

A DESTINATION PROMOTION COMMUNITY INDEX

WRITTEN BY DESTINATIONS INTERNATIONAL ADVOCACY TEAM

INTRODUCTION

Destination organizations are called upon in this next normal era to elevate their work to be seen as a valued investment in their communities. A common good that our society deems necessary to help advance our communities' well-being. Defined as such, a community shared value, which connects supporting common goods as a greater good. Examples of such common goods are understanding to keep us healthy we need clean water, to be educated we need teachers, and to feel safe we need first responders. Destination promotion must similarly stand amongst these other common goods as a necessity for one's own community to thrive and compete on attention at the world stage.

Each of these common goods stands behind a series of metrics or indicators that help inform the community of not only its purpose, but also how well the common good performed and how it benefited the community. Subsequently, indicators can help develop an index of understanding and value between the investment of these common goods

EXAMPLES

Every common good a community deems necessary stands on top of several indicators or metrics for the community to easily understand and value the performance of said good. Allowing anyone in the community to value the common good and its benefactors.

- **Example 1:** Graduation rate in relation to education.
- **Example 2:** Credit rating in relation to finance.
- **Example 3:** Drinking water quality in relation to public works.

and their performance. To be understood in the community, it is critical to identify clear and powerful community-facing measurements to highlight how a common good is filling the community need and contributing to the community's well-being. While these measurements, known as "community indicators," are different from most current industry measurements that we use, they are critical to being seen as a community shared value.

OUR DILEMMA

For destination organizations, no such single metric or indicator exists, albeit one that helps the community understand what we do and how well we do it. Certainly, we as a sector are privileged to have many metrics and qualitative analysis at our disposal, but much of these are only industry specific and seldom resonate outside of it.

We've had a lot of discussions with our destination organization about ROI and industry standards but we don't understand them. One of the key issues is our destination organization has this absolute belief in those industry standards and we can't wrap our arms around it.

A city manager speaking to a city council meeting about their local destination organization, 2018

Post-9/11, destination organizations have been poised with greater and greater access to data and information around the visitor economy and economic development metrics but have failed to present them in a meaningful manner to win the argument and need for continued investment in destination promotion. This is not due to quality or lack of quantity of our sectors' metrics but to misjudging how our community should care about our work. Despite the collective efforts of destination organizations, every year a growing number continue to be under government, media or community attack. These attacks are becoming worse and more frequent, and too often we are our worst enemy. After a great deal of research,

Destinations International has concluded that destination organizations must become one of their community's shared values in a way that explains the value of destination promotion and connects that value and the organization to the residents of the community. We need a new approach for how we showcase destination promotion to our community, hence the need for a destination promotion community index.

A NEW APPROACH

For a destination promotion community index to work, it is necessary to revisit how other common goods resonate and provide measurements of success for its community to value. The Destinations International advocacy team, through countless hours spent studying how politicians and other key community stakeholders understand community indicators, determined that for our own community index to be understood and accepted by the community, it must adhere to three questions:

- 1. What does a destination organization do?**
- 2. How well did the destination organization do it?**
- 3. Are the residents of the community better off?**

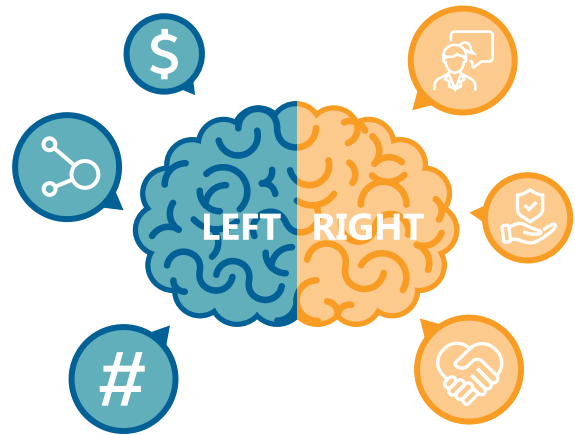
In addition, our index would need to draw upon multiple indicators that create a multi-dimensional measurement(s) that feed into our overall index for our sector. In essence, creating a three-dimensional vantage point of work, worth, and values. To test our approach, we engaged our industry think tank, the Destinations International Foundation to assemble a group of industry thought leaders at the 2022 annual convention and provide answers to our three questions.

INCUBATING THE IDEA AND PRODUCING THE RESULTS

The benefit of incubating the concept through the Destinations International Foundation was the ability to harness the collective of both industry veterans and the next generation of leaders through the 30 Under 30 program in the same space and time. Over the course of the 2022 annual convention, our industry think tank provided us intel and insights into how each of the three questions should be categorized and thought of its relation to our respective communities. Much of this conversation brought us back to why, we as sector measure ourselves with ROI and that is this: ROI is not an argument for supporting destination promotion. It is a measurement of whether you are doing your job once the decision to support destination promotion has been made. From that, it also provides a timeline of when should ROI and measurements be produced, and that is only after the needs surrounding the solution and who it is helping, in relation to a community and a destination organization, have already been answered. Thereafter, any discussions of measurements and ROI can be had to provide continuous feedback as to how and why your destination organization exists.

