

The “Core Elements” of Byways Sustainability

The National Scenic Byways Program is a dynamic, grassroots program, based upon the shared vision and efforts of partners to protect, preserve, promote, and enhance the intrinsic qualities and resources of their special roads. But what is it that makes byways sustainable? What is necessary to support lasting efforts of a byway organization? Byway groups work hard to obtain designation at the state, federal lands, Indian tribe, or national level, often to next come up against the big question: “Now What? How do we keep this going?”

- **What supports the “sustainability” of byways?**

The sustainability of byways and byway organizations around the country is critical to long term success. You can think of a sustainable byway as a three-legged stool, with the legs representing Planning, Intrinsic Qualities, and Visitor Experience. If any leg of the stool is weaker than the others, the stability of the stool will be compromised. Similarly, a byway that is unbalanced in any of these three areas will have weaknesses that will affect the stability or “health” of the byway.

The development of strong partnerships and successful planning efforts to support byways can be measured in direct correlation to a byway organization’s attention to these “core elements” that are essential to a byway’s sustainability.

- **“Core Elements” and the Interim Policy**

Planning, Intrinsic Qualities, and Visitor Experience are the “core elements” that make up the foundation of the National Scenic Byways Program. These three core elements are drawn from the Interim Policy for the Program, published in the Federal Register in 1995. The Interim Policy is the principal policy guiding the National Scenic Byways Program, and sets forth the criteria for the designation of roads as National Scenic Byways or All-American Roads based upon their scenic, historic, recreational, cultural, archeological, and/or natural intrinsic qualities, and establishes the 14 points necessary to address in a corridor management plan. The policy also emphasizes the necessity of byways to support a visitor’s experience in positive ways.

Each of the three core elements is multi-faceted yet interdependent. Following is an overview of the essential aspects that each of the three core elements addresses:

PLANNING:

- **Corridor Management:** A corridor management plan (CMP) is a written document that outlines how a byway organization plans to protect, promote, enhance and manage the intrinsic qualities of their byway. A byway’s CMP will act as the guiding document for all efforts of the byway group and be a key element in all planning. A corridor management plan is required if pursuing designation as a National Scenic Byway or All-American Road.
- **Organization:** The National Scenic Byways Program is founded upon the grassroots strength of individual byway leaders and the groups they work with. Organizing a byway and sustaining a byway organization include important planning elements of: envisioning

an ordered whole; pulling people together; giving the organization structure and order; and seeking united action. Byways need to develop and maintain strong, resilient, long-lived organizations made up of people who are strong proponents for byways.

- **Funding:** Building a strong financial foundation is an important goal for all byways, and an important aspect of planning for byway organizations. Fundraising success is directly linked to other success factors – a clear vision, a healthy organization, active partnerships and sound planning. Byway groups need to make and implement effective, long-term funding plans and promote those plans to potential funders.

INTRINSIC QUALITIES:

- **Inventory and Assessment:** Intrinsic qualities arise from a particular combination of resources along a byway that together define its character, interest and appeal. A byway organization must be able to identify, inventory and assess the intrinsic qualities that are representative of their route. A byway organization must prove the regional or national significance of their intrinsic qualities for designation as a National Scenic Byway or All-American Road.
- **The Byway Story:** A byway story is the intentional, coordinated message that the byway conveys to visitors to help them make connections with the resources and qualities that the byway promotes. What byway story can be formed from your inventory of intrinsic qualities to frame what a visitor could experience along your route? A byway organization must consider how to best interpret their resources and provide the visitor with opportunities to experience the special intrinsic qualities and resources that make their route unique.
- **Protection and Promotion:** The National Scenic Byways Program is based upon a balanced approach of protection and promotion of the intrinsic qualities and resources of our country's most treasured roads. Byways are an experience of all the parts and stories in the corridor. Without those elements, the byway ceases to be a byway. Byway organizations need to learn to identify the core character of the byway, inventory its resources, and communicate that to the individuals and groups that have an immediate and future impact on your byways character.

VISITOR EXPERIENCE:

- **Wayshowing:** Wayfinding is what visitors do, and wayshowing is what your byway or byway organization needs to do. Can visitors effectively find their way along your byway? They will, if you first provide a well-planned guidance system based upon wayshowing principles to show the way. Byway organizations need to plan for how to safely and effectively guide the byway traveler to a positive experience with signage, maps and other means.

- **Accessibility:** About one out of every five Americans has a functional impairment that limits daily life activities and two out of seven families are affected by disability. Compliance with Federal accessibility mandates is essential for byways that use National Scenic Byways Program grant funds, and applying universal design will increase accessibility for *all* people touring your route. Byways need to consider how travelers of many different abilities will experience the intrinsic qualities of their route, and incorporate those considerations into their planning.
- **Marketing:** Authentic experiences, event planning, marketing plans, collateral materials and itineraries all play distinctive and vital roles in providing access to your byway visitor experience. Successful marketing includes promoting your byway to target audiences. Byway organizations need to gain insight on this broad topic to effectively communicate specific messages to their current and potential visitors.

- **Where Can I Find More Information?**

The National Scenic Byways Program and the America's Byways Resource Center have three websites to serve direct access to the information byways need:

www.byways.org

This website is designed with the website traveler and interested media in mind. It is a one-stop shop to facilitate trip planning or spark the imagination of a traveler before visiting your byway. Byway groups can utilize this website to help market their byway, and see that correct information is provided to the traveler to help plan and enhance their experience along your route.

www.bywaysonline.org

This is the official website for the National Scenic Byways Program and supports the Federal Highway Administration's core functions of grants, designations, and national marketing. Here byway practitioners can find information on how to nominate their byway for national designation, apply for grant funding, and learn more about the marketing efforts of the America's Byways collection. To promote peer-to-peer exchange and information sharing, the website also hosts a lively discussion forum.

www.bywaysresourcecenter.org

This is the official website for the America's Byways Resource Center, designed to provide byway audiences with resources they deal with every day. Articles, publications, tools, training opportunities, and web links are provided to assist with byway management, and are listed under the areas of Corridor Management, Organizations, Fundraising, and Visitor Experience. In addition, upcoming training opportunities from the Resource Center are posted online, such as topic-specific Tele-Workshops, National Networking Calls, and on-site multi-day workshops around the country such as the popular "Power Workshops".