



Genesee Valley Trail Town Handbook

Published December 2023





Acknowledgements

This guide was completed by Parks & Trails New York. Lead authors include Rebecca Murray, Dylan Carey, and Erica Schneider.

Special thanks to the following partners for their invaluable feedback and expertise in helping to develop this guide:

Friends of the Genesee Valley Greenway

Letchworth Gateway Villages

NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Funding for this handbook was provided by the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation.



RALPH C. WILSON, JR.
FOUNDATION

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The Genesee Valley Trail Town Initiative

Introduction

The Genesee Valley region offers unique outdoor recreation opportunities for residents and visitors. Full of bucolic landscapes, historic villages, towering waterfalls, forests, glacially-carved gorges, lakes, and rivers set between Niagara Falls and the Finger Lakes Region of Western New York, these regional assets serve as economic drivers.

The Genesee Valley Greenway State Park, on a 90-mile linear park on a former canal and rail corridor, and Letchworth State Park, a 14,427-acre state park, are major area attractions. While Genesee Valley Greenway State Park is not yet complete as an off-road trail, significant progress is being made to make improvements and fill in gaps in the network. Letchworth State Park, the “Grand Canyon of the East,” boasts year-round environmental education opportunities, 66 miles of hiking trails, three waterfalls, and camping and lodging options.

Genesee Valley Greenway and Letchworth State Parks open up linkages between neighboring communities and offer connections to other long-distance trails, including the Empire State Trail, the proposed Southern Tier Trail, and the cross-Pennsylvania border Triple Divide Trail System. More than a dozen communities surrounding these assets feature their own unique landscapes, including forest preserves, farms, lakes, river access, and wildlife management areas.



Programs across the country demonstrate the valuable relationship between communities and neighboring greenways, blueways, and other recreational assets. Outdoor enthusiasts, both residents and visitors, are drawn to these communities to refuel and rest up, spending money at local businesses in the process. Whether they are spending the night in a historic bed & breakfast or filling up on donuts at the local bakery, all visitors are in need of services while touring the region.

Recreation-based tourism is more than just a financial stream, it's also a community-building opportunity. In 2019 community partners, organizations and local community members launched a "Trail Town" initiative in 10 communities across the rural Genesee Valley Region. Modeled after the **Great Allegheny Passage Trail Town Program**, funding from **USDA Rural Development** and the **Northern Border Regional Commission** enabled **Letchworth Gateway Villages** (LGV) and a network of partners, including the **Friends of the Genesee Valley Greenway** (FoGVG) and the **Office of State Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation** (OPRHP) to explore different tourism-related market opportunities; all in an effort to contribute towards the economic recovery strategy from the COVID-19 pandemic and create a robust, sustainable outdoor economy focused on natural assets and quality of life. Through this initiative, ten communities are now united by a regional Genesee Valley Trail Town brand and identity that can serve as the basis of their planning and promotional efforts for years to come.



What is a Trail Town?

A “Trail Town” is a community - a city, village or town - that recognizes the important linkages between outdoor recreation and economic development and makes a concerted effort to improve the infrastructure, services, amenities, and community character to attract and retain a specific set of “customers” — those who walk, bike, or use public lands in other ways. A Trail Town offers residents and visitors seeking high-quality services and amenities a safe, inviting place to eat, play, and sleep after spending time on a long-distance greenway or at a nearby state park or other outdoor recreation area. The community makes it clear that it is “open for business” and actively promotes that goal by implementing policies and establishing programs geared towards outdoor enthusiasts.

In most programs, Trail Towns are linked by a trail corridor, and because of this connection each town can benefit from the strengths and assets of neighboring towns. A town well known for high quality dining and entertainment, but limited overnight accommodations, can attract the same visitor as a neighboring town with a well established hospitality industry. Their close proximity to one another, connected via long-distance trail, makes it convenient for visitors to travel between these locations to seek out different services. Regardless of the trip duration, identifying the places that offer desired amenities and services will be one of the first steps in the trip-planning process for those passing through a town, whether they are day trippers in need of a restaurant (or restroom), or long-distance travelers seeking overnight accommodations and safe bike parking. Because this is the first step in the planning process, it is critical that a Trail Town inventory and advertise exactly what services and amenities they can offer to visitors.

All Trail Towns should be able to offer a basic level of service to users (food, drink, and entertainment). Becoming a Trail Town, however, is not a “one size fits all” approach because each town will determine the best strategies to:

- Incentivize outdoor enthusiasts to visit the community.
- Publicize and offer information about the community.
- Establish an accessible and safe connection between the community and the nearby trail, park, or site.
- Educate local businesses about the economic benefits of outdoor enthusiasts, **especially bike tourists.**
- Inventory and address gaps in retail or hospitality services that outdoor enthusiasts will seek out.
- Promote an “outdoor-friendly” atmosphere within the town by supporting policies and infrastructure that make it safe and convenient to bicycle and walk within the community.
- Collaborate with neighboring towns on shared promotion opportunities, including events.

Visitors to the Genesee Valley Region, especially those that are planning overnight stays need supplies and equipment, and a host of other needs. They need places to stay, places to eat and places to be entertained. In the Genesee Valley, ten communities participated in a three-year initiative to better understand how their local assets can be leveraged to increase visitation, informed by research and data gathering exercises which identified areas for improvement, and opportunities to attract visitors through events and programming.

Benefits of becoming a Trail Town

Increased visitation by outdoor enthusiasts to the community and local businesses, boosting the local economy

Trail Towns flourish when they are part of a network along a long distance trail or in and around a regional network of outdoor recreation destinations. A network of Trail Towns allows different communities to focus on accommodating the needs of different visitors, allowing the whole region to be more attractive for tourists. Tourists spend money in communities on everything from food and lodging to new experiences and gifts. Tourists will also spend money on drinks—not only do they need a large amount of liquid to stay hydrated, but they also enjoy taking stops to cool off at everything from lemonade stands to breweries. The Genesee Valley has plenty of **craft breweries**, and the nearby **Finger Lakes** offers plenty of winery options. At the end of a long day, tourists will need somewhere to sleep, seeking out B&Bs, inns, hotels, motels, or campgrounds. Seeking out new experiences could also include shopping, buying gear for their trip and souvenirs and gifts to send to friends and family.

