

ORGANIZATION NEXT

2020 Strategic Recovery Plan
for Destination Organizations

December 2020 Update





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Hello,

The OrganizationNEXT Strategic Recovery Plan launched in the summer of 2020 to define how destination organizations are prioritizing strategies to address the decimation of business caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. This is an update to that original report with new survey data and industry insight.

There are signs that the global visitor industry is moving in a positive direction as we head into 2021. We believe that OrganizationNEXT provides a high-level overview to inform how destination organizations can stay in front of these transformational times effectively.

This report compares the results of the two surveys in summer and Q4 2020, the latter of which included expanded questions relating to roles and KPIs for destination organizations. Almost all of the destination leaders we've engaged this year are focused on how their organization's purpose needs to evolve in 2021.

The most significant addition in this report is the section on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. We included a new set of questions in the second survey to better understand how destination leaders are implementing strategies to create more equitable organizations and communities.

We are grateful for the guidance of the OrganizationNEXT Advisory Panel to develop this report.

Greg Oates

SVP Innovation
MMGY NextFactor

Summary

In June 2020, MMGY NextFactor and Tourism Economics produced the **OrganizationNEXT Strategic Recovery Plan** to provide destination organizations with a clear set of strategic priorities on their road to recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. The specific strategies were developed from consultations with more than 50 destination leaders, supplemented with the results of a global survey prioritizing those strategies.

More than 350 destination leaders in 20 countries participated in the survey for the June report. We then fielded an expanded second global survey in the fall of 2020. This time, 174 organizations from 27 countries responded.

To recap from the original OrganizationNEXT report, the recovery strategies were grouped into three pillars:

1. **Community Building:** Aligning public-private sector strategies and elevating community collaboration
2. **Customer Engagement:** Reassessing target markets and how to message local and regional travelers
3. **Organization Sustainability:** Ensuring the short and long-term viability of destination organizations

For this second OrganizationNEXT report, we expanded the number of survey questions relating to organization roles and key performance indicators.

The survey results show that the top five roles for destination organizations in Q4 2020 are:

1. Digital marketing
2. Brand and destination marketing
3. Community relations and advocacy
4. Destination information resource
5. Data research and intelligence

Meanwhile, leisure sales and meeting/convention sales ranked 11th and 12th, respectively, highlighting the shift in priorities in 2020 due to Covid-19.

For the KPI rankings, the top five measurements are:

1. Economic impact of visitors
2. Total visitor spending
3. Visitor satisfaction
4. Engagement with digital platforms
5. Measured lift from digital marketing

Resident sentiment ranked 10th, although it still garnered a 4.0 out of 5 ranking in terms of importance. See pages 7 and 8 for the full roles and KPI data sets.

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

For this second OrganizationNEXT report, we also added a new survey section dedicated to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). Since the Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020, there has been a foundational shift in how destination organizations are engaging and supporting a more diverse breadth of their communities.

According to the survey, the top five strategies for destination leaders to address equity, diversity and inclusion in their organizations and communities are:

1. Foster a welcoming environment among local businesses that is inclusive and inviting for visitors to create a sense of belonging and connectedness to the local community.
2. Be proactive about reviewing Board of Directors to ensure it is as diverse as possible
3. Develop content to promote the diversity, equity and inclusion among local businesses
4. Support diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives beyond hospitality and tourism
5. At the executive level, actively develop platforms to improve diversity, equity and inclusion

MMGY NextFactor will be expanding on all of the above takeaways in the DestinationNEXT Futures Study 2021.

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OrganizationNEXT Project Team

- Paul Ouimet – MMGY NextFactor
- Adam Sacks – Tourism Economics
- Greg Oates – MMGY NextFactor
- Jim McCaul – MMGY NextFactor
- Cheryll Girard – MMGY NextFactor
- Jordan Young – InterVISTAS
- Chris Davidson – MMGY Global
- Cheryl Schultz – MMGY Global
- Chelsea Bachman – MMGY Global

Work Plan

Phase 1: **Advisory Panel**

MMGY NextFactor established an Advisory Panel of more than 30 industry leaders (see page 18) to develop recovery strategies under three pillars: Community Building, Customer Engagement and Organization Sustainability.

We then conducted more than 20 focus groups and 50 one-on-one interviews with destination executives to help refine those strategies.

Phase 3: **Equity, Diversity & Inclusion**

In the fall of 2020, we consulted with an expanded Advisory Panel to develop a new section of questions relating to equity, diversity and inclusion. We also spoke with a number of Black CEOs in destination organizations of various sizes to provide insight into race-relations in 2020, and how they believe the industry can best move forward.

