

DESTINATION MARKETING TOOLKIT

Best practices for marketing your
sustainable initiatives.

Produced exclusively for GreenStep Sustainable Tourism Certified Destinations.



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The Destination Certification Marketing Toolkit

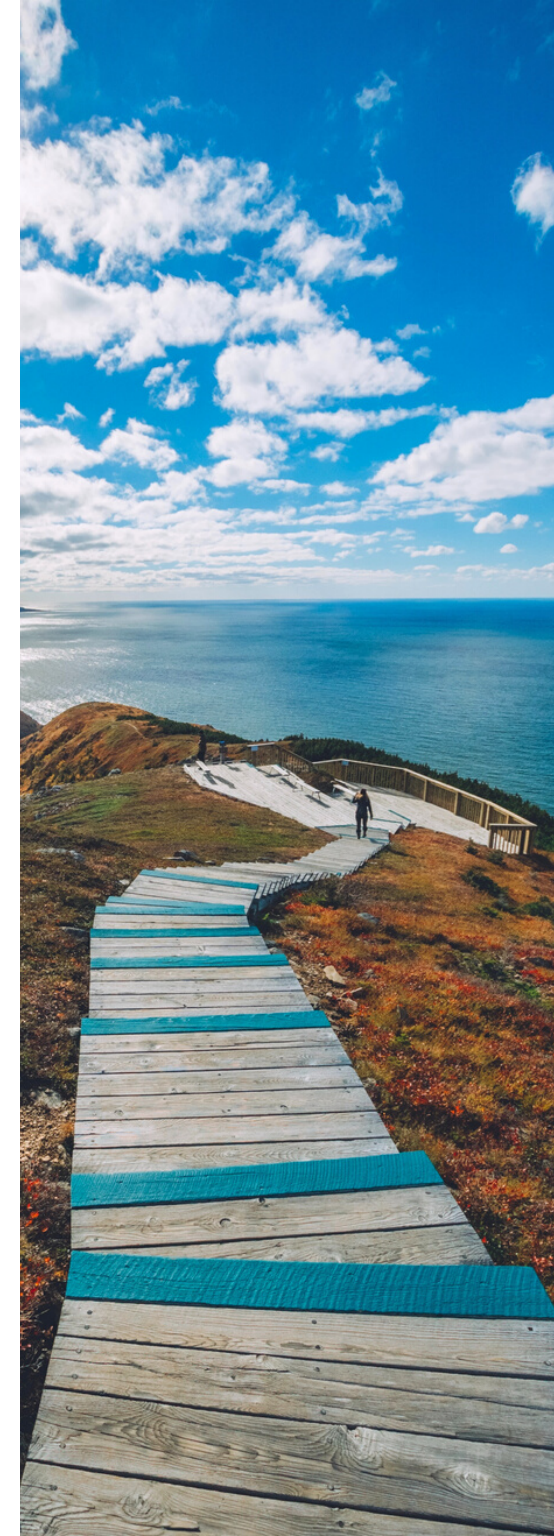
Founded in 2008, GreenStep has provided sustainability-related solutions, programs, assessments, guidance, and expertise to thousands of businesses and organizations across various industries including tourism and hospitality.

The information contained in this document is intended to assist Destinations to promote and market their Sustainable Tourism Certification, remembering that every organization is different and unique and that these guidelines are to be applied according to situational goals and objectives. This is a guide and not all recommendations will be suitable for your organization. Tailoring your messaging to suit your destination brand, tone, perspective, and audience is a priority and should always be considered when developing your messaging.

The Sustainable Tourism Certification is more than a label, it's a process.

How you choose to market and communicate sustainability certification to visitors, stakeholders, and staff will lay the foundation for your sustainability story and what the journey means to your destination.

We have outlined starting points for your journey and highlighted key challenges you may face along the way. In this toolkit you will develop a sustainability language, identify core audiences, and receive guidance on how to share a meaningful and engaging story. Being transparent about your sustainability journey adds credibility and helps to build destination champions who will follow and support your endeavours along the way. GreenStep's Sustainable Tourism team is here to help you get started.



How To Talk About Sustainable Tourism Certification

LANGUAGE AND TERMINOLOGY

Language is one of the most important elements in marketing and communicating a sustainability story. For destinations pursuing Sustainable Tourism Certification, there are plenty of stories, achievements, and milestones to celebrate and share along the way.

