

**SPORTS TOURISM STRATEGIC
PLAN + FACILITY
RECOMMENDATIONS**

**SCOTTS BLUFF / GERING
SPORTS COUNCIL**



April 30, 2023

POWERED BY THE HUDDLE UP GROUP



April 30, 2023

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Tourism Director
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Dear Ms. Leisy & Ms. Niedan-Streeks,

Thank you both for your efforts on our recent work in your community. The two of you and your stakeholders have been quite helpful throughout this process. The groundwork we have set with your local leadership will serve as a strong foundation for future sports tourism, venue, and event development efforts in the City of Gering and throughout Scotts Bluff County.

Enclosed is the report (which we call the “playbook”) detailing our findings. The playbook includes a SWOT analysis of your organizations and the destination as it relates to sports tourism, an overview and evaluation of the venue inventory in the area, benchmarking of your organizations’ sports tourism efforts, and recommendations to enhance your sports tourism “tool kit” moving forward. Both the SWOT analysis and the recommendations are built on a “powers of three” foundation. That is, in most cases, no more than three focus areas for each section.

Please let us know if you have questions about the enclosed recommendations leading up to the roll out of the report and community presentation. We are looking forward to our upcoming visit and follow-up discussions.

Thank you again for all your support throughout this process!

Yours in Sport,

Jon Schmieder
Founder + CEO
Huddle Up Group, LLC



Scotts Bluff / Gering Sports Council
Sports Tourism Strategic Plan + Facility Recommendations
Executive Summary

In the opinion of the Huddle Up Group (hereafter the “Consultant” or “Consultant Team”), there is an excellent opportunity for the Scotts Bluff Area Visitors Bureau and the Gering Visitors Bureau (herein collectively referred to as “SBG”) to enhance its position as a more attractive sports tourism destination. This can be achieved through the implementation of a focused and intentional sports tourism development program. Throughout this process, the area’s community leaders showed a desire to grow sports tourism in the region and for both organizations to become more engaged with the area’s stakeholders. Both characteristics are positive signs the region is ready to grow its sports tourism impact.

This strategic planning and facility audit project was conducted with the input of two (2) members from the Consultant Team and included the following:

- A rating of SBG and the destination through the Sports Tourism Index™.
- Two (2) in-person meetings, 16 phone interviews, and receipt of 39 electronic survey responses.
- One (1) in-person town hall meeting with local stakeholders.
- Tours of 18 different sites that encapsulated more than 42 sports and event venues.
- Benchmarking against high performing destinations and venues both regionally and nationally.

The full report (the “playbook”) offers a SWOT analysis and recommendations for an enhanced sports tourism marketing program (near-term) and suggestions for facility development (long-term). The playbook offers depth on each recommendation along with backup research and benchmarking that support the suggestions made by the Consultant Team. In summary, there are three (3) primary and three (3) secondary recommendations, each of which is detailed in the full playbook:

Primary Recommendations – Organizational Strategies (Shorter Term)

1. Define & Launch a Regional Sports Council
2. External Focus/Community Alignment
3. Technology Use

Secondary Recommendations – Facility “Tool Kit” (Longer Term)

1. Develop a Regional Sports Tourism Facility Master Plan
2. New Indoor Multipurpose Venue
3. Enhancement of Existing Sports Facilities

The opportunity at hand is to put in place an enriched sports tourism support system, engaging all stakeholders throughout the region to drive more economic development while also improving opportunities for community user groups. Through a community-wide effort, SBG can drive increased economic activity through sport in the form of additional overnight stays and visitor spending. This effort will result in more lodging and sales tax revenues being collected throughout the region year over year. Given the opportunities that exist and the numerous organizations that could play a key role, the Consultant Team believes the development of a new sports council is the ideal structure to unify the community and lead the sports tourism charge.



Scotts Bluff / Gering Sports Council
Sports Tourism Strategic Plan + Facility Recommendations
Synopsis

The sports tourism industry has grown consistently over the past 20 years. A study by the Sports Tourism and Events Association – *State of the Industry Report 2021*, states that the participant driven portion of the domestic sports tourism sector was responsible for more than \$39.0 billion in direct spending as of the end of 2021. This direct spending generated a total economic impact of \$91.8 billion to local economies, driving over 635,000 jobs and \$12.9 billion in taxes. Add to this industry growth the increased popularity of emerging sports such as pickleball, BMX, and esports, the opportunity for the continuing expansion of economic development through sports tourism is tangible and ever-expanding.

Throughout the research process, it became apparent to the Consultant Team that there is an opportunity for SBG to enhance its presence in the sports tourism marketplace. The key moving forward will be to empower a singular organization that can lead all community stakeholders in working together to develop tourism driving assets (sports venues) that deliver upon the destination’s sports tourism focus. Through the execution of a strategic and targeted game plan, this new organization can strengthen the region’s position as a player in the sports tourism and events industry.

Methodology

The Consultant Team conducted an assessment on the current sports tourism work of SBG and an analysis of the area’s sports venues. The project was led by Huddle Up Group Founder + CEO Jon Schmieder (Phoenix, AZ), Vice President Dean Polk (Martinsburg, WV), and followed a six (6) step process that included:

1. An evaluation of SBG and the destination through the Sports Tourism Index™ (a proprietary benchmarking tool developed by the Huddle Up Group, summarized in Appendix E).
2. An organizational audit on the current sports tourism work of both organizations, including a review of previously conducted relevant research, as well as input from the two (2) in-person meetings, 16 phone interviews, and 39 electronic survey responses from key community stakeholders. Individuals engaged included, among others, staff and board members from both organizations, elected officials, community leaders, venue managers, athletic administrators, event owners, hospitality industry executives, and local sports club leaders.
3. A multiple day market visit (April 28-30, 2023) that consisted of one (1) town hall meeting and a sports tourism facility audit. The audit included tours of 18 existing or planned sports and entertainment sites that totaled more than 42 venues.
4. The creation and delivery of a strategic plan (the “playbook”) for an improved sports tourism program and an enriched venue “tool kit.”
5. An in-person delivery and presentation to members of each organizations’ staff and board, and community stakeholders, outlining the findings and recommendations defined in the playbook.
6. A follow-up conversation with the SBG 30-days following the delivery of the playbook and presentation of the findings to discuss new developments and next steps.

The facilities visited in step three are listed below and in Appendix D. The Appendix includes a current and potential rating for each venue should tourism-focused enhancements be made.

- 23 Club Complex
- Bearcat Stadium - Football
- Bearcat Stadium - Track
- Cleveland Field
- Five Rocks Amphitheater
- Five Rocks Amphitheater & The Grasslands - XC
- Frank Park - Horseshoe Pits
- Gering American Legion Field
- Gering Civic Center
- Gering High School - Arena
- Gering High School - Indoor Courts
- Gering Municipal Pool
- Gering Public Schools - Tennis
- Highway 92
- Landers Soccer Complex
- Mitchell Hanger
- Mitchell Organized Baseball
- Mitchell Trap Club (Shooting Range)
- Monument Marathon Course
- Monument Shadows Golf Course
- Oregon Trail & Dome Rock Diamonds
- Oregon Trail Disc Golf Course
- Oregon Trail Park Soccer Field
- Oregon Trail Park Stadium - Baseball Stadium
- Oregon Trail Pickle Ball Courts
- Platte Valley Motocross
- Riverview Golf Course
- Scotts Bluff Country Club
- Scotts Bluff Country Club - Tennis
- Scotts Bluff County Fairgrounds - Equestrian
- Scotts Bluff County Fairgrounds - Event Center
- Scotts Bluff High School - Courts
- Scottsbluff High School - Tennis
- Scottsbluff High School Gymnasium
- The Carpenter Center - Diamonds
- The Carpenter Center - Flat Fields
- The Carpenter Center - Indoor Courts
- The Carpenter Center Tumbling and Trampoline
- The Carpenter Center - Pickleball
- Westmoor Pool
- Wildcat Hills Shooting Sports Complex
- WNCC Cougar Palace - Courts
- WNCC Cougar Palace Arena

The scope of the project focused on five (5) key areas:

1. Evaluating the current sports tourism efforts of SBG and comparing “Best in Class” sports tourism organizations in similar destinations to offer recommendations for an improved sports marketing and business development strategy.
2. Assessing the current facility inventory in the region and benchmarking those facilities using the Sports Tourism Index™ as a scoring tool.
3. Providing a gap analysis and recommendations for new sports facility developments and existing facility enhancements that would drive the largest ROI to the community through sports tourism.
4. Identifying available organization and venue funding mechanisms, management models, and public/private partnership opportunities.
5. Detailing an economic impact analysis for the top new facility development opportunity recommended by the Consultant Team.

Discussions were held around national best practices in these theme areas and focus was given to applications for SBG. The intent of this process was to create community support for an increased sports tourism and venue development effort in the region by giving local stakeholders a voice and fostering a teamwork mentality throughout the area.

The Consultant Team took the results from the stakeholder interviews, data from the Sports Tourism Index™, and the site visit to the region, then overlaid national best practices from several event rights holders and “Best in Class” sports destinations to develop and deliver the enclosed recommendations. These recommendations are intended to spark a dialog within the community’s leadership hierarchy to build a framework for next steps on an expanded sports tourism marketing effort.

The recommendations presented here are based upon what the Consultant Team believes are three (3) universal truths about SBG’s sports tourism market position:

- There is a desire to grow sports tourism opportunities throughout Scotts Bluff County.
- The area lacks many of the necessary facilities to drive tourism, particularly during the shoulder and off-peak seasons.
- There is some question as to who “owns” sports tourism in the community.

Scotts Bluff / Gering Sports Council
Sports Tourism Strategic Plan + Facility Recommendations
SWOT Analysis

It is the opinion of the Consultant Team that SBG has an opportunity to grow the impact sports tourism has on the community. Through our extensive analysis and our knowledge of the national marketplace, we believe there is an opportunity for SBG to deliver additional overnight stays to the destination through an enhanced sports tourism strategy. This expanded effort will lead to increased economic development and will positively impact the community over time.

