



TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

FY2026

ANNUAL REPORT

VISITOR IMPACT. COMMUNITY VALUE.

Statesville tourism is built by people who know this community, tell its stories and turn everyday moments into reasons to visit.

JULY 1, 2025 – JUNE 30, 2026

Destination marketing • Visitor impact • Community value

The time is now to tell tourism's story



Tourism brings visitors, partners and residents together around the experiences that make Statesville distinctive.

This Annual Report reflects the value, reach and impact of the Statesville Tourism Development Authority's work throughout FY2026. Tourism works every day in Statesville, often quietly, as visitors fill hotel rooms, discover local businesses, attend events and carry our story home with them.

Our team is small by design, but the work is not. Across marketing, sales, visitor services, media relations, partnerships and destination development, we connect people with the experiences that make Statesville worth the stop and the stay. This report begins documenting that value with greater clarity and accountability.

FY2026 expanded Statesville's visibility while prompting important conversations about resources, measurement and readiness for the future. I am proud of what this team accomplished and grateful to the Board, City and community partners who make the work possible.

MISSION

The primary objective of the Statesville Tourism Development Authority is to promote, solicit and encourage travelers to stop and stay in the Greater Statesville Area, furthering the continued economic development of the City.

Cindy Charlton Sutton, TMP

Fractional Executive Director

A fractional model. A hands-on team.

One destination mission.

The TDA combines public oversight with private-sector destination expertise.

Since 2021, the Statesville Tourism Development Authority has outsourced its operations, administration and marketing to Spokeology. This fractional model gives the Authority an experienced, hands-on team without building a traditional in-house department.

CINDY CHARLTON SUTTON, TMP

Fractional Executive Director

Strategy • Governance • Administration • Partnerships •
Public relations

JOHN STUM

Fractional Destination Services Manager

Sales • Group services • RFP development • Event support •
Industry relationships

INTEGRATED BY DESIGN

The full Spokeology team works behind the destination brand

The hands-on team at Spokeology manages the day-to-day development and execution of Statesville’s destination marketing. That work extends far beyond posting on social media. It includes the strategy, systems, creative production and relationships required to keep a destination visible and visitor-ready.

STRATEGY

BRAND + CAMPAIGNS

CONTENT

WEB + SOCIAL + EMAIL

CREATIVE

DESIGN + VIDEO + PHOTOGRAPHY

PR

MEDIA + CREATORS

SALES

LEADS + RFP SUPPORT

SERVICE

PARTNERS + VISITORS

PAID MEDIA PARTNERSHIP

Spokeology manages paid advertising through a specialized partnership with Advance Travel and Tourism, connecting local destination knowledge with travel-industry media expertise.

The result is an integrated operating model: the TDA Board provides public oversight and direction; fractional leadership manages strategy, administration and destination services; and the Spokeology team develops and executes the work visitors and partners see every day.

Leadership that shows up

Public oversight strengthened by hospitality, tourism and community experience.

Board members are visible partners in the work, supporting community events, destination businesses and the relationships that move Statesville tourism forward.

The Statesville Tourism Development Authority is governed by nine members appointed at large by the Statesville City Council. The Board brings together lodging leadership, tourism professionals and engaged City residents, with the City's Chief Financial Officer serving as non-voting ex officio treasurer. A City Council liaison connects the Authority's work with the City's broader priorities.

LODGING REPRESENTATIVES	TOURISM REPRESENTATIVES	COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES
Jay “Jimmy” Patel Chairman • CEO, JAM Hospitality	Pete Barger CEO, Southern Distilling Company	Donald Hicks Secretary • CFO, Statesville Housing Authority
Zankhana “Tika” Shah Sonesta	Michelle Hepler Executive Director, Rescue Ranch	Joe Bondi Owner, Red Buffalo Brewing Company
Pritesh Nagarji ABC Investments & Management Co.	Daniel Leatherman Director, Iredell County Parks & Recreation	
	Wes Davidson Owner, First Flight Bicycles	
NON-VOTING EX OFFICIO Gina Lawrence, Treasurer • CFO, City of Statesville		
CITY COUNCIL LIAISON Kristie Madison Pfeufer • Statesville City Council Member		

The Board meets on the fourth Tuesday of each month from 9:00–10:00 a.m.

