

Navigating Your Stewardship Journey

CHARTING THE COURSE FOR DESTINATIONS TO
BECOME STEWARDS OF HISTORY, NATURE & CULTURE



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Stewardship

honors the **past**,
protects the **present**
and shapes the **future**.



OVERVIEW

From our vantage point of working with hundreds of destination leaders, we see the unprecedented challenges you are facing, including the increasing pressures on destination organizations to respond to social, cultural and environmental challenges within your communities, all while facing funding and political uncertainties.

We hear your very real need to help rebound from the global COVID-19 pandemic and improve economic prosperity, while balancing community needs with a transformational visitor experience. Our research with more than 300 destination organizations in North America and Europe showed that the vast majority of local residents do not feel included or involved in how tourism is developed or managed in their community—and destination organizations agree—which highlights the urgent need for a community-centered approach and new methods of resident participation in decision-making.



“To achieve destination stewardship, cooperation and a shared vision among stakeholders of the future of tourism and the destination are prerequisites. Indeed, destination stewardship can only thrive with the commitment of a wide range of actors and the engagement of both the private and public sectors. Such engagement implies an interest in shaping and leading on the destination’s priority issues and collaborating with the local community, in line with the triple bottom line, of people, planet and profit.”

Reference: World Travel & Tourism Council, Towards Destination Stewardship, 2021

Community-centered tourism plays a vital role in destination stewardship by fostering a sense of ownership through meaningful resident empowerment and participation. It ensures that tourism benefits the community as a whole, strengthens social bonds and preserves the cultural and environmental integrity of the “destination” they call home.

We have worked alongside many of you during the aftermath of devastating natural disasters or severe weather events. Unpredictable weather patterns are turning “seasonality” into a topic with a whole new meaning. We see the increasing pressure to manage crises, roll-out recovery plans and build resilience strategies, all while still grappling with something we refer to as “M-biguity.”

For decades we have observed debate on whether the “M” in DMO stands for “marketing” or “management,” and the merit and meaning of each. We initially set out to try to rescue the “M” from obscurity by helping to simplify and reconcile the debate. However, we believe there is a new leading and more enduring letter—“S.”

This white paper is the first in a series of resources to put destination stewardship on the constellation map as the north star for the travel and tourism sector.

“Recognizing the reality of tourism impacts and implications is the prerequisite to collaborative destination stewardship. That begins with true tourism management.”

