

# Towards Sustainable & Inclusive Tourism in Washington

## Challenges & Opportunities

Washington State is a remarkable region that entices both domestic and international travelers with its extraordinary blend of natural wonders, cultural diversity, iconic places, urban centers and rural communities, and thrilling recreational adventure opportunities. From the Salish Sea's incredible marine environment with coastal beaches, estuaries and islands, to arts and music to sprawling vineyards & craft beer, vast networks of hiking trails, volcanoes, the edges of the desert, and the towering Cascade mountains, it's a truly special place. Each of the state's regions offer something different for all explorers.

Tourism is Washington State's fourth largest industry, employing more than 200,000 people and generating close to \$22B in annual spending, close to \$3B in tax revenues. According to the Department of Commerce, close to 98% of visitors to WA are domestic (75% state residents), and just over 2% are international.

**As a mecca for outdoor recreation, the main challenge is to ensure the natural places tourism depends on are protected for the future while not only allowing people to enjoy them, but ensuring all people feel welcome to do so.**

As is common in most other jurisdictions in North America, tourism marketing and management funding is primarily from lodging taxes and allocated to promotional activities. Smaller organizations with limited funds do not typically have the capacity to incorporate broader management activities. However, within the current

mandate there are ways to expand and adjust activities to reflect destination stewardship principles and inclusivity aims. Some examples of these efforts can be found, such as: support for local businesses, diverse cultural events, greater diversity in marketing, and promotion of low-impact activities as well as responsible recreation.

**There is a lot of GOOD happening in Washington tourism and this section is not a critique of past and current practice but is based on real life experiences and feedback from a range of people from throughout the state who provided perspectives to shape this handbook in order to ensure it would be a useful resource for peers across Washington. See the acknowledgements section for list of organizations that contributed perspectives.**

## Challenges

### *Impacts from Congestion in Outdoor Recreation*

**Destinations:** Washington is renowned for outdoor recreation, but managing the influx of tourists and recreationists while protecting natural spaces is a challenge. A range of impacts stemming from congestion and overuse including parking impeding emergency vehicles, safety concerns, degradation to trails with high concentrations of users, and a lack of capacity to manage waste. Complexity of land management authorities impedes solutions; for example, enforcement, communication, and providing transportation alternatives.

**Impacts on Tribal rights:** Building on the above, there is a lack of relationships with Tribal governments and Indigenous community members, and therefore tourism developments and activities often negatively impact Tribes – from impeding on traditional ways of life through encroachment on natural areas, to degrading Indigenous lands. There is a lack of incorporation of Tribal messaging in communications about activities, sacred places, etc., and much opportunity for improvement in this area, to the benefit of all destinations and community members.

## Future of Tourism Guiding Principle #1 *See the Whole Picture*



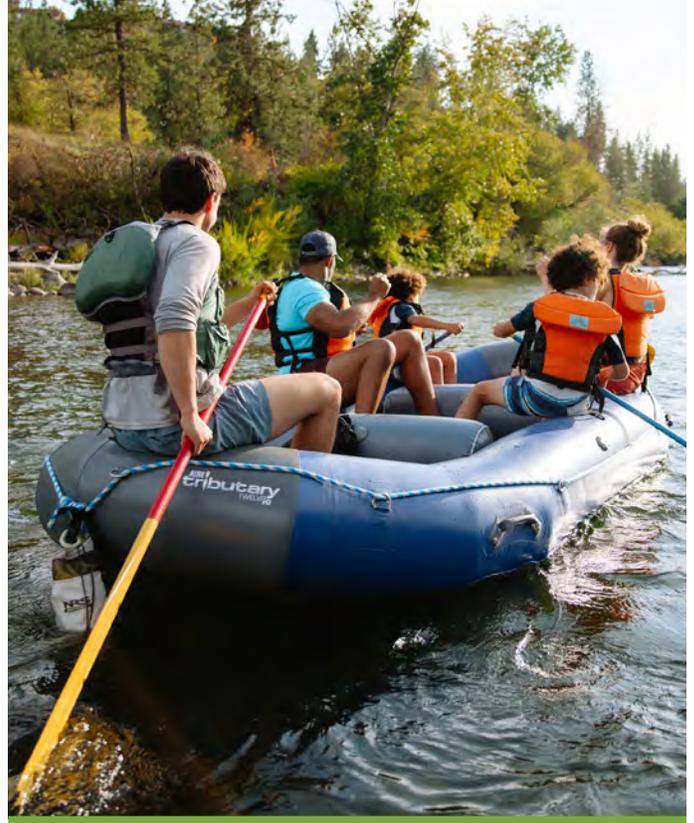
Recognize that most tourism by its nature involves the destination as a whole, not only industry businesses, but also its ecosystems, natural resources, cultural assets and traditions, communities, aesthetics, and built infrastructure.

**Lack of diverse representation, awareness and resources to improve DEIA:** In general, there is a lack of relationships with diverse communities and a lack of diversity in staff and leadership to facilitate the bridging of this gap. For example, there is a lack of engagement with Spanish-speakers and Tribal representatives. There is also room for improvement in creating a sense of belonging and cultural sensitivity for diverse travelers including people with different abilities, cultural identities (including Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC)), LGBTQ+ community, etc.

**Decreasing affordability and livability:** High prices and increased cost of living are leading to exclusion of locals. There are concerns about changes toward catering to visitors in certain places impacting community sentiment and creating perceptions that places cater only to the wealthy. This decreasing affordability is leading to housing and labor shortages which affects the industry, including reducing service quality.

