

ACTION BRIEF

DESTINATION REPUTATION:


POLITICAL CLIMATE AND SOCIAL ISSUES

INTRODUCTION

Political Climate and Social Issues

Political climate and social issues can directly impact a destination's reputation and its ability to attract meetings, conferences and visitors. Meeting planners prioritize destinations where all attendees feel welcomed and safe, regardless of identity or background. As a destination leader, it is essential to proactively communicate social impact while maintaining neutrality in politically charged discussions.

This guide provides a structured approach for destination marketing organizations (DMOs) to effectively navigate political and social issues. It outlines tailored messaging, stakeholder-specific strategies, proactive crisis communication and key questions to help your destination remain a trusted and welcoming place for all visitors.



This research was made possible through the support of the Destinations International Foundation, whose mission is to drive innovation and provide critical resources that strengthen the future of destination organizations. The foundation champions forward-thinking initiatives that enable destination leaders to navigate change with insight, strategy and resilience. We acknowledge their commitment to industry research and extend sincere thanks to all foundation supporters who make initiatives like this possible.

SCENARIOS

The following scenarios illustrate real-world situations that destination organizations may encounter when addressing this issue. They are intended to provide context and practical insight into the key findings outlined in this brief.

1 SCENARIO

State or Local Legislation Sparks National Attention

New state or local laws are passed that are seen as discriminatory or controversial, such as policies affecting LGBTQ+ rights, voting access, reproductive rights or immigration. Major organizations and event planners reconsider hosting meetings or conventions in the destination due to concerns about attendee values and safety.

2 SCENARIO

Political Tensions and Public Demonstrations Raise Perception Concerns

In the lead-up to an election or during high-profile political debates, tensions escalate through divisive rhetoric, protests and counter-protests, often in highly visible areas near convention centers or tourism corridors. Even if demonstrations are peaceful, the perceived volatility raises concerns among planners and visitors about safety, community climate and the appropriateness of the destination for upcoming events.

3 SCENARIO

Viral Incidents Amplify Social Issues and Community Concerns

An isolated but high-profile incident involving discrimination, racial profiling or inappropriate treatment of a visitor or attendee goes viral on social media. In some cases, local advocacy groups or marginalized communities may speak out in response, adding to the visibility of the issue and prompting broader conversations about inclusion. Even if addressed locally, the global perception of the destination is affected, and planners seek reassurances about safety, values and community climate.



1. HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY: HOTELS, RESTAURANTS, ATTRACTIONS AND AIRPORTS

Commitment to Social Impact and Hospitality

- ◆ Reinforce that the destination is welcoming to all, regardless of background, beliefs or identity.
- ◆ Encourage hospitality partners to adopt and display social impact statements to set a unified tone across all visitor touchpoints.



Key Questions for Destination Organizations

- ◆ *Are hospitality partners equipped with messaging and training to handle guest concerns about social impact?*
- ◆ *How are we ensuring that all frontline staff provide a consistently welcoming experience?*
- ◆ *Are we proactively addressing visitor concerns about the political climate in pre-arrival communications?*

Training and Support for Hospitality Businesses

- ◆ Provide social inclusion training for hotel, restaurant and attraction staff to ensure respectful and culturally aware service.
- ◆ Offer guidance on handling sensitive traveler inquiries about social and political issues.



Key Questions for Destination Organizations

- ◆ *Have we provided our partners with best practices for inclusive customer service?*
- ◆ *How do we track and measure improvements in guest experiences among socially inclusive travelers?*
- ◆ *Are we equipping partners with crisis communication strategies to address social issue concerns?*

Showcasing Success and Economic Impact

- ◆ Highlight case studies of socially inclusive events and conferences successfully hosted in the destination.
- ◆ Demonstrate the economic value of being an inclusive and welcoming place for all groups.



Key Questions for Destination Organizations

- ◆ *How can we use past event successes to attract more diverse conferences?*
- ◆ *Are we sharing positive visitor testimonials that reinforce our social impact message?*
- ◆ *How do we communicate the business benefits of embracing all communities?*

2. ELECTED OFFICIALS AND GOVERNMENT LEADERS

Public Commitment to Social Impact

- ◆ Encourage elected officials to adopt and publicly support social impact statements without engaging in political discourse.
- ◆ Reinforce the connection between a welcoming destination and a strong, resilient economy.



Key Questions for Destination Organizations

- ◆ *How do we ensure that officials remain neutral and inclusive in their public statements?*
- ◆ *Are elected leaders informed about the economic risks of exclusionary policies or rhetoric?*
- ◆ *How do we align government messaging with the Destination Organization efforts to reinforce a cohesive strategy?*

Policy Support for Welcoming Tourism

- ◆ Advocate for policies that promote a welcoming environment and advance social impact, including accessibility.
- ◆ Highlight the impact of welcoming tourism initiatives on job creation and business growth.



