

TOURISM COMMUNITY DESTINATION ACADEMY

WAY DOWNEAST REGION MAINE

SUMMARY REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2022



Maine
VisitMaine.com



**Sunrise County
Economic Council**



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Summary Notes prepared from the three modules of the Way DownEast Community Destination Academy held in from March to May 2022.



SNAPSHOT - REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF THE WAY DOWNEAST COMMUNITY DESTINATION ACADEMY

This report lays out the Way DownEast program process and outcomes. It has identified key strategic actions and priorities needed to achieve the preferred future, 'DownEast Drives Dreams'.



SIGNIFICANT APPETITE TO COLLABORATE ACROSS THE REGION

Throughout the planning process, regional stakeholders have worked together to identify a shared future regional vision for tourism. This vision is built on principles of sustainable tourism and aims to build collaborative focus and work on managing visitor impact and experience. The community partners in the CDA have shown a desire to collaborate and find unique and creative ways to bring the communities together. This extends to seamless visitor experiences and connections and sharing the benefits of a tourism economy. A key feature was a desire for local ownership over shaping the direction of their industry and to create shared branding and marketing for the region.



OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD A UNIQUE NATURE-BASED TOURISM ECONOMY

There was recognition that the region has the potential to become a significant and unique tourism destination. Due to geographic locations in the far north-east corner of Maine, it has been a late beneficiary of the surge in nature-based tourism. However, the region has a remarkable natural landscape, and a series of interesting communities and downtown visitor experiences. There is a shared desire to build this nature-based economy and connect it to the existing farming, fishing, and maker sectors.



DESIRE TO FOCUS ON YOUTH AND BUILDING COMMUNITY PROSPERITY

A core underlying desire expressed throughout the CDA was the desire to build community prosperity – and especially creating future economic opportunities for the region's youth. There was the recognition that nature-based tourism could offer significant entrepreneurial opportunities and living wage jobs for people in the region.





1.0 | INTRODUCTION - WAY DOWNEAST CDA

The Way DownEast region includes the four service centers of Eastport, Lubec, Machias and Calais, plus the communities in-between including Perry, Pembroke, Whiting and more within Washington County, Maine. The region also collaborates on tourism issues with Campobello Island, N.B., Canada. As such, the region encompasses three broad communities – The Passamaquoddy People, Washington County, Maine, and Campobello Island, N.B. Canada.

Tourism has long been a cornerstone of the region's economy. Today, tourism is central to the Way DownEast communities as a local economic development strategy for attracting both visitors and new residents. Destination development is an approach to community and economic revitalization that builds a wide variety of assets – not just traditional tourism elements – to attract visitors and improve quality of life for residents.

The Maine Office of Tourism [MOT] and the Maine Woods Consortium [MWC], in partnership with the Northern Forest Center [NFC], sponsored the DownEast Acadia (Way DownEast) Community Destination Academy (CDA). The program has run with formal programming from February to June 2022, with subsequent local planning meetings. This program is being implemented to help support the region develop its tourism economy, and to include a sustainable tourism overlay. A key part of the program is the role of the local coordinator and community-based steering committee. The program is modelled on the Community Destination Academy which has been delivered in other locations around the State of Maine.

The Way DownEast was supported by a local Steering Committee, which included:

- Jeanne Peacock: Eastport City Councilor, Eastport Chamber Treasurer
- Denise Rule: APPLE (Association to Promote and Protect the Lubec Environment)
- John Rule: APPLE, Reporter for the Quoddy Tides Newspaper
- Sharon Mack: Executive Director, Machias Chamber of Commerce
- Maria Lamb, business owner, Wicked Good Vacation Rentals
- Vicki Farrell: Maine Tourist Association, Maine State Visitor Info Center Manager – Calais
- Kara Mitchell, St. Croix Valley Chamber of Commerce
- Ron Beckwith, President, Friars Bay Development Association President



“The Way DownEast region - Water, water, everywhere – each community is touched and connected by water. Water was the original mode of transportation in the area. And most notably, the region experiences extreme tides, changing the physical landscape by 25+ feet of water twice a day. It includes key portions of The Bold Coastline – miles of access to water, islands, lighthouses, rugged coast, quiet and secluded beaches. Wildlife abounds – whales (minke, humpback, finback, right), seals (harbor, grey), porpoises, deer, foxes, otters, birds (puffins, bald eagles, osprey, loons, cormorants, shorebirds, gulls and more). The coastal municipalities of Eastport and Lubec offer some of the world's best diving, sunrise views, seafood, arts, and cultural experiences.”

2.0 | COMMUNITY GOALS FOR THE WAY DOWNEAST CDA

Throughout the CDA process, the group explored their long-term goals from the process, and how they would like to see tourism evolve and contribute to their local communities and economy.

There was a recurring theme and desire to focus on Sustainability and Economic Impact to create urgency, and to build a plan. The desire was to get ahead of tourism and impact trends, to guide the way tourism evolves and develops in the region. Key opportunities that were often discussed centered around topics such as:

It was often discussed that sustainable tourism is not just about bringing more people; but is also about finding innovative ways to boost economic impact and build enduring local prosperity.



NATURE-BASED TOURISM

Leveraging the unique marine and land-based recreational assets.



BUILD ENTREPRENEURIAL OPTIONS

Tourism (especially outdoor recreation) was seen as a potentially very promising local economic driver that could create entrepreneurial opportunities.



TOURISM CAN BRING A DIVERSITY OF JOBS

Jobs that can offer a range of vocations and business growth potential.



TRAINING YOUTH ABOUT THE OPPORTUNITIES

Tourism-related businesses offer the opportunity for young people to remain in the region and build a prosperous life and career.

A core issue that concerned many participants was how to create a tourism economy that would encourage young people to stay in the region and make solid living wages.





3.0 | WAY DOWNEAST CDA – PROGRAM DESIGN

This Community Destination Academy (CDA) is part of a program organized and delivered by a collaboration between the Maine Office of Tourism, the Maine Woods Consortium, and the Northern Forest Center. The CDA program has also delivered destination development work in rural areas of Maine, including Moosehead Lake, Rangeley and the Bethel Area. The program is designed to help regional communities explore the future, and drill down to design and deliver tangible projects that will build a local sustainable tourism economy.



WAY DOWNEAST COMMUNITY DESTINATION ACADEMY TIMELINE AND PROGRAM DESIGN



In addition to the formal program modules, there were also community discussions and visits held in February, and regular project team meetings.

The Way DownEast communities participated in the Community Destination Academy, with approximately 40 people from across the 4 communities attending the three modules. This was a unique opportunity to bring local stakeholders together in a planning approach, to develop a local vision and action plan for sustainable tourism and destination impact management.