**Lack of cohesion in branding and communications.** There is a need for increased awareness and education among frontline staff for better destination experiences. This includes providing a safe and inclusive welcome, promoting how to recreate responsibly, and how and when to disperse travelers from areas that are overcrowded to areas that need more visitation, to account for seasonality and peak/off-peak times. Sometimes in communities there are too many resources, but not enough clear information (different maps and websites from different entities that are not coordinated).

TMACS, Jason Hummel Photography, Courtesy of State of Washington Tourism



Spokane, Greg Balkin - Wondercamp, Courtesy of State of Washington Tourism

**Funding structure and resource limitations:** There is a lack of support particularly for rural tourism destination marketing and management organizations. These organizations must apply annually for funding from city or county governments if they do not have a Tourism Promotion Area designation and funding is typically tied to specific projects and/or limited to tourism promotion activities. They also must compete against chambers for funding so they find themselves busy defending their businesses. This presents a challenge for small organizations in that there is a lack of staffing and financial resources to increase awareness and skills, and even to channel funds toward collaborative initiatives.

**Limited Mandates:** The current structure of destination marketing and management organizations in Washington is based on funding generated from lodging taxes or membership and therefore the mandate is still limited primarily to promotional activities. While marketing is a great tool and can be leveraged to pursue destination stewardship and DEIA goals, the limited mandate prevents them from spending time and resources on broader objectives.

**External Threats and Impacts Beyond Management Capacity:** Tourism organizations are increasingly faced with challenges such as overuse, congestion, parking violations, safety concerns, housing shortages, workforce



Chamna Natural Preserve, Jason Hummel Photography, Courtesy of State of Washington Tourism

shortages, climate change disruptions, and decreasing resident satisfaction, and lack the skills, funding, and capacity to implement management strategies.

### Strengths & Opportunities

**Leadership from the State of Washington Tourism and the Port of Seattle:** Each of the two organizations leading tourism for the state are providing leadership in the areas of destination stewardship and DEIA, through various efforts including the Rural Tourism Support Program and Tourism Sustainability Grant Program, the Port of Seattle's Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and commitment as well as resources for the sector, among many other initiatives. Visit Seattle is a lighthouse example for diversity in marketing, supporting diverse enterprises through its Shop BIPOC initiative, its LGBTQ+ focused content, cultural tourism guides and highlight of Indigenous cultures and Tribes. There is room to provide further guidelines and support, including funding for DEIA initiatives and resources for increasing skills and capacity across destination management organizations and industry associations to keep progressing toward goals.

**Motivation to continuously improve:** Tourism organizations have shown their interest in learning, growing, and motivation to build relationships with

organizations in their communities, increase cultural competency, and support their industry partners to create a more welcoming atmosphere for all people, through experiences as well as messaging and marketing. What they need is the tools and resources to take steps, starting with awareness, and adjustments to day-to-day activities, toward longer term goals.

**Examples and resources abound:** The strong non-profit and nongovernmental (NGO) sector in Washington, including social and environmental organizations, as well as initiatives already underway by some destination management organizations, means that there are examples close to home, as well as learning resources available, for others to get started right away on their learning and action journeys.

**Partnership opportunities are abundant:** This strength of the NGO sector as well as the significant number of enterprises and organizations focused on improving inclusion, quality of life, restoration of lands, etc., mean that the tourism sector has immediate opportunities to collaborate. Collaboration to solve challenges – like parking issues, by working with local government and land managers, or to improve representation in marketing by working with diverse content creators, or to improve accessibility, by gaining an understanding of the status and action steps to take, or to increase cultural awareness and improve relationships and experiences by reaching out to Tribal governments. These are opportunities that are available now in Washington and a perfect way for the tourism sector to get started or progress in their destination stewardship journeys.

### Diverse Communities in Washington

The greatest gift to tourism is cultural diversity. People travel all over the world to see new places and learn new things and meet new and interesting people. In the United States, we are fortunate that our communities are places enriched by such a wide range of cultures and tourism offers the chance for our cultures, our differences, and our commonalities to be celebrated.

Washington's cultural diversity is part of each community's identity, whether rural or urban. There may be more diversity in urban centers; however, most communities can identify and celebrate the different cultures that exist within or nearby, including Indigenous peoples and cultures. And the more diverse representation we have in our tourism industry, the more diversity of travelers we will continue to see, as they feel

more and more welcome and interested to experience each place's uniqueness.

In addition to being home to 34 distinct Indigenous Tribes and Nations, there are many different cultural communities that make up the tapestry of the state. There are vibrant African American communities, East, Southeast, and South Asian communities, Pacific Islanders, Middle Eastern and Arab people, Hispanic & Latino/a communities, Scandinavian communities and more. There are various religious communities and thriving creative arts & culture communities celebrating this diversity with festivals, music, and food! Washington is also known for being LGBTQ+ friendly, with active communities, events, businesses, festivals and more, promoting pride and inclusivity.

Visit Seattle, the destination marketing and management organization for Seattle, hosts [Cultural Heritage pages](#) on their website that highlight history from past to present of five of these cultural communities including Native American, African American, Asian & Pacific American, Latino, and Nordic. The pages include downloadable cultural heritage guides and refer to organizations that share more information and can be visited to celebrate cultures throughout the city. It is an example of how to highlight cultural heritage, history, current cultural events, festivals, arts, food, tours, and more offered to celebrate diverse cultures found within the city. Visit Seattle's LGBTQ+ page shares not only a plethora of businesses and events to visit, but organizations and resources for



### Greater Seattle Business Association (GSBA)

Established in 1981, GSBA is Washington State's LGBTQ+ and allied chamber of commerce and is the largest of its kind in North America. They represent small business, corporate, and nonprofit members who share the values of promoting equality and diversity in the workplace. Their mission is to combine business development, leadership and social action to expand economic opportunities for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community and those who support equality for all. Their programs include supporting business members with business development, providing networking opportunities and visibility for LGBTQ+ organizations, provide advocacy to elected officials on business and equality issues, and have extensive education programs. They produce the [Travel Out guide](#) for LGBTQ+ travel in Washington to highlight LGBTQ+ travel businesses, experiences and more.

visitors to refer to and learn from including [Travel Out Seattle](#) LGBTQ travel guide created by the GSBA, the [Northwest Lesbian and Gay History Museum Project](#), and many more.

