

University of Montana

ScholarWorks at University of Montana

Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research
Publications

Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research

1-1-2002

CTAP Evaluation Report: An Evaluation of the Community Tourism Assessment Program

Thale Dillon

The University of Montana-Missoula

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umt.edu/itrr_pubs



Part of the [Leisure Studies Commons](#), [Recreation, Parks and Tourism Administration Commons](#), and the [Tourism and Travel Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Dillon, Thale, "CTAP Evaluation Report: An Evaluation of the Community Tourism Assessment Program " (2002). *Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research Publications*. 128.
https://scholarworks.umt.edu/itrr_pubs/128

This Report is brought to you for free and open access by the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research Publications by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

Institute for Tourism & Recreation Research

CTAP Evaluation Report

An Evaluation of the Community Tourism Assessment Program

by Thale Dillon

Research Report 2002-1
January 2002

Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research
School of Forestry
The University of Montana

This report was funded by the Lodging Facility Use Tax

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	I
INTRODUCTION	1
BACKGROUND.....	1
THE PROCESS.....	1
PRE-ASSESSMENT.....	2
COMPONENT OVERVIEW.....	2
POST -ASSESSMENT PHASE.....	3
PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES	3
METHODS	3
CTAP OBJECTIVES.....	3
EVALUATION AND ANALYSIS.....	4
FINDINGS	6
PROCESS OUTCOMES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS.....	6
PARTICIPATION	7
COST/BENEFIT (IMPACT) ANALYSIS.....	8
FOLLOW -UP EFFORT	9
MECHANICS OF THE PROCESS	10
MARKETING NEEDS.....	10
TIME REQUIREMENTS.....	10
COMMUNITY EDUCATION.....	11
ITRR SURVEY.....	11
CONTRIBUTION BY THE MSU—EXTENSION SERVICE	11
CONTRIBUTION BY TRAVEL MONTANA.....	12
A AVAILABILITY OF GRANT MONEY.....	12
MISCELLANEOUS.....	12
CONCLUSIONS	14
SUMMARY AND SUGGESTIONS	16
SOURCES	17
APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP QUESTION GUIDE	19
APPENDIX B: PRE-SESSION MAILER FOR FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS	23

Executive Summary

The following themes emerged from focus group sessions and interviews with participants of the Community Tourism Assessment Program (CTAP):

- The CTAP is fulfilling all its objectives as a community development program. The program objectives are five-fold:
 - 1) To help communities decide if tourism is an appropriate economic development strategy.
 - 2) To help communities assess their tourism potential.
 - 3) To help communities weigh the potential costs and benefits of specific development projects.
 - 4) To help communities determine local values and concerns relating to tourism development.
 - 5) To help communities select and develop projects that fit with local values.
- The communities that participate in the CTAP recognize the importance of including people in the process with different points of view in terms of tourism, and appreciate the effort on the part of the facilitators to include these people.
- There is appreciation for the presence of outside experts being brought in to speak to the local committees about specialized topics.
- Although the 8-9 month time requirement for the process seems like a long time and works to deter participation in some cases, participants also realize that the time is necessary to complete all the components of the process.
- The prospect of receiving a grant to fund a chosen development project increases process participation.
- The data provided from outside sources is considered valuable both to the process and to the communities themselves.
- The contributions from Travel Montana, MSU Extension and ITRR are deemed valuable and vital to the process.
- Suggestions as to how the process can be improved include the addition of follow-up meetings after the process itself is completed, and more marketing education.
- A few problem areas were identified, including confusion regarding the economic impact analysis conducted in each community.

Introduction

Background

The Community Tourism Assessment Program (CTAP) emerged from the National Extension Tourism Conference in 1988, where development specialists from Alaska, California, Colorado, Guam, Montana, and Wyoming met to discuss tourism education in the West. They concluded that a process was needed to help communities realistically assess their tourism potential and determine costs and benefits associated with tourism development. The program was formed through the cooperative work of several federal and state agencies and programs, including the U.S. Forest Service, the Montana Extension Service, the Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks Department, Travel Montana, the U.S. Small Business Administration, the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research at the University of Montana-Missoula, the College of Business at Montana State University-Bozeman, and the pilot community of Choteau in Teton County, MT. From this effort was developed a handbook, the Community Tourism Assessment Handbook¹, which is the source of most of the detailed material on the process itself found in this report.

Following the successful completion of the pilot program in Choteau, the Montana Tourism Advisory Council in 1993 committed to fund the process in three Montana communities each year.

