

DRAFT BUSINESS PLAN

Muscle Shoals National
Heritage Area



Prepared for:
The Muscle Shoals National
Heritage Area

Draft:
January 15, 2013



INTRODUCTION

The National Park Service (NPS) recommends that every heritage area have a Business Plan to guide the local coordinating entity and various heritage area activities. According to the NPS, the Business Plan “describes the role, operation, financing and functions for the local coordinating entity and of each of the major activities contained in the management plan; and provides adequate assurances that the local coordinating entity has (or will have) the partnerships, and financial and other resources necessary to implement the management plan for the National Heritage Area.”

A. COORDINATING ENTITY STRUCTURE

This section describes the overall structure of the coordinating entity for the Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area (MSNHA). An organogram is provided below to summarize the overall structure. Included in this section is a description of the role of the coordinating entity as a “provider of technical assistance, project implementer, disseminator of funds, and project organizer.” This section also describes these key functions in terms of the types of tasks for which the entity will be responsible. Finally, the section summarizes the overall operating structure, which includes a description of prospective staff responsibilities.

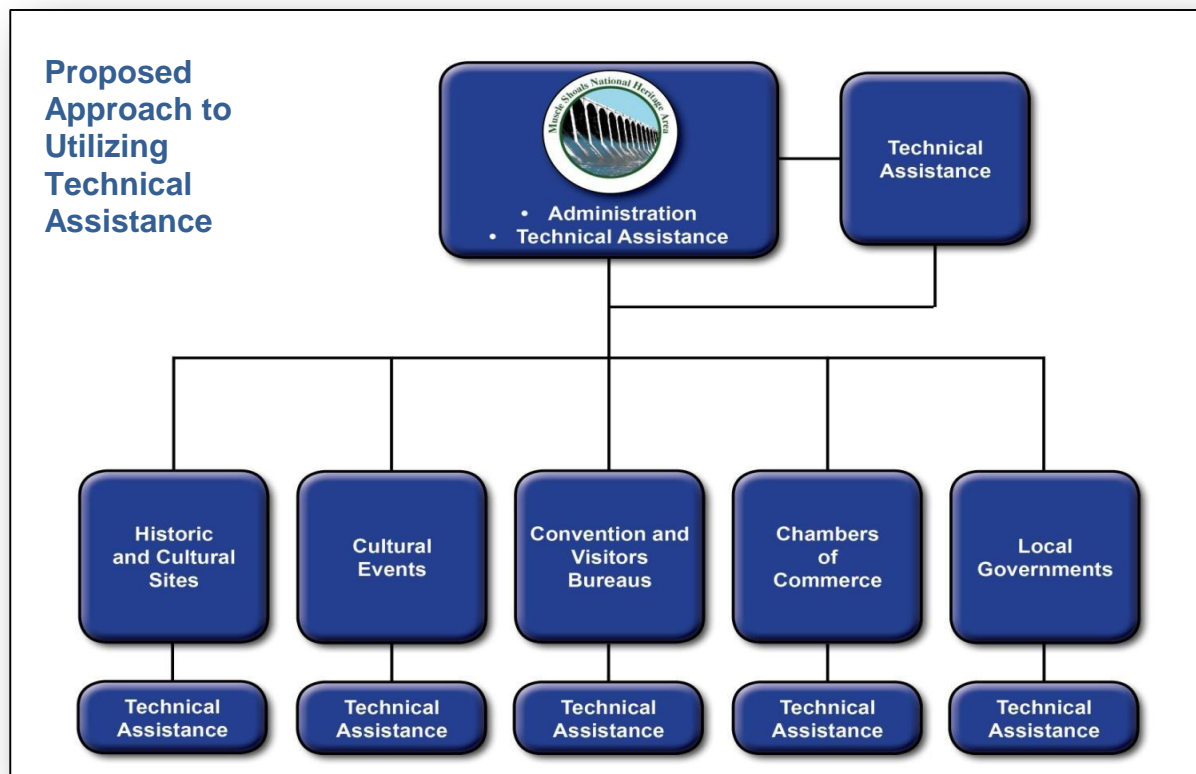
A1. DESCRIPTION

The MSNHA is housed at the Muscle Shoals Regional Center (MSRC) of the University of North Alabama. Being housed at the region's largest university provides a major benefit to its sustainable operation, thanks to the access UNA provides to skilled professionals, students, facilities, and a network of potential collaborators. The university can benefit from the MSNHA as well by increasing opportunities for UNA students and faculty to participate in hands-on heritage training programs, and by enhancing the scope and scale of the university's program applications. For example, UNA has introduced a new Masters of Public History having a strong focus on historic preservation that could offer the opportunity for internships, research, and hands-on training through the MSNHA.

