Visitor Servicing Strategy 2025

Arrive as visitors, leave as friends, return as family

Mildura Rural City Council

Purpose

This Strategy aims to reposition and reinvigorate the approach to servicing visitors of the Mildura region.

In meeting the emerging needs of travellers, a renewed focus on supporting customers across their end-to-end travel journey will deliver resilience, sustainability and growth for Mildura's visitor economy.

This is not only a strategy for Council, but for all invested stakeholders to co-own and drive forward.

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Strategic Context: Beyond 'information'

For many years, visitors have relied on visitor information centres (VICs) to support their travel journey. Studies across regions frequently demonstrate that interactions with this type of support helps to grow visitor spend, increase visitor nights and the likelihood of repeat visitation. The adoption, proliferation and access to information has shifted over time, with globally accessible information now available in the palm of the hand. The need for pure 'information' provision is over, as much of this is readily and instantly available, with footfall to traditional VICs reducing year on year, to less than one in ten visitors to a region engaging in the existing approach.

To maintain relevance, visitor servicing operations requires a wider perspective and innovation to reframe how they can positively support the growth of visitor economies. And, this starts with understanding what customers need, their changing preferences and being a step ahead. In its simplest form, customers no longer require only 'information' – as they can get this easily – what they need is 'inspiration' that helps them connect and resonate with their desires and goals.

For the purpose of this strategy visitor servicing encompasses more than just the bricks + mortar Visitor Information Centre (VIC), it considers the wider servicing experience that supports + aligns with the customer journey through their five stages of travel. The core aim is to create the connection to drive greater spends, repeat visitation and stronger region advocacy.

Mildura, economic prosperity + tourism

Mildura region is located on the Murray River and is the largest city in North West Victoria near the borders of New South Wales and South Australia. With its tri-state location, Mildura is just over an hours flight from Melbourne, Adelaide and Broken Hill. Mildura is home to the busiest regional airport in Victoria and is a true gateway and connector to the regions.

This culturally diverse region is home to 53,326 people from more than 70 cultures and has the second largest population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in regional Victoria. Around 9% of the population speak a language other than English, with Italian being the second most common language spoken. It is home to a rich indigenous heritage, presenting an opportunity for Mildura to share this ancient authenticity with the world.

The economy is driven by dryland farming, livestock, irrigated horticulture, tourism, food and beverage manufacturing, transport and logistics, retail, health and community services. The value of **tourism is $308 million to the local economy**, driven primarily by domestic day-trippers + overnighters, with less than 3% of volume from international visitors[1].

An extraordinary mix of abundance and stunning landscapes, Mildura is also a key event location in Australia, staging over a hundred events annually from water sports, food, music, arts and cultural festivals, outdoor events to exhibitions and conferences.

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[1] Source: Local Government Area Profiles 2018, Mildura (RC), Victoria, Tourism Research Australia.
Map image credit: MRCC Events Strategy

Strategy development process

A clear directive for the development of this strategy was collaboration, engagement and consultation with key industry players, all coming together to put the customer at the heart of strategic decision making.

The process was designed to efficiently and effectively get to the heart of the current issues, **collaboratively forge a vision** for the future and outline the **strategic stepping stones and actions** required to make it a reality. Virtual workshops and online technology enabled deep and thorough collaboration at all levels across the four primary activities below.

Review of related strategies + documents	**+**	Stakeholder Perceptions + Input Survey	**+**	Strategy Input Workshop	**+**	Strategy Action Workshop

Each part of the strategy development process included representatives from:
- Mildura Rural City Council (MRCC)
- Mildura Visitor Information Centre (MVIC)
- Mildura Regional Development (MRD)
- Mildura City Heart (MCH)
- Murray Regional Tourism (MRTB)
- Adjacent regions (Wentworth, Swan Hill, Renmark)
- Local tourism operators across accommodation, experiential, arts + cultural providers

A list of those involved are included in the Thank you and Acknowledgement section on page 23.

REVIEW OF RELATED STRATEGIES + DOCUMENTS

In developing the new Visitor Servicing Strategy to support the growth of the Mildura region visitor economy, the following documents were reviewed and are considered central to the main 'library' for reference + input:

- Mildura Region Events Strategy (2020)
- Murray Region Visitor Servicing Strategy (2019)
- Murray Region Visitor Servicing Transformation Blueprint (2019)
- Murray Region Customer Journey Map (2019)
- VTIC Visitor Servicing Toolkit (2019)
- Mildura region VIC statistics
- Mildura CBD Plan 2020-2035
- Mildura region economic statistics + trends
  - 2019-20 Visitor Survey Results
  - Budget 2018-19, 2019-20
  - Online booking volumes + revenues (2020)

These documents are available from their relevant source publisher.

As the primary author and architect of the visitor servicing transformation work across the Murray region, the Customer Frame team also brought subject matter knowledge and expertise to enrich the width and depth of thinking.

STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS + INPUT SURVEY

Sent out to more than 60 industry delegates across a range of operations and geographies, the input survey was designed to understand the perceptions of where we are today, what's holding the region back in terms of visitor servicing and where to focus effort in the future.

Key points:
- 32 responses (~50% response)
- Range of perspectives from Council, tourism organisations, airport, operators (accommodation, attractions, food + beverage, events), non-tourism businesses + Visitor centre team
- Covered the challenges, strengths, weaknesses, perceptions of current approach + insights into where the issues are + where to focus next
- Some responses gave insight beyond the scope of visitor servicing alone, but are also useful to direct strategy design

The survey outcomes indicated a range of consistent issues, both common to other regions as well as some specific challenges within the Mildura region.

Overall, general consensus of stakeholders was that the existing approach has served the region well but requires a range of improvements to meet the changing needs of visitors and industry alike to drive region prosperity. The outcomes from the survey provided a solid foundation for robust discussions in the subsequent interactive 'input' and 'action' workshops.
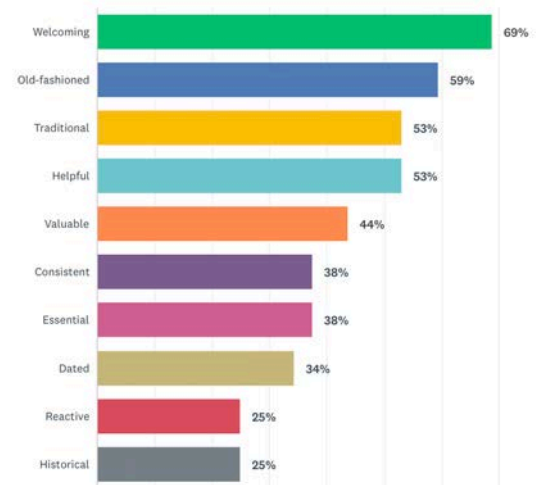

Figure 1: Top 10 words used to describe the visitor servicing approach today

STRATEGY INPUT WORKSHOP

The strategy input workshop was conducted on 5 November 2020, with a range of representatives across industry and the region.