Elevating your attention to sustainability language allows you to better communicate the 'why' behind a destination's actions. As you share a destination's story, marketing with appropriate and consistent language demonstrates understanding, improves credibility, and increases brand awareness.

IMPORTANT DISTINCTIONS

Sustainable Tourism Certified Destinations are assessed against the GreenStep Sustainable Tourism Destination Standard (GSTDS). The GSTDS is a set of criteria consisting of 117 questions. This criteria has been recognized by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) and covers four key sustainability pillars: **Management, Social and Economic, Natural and Cultural and Environmental**.

The GSTDS was developed in alignment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as international best practices for Sustainable Tourism. The GSTDS criteria was formally recognized through a third-party assessment and review process conducted by the GSTC. To learn more about the GSTC, visit <https://www.gstcouncil.org/>.



COMMON EXAMPLES TO BOOST UNDERSTANDING

Appropriate language is important in building a common language and enhancing understanding.

Using consistent language that accurately represents and recognizes destination achievements is a key component of sustainability marketing. Below you will find examples of ways to reframe sustainability language to fit the GreenStep Sustainable Tourism Certification process.

Language to Use		Language to Avoid
Sustainable Tourism Certified	←	Sustainable Certified Sustainable Tourism Awarded Sustainability Accredited
Sustainable Tourism Bronze / Silver / Gold / Platinum Certified	←	Bronze / Silver / Gold / Platinum Award
We are working to improve our sustainability performance and/or reduce our negative impacts	←	We are a sustainable / green/ eco destination

GREENWASHING:

Marketing untrue, unsupported, or misleading information that claims an organization's products and/or services are more environmentally sound than they truly are.

With the increase in demand for more sustainable products and services, greenwashing has become a widespread issue. Greenwashing threatens a destination's reputation and in some cases may be illegal.

While greenwashing is something you should be aware of, it is easily avoided by following simple sustainability marketing best practices:

- Aim for transparency in action and authenticity in communication
- Publish baseline metrics to showcase clear and quantifiable improvements
- Acknowledge missed targets, negative impacts and opportunities for improvement
- Use credible and verified data to back up claims
- Regularly publish updates that showcase the goal of continuous improvement
- Engage in third-party verification, where possible

GREENHUSHING:

The conscious act of underreporting sustainability practices to avoid scrutiny.

Sustainability is a journey and destinations should not be afraid to share their story. Marketing green initiatives helps inspire others and can lead to new collaborative partnerships.

While careful consideration should be taken to avoid greenwashing, failing to communicate sustainability initiatives can be perceived as greenhushing. Greenhushing can be minimized by following these best practices:

- Strive for progress, not perfection
- Only market initiatives and actions that are underway or complete
- Use consistent language and branding amongst destination stakeholders
- Involve visitors and stakeholders in destination sustainability goal setting
- Use quantifiable, measurable, and where relevant, science-based targets for sustainability goals
- Present a reliable and trustworthy image of sustainability-related efforts
- Publish sustainability targets and any related actions that have been initiated as a way to communicate progress

Staff and Stakeholder Engagement

PARTNERING FOR SUCCESS

Destination Certification is a team effort.

As a destination's sustainability story unfolds, there will be many characters involved in the journey.

Capturing the passions of team members and including diverse perspectives will build the foundation for impactful marketing.

DESTINATION SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE ENGAGEMENT

Destination Sustainability Stakeholder Committee: A diverse group of industry and community stakeholders (public, private, not-for-profit, Indigenous, etc.) that will lead destination sustainability initiatives, and support ongoing efforts to improve destination sustainability performance.

Engagement with a destination's sustainability stakeholder committee is an excellent place to begin gathering details on sustainability initiatives and gain insight into the assessment process. If possible, connect with each committee member to better understand the diversity of perspectives and inclusion of industry sectors. Highlight and feature the members that makeup your Destination Sustainability Stakeholder Committee and share why they are involved and how they intend to contribute to helping the Destination achieve its goals.

To learn more about best practices for sustainable destinations, visit:

<https://www.greensteptourism.com/best-practices-of-sustainable-tourism-destinations/>



STAFF ENGAGEMENT

Sustainability should be embedded in the culture of the organization, and positioned as an ethos that underpins the decision making process across all areas. This cultural shift takes time, but will be instrumental in the success of moving initiatives forward.

Internal communication around a destination's sustainability initiatives is important not only for staff engagement, but also for establishing a baseline understanding of destination goals, vision, and practices. Clear sustainability communication allows staff to align their own passions with core destination initiatives and can lead to unique and innovative solutions that improve overall sustainability performance.