Phase 2: **Global Survey**

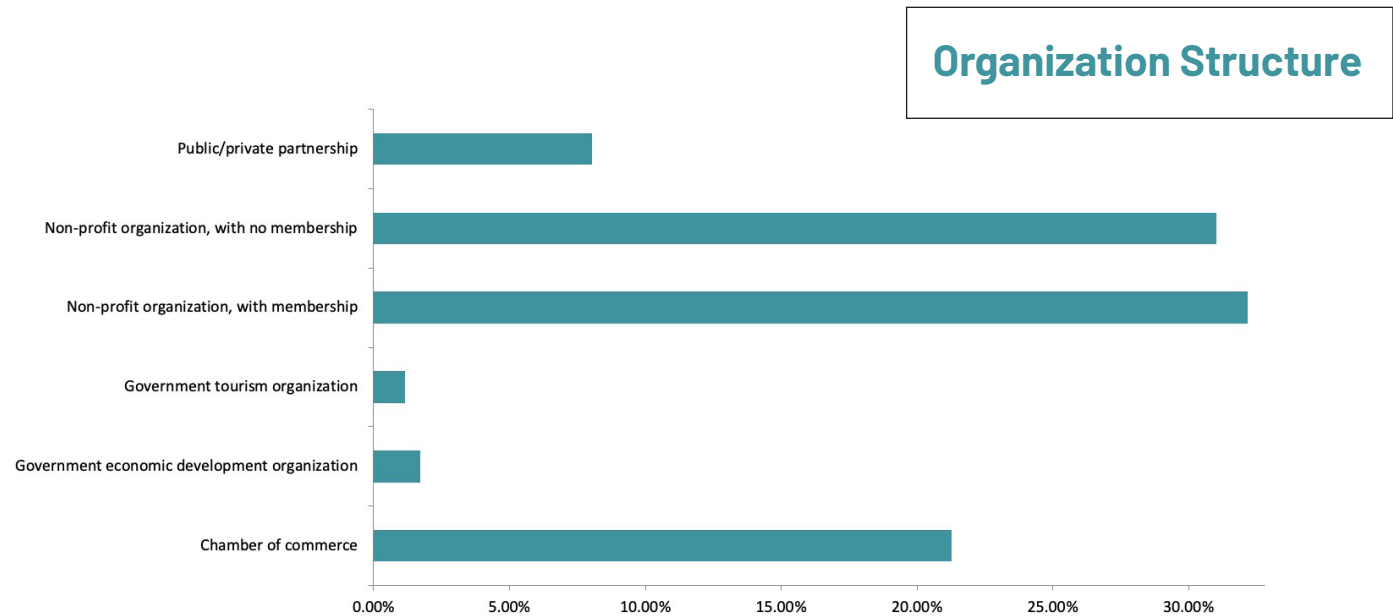
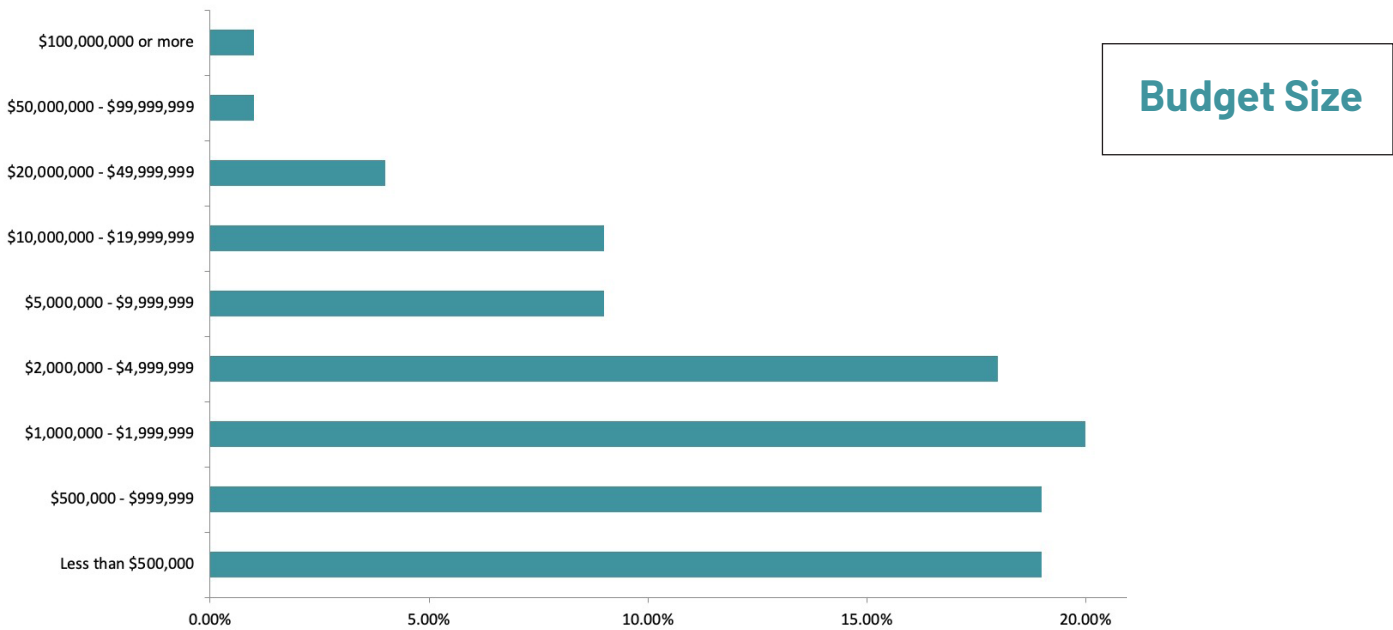
The first OrganizationNEXT survey was sent out to destination organizations around the world in spring 2020.

