

Visit
San Luis
Obispo

Live the SLO Life

2025-2030 Strategic Plan



INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry is one of the strongest economic drivers in San Luis Obispo. The community is a beautiful gem in the Central Coast, offering a mix of history, outdoor recreation, great shopping, and proximity to both the coast and inland vineyards.

This 2025-2030 Five Year Strategic Plan seeks to craft the next roadmap for the organization, and to dovetail with the Brand Book as it can. The Plan sets a course for the organization to continue to drive the lodging economy and serve as the voice for its stakeholders.

The planning effort began in September 2024 in collaboration with Whereabout, a destination consultancy focused on stewardship. The process of crafting this Strategic Plan included:

- » Reviewing numerous background reports to understand the current state of the tourism industry.
- » Interviewing eight individuals representing different stakeholder perspectives within San Luis Obispo.
- » Meeting with Noble Studios to gain their insights on the destination and Brand Book.
- » Creating a Strategic Perspectives Report that presented seven key themes from the discovery work. This report served as the foundation of the strategic planning process by gathering insights on the current state of the industry and identifying opportunities and challenges. The seven key themes from this report are:
 1. Keep leaning into continuous improvement for the TBID.
 2. Explore the investments and actions needed to activate mid-week visitation.
 3. Create excitement through one-of-a-kind festivals and events.
 4. Promote sustainability as a distinctive sub-brand of Living the SLO Life.
 5. While a rising tide raises all boats, ensure your boat is positioned to catch the wind.
 6. Continue to clarify Visit San Luis Obispo's role in the countywide tourism industry.
 7. Advocate for the health of the tourism economy within the context of community.

- » Convening a one-day Strategic Planning Team Retreat on October 28, 2024. Held at the Hotel San Luis Obispo, the Planning Team reviewed the Strategic Perspectives Report; jointly revisited the organization's Vision, Mission, Values, and Position Statement; then identified four key areas of focus (Objectives) for the next five years. For each Objective, the Team identified indicators by which to measure success towards the Objective, and 3-5 Strategies to accomplish the Objective.



STRATEGIC PLANNING HISTORY

Visit San Luis Obispo crafted its first Strategic Plan.

2013

Visit San Luis Obispo revisited its plan with an eye towards destination resiliency in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic.

2020

Visit San Luis Obispo adopted its current 2025-2030 Strategic Plan

2025



2019

Visit San Luis Obispo developed a new Five-Year Strategic Plan.

2022

Visit San Luis Obispo worked with their agency-of-record, Noble Studios, to craft a Brand Book that includes a set of guidelines, and also a set of philosophies and beliefs. Specifically, the Brand Book states that the purpose of the Brand is “Hearts in Beds,” and adheres to principles of being progressive, wholehearted, and connected.



NORTH STAR

VISION

A welcoming community with a vibrant economy that enriches the lives of visitors and residents alike.

MISSION

We share the abundance of SLO, driving the lodging economy and serving as the voice of our stakeholders.

VALUES

We believe in:

- » Service
- » Leadership
- » Adaptability
- » Collaboration

POSITION

The SLO TBID stewards the brand of Visit San Luis Obispo and represents its lodging partners, driving overnight stays by:

- » Telling the San Luis Obispo story via targeted marketing content and activities.
- » Serving as a convener and subject matter expert for tourism conversations impacting the destination.
- » Advancing strategic partnerships that extend the reach and influence of Visit San Luis Obispo.



OBJECTIVE 1: ENSURE ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

INDICATORS

Maintain stakeholder sentiment of Visit San Luis Obispo performance.

Increased engagement and participation with Visit San Luis Obispo's Brand Book and promotional toolkits.

STRATEGIES

1.1 Grow organizational capacity.

One of the limiting factors to growing San Luis Obispo as a destination is the size of the organization and its capacity to take on new work and initiatives as they emerge. To ensure that staffing does not create a bottleneck, the organization will look for ways to build its capacity to take on expanded work, and to continue to deliver excellent results on behalf of the local tourism economy.

