



TOURISM SMITHERS

STAKEHOLDER SURVEY

Operating Year 2023



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Contractor Deborah Kulchiski (Deborah Kulchiski Consulting) was commissioned by Tourism Smithers in April 2024 to conduct the Destination Management Organization (DMO) annual Stakeholder Survey. This is the 4th consecutive year the consultant has conducted the analysis on behalf of Tourism Smithers, which has enabled comparisons and identification of key trends summarized by the community stakeholders.

Introduction to Project

The Municipal Regional District Tax (MRDT) Program is a funding tool at the provincial level that is available for tourism marketing by eligible destinations. The program is jointly administered by the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture & Sport and Destination BC and is intended to help grow BC revenues; specifically, local economies, visitation and jobs as well as amplify BC's tourism marketing efforts. The 3% MRDT tax collected in Smithers provides revenues from short-term accommodation providers that in turn are used for strategic marketing activities and projects.

The Town of Smithers has been receiving the MRDT since 1991. Through a service delivery contract between the Town of Smithers and Tourism Smithers, the municipality administers MRDT funds to the designated recipient; Tourism Smithers. Tourism Smithers has been the benefactor of the MRDT funds since the year 2000, and the resources are a major contributor to the marketing and promotion strategies of the organization.

The 2024 Stakeholder Survey | Operating Year 2023 survey was comprised of 23 questions and aimed to determine:

- Tourism Smithers alignment with Destination BC.
- Stakeholder measurement of awareness of marketing activities delivered by Tourism Smithers in 2023.
- Stakeholder satisfaction with MRDT
- Stakeholder satisfaction with service provider, Tourism Smithers in 2023
- Identification of stakeholder perception of key barriers to tourism growth.
- Stakeholder recommendations on future program planning, marketing and product development.

Survey Administration and Response Rate

An online survey was developed via SurveyMonkey™ and the planning steps were initiated to Destination BC and Tourism Smithers for feedback on April 10, 2024.

The anonymous, online survey was distributed to **154** community stakeholders representing the broad local tourism base that included government, local businesses and industry related services. Also, to note:

- This was an increase of 20 new stakeholders compared to the previous year.
- **4** bounce back emails, finalizing the total number of recipients to be **150**.
- There were **38** respondents.
- Average length of time to complete the survey was 18 minutes.
- There was a **100%** completion rate and none of the questions were skipped

The response rate to the Stakeholder Survey was **25.3%**. This was a slightly higher response rate than received in 2023 (reflecting the 2022 operational year). There was a concentrated effort to increase the response rate noting there was a decline in previous years, thus, Tourism Smithers staff sent additional, targeted reminders to stakeholders, encouraging survey input. Also, taking into consideration, community stakeholder surveys have been competing with a high volume of surveys being distributed by other organizations during the same period, and operators continue to comment on their limited resources and schedule to complete the survey.

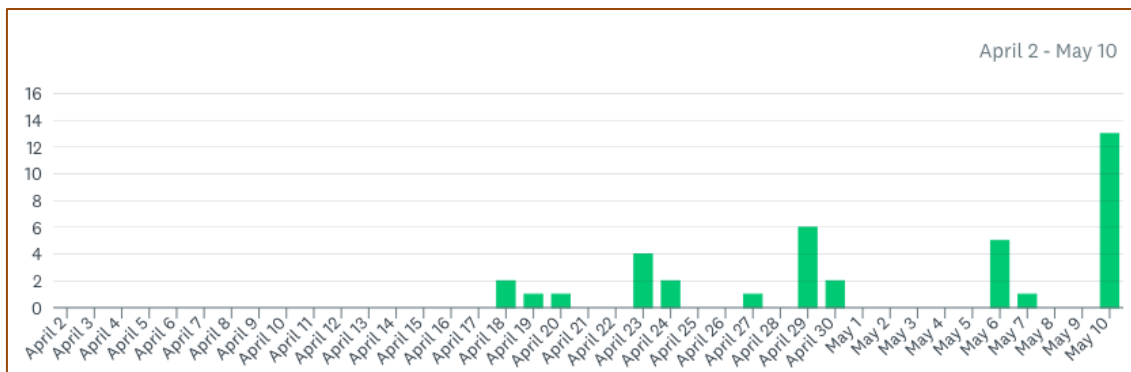
	No. of surveys	No. of respondents	Bounce back surveys	Response Rate
2019	84	20	3	23.8%
2020	90	43	6	47.7%
2021	86	24	8	27.9%
2022	126	29	8	23%
2023	150	38	4	25.3%

There were four (4) additional questions in the survey compared to the previous year. The aim of expanding the survey was to determine the awareness from stakeholders of the new programs introduced by Tourism Smithers in 2023, to acquire more input on how Tourism Smithers could improve upon the value proposition on the programs and services offered, and perceptions on how Tourism Smithers activities can help support or contribute to growth of the visitor economy.

As with the previously conducted surveys, the results of this survey will help to provide insight to the level of satisfaction held by Tourism Smithers stakeholders with regards to program deliverables and use of the MRDT funds in the 2023 operating year, to understand the awareness of new programs and deliverables introduced in 2023 as well as identify the challenges operators may have faced.

METHODOLOGY

An online survey was developed via *Survey Monkey* and the planning steps were initiated to Destination BC and Tourism Smithers for feedback on April 10, 2024. Additional recommendations from DBC were incorporated into the final survey which was distributed on April 18, 2024 through to May 15, 2024. Reminders were sent to recipients on April 29th, May 6th and May 15th. The following chart identifies the key response dates that were in direct correlation to the reminders:



The stakeholder survey supports the 2022-2027 Business Plan and the survey results will be considered in the 2025 Tactical Plan.

SURVEY ANALYSIS

The following is an analysis of the survey data specifically relating to awareness of Tourism Smithers and the organizations project deliverables in 2023 as well as a brief interpretation of the questions results.