In a market the size of Scotts Bluff County, with its numerous positive attributes, it is critical that grassroots sports tourism, as well as special events, continue to serve as economic drivers for the local economy. Keeping these objectives in the forefront while focusing on both an enhanced sports marketing infrastructure, as well as long-term facility development, below is a SWOT analysis on the current position of region as a sports tourism destination. This analysis was derived from a combination of the aforementioned surveys, interviews, site visit, and data collected through the Sports Tourism Index™.

Strengths

1. Community Support – Scotts Bluff County offers event rights holders and visiting teams a hospitable and inviting family-friendly community. The destination is affordable, and though smaller, offers a nice mix of restaurants and attractions. Those interviewed and surveyed repeatedly mentioned that most of the community was generally willing to get behind events and volunteer their time in support.
2. Outdoor Recreation & Attractions – Through both our facility audit and the interview process, it became apparent to the Consultant Team that the region is rich in outdoor recreation potential, particularly with its trail systems. Nicknamed “Landmark Country” the area boasts spectacular attractions like Chimney Rock and Scotts Bluff National Monument along with hundreds of miles of hiking and biking trails through Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area, along the North Platte River and in various parks throughout the surrounding region.
3. Baseball Tradition – There is a rich history of baseball throughout the Scotts Bluff region. Survey respondents cited this tradition as a driving force behind the community’s strong participation rates and sustained competitive success. Despite not being a scholastic sport, the county boasts two highly competitive and active legion programs. Recently, two diamond facilities were built in the county that each have tourism-driving capabilities.

Weaknesses

1. Sports Facilities – With the exception of golf courses, in which the region scored well through the Sports Tourism Index™, it became evident to the Consultant Team that there is a lack of facilities needed to host tourism-driving events in many of the more “traditional” sports. Additionally, of the facilities that are already in place, many need renovations, lack basic amenities, and/or have accessibility issues. This is especially true for indoor, court-focused facilities, in which the Consultant Team did not tour any tournament-friendly venues of this nature during their site visit.

2. **Accessibility & Market Pull** – As with many communities of its size, particularly in the “front range” of the country, Scotts Bluff can be challenging for visitors from outside the region to access. With very few major metropolitan areas within a short drive, the region is limited on the drive market it has to pull from for event participants. Adding to this, the Western Nebraska Regional Airport currently offers only one or two (depending on the day) outbound commercial flights per day and the closest major airport (Denver) is more than three hours away. This lack of airline service will make it challenging for the destination to attract major national tournaments.

3. **Hotel Inventory** – With only about 400-500 “team” or “family-friendly” hotel rooms in the area, Scotts Bluff County lacks the sufficient inventory of hotels needed for hosting larger sports tourism events or multiple events on the same dates. To combat a lack of hotel inventory, SBG and its partners will need to be intentional about the types and timing of events it hosts, spreading them into shoulder seasons and across the calendar year. SBG should lead the charge in making sure all of its event partners are aware and considerate of events in the area that may overlap, and it will need to help those partners realize the benefits (specially, the impact on visitors) of working together to remove/reduce conflicts.

Opportunities

1. **Facility Development** – In today’s sports facility arms race, venues classified as “tournament friendly” and “anchor” are needed to attract top-tier participant focused championships and their related tourism dollars. A “tournament friendly” facility is defined as a venue that has an adequate number of fields/courts/sheets to host local and regional events, however, would need to be cobbled together with additional locations to host larger national level competitions. An “anchor” facility is defined as a venue that has enough fields/courts/sheets on its own to host major regional or national events **all in one location**. In addition to the pure number of fields/courts/sheets, the top anchor facilities in the country also provide key amenities that event rights holders need to host high quality events.

Without added facility options, SBG will be fighting an uphill battle against communities with newer and/or bigger venues (example: soon to open Future Legends in Fort Collins, CO). Below is benchmarking information from a Huddle Up Group survey of over 300 event rights holders, outlining their ideal facility requirements for the most commonly used venues.

Facility Type	Anchor	Tournament Friendly
Flat Fields	Minimum 16 fields	8-15 fields
Pool	50m/8-10 lanes with diving well	25m with diving well
Diamonds	Minimum 12 fields	8-11 fields
Hardwood Courts	Minimum 8 Basketball/ 16 Volleyball	4 Basketball/8 Volleyball
Ice	3+ Sheets Hockey/ 6+ Sheets Curling	2 Sheets Hockey/ 4 Sheets Curling
Tennis	Minimum 12 courts	Minimum 6 courts
Pickleball	40-60 Courts (National)	8-16 Courts (Local) 24-32 Courts (Regional)
Indoor Track	200 meter/6 lanes/banked	200 meter/6 lanes

The following is a list of a few of the top performing sports tourism driving facilities in the country which meet the “tournament friendly” or “anchor” facility benchmarks described above. Many of which do, or will, directly compete with SBG.

National Best in Class: Aurora Sports Park (Aurora, CO), Champions Center (Appleton, WI), Crossplex (Birmingham, AL), Dick’s Sporting Goods Park (Commerce City, CO), ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex (Lake Buena Vista, FL), Grand Park (Westfield, IN), Great Park (Irvine, CA), Hoover Met Complex (Hoover, AL), LakePoint Sports Complex (Cartersville, GA), Myrtle Beach Sports Center (Myrtle Beach, SC), National Sports Center (Blaine, MN), Spire Institute (Geneva, OH), Spooky Nook Sports Complex (Manheim, PA), Rocky Mount Events Center (Rocky Mount, NC), Virginia Beach Sports Center (Virginia Beach, VA).

Finally, if the vision of a new tourism driving facility can be realized, it should not be lost that the region’s youth will also have better places to participate in sports throughout the year. Hosting more practices and tournaments in the area will keep local dollars in the community rather than exporting them to bordering counties and states. As such, any new facility would likely help local clubs, and their participating families, save thousands of dollars a year that they currently spend on travel (and venue rentals) to/from facilities in neighboring communities.

2. Regional Sports Commission – As there are currently multiple organizations and jurisdictions within the county who all act independently to promote the area as a destination for sports tourism, the region as a whole would likely benefit from one organization stepping up to take the lead. This singular organization would be able to provide a unified agenda and avoid the possible confusion, redundancy, and conflicting agendas that can come from the individual municipalities across the county all having their own tourism organizations, goals, procedures, and budgets. This regional approach may also provide opportunities for events at facilities outside of the jurisdiction of any current tourism organization.
3. Created Events – As the new regional sports commission becomes more established, additional opportunities to drive room nights and increase economic impact for the Scotts Bluff County region likely exist by cultivating locally owned and operated sports and special events. By working with local clubs and promoters, SBG can build long-term partnerships that drive business to the area year over year without the threat of being moved to another destinations. These created (or locally “incubated”) events not only allow the promoter to take advantage of the profits from a successful event, but control where they fall on the calendar, making them especially useful for destinations with limited hotel capacity. However, as owning and operating an event can be a massive undertaking and will likely require additional staff SBG won’t immediately have at its disposal, it is crucial that the new organization make empowering its local promoters and clubs a main priority. This is often done through grants, volunteer support, marketing assistance and other value-in-kind donations.

Threats

1. Community Infighting – During the survey and interview process the phrase “the river is a lot deeper and wider than it actually is” was mentioned by multiple survey and interview respondents. This divide is often common in communities who see themselves as competing for resources and tax dollars. What isn’t as common is that in this instance, it is more of the community residents in disagreement and not necessarily the local governments, who seem to be, or are at least starting, to play well together. This “individualist” attitude has led to frustration among many of the key stakeholders within the communities. Whether as a result or a cause, many of those groups have started their own projects without consideration for what is best for the region or who may already be doing something similar.
2. Lack of Regional Sports Tourism Master Plan – As a continuation from the community infighting described above, and with many of the various parks departments, towns, schools, private organizations, and club programs all having their objectives and plans, there is currently no sports tourism master plan in place for the Scotts Bluff County region. The lack of a regional marketing and facility master plan could lead to contradictory marketing strategies and campaigns, overlapping event schedules, as well as the development of redundant facilities, programming, and projects if the various entities are not communicating with one another. The regional sports commission described in the previous opportunities would be an ideal entity to lead the sports tourism master planning charge.
3. Funding & Facility Investment – With limited funds coming from current lodging tax revenues, and no other sustainable funding sources currently in place, both tourism organizations currently in the county are behind the competition in terms of funding for basic tourism marketing and sales efforts. Further, their ability to support local sports facility development or enhancement projects is severely limited.

While the community has been supportive of events in the past, they have also shown a hesitancy to approving any incremental tax adjustments that may support facility development. This was shown by the recent pool project that was not passed. Moving forward, it is crucial that SBG take an active role in ensuring the area’s elected officials, and all those in the community, are aware of the value of sports tourism and the loss (in economic impact and tourism dollars) that could occur if investments aren’t made in facility infrastructure, especially tournament friendly and/or anchor facilities oriented towards youth sports.

Scotts Bluff / Gering Sports Council
Sports Tourism Strategic Plan + Facility Recommendations
Competitive Set Analysis

As part of the analysis, the Consultant Team utilized the Sports Tourism Index™ to evaluate SBG’s current position within the sports tourism marketplace, benchmark the organization against its competitors, and provide a baseline to measure future growth. As the sole proprietor of this platform, the Consultants have exclusive use of the trademarked tool to determine the destination’s strengths, competitive set, and areas of opportunity. This analysis produced a score and ranking based on the organization’s answers to questions addressing four major “buckets” or theme areas. The questions and scoring method were derived from responses by leading event rights holders across the country when asked for their most important criteria in placing events in a particular destination. Benchmarking and rankings are generated from responses by nearly 350 destinations and more than 5,500 facilities across the country. The four buckets, each with a maximum score of 25, are represented as follows:



Bucket	SBG*	Overall Average	Midwest Average	Under 500k Average
Facilities	9.86**	9.62	9.56	9.07
Destination Strength	5.30	11.94	11.34	10.86
Organization Structure	11.76	12.15	12.56	11.66
Events	5.90	8.14	8.29	7.92
Overall	32.82	39.80	40.57	37.18

Each bucket has a maximum score of 25, for a total of 100 points overall.

*SBG’s survey data was entered as one combined organization for the entire county.

