BENCHMARK CASE STUDIES

FIVE U.S. CASE STUDIES

VISIT CALIFORNIA: The Gold Standard for U.S. Tourism Funding

The October 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake was the event that galvanized California decision-makers into identifying long-term sustainable funding for a statewide tourism organization. Widespread media coverage of a magnitude 6.9 earthquake that killed 67 people and halted the World Series for 10 days also damaged California's image as a travel destination. Ongoing news reports fed a perception that all of California had been damaged or was at risk, and destinations far from the Bay Area were feeling the impact. An ongoing discussion about ways to strengthen California tourism became urgent.

In the late '80s, oversight of California tourism was housed in the California Travel and Tourism Commission, and its annual appropriation was subject to legislative approval. The state's major tourism players were seeking a way to increase funding for the California brand and remove it from state politics when Loma Prieta struck. The governor established a task force of the state's leading tourism players — Disney, Universal and the top travel trade organizations — to devise a long-term funding solution for advancing the state's tourism economy. They met the challenge by proposing creation of a brand-new concept: an industry-funded, industry-controlled revenue stream that has evolved into the gold standard for U.S. destination funding.

Organized as a 501(c)6 nonprofit in 1998, Visit California draws strength and credibility from engaging a broad network of industry members and other entities in its work. Its 39-member board includes 24 elected by the industry as well as 12 named by the governor plus the California GO-Biz Director. The organization sets high standards for all of its interactions. Board meetings are open to the public and present Visit California initiatives and outcomes in a highly polished and visually engaging way. The organization also engages another 300 members through advisory committees, and about 1,000 members join in adding impact to Visit California's major presence in trade shows, sales missions, and other high-touch interactions. Its annual Outlook Forum typically draws about 1,000 attendees. Additionally, Visit California's 75-member team includes several field liaisons who stay in touch with members to ensure their needs are being met. Ongoing member communications include phone calls, newsletters, social media, and updates.

An enviable funding mechanism

The envy of most state tourism offices, Visit California's funding mechanism has been replicated and evolved by hundreds of other DMOs globally. California created what has become known in other jurisdictions as a Tourism Improvement District (TID) or a Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID), drawing its inspiration from a concept innovated by a Los Angeles suburb. In October 1989, the same month that Loma Prieta shook the state, West Hollywood began collecting a 1% assessment imposed by hoteliers on their own lodging revenues "to develop and implement a destination marketing strategy targeting potential hotel guests."

The California task force spun West Hollywood's idea into a statewide concept collecting a percentage of revenues generated not just from hotels, but rental car companies, attractions, and other tourism operators. Oversight was modeled from the first non-agricultural use of a California statute allowing a commodity board to govern public-private partnerships. In Visit California's case, the funding mechanism must be reauthorized every six years by the entities paying the assessments, with voting weighted based on the size of investor/member revenues. Since its founding, California's funding structure has been reauthorized each time by no less than 90% of the vote and secured a record 95% vote for reauthorization in 2020. The structure also draws strength from a provision allowing for 10% of the members to call for a reauthorization vote at any time. This provision gives investors an extra measure of control to ensure that the organization remains true to its mission.

This arrangement has allowed Visit California to amass a growing budget — approximately $160 million this year, with about $130 million for marketing — that is controlled by a hybrid industry/state board rather than the state legislature. The funds cannot be diverted for other state purposes and the size of the assessments are determined by the industry, rather than elected officials. When assessment revenues fell sharply during California's pandemic shutdown, the state stepped in to buttress Visit California's funding with a one-time infusion of $95 million. Typically, however, the state contributes a maximum of $200,000 to Visit California's funding, providing the public-private entity with free speech protections for its work. This industry-supported funding model also means that traveler spending, rather than property and other state-generated taxes, is footing the bill for Visit California's work.

This allows the organization to share such messages as these: "This website and any materials produced by Visit California are created at no expense to taxpayers."

Visit California has a $2 million annual research budget. Areas of research include marketing performance, economic impact, insights into visitor attitudes and behaviors, and resident sentiment. Key areas of focus include campaign effectiveness studies to measure incremental visitor spend, traveler spending, trade mission outcomes, number of touchpoints, sales, website activity, handoffs to partner sites, and market share.

Strategic Evolution

Visit California has built massive tourism industry support and trust since its inception by demonstrating high expertise and results, staying on mission and away from controversy, and nonstop engagement and communication with industry stakeholders. At every level, the organization is focused on serving its 18,000 "investors." In weighing decisions, CEO Caroline Beteta says her first thought is, "What's the responsibility to investors, and what would investors say?" This singular focus has been a key factor in Visit California's ability to win reauthorization of its industry-funded revenue structure by enormous margins.

This stockpile of trust also is giving Visit California license to steer the industry slowly and steadily toward destination stewardship. The organization began funding this work before the pandemic and shared its first statewide Sustainable Tourism and Destination Stewardship Plan in 2022. Then, responding to partners, Visit California used $5 million of the state's $46 million EDA tourism recovery grant to fund development of destination stewardship plans for each of the state's four gateway cities and eight regions. On track for completion by the end of 2024, this planning process is pointing Visit California to a whole new level of partnership within its state. Each plan is overseen by a 20- to 25-member steering group representing not only tourism interests but economic development, housing, outdoor recreation, transportation and other regional stakeholders. In many cases, the plans are incorporating destination stewardship plans previously developed within a region.

This statewide community-driven planning approach, a first for Visit California, is generating excitement, buy-in, and new stores of goodwill and partners for Visit California. For Visit California, this direction is highly consistent with its mission to serve the tourism industry because industry partners increasingly are expected to be responsive to their communities. The plans are intended to equip partners with the tools — even toolkits — for engaging with their communities and managing stewardship issues.

Implications for Hawai'i tourism governance

- Visit California is the unquestioned leader of California's tourism industry. It has built that position over the past 30 years with an unwavering focus on the interests of its 18,000 stakeholders. Visit California offers its investors a rich value proposition — a highly successful marketing program, first-class educational events, opportunities to join in the state's high-profile trade events, leadership on issues that are important to them, and high competence at every level.

- Visit California engages directly with its investors on an ongoing basis. It maintains a field staff in key locations around the state to engage regularly with members and understand what they need from Visit California. Investor priorities become Visit California priorities. All investors receive ongoing communications about Visit California outcomes, priorities and initiatives.

- Visit California moves into new directions carefully and incrementally. It tests the landscape with research, communicates nonstop with stakeholders, and shares practical justifications for the actions it takes.