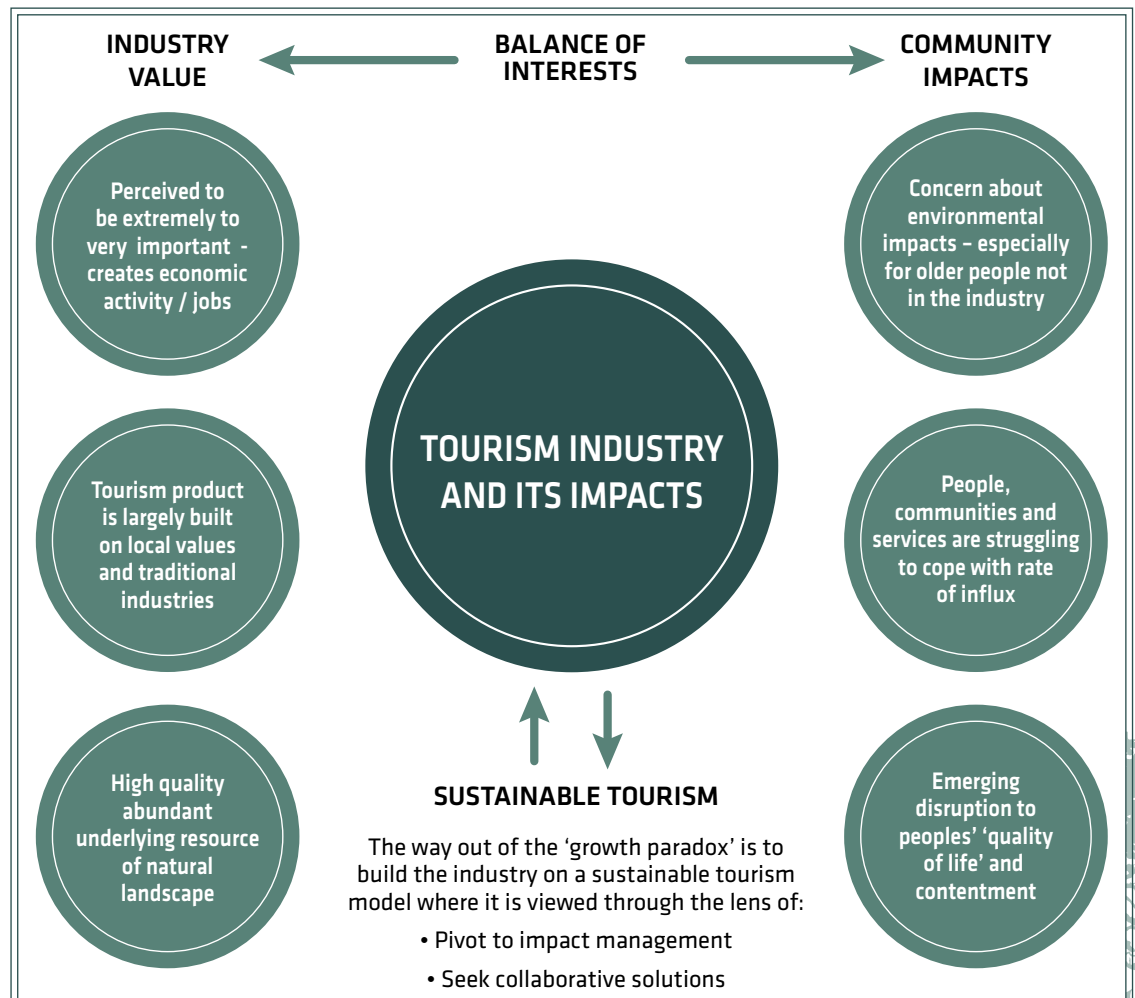
4.0 | SUSTAINABLE TOURISM APPROACH

The Community Destination Academy design includes an overlay focus on Sustainable Tourism. Sustainable tourism is an approach that intentionally considers a range of interests and seeks a sustainable balance. A key challenge for many rural tourism destinations is getting that balance right between positive economic impacts and potential negative impacts on community culture and the environment. This is especially important in the Way DownEast region, which has deep roots in resource-based economies and is embedded in a beautiful and sensitive landscape.

Sustainable tourism aims to achieve the following macro-outcomes:

- Integrated with our local communities in a way that is respectful and functional
- Provides visitors authentic experiences grounded in local reality
- Creates lasting financial and social benefits for locals
- Supported by public policies with organizational support and funding
- Contributes to the health and vibrancy of our natural environment

The sustainable tourism approach is especially important in regions like Way DownEast, as it helps locals guide the evolution of their tourism sector, so it complements the local communities and economies.





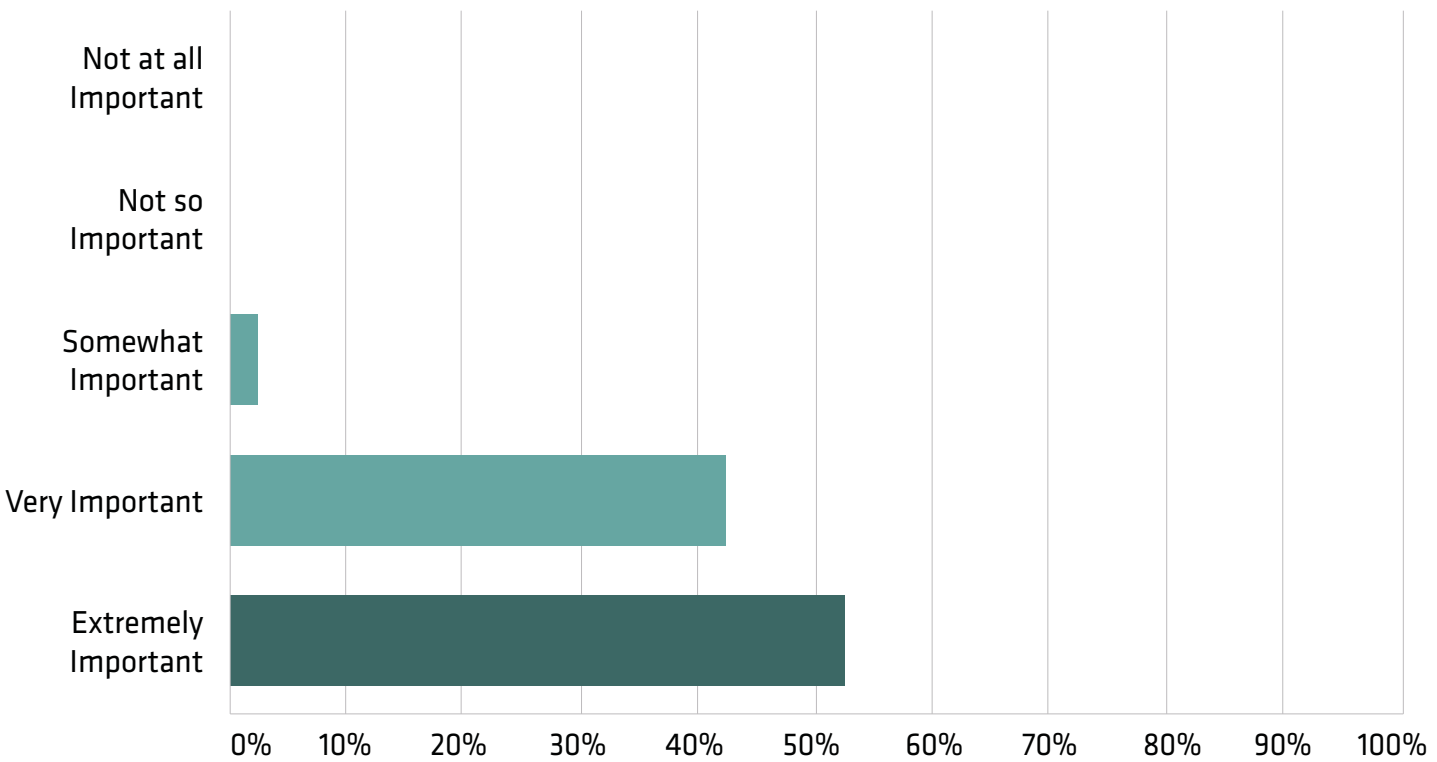
Tourism is an increasingly important economic driver in the rural areas of Maine, and appears to have potential on the Way DownEast region, especially as nearby destinations like Bar Harbor reach capacity.

