Introduction
Economic Importance of Tourism

Since the rapid rise of travel and tourism on the American landscape in the early 1950s, there is no denying that this sector has had a huge impact on our overall domestic economic vitality. The numbers tell part of the story as we look at the role travel plays in the U.S. economy.

Travel and tourism supports jobs in every state in the U.S. The travel industry includes airlines, cruise lines, motorcoach, attractions, lodging of all types, restaurants and dining, guiding, tours, leisure vehicle sales and service, seasonal and recreational activities, equipment sales, and much more.

- **As America's number one services export, the travel industry has added jobs faster than other sectors since the economic recovery began in 2008.**
- **The increase in jobs and revenue from the travel industry helps the U.S. compete globally.**
- **The travel industry generates $2.6 trillion for the U.S. economy, and generates $180 billion in tax revenues for local, state, and federal governments.**
- **Travel supports more than 15.8 million jobs in the U.S., both directly and indirectly. One in every nine American jobs depend on travel.**
- **In 2019, tourists spend nearly $6.5 billion in Maine and supported more than 116,000 jobs.**
- **U.S. travel jobs cannot be outsourced. They are place-based.**
- **Jobs in the tourism industry provide a path to the middle class for millions of Americans.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a bright spotlight on the importance of the travel and tourism industry to the U.S. and local economies, but also to the comfort, ease, and general sense of wellbeing of U.S. residents. People have come to depend upon these amenities including restaurants, lodging facilities, recreation and related services, and service workers to make their lives complete and satisfying and to support their own personal pursuit of happiness.

Maine Tourism Statistics

Maine's annual tourism statistics have been relatively consistent until the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. The money generated from the industry pumps significant dollars into our economy and is critical to the economic well-being of our state.

In 2019, visitors to Maine spent nearly $6.5 billion in Maine. Tourism supported more than 116,000 jobs and contributed more than $2.8 billion in earnings to Maine households, making it one of the largest industries in the state.

Because these numbers are impressive and the impact essential to Maine's quality of life, we must consider that Maine provides first-time visitors an introduction to all the beauty, bounty, and outdoor recreation that the state offers. That first visit often results in multiple future visits. Ultimately, those future visits can and do result in new residents and new businesses, which precipitate new construction, work in the trades, more tax revenues, healthier local economies, etc.

A number of well-respected studies advocate for using tourism visitation as an entry point, which is the most direct route to support the much broader economic development effort on the local level. This involves capturing new residents and new business ventures, as spelled out in the 2014 Oxford Economics Study, "Destination Promotion, An Engine of Economic Development."

"It is a common myth that tourism marketing promotes only tourism. In a fairly recent study (2016) of tourism campaigns in nine states, the research firm of Longwoods International demonstrated how each state's tourism promotion campaign created a 'halo effect,' lifting not only visitorship but also driving business development, real estate sales, purchase of second homes and even college recruitment."
(Longwoods International)

How the Tourism Sector Works in Maine

State

The tourism industry in Maine is more complicated than in some other states, so it is important for business owners to understand how the various organizations and sub-groups impact the overall functioning of our service delivery system to visitors.

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                    │ Actual Visit to │
                    │       ME        │
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                    │     Visitor     │
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│   Tourism    │                              │  Chambers &  │
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                    │     Visitor     │
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A potential visitor to Maine may interact with tourism industry associations, tourism regions, chambers of commerce and destination marketing organizations, or even tourism businesses and services before ever arriving in a destination. And all these groups interact with each other frequently. Often the visitor has many questions that require answers even before the decision is made to visit. When the decision is made to travel to ME, then visitors immerse themselves in the chosen destination.

The Maine Office of Tourism (MOT) and the various state tourism-related associations welcome and invite the involvement of business owners in industry gatherings such as association annual meetings, MOT stakeholder quarterly meetings, and the annual Governor's Conference on Tourism to name a few. Many of these organizations are currently holding zoom meetings that eliminates long travel times.

Involvement is key to getting to know industry colleagues and staying abreast of ever-changing visitor expectations. The Office of Tourism offers a variety of marketing tools and programs designed to support and expand Maine's tourism industry. Read through the list of resources below and make sure you are benefiting from all the available tools and information that can help advance the success of your business or organization.

See Appendix E for how you can engage with the Office of Tourism.

Regional

While being involved at the state-wide level is important and can help your business be in sync with trends and critical industry direction, it is even more important to understand and become involved with tourism on a regional and local level, especially if your business is located in a primary tourism destination area.

Every region and destination must make informed decisions regarding what they realistically can become. Those decisions come through long, hard, realistic introspection and analysis of geography, transportation routes, assets, business mix, and community capabilities. Those conversations require determination and persistent long-term work to enhance what exists and develop whatever critical components that are missing. The visitor desires an experience that is compelling, has the power to entice them to a destination, and to keep them satisfied while there for at least a week or longer.

Our destinations have many natural assets and attractions, but must keep access, infrastructure, and all working components up to date. The work of tourism destinations and development is never finished because visitors' desires and demands keep evolving. If destination areas fail to evolve along with those demands, the destination becomes obsolete and unattractive. The remainder of this workbook will offer some methods for accomplishing destination development on an ongoing basis within your primary destination area.

Resources Cited or Referenced:
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- *Research: 2019 Maine Office of Tourism Highlights.* MOTpartners.com. Maine Office of Tourism, 2019. Web.
- *Destination Promotion, An Engine of Economic Development.* Oxfordeconomics.com. Oxford Economics, 2014. Web.
- *The Halo Effect of Tourism.* Longwoods-intl.com. Longwoods International, 2016. Web.

Destination Development

Please note: This tool kit was created and finalized during the fall of 2020 during a global pandemic. COVID-19 is having a devastating impact on travel at this time and it will likely affect consumer preferences for the foreseeable future. Those impacts are yet to be fully realized and this document will be updated as necessary.

What is a Destination?