The Process

The CTAP is a community self-help program intended to guide local economic development groups through an assessment process with minimal outside assistance. The goal of the process is to help them identify what role, if any, tourism can play in strengthening their local economy. Each component of the process has been tested to find ways for community teams to complete them on their own and to determine where outside assistance is necessary.

The process consists of nine components, each outlined in a separate chapter of the Community Tourism Assessment Handbook. Each chapter details the component's purpose and objectives, as well as the decisions to be made. There are also detailed *how-to* instructions, along with guidelines for evaluating results. The nine components are usually covered in an eight-month period, by the end of which a long-term project plan will have emerged.

The culmination of the process is deciding if tourism development will help a local economy, and if so, deciding on a development project for the community that correlates with local values. Part of the funding available for the CTAP includes grant money to be used by the participating communities to help their development project get off the ground. The grants come with the obligation on the part of the communities to provide \$1 in either soft or hard match for every \$2 given.

¹ Brass, Jane L. (1996). Community Tourism Assessment Handbook. Western Rural Development Center, Utah State University. Logan, UT.
<http://ext.usu.edu/wrdoc/ctah>

Pre-Assessment

Each year, Montana communities of 15,000 people or less are encouraged to apply for participation in the Community Tourism Assessment Program. The number of applicants varies, as does the size of the communities that apply. However, three communities are selected by a committee each August, based on need, potential and demonstrated commitment. The first meeting as a rule takes place in each of the communities in September, with the process concluding in April or May the following year.

Component Overview

The CTAP process itself consists of the following nine components. Some were adapted from existing material, while others were worked out by members of the original developing team. The components overlap each other to a certain extent as some are carried out by different entities at the same time, and most span more than one meeting.

1-Community Organization

A local team (the action committee) is formed under the leadership of a local coordinator to carry out the assessment process through monthly committee meetings, with additional task force efforts in between. This normally takes place before the first meeting, but the committee continues to grow throughout the life of the process.

2-Current Visitor and Economic Profiles

Existing data is compiled to assess the current impact of tourism on the overall local economy. Visitor characteristics and expenditure patterns are analyzed to develop a profile of those who visit the community.

3-Resident Attitude Survey (RAS)

A survey is conducted to assess the attitudes that residents hold towards tourism, tourism development and tourism promotion in their community.

4-Visioning and Goal Setting

The action committee members develop a vision of where they would like to see their community in the future, setting goals for tourism development to help them work toward realization of their vision.

5-Tourism Marketing Basics

Committee members are introduced to basic tourism marketing information to better understand their realistic markets and how to develop products of value to those markets.

6-Attractions and Facility Inventory

The committee produces inventories of existing attractions and tourism-related facilities in the area and rates them based on their competitive advantage and on their value to tourists. The committee also assesses the community's infrastructure to determine local capacity to support an expanded tourism industry.

7-Potential Project Identification

Priority short term and long term development projects are identified to be further evaluated through a rating process. The rating scale is based on value to the tourist, value to the community, and competitive advantage.

8-Initial Project Scoping

Task forces develop a basic description of each of the prioritized projects, including projected revenues, projected costs (construction, operation and maintenance), employment and infrastructure needs.

9-Impact Analysis

An impact analysis is conducted to estimate economic, social, and environmental costs and benefits of each scoped-out project. The analysis will suggest who or what may be positively and negatively affected by the proposed development to help the community decide which, if any, of the projects should proceed.

Post-Assessment Phase

Upon completion of the assessment, the community may find itself in one of three positions. The process may have indicated that tourism is not a development option the community should pursue. Or, if tourism development is found to be an acceptable strategy, it may be that the action committee has not been able to identify a specific project that passes the assessment.

Most often, however, the action committee will have identified one or more projects to develop and the community proceeds to the post-assessment phase. This phase involves project development; project marketing; implementation and management; and monitoring and evaluation. At this point, the formal involvement of the CTAP facilitators is over. However, they continue to be available to the communities as a resource through their respective programs.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the usefulness of the Community Tourism Assessment Program in Montana.

The objectives of this study included:

- To determine if the CTAP process fulfills its objectives.
- To identify and assess the strengths and weaknesses of the CTAP process.
- To make recommendations for possible improvement of the CTAP process.

Methods

CTAP Objectives

In determining whether or not the CTAP process fulfills its objectives, it was necessary to first define these in more concrete terms. This was done through study of the process handbook, as well as through discussions with current CTAP facilitators, one of whom was the team leader during the development of the program. The objectives are five-fold:

- 1)** To help communities decide if tourism is an appropriate economic development strategy.
- 2)** To help communities assess their tourism potential.
- 3)** To help communities weigh the potential costs and benefits of specific tourism development projects
- 4)** To help communities determine local values and concerns relating to tourism development.
- 5)** To help communities select and develop projects that fit with local values.

