



DESTINATIONS
INTERNATIONAL
SOCIAL INCLUSION

INDUSTRY BRIEF

Addressing the Importance of Workforce Development and Retention in the Travel Industry

With the support of



DESTINATIONS
INTERNATIONAL
FOUNDATION

INTRODUCTION

Workforce development is a critical issue affecting the travel, tourism and hospitality industries. Embracing a variety of perspectives in the workplace enables destinations to connect with and appeal to travelers of all abilities and backgrounds, ultimately enhancing destination promotion efforts. These workplaces create lasting community impact by representing the varied perspectives and experiences of their residents. Further, they can experience greater productivity and innovation, translating to positive business outcomes.

While the core principles of social inclusion are universal, we understand the need to adapt the strategy to address the unique challenges, opportunities, and characteristics that vary by region. In line with our commitment to creating welcoming environments for all our members, we will therefore collaborate with our members and partners in Canada and internationally to tailor this model to the distinct cultural contexts of each region.

This brief highlights the importance of workforce development and retention for destination organizations and the travel industry at large. It outlines how Destinations International (DI) will address these issues both in the short- and long-term.



Four employees sit around a table.

DESTINATIONS INTERNATIONAL'S POSITION AND GOALS

Destinations International is committed to the development and retention of people in our industry. We recognize that developing the workforce requires a long-term commitment and vision to understand challenges, assess gaps, develop partnerships and to act within areas that we can influence.

Our vision for the future is aspirational. While it may take time to implement, we have created a thoughtful foundation that proactively influences the future of our industry and the realistic investment it will take to develop our workforce and retain diverse talent. We encourage alignment, collaboration and discussion on how we can move the industry forward together.

Our 10 Year Vision

- 1 Engage Youth and Develop a Pipeline of Talent**
Inspire future generations of all abilities and backgrounds to be a part of the travel industry. This includes creating awareness, addressing how the travel industry is a viable career path prior to entering high school, in high school and beyond, and presenting opportunities for youth engagement.
- 2 Retain Current Professionals in the Industry**
Cultivate talent at the entry level and managerial levels by engaging their thought leadership, providing mentorship opportunities and developing succession planning strategies that are pathways to leadership at the Director to C-Suite levels.
- 3 Highlight Stories That Represent Leadership**
New and existing talent need to see and hear from a variety of leaders who are in leadership positions. These stories are critical for the current and future generations to recognize themselves as leaders in the industry.
- 4 Partner and Align with Industry Organizations**
We aim to establish shared language with organizations invested in workforce development, foster collaboration to support the awareness of career paths and develop creative avenues to support emerging leaders.
- 5 Create a Workforce Celebration Day**
This day is an annual celebration of the people who are at the center of this industry. We want to craft stories that celebrate the importance of the industry, and to inspire and connect a new generation of future leaders.

HOW DESTINATIONS INTERNATIONAL WILL MEASURE PROGRESS (2025 – 2027)

Engage Youth and Develop a Pipeline of Talent

1 Continue the DI student scholarship program.

- Develop a year-round program that offers exposure to leaders, skills development and networking opportunities for internships.
- Provide quarterly sessions focused on professional development, industry knowledge and connection.
- Introduce best practices for destinations to engage with applicants before selection and after receiving scholarships.
- Capture feedback from students through surveys to measure experience and identify opportunities for improvement.

2 Engage scholarship alumni.

- Obtain alumni perspectives on how to attract new people to this industry and how to attract scholarship recipients.
- Position alumni as ambassadors for scholarship program.
- Fundraise for continuity.
- Demonstrate the value of investment for the current scholarship program by creating metrics for success.

3 Identify aligned scholarship opportunities for underrepresented youth.

- Design scholarship opportunities that lessen barriers to success, adapting the model used for the current DI scholarship program as needed.

Seek collaborations with the National Society of Minorities in Hospitality (NSMH), American Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA), Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) or other newly identified organizations that may support these scholarship opportunities.

