Facilitator Guide to the Ecotourism Accessibility Tool: Assess/Align/Coordinate

University of Minnesota Southeast Regional Sustainable Development Partnership Capstone
May, 2015

This tool developed by the University of Minnesota Southeast Regional Sustainable Development Partnership Capstone team is meant to be a facilitation instrument for current ecotourism leaders within Fillmore County who are currently acting as ecotourism/sustainable tourism models within the community such as Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center. This tool is intended to help these leaders in facilitating the transformation of other businesses and tourism operators in the region that are interested in becoming involved with ecotourism. The goal is that ecotourism leaders will be able to provide this tool to all interested parties within the community in order to best allow them to assess their current tourism products and activities, align the operators with the optimal marketing strategy and then help the operators coordinate their approaches toward ecotourism if they are interested in moving in that direction.

This guide is meant to be used by ecotourism leaders and facilitators within the community and provides an overview of the tool, then provides a breakdown of the three main components, and then details how they are meant to be used to facilitate the continued development of ecotourism within Fillmore County.

Tool Overview

Intended Audience:

This tool is intended to cater to direct tourism operators ranging from career-ecotourism opportunity providers, to small shop owners and their employees. Due to the wide range of audience, the tool is geared towards participants with varying knowledge of ecotourism. In order to maximize ease of use and approachability for a varied audience, the tool utilizes non-technical language whenever possible and provides supplemental background information and examples as needed. Indirect tourism operators can also benefit from the use of the tool, although be it to a lesser extent. The coordinate step is relevant to all tourism stakeholders and stresses the importance of community conversation and collaboration for all parties.

Intended Timeframe:

It is estimated that it will take participants between 10-30 minutes to complete this tool. The tool has three sections: assess, align and coordinate. However, participants will likely spend a varied amount of time in each section of this tool depending upon the amount of background knowledge that they have related to ecotourism as well as their overall interest in practicing ecotourism. While the tool is designed to pass through three steps,
the progression through the tool is individualized based upon answers to assessment questions.

**Goals and objectives of this tool**

This tool that the capstone team proposes has three main goals:

- To help tourism operators **assess** the products and services that they currently offer.
- To help tourism operators to **align** the tourism product that they are currently offering with the optimal marketing strategy.
- To encourage tourism operators interested in ecotourism to strategically **coordinate** their approaches.

**Tool Breakdown**

As the image below demonstrates, when using the tool participants will pass through three steps: assess, align and coordinate.

**Figure 1: Tool Breakdown**
Step 1: Assess

Objective: To allow local businesses and tourism organizations to determine which type of tourism they are currently practicing.

Rationale: The assess tool utilizes the tourism framework developed by the SE RSDP capstone team (below). For a more detailed description of this framework and associated tourism indicators please review appendix 1 & 2 at the back of this document.

Figure 2: Tourism Framework

Based on the information gathered at the February 19th meeting, the team determined that there are four types of tourism that are happening across Fillmore County: Tourism, Nature-based Tourism, Sustainable Nature-based Tourism, and Ecotourism. Using indicators or characteristics of each form of tourism, the team created a series of questions to help businesses and organizations label their products and services under...
the ecotourism framework outlined. Table 1 outlines each of these key questions, the concepts or criteria behind them, and the cited source.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Questions</th>
<th>Key Concepts</th>
<th>Citation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tourism</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Does your business or organization directly provide products or services to tourists?</td>
<td>Indicators for measuring tourism include:</td>
<td>UNEP &amp; WTO, 2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is your business open all year?</td>
<td>1. Percent of business establishments open all year</td>
<td>UNEP &amp; WTO, 2005</td>
</tr>
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<td>Do you have seasonal sales increases?</td>
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<td>UNEP &amp; WTO, 2005</td>
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<td>Does 90-100% of your business or organization’s revenue come from local dollars?</td>
<td>3. Revenues generated by tourism as a % of total revenues generated in the community</td>
<td>UNEP &amp; WTO, 2005</td>
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<td><strong>Nature-based Tourism</strong></td>
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<td>Do you consider nature to be an important component of the products or services that your business or organization provides?</td>
<td>[Nature-based tourism is] tourism in which the main motivation is the observation and appreciation of [relatively untouched] nature</td>
<td>United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do the products or services you provide depending on the natural attractions of the area?</td>
<td>All nature-based tourism activities can be categorized into one of three categories: 1. Those activities that rely on nature</td>
<td>Valentine, 1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the products or services you provide enhanced by the natural attractions of the area?</td>
<td>2. Those activities that are enhanced by nature</td>
<td>Valentine, 1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the natural setting of the area incidental for the products and services you provide?</td>
<td>3. Those activities for which the natural setting is incidental</td>
<td>Valentine, 1992</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sustainable Nature-based Tourism</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Has your business or organization completed a strategic planning process?</td>
<td>A holistic and long term planning strategy</td>
<td>Bramwell and Lane, 1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your business or organization recognize the importance of cultural heritage in the area and incorporate it into your planning process?</td>
<td>A recognition of the need to protect local culture</td>
<td>Bramwell and Lane, 1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your business or organization strive to reduce your environmental impacts?</td>
<td>A recognition of the important role that the local environment plays and how this role is dependent on conservation of natural resources</td>
<td>Bramwell and Lane, 1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your business or organization offers stable employment opportunities for</td>
<td>Maximizing the social and economic benefits to the local community while minimizing any negative social</td>
<td>The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTS), 2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
members of the community? and economic impacts. This can be done by ensuring viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation.

