



Tourism Advisory Council Meeting

Tuesday, November 17, 2025

11:00 p.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Metro-North Railroad – Conference Room 10A

Graybar Building

420 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Webcast address: <https://youtube.com/live/LvHgFKNMKMQ>

- I. Attendance and Approval of Minutes
- II. Welcome from Metro-North Railroad
- III. Chair's Report
- IV. I LOVE NY Report
- V. Member Updates & New Business
- VI. Adjourn

Next Meeting: Wednesday, January 21, 2026
11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
655 Third Avenue, New York City



New York State Tourism Advisory Council 2026 Meeting Dates

Wednesday, January 21

11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
655 Third Avenue, NYC
4th Floor Conference Room

Wednesday, March 18

11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
TBD
Albany, NY

Tuesday, May 12

11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
655 Third Avenue, NYC
4th Floor Conference Room

Monday, September 14

11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Niagara Falls, NY

Monday, November 16

11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
655 Third Avenue, NYC
4th Floor Conference Room

Tourism Advisory Council Meeting Minutes

"Draft – Subject to Board Approval"

Date: Tuesday, September 9, 2025
Location: Strong National Museum of Play, Rochester, NY
Attendance:

TAC Members

In person: Cristyne Nicholas, Dan Fuller, Olga Luz Tirado
Called in: George Ntim, Natasha Caputo, Katherine Nichols, David Filipiak, Alexandra Stanton, Mike Oates, Katie Kilichowski and Josh Gellar on behalf of Senator Serrano

ESD / NYS Staff

Ross Levi, Richard Gagliano, Sara Emmert, Rhiannon Edlind, Rick Machung, Kurt Warner, Allan Onderchain

Guests

Don Jefferies, Steve Dubnik, Sara Poe, Diana Keating

Meeting called to order: 12:02 AM

Cristyne Nicholas

I. Attendance and Approval of Minutes

- Motion to approve minutes – Olga Luz Tirado
- Minutes approved – Dan Fuller

- First off, welcome to Rochester and The Strong Museum! We are thrilled to be here. I'm excited to welcome Don Jeffries, the President and CEO of Visit Rochester, to say a few words. Don has done so much to support tourism over the many years. I've had the pleasure of working with him um on golf tournaments, openings and various things. So, thank you so much for joining us today and we'd love for you to say some words.

Don Jefferies

- Thank you very much. We are thrilled that the advisory council came to Rochester. Cristyne, nice to see you again. And everyone else in the room, welcome. And as you know, tourism is \$1.5 billion industry here, with 20,000 jobs. We're an economic engine, as you all know, and we're very proud of it.
- I want to give a shout out to Sarah Poe and Steve Dubnik who run our largest tourism attraction, and they've done a wonderful job with that. Half a million people come through here every year through this facility.

Cristyne Nicholas

- Well, thank you, Don. We really do feel the warmth of your welcome. And speaking of welcome, we are so pleased to be here at the Strong. Steve Dubnik and your team, Sara, everybody, you've done such a great job. So thank you, Steve. We'd love to have you speak.

Steve Dubnik

- Thank you and again I'll extend repeat Don's welcome to you all to Rochester and to the Strong Museum. We are delighted to have you here. If you were here 8 years ago, you haven't seen much of our 90,000-foot expansion, the parking garage, and a lot of other things we added as part of that very major project here.
- And Don, not only do we have 500,000 people coming a year, we have more than 700,000 people coming per year, which for tourism perspectives, about 45% of that comes from outside the

Rochester MSA. And of that number, about half of that comes from outside New York State. So we really do draw a lot of people to Rochester and the Finger Lakes area. I'm very proud to be part of that and greatly appreciate all the assistance we give for New York State with that. So welcome.

Cristyne Nicholas

- Thank you, both.