A second survey was distributed in the fall to gauge how destination organizations were continuing to reimagine their priorities. For the second survey, 174 respondents from 27 countries participated to provide the data in this report.

Phase 4: **OrganizationNEXT 2**

Building on the data in the first OrganizationNEXT report, we developed this second study to show how destination organizations were evolving, regarding how they prioritized the various recovery strategies during the past year.

Survey Profile



Destination Organization Roles

Destination leaders prioritized their organizations' roles fairly consistently with how they ranked them in the first OrganizationNEXT survey in summer of 2020.

We broke out "Digital marketing" this time from "Brand/destination marketing" to delineate and benchmark digital efforts specifically. "Community relations and advocacy" continued to rank highly for destination organizations worldwide, who are increasingly tasked with providing direction for the public, private and civic sectors amid all of the confusion and business loss caused by Covid-19.

Also new for this OrganizationNEXT 2 report, we added "Data research and intelligence," along with "Online engagement with visitors" and "Partnership development," based on feedback from the first report. Clearly, there's a surge in demand for constantly updated data because of the pandemic. There's also more intentional focus on how destination organizations are communicating with visitors across their digital platforms to provide fresh updates on developments in their regions.

Role (ranked 1-5)	Q4 2020	Summer 2020
1. Digital marketing	4.78	N/A
2. Brand/destination marketing	4.72	4.73
3. Community relations and advocacy	4.54 ▲	4.43
4. Destination information resource	4.49 ▼	4.57
5. Data research and intelligence	4.42	N/A
6. Industry advocacy	4.4 ▼	4.56
7. Online engagement with visitors	4.4	N/A
8. Destination and product development	4.37 ▼	4.42
9. Broader economic development	4.31 ▲	4.23
10. Partnership development	4.26	N/A
11. Leisure sales and services	4.02 ▼	4.34
12. Meeting and convention sales	3.72 ▼	4.0
13. Traditional marketing channels	3.57	N/A
14. Convention services	3.18	N/A

Key Performance Indicators

There's been a lot of conversation in 2020 about how destination organizations need to redefine and expand why they exist. For the OrganizationNEXT 2 survey, we added new questions to explore how destination leaders were potentially expanding and/or shifting their key performance indicators.

There weren't a lot of surprises among the top three KPIs. Defining the overall "Economic impact of visitors" and "Total visitor spending" are the big data points every destination organization focuses on, and there's a plethora of new analytics tools promising to provide more holistic data sets. "Visitor satisfaction" is the third most important KPI, highlighting the evolution of how organizations are developing more comprehensive dashboards to track the quality of the destination experience.

However, the high rankings of "Engagement with digital platforms" and "Measured lift from digital marketing" – above "Total room nights" – is somewhat surprising.

Key Performance Indicator (ranked 1-5)	Q4 Score
1. Economic impact of visitors	4.7
2. Total visitor spending	4.54
3. Visitor satisfaction	4.51
4. Engagement with digital platforms	4.5
5. Measured lift from digital marketing	4.36
6. Total room nights	4.31
7. Average daily visitor spending	4.22
8. Local engagement with digital platforms	4.13
9. Total overall investment in sector	4.1
10. Resident sentiment	4.0
11. Measured lift generated by traditional marketing	3.8
12. Total value of investment in social procurement	3.78
13. Overall environmental impacts	3.66
14. Success of diversity programs	3.48
15. Sustainable Development Goals	3.47
16. Investment in certified sustainable tourism product	3.29
17. Total visitor spend on sustainable tourism product	3.2

Strategy Rankings

Community Building

The highest jump from the first OrganizationNEXT survey was "Strengthen strategic relationships with elected and appointed officials," moving up three positions in the rankings since summer 2020. The continued high ranking (#3) of "Promote the value of tourism to my community" underlines the increasing need for effective community advocacy more than ever.

