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## Putting Research into Practice: Three examples of communicating academic research to industry partners

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## **Putting Research into Practice: Three examples of communicating academic research to industry partners**

### **Introduction**

Academic research has the potential to provide innovative solutions to tourism industry challenges, yet multiple barriers keep those solutions from being put into practice. Publication paywalls, academic tenure and promotion metrics, and publication content are just a few roadblocks that prevent tourism industry practitioners from benefiting from the outcomes of scholarly efforts. While the rise of open access journals can increase access to academic publications, not all scholars receive equal “credit” for publishing in these outlets as compared to top-ranked traditional outlets. Furthermore, while accessible from a price standpoint, these open access publications still typically follow the normative structure of academic manuscripts (i.e., emphasis on literature review and methods, limited emphasis on managerial implications), making it difficult for practitioners to decipher the key recommendations for changing their practices and policies.

If tourism scholars are to fully contribute to the improvement of our industry through research, they must go the “last mile” and translate their findings into practical recommendations that are accessible to industry partners. This poster will outline three examples of how academics can translate their scholarly outputs into resources tourism industry practitioners can use. Each example offers recommendations related to the format of communication, content depth, and distribution methods.

### **Example 1: Actionable Advocacy Insights**

The *Actionable Advocacy Insights* series is based on a nationwide study of destination marketing/management organizations (DMOs) and tourism advocacy organizations. The series was developed to help tourism industry leaders more effectively plan for advocacy efforts. Therefore, special care was taken to ensure that findings were communicated with action in mind. We gathered feedback from tourism industry practitioners on the format, depth, and distribution strategies for the *Actionable Advocacy Insights* series. Based on their valuable constructive feedback, we opted *not* to share our findings in a traditional report format. Instead, we are sharing our findings via a series of five PowerPoint slide decks so that industry leaders can use the slides to share actions with key internal and external stakeholders. We are also including speaker notes to help industry leaders present our findings to their networks, while keeping the slide text concise. By translating the findings directly into this format (slide deck), there is a greater likelihood of them being shared and implemented. While many key findings emerged from the research, each slide deck focuses only on one finding theme: 1.) communicating the value of tourism; 2.) involving a broad range of stakeholders in advocacy; 3.) the perceived effectiveness of advocacy strategies; 4.) identifying resources to advocate for tourism; 5.) perceived obstacles to advocacy

efforts in tourism. This promotes a focus on each theme, rather than in-depth coverage of all findings. Each slide deck features 11 slides, including: title, study overview, background/introduction to the problem, key findings (with emphasis on visualizing the results when possible), call to action based on the findings (includes short-term, mid-term, and long-term actions), conversation starters (leaders can use these prompts to guide discussion about the call to action with internal and external stakeholders), methods, contact information, and acknowledgements.

The distribution of the *Actionable Advocacy Insights* series is novel in that specific industry partners (e.g., Southeast Tourism Society and Destinations International) were brought on board to provide content to their members and extend the reach of this work through presentations and the slide decks. In addition, study participants could opt-in to receive each slide deck via email (a large proportion opted-in) and the *Actionable Advocacy Insights* series is hosted on the University of South Carolina's Richardson Family SmartState Center for Economic Excellence in Tourism and Economic Development website, the North Carolina State University Tourism Extension program's website, and through the North Carolina State University Libraries (with a DOI).

### **Example 2: Building Tourism Advocacy**

Developed from a project driven by industry needs – an evaluation of a DMO's advocacy program – this technical report served both as an element of a Master's thesis and a way to communicate key findings to the project sponsor and their stakeholders. The four-page report, titled *Building Tourism Advocacy*, is novel in that it presents key findings from a qualitative study in an easy-to-digest format that shows the longitudinal impacts of the DMO's advocacy program on community awareness of tourism's impacts. Designed in partnership with the DMO sponsor, this report illustrates how research can serve scholarly needs (completion of a thesis) while providing meaningful managerial actions. This example highlights how working with industry partners can ensure accessibility is maximized through both the format and depth of findings presented.

### **Example 3: Sustainable Tourism Case Studies Clearinghouse**

The *Sustainable Tourism Case Study Clearinghouse* serves as a collection of case studies that summarize solutions to key sustainable tourism challenges. Informed by the needs of the tourism industry – gathered through online surveys and in-person interviews with tourism industry members as well as online media listening tools – these case studies are presented in a digital format and offer tourism leaders a portfolio of solutions from global tourism destinations. Developed by a team of undergraduate research assistants and distributed through the North Carolina State University Tourism Extension program, these case studies illustrate how research dissemination can be both valuable to industry partners while also accomplishing key goals for a land-grant institution (undergraduate education and extension of research to practitioners).

## **Conclusion**

Through this work, we aim to help bridge the gap between academic tourism research and industry practice. Sharing examples of how to communicate research more effectively will be of benefit to both the academics who aim to go the “last mile” in putting their research into practice and to practitioners who need research to create innovative solutions to current industry challenges.

Key recommendations include: 1.) using formats like a PowerPoint slide deck to share research findings so that practitioners can integrate findings into presentations for stakeholders; 2.) creating a series of short reports that each have a different theme from the findings to make key takeaways easier to find and process; 3.) partnering with industry members to develop a research outcome that serves their needs *and* academic metrics (e.g., completion of a Master’s thesis, undergraduate education); 4.) leveraging industry partners to provide them with content to share with their members while maximizing the distribution of research outputs.