

Community Assistantship Program

**Foundations for Nature-Based Tourism
in Lake of the Woods**

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Prepared in partnership with
Lake of the Woods Citizen Advisory Group

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Foundations for Nature-Based Tourism in Lake of the Woods

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January 5, 2002**

PLANNING EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Based on two primary sources and multiple supplements, this report outlines a collaborative planning process for sustainable tourism. Specifically, the following process and essential concepts are addressed and exemplified: Develop a shared vision, Create an inventory of local resources, Build on local assets, Minimize the need for regulations, Meet the needs of both landowners and the community, Team up with public land managers, Recognize the role of nongovernmental organizations, Provide opportunities for leaders to step forward, Pay attention to aesthetics.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to highlight collaborative planning processes in rural communities interested in tourism development. Successful tourism development depends on an understanding and appreciation of the planning process that encompasses a variety of groups and values. Thus, Zippel Bay Citizen's Advisory Group can successfully engage in collaborative tourism planning by adhering to the process components described below.

Although many texts were consulted, the primary information source was "Balancing Nature and Commerce in Gateway Communities" (Howe, McMahon and Prost, 1999). Because the Zippel Bay group represents gateway communities, this seemed like a natural link and the group is advised to consult the text itself for additional examples and ideas. Howe, McMahon and Prost focus on the following as key components of the development process:

1. Develop a shared vision.
2. Create an inventory of local resources.
3. Build on local assets.
4. Minimize the need for regulations.
5. Meet the needs of both landowners and the community.
6. Team up with public land managers.
7. Recognize the role of nongovernmental organizations
8. Provide opportunities for leaders to step forward.

9. Pay attention to aesthetics.

A second primary source was the Community Tourism Development handbook produced by the University of Minnesota's Tourism Center (2001). Specialized attractions for a particular tourism market segment are successful in creating distinct images. The Lake of the Woods area appears to recognize the opportunity to diversify and add to its fishing and hunting tourism base as evidenced by the recent wildflower trail and Wilderness drive development. To enhance these, and other recreation and tourism planning efforts, the following components should be considered.

Develop a shared vision. Every community needs to agree on a shared vision for its future. The visioning process requires residents to identify the values and assets of their community, determine what kind of changes are desirable, and identify strategies that will allow them to realize their vision. This vision should address issues such as housing, economic development, and schools, as well as the area's natural resources. Integrated development ensures a balanced economy.

Tourism development processes should involve numerous stakeholders to integrate tourism with other aspects of community and economic development. Public participation is essential to develop a shared vision. To create authentic public participation, a commitment to inform, involve, and educate the public is necessary. Benefits realized by including the public in the planning process are: Improved chances for long-term success, Residents are more likely to support what they were involved in, Increased sense of community identity and pride, Increased understanding of the community's history, culture, and natural resources, Protection of sacred places and sensitive resources, Development and enhancement of community amenities for residents. Once public participation has been assured, the visioning process can begin (Van der Stoep pp. 312-213).

"Community Tourism Development" (UMN, 2001) diagrams a planning process is suggested as a primary resource.