A Destination is a "place worthy of travel for an extended visit that has a critical mass of attractions, lodging, dining and services for visitors to stay comfortably enjoying an array of choices to satisfy them for an extended period of time. The place may be a locality, a town, or a region, but must be large enough to have sufficient services . . . and small enough to allow for multi-sector coordination." (Bruce Hazard, founder of Mountain Counties Alliance)

Think: The Catskills and Acadia

The following contribute to a destination:

- **Attractions are the magnet that pull people to visit any destination. They can be natural, man-made, cultural, historic, human and/or capital investment resources like concert venues, arenas, etc. Within the destination, attractions should have the power to entertain and keep people for a lengthy stay. This ensures the community will benefit from the increased spending of overnight visitors, who spend three times more than day visitors.**
- **Most people require that their basic needs (food, lodging, safety, health etc.) are met to feel a comfort level to stay anywhere for an extended visit.**
- **Visitors expect choices in lodging, restaurants, pubs, entertainment and retail, which requires a destination to have clusters of these to satisfy various preferences.**
- **Quality marketing and promotional materials should be up-to-date and made available to visitors as needed.**
- **Infrastructure:**
  - **Transportation, roadways, walkways, trails and parks are important to visitors.**
  - **Guide services enhance the infrastructure listed above. Examples are Registered Maine Guides and tour services such as the Maine Brew Bus.**
  - **Emergency and medical services are necessary.**
  - **Informational services are needed by visitors 24/7 to bring together the entire experience. Examples include chambers of commerce, regional information centers and lodging staff.**

Levels or Types of Destinations

- **Primary destinations inherently have the criteria outlined previously, but not every community has the assets to be a primary destination!**
- **Secondary and tertiary localities are located within the proximate neighborhood of a primary destination or may be along the route to the primary destination. Those localities should partner with the primary destination to maximize passers-by for their own benefit.**
- **Businesses along the route can creatively develop reasons for visitors to stop, get out of their cars and spend money before they get to a primary destination. Things to consider include:**
  - o **Be the best at what you do.**
  - o **Create a unique experience that arouses curiosity.**
  - o **Play on the theme of the primary destination.**

What is Destination Development?

Destination Development is the long-term grassroots process of convening a group of dedicated leaders – municipal, business, non-profit and residents – to pursue and implement a common vision and strategic plan.

Goal: To create a sustainable community that is economically, environmentally, culturally and socially pleasing to residents, existing businesses, and that has attraction power for new visitors, new residents and new businesses.

Process:

- **Inventory and evaluate all the systems within the community that impact residents, businesses, and visitors. This is a starting point for determining a common vision based upon the post-inventory analysis of strengths, gaps, priorities, attitudes, and needs.**
- **The systems are composed of:**
  - o **Transportation, attractions, meals and lodging, retail opportunities, information, promotion, services, and amenities.**
- **Survey resident and business attitudes toward increased visitation.**

Community leaders should understand from the beginning that destination development is a long-term community effort that requires:

- **Leaders**
- **"Doers"**
- **Commitment – to the process and moving it forward consistently over time**

Without an intrinsic community desire for tourism, and a qualified group of committed people willing to work together to learn development strategies, success will be elusive.

What Prompts Destination Development

Everyone knows that change is inevitable. However, it is easy to fail to recognize the impact of change in our communities because we are so used to things as they are. Often it is not until some major catastrophic event grabs our attention and forces us to seek reasons why it happened that we come to grips with the serious need for a change in the way we look at and think about community.

The Butler Model, developed in the mid-1800s, recognized that resorts went through a very predictable series of phases over time. The tourism industry has discovered that these phases are as applicable to destination communities and businesses in general as they are to resorts. It is worth recognizing the phases to determine where your community might be in the natural progression.
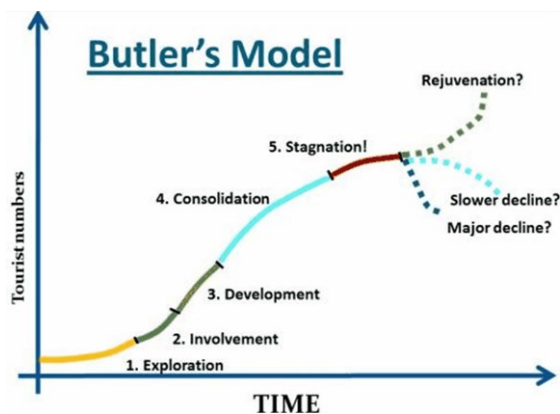

Think:
Millinocket – mill closure
Rangeley – ski resort closure
Moosehead – loss of multiple anchor businesses
Calais – border crossing station relocation

1. Exploration: In this stage a destination is being discovered by a few hardy adventurers seeking something different, who explore an area to find it has special qualities like natural beauty, culture, history, etc. They return home and tell people about this special place even though it has little or no infrastructure, services, etc. and is simply a pristine destination area without serious economic activity.
2. Involvement: Local people recognize increasing numbers of people are coming to their area. They begin to open businesses to provide for basic needs like, food, lodging, guides, transport.
3. Development: Larger companies see the emerging potential of a destination for resort development and begin to make investments in hotels, attractions, etc. The marketing effort to fill new properties causes the numbers of visitors to swell and job opportunities increase in tourism related services as well as construction and other services.
4. Consolidation: By this stage, the tourism economy may dominate the destination and many residents hold jobs in the industry. Depending upon the quantity of visitor influx, sometimes in this stage, some negative impacts can be seen.

5. Stagnation: By this time, competition, a loss of original pristine nature, failure to recognize economic impact of changes, negative social impacts and/or a major disruption, causes the numbers to level off and stagnate. Visitors find other places to spend their time, disappointed in the current experience. This is a threat to local businesses, services, and institutions.