4.1 | IMPORTANCE OF THE TOURISM SECTOR - WAY DOWNEAST REGION

Prior to the initial module 1, participants were asked to complete a survey that explored views about tourism and a sustainable tourism approach. In total, there were 30 survey responses, representing a solid cross section of the workshop participants.

IMPORTANCE OF TOURISM TO THE FUTURE OF WAY DOWNEAST

SURVEY QUESTION: Overall, how important do you think tourism is to the future of the Way DownEast communities?



DataInsight

- Survey respondents rated the tourism economy as very to extremely important to the future of Way DownEast. This result is consistent with similar surveys in other communities including Bethel and Rangeley.
- The importance of tourism to the community's future highlights the importance of investing time and effort now to create a strategy that addresses both the viability of the tourism sector and long-term sustainability.





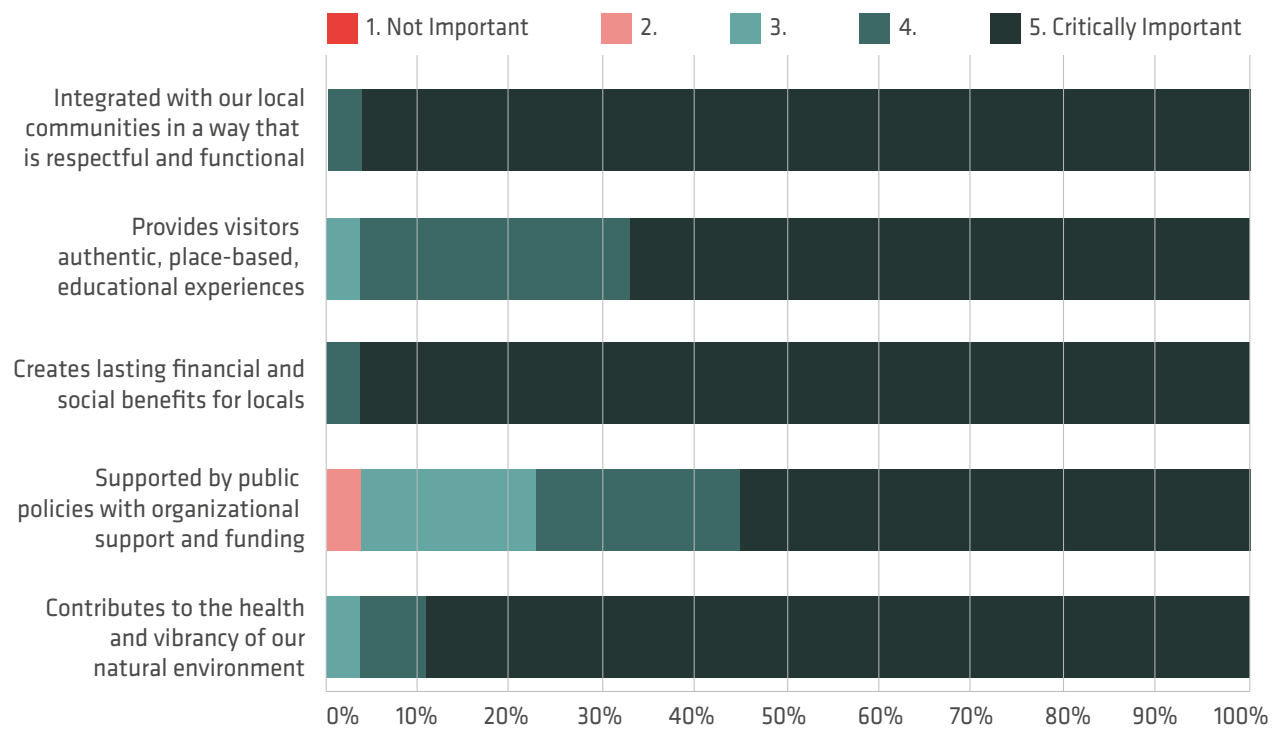
The five dimensions were all considered very important to Way DownEast, scoring an average response between 4.27 and 4.96 [Scale 1 = Not important; 5 = Critically important].

4.2 | IMPORTANCE OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM - WAY DOWNEAST

The survey explored the respondents view of sustainable tourism, and its importance to the future of tourism in the region. This aims to validate the framework, by exploring the five dimensions and their relative importance to the future of the region, and the impact on local people and communities.

IMPORTANCE OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM TO WAY DOWNEAST: SURVEY RESULTS FROM MODULE 1 PARTICIPANTS

SURVEY QUESTION: How important do you think each of the dimensions of Sustainable Tourism are for the future of tourism in the Way DownEast region? [Scale: 1 = Not important; 5 = Critically important]



DataInsight

- The dimensions most connected to local impact scored higher in importance. This is especially the case with tourism being integrated with local communities in a way that is respectful and functional, and creates lasting financial and social benefits.
- The importance placed on the health and vibrancy of the natural environment is noteworthy and speaks to the *value of place* as critical to protect amidst a growing visitation economy.



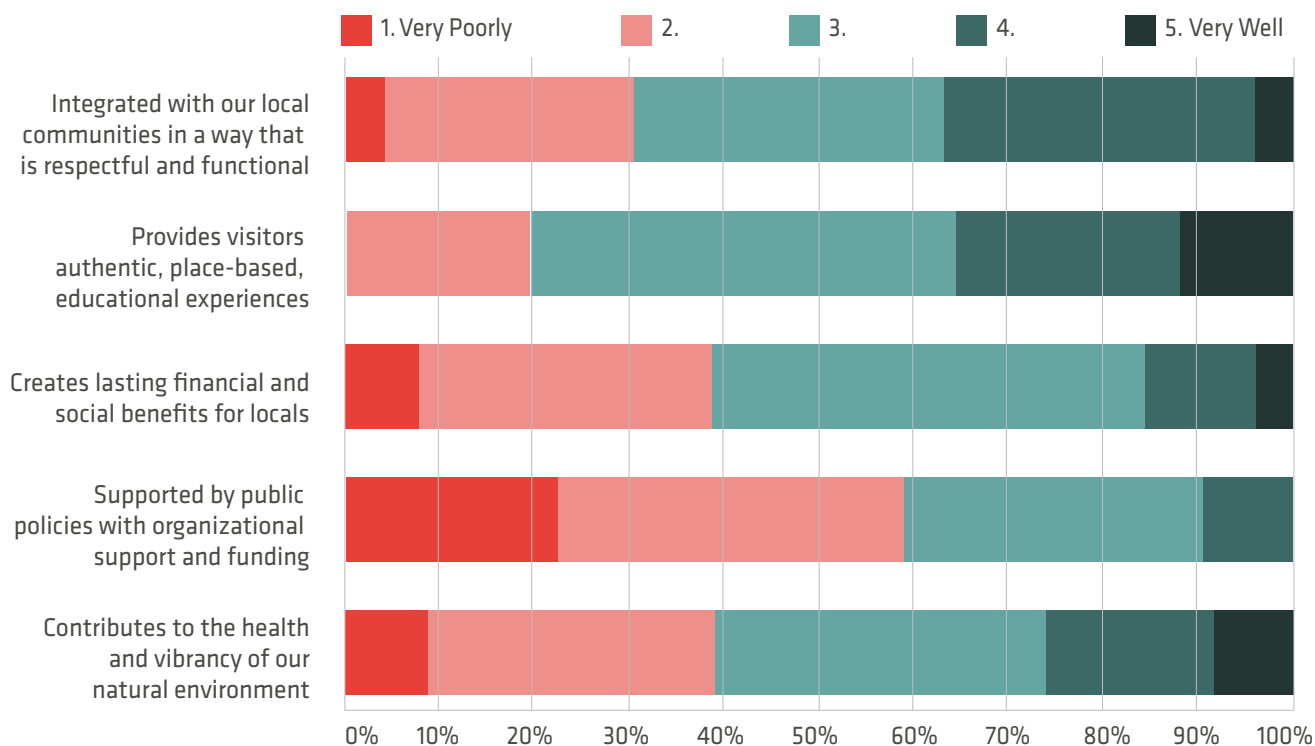
4.3 | PERFORMANCE IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DIMENSIONS - WAY DOWNEAST