By improving the places that tourists will likely visit, communities will see an increase in visitor spending. The Trail Town program is inherently an outdoor tourism-based local and regional economic development initiative.

Increased pride of place and historic preservation

Community character and local history are an incredible draw for tourists seeking out new experiences. These factors also foster “pride of place” among residents and emphasize the importance of culture. By understanding how a community’s “brand” and unique history can serve as valuable community assets, the Trail Town process proves to be an effective mechanism for preserving and promoting the rich, diverse history of the region.

Less air pollution with more walkable, bikeable streets

Ensuring that tourists and visitors can safely and conveniently access nearby communities after spending time at a nearby park, greenway, historic site, or outdoor recreation facility requires an investment in infrastructure that supports both pedestrians and cyclists. Providing safe options for visitors ensures that they can safely and comfortably reach the main street, downtown area, or central business district. These improvements will also benefit non-tourists by providing an incentive for commuters and customers to ride or walk, thereby reducing greenhouse gas emissions and traffic congestion caused by single-occupant vehicles.

Higher quality of life for residents and a more desirable place to live

All of the improvements made to a community to attract tourists will also benefit residents by building and sustaining a reputation as a desirable place to live. These improvements can be physical, including changes to the streetscape. Improvements can also be social, with more opportunities for public events and gatherings. A thriving community can lead to increased home sales and home values, and a healthy local workforce.

Program Background

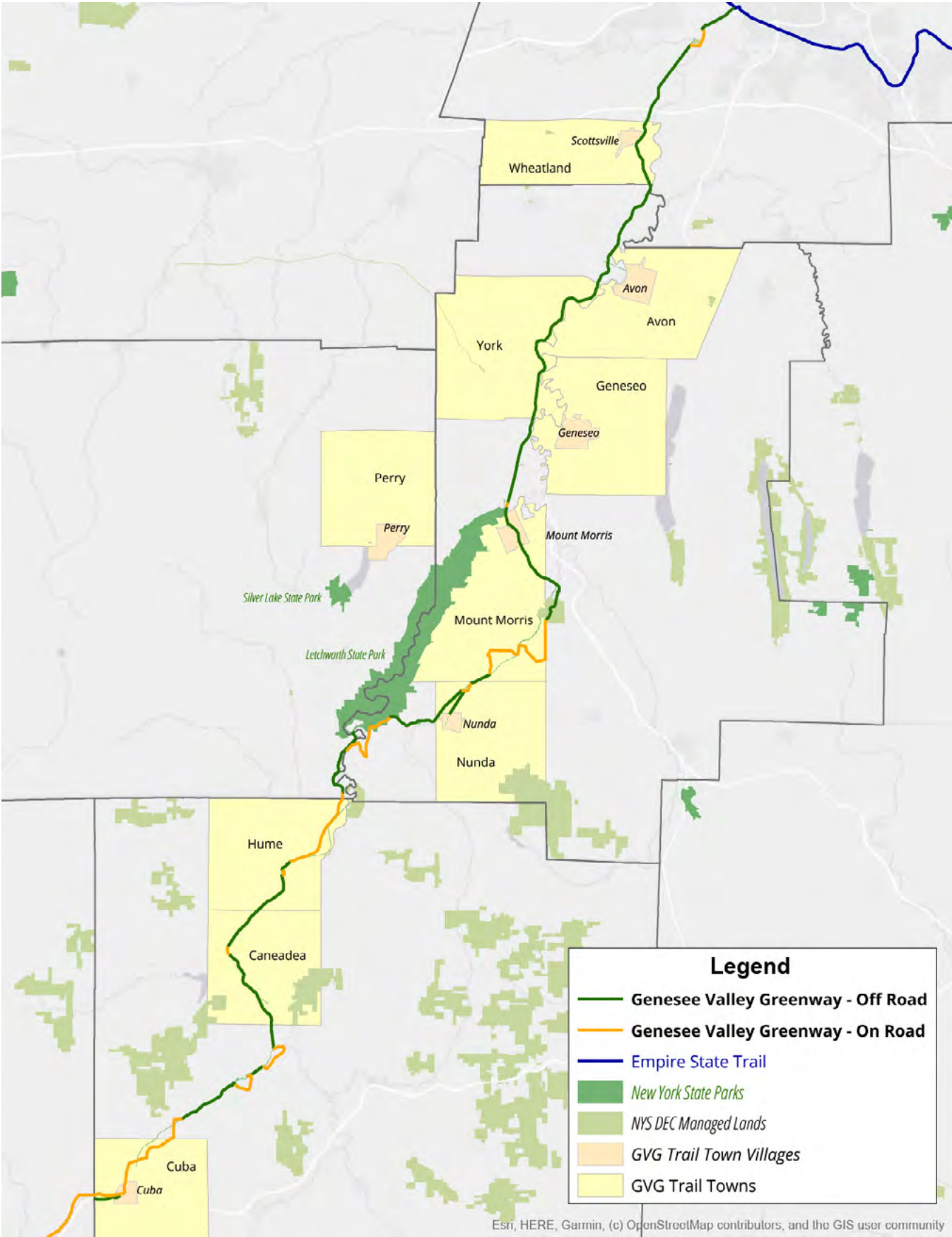
In 2019, Letchworth Gateway Villages (LGV) was awarded funding from the USDA's Rural Development Innovation Center and the Northern Border Regional Commission to embark on a regional planning initiative with 38 organizations based in the rural Genesee Valley Region. Led by LGV and in partnership with the Friends of the Genesee Valley Greenway (FoGVG), the Genesee Valley Trail Town initiative brought together groups who had been working for as many as 40 years to preserve and strengthen key heritage assets in the Genesee Valley. A unified system of trails, blueways, main street districts and hospitality hubs (Trail Towns) were deemed essential building blocks for a thriving rural and recreation-based economy. Using a combination of consistent trail-wide marketing, infrastructure improvements, business coaching, and technical assistance, ten communities have been able to leverage the Genesee Valley outdoor recreation and heritage tourism economy to benefit their local communities.

