



2022 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title of the Story: How We Connect with Locals in Durango

Destination Name: La Plata County, Colorado

Country: United States

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Position: Sustainability & Policy Manager

Submission category: *(Please check one of the boxes that indicates the focus of your story)*

Please find detailed information for the categories below in the Top 100 training module 'Good Practice Story'.

- Governance, Reset & Recovery
- Nature & Scenery
- Environment & Climate
- Culture & Tradition
- Thriving Communities
- Business & Marketing

Find detailed instructions for submitting good practices in the Top 100 training module "Good Practice Story".

Should you have any questions on your submission please refer to our FAQ page or contact top100@greendestinations.org





DESCRIBE YOUR GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Address each aspect of your good practice story in the different sections being specific including relevant quantitative and qualitative information.

Issues faced

What was the problem/issue solved with the good practice?

Visit Durango has undergone many iterations since its creation as the Durango Area Chamber and Resort Association in 1998. Residents of La Plata County are used to a Destination Marketing Organization and a business community that operated under the “heads in beds” mantra. The Executive Director Rachel Brown, who was appointed to the role in 2019, renamed the organization to Visit Durango, and she is aware of the pitfalls of this kind of reputation. She has worked hard to transform Visit Durango from a Destination Marketing Organization to a Destination Management & Marketing Organization (DMMO).

The history of the organization has left Visit Durango with the local reputation that it only exists to make a few business owners money at the expense of the community. This in part was due to the lack of community engagement by Visit Durango and its predecessor DATO. Community engagement has been the focus of the Sustainability and Policy Manager since coming on board with Visit Durango in early 2022. This is an ongoing process that currently consists of three initiatives.





Methods, steps and tools applied

How was the good practice implemented?

The first approach is being more open, transparent, and direct with our philosophy, actions, and data. To achieve this, we reorganized our main website. We added Responsible Tourism as a menu navigation item. Under this we have included many ways to connect with the Visit Durango team. It is also easier for the public to find sustainability information. It helps increase our transparency and showcase sustainability as a top priority of the organization.

The second initiative was creating a community engagement hub through Citizenlab to increase engagement from the local community, especially underrepresented groups and those who are unable to attend community events. Our goal is to obtain a representative sample size that mimics the population, in terms of the demographics of La Plata County. Citizenlab will help us increase our transparency to the community and feedback from the community. Using Citizenlab Visit Durango can create projects with budgets and timelines that are accessible to the public. In addition, comments sections, polls, surveys, and other tools can be put in projects in order to get better stakeholder input. Community members are even allowed to share ideas and initiatives for Visit Durango to work towards if they meet a threshold of votes from other community members.

An example of this is a project we are currently running titled "County Gems to Keep Hidden". We currently have a list of places we do not advertise and have been asking for additional areas, mostly trail systems and natural destinations, the locals would not like to be on our marketing material. Once a resident inputs their idea, we get a notification, and we notify them that their input has been received. Then we notify the Land managers or other partners that operate that area. We discuss if they think this should be added to the list because of overuse/ carrying capacity or if we should continue to market it. After the discussion with our partners, Visit Durango reaches back out to the idea submitter to let them know the outcome and the reasoning behind the outcome.





The software is normally used by Governmental entities, and we are the first DMMO to use it. Citizenlab has never had any other entities utilizing sweepstakes to entice residents to sign up and participate. The platform is live, and we are already receiving resident signups. We are spreading the word with ads through social media, digital platforms, and radio advertising in addition to tabling at local events.

Our goal with this platform is for 3% (1,650 people) of the total county population to use the platform, for the users to reflect the county's demographics, and to have support from county and city residents.

The third approach is through stakeholder identification and workshops currently underway. The first step was to identify and map various stakeholders. We identified over 100 organizations in 18 different categories. These consist of stakeholders Visit Durango interacts with currently and many new stakeholders.

The next step was to set up and create workshops to gather feedback and input. These initial workshops are being held virtually and are targeting the Business and NGO community. With zoom and the interactive presentation tool, Ahaslides, input and data are captured which can be then exported into Excel for analysis as well as a PDF for data retention. These workshops are using tools and methods adopted from the CISR (Continual Improvement for Social Responsibility) framework. We adapted the innovation session format as well as the adapting tools from the analyze phase. During these sessions we are gathering the following information: La Plata County's greatest strengths, risks, and opportunities. The information is provided by the workgroup attendees in the social, environmental, and economic realms. From here we can ask questions and have a dialogue on these topics. During the risk questioning we have adapted the Social Responsibility Failure Mode and Effects Analysis (SRFMEA) tool and asked participants to rate their suggestions severity class and occurrence class to produce a Risk Priority Number (RPN) to help Visit Durango prioritize initiatives after this process is concluded. From the data collected we will identify 5-10 strategic focus areas to develop initiative for. From these, short, mid, and long-term objective will be determined. Each initiative will contain one or more projects for each project we will develop 2-3 leading and lagging SMARTIE (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant Timebound, Inclusive, Equitable) indicators.