1.2 Invest in internal relationship building.

Strong relationships within an organization are the fertile ground in which excellence can flourish. In this strategy, Visit San Luis Obispo will invest in strengthening and building its internal relationships—staff, Board, and contractors—to help build the conditions for organizational excellence. In practice, this could look like team retreats, group training on crucial conversations, and investments in maintaining a healthy culture.

1.3 Develop an innovation process.

While the general consensus from the Discovery Phase of this Strategic Planning

process was for Visit San Luis Obispo to stay the course (as compared to engaging in radical change), strategic innovation and risk-taking has its place. In this initiative, Visit San Luis Obispo will craft a process through which to consider pivots in approach or bold ideas that they could act upon—such as pursuing a Fourth of July Drone Show or creating a SLO Life Coach Certification program.

1.4 Communicate successes.

Visit San Luis Obispo has had some great successes over the past few years—the stabilization, recovery, then growth of the tourism economy post-COVID has been a success with occupancy, ADR, and RevPAR trending higher. Programs like Keys for Trees have been successful as well. In this strategy, Visit San Luis Obispo will craft and execute a communication plan to get the word out on its successes. This plan will consider various audiences—such as Visit SLO CAL and other industry partners, local residents, the business community—and the variety of channels that individuals prefer for receiving information.

1.5 Invest in stakeholder connections.

Visit San Luis Obispo will enhance and expand the tools it uses to connect with its stakeholders, be it through enhancing communications, providing more face-to-face networking opportunities, or other innovative approaches. In the Discovery Phase of this Strategic Planning process, stakeholders mentioned that electronic communications could be improved, as

some news gets buried that readers would want to know. In addition, staff at Visit San Luis Obispo are aware of the annual calendar change looming with Cal Poly, and want to ensure a smart communication campaign so that stakeholders are aware and have the opportunity to adjust how they provide service to accommodate this significant change in visitation timing.



OBJECTIVE 2: DELIVER SMART GROWTH

INDICATORS

Increase in resident sentiment.

Increase mid-week occupancy.

Increase length of stay.

STRATEGIES

2.1 Foster ongoing positive resident sentiment.

Having residents support tourism makes the work of growing the visitor economy that much smoother. While current resident sentiment is considered positive, Visit San Luis Obispo will want to ensure this remains the case. In this initiative, the organization will periodically take the pulse of the community as it relates to facets of tourism, and consider adjustments in approach to ensure residents remain in support.

2.2 Develop remote work messages as part of SLO Life.

With a deep brand focus on connection, wholeheartedness, and progressiveness, a youthful personality, the presence of Cal Poly, and the desire by travelers to be digital nomads—able to work and vacation at the same time—San Luis Obispo is strategically positioned to capture more travelers seeking this kind of experience. This initiative will curate messages about remote work and embracing being a digital nomad as part of the SLO Life brand promise.

2.3 Advocate for conference center development.

One of the more significant gaps in the visitor economy is the dearth of mid-week travel to the community. One way to address this gap is to have the facilities that can accommodate the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) market, and attract more business travel. This initiative will continue the work that has been underway since the 2019-2024 Strategic Plan to develop a conference center in the city.

2.4 Partner with Visit California and Visit SLO CAL to bolster targeted segments of travel.

Visit San Luis Obispo cannot deliver the results it envisions at current staffing levels without smart partnership and leveraging with its peer organizations: Visit California and Visit SLO CAL. Both of these organizations have more staff and a bigger 'megaphone' to get the message out about the Central Coast and its communities. Working together can help elicit more group and meeting travel to the city and region and increase international travelers seeking to explore this area.

OBJECTIVE 3: BUILD MEANINGFUL PARTNERSHIPS

INDICATORS

Create one net new signature brand partnership.
Partnerships balanced across identified key sectors.