Ten communities formed Trail Town Steering Committees consisting of local stakeholders and residents dedicated to participating in a robust, three-year program to help them realize the benefits of being a Trail Town. LGV established a **thorough timeline** to guide committee members through a series of Trail Town activities. By carrying out these activities, each community was able to conduct local research, evaluate assets, engage with local stakeholders, collaborate with the business community, and promote their efforts as an official Genesee Valley Trail Town. Throughout this process, each community received technical assistance to develop an Action Plan which serves as a blueprint for future projects that will enhance the overall aesthetic within the community, strengthen community character, improve policies, and better promote the regional brand.



Photo credit: Nicole Manapol

Map of Genesee Valley Trail Towns as of 2023



In 2020, Parks & Trails New York (PTNY) joined the initiative. Made possible through funding from the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation, PTNY provided additional services and support to the participating communities, including \$100,000 offered in grants over a two-year period. These grants supported initiatives to enhance outdoor recreation and increase connectivity between the Genesee Valley Greenway and neighboring communities. The grants also helped Genesee Valley Trail Towns boost and take advantage of visitation to the Genesee Valley Greenway and other outdoor recreational resources in the area by fostering place-making efforts, creating safer streets for cyclists and pedestrians in Trail Town communities, and implementing projects identified in each community action plan.

2022 Genesee Valley Trail Town Awards

Greater Wheatland Area Chamber of Commerce | Total award: \$11,353

The construction of a kiosk in Scottsville's Canawaugus Park and Mumford's Freeman Park, wayfinding signage, parking signs, crosswalk signage on Scottsville and Mumford's Main Streets, historical interpretive signs, and a bike repair station and bike racks in Genesee Valley Greenway State Park.

Town of York | Total award: \$7,642

Parking signs at the Piffard trailhead, a kiosk, bike rack, and bench at the Fowlerville trailhead, a bike rack and a bench at York Landing, signage on River Road, and promotional materials.

Village of Geneseo | Total award: \$3,123

Completion of the Geneseo Loop Trail, including drainage and trail maintenance, marking the trail with blazes and directional signage, and placing benches along the trail.

Perry Main Street Association | Total award: \$11,000

Signage in multiple locations and a self-service tool kiosk for bike service along the Silver Lake Trail.

Letchworth Gateway Villages | Total award: \$2,185

Genesee Valley Trail Town marketing materials, including brochures, community customizable brochure inserts, rack cards.

Town of Hume | Total award: \$5,000

Demolition of former tennis court in town-owned park space directly adjacent to the greenway in preparation for the site to be used as a community gateway, and the purchase and installation of bicycle racks at three locations.

Town of Caneadea | Total award: \$3,100

Wayfinding and safety signage for public trails and disc golf courses in Houghton, and the installation of an informational kiosk at a river access site in Houghton, making the site a new pocket park and informational hub.

Village of Nunda | Total award: \$5,098

A trailhead kiosk, bike rack and benches along the Nunda Branch Trail of Genesee Valley Greenway State Park, and parking signs and a bike rack in the Village of Nunda.

Cuba Friends of Architecture | Total award: \$1,500

The purchase of three cloud-linked digital information displays and cloud-based digital signage devices that will allow the Cuba Trail Town committee to display general trail information, trail maps, trail history, local events, weather, town, charity, cultural and tourist information through digital feeds and locally created media.

2023 Genesee Valley Trail Town Awards

Village of Scottsville | Total award: \$5,853

Improving access by creating five new ADA designated handicapped parking spaces at Canawaugus Park and a concrete pathway connecting the parking area to the Greenway.

Village of Avon | Total award: \$3,417

Driving foot, bicycle, horse, and snowmobile traffic to the downtown area with new wayfinding and directional signage.

Town of York | Total award: \$7,051

Enhancing the user experience by installing wayfinding signage, ADA-compliant picnic tables, and a bicycle repair station.

Village of Geneseo | Total award: \$5,835

Installing wooden trail signs marking the Geneseo Loop Trail, and bicycle repair stations at Village Park and Highland Park in Geneseo.

Perry Main Street Association | Total award: \$5,853

Creating additional community connections to and activating the Silver Lake Trail by expanding a public art play structure.

Town of Hume | Total award: \$10,000

Providing a designated rest area through the construction of an open-air pavilion on the site of the former tennis court just off the Greenway in the hamlet of Fillmore.

Town of Caneadea | Total award: \$6,000

Highlighting local heritage by contributing towards programming and event support for the first Caneadea Seneca Field Days event in July 2023.

Cuba Friends of Architecture | Total award: \$6,026

Improving the west end of the greenway by installing a picnic table, bench, bike rack and dog waste station, and properly sealing concrete abutments with graffiti-resistant sealant.



New wayfinding kiosk in the Village of Scottsville funded by a Genesee Valley Trail Town grant. Photo credit: Jules Hoepting.

Overall, the program was developed and executed by the implementing partners for the participating communities in the Genesee Valley Region to be able to evaluate their existing assets, outline a plan to make improvements (based on current access and safety, existing signage, opportunities for business engagement and promotion, community character, municipal planning, policies, and leadership) and utilize funding sources to implement recommended changes. This program now serves as a model for other communities interested in the program mission, and associated benefits. The following timeline captures milestone action items during the three-year period:

Task	Timeline
Establish Trail Town Committees	October 2020 - December 2020
Assessments + Baseline Data	October 2020 - September 2021
Bike Around Assessments	June 2021 - August 2021
Community Branding + Mapping Workshops	January 2021 - September 2021
Networking Event	February 2021
Digital Coaching + Marketing Support	January 2021 - December 2021
Genesee Valley Trail Town Summit	October 2021
Action Plans	December 2021 - February 2022
Genesee Valley Trail Town Grants Round 1	February 2022
Networking Event	February 2022
Committee Check-ins	February 2022 - March 2022
Trail Town Coordinator Technical Assistance	November 2022 - October 2023
Networking Event	February 2023
Genesee Valley Trail Town Grants Round 2	March 2023
Genesee Valley Trail Town Fall Gathering	October 2023

Through these exercises, and using the **Genesee Valley Regional Assets Matrix** to evaluate each community's capacity to function as a Trail Town hospitality hub, each town was provided with an Action Agenda outlining priority opportunities and recommended actions (see **Scottsville's Action Agenda** for example).

