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DESTINATION CLEVELAND OUTLINES NEXT CHAPTER FOR TRAVEL & TOURISM GROWTH WITH 2026-2030 STRATEGIC PLAN

*New partnership with Bloom Consulting positions Cleveland as first U.S. city to connect
perception of place with long-term economic growth*

Producer/Editor Note: The videos shown at today's annual meeting can be viewed [here](#).

CLEVELAND (May 6, 2026) – At its 2026 annual meeting, Destination Cleveland introduced its 2026-2030 strategic plan, outlining a focused approach for contributing to long-term community growth through travel and tourism and by strengthening how Cleveland is perceived as a place to visit, live, work and invest. The region's destination marketing and management organization also announced that Cleveland will be the first city in the U.S. to employ Spain-based Bloom Consulting's proprietary research method to better understand how perception influences economic growth.

"Over the past year, our team delivered creative work to attract visitors, strengthen perceptions and amplify the visitor experience; in 2026, the relevance of our work continues to increase as competition for travelers' attention and spending gets even more intense," said David Gilbert, president and CEO of Destination Cleveland. "With recent [research](#) indicating that economic conditions are affecting consumers' travel decisions, we have to work even harder to give Cleveland a competitive edge. And as we look ahead, we can't afford to focus only on what's immediately in front of us. Our work must balance near-term impact with long-term value."

2026-2030 STRATEGIC PLAN

Destination Cleveland's next strategic plan serves as a blueprint for the organization to continue delivering meaningful and lasting impact across the community and the travel and tourism industry. The 2026-2030 plan is an evolution of the organization's last strategic plan and places a greater emphasis on the long-term impact of tourism, including how Cleveland overall is positioned for future growth.

The organization's work over the next five years will build on the previous plan's four strategic objectives, with an enabling objective added to ensure the team can reliably deliver on its external work. The plan's objectives are focused on furthering tourism's position as a growth industry that drives billions of dollars in local impact and supports tens of thousands of jobs and families. They are:

- Increase visitation to measurably affect economic growth
- Strengthen perceptions of Cleveland
- Amplify & enhance authentic and unique destination experiences across the region
- Leverage organizational expertise, capabilities and relationships to advance community priorities that align with Destination Cleveland's mission
- ENABLING: Build outstanding talent and operational foundation

A variety of new and expanded initiatives will help the organization achieve its objectives, including:

- Attracting visitors through mood-driven marketing: The organization's 2026 marketing campaign will be rooted in "mood marketing" – using short, sensory-driven content to create an emotional connection for visitors before they arrive in Cleveland.
- Amplifying experiences by elevating the in-market visitor experience: The new [CLE Insider program](#), presented by Haslam Sports Group with additional support from Growth Opps and Michael and Areli Jeans, the Cleveland Guardians and Cuyahoga Community College Hospitality Management Center of Excellence, equips frontline hospitality staff with the knowledge and tools needed to deliver exceptional visitor experiences.
- Amplifying experiences through placemaking: Placemaking efforts, including an expansion of the Illuminate CLE lighting project to Shaker Square and enhanced lighting on the Hope Memorial Bridge will enhance visitors' on-the-ground experience.
- Advancing long-term community priorities through meetings and conventions: The organization will take a more intentional approach to identifying, attracting and maximizing the impact of events that align with key economic development priorities such as talent attraction, industry growth and business investment.

"As travel and spending habits shift, we're putting a sharper focus on what gives Cleveland an edge: our people," said Gilbert. "With more than 40% of visitors coming to see friends and family, locals play a critical role in driving visitation – and we're working to turn their pride into action."

To support this effort, Destination Cleveland has launched a new community-powered initiative: The Brag Movement, which makes it easy and engaging for residents to share what they love about Cleveland in their own words. More information about the Movement can be found in [this news release](#).

