



# Sports ETA

SPORTS EVENTS & TOURISM ASSOCIATION

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## Expanded Definition of Success

*By Al Kidd and  
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# 1

## History

### A BRIEF HISTORY:



The sports events and tourism industry is both in its infancy, and yet thousands of years old. How can that be you may be thinking? People traveled to participate in and spectate at sporting events as long ago as the ancient empires of Greece and Rome. In fact, the first edition of the Ancient Games in Olympia dates back to at least 776 B.C. It is estimated that more than 50,000 spectators were in attendance in the second century games, travelling from the furthest regions of the Greek empire to bear witness to the competition.



We can still trace our modern-day sports events and tourism industry to many of the same fundamental elements from the past. There are still sporting events taking place at specific venues, athletes participate, spectators watch, historical records are kept, and word about the outcome travels. In these regards, our industry is quite literally ancient.

Flash forward 2,797 years to today. The year is 2021 and what may be considered the modern era of sports events and tourism has only boomed in the most recent decades. Sophistication and organization of the delivery of sport – across all categories – has advanced. Yet the professional association for the industry’s U.S.-based organizations, Sports ETA, is still shy of 30 years old. An industry in its infancy.

The rich history of sports events coupled with the short period of innovation and advancement warrants deeper exploration of where the industry came, its present-day status, and where it is headed. The necessity of this evaluation was percolating in advance of the Covid Pandemic and is certainly now even more imperative to ensure sustainability of sports events and tourism into the industry’s fourth millennium.

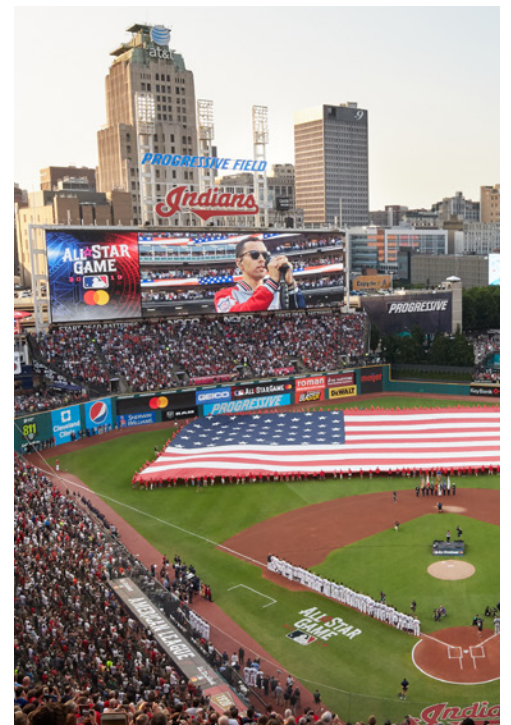


Photo courtesy of Greater Cleveland Sports Commission

## 2 | Overview

For many years, the primary metric for success among sports events and tourism organizations has been economic impact, usually equivocated with hotel room night generation. In other words, sports events and tourism's primary objective was to solicit non-local travelers to a destination resulting in maximum room-night generation – commonly referred to as “heads in beds”.

As the industry has evolved, it has become apparent that hosting sporting events in a certain locale provides deeper value than solely counting heads in beds. However, despite the growing body of evidence underscoring the widening value of sports events and tourism efforts on the local community, industry-accepted expanded metrics of success have significantly lagged.

Confining the scope of industry success to room nights presents several limitations to the industry:

1. It does not account for the reality that a variety of reasons exist for hosting an event, not all of which center on filling hotel rooms. This is the **why** of the event. Every event is different and thus, has a different rationale profile when determining whether to host/build the event and measuring its success. The ranking and scoring of these rationales are also highly audience dependent. For example, a community may host an event due to the platform it provides to enhance the destination's brand perception and awareness, or earned media, rather than due to economic impact. This is often the case with large-scale sporting events due to the incremental costs associated with hosting.

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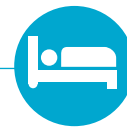


Photo courtesy of Visit Baton Rouge

2. It limits the ability of sports events and tourism operators from telling the whole story, which is comprised of many facets beyond lodging occupancy. By telling a more complete story about the value of sports events and tourism entity efforts, we can expand funding mechanisms, build ambassadorship, and increase overall organizational sustainability. Short changing the story of events in our destinations stifles our ability to leverage those impacts into broader community value propositions. For example, contribution to the quality of life that is then conveyed in the business recruitment efforts of a community.
3. It compromises the industry's innovation and advocacy potential. Prior to – and now during the pandemic – industry organizations from all segments (destinations, rights holders, industry partners, etc.) find themselves in a crucial position to understand, prove, and articulate a wider value chain back to the community more than ever before.

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Photo courtesy of Visit Knoxville Sports Commission

There are small pockets of our forward-thinking industry colleagues who have begun forging through the brush to bring attention to other metrics of success. However, the collective sports events and tourism industry would be wise to embrace a substantial expansion of **what** success means and **how** it is measured. Not only is the expanded definition of success conversation emerging in the U.S., but parallel conversations are also occurring at international sport levels as well.

# 3

## Expanding the Definition of Success



Photo courtesy of Forth Worth Sports Commission

Ask industry colleagues why they do what they do, and they are likely to tell you they drive economic impact through sporting events in their community, first. Then they are likely to tell you they cultivate exposure of their community, quality of life for their local populous, make their town a top sports destination, and a variety of other things.