Connecting throughout the Southeast

Statesville's tourism relationships extend across North Carolina and throughout the Southeast.

In FY2026, Cindy Charlton Sutton, TMP, was named to the Southeastern Tourism Society Board of Directors, representing North Carolina. Her appointment gives Statesville a meaningful voice within a regional network of destination leaders working to advance travel and tourism across the Southeast.

That leadership connects Statesville to emerging ideas, professional development, industry advocacy and relationships that extend beyond any single destination. It also creates opportunities to bring regional perspective home, strengthen collaboration and ensure Statesville remains part of the conversations shaping tourism's future.

REGIONAL LEADERSHIP. LOCAL VALUE.

Serving at the regional level expands the relationships, knowledge and visibility that support stronger destination work here in Statesville.

FY2026 HIGHLIGHTS

A Year of Progress, Partnership & Purpose

A concise view of the decisions, partnerships and destination-building work documented throughout the year.

VISITOR-FUNDED STEWARDSHIP

Statesville's 5% lodging tax is paid by visitors. FY2026 collections totaled \$1.38 million: 80% for the Statesville Civic Center and 20% for tourism promotion and development.

DESTINATION MARKETING

Unified statesvillenc.com, launched an enhanced paid-media and destination-intelligence program, and expanded traveler reach and engagement through a consistent destination story.

VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Launched the Outdoor Trail Town Guide and Wander Maps experience, expanded visitor information at the Statesville Historical Collection and helped bring the Civil Rights Trail marker to the community.

EXPANDED SPORTS & EVENT TOURISM

Hosted the Babe Ruth Southeast Regional Tournament for the first time in Iredell County, welcoming 9U and 11U teams from across the Southeast. Also supported the World Weightlifting Challenge & Games and Westside Twins' transcontinental motorcycle ride.

WEIGHTLIFTING: 140 athletes • 24 games • 448 estimated hotel room nights

PARTNERSHIPS THAT MULTIPLY IMPACT

Deepened collaboration with municipal, cultural, recreational, hospitality and business partners to connect destination marketing with the experiences visitors encounter in Statesville.

LEADERSHIP BEYOND STATESVILLE

Expanded Statesville's voice in the regional tourism industry through Cindy Sutton's appointment to the Southeastern Tourism Society Board of Directors representing North Carolina.

Together, these accomplishments strengthened Statesville's visibility, visitor experience and readiness for what comes next.

\$441.37 million spent by visitors

Visitor spending grew 2.8% in 2025, placing Iredell among 59 North Carolina counties that recorded growth.

\$441.37M TOTAL VISITOR SPENDING	2,564 DIRECT TOURISM JOBS	\$101.29M PERSONAL INCOME
\$30.57M STATE + LOCAL TAXES	\$143.39 TAX SAVINGS PER RESIDENT	2.8% YEAR-OVER-YEAR GROWTH

WHERE VISITORS SPENT

\$140.90M	\$106.21M	\$95.52M	\$66.76M	\$31.99M
FOOD + BEVERAGE	LODGING	TRANSPORTATION	RECREATION	RETAIL

“Visitor spending is money flowing directly into Iredell County businesses, supporting local jobs, strengthening our tax base and improving quality of life for the people who call this community home. Reaching more than \$441 million in annual visitor spending reflects the strength of our hospitality partners and the growing appeal of Statesville and Iredell County. It also reinforces why continued investment in tourism promotion and destination development matters to our entire community.”

CINDY SUTTON | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

COUNTY SCOPE | Visit NC reports visitor impact by county. These figures represent all of Iredell County and should not be interpreted as Statesville-only results.

Source: Visit North Carolina, The Economic Impact of Travel on North Carolina Counties 2025; prepared by Tourism Economics.

Last Night in Statesville

A typical overnight stay becomes local economic activity before most of the community begins its day.

813 OCCUPIED LODGING UNITS	1,626 OVERNIGHT VISITORS	\$201,780 VISITOR SPENDING PER NIGHT
\$73.65M ANNUALIZED VISITOR SPENDING	20 + 22 HOTELS + SHORT-TERM RENTALS	1,525 HOTEL ROOMS

The estimate combines 20 hotel properties with 1,525 rooms and 22 short-term rental properties. Through May 2026, hotels averaged 52.4% occupancy at a \$98.67 average daily rate; short-term rentals averaged 62% occupancy at a \$129 average daily rate. Using an average party size of two, a typical night represents approximately 1,626 visitors in the city.

