



**Sports ETA**  
SPORTS EVENTS & TOURISM ASSOCIATION

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**How Sports Tourism  
Organizations Can Positively  
Affect Their Communities**

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# 1

## Background

Over the last twenty-eight years, the sports events and tourism industry has experienced unprecedented growth. This market shift has led to a dramatic increase in the number of sports tourism organizations serving as a conduit between entities seeking a destination in which to conduct their event, and a destination with a specific venue suitable for hosting the event. These entities represent a variety of geographic locations, market sizes, and organizational structures such as: Stand-alone sports commissions, convention and visitors' bureaus (CVBs), chambers of commerce, governmental agencies or departments (i.e. Tourism Department or Parks and Recreation Department), or private entities such as an economic development agency.



In the early 1990s, thirteen visionary members seeking to grow the industry through collaboration and research founded the National Association of Sports Commissions (now Sports ETA). Historically, sports tourism organizations were tasked with attracting events in order to boost local economic activity. These organizations have evolved to meet the needs of an ever-changing market by offering new products, sports, services, and venues. In 2018, Sports ETA's membership roster comprised of more than 500 organizations representing destinations or sports tourism entities across the U.S. Today, sports events and tourism is a highly competitive industry with destinations continually vying to host events. Sports events range from small, annually held events like a youth soccer tournament, to a one-time mega events such as the World Cup.



Entities seeking a destination for their event



**Sports Tourism Organizations**



A destination with a specific venue suitable for hosting the event



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## The Challenge

**“It is time for the sports events and tourism industry to look beyond economic impact as the sole measure of success.”**

The sports events and tourism industry has changed significantly from its inception nearly 30 years ago and the way sports tourism organizations measure success and the value they provide to their respective communities is evolving. For years, the term “heads in beds” (the number of hotel room nights booked by the event participants and traveling fans) has been the key performance indicator (KPI) for the industry. While still a valuable metric, sports tourism entities have begun to look at additional outcomes and outputs as supplements beyond economic impact. These benefits include, but are not limited to, community image enhancement, strong community relationships, utilization of local venues and facilities, and attracting repeat and high-yield visitors (Ross, 2001).

### Conceptual Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)



Heads in Beds



community image enhancement



strong community relationships



utilization of local venues and facilities



attracting repeat and high-yield visitors



# 3

## The Study

### FOUNDATION

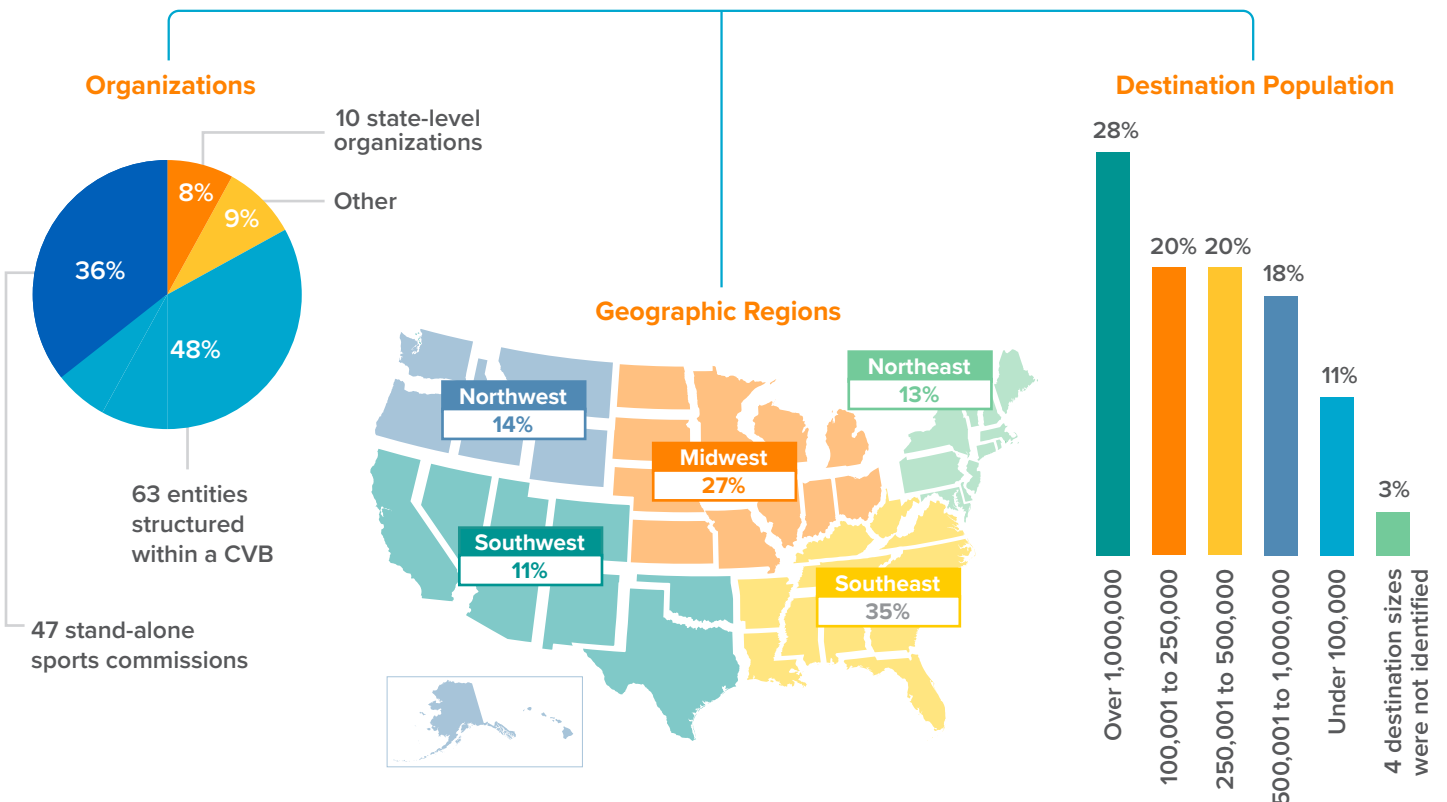
The purpose of this study (the first of its kind within the sports events and tourism industry) was to gain an understanding as to *what* sports tourism entities seek to achieve. The researchers conducted a content analysis of the data contained in the mission statements of 132 sports tourism organizations (within the membership ranks of Sports ETA). This research lays the groundwork for future studies, which could determine *if* and *how* these organizations pursue and/or measure the resulting outcomes.

