

## Culture and Entertainment

The region’s cultural and entertainment opportunities and unique businesses are another key aspect of promoting economic vitality. With so many organizations creating unique programming that is attractive to residents and visitors alike, the implementer should focus on promoting collaboration among them to ensure the maximum economic impact of this work. Experiences are a major tourism driver and should be embraced as economic opportunities.

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What follows are recommendations designed to create a collaborative environment within the space of culture and entertainment, maximizing its economic potential.

### Connect to Existing Community Activities

The region has many existing experiences and events that drive tourism, and enhanced promotion and cross-collaboration should be prioritized to ensure their continued success and exposure. Drawing visitors out into the community beyond the duration of these programs and encouraging them to spend discretionary income at local businesses is a critical component of boosting the economic impact of culture and entertainment in the region. Some key local and regional programs that should be focuses include, but are not limited to:

- UConn’s sporting and arts events – basketball and other sporting events, musical and theatrical performances at the Jorgensen Center for Performing Arts, the Ballard Institute’s puppetry performances and related events;
- The Last Green Valley’s regional Walktober event;
- Downtown Storrs and Coventry Village arts and business promotional events;
- Celebrate Tolland; and
- Annual agricultural celebration – farmer’s market and antique tractor and vehicle show.

One key opportunity for increased economic impact of these programs is the creation of “visitor’s packages”, tying together complementary entertainment, shopping, dining, and lodging offerings to create an incentive to stay in the region beyond the duration of any specific event. The implementer should work with local businesses to create promotions for visitors. On the next page is an example of the type of promotion the implementer should consider developing.



4UConn Women's Basketball (source: <https://www.theuconnblog.com/2020/1/25/21081576/uconn-huskies-womens-basketball-routs-east-carolina-98-42>)

**Planning on attending the 12pm basketball game on X DATE?  
After the game, show your ticket at the following locations to  
receive the specified discount (promotions good for game day  
only):**

- **\$100 for one night at the bed and breakfast**
- **20% off at Italian Restaurant**
- **Free appetizer at Mexican Restaurant**
- **50% off admission to the museum**

These promotions should be listed on the region’s website, social media, and print marketing materials and include any graphics being utilized in the region’s overall marketing campaign (see Visibility and Marketing section). Additionally, the implementer should work with the organization hosting the event to ensure that the offerings are printed in any promotional materials related to the program. In some cases, these advertisements may be free of charge. In other cases, there may be a cost associated with this advertisement. When there is a cost, there are two common options to cover it: the specific businesses being promoted can share the cost of the advertisement or the implementer can draw from a shared marketing fund (see Funding Plan Implementation section).

Where two or more events are occurring on the same date or on subsequent dates, an additional opportunity is presented to create an events-based experience, tying in local business promotions as well. Connecting multiple activities gives visitors a strong impression of the region’s culture and encourages them to stay longer. These opportunities for promotion are critical.

The implementer should determine which types of cross-promotions are most effective based on the demographics of event attendees and hone them to cater to those audiences, as many of them are not currently aware of all the cultural opportunities available to them. For example, college students, families, and seniors likely have different interests in events, shopping, dining, etc. The businesses and event organizers know well which demographics they appeal to most, so ongoing communication with these groups and individuals as well as the event attendees will allow the implementer to design the most effective promotions.

*“There has been an influx of millennials here – now they are looking for something to do with their families. We can offer that to them.” – Coventry stakeholder*

As with outdoor recreation and agricultural amenities, cultural attractions with physical locations (museums, historical sites, performance venues, etc.) should also be inventoried, mapped, and included on the region’s marketing platforms (see Visibility and Marketing section). There should be a map overlaying all three types of amenities to create a comprehensive view of all the region has to offer.

## Coordinate New Community Activities

In addition to building off existing programs, the implementer should consider creating new programs aimed at introducing attendees to all four towns. While the individual towns have been coordinating successful events for years, a more regional approach to coordination will likely attract additional visitors and better support this plan overall. As the implementer's capacity will likely be limited at the outset, it should start with coordinating only one or two events in the first year, potentially even growing an existing local event into a regional event. As capacity grows, it may consider doing a more ambitious event series focused around seasons, months, holidays, etc. and rotating between the communities. As information was collected to inform this action plan, the region expressed interest in the following types of events:

- Agriculture
  - Farm day/weekend: All farmers in the region open their farms for tours, tastings, and other activities. Discounts are offered on their products. The implementer may consider coordinating a "farm passport" for this day/weekend, with participants who visit a certain number of farms being eligible for a prize.
  - Farm-to-table events: Farmers partner with restaurants and farmer's markets or host catered events on their farms showcasing locally-made products.
  - Regional agricultural fair: Agricultural activities like tractor pulls and livestock judging are showcased, also offering opportunities for local vendors to sell their products and services.
- Food
  - "Taste of the Region": Local restaurants and farms come together to provide food and beverage samples to attendees.
  - Farm-to-table events: See above.
  - Restaurant week: Restaurants offer special promotions and/or prix fixe menus over the course of one week each year.
- Music
  - Wine/beer and music festival: Local musicians and wineries/brewers come together for an afternoon-long event.
  - Outdoor music festival: Local musicians put on performances for a full day event, with the implementer coordinating with local vendors to participate.
  - PorchFest: Local musicians put on performances on porches/front lawns of businesses throughout the region for a full day of activities.
- Arts and culture
  - Rotating art show: A collection of works from one (or multiple) local artist(s) is displayed publicly, with the collection rotating between the four towns over the course of a year.
  - Regional open studios: Local artists open their studios for a day or weekend each year, selling their works and offering demonstrations, hands-on activities, arts education, and more. The implementer may consider coordinating an "art passport" for this day/weekend, with participants who visit a certain number of studios being eligible for a prize. There is an existing

regional “open studios” effort already taking place, and that region should build off of it while incorporating some of the ideas listed above.