To help build a baseline, survey respondents were asked how well they thought the Way DownEast region was currently performing against the five of the dimensions of sustainable tourism.

PERFORMANCE AGAINST SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DIMENSIONS

SURVEY QUESTION: How well do you think Way DownEast is CURRENTLY performing for each of these dimensions of Sustainable Tourism? [Scale: 1 = Very Poorly; 5 = Very Well]

The five dimensions scored average responses between 2.27 and 3.28 [Scale 1 = Very poorly; 5 = Very well]. This reflects significant room for improvement, in terms of sustainable tourism dimensions.



DataInsight

- Most responses were in the middle of the range, which could be framed as 'just doing okay – not very poorly or very well'. However, each of the dimensions has some people who scored it as very poorly.
- These results reflect similar data sets from other communities rural Maine areas, and highlight the impacts being experienced in rural communities in outdoor recreation economies.



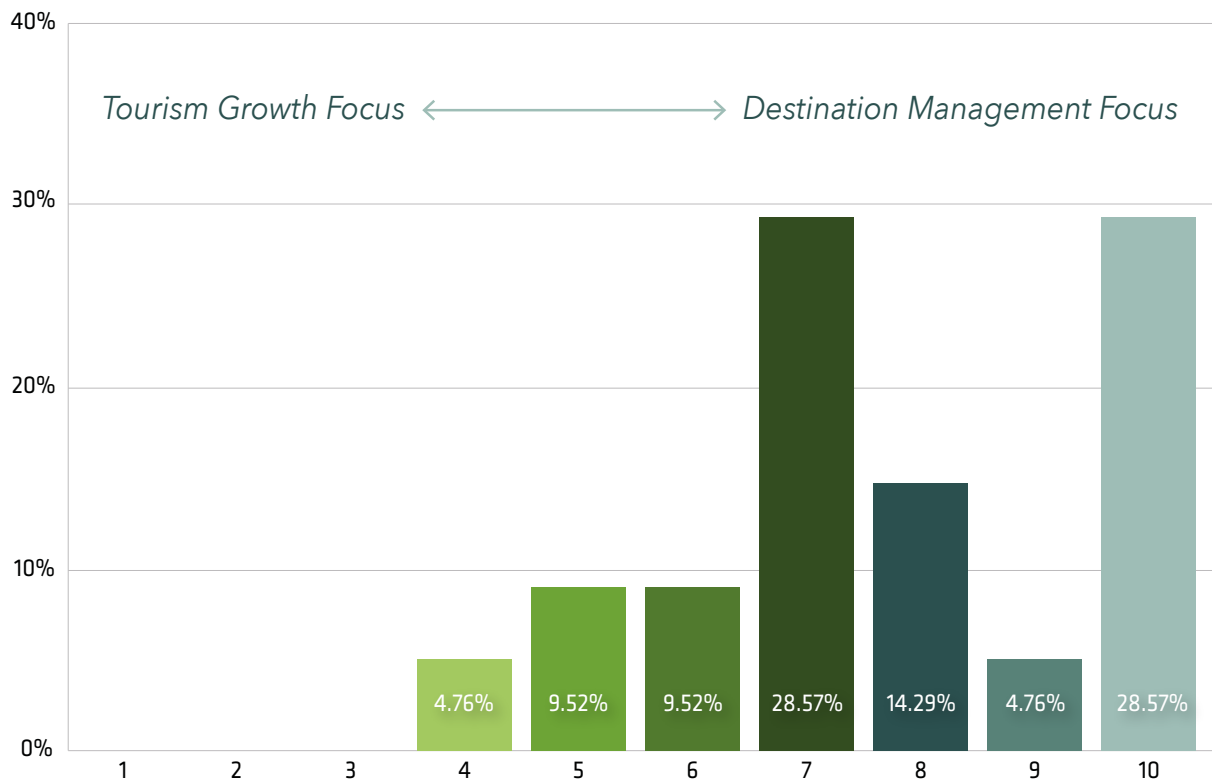
Overall, there seems to be a desire to guide visitation impacts more intentionally in the local Way DownEast communities.

4.4 | DESTINATION MARKETING VERSUS IMPACT MANAGEMENT

The survey also explored respondents' views about the Visitation and Management Focus. A core principle in a sustainable tourism approach is achieving the right balance between the economic benefit and the overall impact in communities. In the simplest terms, tourism is sometime criticized for negative impacts due to the volume of visitors (where destinations get overrun). This survey question explores the future desire in terms of emphasis on growing visitation or guiding and managing the impacts.

PREFERENCE ABOUT FUTURE VISITATION AND MANAGEMENT FOCUS

SURVEY QUESTION: Over the next 10 years, where do you think the Way DownEast region should aim, on the following continuum from 'Tourism Growth Focus' (growing the number of visitors) to 'Destination Management Focus' (intentionally guiding and managing the local impacts of tourism and tourists). [Scale: 1 = 'Tourism Growth Focus'; 10 = 'Destination Management Focus']



DataInsight

- The average response was 7.67, suggesting a strong alignment to focus on intentionally guiding and managing the local impacts of tourism and tourists.
- This data does not preclude the growth of the tourism economy, or even the number of visitors. It does however help think about the evolution of how tourism integrates with the local communities.





5.0 | MODULE 1 - FUTURE EXPLORATION

Module 1 of the Way DownEast Community Tourism Academy was held on March 15, 2022. During this workshop, participants undertook a scenario planning exercise to explore a range of plausible futures. The scenario framework is built around future-shaping themes identified as particularly relevant for the region and offers a way to explore different possible futures and related implications and consequences.

The scenario planning process offers a framework to craft plausible scenarios for the future of the Way DownEast regional tourism economy and consider potential future implications and impacts.