1. Overall, how familiar is your organization with the projects and programs delivered by Tourism Smithers in 2023? Please rate on a scale of 1 - 5 where 1 - Not familiar at all, 3 - Unsure and 4 - Very familiar

	NOT FAMILIAR AT ALL	SOMEWHAT FAMILIAR	UNSURE	FAMILIAR	VERY FAMILIAR	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
▼ Tourism Smithers projects & programs	2.63% 1	39.47% 15	10.53% 4	31.58% 12	15.79% 6	38	2.71

Of the respondents, 71% are familiar/somewhat familiar of projects and programs delivered by Tourism Smithers, (a decrease of 8% compared to last year) and approximately 16% are very aware (an increase of 6% compared to the 2023 survey).

2. Tourism Smithers strives to collaborate and be an inclusive, industry-driven organization. How do you rate Tourism Smithers performance on the following ways of conducting business? Please rate on a scale of 1-5 where 1 – Poor and 5 – Excellent.

	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	VERY GOOD	EXCELLENT	DON'T KNOW	TOTAL
▼ Collaborates and consults with the tourism industry on key decisions	7.89% 3	13.16% 5	34.21% 13	13.16% 5	10.53% 4	21.05% 8	38
▼ Provides leadership and direction to the Smithers & Area tourism industry	7.89% 3	13.16% 5	34.21% 13	21.05% 8	15.79% 6	7.89% 3	38
▼ Understands my business/organizational needs	13.16% 5	23.68% 9	31.58% 12	10.53% 4	7.89% 3	13.16% 5	38
▼ Is focused on markets that align with the needs of the local and regional tourism industry	7.89% 3	13.16% 5	23.68% 9	31.58% 12	13.16% 5	10.53% 4	38
▼ Is knowledgeable about market changes and issues impacting tourism	7.89% 3	13.16% 5	10.53% 4	42.11% 16	7.89% 3	18.42% 7	38
▼ Informs the tourism industry of its corporate strategy & direction	15.79% 6	5.26% 2	39.47% 15	10.53% 4	7.89% 3	21.05% 8	38
▼ Addresses my questions and/or concerns in an effective and timely manner	10.53% 4	0.00% 0	34.21% 13	15.79% 6	15.79% 6	23.68% 9	38

This question was expanded in 2024. There remains a high level of awareness of the efforts of the

Tourism Smithers organization, noting a 7% increase in how Tourism Smithers collaborates with industry on key decisions and the new question relating to how Tourism Smithers answers questions or concerns. On average, Tourism Smithers performed strongest in the “good” category on all aspects of collaboration, exclusiveness and understanding of business/organizational needs and strengthened its position by 12% in 2023 compared to 2022 on how they inform the tourism industry of its corporate strategy and direction.

3. In your opinion please rate Tourism Smithers performance on their activities in supporting the overall tourism industry in Smithers and Bulkley Valley. Please rate on a scale of 1- 5 where 1 – Poor, and 5 – Excellent

	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	VERY GOOD	EXCELLENT	DON'T KNOW	TOTAL
Advocates on behalf of local tourism industry businesses	7.89% 3	13.16% 5	21.05% 8	28.95% 11	18.42% 7	10.53% 4	38
Educates tourism industry businesses and stakeholders about government grant programs	13.16% 5	23.68% 9	31.58% 12	15.79% 6	5.26% 2	10.53% 4	38
Provides communications and support during disaster crises	13.16% 5	13.16% 5	23.68% 9	13.16% 5	5.26% 2	31.58% 12	38
Delivers regular communication to stakeholders	13.16% 5	18.42% 7	34.21% 13	18.42% 7	7.89% 3	7.89% 3	38

This was an expanded question for 2024, aimed to learn more from stakeholders on how they rate Tourism Smithers supporting the overall tourism industry in the community and region including how the organization provides communication and support during disaster crises. Five (5) respondents scored a poor performance on 3 of the 4 activities, with 12 respondents noting they were unaware of Tourism Smithers providing communications and support during disaster crises. Overall, Tourism Smithers scored high (29% of respondents) with regards to advocacy and delivery of communication to stakeholders, while 32% of respondents are pleased with how the organization educates stakeholders on government grant programs.



4. Overall, how familiar is your organization with the projects and programs delivered by Tourism Smithers in 2023? On a scale of 1 - 5, where 1 – Not Familiar and 5 - Very Familiar, how aware are you of the following programs and projects that Tourism Smithers has delivered?

	NOT FAMILIAR	SOMEWHAT FAMILIAR	UNSURE	FAMILIAR	VERY FAMILIAR	TOTAL
▼ Ski and Stay (local ski marketing program)	5.26% 2	23.68% 9	5.26% 2	57.89% 22	7.89% 3	38
▼ Smithers & Area Visitor's Guide	10.53% 4	23.68% 9	0.00% 0	39.47% 15	26.32% 10	38
▼ Ride North - (promoting mountain biking in Northern BC)	21.05% 8	21.05% 8	21.05% 8	23.68% 9	13.16% 5	38
▼ Route 16 / #Route16 - (promoting motorcycle touring in Northern BC)	36.84% 14	26.32% 10	10.53% 4	15.79% 6	10.53% 4	38
▼ Visit Northwest BC - (regional co-op promoting Northwest BC to potential travellers)	21.05% 8	23.68% 9	13.16% 5	31.58% 12	10.53% 4	38
▼ Go North RV - (promoting Northern BC to RVers)	34.21% 13	21.05% 8	13.16% 5	26.32% 10	5.26% 2	38
▼ BC Ale Trail (promoting Northern BC to Craft Beer connoisseurs / travellers)	28.95% 11	13.16% 5	10.53% 4	34.21% 13	13.16% 5	38
▼ Smithers Video	21.05% 8	5.26% 2	13.16% 5	42.11% 16	18.42% 7	38
▼ Photography	13.16% 5	21.05% 8	7.89% 3	36.84% 14	21.05% 8	38
▼ Digital, Radio and Newspaper Advertising	16.22% 6	29.73% 11	10.81% 4	37.84% 14	5.41% 2	37
▼ Supporting Travel Media Relations	28.95% 11	10.53% 4	18.42% 7	28.95% 11	13.16% 5	38
▼ Social media platforms (FB/IG)	15.79% 6	13.16% 5	5.26% 2	36.84% 14	28.95% 11	38
▼ 2023 Silver Dollars Program	29.73% 11	16.22% 6	13.51% 5	24.32% 9	16.22% 6	37
▼ 2023 Shop Local Marketing Program	13.51% 5	18.92% 7	8.11% 3	32.43% 12	27.03% 10	37
▼ 2023 Artisan Tour Marketing Program	26.32% 10	15.79% 6	15.79% 6	18.42% 7	23.68% 9	38
▼ "The Mother" premiere + Ticket Giveaway	28.95% 11	10.53% 4	7.89% 3	34.21% 13	18.42% 7	38
▼ Smithers District Chamber of Commerce Gala Title Sponsor	10.53% 4	13.16% 5	5.26% 2	44.74% 17	26.32% 10	38