- It has taken this same approach in steering its organization toward destination stewardship.

DISCOVER PUERTO RICO: Hurricane, other disasters created urgency for an independent DMO

In researching ways to rebuild Puerto Rico's bankrupt economy following a federal bailout in 2016, an influential local nonprofit called the Foundation for Puerto Rico identified tourism as the most promising opportunity of all. The discussion of how to position the tourism economy for greater success was underway when Hurricane Maria struck in September 2017, killing nearly 3,000 people while devastating the island and its power grid.

In the wake of Maria, the legislature raced to enact a plan backed by the tourism industry to create an independent nonprofit destination marketing organization (DMO) to promote tourism. Legislators established Discover Puerto Rico as a 501(c)6 nonprofit and gave it responsibility for the island's marketing, research, planning, travel trade interactions, and sales for the Puerto Rico Convention Center in San Juan. At the same time, the Puerto Rico Tourism Company, created nearly 50 years earlier as a division of the island's economic development corporation, was restructured to retain oversight of incentive funding for development of air service, cruise lines, and other tourism products. The PRTC also continues to manage island-based tourism functions, such as the welcome centers.

Oversight of Puerto Rico tourism is divided between Discover Puerto Rico and the Puerto Rico Tourism Company. The PRTC's mandate is focused primarily on island-based development and functions. Discover Puerto Rico's work focuses on attracting off-island visitors to generate economic and social benefits for communities across the island. Discover Puerto Rico is overseen by a Board of Directors representing public, private and nonprofit interests. The territory's finances, including funding for Discover Puerto Rico, has been subject to federal oversight since 2016, when Congress passed the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management and Economic Stability Act. Known as PROMESA, the law establishes a process for restructuring the island's debt and approving critical infrastructure projects to restore the island's financial footing.

Funding and KPIs

Discover Puerto Rico's budget has grown from $10 million to $73 million over six years, and its staffing has doubled to 51. However, funding could decline in 2025 when federal recovery funds run out. Discover Puerto Rico receives a flat allocation of $25 million annually from the island's accommodations tax revenues, which swelled to about $140 million in 2024. DPR also has the ability to unlock an additional $23 million in funding annually by raising $8 million to match a separate $15 million allocation from the island's accommodations tax. Until Puerto Rico is released from PROMESA oversight, potentially in 2028, the legislature is unable to pass new tax mechanisms.

Discover Puerto Rico uses Tourism Economics and other providers to track economic performance indicators, spending and traveler behavior. It also monitors marketing performance, convention center metrics, air arrivals, visitor satisfaction, and resident sentiment. It commissions a Longwoods "Halo Effect" study annually to demonstrate the broader benefits of tourism and show how it lifts Puerto Rico's reputation as a place to live and to do business. The DMO innovated a way to identify tourism development opportunities by analyzing a region's tourism potential relative to investment in its infrastructure. The findings have generated interest from communities, developers, and decision-makers and created a new focus for development of tourism assets.

Strategic Evolution

Discover Puerto Rico began in 2017 with a blank slate, a relatively slim budget, and an untested mandate. To build trust, the Discover Puerto Rico team began to engage with residents of the island's 78 communities to hear their thoughts and concerns as well as their ideas for what Puerto Rico should share with travelers. Along the way, the DMO found that Puerto Rico was full of untold stories and little-known cultural and ecological treasures. Discover Puerto Rico's winning strategy was born: Sharing these unique cultural and ecological assets not only could set Puerto Rico apart from its Caribbean competitors but generate visitor spending in communities across the island.

The DMO created a powerful, distinctive marketing position for Puerto Rico, portraying the island as a place for travel with meaning and purpose and ways to connect with a fascinating, vibrant culture. "The marketing became as much about the faces of Puerto Rico as the places of Puerto Rico," says the DMO's top executive Brad Dean. The campaign galvanized attention and generated instant buy-in on the island. Discover Puerto Rico places the island's unique culture at the center of its marketing, even for the "Make Your Meeting Boricua" messaging that drives the MICE strategy. Event planners are told: "Boricua is more than a word to identify a person from Puerto Rico. It's a way of life that means finding inspiration wherever you look and sharing it with whomever you meet." In FY22-23, the economic impact of groups was up 57% from FY18-19.

Discover Puerto Rico's list of active partners grew from 600 to 3,000 in a year and then to 6,100 by 2024. The early wins set the DMO on a path to embrace community engagement as a core part of its role. Initially a half-time position aimed at identifying cultural and historical treasures, DPR's community engagement team has grown to three full-time staff, with a fourth to be added soon, plus three part-time contractors to work with communities across the 100-mile island. This work continues to build the credibility of the organization within Puerto Rican communities and the strength of the campaign.

Implications for Hawaiʻi tourism governance

- Discover Puerto Rico's quest to differentiate its marketing position led it to a far deeper understanding of how tourism could benefit the entire island. By framing its campaign work around unique cultural attributes such as music, artisanship, and the island's joyful spirit, the DMO began building a distinctive, compelling brand for Puerto Rico while providing communities across the island access to the economic benefits of tourism.

- The attention to all of the island's communities, along with the success of the campaign, has built the young organization's credibility and political support for its funding.

- Because Discover Puerto Rico is not a membership organization, it is free to engage with all partners, much like a government organization.

- The division of responsibility between the Puerto Rico Tourism Company and DPR may limit coordination of opportunities for long-term tourism planning and destination stewardship.

- A humble, listening approach — with the first conversation leading to the second conversation and then the third — can uncover important issues and attitudes within communities that may feel left out of a tourism economy.

VISIT FLORIDA
Rebuilding credibility and budget with transparency and reforms

The fact that tourism is the backbone of the state's economy has created longtime support for tourism and made Visit Florida one of the nation's best-funded Destination Marketing Organizations. But in 2016, that confidence was shaken by a series of missteps culminating in public outcry over the nonprofit DMO's use of marketing funds for projects that were not fiscally defensible nor reflective of the state's brand. Top officials were forced to resign, and the Legislature ultimately imposed strict new statutory controls to create more transparency and accountability.

Reforms imposed by the Florida Legislature cast light on all Visit Florida business dealings. Included in these new measures were requirements to post all contracts online and that all funding with taxpayer dollars be matched 1:1 with private investment. Strict controls were imposed on spending and travel policies. The intention was to "create complete and utter transparency across the board," says Visit Florida President & CEO Dana Young, who was among the legislators voting for the reforms.