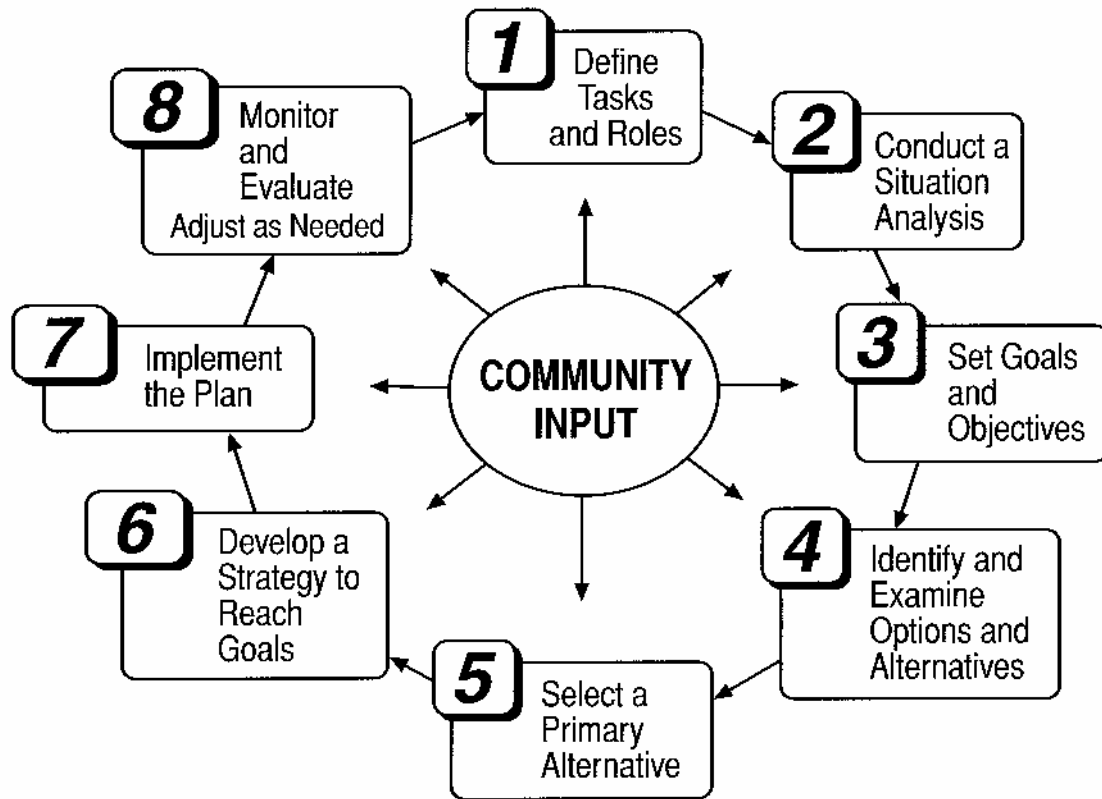


Figure 1. Community tourism planning process (UMN, 2001).

Example: Pittmann Center, Tennessee

Pittmann Center, outside the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, is one example in which developing a shared vision was incorporated into the town's planning process. By developing a shared vision, the community was able to obtain the benefits of tourism without losing their town. Pittmann Center residents convened a series of meetings designed to produce a shared vision. Residents decided to prohibit billboards, limit commercial development, and protect the flow and quality of a local river. Pittmann Center, in turn, enacted several widely supported ordinances. Within this community, the process was driven by local residents. The support and participation of the residents ensured that the community would adhere to its vision (Howe, et al. pp. 32-36).

Inventory local resources and build on local assets. Both social and natural resources should be included in a local resource inventory. Specifically, an inventory should include an accurate profile of the community's natural resources, demographics, and economic trends. Although professional assistance may eventually be required, a committee of citizens can start this task. A significant number of online resources exist that can facilitate data gathering from state and national sources such as the Census, DNR, DTED. Specific questions to address include the following (Howe, et al. p. 57). How many acres in the community are privately and publicly owned? How is the area zoned? What land use is permitted? Is the community growing? What are the income and age characteristics of the local population? Are there endangered species? What are the soil and vegetation types in the area? What are the sources of local jobs? What sectors are growing and declining? After this is done, it is important to clearly define a boundary where the tourism development is to take place (Bosselman et al. p. 22). A community strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis is one planning tool to consider (see Worksheet 3.7 in "Community Tourism Development" for SWOT, and Worksheets 6.1-6.5 for inventory and evaluation existing and potential attractions).

Example: Maryville, Tennessee

In Maryville, residents were concerned that the areas outside of Great Smokey Mountain National Park were developing too rapidly. To prevent further development, residents established a land trust. They conducted an inventory of the land surrounding the national park and identified priorities for protection. They based this inventory on maps identifying agricultural soils, scenic views, wildlife habitats, and migration corridors. Since the founding of the land trust, over 6,000 acres have been protected (Howe et al. p. 59).

Example: Dubois, Wyoming

Dubois, Wyoming is home to the largest concentration of bighorn sheep in the United States. Dubois was once a logging town, with the Louisiana-Pacific sawmill employing most of its residents. After the sawmill closed, it was able to develop a diversified economy based on wildlife with several small Main Street businesses, hunting and fishing guides, wilderness outfitters, bed and breakfasts, and log-home builders. Local businesses cater to wildlife enthusiasts, several restaurants in the town even cook the fish tourists catch and serve them for a small fee.

The success in Dubois is supported by a larger state effort where Wyoming has capitalized on the growing interest in viewing wildlife. The state began a campaign to market its wildlife-viewing opportunities. They built highway overlooks, information kiosks, and visitor centers near prime viewing areas. They also developed a logo for the program and promoted it in travel magazines. Several small towns in Wyoming adopted the logo and used it to promote tourism in their towns (Howe et al. p. 65).

Minimize the need for regulation. Although regulation is important in preventing certain types of development, a myopic or over reliance on regulation can impede successful tourism development. Successful communities have combined regulation with several other ways to influence the development process (Howe et al. pp. 71-78). In Minnesota, specific land protection options at the individual level are described in detail in the “Land Protection Options: A handbook for Minnesota Landowners.” Community level options are available for discussion through Minnesota Planning. A few ideas and examples are presented below.

