stakeholder discussions. Because we have an extensive network of experts on hand, we connect members to those who have similar experiences for best practices or ideas. **At the end of the day, it's about making the industry as a whole stronger by supporting the work you do every single day.**

advising and supporting grant submissions - assisting with board governance issues - building local collaboration - engaging with tourism community as a supplier - planning for the solar eclipse - meeting with consultant hired by a destination for planning purposes - dealing with elected officials - providing industry and visitor data - discussing bylaw revisions - sharing economic impact information - finding a media vendor - facilitating strategic planning - discussing market strategies - consensus-building with local partners

2022-23 BOARD OF DIRECTORS



LEADERSHIP

Leiann Stewart, Miami County VCB | President
Christie Weininger, Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Library & Museums | Vice President
Dan Moder, Explore Licking County | Treasurer
Adria Bergeron, Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District | Secretary
Randie Adam, Visit Cincy | Past President

REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES

Northwest

Peggy Courtney | Sandusky County CVB
Meredith Gilbert | ODNR Division of Wildlife
Jerry Simon | Kalahari Resorts & Conventions

Southwest

Chris Schutte | Greater Springfield
Mackensie Wittmer | National Aviation Heritage Alliance
Susan Valentine-Scott | Clinton County CVB

Central

Sara Blatnik | Visit Dublin Ohio
Amanda Davis | Visit Grove City
Kevin Seymour | COSI

Northeast

Open Seat
Lute Harmon Jr. | *Ohio Magazine*
Tonja Marshall | Visit Canton

Southeast

Open Seat
Audrey Martin | Hocking Hills Tourism Association
Deana Clark | Marietta-Washington County CVB

At-Large

Jeff Bloom | Discover Clermont County
Christa Kozy | Experience Hartville
Lance Woodwoth | Destination Toledo
Wendy Zucal | Dennison Railroad Depot Museum

*Open seats reflect vacancies as board members retired from service. The OTA board chose to fill these vacancies through the annual nomination process, giving members an opportunity to submit applications. Newly-elected board members serving in 2023-24 include **Amy Smith** from The Inns at 8th and Main and **Shannon Carter** from Medina County CVB.*

OTA STAFF

Melinda Huntley | Executive Director
Janet Johnson | Deputy Director
Sarah Herrick | Communications Manager