BEST PRACTICES FOR STAFF ENGAGEMENT

Effectively communicate the significance of the certification achievement to staff in a simple and passionate way. Explain what it means to be achieving GreenStep Sustainable Tourism certification, what was learnt through the process, and how staff can become a sustainability champion for the destination, by following these best practices:

- 1 | Communicate often and regularly regarding updates on sustainability related initiatives and programs
- 2 | Discuss sustainable tourism goals and related actions in regularly scheduled meetings
- 3 | Introduce the Destination Sustainability Committee to the broader organization by way of newsletters, fireside chats, q&a, or other forms of communication
- 4 | Share progress and/or milestones as it relates to the destination's sustainability action plan
- 5 | Develop a culture of sustainability with planned special events to celebrate achievements
- 6 | Interweave sustainability into employee onboarding and employee handbooks
- 7 | Connect sustainability to the core values of a destination's brand

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Destinations are a collection of stakeholders and it is important to involve community partners for the advancement of sustainable tourism as well as for branding purposes.

Destinations can facilitate alignment on key issues which not only builds resilience, but also improves a region's attractiveness to eco-conscious travellers. Sustainability certification is a powerful indicator for progress and the more a destination's community collaborates, the stronger it becomes.



BEST PRACTICES FOR STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Stakeholder engagement is an ongoing process and should be grounded in reciprocity. Collaboration with destination stakeholders should be mutually beneficial and it is highly recommended that actions are tailored to the needs of the community.

Best practices for destination stakeholder engagement include:

- 1 | Create a list of destination organizations and stakeholders including names, titles and areas of focus for progressing sustainability across the destination
- 2 | Facilitate partnership development by connecting stakeholders who share a similar mission and are aligned with similar goals or want to develop similar programs and initiatives
- 3 | Publicly share stories of sustainability achievements from within the destination
- 4 | Host training, webinars, and open dialogues to facilitate the transfer of knowledge between stakeholder organizations
- 5 | Regularly survey or solicit feedback from your industry stakeholders on the direction and/or the programming being developed as they relate to sustainability

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT - INDUSTRY

The more stakeholders that participate in sustainability initiatives, the stronger the influence of Sustainable Tourism certification.

Most tourism businesses are eager to become more sustainable, but many lack the resources or knowledge to begin. Sharing your sustainability knowledge and experience is an excellent way to demonstrate leadership for the destination and help to formulate new partnerships while guiding the industry to begin their own journey. To improve and progress sustainability performance as a destination, engaging and supporting industry businesses will be imperative to your success.

While there are many approaches to industry engagement, including collaboration with GreenStep, a few best practices include:

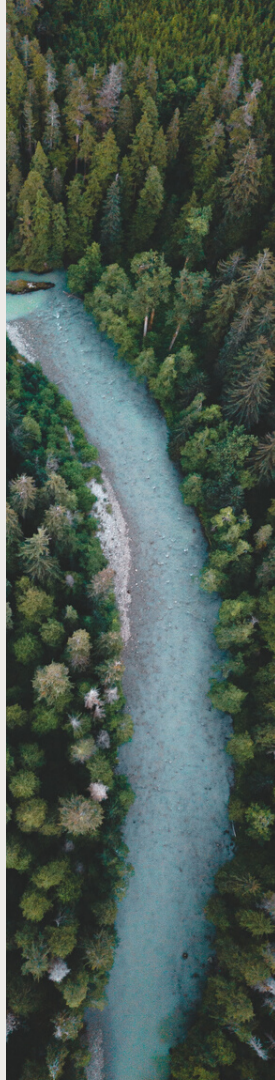
- Promote or host workshops, webinars and training opportunities to improve knowledge and understanding
- Recruit destination stakeholders to participate in industry conferences
- Share programming and resources that can help stakeholders improve their sustainability performance
- Create and distribute monthly tools, tips, and resources
- Publish summary statistics and share research findings
- Sponsor sustainability competitions
- Highlight innovative initiatives led by regional stakeholders
- Publish a best practices guide for industry to follow and participate in
- Create a community of sustainability champions by offering an incentive or benefit to those that participate and engage
- Create a brand message that supports your destination's goals and circulate a toolkit that businesses can use to share and support the initiative to show alignment towards a common goal

Visitor Engagement

Sustainability is interpreted in many different ways and marketing is a powerful opportunity to showcase alignment with global initiatives such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, or science-based targets initiative. Marketing sustainability initiatives and actions showcases what makes a destination unique and appeals to visitors who share similar values.