Q4 was expanded this year to reflect additional programs delivered by Tourism Smithers in 2023; the 2023 Silver Dollars Program, the 2023 Shop Local Marketing Program, "The Mother" premiere and award sponsorship. Awareness of the Route 16/#Route16 program declined this year by 19% compared to last year and the survey realized approx. 30% of respondents were not aware of the new 2023 Silver Dollars program and approx. 29% of the respondents were not aware of the "The Mother" premiere or promotion of the BC Ale Trail. By comparison, respondents noted they are very familiar / familiar with sponsorships, videography and the 2023 Shop Local program.

5. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is "Strongly Disagree" and 5 is "Strongly Agree", please rate your agreement with the following statement:

	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	TOTAL
▼ Tourism Smithers activities advance or help support growth of the visitor economy.	7.89% 3	2.63% 1	18.42% 7	39.47% 15	31.58% 12	38

This was a new question in 2024 for stakeholders. Twenty-seven respondents (71%) either agree or strongly agree that Tourism Smithers activities advance or help support growth of the visitor economy. There were 3 respondents who strongly disagreed.

6. As a destination management organization, Tourism Smithers focuses on 3 pillars; marketing, partnership and product development and destination development. How satisfied are you in the following deliverables? Please rate each on a scale of 1 – 5, where 1 - Very dissatisfied and 5 - Very satisfied.

	VERY DISSATISFIED	DISSATISFIED	NEITHER DISSATISFIED OR SATISFIED	SATISFIED	VERY SATISFIED	TOTAL
▼ Destination Marketing	2.63% 1	7.89% 3	42.11% 16	26.32% 10	21.05% 8	38
▼ Partnerships and Product Development	5.26% 2	7.89% 3	47.37% 18	36.84% 14	2.63% 1	38
▼ Destination Development	5.26% 2	2.63% 1	52.63% 20	36.84% 14	2.63% 1	38

Destination development is a new deliverable pillar that was added to the survey this year, with approx. 40% of respondents noting they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the work Tourism Smithers is doing in destination development. There was a 27% decline in the number of respondents who are either satisfied or very satisfied with destination marketing efforts, while there was a 5% increase compared to last year in satisfaction with product development. There was a notifiable shift to more respondents who were neither dissatisfied or satisfied by comparison to last year.

7. Taking everything into account, how satisfied are you with the overall performance of Tourism Smithers? Please rate each on a scale of 1-5 where 1 - Very dissatisfied and 5 - Very satisfied

	VERY DISSATISFIED	DISSATISFIED	NEITHER DISSATISFIED OR SATISFIED	SATISFIED	VERY SATISFIED	TOTAL
▼ Overall Performance of Tourism Smithers	7.89% 3	2.63% 1	34.21% 13	36.84% 14	18.42% 7	38

By comparison to the 2023 survey, there was no statistical change in how Tourism Smithers stakeholders rate the overall performance of Tourism Smithers, with 27 of 38 respondents scoring satisfied or very satisfied. There was a 10% increase in respondents stating they were neither dissatisfied or satisfied

with Tourism Smithers performance, and by comparison, 3 stakeholders were very dissatisfied vs. no-one stating they were very dissatisfied in 2023.

8. Overall, how would you rate your satisfaction with Tourism Smithers use of MRDT funds? Please rate on a scale where 1 is “Very Dissatisfied” and 5 is “Very Satisfied”.

On average, 18% of stakeholders are either satisfied or very satisfied with the use of MRDT funds by the organization, while over 31% have responded ‘neither dissatisfied or satisfied’. 7 of the 38 respondents noted they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

	VERY DISSASTIFIED	DISSASTIFIED	NEITHER DISSASTIFIED OR SATISFIED	SATISFIED	VERY SATISFIED	DO NOT KNOW	TOTAL
Tourism Smithers use of Municipal Regional District Tax (MRDT) Funds	10.53% 4	7.89% 3	31.58% 12	13.16% 5	23.68% 9	13.16% 5	38

9. If your response to the previous question was dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, what could Tourism Smithers do to improve your satisfaction? Fill in your response below:

There were 17 additional comments relating to the request for additional information on how Tourism Smithers could improve stakeholder satisfaction. Note: 41% of these respondents are unfamiliar with the MRDT Program. Responses are provided as unedited verbatims below:

- I’m not fluent in how the funds are being used
- You have not done anything for our steelhead and salmon fisheries
- Communicate with tourism operators
- Do not know enough about it
- Reach out to new businesses
- Reach out to new businesses
- Do not know what MRDT is
- Increase value
- This survey is a waste of time
- I have no term of reference
- Spend the funds on increasing attractions for tourists like a Waterpark for families, or summer games for families, or weekly Wildlife information sessions. Not spending the money on more signs, where in Smithers are all the side road stores.
- Not familiar with MRDT
- Don’t know what MRDT is
- Do not have enough information to answer this question
- I am not sure how they are being allocated
- The lack of transparency and competitive bidding processes, coupled with the preferential treatment given to "privilege partners" for work and funding, raises concerns about potential conflicts of interest and favoritism. It is essential to ensure fairness, transparency, and equal opportunities for all contractors and stakeholders involved
- Diversity who they showcase. Smithers Tourism showcases the same Coffee Shop, Brewery and Restaurant, when there are so many more to showcase. Just because some are newer, and maybe more polished does not diminish the fact that others have their own appeal to a different customer base. Showing Diversity in what is offered is huge

10. How likely is it that you would recommend Tourism Smithers services to a colleague or another tourism related business in Smithers and region? Please rate on a scale where 1 is “Very Unlikely” and 4 is “Very Likely”, or Don’t Know.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ Very Unlikely	2.63% 1
▼ Unlikely	7.89% 3
▼ Likely	26.32% 10
▼ Very Likely	28.95% 11
▼ Unsure / Do Not Not Know	34.21% 13

Over 55% of respondents are either likely or very likely to recommend Tourism Smithers services to a colleague or another tourism related business. There were 4 respondents who noted they were unlikely or very unlikely to recommend Tourism Smithers while 34% (13 respondents) were unsure.