Strategy (ranked 1-5)	Q4 Score	Change
1. Ensure my organization and the industry is at the table for recovery planning efforts	4.72	0
2. Strengthen strategic relationships with elected and appointed officials	4.57	▲3
3. Promote the value of tourism to my community	4.52	0
4. Ensure recovery plans examine long-term strategies for community and visitor economy	4.51	▲2
5. Work with stakeholders to reopen the visitor economy with clean and safe visitor experiences	4.42	▼3
6. Engage industry stakeholders to build unified protocols for reopening visitor economy	4.37	▼2
7. Expand the content being promoted by my organization to extend beyond traditional partners	4.3	▲2
8. Align more closely with the economic development organizations and private sector companies	4.27	▼1
9. Play a larger role in building and amplifying community pride	4.21	▼1
10. Expand advocacy role to ensure industry businesses and workers are valued and taken care of	4.2	0
11. Expand community collaboration in the use of online platforms to reach potential visitors	4.09	NEW
12. Expand outreach programs in our local community to broaden networks and include unlikely allies	4	0
13. Ensure my organization's policies on ethics and other practices to align with community values	3.89	▼2
14. Align visitor industry strategy with public and private sector sustainability/resilience strategies	3.87	NEW
15. Work with relevant and targeted stakeholders to address social sustainability	3.75	▼2
16. Improve how the organization collects and provides business intelligence and data to investors	3.72	NEW
17. Work with stakeholders to address social/environmental sustainability in business events	3.7	NEW
18. Play a larger role in delivering education and training materials to the industry	3.65	▼2
19. Work with relevant and targeted stakeholders to address economic sustainability issues	3.64	▼5
20. Work with relevant and targeted stakeholders to address environmental sustainability	3.62	▼2
21. Develop resident sentiment survey to guide recovery strategy and long-term planning	3.59	▼4
22. Work with health officials to develop health and cleanliness standards for the industry	3.55	▼7
23. Play a larger role in event creation to stimulate demand	3.35	▼4
24. Establish a social procurement program to support diverse communities	3.27	NEW

Customer Engagement

The highest prioritized strategies for customer engagement remained fairly consistent in the new OrganizationNEXT survey. We added "Improve how the destination organization collects/leverages visitor data and digital signals," which was ranked highly at 4.18 out of 5. This speaks to the ongoing evolution of customer segmentation and digital experience platforms that align visitor touch points across the entire consumer engagement lifecycle.

Strategy (ranked 1-5)	Q4 Score	Change
1. Promote and highlight nature, parks, and outdoor experiences	4.6	▲1
2. Evaluate target markets, and evolve marketing strategies to attract more resilient travelers	4.57	▼1
3. Monitor data signals and trends to inform recovery timing and messaging	4.49	▲1
4. Expand content and messaging filters to ensure appropriate tone	4.42	▲1
5. Develop messaging related to health and safety to reassure visitors	4.4	▼2
6. Collaborate with other industry organizations to expand audience reach	4.25	▲2
7. Expand marketing outreach and campaigns to target local audience	4.23	▼1
8. Repackage current content relevant to new audiences and demands	4.23	▼1
9. Improve how the destination organization collects/leverages visitor data and digital signals	4.18	NEW
10. Focus marketing strategies on generating earned media in lieu of paying for media exposure	4.17	▼1
11. Adapt destination imagery to incorporate visuals with fewer people/crowds	4.13	▲1
12. Develop a content strategy to showcase creative and innovative local makers and influencers	4.12	▲2
13. Reassess business events market and target new groups (e.g. smaller, regional)	4.03	▼2
14. Promote and highlight mindfulness and wellness experiences	4.02	▼1
15. Develop messaging to reinforce the community's values in the "new normal"	3.99	▼5
16. Encourage partners to provide live content online	3.9	NEW
17. Work with technology partners to expand capabilities to deliver hybrid meetings	3.75	0
18. Invest resources in building a library of virtual experiences to inspire future visitation	3.65	▼3
19. Utilize client input to inform recovery messaging and timing (e.g. Client Advisory Board)	3.61	▼3