Evaluation and Analysis

In conducting the CTAP evaluation, there was no need for a random survey. Rather, the input needed was that of people who had participated in the process in their respective communities. While the ideal scenario would be to include feedback from members of the general public who are not involved in tourism, these people would not be familiar with the CTAP and its impact on the community and as such, their input would be of little value to this evaluation.

For the purposes of this evaluation, using focus groups appeared to be the best method. By conducting focus group sessions in the respective communities that had previously participated in the CTAP, the evaluator could bring together people who were involved in the original effort. The participants were already familiar with one another, allowing the sessions to take the format of an informal conversation in which participants were allowed to talk relatively freely. The facilitator guided the direction of the discussions by posing broad questions, then sat back and listened while the participants talked among themselves. The question guide is included in Appendix A

Focus group sessions were conducted in three communities: Livingston, Havre, and Anaconda/Deer Lodge County. These communities were selected based on two criteria. First, they had all completed the process fairly recently (within the previous 4 years). The CTAP process has, like any dynamic program, evolved and improved over time so it was important that the evaluation was of the current process, not the process as it was conducted several years ago. It was also necessary to involve recent participants because these were the most likely to recall details of the process itself. However, it was also necessary to ensure that those communities chosen for the focus group sessions had fully completed the process, including the final project, to avoid evaluating a process that had not yet run its course.

Second, the three communities were chosen to represent each of the three process outcomes mentioned in the Introduction. Livingston participated in the process in 1996/97 and is the only community that has decided not to go through with a project due to lack of local support for the effort. Havre completed the process in 1997/98 and was chosen because it is a community that is very supportive of tourism development but foundered in the effort of getting a project off the ground. Anaconda/Deer Lodge County was one of the 1998/99 communities and was chosen because it was extremely focused and dedicated in its effort, and mustered tremendous public support for its chosen project.

Focus group sessions were arranged with the action committees of each of these three communities. An open invitation was extended through each community's local coordinator to other interested parties. The focus group participants were offered a stipend of \$25 each as compensation for their time, and were presented with questions enabling the researcher to gauge how well the process fulfilled its objectives in each of the communities. These questions were distributed to the participants in advance to allow time for in-depth consideration (Appendix B). The sessions were lead by a facilitator who presented the same questions to all three groups. Each session was tape recorded and transcribed.

The focus group sessions were followed by in-depth interviews with the respective community coordinators, as well as with interviews and discussions with CTAP facilitators (Clint Blackwood [formerly with Travel Montana and one of the development team members], Victor Bjornberg [Travel Montana] and Dave Sharpe [MSU Extension Service, the development team leader]). From the focus group sessions and interviews, themes emerged that were remarkably similar in nature across the various communities. These were detailed in a short document which was then shared with coordinators from additional participant communities (Dillon, Laurel, Red Lodge, Whitehall and Glasgow) for a more

broad-based evaluation. The feedback based on this document was in agreement with the initial findings and was incorporated into the evaluation.

To analyze the material gathered, individual statements pertaining to the CTAP process were identified within the transcripts, coded and assigned to different categories based on their content. These categories are detailed below. Where more than one person made comments with respect to various issues, their input was summarized and included in this report. Comments dealing with issues that were raised by only one person were not included as they do not represent a theme.



Findings

On the whole, those contacted for this study—both focus group participants and the additional coordinators contacted later—were highly satisfied with the CTAP process and appreciative of the opportunity to participate. No one suggested changes to the structure of the program, but some problem areas were identified and a few suggestions for improvements were made. Strengths and weaknesses were identified within the resulting findings, highlighting the usefulness of the process to the respective communities in the participants' own words. The various statements are categorized below based on themes that emerged during the focus group sessions and interviews.

Process Outcomes and Accomplishments

- One of the outcomes of the CTAP process is that it provides direction and focus to community efforts, both those that were already in place when the program started and those undertaken after its completion. In addition, the process itself tends to validate these earlier efforts while also creating heightened awareness within the participating community.

“...we came out of it with some pretty defined objectives and goals... I think it focused some key leaders in the community on, first of all, the assets that we have, the opportunities that we have and some of the things that maybe we could fix and do better.”

“...it tightened things up and clarified things as far as what we were looking at and the future of things.”

“...it certainly helped the Tourism Committee and we're still working from it...it gave us a definite direction to go in—a defined direction which we didn't have before...”