### Explore Seattle's Vibrant Cultural Heritage



Photo: Jack Storms  
Native American Cultural Heritage



Photo: Josh Trujillo / Seattle Post-Intelligencer  
Asian American Cultural Heritage



Jimi Hendrix Memorial Photo: David Newman  
African American Cultural Heritage



Photo: South Park Neighborhood Association  
Latino Cultural Heritage



Reimagining by Betty Edwards  
Nordic Cultural Heritage



## Shop BIPOC: Support Seattle's BIPOC-owned Businesses – and put it on Visit Seattle's tab!

Visit Seattle partnered with Seattle Bank and Intentionalist to help spread tourism dollars to Seattle's small businesses in diverse communities. There were 16 businesses featured in 2023 with subsidized "tabs" available to try food and drink at BIPOC-owned restaurants and shops, sponsored by Seattle Bank and Intentionalist.

Through 2023 they are hosting several \$250 tabs at shops and restaurants in Capitol Hill and First Hill neighborhoods. [Visit the website, click on a restaurant, get a code, use it to get a complementary treat.](#)

## Indigenous Peoples and Tourism in Washington

The State of Washington has 29 federally recognized Tribes and Nations (with several others not federally recognized), with over 140,000 citizens and each with their own cultures, governments and enterprises employing more than 37,000 people (or 1 in 86 jobs – [washingtontribes.org](http://washingtontribes.org)). [This map](#) shows where each is located.

More information about each federally recognized Tribe including contact info can be found through these direct links to their government websites: [Chehalis](#), [Colville](#), [Cowlitz](#), [Hoh](#), [Jamestown S'Klallam](#), [Kalispel](#), [Lower Elwha Klallam](#), [Lummi](#), [Makah](#), [Muckleshoot](#), [Nisqually](#), [Nooksack](#), [Port Gamble S'Klallam](#), [Puyallup](#), [Quileute](#), [Quinault](#), [Samish](#), [Sauk-Suiattle](#), [Shoalwater Bay](#), [Skokomish](#), [Snoqualmie](#), [Spokane](#), [Squaxin Island](#), [Stillaguamish](#), [Suquamish](#), [Swinomish](#), [Tulalip](#), [Upper Skagit](#), [Yakama](#).

## Indigenous Peoples & Sovereignty: Tribal Governments

Indigenous peoples are sovereign – self-governed with rights and power to determine their own governance structures and laws. The National Congress on American Indians (NCAI) provides an overview of sovereignty as follows:

***The essence of tribal sovereignty is the ability to govern and to protect and enhance the health, safety, and welfare of tribal citizens within tribal territory. Tribal governments maintain the power to determine their own governance structures and enforce laws through police departments and tribal courts.***

***The governments exercise these inherent rights through the development of their distinct forms of government, determining citizenship; establishing civil and criminal laws for their nations; taxing, licensing, regulating, and maintaining and exercising the power to exclude wrongdoers from tribal lands. In addition, tribal governments are responsible for a broad range of governmental activities on tribal lands, including education, law enforcement, judicial systems, health care, environmental protection, natural resource management, and the development and maintenance of infrastructure and a broad range public services. Read More <https://www.ncai.org/about-tribes>***

The State of Washington Tourism website provides a great overview of Indigenous experiences, cultural centers, museums and events around the state that can be visited that are owned and operated by the Tribes and showcase both heritage and current cultures, enabling visitors to support Indigenous-led tourism initiatives and learn about the land on which they are guests. [This page](#) also provides direct links to each government (provided above).

There are a number of resources available for learning more about building relationships and partnerships with Indigenous peoples, about developing Indigenous tourism, and the local Tribal government in each community is generally the best place to start. Reaching out to start a relationship without a specific agenda, but to learn more about the land on which a destination is located, the people, the culture along with the challenges and opportunities to work together is a journey that starts with reaching out to introduce oneself and visit. It is important to emphasize here that it is incumbent upon tourism organizations to do research before reaching out to the Tribe. Many Tribes have worked hard to produce public outreach and education materials that are available online. It's helpful to look for these first, digest, and come forward in a more informed way. It is also essential to meaningfully engage with Tribal governments to get information as early

## Washington Organizations to Partner With and Learn From

### **Black Heritage Society of Washington State**

Preserving, collecting and sharing the history of African Americans in Washington State. Founded in 1977 the organization continues to provide educational events, exhibits, and resources to promote public awareness of African American history and culture. The Society recognizes the importance for documenting the culture and heritage of Black people state-wide, and advocates for saving places to uphold the notion that Washington State history is an essential link in the broader narrative that defines the story of our nation.

### **Chinatown-International District BIA**

Business Improvement District for Chinatown-International District. It is an important cultural center in Seattle with over 200 businesses reflecting the diversity of the city as well as important cultural events including Lunar New Year celebrations, Dragon Fest, Night Market, and Food Walk events.

### **National Nordic Museum**

The Nordic Museum's guiding principles for the core exhibition experience, tracing Nordic themes of connection to nature, sustainability, social justice, and innovation from the earliest anthropological records through contemporary Nordic society.