The management plan has recommended a comprehensive role for the MSNHA's coordinating entity, the MSRC, with a particular focus on *coordination and facilitation*. The MSNHA would provide access and support for heritage tourism development, heritage preservation, and conservation through its internal capacity and external resources and collaborations. A diverse Advisory Board will support the MSNHA and help broaden the pool of resources for heritage preservation and tourism in a variety of areas, including natural resources and conservation, recreation, community investment, education and interpretation, marketing and public relations, and fundraising.

Role of Technical Assistance

The various interpretative, tourism, and other technical inputs to the management plan identified a serious need for enhancing interpretation and curatorial services, as well as management, funding, and overall strategic planning, at some of the region's key heritage sites to improve their conservation, marketability, and long-term sustainability. The Alternatives Analysis for the MSNHA focused specifically on the coordinating entity's structure and role, vis-à-vis the provision of technical assistance to local heritage sites and communities. Based on very comprehensive technical and stakeholder input, it was recommended that the entity be oriented towards "Alternative E: Three-Pronged Technical Assistance," as reiterated in the chart below.



Alternative E features the use of individuals with technical expertise in historic preservation, heritage tourism, and related disciplines. This hybrid approach includes some technical assistance “in house” as part of the MSNHA staff, some as consultants hired directly by the MSNHA on an as-needed basis, and some hired by the MSNHA’s partners. For the purposes of this analysis, it is assumed that the split on expert hours/costs would be approximately one third, one third, and one third (33.3% each) between the MSNHA staff, MSNHA direct consultant hiring, and partner hiring.

Partners

In addition to UNA, the MSNHA benefits from a broad and diverse array of partner organizations, as noted in the Strategies section of the management plan. Such organizations include the Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association, local preservation organizations and others. A sample partner organization list is found in the Appendix of this Business Plan.



The Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association is a key partner to market the MSNHA.

Summary

The MSNHA operating entity, the Muscle Shoals Regional Center (MSRC), is housed at the University of North Alabama under the auspices of the university's President. The university acts as an important resource while also benefiting from a direct relationship and collaboration with the MSNHA. Because of its relationship with an established university and programs sponsored through the MSRC, perceptions of the MSNHA within the funding community are automatically enhanced. The entity will focus on coordination and facilitation, and will benefit from a diverse Advisory Board to assist the MSNHA Director and staff in specific program areas. The MSNHA (MSRC) will provide direct technical assistance, as well as grant funding for outside technical expertise, but will also coordinate in-kind technical assistance directly through partner organizations such as UNA.

A2. KEY FUNCTIONS

The management plan recommends a set of key functions for the MSRC that relate primarily to *coordination* and *facilitation* of various program activities, as specified in the Strategies component of this management plan. The key functions include the following:

- Research, education and interpretation
- Preservation and sustainability of existing heritage sites and attractions
- Enhancement of natural heritage and outdoor recreation amenities
- Enhancement of communities and development of tourism infrastructure
- Marketing and promotion for heritage tourism and economic development

Research, Education & Interpretation

As noted earlier, the MSNHA has an advantageous position in being housed under the auspices of a large university. Because of its relationship with UNA, it can more easily coordinate with UNA and other area universities to conduct research on relevant history topics within the region. Working in collaboration with these institutions, the MSRC will help identify and pursue grants that can be undertaken for eligible research projects. The MSRC will also collaborate with the universities on the design of oral history programs that can engage with university and high school students throughout the region. This collaboration will also extend to the development of history educational curricula. MSRC will help access grants to fund transportation programs for school field trips in the area.

The MSRC will also collaborate with area universities and educators in the creation of printed and audio-visual materials that can be used for education and interpretation of the region's heritage. MSRC will work with area sites and attractions on the development of living history demonstrations, where appropriate. Overall, a critical function of the MSRC will be to design theme-based tours for walking,

cycling and driving that interpret the region's history, with a focus on the three interpretive themes. This function is critical because the tours help interpret the region's story and establish the physical linkages between disparate heritage sites. By doing so, the visitor is guided on a path to gain a better understanding of the region's heritage. The tours are important for interpretation, as well as for marketing the region for tourism. Based on the design of these tours, the MSRC will develop materials and various media interpreting the themes and linkages in a way that existing brochures and marketing materials do not. The MSRC will work with the operators of sites and attractions, along with CVBs and tourism agencies, on these tour routes to incorporate them into the design process and ensure their buy-in. The MSRC will also work with bus and other professional tour operators to increase awareness of the heritage area, its themes, sites, and key routes. In some cases, the MSRC will continue to promote the concept of regional heritage tours (such as Roots of American Music) beyond the heritage area boundaries, where those tours help tap into a larger potential audience for the Muscle Shoals NHA.



The Indian Mound Museum in Florence is one of many sites that the MSRC will promote within the region.