**SBG’s facility score mostly driven by multiple high-scoring golf courses.

For a further breakdown of SBG’s scores, and their meaning, refer to Appendix E.

Using the scores generated by the Sports Tourism Index™, the Consultant Team was able generate a competitive set of destinations within the sports tourism market. Below is a list of organizations with similar scores to SBG.

- **Overall:** Athens CVB (GA), City of Victoria (TX), Ocala/Marion CVB (FL), Visalia CVB (CA), Visit Cape (MO), Visit Tri-Valley (CA)
- **Facilities:** Abilene CVB (TX), Boyd County Tourism (KY), Greater Grand Junction Sports Commission (CO), North Platte Area Sports Commission, Visit Casper (WY), Visit Salina (KS)
- **Destination Strength:** City of Great Bend (KS), North Platte Area Sports Commission, Pleasant Prairie CVB (WI), Visit Beloit (WI), Visit Casper, Visit Sebring (FL)
- **Organization Structure:** Dalton CVB (GA), Discover Peoria (IL), Ocala/Marion CVB, ShelbyKY Tourism (KY), Visit El Paso (TX), Visit Baton Rouge (LA), Visit Macon (GA)
- **Events:** Campbell County CVB (WY), City of Lynchburg (VA), Joplin Sports Authority (MO), Ocala/Marion CVB, Visit Champaign County (IL), Visit Fort Dodge (KS)

Finally, As SBG begins to undertake the steps outlined in the recommendations in the following sections, there are several high-performing sports tourism organizations, similar in size to the Scotts Bluff County area and/or makeup to the proposed SBG structure, which should be looked at for best-in-class examples. These include, but are not limited to (in alphabetical order):

- Campbell County CVB (Gillette, WY)
- Dodge City Sports Commission (Dodge City, KS)
- Elizabethtown Tourism (Elizabethtown, KY)
- North Platte Area Sports Commission (NE)
- Visit Sebring (FL)

Scotts Bluff / Gering Sports Council
Sports Tourism Strategic Plan + Facility Recommendations
Primary Recommendations

The enclosed primary recommendations include three (3) opportunities for an enhanced sports tourism marketing program. While the scope of work for this project also had a focus on facility development opportunities, it is likely that an enhancement to the sports tourism marketing program would deliver returns much earlier than the development of an entirely new venue. The recommendations are listed on the following pages along with more detail for each concept.

Primary Recommendations – Organizational Strategies (Shorter Term)

1. Define & Launch a Regional Sports Commission – As stated throughout this playbook, there is some confusion and uncertainty in the community as to which organization in the county “owns” sports tourism. This uncertainty leads to mixed messaging, redundant use of resources, and often an overall lack of action within the region. Though this is not completely uncommon in markets where multiple DMOs/CVBs coexist, the Scotts Bluff region would be best served by creating one entity to advance the sports tourism and development charge.

Beyond the clarity and unified approach that would come from having one organization lead the sports efforts for the entire region, those communities that haven’t played an active role in sports in the past would now also likely have a seat at the table. Furthermore, sport event organizers who are looking to bring their events to the destination prefer to work with experienced sports professionals who can help support their events. Organizations that lead solely with a “heads in beds” mentality are often bypassed during the selection process by these rights holders in favor of working with more event friendly sports-minded organizations. Another benefit of establishing a designated sports “commission” or “council.” Finally, if formed as a stand-alone entity, a sports commission also has more flexibility to focus on the development of all sports opportunities in the region, not just those opportunities that drive tourism.

By taking a regional approach and putting in place the items discussed below, the new sports tourism strategy should have its own separate and complementary brands from that of the current tourism-focused organizations in the county. National best practices for naming sports commissions point towards using a known destination point or a regional area. Examples of this would be Durham Sports Commission (a known destination nationally) or West Michigan Sports Commission (using a region where the actual city location may not be well known). Whatever name is used, it is recommended to have a sports specific logo developed that is modern and simple to identify.

As this new entity comes about, it is important to keep in mind that the highest performing destinations that have both a DMO/CVB and a sports commission in their market, have a clear plan and well-defined roles for all organizations to support one another (examples: Louisville, Kansas City, Omaha, Richmond, Spokane). Identifying specific roles for each organization will be vital to ensuring intentional and complimentary efforts across all key functions: business development, destination marketing, funding and fundraising, event execution, community engagement, marketing, public relations, etc. Specifically, defining what each organization’s core competency is, and what role each plays, will help avoid redundancies and alleviate confusion in the marketplace.

For this new effort to be successful in the highly competitive sports tourism industry, the new sports council must now focus its attention on the following tasks:

- a. Determine Organization Structure – Most sports tourism organizations fall into one of four (4) structure types:
 - Blended – The sports effort is inside of a DMO. In this case the DMO funds the entirety of the sports marketing program and controls all the efforts of the organization.
 - Stand-alone – A wholly separate entity from the DMO, funded independently through a myriad of sources such as donations, owned events/programs, sponsorships, and fundraisers.
 - Dotted line – These organizations appear on the surface to be standalone entities; however, they are heavily governed by the local DMO. In this structure the DMO usually provides a large portion of the sports organization’s budget and/or staffing. Dotted line sports commissions can operate somewhat autonomously, however the DMO, and its mission, are usually heavily tied to the organization’s success metrics.
 - Government – Based inside of a government agency such as a city or county. The main drawback to this model is lack of flexibility as governmental oversight, policies, and protocols can slow down the sports organization, especially when there is need for a swift response between the sports commission and an event owner.

It is the recommendation of the Consultant that the new sports council brand be established as a “blended” organization within one of the current organizations, while also forming a sports specific advisory group following the guidelines outlined below. In the future, the organization could evolve into a stand-alone entity.

- b. Develop Mission Statement, Objectives, and Goals – An effective organization knows what success looks like in the near and long-term. The new sports council will need to develop a unified message that outlines the organization’s mission, objectives, and goals. When developing this messaging document, the new sports commission should consider the following best practices:
 - The best mission statements are simple and to the point.
 - The objectives that support the mission statement should be few in number and represent the key “pillars” of the organization.
 - There should be both short-term and long-term goals.
 - Key stakeholders should be able to remember and reiterate the organization’s mission and objectives.

Examples of mission statements, objectives, and goals can be found below.

Mission – The Sports Council enhances our community through sport (and we do so in three ways).

Objectives (or pillars)

- Bidding and hosting regional and national events.
- Recognizing sports achievement through our sports hall of fame.
- Support youth and amateur sports programs in our community.

Goals (Short Term)

- Drive \$10 million of economic impact to the destination annually through hosting events.
- Execute the annual hall of fame recognition event with a positive financial return.
- Provide access to sports camps for 100 underserved youth in our community each year.

Goals (Long Term)

- Drive \$20 million of economic impact to the destination annually through hosting events.
- Develop a permanent home for the hall of fame.
- Work with community partners to develop a pipeline for at risk youth to access sports programs throughout their entire childhood and teen years.

c. Board of Directors and/or Advisory Board – The new sports council will need to develop relationships with community stakeholders. This is often accomplished with the help of a strong board. The ultimate goal of any organization is to build a board that is held in the highest regard in the community that it serves. The highest performing sports organizations in the country have created such a strong board that very few moves are made in the community without their consult, sports or otherwise. The end goal is to create an environment where the biggest decisions in the community happen at the sports council's board room table. To achieve this, the following attributes should be considered when building out the new sports commission board:

- The board makeup should provide an environment for community leaders that touch sports tourism, events, economic development, and the business community to connect in one meaningful and intentional place.
- The board should consist of 7-10 members.
- Board members should be decision makers for their respective organizations.

- It is common that there is some form of an annual financial commitment from each board member.
 - The board should be diverse in several areas, including, but not limited to the following: race, sex, age, skill sets, industry, background, and political connectivity.
 - Board terms are normally for three years with the option to renew for a second tenure before terming out.
 - Board members should serve on at least one committee.
 - A sample of the board members could include representation from the following entities: SBACVB Board, GCVB Board, County, City of Gering, City of Scottsbluff, college athletics director, sports club president, and at large corporate leaders (2-3).
- d. Secure a Sustainable Funding Source – The new sports council will need to have a diverse and sustainable funding model in order to be successful over time. Best practices for sustainable funding would include the following:
- Basic funding from the current DMOs/CVBs to cover staffing, office space, marketing, and travel.
 - Contributions from the members of the organization, such as the Board of Directors outlined above.
 - Receive a portion of an increased food & beverage tax, sales tax, or lodging tax.
 - Implementation of a TID or similar assessment.

Specifically, TIDs, which have become increasingly popular in recent years, are a customizable assessment on select businesses within the tourism industry. To enact a TID, state enabling legislation is required before one can be implemented at a local level. Once enacted locally, these funds are led and controlled by the district's businesses. One advantage to TIDs is that their funds cannot be used for projects that are not specifically defined within the terms of the TID. Thus, these funds are protected from mission creep or political pressure to use the money for other projects that don't align with the goals of the TID.

With funding in place, SBG can use the expanded budget on adding staff count, increased marketing initiatives, incentive funds to attract new events to the community, to support facility enhancement (upgrading current venues), and/or development (creating new venues). Several of these national best practices for funding sustainable facility development programs are described later in this report.

- e. Dedicated Sports Staff – The new sports council must add headcount dedicated to supporting its sports tourism mission. According to data from the Sports Tourism Index™, 83% of destinations on the platform have at least one staff member solely dedicated to the sports tourism market (n=348 CVBs and sports commissions). With one intentionally dedicated staff member, the primary responsibilities of this position should include:

- Business development/sales.
- Serving as the “connective tissue” with community stakeholders (externally facing).
- Servicing events as they are held in the destination.

The sports market is much different than many of the other markets a CVB or DMO will sell its community to. As such, sports and events rights holders within the industry want to know they are working with someone who understands their needs and is not simply looking to fill a “heads in beds” quota. The highest performing sports tourism organizations in the industry spend considerable time and resources supporting their event partners before, during, and after their events take place. The Consultant Team calls the active support to the rights holder by the host destination “wearing backpacks.” Sports commissions and CVBs/DMOs that can put on the “backpacks” and help the event organizer outside the field of play, free up that event owner to focus entirely on the proper execution of their event. This added level of support leads to a higher renewal rate between the event owner and those “backpack” destinations, which sustains sports tourism business year over year and allows the destination to be more selective when trying to fill out their annual event calendar.

