



## Community Tourism Strategies

### Description

A community tourism strategy is the result of a community based planning process used specifically to explore issues around tourism for a region or, in some cases, a new product or activity. It is a key tool in integrated tourism management because it enables the views of diverse stakeholders to be incorporated in a structured way.

The purpose of developing a community tourism strategy is to provide an agreed baseline or foundation for tourism activities or development, to set goals for the future and to provide a pathway for achieving those goals. Preparing the strategy usually requires active leadership and, often, a facilitator (individual or small group). These are needed to help establish the community process and keep it going, and to bring together the material from the community-based planning process and collate it into a formal document that becomes 'the strategy'. They are also needed to provide continuity as the strategy is implemented.

Community tourism strategies differ from local authority tourism strategies in that they focus on a particular community of interest. A community tourism strategy may encompass more than one regulatory jurisdiction (for instance as in the Catlins), or focus on a small area such as a town or particular attraction within on territorial authority are (for instance, Curio Bay in the Catlins).

### How and when the tool is used

Community tourism strategies have been developed in a number of places around the world, in particular in Britain and North America. In New Zealand, examples of community strategies can be found in the Catlins area, Stewart Island, and the Waitomo District. In each of these cases, the communities and facilitators have used use a variety of tools to develop the strategies.

Developing a community based tourism strategy usually requires applying a range of tools to engage the community of interest and associated stakeholders, to elicit their views, and to ensure their ongoing involvement. Useful processes and tools include community meetings ([focus groups and workshops](#) ❄️, [visioning](#) ❄️, [charrettes](#) ❄️), surveys, and interviews with the community and visitors. Choosing the best tool or tools is usefully linked to some form of [stakeholder analysis](#) ❄️ in order to identify the stakeholders who need to be involved and the most appropriate ways of involving them.

Experience demonstrates very clearly that the development stage of a community strategy is only the first step. Once the strategy has been developed, there needs to be ongoing community engagement through to implementation. As in the development stage, implementation requires buy-in from all stakeholders. Getting appropriate engagement from agency as well as community stakeholders is crucial here, even though the strategy is community-driven. These wider linkages are important because action points often need addressing by local and central government agencies as well as by community organisations. Also, agencies are not represented well in community process, either because they do not see the process as important or they do not have the time and resources to commit to it.

While a tourism strategy represents a 'snapshot' or captures the intent of the community at a particular time, it is important that it contains provision for appropriate monitoring and evaluation of the underlying vision, and its goals and objectives, implementation pathway, action steps and overall effectiveness. This monitoring and evaluation is necessary to ensure that the strategy does not become irrelevant over time and thus ignored.

### Application

Community-based tourism strategies may be developed for particular communities, for instance with a particular resource or activity in mind, or for wider areas with a range of resources and activities to develop. The more communities involved, and the greater the range of stakeholders, the more complex the planning process is likely to be.

In 2002, the Tourism Industry Association New Zealand (TIANZ) developed a planning guide that provides a framework for developing a community tourism strategy. Communities are encouraged to sustainably manage tourism in their area by defining a vision, identifying key stakeholders, taking stock of tourism resources and drawing up guidelines for future direction.



It is important that the goals and vision of the community strategy are consistent with the relevant regional strategy or strategies. Where a community based strategy is in place before a regional strategy is developed there may need to be some negotiation or rationalisation of the two levels of strategy development to ensure that their objectives do not conflict (or are consistent).

Getting funding to develop the strategy itself is often a critical early issue, as is funding for implementation. There are a wide range of sources that communities can draw on, including local councils, economic development agencies, government agencies, New Zealand Lotteries, regional trusts and community fundraising. Support for a strategy may involve funding in kind including input from agency staff, time from university academics and students, and most importantly, community voluntary input.

### **Our evaluation**

The success of a community tourism strategy depends ultimately on its successful implementation. Therefore, in developing the strategy, the community must be very clear about how the implementation process will be managed, and set guidelines and milestones for evaluation and review. Time becomes a dominant element as a community's initial enthusiasm and effort will dissipate in the face of frustrations over getting things done. So, those driving a strategy along must retain sufficient flexibility to enable new people to be brought in, to adapt the strategy to changing visitor needs, new products and services, and agency changes and policies, and to respond to evaluation of what they are doing. While collective responsibility (for example, through an implementation committee) is a common approach to managing implementation, often a single 'champion' or watchdog can help ensure that progress is maintained. Funding is often a significant problem for small communities seeking to develop and implement a tourism strategy. The strategy itself should explore options for funding of particular actions.