“[The process] substantiated some of the things and also some of the projects that we've been involved in for a number of years. It validated, I think, some of the things we've been trying to work on... I think it provided us with a little bit of a roadmap.”

“We had gone through the full vision process and this [the process] validated that...”

“The inventory. Doing all the inventories of all the things that we had—I think it raised the awareness.”

- Another outcome of the process was that it encouraged consideration within the action committee for the wishes of the community.

“This project we selected was what we felt was consistent with the wishes that it would be in town, historic development.”

“...so at least [the process] gives us an idea of saying well we may not be as much looking at the elk habitat or favorite fishing hole, but what are other recreational things we can look at?”

“...you go through the process and then you see the different ideas and what is going to work and then you see okay, this is what we need and we can't pay for that, it doesn't fit in, so kind of you go by what is going to work and then you put on what is the priority for the community as a whole.”

On respecting the desires of the community: “We went for [this project] so that it would help the tourists that are here, but it’s not really going to be the driving force to get them coming more.”

- The CTAP process also enabled the communities to answer certain questions and make certain decisions with respect to what direction their development effort should take.

“One of the reasons we wanted to go for the project is that it’s been underlying that we should go in for tourism... We didn’t know how many people wanted it, how many people didn’t want it. What did they want to develop? What did they not want to develop? We didn’t have that data.”

“When 82 percent want cultural tourism, everybody said, oh, okay maybe we should do this before we do whatever else everybody else was thinking of doing.”

- Another benefit that was achieved through this process was the discovery of all the resources available within the communities themselves, resources that may not have been brought out under different circumstances.

“I thought that the community had a tremendous amount of resources with regard to skill level with people... We have people like that around town and we just have to find out who they are and if they get excited about a project, man, they’re a wealth of information!”

“The more people you have together, the broader your base of support, of course, and your ideas and resources. I mean you can get, ‘I have the dump truck and I have the backhoe,’ that kind of stuff.”

- An extremely valuable outcome of this process was the educational component. Participants learned how to conduct an assessment process, something they were not familiar with prior to this involvement. Some of the communities have been able to use what they learned for other projects such as city clean-up.

“So, as far as education, I mean, I got a lot out of it. It opened up my eyes a lot—of the if-you-will political process, for grant money if you want to call it that, I mean I’ve never applied for a grant dollar in my life. So I looked at this and I learned how to do it... So, I mean, it was a great educational deal!”

In response to whether there has been opportunity to use what was learned from the process: “Oh sure! Technically what we could do, I feel, is just pick up the ball right where we left off. Absolutely. That learning is still there.”

Participation

- The CTAP process encourages the cooperation of the numerous entities affected by tourism and as such, it has the ability to bring together a number of different groups to work on the same thing. The idea is to continually involve other groups and mobilize people throughout the life of the process, making it a community-level rather than a personal-level effort.

“Previously, prior to getting started on this program, there were a lot of factional groups out there trying to promote here and promoting there and there really wasn’t a centralized unit to put this together and that’s what this program did for us. It brought all the segments of the community together in one meeting room and talked about the same topics.”

“Obviously, this process helped everybody come together and agree on something.”

“Probably one of the strongest points [of the process] is the bringing together all these people, all agreed to compromise.”

- The participants in the process realize the importance of the involvement of multiple “factions” and fully encourage further recruitment.

“You have to have everybody around the table. Because when you don’t have someone around the table, then you miss big things. (...) Without maybe having more of the first-line beneficiaries around the table, I don’t think we would have gotten as much bang for the buck.”

“The more people you have together, the broader your base of support, of course, and your ideas and resources.”

“When you have that many people buying into a project that makes it so much easier...”

- There is recognition of the fact that the process by its very nature has a tendency of attracting mostly people with a vested interest in tourism, as well of the fact that even these people are not always interested in participating.

“... unfortunately a lot of people that should participate in it, don’t. And I think that if you now—hindsight’s always great, but if we did it again, I would make it imperative that somebody from the Innkeepers’ Association participate and that there’d be some representation from the retail community.”

“I think one of the unfortunate things is that the people who participate regularly at the meetings were like “preaching to the choir”... It started out big and then it got down to the core and the core of it ended up being pretty much the Tourism Committee of the Chamber; the people who represent attractions and truly believe tourism is viable... The number-one thing tourists do when they travel is shop. We had nobody from our retail sector participate in this. We had nobody from transportation or whatever and so I don’t know if it’s the program or just us or the community but I think we missed an opportunity to educate some more people in the community about the positive things in tourism ...”