Due to the size of La Plata County, we are going to hold multiple workshops, one in each municipality, with others taking place throughout the county. These workshops will provide childcare to ensure we can include those with kids. We are also going to hire a Spanish translator and American Sign Language interpreter, if available, to include as many groups in these discussions as possible.

Key success factors

What helped you tackle the issues?

Since the project is ongoing there are more lessons to learn. Here are a few we have learned so far:

It is important to have a someone within a project who looks very critically at your work at every step of the way. They do not have to be a person with authority, but someone whose opinion you trust and can think about an item from different angles. While this may affect the time it takes to roll out the project, taking the extra time to adjust the details helped increase clarity and understanding from the viewer's when it was presented. In the end the workshop was more understandable and has had less things to iron out.

In something like a workshop, present it to many groups you trust to see how they interact with the presentation before rolling it out to the rest of community. Have a candid conversation afterwards and look for those tweaks and improvements. Don't be afraid to ask your own questions based on items mentioned by attendees, you never know what you can learn. As an example, I had no idea that migratory corridor fragmentation existed, nor did I know it was happening in our community.





One of our biggest challenges was reconnecting with an important organization we have worked with in the past, who was no longer willing to work closely with us. We needed to try and repair that relationship. While they are not currently partnering with us, they see we are making moves they agree with. They have offered us very helpful advice on getting residents of one of the minority groups to be able to attend our resident workshops. The process of stakeholder engagement has allowed us to start repairing this relationship.

For engaging with private organizations and NGO's having the workshops virtually helped increased participation due to not building in travel time and has also allowed some to join when they were out of town. However, we believe the discussion aspect would be improved if these were held in person.

Parts of this process would be easy to replicate no matter the destination and others could have barriers. Our first initiative on being more open and transparent requires a governance change and with the right buy-in can easily be adapted by any organization. Our second initiative is the biggest barrier for other organizations. Citizenlab may be too expensive for some organizations to utilize. Citizenlab targets municipalities and their price reflects this. The stakeholder workshops' biggest barrier is time. This includes time to produce the workshop, setup times and groups, run the workshop and then analyze the data gathered.





Lessons learned

While implementing the Good Practice what challenges were faced, and how were they overcome?

In this ongoing process a couple lessons have become apparent. The first is only stakeholder identification has been performed and not stakeholder mapping. This has been a misstep and the extra time should have been taken to perform this extra step. During this process it has become apparent we have external stakeholders who we already work with who are in the demand category. We need to move them a back in the collaboration category. We have seen other external stakeholders, especially the social organizations, in the resistance or confusion category. This could present a large hurdle as Visit Durango reaches out, especially when trying to help improve the social aspects of La Plata County. We saw this when hosting the workshop for the social advocacy groups in town when only one out of the eight invited showed up. Even the reschedule had a low turnout. Second, we have seen some internal stakeholders in the Inertia category. This may be due to the fact they don't understand or see the importance of the engagement process, or it could be due to a lack of time with their other responsibilities outside of Visit Durango. Had the mapping been done prior to starting this we might have had better engagement during some of the less populated workshops.





Results, achievements and recognitions

What were the qualitative and quantitative results of the good practice?

We are still in the data-collection stage and do not yet have results to analyze currently. However, we have noticed the following trends:

Engage.durango.org has seen exponential growth from the local community over the last month since the local advertising went live, increasing from just 10 users to almost 100. We still have a long way to go, but if this continues at the same rate, we will be on track to hit the 1650 we are looking for. Our data also suggests that we do need to engage with the minority groups in this area.

With the workshops, preliminary feedback has been positive and more importantly many of these groups are excited we reached out to them in the first place. Some of these organizations plan on following up with Visit Durango later, and we can continue to build partnerships with these organizations.

While we don't have results from the workshops at this time, we have compiled the items which are top of mind in the following areas: social risks, social opportunities, social strengths. Based on these early findings Visit Durango is excited to see what is needed in the community and coming years to help La Plata County and its residents thrive.

Additional references

Provide links to further information. Pictures and videos should be available for download either from YouTube, Vimeo or other Cloud-based (Google/ One Drive) download URL (not WeTransfer).

<https://engage.durango.org/en/>

<https://www.durango.org/responsible/policy/>

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