6. Decline or Rejuvenation: Once stagnation sets in, there are two possibilities: decline or rejuvenation.
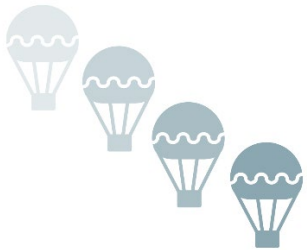
Decline can be slow and gradual, until someone recognizes that things have changed and attempts to figure out why. Former visitors are replaced by people seeking a cheap option as opposed to a quality experience.
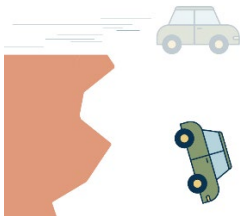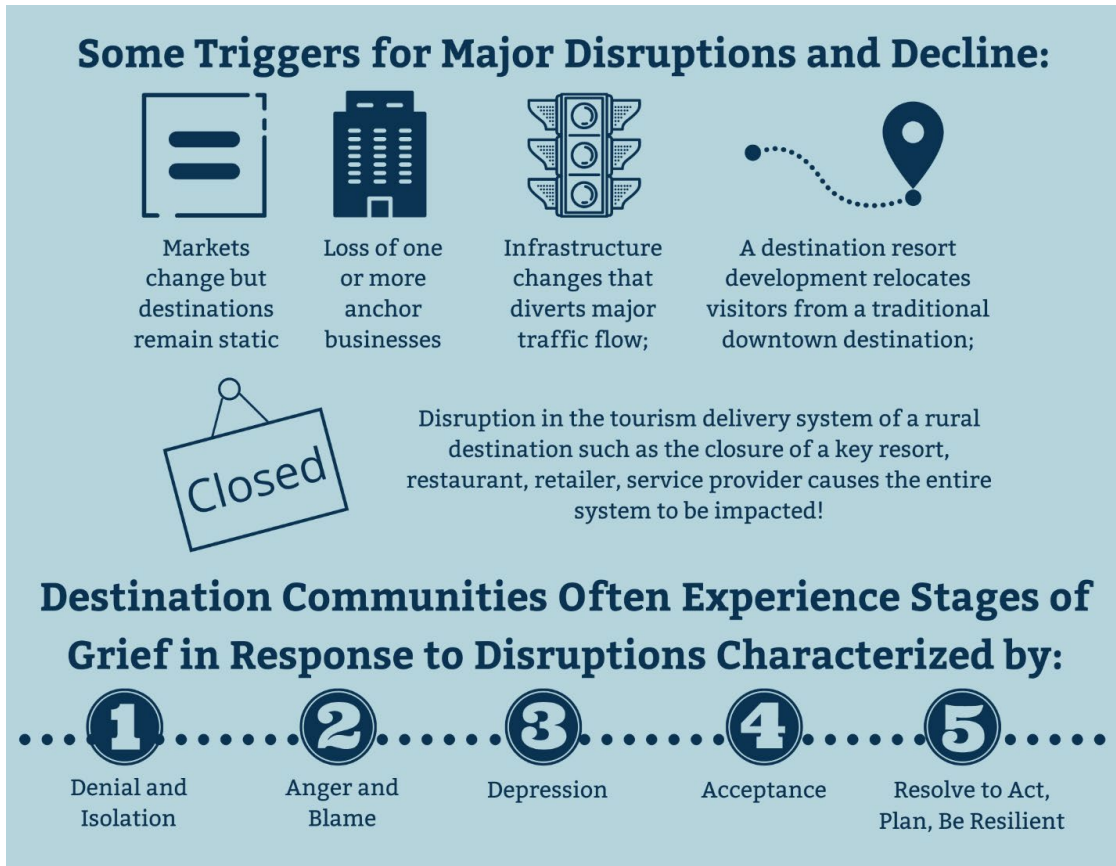
Or the decline can be dramatic with the immediate recognition of a major economic disruption like a mill closing or a COVID-19 crisis.

Rejuvenation sometimes involves a private injection of cash to create a new attraction to regain popularity.

It might be a rebranding exercise or new development to refresh tired facilities, designed to bring back visitors who have previously deserted the destination.

With no focus on rejuvenation, the total decline continues impacting residents and businesses through loss of services and critical institutions such as schools and hospitals, along with the necessary population for the community to survive.

Some Triggers for Major Disruptions and Decline:

Markets change but destinations remain static

Loss of one or more anchor businesses

Infrastructure changes that diverts major traffic flow;

A destination resort development relocates visitors from a traditional downtown destination;

Disruption in the tourism delivery system of a rural destination such as the closure of a key resort, restaurant, retailer, service provider causes the entire system to be impacted!

Destination Communities Often Experience Stages of Grief in Response to Disruptions Characterized by:

1 Denial and Isolation

2 Anger and Blame

3 Depression

4 Acceptance

5 Resolve to Act, Plan, Be Resilient

Communities must get to the final stage of acceptance and resolution (5) to be able to effectively work on a rejuvenation plan. At this point, the destination must begin to go through a destination development process to determine where their preferred future lies, to gain consensus among residents, businesses and leaders, and to outline a plan to take them into their new future.

General Steps in the Tourism Destination Development Process

First, it is important that the community understands the impacts of tourism development both positive and negative. Honest conversations with residents regarding their support, or lack of support, for tourism are critical and will bring about sustainability discussions. Gain community buy-in for tourism, based upon a clear understanding of the components for sustainable tourism.

Next, it is realistic to consider and discuss the investments - financial commitment and the time required - for successful destination development.

Potential business and organizational participants for community tourism planning and development must be chosen and agree to participate.

General Steps in the Tourism Destination Development Process

Organize & Assess Current Situation
- Organize ongoing tourism planning process with leadership team and community input
- Conduct an inclusive asset inventory for situational analysis

Facilitated Community Conversations **
- Determine your desired future
- Decide on critical areas of focus and goals
- Develop a general plan of action

Evaluate and Reorganize
- Adjust plan as necessary
- Adjust marketing as required

Determine Professional Assistance Needed **
- Bring in technical expertise as required
- Evaluate funding options

Tourism Management
- Information center operations
- Meetings
- Events

Determine Marketing Direction **
- Assess your market to determine your target market(s)
- Develop a marketing plan based on the research

Maintain and Monitor Community and Tourism Metrics
- Monitor: inquiries, visitor counts, visitor satisfaction, traffic counts, park usage, etc.
- Indicators: population growth or decline, environmental factors, etc.

**Generally covered in Community Destination Academy

Tourism destination development is a cyclical process that should be maintained and monitored over time so that a need for change can be identified through a set of metrics. Consistent attention to planning and monitoring can keep a community from being blindsided by subtle impacts of change over time and can help leaders recognize and act quickly to minimize the impacts of dramatic change.

Why is Destination Development Important?

Development work is essentially about getting "your house ready for company." Your "company" can be viewed as new residents, new businesses, and new visitors. This means looking at what you have as though you haven't seen it before and fixing the things that are broken, enhancing existing things, and adding new things. Community input is important to the discussion because all those things really matter to residents and businesses.

As residents and businesses take greater pride in their community for its sense of place, its vibrant downtown, beautification efforts, safety and integrated systems (i.e. wayfinding, transportation, emergency services) it makes community life a pleasure. These are some of the same qualities that attract new residents, new businesses and grow visitation.

At this point, the natural impulse may be to begin marketing. Prior to extensive and expensive marketing efforts, it is important to have completed the work of ensuring visitor satisfaction. Marketing is like sending out an invitation to special audiences to come visit for leisure, and perhaps consider this location as a possible home or a nice location for a business. To send that invitation before the community has prepared itself to receive new markets in the best and most welcoming way, is often an exercise in futility. When communities cannot put their "best face" forward, visitors often go away determined never to visit again, which totally defeats the purpose of any marketing efforts.