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding as to **what sports tourism entities seek to achieve.**

### PROCESS AND FINDINGS

Over a 48-hour period, researchers collected mission statements from 132 entities, taken directly from the organization's website to ensure data consistency. The qualitative data was organized by entity name and mission statement prior to the coding process, which included analyzing detailed elements within each organization's mission statement.

### Mission statements (collected from 132 entities)



## OUTCOMES

Results of the content analysis revealed six primary themes inclusive of one primary output and five primary outcomes. By definition, an output is the product or service the organization provides to the market, while an outcome refers to what the organization hopes to achieve by supplying the product or service.

Approximately 70% of the mission statements analyzed within this study referenced the product or service of events. This primary output category can be broken down further into (a) event recruitment, (b) event servicing, and (c) event development.

The recruitment element draws on the proactive efforts of an organization to bring in outside events to the local community. Sports tourism entities may also choose to support existing events via servicing (providing volunteers, promotion, etc.) instead of recruiting or developing new events. However, many mission statements discussed the creation of local tournaments or high-profile “signature” sporting events within their respective markets.

Contrary to popular belief, in the United States, sporting events from the mega level down to youth sport tournaments do not randomly migrate to certain destinations. Rather, sports tourism organizations proactively target, recruit, and even build them. Recent research by Sports ETA suggests that more than 50 percent of sports tourism entities are now developing their own events for portfolio expansion.

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**output =**  
the product or service the organization provides to the market

**outcome =**  
what the organization hopes to achieve by supplying the product or service

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67%

### 1. Economic Development



Although additional metrics for measuring success have emerged in recent years, sports tourism entities understand that their existence often hinges on economic return.

53%

### 2. Destination Branding



Brand awareness and promotional efforts are key to an organization's goal of becoming a nationally or internationally recognized premier sports tourism destination.

47%

### 3. Socio-Cultural Leverage



One of the most interesting outcomes revealed that many sports tourism entities are articulating the need for enhancing quality of life, community pride, and/or health and wellness in their local communities.

## PRIMARY OUTCOME THEMES

(listed in order of occurrence frequency) from the mission statement content analysis included:

27%

### 4. Tourism/Business Development



Although this category shares a link to economic development, more than one quarter of mission statements simply focused on driving patronage to hotels and other businesses without a specific focus on economic impact.

15%

### 5. Venue Engagement



Venue engagement emerged as a unique component due to its focus on building strong collaborative partnerships with physical assets in a community or region, including sports-related facilities.

# 5

## Summary and Action Steps

The findings of the study provide practitioners within the sports events and tourism industry with a holistic overview of *what* sports tourism entities desire to achieve as they work toward continued organizational sustainability.

As sports tourism organizations look to expand their community value proposition, here are four actionable steps to take based upon the findings of this study:

**Achieve,  
measure,  
advocate,  
and repeat.**

### 1. Reflect on why sports tourism is important for your community.

Now, more than ever, is a good time to reflect on the reason your organization exists in the first place – your *why*. Truly spend time thinking through the value your work provides and writing down that value, bearing in mind your *why* may have shifted since its inception.

### 2. Revisit your organization's stated objectives.

Once you have brought your organization's *why* front-of-mind, revisit your stated outcomes – your *whats*. Review your organization's own mission statement, strategic plans, and other relevant documents. Perhaps some of your objectives mirror those identified in this study, and perhaps they are unique to your locale. Write these objectives down, too.

### 3. Ensure alignment between *whats* and *whys*.

After completing steps one and two, you have two lists. The *whats* and *whys* of your organization must be in alignment. Do your *whats* point directly to achieving your *whys*? This congruency sets you on a path forward.

### 4. Achieve, measure, advocate, and repeat.

Use the insights gained through this exercise to achieve your organization's objectives. Make sure to have a method to measure all objectives that point toward your *whys*. Effective measurement will require you to think about metrics with fresh eyes. Use these measurements to advocate your organization's value proposition back to the community and feed your organization's sustainable future.

#### Citations:

This whitepaper is based on a recently published peer-reviewed article available here: Stoll, J. A., Dixon, A., Goldsmith, A., Andrew, D. P. S., & Chelladurai, P. (2020). Sport tourism entity desired outcomes. *Journal of Sport & Tourism*, 24(3), 195-213. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14775085.2020.1822201>

Ross, S. (2001). Developing sports tourism: An e-guide for sports event marketers and destination planners. *National Laboratory for Tourism and eCommerce*.