Is there a monitoring system in place that addresses natural resource carrying capacity? Demonstrating the sustainable management of the tourism destination (typically through a strategic plan as well as an established monitoring system) The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTS), 2013

<table>
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<th>Ecotourism</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Does your business or organization offer educational opportunities?</strong></td>
<td>Tourist interaction with natural attractions should focus on learning and education Ly &amp; Bauer, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Are a portion of the funds generated from tourism being reinvested back into the conservation of natural areas?</strong></td>
<td>Recognition of the need to invest into preservation and conservation of natural resources. The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTS), 2013</td>
</tr>
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</table>

The questions were incorporated into the tool which allows participants to assess themselves based upon the current characteristics of their business or tourism operations. A detailed breakdown of the assessment tool can be seen in figure 3. It is important to note that the assessment questions start with Tourism and build up to Ecotourism, as presented above in Figure 3.

Tourism and Nature-based Tourism are more lenient on requirements because there are a variety of ways that businesses and organizations can practice both forms of tourism. In addition, a business or organization does not need to fulfill all of the criteria in order to qualify for Tourism or Nature-based Tourism. However, in order to be categorized as Sustainable Nature-based Tourism or Ecotourism, there are specific criteria that must be met. For Sustainable Nature-based Tourism, operators must abide by all sustainability principles which includes administering a monitoring process in order to qualify. For Ecotourism, operators must abide by all of the sustainability principles, and have an educational component to their practices. Using either of these labels without fulfilling all of the criteria puts operators at risk of being labeled as “green washing,” which may have negative impacts on reputation and future business.

After the business or organization has completed the assess portion of the tool to the best of their ability, they will be directed to a page that includes information about the type of tourism that they are practicing, and directs them to the next step in the tool: align.
Figure 3: Assess

Tourism
My business is directly involved in Tourism

NO Direct connection to Coordinate

YES
Nature-based Tourism
Nature is an important component of my business

I DON’T KNOW
Answer 3 additional questions:

YES to any, move to Nature-based Tourism question
NO Direct Connect to Coordinate

I DON’T KNOW
Answer 3 additional questions:

YES to any, move to Sustainable NB Tourism question

NO Move through all questions, if all NO, then Tourism Snapshot

NO Nature-based Tourism Snapshot & Coordinate

Sustainable Nature-based Tourism
Questions based on the criteria for Sustainable Nature-based Tourism

YES

NO Sustainable Nature-based Tourism Snapshot & Coordinate

Ecotourism
Questions based on the two remaining criteria to be labeled as an Ecotourism operator

YES*

NO
Ecotourism Snapshot & Coordination piece

* Participants must meet ALL sustainability criteria in order to be practicing Sustainable Nature-based Tourism, or to move towards Ecotourism
Step 2: Align

Objective: To give local business and tourism operators additional information regarding two things: (1) aligns the tourism operator with the current type of tourism that they are practicing (e.g. nature-based tourism, sustainable nature-based tourism, or ecotourism) through a tourism snapshot and case studies, and (2) to guide the interested participant in how to take steps toward ecotourism.

First, this step of the tool will provide and explanation for why they were placed in this form of tourism; this will be given in the form of a snapshot nature-based tourism, sustainable nature-based tourism or ecotourism. This part of the tool will then provide examples, in the form of case studies, of the type of tourism products that they were identified to be offering to help participants align themselves with the most effective marketing message. This will allow tourism operators to ensure that the tourism product that they offer adheres to uniform standards in order to best reach their target audience.