“It just showed the problem with the complacency of the business community and it showed up when we went through the process... So it’s sad that we didn’t have our people involved but it’s also sad that we can’t get the motel people to come to our tourism meetings. That’s a problem of the community that wasn’t the fault of the program at all.”

“Those people [CTAP facilitators], they came and preached to the choir.”

Cost/Benefit (Impact) Analysis

- An integral part of deciding on a development project is the impact, or cost/benefit analysis carried out in each community. There is a general awareness that this is a necessary part of the process and that it was performed in each community.

“It was a broad overview of, ‘if you improve [a local attraction], how many more potential tourists would go through?’ We talked about how our improvements would help or hinder the infrastructure of the community and that kind of stuff.”

“We did talk about ... the economics of it—the social and cultural part of it and the physical environment which kind of helped us set the vision statement ... then we also talked about the need—the points on the social and cultural impact—that any type of major expansion of tourism could have on our community.”

- Unfortunately, there are some problems with the presentation of the impact analysis. It appears that it is too detailed, too complicated and not realistically useful to the communities. All but one community of all those contacted had problems understanding the analysis.

“[The economic impact analysis] was evaluated as the least meaningful meeting and that was when [a visiting economist] came, remember, and went through all that data as far as impact analyses and [a member of the action committee] and I followed up with him and that probably needed to be more fleshed out as it was presented. Something needs to be changed.” (In response to this: “You’d get lost in a number of items. He covered so much information”, “That wasn’t very helpful. Hard to absorb it all and assimilate it.”)

Talking about the cost/benefit session: “We needed the end of the meeting before we needed the intro about it—about the concepts and the principles—and then delving into the actual [analysis], and really, everybody should have brought calculators!”

Talking about the cost/benefit analysis: “That concept would be a tough sell to people who are in business. Taking important points out of that session and going to the public and how that’s going to benefit you. I don’t think they would have been following it. At one time I think it was beyond, I won’t say ‘general intelligence’, but...”

“And you apply [the economic impact information] and a year from now, who’s going to take all the information a year from now, in retrospect go back and figure out, did we break even? Did we do well? Did we do poorly? I don’t know if you could do that.”

“What we had a problem with here is that [our county] also included Yellowstone National Park and those statistics were always, you know, every time they put something on the screen, ‘Now remember, this includes Yellowstone National Park!’... So all our infrastructure numbers were really, really out of whack.”

On the economic impact analysis: “...I just think they made it a lot more complicated than it needed to be.”

On whether or not they felt the data provided applied to them: “No, not in a helpful situation.”

Follow-Up Effort

- Among all the process participants there was a strong desire to be involved in one or more follow-up sessions to allow for their efforts and energies to be refocused.

“I wouldn’t mind some day having the program again and getting the update on things, on what’s going on.”

“It would be nice if you did have a follow-up to that program because even though we’re doing these things, it’s sort of a wake-up call when you see, yeah—we did put that program together ... Even if there was only a one-day follow-up that came at least within maybe two years ... that would be wonderful.”

“It wouldn’t hurt to have a shot in the arm if that’s possible in the program and I think you’ll find other communities that would say the same thing.”

“Not only marketing the first year, but also follow-up sessions, because you can only absorb so much over a period of time and to come back and to have a follow-up session...”

“I guess that would be a benefit of this process that it brought more entities together again so that they could all compare notes on what has been done.”

Mechanics of the Process

- Addressing the workings of the process:

“Then once the two projects, or the project, are identified, then you go to the project study and say, okay, what kind of social impact is it going to have, what kind of economic impact? Is it going to have an environmental negative or positive impact? So you do all of that, and then you get your money.”

“...when you dedicate eight or nine months to a learning process and you get through the project I think there’s more to the program than just the completion of the project.”

“We knew exactly what was going to be covered. That book was important for each of them to have.”

“I think a lot of that paper we were given is a good reference to be able to go back to it if, you know, we start looking in the fall at another project...”

Marketing Needs

- Many focus group participants felt that the process needs to include more marketing education. They felt that the provided “lesson” was insufficient.

“One of the things we wanted to do following our assessment was have [the person from Travel Montana] come back who was the marketing person... We talked about marketing and keeping it going and we were going to have her come back and do a follow-up workshop with all of the attractions on a marketing plan... She was just like one of the speakers only for an hour and that was one of the reasons I don’t feel it was covered adequately...”

“I wish we’d had one whole session just on marketing... I think you could expand it easily by another session or two.”