II. Chair's Report

- It's been a busy summer since we last met, and there have been several tourism-related announcements made by Governor Hochul. First, there have been a number of expansions and improvements to the state's outdoor recreation assets.
- Last month, the governor announced that 291 additional acres were added to Minnewaska State Park Preserve in Ulster County, helping conserve an important section in the northern Shawangunk Mountains and making it available for outdoor recreation.
- Additionally, New York State acquired 900 acres in Ulster County, forming the largest addition to the Catskill Forest Preserve in more than a decade. This increases recreational opportunities on the north end of the park and protects important views from the park and the adjacent Rondout Valley.
- Also in Ulster County, expansive upgrades at the Peekamoose Blue Hole are now complete, enhancing safety and accessibility.
- Also in August, the Governor announced the launch of a \$25 million rehabilitation project at the 115-year-old Bear Mountain State Park in the Hudson Valley.
- The project will update infrastructure, create a new accessible playground, expand picnic areas, and add public restrooms.
- Bear Mountain State Park features more than 50 miles of hiking trails, including the original section of the Appalachian Trail. It also includes fishing access, a swimming pool, and Trailside Museums and Zoo.
- More than 2.3 million people visited Bear Mountain last year, and this investment ensures the park's facilities will serve generations to come.
- In June, the Buffalo and Erie County Botanical Gardens broke ground on its long-anticipated expansion. The \$31 million project which received significant state support will include upgrades to the welcome center, a garden cafe, and accessibility initiatives, and is expected to be completed in early 2027.
- Also in Buffalo, Governor Hochul announced the completion of the \$11 million Wilkeson Pointe improvements project, which expands access to the waterfront and enhances the visitor experience. The 7-acre site also features a new restaurant with a beer garden that features sand seating areas, as well as a patio deck with waterfront views.
- A previous TAC meeting host, the Albany Convention Center Authority, was awarded a \$10 million grant to support the expansion of Albany Capital Center and further its mission as the premier Capital Region event and meeting destination.
- The project will expand meeting space and add amenities that position the center to better serve the growing industry demands.
- Since opening in 2017, the Albany Capital Center has hosted more than 1,100 events which attracted more than 630,000 visitors to the capital city, generating nearly \$100 million in total new visitor spending and adding over 133,000 hotel room nights.
- Earlier this summer, the governor announced the return of Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North Railroad "Summer Saturday" discount programs.
- On Saturdays in July and August, monthly ticket holders were able to bring up to two additional travelers for only \$1 per person each way.
- The program encouraging riders to travel and explore different towns on the railways and allows travelers to see new destinations, avoid traffic, and bring friends or family.

- In airport news, Governor Hochul recently announced that passenger experience enhancements were completed at Syracuse Hancock International Airport, creating a world-class travel hub that will support the entire region.
- New features include an expanded North Concourse with additional seating and concession areas. The project also renovated the second floor of the terminal building to expand the Federal Inspection Station facility.
- Work has also been completed on the transformation of the Greater Binghamton Airport into a modern, state-of-the-art gateway that will welcome travelers and will also serve as a regional economic engine.
- The project reimaged the main terminal to improve passenger flow while immersing visitors in the natural aesthetics of the surroundings. The airport's main approach road was also redeveloped.
- The governor also announced the completion of a project at Saratoga County Airport that substantially upgraded the facilities and services, further positioning the region for economic growth and expanded tourism.
- The reimaged airport features a new terminal building that boasts a spacious lobby, a new passenger waiting area, car rental space, a pilot's lounge, and restaurant, along with a brand new adjacent 20,000 square-foot hangar, among other upgrades.
- I had the opportunity to visit the Great New York State Fair in Syracuse this year and was able to experience firsthand what a great event it is for the Empire State.
- I saw the giant I LOVE NY activation set up in the Expo Center for the duration of the Fair, which had people lined up to learn about travel destinations across the state and win some cool I LOVE NY prizes.
- That concludes my report. Any questions?

