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A Leadership Perspective by Karen Kühl

TOUR
CAYUGA
in the FINGER LAKES

tourcayuga.com

Tourism can be interpreted as a tree of opportunity and growth, a metaphor that reflects how the day-to-day work of a destination organization connects to its broader purpose.

This report applies that metaphor within the context of:

- **Destinations International's Advocacy Report**
- **The DestinationNEXT Futures Study**
- Tour Cayuga's 2026–2030 Strategic Plan with particular emphasis on the Impact Multiplier framework a new perspective on return on investment
Growth of Awareness + Leadership Wins + Influence on Future Guidance = Impact

Alignment with Destinations International's Advocacy Framework

The Advocacy Report underscores that destination promotion is a catalyst for community vitality.

The Community Vitality Wheel reflects:

- Place Stewardship & Investment (roots)
- Brand Management (trunk/leadership)
- Promotion & Sales (branches/foilage)
- Community Impact (rain/sunshine)

The advocacy lexicon urges us to talk about:

- Community vitality
- Quality of life
- Tourism as a catalyst for economic development



This shift mirrors how we communicate in Cayuga County, moving beyond visitor counts to emphasize how tourism supports residents, culture, and long-term vitality. It also supports the importance of our shift in viewing our ROI, away from quantitative and focusing more on the qualitative impacts. This is why we now use the Impact Multiplier.

The Tree Metaphor



Roots

Destination Management & Stewardship

The unseen but vital work of listening to residents, supporting local businesses, investing in inclusive practices, and practicing sustainability. Strong roots are essential for long-term health.



Trunk

Organizational Leadership

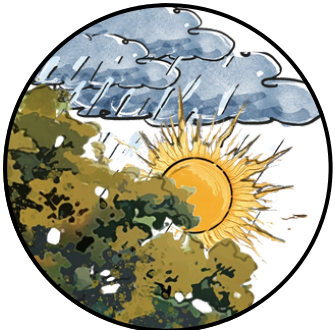
Leadership interprets community values and carries them upward, ensuring resilience as needs and trends change.



Branches Leaves

Destination Marketing

Outward expression of the community's values. Campaigns and itineraries flourish when rooted in authentic stewardship.



Rain & Sunshine

Visitors

Attracted by the destination's authenticity, these external influences play a vital role in sustaining the local ecosystem, supporting businesses, enriching community life, and fostering residents' pride.

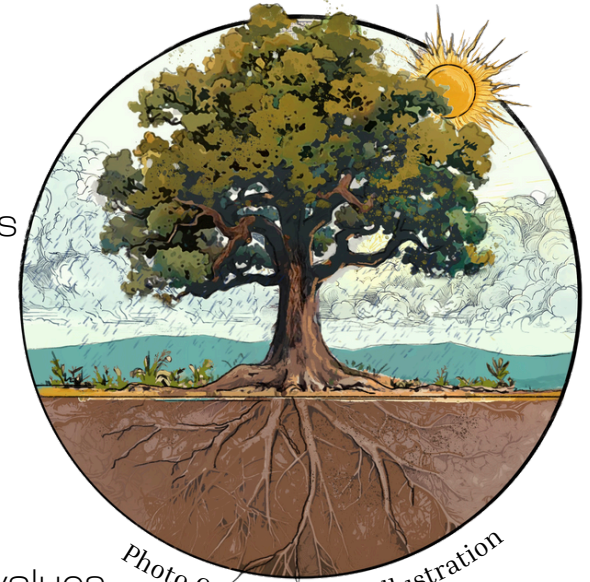


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Connection to Tour Cayuga's Strategic Plan and the Impact Multiplier

Tour Cayuga's 2026–2030 Strategic Plan explicitly commits to evolving from a marketing-first Destination Organization into a destination management and stewardship organization.

The following goals of the Strategic Plan align directly with the Tree Metaphor:



Deepen Regional and Community Collaborations Roots

Building partnerships, producing local impact reports, and strengthening communication.



Shift Brand Positioning and Visitor Perception Branches/Leaves

Campaigns like Go Beyond highlight slow travel and sustainability, ensuring marketing reflects authentic values.



Improve Tourism Product and Experience Readiness Roots/Trunk

Investments in partner development, accessibility, and workforce growth create stronger foundations.



Center Destination Stewardship Roots

Revising the mission, expanding stewardship programs, and supporting sustainable and inclusive practices.

Reinforcement from DestinationNEXT Futures Study

The DestinationNEXT 2025 Futures Study confirms that the future of DMOs lies in stewardship and community value creation .

Key themes include:

Authenticity & community integration as competitive advantages.

Resilience & adaptability as leadership imperatives.

Stakeholder alignment as the foundation for trust & long-term success.

This echoes the Tree metaphor: branches alone cannot sustain a tree; resilience comes from strong roots and a steady trunk.

Next Steps – Continuing the Work

- **Use the Tree as a Communication Tool:** Share it with policymakers, partners, and residents to explain the Destination Organization's role in a memorable way.
- **Apply the Advocacy Lexicon:** Anchor our language in “community vitality” and “quality of life,” shifting beyond ROI and reinforcing our Impact Multiplier.
- **Strengthen the Roots:** Invest in inclusive practices, sustainability, and resident engagement.
- **Build for Multiple Futures:** DestinationNEXT reminds us to prepare for uncertainty. A resilient trunk and healthy roots ensure adaptability regardless of future scenarios.

Conclusion

Tourism, like a tree, thrives only when rooted in stewardship, guided by steady leadership, and nurtured by the right conditions. Leaders cannot control the sunshine or the rain, but we can ensure that our roots are deep, our trunk is strong, and our branches authentically reflect the values of our communities.

When we do this, tourism becomes more than an economic engine, it becomes a tree of opportunity and growth, multiplying benefits for residents, businesses, and visitors alike.



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