



## Chapter 3

# Planning: Why and How

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Planning is necessary for tourism to develop in a way that is beneficial, sustainable, and not detrimental to the environment, culture, or community.

Integrate tourism planning into your overall community planning. According to Gunn, “Many communities view tourism as a separate layer that is simply added to a community. Engaging in tourism from this viewpoint is always disappointing because it fails to integrate tourism into the social and economic life of the community.”

Tourism may already be partially included in your local or regional recreation, land use, or economic development plans. If this is the case, you may work with the planning authority to expand tourism’s role. If not, tourism planning may catalyze further planning in your community.

### **WHAT’S IN THIS CHAPTER?**

- **Local Involvement**
- **The Community Tourism Planning Process**

### **Local Involvement**

Tourism touches all aspects of a community—businesses, government services, the natural environment, and residents. Efforts to involve representatives of these various elements in discussions and decisions will help create positive attitudes and a healthy tourism industry that is in harmony with community values.

All residents should be invited to participate in fundamental tourism development decisions. Residents will be more inclined to support tourism if they are involved in initial discussions and have opportunities to voice their opinions. They will also be more willing to volunteer for tourist-related activities (recreation, information sharing, interpretation) and events (festivals, celebrations, sports) later on.

The community tourism planning process described below provides a forum for local involvement. It emphasizes the inclusion of a variety of residents to:

- Articulate community values;
- Select broad tourism goals for the community;
- Generate local support for tourism development;
- Help achieve tourism goals; and
- Help monitor and evaluate tourism's success in meeting goals.

Figure 3.1 highlights the steps needed to successfully build and maintain community involvement.

### **Figure 3.1: Promoting Community Involvement**

#### **1. Decide who should be involved**

- Assess current involvement. If lagging, actively solicit participation.
- List people and groups affected. Invite them all!
- Make the first meeting a well-publicized community event to draw a variety of participants who may stay on as volunteers.

#### **2. Gather information**

- Locate existing materials (current tourism efforts, information on who visits your community or region, etc.)
- Determine whether there is enough information available for both tourism and nontourism interests to make basic decisions about tourism.
- Gather additional information as needed (seek expert advice, conduct surveys, etc.)

#### **3. Conduct community meetings**

- Hold meetings to gather information, seek input, plan, or get feedback.
- Present proposals and opportunities in terms of both costs and benefits.
- Use group process techniques to elicit community values and ideas about tourism.
- Limit the agenda to one or two questions; solutions may take several meetings.
- Work toward consensus and establish priorities for actions.

#### **4. Communicate and evaluate**

- Distribute meeting results to the public via the media.
- Solicit ongoing citizen feedback; be open to unexpected responses.
- Continue meetings/consensus building until there is general agreement on goals.
- Evaluate local involvement on an ongoing basis; assess shifts in attitudes and goals that may require a new direction for tourism development.



## The Community Tourism Planning Process

Planning usually begins with an initial idea that tourism development is a desired economic development strategy for the community. In communities with some tourism, development efforts often begin with an existing organization such as a chamber of commerce, retail association, or economic development group. The organization may provide initial leadership to planning efforts. Leadership may also come from tourism businesses, individuals, or elected officials.

Planning will help your community set goals for tourism and provide guidelines for development. Ideally, these will grow from more general community goals and objectives and answer the question “How can tourism contribute to community goals?” It is important to start with a sense of your community’s vision.

### ***Preliminary Steps***

#### ***Identify Tourism***

The first step in the tourism planning process is to identify tourism as a possible economic development strategy.

#### ***Identify Participants***

After you have identified tourism as something you wish to explore for your community, identify key people who should be involved in or aware of planning activities. This group should represent the entire community. Community tourism development is often left to a small group of individuals who are directly involved in tourism-related businesses. Usually, these individuals mostly favor tourism development since their businesses and livelihoods depend on it. Many others are affected by tourism and should be included in decision making. These stakeholders are usually more cautious about tourism and more vocal about potential negative impacts.

*Government agencies and elected officials* are important partners for several reasons.

First, government is responsible for most of the infrastructure and services upon which tourism depends: water, sewer, law enforcement, emergency services, roads, and so on. Government participation will help ensure that infrastructure development, zoning, building policies, and regulations will facilitate tourism while meeting residents’ needs.



Second, government helps plan and manage many tourist attractions and facilities, such as recreational areas, parks, community swimming pools, beaches, and golf courses. Springfield, Minnesota, for example, promotes the community water slide as one of its attractions. In Chisholm, Minnesota, the state owns and operates Ironworld Discovery Center, dedicated to preserving the history and heritage of Minnesota's Iron Range, where open pit mining flourished until the mid-1970s.