4 Engage with educators in universities to understand how to reframe the narrative about the travel industry.

- Hold bi-annual meetings with educators in universities to discuss the current state of education and student application within tourism/hospitality management programs.
- Identify five reasons why application rates are lower and discuss ideas on how to change this narrative.
- Identify at least five processes or mechanisms that are working well; ask how we can to support them.
- Speak with at least 20 students enrolled in current tourism / hospitality programs to get their perspectives on the industry.

5 Engage with post-secondary educational institutions that have hospitality programs to gather insights on barriers and opportunities.

- Use these meetings with at least 10 educators across a minimum of 5 universities to discuss the current state of education and student application.
- Use these meetings with same educators to create awareness of DMO roles and impact.
- Identify and leverage university research to inform understanding.
- Identify five reasons why application rates are lower and discuss ideas on how to change this narrative.
- Identify at least five processes or mechanisms that are working well; ask how we can to support.
- Through input from educators and others, speak with at least 20 students enrolled in current hospitality programs to get their perspectives on the industry.

6 Engage with K – 12 programs to discuss the hospitality industry as a career path, prioritizing efforts on middle/junior high school and high school.

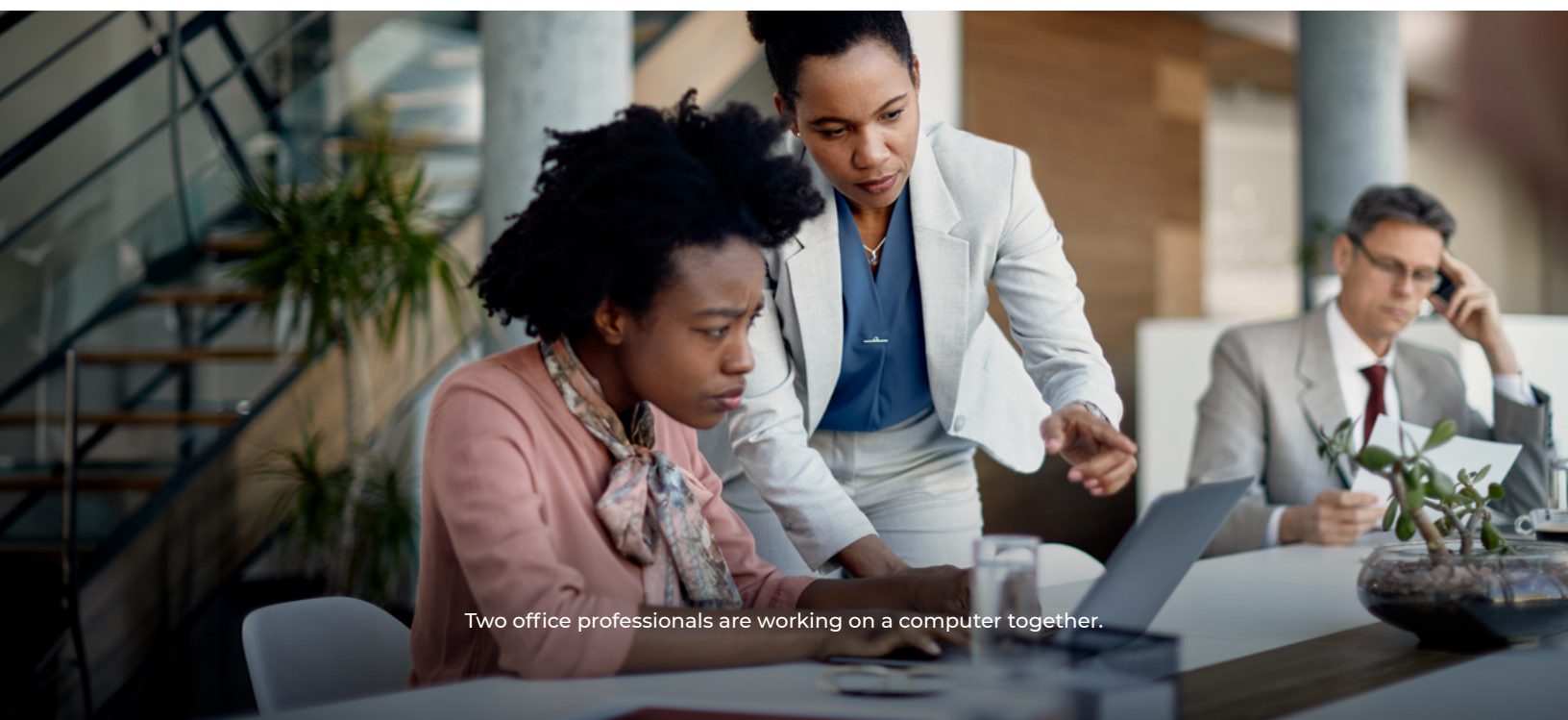
- Connect with 10 members who have engaged with K-12 programs to get feedback on lessons learned.
- Hold conversations with at least 10 administrators with Career, Technical and Agricultural Education (CTAE) programs in middle schools and high schools representing urban, rural and various regions to identify gaps in educational content aligned with career pathing.
- Identify five opportunities to provide students with awareness about the travel industry as a career path.
- Through conversations with administrators, seek input from middle school students and their parents to inform the development of career fairs/days at the high school level.