III. I LOVE NY Report

Ross Levi

- Since our last meeting, we shared the 2024 New York State tourism numbers with our statewide tourism partners, who rely on this data to inform their marketing strategies and make the case for tourism investment with their stakeholders. A number reached out to us to thank us for continuing to provide this valuable tool to them.
- The findings were captured in the annual report we commission from Tourism Economics – and they were positive.
- Last year, New York State welcomed an all-time high 315.4 million visitors, who directly spent \$94 billion and generated \$145 billion in total economic impact.
- Visitor volume increased almost 3% year-over-year, and visitor spending increased by more than \$6 billion, representing an almost 7% growth year-over-year.
- State and local tax revenues generated by tourism saved the average New York State household nearly \$1,500 in taxes.
- Tourism remains the state's second largest private sector employer, supporting an average of 924,000 jobs in 2024.
- While 2025 numbers won't be available until next year, we are certainly aware of the headwinds that the tourism industry is facing, and the New York State Division of Tourism and I LOVE NY program is constantly optimizing marketing efforts to maximize overall performance to address these specific issues.
- For example, we launched an initiative on July 1 in conjunction with Canada Day. We shared graphics on our website and on social media with the message "On Canada Day, New York State Celebrates Our Canadian Neighbors."
- Unlike our regular marketing efforts, this was not shared with the specific intent to encourage travel. Rather, we wanted to showcase the longstanding relationship between Canada and New York State, and that friendship will endure no matter what.

- We want Canadians to know that New York State deeply values our friendship of 158 years and counting, so we encouraged partners around the state to join us in this effort.
- Many different attractions, TPAs, DMOs and state agency partners shared this message as well, including ORDA, NYC Tourism + Conventions, the Times Square Alliance, Visit Rochester, The Wild Center, Thousand Islands Seaway, Oswego County Tourism and the Buffalo Bills.
- Thanks to some targeted media outreach, the campaign received attention from Canadian outlets including Travel Industry Today, Canadian Travel Press and TV12 Brockville Ontario.
- As always, we had a very robust summer marketing campaign. At our last meeting, we previewed some of those efforts and discussed our new tagline, New York State: Everything You Love. We wanted to now show you the commercials that ran throughout the summer travel season.
- **Video plays.**
- Besides our traditional drive markets, we also wanted to extend a special invitation to international visitors – especially Canada. This included broadcast spots and out-of-home marketing running in different international markets, some of which will continue into the fall.
- Our summer campaign also included the largest ever mobile tour, with over 40 stops throughout the Northeast.
- We also published summer themed blogs, including 25 Things to do This Summer in New York State and 13 Ways to Soak in the Last Days of Summer in New York State, and created our usual summer content on social media, prompting viewers to visit our website and plan their trip.
- Summer is also when our segment tourism programs are running at full speed, making a specific travel invitation to strategically important market segments.
- This summer, Accessible NY partnered with two influencers who enjoyed trips to the Adirondacks and the Finger Lakes and shared them with their million-plus combined followers.
- Tara Shetterly, a content creator based out of Virginia who uses a wheelchair, traveled to the Finger Lakes to experience adaptive outdoor adventures. She spent time hiking in an Action TrackChair in Cortland, adaptive kayaking with Rochester Accessible Adventures in Fairport, and trying out the adaptive mountain bike available through the Town of Victor.
- **Video plays.**
- We also invited Melanie Droubay and her son, Hudson, who has down syndrome, to come to the Adirondacks for a family adventure.
- Along with the videos cross-posted to both Instagram and TikTok, we also published corresponding blogs, put paid advertising behind the posts, and conducted a survey from campaign viewers. We're still waiting for the final report, but engagement with both creators was high and the reception was incredibly positive.
- We are looking forward to having another influencer on an accessible trip to New York State next month.
- Accessible NY also activated at two events this summer: Western NY Disability Pride in Buffalo and the Disability Unite Festival in Central Park. The main goal for Accessible NY activations is to connect directly with consumers from the community and provide awareness that New York State has accessible travel opportunities for them.
- Both activations saw positive reception and we will continue to consider future Accessible NY events.
- Accessible NY also launched its first ever newsletter in July, with a focus on accessible outdoor adventure in NYS, a spotlight on the Wild Center and a list of accessible events around the state. The goal of the newsletter was to drive it's over 11,000 recipients to the accessibility landing page on our website – which is double the number of recipients since December! The newsletter saw similar performance rates as our other segments, and another will be coming in fall.
- We had another very successful Pride season in New York State, with celebrations taking place from Long Island to Buffalo and everywhere in between!
- In May, we launched a digital media campaign to promote LGBTQ travel. This year the campaign expanded focus beyond Pride Month to promote summer travel from May to July. The campaign included paid social media ads on Facebook and Instagram, a search campaign, editorial placement in Passport magazine's email newsletter, and syndication of our Pride Guide.