11. Are there any other ways Tourism Smithers could serve you better?

This was a new question for Tourism Smithers stakeholders with the goal to gain more specific feedback on the suggestions, expectations and perceptions from stakeholders. Of the 38 responses, there were 13 n/a's and 25 comments which are provided below and are unedited verbatims:

- There are probably limits as to what Tourism Smithers can do based on resources and personell
- More diversified & inclusive marketing. Currently much of the media focuses on the ski hill, breweries & sleigh ride and could have a greater focus on the downtown core and it's amenities over all. Smithers feels like it is at a cross roads, and would benefit for a "all hands on deck" approach to keeping the down town core alive and viable.
- Broader, the best thing about tourism smithers was the videos last year
- None!
- No idea, sorry
- Build a better Visitors Center so that I can recommend our guests to visit the Center. At the current state, this is a disgrace for the Tourists to visit a unattractive building and not like other Tourism towns provide excellent service and attraction with their buildings, like Log buildings or at least a visible combined Center for Tourists and Locals.
- Indeed, opening the market to contractors in the northern region would stimulate the local economy and ensure equal opportunities for all to participate in contracts funded by grants and public funds. This approach promotes inclusivity and fosters a competitive environment that benefits both the contractors and the community.
- I feel Tourism Smithers is doing a great job to
- Engage with local anglers and NGO's to promote and support our fisheries.
- lobby government to support tourism they talk to talk but they continue to make it harder to run a small business in the tourism sector
- Nothing comes to mind
- Helping the little guys
- We haven't been approached by Tourism Smithers, so we don't actually know what they could do for us! Not exactly sure how they work or drive customers to us.
- Diversify on areas other than ski and stay. Focus beyond winter as that market weather/performance is not stable. And ski hill needs investment in facilities.
- An expansion to promoting more health & wellness based local businesses and slow tourism opportunities here.
- More community in person meetings with as many tourism sector businesses as possible to get a wider audience and base of input for moving forward.
- Stop operating
- Tourism Smithers is working as hard as they can on our little corner of the world!
- I like the idea of assisting in trip planning or presenting possible trip itineraries in coordination with the different groups (in our case, backcountry skiing).
- Figure out what TRULY makes Smithers Special, and a unique experience. It's not the Ski hill, there are 38 in BC and I doubt Smithers

promote our town and services we offer to the travelling public!

- I would like to see better integration of Tourism Smithers, Info Centre, Chamber and TOS economic development as there is significant overlap in functions and it's generally getting more confusing to the business owner. I think there is room to streamline service delivery / formalize under one umbrella.
- I would be interested in a study showing the economic benefits of various events (BVX, Midsummer, ect) in the community. It would be helpful when we are getting push back from other groups to point out that events like this benefit the entire community

cracks the top 25 in terms of Terrain, Snowfall and costs. Especially when there is a Legendary mountain 2 hrs away. It's not our main Street, or "Alpine Look". It's the Community, people and Characters of Smithers. It's the immediate access to Nature. Not everyone bikes, not everyone Skis, but everyone visiting a mountain town likes Easy accessible hikes and walks.

- don' t worry about "Inclusivity" unless it is for handy cap people.
- It's alright
- Don't Know

12. Please think about the future of tourism in Smithers and the Bulkley Valley region. In your opinion, what are the top barriers to growth of the tourism industry in Smithers? Please provide up to three barriers.

This question received a total 38 responses and by comparison to the 2023 survey, there is a high concentration of repeated suggested barriers; limited amenities, housing for staff, high cost of travel to region and community, air access and limited transportation options. The following is the unedited list of barriers noted by stakeholders verbatim:

- Distance from major centre
- Limited winter market
- Limited amenities
- negative government narrative
- new Air BNB rules against short term rentals
- Staffing and service levels
- High air fare rates bus YYD
- Inadequate tourism office
- housing for staff, no workers means long hours
- Weather
- affordable accomodation (hostels, affordable air bnb)
- Many of my BnB guests seem to be stopping for a rest on their way through, not making the area their prime destination
- Transportation costs
- Fishing industry downturn
- Climate change
- Lack of backcountry zoning (motorized/ non motorized conflict).
- Poor airline service
- Downtown crime
- Fishing regulations and the short notice-period for closures
- Lack of cooperation between community groups when trying to out on events
- Not educated on anglers problems
- Transportation to get to Smithers
- Reliable air access - flight schedules are not dependable and costs are high
- airline accessibility - # of flights, cost
- wildfires and/or threat of - including when there are fires elsewhere in the province that stop folks from traveling to our area
- Location of encampment
- Roads
- housing for staff, no workers means long hours
- A new tourism building and center
- No visibility of a Tourism Center or Building
- Lack of transparency
- Distance/cost to get here
- Winter access - roads (specifically FSRs) not plowed in winter or with reduced maintenance if PIR shuts down...
- Cost of getting here and unpredictability. Flights are \$\$\$ and sometimes don't land in bad weather. Driving is \$\$\$ and is a one lane highway most of the way.
- Clear cut logging
- Higher airfare prices
- Ready to market tourism products
- Crime rate skyrocketing

13. *In the short-term, Tourism Smithers will be developing strategies for tourism recovery; working with local industry related businesses. In your opinion, what should be the focus for Tourism Smithers in the year ahead?*