Visit Florida retained its status as a 501(c)(6) nonprofit corporation. Created as a public/private partnership by the Florida Legislature in 1996, its strategy is overseen by a 32-member board of directors. The board includes major trade associations, including the Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association, the Florida Attractions Association and Destinations Florida, the state association for DMOs. As a membership organization, Visit Florida collects partnership dues from its public and private sector members. Its sole purpose is to promote the state domestically and internationally, while DMOs market their own destinations through local bed tax receipts. The state organization has no grant function, but shares its massive media buying power with members through cooperative marketing programs and invites them to join in Visit Florida's huge presence at major trade shows and on sales missions.

Funding with accountability

Visit Florida is funded by the Florida Legislature and is required to seek legislative support for its funding every year. This structure is unlikely to change. Each county, however, collects a tax on lodging revenues to fund their local marketing. The lodging tax rate varies among counties.

Visit Florida shares quarterly updates of economic impact with rolling annual visitation totals, both to share accountability and ensure high awareness of the impact of the state's tourism industry. Most recently, the state reported 131.5 million visitors in 2023, along with $121.5 billion in economic impact, generating $16.3 billion in state and local taxes and 2 million jobs in a state of 22 million people. As a way of maintaining accountability, the state relies heavily on highly measurable marketing tactics. Florida's respected state economist is required every three years to calculate Visit Florida's ROI, last placed at $3.27 for every $1 of its publicly funded budget.

In March 2024, the Florida Legislature approved $80 million for Visit Florida, maintaining the record funding level for the second year in a row. It took many years for the organization to achieve this level of support. It took three years for all of the state's five biggest DMOs — Miami, Orlando, Fort Lauderdale, Palm Beach, and Kissimmee — to rejoin the organization after its accountability and transparency reforms were put into place. CEO Dana Young said she worked steadily throughout those years to rebuild the DMO's faith in Visit Florida's value proposition. All of the DMOs within the state of Florida and now active and engaged partners with Visit Florida.

Rebuilding trust

Visit Florida has worked hard to regain trust in the statehouse. The agency maintains ongoing discussions with the legislature and addresses legislators' desires for seeing measurable results from state spending on a regular basis.

Florida's marketing has steadily gained ground in recent years, with the state now claiming a 13.8% share of domestic visitors and a 30% share of international visitors. National studies have shown that Florida shot ahead of its competition during the pandemic because it stayed open and continued to market while much of the world was shut down. It has pressed that advantage ever since. Visit Florida sticks closely to its mandate to protect and grow Florida's share of destination travel. While concerns about over tourism in environmentally sensitive areas have arisen in the Keys and Key West, in Florida these are seen as issues for local decision-makers to resolve.

This has been a path to success in a state where the majority of residents have a positive perception of the tourism industry, believe tourism improves their quality of life, and agree that tourism is an important part of Florida's future.

Implications for Hawaiʻi tourism governance:

- Visit Florida rebuilt its funding and restored trust by accepting tight controls and demonstrating fiscal responsibility, even using an independent, trusted state economist to assess the effectiveness of its work.
- Visit Florida generates ongoing awareness of the benefits of tourism by releasing quarterly visitation updates and rolling 12-month totals. The constant messaging about the positive economic benefits of tourism resonates strongly in a state where tourism negates the need for an income tax.
- Visit Florida is intentional about using its marketing might to promote all parts of the state, including rural areas that require more promotion to attract visitors.

UTAH OFFICE OF TOURISM: Lost Olympic bounce inspired performance-based funding

Although the 2002 Winter Olympics was a huge win for Utah, the state wasn't equipped to leverage its new-found global fame and lost its Olympic bounce. Tourism advocates had built support for one-off funding that had increased the Utah Office of Tourism (UOT) budget from about $900,000 to about $2.5 million. But the funding wasn't permanent, and the amount was far short of what Utah needed to build its reputation as a top visitor destination. To build a stronger budget, tourism advocates had to navigate a daunting challenge: The state legislature was adamantly opposed to any form of tax increase, and the counties opposed any diversion of their lodging taxes to fund state promotion.

A path to new funding

In 2003, the state tourism office took the bold step of funding research to document the ROI from marketing the state to visitors. Conducted by NFO Plog, the study showed that for each $1 invested in tourism, the state generated returns of $8.64 for the Utah economy. They shared the findings with the gubernatorial candidates, including ultimate victor Jon Huntsman, who was campaigning on the need to build the state's economy. The study documented the potential for investing in Utah's tourism economy, and tourism advocates showed how a growing state tourism budget could be funded over the years without raising or diverting existing taxes.

The idea, based on a funding model innovated in Missouri, tied the Utah Tourism Office's fortunes to its ability to generate increased state tax revenues year after year. This performance-based funding approach resonated well with the state's business-minded decision-makers. The brand-new Huntsman administration supported $10 million in seed funding for a new Tourism Marketing Performance Fund to begin testing the concept. The plan was a home run for other tourism interests as well. The Utah Sports Commission initially secured 7.5% of the annual proceeds and then its share rose to 10%. Another 20% goes into the Cooperative Marketing Performance Fund, which delivers annual grants as high as $300,000 for local DMO and nonprofit marketing efforts. The Utah Tourism Office retains the rest. Its FY24 budget is $22.8 million.

The UOT is a division of the Governor's Office of Economic Opportunity, and its mission is "to elevate life in Utah by advancing the visitor economy through marketing, stewardship, and destination development." UOT's Board of Tourism Development is structured to approve the out-of-state marketing plan for UOT. In recent years, its membership was expanded from 13 to 15 to provide voices for outdoor recreation and cultural interests. Members represent a mix of industry and geographic perspectives and are appointed by the Governor. A Board subcommittee conducts a rigorous annual process to evaluate applications for the Utah Cooperative Marketing Program and its recommendations to the full Board are rarely challenged.

A performance-based funding model

Devised by Utah Tourism Industry Association Director Nan Anderson, UTIA Lobbyist Des Barker, and current UOT Deputy Director Dave Williams, the funding concept rested on capturing a portion of the growth in state tourism revenues, up to a maximum of $3 million. Beginning in 2015, the formula was altered to calculate growth annually through analysis of state revenues from 24 NAICS codes relating to tourism, weighted to remove the influence of resident spending. Half of the revenue growth above 3% or the percentage change in the Consumer Price Index, whichever is higher, went into the Tourism Marketing Performance Fund (TMPF). The maximum increase stayed at $3 million a year. This funding formula lasted through Fiscal Year 2019, when the legislature capped UTO funding at the level attained that year. Because legislators have retained discretion over the TMPF, they are not obliged to transfer the full amount to UOT and have diverted it to other agencies at times. Revenue can accumulate year after year because the fund was made ongoing in 2015, and the proceeds do not lapse. The UOT's success in building its budget strength has been a key factor in the growth of Utah tourism and global awareness of the Mighty Five brand.