The MSRC will work with the operators of sites and attractions, along with CVBs and tourism agencies, on these tour routes to incorporate them into the design process and ensure their buy-in. The MSRC will also work with bus and other professional tour operators to increase awareness of the heritage area, its themes, sites, and key routes. In some cases, the MSRC will continue to promote the concept of regional heritage tours (such as Roots of American Music) beyond the heritage area boundaries, where those tours help tap into a larger potential audience for the Muscle Shoals NHA.

The MSRC will help facilitate technical assessments aimed at enhancing existing interpretation centers relating to the three themes (see Preservation & Enhancement below). In addition, the MSRC will coordinate with stakeholders and facilitate technical assessments of the long-term requirements and feasibility of developing new capital facilities for interpretation, including themed interpretation centers. The MSRC might not be involved in the direct funding or development of such facilities, but would definitely assist with facilitation among stakeholders and with helping to secure technical assistance for feasibility studies, site selection, preliminary design, capital planning, and fundraising, or with other due diligence in support of their efforts. The MSRC will work with stakeholders, such as those involved in the Alabama Music Hall of Fame and other sites, to help ensure that relevant existing collections remain intact within the heritage area. The MSRC will also facilitate efforts among partners to attract live music venues to the heritage area, particularly where such facilities can enhance revitalization of local downtowns such as Sheffield's.

Preservation & Enhancement

The Strategies component of the management plan calls on the MSRC to help preserve and enhance existing natural and cultural resources. This management plan has identified serious deficiencies in the conditions of some heritage sites in the region, and a lack of long-term strategic planning at most sites. A key priority for the MSNHA will be to improve conditions at existing sites, attractions, and events, and to enhance their "tourism readiness" and increase their long-term sustainability through various forms of strategic planning. Such strategic planning would relate to various combinations of the following issues, or all of them collectively and comprehensively, depending on the needs of the individual site, attraction, or event.

- Historic resources preservation and curatorial issues
 - Site enhancement
 - Interpretation
 - Use of emerging technologies (for preservation and interpretation)
 - Facilities and capital planning
 - Budgeting and funding
 - Marketing and promotion
 - Management, staffing and capacity
 - Ownership structure and long-term sustainability
-

In order to assist with these issues, the MSRC will provide technical assistance through the three-pronged approach discussed earlier, namely through in-house (direct) assistance, MSRC-contracted assistance, and/or partner-contracted assistance. Contracted assistance can take the form of either paid consultants or pro bono services and technical specialists. In some cases, as noted before, students and/or faculty from UNA or other universities can be brought in to provide technical assistance as part of PhD or graduate research, internships, assistantships, or historians-in-residence programs. For conservative budgeting purposes, it will be assumed that up to one-third of all technical assistance services will be provided on an in-kind or pro bono basis. However, the role of the institutions could easily exceed that amount.

In addition to technical assistance on interpretation and preservation, business operations, and strategic planning, the MSRC will also facilitate discussions with area communities, property owners, and land trusts on policies which could enhance and preserve natural and cultural heritage sites and land. Such policies have been detailed in the Strategies section of this management plan. The MSRC could have in-house expertise to provide input on these policies, but it will more likely secure such expertise through its collaborations with regional planning agencies, educational institutions or consultants.

Natural Heritage & Outdoor Recreation Amenities

This plan's Strategy section calls for the MSNHA to act as a "catalyst" for enhancing natural heritage areas and outdoor recreation facilities. Most importantly, there is the need for developing a greenway system that helps increase access to the Tennessee River throughout the heritage area. The region already has a substantial base of outdoor recreation tourism attractions and events, but lacks connectivity to the river and comprehensive interpretation of the region's natural heritage. The MSRC

will facilitate discussions with TVA and other partners to encourage the development of a heritage greenway and increase access along the river. The MSRC will develop materials for interpretation and promotion relating to the river and its ecosystem, and it will work with business groups and municipalities to encourage development of more outdoor recreation businesses in the region.

Community Enhancement & Tourism Infrastructure

The Strategy section has recommended that the MSRC help encourage and assist with community enhancement and development of tourism infrastructure. Again, the MSRC will mostly be involved in providing technical assistance to local municipalities, chambers and other partners on policies and incentives that can help enhance existing physical conditions and attract key tourism uses (i.e., lodging, dining, and tourism retail).



The MSNHA is more fortunate than many NHAs to have such a high-quality hotel as Florence's Marriott.

Marketing, Promotion & Economic Development

The MSRC will market and promote the MSNHA to increase heritage tourism as a means of enhancing the region's economic development. The MSRC will provide technical and financial assistance to area operators in promoting their events, especially when tied to the NHA's three interpretive themes, and in designing and promoting new events. The MSRC will, in particular, work with area operators to establish a new river-themed event as outlined elsewhere in this management plan.

The MSRC will assist individual sites, attractions and events by ensuring that they are "tourist-ready." As outlined in the Strategies section, the MSRC will establish a program for assessing sites and establishing standards for "visitor ready" and "emerging" destinations. A promotional program will be established that improves and expands the MSNHA's existing website, creates and distributes promotional materials and themed tour maps, secures funding for gateway signage, generates press releases and builds travel media relations, makes regular presentations, and utilizes social media and other emerging communication technologies.