Second, the align tool will provide guidance to interested participants as to how they can alter their current operations to move towards ecotourism. Interested participants will be able to review supplemental information developed through a review of commonly accepted ecotourism certification programs in North America so they can self-identify what more they would need to do in order to convert their current practices into ecotourism. Certification requirements for Rainforest Alliance and The Global Sustainable Tourism Council were utilized in the development of this section of the tool.

Rationale

Case examples provided by this step of the tool are meant to give the participant a brief explanation of the type of tourism they are currently practicing (tourism, nature-based-tourism, sustainable nature based tourism or ecotourism) and to provide examples of activities, lodging, and dining experiences that are examples of that form of tourism. Because of the nature of this learning opportunity, providing exemplar cases is meant to solidify the participants understanding of “what is tourism and how does it look like with this activity?” In addition, ecotourism and its stakeholders can be extremely permissive due to many factors; individuals and organizations may not understand the theories and practices of ecotourism, some may have mistaken ecotourism for other types of tourism, and/or lack access to learning or educational tools about ecotourism. Presenting a brief case example has the benefits of identifying specific tourism components and narrowing the participant’s focus to individual components within case scenarios.

For participants that are interested in pursuing ecotourism, the assess step of the tool also provides supplementary information about the unique characteristics that a business or tourism operation must fulfill to adhere to the standards of ecotourism. This section of the tool is meant to be a self-assessment that allows individuals to identify how well they adhere to criteria necessary for the practice of ecotourism such as:
• The use of strategic planning and monitoring
• Promotion of local socio-economic sustainability,
• Promotion of local environmental sustainability
• Preservation of cultural heritage
• Provision of education on local natural areas and culture
• Contribution to the conservation of local natural areas.

A copy of this supplemental information can be found in appendix 3 of this document.

Step 3: Coordinate

“The solution to society’s most pressing problems lie in the collective, not in any single institution.”1

Objectives: This final stage encourages collaboration among tourism operators by reinforcing the importance of community coordination, and outlining four steps that regional stakeholders can utilize moving forward.

Rationale: Coordination of local community members is an essential component of the long-term sustainability of the ecotourism enterprise. The ecotourism movement is a single step in a bigger collective action to help protect the environment and create a sustainable future. Each business or organization that works in the tourism industry must realize that their actions alone have the ability to add to the degradation of natural resources or contribute to the preservation of natural areas. Degradation of the environment is not the fault of a single tourism operator, it is caused by the collective exploitation of natural areas in the community. Ecotourism will truly become impactful and sustainable only when the community comes together to coordinate their actions.

All stakeholders should be involved in this conversation: this includes operators that interact directly with tourists (“direct actors” and the targeted audience for first portion of this tool), and stakeholders that do not interact with tourists but in some way support the tourism industry indirectly (these stakeholders are “indirect actors” and can include individuals or businesses that provide tourism operators with goods and services). This collaboration is important for the success of ecotourism because many of the sustainability principals require collective community action in order to effectively meet the requirements.

Outlined below are the four coordination steps that ecotourism stakeholders can work on in moving toward better. The steps are meant to be non-prescriptive guidelines to allow for stakeholders anywhere in the process participate in the ecotourism vision. The steps are as follows:

- **Step 1: Networking.** Getting to know others that are in the same industry is the first step in the coordination process. Networking can be formal such as seminars, conferences or even community meetings (similar to the ecotourism meetings that Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center has been hosting), or can be informal and just be a relatively small action such as lunches, joining the same email network or even contributing to the same community blog or social forum. These relationships are the first step to building a cross-organizational dialogue.

- **Step 2: Collective Vision.** After beginning a dialogue businesses and organizations can then begin to come together with a common agenda or collective vision. The collective vision is the long term objectives that can be agreed upon by all the organizations involved. In this case the collective vision is ecotourism. Ecotourism in the end goal for the community and the collective vision that all involved regional stakeholders hope to meet.

- **Step 3: Modify Strategy.** Community members that wish to participate in the collective vision must look practically at the steps that they need to take to make the vision happen. For each business and organization this may be different. For example, a hotel owner may have to make different changes than agri-business in the region. Understanding that all people are going to be at different levels of the process in key. This gives people the opportunity to honestly understand where their starting point is and what opportunities they have to change their business and organizational strategy in order to meet their goals. In this step businesses and organizations should take the opportunity to outline how other community stakeholders can help them move forward in reaching the unified vision.