In 2023, FoGVG pursued a New York State Park and Trail Partnership Grant (PTPG) to hire a part-time, 12-month Trail Town Coordinator beginning in fall 2022. Administered by PTNY, Park and Trail Partnership Grants are open to organizations whose mission reflects the preservation, stewardship, interpretation, environmental education, maintenance, and/or promotion of a New York park, trail, historic site or public land under the jurisdiction of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation or Department of Environmental Conservation. The Trail Town Coordinator was the primary point of contact for participating communities and served as a liaison between communities and implementing partners for one year.

This partnership enabled better information sharing, resource generation, and led to the creation of trail-wide marketing resources, access to funding for infrastructure improvements, business coaching and technical support, as well as stewardship engagement, and event planning assistance.

How to Use This Handbook

By documenting the process that the ten communities followed to become a Genesee Valley Trail Town, this handbook can serve as a promotional tool for communities that are currently part of the program and serve as a road map for those interested in becoming Genesee Valley Trail Towns. The support and resources afforded by this handbook can help current and future Genesee Valley Trail Towns meet key goals and educate community leaders, residents, and others on the benefits of embracing outdoor recreation as a driver of economic growth and community building through a formal Trail Town program.

Communities within the broader Genesee Valley region are in a position to collaborate and be part of the established Genesee Valley Trail Town network; for communities outside of the immediate range, this handbook can still function as a useful guide for developing a Trail Town program.

The steps included in this handbook are not necessarily linear, but should be well documented to track progress made on each component of the program. All of the recommendations and templates can be used to onboard new committee members and keep community members engaged and active.

This handbook is intended to outline a process for pursuing a Trail Town designation, organized into six major sections:

1. Committee formation
2. Research and data gathering
3. Promotion and brand awareness
4. Stakeholder engagement
5. Action plan development
6. Project implementation

Becoming a Genesee Valley Trail Town

A Trail Town program is only truly successful when it is a priority for your whole community, including elected leaders. Take time to educate municipal leaders on the background and benefits of becoming a Trail Town before starting this planning effort. Share other **Trail Town models**, this resource, and **webinars** to demonstrate program goals and impact. The support you receive on this initiative, and the local attitude towards this effort are just as important as any of the physical improvements made.

This process does not necessarily have a start and end point because the work of a Trail Town is never truly complete. There will always be room for improvement and opportunities for growth. This process will be iterative and will therefore require a long-term commitment from those involved and an understanding with the municipality about their role in sustaining the status as a Trail Town in the long term. It would be advisable to set up a formal municipal agreement between the Trail Town Committee and the municipality through a board resolution. The resolution should include language that supports the following:

- Recognition of the goals of a Trail Town, and how these goals can benefit the community.
- A commitment to actively partner with the Trail Town Steering Committee to administer and advocate for the program.
- A commitment to help committee members carry out the steps outlined in this handbook, grow membership, consult with regional partners, organize and participate in activities to solicit feedback from residents, and articulate the goals of a Trail Town to the general public.



Committee Formation

Establish a Trail Town Steering Committee to build a network of leaders from the area who can offer expertise in planning, promotion, marketing, or fundraising and share an enthusiasm for outdoor recreation, community building, and geo-tourism. Building out a network of like-minded individuals dedicated to improving your community by carrying out the goals and mission of a Trail Town is important. These members will take on different roles and responsibilities and can help facilitate conversations with state agencies, local governments, private sector entities, and local non-profits.

Potential members could include:

- Chambers of Commerce / Main Street Associations
- Hiking, cycling and other outdoor recreation clubs and organizations
- Merchants, hospitality-related businesses
- Outfitter businesses and bike shops
- Park managers and interpretation staff
- Volunteer or Friends groups that support trails
- Local authors and photographers
- Travel-related organizations and businesses (i.e. B&Bs, restaurants, breweries, events)
- Historic preservation, agricultural, and conservation groups
- Community leaders or individuals with special knowledge of the area's heritage
- Local schools and colleges or extensions offices
- Municipal / County planning, parks and recreation staff
- Local Youth

Recruit members by hosting a general interest event, or using existing events (or **activities already occurring in the region**) to recruit members and talk about your involvement as a Trail Town committee member. Tabling opportunities establish a “face” for this initiative and can function as a platform to talk about the goals of the program and the associated benefits.

These outreach events offer an opportunity to talk to people about the topics and roles that are critical to a Trail Town program. Namely:

- Trail development, maintenance and management
- Merchants/hospitality business mobilization and outreach
- Marketing, public relations, content development, photography
- Promotion
- Stewardship: trash pick up, beautification efforts, advocacy
- Signage and wayfinding guidance
- Education and awareness
- Grant pursuit

The members that make up the committee will be responsible for carrying out the tasks associated with the following program areas.

2021 Genesee Valley Trail Town Summit.
Photo credit: Nina Piccini.



Genesee Valley Trail Towns members hold positions within local and county government, higher-education, planning, local nonprofits and businesses, as well as volunteer organizations. A formal board resolution from each community participating in this initiative was required, and a Trail Town committee member was designated to liaise with the LGV-Genesee Valley Trail Town project team. This member helped organize activities on the ground in their community and participated in workshops and other planned activities.



Research and Data Gathering

Self-Assessment

A self-assessment is designed to encourage communities to take an inventory of their existing recreation and hospitality assets, and other built infrastructure. This exercise will be the first chance to start thinking about opportunities for growth and development based on the findings. The assessment will provide a comprehensive understanding of:

- Available services, amenities, and attractions
- Distribution, placement, and types of signage along the trail and in the community
- Condition of bicycle and/or pedestrian infrastructure
- Appearance and access to trailheads or gateways
- Availability of information about nearby services, amenities, attractions (including outdoor recreation opportunities), as well as nearby communities and events.

Genesee Valley Trail Towns were provided with an online self-assessment template modeled on the Great Allegheny Passage Trail Town self-assessment. Committee members were instructed to dedicate at least 2 hours to conduct a walking tour of their town to document the condition, accessibility, or availability of the general access between a nearby recreation asset and the town (i.e., Genesee Valley Greenway State Park, Silver Lake State Park, or Letchworth State Park), signage, safety (including sidewalks), parking, Central Business District and Main Street businesses, and design.

Each Trail Town steering committee should schedule a time to complete a **Trail Town Self-Assessment**; it is recommended that groups set aside several hours to complete it. The assessment will be most useful if conditions are assessed on the ground. A walking or biking tour, of the town will help the steering committee get the most out of the exercise.