### **Sea Mar Museum of Chicano/a/Latino/a Culture**

The first of its kind in the Pacific Northwest, the Sea Mar Museum of Chicano/a/Latino/a Culture showcases the history of Chicano/as and Latino/as from post war immigration to present time.

### **Wing Luke Museum**

Art and history Smithsonian-Affiliate Museum (the only pan Asian-Pacific American community-based museum in the US) focused on the culture, art and history of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders.

### **The Burke Museum**

*The Burke Museum cares for and shares natural and cultural collections so all people can learn, be inspired, generate knowledge, feel joy, and heal.* Its working labs located on the University of Washington campus in Seattle focus on dinosaurs, fossils, Northwest Native art, plant and animal collections, and cultural pieces from across the globe. Its exhibits are guided by their [Native American Advisory Board](#).

### **Golden Bricks Events**

Golden Brick's outdoor-focused experiences for Black, Indigenous, People of Color are designed for emotional & physical safety, accessibility, connection, joy, and belonging. *We envision a world where BIPOC outdoor participation is not "unbelievable", but common. We want to diversify the faces of the outdoors and conservation through our events.*

### **Northwest African American Museum**

The Northwest African American Museum is an anti-racist, pro-equity, affirming gathering place of hope, help, and healing for the entire Northwest region that is building intergenerational cultural wealth, through ongoing exhibits, events and educational programs.

### **Washington Trust for Historic Preservation**

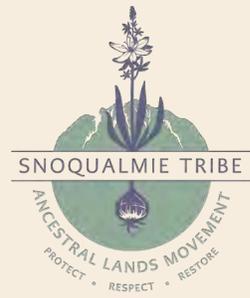
Manages the [Maritime Washington National Heritage Area](#) – a region-wide partnership that aims to connect diverse cross-sector organizations to protect marine resources and connect residents and visitors to the state's maritime heritage.

## Snoqualmie Tribe Ancestral Lands Movement

The Ancestral Lands Movement seeks to spread awareness of the Snoqualmie people who have lived in the southern Salish Sea region since time immemorial and share the significance of these lands and provide information on how people can help the Tribe in respecting, restoring, and protecting these lands.

Launched in 2021 in response to the increased impacts of recreation on their ancestral lands which includes the well-known sacred Snoqualmie Falls, the Snoqualmie Tribe Ancestral Lands Movement shares regular information via blogs, social media and their website. Tips on how to Recreate Respectfully are provided by the Tribe, along with downloadable resources such as this [one-pager](#) and an animated, illustrated story map [Recreational Impacts on Snoqualmie Tribal Ancestral Lands](#) which provides an overview of Snoqualmie history, current information about the Tribe and impacts of recreation activities including as hiking and mountain biking as well as development impacts to lands, and wildlife.

The Snoqualmie Tribe is calling for increased research and monitoring to drive decision making around outdoor recreation development and mitigation. [Learn More](#) and [Follow on Facebook](#)



as possible in the planning process to get feedback on how to avoid or mitigate any negative impact your planned tourism activities may have on tribal traditional ways of life, cultural practices, or resources. Being open to hearing that an idea is not appropriate or of interest, and working together on ideas, is also the advisable approach.

One of the biggest opportunities for tourism organizations to enhance relationships and experiences for visitors is to work with Tribes to explore whether there are appropriate and helpful ways to incorporate tribal messaging into tourism communications, or ways in which organizations can help amplify messaging Tribes are already sharing. Information highlighting the cultures, the stories, the people, the sacred sites, as well as what is appropriate and not appropriate to do and where, must be provided by the Tribe and not written by the destination organization without collaboration or the Tribe's consent.

Note that Tribes should not be expected to contribute to tourism projects without compensation – they must be at the table and compensated for their time and subject expertise. Working with Tribal representatives to ensure tourism in your community is not having negative impacts on lands and cultural resources is essential to a positive future of tourism on Indigenous lands and with Indigenous peoples across Washington.

## Land Acknowledgements – How do we do them and why?

A Land Acknowledgement is a statement recognizing the traditional territory of the Indigenous people who called the land home before the arrival of settlers, and in many cases still do call the land home.

Land Acknowledgements reflect the Indigenous cultural practice of protocol – acknowledging and appreciating that one is on the land of another. It is a sign of respect and appreciation and gratitude.

The following websites have useful resources on Land Acknowledgements:

[Duwamish Tribe How to Make a Land Acknowledgement](#)  
[Snoqualmie Tribe Introduction to Land Acknowledgement](#)  
[Washington State Health Care Authority on Medium Native Land](#)

## Local, National, and International Resources

### Local Resources

[Governor's Office of Indian Affairs](#) offers information resources and Tribal Directory of government offices and businesses in Washington.

[The Nature Conservancy's Washington Chapter](#) partnered with Native-owned consultant firm [The Whitener Group](#) out of Olympia created a free training course *Growing Competency and Capacity to Partner with Indigenous Peoples: Tribal Engagement Training for Conservation Practitioners in North America*. Access "Indian Country 101" [here](#) and there is a deeper dive into working with Washington Tribes called IC 102 on the same [course page](#), it's module 4 of the total set.