“Not only marketing the first year, but also follow-up sessions, because you can only absorb so much over a period of time and to come back and to have a follow-up session...”

- Some participants also expressed a desire for different marketing approaches. Currently, the marketing session focuses on marketing a community to the outside world—externally, while some see the need for ideas on how to market to their own community—internally. By internal marketing, they mean both marketing events to the local population, and marketing the idea of tourism in general to the residents.

“I think that marketing session could have focused on internal. We were trying to get it there but it was focusing on external and I think it needs to have internal more than external.”

Time Requirements

- To some, the length of the process is seen as a stumbling block to recruitment, making it hard to persuade people to stay on board.

“I think some of them went in thinking that the money was going to be easy and all they wanted was the money in the end. They didn’t want to go through the eight months of... So that became a stumbling block...”

On the length of the process: “I think after a period of time people wanted to start seeing things happen.”

- However, there was definite recognition of the necessity of the length due to the material that needs to be covered.

“Once you get over [the time] hurdle I don’t think the length of time is a really serious problem. But I would think that it does take that long. There was a lot of things to go over during that time. It was well organized—it takes you right through the process... To shorten it you have to have more meetings in a shorter period of time and I may have lost a few [participants].”

“I think the timeframe gave you an opportunity to collect information between meetings to bring to the next meeting.”

Community Education

- By virtue of being an assessment process, and not a promotional program, the CTAP does not address the issue of community education. If an action committee decides it needs to educate community residents about the impacts of tourism, the CTAP provides no guidelines. Some participants feel this is a problem.

“I think our group looked at [the benefits and the costs] but I think we could have done a better job of getting out to the community so they would understand how those dollars were going to impact our community because a lot of our business people haven’t bought into that.”

“I guess one of the negatives...about the questions I had from people that maybe we didn’t get it out there—educate them well enough on how tourism could impact our community economically. So maybe that was something that could be improved on.”

In response to question regarding community education becoming part of process:
“Definitely. I think education is something that is only absorbed if you’re willing to absorb it.”

ITRR Survey

- For all the communities contacted, the Resident Attitude Survey conducted by ITRR was essential in making some of the decisions required by the process.

“The survey helped people realize that we could do something and now that we have that [project], now maybe it will help people build on their history.”

“...I think it’s a great thing to do in terms of getting the players there, the survey’s great...it gives you some ammunition, but it gives you a way to sift out, kind of what’s going to work and what isn’t going to work.”

“The survey was so critical—that was really good for us to know... To have somebody objectively be able to do that.”

Contribution by the MSU—Extension Service

- The facilitator from the Extension Service was felt to provide assurance from an outside source, as well as validation of the action committee’s efforts.

“We think we do okay, but it’s good to have someone like [him] saying, ‘Your community is outstanding in how you come together’, that’s important for us to hear from outside people.”

“Sometimes you might get a little bit discouraged and he’d say, ‘No this is really working!’”

“Absolutely the best! Positive, informed, enthusiastic. He stayed with us and he kept coming back and answered questions.”

Contribution by Travel Montana

- The facilitator from Travel Montana was felt to fill an organizational function, as well as keeping the process on track and providing a personal commitment to each community.

“I think Travel Montana guided us through [the process] where we wouldn’t have had that. We may have been able to pull these groups together, but Travel Montana knew the direction to take everybody. We could have met for nine months and discussed all the projects we wanted to do and you know how it goes a lot of times, and they kept us on track.”

“One thing—maybe this is on a personal thing—there was that personal commitment from [him] and I think that was really important. He helped keep us on track. He was a great facilitator that could pull us back when we would get off on a tangent and I think that personal commitment to this community was very important.”

“Knowledgeable. He had a job to do. He was very professional. He was doing that job... He’s doing his job by coming to these communities and getting us on the right path. He doesn’t make up our minds...”

Availability of Grant Money

- The prospect of receiving a grant to get a development project started at the end of the process served two outcomes. First, it attracted more participants to the action committee.

“...the people who participated were all people who had the opportunity to get the money. So they thought it was a vested interest.”

“I think some of them went in thinking that the money was going to be easy and all they wanted was the money in the end.”

- The second benefit of the grant money was that it seemed to lighten the burden for the committee members, making the process seem easier.

“It made it look easier, you know, when \$20,000 was sitting there—it made the goal look a lot closer.”

“If it wasn’t for that seed money, to be able to go through a couple of champions...that there is some seed money here and to be able to go to them and say, ‘Would you be champion of this project?’”

Miscellaneous

- Some issues were raised by only two or three focus group participants and did not seem to represent a common theme among the communities. However, the comments are included here because they do complete the picture of the process.