WEEKDAY AND WEEKEND IMPACT

MEASURE	WEEKDAY (MON-THU)	WEEKEND (FRI-SAT)
Occupancy	50.7%	56.5%
Average daily rate	\$97.91	\$100.34
Overnight visitors	1,576	1,752
Estimated spending per night	\$195,000	\$218,823

Weekend nights generate approximately 12% more visitor spending than weekday nights. The difference illustrates why leisure events and experiences matter, while weekday meetings and group business remain an important opportunity for lodging growth.

Sources: STR May 2026 report, AirDNA and Statesville TDA modeling. Annualized spending is a planning estimate, not an audited financial measure.

Financial stewardship and transparent reporting

Visitors pay a 5% occupancy tax on lodging stays within the City of Statesville. FY2026 collections totaled \$1,381,428. Under the City's 80/20 structure, \$1,105,142 supported the Statesville Civic Center and \$276,286 supported tourism promotion and destination development.

\$1,381,428 TOTAL FY2026 OCCUPANCY TAX COLLECTED	\$1,105,142 80% TO STATESVILLE CIVIC CENTER	\$276,286 20% TO TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
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The City collection report measures lodging taxes generated during the fiscal year. The TDA operating statement follows the City's distribution timeline and records \$271,175 received by the Authority during FY2026.

FY2026 TDA OPERATING RESULTS

\$374,986 TOTAL OPERATING REVENUE	\$379,217 TOTAL EXPENDITURES
(\$4,231) REVENUE UNDER EXPENDITURES	56.7% OF AMENDED EXPENSE BUDGET USED

OPERATING REVENUE Hotel and motel tax fund distribution \$271,175 City and Civic Center contributions \$92,116 Investment income \$11,695	EXPENDITURES Destination promotion \$359,858 Administration \$19,360 Amended expense budget \$668,295
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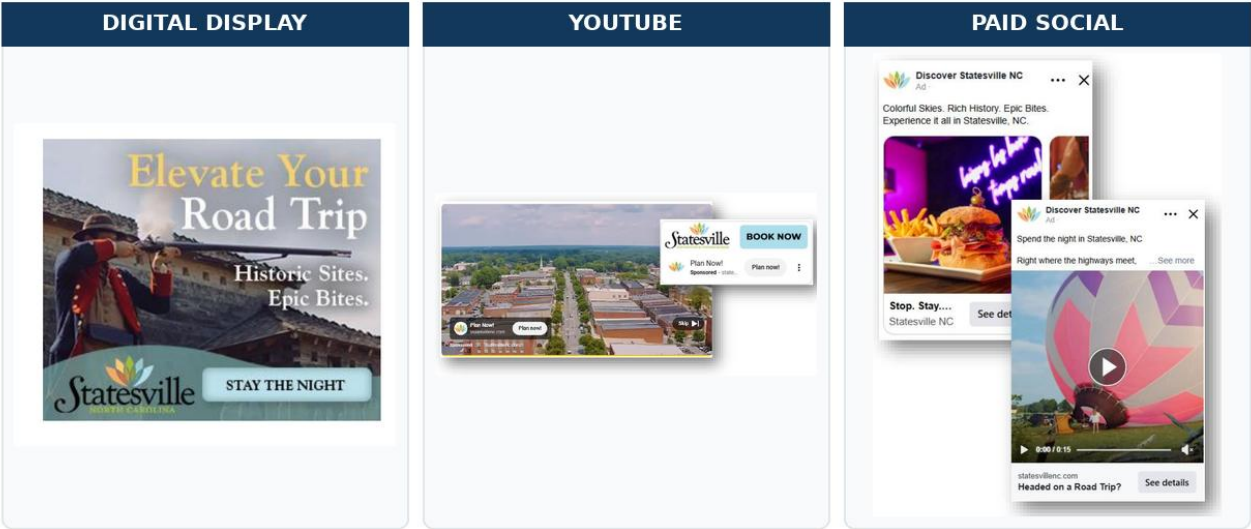
FINAL YEAR-END FINANCIAL INFORMATION Figures are as of June 30, 2026 and were provided by City Finance on September 21, 2026. They remain unaudited pending completion of the annual audit.