FUTURE TRENDS

As a prelude to the scenario building work, the workshop explored future trends shaping the broader contextual environment. These trends covered topics such as:

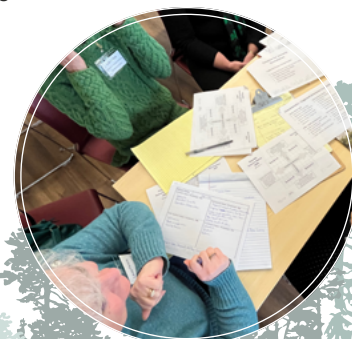
- Population growth, mass urbanization and changing distribution of people
- Societal changes, shifts in community values
- Transformation in energy systems, technology impacts on transportation
- Emergence of sustainable tourism
- Maine Office of Tourism visitor profiles - theory and research
- Emerging visitor profiles and economic impacts



FUTURE SPLITTING THEMES

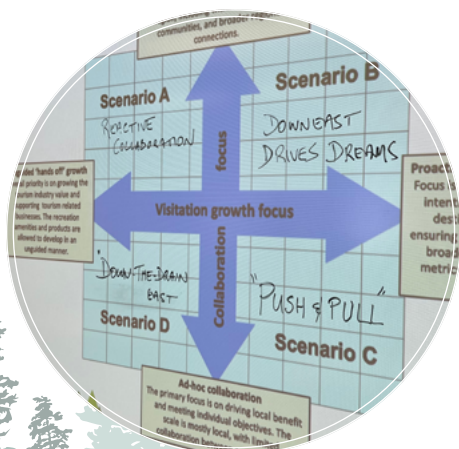
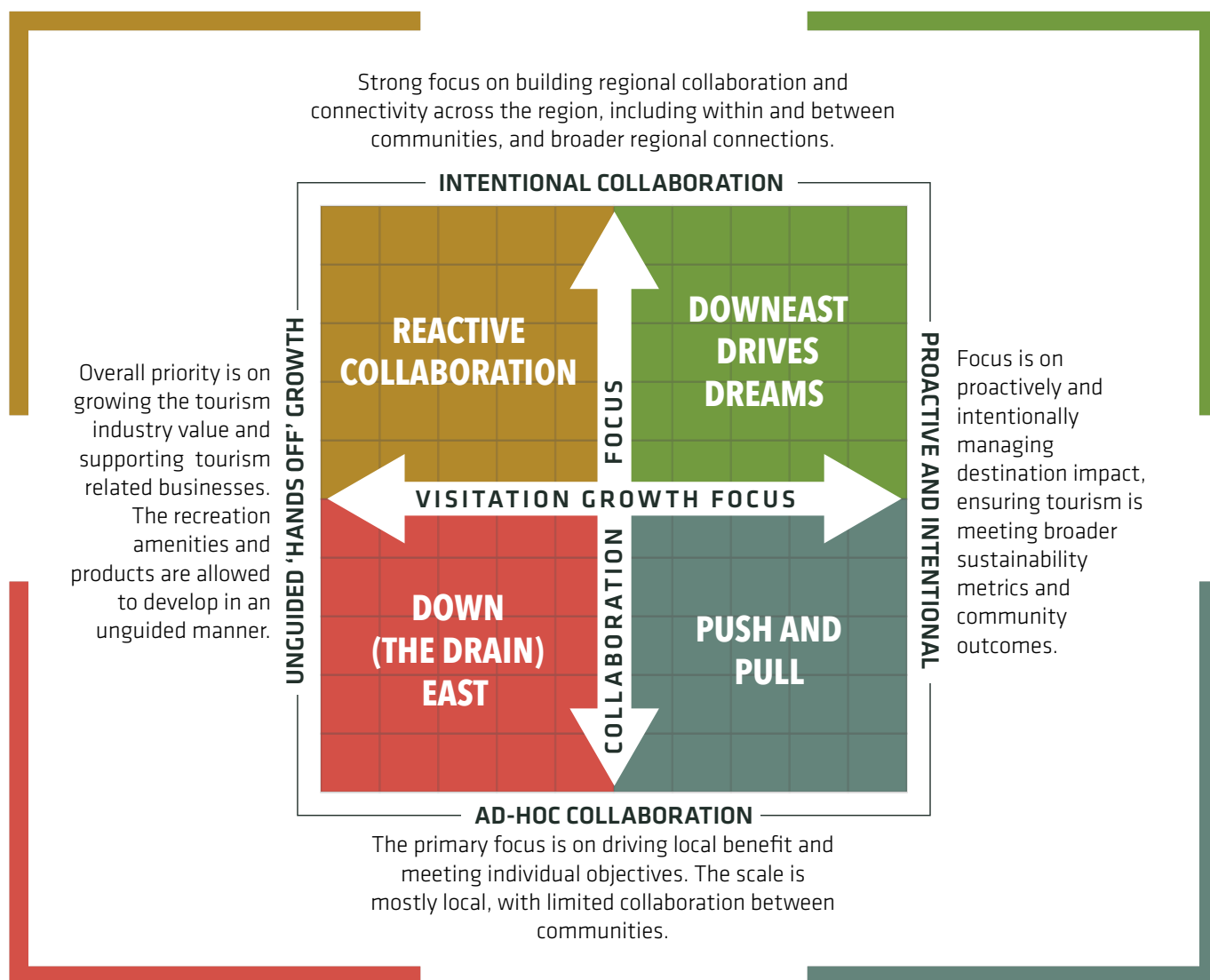
Following the exploration of future trends, the workshop engaged in scenario planning. The scenario framework focused on two key 'future splitting' themes – Visitation Growth Focus and Collaboration Focus. These were identified from the community discussions in February and from the initial survey work. They are also consistent with local experience and industry research. These two themes became main axes on a scenario planning matrix used by participants to explore potential future outcomes.

The scenario-based methodology is ideal for future explorations, as it allows people to map out a range of plausible real-life scenarios in a structured and organized manner. It also allows the opportunity to examine the pros and cons of different future choices.



5.1 | EXPLORING FUTURE SCENARIOS - WAY DOWNEAST

The Module 1 workshop focused on developing a range of plausible scenarios for the future of tourism in the region. These were built around the scenario framework that was constructed using the two main axis of 'Visitation growth focus' and 'Collaboration focus'. Each scenario is developed as a function of the 'conditions' described at the end of each axis. Way DownEast participants gave each scenario a name to help evoke the sense of each potential future, and together paint a 'future canvas' of plausible 2030s.