Are You Ready?

The disruption that has occurred often compels community leaders to begin working together in a more cohesive way that lifts them out of anger and depression to constructive dialog. As groups band together to develop a path forward, there are positive conversations and group participation mechanisms that often help communities get to the edges of visioning and solid concepts toward a long-term plan.

It is important to remember that every destination is different and in a different stage of development or rejuvenation. Therefore, there is not a "one size fits all" when it comes to community readiness or timing for a Community Destination Academy. Because of this, readiness factors are broad in nature.

Destinations that have completed some or most of the following steps usually exhibit readiness for more serious development work. Completion of this kind of work exhibits a commitment toward planning, even though specific areas may still be in progress.

- ☐ **Assets, businesses and community resources have been inventoried and documented.**
- ☐ **Assets, businesses and community leaders share a vision and are moving together toward a goal.**
- ☐ **Some previous strategic tourism and/or marketing studies exist as background materials.**
- ☐ **The capacity and determination to market exists and some market niches have been identified.**
- ☐ **Qualified local leadership is organized, roles are clearly defined and working groups are solidly in place.**
- ☐ **Community partnerships are evident with a willingness to work well together.**

- ☐ **There is tourism business and organizational capacity to develop new tourism product.**
- ☐ **There is a commitment to regional planning that is balanced and integrated.**

Resources Cited or Referenced:

- Hazard, Bruce. Whitepaper. Mountain Counties Alliance. 1995. Print.
- Gunn, Clare A. *Tourism Planning*. New York: Taylor & Francis, 1988. Print.
- *Butler's Model*. Adorngeo.com. Adorngeo, 2019. Web.

Resources Reviewed:

- Messer, Cynthia. *Community Tourism Development*. St. Paul: University of Minnesota Tourism Center, 2010. Print.
- Communities Strategies Group. *Rural Development Hubs, Strengthening Rural Innovation Infrastructure*. Aspencsg.org. The Aspen Institute, 2019. Web.

Organizing for Destination Development: Establishing a Baseline

Importance of Key Organizations in Destination Development

The People

Having key people and organizations involved in the planning and development phases of Destination Development work is critical to accomplishing goals and seeing real results on the ground in any community.

A strong leadership team is imperative in moving forward cooperatively and meeting goals and objectives. Like a three-legged stool, there should be balance and equity from each leg.

A leadership team should consist of:
1. Municipal/Local Government
2. Businesses/Nonprofits
3. Community/Residents
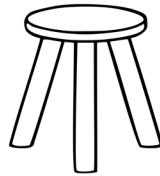
It takes this combination of people who are committed, forward thinking and able to move a concept into reality.

- **Chambers of commerce and destination marketing organizations (DMOs) are focused on getting the word out about new programs, events, and activities. As marketers, to be most effective in their promotional efforts, they need to be kept informed of, or engaged in planning, for appropriately timed announcements.**

- **Municipal officials are focused on detailed planning, examining liability issues, determining how things will impact residents, taxes, etc. They need to have a strong partnership with the DMO, whose focus is marketing, to achieve maximum results.**

Those two descriptions illustrate the need for entities to work together to share their knowledge and resources. These groups need to be committed to convening, planning, discussing and shepherding the work until the goals established are fully achieved. Additional entities to consider are land trusts, a town planning committee, an economic development committee, a conservation group or some other entity that is determined and committed to outcomes.

Collaboration is Key

Organizations have board members and local/regional governments have elected officials that move in and out of slots after short periods of service, therefore, commitment to the long-term plan must come from organizational leaders and staff to ensure continuity, longevity, and succession.

Destination Development involves a continual long-term cycle of planning, implementing, marketing, and adjusting

If communities are to keep in tune with trends and expectations of visitors, there must be a well-established collaborative community group that keeps the goals in sight over the long-term. When destinations fail to do this, they see diminishing returns in their attraction, lodging and restaurant metrics.

Building a Leadership Planning & Communication Team

Following are lists of community members representing different sectors. It's imperative to have a variety of stakeholders involved from both traditional tourism-associated entities and those you might not think of as stakeholders. The following list is a compilation of possible stakeholders. Not all communities will have representation from each of these entities.

Local Government
- Mayor/Town Manager
- Town Council/Selectboard
- Fire/Police
- Natural Resource/Public Land Mgr.
- Parks & Rec Director
- Planning/Zoning/Transportation
- Economic Development Person

Local Businesses
- Hotel & Lodging Mgrs.
- Visitor Attraction Mgrs.
- Restaurant Mgrs.
- Theatre Owners
- Outdoor Recreation Outfitters
- Retail Owners
- Real Estate Agents
- Newspaper Editor/Writer
- Radio/TV
- Banks & Financial Institutions
- Hospital

Civic, Business, Non-Profit Groups
- Chamber of Commerce/CVB
- Hotel/Restaurant Assn
- Downtown Assn/Main Street Program
- Economic Development
- Business/Professional Clubs
- Event/Festival organizations
- Cultural non-profits

Community Influencers
- Educators
- Religious organizations
- Indigenous Peoples

Building Your Working Groups

In every community, the workers vary depending upon the current partners at the table. In effective group functioning, partners may move in and out of meetings and projects depending upon their immediate capacity to be involved. Certain projects may be appropriate for a municipal committee, others might better fit into the mission of a conservation group or an economic development corporation.

Not all work has to be accomplished by the same group, as long as the group leaders coordinate and help to maintain continuity between the core leadership team and individual working committees so that everyone is working toward the agreed upon goals and allowing outcomes to be unified into a cohesive plan.

Anticipated and welcome committee fluidity helps to keep key people from total burn-out and ensures that many voices are heard in the process of decision-making and maintains forward momentum. This kind of flexible structure also allows those with specific expertise to join a group as appropriate. This type of assistance casts a broader net within a community and helps maintain goodwill and support of programs and projects. Contributions that are welcomed and accepted means more positive word-of-mouth at the local coffee shops, translating into greater community-wide understanding and support.

Assessing Your Destination

How does your destination currently measure up?
- **Survey regional and community attitudes**
    - **Is increased tourism desired?**
    - **How do residents feel about visitors?**
    - **How do businesses feel about visitors?**

For sample surveys – See Appendix C.