Sources: City of Statesville Occupancy Tax Summary dated September 21, 2026; FY2026 CVB Budget Comparison, Revision 3, prepared by City Finance on September 21, 2026. Allocation amounts are 80% and 20% of total collections and are rounded to the nearest dollar.

One consistent story across every touchpoint

Statesville’s campaign paired signature destination storytelling with display, social, video, search, road-trip content and earned media so travelers encountered a recognizable invitation wherever they planned.

CAMPAIGN IN ACTION



Signature creative, display, road-trip promotion and earned media echoed the same message: stay the night and discover more. Search then captured active intent, with accommodations representing 44% of paid-search page views.

FY2026 SOCIAL MEDIA GROWTH

2.1M TOTAL IMPRESSIONS	18,737 TOTAL AUDIENCE	202,561 VIDEO VIEWS
+29.5% IMPRESSIONS YEAR OVER YEAR	+10.9% AUDIENCE YEAR OVER YEAR	+72.9% VIDEO VIEWS YEAR OVER YEAR

Facebook video views increased 284.1%, making video the clearest growth signal across Statesville’s social channels. Together, paid campaign reach and owned social storytelling created a connected path from awareness to destination consideration.

Sources: Advance Travel & Tourism Creative Suite; Sprout Social Profile Performance Report, FY2025–FY2026.

Paid reach. Measurable action. One connected strategy.

Paid media delivered immediate reach and measurable action, connecting travelers with Statesville across display, video, social and search. Each channel played a distinct role in moving audiences from awareness to destination consideration.

5.77M ADS DELIVERED	97,671 RESPONSES / CLICKS
1.69% OVERALL CLICK-THROUGH RATE	411,636 WEBSITE ACTIONS

PAID MEDIA’S SHARE OF WEBSITE ACTIVITY

71% OF SITE USERS	63% OF PAGES VIEWED	60% OF WEBSITE ACTIONS
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HOW EACH CHANNEL CONTRIBUTED

DIGITAL DISPLAY 4.29M impressions • 55,103 clicks 1.28% CTR; generated the largest pool of site traffic.	YOUTUBE 298,712 completed video views 58.93% completion rate; 1,000+ tracked website actions.
PAID SOCIAL 879,194 impressions • 32,984 clicks 3.75% CTR; reached 455,705 people and added followers.	PAID SEARCH 8,626 clicks • 9.38% CTR Accommodations represented 44% of paid-search page views.

Source: Advance Travel & Tourism, January–June 2026.

Outperforming benchmarks. Reaching real travelers.

Campaign performance was not only strong in volume. Every major channel exceeded its travel-industry benchmark, while visitor intelligence showed where overnight travelers came from and what they experienced in Statesville.

CAMPAIGN PERFORMANCE VS. INDUSTRY BENCHMARKS

CHANNEL	INDUSTRY BENCHMARK	STATESVILLE
Search engine marketing CTR	4%–5%	9.07%
Display banner CTR	0.08%–0.10%	1.17%
Meta social CTR	0.9%–2%	3.65%
YouTube view rate	39%	59%

WHO IS STAYING OVERNIGHT

ORIGIN MARKET	OVERNIGHT TRIPS
Raleigh–Cary, NC	9,100
Atlanta–Sandy Springs, GA	8,200
Pittsburgh, PA	7,600
Greensboro–High Point, NC	5,400 • +23.5%
Charlotte–Concord–Gastonia, NC	4,200 • +27.9%

Visitor activity also concentrated around distinctly local experiences. Placer.ai identified Katana Kitchen, the Statesville Event Center, Amalfi's Pizza, Boxcar Grille, Broad Street Burger Co. and Fresh Chef among the most-visited places measured.

Sources: Advance Travel & Tourism campaign report and Placer.ai, as presented at the July 2026 Q1 Sales & Marketing Meeting.

One destination story traveled across channels

The year’s storytelling connected website content, social media, video, earned media and partner experiences around a consistent invitation: stay the night and discover more.

