



2023 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title: Blending Arts & Culture Programming with Sustainability.

Aspen breathes the air of creativity with a plethora of year-round arts & culture events that use their programming to educate our history & heritage along with communicating and practicing sustainability initiatives.

Destination, Country: Aspen, Colorado

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In the category: Destination Management Environment & Climate Thriving Communities
 Nature & Scenery Culture & Tradition Business & Marketing

The Story in a picture:

The Aspen Ideas Festival hosted by the Aspen Institute where every year they bring together the top experts in the world for a deep dialogue and open discussion found in the arts, science, culture, religion, philosophy, economics, sustainability, and politics.





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Summary:

Aspen has a strong commitment to preserving and celebrating its cultural heritage. Through its various programs and events, the city and nonprofit organizations provide opportunities for locals and visitors alike to learn about and engage with the unique traditions and identities that make Aspen such a special place. With a plethora of arts & culture programming that occurs year-round, there is opportunity to combine sustainability initiatives into events that attract people from all over the world. In recent years, Aspen’s arts & culture organizations have incorporated green initiatives into their programming with zero-waste events, critical dialogue on climate change, scholarship opportunities, and more. By blending world-class events with sustainability programming, we can help reach and spread awareness to a large number of influential people.





Good Practice Story:

Destination description

Brief background of the destination.

Aspen is nestled in the heart of the White River National Forest at the confluence of the Roaring Fork River, Hunter Creek, Maroon Creek, and Castle Creek, and encircled by the peaks of the Elk Mountain Range in the central Rocky Mountains. Located 18 miles east of Independence Pass on the Western Slope of the Continental Divide, this authentic mountain town offers an abundance of recreational opportunities set against a breathtaking landscape. Originally inhabited by the Ute Indian Tribe, Aspen became a mining town during the silver boom of the late 1800s. The average daily population in Aspen is 20,871. Generally, the heaviest days for visitation during the summer occur during July and early August. Aspen is approximately 3.66 square miles with an elevation of 7,908ft. Aspen is well known as a world-class year-round destination with outdoor adventures from biking to fly-fishing, world-class winter recreation, a plethora of arts & culture events and anything else from the riverbed to the sky. We encourage everyone to engage their mind, body & spirit when in Aspen. We have multiple organizations dedicated to creating world class events, educational opportunities, and performances; ranging from classical music to theatre performances and a little bit of everything in between. After 300 million years of geologic activity, Mother Nature gave us the Maroon Bells, wine-colored peaks towering 14,000 ft. above sea level. The reflective Maroon Lake, nestled in the valley at the base of the peaks, beckons the outdoor adventurer seeking beauty, hiking and adventure. Aspen is both extremely family and pet friendly and has over 400+ miles of hiking and biking trails- that hardest part is deciding what to do first!

Issues faced

Problems/issues solved with the Good Practice Story.

One of the problems that arts & culture organizations face in Aspen, Colorado, is the challenge of balancing their programming with climate initiatives while also educating a large number of people all the while protecting, supporting, and celebrating intangible cultural heritage.

Aspen is known for its robust arts and cultural scene, attracting a diverse range of tourists and residents who value these offerings. However, Aspen is also highly committed to sustainability and being a leader in climate initiatives. This presents a unique challenge for arts organizations as they must find ways to align their programming while promoting environmental responsibility.



One of the key issues is the energy consumption associated with arts and cultural events. Many artistic performances or exhibitions require significant amounts of energy for lighting, heating, and cooling large venues. This can have serious implications in terms of carbon emissions, especially in a community passionate about sustainability like Aspen.

Another aspect of this challenge is integrating climate-oriented themes or messages into their programming. Many arts organizations want to use their platforms to raise awareness and educate the public about climate change and environmental sustainability. However, finding the right balance between artistic expression and the educational aspect can be tricky.