Inventory and Evaluate

Inventory and evaluate current infrastructure and systems that impact visitor experience
- **Attractions: Attractions have the power that draws visitors to specific destinations and fall into several categories:**
    - **Natural and Scenic**
    - **Cultural, Historic and Architectural**
    - **Recreational**
    - **Tours and Educational Experiences**
    - **Special Events**
    - **Agricultural Attractions**
    - **Health, Wellness and Lifestyle**

- Private Sector Services:
  - **Accommodations & Lodging**
  - **Food Service & Dining**
  - **Retail and Specialty merchandise**
  - **Miscellaneous Services**
  - **Infrastructure and Physical Environment**
  - **Physical Environment**

Inventory Worksheets - See Appendix A.
Once the inventory work is complete, use the worksheets in Appendix B to evaluate the condition of your attractions. Some will need work to make them more visitor friendly; others are likely ready just as they are.

Sustainability

The concept of sustainability has often been the center of confusion and controversy, mostly because definitions have been somewhat vague and difficult to interpret into practical terms, with some terms having over-lapping but different meanings. (Ex. eco-tourism and nature-based tourism). However, conversations about tourism sustainability in destination development discussions are fundamental to long-term planning and should be basic to the inventory and planning process.

Developing a sustainable tourism policy involves carefully analyzing possible alternative futures, thinking about responses to outside forces beyond local control, determining what to sustain, and evaluating various ways to reach the most desirable future.

Early mass tourism development efforts afforded economic opportunity but placed stress on infrastructure, resources, and society:
- **Rapidly growing world population**
  - **Affordable airlines made travel available to fast-growing middle class**
  - **Growth of affluence worldwide**
  - **Mass marketing**
  - **Rise of both domestic and international tourism (China, India, Mexico, Brazil)**
  - **Fueled desire to visit new places**

Early tourism efforts tended to be characterized by:
- **Short-term marketing goals**
- **Sales for quantity – high volume, high impact – "heads in beds" but low-yield ($)**
- **Environments that are artificial, homogenized, generic, formulaic**
- **Minimal long-term planning, and little thought for management of the visitor experience**
- **Results have often been:**

       o **Overcrowding in key locations; unplanned commercialization**
       o **Negative impacts on the landscape, resources and environment**

Sustainable tourism tends to be characterized by:

- **Longer term marketing goals**
- **Targeted marketing for higher-quality visitors – lower volume, low-impact, but higher yield ($$)**
- **Authentic, specialized, unique, and homegrown environments**
- **Planning for long-term tourism management**
- **Results: Unspoiled landscapes, locally owned businesses, historic buildings intact, walkable communities**

What is Sustainable Tourism?

Sustainable tourism is about achieving a balance between environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of tourism in a way that guarantees long-term benefits to the impacted local communities. This is sometimes referred to as the *triple bottom line* approach to tourism that includes returns on investment for the natural resource environment, the local economy among impacted stakeholders, and respect and preservation of the local culture and heritage.

David Beurle of *Future IQ* uses this working definition of sustainable tourism to mean that tourism:

- **"Is integrated with our local communities in a way that is respectful and functional;**
- **provides visitors with authentic, place-based, educational experiences that leave them feeling enriched and inspired;**
- **creates lasting financial and social benefits for local residents, businesses, and communities;**
- **is supported by public policies with organizational support and funding;**
- **and maintains, or contributes to, the health and vibrancy of our natural environment."**

Community leaders and planners need basic guiding principles for discussion and planning for tourism sustainability. Because things are constantly changing, it is also about recognizing that change will continue to occur and that communities must be prepared to adapt for change, but in a controlled, planned, and deliberate way. Keeping some of the following principles in mind throughout local discussion may help.

Sustainable Principles
(Outlined by Ed McMahon in Urban Land Magazine, 2015)

- **Preserve and restore the historic story through buildings, neighborhoods, and landscapes.**
- **Focus on authenticity – uniqueness of the community story as it is rooted in local tradition.**
- **Ensure that tourism service facilities (lodging, dining, retail) are compatible with the authentic feel of the community.**
- **Resources need interpretation – education and interpretation help to effectively manage resources, instill respect and community pride, and strengthen sense of place.**
- **Protect community gateways since first impressions matter – inviting entry points and overall appearance either welcomes or discourages visitation.**
- **Attractive, well-organized wayfinding is important – sign clutter is ineffective.**
- **Walkability enhances the economy – the key to generating revenue and business sustainability is getting people out of their cars.**
- **Linking attraction sites offers a more worthwhile experience. One small community may not have the power to draw visitors but linked with others can rise to a higher level of interest.**
- **Tourism has limits and visitation must be managed – exceeding carrying capacity in a community, natural site, or experience will have negative results.**

Here is an example of a Maine regional sustainability pledge that is an outcome of their CDA work:

The Mahoosuc Way (Towns of Bethel, Greenwood, Newry and Woodstock)
Pledge to Embrace Our Place

"The Mahoosuc Pledge helps us communicate our community values to newcomers and visitors. At the heart of our values, is a desire for a collective action to ensure we preserve this unique place. The Mahoosuc region is a working landscape in western Maine, with its natural resources providing recreational enjoyment and our livelihood for generations.

By offering the Embrace Our Place pledge, we are inviting you to be part of our shared experience here in the Mahoosuc Region. This pledge is part of our commitment to ensure these lands and ecosystems are able to be enjoyed for generations to come. We invite you to embrace our communities and way of life, today and into the future."

The Mahoosuc Way
Pledge to Embrace Our Place

HONOR THIS LAND

I PLEDGE TO: Honor this land, respect working forest traditions and local knowledge, and leave this place better than I found it.

EXPLORE WISELY

I PLEDGE TO: Consider my impacts, be careful what I do, and make smart choices about when and where I go.

SHOW RESPECT

I PLEDGE TO: Understand I am one of many people who use these resources, and to be kind and respectful to others.

CULTIVATE COMMUNITY

I PLEDGE TO: Embrace the shared experience of the region, and actively contribute to helping the Mahoosuc communities thrive.

BE CLIMATE CONSCIOUS

I PLEDGE TO: Reduce my unnecessary environmental impacts, reduce my carbon footprint, minimize my waste, and recycle and reuse what I can.

SPECIFICALLY, I COMMIT TO THE FOLLOWING NEW ACTION:

_____

_____

SIGNED: _____ DATE: _____

For full details of the pledge go to MahoosucWay.com.