- **Step 4: Collaboration.** This step is pivotal. Collaboration requires organizations to meet regularly to help keep growing partnerships and the collective vision intact. Through collaboration, tourism organizations and businesses have the power to help one another enhance their capacity to meet a collective vision. Communities also have the ability to meet their collective goals faster, and more effectively through collaborative partnerships. Collaboration also has the power to hold other organizations accountable to make sure that their overall strategies are still in alignment. However, a collective long-term, meaningful vision requires a holistic process and will not happen without a coordinated effort.

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### Appendix I: Five Tourism Types: Components and Definitions

**Tourism:** produces economic gain and is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes (WTTO, 2015).

**Nature Based Tourism:** tourism in which the main motivation is the observation and appreciation of nature (UNWTO) and includes activities that rely on natural areas, activities that are enhanced by natural areas and activities for which the natural setting is completely incidental (Valentine, 1992).

**Sustainable Tourism:** is tourism which attempts to minimize its negative socio-cultural and environmental impacts by developing a holistic sustainability strategy and utilizing practices that are conducive to sustaining the environmental, social and cultural characteristics of the region (GSTS, 2013).

**Sustainable Nature Based Tourism:** is tourism in nature which attempts to minimize its negative socio-cultural and environmental impacts by developing a holistic sustainability strategy and utilizing practices that are conducive to sustaining the environmental, social and cultural characteristics of the region (GSTS, 2013).

**Ecotourism:** is nature-based tourism that utilizes practices that are conducive to sustaining the environmental, social and cultural characteristics of the region and also has a focus upon education and conservation (Ly & Bauer, 2014).
Appendix II: Tourism Type Indicators

The following indicators were identified and used in the development of questions for step 1 of this tool: assess

Tourism Indicators
- % of business establishments open all year
- Number of local people employed in tourism (also ratio of tourism employment to total employment)
- Number and % of tourist industry jobs which are permanent of full-year
- Revenues generated by tourism as % of total revenues generated in the community

UNEPE & WTO, 2005

Nature Based Tourism Indicators
- Relies on experiences directly related to natural attractions
- Goods and services enhanced by the natural setting of the area
- Nature is incidental in activities

Valentine, 1992

Sustainable Nature Based Tourism Indicators
- A holistic and long term planning strategy
- A recognition of the need to protect local culture
- A recognition of the important role that the local environment plays and how this role is dependent on conservation of natural resources
- Maximizing the social and economic benefits to the local community while minimizing any negative social and economic impacts. This can be done by ensuring viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation.
- Demonstrating the sustainable management of the tourism destination (typically through a strategic plan as well as an established monitoring system)

Bramwell and Lane, 1993, The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTS), 2013

Ecotourism Indicators
- Environmental, social, cultural and/or economic sustainability education
- Coordination between local or regional partners to ensure that everyone is on the same page

Ly & Bauer, 2014
Appendix III: Ecotourism Self-Assessment

This document is designed to be a tool for current tourism operators who are hoping to incorporate sustainability into their practice or wishing to practice ecotourism. It is meant to be a self-assessment that allows individuals to self-assess how well they adhere to criteria necessary for the practice of ecotourism such as:

- The use of strategic planning and monitoring
- Promotion of local socio-economic sustainability,
- Promotion of local environmental sustainability
- Preservation of cultural heritage
- Provision of education on local natural areas and culture
- Contribution to the conservation of local natural areas.

It was developed utilizing certification requirements for the two most commonly accepted ecotourism certification programs in North America: Rainforest Alliance and The Global Sustainable Tourism Council.

Objectives:
- To provide clarification for tourism operators wondering why they were classified as either nature-based tourism, sustainable nature-based tourism or ecotourism by the assessment tool developed by the SE RSDP Capstone Team.
- To provide guidance as to how tourism operators can alter their current operations to move towards ecotourism.

How to Use this Tool:

In order to complete this self-assessment tool, operators will be able to assess how closely their business currently adheres to indicators developed by ecotourism certification programs. Each indicator is under a heading describing which component of ecotourism it fulfills: strategic planning and monitoring, socio-economic sustainability, environmental sustainability, cultural heritage, education, and conservation.

