



FINDING A SHARED VISION FOR THE FUTURE

After completing the steps in “Assess Your Raw Materials,” or if you already have a pretty good idea of your community's assets and weak points related to tourism development. Before you can develop your plan for a nature tourism site or community project, you need to work with your team to create a shared vision of where you want to go. How much, when and where does tourism development make sense in your project area? What type of visitors are you trying to draw? How each decision or group of decisions impact your community?

Collaboration is key in this step. Make sure you get input from a wide cross-section of the community. While the previous step was of a more technical nature, during this step you should plan to rely heavily upon meetings, workshops, town hall forums, etc. Use the links from the “Envision Your Finished Product” page to help you. If you need to, you may consult our “Resources” page or contact us.

Much of the work in this section involves meetings and workshops. It is essential to keep a record of the conclusions and key points of each of these discussions. You will need to refer back to this information in future steps.

Step 7. Identify Community Values and Assets. What is important to people in your community? What holds them together, or pulls them apart? What are attitudes towards nature, wildlife, and tourists? Who are your public land managers and wildlife experts? What are the economic and legal limitations that you must operate under?

Step 8. Create a Vision. Bringing tourists to your community can have a huge impact on the way your community looks, feels and interacts in the future. To control or minimize this impact, there needs to be a shared vision of what the future will look like.

Step 9. Find Your Purpose, Choose Your Audience. Why do you want to bring nature tourism to your community? Who will benefit and how? Who is it that you want to attract to your community? What sort of experience or experiences is your community willing or able to provide, and who do you think will be drawn to this experience?

Step 10. Decide Upon Desired Outcomes. Finally, you will need to use the results of the previous questions to develop an Action Plan with concrete goals upon which your team will act.

7. IDENTIFY COMMUNITY VALUES

This step can be tricky. There are a lot of ways to go about identifying the key values in your community, and which one you choose will depend a lot on the makeup of your team, your time and other resources, and your community itself. The key here is to *keep an open mind*. You're trying to find out what people here really care about, why they like living here, what they would like to see more of or less of. The process needs to be open to everyone in the community. Whatever method you choose, try to listen to community members and refrain from passing judgment. You're not trying to change people's minds or sell them on the tourism idea. You want to create your vision around those things that people in the community truly care most about, so that you can get the highest level of participation and agreement in future steps. By the end of this process, you may have identified a few more people who want to be on your team.

Choose and implement a method.

There are many ways to get input about the community's values. We have provided a few methods that other communities have used as examples below. You can choose one of these, or develop one that better fits your needs. Choose a time horizon - e.g. 5, 10 or 20 years - over which you will ask people to envision the future of the community.

A. Town Meetings and Surveys

This is the classic way of going about this process. Send a survey to several hundred randomly selected households in your area and ask for their input, and hold one or more well-publicized town meetings to generate discussion of the community's future. This is the most familiar form of gathering community input and therefore, depending upon the character of your community, may be more or less effective than some of the less conventional methods described below.

B. "Postcards from _____."

You can do this through a town meeting or workshop, or work with businesses to have the postcards and collection boxes available around town. In this project you ask residents of the community to write a postcard to a hypothetical relative twenty years in the future, describing the qualities and characteristics that they most value and want to share. The town of Breckenridge, Colorado has used this process. You can find out more about how they did it and the results on their web site, accessible from the "Envision" links page.

C. "Meetings-in-a-Box"

This was a plan implemented by a community in Michigan as part of their visioning process. The "Meetings-in-a-Box" (MIBs) were small focus groups of no more than 10 people, held by area residents, organizations and businesses. The planning group for the MIBs process handed out cardboard boxes containing materials to hosts of the meetings. Participants in the meetings individually completed response forms, which were returned to the visioning team. Resources and a more detailed description can be accessed from the "Envision" links page.

The results of your information gathering will be analyzed in the next step.

8. CREATE A VISION

Now you can sit down with your team and analyze the results of your surveys to form a vision of your community at the end of your identified timeline. There are several questions below that you should try and answer together, to form a comprehensive picture of your vision. These questions look at details and are aimed at moving you towards developing specific targets, but there is one overarching question you must answer:

How do we want our community to look, feel and BE in the future?

It may help to use drawings, photos or maps to paint a complete picture about the future quality of life and face of your community.

Questions to address:

1. How much population growth do people want to see, both in terms of residents and visitors?
2. What do people feel are the key cultural and historical aspects of your community that need to be preserved?
3. How much additional commercial, residential and industrial development do people want to see?
4. What types of recreational activities and open spaces do people want to have?
5. What type of infrastructure, in terms of transportation, utilities and communication, do people want to see?
6. What sorts of public services, such as schools, medical, police and fire fighting, are most important to people?
7. What sorts of private services, such as retail shopping, restaurants, recreation and medical services are most important to people?

9. FIND YOUR PURPOSE, CHOOSE YOUR AUDIENCE

Go back to the worksheets you completed in part I, Assess Your Raw Materials. Look at Steps 2 and 6, the baseline economic data and market profile. The documents you created in those steps will remind you who is coming to your community now and what they are getting out of the experience. Use this information to address the following checklist.

Marketing strategy checklist

1. Use your vision and assessment materials to define your community and or site and surrounding area.
2. Identify your target audience or users
3. Establish the marketing category (e.g., RV traveling seniors, high-end ecotourists, casual nature travelers, etc.)
4. Determine whether your community/product will be a market category leader, follower, challenger, or specialized niche item.
6. Describe the unique characteristics of your nature experiences and/ or services that distinguish them from the competition.
7. Define whether your pricing will be above, below, or at parity with your competitors and establish whether you will lead, follow, or ignore changes in competitors' pricing.
8. Identify the distribution channels through which your products/services will be made available to the target market/end users.
9. Describe how advertising and promotions will convey the unique characteristics of your products or services.
10. Describe any research and development activities or market research plans that are unique to your business.
11. Describe the image or personality of your community and its products or services
- 12. Decide Upon Desired Outcomes/Develop a Project Plan**

Keys to Implementing the Action/Project Plan *

- ◆ Prioritize projects based on developed criteria
- ◆ Assign committees or individual champions to each project
- ◆ Identify strengths and weaknesses of each project (SWOT Analysis)
- ◆ Develop an overall timeline based on prioritized goals, strengths and weaknesses and resources.
- ◆ Coordinate the various efforts being implemented from the action plan
- ◆ Continue to share the ideas and successes with the larger community

Tips for Planning A Successful Project

You can never over-plan a project: In the end, good planning will likely save you money and headaches. Scope out your project systematically, and then execute it in distinct steps:

Understand what you're overall project demands.

Talk to friends and acquaintances that have completed similar projects. Watch seek help online or consult do-it-yourself and home-improvement experts.

Plan what revenues the project may generate.

Establish a realistic budget considering all materials and expenses for labor. Factor in an extra 30 percent for unexpected costs.

Does the project fit within local and state plans and regulations?

What other facilities and services will need to be enhanced to support the project construction and operation?

Set a timetable s for tasks and project completion.

Establish a realistic deadline for the project. Decide how much should be completed by the end of each week, month or year (if the project is large). Then add 30 percent to your time estimate.

Obtain bids and references from competing firms/consultants.

This will help ensure competitive pricing and quality work.

List the sequence in which tasks need to be accomplished.

Keep the end result in mind.

Use photos, sketches, and prototypes as review and reflection models.

Stage breaks for yourself.

Fatigue reduces productivity and can contribute to poor workmanship.

Expect the unexpected.

A project that's completed without a hitch is the exception, not the rule.

* **Keys and tips can apply to a single project or series of related projects**