For a more detailed set of criteria for sustainability for hotels, tour operators, and destinations, go to the Global Sustainable Tourism Council at https://www.gstcouncil.org/gstc-criteria/ for their latest version 2.0 of performance indicators and standard destination guidelines (SDGs).

The discussion about sustainable tourism always includes community involvement, deliberation and coming to consensus, because that conversation must be an exercise in public choice. Gaining consensus around a desirable future is an exercise in sustainable tourism.

The following link is a guide focused on best practice approaches to sustainable economic development through tourism. http://whc.unesco.org/sustainabletourismtoolkit/how-use-guide

Resources Cited or Referenced:

- Messer, Cynthia. *Community Tourism Development*. St. Paul: University of Minnesota Tourism Center, 2010. Print.
- Beurle, David. *Mahoosuc Region Sustainable Tourism Plan*. Future-iq.com, 2020. Web.
- *Global Sustainable Tourism Council Standard Destination Guidelines*. Gstcouncil.org. Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2020. Web.
- McMahon, Ed. *Sustainable Principles*, Urban Land Magazine. Washington, DC: Urban Land Institute, 2015. Print.
- *Online Sustainable Tourism Toolkit, People Protecting Places*, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, World Heritage Convention. whc.unesco.org. UNESCO World Heritage, 2020. Web.

Setting Vision, Mission, Goals

Once the inventory work has been completed, evaluated for clusters or groupings of similar businesses, strengths, gaps and priorities, the community then has a solid foundation to begin to determine their vision for their preferred future, to set goals and develop action steps to lead them toward a shared vision.

Visioning

Determining the vision of a destination is an exciting conversation that can also serve to motivate participants to action and accomplishment. Strength of a vision lies in it being shared across a broad sector of community who will perpetuate it. The process must:

- ✓ **Be facilitated – takes 2-3 meetings**
- ✓ **Involve a broad base of stakeholders**
- ✓ **Integrate various visions expressed in discussion**
- ✓ **Find common ground incorporating pieces of all visions expressed**
- ✓ **Should integrate recent community goals set within other group discussions**
- ✓ **Be shared widely among residents for support, more ideas and priorities**
- ✓ **Motivate the community to agree on the outcomes and work together to accomplish results**

Some questions to ask as part of the visioning process:

How do you want your destination to look in 5/10 years?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

What would you like to see happen? Change? Remain the same?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

What is an acceptable level of community change?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

What type of tourism development fits with your image of your destination's future?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

In thinking about future tourism, what gets you really excited?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Prioritization

Throughout the small group conversations and work on visioning, a lot of discussion and brainstorming takes place. The notes from those work groups become the basis for building lists of ideas that can be incorporated into community. The facilitator will have the group establish their individual priorities to determine where the clusters of highest importance lie. That information can give rise to further discussion to build consensus around key priorities of importance. This is a very important step in the process of building out the vision.

Positioning

Tourism in the vision: Once the vision has been agreed upon, discuss where tourism fits with the vision.

- ✓ **How will tourism make things better?**
- ✓ **How might tourism run counter to the vision?**
- ✓ **How do we need to look at tourism differently?**
- ✓ **What types of tourism fit best within our vision?**

The vision positioning discussion should involve stakeholder comments regarding the various types of tourism their community is willing to embrace. Some areas have a solid cluster of trails for biking, trails for hiking, farm-to-table restaurants, art museums, cultural community clusters, educational institutions, etc. As those clusters stand out from the inventory work, it is important for the conversation to determine where to place focus, instead of trying to "be everything to everyone."

A solid focus on a unique community strength, will entice visitors drawn to that focal point who will be pleased and surprised to find all the other options available to further endear them to that destination.

Examples:

Austin, TX has many tourism options, including the river and waterfront, parks, fine restaurants, history, galleries, festivals, but the focus is MUSIC!

Napa Valley is known as wine country because that is their strength and their focal point. Everything revolves around wine, but there are other things to do and see as well.

So, what are some variables that might be used to position your destination for its key point of uniqueness? Some things to look at are:

Outdoor Recreation
Location/access
Indigenous culture History Ethnicity
Landmarks/icons
Season Personality/values
Natural Environment
Attractions Cruise
Emotional benefits & feelings
Legends Events People
Sport Nightlife Climate
Landscape
Wildlife Celebrity
Industry & local products
Culinary
Culture

Next Steps:
1. Draft a common vision from group feedback in the previous meetings and discussions.
2. Circulate for further input.
3. Revise the vision statement based upon any further input.
4. This final report becomes the basis for future action.

These community discussions are extremely important to lay a foundation for future actions. It is critical to capture as much of the conversation and suggestions as possible so that stakeholders feel they have been heard in the process. Discussion will not always happen in the specific order that you see here, but the larger topics suggested should be a part of the conversation to ensure that the key issues have been addressed.

Mission

From the previous discussions, a mission statement can be formed for the organization that will move the destination development effort forward. The mission statement succinctly explains the role of the organization in moving the vision to reality. What will the organization be responsible **to do** in broad terms to accomplish the vision? The answer to that question is the mission.

Examples:
- **The mission of _____ is to create a vibrant economy by promoting, developing, expanding our visitor industry.**
- **The mission of _____ is to stimulate economic growth by increasing visitor volume and expenditures.**
- **The mission of _____ is to target market for new visitor sectors and develop new experiences to satisfy them throughout their stay in our community.**

Setting Overall Goals for Tourism Development

With the vision and mission already articulated, conversation should flow easily into establishing goals to accomplish them.

Goals should be:
- **Consistent with the vision**
- **Developed in the larger destination development team**
- **Incorporate tourism directives captured in other recent community processes**
- **Realistic**
- **Measurable**
- **Achievable within a specific timeframe**

Possible questions to ask:
- **How many more visitors does the community want to attract?**
- **What partnerships would make sense to develop tourism here?**

- **How many jobs do we want to create?**
- **What is the percentage increase of income needed for local residents?**
- **What season(s) do we want to develop?**
- **What infrastructure must be developed to accommodate a visitor increase?**
- **How many visitors are too many?**

From the goals established, the destination development team can identify
- **Action steps**
- **Timelines**
- **Assign tasks to team members**

Resources Cited or Referenced:
- Strange, Jennifer; Brown, David, Solimar International. *Tourism Destination Management, Achieving Sustainable and Competitive Results, Online Toolkit and Resource Series.* Usaid.gov. USAID, George Washington University, Global Sustainable Tourism Alliance, THEMIS, World Tourism Organization. Web.