The input workshop focused on setting a clear vision for where stakeholders want visitor serving operations to be, with a view to gaining a clear alignment and consistency on the overall context and direction.

Set within the context of a common vision, the group of cross-industry representatives explored the four strategic questions that surfaced from the input survey findings. These outcomes then formed the basis of refining the vision for Mildura's visitor servicing and the shape of the overall strategy.

Figure 2: Strategic questions arising from input survey for input workshop

STRATEGY ACTION WORKSHOP

This final step of the strategy development process, conducted on 26 November 2020, presented the draft vision, strategy focus and strategic initiatives. Then the stakeholder group worked collaboratively with these to discuss the implications and actions required to close the gap between strategy and reality.

The outcomes of the action workshop formed the basis for the implementation actions that form a part of this strategy.

Challenges + strategic considerations

Whilst there is a level of positive sentiment towards the existing approach, throughout the strategy process a range of issues were raised by stakeholders.

These included perceptions of:

- ⊗ Lack of coordination between visitor servicing, operators, Council, tourism bodies
- ⊗ Multiple, misaligned info sources that are difficult to manage and confusing
- ⊗ Feeling 'disconnected', across the whole system, particularly for operators
- ⊗ A need to tell the stories to link the region's products
- ⊗ Very product oriented, not experiential
- ⊗ Incomplete region history presented (indigenous)
- ⊗ Current centre being dated in terms of layout + interactivity
- ⊗ Presents only part story, missing layer of indigenous culture
- ⊗ Brochure walls passive in approach, like a self-serve library

- ⊗ Disconnected from locals, with little reason for them to visit or interact – 'a thing for tourists'
- ⊗ Less than 1 in 10 reach, with a large potential to influence journey spend, length + return patterns
- ⊗ Missed opportunities on main routes into city, with visitors passing key assets without knowledge
- ⊗ The needs across the customer journey + limited use of mobile / digital technology to support it
- ⊗ Disconnected approach, primarily between main management bodies, reflecting an incompleteness to the customer
- ⊗ Basic social media outputs that have limited following, interest or use

In processing the key findings from the survey, the perspectives and views were clustered together to present the following topics to be addressed within the strategy:

- **Location** – riverfront, roving, city centre, greater region

- **Cross-team sharing** – information, 'what's on', scheduling + consistency

- **Digital + technology** – social media presence, apps, websites

- **Joined-up + working together** – MRCC, MRD, VIC, Events, Industry + Community

- **Variability in service delivery** – in centre + across industry

- **Consultation** – perception of not being engaged or heard (industry)

- **Refresh** – modernise the shop front, counters, brochure 'walls'

- **Vision** – where are we heading = not a shared view

Overall, a need to create a strategic step-change in the approach to visitor servicing, beyond a band-aid solution, that requires all stakeholders to take part and be involved.

What customers need in their travel journey

Following the work undertaken by MRT in 2018/19 in developing the end-to-end customer journey map, it is clear that customers require differing types of support and outcomes across their travel journey[2].

Across the five stages of travel, customers seek to meet five core needs. The overall map sets the context for where visitor servicing operations can expand to support both upstream and downstream steps of the customer travel journey.

JOURNEY	DREAMING	PLANNING	BOOKING	EXPERIENCING	REFLECTING
			SHARING		
NEEDS	INSPIRATION	INFORMATION	VALIDATION	CONNECTION	GRATIFICATION

Source: i2i Visitor Servicing Program, Customer Frame 2020

Visitor Servicing has traditionally operated within the 'Experiencing' stage of the journey, when customers are in-region and requiring information. Some visitor servicing operations have expanded their offerings to include bookings, but these are generally done whilst in this stage, when in region.

As Visitor Servicing operations are a key resource library and source of local information, the opportunity exists to provide support to customers much earlier in the journey:

- providing inspiration to get onto the 'shopping list' or consideration set of the customer
- easily accessible and digestible information to support their trip planning
- booking services to reduce the frustration and paradox of choice facing customers

then later in the journey:

- keeping in contact, thanking them for their stay and asking them to return

These are significant gaps for customers and visitor servicing is well placed to serve them. However, it requires a step change and innovation in the types of work traditionally undertaken by Visitor Information Centres. It means going beyond the confines of the old bricks and mortar approach, embracing digital services to increase reach across the customer travel journey.
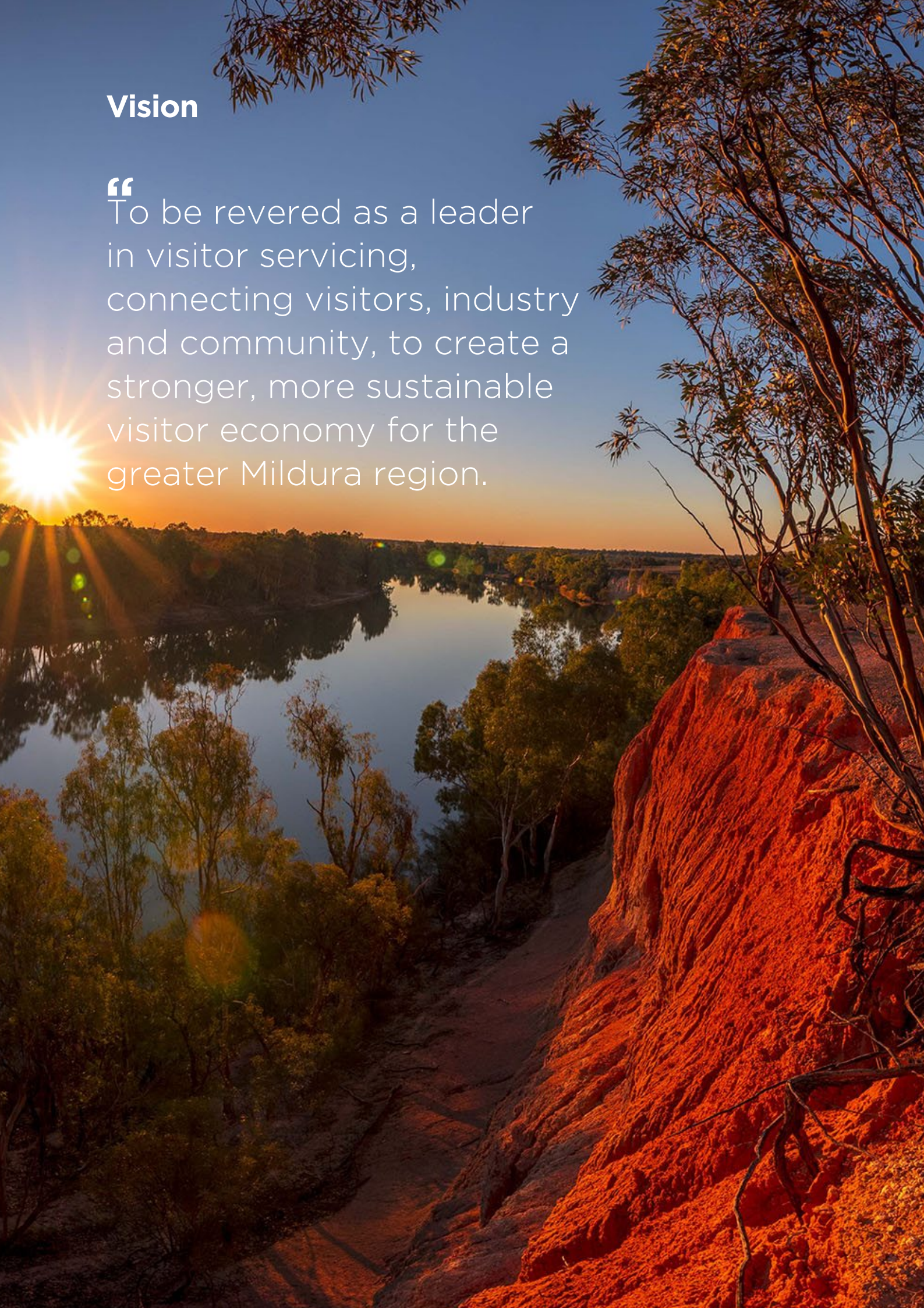
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[2] Murray Regional Tourism: Customer Journey Map 2019

Vision

" To be revered as a leader in visitor servicing, connecting visitors, industry and community, to create a stronger, more sustainable visitor economy for the greater Mildura region.

Vision, mission, goals + strategic approach

VISION

"To be revered as a leader in visitor servicing, connecting visitors, industry and community, to create a stronger, more sustainable visitor economy for the greater Mildura region."

Mildura will be seen as leader in regional visitor servicing, having successfully reframed the traditional 'Information' model to the custodian of providing 'Inspiration' for customers. Visitors, industry and community will be connected, with each playing their part in delivering a vibrant, sustainable and growing visitor economy.

MISSION

"Arrive as visitors, leave as friends, return as family"
Through visitor servicing efforts, we engage with every visitor who considers Mildura with a view to a valued, long-term relationship, not a one-off transaction.

STRATEGIC GOALS

Whilst the vision sets out where we are heading, the following four strategic goals underpin the commercial and cultural impacts that need to be met.

1. **Increase repeat visitation** – provide more reasons for day-tripper and overnight visitors to return to the Mildura region

2. **Increase visitor spend within the region** – enable a greater level of spend through increased engagement by aligning customer needs with region offerings

3. **Enhance industry collaboration** – reduce time and complexity, improve partnership opportunities and ability to leverage resources through a shared vision, strategy and common working model

4. **Improve customer advocacy** – ensure more visitors leave with positive sentiment towards the Mildura region, telling others of their experience to drive greater volumes

STRATEGIC APPROACH

The strategic approach is to shift visitor servicing operations beyond the confines of the transactional bricks-and-mortar approach, to a wider reaching and dynamic, experiential approach that meets customers where and when they need it.

Furthermore, the approach extends visitor servicing operations to formally collaborate and work closer with industry to ensure a seamless end-to-end customer experience.

The focus is to build a deeper digital capability that considers the customer needs across the entire customer journey and the five stages of travel.

STRATEGIC APPROACH

✓ Be where customers are

✓ Support more steps of the customer journey

✓ Engage proactively with industry

✓ Expand digital capability to amplify connection

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CUSTOMER FRAME

Mildura Visitor Servicing Strategy

To realise the vision, (of leader <u>and</u> connector) a transformational strategy is required to revitalise the existing approach, address the key issues raised by stakeholders and close the gap between what customers need across their end-to-end travel journey.

The strategy is focused on five core areas to help invigorate the growth of the visitor economy across the short, medium and long-term.

CREATE AN INSPIRATION CENTRE

CURATE THE REGION'S WONDERS

EXTEND VISITOR TOUCH POINTS

ENHANCE INDUSTRY COLLABORATION

ESTABLISH CLEAR DIGITAL PRESENCE

MILDURA VISITOR SERVICING STRATEGY
Connecting visitors, industry and community

For success, it requires a new level of thinking within existing resources, whilst providing for targeted and focused investment to fill the gaps that meet customer needs and drive region prosperity. It presents a range of new opportunities, founded in a greater level of industry participation, collaboration and partnership. It is a reinvention of sorts, with each strategy leaf combining together to drive collective growth and success.

Specifically, the five strategy areas are focused on:

1. **ENHANCE** **INDUSTRY COLLABORATION**	Engage + partner with industry to connect + strengthen the overall region experience
2. **CURATE** **THE REGION'S WONDERS**	Make it easy for customers to understand what's possible, beyond 'product' + connect to the richness of the region
3. **CREATE** **AN INSPIRATION CENTRE**	Be a destination in itself + more 'Apple Store' like in delivery, that brings pride for the community
4. **EXTEND** **VISITOR TOUCH POINTS**	Broaden geographical reach beyond town epicentre + be where customers are
5. **ESTABLISH** **CLEAR DIGITAL PRESENCE**	Reach, inspire + assist customers earlier in their journey, making it as frictionless as possible to choose Mildura

1. Enhance industry collaboration

Engage + partner with industry to connect + strengthen the overall region experience

Responding to stakeholder issues of: A lack of coordination, multiple and misaligned information sources, and feeling 'disconnected'.

INDUSTRY FORUMS + EXPO

Industry players at all levels need to be brought together to improve the quality and quantity of information sharing. From tourism plans for the region, consumer trends and sharing new opportunities, a regular industry forum will begin to establish the necessary relationships and connections that keep everyone moving in the same direction to a common agenda.