Organization Sustainability

The most significant upward shifts in rankings relating to organization sustainability were: "Use lessons learned from remote working to examine office flexibilities and efficiencies" and "Assess organization structure to prioritize key roles and essential programs." Clearly, we can expect organizations to look and operate differently as the industry emerges out of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Strategy (ranked 1-5)	Q4 Score	Change
1. Work strategically with hotel partners to ensure industry recovery and resilience	4.44	0
2. Reassess organizational roles and activities to identify priorities and potential adjustments	4.25	▲1
3. Assess organization structure to prioritize key roles and essential programs	4.23	▲3
4. Identify potential reopening and recovery scenarios to guide strategy and priorities	4.22	▼2
5. Collaborate with other organizations to determine opportunities for shared resources	4.14	0
6. Use lessons learned from remote working to examine office flexibilities and efficiencies	4.13	▲6
7. Expand advocacy and education role to protect funding sources and relevance	4.12	▼3
8. Assess KPIs related to economic development (e.g. recovery, jobs, taxes)	4.11	▲1
9. Review organization mission, vision and values to guide organization through recovery	4.08	▲2
10. Assess KPIs related to visitor satisfaction	4.08	0
11. Assess reserve funding requirements and policies	4.07	▼4
12. Assess KPIs related to community and advocacy (e.g. resident satisfaction)	4.03	▲2
13. Pursue emergency government financial assistance funding	3.85	0
14. Assess KPIs related to sustainability (e.g. off-peak visitation, dispersal)	3.76	▲2
15. Pursue new private funding sources (e.g. partnerships, sponsorships, crowdfunding)	3.53	0
16. Bring back marketing and content development staff before other departments	3.3	NEW
17. Pursue new public funding sources (e.g. direct gov't allocation, new tax, capital recycling)	3.11	0
18. Pursue Tourism Recovery District (recovery focused tourism improvement districts)	2.88	0
19. Bring back research and data staff before other departments	2.68	NEW
20. Bring back furloughed leisure sales staff back before other departments	2.54	NEW
21. Bring back convention sales and services staff before other departments	2.54	NEW
22. Bring back financial and HR staff before other departments	2.54	NEW
23. Bring back partnership and programs staff before other departments	2.53	NEW
24. Bring back visitor services staff before other departments	2.46	NEW

How Destination Organizations are Addressing Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in 2021

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

The below strategies define how destination organizations are expanding their focus on improving equity, diversity and inclusion in their organizations and communities. These strategies are new for this second OrganizationNEXT report, and we expect to expand on them moving forward. The goal is that this data will help provide a benchmark for driving systemic change across our industry.

The first 12 strategies were all ranked higher than 4 out of 5, emphasizing how destination leaders are increasingly in agreement about the need for greater equity in their organizations and operations to provide more opportunities for more people in our industry and communities.

Strategy (ranked 1-5)	Score
1. Foster a welcoming environment among local businesses that is inclusive and inviting for visitors to create a sense of belonging and connectedness to the local community	4.44
2. Be proactive about reviewing Board of Directors to ensure it is as diverse as possible	4.25
3. Develop content to promote the diversity, equity and inclusion among local businesses	4.23
4. Support diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives beyond hospitality and tourism	4.22
5. At the executive level, actively develop platforms to improve diversity, equity and inclusion	4.14
6. Collaborate with partners to support diversity, equity and inclusion in civic/private leadership	4.13
7. Ensure staff at all levels accurately represent the diversity of the destination	4.12
8. Actively understand and promote to all underserved audiences	4.11
9. Develop training programs to educate staff at all levels about diversity, equity and inclusion	4.08
10. Develop in-destination programming to promote the diversity of local business entrepreneurs	4.08
11. Actively solicit/invest in research relating to the diverse traveler to develop messaging	4.07
12. Develop/benchmark metrics to track diversity, equity and inclusion programmatic progress	4.03
13. Create a Community Advocacy initiative to enhance local diversity, equity and inclusion	3.85
14. Collaborate with educational institutions to establish diversity, equity and inclusion programs	3.76
15. Establish a Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Advisory Council	3.53
16. Collaborate with educational institutions to establish scholarships	3.3

Leading by Example

On June 11, 2020, the U.S. Travel Association hosted a seminal webinar: **"Leading by Example: Lessons in Race and Racism."** That was followed a couple weeks later on June 26 with another webinar: **"Lessons in Race and Racism: A Continued Discussion."**

Both were hosted by Elliott Ferguson, president and CEO of Destination DC, and the present Chair of the U.S. Travel Association. Those two conversations are extraordinary based on the frankness of the dialogue during the height of the Black Lives Matter protests in America. They also provide an excellent starting point for beginning to understand some of the many challenges related to race in the tourism, hospitality and event industries.