To build trust, the UOT relies on the highly respected Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute at the University of Utah to run an annual analysis of tourism economic impact. In 2022, that was calculated at a record $11.98 billion, generating 151,800 jobs and a record $2.12 billion in total state and local tax revenue. The UOT uses the Kem C. Gardner findings to calculate the benefit of state tourism for Utah householders, which has exceeded $1,200 in annual tax savings for many years. UOT's innovative Red Emerald strategy points to a unique set of metrics that include flattening the growth of national park visitation, while increasing visitation to state parks. The strategy also focuses on redistributing visitation to shoulder seasons and repeat visitation. Applicants for co-op marketing grants can win extra points by aligning with Red Emerald strategies and partnering with other destination organizations.

Strategic Evolution

For the first time in many years, the 2024 Utah Legislature considered a heavy cutback for the UOT's budget. The industry shifted into high gear to protect the funding but lost approximately $1 million of the prior year's funding. More interests are seeking diversion of room taxes, often to support management of recreational infrastructure, such as medical airlift from remote outdoor spaces.

In the years since its performance-based funding model was established, the office has built credibility and support by inviting outside review. In 2015, the office addressed skeptics by recommending an outside review of the TMPF mechanism. The

UOT embraced the modest recommendations, but most of all demonstrated that its funding mechanism could withstand a rigorous test. The office also built long-term support by adjusting its own funding expectations at times to support legislative priorities.

The office derives much strength from a co-op marketing program that is widely seen as a win-win-win for the UOT, its partners and legislators, who appreciate seeing the direct impact of state tourism funding in their own backyards. Applicants and the board subcommittee that reviews their applications take the work seriously. The office continues to evolve the Red Emerald Strategy that provides the foundation for its work. UOT is now expanding its mission to advance product development with a $3.8 million EDA grant.

Implications for Hawaiʻi tourism governance

- Newly retired, long-time UOT Managing Director Vicki Varela won the confidence of state legislators from the start by pledging to operate in a "business-minded" way. The approach, honored throughout her 11-year tenure, was highly sensitive to the results-oriented mindset of a conservative state. The UOT works closely with the state legislature to keep them apprised of the office's strategy and operates in alignment with legislative goals.

- Although 30% of UOT's funding is assigned to other entities, the structure creates unity of purpose for the state's tourism interests. Because their funding fortunes rise and fall together, they have a shared interest in coming together to support tourism.

- Varela made it a top priority to build strong collaborative relationships within the industry, ultimately becoming an ex officio member of the UTIA. She believes it is vital to establish shared guiding principles around a thoughtful plan with partners. When issues and grievances arise, the strategy is to resolve them internally to present a united front externally so that conflicts do not play out publicly.

- To build credibility, the UOT invites rigorous outside review of its results from respected entities, including the state's respected Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute.

- Rather than expecting all to align with a state strategy, UOT shapes offerings, including the Co-op Marketing Program, to support partners' strategies.

- UOT made a practice of shaping its own story and doing its best to stay out in front of public attitudes toward tourism.

- Rather than going it alone, the UOT has been intentional about building strong partnerships with peer state agencies, including the Office of Outdoor Recreation, Transportation, Natural Resources and others whose work is foundational for a strong state tourism industry.

TRAVEL MICHIGAN: How partnership built a powerful brand

For two decades, Travel Michigan has been a leading example of collaboration between a state tourism office and a wide range of regional, state and local partners. However, a February 2024 restructuring of Travel Michigan's parent agency appears on track to sharply reduce the influence and impact of the division that originated the state's emblematic "Pure Michigan" brand. Once among the better-funded state tourism offices, Travel Michigan's annual tourism budget has slipped from a high of $40 million to $30 million in the current fiscal year and is expected to fall to $15 million later this year.

Michigan is the latest of several states to seek efficiencies in their economic development offices by centralizing state marketing functions, including tourism marketing, into a single marketing division. Many such restructuring efforts are centered on redirecting large state tourism office media budgets to broader economic development or other state purposes. Similar efforts have unfolded in several states — including Illinois, Ohio, and Montana — over the past two decades. For state tourism offices, this shift often results in a loss of funding, independence, and ability to drive change and adapt to new challenges. It also can result in a muted or vague message for visitors and business prospects.

Housed in an economic development corporation

Travel Michigan is a division of the Michigan Economic Development Corp., founded in 1999 as an independent arm of state government to drive development of several business verticals, including tourism. The organization is overseen by two different boards, including the MEDC Executive Committee and the MEDC Corporation Board, and financed by the Michigan Strategic Fund. The 20-member Executive Committee oversees and advocates for the MEDC and appoints the MEDC's Chief Executive Officer. The CEO appoints vice-presidents for each economic development division, including tourism. Executive Committee members also serve on the MEDC Corporation Board, which meets annually to evaluate MEDC's performance. Executive Committee members, along with additional members of the Corporation Board, are appointed by the governor.

Of the many MEDC verticals, Travel Michigan has been the most high-profile and historically had a significant budget. The brand it developed for Michigan tourism — Pure Michigan — was embraced statewide, placed on the state license plate, and absorbed into the messaging of other MEDC units as Pure Opportunity. Although it had funding power, Travel Michigan had one of the smallest MEDC staffs, with headcount declining from 21 in 2003 to 9 currently.

The Travel Michigan division is overseen by the Michigan Travel Commission (MTC), an independent appointed board that assists with long-term planning, assesses performance, advocates for tourism, and ensures that Travel Michigan spending benefits the tourism industry.

The MEDC is funded through the Michigan Strategic Fund, which operates with funding from state general funds and Michigan's ongoing share of the 1998 tobacco settlement. The Executive Committee allocates budgets for each MEDC division. The MEDC employs civil servants and non-state employees with specialized skills.

Metrics focus primarily on marketing performance along with travel volume and spending, contribution to state and local taxes, and visitor characteristics. Travel Michigan also provided DMO partners with opportunities for assessing destination strength and alignment against national benchmarks. The MEDC's research function was reassigned to another MEDC division many years ago.

