

Regional Branding FAQs *(Revised June 18, 2018)*

Why is the Colorado Tourism Office (CTO) creating new travel regions?

One of the most consistent concerns shared in 20-plus listening sessions held in 2016 to develop the Colorado Tourism Roadmap related to the seven travel regions created in the 1990s. Across the state, listening session participants said the travel regions were doing little either to foster industry collaboration or to make consumers more aware of Colorado travel opportunities.

Many pointed out that many of the existing regions failed to encompass a shared experience that could be communicated to travelers or others. Others shared concerns that the regions' geographically based names – such as South Central or Northwest – lacked inspiration for travelers.

It became clear that by identifying and branding the unique qualities of each part of the state, Colorado has an opportunity to build its tourism industry's competitive advantage. Once complete, this work will lay a strong foundation for making consumers aware of unique experiences statewide, while creating a focus for industry collaborations and development of new regionally based traveler experiences.

How is CTO accomplishing this task?

As a first step, CTO last summer formed the Regional Branding Task Force to guide the development of new travel regions. The first assignment of the 11-member Task Force -- co-chaired by Chris Romer, CEO of the Vail Valley Partnership, and Cathy Ritter, director of the Colorado Tourism Office – was to select a marketing/branding agency to develop a research-based approach to identifying and branding new travel regions.

In October, the Task Force chose international place branding agency Destination Think! from a field of nearly 50 bidders. Headed by Chief Strategist William Bakker, widely regarded as one of the foremost tourism marketers in the world, the Destination Think! team launched a comprehensive research program. This has included:

- A product experience scan exploring whether certain pursuits were unique to part of Colorado's geography.
- A sentiment analysis based on a scrape of social media data.
- A review of regional branding best practices encompassing both domestic and international models
- A survey of Colorado tourism industry stakeholders as well as person-to-person interviews with key industry leaders, and
- A Colorado resident survey to gain insight into local perceptions and attitudes.

This research ultimately led the Think! team in February to propose nine travel regions for further testing. (See figure below.) This map was tested in a series of 20 facilitated, invitation-only workshops in each region.

Findings from these workshops were incorporated into two alternate maps. Think! will be seeking input from the Task Force on June 19 to shape the final draft map and develop recommended brand identity statements for each proposed region. William Bakker and others from our Think! consulting team will present the recommendations in a face-to-face meeting in Denver on June 28 for a final round of industry input.

As a final step, the recommended regions and their brand identities will be tested through a last round of consumer research.

The final deliverable will include a map of the new travel regions and a description of each region's "Place DNA," that collection of special qualities that sets each region apart from any other place in the world.

While the naming for each region may emerge through this work, it is possible that additional time will be needed to complete the work of naming the regions once Destination Think! completes its assignment on August 10.

Why did the CTO conduct regional branding workshops?

The 20 workshops scheduled from April 23 to May 4 were a key component of Destination Think!'s research-based approach to identifying the new travel regions. The main purpose of the workshops was to give the Think! team an opportunity to test their findings face-to-face with a range of Colorado experts. Each proposed region hosted at least two workshops. All workshops included a series of exercises facilitated by the Destination Think! team.

Typically, one workshop was reserved for discussion among tourism industry stakeholders, while the other included a more diverse gathering of thought leaders, including historians, artists, journalists, business leaders, community leaders and others. The one exception was in Region 9, which due to its size hosted four workshops – two in Fort Collins and two in Denver. A process has been set in motion to encourage representation from throughout the region at all four workshops.

I am concerned that my destination/attraction/community is not in the right region. What should I do?

In making their initial recommendations, the Think! team kept counties intact as they drew regional boundaries, mainly to avoid unintentionally fracturing any county-wide

funding mechanisms. They also took care to ensure that a traveler could reach any part of a region a drive of no more than 3 ½ hours.

However, some “gray areas” remained. Through the workshops, participants had a chance to express any concerns about the way the maps were proposed. Consideration ultimately was given to dividing counties between two regions to accommodate travel patterns. In certain cases, some destinations were invited to participate in more than one regional workshop to voice their opinions.

Destination Think! considered feedback from all of the workshops– along with further research – prior to making its final recommendation for Colorado’s new travel regions.

How will these new regions be used?

The early thinking was that these new regions would provide a solid basis for regional marketing efforts. However, based on their review of best practices, Destination Think! strongly recommends against using the regions as marketing entities. Other destinations have reported spending millions to brand their regions – unsuccessfully and ultimately, pitting one region against another.

Instead, Destination Think! recommends using the insights to develop and share inspirational messages about what travelers could find in each part of Colorado. Regional branding also could create a focus for regional collaboration around a particular experience or even as inspiration for destination development as partners focus efforts on creating new experiences around what truly sets a region apart.

Without a doubt, the new regional identities will be incorporated into CTO’s welcome centers to guide travelers in seeking experiences statewide.

How many regions will there be?

Destination Think!’s initial recommendation proposes nine travel regions in place of the seven created more than two decades ago. However, that number could change, based on the workshops and followup research and feedback, before this process is complete.

When will the new travel regions be final?

Destination Think! is on track to complete their final recommendation to the CTO’s Regional Branding Task Force no later than August 15, 2018. The CTO, with input from the Regional Branding Task Force, will determine at that time whether additional work is required for naming.