

About Geotourism Stewardship Councils

As prescribed by our predecessor, National Geographic's Center for Sustainable Destinations, a Geotourism Stewardship Council is a nongovernmental or public/private entity. A Council may be national, regional, or local. It may go by any name, or coalesce around an existing group, but has the characteristics described below.

The Council's task is to oversee and advise on the four activities of a geotourism strategy:

- identifying,
- sustaining,
- developing, and
- marketing the geotourism assets of a place.

Council advice and activity should be in keeping with the interests of the communities, with good conservation and preservation practices and with responsible economic development. The Council encourages appropriate tourism in appropriate places, and discourages inappropriate tourism in unsuitable places. The Council should subscribe to the principles embodied in the Geotourism Charter and in the geotourism definition:

Tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place—its environment, heritage, aesthetics, culture, and the well-being of its residents.

Council activities are intended not only to promote geotourism assets to tourists but also to be a catalyst for local communities—to help them discover their own distinctive tourism assets and provide economic benefits and an incentive for protecting them. The Council should monitor sustainability and ensure that tourist capacity is appropriately managed, while encouraging maximum benefit to the community per visitor. Catalyst activities might include:

- Hosting an annual festival to build local pride and awareness, while garnishing tourism spending in the destination.
- Creating a marketing tool such as a Geotourism MapGuide or web site with extensive local participation and oversight by a university, the National Geographic Society, or another objective institution.
- Reviewing and providing recommendations to government on tourism developments and proposals.
- Administering certification programs, conservation funds, and a destination management system.
- Serving as ongoing gatekeeper and clearinghouse for community-generated geotourism information, issued via the Internet and handheld devices.

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Council members should represent the following interests:

- historic and archaeological preservation
- natural conservation, including habitats and geological sites
- communities
- indigenous peoples and other cultural minorities
- traditional arts (craft, music, dance, theater, storytelling, reenactments, etc.)
- destination management and marketing organizations
- farm/restaurant programs, agritourism, Slow Food
- beautification programs (signage, architecture, and scenic landscape concerns)
- other stakeholder groups emblematic of the locale
- government (tourism, planning, environment, culture, and economic development)
- private businesses compatible with geotourism

Local collaborators and advisors potentially include:

- Geotourism innovators— guides, innkeepers, restaurateurs, tour operators, etc.
- Local arts, craft co-ops, music groups, or other heritage groups
- Agricultural cooperatives, historic preservation groups, conservation organizations (including ecotourism leaders)
- Community leaders or individuals with deep knowledge of the area’s heritage, especially older individuals
- Church groups, school associations, universities, volunteer/charity organizations
- Local geographical, historical, or travel author
- Historians, naturalists, librarians
- Local minority or heritage groups and experts
- Specialists in locally based food and drink

Proactive people from this list may also be appropriate members for the Council.

Procedures. Each destination must tailor an approach appropriate to local circumstances, so there is no formally prescribed method for choosing council members and sustainable funding of council activities. Generally, a robust council will draw from government, civil society, and the private sector. Until the Council becomes self-supporting, one or more member organizations can serve as its fiscal agent. To ensure continuity, government should not control the Council, although it should have a significant role.

Operationally, the Council can work in a continual cycle:

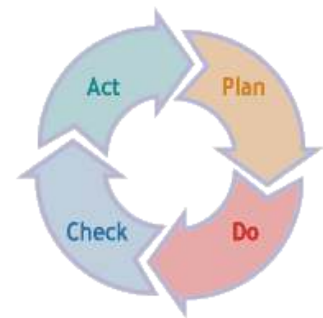
Plan—Planning, including identifying stewardship aspects and establishing goals

Do—Implementing, including training and information dissemination

Check—Monitoring and progress reviews

Act—Taking corrective action as indicated

The Council best functions through a collaborative website, initially hosted by one of its members.



For more information, contact the Destination Stewardship Center, info@destinationcenter.org