



*The*  
**Fairgrounds**  
N A S H V I L L E  
Where Events Make History



# Forward 5

2017-2021 Strategic Plan

Forward 5 is a dynamic five-year roadmap that will be used to guide the administration and operations of the The Fairgrounds Nashville towards a sustainable future.

The Fairgrounds Nashville began strategic planning in September 2016. The process used in preparation of this document was the Bryson Model<sup>1</sup> (Appendix A) due to its focus on public sector planning. A planning team, comprised of Fairgrounds employees, came together over the course of three months to perform a thorough analysis of the Fairgrounds' current condition and visioning of its future.

Planning Team:

Laura Schloesser, Executive Director  
Kenneth Sanders, Assistant Director  
David Lewis, Operations Manager  
Scott Wallace, Events and Marketing Manager

Board of Fair Commissioners:

Ned Horton, Chairman, Board of Fair Commissioners  
Caleb Hemmer, Vice-Chair, Board of Fair Commissioners  
Kenneth Byrd, Board of Fair Commissioners  
Bonna Johnson, Board of Fair Commissioners  
Erin McAnally, Board of Fair Commissioners

Special thanks and recognition for their support:

The Fairgrounds employees  
Mayor Megan Barry and staff  
Councilman Colby Sledge, 17<sup>th</sup> District  
Councilman Sam Coleman, 33<sup>rd</sup> District and Chair, Codes, Fair and Farmer's Market Committee  
Metropolitan Council Members  
Members of the public who provided support and advice along the way

This document was adopted by the Metro Board of Fair Commissioners on February 14, 2017 on a 4-0 vote.

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<sup>1</sup> Bryson, J.M. (2011). Strategic planning for public and nonprofit organizations: A guide to strengthening and sustaining organizational achievement (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.



## THE PROPERTY

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The Fairgrounds Nashville is located at 500 Wedgewood Avenue in the City of Nashville, Tennessee. The property's ideal location is approximately 2-miles from the heart of downtown Nashville, and is in close proximity to multiple freeway access points, hotels, restaurants, and other points of interest.

The 117-acre property has a rich history dating back to 1891 with the creation of Cumberland Park. The park was originally constructed as a dirt harness racing track and continued as such until the 1950's. Vehicle racing began in 1904 and continues today on a 5/8-mile track known as the Fairgrounds Speedway. The Tennessee State Fair was held on Fairgrounds property for the first time in 1906 and remains a community draw each September. Other amenities have come and gone including Cascade Plunge, a community swimming pool, and Fair Park with amusement rides and miniature golf.

The Fairgrounds is surrounded by several well-established, yet revitalized, neighborhoods such as Wedgewood-Houston, Russwurm Heights, Vine Hill, Melrose Heights, and the City of Berry Hill. These neighborhoods have a strong residential presence while supporting small businesses, artisans, and light manufacturing. Along Nolensville Pike, there is a strong international community supported by numerous community-based social service and advocacy agencies. This international presence is a strength of the community and provides an opportunity to expand further into cultural programming.

## METRO NASHVILLE

The city of Nashville is undergoing unprecedented growth. The population of the 10-county Cumberland Region is projected to increase by 1 million people by the year 2035.<sup>2</sup> With that growth, The Fairgrounds is poised for growth as well – capitalizing on new events, increased attendance, and new and renewed community interest.



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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nashvillempo.org/growth/> November 15, 2016

## **CURRENT CONDITION**

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2016 was a transitional year for The Fairgrounds. It was poised to be invigorated with new energy and direction. A new Executive Director, Laura Schloesser, began her role full-time in September. As part of the 2016-2017 budget, Mayor Megan Barry proposed in her Capital Spending Plan, and the Metro Council approved, a \$15 million investment for improvements to the property. Twelve million dollars was allocated to infrastructure improvements and three million was allocated to Metro Parks for the construction of community recreational space and greenway improvements. Commonwealth Development Group, in collaboration with Tennessee State University College of Engineering, was retained to begin work on a site evaluation and assessment to determine the current state and use of the property and develop recommendations. While it was clear that basic infrastructure needs such as electrical, HVAC, plumbing, roofing, and painting were at a critical stage – less clear were improvement needs relating to items such as road alignment, bridges, and Brown’s Creek. At the time this strategic plan was finalized, the planning effort for the improvements was well underway but not finalized.

