



Communities are key to sustainable tourism development. Supporting and sustaining local communities underpins a triple bottom line approach to responsible tourism where economics, environmental and social thinking are all integrated into core business activities.

The key areas of community support involve government lobbying and education, infrastructure and planning, community engagement and consultation, employment, traineeships, business partnerships and product development.

This factsheet overviews:

- Guest Education
- Community Engagement and Consultation
- Government Lobbying
- Employment
- Business Partnerships and Product Development
- Infrastructure and Planning
- Guest and Community Feedback

GUEST EDUCATION

Informed tourists lead to more positive experiences and community benefits. Therefore, reach out and collaborate with the local community to develop educational materials to provide to guest.

Develop educational collateral that may include information brochures, video clips, notice boards, posters, guides, community talks and organised community tours.

Open up the lines of communication by establishing an avenue for communities to continually contribute information and advertise community projects, events and activities.

Inform your guest on:

- Language
- Religion
- Food (and alcohol)
- Local currency and prices
- Community structure
- Respect for cultures and customs and appropriate behaviour (dress codes, gender issues, sacred sites, etc.)
- Local environment and environmental protection measures
- Local maps and sustainable transport
- Health and safety considerations
- Emergency contacts

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

There are many ways to engage and consult with communities. Be considerate of their individual needs and customs as every community is different and may require an alternative approach to consultation.

Ensure that consultation is effective and productive (i.e. achieves some of the desired outcomes for all stakeholders). Work with adjoining property owners and tourism businesses in your region and encourage them to adopt similar practices.

Engage your local community through:

- Community meetings
- Interviews and focus groups
- Public exhibitions and informative displays
- Advisory committees
- Media and advertising
- Written submissions and feedback forums
- Polls and surveys
- Open days and guided information tours
- Conferences or workshops

GOVERNMENT LOBBYING

Consider government lobbying and community engagement on social issues such as health and education services. Work with the community to identify educational needs and provide financial, technical or in-kind resources and assistance to deliver training and support programs for health and sanitation, literacy and language courses, financial and business management skills, and environmental management and managing special tourist sites where possible.

This might include:

- Local community members co-training with employees
- Funding (or in-kind contribution such as food and board) for training programs
- Providing buildings as classrooms
- Employee-run community training

Set targets for the percentage of financial assistance provided to local community initiatives based on total revenue of operations. Continually review and increase these targets if possible. Implement a company policy against the commercial and sexual exploitation of local communities (especially children) and ensure staff and guests are aware of it and that any breaches to the company policy will not be tolerated.

For more information visit: <http://www.thecode.org>.

BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS AND PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Business partnerships, between tourism operations and local communities, can provide mutually beneficial development opportunities. By partnering with local businesses, tourism operators can benefit from pooled skills and resources, cross promotion and an opportunity to offer new tourism experiences to guests. Partnerships can be formal contractual arrangements or informal cooperative agreements.

When developing or reviewing business operations, consider how the local community could be better represented. Identify the percentage of products currently purchased from local businesses and set targets to increase local sourcing. Ensure any products or services acquired locally abide by laws relating to the sale of artefacts, local resources and produce.

Identify business operations that could be reviewed to accommodate locally available products or services:

- Select food and products that are suitable to the region and available locally.
- Develop menus based on seasonal availability of local produce.
- Pay a fair and reasonable price for products considering the cost and time required to produce. Provide information to visitors about the producers, and be transparent about the mark-up of any products.
- Promote local initiatives to guests and encourage them to also buy local produce by providing information about local restaurants and markets.
- Provide retail space for local businesses to sell their products and services and help support local cooperatives by supporting local business events.
- Provide assistance to local producers to help them meet quality and quantity specifications and develop contracts to maintain supply. This might include financial assistance through donations, loans or development support agencies.
- Encourage local suppliers to stock required products.

EMPLOYMENT

It is important that tourism operations consider employing local people to help keep the financial benefits, associated with the operation, within the community. Set employment targets for local people at your operation (i.e. 80% employees live within 20km of operations). Continually review and increase these targets over time.