VISITOR ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

- Post destination updates and support for global events such as World Tourism Day
- Promote and share local sustainability events and initiatives
- Feature local stakeholders that are pursuing their own sustainability journey and highlight actions that businesses are taking to do their part
- Promote low carbon activities to guests
- Explain closures and access restrictions to increase compliance (carrying capacity of attractions and popular sites, to reduce over-crowding)
- Educate visitors on how they can participate in pest or invasive species management
- Share the destination's sustainability vision, along with guidance on how visitors can support destination initiatives during their visit and upon their return home
- Introduce a visitor code of conduct or visitor sustainability charter to help guide visitors to act and behave in a way that supports your destination vision and protects community assets



Marketing Your Certification

The best time to plant a tree was yesterday. The second best time to plant a tree is today.

- Chinese Proverb

Sustainability marketing does not begin, nor end with certification. Destination Certification is a lengthy process and there are many stories and learnings that can be shared along the way. Make a plan to share often and regularly so that your sustainability message becomes consistent.

HELP TO GET YOU STARTED

As a part of your destination's sustainability team, GreenStep is here to help you get started. Follow our social media channels and tag us in your posts and stories so we can help share your journey!



@GreenStepSolutions



@GreenStepInc



@greenstepsolutions



@greenstep-solutions-inc

Certified Sustainable Tourism destinations also satisfy one of two commitments required to become a signatory of the Sustainable Tourism 2030 Pledge. The pledge is a great launching point for sustainability marketing by sharing your commitment publicly.

For more information, visit:

<https://www.sustainabletourism2030.com/pledge>

Suggested Hashtags:

[#SustainableTourism](#) [#SustainableDestination](#)

[#SustainableTravel](#)

YOUR FIRST POST

One of the first marketing actions a destination should take is to publicly share their commitment to becoming a Sustainable Tourism Certified destination. In addition to sharing the exciting news, this initial post will help to establish accountability and credibility for future posts. To improve outreach, GreenStep will share tagged social media posts to help destinations reach broader audiences.

Important Note: The pre-certification examples provided can be used at any stage of the assessment process.

SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS | PRE-CERTIFICATION



We're making sustainability a priority! With the help of [@GreenStepInc](#) we're assessing our sustainability performance and creating an action plan for improvement. We plan to share our learnings along the way!



[@greenstepsolutions](#) is encouraging destinations like us to join the [#SustainableTourism](#) movement. We've been working to review our current programs, initiatives, and to identify areas where we can improve. Other tourism destinations can start their sustainability journey by taking GreenStep's free Sustainable Tourism assessment for Destinations. We are proud to share our journey to a more sustainable future for tourism.



[\[Destination XXX\]](#) is taking strides to become more sustainable by becoming an [@greenstep-solutions-inc](#) Sustainable Tourism member. We will be sharing tools and resources with industry businesses, who can help to support this important initiative.



Example:

The World Charter for Sustainable Tourism emphasizes that “tourism can significantly reduce its ecological footprint and that it can become an engine for innovation for green, inclusive, and low carbon economies, and safeguard cultural creativity, diversity, and human and ecosystem wellbeing.”

Our journey to becoming a more sustainable Destination is underway. [\[Destination XXX\]](#) has recently signed a formal Letter of Commitment, agreeing to have our Destination assessed against internationally-recognized criteria for sustainable tourism which will uncover both strengths and opportunities in which to focus our efforts to improve our performance over time.

We know there is much work to be done, but we are excited to gain more insight into how our Destination is performing, and to identify areas where we can have immediate impact, benefitting both the visitors and residents within our communities.

SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS | MID-CERTIFICATION



Learning opportunity! @greenstep-solutions-inc is hosting a free carbon footprint tracking webinar on [date] at [time]. Every community member that participates helps [Destination Name] become more sustainable! Comment below to let us know if you'll be there.



This week we're spotlighting [Destination Stakeholder], a local [business type] for their commitment to [aligned sustainability initiative]. [Write here a short summary of the stakeholder's sustainability actions].



As you know [Organization Name] has been diligently working with @GreenStepSolutions to achieve our sustainability goal of [sustainability goal]. Meet the members of our passionate Destination Sustainability Committee who are working to make that happen. [Write here a brief bio of relevant committee members].