Public-private partnerships amplified the brand

At the height of its funding power, Travel Michigan was acclaimed for its innovative and inclusive statewide cooperative marketing campaign, which triggered millions of dollars of added investment from industry partners into the state's Pure Michigan campaign. The co-op vastly expanded Travel Michigan's media footprint year after year and portrayed all kinds of destinations through the lens of the Pure Michigan brand. It remains to be seen whether a restructured Travel Michigan will have resources to support such a comprehensive co-op effort.

From its inception, Travel Michigan's purpose has been to benefit the state's travel industry. In the past, the Michigan Travel Commission had been empowered to withhold spending of state funds that did not serve this purpose. The office's strategic plan describes three pillars: collaboration and marketing, destination development, and public policy and funding. Destination Development is defined as support for travel and tourism infrastructure, providing benchmarking resources for industry partners, and increasing industry awareness of issues relating to accessibility and DEI.

Over the years, Travel Michigan has used its formidable marketing power increasingly to celebrate the state's diversity, expanding Pure Michigan's early focus on nature to promote the state's cities as well. It shared messages about Michigan's warm welcome for all and promoted travel as a way of creating understanding and bringing people together. Its wild success in promoting less-visited places led the office to share stewardship messages and become an early advocate for reservation systems to ease pressures on popular state parks. Although its mandate was to serve the visitor industry, the state office also found ways to lift the image of battered communities, including Flint.

Implications for Hawaiʻi tourism governance

- A tourism brand has the power to express the voice and values of an entire state in ways that encourage widespread adoption and brings the people and communities of a place together.

- A state tourism office draws its credibility and ability to lead change from the strength of its brand voice.

- Loss of funding and independence can impact a state tourism office's ability to manage the brand, drive change, and evolve to meet new challenges.

- Even highly successful state tourism offices with strong public support can lose independence and effectiveness if they do not have independent access to funding.

FÁILTE IRELAND: A tale of two organizations

Fáilte Ireland

https://www.failteireland.ie/

In the annals of Ireland's post-conflict narrative, the genesis of Tourism Ireland in 1999 stands as a beacon of hope, a testament to the power of unity forged during the years of division. Born from the Good Friday Agreement, Tourism Ireland wasn't just an administrative entity but a symbol of reconciliation, a tangible embodiment of the shared aspirations to mend the fractures that had long plagued Northern Ireland. Conceived as one of the 12 'All of Ireland' North-South Implementation Bodies, Tourism Ireland assumed a dual role – that of a bridge connecting the North and South and a global ambassador tasked with showcasing the island's rich patchwork of experiences to the world. Its mandate extended beyond mere promotion; it was a conduit for fostering understanding, cooperation, and economic prosperity.

However, the landscape of tourism development in Ireland was far from seamless. With myriad organizations scattered across the region, each with its own agenda and modus operandi, the need for consolidation and synergy became apparent. As a consequence, Fáilte Ireland emerged as the linchpin of Ireland's tourism ecosystem, amalgamating disparate entities such as Bord Fáilte, Regional Tourism Authorities, and The National Hospitality Training Centres into a cohesive force for progress.

Establishing its headquarters in Dublin and setting up eight regional offices, Fáilte Ireland signaled a paradigm shift in Ireland's approach to tourism. With a workforce of over 215 in Tourism Information Centers and 460 staff members, it boasted both the people power and the resources to drive meaningful change. Yet, among the swell of growth and expansion, concerns lingered about the potential dilution of local connections and relevance in favor of centralized decision-making.

As the curtains rose on the division of responsibilities, Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland assumed their respective roles with clarity and purpose. Tourism Ireland's main responsibility is to promote Ireland overseas and bring in international B2B contacts to Fáilte Ireland. The latter was responsible for development and management within the destination: development meant brand creation like The Wild Atlantic and the whole tourism experience around it, including signage, research, registration/licensing, training and education, and grant schemes. While Tourism Ireland took on the mantle of international marketing with a budget of €92 mo in 2022, Fáilte Ireland shouldered the weight of tourism development, armed with a budget of €190 mo in the same year. It was a symbiotic relationship, each entity complementing the other in a choreographed synergy towards shared objectives. It was a testament to the maturity of Ireland's tourism strategy – an 'adult relationship' forged through dialogue, collaboration, and mutual respect.

At the grassroots level, the intricacies of managing 26 counties with varying budgets posed a formidable challenge. Mitigating resident pushbacks, nurturing destination experiences, and harnessing hyperlocal knowledge became the mandate of the day. Guided by the principle of subsidiarity, Fáilte Ireland endeavored to empower local stakeholders, recognizing their invaluable role in shaping the tourism landscape. Yet, among the metrics of success and growth targets, Fáilte Ireland remained steadfast in its commitment to viewing progress through the lens of the community. In a departure from conventional paradigms, success was measured not in numbers alone but in the tangible benefits accrued by visitors, industry players, communities, and the environment alike. The VICE stakeholder model – Visitor, Industry, Community, and Environment – served as a compass, guiding every decision and initiative towards a more inclusive and sustainable future.

In this narrative of transformation, the residents of Ireland emerged not as mere spectators but as co-authors of their destiny. Their voices resonated through every destination experience plan, their support is very much valued when giving a subsidy to a project proposed by a county. Fáilte Ireland supports the local counties with the development of experience both financially as with knowledge sharing. Fáilte Ireland supports the local counties by providing a measurement framework for resident's sentiment. They help to monitor and mitigate problems that might occur at the local level. Failte Ireland works very closely with the Local County Councils to safeguard the future sustainability of tourism.

During Ireland's post-conflict journey, Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland stand in Europe as beacons of progress; It's a tale of two organizations, illuminating the path towards a brighter, more prosperous future for tourism. Their story is not just one of administrative prowess but of resilience, reconciliation, and most of all the enduring respect for the spirit of the Irish people.

What Hawai'i can learn from the Irish model. An example for destination development and management worldwide, this is a successful story of two organizations. On one hand, you have Tourism Ireland for the promotion of the island, and on the other hand, Failte Ireland focusing entirely on development, sustainability, and community. This model requires a great deal of collaboration and almost constant 'mature' dialogue between the two organizations at national level on the one hand, and Failte Ireland at the national level and the counties at the local level ; only then can you achieve a success story. Ireland is also a beautiful narrative of a nation that has always worked closely with local communities and uses tourism as an instrument of reconciliation.