- We also launched an Out of Home tactic known as Wild Posting, distributing LGBTQ Travel campaign posters placed in LGBTQ-friendly neighborhoods and hot spots in New York City, which you can see up on screen now. The campaign messaging encouraged extending Pride celebrations into a summer getaway in New York State.
- We continued to promote Pride through the summer with new blogs, social media posts, and email outreach. ILOVENY.com had 100 pride event listings featured, the most the program has ever seen, beating last year's record of 65.
- I LOVE NY LGBTQ also activated at 7 events, including at NYC Pride, Harlem Pride, Pride in the Sky, World Pride in Washington, DC and a recent activation in the Fire Island Pines and Cherry Grove. In total, the activations saw over 28,000 unique impressions.
- The last of these activations was at Pride Day at the Great New York State Fair, which celebrated its 10th anniversary. Myself, along with my colleague Rachel Stewart, attended the event, held in partnership with FAIRNY, to close out our season and bring the I LOVE NY LGBTQ tour to fairgoers.
- With summer coming to a close, we will begin to look ahead to winter Pride celebrations, which of course includes our annual Pride Ski Weekends.
- I LOVE NY Black Travel conducted its first paid summer campaign, inspiring visitors to book a summer getaway. The campaign ran for just under a month and produced over 59,000 landing page views, proving successful in influencing engagement patterns.
- You may remember that Black Travel launched a consumer newsletter initiative in the beginning of the year with the goal to send quarterly seasonal newsletters to interested consumers.
- The second newsletter was issued in June, promoting music, festivals and other summer fun.
- Black Travel also activated at three summer events including Buffalo Juneteenth, Harlem Pride with cross promotion for LGBTQ and the Black Arts and Culture Festival in Albany.
- For the second year, Black Travel will be activating at Yard Fest at MetLife Stadium for the NYNJ Historically Black Colleges and Universities Homecoming. This will be the first year doing a takeover of the event's newsletter, aimed directly at homecoming attendees to highlight some destinations close to the city. This curated newsletter will encourage visitors to extend their time in New York and explore other areas of the state.
- A successful PTH Weekend took place over Father's Day Weekend in June with over 140 events, presented by 130 different organizations across all 11 vacation regions.
- Post-event survey responses from participating sites indicated that many tours were sold out, the weekend was busier than usual, and new visitors attended the sites and events.
- Approximately 70% of sites saw expected, or greater than expected attendance with positive feedback from visitors.
- In addition to numerous owned and organic promotional efforts, we launched a paid digital campaign to direct traffic to the digital PTHW calendar and blog post with the intention of increasing attendance at program events. The campaign included Facebook and Instagram ads as well as syndication.
- Shifting the budget from print to paid social has proven highly successful. 75% of web traffic to the calendar during the 4-week campaign was driven by paid social, visits to the PTH Weekend Getaways in NYS blog showed increases from last year, and syndication click through rate also improved.
- We are looking forward to Fall PTHW, taking place October 11-13 during New York State History Month. Some exciting events include, "Mysteries, Myths & Mayhem" at Fort Stanwix National Monument in Rome, an immersive program at Southampton History Museum, and Siege Living History Weekend at Saratoga Battlefield.
- We have also been busy working with the travel trade, and over the past few months have attended several important trade shows.
- As we do every year, I LOVE NY attended IPW, this time in Chicago, with 9 New York State partners. We had our branded isle, which you can see on screen, which included the I LOVE NY a co-op booth hosted with our attending partners. Over the 3 days, we met with over 175 buyers.