Did you know that [x%] of [Destination Name] tourism businesses have made public commitments to improve their sustainability performance? With the help of @GreenStepInc, our region is growing as a #SustainableTourism destination. Let's all be part of the solution!



This year, [Destination Name] made a commitment to measure our sustainability performance and to become Certified through Canadian-based Certification provider, GreenStep Sustainable Tourism. We are in the process of submitting evidence to backup our assessment results. The evidence submission process is thorough, and an important part of having our performance verified by a third-party. We are looking forward to receiving word that our evidence has been accepted, where we will then move to the next phase of developing an #sustainability action plan for our Destination.

FOLLOWING CERTIFICATION ACHIEVEMENT

It's time to share your results!

Once a destination has been assessed and provided with a grading and a Certification designation, it's time to celebrate the achievement and share the good news.

- Make social media posts to engage visitors and celebrate key stakeholders
- Publish an official press release
- Schedule an interview with local news agencies (or consult with a PR Firm)
- Create a sustainability page on the destination's website to showcase ongoing updates, milestones, initiatives, and ongoing progress towards your goals

Important Note: The example posts specific to announcing Certification achievement and grading should only be made once the certification process has been completed.

SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS | POST-CERTIFICATION



We are very proud to announce that [Organization Name] is officially Sustainable Tourism [Bronze, Silver, Gold, Platinum] Certified as designated by @GreenStepInc #SustainableTourism



We are proud to announce that [Destination Name] has achieved Sustainable Tourism [Bronze, Silver, Gold, Platinum] Certification as designated by @greenstepsolutions. We will be consistently working towards reducing our carbon footprint and using sustainable destination development strategies across the organization



[Destination Name] is proud to announce that we have achieved @GreenStepSolutions Sustainable Tourism Certification. Our Destination is unique in [Insert details] and through this process we have identified some key focus areas to help support our industry businesses, while educating our visitors. Watch for our new #sustainability toolkit coming soon!



[Destination Name] is proud to be Sustainable Tourism [Grading] Certified by @GreenStepSolutions. As part of our sustainability action plan commitments, we recently introduced the following program for industry businesses. [talk here about any sustainability initiatives].

Topics for Social Media



UNDERSTANDING YOUR AUDIENCE

As a destination, extra attention should be paid to how you tailor messaging towards specific audiences. Often times, destinations need to communicate both with their business stakeholders as well as potential visitors.

How a destination packages their sustainability communication and where that information is delivered can greatly impact the effectiveness of marketing efforts.

Communication Channels for Visitors	Communication Channels for Industry
Email Tiktok Twitter Instagram Facebook Website	Email LinkedIn Facebook Zoom Chamber of Commerce Meetings Newsletters AGM Industry Events

Website Updates

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

Travel is a highly competitive industry and the Sustainable Tourism Certification can help distinguish your destination from the competition. For some visitors, meeting planners, or business travellers, sustainability certification can be the differentiating factor that attracts them to your destination.

GreenStep recommends three simple actions to seamlessly integrate sustainability into destination websites and RFPs.

- 1 | Add the Sustainable Tourism logo to the destination website's header or footer. The digital grading logo is emailed to the destination once the certification and evidence review process has been completed. If another copy is needed, email: support@greenstep.ca



- 2 | Update or add to an existing Destination Information (About Us) page. See the example below for suggested language:

[Destination Organization Name] has undergone a comprehensive assessment and review process to achieve Sustainable Tourism [Bronze/Silver/Gold/Platinum] Certification. The mandatory requirements included the signing of a formal letter of commitment, the formation of a destination sustainability committee, a destination evaluation based on globally-recognized criteria, which included 117 questions across four categories, evidence submission and verification for each question noted as present within the destination, and the development of a Sustainability Action Plan.

Following the assessment, we received a final report that recognized where we were doing well, and also highlighted areas of opportunity for improvement. We have incorporated this information into our sustainability action plan for continued success on our sustainability journey.

[Destination Organization Name] will be reassessed every three years to maintain our certification and be held accountable to our action plan.

3 | Create a dedicated sustainability page for the destination website. This page can include information about the Sustainable Tourism assessment process, specific actions taken by the destination and the future goals of the destination related to sustainability. You may wish to include a guidelines on how to be a "good visitor", this will help visitors to your area to understand how their behaviour can support or hinder your sustainability objectives as a destination.