Bike-Around

First impressions are incredibly important. Locals and residents may overlook certain details about a community that might leave a lasting impression for a first-time visitor. To guarantee that visitors will not pass by a town altogether, or head back home prematurely, a town must first understand how visitors first experience your community, and address any obstacles or deterrents they encounter while navigating this unknown area.

A bike-around is a community-level assessment designed to evaluate a community from the perspective of a visitor. This exercise will help committee members and local leaders understand what factors could influence someone's decision to visit, or not visit a community. Facilitating a community bike-around can help illuminate issues that deter visitors from leaving a nearby trail, park, or historic site, and making their way into your community. It is also a way for local residents, businesses, and decision makers to have a more thorough discussion about what a community does well (such as directing visitors to various points of interest through wayfinding signage) and what it could improve (such as more adequately promoting all of the accessible and outdoor-friendly features). Insights generated during this exercise will be used to inform the Action Plan.



PTNY's bike-around checklist, which can easily feed into the Trail Town Self Assessment, is an easy-to-use tool for assessing a community, and for identifying steps to make a community more accessible, safe, and welcoming for visitors and residents. Findings from the assessment should offer a better understanding of the challenges visitors might face when seeking services in a community or general areas for improvement. Depending on the location, some checklist items may not apply, and additional elements should be added.

Read through the assessment questions before starting a ride, stop often to discuss observations, and take sufficient notes. The voice memo app on a phone may serve as a useful tool to document the group's thoughts in the moment. Questions on the assessment do not need to be answered in order.

During the ride, a more experienced and comfortable rider should be identified to take the lead and guide the group, and another similarly experienced rider should stay at the rear of the group, to ensure that riders do not fall behind and that there are no other issues with the group. Riders should wear safety vests or brightly colored clothing to alert drivers or other cyclists to the group's presence.

A discussion should take place at the end of the ride to go over findings and impressions that participants noted during the bike-around. Select a location, either a local restaurant or other civic gathering place to discuss (over a meal, preferably). The post-ride discussion questions included in the assessment can help guide the discussion, although they are intended to be prompts for group discussion, not necessarily a set of questions to be strictly answered. This discussion can also provide participants with an opportunity to consider other questions not included in the assessment.

While this exercise is designed with cyclists in mind, it is strongly recommended that a portion of the activity be conducted on foot. This will allow the event to be inclusive of people of all ages and abilities, and provide committee members with the perspective of visitors that choose to drive to a community and park at a nearby lot or trailhead; these visitors are here for the sole purpose of recreating, and will likely have plans to walk to nearby restaurants and shops afterwards. This exercise then incorporates fundamental questions about parking availability and convenience, as well as sidewalk conditions and street-crossings.

Guidelines for Planning a Route:

The following are some design parameters for planning your bike-around route and community assessment:

- Entire route should be no more than 10-12 miles (round-trip) and be designed for different levels of ability. The route may include a walking component, enabling participants to join in at different times or for different segments.
- Routes should link in with main street / business districts or other destination anchors that visitors are likely to want to visit.
- Routes should end near a food and beverage destination where the group can get some food and drink, and sit down and have a debrief about everyone's experience.

In May 2021, PTNY hosted an informational webinar to prepare each Trail Town to host a bike-around in their community. The webinar offered guidance on pre-ride preparation, route planning, group ride etiquette (i.e., **hand signals**), safety considerations, prompts for a post-ride discussion, and how to use the four-part assessment. PTNY and partners encouraged committee members to adapt the assessment as necessary and use the findings to spur discussion both on the ride and during the post-ride discussion.

To learn more about neighboring Trail Towns, and how others were planning to address opportunities and obstacles, committee members participated in other bike-arounds hosted by their neighbors.

Digital Audit

The Trail Town committee will need to establish a strong working relationship with the business community because visitors will rely on the services and goods offered by local businesses. The community will therefore rely on the businesses to maintain a strong online presence with consistent messaging intended to attract new visitors, and keep locals coming back.

A Trail Town committee should conduct a “digital audit” to help local businesses further improve their online presence. By evaluating content for the online platforms that local businesses are active on, how active they are, and where they rank in direct and indirect searches, a Trail Town committee will have a better understanding of the collective “digital footprint” in their community. Findings from the audit should be presented to the businesses in the form of recommendations, based on the following information:

- Search Engine Optimization (SEO) - how many times does the business appear in a Google search and where is the website listed?
- Website - does the business have a website? Is it easy to navigate? Does it look good on mobile? Does it have updated content (including posted hours)? Is the navigation menu clearly labeled? Is there a balance of text and graphics? Does it clearly indicate services/products offered?
- Social Media Presence - what platforms are they on? Is information consistent across their various profiles? Are they “responsive” to incoming messages?
- Claimed versus Unclaimed Listing - are the business' online profiles claimed / owned by the business?

Addressing all of these questions, and making changes based on the findings will guarantee that all of the businesses in your community can be found easily, and visitors will know exactly what they're "selling," and that they're "open for business."

A committee can arrange to meet with business owners to discuss and offer ways to:

- Increase SEO ranking
- Offer boiler plate messaging about outdoor recreation opportunities in the area, and exactly how their business can cater to outdoor enthusiasts
- Integrate additional information on the website that might be lacking
- Create at least one dedicated social media page
- Create a listing on major travel sites, such as Google Maps, Yelp and TripAdvisor. These sites are essential for tourism-based businesses. By being listed on these sites, businesses make themselves visible to trail users who might be relying on these sites to plan their trips and daily activities. It also creates opportunities for patrons to leave reviews and for businesses to engage with them by thanking reviewers or addressing concerns.
- Become Google verified

A digital audit was conducted by LGV to catalog information about local businesses within each Trail Town. The data collected was then used to populate the **Explore Genesee Valley mapping feature**. For each listing the following data was collected:

- | | |
|--|--|
| • Website | • Can be found in discovery search (include page rank) |
| • Google Verified | • Mailing address |
| • Google Rating | • City |
| • Facebook Page | • State |
| • Facebook Rating | • Postal Code |
| • Yelp | • Chamber Member |
| • Business claimed on Yelp | • Tax Parcel # |
| • Yelp rating | • Hours |
| • Trip advisor | • Contact Person |
| • Business claimed on Trip Advisor | • Phone number |
| • Tripadvisor rating | |
| • Can be found in direct Google search (include page rank) | |



Placemaking Workshop

Placemaking is the process by which local stakeholders make observations about, plan for, and help shape a community into a more attractive, inviting, and accessible space. A placemaking workshop can be held to capture ideas and feedback from vested stakeholders about things that the Trail Town Committee, municipality, as well as local and regional partners can do to make a community more attractive, inviting, and accessible.