As additional dedicated sports positions are added in the future, it is most common that one staffer serves as the main business development arm and the other provides support services. These additional positions are usually at the manager or coordinator level, and their hiring allows the sports commission’s executive director to focus on high-level, long-term objectives such as funding, stakeholder engagement, and facility development. Data from the Sports Tourism Index™ shows that 72% of the DMOs/sports commissions on the platform have a dedicated business development person and 54% have staff dedicated to servicing events.

2. External Focus/Community Alignment – While there are many municipalities and organizations in the region who have a hand in sports and tourism, executing the recommendations in this report will take an intentional effort from the SBG team to be externally focused with community stakeholders. The Consultant Team calls this role serving as the “connective tissue.” This strategy requires an ongoing and consistent outreach program to the area’s venue owners, clubs, high schools, colleges, elected officials, hospitality, and community leaders. By focusing more time on the larger regional conversation relating to sports tourism, SBG can connect the dots between various community partners and uncover more collaboration opportunities in the future. A few best-in-class strategies the Consultant Team recommends the new council take include:
 - a. “Four Touch Rule” – Deliberate tracking of four individual meetings or conversations per year with each community stakeholder by a member of the SBG staff. This is a useful tool for keeping relationships strong and opening lines of communication for purposes of relationship building and awareness, and not simply for “favors” or “asks.”

- b. Value Proposition – Create an education campaign to roll out both internally and externally to support awareness and promotion of SBG’s efforts. This quarterly road show would be presented in a 60-minute workshop format. SBG staff would present on the value of sports tourism to the region and the opportunities available in the sports and events marketplace. Presentations should be made to a widespread number of the leading community groups (examples: elected officials, chamber leadership, civic clubs, high school and collegiate athletic directors, hoteliers, restaurant association, sports venue managers, youth sports clubs, event owners, etc.). It is important to reiterate that the SBG staff utilize outside supporters (examples: CVB/DMO Boards and staff, their own board members, and event rights holders when in town) as partners in these meetings to give these presentations third party validation.
 - c. Corporate/Hospitality “Forums” – Where the education campaign noted above is aimed at community groups, SBG staff should also develop a program to educate and engage the corporate and foundation communities throughout the region. The Consultants recommend the creation of a quarterly or bi-annual “6&6 Lunch.” These lunches employ six existing stakeholders (examples: SBG board, sports advisory group members) to each invite one guest from the business community who has limited knowledge of SBG and sports tourism (six stakeholders, six guests, = “6&6”). Each luncheon should serve as an informative event on the work of SBG in the industry, the importance of sports tourism, and the opportunities for partnership involvement.
 - d. Trumpet Successes – In all cases where SBG engages in the production of an event, the organization should make it a priority to promote the community impact of that event. This promotion should be sent out via traditional and social media outlets, to both media and non-media audiences. The information should include economic impact data and successes for the region. It is important that SBG avoid the perception of taking complete credit for the event, and that the event rights holder/local promoter be included in the promotion process throughout. Further, any ROI should be calculated on the tourism spending for every marketing dollar spent by SBG. Any form of an economic impact analysis on the value of sports tourism would also be helpful in this area.
3. Technology Use – For both new organizations and destinations with limited staffing and resources, it is vital to take advantage of tools that provide efficient and cost-effective benefits. Likewise, when the traditional trade show marketing opportunities that many CVBs and sports commissions use to network and drive business to their communities aren’t viable, the use of an online event matchmaking tool, such as the Sports Tourism Index™ and Scout platform can serve as a cost-efficient resource to identify new business that could be held in Scotts Bluff County.

Beyond using this tool for business development purposes, the Sports Tourism Index™ and Scout platform also features an Estimated Spending Calculator. Using this tool, or other similar economic impact calculators, can be a great resource and a crucial step in spreading the word about the value tourism-driving sports and events, and thus, SBG as an entity can bring to the community. (See “External Focus – D” above.)

Scotts Bluff / Gering Sports Council
Sports Tourism Strategic Plan + Facility Recommendations
Secondary Recommendations

Below are three (3) secondary recommendations that focus on opportunities for an improved sports tourism facility “tool kit.” The development and enhancement recommendations outlined below are listed in order based on what the sports tourism and community impact is likely to be for the region should each of these recommendations come to fruition.

Secondary Recommendations – Facility “Tool Kit” Opportunities (Longer Term)

1. Develop a Regional Sports Tourism Facility Master Plan – As mentioned previously, it is the understanding of the Consultant Team that many of the stakeholders in the area (the various schools, municipalities, sports clubs, etc.) have previously completed or are currently developing their own facility master plans. However, there is currently no unified game plan for future facility development and/or enhancement for the entire destination. Pulling together the wants and needs of all area stakeholders to eliminate any redundancies in the future would be a valuable exercise for the region. The new sports council is the perfect entity to lead such a project and to generate community-wide momentum relating to placemaking through sports. This process would also likely lead to better regional alignment and participation from the various partners that may not be engaged today. It is the belief of the Consultant Team that this should be the first process undertaken before any additional facility development projects are begun. The Rochester Sports Foundation (Rochester, MN) and Springfield Sports Commission (Springfield, MO) are two organizations who have begun this process and may be able to provide a template and roadmap to success.
2. New Indoor Multipurpose Venue – The existing indoor, multipurpose and court-sport focused facilities in the region are limited, lack the number of courts that event owners demand, and have local user groups that often control the event calendar and limit availability. During the venue audit, the Consultant Team did not visit any “tournament friendly” or “anchor” indoor hardwood court venues. When asked about the facility most needed in the community, the most common answers among stakeholders were swimming pool, indoor multipurpose hardwood courts that could host basketball, volleyball, and pickleball among other sports, and indoor turf.

In the experience of the Consultant Team, one of the biggest trends nationwide among municipalities is the attempt to remove swimming pools from organizational balance sheets due to high operational costs. Additionally, as a sports tourism exercise, one stand-alone indoor turf field does not serve as a tournament-driving facility. However, given the national experience of the Consultant Team, and its knowledge of the current landscape in the sports tourism industry, the Consultant Team believes adding a “tournament friendly” indoor court facility to the current venue mix would provide a strong ROI to the region.

Using the Sports Tourism Index™ as a benchmarking tool, the chart on the following page summarizes the key characteristics possessed by the top indoor hardwood court sports facilities in the country. Note that in the “Difference” column the darker the color of green, the larger the gap between the top 10 facilities and the average venues.

Indoor Courts = 445 scored by the Sports Tourism Index™

	AVERAGES		
	Top 10	Overall	Difference
# Basketball Courts	16	3	13
# Volleyball Courts	27	5	22
Court Surface (Hardwood)	70%	77%	-7%
Scoreboard	90%	82%	8%
Scorers' Table	100%	90%	10%
Team Benches	60%	53%	7%
PA System	60%	58%	2%
Locker Rooms	70%	72%	-2%
Permanent concession stand(s)	100%	75%	25%
Permanent restrooms	100%	99%	1%
Permanent Wi-Fi	100%	89%	11%
Parking	100%	98%	2%
ADA Compliant	100%	99%	1%
Auxiliary meeting rooms	9	3	6
Ability to book (Definitely yes)	80%	48%	32%
Score	4.10	2.81	1.30

National Best in Class: American Sports Center (Anaheim, CA), Bell Bank Park (Mesa, AZ), Community First Champions Center (Grand Chute, WI), Hoover Met Complex (Hoover, AL), LakePoint Champions Center (Atlanta, GA), Myrtle Beach Sports Center (Myrtle Beach, SC), Omaha Sports Academy (Omaha, NE), Rock Hill Sports Complex (Rock Hill, NC), Rocky Mount Events Center (Rocky Mount, NC), Virginia Beach Sports Center (Virginia Beach, VA)

The data presented here would indicate that it would benefit the region by developing a tourism-focused facility that could serve the community and host state and regional tournaments. This new venue would provide the area with a tournament-ready facility that it doesn't currently have in its inventory. Add to this, SBG's ability to secure regional events and the multitude of local partnerships that are available, the key elements are in place to support the buildout of a new facility. If built, a new indoor court focused facility in the region should have (at a minimum) the following elements:

- 4-6 basketball court facility that could convert to 8-12 volleyball courts.
- A flexible championship court that could accommodate at least 1,000 spectators and the ability to expand total seating for larger championship events.
- Scoreboards, shot clocks, benches, and a press table dedicated to each court.
- Locker rooms and ancillary meeting space for tournament operators and officials.
- Permanent restrooms, concessions, PA system, and Wi-Fi throughout the facility.
- Parking that meets industry standards (at least 3.5 permanent spaces per 1,000 square feet).
- A common area to accommodate athletes and spectators.
- ADA compliant.
- Ability for SBG to book the facility for tourism driving events ("Favored Nation Status").

As part of the scope of work for this project, the Consultant Team was tasked with creating a top-line impact analysis of what the number one recommended venue development opportunity could generate for the community. Should SBG and its partners find a pathway to develop a new 4-court multi-sport indoor venue, the facility would be able to host sizable events throughout the year in various sports. This would be especially true during shoulder and off-peak tourism seasons. Using local tax rates and a conservative 25% capture rate for proven events that could fill the facility’s calendar, the Consultant Team believes the following new economic activity could reasonably be realized over a calendar year*:

- 12 new state, regional, and national tournaments.
- More than 14,000 total attendees relating to tournaments/competitions.
- Nearly \$2.2 million in direct visitor spending.
- Over 6,000 hotel room nights.
- Hotel Lodging Taxes generating over \$33,000.
- Sales Tax collections of approximately \$165,000.
- Occupation Tax collections of over \$33,000.
- Total sports tourism related taxes of more than \$231,000.

*Notes: The detailed impact analysis can be found under different cover.