Tax incentives and low-interest loans are effective at promoting business development. For example, in Fredericksburg, Virginia, property owners that renovated historic buildings were granted a seven-year grace period on increases in their property taxes. Also, in Lowell, Massachusetts, city leaders convinced bankers to provide low-interest loans to property owners interested in renovating their buildings. Thirteen local banks allocated 0.05 percent of their assets to a local loan pool.

Most communities have implemented tourist-related taxes, such as a tax on hotel rooms, which are popular because the financial burden is placed on visitors as opposed to community residents. Several examples of this exist as in Monroe County, Florida, where voters approved a “tourist impact tax.” The county financed land acquisition through a 1 percent tax on hotel rooms. In Sonoma County, California, voters approved a 0.25 percent sales tax to purchase open space and the development rights on farmland. Finally, in Grand Marais seasonal residents pay over 70 percent of taxes in the area. The town has over 7,000 seasonal property owners who have helped finance infrastructure improvements through property and sales taxes.

Voluntary contributions also provide a simple way to supplement government funds. For example, in Ashland, Wisconsin, the Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute provided realtors with information on how to minimize potential new waterfront homeowners impact on loans to.

Meet the needs of land owners and the community. Pay attention to patterns of development. A balance needs to be maintained between various land uses. Development must meet local priorities and be in line with the community’s vision for the future.

Team with public managers. Public land managers can be an asset to the local community. Both land managers and the community can have similar goals. These shared goals provide a starting point for partnerships.

Example: Moab, Utah

Moab began a campaign to attract tourists in the 1980s. The city was overly successful, resulting in degradation to surrounding public land. In response, a Canyon Country Partnership was formed to protect the region’s natural ecosystem and control the recreational use of land. Commissioners from four surrounding counties, officials from the US Forest Service and National Park Service, and officials from three state agencies formed the alliance. They were able to share information and work together to ensure that individual decisions did not conflict with local priorities (Howe et al. pp. 98-100).

Recognize the role of community organizations. The community can utilize local resources as well as local organizations to create tourism. These local organizations are capable of a sustained effort to oversee and carryout local initiatives. Often these groups are centered around a single issue. By moving beyond that issue, the group can unite the community behind shared priorities. These groups often begin as economic development councils, chambers of commerce, or local environmental organizations.

Example: Tyrrell County, North Carolina

Tyrrell County is a rural area that has been successful at using eco-tourism to augment the local economy. Tyrrell County is one of the poorest counties in North Carolina, with an unemployment rate of nearly 20 percent. To aid local residents in developing and operating businesses, Tyrrell County has created a Community Development Corporation. The CDC provides technical assistance, loans, and has established a job training and placement program for local residents.

In addition to the CDC, Tyrell County has created an eco-tourism plan. The County has six national wildlife refuges. To provide a starting point for tours of the area, a new visitor center is being constructed in Columbia, the county seat with funding from Congress. Supporting and diversifying this effort is an already constructed greenway along the Scuppernong River that consists of 27 miles of canoe trails, and bicycle and walking paths (Howe, et al. pp. 40-43).

Example: Red Lodge, Montana

Red Lodge is located near the entrance of Yellow Stone National Park. Once a mining town, Red Lodge now boasts a successful tourism industry. Due to its popularity, Red Lodge has seen an influx of new residents. Rents have doubled and housing prices have increased 170 percent. To meet these challenges and discuss the town's future, residents convened a workshop. Citizens discussed how to preserve their small-town values and identified projects to preserve their high quality of life. Citizen-based task forces were formed to help implement the projects that had been discussed. One task force

helped form a Boys and Girls Club. Another set up a water-quality monitoring program for the town's water supply and developed a land-use plan.

Example: Sandpoint, Idaho

Sandpoint has been able to supplement their timber industry by promoting tourism. Most visitors drive through Sandpoint on their way to the Canadian Rockies or Glacier National Park. Sandpoint has several diverse attractions of its own. It is near Lake Pend Oreille, a 43-mile lake stretching between two mountain ranges. In addition, Sandpoint has several cultural amenities. The town has a variety of theatres and holds several concerts and events each year.

Several organizations in Sandpoint are in charge of promoting tourism, including Chamber of Commerce and the Resort Association. Their strategy focuses on promoting a variety of events to draw tourists to the area. A tourism promotions committee facilitates promotion of the events. The community has also played a role. Individuals, art groups and other non-profit organizations have all been involved in tourism activities (Tischler et al. pp. 193-204).

Provide opportunities for leaders to step forward. Individual citizens are an important component in tourism development. These individuals need to be given the opportunity to get involved. Often community organizations and local government neglect to include the public in their decision-making processes. Participants will often become involved when they are directly affected by the planned development.

Pay attention to aesthetics. It is important for development to be visually pleasing. Protecting natural amenities, including views and scenery is an important task. In addition, man-made environments also benefit from being aesthetically pleasing. These features can enhance the economic well-being of the area, and win support from local citizens.