Program Support

In support of these activities, the MSRC will develop a strong network of sites, attractions and events by coordinating with key stakeholders and operators. The coordinating entity would develop strong leadership, such as by networking and joining key organizations, attending conferences, providing internal training, and accessing available leadership programs. The MSNHA would diversify its board and would coordinate with working committees and existing associations and organizations. Also in support of its program activities, the MSRC would develop internal and external fundraising capacity; by establishing membership programs, pursuing corporate sponsors and grants, working with in-kind technical assistance providers, conducting fundraising events, offering fee-based services and establishing income-generating programs. The MSRC will also monitor challenges and success of efforts to meet its goals and objectives, using a series of benchmarks and metrics as outlined later in this Business Plan.

A3. OPERATIONS

To carry out the functions described above, the MSNHA will operate as an independent non-profit entity (Muscle Shoals Regional Center) housed at the University of North Alabama (UNA). Staff currently includes an Executive Director and, on an interim basis, a part-time Administrative Assistant. On a more permanent basis, the entity will operate with three full-time staff members, as outlined in the Implementation Plan. In addition to the three full-time staff and one or more interns, the MSRC will bring various external specialists in-house to work on a pro-bono or fee-for-service matching grant basis, depending on the project and the recipients' resources. Other technical assistance will be provided through the selection of consultants through a request for proposals (RFP) process, and/or through development of partnership arrangements for the provision of such services. This recommended operating structure is defined in more detail below.

Permanent Positions

The three permanent positions include an Executive Director and two technical specialists, as described below.

Executive Director

The Executive Director will manage and provide oversight for all operations of the MSRC. The Director will have primary responsibility for external relations, fundraising, and partnership development. The Director will also maintain and promote the existing partnership with University of North Alabama Sponsored Programs.

Preservation & Interpretation Specialist

This position will manage all research, technical assistance, and grants for heritage interpretation, preservation, and enhancement. This person will oversee in-house technical assistance (with a specialty in interpretation, preservation, and curatorial services) and will manage internship and historian-in-residence programs. This technical specialist will also provide technical expertise and assistance relating to strategic planning, funding, design, and operation of heritage sites. This individual will also oversee education programs, including transportation grants. Furthermore, this staff person will help the Executive Director with grant writing and fundraising for heritage development programs.

Marketing & Tourism Specialist

This specialist staff person will oversee development of web site and marketing materials, promotions, tour design and coordination, CVB and tourism services partnership development, database management, and economic development promotion.



The MSNHA will benefit tremendously from the many resources of UNA.

Non-Permanent Positions

The coordinating entity will also benefit from the assistance of volunteers, interns, and grant-based temporary technical specialists, as follows.

Historian-in-Residence (Non-Permanent Grant)

An occasional historian-in-residence would be recruited every one-to-three years through regional or national competitions to work with the MSNHA on specific research or interpretation projects. This individual's tenure would be funded through sponsored grants and source institutions. The "historian" may also include musicians, writers, scientists, or others with a specific research link to one of the area's three primary themes.

Volunteers

Through its Advisory Board, the MSNHA will seek the assistance of volunteers, particularly those with specialist technical backgrounds, to work on fundraising, events management, special projects, and other activities, as required.

Interns and Assistantships

Various UNA and other university PhD candidates and students will be recruited through university programs to gain credit for internships and assistantships through the MSNHA. These individuals might work pro bono, but would more likely receive academic credit, a stipend, or a nominal wage (e.g., \$10.00/hour) for their work.

B. BUDGET & FUNDING SOURCES

The National Park Service requests that the management plan outline the budget amounts required for the operation of the coordinating entity to complete heritage area projects or initiatives. The costs and funding sources are to be identified in dollar amounts and in-kind contributions from anticipated or known partners. Identification of partner commitments helps provide reassurance that the heritage area has broad support and its program is sustainable.

B1. OPERATING INCOME & EXPENDITURES

Budget Overview & Assumptions

Income and expenditures were forecasted for the five-year period from 2013 through 2017 (please see the budget on the following page). Income would be generated during this period from a combination of State and Federal grants or appropriations, sponsorships, membership dues, fundraising events, special project grants, and earned income. This initial budget is predicated on the very conservative assumption that the MSNHA will be awarded a National Park Service (NPS) appropriation through the Heritage Partnership Program at an amount roughly equal to the average annual grant award for heritage areas, or about \$148,000. It is also assumed that the State of Alabama, through the University of North Alabama (UNA) will provide a large share of the initial matching funds for the heritage area, but that these matching funds (and the federal appropriation) will gradually diminish over time. The match is conservatively estimated to peak at \$130,000 in Year 2, declining to \$85,000 by Year 5. In reality, the two appropriation amounts are targets, based on the assumption that if the State can help provide at least a partial match, then the federal government will appropriate funds for the heritage area.