By fostering two-way interactions and improving lateral connections, new experience development opportunities can take place that will enrich the region's offering. Visitor servicing holds a central role in connecting these players together, around the ultimate reason they all exist – the customer. They are the point where the needs of industry bodies, local operators, businesses and customers come together.

Within this strategy, an annual forum, online portal and expo style event will help create the step change in common understanding and working together towards a common goal – realising and growing the visitor economy.

FAMIL PROGRAM

Familiarisation programs (famils) have been a foundation of the tourism industry for many decades, used successfully to elevate the Queensland tourism industry in the 1990s. The need to experience it for yourself is something that reading brochures and informal discussions simply cannot achieve.

By constructing and formalising a famil program, Mildura can begin to build a new layer of understanding for the region's offerings, that transcends visitor servicing operations, region marketing (MRD) and inter-business partnership opportunities. Unlike other regions, this approach would be inward facing, with the key purpose of building a deep knowledge and appreciation within the various stakeholders. External famil programs would be specifically out of scope, remaining clearly within the remit of MRD in its region marketing capacity.

COMMUNITY + BUSINESS PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

Mildura has the opportunity to detail and pilot a program that engages local businesses to become identifiable partners in serving the information needs of visitors. The relatively new concept, proven overseas[3], broadens the reach and footprint of visitor servicing, with local businesses becoming a delivery partner of core visitor information. When in region, visitors can easily identify 'partner' businesses, increasing their likelihood to interact to gain local insights whilst also increasing the opportunity to engage commercially with the local business.

To become part of the program, businesses are engaged based on a range of selection criteria, designed to complement existing visitor services operations. Murray Regional Tourism (MRT) has recently drafted a blueprint for how such a service could operate, with Mildura best positioned to lead the region through a pilot implementation.

REVIEW THE STRUCTURES + IMPROVE CROSS- REGION WORKING

The stakeholder landscape is complex and requires intentional structures and governance to ensure joined-up working. This initiative will map out the existing stakeholder engagement landscape (regarding visitor servicing), seeking to improve cross-region working through the establishment of new groups, redefining of existing groups and exploring wholesale structural reform. Specifically in scope are the working relationships between MRCC, Wentworth, Renmark + Swan Hill.

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3 VisitScotland iKnow Partnership Program 2019

2. Curate the region's wonders

Make it easy for customers to understand what's possible, beyond 'product' + connect to the richness of the region

Responding to the stakeholder issues of: *Need stories to link products, currently very product oriented, incomplete region history presented (indigenous heritage)*

CUSTODIAN OF LOCAL STORIES

The visitor centre team + local ambassadors are the gatekeepers of the visitor inspiration and insights that only locals know. To connect beyond just functional needs, visitors need stories to bring a destination or experience to life.

In the 'Dreaming' and 'Experiencing' stages of the customer travel journey, local stories can help to set Mildura apart from other destinations. Beyond being a simple library of products and brochures, visitor servicing operations can refocus effort to capture local stories, sharing them with the world.

The visitor servicing team would become responsible for collecting and crafting a repository of local stories, able to be accessed, leveraged and shared by other stakeholders. It is through these local stories that new marketing angles can be developed, new experiences formed and a deeper emotional connection can be delivered to bring the region to life and make it memorable for customers.

CREATE IMMERSIVE ITINERARIES

Promoting tourism products one by one is a transactional approach, whereby the customer needs to do the work to connect up a complete experience. Visitor servicing can help to connect commercial and natural assets together into themed, off-the-shelf itineraries that make it easy for customers to engage with and enjoy.

These itineraries require tapping into the local knowledge and stories, whilst integrating the offerings provided by tourism operators. With a range of itinerary options developed over time, it will give visitors more reasons to return and tell others of what is possible in the Mildura region.

CONDUIT SINGLE SOURCE

The problem in the information age is the volume of information available and the (sometimes questionable) authenticity and robustness of it. Consistency of information is a key component to ensuring a visitor has a positive overall experience, with this information being distributed by a reliable source.

Visitor servicing should become the central point of quality information for industry, visitors and the community.

By positioning services in this way, all stakeholders will be able to understand where to go to share (push) or consume (pull) information about what is going on in the region. Additionally, the visitor servicing function is also best placed to advise where new information needs to be shared or distributed. In this way, visitor servicing becomes the connector between information parties. At a more tactical level, the existing 'What's On' could be reimagined and made more dynamic to meet this need.

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Mildura has a deep indigenous history that is somewhat yet to be told and amplified. Leveraging the other strategic initiatives, visitor servicing can extend its curation role to engage with local indigenous communities to integrate their stories and perspectives, helping to share the complete experience for visitors.

A simple engagement model can be developed to include regular discussions with indigenous elders and collaborating with the various indigenous groups across the Mildura region to innovate and ideate on new ways to pull through the region's rich cultural heritage.

3. Create an inspiration centre

Be a destination in itself + more 'Apple Store' like in delivery, that brings pride for the community

Responding to the stakeholder issues of: Existing centre being dated, presents only part story, brochure walls / passivity, disconnected from locals

REFRESH + MODERNISE

Within the context of changing consumer expectations and needs, the existing Visitor Information Centre, whilst functional, provides limited opportunities for a relaxed 'human' interaction. The large counter, brochure walls and passive interpretive history/knowledge walls elude to a previously successful practice of delivering an information 'transaction'.

Much like the more recent changes in retail banking sites, where counters and barriers are removed, that rely on interpersonal interaction to deliver an emotional connection. It is this connection that shifts a 'transaction' to an 'experience'. Apple represent a great example of this in action, with Apple stores commanding the highest return per square meter in the world[4].

Furthermore, with more cost-effective availability of new and engaging technology such as virtual reality and augmented reality, the floor space can become more fluid and open in design. With the collaboration of local partners for content and inspirational ideas, a new 'inspiration centre' could be created – one that is engaging for visitors and locals alike. Done well, the 'Inspiration Centre' could become an icon in and of itself for region, further enhancing the opportunities to educate and influence visitors and the community on the richness of the region.

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE TRAINING

The time of basic customer service training has passed. Whilst foundation programs are in place, visitor servicing staff and volunteers should be inducted into regular training programs that enhance the customer experience, based around appreciative inquiry (AI) and intentional experience (IE). Appreciative inquiry helps to unearth the unknown or unconscious needs for customers, enabling the team to align the region's offerings to meet those needs, resulting in an approach that is natural and customer-led. Intentional experience sets out the feelings and emotions you want to arouse in visitors, working backwards from them to determine the best course of action. By inducting the team through a common platform of training, a more consistent and levelled-up experience can be realised.