Tip:

Use the Sustainable Tourism final report as a guide, looking at areas the destination scored well in addition to areas it can improve on. Pull out specific topics, and speak to the details of your results to questions related to that topic. You may even wish to consider publishing the destination action plan, as proof that the destination is working towards continuous improvement. Transparency adds credibility to messaging and will offer added accountability to help destinations achieve their goals and objectives.

Press Release

INSPIRE OTHERS

Sharing a destination's sustainability story with local media is an excellent way to highlight the achievement of Sustainable Tourism Certification as well as inspire others within the destination and beyond. A press release is an opportunity to describe in more detail the work a destination has done to become more sustainable.

Recommended publications include local news outlets and industry publications, to help reach those who are invested in your destination.

Tip:

It is important that press releases are written proactively, addressing both achievements and opportunities for improvement, so that destinations can guide the messaging. We always suggest a transparent and honest tone, focusing on lessons learned, and describing the tangible actions that will guide the destination management team and strategy.



SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: [Date]

[Business Contact Name]

[Business Name]

[Phone]

[Email]

HEADLINE (ONE LINE ONLY)

Subhead: More Detail As Needed, One Line Only

City, Province: Your announcement starts here, and should lead with a strong first paragraph that clarifies what you are announcing, where, and its relevance to your industry. Don't bury the lede: doing so makes it harder on reporters to find the information they need most, so get right to it in the first paragraph.

The second paragraph is the best spot for quotes, but choose your quotes carefully. No reporter likes reading from a sea of people saying the same boring thing. Leverage quotes to build the importance of your story but also to shape your core messages. Whenever and wherever possible, include quotes from customers or partners who will benefit from the news, and avoid extreme exaggeration: having your CEO say that your product is the next best thing to a rocket ship is typically a very bad idea unless you are Elon Musk.

(Continued on next page)

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE (CONT.)

In the third paragraph it is often tempting to add fluff that doesn't need to be there. It's also often extremely tempting to bleed over to a second page by bolstering the third paragraph with company history, lore, and supporting expert opinions. Keep in mind that the goal of the release is to provide clear, concise context on the story--you can always including more detail or links to additional testimonials in your pitch emails or on your blog. Some additional words of wisdom:

- Nobody likes long blocks of content, so use bullets to your advantage to break up the text
- Use language people can actually understand: if you had to use thesaurus.com to find it, delete it
- During your final edit, be honest with yourself on whether or not you are truly focused on what is newsworthy about this announcement. If not, revise accordingly.

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About GreenStep Solutions Inc.: GreenStep Solutions has provided green business consulting, certifications and software for more than 1,200 BC Businesses since 2008. GreenStep helps businesses and organizations identify opportunities to go green while at the same time, saving money and improving their green credibility, helping to meet the growing consumer demand for more responsible business. GreenStep also offers the Green Tourism Canada program and ecobase Certified. For more information, visit www.greenstep.ca.

About Your Company: This is a placeholder for a short, 3-4 sentence description of your company along with a link to your homepage. Double check to ensure the first sentence accurately and clearly describes your business in a manner that could easily be lifted and translated by a reporter.

Ongoing Communication

TENDERS AND REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFPS)

Sustainable Tourism Certification is a powerful asset and differentiator in a competitive bidding process. The Sustainable Tourism Certification and assessment process has prepared destinations to develop a credible, well-thought out sustainability story and strategy that can help secure tourism business, be it events, conferences, meetings, festivals, or tournaments. While this toolkit has been designed primarily for marketing sustainability achievements to visitors or industry stakeholders, language and ideas can be adapted from this toolkit for use in tenders and proposals. For more information on how to leverage certification for bidding, contact: info@greenstep.ca



COMMUNICATION BEYOND CERTIFICATION

Marketing sustainability achievements goes beyond social media and website updates. This toolkit is just the first chapter of what will build to become a process of continuous improvement and ongoing dialogue with your stakeholders.

Destination sustainability certification involves a wide range of topics and it can be difficult to know where to begin. If you ever need help finding stories, the destination assessment report is a great place to begin. Look at the criteria questions closely, and call on businesses within your destination who are actively displaying best practice in the chosen area, and feature their initiatives, programs, and request permission to share these with your broader community.

Sustainability aims to enhance all aspects of an organization, including communication. While many areas of opportunity for sustainability improvement are outlined in the Sustainable Tourism criteria, each destination will have its own unique pathway to certification.

GreenStep is excited to join you and your destination on this journey and we look forward to following along!



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Our headquarters are located at
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