The panelists included:

- Ernest Wooden Jr., past-President & CEO, Los Angeles Tourism & Convention Board
- Melvin Tennant, President & CEO, Meet Minneapolis
- Al Hutchinson, President & CEO, Visit Baltimore
- Monica Smith, President & CEO, Southeast Tourism Society
- Michelle Mason, President & CEO, Association Forum
- Brandon Meyers, Chief Revenue Officer, ADARA

"We need to be comfortable having uncomfortable conversations," said Ferguson. "This is not simply an issue of diversity and inclusion. There need to be discussions about slavery and Jim Crow, and how these are not issues of the past, but issues that have echoed through the centuries and affect us today. Racism is systemic, and we all have a role to play in discussing its origins. This is a learning and growth opportunity."

Ferguson emphasized that industry people are responding to the heightened conversation around diversity, equity and inclusion in different ways.

"There are four types of people listening to the discussion," he said. "Some are concerned. Some

don't know what to say. Some are scared. And some, unfortunately, won't seriously attempt to understand the issues their Black colleagues face. But these are discussions we need to have, and then follow with action, if we are to effect real change in our country."

When the panelists were asked what advice they would give to the industry moving forward, Wooden stated that 2020 is a "watershed moment" to advance race relations.

"This is hard what we're trying to do; this is hard work," he said. "If I had to boil it down to one thing, I would advise all of us to start with the concept, and this is a hard concept to really get: Diversity strengthens organizations. It's accretive to profits. Having diverse points of view on the management team is going to make you a better operation."

An Awakening

A lot has happened since the U.S. Travel conversations. Destinations International, for example, has produced a comprehensive series of thought leadership and an actionable strategic framework to help improve diversity, equity and inclusion within destination organizations.

First, the organization published the **"Board Diversity for Destination Organizations"** paper this fall, outlining the need for Boards of Directors to be more representative of the communities where they operate.

The research states that 65% of destination organization CEOs are dissatisfied with the ethnic diversity of their Boards. As well, LGBTQ, physically handicapped, and youth leaders are also under-represented. With such homogeneous boards, it is difficult for destination organizations to validate their role as an advocate for diversity, equity and inclusion in their region.

In October, the National Blacks in Travel and Tourism Collaborative (BTT) and Destinations International hosted

a webinar: **"Incorporating an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy to Enhance Organization Culture."**

The conversation highlighted the BTT's educational materials for destination organizations, including the **DEI Deep Dive Masterclass Series**, which provides training in cultural diversity, engaging multicultural audiences, and inclusive leadership.

"It is critical for CEOs and executive leaders in our industry to embrace and implement equity, diversity and inclusion strategies to drive any vision for change," said Melissa Cherry, COO at Destinations International. "Without that commitment, we will fail. A diverse and inclusive workplace is central to our industry's ability to attract, develop, and retain the talent it needs to remain competitive, drive innovation and maintain relevancy."

Cherry is incorporating non-tourism industry insight into Destination International's growing body of research. One example is McKinsey's 3-part **"Diversity Wins: Why Inclusion Matters"** series defining the relationship between diversity and performance. The last installment in the series in May 2020 states:

"Our 2019 analysis finds that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity on executive teams were 25% more likely to have above-average profitability than companies in the fourth quartile — up from 21% in 2017 and 15% in 2014.... In the case of ethnic and cultural diversity, our business-case findings are equally compelling. In 2019, top-quartile companies outperformed those in the fourth one by 36% in profitability, slightly up from 33% in 2017 and 35% in 2014. As we have previously found, the likelihood of outperformance continues to be higher for diversity in ethnicity than for gender."

Building on that from a consumer perspective, MMGY Global published new research in November. **"The Black Traveler: Insights, Opportunities & Priorities"** paper states that Black U.S. leisure travelers spent \$109.4 billion on travel in 2019. This spend was generated by 458.2 million Black U.S. traveler stays, which represents 13.1% of the U.S. leisure travel market.

"We have long suspected the amount that U.S. Black travelers spend on leisure travel was undervalued," said Martinique Lewis, president of Black Travel Alliance. "These findings of the U.S. market will become our calling

card to destination management organizations and travel brands as we work to increase Black representation at all levels of the travel industry."

Lastly, at the Destinations International CEO Summit in December, the organization launched the **"2020 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Study on Destination Organizations."** The research provides the most indepth exploration to date of how destination organizations are evolving in relation to addressing EDI.

One takeaway highlighted how younger generations value equity, diversity and inclusion. This is a critical understanding for attracting new leaders to destination management and marketing. The report reads:

"Studies on EDI show that diversity is particularly important to Generation Y. There is an opportunity for training and education for entry and midlevel employees that would have a long-term impact to implement EDI practices and be deliberate on succession planning to grow diverse candidates in executive roles and positions. Additionally, sentiment reveals that there is a need to establish best practices for this group to have a voice to foster a culture of inclusion and openness to build a sense of community within organizations."