REVITALISE GIFT SHOP + EXHIBITS

One of the great things about a local region is the unique products and talents that can't be found anywhere else. Mildura has an immense opportunity to change-up the current thinking on the retail shop offerings, becoming an iconic home for authentic local fayre[5] for both visitors and locals. Linked to this, a revolving calendar of exhibits can help to bring a regular renewing of the space, which could be linked to seasons or something more specific to the Mildura region. This brings a level of exclusivity and time-based urgency, whilst creating a new type of link with local businesses and the community to share in the space.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The 'Inspiration Centre' can form a cornerstone in building civic pride and an open community culture. A regular calendar of open invitations to the community to engage with and become a part of the visitor centre operations will change the existing feeling of disconnection. This can be extended to reach out for community support in unearthing the regions wonders and creating the immersive stories.

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[4] CoStar Research 2017: Global retail sales per floor area

[5] Not mass-produced koalas made in China as is often the case!

CUSTOMER FRAME

4. Extend visitor touch points

Broaden geographical reach beyond town epicentre + be where customers are

MULTI-LOCATION EXPANSION

A foundation of the strategic approach is to be where customers are. This requires the development of new customer engagement points at key nodes in the region including within the riverfront area, the airport and other primary gateways into and through the region. These satellite services are based on a retail pop-up concept, with significantly smaller shop footprints that can direct customers to the larger 'inspiration centre' when appropriate.

It is envisaged that sites would be collaboratively formed, partnering up in these locations, utilising existing space and resourcing them with a combination of staff and region volunteers. This layered approach to visitor servicing enables a wider reach, especially when combined with the business partnership program concept.

STATIC INTERACTIVE SOLUTIONS

With such a large geographic region, stakeholders felt that many of the region's wonders are missed as customers traverse to the city centre. To capture interest and engage customers, a network of static interactive solutions should be developed along key routes to shift these behaviours.

A simple but effective solution, easily identifiable and engaging interpretive boards can be installed at key points to reveal the hidden treasures of a particular area. Each board can also depict the wider network of information to refer customers onwards to another place of interest, or through to active visitor servicing nodes for further

assistance, inspiration and support. These static solutions would need to be supported by adequate road signage that invites visitors to stop and engage.

ROVING FACILITY FOR EVENTS

Being where customers are also means 'taking the show to them'. Roving visitor inspiration vehicles are effective ways to tactically deploy visitor servicing agents into areas of high customer traffic and volumes[6]. This roving facility is more than just a functional 'brochure library on wheels'.

It is an innovative way to showcase the region and pull through the specific personality of the Mildura region. Being mobile with visitor servicing also activates touch points at all stages of the customer journey, creating new opportunities to reach customers in the earlier stages, such as the Dreaming stage, helping put Mildura firmly into the customer's consideration set for their next destination to visit.

ROVING VOLUNTEERS

Whilst deep knowledge and expertise is maintained through employed visitor servicing agents, to extend customer reach, available resources, engage the community and help build civic pride, a roving volunteer program should be developed.

These region ambassadors are drawn from various parts of the community[7], educated on the purpose, offerings and key stories and brought together to help drive the visitor economy. They are 'on-tap' and can be deployed during peak periods, at new locations and to support specific events.

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[6] The VisitScotland Coo-van concept provides an excellent, proven example of this

[7] Phillip Island Ambassador program engaged with over 400 students as well as traditional 'retirees'

CUSTOMER FRAME

5. Establish clear digital presence

Reach, inspire + assist customers earlier in their journey, making it as frictionless as possible to choose Mildura

Responding to the stakeholder issues of: Customer journey + use of mobile / digital, Disconnected approach, Basic social media outputs

SOCIAL MEDIA APPROACH

Social media channels are now a major part of the entire customer journey, delivering content at all stages from Dreaming through to Reflecting. As such, it is a core capability to effective visitor servicing operations and required dedicated resources, coordination and focus.

To have a voice, it is essential that Mildura increases both the frequency (volume) and relevance (inspiration) of social media content, moving to a coordinated and unified approach. This initiative is designed to focus the efforts of cross-industry resources with a shared plan into specific channels, instead of the current dispersed approach.

By establishing repeatable #hastags and @handles for use by all industry bodies and operators, the region will build the 'mass' to cut through and hold its own voice in the marketplace. Once established, this can be amplified through planning and leveraging digital marketing budgets.

IMPROVE WEB – LIVE CHAT + BOOKING

The ability to 'be where customers are' extends to the digital realm, with live chat and online booking functionality being the core foundation to influence decisions and make it easy to book and choose Mildura. Live chat brings the human element directly into the frame, where visitor servicing agents can use their skills normally limited to face-to-face meetings to understand customer needs and direct/influence them to align with region offerings.

Online booking as a one-stop-shop makes it easy for customers. A unified platform that enables customers to search across the region, with real-time availability could be the deciding factor when a visitor is choosing between two regions for their trip. By making it as easy and frictionless as possible, this service adds to the overall destination Mildura proposition.

Furthermore, this functionality also provides a revenue stream to offset the costs of visitor servicing. Without such a unified booking offering, customers will choose other channels (such as booking.com etc) where that booking revenue does not stay in the region.

Finally, an opportunity exists (as the conduit source) to connect up and provide links between the digital channels to the customer resources available.

MOBILE FRIENDLY

Over 70% of travellers have done travel research on mobile[8]. It is essential that all visitor servicing touch points and information are mobile friendly and functionable. Additionally, an opportunity exists to create a comprehensive in-region app that holds elements such as itineraries, trip planners, booking functionality and location activated prompts. Mobile devices also hold a range of intelligence that will enable a deeper understanding of customer flow, their customer profile and track engagement and spend.

MANAGE CUSTOMER DATA

Customer data is a key region asset. Being able to continue conversations and build relationships with customers, beyond a single 'transaction', is the key to success. By capturing customer data and insights, then sharing these back with industry bodies and operators to use, new opportunities can be revealed and leveraged to increase repeat visitation, drive experience development and become more efficient in region marketing.

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[8] Source: Google Consumer Insights

CUSTOMER FRAME

Implementation for action

The following Action Plan outlines the priority implementation of critical success initiatives for the Mildura Visitor Servicing Strategy to be enacted. It is intended as a working document that is regularly reviewed and updated.