The strategic planning process began in October 2016 with a team comprised of four Fairgrounds employees working through the Bryson model. The public was invited to participate by providing feedback in an open house in early December. An on-line survey was published at the same time and received 166 responses. Results indicated support for the general direction presented (Appendix B). Several updates to the plan were made as a result of the public input including researching the advantages and potential of having a long-term tenant relationship and energizing our green space.

Through the strategic planning process, the internal examination of the administration and operation of The Fairgrounds clearly showed the need to focus early on processes. The lack of documented rules and procedures cause unclear expectations and inconsistent application resulting in frustration within our work team and with our customers and guests. To be outwardly successful we must first direct our efforts inward which is why the first 18-24 months will be heavily focused on analyzing why and how we do what we do and making improvements where needed to live our mission and model our values on a daily basis.

The future of certain amenities and events, including auto racing and Tennessee State Fair, is of great interest to many. The Charter specifies that The Fairgrounds must continue to host those events along with the flea market and other expo events, unless voted otherwise, and as such we are obligated and committed to ensuring they can and will be operated safely, ethically, and in such a manner to support the mission of The Fairgrounds. The Nashville Flea Market has long been an endeared staple at The Fairgrounds. We will look to further invest in and support the Flea Market while honoring its nostalgia and exploring innovative updates to engage an evolving and future audience. In addition, ensuring The Fairgrounds is represented fairly with strong asset protections through good contracting is essential and will be an early focus.

## MANDATES

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### Mandates:

- Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County, TN Charter, Article II, Fair Commissioners
- Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County, TN Charter, Chapter 6, Metropolitan Board of Fair Commissioners
- Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County, TN Code of Ordinances, Chapter 2.78, Board of Fair Commissioners

### Other Relevant Codes:

- TN Code § 4-57-106 (2012)

In 1909, a Board of Fair Commissioners was created to establish policy, rules and regulations for the governance of the fairgrounds and was given authority to produce a divisional fair. There were updates to the charter in 1923, 1927 and 1931 that detailed board membership, duties and exclusions.

In 2011, membership and term of office of the board of fair commissioners was controlled by Sec. 11.601 of the Metro Charter and reduced the number of board members to five (5) and added language to mandate that certain activities be conducted on the premises including:

- The Tennessee State Fair
- Expo Center Events
- Flea Markets
- Auto Racing

In addition, no demolition of the premises can occur without approval by ordinance receiving 27 votes of the Metropolitan Council or amendment to the Charter.

Additional duties of the Fair Board were added to the code of ordinances in 2011 authorizing the fair board to negotiate with a non-profit, selected by the State of Tennessee via TN Code § 4-57-106 (2012), to operate the state fair in 2011 and 2012 and to continue to operate expo-related activities.

## MISSION and VALUES

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The Fairgrounds' statement of purpose is simply:

### Connecting our community with events

This mission statement is a succinct and memorable purpose that describes The Fairgrounds' core function. This mission is not limiting and allows for innovation and creativity in its execution. Our "community" is broad, Nashville and beyond, and invites a diverse clientele to the property.

The identification and definition of our core values is a reflection of our beliefs and commitment and is essential in communicating our operational philosophy to the public.

**Our Customers** – We commit to collaborate with and support our partners, vendors, and promoters to provide our guests with fun, safe, accessible, and affordable experiences.

**Our Workforce** – We value our team, we are united and hardworking, we support one another and commit to providing the tools, resources, and training needed to be the best we can be.

**Our "Golden Rule" Service** – We are passionate, service-minded and committed to our customer-focused approach.

**Our Integrity** – We are fair and maintain a high standard for ethical and moral behavior in all that we do. How we act and what we do when no one is watching.



## STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES (SWOC)

Identifying our strengths and weaknesses involved an assessment of our current environment and our present capacity while opportunities and challenges focused on the future. This process, in conjunction with our stakeholder analysis, helped identify critical success factors, or outcomes (i.e., criteria we must meet, performance indicators we must do well against). This analysis assisted in understanding our place within our environment in order to look beyond the present.