Organizations need to ensure that their educational messages are effectively conveyed without overshadowing the artistic integrity of their performances or exhibits. They must also gauge the interests and expectations of their audiences to avoid alienating them. It becomes imperative to strike a delicate balance, creating programming that engages and educates a diverse range of people, all while maintaining artistic excellence.

Moreover, educating a large number of people presents logistical challenges for arts organizations. Aspen's population fluctuates due to tourism, and events often attract people from various backgrounds and age groups. To effectively educate such a diverse audience, organizations need to employ diverse communication strategies, incorporating visual displays, interactive exhibits, workshops, and educational forums. They need to ensure these initiatives reach both local residents and visitors, creating an inclusive educational environment.

Arts and culture organizations in Aspen, Colorado, are facing a complex challenge of aligning their programming with climate initiatives while also educating a diverse audience. Balancing the artistic and educational aspects, reducing carbon emissions, and reaching a large number of people are consistent issues that require creative solutions, financial investments, and strategic planning.

Methods, steps, and tools applied

Solutions implemented to address the sustainability problems or issues.

To address some of the challenges, arts and culture organizations in Aspen have been investing in climate initiatives and continuously exploring ways to reduce their carbon footprint. They are incorporating energy-efficient technologies, such as LED lighting, motion sensor systems, and renewable energy sources like solar panels. There are also programs that have been incorporated into events that open the discussion to climate change. Below are a few examples of what our nonprofit arts & culture organizations have done to combat these issues.



Anderson Ranch Arts Center hosts critical dialogue programs throughout the year. This year, they are blending artists with climate change conversation. This summer 2023, acclaimed artists Alan Michelson and Mary Mattingly will come to share their journey of confronting climate change in their art with Climate Museum director, Miranda Massie. At a time of growing momentum to reckon with the daunting effects of climate change, the public is invited to hear the stories of two artists' approach to using their art to speak about the changing climate and the myriad of ways it has affected communities in the US. Alan Michelson has been a leading practitioner of a socially engaged, critically aware, site-specific art grounded in local context and informed by the retrieval of repressed histories. Mattingly combines photography, performance, portable architecture and sculptural ecosystems into poetic visions of adaptation and survival, offering specific solutions and architectural prototypes that we can build upon in our pursuit of a better life. Miranda Massie, founder of the Climate Museum, a dedicated home for interdisciplinary arts-based climate programming, will lead this exciting and pertinent discussion, inviting us all to tackle this difficult reality through the creative lens of art. Anderson Ranch's Critical Dialogue Program seeks to engage the community in lively discussion about contemporary art and art making. Artists, curators and other creatives lead these conversations, inviting a broad audience to join in on taking a closer look at art's power to change the world. This program is intended to be informative, motivating, and inspiring for those interested in the ways that artists are confronting and unpacking current challenges in our culture such as climate change, mass incarceration, gender inequality, and much more. This program is open to artists, Ranch supporters, collectors, art enthusiasts and those seeking a rigorous and dynamic look at what it means to be an artist in today's world.

Each summer, the Aspen Institute hosts the Aspen Idea's Festival and and Aspen Ideas: Health. Against the awe-inspiring backdrop of the Aspen Meadows campus in the Rocky Mountains, guests will convene — in open-air tents and venues that bring the outside in — for stimulating and invigorating conversations with some of the brightest, most interesting thinkers and doers. Leaders from around the globe and across many disciplines will engage in deep and inquisitive discussion of the ideas and issues that shape our lives and challenge our times.