*Nongovernment organizations* (e.g., religious, arts, recreation, historic, environmental, professional, ethnic, and youth groups) represent the cultural aspects of a community that help make it unique. They also should participate in tourism planning. Many are already involved with visitors through events, festivals, or attractions. Local historical societies preserve, develop, and manage sites that attract visitors; youth organizations assist at county fairs; arts and ethnic organizations coordinate events. Nongovernment organizations also support specific causes such as environmental protection, youth training, and ethnic awareness development that can benefit tourism.

Because nearly all *businesses* are affected by visitors at some point, they too should have an opportunity to be involved in tourism planning. Small business operators may not have time to be actively involved in committee work, so you will need to identify other ways to include them. You can use simple methods such as asking for input on specific topics via mail or e-mail, or asking them to handle short-term, specific tasks. Being involved will help them more clearly see the benefits, support tourism development, and potentially lend creative new ideas to the process. Be sure to include media—local and regional newspapers, radio stations, and television stations. They are important in keeping the public informed, and can be key influencers of community opinion.

Table 3.1 shows the variety of traditional and nontraditional community members and organizations that should be invited to participate in tourism planning. They are divided into those traditionally included in tourism and nontraditional stakeholders, who might easily be overlooked. Use the table as a guide to complete Worksheet 3.1 (found at the end of this chapter).



**Table 3.1: Potential Participants for Community Tourism Planning**

TRADITIONAL	NONTRADITIONAL
<b>City, County, Government Officials</b>	
Mayor or Chief Executive City Council City Manager County Commissioners County Extension Educators	Fire/Police Chief Natural Resource/Public Land Agencies Local Parks & Recreation Director Planning & Zoning Department Transportation Dept. & Public Utilities Other Local Political Leaders
<b>Civic, Business, Nonprofit Organizations</b>	
Chamber of Commerce Convention and Visitor Bureau Hotel/Restaurant Associations Downtown Business/Retail Associations Economic Development Officer Attractions Associations Business/Professional Clubs Event & Festival Organizations Fine & Performing Arts Councils	Historical Society/Preservation Groups Cultural Organizations Minority Groups/Indigenous Populations Environmental/Conservation Groups Rotary/Lions/Optimist/Kiwanis Civic Clubs American Legion/Veterans of Foreign Wars Junior Chamber Garden Clubs and Other Civic Groups Sports Clubs – Ski, Snowmobile, etc.
<b>Local Businesses</b>	
Hotel/Motel Managers Tourist Attraction Operators Restaurant/Food Service Managers Theater/Amusement Operators Outdoor Recreation Outfitters Retail/Shop Owners Taxi/Car Rental Operators Travel Agents	Service Station Owners Automotive Dealers Real Estate Agents Newspaper Editor or Columnist Radio/TV Station Managers Grocers/Pharmacists Banks or Financial Institutions Hospital/Medical/Insurance
<b>Other Community Decision Influencers</b>	
College & University Officials Local Tourism or Business Professors School Principals/Superintendent/Teachers	Church Leaders Religious Organizations Other Decision Influencers

Adapted from Texas Agricultural Extension Service. (1999). *Developing tourism in your community*. College Station, TX: Texas Agricultural Extension Service, Texas A&M University.

***Hold an Initial Meeting***

Once you have identified potential participants, schedule a meeting to explore the interest and support within your community for tourism development. Send personal invitations to individuals and groups on Worksheet 3.1. Publicize the meeting widely and be sure people



understand that it's open to all community members. Do all you can to ensure key community decision influencers are present.

Before the meeting, develop an agenda and select a facilitator. Objectivity and facilitation/moderation skills should be key criteria. A county extension educator, local college or university faculty member, or paid professional facilitator can help keep the discussion flowing and directed toward your goals. This individual can also help you develop the agenda.

The agenda should include:

- Introduction to tourism development:
  - What it is, who is involved, etc.;
  - Tourism as an economic diversification strategy;
  - Benefits and costs of tourism; and
  - Need for planning, community involvement.
- Open discussion:
  - Identification of current tourism efforts;
  - Quick identification of local assets; and
  - Decision to proceed or not to proceed.

Tourism is not appropriate for every community. As part of your meeting, use Worksheet 3.2 to help you decide whether your community should proceed with tourism development. If the assessment shows your community is not ready to make the long-term commitment and investment necessary for tourism to succeed, discuss what *is* needed. Is tourism an option in the future? Do you need more research and discussion to build interest, or is tourism simply not a preferred economic development strategy? Those interested in tourism development may want to explore community interest and perhaps even conduct the resident attitude survey (Assessment 6.1) before determining future actions.

If, on the other hand, there is sufficient support and interest among the key decision makers in the community to proceed, you are ready to form a planning committee.

### ***Form a Tourism Planning Committee***

Before establishing a new committee, identify entities already involved in tourism. You may choose to have an existing entity lead