Existing visitor servicing resources and budgets may need to be adjusted to align with the recommendations and actions of this Strategy. Budgets will be developed and presented on an annual basis as part of the budget process. It is recommended that the MVIC team host a planning session to unpack the specific needs and implications for enacting the strategy.

TIMEFRAMES

The timeframes used for the suggested implementation actions are based on three primary timing groups:

- Short-range   2021 - 2022
- Mid-range   2022 - 2023
- Long-range   2023 - 2025

Notionally based on calendar year, these timeframes overlap to enable compatibility with Council and other partner budgetary cycles. The Long-range planning window is intentionally longer in duration, enabling greater flexibility for actions that are much further in the future and subject to greater estimation and unintended impacts.

CRITICAL STRATEGIC INITIATIVES FOR SUCCESS

1. ENHANCE INDUSTRY COLLABORATION	2. CURATE THE REGION'S WONDERS	3. CREATE AN INSPIRATION CENTRE	4. EXTEND VISITOR TOUCH POINTS	5. ESTABLISH CLEAR DIGITAL PRESENCE
Industry forums / expo Famil program Community + business partnership program Review structures + improve cross-region working	Custodian of local stories Create immersive itineraries Conduit single source for information Indigenous community engagement	Refresh + modernise the existing site Customer experience training Revitalise gift shop + exhibits Community engagement	Multi-location Static interactive solutions on key routes Roving facility for events Roving volunteers	Social media approach Improve web experience Mobile friendly Manage customer data

ABBREVIATIONS

MVIC – Mildura Visitor Information Centre
MRCC – Mildura Rural City Council
MRD – Mildura Regional Development
MCH – Mildura City Heart
MRTB – Murray Regional Tourism Board
VV – Visit Victoria
VTIC – Victorian Tourism Industry Council

The bolded organisation identified in the stakeholder column of the Action Plan is the lead agency, with other key stakeholders identified as potential partners to help facilitate the action.

CUSTOMER FRAME

1. ENHANCE INDUSTRY COLLABORATION
Aim: Engage + partner with industry to connect + strengthen the overall region experience

INITIATIVE	ACTION	STAKEHOLDERS	KPI'S	2021-22	2022-23	2023-25
Industry forums / expo	**Industry forums to share plans + progress, drive partnering opportunities, product development gaps + opportunities**					
	Consult industry stakeholders to establish forum objectives + parameters to align outputs with industry needs	MRD MVIC	Forum guidelines + outputs			
	Schedule + host bi-annual industry forums with all levels of industry in attendance	MRD MVIC	Successful bi-annual forums held online +/or in-person			
	Develop information sharing portal for industry with information (events, updates) + discussion platforms to increase communication + awareness	MRD MVIC Industry	Portal that is regularly updated + accessed by all industry (one point of information)			
Famil program	**Famil program for depth of knowledge, insights into what customers need, what's available + what makes the region special**					
	Develop annual industry awareness program (calendar) that incorporates famils + industry events to raise awareness of region product, services + events	MVIC MRD Industry	Annual awareness program + calendar			
	Develop annual famil program with minimum 6 events per year including site visits, industry presentations + staff famil program	MRD MVIC	Annual calendar of famils + events distributed to all industry + available on industry portal			
	Capture famil outcomes + highlights on industry forum to share with wider industry + raise awareness of the latest products + events available in the region	MRD MVIC Industry	Library of latest products + events on industry portal			
Community + business partnership program	**Visitor Inspiration Partner (VIP) Program – local business program of simple accreditation that is easily identified by customers as a trusted source, delivered in a consistent way**					
	Develop structure for Visitor Inspiration Partner program	MRTB MVIC MRD	Robust program including objectives, guidelines + engagement			
	Develop accreditation + training program to support Visitor Inspiration Partner businesses + ensure quality outputs for customers	MVIC MRTB TAFE	Accreditation program in place			
	Promote program to industry to maximise involvement	MVIC MRD MRCC	Industry communication			
Review structures + improve cross-region working	**Industry structures that support the visitor experience through collaboration, information sharing + region development initiatives**					
	Schedule + conduct quarterly group meetings with all adjoining region VICs to collaborate on group projects + initiatives	MVIC Swan Hill, Renmark + Wentworth VICs	Quarterly cross-region meeting calendar			
	Attend quarterly Murray VIC Manager meetings to collaborate on group projects + initiatives	MVIC All Murray Region VICs	Quarterly meetings held + minuted			
	Develop resources with adjoining VICs to improve the visitor experience + encourage cross-region dispersal eg. itineraries, travel planners, day trips etc.	MVIC Swan Hill, Renmark + Wentworth VICs	Resource library shared on industry portal			

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2. CURATE THE REGION'S WONDERS
Aim: Make it easy for customers to understand what's possible, beyond just tourism 'product'

INITIATIVE	ACTION	STAKEHOLDERS	KPI'S	2021-22	2022-23	2023-25
Custodian of local stories	*Custodian of local stories + experiences, driving authenticity (online + offline) for immersive content creation*					
	Encourage use of locals to promote their favourite spots/activities via online + offline channels (website, socials, VIC) to provide authenticity + value to the visitor experience Source 'storytelling' training resource for VIC, industry partners + locals to build local stories + experiences	MVIC MRD Industry Locals	Locals engagement program to capture local stories + secrets Training program in place	███	███	
	Establish a method for capturing local stories + secrets to share with visitors online + offline + on the industry forum	MVIC MRD	Area on industry portal for capturing + sharing local stories	███	███	
	Develop new VR content based on local experiences for website + VR sets at VIC	MRD MVIC	VR capability			███
Create immersive itineraries	*Create immersive itineraries based on customer needs + profiles that cover off the natural + commercial product of the region, unearthing the region's hidden gems*					
	Develop a series of themed itineraries for hard copy + digital use, incorporating satellite navigation with drive/cycle/walking versions	MVIC Industry	Itineraries	███	███	███
	Investigate purchase or development of itinerary building software for website + VIC for customer generated itineraries	MVIC MRD	Itinerary building software available + in use by industry + VIC staff		███	███
	Develop Travel Planner resource for travel to the region from key markets + adjoining regions	MVIC Adjacent regions VICs	Travel Planner resource in place		███	███
Conduit single source for information	*A conduit single source for information flow, moving from a static library of information to a dynamic system, working with industry as a live showcase + reference (not repository)*					
	Establish visitmildura website as the single source of all information, supported by back-end industry portal	MRD MVIC Industry	Industry + visitors using visitmildura website as single source Website always up to date with latest information	███	███	███
	Investigate viability of visitor app that links with visitmildura website for ease of visitor access to region information	MRD MVIC Industry	Visitor app in place		███	███
	Investigate technologies to support the ongoing development + use of visitmildura website, such as QR codes for on-the-spot information + local secrets to encourage region dispersal, longer stays + higher spends	MRD MVIC	Technology		███	███
Indigenous community engagement	*Indigenous community engagement, integration + pull-through to deliver on the region's rich cultural history*					
	Engage with First People of the Millewa Mallee + MRCC Aboriginal Action Committee to: - Support the development of indigenous tours - Access local craft/art for gift shop - Input into centre displays	MVIC Indigenous groups	Indigenous tourism product		███	
	Curate existing indigenous stories + products + make available online + offline	MVIC Indigenous groups	Indigenous tourism product		███	
	Create an interactive indigenous experience within the VIC for visitors to get a taste of the region's offerings, established as an attraction in its own right	MVIC MRD	Interactive display / attraction		███	███

