

Your Organization and Community's Context

Previous sections have provided a detailed outline of challenges, Washington context and resources, as well as an overview of current thinking and key movements within the tourism sector. This section will help you to think about how to frame this information within the context of your organization and will support you to lay the groundwork for developing an action plan.

What Do You Want Tourism to Achieve in Your Community?

This is a good time to reflect on what you think the main goals and outcomes of tourism should be in your community. You might want to engage in some 'blue sky thinking' and map out what perfect tourism looks like for your organization and your destination, or what the ideal contribution of tourism would be in your community without any barriers.

This can be a useful tool for drawing out what the main inhibitors are to your vision for tourism or areas where tourism is not resulting in a net benefit. It will be useful to think about ideal outcomes from environmental, social, economic and cultural angles and for each sector of the tourism industry.

What are important aspects of your community's identity that, if gone, would change the character and 'sense of place' for residents, and would undermine the very reason people started visiting in the first place?

In their book [Senses of Place](#), anthropologists Steven Feld and Keith Basso define sense of place as: "the experiential and expressive ways places are known, imagined, yearned for, held, remembered, voiced, lived, contested and struggled over." Elizabeth Becker, author of [Overbooked](#), once described this intangible thing in a tangible way. She

referred to a historic bookstore in a city that if gone – if pushed out by souvenir stores or other ubiquitous and generic shops that often happens in tourism hot spots – that the essence of that city, what makes it what it is, would be gone, and mark a tipping point in the place's [tourism life cycle](#).

What are You Already Doing Across Your Destination and Within Your Organization?

Before making decisions on what actions to take or creating an action plan, take a little time to research and understand the wider context. This will help you identify what is already happening in inclusivity, sustainability, and responsible outdoor recreation that you can plug into, build upon or contribute to. For example:

- **Does your local government have climate commitments or an existing sustainability plan?**
- **Are there any local organizations already working on climate action or DEIA in tourism?**
- **Who are the organizations working to preserve and enhance sense of place?**
- **Internally, review any strategic, marketing, business or environmental plans and document the existing goals or actions directly or indirectly related to sustainability. This may include climate, energy, waste, water, transport, food, supply chain, built environment, ecosystem protection and regeneration, guest communications, responsible travel and recreation messaging, equity and livelihoods, supporting underrepresented communities, etc.**

Don't worry if you only have access to a limited number of the above. The goal is to consider what you already have and begin thinking about how you could use resources and processes already at your disposal.

You may also find it useful to take a look at some other organizations' plans, to get ideas and inspiration for your own. Please refer to Annex 1 of this handbook for links to planning documents, strategies and visions from a range of organizations that are already prioritizing sustainability and climate outcomes and are taking a destination stewardship approach to tourism management.

Future of Tourism Guiding Principle #12 Protect Sense of Place



Encourage tourism policies and business practices that protect natural, scenic, and cultural assets. Retain and enhance destination identity and distinctiveness. Diversity of place is the reason for travel.

Taking action on sustainability can feel overwhelming at times, and it can be hard to know where to start. That said, it is highly likely that you are doing more than you think and are already taking some meaningful steps towards integrating sustainability and building resilience into your operations. The most important thing is to make a start from wherever you are right now and build from there. Even if you haven't previously thought very much about planning for this, you're probably already doing more than you think. For example:

- Does your business already have a sustainability or responsible travel policy in place? If so, what

Destination Stewardship Plans: Aiming for Balance

Tourism destinations seeking to guide tourism decision-making in their communities using an approach that centers community priorities are turning to destination stewardship planning as a method to identify priorities, plan collaborative actions, and allocate funding. The following are the visions from destination stewardship plans published in 2022-2023 in the iconic outdoor recreation communities of Lake Tahoe, Vail, and Jackson Hole. Each of these communities has a multi-sector destination stewardship council to coordinate and cooperate on plan implementation.

Jackson Hole Sustainable Destination Management Plan – Community Vision:

Teton County, Wyoming, is a leader in balancing the needs and aspirations of community members, businesses, and visitors by actively integrating the viability of the tourism economy with the regeneration of the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem and enhancement of quality of life. [Read the Plan](#)

Lake Tahoe Destination Stewardship Plan – Shared Vision:

Tahoe is a cherished place, welcoming to all, where people, communities, and nature benefit from a thriving tourism and outdoor recreating economy. [Read the Plan](#)

Vail's Stewardship Roadmap – Vision:

Vail is the world's premier sustainable mountain resort community, renowned for its quality of life, inspiring experiences for all, and stewardship of nature. [Read the Plan](#)



PROCOLOMBIA

In 2020, the Colombian government passed a new Sustainable Tourism Policy into law. The policy prioritizes environmental protection and social justice and promotes best practices that integrate the voice of local communities into tourism decision-making and conserve Colombia's natural and cultural heritage. It is one of the only countries in the world with this kind of policy and legislation in place.