As in previous years, this is an open-ended question to enable Tourism Smithers their perspective on what the focus should be for Tourism Smithers in the year ahead. There were 32 comments with a notable trend from previous years recommending additional support for small businesses, increased promotion and development of eco-tourism and outdoor recreation experiences and improved transportation options both to and within the Smithers and Bulkley Valley region. Unedited comments are provided below:

- better centralized source of information for locals and visitors
- Invigorating the down town, events, utilizing Bovil Square, live music, open mic, food trucks, show & shines, Shop Local Campaigns that don't rely on business donation, but rather on grant funds. Reclaiming the downtown to be vibrant and community minded /a safe and inclusive space free of drug related activities. It would be amazing to have a mid week market type event (craft & farmers vibe) in the downtown or reinvigorate the Main Street Days where there are all the various activities, including Valley Fiddlers etc. Maybe there could be a "Local Passport" where you get stamps for shopping at local businesses and when you fill up your passport within a certain timeframe get entered to win a local prize pack. etc. I also could see the value of better signage at the edges of town (like the signage by the gold course, that says something to the effect of "Downtown Smithers, Welcoming and Open for Business". That's kind of cheese, but something that feels like an invitation to visitors, a permanent fixture. Maybe even a seasonal tourist centre outpost in the down town - that draws visitors down Main Street. Perhaps even the ice cream hut could move to Bovil square for summer to bring people out and about.
- Self-propelled and slow tourism, promote local health & wellness businesses as well as the amazing food producers in the valley.
- Unity
- Cheaper tourism opportunities.
- Promoting outdoor activities and supporting businesses in the sector. Targeting the European market by showcasing indigenous culture and wildlife observation opportunities.
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- Promotional material
- Salmon and Steelhead angling opportunity.
- Making it easier to get to Smithers and explore the area without a private vehicle would benefit many local businesses and increase the likelihood of visitors spending more time here. Especially if this service stands out from what other northern communities can offer.
- support for local business, so it can continue to be a backbone for visitor attraction
- not familiar enough to have an opinion
- Sport fishing
- biking, hiking, RV ing, arts & music
- continue to collaborate with a variety of services
- All season enjoyment more social media tik tok
- mini workshops (1-2 hours long) on ways to improve business practices/marketing
- Advocate more for a taxi service in town
- increase affordable options
- Mountain biking, Nordic ski & weekend visits
- Clean up the homeless and thefts
- Building infrastructure for Tourists to stay longer than just one day, Tourist want to entertained in the evenings and to focus on building a new Tourism Center with more digital shows and videos about our Backcountry and what Guest's can do while in Smithers.
- Create more incentives for touring artists to perform. Currently no venue with a permanent PA system/stage. Legion would be most likely location but requires pressure on their board to make this happen.
- Stop altogether. Spend the money on creating a local, sustainable economy. Face the reality of how we all have to change to survive
- The charming little stories.
- Convince local businesses to work together towards a common goal. Growing the Collective pie as appose to trying to just grow their own individual piece. Focus on ALL the

- culture and wildlife observation opportunities.
- Reliable air service from Vancouver to Smithers
- Advance backcountry zoning. Establish tourism as a resource industry equal to extraction.
- Mountain recreation for all seasons, ale trails, rubber tire traffic and getting more reasonable airline fares.
- Making people feel safe when visiting downtown Smithers. Recently I chatted with Via Rail visitors who did not want to walk downtown via the homeless camp due to feeling unsafe / vulnerable.
- More flights. Cheaper flights. Transportation from airport to town.

- businesses, not just the key few. Each business is unique and awesome in their own way, sometimes the most desired restaurants are the ones that are hole in the wall. Focus on Easy/Safe Access to our surrounding gorgeous Nature. We want to attract FAMILIES, so those kids grow up loving places like this, and bring their Families.
- Working / negotiating with Air carriers on air fare rates and being part of an initiative for funding on a Side-of-the-Highway pull out park.

14. How much growth potential do you think each of the following tourism products and/or experiences (e.g. arts & culture, mountain biking, fishing, indigenous) have in Smithers? Please rate each of the following program areas on a scale of 1-4, where 1 - no growth potential and 4 - strong growth potential.

	NO GROWTH POTENTIAL AT ALL	LOW GROWTH POTENTIAL	GROWTH POTENTIAL	STRONG GROWTH POTENTIAL	DON'T KNOW	TOTAL
▼ Steelhead Angling	24.32% 9	35.14% 13	16.22% 6	16.22% 6	8.11% 3	37
▼ Angling / Other Species	10.53% 4	31.58% 12	31.58% 12	18.42% 7	7.89% 3	38
▼ Jetboating	10.53% 4	23.68% 9	39.47% 15	5.26% 2	21.05% 8	38
▼ Rafting / Paddlesports	2.63% 1	7.89% 3	39.47% 15	47.37% 18	2.63% 1	38
▼ Mountainbiking	0.00% 0	2.70% 1	29.73% 11	64.86% 24	2.70% 1	37
▼ Mountaineering	0.00% 0	10.53% 4	36.84% 14	42.11% 16	10.53% 4	38
▼ Motorcycle Touring	2.63% 1	7.89% 3	39.47% 15	31.58% 12	18.42% 7	38
▼ Hiking	0.00% 0	2.63% 1	34.21% 13	60.53% 23	2.63% 1	38
▼ Skiing (Nordic/Alpine/Backcountry)	0.00% 0	5.41% 2	35.14% 13	56.76% 21	2.70% 1	37
▼ Indigenous Experiences	0.00% 0	13.16% 5	26.32% 10	50.00% 19	10.53% 4	38
▼ Golfing	7.89% 3	36.84% 14	21.05% 8	15.79% 6	18.42% 7	38
▼ Hunting	10.53% 4	36.84% 14	18.42% 7	18.42% 7	15.79% 6	38
▼ Retail / Shopping	2.63% 1	31.58% 12	44.74% 17	15.79% 6	5.26% 2	38
▼ Arts & Culture	5.26% 2	10.53% 4	39.47% 15	39.47% 15	5.26% 2	38