*Expanding* the definition of success is quite different than *redefining* success. Expansion means becoming larger or more extensive, not eliminating, or reducing. This is not intended to be a rebuke of those pursuing hotel room nights, direct spending, or even economic impact. It is widening the goalpost beyond them.

In fact, recent research (Stoll, et al., 2020) shows that these phrases commonly appear in a significant number of sports events and tourism organization mission statements. In other words, these outcomes are such a fundamental part of the organizations' efforts, that they appear on each annual report, the company website, and likely even a placard on the wall in their offices.

These are all worthwhile objectives to pursue. But they cannot just be a part of our industry's lingo. They must be carefully defined key performance indicators thoughtfully measured through sound quantitative methods to yield valid and reliable results. Only then can they be leveraged to the long-term benefit of the organization, and the community.

They must also be embraced by the masses - our industry colleagues around the nation.

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## WIDENING THE SCOPE OF SUCCESS

When we look at hotel room nights, we are really looking at the financial implications of our industry's business transaction. Direct, indirect, and induced impact, job creation, tax generation, and on down the line. But we must also think about the costs associated with hosting an event in our community, public and private consumption benefits, property value implications, and more.

Flip to driving community exposure. How are you measuring that desired outcome? Perhaps through earned media value, brand perception and awareness, social listening, social impressions, advertising conversion, crowd counting, geo-fencing, destination image attribute perception, spectator and fan DNA, sponsor valuation, or other means. Or perhaps not at all.

Your organization likely also strives to contribute to quality of life in your area. Have you given thought to how you define this objective and how you measure it? Metrics such as resident sentiment, sense of place, psychic income, consumption benefits, community pride and connectedness, social capital, community capacity, health and wellness, volunteerism, philanthropy, sustainability, participatory and spectator opportunities, among others, all play a role in this equation.



And these are just a few expanded metrics of “success”. Imagine if you were able to use these metrics as bases to evaluate pre-event opportunities and post-event performance, communicate to your key stakeholders using more meaningful context, and leverage these metrics into increased innovation and advocacy for your work. We begin to see the sports events and tourism industry is not just about filling hotels on weekends, it is interwoven into the fabric of our communities.

These metrics convey a much more comprehensive perspective on return on mission, return on objectives, and return on investment – the terms we are used to hearing thrown around. The difference is now we must prove we are delivering on these buzz words.

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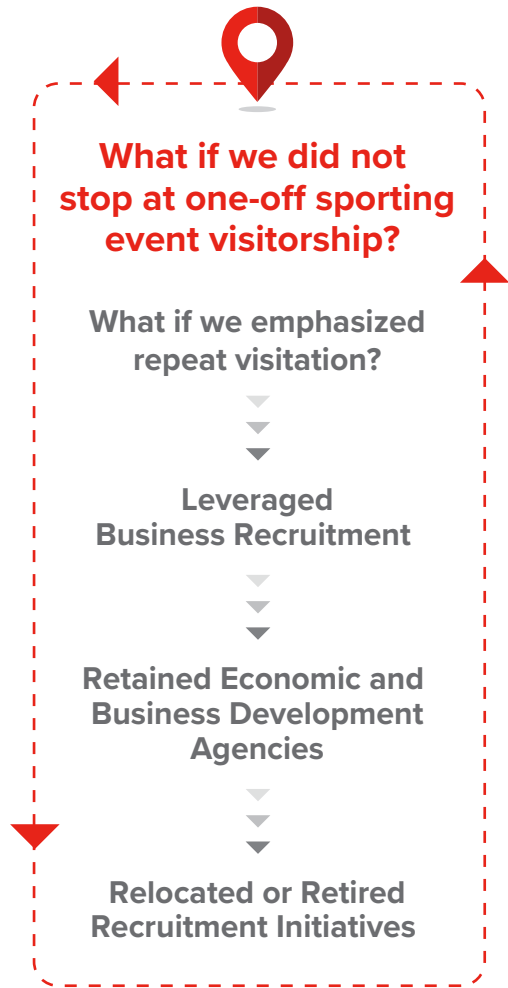


Photo courtesy of Rockford Area CVB

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## Conclusion

### A STAKE IN THE GROUND

The charge of this whitepaper is to establish an industry-wide call for the recognition and adoption of an expanded definition of sports events and tourism “success”.

**Sports ETA will be pushing the expanded definition of success in our industry. Our goal is to provide our members with advanced metrics for success by developing and aggregating tools to help you make better business decisions.**

### THE PATH FORWARD

BusinessWeek magazine dubbed Peter Drucker “the man who invented management”. Mr. Drucker is credited with coining the phrase “If you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it.”

The sports events and tourism industry would be wise to heed Mr. Drucker’s adage.

Over the coming weeks and months, Sports ETA will be pushing to expand the definition of success in our industry. Our goal is to provide our members with advanced metrics for success by developing and aggregating tools to help you make better business decisions. We will educate you on what these metrics are, what they mean, why they are important, and how to use them. Arrows will be methodically added to your quiver of resources.

Together, we can approach our great work with a widening perspective of its definition of success. A definition that truly captures the vastness of why we do what we do and the benefits our communities derive from these efforts.

We invite you to join our charge.

*Al Kidd & Jennifer Stoll, PhD, STS*



Photo courtesy of Palm Beach County Sports Commission