During this process the Consultant Team was made aware of a recently defeated attempt to increase the sales tax in the area to fund the construction of a new swimming pool. Should community members and local leaders continue to explore this pathway, and potentially wish to include this venue type in a new indoor multipurpose venue, the Consultant Team has included an analysis of common attributes found among the top tourism-driving aquatic facilities in the country.

Aquatic Centers = 177 scored by the Sports Tourism Index™

	AVERAGES		
	Top 10	Overall	Difference
Deck Space	13	10	3
Pool – Depth	10	11	-1
1m – Diving	3	1	1
3m – Diving	2	1	1
5m – Diving	1	0	0
7.5m – Diving	1	0	0
10m – Diving	1	0	0
Auxiliary meeting rooms	3	2	1
Diving Well	90%	30%	60%
Hot Tub	70%	26%	44%
Starting Blocks	100%	92%	8%
Permanent restrooms	100%	99%	1%
Permanent Wi-Fi	100%	85%	15%
Parking	90%	96%	-6%
ADA Compliant	100%	96%	4%
Ability to book (Definitely yes)	100%	54%	46%
Score	3.82	2.69	1.13

3. Enhancement of Outdoor Sports Facilities – The Consultant Team believes that additional opportunities to provide a strong ROI to the community exists through the upgrading and expansion of a few already constructed outdoor facilities to meet the “tournament friendly” or “anchor” facility benchmarks.

- a. Landers Soccer Complex: As a 6-8 flat field facility with quality grass playing surfaces, Landers provides the region with an already established facility that has a very real tourism-driving potential with the addition of basic amenities and ability for SBG to book the facility for tournaments and events.

Using the Sports Tourism Index™ as a benchmarking tool, the chart on the following page summarizes the key characteristics possessed by the top flat field facilities in the country. Note that in the “Difference” column highlights the gap between a Top 10 facility and Landers Soccer Complex.

Flat Fields = 692 scored by the Sport Tourism Index™

	AVERAGES		Landers	Difference
	Top 10	Overall		
Full-sized soccer fields	20	5	8	-12
Fields with lights	15	3	0	-15
Artificial turf fields	6	1	0	-6
Fields with portable goals	22	5	8	-14
Auxiliary meeting rooms	3	1	0	-3
Minimum of two team benches per field	100%	78%	No	X
Stadium field	80%	34%	No	X
Permanent concession stand(s)	100%	66%	Yes	
Permanent restrooms	100%	70%	No	X
Permanent Wi-Fi	90%	26%	No	X
Adequate Parking (60 spaces per field)	100%	90%	Yes	
ADA Compliant	100%	91%	Yes	
Ability to book (Definitely yes)	80%	44%	No	X
Score	4.11	2.32	1.30	-2.81

National Best in Class: Bell Bank Park (Mesa, AZ), Burns Soccer Complex (Little Rock, AR), ESPN Wide World of Sports (Lake Buena Vista, FL), Great Park (Irvine, CA), Kino Sports Complex (Tucson, AZ), Lake County Soccer Complex (Springfield, MO), Mercy Health Sportscore Two (Rockford, IL), Merrimack Sports Complex (Huntsville, AL), Mike Rose Soccer Complex (Memphis, TN), Moore Park (Lafayette, LA), Philip A. Bolen Memorial Park (Leesburg, VA), Reach 11 (Phoenix, AZ), Round Rock Multipurpose Complex (Round Rock, TX)

Citing the data presented above and the benchmarking chart provided earlier in this report, the addition of basic amenities would provide the area with a “tournament-ready” flat field facility that would be among the best in the region. At a minimum these should include:

- At least eight (8) full-size, lighted, flat fields.*
- A “stadium” field with locker rooms and seating that could accommodate at least 1,000 spectators with the ability to expand total seating for larger events.
- Portable goals, scoreboards, team benches, PA systems, and a scorer’s table dedicated to each field.
- Added playing space around grass fields to allow for moving fields 5-10 yards in any direction to help reduce wear on playing surfaces.
- Ancillary meeting space for tournament operators and officials.
- Permanent restrooms, concession stands, and Wi-Fi throughout the facility.
- Parking that meets industry standards (at least 60 permanent spaces per field).
- A common area to accommodate athletes and spectators.
- ADA compliant.
- Ability for SBG to book the facility for tourism driving events (“Favored Nation Status”).

* Industry best practices recommend turf for at least 25% of all fields at a site. Turf fields not only allow for greater use but provide options during weather delays. In a climate like Scotts Bluff’s, turf can also substantially extend the playing season of a facility, which can provide a significant economic boost during a destination’s shoulder seasons. According to the Sports Venue Calculator Group, who specialize in sports venue construction and maintenance costs, the average turf field is available for 2,800 hours of use per year compared to an average grass field utilization time of 800 hours per year.

- b. Diamond Facilities – Two new diamond facilities exist in Scotts Bluff County that are among the best in the region. While both these facilities currently host a few tourism-driving tournaments each year, both also fall short of national standards in terms of pure field counts.

Particularly, Dome Rock Diamonds at Oregon Trail Park, with its quality, access to nearby “stadium” fields, and room for expansion, stood out to the Consultant Team for its potential to be developed into a true “tourism-friendly” or possible “anchor” venue capable of hosting state, regional and select national-level tournaments.

By again using the Sports Tourism Index™ as a benchmarking tool, the chart on the following page summarizes the key characteristics possessed by the top diamond facilities in the country. Note that in the “Difference” column highlights the gap between a Top 10 facility and the Oregon Trial Park/Dome Rock Diamonds Complex.

Diamonds = 879 scored by the Sports Tourism Index™

	AVERAGES		Dome Rock	Difference
	Top 10	Overall		
Fields	17	5	7	-10
Fields with lights	15	4	7	-8
Artificial turf fields	9	1	0	-9
Auxiliary meeting rooms	4	1	2	-2
Covered dugouts	80%	76%	Yes	
Stadium field	50%	28%	Yes	
Permanent concession stand(s)	100%	76%	Yes	
Permanent restrooms	100%	98%	Yes	
Permanent Wi-Fi	70%	39%	Yes	
Adequate Parking (60 spaces per field)	100%	97%	Yes	
ADA Compliant	100%	98%	Yes	
Ability to book (Definitely yes)	90%	55%	Yes	
Score	3.92	2.29	2.85	-1.07

National Best in Class: Champion Fields at Old Settlers Park (Round Rock, TX), Hoover Met Complex (Birmingham, AL), Grand Park Sports Complex (Westfield, IN), ESPN Wide World of Sports (Lake Buena Vista, FL), North Softball Complex (Fargo, ND), Gulfport Sportsplex (Gulfport, MS), Louisville Slugger Sports Complex (Peoria, IL), Ballpark of the Palm Beaches (West Palm Beach, FL), Champions Park (Gainesville, FL), Bentley Park Sports Complex (Tulsa, OK), mTrade Park (Oxford, MS), USSSA Space Coast Complex (Melbourne, FL)

Once again, the data presented here indicates that it would benefit the region to develop a tourism-focused facility that could host state, regional, and some select national level tournaments. Beyond a pure field count, to become a valued asset for tournament organizers, the facility would need to include the amenities listed below:

- 8-12 full-size (300+' fences), baseball/softball diamonds with lights.*
- Adequate, preferably covered, bleacher seating at each field.
- Covered dugouts, scoreboards, PA systems, and a press box dedicated to each field.
- Ancillary meeting space for tournament operators, umpires, athletic trainers.
- Permanent restrooms, concession stands, and Wi-Fi throughout the facility.
- Parking that meets industry standards (at least 60 permanent spaces per field).
- A common area to accommodate athletes and spectators.
- ADA compliant.
- Industry best practices recommend turf for at least 25% of all fields at a site.**
- Ability for SBG to book the facility for tourism driving events (“Favored Nation Status”).

- c. Open Spaces – The recent pandemic has spurred an upward trend in participation rates for many outdoor recreation and “silent” sports such as hiking, biking, geocaching, kayaking, fishing, and paddleboarding. All of these activities, and many others, now have tourism-driving championships and events designed around these mostly naturally occurring facilities. With Scotts Bluff County and the surrounding areas significant open spaces, there are numerous opportunities to develop competition friendly venues that would also provide a boost to the leisure traveler.

To capitalize on these opportunities, SBG will need to take an active role in collaborating with key stakeholders (example: state and national parks services, events rights holders, local clubs) to develop the facilities necessary to host events championship-caliber events.

The Consultant Team recommends that an evaluation be done of the existing parks and trail systems to see what enhancements would drive more competition to the area while providing the leisure traveler with the needed amenities. Bentonville, Arkansas’s bike trail system, and more recently a master plan in Birmingham, Alabama, offer a roadmap to how this could be carried out.

Scotts Bluff / Gering Sports Council
Sports Tourism Strategic Plan + Facility Recommendations
Typical Funding Models

As mentioned in Primary Recommendation 4.1.d, in order to enrich the destination as a desirable sports tourism market, SBG and its partners need to identify a sustainable funding source to enhance, develop, and maintain tourism driving assets. Numerous markets across the country have implemented a dedicated tourism-based revenue source (a tax) to enhance their sports marketing programs and sports facilities. These revenue streams most often come in the form of a hotel occupancy tax, TID, or a food and beverage tax that is dedicated to the singular purpose of increasing overnight stays through hosting sporting events. A sample list of destinations that have gone down these funding pathways can be found in Appendix C. Should such a tax or another funding source be identified, the Consultant Team has outlined below how such a funding model could work for SBG and its sports tourism program:

- Sports Development Fund – Identifying a dedicated funding source to enrich the region’s sports program and venue inventory is critical for SBG and its partners to grow the community’s sports tourism impact into the future. The national best practice for the activation of these newly identified funds would be to use them as a catalyst for a “challenge grant” style program. That is, there would be a formal grant request process for SBG’s partners to apply for funds in a dollar-for-dollar match on capital projects that would drive overnight stays to the area. For every dollar the partner invests, they would be eligible for a dollar from SBG’s sports development fund. Employing this type of matching program ensures that all parties have a personal stake in the positive outcome of each project, and that SBG’s investments are well protected. In addition, effective use of these funds to drive more overnight stays would subsequently increase the impact of tax collections by these additional visitors. Ideally, SBG should tie all grants to the concept of “Favored Nation Status” noted earlier in this report.
- As a major point of note, numerous cities are increasing their bed tax rate, using a food and beverage tax, and/or TIDs to put towards the funding of construction and/or operation of new and enhanced sports facilities. In nearly all these cases, the taxes generated to enhance/build these facilities are used to drive incremental overnight stays for the destination. As an example, not necessarily a recommendation, the most common funding mechanisms the Consultant Team has seen implemented nationally include (in order):
 - Tourism Improvement Districts (TIDs)
 - Hotel/bed taxes
 - Prepared food (restaurant) taxes
 - Sales taxes
- Beyond these traditional funding mechanisms, the municipalities and many of the area’s corporate leaders have a vested interest in the sports market and how it can positively impact the area’s youth. A discussion with the area’s leaders should be had around what resources could be brought to the table for new sports facility and local program development.