Resources

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Public Involvement Strategies

Public involvement ranges from simple information provision to public-oriented problem-solving techniques. This document broadly outlines public information techniques, public input techniques, and problem solving techniques following the spectrum described by the International Association for Public Participation and enhanced with additional materials. A combination of techniques is recommended to inform the publics about planning processes and opportunities, involve them in the process and monitor its success.

Public Information Techniques

Printed Materials

This includes fact sheets, newsletters, and brochures. This information should be visually pleasing, and the message should be short and simple.

Pros: A large audience can be reached.

Cons: There is no guarantee that the material will be read. You are also limited to your mailing list.

Cost: Depends on mailing number and content weight, composition

Advertisements

This includes paid advertisements in newspapers and magazines. Pay attention to the day you intend to print the ad and the section of the paper the ad is printed in.

Pros: Reaches a broad audience.

Cons: Can be expensive. Only a limited amount of information can be included.

Cost: Varies with outlet.

Information Centers

These are offices that distribute information and respond to inquiries. To be effective, they must provide an adequate staff and be in an accessible location.

Pros: Provides an educational setting. Information is easily accessible to the public. Allows for ongoing communications.

Cons: Access is limited to those in the area.

Cost: Typically cost of materials only

Open Houses

These allow the public to tour a facility and learn about an issue when their schedule allows. Stations should be set up to allow several visitors at one time.

Pros: Allows small-group communication. Builds credibility.

Cons: Difficult to document public input. Staff intensive.

Cost: Staff time to prepare and house

Public Input Techniques

In-Person Surveys

One-on-one interview with standardized forms. The intended use should be clear before starting.

Pros: Reaches a broad sample of the public.

Cons: Expensive.

Cost: Staff time to compose and implement survey, analyze data & compose report

Mailed Surveys

These are mailed randomly to a sample population and provide statistically valid results. These are good for attitudinal studies.

Pros: Provides input from a larger sample than those who would generally attend meetings regarding a certain issue.

Cons: Possible low response rate. Level of detail can be limited.

Cost: Estimate \$3 per survey for 8 page survey with 2 follow ups

Telephone Surveys

Random sampling via telephone that can provide statistically valid results.

Pros: Provides input from a cross-section of the public, not only those on a mailing list. Higher response rate than mailed surveys.

Cons: More expensive than mailed surveys. Bias is more likely. Recent technological innovations (caller id, cell phones) created challenges

Cost: Estimate \$25-50 per completed call, depending on length

Sondeo

This approach uses interview techniques with a mixed research group to understand different interest groups' perspectives.

Pros: Promotes broad participation. Team-based approach. Quick turn around.

Cons: Requires time commitment and staffing. May not be representative.

Cost: Staff time to prepare, hiring community interview members

Public Hearings

Formal meetings with scheduled presentations.

Pros: Provides an opportunity for the public to speak. Puts comments on record.

Cons: Doesn't foster dialogue. Many dislike public speaking.

Cost: Staff time

Problem-Solving Techniques

Mediation

The process of resolving disputes through compromise. Used as a last resort to solve problems with specific stakeholders.

Pros: Promotes accountability. Focuses on specific issues.

Cons: Time and labor intensive.

Cost: Consultants fee plus staff time

Consensus Building

Several techniques can be used to build consensus on project decisions. These techniques are often used with advisory committees and include nominal group process, Delphi, public value assessment and others.

Pros: Encourages compromises. Focuses on solving problems and helps avoid later conflicts.

Cons: Does not work for groups with no interest in compromising.

Cost: Varies with technique

Focus Groups

These are forums that can be used to obtain input on planning decisions. A skilled facilitator should be used.

Pros: Works best for select target audience.

Cons: Can be expensive.

Cost: Time to prepare, incentives for participants, snacks/lunch during session

Community Dinner

These are special events where dinners are served during before a discussion. They are advertised throughout the community and interested individuals buy an inexpensive ticket to the dinner.

Pros: A more informal way to gather public input.

Cons: Requires a facilitator. May receive poor attendance.

Cost: Staff time, dinner costs

Advisory Committee

These are groups of representative stakeholders organized to provide input into the planning process.

Pros: Provides for detailed analyses of the issues. Participants gain a greater understanding of other perspectives.

Cons: The general public may not agree with the committees recommendations. Consensus may not be reached. Time and labor intensive.

Cost: Time to facilitate and organize

Workshops

These are informal meetings that may include presentations, but end with interactive working groups.

Pros: Promotes small-group communication. Builds credibility. Maximizes feedback. Promotes public ownership in solving the problem.

Cons: Several facilitators are necessary.

Cost: Staff time

Resources

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