- With the help of 60 TPAs, DMOs, New York State attractions and staff, we hosted an evening reception at the legendary Second City in Chicago, with 160 interested buyers and journalist in attendance. The theme was for the “First City” to give our guests an authentic taste of the “Second City,” and the event was very well attended and received.
- We also attended this year’s Student Youth Travel Association conference in Savannah. Our travel trade consultant represented I LOVE NY and conducted 28 appointments with top youth and student planners.
- I LOVE NY was a premier sponsor of the NYC Tourism & Conventions Dine Around event at SYTA, where we had logo placement around the venue and a QR code to our sales kit placed at each table setting.
- The most recent show we attended was Connect Marketplace in Miami. Our consultant attended and conducted appointments with top event planners and buyers on behalf of I LOVE NY.
- Over the two days, we sponsored a luncheon where we were joined by 7 TPAs, conducted a trivia game, and had an I LOVE NY booth available as a home base for all NYS partners to use.
- Coming up next month, we will be partnering again with NYC Tourism & Conventions at IMEX America in Las Vegas. We will have 5 partners from New York State joining us to conduct appointments.
- Earlier this summer, I LOVE NY held its first joint media and trade Global FAM to promote the Erie Canal and the upcoming bicentennial as well as other must-see places around the state.
- 21 journalists and tour operators from our 4 core markets of Canada, UK, Germany and Australia traveled to Syracuse, Watkins Glen, Rochester, Niagara Falls and Buffalo.
- Some of the results of this trip include a new UK itinerary with tour operator Trips Beyond, coverage in The Sun and coverage in UK-based publication, The Travel Magazine. We will be seeing more results of this FAM through the year.
- Next week, we will be hosting a Fall receptive domestic FAM. Over the course of 6 days, our travel trade team will be bringing 7 domestic tour operators and receptives to visit NYC, the Hudson Valley, the Finger Lakes and Central NY to experience diverse attractions, accommodations and bookable opportunities.
- This fall, I LOVE NY will also be hosting a Fall harvest global FAM in the Finger Lakes, Hudson Valley and Thousand Islands regions. The group, consisting again of both tour operators and media, will experience all things Fall and culinary in these regions.
- Each participating country will have the opportunity to invite 4 tour operators and 4 media. Our team also planning a B2B reception for the TPAs to have a chance to meet and network with the international guests.
- You may remember that our PR strategy for this year featured a new approach of smaller, more intimate themed press events to complement our larger media nights, In August, together with our PR firm MMGY, we hosted 5 media members on a two-day excursion along the Haunted History Trail in the Catskills and Hudson Valley.
- The itinerary brought journalists on a tour of different locations in the region. We then hosted a dinner at Resorts World Catskills, at which myself, along with representatives from Central New York, Catskills and the New York State Haunted History Trail dined with the attendees and shared more about the state’s seasonal offerings.
- The highlight was a nighttime Paranormal Investigation at The Shanley Hotel where we experienced some spooky occurrences!
- The has already resulted in great media coverage, including a Ghostly Guide to Upstate New York in Conde Nast Traveler, which you can see on the screen.
- We have received some great earned media TV coverage as well. In May, I joined the Good Day New York hosts to showcase easy and affordable travel options in Upstate New York, perfect for summer getaways.

