

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM BEST PRACTICES FOR BUSINESSES: A GUIDE

 Indicates Outbound Link

PROGRAM INTRODUCTION

Outdoor NC, as an extension of Visit NC, is advancing a responsible travel ethos throughout the state by encouraging visitors to our outdoor places and downtown spaces to not only experience North Carolina, but to embrace it. Outdoor NC is inviting visitors, residents, businesses, and destination organizations to Join the Outdoor NC Movement and learn about ways to effectively incorporate sustainability into day-to-day business operations.

This guide is designed to provide an overview of how to get started, including where to get information, resources, and additional learning. Sustainability efforts should be seen as operations that evolve and improve over time. If you're not sure where to start, or if you need to ramp up your efforts, this guide will get you moving in the right direction. In addition to helping your business save money, there are many benefits to improving your sustainability efforts, especially by reducing resource consumption and lessening negative impacts on the environment.

STEPS TO SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS OPERATIONS

Why is sustainable tourism important? Travelers want it, destinations need it, and it's good for business. Here are some actions to ramp up your operations:

MAKE A COMMITMENT

1

- Make sustainability a core part of your business strategy.
- Create and implement a business action plan that includes how to operationalize sustainability through green teams, policies, engagement, monitoring, and communications.

PRIORITIZE ACTIONS

2

- Assign someone with responsibility for the delivery of sustainability procedures in the business.
- Define environmental and social priorities and identify short-term goals for quick wins, as well as longer-term targets.

DEVELOP POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

3

- Organize sustainability through policies and procedures for more efficient operations.
- Ensure DEI policies and programming are part of business operations.
- Create sustainable supply chain policies that consider local sourcing and purchasing of environmentally friendly goods where possible.

ENGAGE WITH STAKEHOLDERS

4

- Enlist and train employees in sustainability operations.
- Be a good neighbor and participate in local programs and campaigns to improve your community.
- Look at ways to support natural and cultural heritage conservation.

REDUCE AND MONITOR

5

- Reduce your environmental footprint.
- Track and measure your environmental operations including chemical use, recycling diversion, water consumption, energy use, and emissions.

COMMUNICATE PROGRESS

6

- Communicate your sustainability success stories through marketing and communications.
- Engage staff, visitors, and residents to be stewards and provide incentives for their active participation.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM BEST PRACTICES RESOURCES & TOOLKITS

NC SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS TOOLS



outdoornc.com 

Outdoor NC is a movement that is committed to promoting stewardship throughout North Carolina, inspiring everyone to not only experience the outdoors, but embrace and protect it as well. It provides a wide variety of resources which educate outdoor adventurers on how they can recreate responsibly, respectfully, and safely. These resources include support of accessible outdoor adventure as well as a unique set of seven Outdoor NC Leave No Trace principles to support and educate outdoor enthusiasts. We actively encourage everyone to join our collective movement to protect our beloved, shared outdoor spaces.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM LEARNING RESOURCES

West Virginia University Sustainable Tourism Webinars

West Virginia University Extension has developed the Sustainable Rural Tourism webinar series. The series covers the basics needed to understand and implement sustainable tourism development. Industry speakers help to illustrate key concepts and draw on examples from across the state while engaging participants in interactive discussions.

[view webinars](#) 

The Long Run Sustainability Courses for Small Businesses

Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises are particularly susceptible to inaction since time and resources are so limited. Many of these businesses fall victim to 'greenhushing' (under-communicating sustainability initiatives) for fear of 'greenwashing' (over-claiming sustainability initiatives). Others simply don't know where to start. Yet, smaller businesses – whether tour operators or accommodations – play a critical part in driving change. To help businesses along the way, The Long Run has developed the following small business resources:

Strategic Sustainability Planning

to help businesses embed a sustainable mission and vision throughout operations.

Resource Efficiency

to help businesses make small, effective changes that save money and reduce negative environmental impact.

GLOBAL INDUSTRY ORGANIZATIONS & RESOURCES

Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)

The GSTC is a global initiative dedicated to establishing and managing global standards for sustainable tourism within destinations and business operations. The GSTC Criteria provides the internationally accepted set of standards that tourism businesses should aspire to reach to protect and sustain the world's natural and cultural resources.

[visit GSTC website](#) 

Future of Tourism Coalition (FoTC)

The Future of Tourism Coalition is a collaborative effort to chart a new, more sustainable direction for tourism and shift the status quo. The Coalition is comprised of six non-governmental organizations: Center for Responsible Travel (CREST), Destination Stewardship Center, Green Destinations, Sustainable Travel International, Tourism Cares, and the Travel Foundation, with the guidance of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC).