The State match amount is estimated conservatively based on targets for other forms of revenue stream to the MSNHA (MSRC). For example, it is assumed that, thanks to the university's role, the heritage area will conservatively attract sponsorships of up to \$18,000 in Year 1 and varying each year after. A Year 1 target of \$9,500 has been set for special project grants or those grants generated by foundations and others for project or program-specific uses and not available for administrative operations. A realistic first-year target of \$4,000 for memberships is set, along with a target of \$11,000 for other fundraising. In addition, Year 1 income would include in-kind contributions with a volunteer value that can be applied as part of the match. It is assumed that the MSNHA will not generate any earned income in its first year, but can grow such income over time with the addition of technical staff. The budget table on the following page summarizes these forecasts.

Expenditures

The MSRC will generate expenditures relating to administration and operations, heritage resource development, and marketing and tourism.

Administration & Operations

Under administration and operations, it is assumed that one staff member (Executive Director) will be employed by Year 1. In addition to personnel, administrative expenses will include office equipment and supplies, conferences and travel, memberships, and professional fees (accounting, legal, etc). The professional fees should decrease over time once most operating systems are in place. The budget assumes that, through the generosity of UNA in providing an office for MSRC operations (at least through Year 5), there will be no rental costs for the heritage area.

Heritage Resource Development

Heritage resource development will include one staff member (technical specialist) initially, and additional technical specialists could be required over the long-term. Other expenses include: the issuance of technical assistance grants (for outside consulting); transportation or other education and outreach grants; and costs for research materials, printing and distribution.

TABLE 1. INCOME AND EXPENDITURES FORECAST, MSNHA, 2013-2017					
Income	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
State of Alabama/UNA for MSNHA	\$ 97,000	\$130,000	\$ 110,000	\$ 90,000	\$ 85,000
NPS Heritage Partnership Program	\$ 148,000	\$200,000	\$ 200,000	\$ 175,000	\$ 165,000
Corporate Sponsorships	\$ 18,000	\$ 15,000	\$ 20,000	\$ 25,000	\$ 25,000
In-kind volunteer value	\$ 8,500	\$ 10,000	\$ 12,000	\$ 13,000	\$ 21,000
Special project grants	\$ 9,500	\$ 12,000	\$ 16,000	\$ 18,000	\$ 20,000
Memberships	\$ 4,000	\$ 7,000	\$ 9,000	\$ 11,000	\$ 12,000
Earned Income / TA	-	\$ 6,000	\$ 9,000	\$ 13,000	\$ 20,000
Fundraising / Events	\$ 11,000	\$ 20,000	\$ 24,000	\$ 25,000	\$ 25,000
TOTAL	\$ 296,000	\$400,000	\$ 400,000	\$ 370,000	\$ 373,000
Expenditures					
Administration & Operations					
Personnel (1 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE))	\$ 71,500	\$ 77,000	\$ 77,000	\$ 77,000	\$ 77,000
Office supplies	\$ 9,500	\$ 2,500	\$ 2,500	\$ 2,500	\$ 3,500
Travel & Conferences	\$ 7,500	\$ 8,500	\$ 8,000	\$ 9,000	\$ 8,500
Memberships	\$ 6,500	\$ 8,000	\$ 8,000	\$ 8,000	\$ 8,000
Professional fees	\$ 10,000	\$ 9,000	\$ 6,500	\$ 6,500	\$ 3,000
Heritage Resource Development					
Personnel (1 FTE)	\$ 66,000	\$ 71,500	\$ 71,500	\$ 71,500	\$ 71,500
Technical Assistance Grants	\$ 10,000	\$ 55,000	\$ 75,000	\$ 50,000	\$ 60,000
Transportation Grants	\$ 2,000	\$ 13,500	\$ 14,000	\$ 12,500	\$ 13,300
Research materials	\$ 5,000	\$ 15,000	\$ 20,000	\$ 10,000	\$ 13,000
Marketing & Tourism					
Personnel (1 FTE)	\$ 55,000	\$ 66,000	\$ 66,000	\$ 66,000	\$ 66,000
Marketing materials	\$ 35,000	\$ 40,000	\$ 19,000	\$ 22,000	\$ 10,000
Event/Grants	-	\$ 25,000	\$ 30,000	\$ 30,800	\$ 35,000
Web site	\$ 18,000	\$ 9,000	\$ 2,500	\$ 4,200	\$ 4,200
TOTAL	\$ 296,000	\$400,000	\$ 400,000	\$ 370,000	\$ 373,000
Partner Investments					
Sources:	MSNHA Strategy, Comparable heritage areas, and RGDE.				