STRATEGIES

3.1 Perform an audit of our partnership landscape.

Visit San Luis Obispo has many existing partners with whom it collaborates to achieve its vision and mission. With the creation of this 2025-2030 Strategic Plan, the organization will have a clear line of sight into the work that lies ahead. With that awareness, the organization will review its partner landscape through a cost/benefit analysis—who does Visit San Luis Obispo work with, where do missions align, and where would additional partners support achieving strategies?

3.2 Develop partnerships to address key gaps.

With the findings of the Partnership Audit in hand, Visit San Luis Obispo will create an action plan to initiate, build, then deepen relationships with partner organizations. While many of the partnerships to develop will be to help carry out the strategies identified in this Strategic Plan, the best outcome for all partnerships will be strong, committed, mutually-beneficial relationships that endure into the future.

3.3 Develop an events strategy to complement Visit SLO CAL's approach.

One of the themes from the Discovery Phase of this Strategic Planning work was to create excitement in San Luis Obispo through events and festivals. Visit SLO CAL has developed an events strategy for the county-wide destination. With awareness of that strategy, Visit San Luis Obispo will develop its own that elevates approaches and themes for events and festivals that align with the Visit San Luis Obispo brand.



OBJECTIVE 4: ACTIVATE THE SLO LIFE

INDICATORS

Lift in brand sentiment against baseline.

Increase RevPAR.

Increase awareness of SLO as a sustainable destination.

STRATEGIES

4.1 Further enhance the use of data to inform marketing programs.

Live the SLO Life, Visit San Luis Obispo's brand, tells a compelling story of the destination and the feeling of being in the community. Through strategic investigation and leveraging of data, Visit San Luis Obispo can further refine its target audiences, target markets, and times of year where marketing the brand can have even more impact.

4.2 Maintain focus on social awareness & environmental responsibility.

Many stakeholders identified Visit San Luis Obispo's approach to sustainability, the environment, and inclusivity as part of what make it distinctive. Further, these attributes are increasingly important to younger travelers, who are a growing segment of the traveling public. Visit SLO will continue to lean into the Sustainable SLO sub-brand, in support of the City's 2035 Carbon Neutrality goal, to distinguish itself as a destination, and bring to life the natural, progressive, and welcoming attributes of the SLO Life brand.

4.3 Maximize the evolution of the "Live the SLO Life" brand.

As the "Live the SLO Life" brand continues to evolve, amplification will include raising awareness of San Luis Obispo as a stand-out destination to experience, further showing off the city's unique charm, welcoming spirit and unpretentious luxury. Passionately investing and focusing on the newest iteration of the campaign, the "SLO Life Coach," will help achieve early successes that will carry the destination into the future.

4.4 Differentiate Visit San Luis Obispo while building off Visit SLO CAL's success.

Given that there is a San Luis Obispo County, City of San Luis Obispo, Visit SLO CAL, and Visit San Luis Obispo, there is warranted confusion on which organization does what, for what area, and for what purpose—especially when it comes to travel and tourism. In this strategy, Visit San Luis Obispo will craft an approach that both builds from Visit SLO CAL's successes while ensuring it is seen as a unique destination.

NEXT STEPS

Once adopted by the TBID Board, Visit San Luis Obispo will communicate this Strategic Plan to its partners using a variety of channels—VisitSLO.com, face-to-face conversations, and partner outreach. Visit San Luis Obispo will also share how stakeholder input influenced this plan and was considered in the formulation of the Objectives and Strategies.

The implementation of the plan will be owned by the Visit San Luis Obispo staff, and supported by Board members when appropriate. The team will develop a systematized way to give periodic updates on overall progress to the Board, and to track and present indicator measurements once a year.

Next, Visit San Luis Obispo will identify the first set of strategies to begin to implement. These may be those that need to happen first, strategies that are prerequisites for other strategies, or those that are early easy wins. As a guideline, this should include between one third and one half of the strategies described in this Plan. For each strategy, Visit San Luis Obispo will want to have a single person act as its project manager. Within the group of individuals working on a particular strategy, this person will be in charge of crafting a work plan, building timelines, identifying and engaging with partners both in and outside of the organization, specifying financial needs for executing the strategy, and finally, implementing that plan of action.