Reference: Future of Tourism Coalition



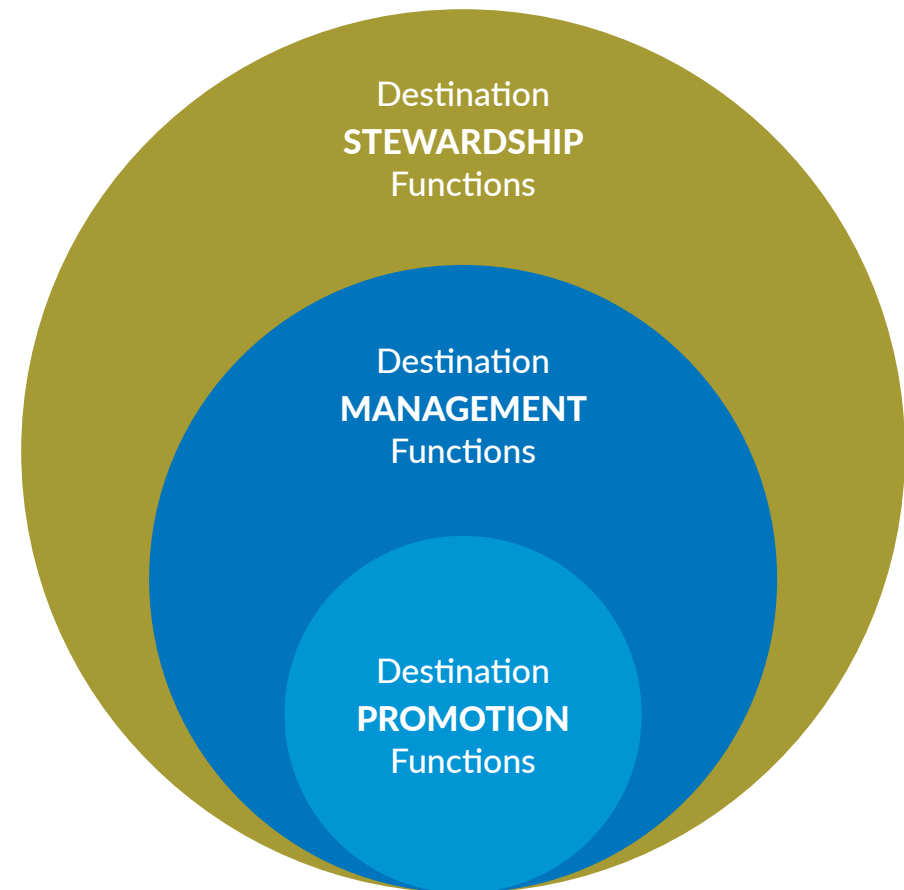
THE WHAT

Our purpose is to enrich lives through travel, and that includes our community and our visitors alike.

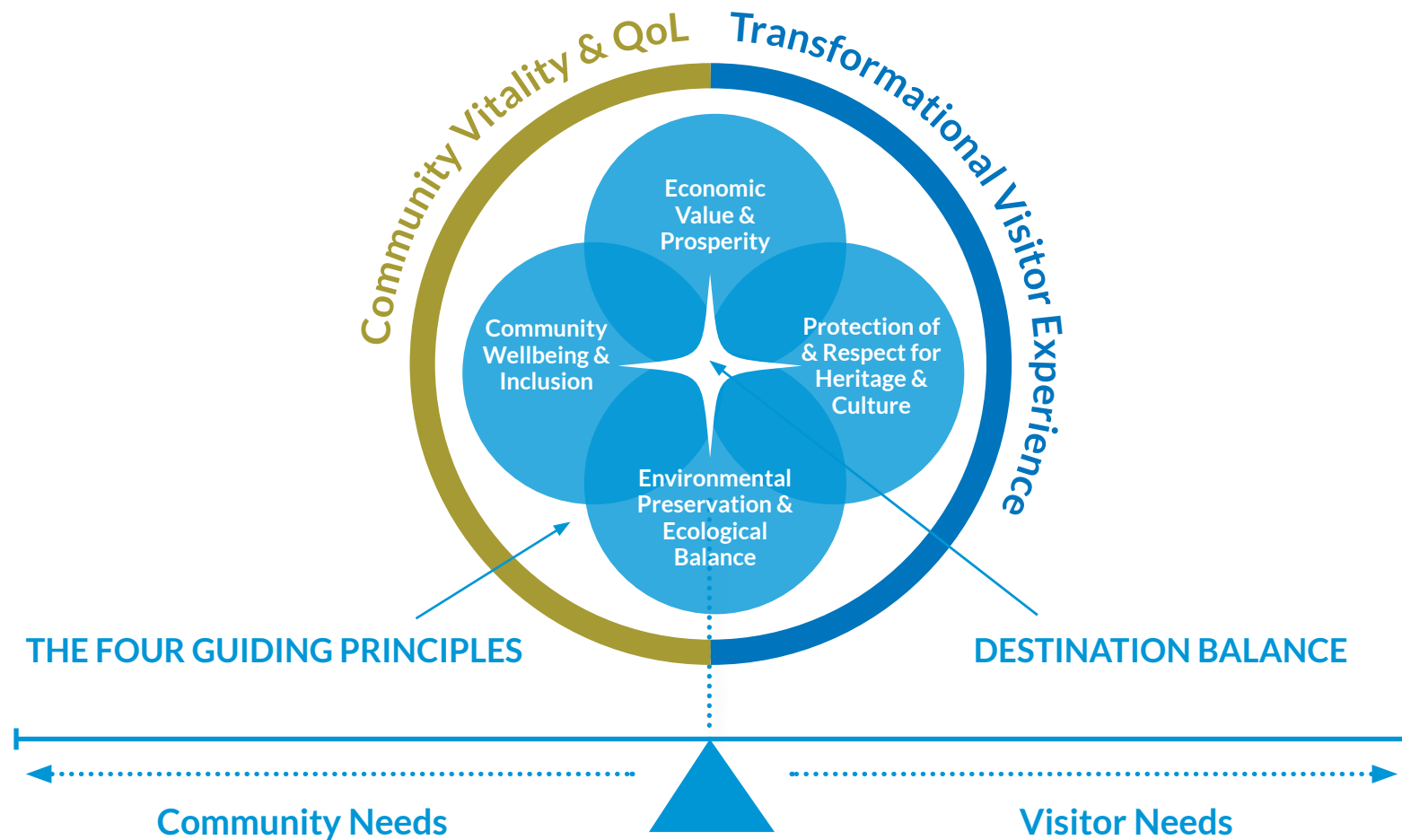
Destination promotion is vital to attract visitors and generate economic value for communities. With that demand generation comes the need for destination management to ensure a balance between positive visitor experiences and community wellbeing.

