

ACTION BRIEF

DESTINATION REPUTATION:


DRUG ACTIVITY AND HOMELESSNESS

INTRODUCTION

Drug Activity and Homelessness

Drug activity and homelessness are challenges faced by many major cities, and how a destination addresses these concerns directly impacts visitor confidence. Meeting planners and travelers value destinations that acknowledge these issues while demonstrating a proactive approach to safety, social impact and community well-being.

This brief provides destination organizations with a structured approach to navigate these concerns, ensuring that messaging remains clear, solution-focused and aligned with stakeholders. The goal is to maintain visitors' confidence while supporting long-term strategies that improve the destination for both residents and guests.



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

Visible Homelessness Near Tourist Corridors

A growing unhoused population becomes increasingly visible near convention centers, hotels, entertainment districts and waterfront areas. Visitors express discomfort and meeting planners begin raising concerns about attendee perceptions, even if safety incidents are rare.

2 SCENARIO

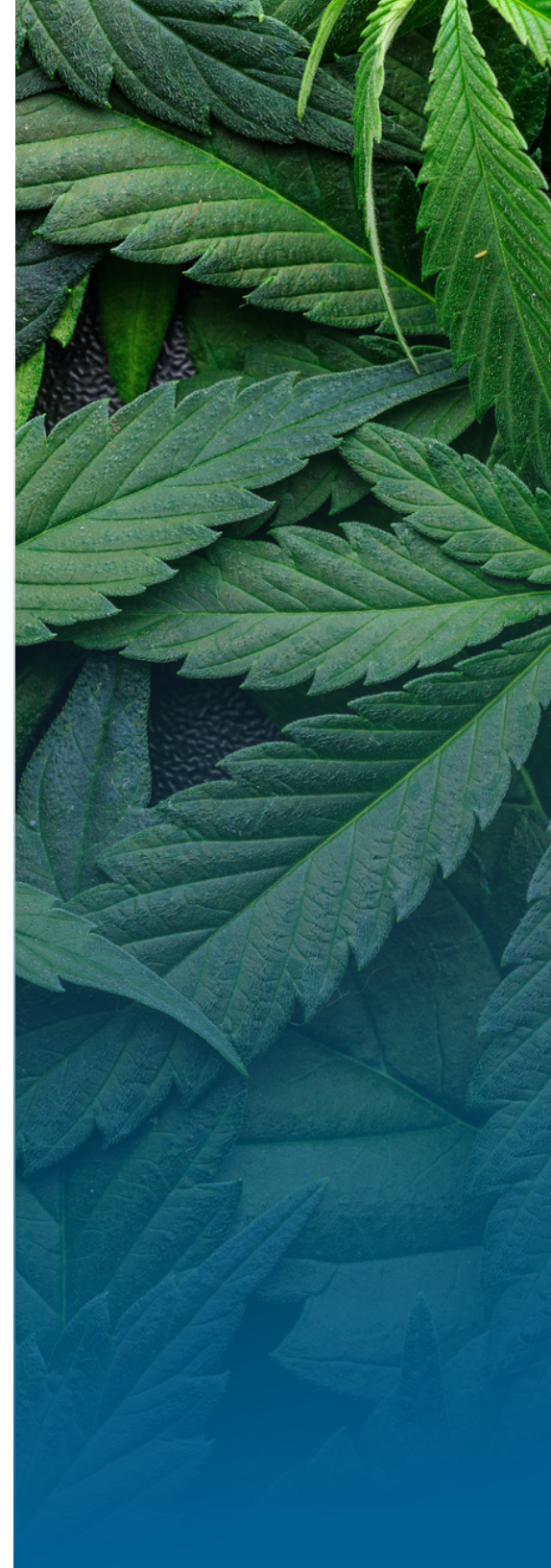
High-Profile Drug Use or Overdoses in Public Spaces

News coverage highlights incidents of public drug use or overdoses occurring near major visitor areas, such as transit hubs, event venues or parks. Although isolated, these incidents amplify negative perceptions of safety and security, especially among first-time visitors and large group events.