THE ICELANDIC TOURISM BOARD: Never waste a crisis

www.visiticeland.com

Iceland has consistently demonstrated progressive approaches to tourism. As early as 2007, they were leading the way with efforts to establish a robust international brand. Simon Anholt and his team collaborated with the Icelandic government to amalgamate various sectors, forming a cohesive international brand and expert product. Instead of managing fisheries and tourism separately, government organizations were unified into an integrated expert service for Iceland. Initially, this appeared to mean the end of the Iceland tourism board, but it marked only the beginning of a new important era of destination management.

So, what unfolded? To comprehend Iceland's current position, it's crucial to trace the country's trajectory over the past decade following the severe financial crisis of 2008. Iceland, reliant on heavy industries and fishing, faced a significant economic downturn exacerbated by over-leveraged banks, resulting in a drastic depreciation of the Icelandic krona and a surge in unemployment. The country had to be bailed out by the International Monetary Fund.

The eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano in April 2010 marked a turning point for Icelandic tourism. With a weakened currency, Iceland became an affordable destination, and the eruption served as a global advertisement for its natural beauty. Tourism, once a minor contributor to the economy, burgeoned into its largest industry over the ensuing decade.

The plans laid out in 2007 were swiftly implemented post-bank crisis. In 2010, a new organization, "Promote Iceland," emerged, comprising individuals from the export council, ministry, and the Icelandic Tourism Board. This entity assumed responsibility for all international marketing and communication for Iceland as a tourist destination. Remarkably, the Icelandic Tourist Board's last communication campaign occurred in 2010, coinciding with the Eyjafjallajökull eruption. Subsequently, they focused on destination management and development, encompassing quality standards, preservation efforts, tourism planning, data analytics, and regional management plans.

The establishment of "Promote Iceland" catalyzed a significant increase in international visitors over the past decade. In 2019, tourism revenue accounted for 42% of Iceland's economy, a notable rise from approximately 27% in 2013. Meanwhile, with adequate funding, the Icelandic Tourism Board expanded its scope, employing qualified personnel to execute sustainable tourism initiatives, free from undue marketing influence.

The Icelandic Tourist Board operates as an independent authority under the Ministry of Industries and Innovation, regulated by the Tourism Administration Act, overseen by the Minister of Tourism, Industries, and Innovation.

Promote Iceland operates as a public-private partnership, tasked with promoting Iceland's commercial interests abroad and boosting export revenues. Previously, there lacked a formal governance framework to manage the relationship between these entities. While the CEO of the Icelandic Tourism Board held a position on Promote Iceland's board, the arrangement lacked structural organization, which is deemed less than ideal.

Collaboration between the Icelandic Tourist Board and regional tourism boards has been fruitful, with funds allocated for regional destination management plans. Presently, efforts are underway to support regions in adopting a more grassroots, regenerative tourism approach.

What Hawai'i can learn from Iceland: Never waste a crisis! Former Icelandic Tourist Board CEO, Ólöf Ýrr Atladóttir (2010-2019), presented these initiatives in Hawai'i (Kauai) in 2016, receiving positive feedback. Her advice to HTA (Hawaiian Tourism Authority) is to either establish a separate organization solely dedicated to destination management or create a management entity where marketing is one of the functions, emphasizing the importance of proper prioritization.

4VI - VANCOUVER ISLAND: The DMO as a social enterprise

https://forvi.ca/

In the lush landscapes and stunning vistas of Vancouver Island, a new era was dawning for tourism. It wasn't just a picturesque sunrise painting the sky with shades of pink and orange; it marked the beginning of a transformative journey for Tourism Vancouver Island, now rebranded as 4VI.

Tourism Vancouver Island has always operated as a non-profit, so the focus isn't so much on the organizational structure or legal status, but rather on how funds are acquired and utilized. It's the latter aspect that sets them apart on a global scale. Most of Tourism Vancouver Island's funding comes through Destination British Columbia, similar to other regional tourism organizations in the province. Destination BC operates as one of Canada's crown corporations, governed by business principles and owned by governments. In 2016, they received $1 million USD for marketing services upon the creation of a marketing plan. Securing this funding wasn't challenging, and they could easily obtain an additional $1 million from stakeholders on Vancouver Island in exchange for media space. By 2018, Anthony Everett began working for Tourism Vancouver Island, and during his tenure, Destination BC specified that the allocated funds could only be spent on PR activities.

This restriction meant the organization could no longer engage in co-promotion plans with stakeholders offering media space, nor could they secure the additional $1 million from stakeholders. It also hindered their ability to focus on crucial areas like destination development and educational campaigns. Anthony successfully persuaded the board to seek additional funding to fulfill the community's expectations, not just those imposed by Destination BC. He advocated for an entrepreneurial approach to secure funds from other sources, ensuring tourism continued to benefit Vancouver Island positively. This became increasingly crucial during the pandemic when Vancouver Island experienced a surge in visitors from the mainland, making it the most visited place in Canada in 2021. Amidst these challenges, they requested government funding to manage visitor influx and support local needs, receiving half of the requested $2 million budget. It was during this critical time that 4VI was established to independently secure funding to uphold their desired social impact on the island.

4VI sets a precedent by generating profits through selling expertise to businesses and destinations, then reinvesting these profits into the island's communities, businesses, culture, and environment. The transition wasn't just a name change; it represented a fundamental shift in philosophy. Gone were the days of solely promoting tourism for economic gain. 4VI now stood as a champion of responsible travel, safeguarding Vancouver Island's natural beauty and cultural heritage.

Their commitment extended beyond mere rhetoric. 4VI pledged to address climate change, aiming to halve emissions by 2030 and achieve Net Zero by 2050, as outlined in the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism. With a comprehensive climate action plan, 4VI aimed to lead the way towards a more sustainable future, not just for tourism but for the planet.

But their journey didn't end there. With the impending Biosphere certification from the Responsible Tourism Institute, 4VI was on track to become a global leader in sustainable tourism. Their dedication to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals remained steadfast, covering areas such as climate change, environmental conservation, social equity, economic prosperity, and cultural preservation.

The story of 4VI wasn't merely about rebranding an organization; it was about rewriting the narrative of tourism itself. It was a tale of resilience, innovation, and, above all, hope. With each stride forward, 4VI illuminated a path towards a future where travel wasn't just a journey but a force for good—for Vancouver Island, its people, and generations to come.

What Hawaiʻi can learn from 4VI: Perhaps the destination management organization (DMO) needs to assume a broader role beyond visitor attraction. Marketing skills could be utilized for branding and storytelling to steward the place and its people, but with a different purpose in mind. The DMO's objective should be to have a positive, long-lasting impact on the community. As politicians often prioritize short-term gains and focus solely on profits, who advocates for the people? When tourism represents the livelihood of an island, there's an understanding that during times of crisis, you're essentially on your own. Therefore, it's imperative for the DMO to fulfill the most pressing needs of the community.