Tourism operators have the option to assess how well their operation adheres to each indicator by selecting:

- Yes. Definitely
  Indicates that the operator is already fulfilling the criteria
- I don’t know
  Indicates that the operator is unsure of whether he fulfills the criteria
- No. Definitely not.
  Indicates that the operator is not currently fulfilling the criteria

Using this supplemental tool the tourism operator will be able to identify specific areas of improvement for his operation to move towards ecotourism based upon where he/she has checked off the most red boxes. This will best allow the operator to identify where to strategically focus his efforts.
# Ecotourism Self-Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Planning and Monitoring</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Definitely</th>
<th>I don’t know</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Definitely not</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does your business have a strategic plan that relates to sustainability?</td>
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<td>Does your business have a marketing plan which highlights the specific type of tourism that you are offering?</td>
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<td>Are you aware of a management organization or group in the area that is responsible for coordinating the approach to sustainable tourism?</td>
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<td>Do you collaborate with regional collaboration efforts focusing upon promoting sustainable tourism and community development?</td>
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<td>Are you aware of, and in communication with, other businesses and assets in the community related to tourism?</td>
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<td>Does your organization have a system in place to monitor and address any potential or current negative impacts on local environment or community caused or exacerbated by your business?</td>
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<td>Does your business have a system in place to monitor, and take actions to improve visitor satisfaction?</td>
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## Cultural Heritage

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Heritage</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Definitely</th>
<th>I don’t know</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Definitely not</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If your business deals with cultural heritage, does it have a system to protect the cultural authenticity of the community?</td>
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<td>If applicable, does your organization follow policy or a code of behavior when visiting culturally or historically sensitive sites?</td>
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<td>Does your business follow a policy that ensures that no</td>
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<td>Question</td>
<td>Answer</td>
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<tr>
<td>This business provides members of the local community with employment and training opportunities.</td>
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<td>Are you aware of laws related to the prevention of commercial, sexual, or any other form of exploitation and harassment of anyone particularly children, adolescents, women, or minorities?</td>
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<td>Are you aware of what to do if you see or suspect commercial sexual or any other form of exploitation?</td>
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<td>Does the local community have access to natural and cultural sites?</td>
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<td>Do you participate in programs in local community to enhance understanding of the opportunities and challenges related to tourism and the importance of sustainability?</td>
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<td>Are you able to speak about the opportunities and challenges related to tourism and the importance of sustainability with interested community members?</td>
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<td>Do you have opportunities to participate in a system that encourages businesses, visitors and the public to contribute to community and sustainability initiatives?</td>
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<td>If you are a small or medium size business, do you feel like you have sufficient sources of support?</td>
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<td>Does your business strive to provide equal access to tourism opportunities to visitors regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, or disability?</td>
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<td>Are most of the inputs for your business (food, materials etc.) are purchased locally?</td>
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<td>Environmental Sustainability</td>
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<td>Does your business contribute to the evaluation, conservation and rehabilitation to natural resources in your local community?</td>
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<td>Does your business provide a set of rules for promoting proper visitor behavior at environmental sites?</td>
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<td>Does your business have policies that favor purchasing sustainable products?</td>
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<td>Does your business work to reduce the use of disposable goods?</td>
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<td>Does your business measure its energy consumption, know its sources, and are steps being taken to reduce energy use and encourage the use to renewable energy forms?</td>
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<td>Does your business measure its water consumption, know its sources, and are steps being taken to reduce its overall consumption by reducing waste?</td>
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<td>Is your business aware of the greenhouse gas emissions it may produce and are there procedures implemented to minimize them and offset emissions?</td>
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<td>Does your organization encourage its staff, suppliers and customers to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions?</td>
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<td>Does your business promote and make initiatives (when possible) to ensure that wastewater is properly treated, released safely or reused?</td>
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<td>Does your business attempt to reduce its waste? If reduction is not possible, do you take steps to reuse or recycle such waste?</td>
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<td>If applicable, does your business make an attempt to reduce the use of harmful substances such as pesticides, paints, swimming pool disinfectants, and cleaning materials?</td>
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<td>If applicable, does your businesses ensure proper storage and handling for all harmful substances?</td>
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Does your business implement practices to minimize pollution? This includes noise, light, runoff, erosion, ozone-depleting compounds, air contaminants, soil contaminants, and water contaminants?

Does your business have policies in place that ensures that wildlife is not harvested, displayed, sold, traded, except as part of a regulated activity that ensures that their utilization is sustainable and in compliance with local and international laws?

If applicable, does your business ensure that no captive wildlife is held?

If applicable, does your organization have policies that prevent the introduction of invasive alien species?

If your business interacts with wildlife, does your business take into account collective impacts, and your business does not produce adverse effects on the viability and behavior of populations in the wild?

### Education (Ecotourism)

Does your business specifically provide education opportunities related to local natural areas and culture to tourists?

Does your business provide accurate interpretive information and educational experience related to local natural areas and/or culture?

### Conservation (Ecotourism)

Does your business contribute either directly or indirectly to the conservation of local natural areas?

Is there a system in place to evaluate, conserve and rehabilitate natural areas?