STRENGTHENING PERCEPTIONS FOR LONG-TERM GROWTH

A core element of Destination Cleveland's evolving approach to strengthening perceptions is an enhanced focus on understanding how Cleveland is perceived overall and how that affects economic growth across tourism, business investment and talent attraction. Destination Cleveland's new partnership with [Bloom Consulting](#) will translate place perception into measurable outcomes for the region. Cleveland is the first U.S. destination to engage the firm to conduct its proprietary reputation and perception research. The study evaluates how 12 factors collectively shape how cities are understood and experienced by those outside the area.

"Perception is a material driver of economic outcomes and is central to the region's long-term goals for visitor, talent and business attraction," said Gilbert. "With a deeper, data-based diagnosis of what people think of our region overall and which of the 12 key perception elements have the strongest impact on that perception, we can replace assumptions with facts and align our efforts as a community to strengthen our reputation and drive meaningful economic growth."

Based on its body of work in this area, Bloom's research shows that, generally, overall perception accounts for between 22% and 37% of economic growth across tourism, business and talent attraction. The study quantifies how changes in the 12 perception elements correlate to growth across different areas. The findings will identify which of those elements have the strongest impact on Cleveland's perception and will inform a strategic framework for partners across tourism, economic development, government and civic leadership to develop a long-term, coordinated community approach to reshaping perception for economic growth. The effectiveness of the approach will be continuously monitored and measured over time.

Once the research is completed, Bloom Consulting CEO, Jose Torres, will review the findings with the civic stakeholders who have been partners in this work. Destination Cleveland will then engage with stakeholders and others relevant to the categories identified for improvement to determine how to put the insights into action.

2025 SUCCESS

Destination Cleveland's forward-looking strategies build on strong 2025 results, which – despite economic headwinds – contributed to visitation, economic activity and future business. Achievements included:

- **Record-breaking year for convention sales:** The organization's meetings and conventions sales team continued to build a pipeline of future business. In 2025, the team achieved a new record high for room nights booked at 308,378 through 410 events taking place from 2025 through the mid-2030s.
Hotel occupancy, the most real-time indicator of travel demand, remained strong in 2025 at 60.7% – a 1.1% increase over the previous year. This outpaced national occupancy, which declined by 1.2%, and placed Cleveland within the top 30% of its peer set.
- **Marketing efforts strengthen perception in key markets:** At the same time, Destination Cleveland continued to strengthen how the city is perceived. Integrated marketing efforts across target markets reached potential visitors through hundreds of out-of-market media placements and consistent digital content highlighting the city's culture, attractions and experiences and reinforcing positive perceptions of Cleveland as a visitor destination.
- **An elevated visitor experience:** As more visitors chose Cleveland, Destination Cleveland continued to ensure their experience was a memorable one. In 2025, the CLE Concierge team assisted nearly 1,100 visitors each month – representing travelers from all 50 states plus Washington, D.C. and 72 different countries. Since its launch in April 2025, Illuminate CLE has drawn thousands of people downtown and contributed to a greater sense of vibrancy and activity, while ongoing work continues to expand neighborhood and outdoor experiences for visitors.
- **Talent attraction continues to gain momentum:** Destination Cleveland continued its work with Cleveland Talent Alliance partners to strengthen perceptions of the city as a place to live and work. Efforts in 2025 included coordinated promotional, engagement and employer-focused activities across the region. Research shows visitors are nearly three times more likely to consider relocating or investing after visiting, underscoring the powerful connection between tourism and long-term growth.

Held at TENK West Bank during [National Travel and Tourism Week](#), Destination Cleveland's annual meeting was attended by more than 500 representatives of hospitality businesses and community organizations as well as local government leaders. The event was made possible in part through sponsorship from [United for Business](#) and [Watershed Distillery](#).

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ABOUT DESTINATION CLEVELAND: Destination Cleveland is Cleveland's destination marketing and management organization. The private, non-profit organization's mission is to stimulate economic growth by attracting people and connecting them to experiences that illustrate Cleveland's diversity, creativity and contagious passion. In 2024, visitation increased for the fourth straight year to 18.6 million visits, with visitor spending infusing a record-high \$6.9 billion into the local economy. For more information, visit www.thisiscleveland.com