“ROI is not an argument for supporting destination promotion. It is a measurement of whether you are doing your job once the decision to support destination promotion has been made.”

Destinations International, 2023



LEFT AND RIGHT BRAIN INDICATORS

Our sector has been a beneficiary of the data industrialization complex that has occurred over the last two decades. We have been provided with an increasing number of logical metrics that can at times speak to our work in quantifiable ways that we can further disseminate to the nth degree. It has been one of our achievements in being able to speak to the adage of what gets measured, gets done. Pointed out on behalf of our 30 Under 30's in our Foundation Challenge, is we have been applying a left-brain approach towards our work for much of this time, leaning on metrics that are linear, sequencing, and rooted in math and logic. This is not inherently bad, until it is taken to a point where we have nothing to show for the other side of our work, the one that speaks to the right side of our brain. This has been the fundamental gap in our communities understanding of what we do, because we have only been speaking to one side of the brain, the left. Thus, for a community to understand destination promotion through indicators or an index, it would have to be presented in a manner that spoke to both left and right brain attributes. To make up for the right brain which is associated with our intuition, rhythm, emotional, and artistic side.

When articulating things of need, we tend to better value and understand them when they cater to both sides of our brain, essentially a ‘whole-brain’ approach. Two examples that were shared by the 30 Under 30 participants were how we measure music and food. Music, from the left can be described in theory, notes, bars, tempo, and beats, as well as its ROI in terms of records sold, streamed, or placement on the charts. However, from the right, it can also be felt through our emotions, senses, and even placement of time of when it was heard. Similarly, food can be measured in macros, caloric intake, and fuel, as well as the scientific endeavor of its effect on our health. Yet, it’s also resonating with our culture, personality, and sense of family or traditions. For destination promotion to answer our three questions, it must be presented in a way that appeals to both the left and right parts of the brain.

LEFT BRAIN INDICATORS

For many, this is our most used and exercised way of describing our work into measurements. Logic-based ROI is a foundational element to everything we do but it should not overwhelm the way we describe all that we do. Since they are a requirement into developing part of a holistic picture of the work we do, below is a suggested categorized list of indicators than lean left. Since every community is unique, it allows for each destination organization to showcase its unique indicators your community cares about. Consider these as more of a guidepost than turn-by-turn directions.

1: Economic Development

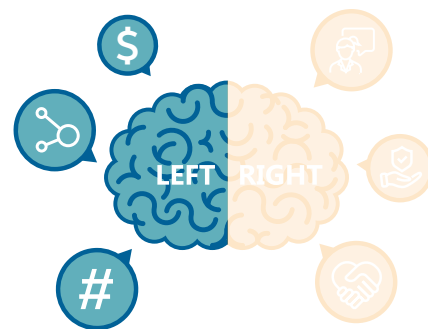
i.e. \$ of Tax Revenue, % of Employment Rate, # of New Jobs Created, Household Wealth, new construction related to hospitality.

2: Talent Acquisition

i.e. # of New Residents, # of New Students Enrolled (high school and local academia), % of offer acceptance rates, employee retention rates.

3: Quality of Place

i.e. # of New Local Business Licenses, # of New Home Sales, # of New Types of Local Businesses, Rental vacancy rate, # of destination products developed.



RIGHT BRAIN INDICATORS

Where we as a sector have struggled at times is to articulate our work and measurement beyond an ROI statement. To provide assurances to your community that destination promotion is important without having to corroborate it back to our relationship with GDP. This is where the right brain thrives, in placing the important and essential idea of destination promotion amongst our intuition and emotions and sense of belonging. Consider the following as a suggested thematic set of indicators that complement the logical side of the work we do.

1: Sentiment

i.e. Resident, Visitor, Business.

2: Perception

i.e. Safety & Security, Sense of belonging to local community, Brand awareness, Authenticity, Satisfaction of local workers.

3: Quality of Life

i.e. Prosperity, Environmental, Accessibility, Sustainable destination development, Population growth, Stakeholder collaborations.