The next evolution is a community-centered destination stewardship approach. This level of strategic planning and implementation is holistic, involves residents in decision-making and is guided by the four principles outlined below. A true destination stewardship approach integrates destination promotion and allows for adaptive management to create a thriving destination for all stakeholders.

With this approach we aim to balance the needs and aspirations of residents alongside industry and visitor needs, using these four principles as a decision-making filter for destination organizations.



MILES PARTNERSHIP DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP MODEL



The key to achieving balance among the four principles, which include economic prosperity, cultural vitality, community wellbeing and the preservation of nature, lies in balancing the needs of the community and visitors. These values, with their intricate composition, serve as guiding principles for destination stewardship and offer a decision-making filter for destination organizations.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Economic Value and Prosperity:

This principle recognizes the importance of economic prosperity as a critical component that brings benefits to the community. It encourages destination organizations to maximize local economic opportunities, such as job creation, entrepreneurship, use of local supply chains and income generation, while minimizing negative impacts on the local economy, such as leakage of tourism revenue or housing and workforce shortages. By taking a leading role in fostering entrepreneurship, supporting local businesses and promoting sustainable tourism practices, destination organizations can contribute to the economic vitality of the destination while maintaining a healthy balance with the other principles.

2. Protection and Respect for Culture and Heritage:

Preserving and celebrating a destination’s heritage and culture are central to destination stewardship. This principle engages Indigenous communities in safeguarding their cultural identity, traditions and heritage, and educating visitors about the destination’s history, customs and sites of cultural significance. This principle can also include an emphasis on local thematic strengths such as gastronomy, wine and produce, or supporting initiatives to maintain arts, culture and traditions.

This approach honors the past, preserving the languages, stories and sites of significance so they can be learned from and celebrated by the community and visitors alike. It also shapes the future with development of experiences, festivals and events that create a vibrant destination with authentic cultural exchanges, rich storytelling and experiences.



3. Community Wellbeing and Inclusion:

Through meaningful community participation, a destination stewardship approach seeks to ensure equal opportunities, access and benefits for all individuals and groups within the tourism context. It involves understanding bias, eliminating discrimination, promoting diversity, ensuring active resident empowerment and the elevation of minority voices. This approach strives to cultivate an inclusive and vibrant visitor experience that showcases and celebrates diverse peoples and promotes a sense of belonging for all individuals, irrespective of their background or characteristics.

4. Environmental Preservation and Ecological Balance:

A destination stewardship approach emphasizes the preservation and protection of the destination's natural resources, ecosystems and biodiversity. By embracing regenerative principles, the destination's natural resources can be sustained and enhanced. By involving the community and visitors in stewardship efforts, there is a greater likelihood of achieving ecological balance through responsible tourism practices that encourage environmental protection and conservation and use tourism as a catalyst for positive climate and environment action.



“Stakeholders must invest in protection, resilience and adaptation to mitigate externalities and guarantee the long-term future of the natural, built and soft infrastructure that enables the sustainability of tourism.”