CATALUNYA (SPAIN): A multi-government approach to support the local community

https://www.catalunya.com

In Spain, regional authorities hold the most authority over tourism. The regions do align and work closely together with the national and local governance level for tourism. Benefitting the people living in the regions is the foremost consideration.

At the national level, the State Secretariat for Tourism had a 2021 budget of EUR 1.3 billion, and a 2022 budget of EUR 1.7 billion. The Secretariat is responsible for formulating, coordinating, and executing tourism policy at national and international levels. It oversees three national organizations: Turespaña, Paradores de Turismo, and SEGITTUR. Turespaña handles international tourism marketing and promotion through a network of 33 global offices. Paradores de Turismo manages a network of 97 state-owned hotels, mainly in historic sites and protected areas, employing over 4,000 people. SEGITTUR focuses on developing tourism technologies for both public and private sectors to enhance competitiveness, quality, and sustainability. Effective coordination among central and regional administrations and the private sector is vital. Key entities include the Sectoral Tourism Conference, the Spanish Tourism Council (CONESTUR), the Inter-Ministerial Committee for Tourism, and the Advisory Council of Turespaña, which comprises both public and private sector representatives and assists in defining and implementing marketing strategies for Spain abroad.

At the regional level The Catalan Tourist Board (CTB), established by the Government of Catalonia, executes the government's tourism promotion policies, succeeding the Turisme de Catalunya consortium in 2010. Its mandate is to promote Catalonia as a premier tourist destination, emphasizing quality and the socio-economic benefits of tourism.
Transitioning from the consortium, the CTB introduced a pivotal change in Catalan promotional strategy by engaging the private sector in international awareness initiatives. This collaborative approach strengthens over time, with private entities sharing responsibility for promoting and marketing tourism in Catalonia globally. This has been proving very successful between 2010 and 2018.

Since 2016 the biggest city in Catalunya — Barcelona — started to see the excesses of tourism, receiving a lot of push backs from the residents. As this is a challenge a city cannot beat by itself, it required the support of the regional tourism authorities. One symbolic moment was the Barcelona Declaration for tourism that was developed in 2018. During the European Year of Cultural Heritage, the city of Barcelona and many of its stakeholders declared a pledge for the future collaboration around tourism, fostering a greater synergy between tourism and cultural stakeholder. For Catalunya this was an important declaration, to an extent that they have been promoting it to all regions in Europe through the network of regions, called NECSTouR.

For Catalunya this declaration defines the pathway for future governance as written in Principle 1:
Principle 1: SMART AND INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE "What is good for residents is good for visitors"
Article 1.1 The residents - the local community - should be the main beneficiaries of any activity developed in the place they live. They must be consulted and included in the decision-making process from its early stage. Community empowerment and community participation are key factors in avoiding conflicts between the shared uses of cultural heritage sites/places between residents and visitors.

National, regional and local authorities should integrate a multi-stakeholder, multi-sectoral and participatory approach to cultural/tourism related initiatives, from decision-making and implementation to monitoring. This horizontal approach will not only share commitment and responsibilities but it will also bring opportunities for social innovation, co-creation and joint investment. Tourism planning and heritage interpretation need to acknowledge the diversity of stakeholders and reflect the plurality of different points of view.

Today the work is not finished, as more and broader stakeholders are getting involved in tourism in the region. Also, the region is supporting much more the local level by following the choices that cities or local tourism authorities make for their own benefit. At the moment of the interview the CEO of the regional tourism authority and the CEO of the tourism authority of the city of Barcelona are together in Zürich to promote a sailing competition that will take place in Barcelona, benefitting the city and the region and the people.

With a very good example dating back to 1992 — The Olympics in Barcelona — and its legacy of providing an enhanced sports infrastructure for the local inhabitants, the region and the city stay strongly united and committed to make sure tourism remains focused on benefitting the people and their place.

What Hawai'i can learn from Catalunya: There's a massive amount of coordination and alignment needed between multiple governance structures and the private sector. Sometimes the interests seem to go in different directions, but not if all partners align and focus on the community needs, and it's the role of the government to make sure that focus remains there when developing a sustainable growth in tourism.

TOURISM BAY OF PLENTY, NEW ZEALAND: Don’t keep them separated

https://www.bayofplentynz.com/

Tourism Bay of Plenty (TBOP) is the regional DMO for the entire coastline on the North Island, roughly from Tauranga to Whakatane, which includes tourist highlights like Mount Maunganui, Whakaari (the White Island), Ohope Beach, and the Whirinaki Forest. Nestled on the eastern side of New Zealand’s North Island, the Coastal Bay of Plenty region boasts stunning beaches and several charming towns.

In 2018, TBOP identified some significant challenges to remain relevant both to the communities it represented and the evolving landscape of tourism, as well as the type of visitors it aimed to attract. First and foremost was the challenge of maintaining the “license to operate,” prompting the organization to question its own relevance. Secondly, there was an early form of overtourism around Mount Maunganui in Tauranga, which wasn’t just about numbers but also about visitor pressure and behavior. Thirdly, TBOP aimed to redefine tourism, not merely as an industry focused on filling beds and seats, but by closely collaborating with all sectors of society impacted by tourism, both positively and negatively.

This meant forging much broader and deeper partnerships and altering its stakeholder model. Additionally, TBOP sought to centralize its activities around a love for nature and the environment, anchored in the holistic and regenerative worldview of the indigenous Maōri community. Destination management was a cold, technical term compared with the regenerative values of the Maori community. The concept of Mana Whenua would now be central to everything they did, even in crafting a new strategy.

TBOP embarked on a new strategic process resulting in the globally recognized strategy “The Love of Tourism.” The strategy emerged from numerous workshops and consultations throughout the region, with each step validated by local iwi and hapu, the indigenous families and groups along the entire coastline. The co-creation of the plan not only involved interviews and consultations but also a radical shift in TBOP’s approach, consistently keeping all partners, old and new, informed about the process and soliciting feedback. Sharing the results and ultimately launching the plan were public elements.

In addition to the “The Love of Tourism” strategy, two more strategic documents followed, further elaborating aspects of the new strategic direction. The first focused on “Connecting with Residents,” outlining a new partnership model, while the second centered on “Tourism with Purpose,” translating the sustainable and generative values of the Maōri into concrete tourism actions.