7 Offer thought leadership about the travel industry to educational institutions (K-12 and post-secondary).

- Develop PowerPoint templates for industry members to use when speaking to different educational levels. Engage with members to understand utilization, impact and foster dialogue.
 - » Elementary Schools
 - » Junior High Schools
 - » Middle/Junior High Schools
 - » Post secondary schools (dependent upon the type of class)
- Speak in five middle school and high school classrooms in rural and urban areas across various regions with CTAE programs about the mission of Destinations International (DI) and how it supports its destination members.
- Create bi-annual DI informational sessions for students to learn about the different aspects of the industry.

8 Offer internship and apprenticeship opportunities for students to experience the travel industry.

- Identify ten examples of successful internship programs in the travel industry and outside the travel industry. Establish guidelines on creating effective internship opportunities for the DI membership.
- Create greater visibility into current internship opportunities.
- Identify how to align five people with the apprenticeship programs that currently exist. Provide clear guidance to DI members on how to find and support an apprentice within the destination vertical.
- Explore opportunities with federal agencies to create awareness for grant programs related to workforce development.



Two office professionals are working on a computer together.

Retain Current Professionals in the Industry

1 Identify succession planning strategies and best practices for leadership track career paths (Director – C-Suite).

- Build on DI's current mentorship platform to engage mentors and mentees in the program. Recruit at least 10 mentors and 10 mentees with different backgrounds and abilities.
- Engage at least 10 DI members to discuss successful succession planning strategies.
- Identify existing industry, statewide and other relevant research that provides data on succession planning.
- Identify areas where data is needed and available from partners to support succession planning strategies.
- Develop a "shadow" board.

2 Encourage member destinations to invest in their staff by engaging with the DI community.

- Lead an awareness campaign to demonstrate how DI membership is for all professional levels.
 - » Connect with HR professionals to help incorporate the value of DI membership in onboarding, retention strategies and all-team meetings.
 - » Engage board members and committees with this awareness campaign and request clear actions for support.
 - » Engage DI team to encourage member engagement within their respective roles.
- Examine and implement changes to DI research, surveys and tools to increase engagement, impact and alignment with DI's research vision.
 - » Position Social Inclusion surveys, studies and tools to support understanding of workforce development, employee retention and professional growth opportunities.
 - » Position Social Inclusion surveys, studies and tools to support the professional development of members across all levels of employment.

3 Connect with entry- and mid-level professionals to understand their perspectives on succession planning and retention in the industry.