### National and International Resources

#### [AIANTA](#)

The American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association (AIANTA) is the national tourism association representing and supporting Tribes across the US. Their mission is to "define, introduce, grow and sustain American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian tourism that honors traditions and values." They offer workshops, courses, webinars, conferences, technical assistance, funding opportunities, research, and more, to support the development of Indigenous tourism. The [board of directors](#) represents each of the 15 regions and the northwest region is represented by Jamie SiJohn of the Spokane Tribe. They have a broad team of staff and consultants and offer a wealth of information for those interested in learning about what may be happening in their area. They also operate a consumer-facing travel website called [nativeamerica.travel](#) showcasing experiences around the US. The Northwest region does not currently have any experiences in Washington and therefore there are opportunities to develop the relationship with AIANTA and ensure experiences are showcased as well as to explore development of new experiences with Tribes directly.

#### [Indigenous Tourism Association of BC](#)

ITBC provides guidelines on working with Indigenous peoples which can be found here: ITBC's [Working with Indigenous Communities](#) set of resources including [A Guide for Developing Tourism and Media Relationships in Indigenous Communities](#) and [10 Considerations When Working with Indigenous Communities](#).

#### [Indigenous Association of Canada](#)

ITAC provides several great resources including its [Media & Language Guidelines 12 Ways to Better Choose Our Words When We Write About Indigenous Peoples](#)

[Indigenous Corporate Training Inc.](#) shares [7 Tips on Building Relationships with Indigenous Peoples](#). It's one of the several resources the organization provides.

#### [Indigenous People and the Travel Industry: Global Good Practice Guidelines](#)

published by the International Institute of Tourism Studies, G Adventures and Planeterra with an advisory committee of international Indigenous tourism representatives including Ben Sherman, Chair of the World Indigenous Tourism Alliance, Keith Henry, CEO of Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada and Edward Hall 111, US Bureau of Indian Affairs.



Courtesy of State of Washington Tourism



Syren Nagakyrie, Marissa Solini Photography,  
Courtesy of Disabled Hikers

## Disability & Accessibility in Washington Tourism

Accessibility in Washington has a long way to go, but the good news is there is a lot of motivation to get there. There is a growing interest in improving accessibility, with some Washington tourism organizations taking initiative to engage with specialists to conduct an audit and begin implementing recommendations. For example, Visit San Juans' [Accessible San Juans](#) page highlights activities, accommodation and transportation options for people with disabilities. In most cases, destination organizations and businesses lack awareness and guidance on how to make offerings more accessible and there is therefore a need to boost awareness and provide tools to make improvements.

Some examples of efforts outside but nearby Washington include Oregon, who has made progress in trail accessibility and is investing in accessibility audits for operators. In British Columbia, non-profit Spinal Cord Injury BC and the province's regional destination management organizations



## Disabled Hikers

Get Involved: <https://www.disabledhikers.com/allies>

Disabled Hikers is an entirely Disabled-led non-profit organization based in Washington. Disabled Hikers helps facilitate disabled experiences in the outdoors with information, resources, and events, including trail guides and group hikes. They are committed advocates for justice, access, and inclusion, and work with parks, organizations, brands, and more. Disabled Hikers is available to provide audits of outdoor activities and built environments and therefore can advise a full range of hospitality, tourism, and outdoor recreation organizations, including destination marketing and management organizations. Their assessment service includes meeting with staff to gain an understanding of their perspectives and bring them through the process. The ideal approach is to provide training either before or after the site visit.

*“Disabled Hikers are the invaluable base to the accessibility work in our region. They have provided professional, clear and compassionate guidance through our multiple visitor-facing projects, working seamlessly with a wide range of interest/knowledge levels and political backgrounds. Accessibility is incredibly important to the welcomability of our area, and it’s become clear through our work with Syren that information is power and that we all benefit from greater accessibility. We cannot recommend them highly enough.”*

—Emily Reed | Network Director (she, her),  
Columbia Gorge Tourism Alliance

co-fund regional accessibility & inclusion specialists who are based in the regional destination management offices and support the tourism industry by conducting visits, audits, and recommendation reports. They also are called up on to act as advisors and models for inclusive marketing content.

In general, outdoor accessibility in Washington is increasing at a slow pace. State parks are working on it. Beaches have some accessible features, like beach wheelchairs, but there is no consistency in availability

or promotion. Hotels will often have some adaptations or implementation of ADA regulations, but almost always have issues because there is no enforcement of the regulations. For example, they may have “accessible” rooms but the doorway to the bathroom is too narrow, or the ramp at the entrance is at too high of an incline. To add to the challenge, disabled individuals bear the burden of making complaints.

There is also a lack of recognition and adaptation for various disabilities outside of mobility challenges such as sensory needs, blindness, deafness, and immune-compromised conditions. The Port of Seattle has done some work to improve accessibility at SEA-TAC Airport and included a room for people with sensory sensitivities.

When it comes to marketing and communications, there is a lot that can be done. Several organizations have started to involve influencers with disabilities to visit and document their experience on social media, which is an excellent step. But it isn’t sufficient for a comprehensive

accessibility audit, which is also necessary for enabling change. Additionally, often only one type of disability is represented (for example, a person in a wheelchair), yet there are many different types of disabilities and being inclusive and representative means seeking out content creators that can include more diverse people and experiences.

There’s also typically a lack of transparent information about accessibility. It is important to ensure available information is clearly communicated and not buried in websites. Ensure that it is easy to find, include as much detail as possible, prepared or at least reviewed by someone who is disabled (but also with expertise on conducting professional audits for the broad range of disabilities to be well represented).

**There are resources available online including:**

The National ADA Network [online resources](#)

The US Access Board [guidance documents](#)

Courtesy of Visit Walla Walla



## Taking Action to Improve Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA)

### A deep and broad approach to improving DEIA

The first thing to recognize is that this is a long-term process that requires ongoing commitment and learning, and un-learning and re-learning. It is not a box that can be checked and completed quickly. It's a progression and evolution toward better.