In February of 2023, Belly Up Aspen (one of our top live-music venues) co-produced the inaugural Palm Tree Music Festival Aspen alongside Kygo's Palm Tree Crew and C3 Presents. Located in





downtown Aspen's Rio Grande Park, the festival featured headliners Kygo and Jack White, and included performances by Gryffin, King Princess, Cannons and Forester. With an emphasis on sustainability, the festival partnered with Ever Green Zero Waste to operate in compliance with the city's Z-Green requirements. Along with multiple vendors, the two-day, 4,000 capacity festival produced one ton of uncontaminated compost and two tons of uncontaminated recycling by the end of the event. The initiatives included the use of compostable or recyclable single-use consumables (plates, cups, utensils, glass bottles, etc). There were 3-bin sorting stations (recycle, compost and trash) located at every entrance, exit and throughout the GA and VIP areas. Staff from Ever Green Zero Waste was present throughout the festival, cleaning up any litter and assisting guests with properly disposing of their waste. As a result of these efforts, Belly Up Aspen and their partners received many positive comments from attendees, artists and staff alike applauding their green initiatives.

The Wheeler Opera House has been Aspen's home to live events since 1889. The Wheeler is committed to reducing waste throughout the building. One of the Wheeler Opera House goals is to provide appropriate facilities and resources to operate an environmentally responsible and sustainable venue, advocating and educating visiting artists, guests and community partners on programs and new initiatives. They have put in place a program called "Wasteless at the Wheeler" that incorporates the following practices that support our common goals to reduce waste, eliminate single-use plastic and strive for an environmentally sustainable venue.

- Reusable water bottles provided upon request in the backstage areas (no single use plastics allowed).
- In 2017, reduced and eliminated the use of plastic straws venue wide.
- Uses only recyclable corn plastic cups or compostable cups venue wide.
- Bar vendor provides compostable glasses or boxed water in lieu of single serving plastic water bottles 95% of the year.
- Venue-wide composting (including restaurant).
- Terra-cycling program for administrative areas

In addition to these great incentives, they expect the theater to be full converted to LED lighting in 2024.

Aspen Public Radio has won a multitude of awards for their reporting and events. They have partnered with EverGreen ZeroWaste to create "zero-waste events" which means their food vendors are all using compostable/recycle products and will generate nothing that goes into the landfill, receptacles are being provided for compost/trash/recycle needs, and all participating nonprofit organizations are instructed to provide giveaways that are reusable/recyclable (nothing single-use); it is a leave-no-trace event.





Aspen Historical Society incorporates both green initiatives and programming into their events. Since 2012, AHS has offered an accessible and energy efficient guided driving tour of historic downtown Aspen in their unique electric vehicle – complete with a visit to both the Wheeler/Stallard Museum and the Holden/Marolt Mining & Ranching Museum. At their Holden/Marolt Mining & Ranching Museum, a unique trailside museum that explores the area’s mining, ranching and immigration history, they have offered free admission for car-free visitors who bike, bus or walk since 2019. Programming wise, AHS supports more than 25,000 education contacts per year in person at their sites, on programs, and with regional schools. AHS created a dedicated exhibit about the history of the Ute people that is available to regional groups to host in their locations for free. The traveling exhibit, “Seasons of the Nuche: Transitions of the Ute People” explores the past and present of the Ute people in the American West and was curated from the award-winning exhibition of the same name, displayed at the Wheeler/Stallard Museum between 2012 and 2015, which was designed with input from Ute tribal members. The traveling exhibit, comprising modular display panels and interactive elements, including a tipi, helps bring the history and culture of the Ute people to communities on Colorado’s Western Slope. AHS provides the exhibit to regional organizations to host in their communities with no rental cost, helping make the educational content accessible to the widest audience possible through partnerships with historical societies, libraries, civic groups, schools, and more. AHS collaborates with countless local organizations on various programs, events, and exhibitions that highlight the area’s intangible cultural heritage.

Every year, the Aspen Center for Environmental Studies celebrates Earth Day at Hallam Lake to help ACES with various service projects and end of season clean up days. Each winter, ACES partners with Wilderness Workshop and Roaring Fork Audubon to co-host the popular Naturalist Nights speaker series, bringing a great line-up of experts to explore topics of the natural world with our community. Each month they host a birding session designed for birders of all experience levels, and focusing on birding tips, sharing observations, and the fun of connecting with nature. ACES offers guided summer & winter hikes. The purpose is to get to know more about the Roaring Fork Valley by hiking with a naturalist guide.

