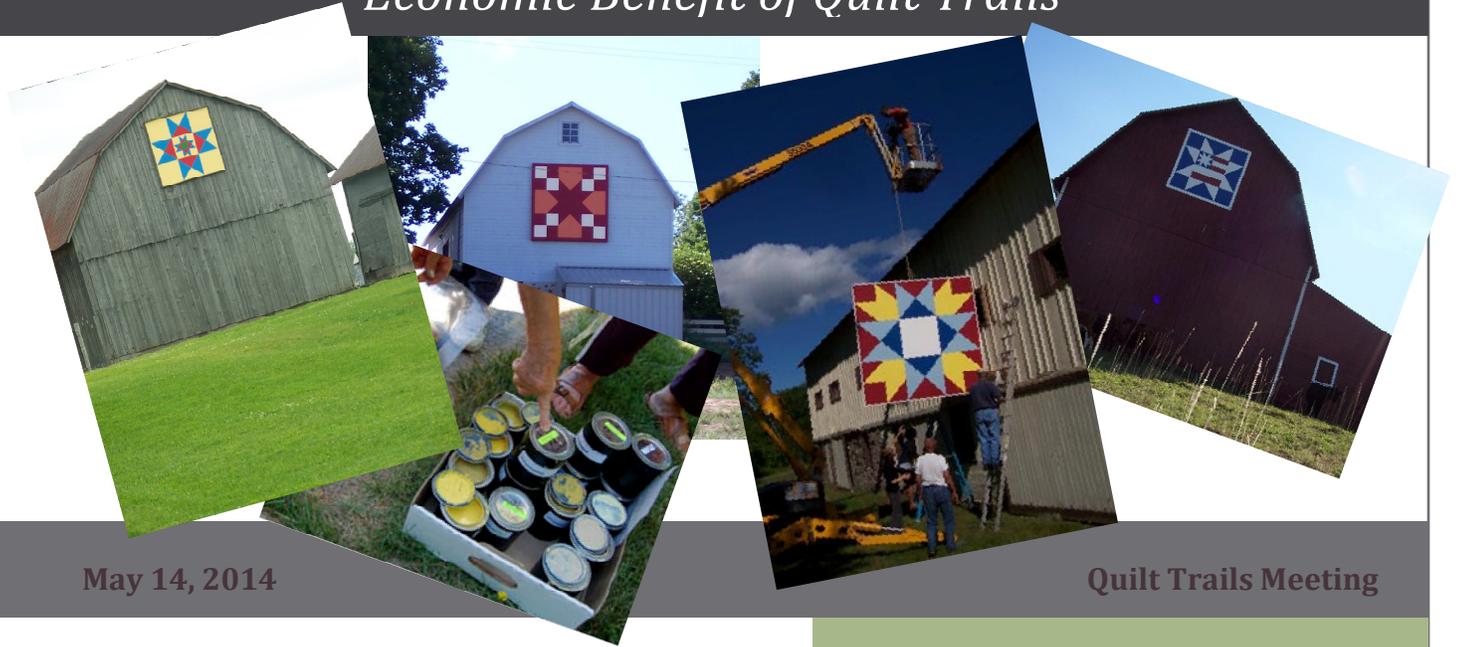


# Economic Benefit of Quilt Trails



May 14, 2014

Quilt Trails Meeting

## Introduction

Quilt barn trails are increasingly popular. Combining a barn with a quilt pattern honors quilting and farming, two important aspects of American heritage. People include quilt trails in their vacation plans. Trails are an adventure of discovery and friendship. Travelers enjoy friends and family; discover beautiful countryside and our special communities.

This type of visitation is tourism – and it adds to local economies because visitors shop, eat, and sleep in local establishments along the way.

Economic benefit and tourism is included in the goals of most quilt trails I have visited or read about. It makes sense doesn't it? If people come and tour the trail and visit little shops and eat at the local diner they are adding to the economy of that place? Yep! But proving this is hard to do – especially to the township planners and economic development folks who want numbers and statistics. Increasing the impact that arts and culture can bring to communities is becoming known – even assumed by some. Still, it is important to keep these people informed about what we are doing and why. The more information we can gather from the businesses along our quilt trails, the better!