Marketing & Tourism

Marketing and tourism expenses include one staff member (tourism marketing technical specialist), plus the cost of development and dissemination of marketing materials. Special media (such as a DVD or film) would be funded by grants outside of the normal budgeting process. There would also be costs for revisions to, and maintenance of, the web site and databases. A few event grants would be provided starting in Year 2. Overall, the budget is balanced but based largely on assumptions regarding the NPS and State appropriations.

B2. FUNDING SOURCES

As noted previously, the MSRC will be funded during its first five years through a combination of federal and state appropriations and grants, fee-based services, project-related grants, donations, memberships, sponsorships, in-kind services, and fundraising events. Some of the key sources of funding are discussed below.

Federal & State Grants & Appropriations

As noted previously, the National Park Service (NPS) Heritage Partnership appropriations are anticipated, conservatively at a level of the average amount granted to other NHAs (\$148,000 per annum). However, it is possible that the MSNHA will qualify for larger matching funds in the range of \$250,000 to \$300,000, in which case it will require higher matches from local sources. The MSRC already has been successful in accessing other federal grant programs, including the Appalachian Gateway Communities Initiative grants through the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). There is also the possibility of grants through National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Economic Development Administration (EDA), and other federal agencies. Furthermore, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) is likely to become an important partner for the MSNHA, at least in facilitating activities through sponsorships, use of land and facilities, and funding of plans and assessments.

The State of Alabama has various discretionary funds available for specific projects and programs, such as those relating to the state's musical heritage. State tourism development tax funds provide one source of such funding. The Alabama State Council on the Arts provides relevant grants for various projects and programs throughout the state. Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources generates grants for environmental programs and natural heritage conservation.



The State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources offers grants for environmental programs.

Memberships & Sponsorships

The Strategies section for this management plan has suggested a system of tiered memberships

for convention and visitors bureaus (CVBs), individuals, and businesses. These memberships could range from as low as \$25 per individual to \$5,000 for businesses or CVBs. Large corporations would be recruited as sponsors for major programs and initiatives, above and beyond regular membership fees. In return, corporations would receive recognition through branding and other rights associated with events, tour routes, and merchandising. Similarly, individuals and others would be encouraged to make donations above and beyond regular memberships in return for various forms of recognition.

Fundraising Events

The MSNHA has a strong advantage for fundraising because of its association with music and with world-renowned artists. This association can be used in its favor to draw large crowds and/or more expensive plate dinners with special guest performers. Annual dinners, concerts, festivals, auctions, and other events should become an important fundraising tool for the heritage area.

In-Kind Services

Perhaps one of the most valuable contributions will take the form of technical assistance provided pro bono or through credited programs from UNA and other institutions. The MSRC will be able to provide internal and external technical assistance to member sites, attractions, events, businesses, organizations, and tourism agencies through UNA academic programs (e.g., History or Archeology), sponsored research, and advisory services.

Fee-Based Services

In addition to technical services provided through partnerships with UNA and others, the MSRC will also provide technical services on a fee basis. Ultimately, member organizations will receive a number of benefits, including some free technical assistance and/or training. However, there should also be a fee-based service for larger projects or programs (e.g., strategic plans) available through a competitive grant process for communities, sites, and attractions throughout the heritage area.

Income-Generating Programs, Merchandise & Facilities

Over time, the MSRC can generate additional earned income through programs, merchandising and facilities that serve the broader market base. The MSRC can contract for the development of branded merchandise to be sold throughout the heritage area, with profits shared between the site and the MSRC. For example, the MSNHA has already successfully produced a music CD to help promote the music of the area to visitors. The MSRC might, at some stage, opt to participate in the operation of a venue or facility where rentals or entrance fees might be charged for users. The advantage of these programs, merchandising strategies, and facilities is that they can provide a recurring income stream for heritage area operations, thereby reducing dependency on project grants and federal and state funding.

Project & Program Grants

The MSRC will apply for various project and program grants through regional, national and international foundations, trusts, and other non-governmental organizations. There are a number of corporate foundations, for example the Ford Foundation (\$413 million per annum) and the Alabama Power Foundation (\$5.1 million per annum), that focus some or all of their funding on arts and culture. Ford also has a focus on Native American arts and culture that could consider grants relevant to the MSNHA's themes. Community foundations, such as the Community Foundation of Greater Decatur (\$500,000 per annum), provide funding for various local programs and projects. A variety of corporations provide sponsorships and grants for education programs, including museum interpretation and use of emerging technologies in interpretation. Conservation grants, also relevant to the heritage area, are sourced from a variety of organizations. In Alabama, key sources include Alabama Legacy (environmental education), Outdoor Alabama, the Curtis and Edith Munson Foundation, and the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

C. PERFORMANCE GOALS, MONITORING & METRICS

Performance measures are provided here to help evaluate management activities and project success. Performance goals are developed for the local coordinating entity - the Muscle Shoals Regional Center (MSRC), and for the heritage area in general. The National Park Service (NPS) has stated that performance goals, benchmarks and evaluation provide useful feedback on heritage area efforts to indicate success and to determine if operational changes are required. In addition, the NPS notes that:

“Cooperative Agreements between the local coordinating entity and the Park Service may be a useful tool for evaluation because they define what work is to be done over a year period and lay out specific tasks each year. They can be used as benchmarks when compared to the actual work completed at the end of the year.”