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- Beurle, David. *Live Sustainable Tourism Planning Workshops in Maine*. Future IQ, 2018-2020. Experiential.
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# Maine Community Destination Academy Program

This program sponsored by the Maine Office of Tourism (MOT), the Maine Woods Consortium (MWC), and the Northern Forest Center (the Center) is based on a community's readiness and is by invitation.

Background

The Maine Office of Tourism researched several programs developed by other states to determine how they could offer more direct support to rural areas struggling to maintain and grow their tourism base. It was apparent from many listening sessions that most rural Maine areas are facing similar basic issues and need assistance to move from their current status to a higher level of visitor satisfaction performance.

- **MOT outlined a new program modeled after Oregon's Rural Tourism Studio**
- **MOT formed a partnership with MWC, a network of non-profits, businesses, and government agencies led by the Center and dedicated to advancing a "triple bottom line" approach (economy, environment, community) to enhance human and environmental well-being in the Maine Woods region. The area of focus encompasses the Maine Woods region of Oxford, Franklin, Somerset, Piscataquis, Northern Penobscot, Aroostook, Washington counties**

Maine Woods High Potential Rural Destination Areas
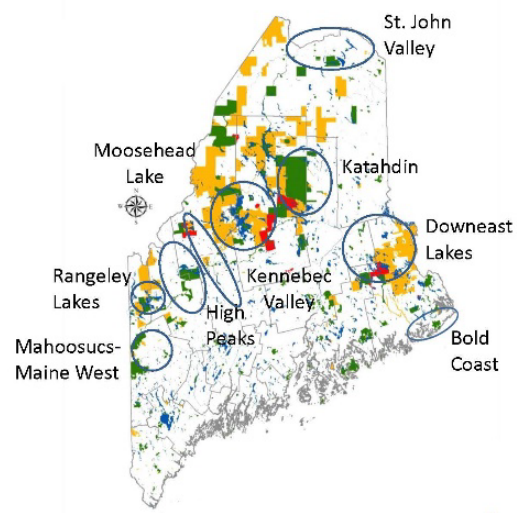
DESIRED OUTCOME: A network of Rural Destination Areas where recreational and cultural amenities, hospitality services, transportation infrastructure, dynamic events, and vibrant downtowns attract visitors, businesses and new residents.

A partnership was ultimately formed between MOT, MWC, and the Center to "pilot" the Destination Academy program in the Moosehead Lake region – an area that had made major

research investments in hiring a nationally known consultant to work with them to reposition their declining destination.

In total, three Community Destination Academies (CDAs) have been implemented by MOT and its partners:

- **Moosehead Lake region of Piscataquis County,**
- **Rangeley Lakes region of Franklin County,**
- **Bethel-Mahoosuc region of Oxford County.**

One of the outcomes of the early work is that the Northern Forest Center and Maine Woods Consortium have successfully leveraged private and public investments to deliver direct technical support to projects and businesses in these regions.

The CDA program is available to communities in the seven counties identified. Northern Forest Center has developed a version of this CDA program for northern Vermont and New Hampshire.

What is Community Destination Academy?

The Community Destination Academy combines professionally led workshops and training with financial and technical assistance to help communities strengthen the amenities and services that attract visitors – and visitor spending. The program is designed to help rural destinations move beyond marketing to focus on evolving visitor interests and providing a seamless, service-oriented experience from lodging and dining to outdoor recreation, cultural events, and shopping. While the program is grounded in the tourism and recreation economy, the approach supports amenities that contribute to local quality of life and help attract new residents and businesses.

Successful destinations require a unique level of cooperation among business, non-profit, and municipal stakeholders and a common set of skills, knowledge, and language to enable effective team-based project implementation. To this end, the CDA program is explicitly geared to serving multi-sector teams with participants expected to commit to the full series of workshops.

Purpose:

Community Destination Academy Goals:

- **Develop working cohorts of business, non-profit, and municipal leaders in high potential Rural Destination Areas.**
- **Build a common set of skills and knowledge for successful, long-term sustainable destination development.**
- **Support implementation of local development projects identified by program participants. Build confidence and a track record of successful collaborative project implementation as a foundation for ongoing product development and marketing.**

With these goals as guideposts, the Community Destination Academy includes the following elements:

1) **Leadership and Collaboration Skills Preparation & Training:** Upon request from local tourism and destination development leaders, a team from the Maine Office of Tourism (MOT) and Maine Woods Consortium (MWC) works with local and regional partners to identify a "leadership cohort" to engage in the CDA program. If needed, a professional facilitator can work with this group to help them work together in an effective, collaborative manner. This thread runs throughout the entire curriculum to ensure cohesiveness in the outcome.

   CDA sessions involve investigating unique needs and interests of the local leadership group and shaping a training curriculum customized to their specific situation. For example, if an area expresses interest in biking, then experts in that field would be brought into the curriculum to help local volunteers understand the critical elements that bikers are seeking and how to accomplish a final product (experience) that will satisfy that market segment.

2) **Community Destination Academy Workshops (Phase I):**
   While each participating destination area is unique and encouraged to identify specific local training interests and goals, the core of the CDA program is built upon a broad core curriculum that is applicable to most Maine rural destination areas.

   Depending upon readiness factors and local needs, the program curriculum is tailored to the specific situation but typically involves a combination of:

   - **Understanding Travel and Marketing Trends**
   - **Assessing Current and Desired State of the Destination**
   - **Creating a Destination Vision**
   - **Creating Memorable Visitor Experiences Creating a Destination Plan**
   - **Turning Plans into Action**
   - **Finding the Money: Destination Financing for NGOs, Towns & Businesses**
   - **Selling Your Story: Destination Marketing**

3) **Financial & Technical Assistance for Local Project Implementation:** As part of the program, CDA participants determine a process for identifying one or more local projects that align with destination area goals, deliver value to multiple local stakeholders, and can be completed in a 6-month to one-year timeframe.

   A predetermined level of matching funds is provided to support team-based implementation of one or more projects that benefit their region in a visible and

impactful manner. In this way, the team building and leadership skills are put into practice in a very practical manner and the community sees an immediate outcome.

4) **Community Destination Academy Workshops, (Phase II):** Roughly six months to a year after the initial workshop series – and, ideally upon completion of a selected local project – MOT supports delivery of a follow-up workshop designed to enable participants to reflect on phase one learning and collaborative project completion. This session also serves to support other emerging local interests and opportunities.

