

# Armstrong: Consultants review DCCVB successes, offer recommendation

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In 2007, DeKalb community leaders established the DeKalb County Convention and Visitor Bureau to facilitate dedicated marketing efforts to grow the county's visitor economy.

The DCCVB includes stakeholders from throughout the county, and the organization's scope and reach has expanded significantly over the past decade.

In an effort to review and evaluate the progress of the organization and chart a re-envisioned course for its future, the DCCVB board engaged DMOproz, a highly respected consulting firm serving destination marketing professionals, to perform an organizational assessment and offer recommendations to maximize our efforts in marketing the county.

DMOproz conducted confidential interviews with key destination government, community and business leaders, polling them about their impressions of the DCCVB and their expectations for a successful future for the organization. The firm also reviewed all DCCVB organizational and contractual documentation, marketing and budgets.

The most significant findings within the report were related to the organization's funding, productivity, impact and community support.

The report described the DCCVB as a "small and mighty" organization that has helped bring millions of dollars into the local economy. The report also commended the bureau for the ability we have to "make it rain" with limited resources.

Results of the community survey and personal interviews revealed 92 percent of respondents felt the DCCVB was doing a “very effective” or “effective” job.

The organization’s collateral marketing pieces were found to be well-executed and inclusive of the communities throughout the county.

The bureau received high marks for its online presence, describing the DCCVB website as easy to navigate and optimized for viewing on all mobile platforms. The report concluded that the entire county is well-represented by the bureau’s online content. The findings praised the website’s robust photo and video sections and highlighted the CVB’s interactive map as an online feature that few destination marketing organizations are utilizing as a valuable planning aid.

The economic impact from visitor dollars in DeKalb County has significantly increased over the past eight years. Visitor spending has grown from \$64 million in 2007 to \$93.9 million in 2016, according to the Illinois Office of Tourism. The third party 10-year history of economic impact generated from visitor spending can be viewed at [dekalbcountycvb.com/economic-impact-of-tourism](http://dekalbcountycvb.com/economic-impact-of-tourism).

Currently, the DCCVB operating budget is approximately \$180,000 with a staff of 1.5 employees. Nearly \$92,000 of the operating budget is composed of a matching grant from the state that is only available to certified bureaus designated as the official Destination Marketing Organization for their service area. The DCCVB is one of 40 such DMOs.

The report indicated that the bureau is drastically underfunded compared with both state and national averages invested with certified/designated DMOs. In part because of home rule, Illinois bureaus are generally funded at 34 percent of the hotel tax revenue in the areas they serve, which is lower than the national average of 50 percent, according to a Destination Marketing Association International study.

Funding the DCCVB at a rate commensurate with other certified Illinois DMOs would greatly enhance the bureau's efforts to increase visitor spending. Of course, any increase in funding is matched by additional grant dollars from the state, allowing the DCCVB to be more competitive with other destination marketing organizations in the region. Additional funds could be invested in the hiring of a full-time sales person dedicated to the recruitment and promotion of events, meetings and tour groups coming to DeKalb County. Additional staff also could assist in marketing and advertising initiatives designed to generate new revenue streams for the DCCVB.

The DMOproz report states that "if there is a single factor holding the DCCVB back from producing the kind of impact its stakeholders want, need and expect, it is that the bureau is significantly underfunded for the job at hand and for the competition surrounding them."

The report recommends that the DCCVB board investigate opportunities to enhance the organization's funding resources. According to the report, increased funding could potentially double the dollars generated from visitor spending for DeKalb County.

Among the concepts, the board will consider is the development of a partnership program with county businesses who wish to invest in destination marketing. Such a contribution from the private sector would augment the support from municipal partners (these funds would also be matched by state).

In the months to come, the board will focus on working with county leadership and stakeholders to discuss the findings of the organizational assessment and explore the feasibility of the report's recommendations.

The DCCVB board and staff thank all of the organization's financial stakeholders for their commitment and investment in tourism marketing. This support has contributed to the success of the DCCVB, and the organization

looks forward to working with all community partners to facilitate the economic growth of DeKalb County.

To see the list of FY18 stakeholders, visit [dekalbcountycvb.com/annual-presentation](http://dekalbcountycvb.com/annual-presentation).

- Debbie Armstrong is the executive director of the DeKalb County Convention and Visitors Bureau.

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