If resources allow, you may decide to contract a specialist who can undertake a deep dive into your organization and your practices and make recommendations. This handbook provides an overview of some of the key steps that you can take to get a better understanding of DEIA and to start thinking about ideal outcomes and actions to take to integrate these considerations into your day-to-day operations.

### Familiarize and build awareness

- One of the first things you can do as an individual is to start reading books and articles as well as following social media accounts of people from different cultural and marginalized communities. There are many across the nation and some right in Washington that provide perspective as well as share their experiences of traveling and of the outdoors.
- We provide a number of organizations in the coming pages that you can read about and engage with. In some cases, they may be able to support you by providing an audit and/or advice, and, in other cases, they may be a suitable organization for you to sponsor or to engage in content development.
- The Port of Seattle provides a number of [anti-racism resources](#) on its website available for any organization to access and read.



Highlands Juneteenth Celebration 2021, Courtesy of Visit Issaquah

- In many cases, organizations survey their employees and customers (existing and potential) to solicit direct feedback about inclusivity, sense of belonging, representation – how well the organization is doing from the perspectives of the people it serves and interacts with or would like to in the future.

### Social media channels to follow

@asianswhoexplore @black\_people\_hike  
@browngirloutdoorworld @Brownpeoplecamping  
@colourthetrails @disabledhikers @thegsba  
@indigenouswomenhike @latinxhikers @lgbtoutdoors  
@loseattlewa @latinooutdoors @mileshikeclub  
@outdoorafro @outdoorasian @outdoorasianwa  
@snotribeancestrallandsmovement @twbseattle  
@wheeltheworld

Crowdriff's list of LGBTQ+ Travel [social media](#) to follow  
Read Visit Spokane's blog written by [local Lisa Gardner on her discovery and experience with @black\\_people\\_hike](#)

### Seek out advice

- One of the most important steps is to find an organization that can provide advice – from an audit of your products, services, experiences, and marketing, to your organization's operational and human resources practices.
- In many cases, organizations set up a working group or a committee, made up of internal and external people to make an action plan and begin the work.
- Many organizations try to improve the diversity of their staff and their board without doing internal work on their organization's culture and sense of belonging.

This can alienate new staff and board members and ultimately defeat the intended purpose.

- It is important to recognize the burden placed on people of color and representatives of racialized and marginalized communities when they are the only one repeatedly called upon to provide advice, to educate, to translate, to be the voice of all those in their community. That is a difficult and burdensome (and often emotional) load to place on any one person.
- Advice needs to be compensated, always. Too often this kind of advice is sought without due compensation. This is business consulting and needs to be valued as such.

### Review practices

- As mentioned above, in many cases, surveys (or focus groups or interviews or a combination thereof) are employed to get an understanding of how well the organization is doing across the spectrum of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility according to different audiences of the organization.
- In terms of practices, we are referring to all internal and external organizational practices, from purchasing, to hiring, to training, to company protocols, to events, product development, B2B communications and B2C communications.



DESTINATION  
BRITISH COLUMBIA™

Destination British Columbia took a holistic approach to assess and take action on diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility. Some of the key actions included: Contracting outside experts for advice, establishing an Accessibility & Inclusion Committee and Strategic Action Plan, created a learning center for tourism industry partners, created Social Impact Procurement Guidelines for purchasing, underwent an inclusivity audit of brand and marketing, created guidelines for inclusivity in marketing and content production for community DMOs and industry, underwent a DEIA culture audit and sought support from the national Center for Diversity & Inclusion, developed and action plan, training, and guidance to support belonging and wellbeing for employees, and made updates to hiring processes. Read more [here](#).



A program initiated by Tourism Cares and supported by a number of travel businesses, Pathways is a coalition of leading travel industry organizations helping to reduce hiring inequalities by offering opportunities for education, employment and entrepreneurship. Pathways is helping spread the word about lesser-known travel industry careers such as tour guiding, travel directing, and tour operating, sponsoring training opportunities in tourism management and business ownership, as well as providing networking and mentoring toward job placement.

[Learn More](#)

- As a destination management or industry association, it's also a good idea to survey tourism industry partners to get an understanding of the needs businesses have to improve their awareness and action on DEIA.
- Identify gaps to inform an action plan.

### Engage in training

- There are many kinds of training available for employees, executives, frontline staff, board members, etc. There are online courses, webinars, reading resources, and in-person workshops led by specialists.
- Every organization should be undertaking DEIA training to be able to assess their stage in the process and identify gaps and ideal future states and outcomes.

India Independence Day Celebration, Courtesy of Visit Issaquah



## Future of Tourism Guiding Principle #5 Fair Income Distribution



Set policies that counter unequal tourism benefits within destination communities that maximize retention of tourism revenues within those communities.

### *Develop a policy, public statement and action plan*

- Part of the process is making a commitment and publicly stating that commitment. This is important to communicate with employees, but also to the public via your website and other communications channels. This helps prospective employees and visitors see that the organization is aware, is committed to evolving and improving, and has implemented specific action steps (as and when this is available).
- A policy or a statement is meaningless without evidence of action to support it. Communicate clearly the action plan, targets, and steps taken on an ongoing basis.

### *Dismantle and rebuild practices*

- Don't be afraid to question everything and rethink all prior practices. This is a difficult but necessary stage.
- From recruiting to purchasing to onboarding to staff events to communications, leave no area unturned.

### *Improve representation and inclusivity in employment*

- Learn new ways to recruit people from outside your usual networks.
- Collaborate with the tourism sector and with other sectors to build promotion pathways to management and leadership.