3 SCENARIO

Media Narratives Influence Perception of Safety and Stability

Local or national media outlets publish stories framing the destination as unsafe, citing drug activity, homelessness and urban decline. These narratives may be based on recent policy changes—such as the decriminalization of certain drugs or shifts in public camping enforcement—that are misunderstood or misrepresented. Even if exaggerated, the resulting perception shift influences planners and may lead them to reconsider the destination for future events.



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

Safety and Community Well-Being

- ◆ Reinforce that the destination remains welcoming and safe, despite challenges.
- ◆ Communicate the collaboration between hospitality partners, local authorities, and community organizations to maintain public safety.
- ◆ Provide assurance that visitor areas are well-maintained, monitored and continuously improved.



Key Questions for Destination Organizations

- ◆ *Are frontline staff trained to handle guest inquiries about safety with clarity and reassurance?*
- ◆ *How are we proactively addressing guest concerns while maintaining a welcoming experience?*
- ◆ *Do we have updated materials that highlight the city's efforts to balance public safety and social impact?*

Proactive Communication and Staff Preparedness

- ◆ Implement training programs to help hospitality employees respond professionally and compassionately when encountering individuals experiencing homelessness or drug-related issues.
- ◆ Provide hotels, restaurants, and visitor attractions with a quick-reference guide on how to report concerns and access community outreach services.
- ◆ Encourage hospitality partners to display information about local safety initiatives and social impact programs to reassure visitors.



Key Questions for Destination Organizations

- ◆ *Have we equipped hospitality partners with the necessary resources and messaging to address guest concerns?*
- ◆ *How do we ensure consistent and positive messaging across all hospitality touchpoints?*
- ◆ *Are we effectively balancing transparency and reassurance in guest communications?*

Showcasing Positive Community Efforts

- ◆ Highlight investments in revitalizing public spaces, security enhancements, and partnerships with outreach programs.
- ◆ Share success stories of social impact initiatives that contribute to both community well-being and visitor experiences.
- ◆ Encourage tourism industry partners to promote their involvement in local solutions.



Key Questions for Destination Organizations

- ◆ *Are we effectively communicating our destination's ongoing efforts to improve public safety and community well-being?*
- ◆ *How can we amplify positive stories from the hospitality sector that demonstrate commitment to social impact?*
- ◆ *Are we engaging visitors in a way that strengthens confidence in our destination's approach?*

2. ELECTED OFFICIALS AND GOVERNMENT LEADERS

Policy and Infrastructure Solutions

- ◆ Position the destination as proactive in addressing drug activity and homelessness through evidence-based policies.
- ◆ Communicate the role of government investments in improving public safety, mental health services and housing initiatives.
- ◆ Emphasize collaborations between local government, law enforcement, and community organizations to support long-term solutions.



Key Questions for Destination Organizations

- ◆ *How are we ensuring that public messaging reflects the destination's proactive approach to safety and social impact?*
- ◆ *Are elected officials aligned in communicating solutions rather than focusing on challenges?*
- ◆ *What data and success stories can be shared to reinforce the effectiveness of current initiatives?*

Crisis Communication and Public Perception Management

- ◆ Develop standardized public statements for elected officials that acknowledge concerns while highlighting ongoing improvements.
- ◆ Ensure messaging remains focused on solutions, such as new policies, increased outreach, and safety enhancements.
- ◆ Maintain transparency without amplifying fear or negativity in media discussions.



Key Questions for Destination Organizations

- ◆ *Are we prepared with clear, coordinated messaging in response to media inquiries?*
- ◆ *How do we ensure that government communications align with hospitality and tourism messaging?*
- ◆ *What measures are in place to correct misinformation and prevent negative narratives from escalating?*

Economic Resilience and Community Engagement

- ◆ Showcase the economic benefits of investing in social impact programs that contribute to both tourism and resident quality of life.
- ◆ Encourage policymakers to highlight the connection between a thriving tourism industry and effective community solutions.
- ◆ Support policy initiatives that promote sustainable and compassionate approaches to addressing social challenges.



