



DESTINATION FIRST CHECKLIST

ROADMAP TO BUILDING A DESTINATION ORGANIZATION

Destination First is your starting point for building a strong, credible destination organization. Use the phased checklist below to navigate the journey—from early-stage development to DMAP accreditation—with practical guidance, recommended resources and clear milestones. For even more support, Destinations International members have access to an extensive library of tools, templates, research and expert guidance designed to help destination organizations succeed.

PHASE 1: FOUNDATIONAL SET-UP (First 18 Months)

Legal & Governance Foundatoinis

- ☐ Articles of Incorporation filed and approved
- ☐ Enabling legislation secured, if applicable
- ☐ Nonprofit status confirmed (e.g. 501(c)(6), if applicable)
- ☐ Corporation Statement of Information submitted (if applicable)
- ☐ Tax filing procedure identified
- ☐ Official legal documents retained in records

Bylaws & Governance Structure

- ☐ Bylawws drafted
- ☐ Bylaws reviewed (legal review complete)
- ☐ Bylaws approved by governing body
- ☐ Bylaws adoption recorded in board minutes (if applicable)
- ☐ Process established for bylaws review/amendment

Board Formation & Orientation (if applicable)

- ☐ Board composition criteria defined
- ☐ Board members recruited across key sectors
- ☐ Board roster approved

CONTINUED - Board Formation & Orientation

- ☐ Orientation handbook developed
- ☐ Initial board orientation conducted
- ☐ Orientation attendance documented
- ☐ Ongoing board education schedule

Staffing & Human Resources

- ☐ CEO/Executive Director job description approved*
- ☐ Executive employment agreement executed
- ☐ Employee handbook created
- ☐ Staff position job descriptions approved*
- ☐ Staff onboarding program implemented
- ☐ Staff orientation documented
- ☐ Payroll and insurance procedures established

Mission, Vision & Values

- ☐ Mission statement drafted
- ☐ Vision statement drafted
- ☐ Core values defined
- ☐ Board approved documented in minutes (if applicable)
- ☐ Statements published publicly

Financial Systems & Oversight

- ☐ Fiscal year established
- ☐ Chart of accounts created
- ☐ Annual operating budget drafted
- ☐ Budget approved by governing body
- ☐ Budget approval recorded in minutes (if applicable)
- ☐ Internal financial controls established
- ☐ Independent auditor or reviewer engaged

CONTINUED - Financial Systems & Oversight

- ☐ Annual audit or financial review completed
- ☐ Audit report and management letter received
- ☐ Audit findings addressed

PHASE 1 COMPLETE:

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|--|---|
| ☐ Legal incorporation complete | ☐ Strategic plan active |
| ☐ Bylaws adopted | ☐ Board seated and trained |
| ☐ Mission, Vision and Values approved | ☐ Budget approved |

PHASE 2: STRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT (18 Months - 3 Years)

Governance & Accountability

- ☐ Ethics policy adopted
- ☐ Conflict of interest policy adopted
- ☐ Transparency/open meetings policy adopted (if applicable)
- ☐ Board disclosures collected (if applicable)
- ☐ Policies approved and recorded in minutes (if applicable)

Strategic Planning

- ☐ Community/market assessment completed
- ☐ 3-5 year strategic plan adopted
- ☐ Goals and measurable objectives defined
- ☐ Strategic plan approved by board (if applicable)
- ☐ Approval documented in minutes (if applicable)
- ☐ Annual operating plan aligned to strategy

REPORTING

- ☐ Annual performance data compiled
- ☐ Annual report published
- ☐ Report distributed to stakeholders
- ☐ Report posted publicly

PHASE 2 COMPLETE:

- ☐ Governance, policies & SOP's in place
- ☐ Organizational KPI's & goals in place based on strategic plan
- ☐ First annual report complete and promoted to local stakeholders

PHASE 3: PROGRAM EXPANSION (3-4 Years)

Marketing & Branding

- ☐ Destination branding developed/refreshed
- ☐ Brand guidelines finalized
- ☐ Marketing plan developed
- ☐ Marketing plan approved by board

Research & Insights

- ☐ Visitor impact/economic study completed*
- ☐ Visitor sentiment research conducted*
- ☐ Dashboards or reports created
- ☐ Insights shared with stakeholders

Community Engagemnet

- ☐ Stakeholder advisory group established
- ☐ Diverse representation confirmed
- ☐ Regular meetings conducted
- ☐ Meeting records maintained

Advocacy*

- ☐ Policy priorities defined
- ☐ Advocacy plan developed
- ☐ Messaging and talking points created
- ☐ Legislative/policy activity tracked

Visitor Services

- ☐ Visitor services needs assessed
- ☐ Visitor services plan developed
- ☐ Volunteer/ambassador training materials created
- ☐ Vistor services delivered (physical and/or digital)

PHASE 3 COMPLETE:

- ☐ Brand and marketing plan in place
- ☐ Community engagment priorities established
- ☐ Advocacy and community strategy shared
- ☐ Established connection between the organization and in-coming visitors foreducation and promotion

PHASE 4: MATURITY & ACCREDITATION (Year 5)

Accreditation (DMAP)*

- ☐ DMAP readiness assessment completed
- ☐ Documentation compiled
- ☐ DMAP applicatio n submitted
- ☐ Corrective actions completed (if required)

Sustainability & Stewardship

- ☐ Sustainability/stewardship plan adopted
- ☐ Metrics established
- ☐ Annual stewardship report published

Social Impact*

- ☐ Social impact policy adopted
- ☐ Accessibility audits completed
- ☐ Inclusion initiatives implemented
- ☐ Progress tracked and reported

Innovation & Leadership

- ☐ Innovation pilots launched
- ☐ Best practices shared externally
- ☐ Participation in industry conferences
- ☐ Awards or recognitions pursued

PHASE 4 COMPLETE:

- ☐ Accreditation identification and completion
- ☐ Opportunities for legacy projects identified
- ☐ Best practices and learnings shared with peers
- ☐ Engagement strategy in place with under-represented areas of the community

***Additional tools and resources on this topic are available to Destinations International Members.**