Placemaking workshops function as a place for Trail Town committees to inventory their community's destination assets that they would consider a defining characteristic for their unique story of place.

The placemaking workshop should be open to the general public and serve as an opportunity for Trail Town Committee members to showcase program goals and benefits, and provide a space for attendees to discuss existing community strengths, opportunities for growth (how would the community like to be seen, and what the community would like to be known for, in the eyes of visitors), physical assets (this can include places, businesses, events, and experiences), social experiences (planned and proposed events) and gaps or areas for improvement (wayfinding signage, policies, online presence, fundraising, etc.).

Everyone should be welcome to join the placemaking workshop. The Trail Town steering committee will be responsible for coordinating the venue for the placemaking workshop (a library or other community space is recommended), and for promoting the opportunity to the community.



Tips for hosting a successful place-making workshop:

1. Create a flier or dedicated web page that clearly articulates the goal of the workshop
2. Make the invite open, encouraging all people from the general public to attend
3. Do personal outreach to local groups and businesses whose feedback is important, specifically requesting their participation
4. Host the bike-around and the workshop on the same day or weekend to get full participation
5. Designate a note-taker during the workshop to capture ideas
6. Use software, such as Slido, or other activities/materials like printed maps and stickers to make your discussion more engaging
7. Record the workshop for those that are unable to attend
8. Offer an online option seeking feedback and input from those that are unable to attend
9. Keep the format simple: follow a SWOT analysis structure
10. Host a Trail Town Steering Committee meeting shortly after the workshop to debrief and determine how this information will be used to inform an action plan.

LGV facilitated, and use the information from each workshop to help inform the **Design Guidelines** and assist communities with identifying their key contribution towards the Trail Town fabric, including which historic era they identified most with and a marketing slogan which would frame the creation of kiosk content and digital content.



2023 EMPIRE STATE TRAIL TOWNS
PARKS & TRAILS NEW YORK
NEW YORK STATE OF GOVERNMENT
Canal Corporation

**TRAIL TOWN
PLACEMAKING
WORKSHOP**

**Monday, June 5
6-7:30pm**
Lockport City Hall
1 Locks Plaza, Lockport, NY 14094
Council Chambers

Lockport was recently selected as an Empire State Trail Town by Parks & Trails New York and the NYS Canal Corporation. As a Trail Town, Lockport is in a unique position to benefit from its location along the Erie Canalway Trail/Empire State Trail.

Join Parks & Trails New York and the Lockport Trail Town Steering Committee for an interactive workshop to share your thoughts and ideas about what makes Lockport a great destination for visiting cyclists along the nations longest multi-use trail and ways the trail user experience might be improved.

For more information about the Empire State Trail Town Program, visit www.ptny.org/EmpireStateTrailTowns



Promotion and Brand Awareness

The outdoor recreation assets in the Genesee Valley are a draw for visitors traveling from out-of-state, as well as those that live locally or within New York State. However, unless these assets are promoted and talked about, someone may not know whether or not to visit, and when. The best marketing strategy will showcase services and products that people remember and are eager to tell others about.

Since visitors want to enjoy the scenery, services, and heritage of nearby communities, a Trail Town will need to highlight how their vibrant space can accommodate a range of needs. This detail can be displayed on a dedicated page on the municipality's website, tailored to the needs of outdoor recreationists. Consider a map which highlights a range of offerings from a bike shop, to an ice cream parlor and restaurants, or a grocery store, and laundry facilities. Emphasizing preferred **walking** and **cycling routes**, and highlighting known locations for bike racks and benches will make the community easy to navigate and simplify trip planning considerations. Hospitality services should be encouraged to review and share these resources so that each establishment can be a trail-friendly place that encourages outdoor enthusiasts to visit and welcomes them with warm hospitality.

Using web and print materials to showcase a downtown's unique character will offer a positive image of the community to local customers, investors, new businesses, and visitors. Developing a promotion strategy should include aspects of advertising, retail promotions, special events, and marketing campaigns.

All current GVTT participants are members of LGV, and it's strongly encouraged for other communities pursuing a Trail Town designation to become a member of LGV to receive all promotional tools and services offered through ExploreGeneseeValley.com.

The Genesee Valley Greenway and Letchworth State Parks are at the center of the Genesee Valley Region, through which the north-flowing Genesee River travels.

Here you will discover handworking farming, communities and historic villages—offering visitors everything from farm-to-table cuisine and craft breweries, secret swimming holes and lakeside retreats, to unique antique shops and bed and breakfast inns.

Whether you're seeking a hearty meal, a taste of history or a conversation along your journey, we welcome your visit.

Each community's character is distinct—get to know them all and find your favorite places to launch Genesee Valley adventures.

Top: Genesee Country Village & Museum
Bottom: A Balloon Over Letchworth Right

Top: Canadice Lake
Bottom: Sample & Right

In collaboration with and supported by: **PARKS & TRAILS** NEW YORK

GENESEE VALLEY TRAIL TOWNS

Explore like a local.

GENESEE - VALLEY -

Find trip plans, insider tips and more at ExploreGeneseeValley.com shared by locals who love living here.

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Sign up to receive newsletters from local organizations to keep track of local events and topics of interest. If areas of interest align, consider reaching out to groups to discuss collaboration opportunities. Taking every opportunity to speak at community events and meetings on behalf of your committee will reinforce your community's reputation as a Trail Town.

The tools found on **Explore Genesee Valley** should be the main platform that a Trail Town considers for promotion. Assigning one volunteer to serve as a “**map guide contributor**” will allow the community to showcase outdoor attractions, in-town and nearby dining options, overnight lodging alternatives and directions to and from specific locations in the guide.