- One of the participants was appreciative of the fact that some of the money collected through the Accommodations Facilities Use Tax is being returned to small communities. This sentiment was echoed by another participant as well.

“I like the idea also, like our community, like from bed tax collection for example...to see that big money come back to the community, this is a great asset for a small town which we don’t have the money to work with, you know, but that is a big help for the smaller towns—having that program.”

“I’d rather see that support from Travel Montana where you give the money to help out the community, not just advertising all the time.”

- Another of the participants felt that the group could have used some additional help in recruiting necessary participants for the process. This sentiment was echoed by one of the coordinators contacted later.

“...but had there been someone from Travel Montana—had there been someone from the University of Montana who called when there’s a couple of key people and a local person cannot get them to put us on their calendar, it would be nice to have a little help...”

“It’s almost like it would be nice if the University would say, ‘Who is not listening to you in the community?’, that we could come and say, ‘Do you realize how critical you are to this mission?’. And that’s not part of the process. That would be nice to have.”

- Finally, the benefit of having people from outside the community facilitate the process was recognized by some.

“I think having outside experts, outside people at each of the sections was very important. That was a real plus, because it brought people back. It wasn’t just going to be us talking.”

“It was good for the community to see resources from both universities and also from Travel Montana and the Department of Commerce. We’re seeing a direct benefit in our community in going through a worthwhile process to determine, ‘Is tourism something you want to do? How do you go about it?’”

Conclusions

To arrive at a conclusion regarding whether or not the Community Tourism Assessment Program fulfills its objectives, one has to move beyond the level of enthusiasm that each past participant community exudes when asked about the process. The five objectives, all of which were fulfilled, are treated separately below.

1. To help communities decide if tourism is an appropriate economic development strategy.

Objective Fulfilled? YES

The decision as to whether or not tourism development is an appropriate development strategy is based primarily on the results from the Resident Attitude Survey conducted by ITRR. The study is conducted in each of the participating communities to assess the attitudes of residents regarding tourism and tourism development. A central tenet of the CTAP is not that “tourism is good for you”, but rather that “tourism may be good for you”, and as such, the survey is essential in reaching that decision.

The process’s openness to the decision of the community is evident in the course of events in Livingston. Not wanting increased tourism is a perfectly acceptable outcome and when the Resident Attitude Survey indicated this to be the desire of the residents of Livingston, no effort was made to change their minds. In the remaining 22 communities that have gone through the process, the survey data indicated that the majority of community residents were supportive of some type of tourism development effort and the process was carried forward.

2. To help communities assess their tourism potential.

Objective Fulfilled? YES

Frequently, a community feels it has a lot more to offer tourists than may realistically be the case. An accurate assessment is arrived at through infrastructure and attractions inventories, as well as demand-side analyses of what a community has to offer its potential visitors. The CTAP process provides the tools and guidance necessary to perform these analyses, along with keen outside eyes to more realistically determine potential. All the communities involved described this as a valuable part of the process in that it helped them be more critical of their own environment, as well as to be more aware of what tourists want.

3. To help communities weigh the potential costs and benefits of specific tourism development projects.

Objective Fulfilled? YES (clarity of analysis needs improvement)

The cost/benefit analysis is two-faceted, involving an economic as well as a social component. The economic analysis includes a local analysis performed by an economist from MSU-Bozeman and has generated confusion in all but one of the communities contacted. While the analysis produces results that are as good as the available data permits, and while there is no doubt that the conclusions arrived at are accurate, the economic analysis itself seems to be lost on the local process participants.

The social component of the cost/benefit analysis draws on data collected through the local Resident Attitude Survey (RAS), and as such is very community-specific. Together with the economic data, a complete cost/benefit analysis is performed, taking into account both monetary and community values. Efforts could be made to involve committee members in the economic analysis on a more participatory level to provide a more complete understanding and thus a more accurate analysis.

4. To help communities determine local values and concerns relating to tourism development.

Objective Fulfilled? YES

This objective as well is fulfilled by using the results from the local RAS. Through the community-generated questions included on the survey instrument, issues specific to each community are addressed, as are more general issues pertaining to tourism development in the community and in the state. The issues identified become part of the visioning process for each community, which addresses local values and concerns in a detailed manner.

5. To help communities select and develop projects that fit with local values.

Objective fulfilled? YES

Local values are identified through the local RAS and then incorporated into the community vision statement. The vision statement in turn is used, along with the cost/benefit analysis, to select projects that fit with the recognized values.