### Opportunities:

- Increasing political and community support
- Ability to self-produce events
- Broadening and increasing our customer base due to population growth
- New or improved revenue-producing events due to site and amenity improvements
- Use of technology

### Challenges:

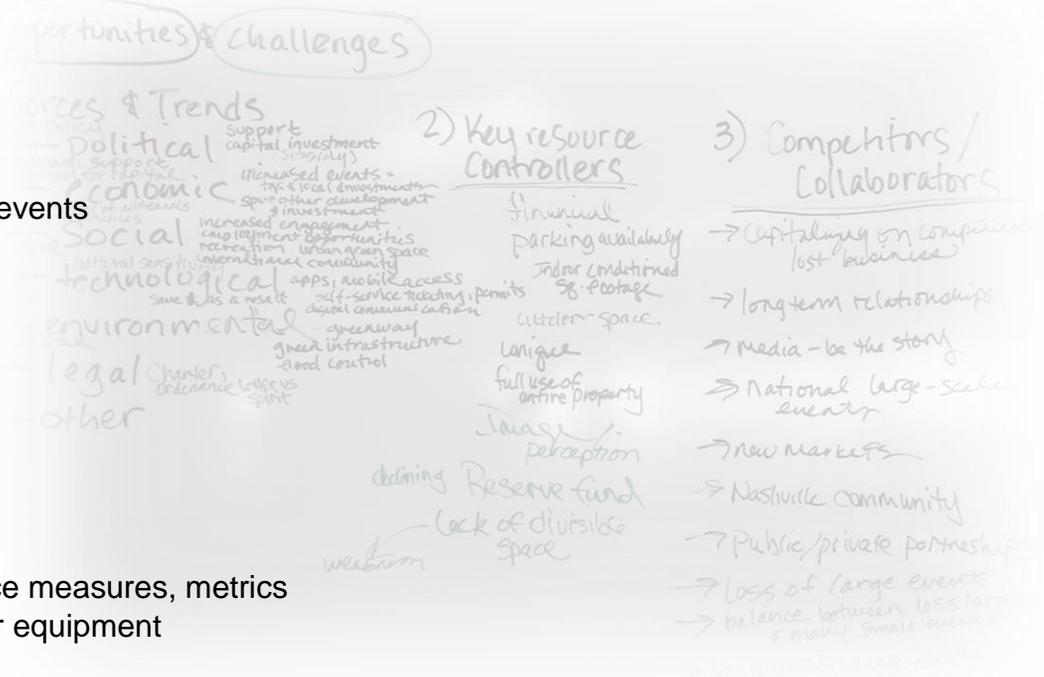
- Shifting event policy
- Telling our story, image, identity, perception
- Ability or desire of event promoters to produce events

### Strengths:

- Location
- Availability of on-site parking
- Ability to host several events simultaneously
- Engaged and committed staff and Fair Board
- New leadership

### Weaknesses:

- Lack of plans, policies, procedures, performance measures, metrics
- Underutilized or derelict buildings, amenities, or equipment
- Declining reserve fund
- Underutilized or unavailable technology



## **STRATEGIC ISSUES AND STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS**

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Through the SWOC analysis, strategic issues emerged. In the form of a question, each issue is followed by strategies to overcome it and outcomes to achieve. It is imperative that this section remain flexible as unforeseen forces over the next five years may affect The Fairgrounds' ability to achieve the desired result.

### **Strategic Issue #1**

How will we increase and stabilize our reserve fund?

- Complete a fee study and develop a pricing plan
- Adopt a revenue policy
- Establish cost-of-service for mandated services and other large-scale events
- Develop business plans for self-produced events
- Study the advantages and potential of a long-term tenant relationship

### **Strategic Issue #2**

How will we position ourselves within the event market to become the venue of choice?

- Update marketing materials including building floor plans with amenities
- Establish relationships with community and cultural agencies
- Monitor event RFI, RFP sites to identify new business opportunities
- Research trends in venue and event management
- Establish a recognizable presence in the southeast event venue industry
- Support and energize our green space



### Strategic Issue #3

What is our story and how will we tell it?