Key Questions for Destination Organizations

- ◆ *How can we leverage economic impact data to advocate for social impact initiatives?*
- ◆ *Are we effectively communicating the connection between tourism, public safety, and community well-being?*
- ◆ *What strategies can we implement to engage local businesses and government leaders in long-term solutions?*

3. LOCAL BUSINESS LEADERS, LAW ENFORCEMENT AND RESIDENTS

Community Partnerships and Safety Enhancements

- ◆ Promote collaborations between law enforcement, business leaders, and community groups to create safer public spaces.
- ◆ Support initiatives such as business improvement districts, community policing programs, and safety ambassador initiatives.
- ◆ Encourage residents and business owners to participate in public safety discussions and community-driven solutions.



Key Questions for Destination Organizations

- ◆ *Are we fostering strong partnerships between tourism stakeholders and public safety organizations?*
- ◆ *How do we ensure that business leaders and residents feel involved in the solution?*
- ◆ *What additional resources can be provided to support community-driven safety initiatives?*

Public Education and Engagement

- ◆ Educate residents and business owners on how to engage with individuals experiencing homelessness or addiction in a compassionate and solution-oriented manner.
- ◆ Encourage participation in volunteer programs, social impact initiatives, and community improvement efforts.
- ◆ Provide clear communication on how to report concerns and contribute to public safety improvements.



Key Questions for Destination Organizations

- ◆ *Are we equipping residents and businesses with the tools they need to contribute to a positive visitor experience?*
- ◆ *How do we ensure that the public understands the destination's approach to balancing safety and compassion?*
- ◆ *What engagement strategies can be implemented to strengthen community support for social impact initiatives?*

Health and Social Services Partnerships

- ◆ Strengthen relationships with local health departments, housing agencies and nonprofit service providers to ensure coordinated responses to addiction, homelessness and related public health concerns.
- ◆ Support integrated outreach efforts that connect individuals in need with mental health services, substance use treatment and shelter options.
- ◆ Advocate for increased investment in wraparound services that address the root causes of homelessness and addiction.



Key Questions for Destination Organizations

- ◆ *Are we connected with the organizations delivering frontline services to unhoused or at-risk individuals?*
- ◆ *How can we support a coordinated response between public health, housing and tourism stakeholders?*
- ◆ *What role can destination organizations play in promoting dignity-centered solutions that improve both public perception and real community well-being?*

NEXT STEPS AND KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs)

Next Steps

- ◆ Develop a unified messaging toolkit for hospitality partners, government leaders and local businesses to ensure consistency.
- ◆ Implement training programs for frontline staff on handling visitor inquiries about safety and social impact initiatives.
- ◆ Establish a digital campaign highlighting the destination's commitment to public safety and community well-being.
- ◆ Strengthen partnerships with outreach organizations to create visible, measurable improvements in high-traffic visitor areas.
- ◆ Monitor and adjust messaging strategies based on public perception, media coverage and visitor feedback.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

- ◆ Increase in visitor satisfaction scores related to safety and overall experience.
- ◆ Growth in stakeholder participation in social impact programs and public-private partnerships.
- ◆ Reduction in negative media coverage and online discussions regarding homelessness and drug activity in the destination.
- ◆ Engagement rates on digital campaigns promoting the destination's proactive efforts.
- ◆ Measurable improvements in community well-being metrics, such as reduced homelessness and increased access to support services.
- ◆ Effectiveness of crisis response efforts in mitigating reputational risks and reinforcing positive narratives.

Destinations that proactively address drug activity and homelessness through structured, solution-oriented messaging build trust among visitors, stakeholders and the community. By maintaining a balance between transparency, compassion and public safety, destination organizations can reinforce confidence while supporting long-term improvements. The most successful destination organizations align messaging across hospitality, government and community stakeholders, ensuring that every touchpoint reflects a welcoming and well-managed destination. With the right approach, your destination can turn challenges into opportunities to showcase resilience, collaboration and commitment to the well-being of all.

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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