Founded in 1991 and entering its 32nd season, Jazz Aspen Snowmass (JAS) is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization. The Mission of JAS is to present and preserve jazz and related forms of music through world-class events, performances, and education programs. Since 1996, JAS has generated over \$8 million to support its multifaceted music education programs. JAS has grown from a simple





3-day event in Aspen to a complex set of multi-day festivals in Aspen/Snowmass, Colorado; diverse year-round music education programs; a full-scholarship summer Academy for rising jazz musicians; and the addition of the JAS Café featuring outstanding jazz musicians throughout the year in venues around Aspen. JAS launched its acclaimed music education programs in 1996 with the Thelonious Monk Institute Jazz Colony, which became the JAS Academy Summer Sessions in 2000-2008- the nation's only all-scholarship summer training program for gifted young emerging jazz artists.

The Aspen Art Museum has made it their mission to minimize our environmental impact and is implementing a range of initiatives to achieve just that. Their dedication to sustainability is particularly evident at their Rooftop Café at the museum from an innovative approach to ingredient utilization to conscientious menu choices. Specifically, they prioritize plant-forward menus that celebrate the vibrant flavors of local and seasonal ingredients, supporting small-scale and regenerative agriculture practices. By sourcing locally, they help contribute to the vitality of our region's food system. They practice using only compostable to-go ware, ensuring that every item provided is both convenient and gentle on the planet. Private events held on the rooftop are strictly prohibited from using non-reusable plastics, reinforcing a commitment to a plastic-free future. The museum composts their food waste and paper products, diverting them from landfills and giving them new life as valuable soil amendments. In their kitchen, they have embraced the use of an all-electric setup, complete with energy-efficient induction burners. By harnessing the power of electricity, they are greatly reducing reliance on fossil fuels. In September 2022, they joined forces with Seed Peace, a remarkable regenerative nonprofit farm in Carbondale, Colorado for an event at the museum. This unique event not only celebrated the art of seed saving and regenerative farming, but it was also a testament to their dedication to minimizing waste. Every detail of the event was thoughtfully crafted to be low-waste, with a strong emphasis on plant-forward dishes. The menu showcased small amounts of local, pasture-raised, and 100% grass-fed beef, allowing guests to savor the flavors while supporting sustainable farming practices. The event served as a fundraiser for Seed Peace, with the proceeds directly benefiting their programs that are actively nurturing the local food system in the Roaring Fork Valley, from seed to table.

Key success factors

Critical elements that led to successfully solving the issues.





A key success factor in implementing these successful programs lie in building strong partnerships. By joining forces with various stakeholders, these organizations can leverage expertise, resources, and networks, thereby enhancing their programming's reach and impact. Another major factor at play is engaging diverse audiences. The success of these programs is largely due to tailoring their programming to specific audiences, so they can ensure that the educational content remains engaging, relevant, and accessible to a wide range of individuals. A few other key success factors at play include ensuring credibility, delivering innovative programming, providing interactive experiences, fostering community participation, measuring impact, and ensuring long-term sustainability. By combining these factors, organizations have had the ability to effectively raise climate awareness, educate large numbers of people, and inspire action within their community.

Lessons learned

Challenges faced while implementing the Good Practice and their solutions.

A few lessons learned during this implementation of arts & culture programming is how to engage the right stakeholders to support the long-term goal of sustainability efforts. Investors are largely there to help keep the success monetarily of the organization, so a big lesson was having to gain the support of spending more for green initiatives which in turn would be the long-term success of the events. Gaining resources to implement these practices as well was a lesson in terms of who is the right partner and how do we take the first step toward creating environmentally friendly world-class events. We are forever learning but believe that we are taking the right steps for the future of Aspen's cultural scene.