Promotion should come in the form of both online and print materials. However, deciding exactly what content, including local assets, services, amenities, and attractions should be displayed, should be a discussion among committee members during the placemaking workshop. Deciding who will pay for the cost of print materials, who will print them, where this information will be made available (at a kiosk, or local welcome center), and at what events it will be distributed, should be a topic of discussion reserved for the Trail Town committee.

Resources are available to help businesses **improve their online visibility**, which will invariably help generate a positive image for your town.



Stakeholder Engagement

Routine, consistent communication among committee members is incredibly important. Establishing a recurring check-in each month, if only for thirty minutes, will allow time to discuss progress made on research and data gathering efforts, any coordination or next steps with the municipality, promotion efforts, upcoming events, or general discussion about recruitment and retaining volunteers.

Hosting a networking event can allow committee members to engage with each other, and serve as a venue to promote the program, discuss findings from research efforts, address obstacles or barriers to implementation, or showcase progress. Those participating in the Genesee Valley Trail Town program were invited to participate in **webinars and engagement events** over the three-year period. Offering both in-person and virtual options will guarantee participation from everyone involved, regardless of their location.

Hosting a new event, or participating in existing ones, to promote the work of your Trail Town can result in new committee members or visitors.



1. What characteristics can the community build off of that already attracts outdoor users.
2. What can the community improve to attract outdoor users.
3. What changes can be made to ensure that people of all ages and abilities will not only enjoy their time in the community, but make them inclined to spread the word about what it has to offer outdoor users.

- Existing conditions: population, location, local history, map of local parks and trails (surface condition, miles in town if applicable, property owner), list of hospitality businesses and services, key destinations, available online promotional resources (website, social media accounts).
- An overview of the community's interest in the Trail Town program.
- A list of those supporting the initiative (including municipal and local officials, businesses).
- Copy of the municipal resolution endorsing program involvement.
- Clear set of goals and corresponding objectives (see “benefits of becoming a Trail Town”).
- Information and findings from known data collection efforts including the self-assessment, bike-around, and placemaking workshop.
- Results from public engagement opportunities to solicit feedback on data collection efforts.
- 5-10 short and long-term recommendations based on findings.

Genesee Valley Regional Assets Matrix						
		<div>Key:</div> <div><div>Excellent</div><div>Acceptable</div><div>Opportunity</div><div>No Evidence</div></div>				
L1 Hospitality Hub - vibrant downtown that can accommodate overnight lodging						
L2 Town - wide-area with multiple amenities, including a small downtown						
L3 Hamlet - crossroads						
L4 Destination - park, museum, exit, able to attract tourists						
Assessment Matrix		Trail Access & Safety	Signage	Business & Promotion	Community Design	Municipal Planning
Asset Type (L1-L4)						
County Allegany Genesee Livingston Monroe Wyoming						
Town/Town Govt. (Glenayre, Trailhead, Adirondack Park)						
Location:						
		Plan (Y/N) Trail to Town Connectivity Safety - Bike Lanes / Loops Safety - Sidewalks Safety - Crosswalks Parking - Trailside Parking - Business District Bike / Trailer Parking	Plan (Y/N) General Signage Signage in Town Signage Into Town (on-road) Signage Into Town (on-trail) Adopted Signage & Franchise Standards General Impressions Online / Digital Presence Services - Lodging Services - Food & Drink Services - Recreation Services - Cultural Sites Services - Retail Services - Transportation Services - Technology Promotion & Events Funding Programs available at Local Levels Steuer Association / Local Chamber of Commerce	General Impressions Streetscape Storefronts Amenities Character Public Parks / Open Space Comprehensive Plan (DATE) Planning / Zoning Boards Agricultural Preservation Plan Watershed Protection Plan Local Watersford Redevelopment Plan Main Street Program / Org Architectural Design Guidelines Historic Properties / District National Historic Registry Certified Local Government Program		
L1	M	G				
L1	L	T				
L3	L	T				
L3	L	T				
L1	L	LGV				
L1	L	LGV				
L1	W	LGV				
L2	L	T				
L3	A	A				
L3	A	A				
L1	A	G				
L3	W	G				
L3	I	T				



Project Implementation

Finding funding to implement the short and long-term recommendations within an action plan will require a significant amount of coordination with your participating municipality. As a guaranteed “eligible applicant,” and the beneficiary of any improvements, it is highly recommended that a separate planning session occur after the action plan has been completed to discuss a project pipeline.

Applying for funding through the State’s Consolidated Funding Application will allow applicants to access multiple state funding sources through one application, making the process quicker, easier, and more productive.

A number of U.S. Department of Transportation funding sources can be used for bicycle and pedestrian-related purposes. A portion of federal funding is directed to the state to be disseminated, including by the **NYS Department of Transportation**.

The **Recreational Trails Program** is a federally funded program administered by the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, and provides funds to develop and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities for both non-motorized and motorized trail uses.

Additional funding sources include:

- **Safe Streets for All (SS4A)**
- **Transportation Alternatives Program**
- **Rural Opportunities to Use Transportation for Economic Success (ROUTES)**
- **Conservation and Outdoor Recreation Challenge Cost Share Applications**
- **Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) Program**
- **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)**

For other funding opportunities visit **PTNY’s website**.

Looking Ahead

Genesee Valley Trail Towns are creating momentum in the region by spearheading local programs that **support safe cycling for youth, incentivizing visitation** to the Genesee Valley Greenway and hosting culturally significant **events to celebrate local heritage**. Through these efforts Genesee Valley Trail Towns are creating welcoming places where residents and visitors want to eat, play, and sleep.

All of the energy at the local level is further strengthened by investments that transcend municipal borders. Beyond participating in a regional Trail Town program, communities are inherently linked and poised to benefit from **improvements to the Genesee Valley Greenway, four new pedestrian bridges under construction in Allegany County**, and ripple effects anticipated from the State's **Downtown Revitalization Initiative** and **New York Forward** programs.

With all of this progress happening in real time, committee members should be “looking ahead” and planning for the next iteration of this work. As evidenced by this handbook, a Trail Town program has many different components, each requiring a unique set of skills or expertise provided by willing participants and volunteers. A committee should task one person or team of people to be responsible for each of the following areas: research and data gathering, promotion and branding awareness, stakeholder engagement, and action plan development and project implementation. By creating a formal structure within the committee and establishing clear roles and responsibilities, one person is not responsible for advancing and keeping track of all of the steps outlined in the action plan.