Performance information can also be used to help leverage future funding, grants, in-kind, or investment support, by “demonstrating the ability of the local coordinating entity and partners to implement successful projects.”

C1. KEY GOALS

Key goals and objectives have been established in the Strategies section of this management plan, and those were a direct outgrowth of the plan's Foundation Statement, which was prepared relatively early in the planning process. The metrics and other performance measures should relate directly to the ability of the coordinating entity to assist the MSRC in meeting these goals.

1. **Capacity.** Develop the local coordinating entity (UNA's Muscle Shoals Regional Center) into a highly-effective organization capable of implementing the management plan.
2. **Education & Interpretation.** Conduct research, education and interpretation relating to MSNHA's primary themes as a means of documenting and telling the story of the area's unique heritage.
3. **Preservation & Enhancement.** Preserve and enhance the heritage area's numerous natural and cultural resources, particularly those with a clear link to the MSNHA's three primary themes.
4. **Recreation.** Serve as a catalyst for development of outdoor recreation and natural heritage opportunities.
5. **Community Enhancement.** Encourage and assist in community enhancement and development of tourist “infrastructure.”
6. **Marketing & Tourism Development.** Market and promote the heritage area through a number of vehicles to increase heritage tourism as a means of economic development.

C2. KEY METRICS

As noted above, the measures for success should relate directly to the goals established for the coordinating entity - the MSRC. The following describes several key metrics for tracking, monitoring and measuring success. *It should be noted that the goals have been established as ongoing tasks rather than as final targets. For example, preservation itself is a n ongoing task; it does not “end” once the physical assets of a heritage site are preserved, but is rather an ongoing process of ensuring that the region's historical sites will be available for interpretation, education, and enjoyment of future generations.*

1. **Capacity.** Enhancing the capacity of the coordinating entity to implement the management plan is a critical goal, particularly in the early stages of operations, as a prerequisite to all other goals that can be achieved. Key metrics include the following:
 - a. Stable or generally increasing operating funding levels over time
 - b. Number of funding sources, illustrating the diversity of funding sources and sustainability of operations (with a lack of dependency on any one type of funding source)
 - c. Amount of funding leveraged from non-governmental sources
 - d. Amount of earned income generated (through technical assistance programs, rentals, fundraising events, and other activities outside of grants or appropriations)
 - e. Staffing levels and professional and technical capacity
 - f. Advisory Board members representing various heritage, tourism, demographic and economic factions in the region (illustrating the diversity of the board)
 - g. Number and diversity of partner organizations providing direct support, illustrating a broad base of partnerships
 - h. "Repeat" contributors and supporters (indicative of ongoing support), illustrating sustainable and ongoing support from a strong "stable" of partners and supporters
 - i. Programs in place that are targeted to meeting key MSNHA goals and objectives
 - j. Number of volunteers and value of volunteer hours
 - k. Value of external in-kind support, such as technical assistance
2. **Education & Interpretation.** Research, interpretation and education are critical components of the overall mission of the MSNHA and its coordinating entity. Key metrics for tracking success in this arena include the following:
 - a. Numbers of students gaining access to area sites and programs
 - b. Increased awareness of the region's heritage (determined through surveys, for example)
 - c. Number and value of research projects associated with the heritage area and its three interpretive themes
 - d. Number of publications and films generated based on research conducted or facilitated by the MSNHA
 - e. Value of technical assistance provided for interpretation
 - f. Number of technical assistance projects for interpretation
 - g. Design of themed tours, creation, and dissemination of interpretation material (maps and tour guides, etc.)
 - h. Funding secured and implementation of interpretation signage
 - i. Number of sites assessed and implementation of standards for "visitor ready" sites
 - j. Increased number of visitor-ready sites, attractions, and events
 - k. Increased attendance at educational venues, such as lectures, films, presentations, and museums
3. **Preservation & Enhancement.** One of the primary issues impacting on the success of the MSNHA is the condition and operation of existing heritage sites, attractions and events. There is a need for strategic planning, preservation, and sustainable operations of the existing sites within the heritage area.
 - a. Value of technical assistance provided for preservation and curatorial services
 - b. Number of technical assistance projects provided for preservation and curatorial services
 - c. Number and value of five-year strategic plans prepared
 - d. Share of heritage sites, attractions and events seeing an improvement in their financial position after receiving technical assistance and strategic planning
 - e. Share of privately-owned heritage sites, attractions and events having sustainable plans for transfer
 - f. Number of collections retained in the region, and number of acquisitions made to strengthen local heritage collections