Scotts Bluff / Gering Sports Council
Sports Tourism Strategic Plan + Facility Recommendations
Conclusion

For the region to be relevant in this market, SBG and its sports tourism stakeholders must continue to build bridges with key players locally and pave the way for facility enhancement over the long term.

The addition of an improved sports tourism infrastructure and marketing strategy and the execution of the enclosed recommendations will empower SBG and local event operators to create home-grown participant driven events, develop new event and venue products, and host more bid-in regional/national championships. To achieve these lofty aspirations, SBG has a heavy lift ahead, but by forging this path, the destination will be better positioned regionally as a strong player in the sports tourism industry while also providing better opportunities for local youth through sports.

To raise the bar in the region, and to positively impact the community, SBG's leadership should focus its efforts on three (3) overarching objectives:

1. Create a culture of sports and events development. Develop human capital (staff). Develop relationships (local stakeholders and regional/national event owners). Develop a vehicle to push the tourism agenda through sports (funding). And, finally, develop physical products (venues).
2. Partner with local promoters to build created events that will call the area home long into the future and that will not be subject to an RFP process with SBG's competitors. There is a major trend in the industry around the created events concept, inclusive of a focus on the regional drive market. This is an area that SBG should work on with its local event owners and venue managers to evolve in the future.
3. Make the improvement of the destination's venue "tool kit" a priority by adding new venue assets and enhancing the existing assets where necessary. The top multi-sport facilities in the country have spurred private investment in and around them, which is something that needs to be top of mind for regional leadership throughout this process.

As with any new project, there are numerous variables that need to be considered when evaluating the ROI and risk in developing new sports facilities. In the experience of the Consultant Team, destinations who consider the overall impact on their community and its citizens will have more success, and see a higher level of collaboration, than those that measure purely by room nights or bed tax collections. This community-wide effort will help SBG connect the tourism and business communities in an ongoing and proactive manner into the future.

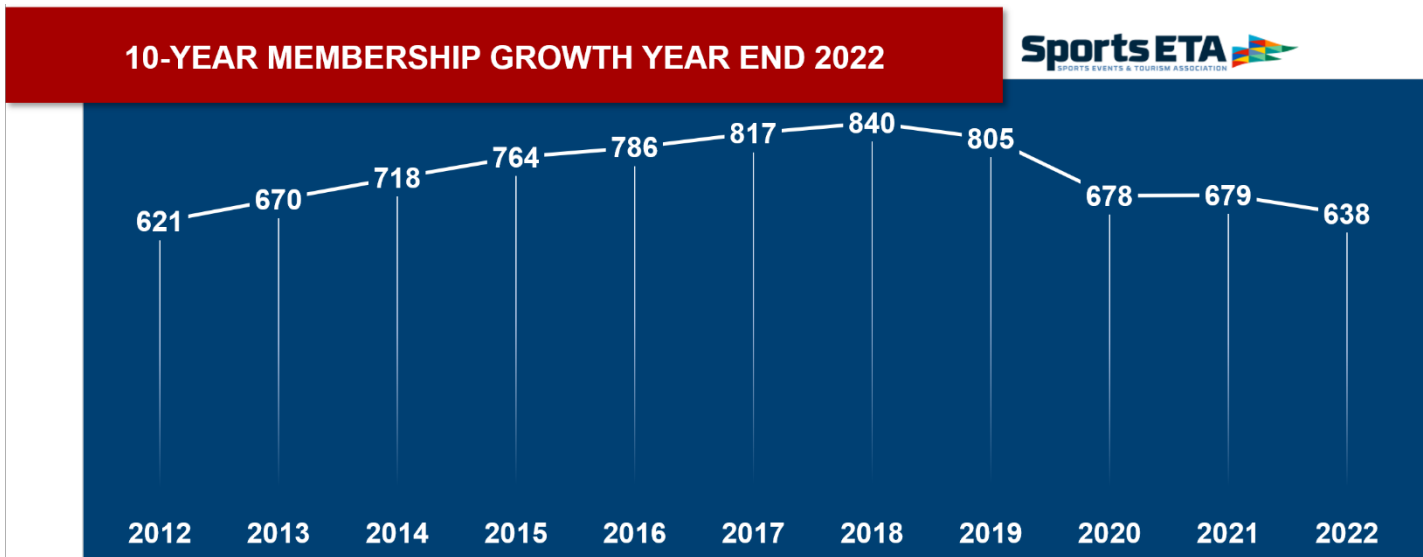
In the eyes of the Consultant Team, the puzzle pieces exist for a new regional sports council to expand economic development for the county through sports tourism. The Consultant Team believes it is within the power of this new team to capture more opportunities in the sports tourism and events market while also enriching the lives of its citizens.

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Appendix A – SportsETA Membership

Despite the downtick in national membership figures that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, the sports tourism industry has grown exponentially over the past two decades. The nature of the industry is that it is relatively “immune” to market factors such as troubled economies, war, high unemployment, or similar factors. Projections indicate that the grass roots sports tourism industry (exclusive of mega events like the Superbowl, Final Fours, etc.) is growing at a pace of 12-14% per year, with more growth anticipated in the coming decade.

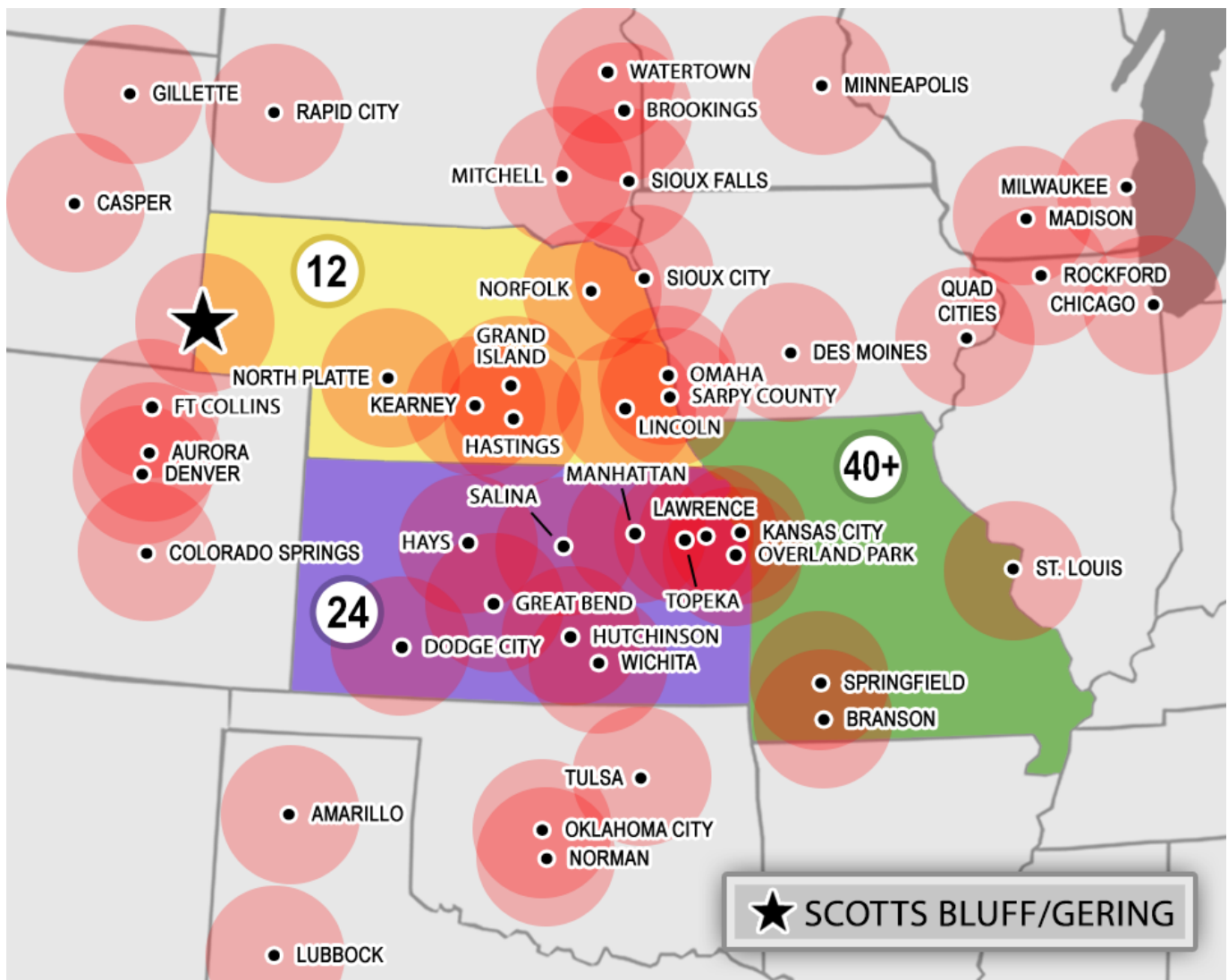
Today, there are more events, with more participants competing in those events, than ever before. As a result, there are also more organizations placing an intentional effort into attracting these events to their destination than ever before. Below is a chart outlining the growth of membership organizations within SportsETA, which is expected to rebound to pre-pandemic numbers in the near future and is a direct correlation to the growth of the sports tourism industry as a whole.