Shortly after the launch of the strategies, their implementation was hindered by two tragic incidents: the eruption of Whakaari, one of the region’s attractions now indefinitely closed to the public, and the COVID-19 crisis, which brought tourism to a complete standstill. Despite these setbacks and delays, TBOP continued to use the new strategic direction as its compass.

The new strategy didn’t just stay on paper but resulted in more than just a changed partner model; it also led to an internal restructuring. New roles were introduced within the organization, such as an internal strategist tasked with overseeing the plan’s execution, as well as a new staff member from the Maori community serving as a permanent liaison to the local iwi. The organization was subdivided into various entities, each now led by a Head of Destination Management, a Head of Destination Marketing, and a Head of Insights. The segmentation was revised. In addition to the traditional geographical markets, a niche approach was developed, with a particular emphasis on establishing a storytelling program aimed at attracting a more quality-oriented tourist. This included individuals passionate about nature (the outdoor adventurer), local culture (cultural explorer), and those making more conscious choices (ecotourism).

A program was developed with the goal of training 100 businesses in the use of sustainable practices through a twelve-week-long training program. The well-being indicators of the city councils also became objectives of the DMO.

Overall, it can be said that in everything TBOP now undertook, not only the visitor but also the residents were central, ensuring that all activities, development, and promotion consistently respected the region’s DNA.

Of course, this is a story of people, and not everything was an immediate success. The plan included the gradual reduction and even the eventual cessation of cruise ship tourism, but so far, this goal has not been achieved. The numbers are at the same level as before the COVID crisis. The port of Tauranga was in survival mode after the crisis, following its own economic logic. However, TBOP could still play its role by attempting to limit or spread the number of cruise ship arrivals per day and, more importantly, by managing the experience of cruise ship passengers better. They were seen as destination samplers and the presence of local people and raising awareness could prevent a lot of friction by now.

TBOP cannot control tourism businesses or impose their will, and the focus, especially since the pandemic, still leans too much towards growth in numbers rather than in profit. However, the costs to nature and the community are now visible, making this nonetheless a success story. There is no doubt about it. The governance structure was internally adjusted, but there were also external changes. TBOP still relies on financial contributions from various city councils, but they now see tourism through a different lens. In urban planning projects or development initiatives, the DMO is viewed as a structural partner.

For TBOP, the shift towards more regenerative processes remains a positive narrative. It's a journey you can't simply rush, but there's a clear sense that despite setbacks, progress has been made and there's still a long way to go. One key point the organization emphasizes is the decision to keep all processes of branding, promotion, destination development, community engagement, and sustainability under one roof. It's not the easiest path because many people have to step out of their comfort zones and adapt, but according to them, it's the one that yields long-term benefits because otherwise, there's a risk of developing things that aren't promoted or promoting things that aren't developed.

What Hawai'i can learn from New Zealand: New Zealand has, due to the Treaty of Waitangi, established a coexistence model between the Crown and rangatira, granting a set of rights and obligations to each Treaty partner. While this hasn't resulted in an ideal or fair situation for the indigenous minority of the island, it has fostered a spirit of bi-governance in all their endeavors. In the meantime, it's also true that this model is deeply ingrained in the governance structures of what they do, including tourism. There exist numerous governing bodies and councils where plans, decisions, and strategies can be discussed with indigenous communities. This leads to greater support for change projects but especially to a natural control ensuring that tourism growth doesn't come at the expense of a third party, be it the natural environment, the local community, or culturally rooted values.

THE NETHERLANDS: Use your power to connect people and places

NBTC
Netherlands Board of Tourism & Conventions

www.nbtc.nl

The Netherlands has always been known abroad for its strong brand and its power to attract visitors, but with Amsterdam as an attractive capital, they also became known for witnessing the excesses of tourism. Already back in 2016 alarming concerns echoed , from rising housing costs to the strains of unruly tourist behavior. It was a crossroads moment, demanding innovative solutions and a fresh perspective.

Within the marketing mandate, the Netherlands Board of Tourism & Conventions could find only limited solutions. For instance, the DMO collaborated with carriers and operators to promote Amsterdam only if other lesser-known destinations in the Netherlands were included as well, thus balancing the benefit. The DMO tried to be more focused and efficient in their marketing effort, gaining financial and human resources to expand their scope from destination marketing to destination management. Even when this meant losing out on private co-financing for the budget (which was previously always higher than 50%, and gradually reduced to 40% and even 20% during Covid-19), their commitment to sustainable development remained steadfast.

In 2018, together with a broad range of stakeholders, the DMO embarked on a visionary journey, crafting what would become known as Perspective 2030. Their mission? To sculpt a future where every Dutch citizen flourishes amidst the bustling energy of tourism. Three pillars of success were outlined. First, tourism should be a top-tier policy priority, calling upon all players in the visitor economy to unite under a shared vision. Second, they championed joint action and investment, heralding a new era of collaboration between public and private entities. And third, they forged a national data alliance, a beacon of knowledge to guide their endeavors with clarity and insight.

But the journey didn't end there. NBTC knew that real change required more than just words on paper – it demanded action. Thus, they set about restructuring partnerships, inviting local governments to the table to co-create a vision of sustainable tourism management. Mandates were broadened, empowering stakeholders to tackle complex challenges head-on, from licensing to legislation. Yet, perhaps the most powerful tool in their arsenal was their ability to turn their staff into 'connectors'. NBTC became the bridge between diverse stakeholders, not just the typical tourism partners, but mostly local and regional public partners, fostering dialogue and understanding at every turn, and about every aspect tourism was influencing.

They poured their hearts into the development of destination management practices, reshaping the landscape to ensure growth was not just sustainable but enriching for all involved. This change also influenced their Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), aligning them with the noble cause of destination management, for example, setting a target on the number of local governments that implement the principles of sustainable destination development. They stood as tireless advocates, fighting for the interests of residents, businesses, and visitors alike, igniting a flame of collaboration that burned bright across the land. And so, armed with vision, determination, and an unwavering commitment to their cause, NBTC navigates the turbulent waters of tourism growth. It is not a finished journey. It demands long term commitment.

What Hawai'i can learn from The Netherlands: Use your power and experience of connecting different people, but focus on all the connecting that needs to be done in the destination between different stakeholders (beyond tourism) instead of keeping too much focus on the global tourism industry. As long as you keep your place attractive for residents to live in and welcoming to visitors , international guests will continue to have interest and come to visit your place. Go there where you are most needed, even if it means losing out on funding.