- Develop a fun and interactive social media presence to bring recognition to the property and engage visitors
- Develop a marketing plan
- Document the property's history
- Explore updates to the existing website to enhance user experience
- Calculate the economic impact of our events
- Publish an Annual Report

### Strategic Issue #4

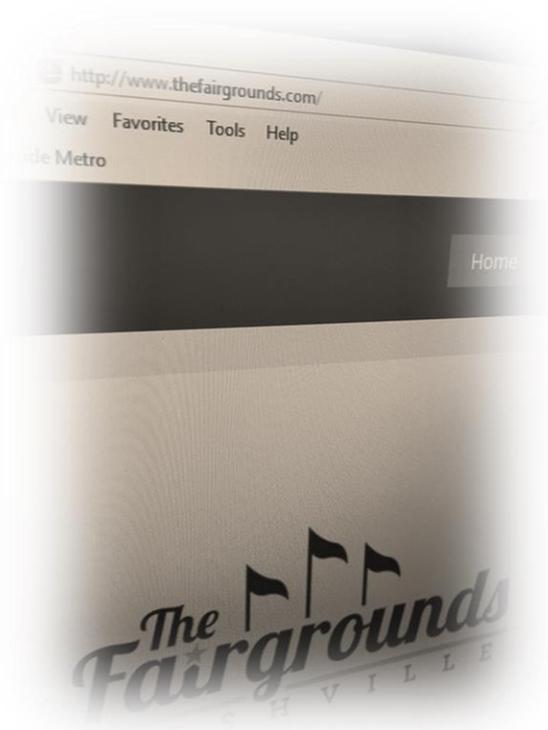
How will we maintain the property to fulfill our mission?

- Develop a life-cycle inventory of our assets to aid in budget preparation, capital replacement, and preventative maintenance scheduling
- Develop a plan for the removal of barriers to ensure equal access
- Develop maintenance and care standards for buildings and grounds
- Develop a fleet management plan

### Strategic Issue #5

How will we improve process to be more efficient, effective, and provide consistent and reliable service?

- Develop a comprehensive policy and procedure manual with timetable for review of documents
- Develop a records management procedure to address retention, disposal, access, disclosure and distribution
- Develop a contract compliance review plan and schedule
- Become active members in industry groups such as venue management and exposition associations



### Strategic Issue #6

How will we leverage available technology to improve processes?

- Implement new or updated software to help manage rentals, permits, event contracts, and reservations
- Develop and implement a work-order system
- Provide training for staff

### Strategic Issue #7

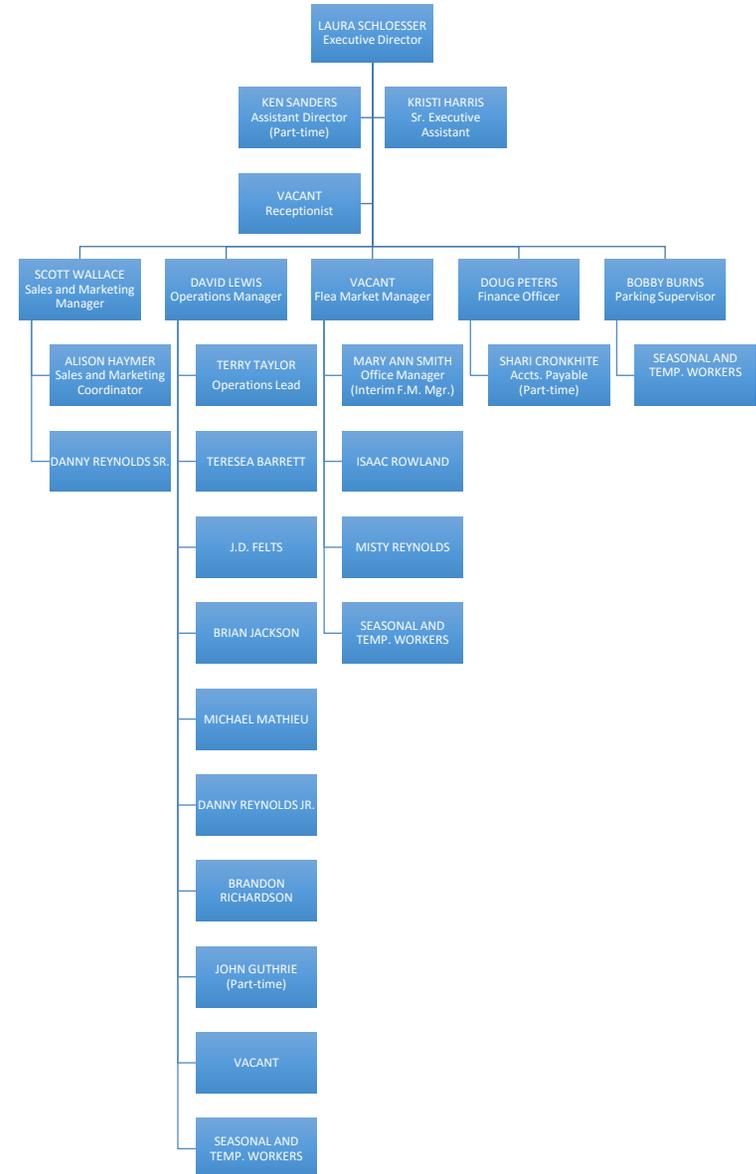
What are the optimal organizational structure and workforce development investments needed for success?