Appendix B – Scotts Bluff / Gering Sports Council Competition Map

The sports and events tourism industry is as competitive today as it has ever been. Numerous destinations market themselves in this niche industry in the form of a sports commission, DMO, convention & visitors bureau, city, or through an alternative organization.

Below is a visual representation of the various entities in SBG’s geographic region that are active in the sports tourism and events space. Tournaments often attract teams from as far away as a full day’s drive. This graphic shows the significant level of competition in this industry and the high-level geographic overlap amongst these communities.



Appendix C – Trends in Sports Facility Funding

The most common funding source for new facilities is a general fund allocation from the city/county where the facility is located as well as a land contribution for the venue to be constructed (again donated by the city or county). Although the level of success is yet to be determined, several communities around the country have already, or are in the process of, raising their hotel/bed (transient) tax collection rate to fund sports-related facility development, including:

- Rockford (IL), having already finished a significant expansion of its outdoor sports venues, used bed tax dollars to bond \$10 million towards a new indoor facility. The Downtown Sports Complex carried a price tag of \$24 million and opened in late 2016.
- Evansville (IN) opened a \$15 million multi-use outdoor sports complex that is entirely funded by bed tax dollars. The future management of this facility will also be funded by bed tax dollars, and it is run by the DMO itself.
- Spokane (WA) bonded \$25 million against future bed tax collections to construct a new athletic field house (The Podium) which opened in December 2021.
- Shreveport (LA) passed a bed tax increase for the expansion of their Convention & Visitor Bureau's national marketing program. This new tax also supports the Independence Bowl (venue enhancements and improved matchups) and the Shreveport Regional Airport (incentives for new airline routes). This combined effort between three of Shreveport's leading agencies shows the economic development impact that sports tourism can have on a mid- or small-size market.
- Fox Cities (Appleton, WI) raised their bed tax rate from 6% to 10% to build a convention center, a new large (hardwood and ice) indoor sports complex, and to renovate three existing sports facilities used to attract regional and national tournaments. The new facility opened in October of 2019 and due to its early success, further expansions are already being discussed.
- Placer Valley (CA) allocated funds from an increased bed tax to develop and open a new indoor hardwood complex in 2018.
- Pasco (FL), in partnership with the Florida Sports Foundation, developed a new sports complex on 120 acres of county-owned property. Pasco County is investing \$11 million to the project, including \$8.5 million in tourist tax funds and \$2.5 million in unrestricted bond proceeds.
- In January 2016, Warren County (OH) raised the lodging tax one (1) percent to finance a \$10 million, 20 field sports complex. The rate hike increased the county hotel occupancy tax from 3% to 4%. The tax will be used over 20 years to pay off debt the Warren County Convention & Visitors Bureau will take on to pay for the complex.

Appendix C (cont'd) – Trends in Sports Facility Funding

In addition to the hotel tax examples noted on the previous page, several communities have implemented a food and beverage tax for the purpose of developing or enhancing sports facilities.

- Elizabethtown (KY) passed a 2% food and beverage tax in 2012 to fund the development and management of the Elizabethtown Sports Park. In the first five years of operations, the “mega complex” generated nearly \$100 million in direct visitor spending to the community (according to studies commissioned with SportsImpacts, one of the top economic impact agencies in the country). Etown as it is known, is currently looking at facility expansion opportunities to capture even more sports tourism activity.
- For the past 30 years, Fort Wayne (IN) has implemented a 1% food and beverage tax that is used for capital projects. This program has funded several new buildings at the site of the Allen County War Memorial Coliseum arena, including a 100,000-square foot expo center and 5,000-seat baseball stadium. These funds have also been used to renovate the arena’s ice floor, to add 2,500 seats and meeting rooms to the arena. The fund generates \$7.5 million per year and is currently being considered to help finance a new arena downtown.
- Ashland (OR) employs a 5% food and beverage tax which garners nearly \$4.5 million a year. Twenty percent of these funds are allocated to the acquisition and preservation of open spaces for parks and recreation, with 80% of the funds used to retire debt for a recently completed community-wide waterway enhancement.
- Historically, King County (WA) has used intermittent funding from food and beverage taxes to build stadiums such as the King Dome. While this program is not active today, it has been a tool the Greater Seattle area has used in the past for venue development to entice professional sports teams to the area. Similarly, the State of Florida has a professional league stadium venue development program that is also funded by temporary food and beverage taxes, when needed. Finally, Milwaukee used a food and beverage tax to build Miller Park, home of Major League Baseball’s Milwaukee Brewers.
- In 2007, the State of New Jersey created the “Sports and Entertainment District Urban Revitalization Act.” Under this legislation, the community of Millville levied a 2% local food and beverage tax to fund a sports and entertainment district including a 500-acre motorsports park that hosts numerous events including NASCAR racing.

It should be noted that different states have different regulations regarding the use of funds generated by bed and/or food and beverage taxes. The cases outlined above are not exhaustive and should be viewed only as examples for further discussion.

Appendix D – Scotts Bluff / Gering Sports Council Venue Summary & Notes

Overall, the Consultant Team toured multiple “Tournament Friendly” facilities and two (2) current “Anchor” facilities across the region. Below is a list of all venues (sorted alphabetically) that were evaluated by the Consultant Team. Using the Sports Tourism Index™, the Consultant Team rated each facility on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being superior) at its current quality (CQ). The Consultant Team also predicted what the potential future quality (PQ) likely could be if upgrades were made to each venue. (DNV indicates the Consultant Team did not visit the facility during its site tours.) The rating system used the following color codes:

Anchor Facility
Tournament Friendly
Not of Tournament Quality

Facility Name	Facility Type	National Average	Index Score & CQ	PQ
23 Club Complex	Diamonds	2.29	2.30	Yellow
Bearcat Stadium - Football	Football Stadium	2.42	2.10	Yellow
Bearcat Stadium - Track	Outdoor Track	3.24	3.60	Green
Cleveland Field	Diamonds	2.29	2.35	Yellow
Five Rocks Amphitheater	Theater	2.74	2.20	Yellow
Five Rocks Amphitheater & The Grasslands - XC	Cross Country	3.29	3.20	Green
Frank Park - Horseshoe Pits	Other	2.84	2.20	Green
Gering American Legion Field	Baseball Stadium	2.49	1.75	Yellow
Gering Civic Center	Convention Center	2.13	1.70	Red
Gering High School - Arena	Arena	2.87	1.85	Red
Gering High School - Football	Football Stadium	2.42	1.95	DNV
Gering High School - Indoor Courts	Indoor Courts (Basketball/Volleyball)	2.82	3.00	Red
Gering Municipal Pool	Swimming Pool	2.69	2.03	Red
Gering Public Schools - Tennis	Tennis (Indoor or Outdoor)	2.42	2.60	Yellow
Highway 92	Motor Sports Racing Track	2.24	2.35	Yellow
Landers Soccer Complex	Flat Fields	2.33	1.30	Green
Mitchell Hanger	Other	2.84	1.90	Yellow
Mitchell Organized Baseball	Diamonds	2.29	2.25	Yellow
Mitchell Trap Club (Shooting Range)	Shooting Range	3.07	2.50	Yellow
Monument Marathon Course	Other	2.84	2.10	Yellow
Monument Shadows Golf Course	Golf Course	3.52	4.00	Green

**Appendix D (cont'd) – Scotts Bluff / Gering Sports Council
Venue Summary & Notes**

Oregon Trail & Dome Rock Diamonds	Diamonds	2.29	2.85	
Oregon Trail Disc Golf Course	Disc Golf Course	3.41	3.95	
Oregon Trail Park Soccer Field	Flat Fields	2.33	1.75	
Oregon Trail Park Stadium - Baseball Stadium	Baseball Stadium	2.49	2.05	
Oregon Trail Pickle Ball Courts	Pickleball Courts	2.47	2.20	
Platte Valley Motocross	Other	2.84	0.90	
Platte Valley Radio Controlled Club	Other	2.84	1.60	DNV
Riverview Golf Course	Golf Course	3.52	3.35	
Scenic Knolls	Golf Course	3.52	3.85	DNV
Scotts Bluff Country Club	Golf Course	3.52	3.00	
Scotts Bluff Country Club - Tennis	Tennis (Indoor or Outdoor)	2.42	2.00	
Scotts Bluff County Fairgrounds - Equestrian	Equestrian	2.95	3.21	
Scotts Bluff County Fairgrounds - Event Center	Convention Center	2.13	1.55	
Scottsbluff High School - Tennis	Tennis (Indoor or Outdoor)	2.42	1.75	
Scottsbluff High School Gymnasium	Arena	2.87	1.85	
The Carpenter Center - Diamonds	Diamonds	2.29	2.10	
The Carpenter Center - Flat Fields	Flat Fields	2.33	2.20	
The Carpenter Center - Indoor Courts	Indoor Courts (Basketball/Volleyball)	2.82	2.58	
The Carpenter Center - Pickleball	Pickleball Courts	2.47	3.05	
The Carpenter Center Tumbling and Trampoline	Other	2.84	3.40	
Westmoor Pool	Swimming Pool	2.69	1.40	
Wildcat Hills Shooting Sports Complex	Shooting Range	3.07	4.10	
WNCC Cougar Palace - Courts	Indoor Courts (Basketball/Volleyball)	2.82	2.98	
WNCC Cougar Palace Arena	Arena	2.87	1.75	