3. CREATE AN INSPIRATION CENTRE
Aim: Be a destination in itself + more 'Apple Store' like in delivery, that brings pride for the community

INITIATIVE	ACTION	STAKEHOLDERS	KPI'S	2021-22	2022-23	2023-25
Refresh + modernise the existing site	**Refresh + modernise existing VIC site footprint with less behind-the-counter work (transaction) to being a 'partner' (experience)**					
	Review current VIC for quick wins to improve the visitor experience including static vs rolling displays, use of technology + iPads, interpretive displays	MVIC	Review + improvements		■	
	Improve visitor experience through interactive terminals, concierge service + in-the-moment information provision via digital technology + tools	MVIC	Interactive tools		■	
	Engage specialists to provide design + costings for centre refurb including removal of large counters, towards workstation + interactive terminals to engage visitors + create conversation	MVIC	Centre refurb proposal New design VIC		■	
Customer Experience training	**Customer Experience training in positive enquiry / intentional experience**					
	Undertake a capability + skills analysis of existing resources to identify training needs, capability + capacity gaps to ensure succession + continuity of service	MVIC	Training needs analysis + resourcing model	■		
	Staff training to improve service delivery + visitor engagement: - All VIC staff to complete the i2i Visitor Inspiration training program - appreciative enquiry + customer service principles - storytelling + customer experience	MVIC MRTB	All staff to complete i2i program New staff to complete in induction Integrated staff training program	■		
	Investigate opportunity to integrate with TAFE Ambassador Program to increase local business' focus on tourism + visitor experience	MVIC TAFE Industry	Ambassador Program (TAFE)			
Revitalise gift shop + exhibits	**Revitalise gift shop + exhibits, pulling through local art/culture/food into shop + set calendar for authentic local exhibits that rotate frequently**					
	Enlist visual merchandiser to assist with gift shop layout to enhance visitor experience, improve engagement + maximise sales	MVIC			■	
	Source + stock local product, art + wares that showcase the region's uniqueness, including live demonstrations + tastings Encourage local artists + businesses to showcase products unique to the region to increase market exposure through social media + information portals	MVIC MRCC events Industry Local artists	Extensive range of local products displayed in VIC Engagement program to encourage involvement	■		
	Create a calendar of exhibits + events based on local products, seasonality + events to increase linkage between VIC + region + encourage visitor dispersal	MVIC Industry Local artists Community MRCC Events Adjacent regions	Calendar of events + exhibits for VIC, promoted locally, on visitmildura website + via neighbouring regions	■	■	■
Community engagement	**Community engagement – invitation to visit, invoke pride, be involved + share knowledge to give more reasons to visit the VIC site**					
	Undertake an Ambassador Program such as the 'be a tourist in your own town' program to encourage businesses + locals to be more 'visitor friendly'	MRD MVIC Industry TAFE	Revive program Industry + business completion of program	■		
	Run activities during peak periods that encourage local involvement – eg. indigenous performances, meet the maker, local community group displays/performances, youth activities	MVIC FPMM, AAC Community groups MRCC Youth services	Ongoing calendar of events Local comms + marketing to encourage attendance	■	■	■
	Create a space where locals + businesses can go to celebrate the region, share stories, keep updated + create conversations about what's going on in the region + opportunities to be involved	MRD MVIC Local businesses Industry	Facebook group or page with regular updates + content sharing	■		

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4. EXTEND VISITOR TOUCH POINTS
Aim: Broaden geographical reach beyond town epicentre + be where customers are

INITIATIVE	ACTION	STAKEHOLDERS	KPI'S	2021-22	2022-23	2023-25
	Multi-location expansion – river front, airport + gateways to improve reach + access					
Multi-location	Evaluate gateways to region (eg. Ouyen, Red Cliffs, Merbein, Mildura Central Shopping Centre) using data to assess viability of presence + explore presence options (eg. physical, mobile, interactive signage, Visitor Inspiration Partner) at key locations, with a potential riverfront VIC Kiosk in scope (working party to discuss)	**MVIC** MRD MRTB Industry	Gateway data map Key locations analysis Riverfront Kiosk options	■		
	Develop an interpretive visitor information kiosk solution within the Powerhouse building to complement any enhancements to the Alfred Deakin Centre site	**MVIC** MRD	Interpretive plan developed Riverfront Kiosk open mid 2022	■		
	Evaluate staffing needs (paid vs volunteer) for outreach sites + gateway points based on analysis data, with consideration to seasonal + event-based visitation peaks	**MVIC** MRD MRCC Events MRTB	Staffing report outlining needs		■	
	Establish visitor needs for each location to ensure appropriate information provision is provided at each key location (eg. digital vs static, person vs signage etc)	**MVIC** MRD MRTB	Visitor needs analysis by key location		■	
Static interactive solutions on key routes	**Static interactive solutions on key routes into the region**					
	Undertake a tourism signage review	**MRD** / MVIC VicRoads / MRCC Industry	Tourism signage review findings paper	■		
	Investigate technology solutions for best-fit information provision at key points + locations, such as the use of QR codes in local business windows, interactive displays in parking bays etc.	**MRD** MVIC MRCC Industry	Report outlining tech solutions based on needs of visitors + region	■		
	Undertake research into visitor information needs at key points in the customer journey to ensure best-fit, long-term solutions are implemented to drive visitor spend + dispersal	**MVIC** MRD MRTB	Generic visitor needs paper	■		
Roving facility for events	**Roving facility for events + cross-regional pull through**					
	Investigate the operating model + feasibility of a roving VIC for the region, with resulting business case for investment	**MVIC** MRD	Roving VIC Business Case		■	
	Purchase + fit out a roving vehicle with audio visual displays, booking capability, basic souvenirs, to be deployed at major events, markets, seasonally at peak attractions, neighbouring regions etc.	**MRCC Fleet** MRCC Events Unit Consult Moira Shire	Vehicle purchased + fitted			■
	Create a social media persona for the roving vehicle to create buzz, interest + engagement ('roo'van) with an annual calendar of commitments + events for the roving vehicle to ensure maximum utilisation	**MVIC** MRD Adjacent regions	Social media presence + personality Annual schedule of commitments			■
Roving volunteers	**Roving volunteers in key visitor hotspots at key times / events / dates / seasons**					
	Undertake analysis of existing + future volunteer needs for key events + locations across the region to ensure adequate staffing capacity + back-up Create staffing calendar based on requirements to ensure adequate support	**MVIC** MRD	Calendar of events + commitments Staffing analysis Staffing plan	■		
	Create roving volunteer position description + incentive program to encourage involvement + ensure the right people are recruited for the positions Create an ongoing evaluation system to ensure service standards are maintained – similar to an accreditation	**MVIC** MRD	Position description Incentive program Volunteer evaluation / accreditation	■		
	Develop a roving volunteer training program on customer service, visitor experience + region product Ensure roving volunteers are integrated into the VIC network with consistent + regular two-way communication + updates	**MVIC** MRD	Roving volunteer training plan / program Industry portal	■		