Action Steps for CEOs

Change starts at the top. For destination organizations to be more diverse, equitable and inclusive, CEOs must personally commit to driving real change.

"We need to look at how we educate CEOs, how we educate our staff, and how we educate our Boards and partners," said Ferguson. "How do we ensure in five years we're not just hitting the reset button, again? There's nothing worse than a CEO saying, 'Yes, this is all absolutely right, but now I'm going to hire someone to address that.' We can't just outsource this to a third party. There has to be ownership at the CEO level. They have to take responsibility."

Timothy Bush, Chief Tourism Development Officer at OneSpartanburg Inc. in South Carolina, also emphasized the need for chief executives to own this conversation in order to shift organizational culture effectively.

"Ultimately, our Boards of Directors won't support the required actions to increase diversity, equity and inclusion internally without the CEO personally invested in the purpose," said Bush.

He added that all Board members should be educated about how destination organizations are developing EDI initiatives in 2020.

Existing Board members, Bush explains, have a responsibility to be current with how the Black Lives Matter protests have elevated racial equity as a core priority for the industry. He also suggests that new Board members should be required to complete their education before their first official meeting.

Bush acknowledges that Board governance is just a start, and there's a long road ahead, especially with everyone focused on the recovery from Covid-19.

"Diversity, equity and inclusion makes us better organizations because it fosters a culture that empowers people," he said. "People feel empowered because they feel safe, and we need that in our organizations today.... This goes deeper than bringing more Black people onto the Board, or anyone else. It's about making a statement to the community that diversity is important. As an organization, we have a responsibility to speak to a larger community and create a hand-up for everyone in that community."

For CEOs who feel their Board isn't especially well constituted to embrace the need for proactively addressing racial equity, Bush suggests that CEOs can create executive committees "who can speak to the disconnect." He says the CEO and such committees can champion specific initiatives that will have a positive impact in their communities, while also defining how those initiatives make the destination more competitive. This brings stakeholders together, some of whom will have influence with the Board.

"We need to ask our Boards and membership to be more accountable, and we need to think big picture," said Bush. "This is how we build better communities. We can't reach every CEO everywhere, and we realize the challenges before us, but I've become disenfranchised with silence. We can't just keep kicking the can down the road."



DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION STATEMENT

In a destination that is an extraordinary mosaic of cultures, the Augusta Convention and Visitors Bureau recognizes and advocates the importance of creating an environment where all people feel welcome and included. We will always uphold the fundamental beliefs of respect, equity, inclusion, collaboration, creative freedom and hospitality to all.

As a destination marketing organization that embraces visitors from across the globe, we believe in equal and fair treatment for everyone, regardless of ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, political viewpoint, socioeconomic background, or religious belief.

From old to young, black to white, artsy to techy, the fabric of our community is wonderfully designed. We take great pride in knowing that our destination creates choice and instills confidence in all people, empowering them to seek and share new experiences, while making this an ideal place to live, work and visit.

Building a Better Organization

The Augusta Convention & Visitors Bureau added a Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Statement this year in its Corporate Mission, but President and CEO Bennish Brown didn't immediately release it. Instead, he said, "First we needed to identify how to join other organizations in the community to see how we could build on that, learn from each other, and hold each other accountable."

Brown says he's fortunate that his team and Board represent the diversity of the destination. That said, there's work to be done to improve how the organization continues to advocate for diversity, equity and inclusion in all industries across the destination.

As an example, Brown has been examining the level of diversity among the CVB's vendors. He's learned that his organization "can be much more intentional" about expanding community outreach to work with a broader spectrum of contracted partners, but he and his team first need to do more to learn about who's actually working in the city. Brown's motivation is that diversity drives destination performance.

"Sure, it's the right thing to do, but we also can't exclude how diversity contributes to the bottom line for our destination overall," Brown explained. "We need to continue speaking with the Board and our community about how this isn't just a trend, or how we need to hop on the bandwagon. We need to continue to put diversity into action. I'm also looking at, how do I tap into my Board members who work in diverse companies? What are the opportunities there to expand on what we're doing? A Board wants to be engaged, and I'm now having conversations with them I've never had before."

Tourism, hospitality and association leaders are also having new conversations with potential hires for C-level positions and potential Board member applicants. One example of that is ensuring that executive search committees are more diverse to foster a more enabling environment for equity, diversity and inclusion.

"George Floyd was a turning point," said Julie Coker, president and CEO of the San Diego Tourism Authority. She explained, for example, how the American Society of Association Executives is being "very intentional about its search committee being diverse" as it evaluates CEO candidates in the coming months.