- During the segment, I shared insights on activities throughout the state including the upcoming Erie Canal Bicentennial, the 2025 season at Saratoga Race Course, and adventuring in the Adirondacks. Here's a clip of that.
- **Video plays.**
- I also joined PIX 11's Morning Show in August to talk about last minute summer weekend getaways in Upstate New York – things like the Great New York State Fair, concerts at Jones Beach, Hudson Valley Ramble events and Taconic State Park's National S'mores Day Event.
- As always, we appreciate the opportunity to join these broadcasts and get the word out about tourism in New York State.
- We mentioned in May that the 2025 REDC initiative included \$7M in grants through the Market New York program for tourism-related marketing/working capital projects.
- Applications closed on July 31st, and over 100 applications requesting over \$25M were received, showing how competitive this program is. Applications are currently being scored, and awards will be announced later this year. As always, specifics on Market New York can be found at iloveny.com/MarketNY.
- This weekend, I will be attending the NYSTIA Tourism Excellence Awards and Summit in Lake George where I will be reprising my role as presenter for the awards.
- My colleague, Jess Pulver, will provide a run-through of the I LOVE NY America 250 calendar and webpage, and Danae Jones-Persip will again be presenting the Emerging Leader award.
- And as a reminder, the World Canals Conference in Buffalo is just a few weeks away, being held in conjunction with the Erie Canal Bicentennial. The I LOVE NY experiential team will be in attendance with the I LOVE NY pod tour to promote travel. TAC members are also welcome to attend. More information is available at wcc2025buffalo.com.
- The Canals Conference will also be hosting pre- and post-conference tours encouraging folks to come for the conference and stay for New York! The tours are open to all conference attendees, as well as the general public. One tour will span five days, beginning in New York City, traveling across the state and ending in Buffalo the day before the conference begins.
- These two opportunities help showcase all that New York State has to offer for folks traveling in from around the globe for the World Canals Conference, and we are pleased that both are already sold out!
- So that is a look back at work that has been since the last TAC meeting. As we close the door on summer, I LOVE NY is already hard at work on Fall.
- The famed I LOVE NY Fall Foliage report launches tomorrow and a new one will be issued every Wednesday throughout the season.
- The reports are accompanied by the interactive foliage map on our website, recommending prime viewing locations, examples of peak foliage in designated areas and information about regional attractions.
- The report is just part of our integrated Fall marketing campaign, including our seasonal website switchover, fall social media posting and multiple fall-themed blogs.
- A fall commercial will also be coming to televisions across our state and in drive markets.
- We are also excited about the upcoming Ryder Cup golf competition at Bethpage Black on Long Island and are utilizing the event to promote travel throughout the state. This includes I LOVE NY activations on site showing off great destinations across New York and hosting international trade partners for a golf-themed FAM tour taking place in conjunction with the tournament.
- We look forward to reporting back on all these Fall efforts at our next TAC meeting.

Olga Luz Tirado: Discusses Harlem Markers Project. Including signage, launch of app, and test bus tour. As chair of NYSTIA's DEAI Committee, I am giving a presentation on the project we're doing for America 250 called "Untold Stories." We are going to be telling stories of people of color, people with disabilities, women, AAPI, etc. I will be telling six stories in the presentation.

Natasha Caputo: I will also be at NYSTIA talking about a lot of local events we're doing. I do want to add that September 27th and 28th here in Westchester County in the Hudson Valley at Croton Point Park is the amazing, immersive 2-day experience of RevFest 250th. It is part of our Rooted in Westchester program initiative through 2026 that is supported by that Market NY grant.

Dan Fuller: Next week, we'll have our industry meeting for NYS, so all the skiers will be gathering in Western NY next Monday and Tuesday. A lot of our initiatives are talking about how to make more robust snowmaking systems as well as making them more efficient.

Cristyne Nicholas:

Thank you. Do I have a motion to adjourn? Second?

Meeting adjourned: 1:04 pm

- Motion approved by Olga Luz Tirado
- Motion second by Dan fuller

Next TAC meeting: November 17th at 11:00pm in NYC