This integrated approach gives prospective visitors multiple ways to encounter Statesville while helping local partners see themselves within the broader destination story. Community events, culture, food, outdoor experiences and the people behind them became connected chapters rather than isolated promotions.

EARNED MEDIA & CREATORS

NC Tripping brought Statesville to life

FY2026 hosted collaboration • June 2026 visit • Results updated August 3, 2026

Statesville hosted NC Tripping for an immersive destination visit built around the people, places and experiences that make a trip memorable. Trusted third-party storytelling introduced those experiences to travelers already looking to Christina Riley and NC Tripping for ideas across North Carolina.

The June visit launched immediate Story coverage and created a deeper collection of restaurant, shopping, history, outdoor, arts and weekend content that continued publishing after the fiscal year closed.

785,229 CUMULATIVE VIEWS	30,952 ENGAGEMENTS	41,291 STORY IMPRESSIONS
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THE VISIT CREATED MOMENTUM 19 Instagram Stories during and immediately after the hosted experience generated 41,291 impressions, including 36,088 unique impressions.	THE CONTENT KEPT WORKING Cumulative reporting reached 785,229 impressions and views across Instagram Stories, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok, with 30,952 engagements.
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CONTENT DESIGNED TO INFLUENCE A FUTURE TRIP

Where to eat local • Downtown shopping • Southern Cask to Bottle • Statesville Historical Collection • Fort Dobbs • Blueberry picking • Arts and makers • Weekend itinerary and walking tour

Reporting note: The partnership and hosted visit occurred in FY2026. Cumulative results include related content published after June 30 and are reported through August 3, 2026.

Visitor experience grew beyond a single campaign

Outdoor Trail Town Guide	Launch, Walking Trail Maps integration and partner storytelling.
Destination Services	Group travel, RFPs and relationship development.
Wayfinding & Gateways	Citywide signage and visitor-navigation work continued. Phase I coming soon.
Culture & Community	Civil Rights Marker and local partnerships.

Together, these projects strengthened the visitor journey before arrival, during the stay and after travelers returned home with a story to share.

SALES, SPORTS & EVENTS

From relationship-building to room nights

Sports tourism expanded when Statesville hosted the Babe Ruth Southeast Regional Tournament at Jennings Park, welcoming 9U and 11U teams from across the Southeast for the first time in Iredell County and connecting visitors with several partner hotels. The TDA also supported the World Weightlifting Challenge & Games and partnered with Westside Twins Motorcycle Co. to welcome a transcontinental motorcycle ride to Statesville. The weightlifting competition welcomed approximately 140 athletes across 24 games and generated an estimated 448 hotel room nights from participating families.

FY2026 ended with a clearer call for organizational readiness

The Board examined purpose, resources and long-term sustainability. That work included bylaws, compliance, audit continuity, financial safeguards, occupancy-tax structure options and the relationship among destination brands and potential future entities.

JUNE 2026: A TURNING POINT

In response to the Board’s questions about what the Authority is accomplishing and how the budget can support its future, a Path Forward proposal established the framework for deeper evaluation in FY2027.

Planning has begun. No new organizational structure has been adopted. The next phase will require careful evaluation, legal and financial guidance, and clear Board direction.

THE PATH FORWARD

FY2027 begins with a path to define together

01

Clarify structure

Evaluate governance, funding and operating-model options.

02

Restore industry connection

Bring back Sales & Marketing meetings and the Tourism Summit.

03

Grow destination demand

Strengthen storytelling, creator partnerships, sales and visitor services.

04

Measure what matters

Connect investment to verified reach, room nights and visitor impact.

BOARD APPROVAL

The Board approved the FY2026 Annual Report on September 22, 2026. Completion of the annual audit will follow.

CLOSING

The value is in the work, the relationships and the stay

Every campaign, sales conversation, hosted event, visitor question, media relationship and community partnership serves the same purpose: giving travelers a reason to stop, stay and experience more of Statesville.

This Annual Report creates a foundation for telling that story consistently. It also creates a promise: to keep connecting public investment with measurable destination impact and to keep showing the value of the small, committed team doing this work every day.

VISITOR IMPACT. COMMUNITY VALUE.

Tourism is economic development with a welcome attached.

[SCVB.STATESVILLENC.COM](https://scvb.statesvillenc.com)