[visit FoTC website](#) 

Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) Sustainability Center

The Adventure Travel Trade Association is the largest global network of adventure travel leaders, with a mission to empower the global travel community to protect natural and cultural capital while creating economic value that benefits both trade members and destinations. Resources include educational webinars, tour operator training courses, and toolkits.

[visit ATTA website](#) 

INDUSTRY OPERATIONS

US Green Building Council (LEED)

LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) is the world's most widely used green building rating system. LEED certification provides a framework for healthy, highly efficient, and cost-saving green buildings, which offer environmental, social, and governance benefits.

[visit LEED website](#) 

Energy Star

Energy Star is a voluntary partnership between the US Department of Energy, the EPA, product manufacturers, local utilities, and retailers. Partners help promote efficient products by labeling them with the Energy Star logo and educating consumers about the benefits of energy efficiency.

[Energy Star Tips for Small Businesses](#) 

[Energy Star Tips for Lodging](#) 

INDUSTRY OPERATIONS [CONTINUED]

American Hotel & Lodging Association (Sustainability)

As hotels work toward forward-thinking goals in reducing environmental harms, building and operating sustainable hotels, and sourcing sustainable goods and materials, AHLA aims to communicate, educate, and advocate on behalf of the lodging industries' various sustainability efforts. With the help of AHLA's Sustainability Committee, which is comprised of senior subject matter experts from major brands, owners, and management companies, AHLA provides insights and resources for their four main pillars of focus: energy efficiency, water conservation, waste reduction, and responsible sourcing.

[American Hotel & Lodging Association Sustainability Tips](#) 

EcoBnB

This blog on sustainability offers vacation rental owners a summary guide to introduce sustainable travel to renters while also implementing sustainability practices such as using energy-efficient light bulbs, conserving water, providing composting facilities, and offering guests sustainable transportation modes.

[view blog post](#) 

Green Restaurant Association

The Green Restaurant Association is a leading voice encouraging restaurants to green their operations using transparent, science-based certification standards. With its turnkey certification system, the GRA has made it accessible for thousands of restaurants to become more environmentally sustainable in Energy, Water, Waste, Food, Chemicals, Disposables, & Building.

[visit Green Restaurant Association website](#) 

MPI Sustainability Tools for Meetings and Events

Meeting Professionals International (MPI) provides innovative and relevant education, networking opportunities and business exchanges, and acts as a prominent voice for the promotion and growth of the industry. MPI provides a series of guides and toolkits for meeting and event planners including a guide on social and environmental impacts, measurement tools, industry trends, and sustainability news.

[MPI sustainability resources](#) 

ASSESSMENTS & CERTIFICATIONS

The Good Travel Seal

The Good Travel Seal is a sustainability management program offered by Green Destinations for all tourism and travel-related businesses and facilities, designed to be feasible and affordable, especially for Small and medium enterprises. The Good Travel Seal program evaluates and certifies sustainable practices and provides the necessary support and guidance to help businesses implement effective strategies. All types of companies, from large to very small, are welcome, including hotels, conference centers, B&Bs, campsites, restaurants, activity providers, shops, visitor centers, local DMOs, etc.

visit [The Good Travel Seal website](#) 

Certified B Corporation

B Corp Certification is a designation that a business is meeting high standards of verified performance, accountability, and transparency on factors from employee benefits and charitable giving to supply chain practices and input materials. As leaders in the movement for economic systems change, B Corps reap remarkable benefits. They build trust with consumers, communities, and suppliers; attract and retain employees; and draw mission-aligned investors. B Corps are by definition also focused on continuous improvement, leading to their long-term resiliency.

visit [Certified B Corporation website](#) 

STAY IN THE KNOW

[NC State University College of Natural Resources Sustainable Tourism Blog](#) 

[NC State Tourism Extension News](#) 

[Skift \(industry news and trend reports\)](#) 

[Travel Daily News \(industry news\)](#) 

[Green Lodging News](#) 

[Speaking of Travel \(North Carolina tourism perspectives\)](#) 

[The Turndown Travel Podcast \(specifically for hoteliers\)](#) 

[Destination Marketing Podcast \(provides insights into sustainable tourism marketing\)](#) 

[The Greenpath Podcast \(sustainability for vacation rental owners\)](#) 