### **Creating more equity: Supporting diverse businesses in your community**

- An organization can be making efforts toward improving diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility, but the reality on the ground might be that visitors and experiences are still not diverse and marginalized communities are still experiencing more negative impacts than positive ones.
- Getting to know the businesses owned by peoples and groups deserving of equity and highlighting them in promotional materials is one step.
- Getting to know the communities, and how to support more people getting involved in tourism including pathways to employment as well as to entrepreneurship is another.
- Across Washington many environmental organizations have begun this journey and partner with youth groups, non-profit organizations, BIPOC-owned businesses and more, to support their participation in outdoor recreation and environmental conservation. This is something every organization can get started on right away.

***“Targeted recruitment that diversifies the tourism workforce and lends voice and presence in all levels – representative of the world we live in – will create optimal cultural and unique experiences. It will also lead to more curated destinations that can appeal to all who visit and travel in Washington.”***

***– Stephanie Johnson-Toliver, President, Black Heritage Society of Washington State.***

### *Representation and inclusivity in marketing and communications*

- This is often the first step taken by organizations. Seeking out diverse models for photo and video shoots of their tourism experiences, accommodations, or destinations. Or seeking out diverse influencers to take trips and highlight them on social media. It is a useful and important step but should be considered as one part of a broader effort.

### *Question to ask – how diverse is your diverse marketing?*

Sometimes there can be an over-reliance on one group or one content creator to create diversity. But it is important to go beyond and think about broader diversity. This includes people with different gender identities, from different cultural groups, and with different types of disabilities. For example, as discussed earlier, disabilities range from physical to mental and affect 10% of the population – from all backgrounds.

### *Language is key to communicating with diverse audiences*

- Oftentimes marketing and communications materials are only in English. Sometimes there are messages directly targeting international source markets. But it's important to consider your local context and speak to the communities represented in the place in which you operate. This demonstrates a culture of welcome and inclusion to the people that live there, and in turn to the people who are considering visiting.
- This also is important when conducting engagement efforts, such as resident sentiment or satisfaction surveys to ensure that a broad and diverse set of community members are consulted.

## Washington Organizations to Partner With and Learn From

### **Big Tent Outdoor Rec Coalition**

The Coalition is an association of the primary organizations participating in outdoor recreation in Washington State. The more than 45 organizations involve over 200,000 members. The mission of the Big Tent is to promote sustainable, diverse, equitable, and inclusive outdoor experiences in Washington state through advocacy and education. The organization advocates for sustainable state funding for recreation and conservation lands as well as sustainable and equitable development and human interaction with those lands.

### **Converge Media**

Content creators, producers, writers and local news reporters, specifically for the Northwest's Black community. *We believe that the Black community deserves authentic representation, a focus on our community's issues, and equitable access to elected officials, leadership, and governmental information.* Their Support Black Business program profiles Black businesses across the PNW.

### **Friends of Waterfront Seattle**

Friends of Waterfront Seattle (Friends) is the nonprofit partner to the City of Seattle responsible for helping to fund, steward, and program the park. It is an exemplary model of an anchor attraction in a city supporting the surrounding community members. Every dollar of philanthropy through Friends of Waterfront Seattle leverages \$6 in public funding for a \$1 billion community-driven vision for Seattle's waterfront. The organization is committed to anti-racism and inclusivity in its operations and the public spaces they operate. This is reflected across its diverse community cultural, education, recreation programs and events.

### **Miles Hike Club**

BIPOC-owned and led guided hiking company based in Seattle offering experiences around Washington. *Miles Hike Club aims to enlighten, inspire, and foster memorable bonds as we unlock the adventurer in those exploring the great outdoors.*

Miles Hike Club offers customized guided hikes based on hikers' experience level and interests and is open to all levels including beginners. They also offer corporate group experiences.

### **Outdoor Afro (Seattle Chapter)**

Outdoor Afro is a nonprofit organization that celebrates and inspires Black connections and leadership in nature. The network also connects Black people with lands, water, and wildlife through outdoor education, recreation, and conservation. Some examples of Outdoor Afro's year-round activities range from fishing, hiking, biking, kayaking,

gardening, skiing, etc. It is the largest network of its kind with 60 cities participating across the country. [The Seattle Chapter](#) uses Facebook and Meetup platforms to set up outings.

### **Latinos Outdoors Chapters in Seattle and Yakima**

Latinos Outdoors mission is to inspire, connect and engage Latino communities in the outdoors. Programs include the *Vamos Outdoors* group outings, *Yo Cuento Outdoors* storytelling and communications program, and *Creemos Outdoors* leadership training. Supported by volunteers and donations.

### **Outdoor Asian Washington Chapter**

Outdoor Asian's mission is to create a diverse and inclusive community of Asian & Pacific Islanders in the outdoors – [Washington chapter meet-up events](#). Supported by volunteers and donations

### **Traveling While Black**

Travel blogging Seattle-based couple that review destinations within Washington and provide fun and honest ratings on their experiences, including ease of arrival, 'fun-o-meter' and comfort meter for Black travelers. They are a great resource for destinations seeking content production but also for reviews and recommendations for improving experiences to be more inclusive.

### **SEA Potential**

Sea Potential's mission is to transform the maritime industry with representative and inclusive workplace culture as well as foster youth connection to marine ecosystems. Their services include curriculum design, youth programs, executive coaching, organization assessment services, building strategic partnerships, and more.

### **Washington's National Park Fund**

Washington's National Park Fund is the official philanthropic partner to Mount Rainier, North Cascades, and Olympic National Parks. Funding projects that advance diversity, equity, and inclusion in Washington's national parks, to make them more accessible for all. Projects include a variety of efforts for conservation and restoration as well as improving DEI & A – including Tribal Youth Develop a Native Conservation Corps Program, Supporting Internships for Diverse Youth, Bilingual Rangers to Welcome Spanish Speakers, and more. They have also funded Latino Outdoors' women's leadership training.