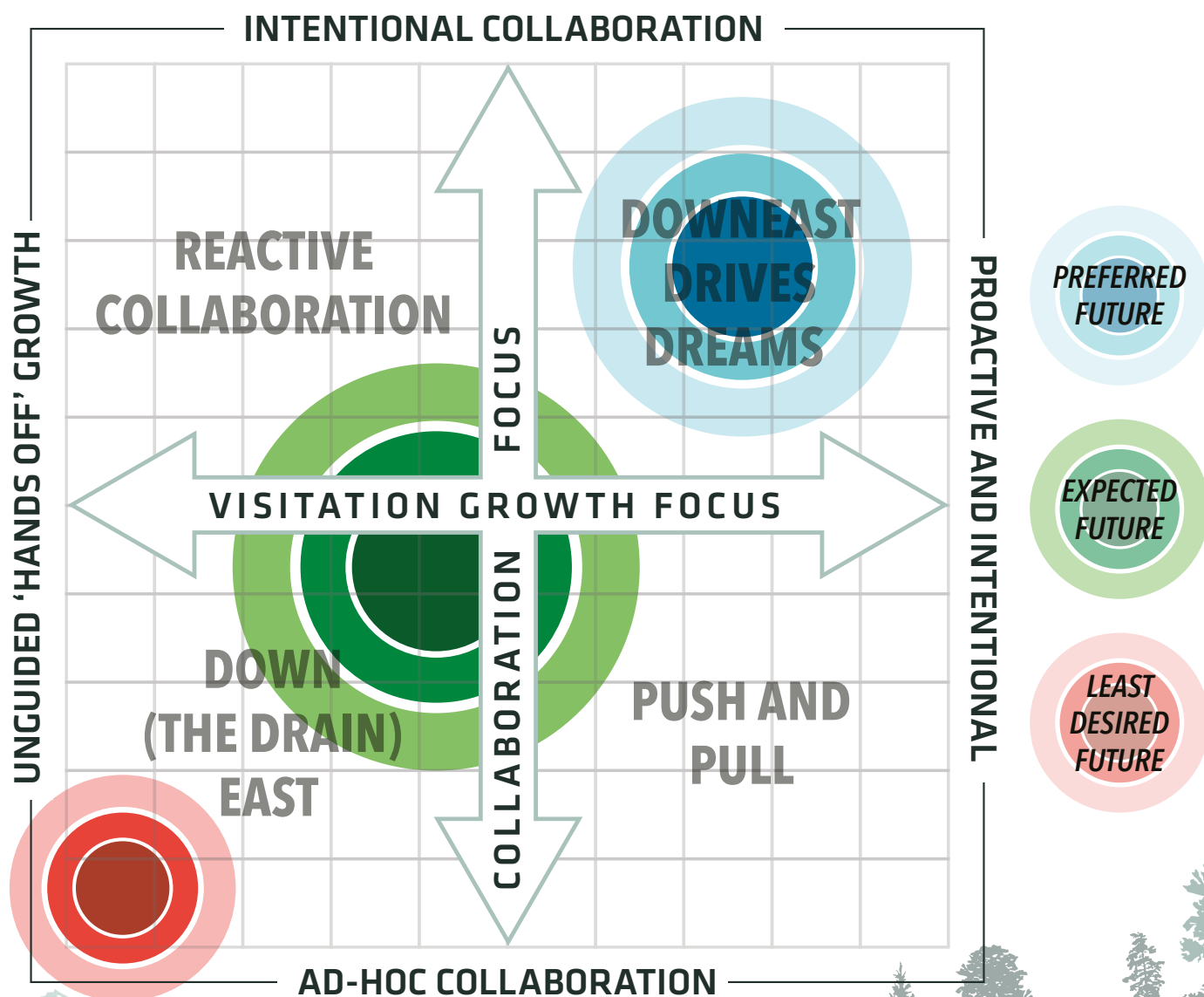
As the scenario names suggest, there were quite different future outcomes associated with each scenario. This exercise helps map out future possible directions and explore implications and consequences.

5.2 | IDENTIFYING THE 'PREFERRED FUTURE' FOR WAY DOWNEAST

At the conclusion of the scenario development exercise, workshop participants were asked to consider what they believed would be the 'Least Desired', the 'Expected Future', and the 'Preferred Future' for their region in 2030. They recorded their responses in an individual survey, on a 10 x 10 grid that overlaid the scenario framework. The Expected Future was the scenario they considered the most likely future, assuming there was no change in existing conditions, direction, or trajectory. The Preferred Future was what they believed was the most optimal future scenario for the region. The Least Desired Future was the one that held the least appeal for the future.

There is a significant gap between the Expected and Preferred Futures, which suggests that some bold actions, new thinking, and much community work are required.

The results show that stakeholders in Way DownEast want to see a change in direction. Local interest is strongly based on building proactive and intentional visitation growth focus and strengthening intentional collaborative approaches. This drives the region to the upper right into the 'DownEast Drive Dreams' future.



5.3 | DOWNEAST DRIVES DREAMS - THE 'PREFERRED FUTURE'

The preferred future 'DownEast Drive Dreams', was described by the workshop participants in terms of future characteristics and impacts, and 'brought-to-life' by crafting headline news and describing this future version of Way DownEast. Workshop participants were also asked what they would see on the ground in 2030 under this preferred future. It was envisioned that the four main communities would share tight connections, and work very collaboratively to build shared brand and messaging. There would be seamless connection between the communities, and the maritime resources would be a key part of the tourism offering. Local heritage would be celebrated, and there would be vibrant communities, active downtowns and progressive schools.

CHARACTERISTICS AND IMPACTS IN 2030 OF THE 'DOWNEAST DRIVES DREAMS' SCENARIO

COMMUNITY IMPACTS

- More vibrant communities with increased local prosperity and populations.
- More youth remain in area and find valuable work, and better school resources.
- Positive relationship between communities and visitors.

VISITOR EXPERIENCE IMPACTS AND PROFILE

- Visitors come from a wider area, and report high satisfaction with experience.
- Higher spend per visitor, who stay longer, explore more of the region, and integrate better with locals.
- More evenly distributed across the region and seasons of the years.

LOCAL ECONOMIC IMPACTS

- Deeper and more consistent economic benefits from tourism.
- Greater range of tourism products and experiences available.
- Better transportation options, and compatibility with existing economic drivers.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

- Ecosystem approach produces strong environmental outcomes.
- Increased protection of sensitive areas, and more use of renewable energy.
- Stronger management of impact of visitation traffic and use of landscape.

2025 HEADLINE NEWS:
**"WASHINGTON COUNTY
ELECTRIFIES TRAVEL WAY
DOWNEAST"**



2030 HEADLINE NEWS:
**"RESTAURANT IN EASTPORT
WINS MICHELIN STAR"**



2025 HEADLINE NEWS:
**"COLLABORATION HITS ALL-
TIME HIGH - CONNECTED
REGION EMERGES"**



2030 HEADLINE NEWS:
**"EMISSIONS FALL AS
TOURISM RISES"**





6.0 | MODULE 2 - ROADMAP AND STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

Module 2 of the Way DownEast Community Tourism Academy was held on April 26, 2022. The purpose of this module was to begin developing the strategic roadmap, that will help the region pivot towards the preferred future 'DownEast Drive Dreams'.

During this module, participants explored:

- How to move toward the preferred futures, especially addressing building intentional collaboration and connections, and focusing on proactive and intentional visitation
- Reviewed regional assets and inventory mapping work undertaken by Maine Office of Tourisma
- Developed an initial set of Strategic Pillars
- Brainstormed strategic action ideas and initial prioritization of pillars

During the workshop, there was considerable brainstorming work to understand what is already happening in the region and identify key gaps. A key feature of the Community Destination Academy design is the opportunity for participants to engage in deep exploratory discussions and participate in interactive decision-making exercises. This work builds the deeper shared understanding and collaborative experiences.

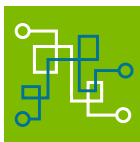


6.1 | DEVELOPING STRATEGIC PILLARS

The strategic pillars were built from initial input from participants in Module 1 and were further refined during Module 2. The pillars are aimed to be big 'buckets' that can help organize ideas and actions. Together, the set of pillars represents the big strategic action areas that will help the region pivot towards the preferred future.

The strategic pillars help organize actions ideas into key themes. These are the foundational building blocks that will help Way DownEast achieve the preferred future.

WAY DOWNEAST STRATEGIC ACTION PILLARS



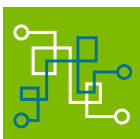
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- These pillars highlight two big underlying themes. One is collaboration - to build connections and transportation; and the other is branding and promotion.
- These pillar themes have consistently been identified as key building blocks through the discussions in module 1 and 2.
- The asset inventory discussion in Module 2 highlighted the rich set of assets the region currently has, which it can build on for nature-based and recreation tourism products.