When advertising and recruiting, ensure the following:

- Hiring policies are fair and equitable without bias on the basis of gender, ethnicity, age or disability.
- Fair wages are paid for your region. Incorporate additional benefits into employment contracts including sick and holiday pay, reasonable working hours, overtime, and health cover.
- Additional employee assistance (where appropriate) is included such as free uniforms, transport, meals, accommodation or child care.
- Ongoing training and upskilling opportunities are provided equally for employees
- Staff are provided with incentives and bonuses linked to performance or service levels.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND PLANNING

Consider the operation's current and future impact on local infrastructure and resources. Could your operation be directly involved in infrastructure improvements and what kind of financial or technical assistance could you provide? Infrastructure enhancements might include improved transport options such as roads, bridges and public transport.

Consider the following issues:

What financial, technical or in-kind support might be needed to help improve transport infrastructure?

What is the impact of current operations on traffic, congestion and road conditions?

Is there adequate public transport within the community and for visitors?

Water, energy and natural resources:

- Does the local community have sufficient access to water, energy and natural resources and appropriate technology?
- What are the current and future estimates of water, energy and natural resource demand?
- Are there adequate local resources and will tourism demand cause deficiencies (or price rises) to water, energy or other natural resource supply to local communities?
- Within the community, what projects could be undertaken to reduce, reuse or recycle to improve the sustainability of water, energy and natural resource supplies?
- Could financial, technical or in-kind support be provided?
- Can you identify technologies or alternative sources of water, energy or natural resources to reduce resource consumption within the community?

Solid waste and wastewater systems:

- What are the current and future estimates of waste generation?
- Are the local services and infrastructure adequate?
- Are tourism operations causing any health and/or sanitation concerns in the local community?
- What assistance (financial, technical or in-kind support) could be provided to help initiate and maintain these schemes?

Hospitals, fire brigades and emergency infrastructure and planning:

- What are the most likely emergency situations that could potentially occur in the region (floods, fires, tsunamis, hurricanes, earthquakes, cyclones, etc.)?
- Are there appropriate management systems in place to deal with emergency situations if they arose?
- What services (shelter, bedding, medical aid or human and financial resources) could tourism operators in the region provide if an emergency situation arose?
- Is the local community aware of potential emergency situations and how will they respond?

Schools and sports facilities:

- What local schools are in the area?
- What facilities or financial assistance could tourism operators provide such as books, donations, scholarships to local school children, transport, facilities for teachers, etc.?
- Are there enough sport and recreation facilities available to local communities and their children?
- Could tourism operators help foster collaborations between international organisations and schools and local communities?

GUEST AND COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Consider developing a complaint handling policy and procedure to encourage feedback. Promptly respond to positive and negative comments, including comments about organisational policies and related performance targets. Listen to feedback, take corrective actions, and measure customer satisfaction.



CASE STUDY



THE LANGHAM SYDNEY

The Langham, Sydney, is located within the tourist precinct 'The Rocks' and historic area of Sydney's city centre.

The Langham Hospitality Group implemented program to recognises their commitment to sustainable development in all of the neighbourhoods that they operate in.

The Langham has a complaints handling policy and procedure detailing what guests can expect from the hotel, how the hotel will meet the expectations of guests, how the hotel will handle a complaint and the empowerment of staff to handle a guest complaint successfully.

The Langham ensures that guests are heard when providing feedback and a solution is found as soon as possible in conjunction with a sincere apology.

INITIATIVES

- ✓ Complaints handling policy and procedure detailing what guests can expect from the hotel, how the hotel will meet the expectations of guests, how the hotel will handle a complaint and the empowerment of staff to handle a guest complaint successfully.
- ✓ Guests are given the opportunity to provide feedback and staff find a solution as soon as possible in conjunction with a sincere apology.
- ✓ The CONNECT program engages guests, colleagues, community, media, suppliers and owners and pursues social, ethical and environmental issues. This program is used to obtain stakeholders' views on hotel strategies and programs as well as incorporating feedback to improve their sustainable action plan.