Responses to Q14 were diverse, with respondents rating mountain biking (65%) hiking (61%), and skiing (Nordic/alpine/backcountry) at 57% as having the most potential for growth. These top 3 activities were also ranked the highest in 2023, with mountain biking positioning as #1 this year vs. #2 last year, a 3% increase in confidence from 2023. Angling, jet boating, and hunting all ranked equally again this year as those activities having the lowest potential for growth with 11% of respondents vs. 17% last year. There were 3 respondents who provided additional comments and noted unedited verbatim:

- Local food producers, farmers, agriculture, flower growers, etc.
- Yoga, massage, fitness, healthy local food
- Music related events / potential for Visual Arts Retreats



15. Destination marketing organizations such as Tourism Smithers traditionally take on a wide-range of activities outside of marketing and promotion to help grow tourism in their community. In your opinion, how much of a priority should Tourism Smithers place on each of the following program areas? Please rate each of the following program areas on a scale of 1-5, where 1 - Not a priority and 5 – Essential

Community planning continues to rank highest among respondents with 50% placing this as a top priority for Tourism Smithers. This also ranked highest in the 2023 survey, with 59% of respondents believe Tourism Smithers should work with the Town of Smithers to ensure plans for tourism while moving forward. Supporting tourism product development and community relations ranked 2nd and 3rd respectively as top priorities while 18 respondents (47%) noted trip and itinerary planning to ensure visitors have the essential information they need is essential.

	NOT A PRIORITY	LOW PRIORITY	MEDIUM PRIORITY	HIGH PRIORITY	ESSENTIAL	DON'T KNOW	TOTAL
▼ Supporting tourism product development (i.e.: providing tourism insights and/or by identifying opportunities)	2.63% 1	7.89% 3	21.05% 8	44.74% 17	21.05% 8	2.63% 1	38
▼ Market research & industry performance tracking (i.e.: accurately measuring industry and Tourism Smithers performance)	2.63% 1	7.89% 3	26.32% 10	39.47% 15	21.05% 8	2.63% 1	38
▼ Industry development (i.e. working with industry to develop skills and capacity that ensure outstanding tourism experiences)	2.63% 1	5.26% 2	26.32% 10	31.58% 12	28.95% 11	5.26% 2	38
▼ Trip and itinerary planning (i.e.: ensuring visitors have the information they need while planning their trip to Smithers & Area)	2.63% 1	2.63% 1	13.16% 5	34.21% 13	47.37% 18	0.00% 0	38
▼ Community relations (i.e.: working with the community and region on behalf of the tourism industry)	2.70% 1	2.70% 1	18.92% 7	43.24% 16	32.43% 12	0.00% 0	37
▼ Community planning (i.e.: ensuring the Town of Smithers plans for tourism)	2.63% 1	2.63% 1	7.89% 3	50.00% 19	36.84% 14	0.00% 0	38

16. Looking forward, which of the following would provide value to you and your business in the next 12 months?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼ Digital Marketing Skills	44.74%	17
▼ Communication Skills	23.68%	9
▼ Business Skills	18.42%	7
▼ Tourism Smithers Industry Networking Sessions	52.63%	20
▼ Virtual Updates from Tourism Smithers	34.21%	13

This question was enhanced this year by including “Tourism Smithers Industry Networking Sessions” and “Virtual Updates” as value added services or programs. Approximately 53% of respondents believe industry networking sessions to be of most value, which reflects the additional events Tourism Smithers delivered in 2023. Digital marketing skills remain strong, with approximately 45% of respondents believing this to provide value to their business. By comparison, this is down 9% compared to 2023. Virtual updates from Tourism Smithers ranks 3rd in value.

The following are unedited verbatims received when asking for other value options that Tourism Smithers could consider delivering:

- Community Incentives to continue to support/shop local.
- bring tourists to Smithers
- what is meant by 'Virtual Updates'?
- Regular inquiry as to marketing availability on our multi-media platforms
- informing us of grant opportunities and/or incentives
- I personally am not a huge fan of just email updates. They are good occasionally for BROAD updates, but I'm burnt out on being Infront of a computer screen so much. I want real interaction, someone to come chat with local businesses, see how we are doing letting us know what we could be doing, or what could help us.
- Affordable housing for tourism workers
- non of the above, it people can't afford to travel it's irrelevant

17. How would you describe your business or organization?

Approximately 66% of respondents represent a business or other organization that provides products or services directly to tourists. Additional responses came from other industries or businesses; media, someone who maintains assets and ski trails which draw visitors to Smithers, an influencer and angler advocate/fisheries conservation specialist.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼ A business or other organization that provides products or services directly to tourists (e.g. accommodation, restaurant, outdoor activity).	65.79%	25
▼ A government organization	5.26%	2
▼ An organization, association, business or agency that supports tourism but does not provide direct services to tourists (e.g. a community organization, a support business)	15.79%	6

18. Please identify the tourism sector you primarily conduct business in:

Response rates for component industries varied considerably and were generally higher for industries that were more directly tourism-related for Smithers (i.e. outdoor recreation, accommodation, retail, arts, culture & history). The lowest response rate came from the transportation sector (1 respondent).

To note: there were 23 stakeholders invited to participate in the survey from the food and beverage sector resulting in only 2 respondents. In addition to the industry sectors, there were responses from; a volunteer, someone working in communications and government.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼ Accommodation	15.79%	6
▼ Food and Beverage	5.26%	2
▼ Arts, Culture & History	15.79%	6
▼ Retail	15.79%	6
▼ Outdoor Recreation	26.32%	10
▼ Transportation	2.63%	1
▼ Festivals & Events	7.89%	3

19. Upon post pandemic review of the tourism industry in BC, how has the tourism revenue of your business change? (In 2023 compared to 2022).

34% of the respondents noted the tourism revenue of their business increased in 2023 compared to 2022. By comparison, 52% of respondents noted an increase in tourism revenue when comparing 2022 to 2021. Also, to observe, there was an increase of 15% of respondents who noted their tourism revenue decreased in 2023 compared to 2022, while approximately 14% of respondents do not know compared to 7% in 2023.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼ Increased	34.21%	13
▼ Decreased	28.95%	11
▼ Not Changed	15.79%	6
▼ Do Not Know	21.05%	8

20. How optimistic are you that your business revenues will grow in the next 12 months? Please rate on a scale of 1 - 4 Not optimistic and 4 - Very optimistic

Approximately 21% of the 38 respondents are either optimistic or very optimistic their business revenues will grow in the next 12 months, which is down 17% compared to 2023. Approximately 29% of respondents are not optimistic their business will grow – an increase of 8% compared to 2023.