- Summer theater: Local theater groups put on outdoor performances that rotate between the town centers of the four communities.
- Museum day/weekend: All museums and historical sites in the region open their doors and provide guided tours and discounts on admission. The implementer may consider coordinating a “museum passport” for this day/weekend, with participants who visit a certain number of museums being eligible for a prize. Smithsonian Magazine coordinates a nationwide Museum Day and the State of Connecticut coordinates Connecticut Open House Day each year, offering two already visible platforms for better promotion.
- Outdoor recreation
  - Build-a-boat competition: Teams of participants from around the region compete to construct cardboard boats, culminating in a final boat race in a large swimming pool or lake.
  - Triathlon: Athletes enter a running, biking, and swimming competition through the four towns.
  - Charity races: Athletes enter 5ks and other types of races, with the proceeds going to specific charities/causes.
  - Wildlife walks and conservation tours: Environmental experts lead walks through scenic open space and trails, educating attendees on the importance of ecological assets within the region.

Creating appeal to different demographic groups is critical in ensuring the maximum economic impact of these events. The implementer should support the creation of events targeted toward groups like college students, young adults, families, and seniors. These events may be different, or there may be opportunities to appeal to multiple groups through the diversity of activities and participating vendors. The timing of these events is critical as well, and tying them to days where additional visitors may be in the region (UConn Family Weekend, youth sporting tournaments, etc.) is an important consideration.

### Engage with Arts and Culture Organizations



5Arts on Main, Coventry (source: <https://www.courant.com/hc-wm-coventry-arts-0906-20180905-story.html>)

Assuming the success of any of the events the implementer chooses to organize, there may be opportunities to leverage partner organizations to take on a larger proportion of the coordination. While the implementer may need to jumpstart the events at the outset, other groups may take interest in working on them as they show success and impact. Partners could include Windham Arts, the Coventry Arts Guild, Arts of Tolland, Community School for the Arts, Coventry Village Partners, Mansfield Downtown Partnership, etc. These organizations should be engaged frequently by the implementer to ensure any efforts are

collaborative and cross-promoted and to further involve them in the coordination process.

Looking forward, the towns may consider creating a regional arts and culture council or sub-committee of the regional steering committee/nonprofit (see Managing Plan Implementation section) to handle programming and create additional opportunities for businesses within this sector. The council should have a dedicated budget for organizing and promoting events (see Funding Plan Implementation section) and should be made up of representatives of the organizations mentioned above in addition to others from the agriculture, food/beverage, music, arts and culture, history, and outdoor recreation communities. As event coordination requires significant organizational capacity, creating a separate organization to manage it is sensible in that it prevents this activity from consuming the time of those driving the implementation of the plan overall.

### Desired Outcomes and Program Evaluation

Some goals of increasing engagement around arts and culture programming might be to encourage participants to spend more time in the region, allowing local businesses to capture their discretionary spending dollars. Businesses being advertised through promotions related to these events should be surveyed about changes in sales on event days. Event participants should also be surveyed about their demographics, event participation, businesses and other attractions visited, spending habits, and overall satisfaction with their experience in the region. This feedback is critical as the efforts around entertainment and culture are evolved to most effectively target the discretionary spending of residents and visitors.

### Examples and Resources

Below is a list of resources to be used for implementation of different components of the Culture and Entertainment section of the plan:

#### **Examples of recommended events**

- Farm weekend (CA): <https://www.farmtrails.org/experience/weekend-along-the-farm-trails/>
- Farm-to-table event (CT): <https://maxcheftofarm.com/>
- Agricultural fairs (CT): <http://www.ctagfairs.org/events/filters/iso=1>
- Taste of the Region event (CA): <http://www.cerritostaste.com/>
- Restaurant week (CT): <https://www.connecticutrestaurantweek.com/restaurant-weeks-ct/new-haven-restaurant-week-2011/>
- Beer and music festival (NJ): <https://www.acbeerfest.com/>
- Outdoor music festival (CT): <https://ctfolk.com/event/2020ctfolkfest/>
- PorchFest (CT): <https://blackrockcc.org/porchfest/>
- Artist open studios (CT): <https://artspaceneewhaven.org/cwos-home/about-cwos/>
- Summer theater (CT): <https://www.shorelinearts.org/shakespeare-on-the-shoreline>
- Museum day (national): <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/museumday/museum-day-2020/>
- Build-a-boat competition (TX): <https://riverlegacy.org/cardboard-boat-regatta>

- Triathlon (MS): <http://possumtowntriathlon.com/>
- Charity race (CT): <https://www.hartfordmarathon.com/eversource-hartford-marathon/races/5k/>
- Wildlife walk (VT): <https://vtfishandwildlife.com/watch-wildlife/guided-wildlife-walks>

### **Regional Arts Council**

- The implementer should consider creating an organization like the Windham Regional Arts Council for the four-town area. The Council has been very successful and can provide guidance for the implementer as it looks to create a similar entity. See it here: <http://www.windhamrac.org/>.
- Portland, Oregon's Regional Arts & Culture Council has done excellent work across the areas of programming, education, funding, and advocacy. All these functions should be considered as the regional organization evolves beyond the event coordination component that will be its primary focus at the outset. See it here: <https://racc.org/>.