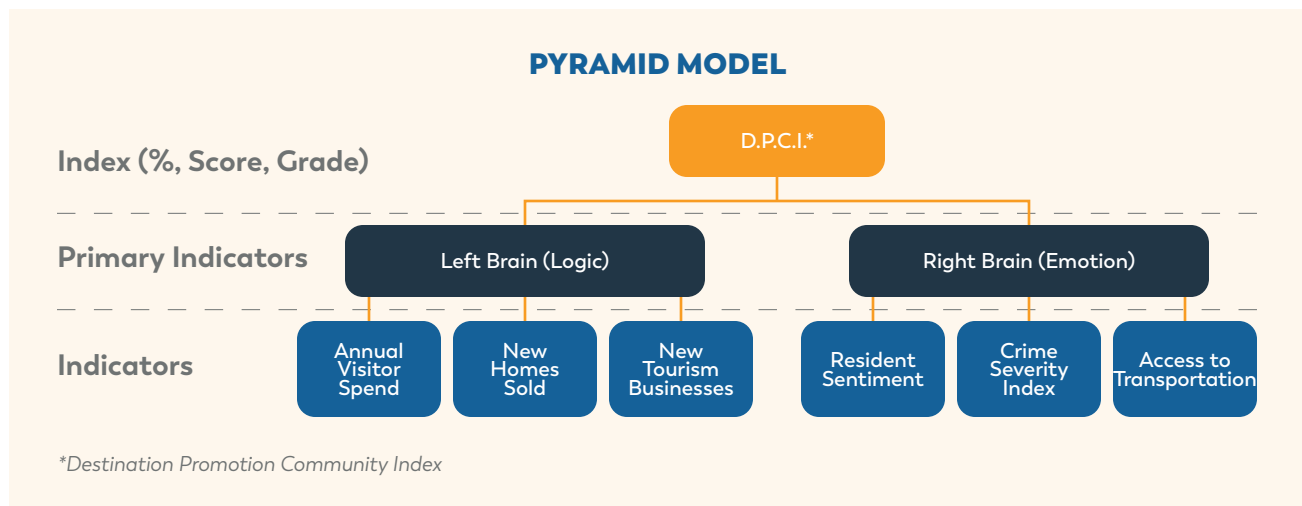
DEVELOPING YOUR PROMOTION COMMUNITY INDEX

With the above indicators as suggested themes or buckets to pull for your own index, these then can now be used to provide a balanced ROI or investment story for your destination. Your goal is to try and paint a picture of how many of your indicators support or provide a schematic to the importance of destination promotion. Although we appreciate well thought out graphs or diagrams, our stakeholders might appreciate understanding how your indicators

feed up into the vibrancy of a well-positioned community brand. A similar example to draw upon is when you look to see the financial health of your state/province or region, a credit rating is assigned. The rating itself is a measurement grade but that grade is constituted by several micro indications that feed the macro index of a rating (FFF to AAA). When you visit the doctor, they provide you an outline of your health through a series of indicators between weight, blood analysis, lifestyle choices, and demographics. All which lead upwards to evaluating if the choices and activities you are engaging in help illustrate being healthy or not.

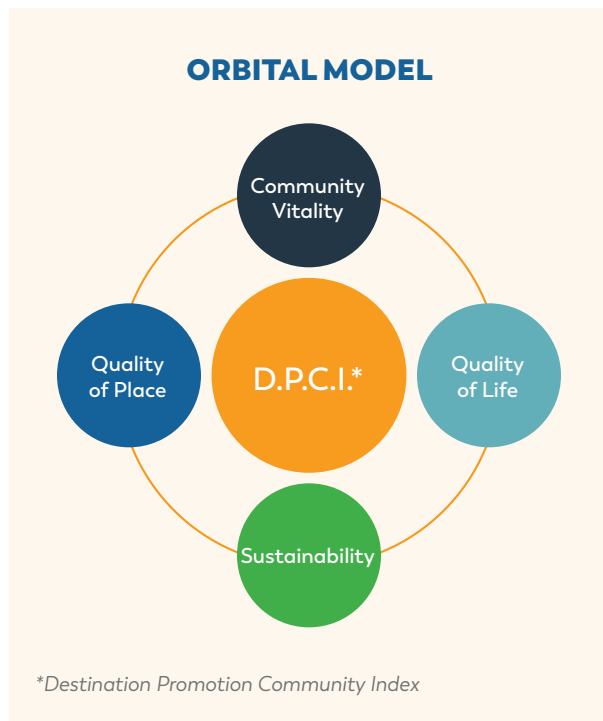
We should use a similar strategy in now displaying our work, made up of left and right brain indicators that have an upwards trajectory of the work of destination promotion.

One variant of this is displaying your work as a **pyramid**, with your indicators flowing upwards to constitute the index like the example seen below. This provides a sense of weight or importance as each indicator can be shown carrying its significance amongst the spectrum of other indicators



within. This type of design would work well within an annual report, stakeholder meeting, or webpage along with your other transparency related materials.

Another iteration of this is in an **'orbital' model** where your indicators surround or encompass your desired index. Each indicator carries the same weight and inertia around your community's destination promotion and could be built adjacent to similar displays of other common goods. Illustrating how destination promotion should be considered alongside essential elements such as clean water, an education system, or commerce and infrastructure. This model can be seen below.



IF WE SAY TOURISM BUILDS COMMUNITY, WE MUST PROVE IT.

For destination organizations, our work is essential for improved community vitality. The success of our work helps show investment into our communities with economic, social, and cultural significances. The public

argument for why we exist has never been needed greater and measuring the job of destination promotion is where we need to shift our focus. To be seen as a community shared value, our community must know what we do, how well we do it, and why they are better off because of what we do. When we value things, truly value them, we come to appreciate them for how they might appeal to both our logical and storied sense of self. The ability to tell the story and carry the emotion but provide data and truth give it air cover and support to win the argument. We must task destination organizations to now present their work with how they create quality of place that can influence quality of life. Measurements are important, and we must continue to supply our indicators to continually validate why destination promotion is essential. An educated community who feels confidence in what the destination organization is doing and how they are doing it will continually support and value destination promotion as a necessity that they cannot be without.