	NOT OPTIMISTIC	SOMEWHAT OPTIMISTIC	OPTIMISTIC	VERY OPTIMISTIC	DO NOT KNOW	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
▼ Business Revenue Growth	28.95% 11	36.84% 14	15.79% 6	5.26% 2	13.16% 5	38	2.37

21. Over the 12 months, how optimistic are you that the tourism industry in Smithers will grow? Please rate on a scale of 1 – 4 where 1 - Not optimistic and 4 - Very optimistic.

	NOT OPTIMISTIC	SOMEWHAT OPTIMISTIC	OPTIMISTIC	VERY OPTIMISTIC	DO NOT KNOW	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
▼ Smithers Tourism Industry Growth	21.05% 8	28.95% 11	31.58% 12	7.89% 3	10.53% 4	38	2.58

This is a consistently asked question in the annual Tourism Smithers survey. On average, 39% of stakeholders are optimistic/very optimistic the tourism industry will grow in Smithers, an increase of 4% compared to last year. Also by comparison, there was a 16% increase in respondents who are somewhat optimistic this year, and an increase of 7 more respondents (15%) who are not optimistic the tourism industry will grow in Smithers over the next 12 months.

22. Please rate your familiarity with the following provincial government support programs for tourism related businesses, with 1 being "Not at All Aware" 3 being "Aware" and 4 being "Very Aware"

This is the second year including the question about familiarity with government support programs, adding CERIP to the list for the 2023 operating year. There was a low percentage of stakeholders who were aware or very aware of the programs, and 52% of respondents who were not aware at all. This is slightly higher by comparison to last year where on average 51% of stakeholders were not aware at all of the programs, suggesting there may have been new respondents to the survey this year.

	NOT AWARE AT ALL	SOMEWHAT AWARE	AWARE	VERY AWARE	TOTAL
▼ Community Economic Recovery Infrastructure Program (Provincial)	44.74% 17	26.32% 10	21.05% 8	7.89% 3	38
▼ Tourism Relief Fund (Federal)	42.11% 16	28.95% 11	21.05% 8	7.89% 3	38
▼ Active Transportation Grant (Federal)	60.53% 23	18.42% 7	13.16% 5	7.89% 3	38
▼ Tourism Events Program (Provincial)	63.16% 24	21.05% 8	7.89% 3	7.89% 3	38
▼ Community Economic Recovery Infrastructure Program (CERIP)	50.00% 19	26.32% 10	15.79% 6	7.89% 3	38

23. This is your opportunity to share last words. Are there any other comments you would like to share about Tourism Smithers or tourism in Smithers and the Bulkley Valley region overall?

For the fourth consecutive year, the survey concluded with the open-ended question and provided the opportunity for stakeholders to share any additional comments. There were 24 responses, an increase of 9 from 2023. Overall, there is general support and appreciate for Tourism Smithers with additional responses relating to support for small businesses, the Smithers Visitor Centre (which is operated by the Smithers Chamber of Commerce), the downtown core safety and first impressions and eco-tourism/outdoor experiences. Responses are provided as unedited verbatims below.

- too busy at the moment to provide a thoughtful answer
- Support your fish and fisheries. Don't stick your head in the sand when it comes to difficult conversations.
- With nature being the backbone of our
- Diversity. Inclusivity. Emphasis. Promotion. Newness. It's time to lean into the community and do our best to preserve what we have, in order to encourage new investment. To 'tidy' up and support our local businesses before we start to see

tourism in the valley, ecotourism should be a major focus. We have a diversity and accessibility that rivals major national parks, without the political hurdles that go with that designation. With the challenges facing us through environmental changes, dwindling wildlife and fish stocks and pollution regulations, tourism's focus has to shift from "tried and true" traditional industries to new markets. There are many unique and high-quality attractions in our valley. Perhaps working directly with those providers to create packages would make it easier to attract and keep visitors in our area rather than just passing through. In my experience, these little businesses put so much effort into their product/service they don't have the capacity to develop new connections/partnerships without guidance. Tourism Smithers has a unique overview to make purposeful connections between businesses that would complement each other and highlight the amazing character of our area.

- The products you put out are really great. For such a small market you go above and beyond what occurs elsewhere. good work.
- Crime perceptions in this community is really hurting our community and tourism in the community. Many businesses on Main Street are struggling because of this and we are going to lose them unless something is done about it.
- I see Tourism Smithers promotions on FB, well done and engaging! Other than that, don't hear about the organization very much.
- Tourism Smithers should fund an employee who works out of the Chamber office/tourist info centre that has the capacity to assist travellers with activities in the Bulkley Valley. Too much is left to Sheena and Susan who have many other important tasks to accomplish. We need a "face" for tourism Smithers who is dealing with the public one on one with a knowledge base for our area.
- Our tourist info centre is a disgrace. Hidden, not up to the standard of any other community
- I feel tourism in our valley is limited but we are doing everything possible to draw visitors and repeat visitors to enjoy our beautiful valley

shuttered store fronts. To reinvent Smithers as a destination for all interests, not just leaning into the big money businesses (fishing, skiing, hunting) but the more grass roots foundation of locally owned businesses who do not operate seasonally.

