



## GUIDE: COMMUNICATING THE VALUE OF A DMO

### How DMOs Can Strengthen Their Narrative & Defend Their Role

#### 1. Understanding the Challenge

Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) serve as catalysts for sustainable tourism development, community well-being, and regional economic health. Despite this crucial role, DMOs often face scrutiny regarding their impact on local communities, funding allocations, and stakeholder priorities. In a dynamic environment marked by political pressures, shifting public sentiment, and the growing call for sustainable practices, DMOs must proactively shape the narrative around their value.

#### Common Challenges Faced by DMOs:

1. **Perception Issues:** Some residents believe DMOs exist solely to increase tourist numbers, ignoring broader community impacts.
2. **Funding Threats:** Governments and municipalities frequently consider diverting tourism funds to other sectors, underestimating a DMO's long-term contributions.
3. **Political & Legislative Risks:** Centralized tourism policies at the state or provincial level can overshadow or undermine local and regional DMOs.
4. **Anti-Tourism Sentiment:** Overcrowded destinations grapple with negative public opinion, making tourism promotion a politically sensitive topic.
5. **Weak Storytelling:** Relying on visitor data alone fails to create an emotional connection with local stakeholders.

#### 2. Strategies for Communicating DMO Value

##### A. Shift the Narrative from Visitor Numbers to Community Benefits

Rather than emphasizing raw tourism statistics (e.g., record-breaking arrivals), focus on how DMOs tangibly improve residents' quality of life.

- **Showcase the Broader Economic Impact**
  - Emphasize that tourism revenues help offset local taxes and fund essential services such as roads, healthcare, and public safety.
  - Demonstrate that DMO-led initiatives stimulate small businesses—from artisan shops to local farmers' markets—fostering a more resilient economy.



- **Highlight Shared Benefits for Locals and Tourists**
  - Draw attention to investments in public spaces like trails, parks, and cultural festivals that serve both residents and visitors.
  - Underscore how infrastructure improvements driven by tourism (e.g., upgraded transit systems, beautification projects) make communities more livable for everyone.
- **Champion Sustainability & Stewardship**
  - Position the DMO as a leader in responsible tourism practices, including visitor education on waste reduction, conservation, and respect for local cultures.
  - Demonstrate ongoing preservation efforts—such as coastal cleanups or historic landmark restorations—that protect resources for future generations.

#### Example

Instead of: “Tourism generated \$50M in revenue last year.”

Say: “Visitor spending helped fund the new downtown transit system, reducing congestion and improving quality of life for local families.”

## B. Tailor Messaging to Different Audiences

Different stakeholders have unique interests and concerns. Customize messages to resonate with each group:

Audience	Effective Messaging
Residents	Tourism bolsters public services, stimulates local businesses, and enriches community amenities.
Business Owners	More visitors can translate into increased sales, higher foot traffic, and new partnerships.
Local Government	DMOs generate tax revenue that supports infrastructure investments, education, and public safety.



Policymakers	Cutting DMO funding risks diminishing long-term tax revenues and undermining regional economic growth.
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### Example

The following quote illustrates Wonderful Copenhagen’s positioning when they were persuading policymakers of the need for the DMOs existence:

*“There are market failures out there and we are actually the ones who are solving market failures. So if we weren’t there who would then do our job?”*

- Rikke Holm Petersen, Director of Communication, Marketing & Behavior

**Pro Tip:** Use localized examples—cite improvements to a specific school or a community arts program—to make the impact tangible.

## C. Use Data, But Lead with Emotion

While quantitative data (tax revenues, job numbers) is vital for credibility, emotional narratives make a lasting impression on public sentiment and political decisions.

- **Leverage Resident & Business Testimonials**
  - Collect stories from community members—such as a local artisan who survived an economic downturn thanks to tourism demand, or a healthcare provider able to expand services due to increased funding.
  - Video testimonials featuring real people’s experiences can be more persuasive than infographics alone.
- **Showcase Community Investment Wins**
  - Visually document how tourism funds build or maintain community assets: renovated public spaces, cultural events, or environmental restoration projects.
  - Use “before and after” snapshots or short, shareable clips on social media.
- **Keep Language Relatable**



- Replace industry jargon (e.g., “tourism ROI” or “heads in beds”) with real-life outcomes: “stable jobs,” “funded after-school programs,” or “well-maintained parks.”

### **Example**

Instead of: “Tourism creates X number of jobs.”

Say: “Thanks to tourism, over 500 families in our town have stable incomes.”

## **D. Proactive Community Engagement**

Actively involve residents, policymakers, and local businesses in shaping—and celebrating—the benefits of tourism, rather than waiting to address criticisms after they arise.

- 1. Create a “Powered by Tourism” Campaign**
  - Use signage or stickers (“This park/trail is funded by visitor spending!”) to draw direct connections between tourism and community assets.
  - Share short videos and posts on social media showcasing improvements made possible by tourism dollars.
- 2. Host Resident-Focused Events & Education**
  - Organize open forums and Q&A sessions where community members can learn how tourism funds are allocated.
  - Invite locals to “behind-the-scenes” tours, highlighting everything from marketing strategies to partnerships with local attractions.
- 3. Develop a Resident Sentiment Survey**
  - Conduct regular surveys to gauge evolving attitudes about tourism.
  - Use the results to inform policy decisions, marketing campaigns, and future development projects.
- 4. Strengthen Political Advocacy**
  - Collaborate with local legislators, environmental groups, chambers of commerce, and cultural institutions to collectively advocate for DMO funding.
  - Share research and success stories that demonstrate the broad social and economic benefits of a well-funded DMO.
- 5. Leverage Partnerships & Local Influencers**
  - Engage community leaders—like chefs, artists, or business owners—who command trust and respect among locals.
  - Partner with schools or universities to develop youth-focused initiatives that educate tomorrow’s community leaders about responsible tourism.



## E. Move from Defense to Offense

Rather than responding defensively to funding cuts or negative press, DMOs can consistently promote positive narratives and proof points.

- **Regularly Publish Impact Reports**
  - Compile easy-to-digest quarterly or annual updates on how tourism revenues are used, the number of local businesses supported, or infrastructural improvements made.
  - Make these reports visually engaging and share widely on social media, local news outlets, and community gatherings.
- **Develop an “Ambassador” Network**
  - Train passionate individuals—community leaders, small business owners, and volunteers—to speak on behalf of the DMO’s work.
  - Provide them with talking points, data, and story examples that reflect the DMO’s value.
- **Stay Engaged in Local Policy Discussions**
  - Participate in city council meetings, zoning discussions, or economic development committees to ensure tourism’s strategic role is acknowledged.
  - Proactively communicate the importance of balanced growth that respects residents, environmental limits, and visitor demand.
- **Emphasize Shared Community Values**
  - Frame tourism as an ally in addressing local challenges, such as environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and youth employment opportunities.
  - Align tourism initiatives with broader community goals (e.g., promoting wellness, expanding public art, or improving public transportation).

## 3. Conclusion

By anchoring messaging in tangible community benefits, DMOs can transcend traditional visitor metrics and showcase their essential role as stewards of local well-being, economic resilience, and sustainability. Harnessing compelling storytelling, forging strategic partnerships, and engaging stakeholders proactively allows DMOs to proactively advocate for their value, instead of being reactive or defensive—and go even further by shaping a positive narrative that resonates with both residents and policymakers alike.



When DMOs consistently reinforce how tourism revenue underpins community assets, addresses local concerns, and fuels regional prosperity, they shift from being perceived as “just another marketing entity” to being recognized as a trusted partner in shaping a vibrant and thriving destination for everyone.