**Appendix D (cont'd) – Scotts Bluff / Gering Sports Council
Venue Summary & Notes**

Cleveland Field
<p>City owned facility. Home to legion and WNCC teams. The field has drainage issues. Old concrete bleachers. Wooden fence. Lights. Old scoreboard. Pretty worn-down facility and needs updates.</p> <p>A second field onsite used by WNCC Softball that as cages and is lights. Small metal bleachers somewhat covered. This field is a little nicer.</p>
Five Rocks Amphitheater
<p>Large open grassland that is used for various events. City owned. Gravel parking. Trailhead. RV sites. Serves as the finish line for the marathon.</p>
Gering Civic Center
<p>26,750 sf. 7 rooms that all open into one. Seating for about 300 total. Lower ceilings limit some sports capabilities. Nice clean building. Full food service.</p>
Gering High School
<p>Cool venue. Original gym refurbished in 2019. 1200 seats. 2 big digital video boards. Built in streaming capabilities. Small Aux gym in building with 1 more court. Wrestling gym with 2 mats. No seating. More of a practice area. 4 lit tennis courts.</p>
Highway 92
<p>Only asphalt track in Nebraska. Old. Some lighting. A few bleachers.</p>
Landers Soccer Complex
<p>6-8 full-size flat field complex. No lights. No bathrooms. Confusion on if the one building is a concession stand.</p> <p>The playing surface looked very nice. Landlocked on 2 sides by solar panels fields. Facility has potential with added amenities.</p>
Mitchell Hanger
<p>Large open grass space. Host site for their annual balloon fest.</p> <p>Area is also home to the skeet shooting club and a small motocross track.</p> <p>Not much in terms of permanent amenities. No lights. No paved parking, but a wide open space.</p>
Monument Marathon Course
<p>Starts at Wildcat Hills State Recreation area and ends at 5 Rocks.</p> <p>Steep downhill start. Mostly on nice, well-kept, multi-lane roads.</p>
Monument Shadows Golf Course
<p>A very nice and picturesque 18-hole city owned, public course. Hosts state championships. Driving range. Restaurant but no banquet space or locker rooms.</p>

**Appendix D (cont'd) – Scotts Bluff / Gering Sports Council
Venue Summary & Notes**

Oregon Trail Park
<p>Big Park with multiple diamonds, flat fields, pickleball, a community pool, disc golf, and 2 baseball stadiums.</p> <p>Gering Legion Field - 300' stadium. Was under reconstruction during our visit.</p> <p>Oregon Trail Park Stadium - Home to wood bat team. A very nice quality small stadium with newer seats, concessions. Located right beside the Legion Stadium.</p> <p>6 pickleball courts that were still under construction. Additional space and plans to potentially add 6 more courts. Courts will be lit with bathrooms nearby.</p> <p>Diamonds - Clover with some additional surrounding fields. The new clover was recently redone and looks to be very high quality. Lights. Center Concession tower with press box. Nice complex. Great potential if it can be used in conjunction with nearby stadiums.</p> <p>Disc Golf - standard community park disc golf course. Open layout. 18-holes.</p>
Riverview Golf Course
<p>Public course. Small clubhouse with bar and grille. Not much in terms of other amenities.</p> <p>Small warm-up putting green. Did not see a driving range.</p>
Scotts Bluff Country Club
<p>Nice course with driving range. Full-service clubhouse with decent size banquet hall. Locker rooms.</p> <p>4 tennis courts. Construction crew was there when we visited had two courts torn down. Maybe adding pickleball?</p>
Scotts Bluff County Fairgrounds
<p>Small dirt floor arena with 2nd outdoor arena with seating. Older building that needs some maintenance.</p> <p>An event center with concrete floor. Has 2 sets of basketball hoops, but the floor needs resurfaced and relined to make it a tournament ready venue. 4 large drive-in doors.</p> <p>3 diamonds onsite that also aren't in great shape.</p>
Scottsbluff High School
<p>1-court gymnasium. Newer and pretty nice. 2 big scoreboards. Aux gym with 2 full-size courts if seating is pushed back. Telescopic bleachers one on size. 4 lit tennis courts.</p> <p>23 Club Complex located behind school - 6 fields total counting the 2 high school softball fields. Mostly 12u size. 1 field is high school-size baseball field. All lit but one. Scoreboards. Nice little complex.</p> <p>Outdoor Horseshoe pits that host state tournament.</p> <p>Football stadium across the street. Grass with metal bleachers. Decent amount of seating. Scoreboard.</p> <p>Lights. On par with standard high school stadiums. 8-lane track which looks to have been recently resurfaced. Throwing/field events located at the school down the road.</p> <p>Facilities are pretty heavily utilized but they do some rentals.</p>



**Appendix D (cont'd) – Scotts Bluff / Gering Sports Council
Venue Summary & Notes**

The Carpenter Center
One basketball court facility but very low ceilings limit acceptability for anything beyond very young kids. Had 3 pickleball courts going in there when we visited. A few diamonds, flat fields and outdoor basketball courts, but the quality wasn't great. Trampoline and tumbling center - Had all the needed equipment to run an event, but no seating. Strong club hosts some events at WNCC arena.
Western Nebraska Community College
Cougar Palace - small, 2-court arena with bleachers pushed back but shared boundary would only allow for one competitive basketball game at a time. Space for 2 volleyball courts. Only indoor facility they have. Used for everything. Sports and school activities. Host a few wrestling, gymnastics, basketball events each year. School owns some land that could be used for new facilities.
Westmoor Pool
The community pool not suitable for any swimming or diving competitions.
Wildcat Hills Shooting Sports Complex
Shooting range at a large state park. Mostly outdoor but covered. Very nice. Pistol. Small bore. Rim fire. Archery. 3D. Ax throwing. Skeet. Indoor air rifle. Adding a disc golf course. Lots of trails. Park serves as the starting line for the marathon.

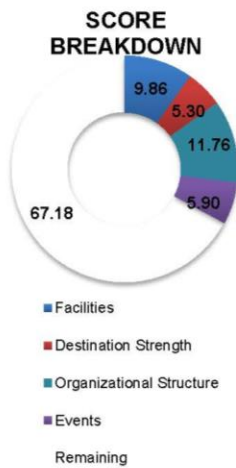
Appendix E – Scotts Bluff / Gering Sports Council Sports Tourism Index™ Results

Scotts Bluff-Gering Sports Council



FINAL SCORE
32.82

SPORTS TOURISM INDEX REPORT
 Market Size: Under 500k
 Organization Type: DMO (CVB/Sports Commission)
 Geographic Region: Midwest
 Sports Budget: 50,001-60,000



RECOMMENDATIONS

Facilities

Your destination has a limited inventory of facilities to use in attracting tourism driving events. Immediate focus should be on working with your local event promoters to enhance and expand their events that drive tourism to the community. Future focus should be on driving a high level discussion in the community on facility development of new venues that would have tourism and also community uses.

Destination Strength

Your destination has some access challenges that are likely tied to limited air service and/or a small population within a days drive. It is likely that a focus on hotel product development would support the sports tourism market in the future.

Organizational Structure

Your organization has limited staff and budget dedicated to the sports market. It is most often the case at this level that the staff member responsible for sports also has other sales verticals which can hinder their ability to consistently build relationships in the sports market. Community wide support for organizations at this level is often a significant challenge. This would commonly include elected officials and corporate leaders in the community.

Events

Your organization hosts an average number of bid-in events, may create and/or owns a handful of its own championships, and services some events at a basic level. Organizations that score well in this area likely have the ability to work with their local promoters to create new tourism driving events and/or grow their current properties year over year. There is likely an opportunity for organizations in this category to enhance their efforts in servicing events in order to strengthen renewal rates in the future.

Appendix E (cont'd) – Scotts Bluff / Gering Sports Council Sports Tourism Index™ Results

Scotts Bluff-Gering Sports Council



INDUSTRY AVERAGES REPORT

Overall Scores ▲

	Your Score	Average Score	Difference
Facilities	9.86	9.62	0.24
Destination Strength	5.30	11.94	-6.64
Organizational Structure	11.76	12.15	-0.39
Events	5.90	8.14	-2.24
Overall	32.82	39.80	-6.98

Facilities Breakdown*

Participant-Based	Your Score	Average Score	Difference
Shooting Range	4.10	3.07	1.03
Golf Course	4.00	3.52	0.48
Disc Golf Course	3.95	3.41	0.54
Outdoor Track	3.60	3.24	0.36
Equestrian	3.21	2.95	0.25
Convention Center	1.70	2.13	-0.43

Spectator-Based	Your Score	Average Score	Difference
Baseball Stadium	2.05	2.49	-0.44
Theater	2.20	2.74	-0.54
Motor Sports Racing Track	2.35	2.24	0.11
Football Stadium	1.95	2.42	-0.47
Arena	1.85	2.87	-1.02

Destination Strength

	Your Score	Average Score	Difference
Tourism Drivers^	1	3.18	-2.18
Hotels*	0.80	1.15	-0.35
Destination Accessibility*	1.75	2.15	-0.40

Organizational Structure*

	Your Score	Average Score	Difference
Sports Staff	0.50	1.93	-1.43
Grant Program	4.25	2.14	2.11
Board & Advisory	0.00	0.55	-0.55

Sporting Events

Number on an annual basis	Your Answer	Average Answer	Difference
Local Events	7	25	-18
Bid-In Events Hosted	3	8	-5
Events Serviced	4	28	-24

* Max score of 5

^ Max score of 10

▲ Max score of 25

**Appendix F – Scotts Bluff / Gering Sports Council
5 -Year Strategic Mission Pillars**

In the future, SBG’s enhanced sports tourism efforts should sharpen its focus on three (3) key mission areas, or “Pillars.” Each Pillar (or role) is driven by a different audience, all focused on increasing overnight stays and consumer spending, as well as enhancing relationships with local community stakeholders in the region. This refined focus will help SBG enhance its messaging and will deliver directly on the organization’s tourism mission, as well as positively impact the community’s sports groups. The recommended Pillars are described below along with their driving audiences and specific tactics that could be deployed.

Scotts Bluff / Gering Sports Council Sports Tourism Market 5-Year Strategic Mission Pillars			
Pillar	Enhanced Structure Events: Bid/Created/Owned (Short-Term)	Venue Enhancement (Long-Term)	Community Engagement (Ongoing)
Audience	Tourism Economic Development Rights Holders/NGBs Local Promoters High Schools/Colleges	Venue Managers Hospitality Leaders Elected Officials Economic Development Parks and Rec/Colleges Cities/Counties	Elected Officials C-Level Community Leaders Local Media Non-Profit Civic Groups Hospitality Community
Tactics	Create New Organization Grow Existing Events Create/Incubate New Events Continue Bid-In Events	Venue Needs Master Plan Venue Development Fund Funding Source(s) Defined Develop Indoor Space(s) Enhance Existing Venues Field Trips	Staff = Outwardly Focused “6&6” Lunches “4 Touch” Program Advisory Group Assign Group to Electeds Economic Impact Releases