



Trail Tourism Readiness Self-Assessment

This assessment helps users identify strengths, and opportunities, and associated resources and tools, along a continuum of progress for effectively promoting and marketing trails. Answer each of the questions to determine which phase of readiness per indicator best describes your community. Throughout the toolkit, recommendations for next steps are organized by readiness phases.

Elements of Success	Definitions	Questions	Phases of Trail Tourism Readiness			
			In Development (community assets and experiences are minimally marketed, and they receive limited visibility even locally)	Local Favorite (community has assets it promotes, though with limited access, and known primarily by locals)	Regional Destination (community has a developed tourism approach, and has some regional visitation)	National Destination (community has a strategy and established partnerships to attract a national audience)
Advocacy for Trail Tourism	The ability to influence decisions within political, economic and social institutions, including state tourism boards and destination marketing organizations (DMOs), to affect public policy, laws or budgets that support trail tourism.	How aware and supportive of trail tourism are local public officials and tourism entities?	Our community's trail, prospective trail or outdoor recreation opportunities in general are not yet on the radar of our public officials and tourism entities.	Our trail is known locally, but our community lacks a formal advocacy campaign to communicate about trail tourism to public officials and tourism entities.	Policymakers and tourism partners are aware of the benefits of trail tourism and see it as an economic development driver, but support for increasing the scale of trail tourism could be greater.	Our community's trail and outdoor recreation environment is a driver of tourism and maintains continuous relevance and support from local and state governments and other partners.
		How developed are your trail tourism advocacy messages?	We do not yet have advocacy messaging or defined asks aimed at our elected or public officials.	We have developed advocacy messaging and defined our ask, but have not fully engaged elected or public officials.	Our community has effectively communicated the benefits of trail tourism and needed support to public officials through effective advocacy campaigns.	Our advocacy messaging is driving or complimentary of regionwide tourism or economic development strategy.
Building a Trail Tourism Ecosystem	Prioritizing the development of amenities—desirable or useful features—that enhance the quality and usability of the trail experience, and encourage the economic participation of residents and visitors. These include functional infrastructure (e.g., restrooms, bike repair stations, information kiosks, etc.) as well as enhancements to user experience, such as public art, interpretive signage and other features that position the trail as a destination.	What is the visitor landscape like for supporting trail tourism in your community?	Our community has no or few visitor attractions to support trail and outdoor recreation-based tourism.	Our community has some visitation assets to support local day use, such as food and retail, but lacks those necessary to promote broader use.	Our community has enough lodging options and adjacent tourism attractions to support non-locals, but may lack the necessary amenities to facilitate multi-day trips.	Our community has a visitor landscape which elevates the overall tourism user experience, accomodates and facilitates multi-day trips, and serves as a draw for visitors from outside of the region or state.
		What is the scope of trail-related amenities available in your community?	Our community has few to no trail amenities.	Our trail has some basics like parking, restrooms and trail markers, but may lack more essential amenities.	Value-added amenities such as bike repair stations, information kisoks or comprehensive trail maps are available along with core essentials.	Our trail system features a full suite of basic and value-added amenities that creates memorable experiences for visitors, such as public art, vistas and connections to heritage sites.
Demonstrating the Impact of Trail Tourism	Gathering the data and insight necessary to educate and build support among key stakeholders and decisionmakers, developing a shared understanding of the benefits of trail tourism, pursuing evaluation strategies to demonstrate impact, and communicating outcomes to local businesses and community members.	How well-known and accepted are the economic and social benefits of trail tourism in your community?	Trail tourism is not on the radar of regional stakeholders, or our trail or prospective trail faces questions or skepticism about viability, costs, safety and land use.	Our trail is enjoyed and used casually by a mostly local audience that is aware of and appreciates its benefits to them personally.	Our trail is established as a valued recreational asset, with local businesses directly benefiting, and impacts are accepted and communicated to key stakeholders in our community.	Qualitative and quantitaive benefits are fully understood and championed by the community, consistently monitored and transparently reported.
		How developed is your tourism data collection and reporting?	We do not have tourism data, or it is limited or inconsistent.	We have started to collect data but are uncertain about which metrics matter most, how to communicate benefits in non-technical, “real-world” terms, and lack of examples from similar communities.	The data we collect incorporating economic, social, health and community outcomes contributes to trails being viewed as essential tourism infrastructure rather than simply “nice to have.”	We produce annual impact reports, track long-term trends, collaborate with partners to standardize metrics, and use advanced storytelling (e.g., dashboards, videos, case studies) to promote continued investment and innovation.
Funding Trail Tourism	Developing a strategy to secure financial resources to support efforts to bolster trail tourism, including trail-specific needs, programs, projects or activities like marketing, outreach, events and programming.	How robust is funding and financial support for trail tourism in your community?	We have secured little to no initial funding to support our trail and trail tourism more broadly.	Our community has funded initial phases of trail tourism and development, but ongoing financial support is uncertain or expected to be inconsistent.	Longer term funding mechanisms are in place, though funding for amenities, wayfinding, marketing, programming or events may be limited.	Our community has established, secure and sustainable funding sources that ensure long-term funding for trail maintenance, upkeep and promotion efforts.
		How developed is your funding partnership and investment strategy?	Our next (or first) source of funding to support trail tourism and development efforts is unknown.	We have a few core financial supporters, and there is a need to explore new, additional funding sources.	We have started to diversify our funding, tapping creative sources like DOTs, health systems, and dedicated tax revenues.	We regularly engage with local, state and federal funding partners to bundle trail tourism with other economic development and tourism-related projects and investments.