“Sustainable tourism is the future of our industry. Now more than ever, travel must actively help and strengthen the communities and ecosystems within a destination, and we are embracing this at ProColombia. We recognise sustainable tourism as a transformative tool that has the power to protect our incredible landscapes, conserve our natural resources and contribute to our fascinating locals.”

does it include? Do you have any targets relating to reducing carbon emissions? Do you have targets on other mitigation-related activities such as energy efficiency, sustainable purchasing, waste management, conservation?

- Does anyone in your organization already focus on sustainability / climate / resource efficiency/ community engagement / responsible recreation, as part of their job?
- Do you have any plans or policies in place relating to DEIA?
- What are you already doing on sustainability, social responsibility, or climate action or DEIA? For example, do you have any energy efficiency / saving measures in place? Do you take steps to reduce food waste or the use of single use plastic? Do you encourage staff to walk, cycle, take public transport or car-share to work? Do you have inclusive recruitment and hiring or marketing policies? Do you support conservation in your community? What actions are already underway?

Applying Destination Stewardship ‘Lenses’ To Decision-Making And Planning

It is useful and highly effective to start thinking about your operations from different perspectives, such as climate, DEIA, or destination stewardship, in order to determine what actions to take next.

For example, imagine that you are about to develop a new nature hiking experience in your destination.

What considerations would be different if you design it with your climate ‘lens’ on? Perhaps you could ensure that all food supplied is locally sourced, or that hikers are driven by bus or shuttle to the start and end of the hike in a group rather than in individual vehicles.

What else might you consider if you put a DEIA ‘lens’ on? Perhaps you could choose to prioritize collaborating with an Indigenous community or Black-owned business, to develop and lead the hike. You might consult a disability specialist for accessibility recommendations. And perhaps you could subsidize the cost of the hike for marginalized or underrepresented groups and target your marketing towards them? You might also consider publishing the activity or event in additional languages, to show different cultural communities that they are welcome.

What else might you consider from a destination stewardship perspective? Perhaps you could spend more time collaborating with local community groups, wildlife specialists or other non-profits focused on trail preservation, for example, when designing the hike in the first place. Or you could choose to measure the

success of the hiking experience using holistic indicators such as community satisfaction, knowledge transfer to participants about conserving protected areas, uptake of participation from marginalized groups, etc.

Applying these different ‘lenses’ is a good tool to help build the resilience of your destination when you are designing and delivering tourism activities.

Understanding Your Organization’s Context, Mandate, And Sphere Of Influence

When starting an action planning process, it is useful to think about your own context as this will help you to understand the main areas that you are responsible for and where your sphere of influence is. For example:

- To what extent are you able to make decisions about and implement taxes or other fees?
- Do you have the authority to put up information signs on trails or in recreation areas, or is it the responsibility of another agency?
- Is your organization in charge of its procurement and recruitment policies or are they tied to another agency’s protocols?
- Is your funding tied to specific activities and outcomes?
- Have you meaningfully consulted with the Tribe whose ancestral lands are being impacted by the project or plan?

The answers to these kinds of questions are likely to influence the priority actions you take or plan for; however, they are not designed to limit your ambitions. For example, if you have no authority to implement a tourist tax to collect funds for regeneration projects, this probably shouldn’t be one of the central targets of your action plan. That said, you can still set a goal related to this, for example to collaborate with the agency that does have the authority to implement these policies in order to advocate for a new ‘tourism regeneration tax’ or some type of visitor contribution to conservation, well-being, or other community priority.



Identifying Potential Partners and Collaborators

Take some time also to map out a wide range of community members and leaders, identifying those entities or individuals whose buy-in and engagement will be vital for creating and implementing any new plans, or who will play an important role in supporting you to solve challenges. Consider how you can collaborate with and proactively engage other community members to achieve your sustainability goals - within your local area, as well as across the sector in which you operate. You can use the table below to help you think about key individuals, businesses, local government agencies, Tribes, and other organizations to connect and work with.

Identify leaders within your organization/partner organizations or externally who will champion sustainability initiatives or collaborate on a plan and provide necessary guidance and input. What are their current activities related to sustainability and resilience? What is their anticipated level of influence, impact and interest?