Summary and Suggestions

While some suggestions were brought forth in the Findings sections of this report, many of them fall outside of the scope and objectives of the CTAP process. The CTAP is not a promotional tool and was not developed to push tourism development on those who do not want it. Again, this is illustrated in the outcome of the process in Livingston. In fulfilling the objectives it is intended to, the CTAP constitutes a very effective self-help tool. Participants are extremely appreciative of the program, praising it as one of the few ways that small communities see any part of the bed tax returned to them.

In terms of ways to improve the process, it would be helpful to work on the following:

1. Make the economic analysis work more accessible to participants by avoiding mathematical detail and focusing more on the main concepts of economic impact.
2. Improve visitor profiles and spending information through on-site data collection in each of the communities prior to project start, providing better data to the participating communities. This addition necessitates moving the application deadline from late summer to early spring to allow for survey work to be carried out throughout the summer, the busiest travel season in most parts of the state.
3. Add follow-up sessions to take place in each community approximately one year after the completion of the process, to ensure that the process is still on track, to ensure that granted projects are moving forward, and to provide further assistance if needed.
4. Provide more marketing guidance, maybe through an additional follow-up session, with emphasis on specific projects and localized marketing.

Sources

Brass, Janet L. (1996). *Community Tourism Assessment Handbook*. Western Rural Development Center—Utah State University. Logan, UT.

Appendix A: Focus Group Question Guide

Guiding questions for CTAP focus group:

General opening question:

How did you feel the CTAP process worked for your community?

Follow-up questions to narrow focus:

- 1) How did you determine whether or not tourism was something that should be pursued in your community?
What pros and cons were considered?
- 2) When considering tourism-related development projects, were you able to evaluate potential costs and benefits associated with each?
How was the evaluation process carried out?
- 3) Were you able to assess local values, past, present and future, in an adequate way?
Did you use the info from the Resident Attitude Survey in developing your vision statement?
How did you develop your goals statement?
How about concerns regarding tourism development—were they addressed?
- 4) Were you able to select a project/projects that fit with local values?
What were the criteria used to determine this?
Did you use the goals and vision statements?
(Why not?)
- 5) What knowledge was gained through the process (knowledge of community, of tourism, of marketing of supply/demand relationships, of economic development, etc.)?
Is this knowledge/experience still useful to the community?
Are you still using this process/info to assess other types of developments?
- 6) Were people's aspirations changed as a result of going through the process?
Did people change their minds regarding development in light of what was learned?
- 7) How did you feel about the length of the process?
- 8) What is your opinion of the facilitating organizations involved in the process? How valuable was the input from each entity?
Travel Montana?
MSU Extension Service?
ITRR?
- 9) What would you say was the strongest feature of the process?
- 10) What would you say was the weakest feature of the process?
- 11) If you were talking to someone from a different community that is about to go through the CTAP, what would you tell them?
Advice?
Caution?

Appendix B: Pre-Session Mailer for Focus Group Participants

COMMUNITY TOURISM ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

The Community Tourism Assessment Program is a process designed to assist rural communities considering tourism as an economic development plan. The Tourism Advisory Council has charged ITRR with evaluating this process, and as a representative of one of the past participant communities, I am pleased that you have chosen to give your time once again by participating in our focus group session, scheduled for *(date and time)*. The session will be held at *(location)*, and refreshments will be provided.

To prepare you for what we will discuss, please consider the following points. There are many issues involved in the CTAP, and I'm sure many of them could benefit from discussion. However, this evaluation is concerned only with the process itself. The success or failure of any projects that were decided upon as an outcome of the process will not be part of the discussion, nor will the grant process.

The goal of the CTAP process is to inform a community so it will be able to answer the following questions:

"Is tourism for us?"

"What are the potential costs and benefits associated with specific tourism-related developments?"

"To what extent, if any, should community tourism-related projects be further developed and promoted?"

To address the success of the process, please consider these questions and try to assess the degree to which the process helped your community do the following:

Assess tourism potential

Weigh costs and benefits of potential tourism projects

Determine local values and concerns regarding tourism development

If at all, select and develop projects that fit with local values

We will also talk about what knowledge was gained through the process, if aspirations were changed (how and why), and what actions were taken. Each contributing element of the process (Travel Montana, MSU Extension Service and ITRR) will be discussed, and you will be asked about how useful you feel the process was to your community.

Again, I sincerely appreciate your help in this matter. The process cannot be evaluated without your input, and I thank you for your participation. I am looking forward to our meeting!

Sincerely,

Thale Dillon
Project Coordinator