6.2 | STRATEGIC ACTION IDEAS AND PILLAR PRIORITIZATION

During Module 2, participants brainstormed potential ideas and actions under each of the broad pillar headings. Ideas were grouped and sorted. Initial scoring of ideas was done, to sort the relative emphasis of the pillars. These are intended to be only high level and preliminary prioritizations.

PILLAR	STRATEGIC ACTION AREA	TOTAL
Pillar 1: Build and Sustain Regional Collaboration	Way Downeast Tourism Coalition - The overarching group needs to be formed to help drive collaboration across all activities.	28
	Internal outreach to local organizations, municipalities, and stakeholders.	
	Stronger connection to MOT through DART.	
	Dedicated person to build collaboration.	
Pillar 2: Strengthen and Communicate Way Down East Brand Identity	Collaborative regional marketing - Way DownEast destination website would serve all four communities. Perhaps utilizing local art students or artists for a logo design and/or a destination tagline.	21
	Create common / interlinked social media platforms.	
	Create marketing that shares unified brand and logo.	
Pillar 3: Improve Multi-Modal Transportation Systems	Create water transportation system that connects Lubec and Eastport, and other parts of the region.	9
	Build more safe bicycle lanes and trail networks.	
	Road improvements to ensure easy travel and avoid congestion.	
Pillar 4: Improve Cultural, Community and Nature-Based Visitor Experiences	Leverage College programming for nature-based guides.	9
	Enhance their downtown areas or waterfronts with their own unique project but placing a Way DownEast/Community Destination logo sign when completed.	
	Buildings along the Main Street had placards made indicating the original purpose of the building and its various interactions through history.	
	Story telling through an interpretive panel in every community along the route between Machias and Calais.	
	Re-enactor events – promoting the unique history and heritage.	
	Charting Your Course to Down East Maine - Lay out the public access points to the ocean...all in one place...all on one “history and culture” map.	
	Develop a campaign to draw visitors to the historic downtowns and promote as hubs of activity with the surrounding nature-based experiences.	
Pillar 5: Promote Sustainable Tourism Principles and Environmental Stewardship	Passport to Washington County.	6
	Curated visitor experiences, including environmental stewardship (which includes historic preservation and good preservation practices).	

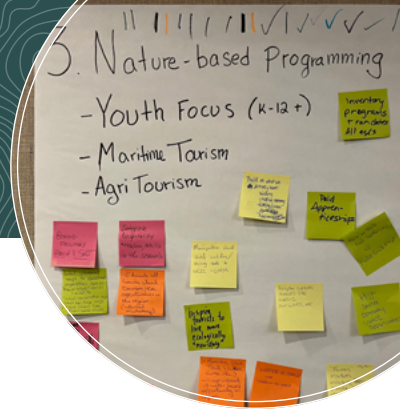


FutureInsight

- The key priority pillars identified by participants included 'Build and Sustain Regional Collaboration' and 'Strengthen and Communicate Way Down East Brand Identity'.
- These are big picture systemic strategic action areas, that have consistently been identified as key building blocks through the discussions in module 1 and 2.

7.0 | MODULE 3 - COMMUNITY SUMMIT AND PRIORITIZATION

Module 3 of the Way DownEast Community Tourism Academy was held on May 16, 2022. Approximately 60 community members attended. The program included a presentation of the work in Modules 1 and 2, and then group brainstorming and prioritization of a shortlist of possible projects, aiming to deepen the focus on several key projects. The shortlist was prepared based on work in Module 2, and Steering Committee input prior to Module 3. The top broad project ideas, and the scoring is as follows.



STRATEGIC PROJECT IDEA	BRAINSTORMING ADDITIONS AT COMMUNITY SUMMIT	TOTAL
Local Tourism 'Way DownEast' Focused entity <i>(Way DownEast / DART subcommittee)</i> PILLAR 1	Purpose is to drive deeper collaboration among tourism entities – MOT, Tourism New Brunswick, DART, CCRTA (Canadian Regional TA), Acadia, Roosevelt Campobello International Park, Fundy National Park.	17
	Bring together local and regional group representatives from the four towns – with recruiting of people from the smaller towns.	
	Purpose it to make the region a central tourism hub that is connected internally and externally to other destinations.	
	Educate community members & organizations about how to help support and build local nature-based tourism.	
Marketing Integration <i>(Build linkages to integrate and connect existing website and social media platforms)</i> PILLAR 2	Invest in good quality integrated marketing and promotion platforms that link to MOT and DART and build closer ties to surround regions such as Canada and Bar Harbor.	21
	Build in unified social media branding, visitor information and promote local events – include a focus on educating visitors, locals, and communities on the importance of sustainable tourism.	
Nature-Based Programing <i>(With youth, maritime and agritourism focus)</i> PILLAR 4	Build on strong nature-based assets (History, creative economy, fishing (ocean), dark skies, Passamaquoddy connection). Inspire tourists to live more ecologically – a “new story” about tourism.	18
	Maintain a strong youth focus, that promotes the opportunities in a new kind of tourism economy and job and vocational opportunities.	
	Leverage and grow maritime tourism, including re-establish the Eastport to Deer Island ferry; passenger ferry from Lubec to Eastport to Campobello; to help promote Blue Trails – (water, lakes, rivers, etc.).	
	Develop more agri-tourism products, such as regular Farmers Markets including produce, but also other vendors – bread, wine, distilleries, crafts, food trucks, entertainment, etc. Develop Farm to Table, food gatherings with Foodie Guide maps, and Fiber Arts Tours/Events – wool, knitting, etc.	
Downtown Experiences <i>(Enhancement of community centers)</i> PILLAR 4	Build on downtown enhancement and 'Main Street' efforts, to bring the downtown centers to life as hubs of activity, connectivity, and cultural richness.	11
	Focus on beautification and enhancements by prioritizing historic preservation over new structures and repurpose civic architecture.	
	Actively protect historic buildings and Main Streets and create façade improvement revolving loan funds.	
	Support community beautification efforts such as cleaning up empty Store fronts, clean up roadside litter, Anti-littering campaign, and improved interpretive signs.	
Regional Maps PILLARS 4 & 5	Create unique maps that connect the regions and showcase nature-based tourism.	6
	Include Brewery and wine routes. Farm to Table opportunities, Recreation opportunities.	
	Historic tour maps, including cemetery tours, ghost story tours and downtown walking maps.	
Re-Enactor Events PILLAR 4	Teaching local history to schools through re-enactors events and experiential learning.	2

8.0 | RECOMMENDED PROJECTS

The Way DownEast CDA explored future trajectory and built a strategic framework to move forward. The participants and community created a solid repository of project ideas, which can be used to help mobilize collaboration and build a sustainable nature-based tourism economy.

Following the Module 3 session, the project team considered potential initial projects that will be both achievable and impactful. The following recommended projects aim to drive collaboration and have a high visibility impact for visitors and residents alike. These projects intentionally cut across the pillars and the strategic project ideas, to deliver multiple outcomes, and help bring together creative thinking. They also aim to drive economic impact and demonstrate how tourism can add value to local communities.

The recommended initial projects were as follows.