- Encourage entry- and mid-level professionals meet in a shared safe space. Connect with at least 20 entry- and mid-level professionals to understand their perspectives on retention and succession planning.
- Create a task force to encourage community and to discuss retention related goals for the industry.

- Continue to engage with 30 under 30 alumni and the current class to address succession planning ideas.
 - » Incorporate alumni into speaking engagements to share thought leadership about succession planning and retention.
 - » Create mentorship opportunities for alumni and current classes.
- Design professional development resources aimed to assist with retention and succession planning.
 - » Identify training needs for entry-level and mid-career professionals (focus on professional verticals or leadership development).
 - » Collaborate with values-aligned partners related to empowering people of all backgrounds and abilities and succession planning.
 - » Identify targeted resources to empower entry-level and mid-career professionals to stay in this industry.
 - » Develop a toolkit or one-sheet highlighting the resources, tools, summits or professional development opportunities that are most crucial for developing leadership.



Two 30 Under 30 honorees walk together at the DI Annual Convention.

Highlight Stories That Represent Diverse Leadership

1 Develop content that is appealing and resonates with the generations we aim to attract.

- Identify effective methods to deliver and digest content for targeted generations.
 - » Create a communications strategy that delivers content.
 - » Measure the engagement of the related strategy and add content

2 Create a series of video interviews and stories about leadership pathways.

- Develop at least 10 videos that can be repurposed to highlight:
 - » The individual's professional journey.
 - » Challenges they have encountered along the way and how they overcame them.
 - » Why industry is welcoming.
 - » Advice on advancing in leadership (variety of verticals, geography, budget size).
 - » A nugget of inspiration.



The 2024 DI Foundation HBCU scholarship recipients pose with DI staff.



A group of leaders socialize during the Black Leaders Reception at DI's Annual Convention.

Partner and Align with Industry Organizations

1 Connect with existing industry partners in the Destinations International (DI) network to discuss their involvement and investment in the development of the workforce.

- Establish relationships with new partners who have interest and alignment with workforce development.
- Research best practices outside the industry pertaining to the workforce development.
- Solidify working model for current partners interested in alignment.

Create a Workforce Celebration Day (February 19)

1 Curate content to highlight why this industry is welcoming to people of all backgrounds and abilities.

- Use content curated from destination leaders to amplify employee stories.
- Create a global hashtag that can be shared and tracked.
- Talk about your why: *“Why are you a part of the industry?”*
 - » Encourage industry leaders from all professional levels to be a part of community enrichment activations in school to educate youth about the travel industry.
 - » For high school and post-secondary school students or ages: develop career fair and shadow days to learn about this industry.

NEXT STEPS FOR OUR INDUSTRY

From 2025 to 2027, DI will pursue all initiatives above by facilitating conversations to establish connection, understanding and trust. Through input from our existing community network, social inclusion committee members, and broader membership, we will assess, refine our approach and formalize metrics in preparation for 2028–2035.

This industry brief lays the groundwork for a global collaborative effort to integrate social inclusion into workforce strategies, tailored to regional needs and priorities. We will work consultatively with our members in different parts of the world, adapting and evolving this model to meet their specific needs while continuing to promote social inclusion at a global scale.

We seek to collaborate with partners and co-create realistic opportunities for everyone to succeed in this industry. Leaders across our industry are encouraged to read this brief to determine how your organization aligns and how you want to actively engage with Destinations International in support of workforce development, and retention efforts.

**WE WELCOME YOUR ENGAGEMENT
ON THIS JOURNEY. CONTACT
INCLUSION@DESTINATIONSINTERNATIONAL.ORG
TO GET INVOLVED.**



RESOURCES

1. [Destinations International Social Inclusion Framework](#)
2. [Social Inclusion Studies](#)
3. [DI Social Impact Assessment Tool](#)
4. [DI Foundation HBCU Scholarship Program](#)
5. [DI 30 Under 30 Program](#)