5. ESTABLISH CLEAR DIGITAL PRESENCE

Aim: Reach, inspire + assist customers earlier in their journey, making it frictionless as possible to choose Mildura

INITIATIVE	ACTION	STAKEHOLDERS	KPI'S	2021-22	2022-23	2023-25
Social media approach	Social media approach – increase frequency + more emotive, less about 'product'. Coordinated showcase of existing offerings / innovation / quirky region facts + stories					
	Collaborate with MRD + Events Unit to establish priorities for each area in digital marketing + establish a planned + coordinated approach	MVIC Events Unit MRD Industry	Prioritised action plan	■		
	Develop a digital engagement plan for Events/MVIC socials including digital acquisition plan to build audience + maximise engagement	MVIC Events Unit MRD	Digital engagement plan	■		
	Engage industry + locals to contribute to region's social media plan to provide authenticity, engagement + interest in the region	MVIC MRD Industry Community	Industry engagement plan	■		
Improve web experience	Improve web experience to improve ease of booking, visitor engagement + live chat functionality					
	Activate Live Chat on visitmildura website	MVIC MRD	Live chat functionality implemented	■		
	Review functionality of booking system + function on visitmildura website	MRD MVIC	Enhanced booking function live	■		
	Continue to develop + deploy digital resources to website to provide link for other digital channels – eg. itineraries, walks, checklists, travel planners, video resources	MVIC MRD	Digital channel integration	■	■	■
Mobile friendly	Mobile friendly – adapt systems for a mobile experience + actively use intelligence. Utilise Council's free wifi network to customise offers + mobile alerts for visitors					
	Investigate the viability to develop an app with interactive itineraries, trip planner, booking function, location activated prompts + information, events calendar, rewards system (Mildura Dollars $)	MRD MVIC Events Unit Industry	App		■	■
	Utilise Council wifi system for - push notifications to visitors at key points on their journey - acquisition of data on visitor movement - personal information to tailor experiences + products	MVIC MRD	Series of push notifications + live visitor comms Visitor movement data Tailored experiences	■	■	■
	Explore possible use of augmented reality features at key sites	MVIC MRD	List of possible tech solutions		■	■
Manage customer data	Proactively manage + use customer data to improve visitor experience, collaboration + industry development					
	Establish customer database program + track information received through bookings, wifi logins, emails received + surveys etc to provide demographic information to inform promotion, markeing + product development opportunities	MVIC MRD Industry	Intelligent customer relationship management system	■		
	Develop promotional plan to provide targeted marketing (events, products, news) to customer database	MVIC MRD	Ongoing comms plan tailored to specific visitor needs + interests	■		
	Further develop existing 'Reach Out' Program to engage with online bookings to offer further assistance + resources	MVIC	Increase in online booking touch		■	

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NAME	ORGANISATION	POSITION
Alison Stone	Discover Mildura Tours	Owner/Operator
Ashton Kruzer	Mildura Paddlesteamers	Owner Operator
Brett Millington	Mildura Regional Development	CEO
Cameron Sutton	Inlander Resort & MRTB Board Member	Manager
Cherie Timmis	Fossey's Distillery	Owner/Operator
Christine Celegon	Mildura Rural City Council	Senior Tourism Officer Mildura VIC
Dannielle Hobbs	City Heart Traders	Manager
Daryl Beasy	Apex Riverbeach Caravan Park	Owner/Operator
David Zacher	Mildura Rural City Council	Mildura VIC Team Leader
Gaynor Lines	Mildura Rural City Council	Tourism Officer Mildura VIC
Hannah Gebert	Wentworth VIC - Wentworth Shire	Tourism Officer
Jodie Bromley	MRD / Dockside	Chair Tourism Sub Committee MRD / Owner
John Jackson	MRCC Aboriginal Action Committee	
Kate Henschke	Mildura Rural City Council	Manager Leisure and Cultural Services
Liam Wood	The Setts	Event Organiser/Business Owner
Mark Francis	Murray Regional Tourism Board	CEO
Pamela Canavan	Mildura Regional Development	Social Media
Paul Moore	Aarinda Apartments	Owner/Operator
Paul Wilton	Mildura Motor Inn	Owner Operator
Peter Kelly	Murray Off-Road Adventures	Owner/Operator
Peter Matsumoto	First People of the Millewa Mallee	Representative
Phil	Riverfront Development Project	Architect
Rebecca Chamberlain	Mildura Airport	Business Development Manager
Rebecca Lyons	Swan Hill Rural City Council	Swan Hill VIC Coordinator
Sara Wrate	Mildura Rural City Council	Events and Projects Coordinator
Sarah Gilmore	Mildura Regional Development	Marketing Officer
Sue Whitbourne	Renmark Paringa Council	Visitor Information Coordinator
Thelma Chilly	MRCC Aboriginal Action Committee	

And a final thank you to those across the industry who responded to initial input survey, in addition to those above.

It is with your collective support that the Mildura region can build a sustainable and prosperous visitor economy.