Creating a structure for advancing the action plans will also set a baseline of expectations for those involved, determine capacity, and identify volunteer needs. Once a structure is in place, committee members can actively recruit to fill vacancies.

Each committee should plan to meet on a regular basis, ideally at least once a month, and dedicate one meeting at the beginning of the year to map out the next few months, depending on what is needed to meet action plan recommendations and goals. Creating a calendar of events can help keep information about funding opportunities, events, and anticipated milestones organized and establish a realistic timeline for a work plan. It will be important to establish a structured working relationship among committee members that all agree to a reasonable set of goals and outcomes. The committee should agree on a mission/objective, designate a chair or facilitator, select an administrator (to take notes during meetings or send reminders), define internal operations (who is responsible for each aspect of the program), and designate milestones.



To keep the momentum behind a Trail Town program following the first phase of this work outlined in this handbook, PTNY recommends that each committee:

Recruit additional committee members to support the goals, objectives, and tasks outlined in your action plan

Once a committee has a plan for future projects, and associated roles and responsibilities are defined, recruiting new members is a logical next step. Bringing new members into your committee will naturally generate new ideas and offer a new perspective, create a more equitable distribution of the workload, and create a larger network of people dedicated to the program goals.

Work in collaboration with surrounding communities

Take advantage of having like-minded Trail Towns as neighboring communities. Collaboration could take the form of an event, a joint press release in support of a common initiative, or bulk purchasing for desired amenities. Relying on other Trail Towns for advice about their committee structure, or how they are recruiting new members could lead to more open and consistent information sharing. Find the best way to communicate with other Trail Towns, whether through informal email, routine quarterly Zoom meetings, or through existing Happy Hour or recreational meet-ups.

Ongoing research and evaluation

Developing and executing action plan recommendations should be an iterative process. The document should never be considered final because it should be adapted to meet the changing landscape, both physically and socially. As projects are completed, new ideas should be generated; as new committee members and volunteers are engaged, priorities should be shifted to reflect a new audience. Use existing resources to surface additional insights (i.e., revisit findings from the **visitor survey**). Committee members should conduct additional research to better understand the target demographic.

Find additional ways to promote your community as a Trail Town

At the heart of a Trail Town is a community prepared to make improvements to stand out among the endless destination locations in New York State in an effort to attract new visitors. In order to get your community “on the map,” and showcase the special assets that visitors will find interesting enough to plan a trip around, a community must use all of the resources that have been created, or will be created, to tell new visitors exactly why they should plan a trip to this location, and what they will find when they get there.

While the concept of Trail Towns might be familiar to certain audiences, others might find it hard to understand. Use this handbook to create a simple, straight-forward description of the program, and how the program is relevant to your community. Publicizing this information on a municipal page will lend legitimacy to the program.

Pursue grants to fund action plan recommendations/projects

Municipal leaders play a significant role in a Trail Town program. While not expected to be coordinating meetings and crafting agendas or developing a work plan, a municipality should be in routine communication with the committee leader. Establishing a check-in each month will allow the committee to share updates about committee member growth and development, required promotional materials, project proposals, funding pursuits, events, and community engagement opportunities. Trail Towns can also request time to speak about these topics during municipal board meetings or main street group meetings. Moreover, the committee can request specific support from the municipality, from simple requests like promoting an upcoming event, to more complicated requests, such as pursuing a grant opportunity. There are numerous **funding opportunities** available for municipalities that are specifically tailored to support projects.

Throughout this process each committee should strongly consider a collaborative approach, including partnering with nearby communities. Focusing on the assets each community can offer and organizing a public event that builds on these strengths, such as a themed bike ride or a series of pop-up markets with live music, can connect multiple communities and draw in visitors. Each committee member plays an important role as a “brand ambassador” by elevating the Genesee Valley as a regional destination; this can be accomplished through information sharing and networking among communities, business owners, residents, and elected officials.



About the Trail Town Partners



Parks & Trails New York

Parks & Trails New York (PTNY) is a leading advocate for expanding, protecting, and promoting a network of green space for use and enjoyment by all. Serving as a resource and advisor for communities seeking to capitalize on the geo-tourism market and transform themselves into walkable and bikeable destinations, PTNY can offer strategies to help build capacity within your community to help sustain your goals as a Trail Town.



Friends of the Genesee Valley Greenway

The Friends of the Genesee Valley Greenway, Inc. (FOGVG) is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit membership organization, incorporated in 1993. The mission of the Friends is to assist in the development, protection, promotion, and maintenance of New York's Genesee Valley Greenway State Park in accordance with guidelines established in the OPRHP Genesee Valley Greenway Management Plan and to support and promote other non-motorized recreational opportunities for the general public along the Genesee Valley Greenway.



Letchworth Gateway Villages

Letchworth Gateway Villages (LGV) is a municipal collaboration designed to catalyze economic growth and new tourism-related market opportunities for the communities that serve as "gateways" to Letchworth State Park. Through network-building, regional marketing, technical assistance, and research, LGV serves as a vehicle to build the regional cooperation critical for realizing our long-term economic potential. LGV is formalized under an MoU agreement established in 2019 and legally operates as a 501c3 through a fiscal sponsorship arrangement with Social and Environmental Entrepreneurs (SEE).

Additional Resources

Great Allegheny Passage Trail Town Program

USDA Rural Development

Northern Border Regional Commission

Letchworth Gateway Villages

Friends of the Genesee Valley Greenway

Office of State Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Bicyclists Bring Business: A Handbook for Attracting Cyclists to New York's Canal Communities

Explore Genesee Valley Wine Lovers' Itinerary

Explore Genesee Valley Breweries and Eateries

Timeline for Genesee Valley Trail Town Program

Genesee Valley Regional Assets Matrix

Village of Scottsville Action Agenda

Letchworth Gateway Villages Webinars

Explore Genesee Valley Activities and Events

Trail Town Self Assessment

Bike-Around Check-List

Letchworth Gateway Villages Design Guidelines

Digital Main Street



STATE PARK

NEW YORK Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation



PARK OPEN
6:00am to 10:00pm

CONTACT PARK MANAGER
585-493-3600

Genesee Valley Trail Town Handbook

Published December 2023



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