Reference: World Economic Forum

We think of destination stewardship as your opportunity to:

Preserve your point of difference in the world by being a steward for your place, its peoples and unique history, culture and nature.

It's your essence.

Preserving your point of difference in the world:

Underscoring the significance of your brand and the importance of being authentic and distinctive. We acknowledge the vital role played by a robust brand, marketing and communications strategy—areas that are integral to any successful stewardship approach.

Being a steward of your place:

Recognizing and embracing your responsibility as a guardian of your destination, fostering its long-term sustainability and wellbeing.

Inclusive of its peoples:

Encompassing your entire community, including residents, tourism businesses and a wide range of stakeholders.

Unique history and culture:

Emphasizing the preservation of the cultural distinctiveness, historical site, and narratives that constitute the identity of your destination and local businesses.

Preserving nature:

Preserving and protecting natural attractions within your destination, benefiting both the local community and visitors alike.

THE WHY

In 2019, Megan Epler Wood (et al) said, *“No one arm or representative of the travel and tourism industry or government is presently ‘in charge’ of protecting destinations.”*

We believe this quote is a call to arms for us as an organization, and we invite all our travel and tourism partners and colleagues to consider their role as protectors as well as promoters.

The Swedish Energy Agency and Smith School collaborative paper “The role of Ministries of Finance” (2023) states the world is in crisis. “With a war, a pandemic, an energy crisis, inflation, slower economic growth and a possible global recession in 2023, it is no surprise that the Collins Dictionary 2022 word of the year was ‘permacrisis.’” The paper continues to articulate the “symptoms” being felt globally such as floods, fires, droughts and other extreme weather events are due to an “unchecked and endless erosion of social and natural capitals.”

Referencing the tourism sector specifically, the UNWTO states that: “The urgency of climate action can no longer be ignored and the tourism industry has seen increased awareness and action in the face of this urgent need. Actions and investments are required to avoid further significant disruptions in the travel and tourism sector as it can be particularly vulnerable to climate impacts.”

Destination stewardship builds on destination management to recognize tourism impacts and implications more holistically. The approach leverages tourism as a vehicle to support achieving biodiversity and targeted climate action, as well as heritage and cultural conservation, and balances the needs of the community and visitor.



“An economy focused on wellbeing significantly frees us from the time, energy and financial strains we are currently incurring trying and failing to fix the environmental and social harms caused in the relentless pursuit of growth. It would be preventative by design, stopping further harm from occurring to people and the planet in the first place.”

Reference: World Travel & Tourism Council, Reference: WEALL EU Wellbeing Economy Coalition (2023)

Destination stewardship builds on destination management in the following ways:



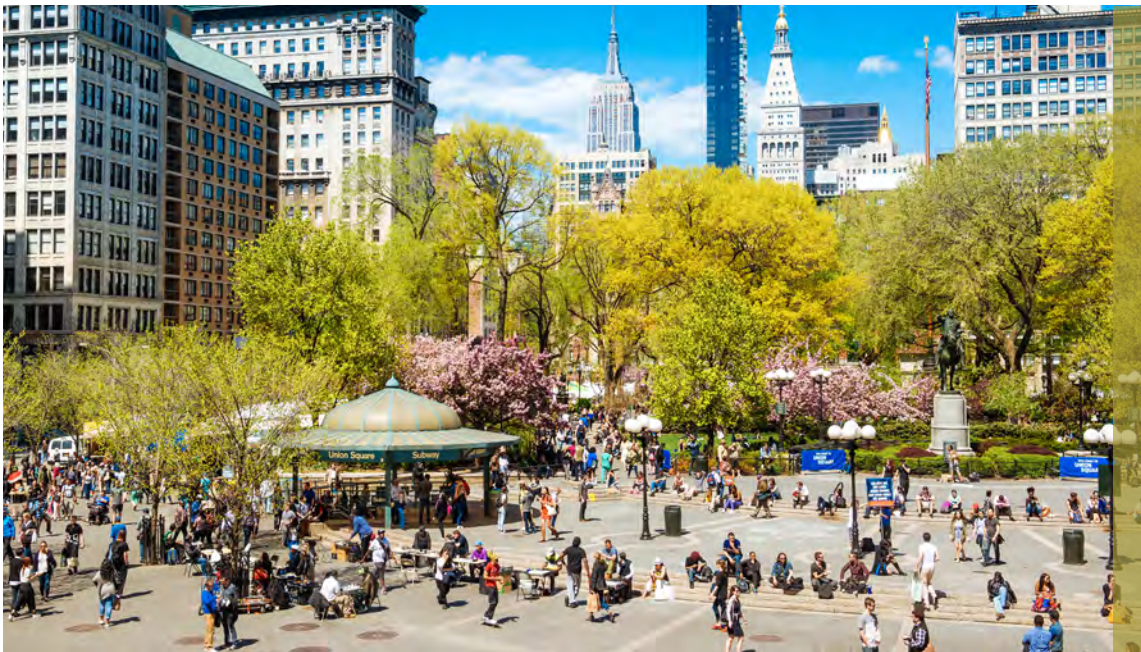
World-view	Control	Kinship
Role	Manager	Steward
Style	Leader	Servant
Scope	Visitor	Holistic
Horizon	Short-medium term	Long-term
System	Mechanistic	Nature / Living
Approach	Consultation	Co-creation
Practice	Sustainable	Regenerative
Value	Partnerships	Diversity and inclusion
Focus	Recovery	Transformation
Driver	Mandate	Relevance and value
Visitor	High value	High values
Resident	Sentiment	Empowerment
Consultation	One-off	Ongoing engagement
Desired outcome	Volume and spend	Social well-being and equity

As travelers become more sensitive to climate-related issues and social complexities and conscious of their travel behavior, methodologies to help destinations guide, measure and report their economic, social, cultural and environmental wellbeing is increasing. These are evolving into data and dashboards to help inform residents and visitors and provide benchmarks to help travelers make values-based travel decisions, as well as for residents to better understand tourism-related impacts, be they positive or negative.

We appreciate that tourism is different from other sectors. It creates a relationship between a visitor and a place and its people. The transaction occurs in the home of the destination's residents and often involves the unique natural, historical and cultural capitals of that place.


We have a team of specialists who work alongside destination organizations to help promote diversity, embrace inclusivity and ensure more equal opportunities and sustainable benefits from tourism, while fostering community belonging and pride.

With a focus on diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility, destinations can authentically preserve their culture and heritage and mitigate the risk of marginalization or complete erasure of stories, languages and peoples. This has the potential to create a more vibrant destination with authentic cultural exchanges, rich storytelling and experiences accessible to all.



“These places we visit that we call destinations are actually peoples’ homes. We are guests in somebody else’s home, in somebody else’s country, in somebody else’s community.”

Reference: The Last Tourist



*“If not us, then who?
If not now, then when?”*

THE HOW

The Wayfinder: Charting the course for destination stewardship

We have harnessed our experience working with hundreds of destinations of various sizes, stages and situations to develop the Wayfinder, a tool to guide you in developing and implementing a community-centric approach to destination stewardship.

Acknowledging that stewardship is not a one-size-fits-all approach and recognizing that each of us is at different stages in the journey, we have distilled the complexity and ambiguity of destination stewardship into a concise journey map.

The Wayfinder exists to help destination organizations navigate through uncertainty; to get clear, get focused and get moving. Our aim is to provide clarity, organization and momentum for your stewardship journey, regardless of your starting point.

We want to partner with you to create a holistic journey map that ensures not just the sustainability of the destination, but a regenerative, thriving future that supports holistic wellbeing (economic prosperity, preservation of nature, community wellbeing and cultural vitality) by better balancing the needs of communities and visitors alike. Our commitment extends beyond providing guidance—we will be with you every step of the way, supporting the strategic development and implementation of your stewardship plan.