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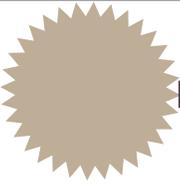


## Finding Economic Evidence

Documenting visitation and funding spent in communities is difficult. Ideally you would like to have a profile of your visitors:

- **Who are they?**
  - numbers, ages
- **Where are they from?**
  - track by city or zip
  - identify those 50+ miles away
- **How long did they stay?**
  - important to know if they lodged locally and # of nights/rooms
- **Why did they come?**
  - was your trail the primary reason for their visit?
- **How much did they spend?**
  - lodging, meals, gifts, supplies & services
- **Is this their first or a return visit?**

Discovering some of this information about your trail visitation will help you to tell your story. Traditionally visitors are considered tourists if they travel from more than 50 miles away from your trail. What they spend is adding to your economy; bringing new money into your area.



# Identify and Document Visitation and Impact of Your Trail

## Counting Visitors at the Gate

Discovering economic impact from our trails is difficult. We do not have an entry gate. There is no place to ‘count’ our visitors and no easy way to gather information to tally numbers of visitors; money spent in shops, businesses and restaurants; where visitors come from; and if they come back.

***Economic impact to our community is derived when outsiders visit and spend money.*** They bring ‘new money’ into our community. Economic impact is not gained when locals visit our trails and eat and shop along the way.

Here are some ideas to consider in identifying and documenting visitation and impact of your trails.

### Coupons & Surveys

Add coupons and/or a survey to your information brochure and map. The questions on page 1 can form the basis of a survey. Secure the participation of some key eateries, lodging providers, and businesses for 10% or 20% off purchases with the coupon and/or the survey. Maybe the survey could be printed on the back of the coupon.

### A Pilot Project

Create a limited distribution of a special brochure that includes a survey and/or coupon. Decide on a limited period of distribution. Partner with select eateries and shops supportive of your trail and who will accept your coupon. Distribute this brochure at locations where visitors pick up your brochure. This could be a local quilt shop or visitor center.

### Survey Incentive

Create an incentive for participating in a mail-back or leave a survey at a quilt shop or visitor center. This could be a quilt, quilt pattern or other treasure. Like a lottery drawing, interested people would take the time to do a quick survey. This could be a one-time project across a number of quilt trails with an incentive prize for participating be with each trail and a final big drawing across all the trail participants. Such a project would give local AND cross-state numbers and statistics.

### Bus Tours

Make sure you contact companies that are organizing bus tours and make a pitch for coming to your area for your trail. Partnering with local businesses via the Chamber or Tourism organization would strengthen your position. These tours can also identify numbers of participants and demonstrate to communities the types of stops and impact their visit will bring.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Thanks!

These ideas emerged from a meeting between a museum curator, rural sociologist, extension community development specialist and an economic analyst – all interested in community cultural activity and especially quilt trail projects. Included were Julie Avery, MSU Museum; Wynne Wright MSU Community Sustainability & Sociology; Yvonne Zoia, MSU Extension Educator and Steve Miller, MSU Agricultural Economics & Analysis.

### Challenge

Consider how to begin to document visitation to your trail. Start small. Experiment with ways to identify and track information. Keep in touch with local businesses, governmental and tourism agencies. Make sure they know about you and your goals. Ask for their help and assistance as you are contributing to your community and region economy and attractiveness to visitors.





## Economic Study

### Ohio Arts Council Quilt Barn Impact Study

*Understanding the Value of the Ohio Quilt Barn Trails*

In 2008 the Ohio Arts Council commissioned a study of Quilt barn trail impact. They surveyed quilt barn project coordinators, inventoried trail information from each county, interviewed selected trail organizers and held focus groups in three counties. While an older study this is one of the few 'scientifically' organized studies.

They looked at the organization of quilt barn projects and their growth and identified economic, social and cultural contributions of projects. Among the economic contributions of quilt barn trails were:

- **Tourism**  
Quilt barn owners and business owners noted increasing frequency of visitors who come for the quilt trail.

- **Entrepreneurship**  
Emerging trails encourage local businesses and entrepreneurial products and marketing. From the promotion and production of quilt making supplies to products like trail quilt patterns, note cards, magnets and more.

- **Community Resources**  
The development of strategic business partnerships with governmental and business entities can leverage financial support of trail projects and forge new partnerships and awareness for the future.

The Ohio report also notes social and cultural contributions of trails as building networks and partnerships and increasing community pride and awareness of local history and traditions.





**Future Considerations • *share, connect & collaborate***



**Grow the Network and Communicate**



**Encourage Entrepreneurial Products**  
 "Along the Trail" – says it all quilt tapestry by Elsie Vrederburg.



**Use social media to inform and link and educate.**

**Gather . . . again and again!**



*Share knowledge & combine forces!*