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## **Louisville is an Inclusive & Welcoming Destination**

### Hospitality Industry Strives to Provide Leadership and Growth Around Diversity, Equity, Inclusion

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (September 23, 2020) —As the entire nation works to shine a spotlight on racial disparities, Louisville is continually looking for ways to further positive changes to embrace an even more equitable future, upholding the city's reputation as an authentic and welcoming city.

"As we process the grief and raw emotions our community is experiencing right now, we realize we are treating more than one pandemic, addressing sustained systemic racism as well as fighting a health crisis. During these difficult and painful times, we all have a responsibility to help our city grow in order to pave the road for a better future," said Karen Williams, President & CEO of Louisville Tourism. "Although Louisville Tourism's primary focal point is economic development, our broader mission is a thriving community where tourism can make a difference to quality of life. Travel and tourism have long been a foundation in helping change perceptions to bring people together – something we all need now more than ever."

To that end, Louisville Tourism, the marketing agency that promotes the city as a travel destination, is committed to advancing racial equality and inclusion by taking thoughtful and direct action, recently unveiling several hospitality industry initiatives to assess and improve racial and minority imbalances inside and outside the organization.

The agency recently **launched a Black Tourism Advisory Council (BTAC)** led by Cleo Battle, the company's Chief Operating Officer. Battle is also one of the leaders of an industry-wide effort to address social justice in the Tourism industry through ongoing summits within the Destinations International community. Members of BTAC were invited to join ongoing conversations about intentional inclusivity in the hospitality industry. Representatives from all major local hospitality industry sectors are included to address systemic racism to improve Louisville's hospitality organizations and overall destination experience for visitors and residents. One of the first initiatives is getting BTAC's advice on a new product launch of Louisville's African American heritage.

"It is important that we create comprehensive experiences that demonstrate that we understand the needs and desires of Black tourists. They must feel safe and welcome in Louisville." Says Donald Lassere, President & CEO of the Muhammad Ali Center and BTAC member. Says Betty Fox with the Louisville Urban League, "It's going to take additional resources and commitment to deliver on the promise of showcasing the city's Black heritage." Fox believes the BTAC will "be able to help provide strategic guidance to Louisville Tourism that leads to increased exposure and contracts for Black businesses." Another BTAC member, local

businesswoman and tourism entrepreneur Andrea Meriwether thinks there are endless possibilities to share “the rich black history” in Louisville. Says Meriwether, “Each story and experience has so many layers that it speaks to visitors on so many levels but connects us all by varied interest and goes beyond the color of our skin. (There are) stories of triumph, economic advancement, accomplishment and how people of color built and contributed to the growth of the city we know and love today.”

**New Black Heritage experiences will be launched this fall.** Louisville Tourism has been actively working on initiatives to curate the city’s rich, cultural assets reflecting Louisville’s Black Heritage to build ongoing promotional campaigns. Staff has been working with local attraction partners over the past 18 months to increase growing interest in Muhammad Ali Tourism as well as to spotlight African American influence within the Bourbon and horse racing industries. These new more diverse, inclusive and immersive experiences benefit all travelers to Louisville and will be promoted through collaborative partnerships with organizations such as the National Civil Rights Trail, Black Bourbon Society, Kentucky Department of Tourism and the African American Travel Conference.

To assess its own organizational culture, Louisville Tourism is currently **conducting a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI) analysis** of practices regarding diversity in hiring, employee education, ways to work with a more inclusive variety of vendors and diversity representation in marketing collateral. To gain impartial input, Louisville Tourism hired [Gifted By Design](#) for this work.

In addition, the agency is offering a program of **ongoing DEI training for the hospitality industry**. New ongoing educational opportunities for Louisville Tourism staff and industry partners will be provided by several women and Black-owned business. More than 450 hospitality industry members attended a virtual DEI workshop offered by [Fe-Smart LLC](#) in August with the next one scheduled October 1 and more planned for the future.

Says Karen Williams. “Our primary mission remains to grow the economy through tourism and it is our responsibility to our community to do that inclusively. We will be guided by organizations that have access to the best research, training and resources in DEI.” The training will help ensure all who interact with Louisville’s hospitality industry are respected and treated appropriately. As the hospitality industry looks to a rebound from the pandemic, success in this work will help attract and sustain both leisure and meetings business.

Meeting planner client Michelle Mason, President & CEO of Association Forum, a large meeting planner association in the Chicago area, has this to say about Louisville’s future in the industry, “As we open our hearts and minds in the pursuit of social justice and equality, Louisville is not only an amazing place for black and brown people to have meetings; it is a historic place to convene meetings. Home to the Muhammad Ali Center and other cultural sites, you will be amazed by the hidden gems influenced by southern and midwestern culture.”

End

Since 1968, Louisville Tourism’s primary goal has been to enhance the area’s economy through tourism development - to promote and sell Louisville as a world-class destination. Prior to the pandemic, Tourism was the third largest industry in Louisville generating an estimated economic impact of \$3.5 billion which supported 60,000 local tourism-related jobs.