“A destination can bounce back and return to business as usual, which may at times place an unsustainable burden on destinations and communities, or it can proactively bounce forward and adopt a stewardship approach that balances the needs of visitors with the needs of destinations and residents. Old business and governance models will likely hold back new aspirations for destination stewardship. A reset based on structural changes to how tourism is governed can help protect the future of destinations and the sector. Implementing comprehensive destination stewardship is a significant undertaking with far reaching implications.”

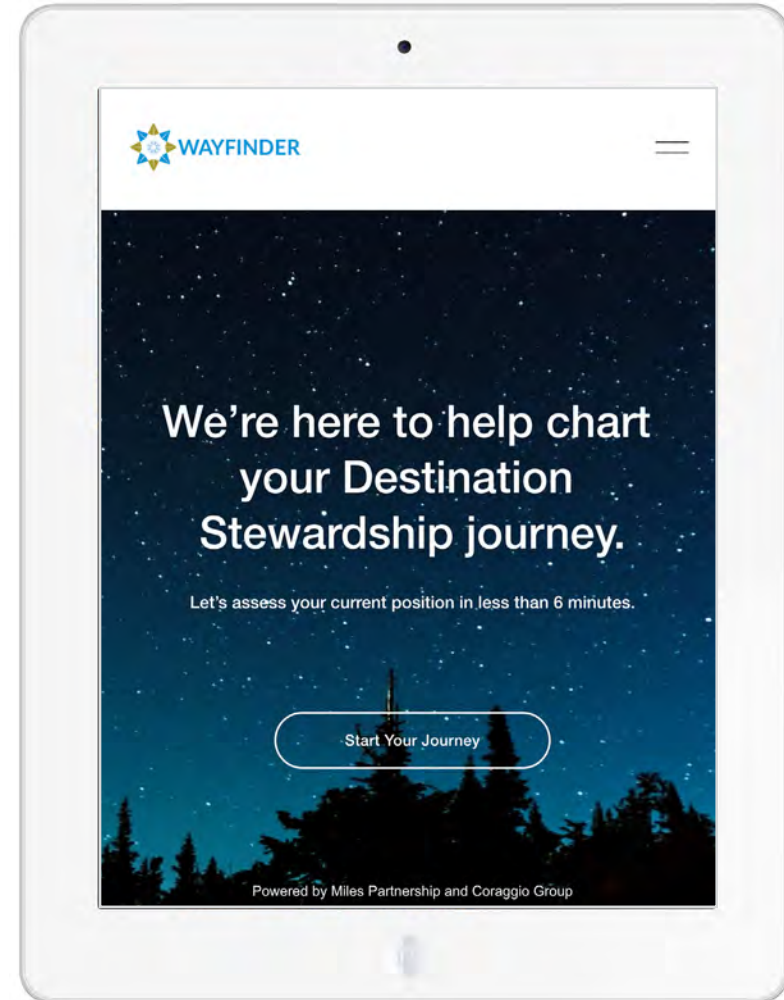
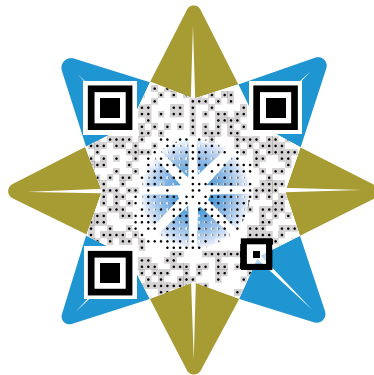
*Reference: World Travel & Tourism Council,
Towards Destination Stewardship, 2021*



Chart your course.

The Wayfinder Assessment is a tool that will enable you to gain insights on your destination's progress towards stewardship. Once we analyze your results, you'll receive a summary that will help you identify areas of strength, and where to focus your energy to advance your stewardship efforts.

Visit DestinationWayfinder.com to complete the Wayfinder Assessment and find out where you are on your destination stewardship journey—we'll meet you there.





Preserve your point of difference in the world by being a steward for your place, its peoples and unique history, culture and nature.

Thank You

This white paper has benefited greatly from the thought leadership of many individuals, companies and organizations. We give special thanks to the experts in destination stewardship for their invaluable work, insights and knowledge.

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PARTNERSHIP

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