Identify Potential Tribal Government Partners

When mapping potential partners, it is essential to identify the local Tribal government in your location. Indigenous peoples and Tribal governments are not stakeholders, but holders of rights and title as sovereign governments. It is important to review tourism activities and aims with them to gain approvals and perspectives regarding potential impacts to cultural traditions and practices as well as land and resources that may be important to the Tribe or may be sensitive to certain tourism activities. For example, what kinds of events take place on the land and waters in

Future of Tourism Guiding Principle #3



Collaborate in Destination Management

Seek to develop all tourism through a collaborative management structure with equal participation by government, the private sector and civil society organizations that represent diversity in communities.

the area? What can you do to ensure any activities your organization develops are in line with what is acceptable, and beneficial to Indigenous peoples (vs negatively impacting lands or cultures and ways of life)?

See Indigenous Peoples and Tourism in Washington section for more detailed information and links to Tribal websites and more guidelines in this area.

Resident Engagement

In the past residents were almost always left out of the tourism conversation. From planning to events to sales and marketing, tourism was seen as separate to local life. Over the years, with a convergence of an increased interest in local life from visitors, as well as an upsurge in anti-tourism sentiment in places suffering from overtourism, resident engagement in tourism has been on the rise. Often it is still confined to consultations related to new developments. And, more recently, gauging sentiment toward tourism became more common during the pandemic as tourism

Map Potential Partners & Collaborators	Who could we collaborate with?	What could we do together?
Local (e.g., Tribal governments, other local government agencies, businesses, local associations, resident & community groups, political representatives, government agencies, NGOs, social enterprises, educational institutions, chambers of commerce)		
Regional / national (e.g., DMOs and other tourism organizations, trade association, funders)		
Across the sector (e.g., professional organizations such as specialists in DEIA, communities of other destinations and tourism businesses across geographies)		

managers wanted to know if residents were comfortable opening their communities to visitors, particularly when tourism began opening up, but infections were still widespread. Some tourism destinations began engaging residents to better understand the place – in an exercise called placemaking – which helps to create new experiences, for locals and visitors alike.



Art by Fire, Courtesy of Visit Issaquah



The North Lake Tahoe Resort Association announced its new name and strategy in 2022 as the [North Tahoe Community Alliance](#). The organization's mission shifted in 2022, and its efforts focused on promoting responsible travel during off-peak seasons, stewardship education, and collaborating with regional stakeholders to identify and implement solutions to issues that impact residents, businesses and visitors. The income earned from tourism taxes in their community is primarily aimed at reducing negative impacts and improving benefits. Spending is allocated to responsible marketing messaging in low seasons, micro transportation to connect the community to recreation sites, affordable housing programs, waste management and more.



[VisitFlanders](#), the regional DMO for the Flanders region in Belgium, pioneered deep resident engagement which led to setting new community-centered goals for the tourism organization, created new experiences steeped in local traditions and recreation activities – from historical preservation to road cycling – and the development of a sentiment tracker, inspiring similar models now seen in other places around the world.



Elephant Head Trail Lake Chelan, Courtesy of Traveling While Black

Resident Engagement vs Resident Sentiment

As many organizations continue to use surveys to gauge resident sentiment, it is important to recognize the difference between gauging sentiment and a deeper engagement that influences decision-making. It is important to track resident satisfaction with tourism's impacts on their quality of life, on infrastructure, on amenities, as well as the management of tourism and its impacts to the environment and the balance between costs and benefits. Conducting more involved engagement can help to reset goals and strategies that center community wellbeing. There are many ways, including new and innovative methods to reach residents and attention must be made to reaching diverse and underrepresented community members. This includes language and cultural considerations for surveys and workshops and events, as well as seeking out organizations to partner with that are active in communities you wish to reach, rather than expecting they come to you. The initiative *Time for DMOCracy* worked with destinations across Europe and North America to develop a toolkit and guidelines for community engagement that provides a range of options for organizations to consider. Access the [Time for DMOCracy Community Engagement Toolkit here](#).

Reflections

- Do you have a tourism plan or strategy document? If so, how up to date is it?
- Could you make any immediate changes within your organization's structure and operations to improve sustainability?
- Do you have policies in place to improve diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility? Can you think of any changes you could make in your organization that would widen opportunities for marginalized or underrepresented groups?
- What other groups or organizations in your community could you engage with to strengthen existing plans/develop a new plan?
- What are your long-term goals or ideal outcomes that you would like to work towards, building on the immediate actions you are considering?