Upon conclusion of the CDA program, the participating leadership team should be prepared to work together to implement additional destination development projects and seek grant funds for larger projects like tourism master planning, a public facility feasibility study and/or implementation of infrastructure projects, and business development.

To date the Community Destination Academy has led to successful and ongoing efforts to implement destination area projects ranging from rebuilding a downtown boardwalk along Moosehead Lake to implementation of a new regional wayfinding system in the Rangeley Lakes, and a broadbased sustainable tourism strategy to address potential overtourism issues in the Bethel-Mahoosuc region.

Most importantly, the program is building new teams of business, municipal, and non-profit leaders and providing them with the training and resources to advance to new strategies to meet the changing needs and interests of regional, national, and global travelers.

How Can a Community Secure a CDA?
Through the application process and preliminary discussions in community, the Partnership Team determines that at least most of these readiness factors are solidly in place and that the CDA process can build on the foundation that has already been laid.

Readiness Factors:
- **Loose definition of destination area, inclusive of key service centers**
- **There is an existing inventory of tourism resources, attractions, assets, businesses, and public/private services.**
- **Service Centers include a mix of attractions, lodging, dining, recreation, and services to satisfy visitor needs for a range of choices.**
- **There exists a critical mass of year-round, regional lodging, dining options and retail facilities.**
- **There is an organized, committed grass-roots leadership group with a mix of business, municipal and non-profit leaders.**
- **Demonstrate examples of innovative thinking among destination leaders.**
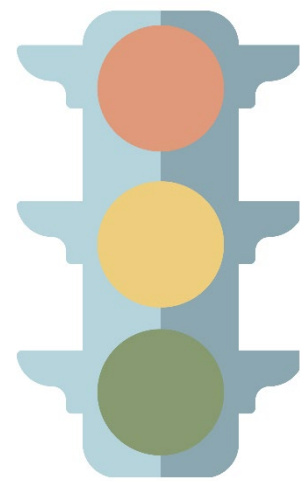
- **Demonstrate experience of finding financial assistance for destination projects.**
- **Show examples of engagement in board development, tourism training, development, visioning, master planning, etc.**

CDA General Format: Two - 1.5-day workshops held at least two weeks apart.

Content: According to local input; may include leadership training, teambuilding, financing, telling your story, product development, always includes project execution.

Who Should Attend:

Key LEADERS from (Think 3-legged stool)

- **Businesses**
- **Non-profit organizations**
- **Municipal staff and elected officials**

All three categories must be equally involved for true success in implementation.

Include in the sessions, but do not limit to the following:

Lodging, restaurant, retail, any tourism facing local businesses

Attractions and recreation providers

Cultural, historic, and other non-profit organizational leaders

Municipal staff and elected officials

School, Healthcare and Wellness

Land trusts, trails organizations

County tourism, economic development leaders

Regional tourism leaders

What Results Can You Expect?

Throughout the CDA, there are many conversations, "aha" moments and ideas that surface in public and private discussions. From these, the group is guided toward a few projects that meet the criteria established by the CDA Partnership. This practical measure creates a short-term success and demonstrates a visible outcome to the community through teamwork using CDA practiced skills.

Results will vary according to community needs and the CDA discussion. The local Leadership Team uses the detailed notes and the report from the CDA to determine the best project(s) to meet the specific community goals within the budget allowed. Some communities accomplish 2 to 3 projects, but it depends upon needs and costs.

Recommended Project Criteria:

- **Can be accomplished with an investment of $ (specific amount changes based on budget)**
- **The group must raise a match of 25% minimum**
- **Is highly visible to community/region**
- **Will impact multiple stakeholders**
- **Can be implemented within 6 months to 1 year of the CDA**
- **Can be used as public relations to community to show progress and the power of cooperation**
- **Carries the group in the direction of facilitating increased visitation.**

What Happens after CDA?

After Phases I and II of the CDA process, the local leadership team continues to meet to determine workable, visible projects, lay out timelines and usher that work to completion. The

Partnership staffers (MOT, MWC, NFC) continue to work with the local leadership team until the project(s) are completed or at least for a year.

Upon project completion, the group holds one final follow-up session to share results with all the original participants, to recap successes, challenges, lessons learned and to discuss next steps to be led by the local leadership team. At this session, often there are innovative ideas percolating in community and the conversation can be continued locally without the presence of the Partnership Team.

If specific challenges arise during the CDA process, the CDA partnership staff may recommend a tailored follow-up session based upon that expressed need, such as board training and development, social media one-on-one work with individual businesses, or some other need.

It is the hope of the Partnership Team that as the CDA process enters a local phase of continuation, that the local Leadership Team has begun to fulfill the purpose for the CDA and is moving on a positive path to continue toward more effective, collaborative results.

Overall Purpose:
- **To understand how community must prepare for future trends in visitation**
- **To work on concrete projects to move community in the direction of coordinated preparedness for more effective visitation – elevated visitor experiences that encourage longer stays, greater spending**
- **Ultimately lead to better informed and more effective tourism marketing efforts**

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS TOWARD SUCCESS: CHARACTERISTICS OF A SUCCESSFUL DESTINATION

Community Destination Academy (CDA) has been developed to assist communities through determining their desired future, vision, goals, action plan and marketing direction. That is why a certain amount of readiness and community preparation is critical to the success and outcomes of the CDA.

A Successful Tourism Destination:
- ☐ **Has a unique identity.**
- ☐ **Is readily and cost effectively in alignment with your chosen target market segments.**
- ☐ **Has a critical mass of products and services of such significant quality to attract and satisfy the identified target market segments for an extended stay.**
- ☐ **Has worked to align infrastructure with the destination image.**
- ☐ **Has carefully planned to cover all essential services required by the visiting public.**
- ☐ **Has an available workforce and affordable housing to accommodate workers.**
- ☐ **Has developed a complete and integrated wayfinding system throughout the destination.**
- ☐ **Has a system for visitor information available 24/7 to assist and guide the visiting public.**
- ☐ **Shows evidence of strong business, community and governmental leadership, cooperation and synergy throughout the region.**

- ☐ **Is practicing succession planning to insure the continuation of the tourism development process.**
- ☐ **Offers continuous industry education to businesses and employees.**
- ☐ **Has a destination management/marketing organization (DMO) that is committed to securing long-term funding for marking purposes.**

Resources Cited or Referenced:

- Moreland, Donna, and Wilson, Michael. A consolidation of various documents in the development of the Maine Community Destination Academy. Maine Office of Tourism and Northern Forest Center. 2018-2020. Print.