Courtesy of Miles Hike Club



Courtesy of Traveling While Black

## Environmental Stewardship in Washington Tourism & Outdoor Recreation

Washington's history and base of environmental stewardship and conservation throughout the state, from smaller volunteer-led organizations to larger state-level organizations is strong. The sector is focused on preserving and restoring nature, connecting people to nature to develop and inspire long-term commitments to environmental protection, and increasingly, to improve access for all. Most organizations include educational components, events, and volunteer programs and several work with youth organizations and educational institutions to involve youth in outdoor recreation as well as citizen science and environmental conservation programs.

Each organization is on a path to improve accessibility and inclusion and most include policies, public statements, as well as activities to move their organizations along this path and to improve diversity and inclusion in the outdoors throughout the state. There are opportunities for improvement in terms of coordination and inclusion of Indigenous-led conservation and messaging around use and impacts of lands from an Indigenous perspective.

There is also an opportunity for tourism organizations to learn from and work with environmental organizations to engage visitors in understanding how to recreate responsibly and protect nature and wildlife while visiting, but also to take part through the development of new experiences that focus on restoration and protection, which also directly contributes financially to the organizations doing the work to maintain the environment all Washington tourism depends on.

## Washington Organizations to Partner With and Learn From

### Chelan-Douglas Land Trust

A conservation organization for North Central Washington, the Chelan-Douglas Land Trust works with local groups, businesses, and people to safeguard valued natural spaces, the economy, clean air and water, wildlife, and the freedom to enjoy them. It began in 1985 by volunteers. Now it has over 2,500 members, focused on saving natural areas in the region. Their guiding principles and commitment to DEIA includes collaborations with Indigenous Tribes in region and Latin community. They are primarily focused on conservation of habitat, improving quality of life through conservation, and connecting people to nature, providing field guides, trails info and funding stewardship and land protection projects. They offer volunteer events such as work parties, citizen science projects, and field trips to discover stewardship up close.

### Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust

*The Mountains to Sound Greenway National Heritage Area is a geographic corridor made up of connected ecosystems and communities spanning 1.5 million acres from Seattle to Ellensburg along Interstate-90 in Washington state. It is a*

*coalition-based organization that leads and inspires action to conserve and enhance this special landscape, ensuring a long-term balance between people and nature. They hold events, volunteer and environmental education programs including tree-planting as well as outdoor recreation activities to connect people to nature in the region. They also provide career resources for BIPOC, internships, diverse/representative marketing. Workforce Development provides resources to help self-identified Black, Indigenous, and People of Color break into guiding and conservation careers at varying skill levels. They provide [resources](#) on First Peoples of the area including links to each Tribe.*

### Olympic NPS

Olympic National Park encompasses nearly one million acres with 95% of the park designated as wilderness. The National Park Service strives to make the park as universally accessible as possible and offer a wide range of facilities and experiences for all visitors. Provides accessibility listings for park services for people with mobility and hearing disabilities.

## Washington Organizations to Partner With and Learn From

### [The Mountaineers](#)

Nonprofit with mission to help people explore, conserve, learn about and enjoy the lands of the PNW. Volunteer stewardship, education programs on outdoor recreation, and advocacy programs. Free activities (after membership fee). Stewardship program led by members and volunteers to repair trails, restore shorelines, etc. They run several youth programs and camps and partner with 40+ youth organizations to custom-design outdoors programs (Scholarships available) and operate a gear library to increase access to equipment.

### [Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest and USDA Forest Service](#)

*The Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest is a large and diverse landscape, encompassing 3.8 million acres along the east slopes of the Cascade Range in Washington. It is managed by the USDA Forest Service.*

They conduct Visitor Use reports which track use for visitor management purposes which can be accessed [here](#).

### [2022 Equity Action Plan Executive Order 13985](#),

Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government, requires the head of each agency to prepare a plan for addressing any barriers to full and equal participation in programs, services, procurement, contracting, and other funding opportunities.

### [Pacific Northwest Trail Association](#)

*The mission of the Pacific Northwest Trail Association is to protect and promote the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail (PNNST), and to enhance recreation and educational opportunities for the enjoyment of present and future generations.*

The PNTA performs over 80% of maintenance and construction on the Pacific Northwest Trail with youth and young adults from trailside communities and schools near the PNT. Volunteers and donors contribute to trail maintenance. The organization provides Know before you go resources, how to be safe, protect wildlife, etc.

### [Conservation Northwest](#)

Nonprofit conservation organization Washington affiliate of National Wildlife Federation, dedicated to wildlife conservation and nature restoration, working across Washington and into British Columbia.

The [Wildlife-Recreation Co-existence program](#) aims to reduce outdoor recreation impacts on species and habitats through applied science, advocacy and outreach and strive to advance sustainable outdoor opportunities while also standing up for Indigenous cultural resources, values and Treaty rights, including First Foods.

Some materials provided in Spanish including commitment to justice, equity, diversity and inclusion plus [list of resources](#) for anti-racism, allyship and supporting Black-owned businesses.



### Reflections

- **What are the main challenges related to tourism in your community or organization?**
- **What are the biggest future threats to tourism in your community or to your organization?**
- **Do you have any relationships with or tourism initiatives in place with Indigenous communities?**
- **What is the status of inclusivity in your organization or destination? And where would you like to get to?**
- **What organizations would you like to reach out to and support or engage for advice?**