Also, Coker adds, "Meeting Professionals International now has a Board member application that asks for experience driving diversity and inclusion, and asks directly, what did the person specifically contribute to? Actions have meaning. There's much more meat on the bone now when organizations are searching for new leaders and potential Board members."

Moving Forward

Clearly, one of the key priorities looking ahead for destination organizations is how to better define and communicate that equity, diversity and inclusion impacts performance. Destination International's new research and EDI platform is helping lead that effort, but this requires a whole-of-industry approach.

From her early career days at Hyatt Hotels, Coker explained that Hyatt had a Diversity Council, and the head of the Council reported directly to the CEO.

"Part of the Council's goals was identifying the relationship between diversity, ROI and better business outcomes," Coker said. "What gets measured gets done. And we found that the hotels with more diverse staffs had better metrics related to customer service, profitability, and employee satisfaction."

Also, Coker, Brown, Bush and Ferguson all suggested that more white people and young people need to engage more intentionally in conversations about diversity, equity and inclusion across the industry.

"We need to get more white men and women involved in diversity, equity and inclusion," said Ferguson. "White engagement is extremely important, and that has to happen at all levels in our organizations, because the conversations are often different at each level. We also need to hear from our young leaders and how they're thinking about Black Lives Matter and systemic racism, because they're leading the change in a lot of ways."

Coker adds that organizations must have an environment where people feel safe to challenge the status quo.

"This isn't taboo anymore," she explained. "If you're a white person on an all-white Board, you need to ask the question: 'Are we doing the best we can?'"

Another senior industry executive interviewed for this report stated: "If white people don't rally around this, change won't happen."

The bottom line is that diversity has always been the wellspring of creativity, innovation and progress in any sector.

"Diversity strengthens organizations, but many business leaders don't prioritize diversity in the workplace as an asset," said Ferguson. "The reality is our organizations are stronger, more effective and more profitable when we have people thinking about things differently."

For more information, visit:

- ustravel.org/webinar/leading-example-lessons-race-and-racism
- destinationsinternational.org/equity-diversity-inclusion

OrganizationNEXT Advisory Panel

Adam Sacks

President, Tourism Economics

Annette Rummel

President & CEO, Great Lakes Bay Regional CVB

Bennish Brown

President & CEO, Augusta CVB

Bettina Reventlow-Mourier

Deputy Convention Director,
Wonderful Copenhagen

Cassandra McCauley

Executive Director, Stakeholder Engagement &
Destination Development, Tourism Calgary

Catherine Callary

VP Destination Development, Ottawa Tourism

Craig Davis

President & CEO, VisitDallas

Dasha Runyan

VP Sales, Richmond Region Tourism

David Gilbert

President & CEO, Destination Cleveland

Deb Archer

President & CEO, Destination Madison

Don Welsh

President & CEO, Destinations International

Elliot Ferguson

President & CEO, Destination DC

Gabriel Seder

Senior Director, Advocacy Policy,
Destinations International

Gregg Talley

President & CEO, Talley Management Group

Gwendal Castellan

Manager, Sustainable Destination Development,
Tourism Vancouver

Hannah Belsito

VP, Destination Development, Destination Cleveland

Jack Johnson

Chief Advocacy Officer, Destinations International

Jay Burress

President & CEO, Visit Anaheim

Jeff Miller

President & CEO, Travel Portland

John Groh

President & CEO, Rockford Area CVB

John Lambeth

President & CEO, Civitas

Julie Coker, President & CEO

San Diego Tourism Authority

Kensuke Sakurai

Director of Destination Development & Strategic
Tourism Initiatives, Akita Inu Tourism, Japan

Leslie Bruce

President & CEO, Banff & Lake Louise Tourism

Martha Sheridan

President & CEO, Greater Boston CVB

Mary Kay Vrba

President & CEO, Dutchess Tourism

Maura Gast

Executive Director, Visit Irving

Maureen Haley

Director of Strategic Tourism Initiatives, Visit Houston

Melissa Cherry

Chief Operating Officer, Destinations International

Melissa Riley

VP Convention Sales & Services, Destination DC

Minto Schneider

President & CEO, Explore Waterloo Region

Mitch Whitten

Executive VP, Visit Fort Worth

Nancy Small

CEO, Tourism Richmond

Paul Nursey

CEO, Destination Greater Victoria

Rachel Benedick

EVP Sales & Services, Visit Denver

Richard Reasons

President, Simpleview

Scott White

President & CEO, Greater Palm Springs CVB

Shelly Green

Past President, Discover Durham

Tammy Blount-Canavan

Executive VP, FiredUp Culture

Timothy Bush

Chief Tourism Development Officer, OneSpartanburg Inc.

Victoria Clarke

Executive Director, Discover Saint John

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