Key Questions for Destination Organizations

- ◆ *How can we encourage local government to support welcoming tourism policies?*
- ◆ *Are we providing data-driven insights that illustrate the economic benefits of diversity?*
- ◆ *What partnerships can we form to strengthen advocacy for inclusion in tourism?*

Managing Crisis Communications on Social Issues

- ◆ Provide officials with clear guidance on responding to politically charged issues that may impact tourism.
- ◆ Develop standardized messaging that keeps statements focused on hospitality, safety and social impact.



Key Questions for Destination Organizations

- ◆ *Are we prepared with media response templates for potential social issue controversies?*
- ◆ *How do we ensure consistency in messaging across government and tourism stakeholders?*
- ◆ *What proactive steps can we take to prevent political issues from negatively affecting event bookings?*

3. LOCAL BUSINESS LEADERS, LAW ENFORCEMENT AND RESIDENTS

Community-Wide Social Impact Efforts

- ◆ Engage businesses and residents in initiatives that showcase the destination as a welcoming and respectful place for all.
- ◆ Encourage local organizations to participate in social inclusion programs and partnerships.



Key Questions for Destination Organizations

- ◆ *How do we educate residents and businesses on the value of social impact in tourism?*
- ◆ *Are we promoting community-driven initiatives that reinforce our destination's welcoming identity?*
- ◆ *How do we track and respond to community sentiment about social impact?*

Security and Law Enforcement Partnerships

- ◆ Ensure law enforcement agencies are aligned with visitor-facing messaging that promotes safety and respect for all.
- ◆ Facilitate training for officers and security personnel on cultural awareness and visitor engagement.



Key Questions for Destination Organizations

- ◆ *Are security and law enforcement agencies equipped to handle visitor concerns sensitively?*
- ◆ *How do we reinforce a perception of safety without discouraging travelers?*
- ◆ *What partnerships can be strengthened to align community policing with hospitality goals?*

Promoting Local Success Stories

- ◆ Share testimonials and case studies from local businesses and residents who have benefited from inclusive tourism.
- ◆ Encourage storytelling that highlights diverse community voices and their contributions to tourism.



Key Questions for Destination Organizations

- ◆ *How can we use real stories to reinforce our social impact message?*
- ◆ *Are we proactively engaging diverse business leaders in tourism marketing?*
- ◆ *How do we ensure that all communities feel represented in our destination's branding?*

NEXT STEPS AND KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs)

Next Steps

- ◆ Develop and distribute an official Social Impact Commitment Statement for use by hospitality partners, businesses and elected officials.
- ◆ Implement training programs focused on inclusive customer service and crisis communication strategies.
- ◆ Strengthen partnerships with local organizations and advocacy groups to enhance social impact initiatives.
- ◆ Establish proactive digital campaigns to reinforce the destination's welcoming message across all media channels.
- ◆ Monitor public sentiment and stakeholder engagement to refine messaging strategies as needed.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

- ◆ Increase in hospitality partners adopting social impact statements and training programs.
- ◆ Growth in visitor satisfaction scores among diverse traveler demographics.
- ◆ Higher engagement rates in digital and social media campaigns promoting social impact.
- ◆ Increase in event bids won from social impact-focused organizations and affinity groups.
- ◆ Number of officials and business leaders publicly endorsing inclusive messaging.
- ◆ Success of crisis response efforts in mitigating negative perceptions tied to social issues.

Successfully navigating political climate and social issues requires a proactive, unified approach that aligns messaging across tourism, government and community stakeholders. When destinations lead with social impact, they strengthen visitor confidence, attract socially inclusive events and foster long-term economic resilience. By implementing this structured approach, destination organizations can ensure their messaging remains welcoming, neutral and supportive of all travelers. Investing in social impact not only enhances the visitor experience but also positions the destination as a leader in responsible tourism.

To understand more about this issue affecting your destination's reputation, learn more at <https://destinationsinternational.org/destination-reputation>



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About Destinations International

Destinations International is the world's largest and most respected resource for destination organizations, convention and visitors bureaus (CVBs) and tourism boards. With more than 8,000 members and partners from over 750 destinations, the association represents a powerful forward-thinking and collaborative community around the world. For more information, visit destinationsinternational.org.

Future Partners

About Future Partners

Future Partners was founded by Dave Bratton and Erin Francis-Cummings in San Francisco, California, in 2003. It is a team of market researchers that work with over 250 organizations and travel brands around the U.S. and the world to provide insights and strategies that capture hearts, minds and market share. Future Partners connects human behavior and understanding to bring the future of travel within reach. For more information, visit futurepartners.com.



About the Destinations International Foundation

The Destinations International Foundation is a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering destination organizations globally by providing education, research, advocacy and leadership development. The Foundation is classified as a charitable organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Service Code and all donations are tax-deductible. For more information, visit destinationsinternational.org/about-foundation.



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