- g. Number of additional heritage sites meeting preservation and conservation standards (including the MSNHA's "tourist ready" standards), and number of sites protected from destruction
- 4. Recreation.** This region has an exceptional number of recreation sites and facilities. However, there is a lack of facilities establishing visitor linkages and access to the Tennessee River, the waterway that links all six counties and many sites in the heritage area. The following metrics help track success in bringing more access to the river for visitors and residents alike.
- a. Access to funding for planning and implementation of a Tennessee River greenway, linking the six counties and individual trails
 - b. Development of a partnership with TVA for implementation of the greenway and other river-related recreation and heritage projects
 - c. Number of technical assistance or facilitation initiatives provided to local economic development and Main Street organizations in recruiting and developing more outdoor recreation businesses
 - d. Number of new outdoor recreation and related businesses leveraged through the use of MSRC technical assistance
 - e. Number of technical assistance or facilitation initiatives provided to local planning, parks, recreation and other agencies in planning for more or better access to the river and waterfront areas
 - f. Number of technical assistance or facilitation initiatives provided to partner organizations to assist with interpretation of natural heritage areas
- 5. Community Enhancement.** The physical environment and context is very important in marketing the region for heritage tourism. There is a need to ensure that the environment is conducive to promoting heritage tourism. The coordinating entity, the MSRC, can play an important role in coordination and facilitation, as well as in bringing technical expertise to communities to help them develop plans and strategies for enhancing their physical assets and leveraging tourism.
- a. Number and value of technical assistance or facilitation initiatives provided to regional and municipal planning and other agencies to develop plans and policies, and to leverage infrastructure improvements to enhance community character
 - b. Value of infrastructure funding and other investment leveraged through the use of plans, incentives and policies generated with the help of technical assistance or facilitation from MSRC
 - c. Number and value of technical assistance or facilitation initiatives provided to municipal economic development or Main Street organizations on tourism infrastructure
 - d. Number of tourism services and support businesses attracted or leveraged, at least in part, because of technical assistance or facilitation initiatives provided by the MSRC
- 6. Marketing & Tourism Development.** The role of the MSNHA and its coordinating entity, the MSRC, in tourism development should be measured and tracked over time to ensure maximum success. Possible metrics for measuring this success include the following:
- a. Number of articles written about the MSNHA in regional and national publications
 - b. Number of broadcast media articles about MSNHA
 - c. Number of hits on MSNHA web site, or on Twitter, Facebook and other social networking media
 - d. Use of apps and hand-held tour technologies in the MSNHA region
 - e. Requests for information received by MSRC
 - f. Growth in attendance at MSNHA heritage sites, attractions, tours, and events over time. While such growth (or decline) cannot be attributed directly to the actions of the MSRC, there should be some general indication of impact. This impact can be assessed, for example, based on regular visitor surveys and on interviews with operators.

- g. Increase in lodging room-nights, revenues, and tax revenues over time. Again, such growth (or decline) cannot be attributed directly to the actions of the MSRC, but there should be some general indication of impact. This impact can also be assessed through regular visitor surveys and operator interviews.
- h. Increase in retail sales and tax revenues over time (with attribution based on surveys and interviews with Main Street organizations, operators, and others)
- i. Economic impacts of MSNHA as determined from above (collected through an economic impact study) on a regular basis (once per 3-5 years)

Because of the existence of the area's various CVBs, the Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association, and related entities, the measurement of any gains in tourism must consider this factor.

C3. BENCHMARKS

In addition to regular monitoring and measuring of MSNHA progress in meeting key goals, there is also a need to benchmark MSNHA performance. Clearly, the closest and easiest comparable programs available for benchmarking are other national heritage areas designated by the NPS. Perhaps most relevant are those national heritage areas located in the region, as well as those that offer similar themes and approaches for interpretation and tourism. Possible heritage areas with which to benchmark progress on a regular basis are the following:

- Atchafalaya NHA
- Mississippi Hills NHA
- Mississippi Delta NHA
- Cache La Poudre River Corridor
- Northern Rio Grande NHA

Progress against these other heritage areas should be benchmarked in terms of growth in attendance, fundraising, volunteer hours, in-kind contributions, and other factors outlined above.



Created by Congress in 2009, the same year as the MSNHA, the Mississippi Hills NHA would be a good benchmark NHA.

In the case of the MSNHA, it is also important to benchmark music heritage tourism development against other regions within the "Roots of American Music" triangle that are being promoted, in part, by the MSNHA. In particular, it would be important to survey visitors in Memphis and Nashville, along with tour operators, to determine their participation in tours that might include the MSNHA. It would also be helpful to benchmark tourism and attendance with places like Tupelo (MS) and Owensboro (KY) that are situated on the periphery of the music "triangle," but that offer relevant sites (the Elvis Birthplace and the new International Bluegrass Music Museum, respectively).

