

Optimal Value Framework for Destinations

The Optimal Value Framework is a strategic approach that can be used to help destination stakeholders work together to understand and optimize the value of tourism for their community, agree on more balanced measures of success, and prioritize the impact areas most important for them to manage carefully and resource sufficiently. The framework helps identify the strategic levers that increase the benefits and minimize the cost or negative impacts of tourism to the destination.

The values (positive and negative) that we take into consideration include:

- Economical value: revenue generation, employment and how stakeholders, such as residents and local entrepreneurs in the destinations are benefiting from tourism.
- Cultural value: conservation of built heritage, intangibles such as original stories, wisdom sharing, customs and beliefs, traditional lifestyles
- Environmental value: preservation of natural resources, biodiversity, climate
- Societal value: improving the quality of life, housing, access to facilities, health and well-being, diversity, equity & inclusion
- Individual or mental value: health, wellbeing, wellness, opportunities for rest and recharging versus feelings of overwhelm, burnout, etc.



Ultimately 'value' is subjective and therefore depends on the views and perceptions of the community - including residents, workers, business owners. Our goal is to help stakeholders think through which impact areas (both positive and negative) are most important to be managed and in which to demonstrate good performance, such as disrespectful visitor behaviours, traffic congestion, pollution of waterways, improvements of transit systems, etc. The aim being that tourism can become as net-positive for as much of the broader community and environment as possible, while contributing meaningfully towards long-term sustainable development objectives for destinations, such as quality of life and conservation of natural and cultural assets. In this regard, we've designed the Optimal Value Framework as a way for destination stakeholders to work together in defining what outcomes they most want tourism to deliver (why do they want tourism?) what challenges they are most concerned about (how tourism is exacerbating problems and failing to deliver on community values), and what future risks to sustainability exist.

Some examples may include improved worker satisfaction leading to better retention and decreased workforce shortage, restored water quality (for drinking water, and recreation enjoyment), decreased traffic congestion and emissions through improved transportation services, or myriad other outcomes identified as important specifically for the destination by its stakeholders.

The process includes an analysis based on a set of impact areas mapped to the Future of Tourism Guiding Principles to understand how well a destination is optimizing tourism's value currently. By analyzing available data, the framework can tell us how in balance or out of balance the destination is and point to opportunities for shifts.

It results in a set of recommendations for better optimizing tourism in the destination, to be considered in broader planning efforts and reflected on when analyzing new initiatives. It also results in a set of indicators for a destination to use as a monitoring tool.

The Optimal Value Framework in Practice

Vail, Colorado, USA

The Travel Foundation is working with MMGY NextFactor and Better Destinations to create one of the USA's first destination stewardship plans, for the mountain resort of Vail. The plan is being guided by the principles of sustainability and will put residents' values and goals at its heart.

Vail is a popular resort in Colorado, USA and is hailed as North America's pre-eminent snow destination. The project team works with the Town of Vail and a group of more than 20 cross-sector organizations that represent the destination beyond the municipality and including the Gore watershed and Vail Mountain as the geographic boundaries of the destination.

Our work in Vail includes participating in all stakeholder consultations to inform the development of an Optimal Value Framework as a component of the destination stewardship plan, and for Vail to use as a tool into the future.

Lake Tahoe, California & Nevada, USA

The Travel Foundation is working with the Center for Responsible Travel (CREST) and Better Destinations to support the Tahoe region in the USA to develop a shared vision around how tourism is managed and improve its impact on the environment, local communities, businesses and visitors.

The Lake Tahoe region is made up of multiple towns and cities, four county governments, and two states with four destination management organizations. While many destinations saw tourism grind to a halt during COVID, visitor numbers surged around the Lake Tahoe and Truckee region, causing many unprecedented issues including an increase in plastic waste, overcrowding and pollution. A multi-sector coordinated response to COVID in the region demonstrated the power of collaboration, and spurred the initiative to come together to manage the region sustainably and in partnership into the future.

The Travel Foundation and our project team partners are working with a team of representatives from 14 organizations including all levels of government, DMOs, planning agencies and non-profit/non-governmental organizations on a destination planning process.

We are leading the development of an Optimal Value Framework for Tahoe and are also involved in all aspects of the project's stakeholder engagement processes to steer the analysis and resulting new indicators to help guide tourism in Tahoe into the future.