THEMATIC MURAL SERIES

Develop a series of thematic murals that connect the Way DownEast communities, by sharing a common theme such as *nature, recreation, history, heritage, art*, etc. Begin with a single theme, work with each town to visually capture the local stories related to that theme. Over time, more murals can be designed to increase the number of murals in each community creating a local mural walk. The increasing number of murals will entice people to visit all 4 communities to see the murals, which will become an attraction to visitation.

- The *common theme* should be planned, discussed, and agreed upon by all four communities (helping build collaboration and unified branding).
- Each town's *depiction* of the theme *will vary* according to their own assets and stories.
- Mural location is *highly visible* in each downtown as a background for a photo opportunity and to exhibit regional collaboration and unity.
- Each mural has a *common core* that offers a welcoming message to visitors.
- Towns work with a *single artist* to listen to their stories and weave them together into a visual depiction. *Local people* must be *involved* somehow in the making of their mural. Example: The artist might draw the big outlines with various sections being painted by local people.



THEMATIC MAP SERIES

Begin with themed maps for the greater four-community region that show visitors where and how to enjoy a group of activities that naturally complement each other. Develop into a series of themed maps that cover and build awareness of the *unique* regional assets. Initial map ideas or themes could include:

“Meet your Maker” map highlighting:

- Agritourism, Farm to table products and dining experiences
- Breweries – using local grains for production
- Fiber arts studios and events
- Made in Maine arts & crafts studios & galleries (open to visitors/sales)

Historic and Cultural Attractions:

- Passamaquoddy connection, culture, museums, etc.
- Historic Homes and buildings (open to public), Historic tours
- Festivals and events

9.0 | IMMEDIATE NEXT STEPS

The Way DownEast CDA program has delivered a clear mandate for embracing nature-based recreation tourism and using this to contribute to enhanced community prosperity. Following the Community Summit, the project team (and funders) and local Steering Committee have been working on immediate next steps.

Some of the actions that are currently underway include:



RECONSTITUTING THE LOCAL PROJECT WORKING GROUP

- The initial working group was brought together to convene and host the CDA program. This group is evolving to move into a project implementation mode. Throughout the CDA, there was recognition of the need to have some unifying group in the region that helps keep people connected, informed, and motivated to implement projects.
- A Way DownEast Tourism Committee has been identified and has convened twice now. This group draws representatives from the four communities. Their task is to plan and implement the community art project and discuss how to best continue working together as a destination on long range tourism development planning and project implementation. They will utilize existing significant assets that connect them as a framework, like the Bold Coast National Scenic Byway and the (probable) designation as the Downeast Maine National Heritage Area, to think broadly about their connection to the rest of the region while also focusing in on needs/opportunities/work specific to their communities.
- They will work more closely with DownEast Acadia Regional Tourism to develop marketing tools that are specific to the needs of the Way DownEast region. This group will next reconvene after the Downeast Tourism Summit in Eastport, October 13, 2022



PROJECT COORDINATOR SUPPORT

- Additional support has already been provided by the Maine Office of Tourism and the Maine Woods Consortium to extend the project coordinator role played by Crystal Hitchings (Sunrise County Economic Council)



COMMUNITY ART PROJECT

- Kara Mitchell of the St. Croix Valley Chamber is leading the Community Art project. This project is supported by smaller project committee to do further research and information gathering on a community art project that all communities can embrace. The committee will meet throughout the winter months and report at each Steering committee meeting for feedback. The Project committee will complete their work by the end of June in time for the next summer season.
- The DownEast Acadia Annual Tourism Symposium will be held in Eastport this year, and the theme is “The Creative Edge - Arts, Culture, and Collaboration in Eastport and Way DownEast Maine”. Kara Mitchell is preparing a summary presentation of the CDA and the proposed art project for this event, and together with a representative from each of the four towns will speak about the CDA and intent for continuing the collaboration.



10.0 | CONSULTANTS INSIGHTS

The Way DownEast region has embraced a collaborative planning effort with enthusiasm and energy. Throughout the module sessions and community discussions, there has been a continued recognition that the region will be stronger with the communities working together.

In considering the planning efforts and final outcomes, some specific insights are offered, from the project consultant. David Beurle from Future iQ helped to design and facilitate the sessions and provides these comments as Consultant Insights.



INTENTIONALLY MOVING TO IMPLEMENTATION

The transition from project ideation to project implementation can be sometimes challenging, especially when there is a broad choice of viable projects. In addition, the Way DownEast region is attempting to bring together a group of communities into a collaborative framework. Moving from planning to implementation will require some intentional decision making to select pilot projects and put the intentions into action. The process has surfaced and refined some very viable and exciting projects – especially the idea of thematic murals, signs, and maps. These projects should be used as a launching pad for other system projects, that will keep building momentum.



SHOWING POSITIVE ACTION IS POSSIBLE

Demonstrating to the community members that ‘something good is happening’ is important, especially as the region emerges from pandemic shutdowns, and as domestic tourism pressure ramps-up. There are a lot of good things happening and communicating this to the communities with a united voice can help the whole region.



PARTNERSHIP WITH MAINE OFFICE OF TOURISM

The Maine Office of Tourism (MOT) has offered considerable support for the regional community, through the Community Destination Academy, research capability and marketing support. As such MOT is a key partner, and the region should embrace this partnership and make full use of the services, guidance, and support. This is especially important in helping find ways to leverage the tourism epicenter of Bar Harbor and finding ways to spread the impact to the Way DownEast region.



EMBRACE THE SCALE OF THE OPPORTUNITY

Tourism is undergoing radical change and emerging trends suggest that the appetite for nature-based and recreation tourism will continue to grow significantly and rapidly. Given the ‘undiscovered’ nature of the region, and the beautiful environment, there is a large upside potential. Capturing this potential will require some strong collaborative leadership and decision making.



BUILD THE DOWNTOWN EXPERIENCES

The region is unique as it has a series of historic and very interesting downtowns, embedded in a fascinating marine and nature-based environment. For example, Eastport has the potential for small scale cruise ship visits, literally right in the downtown precinct. These downtowns are already attracting investment in terms of renovation and renewal. The downtown locations are a prize asset in this region and should be at the center of programs to build the visitation economy.

The Way DownEast CDA process has produced a clear vision, a strategic framework, and a viable list of exciting projects, that can help activate strategic action and change. The participants and community leaders are well placed to select one of the appealing projects and bring interested stakeholders together to move into implementation mode.



11.0 | MORE INFORMATION & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For more information about the Way DownEast Community Destination Academy and ongoing work to create a dynamic and sustainable tourism industry in the region, please contact Crystal Hitchings:



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**Sunrise County
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

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This Community Destination Academy (CDA) is part of a program organized and delivered by a collaboration between the Maine Office of Tourism, the Maine Woods Consortium, and the Northern Forest Center. The CDA program has also delivered destination development work in rural areas of Maine, including Moosehead Lake, Rangely and the Bethel Area.

Summary Report prepared by Future iQ, in collaboration with the Community Destination Academy team. Additional information available on the project portal:

<https://lab2.future-iq.com/way-downeast-cda>



future→iQ

A photograph of a woman with long brown hair, wearing a blue tank top, black shorts, a black helmet, and sunglasses, riding a black bicycle on a gravel path. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The path is next to a body of water, with a large green tree on the right and a small wooden bench in the background. The sky is blue with some white clouds.

TOURISM COMMUNITY DESTINATION ACADEMY WAY DOWNEAST REGION MAINE

SUMMARY REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2022