- Tourism is generally, undervalued in terms of industry recognition - meaning in the broader community.
- Tourists that I come in contact with (primarily road travellers) love the "feel" of Smithers. The arts (visual, music primarily) & culture in the area. It would be nice to see some of these "add on" tourist activities highlighted more often as it is part of the pleasant surprise of Smithers for tourists and often a reason they decide re-evaluate their travel plans to an overnight stay
- Lobby government to help tourism operations not create barriers!!!!!! support small tourism businesses
- Smithers tourism center needs to be open EVERY day in the Summer
- Overall Tourism Smithers is doing a great job.
- Thanks!
- Keep the downtown safe from violence and theft
- Smithers needs to become more attractive in ways that Tourist enjoy the Town as well as the outdoors, if there are able age- and health wise. Many travelers we accommodate are over the age of 50 and would enjoy something that the Town offers in the evenings like concerts, or outdoor theater or anything that all guest's and locals could enjoy.
- Foster the feeling that it is the whole community who are the ambassadors to make visitors' experience the best it can be!
- I feel certain people or businesses in the community try to do big fun things for the community, and it's just not supported. We have some incredible examples of people doing really cool things, but it does not fall within the "Tourism Vision" so they do not receive the recognition or support.
- I am concerned about the Main Street Smithers experience due to increase in homelessness and unsightliness. Consistent downtown programming (NOT

- I think that Tourism Smithers does a great job at promoting Smithers and our tourism events. Thank you.
- Tourism will continue to drop due costs. As long as BC pushes the carbon tax less people will be able to afford to go anywhere.
- We have come a long way, but there are major difficulties.

run by volunteers) to bring people downtown, downtown ambassadors, or community policing presence would help this. Let's not ignore this issue or shift the burden to our local shop owners. It's not fair - please do more than advocate on this community challenge. We need tangible / visible action to show our tourism businesses support.

SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

Stakeholder insights and feedback to tourism-related projects from 2023 and comparisons to 2022 conclude that Tourism Smithers continues to receive strong endorsement and engagement from stakeholders and has a better understanding of their perceptions, needs and expectations of the destination management organization.

One of the significant factors to consider is that there was an increase of new stakeholders included in this survey, who may be responding to the survey as a new business contact or new business/operation vs. a longer-standing business, resulting in a noticeably higher response rate for many questions in the 'neither dissatisfied or satisfied' or 'do not know' rate this year.

Observations also conclude the industry continues to strengthen with many businesses still reporting revenue increases year over year and the confidence in growth of the overall tourism industry in Smithers and area has increased by comparison to the previous survey year when the industry was still recovering from the restrictions of the pandemic.

The survey results provide additional direction and recommendations for Tourism Smithers to identify new opportunities, determine the best marketing decisions, project funding decisions, product development decisions, stakeholder communications and engagement. The survey results will also enable Tourism Smithers to adjust to industry challenges and continue to make informed decisions that may also include ongoing challenges related to factors outside the mandate of the organization such as housing, safety & crime, transportation gaps and visitor servicing to maximize benefits and minimize negative impacts on the community.





STAKEHOLDER SATISFACTION SURVEY WORK PLAN

CLIENT:	Tourism Smithers
CLIENT CONTACT:	Gladys Atrill, Executive Director
PROJECT START DATE:	April 03, 2024
PROJECT COMPLETION DATE:	May 17, 2024

TASK	RESPONSIBILITY	START DATE	STATUS
INTRODUCTORY STAGE			
Develop Tourism Smithers Stakeholder Satisfactory Survey <u>Project Plan</u> and submit to Tourism Smithers for review and approval	D. Kulchiski	04.03.24	04.03.24
Develop <u>Stakeholder Survey</u> questions and submit to Tourism Smithers for review and approval	D. Kulchiski	04.03.24	04.05.24
Ensure detailed Tourism Smithers stakeholder list (survey audience).	D. Kulchiski G. Atrill	04.03.24	04.08.24
Submit Project Plan, Stakeholder Survey and survey audience to Destination BC for review and approval.	D. Kulchiski	04.08.24	04.10.24
Meet/discuss with Tourism Smithers to finalize project plan and survey distribution/survey report schedule	D. Kulchiski G. Atrill	04.03.24	04.10.24
SURVEY PURPOSE & METHODOLOGY			
<p>In their continued efforts to remain accountable and transparent to stakeholders, and in compliance with the Municipal and Regional District Tax (MRDT) annual program reporting requirements, Tourism Smithers (as the designated recipient) is conducting a stakeholder survey. The purpose of the survey is to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assess the level of awareness of tourism marketing activities in Smithers and the Bulkley Valley region, and 2. Assess the level of satisfaction with the current use of the MRDT funds. 3. Assess the impact COVID-19 has had on businesses in the last operating year in Smithers and the Bulkley Valley region (April 2023 – March 2024) <p>Methodology:</p> <p>An online survey via <i>Survey Monkey</i> will be distributed through the Tourism Smithers stakeholder email list (as per attached). The survey, including forward introduction, is scheduled for the initial distribution on Monday, April 15, 2024 and close on Monday, May 13, 2024. Reminders will be sent to Tourism Smithers stakeholders on April 25th and May 9, 2024. (Update: The survey was distributed on Thursday, April 18th following comments an approval from DBC. Reminders were sent on Monday, April 29th, Monday, May 6th and Friday, May 12th).</p> <p>Evaluation of the survey data will take place immediately following the close of the survey. This will include calculating response rates, summarizing the data, interpreting the results and identifying any significant differences compared to the previous survey year. The draft survey findings will be compiled in a thorough report to Tourism Smithers by no later than May 16, 2024 and the final report will be submitted to client by no later than May 17, 2024.</p>			

SURVEY REPORT	RESPONSIBILITY	START DATE	STATUS
<p>1. The survey report will ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o enough documentation for ease of application in following years o evidence of consultation with stakeholders 	D. Kulchiski	05.13.24	Distributed 05.18.24
<p>2. The final survey report will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Executive summary with report highlights o Introduction and background including objectives of the survey o Brief overview of methodology o Presentation of results including text, tables and graphs where applicable o Key findings o copy of the survey (appendix) 	D. Kulchiski	05.13.24	05.17.24
<p>3. The survey report will be made available to Tourism Smithers stakeholders following May 31, 2024 submission of final report, and may also be summarized in the organizations stakeholder communication distribution channels such as website, newsletter, social media and media release. In addition, the findings will be included for reports to both the next scheduled Tourism Smithers Board of Directors meeting and Smithers Council update and presentation.</p>	G. Atrill Tourism Smithers staff	06.15.24	