- Evaluate the use of temporary staff
- Develop a staffing plan
- Develop a compensation plan
- Establish a procedure and format to ensure consistent approach to employee performance appraisals
- Review and update existing job descriptions for all full- and part-time positions
- Create and internship program and partner with local universities and schools

### Strategic Issue #8

How can we best evaluate our services and processes?

- Develop measures for monitoring performance against targets
- Develop a systematic evaluation process for events, facilities, operational and customer service
- Benchmark and evaluate like venues for best practices
- Engage neighbors, customers, guests, and other interested parties through public meetings and surveys



## 5-YEAR OUTCOMES

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Each year, The Fairgrounds will establish agency goals and objectives to achieve. Each employee's annual work plan and performance goals will complement and tie back to the overall annual plan. To achieve success, we must all understand and support these goals and one another. Accountability is imperative; therefore, periodic updates on progress will be presented to the Fair Board as well as the publication of an Annual Report for public review.

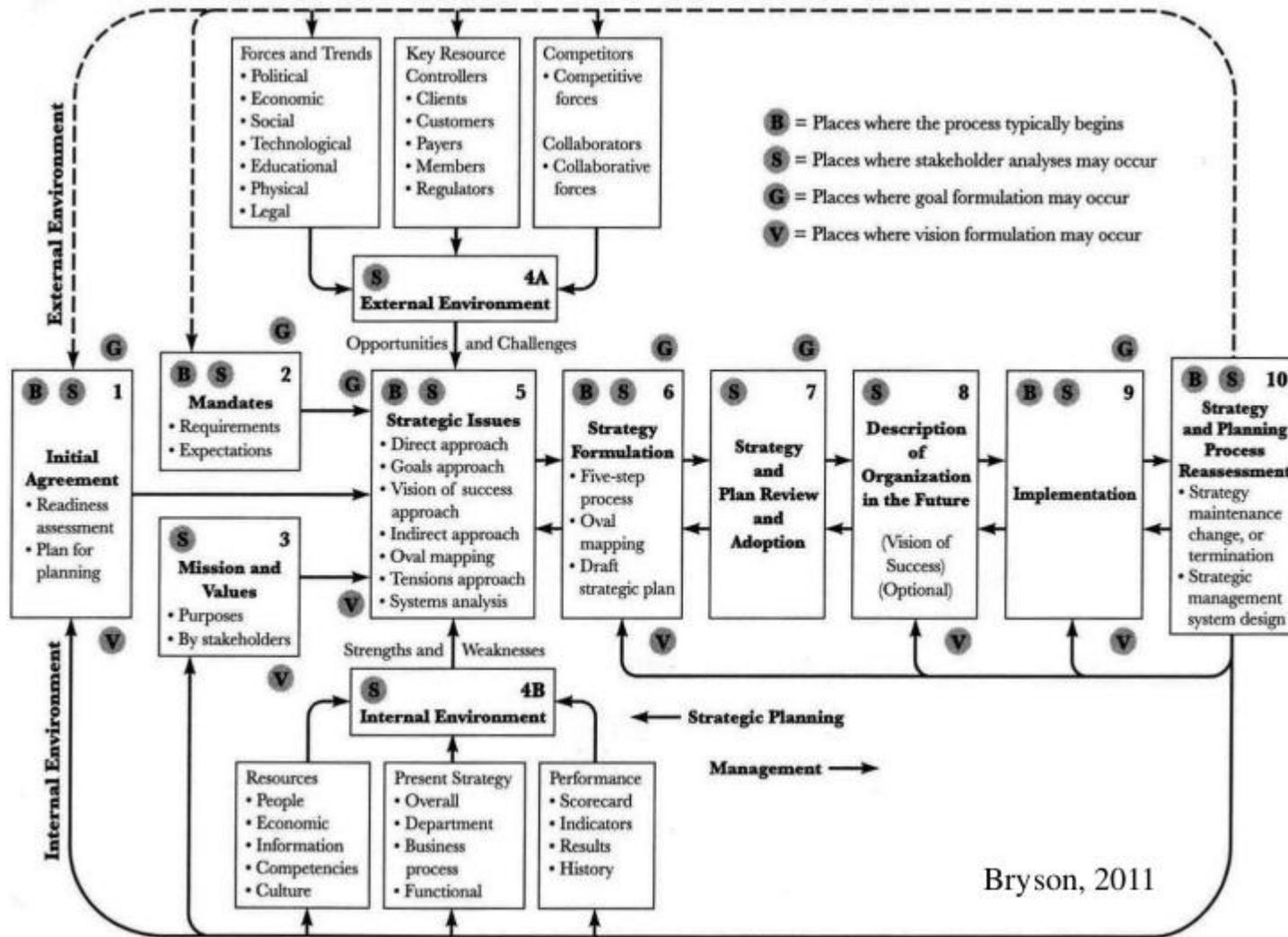
By 2022:

- \$100,000 increase in reserve fund
- Increase event days by 50%
- Become a Top Workplace in Tennessee
- Be awarded a Venue Excellence Award by the International Association of Venue Managers
- Complete improvement plan on time and within budget
- Consistently achieve at least a 4.5/5.0 excellence rating from our community, vendors, customers, and guests

These outcomes are designed to be a culmination of many smaller, but not insignificant, achievements over the next five (5) years. Every personal and agency goal achieved along the way will contribute to our success and sustainability.



# APPENDIX A – BRYSON MODEL



## APPENDIX B – SURVEY RESULTS

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166 respondents from 41 unique zip codes in seven counties within Tennessee and three other states including Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama.

Support for mission statement: 4.1/5.0

### Support for Values

Value 1 – Our Customers	4.4/5.0
Value 2 – Our Workforce	4.3/5.0
Value 3 – Our “Golden Rule” Service	4.3/5.0
Value 4 – Our Integrity	4.4/5.0

### Support for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges

Strength: Location	4.5/5.0
Strength: Parking	4.2/5.0
Strength: Simultaneous Events	4.1/5.0
Strength: Engaged and committed staff and Board	3.7/5.0
Strength: New Leadership	3.9/5.0
Weakness: Lack of plans, procedures	4.2/5.0
Weakness: Derelict buildings, equipment	4.5/5.0
Weakness: Use of technology	4.3/5.0
Weakness: Declining reserve fund	4.0/5.0
Opportunity: Increasing political and community support	4.2/5.0
Opportunity: Self-produced events	4.0/5.0
Opportunity: Increasing customer base	4.3/5.0
Opportunity: New events due to site improvements	4.3/5.0
Opportunity: Use of technology	4.2/5.0
Challenge: Shifting event policy	3.7/5.0
Challenge: Telling our story	4.0/5.0
Challenge: Desire of promoters to produce events	4.0/5.0

Support for Strategic Issues and Strategies: 4.0/5.0

## General use information

### Events attended by survey respondents within past 12 months

Flea Market	78%
Consumer product show	41%
Tennessee State Fair	32%
Speedway	25%
Sporting Event	16%
Cultural event	14%
Public special event	11%
Private event	8%
Concert or performance	9%
Animal show	5%

### How often survey respondents attend events at The Fairgrounds

Once or twice per year	49%
4-8 times per year	30%
More than 12 times per year	10%
Never	12%

### Top 3 ways survey respondents learn of events held at The Fairgrounds

Word of mouth	47%
Social media	41%
Website	27%

### Top 3 ways survey respondents would like to learn of events at The Fairgrounds

Facebook	30%
Website	23%
Word of mouth	8%
Other (Email)	8%