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Developing a Regional Trail Identity	The effort to organize a place-based brand that orients a region's identity—the unique personality, visual style and overarching theme of a location, organization or brand as expressed through the environment—to the trail as a tool to generate tourism and visitation.	How recognizable is your community's trail destination and identity?	Our community's trail, prospective trail, and other outdoor recreation tourism attractions may not yet exist or may lack consistent (or any) identifiable brand, vision or identity.	Our community has established a vision to drive trail tourism, but visitor experience is not fully differentiated from other communities.	Our community identity and brand is cohesive and grounded in authentic local character and meaning.	Trail has a recognizable identity and unique brand that is known nationally.
		How consistent is the trail's brand and visual identity across route signage, wayfinding and promotional and informational materials?	Our community may not yet have a trail, or our trail or prospective trail is only minimally known in the local community.	Our trail has basic signage and wayfinding to help visitors navigate, but it may be fragmented or not fully complete.	The trail is well-marked with visual consistency across wayfinding elements, and there are fully developed trip-planning options.	We have strong storytelling signage and wayfinding assets that deepen the visitor experience and anchor the identity physically in the landscape.
Maintenance and User Experience	Trail system upkeep that allows users to clearly understand the trail route, plan a trip using the trail, navigate the trail safely and have an enjoyable trail experience.	How navigable, discoverable and enjoyable is your community's trail and tourism experience to visitors?	Our community trail, prospective trail or outdoor recreation opportunities are not yet available to the local community.	The trail may be lacking access or navigational features which make it complex for anyone other than locals who are "in the know."	Our trail is easy to find, access and navigate. We have developed resources for users to understand trail conditions, difficulty, safety and nearby amenities and attractions.	Trip planning tools make it easy to find routes, local businesses and supplementary amenities that fully support the trail visitation experience.
		How developed is your trail maintenance and upkeep plan?	There is no operational or maintenance plan and land agreements may still be under negotiation.	Trail maintenance is basic or inconsistent, dependent on when funding or volunteers are available.	Our community has an established maintenance plan and upkeep routine but could use a formal maintenance funding plan.	Our trail has a long-term maintenance plan supported by a sustainable funding mechanism or partnerships.
Marketing for Trail Tourism	Specific communication strategies intended to leverage the trail to encourage new visitation and solidify the trail-oriented regional identity among residents and visitors alike.	How advanced are your community's outreach and messaging efforts to promote your trail tourism assets?	Our community lacks strategic (or any) messaging to promote and encourage trail tourism, and marketing may be solely word of mouth or to local groups that are in the know.	Our community minimally promotes trail tourism assets, mostly to the local market. The trail lacks a consistent marketing message or impactful online presence.	Our community is executing a marketing plan with cohesive messaging and clear target audiences. Promotion, communication and outreach efforts are being evaluated using commonly available analytics.	A broader national or international marketing campaign is in place. Marketing efforts are being tracked using advanced analytics.
		How developed is your marketing strategy for trail tourism?	We have not yet developed any marketing tools or strategy for our trail or prospective trail.	We have begun developing marketing resources like one-pagers, user testimonials, and key messaging but do not have a formal outreach plan or marketing strategy.	We work with our local DMO to feature the trail and surrounding community in regional campaigns, engage influencers and social media, and have some paid promotion of events, programs and other notable happenings.	We have brand consistency across platforms, share marketing assets and messaging with upstream and downstream communities, and lead collaborative marketing planning efforts, helping nearby communities integrate into a cohesive, regionwide trail tourism narrative.
Developing Organizational Capacity and Collaboration	The extent to which the trail and regional partners have staff or volunteers that can facilitate a range of tasks oriented to each of the elements of successful tourism, including in collaboration with other organizations to pursue shared goals.	How much support exists to implement trail tourism in your community?	Our trail or prospective trail has one or two champions or advocates who may be volunteering their time to drive action forward.	Our community has core trail or outdoor recreation champions with dedicated, limited staff, but may lack the bandwidth or resources to establish advanced tourism strategies like programming or events.	Our community has full-time trail leaders who are able to host programs or events. Trail leaders are working with local tourism boards or officials and are integrated with regional tourism efforts.	Our trail/outdoor recreation ecosystem has enough paid staff, community partners and volunteer support to advance signature events and regular programming. The trail is actively promoted by DMOs.
		How ready is your trail system/outdoor recreation ecosystem to connect into broader tourism in your community?	The trail or prospective trail in our community is isolated, not started, or incomplete.	Our trail is complete or has plans for completion, but may be experiencing friction around coordination across jurisdictions.	Our trail is complete and well-connected locally, but is not marketed as part of a larger system.	Our trail is fully integrated with our regional tourism landscape and can serve as an example for others.
Fostering Stewardship and Belonging	Creating a welcoming and inclusive experience on the trail and within the community for a broad range of residents and visitors that can be demonstrated by educational signage, culturally appropriate and diverse trail activations, support for the trail from surrounding landowners and businesses, and a holistic integration of the trail into the community.	How widespread and engaged is your base of people using the trail and visiting the trail?	Trail and outdoor recreation-based tourism in our community is limited or nonexistent.	Our trail is known mainly by locals who enjoy and champion the outdoor recreation opportunities available in our community.	Our trail is attracting a wider range of regional visitors interested in outdoor recreation-based tourism.	Our trail is seen as a national asset that welcomes all visitors.
		How broadly welcomed, stewarded and supported is trail use by the local community and visitors alike?	Our trail does not yet exist, or is known and used by only a small number of local trail enthusiasts.	Our trail may be seen as only "for" some in the community, and belonging and stewardship may be inconsistent.	Our trail system is welcoming and fully embraced and stewarded by a diverse community.	Our community effectively balances promotion to external audiences with inclusive and responsible visitor management.