Achievements and Results

Direct and indirect results of the Good Practice.

Some results from the practices listed above include The Wheeler Opera House in 2017 receiving the City of Aspen Green Team grant that was used to officially allow them to purchase reusable water bottles that visiting artists use when on site at the Wheeler. In 2019, a successful partnership with TerraCycle, Eliminating the Idea of Waste® by recycling the "non-recyclable." from coffee capsules, pens, plastic gloves, toothpaste containers, TerraCycle partners with collectors across 20 different countries to offer recycling for items not accepted thru local recycling streams. Finally, by 2024 they are on track to achieve full LED lighting. Anderson Ranch's Critical Dialogue Program has grown in size from 20-person gatherings to 100+ attendee lecture-style presentations. All Aspen Historical Society events meet the COA requirements for zero-waste events and they are able to support more than





25,000 education contacts per year. Since 1996, JAS has generated over \$8 million to support its multifaceted music education programs and is the nation’s only all-scholarship summer training program for gifted young emerging jazz artists. This year, the Aspen Institute has gathered over 300+ influential speakers and have announced their new partnership with NBCUniversal News Group. This partnership with NBCUniversal’s editorial team has helped create engaging and informative content that features NBC's top talent, share “Aspen Ideas” with new audiences across a range of NBCUniversal platforms from NBC Nightly News to Noticias Telemundo, and works together to promote the kinds of ideas that address and, we hope, inspire our collective future. With their program support, the Aspen Center for Environmental Studies Rock Bottom Ranch is one of Aspen Center for Environmental Studies’ (ACES) three sites in the Roaring Fork Valley. At Rock Bottom Ranch, ACES models regenerative agriculture production systems that prioritize land stewardship, ecosystem health, carbon sequestration, and animal welfare. Their vegetable and livestock productions systems are based on natural cycles and designed to mimic nature. ACES is leading the charge on developing models for replicable, regenerative agriculture where food production can actually restore soil biodiversity and positively affect our climate.

Tips for other destinations

Your suggestions or recommendations for other destinations facing the same issues or implementing similar solutions

For other destinations, a good way to start is to educate and raise awareness. Organize workshops, lectures, and panel discussions highlighting sustainability themes and their intersection with arts and culture. Encourage local artists and arts organizations to use their work as a platform to educate the public about sustainability challenges and solutions. Another way to start small is by collaborating with local transportation authorities to promote and provide information on public transportation options for attendees of arts and culture events. Encourage visitors to utilize public transportation or promote carpooling to minimize the carbon footprint. Another tip is to measure and communicate impact. Regularly measure and communicate the environmental and social impact of sustainability initiatives on arts and culture programming to showcase progress, inspire participation, and attract funding or sponsorship opportunities. Finally, involve the community. Engage the local community in the sustainability efforts by hosting volunteer days focused on environmental cleanup, creating public art projects, or organizing eco-art events with community participation.

Recognitions and Additional references





Recognitions and awards the Good Practice received and supporting evidence.

Museums and centers: <https://aspenchamber.org/explore/arts-culture/museums-centers>

Culture organizations: <https://aspenchamber.org/explore/arts-culture/culture>

Aspen's Music scene: <https://aspenchamber.org/explore/arts-culture/music>

Screen and stage: <https://aspenchamber.org/explore/arts-culture/screen-stage>

Aspen Idea's Festival: <https://www.aspenideas.org/attend/festival>

Aspen Historical Society: <https://aspenhistory.org/>

Aspen Center for Environmental Studies: <https://aspennature.org/regenerative-agriculture/>

<https://www.aspenpublicradio.org/station-news/2023-04-24/aspen-public-radio-wins-multiple-news-awards-from-colorado-broadcasters-association-and-society-for-professional-journalists>

<https://www.andersonranch.org/critical-dialog/>

<https://wheeleroperahouse.com/wasteless-at-the-wheeler/>

