

## Policies Matter ... To Your Customers and Your Business

### Industry Topic Specialists

Name: Donna Bennett  
Position: Co-founder  
Company: [Westben](#)  
Location : Campbellford, ON  
Email: [donna@westben.ca](mailto:donna@westben.ca)

Name: Kristi Denby  
Position: Sustainable Tourism  
Development Specialist  
Company: [Tourism Café Canada](#)  
Location: Williams Lake, BC  
Email: [kristi@tourismcafe.org](mailto:kristi@tourismcafe.org)

### Specialist Highlights

- Developing Westben policies was an organic, and evolutionary process over the 23 years.
- Policies mitigate risks and articulate the culture of your business and organization, they speak to what you stand for and how you relate to customers, staff, volunteers, and partners.
- Policies illuminate integrity, commitment to action, accountability, and transparency.
- It is important to go over what policies are required by legislation, and what policies should be internal vs. external.
- Gen Z and millennials are looking for more than words as both travellers and as employees. They want to see proof in the form of policies, plans and clear actions.
- Pay attention to emerging trends and what people value when creating new policies, i.e. travelling with your pets.

### Discussion Ideas & Tips

Creating new and updating past policies is an exciting and important practice that creates a culture of integrity, transparency, and accountability in your business. The Tourism Café conducted Canada wide policy research on 60 tourism businesses, based on information available on their websites. Many of these businesses were Canadian Signature Experience companies.

The research revealed:

- 95% of businesses had a refund and/or cancellation policy
- 26% had a sustainability policies or plan
- 18% had accessibility policy or information
- 12% had reported sustainable procurement actions or a policy
- 10% had a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policy or statement.

This does not mean companies do not have any policies in other areas, but they were not available online for customers looking at a company website when deciding where to purchase travel. Some key gaps that emerged included: no dates on the policy, if they existed, they were difficult to find being buried on their website, vague, and not linked to actions.

Discussions regarding why policies matter to your customers and your business have been held with 10 tourism operators and professionals in Ontario.

*“Companies are being scrutinized like never before. The scale of the social and economic upheaval precipitated by the pandemic also offers a strong impetus for change.”*

– *Shaping the Sustainable Organization, Accenture*



### Tactical Practical Take-Aways

- Policies can impact your customer, employees, staff, volunteers, business partners and suppliers; they are important.
- Policies should be based on defining your business's responsibility and commitment to learning and action.
- Policies evolve and don't have to be complicated.
- Prioritize progress over perfection when creating policies.
- Don't get bogged down with everything at once. Pick one or two policy areas that are important to your business to focus on first.
- Ensure to date stamp and review/update policies. Creating a review schedule in your calendar can be effective.
- It's not enough to just have a policy in place to cover yourself legally. Use policies, embody them and strive to do better.
- If your organization is committed to creating a policy, you need to understand that effort must be put into implementing and upholding it.
- Many people have changed their personal purpose and become more conscious since the start of the pandemic. These people are looking for action and proof in the form of policies.
- Think of creative ways to showcase your policies and actions through marketing and communications.
- Think like a visitor or prospective employee when creating and posting a policy publicly.

### Creating a Policy

The following ideas were shared to support and encourage tourism businesses to start creating formalized policies.

- Effective policies should be clear, consistent, specific, and easily understood.
- Start embedding the language of what you already do into a formal policy. For example, formalize the work you already do in supporting local and using biodegradable packaging into a sustainable procurement policy. Policy is a permanent commitment and can be a great tool to refer to as your business grows.
- Reach out to industry leaders or companies you admire, DMOs, Chamber of Commerce's to start creating your policies. It is important to understand what policies are required by law (privacy, COVID-19) and what is important to your company culture and brand. You would be surprised how much people are willing to share and support your policy journey.
- Some operational or governance policies are confidential and internal, some of these may relate to risk management, compliance or HR. External policies show the world, both guests and potential staff your business rules/policies, your brand, your values, and actions
- Use templates, then fill in the gaps and tailor to your business.
- The key is to just start somewhere by selecting a few policy areas that are most important to your business. Block off time in your low-season to write and/or review policies.
- Start embedding the language of what you already do into a formal policy. For example, formalize the work you already do in supporting local and using biodegradable packaging into a sustainable procurement policy. Policy is a permanent commitment and can be a great tool to refer to as your business grows.
- Weave the policy into your strategic plan or pull from your strategic plan to inform policies. Try building the core values of DEI, accessibility, and sustainability into your organization's operations.
- Post policies where they can be easily found on your website, ensure to date stamp and review/update policies as needed. You can move policies around on your website depending on its relevance.

*"Accessible tourism is no longer about building ramps and accessible bathrooms. It's about building products and services for a larger and rapidly growing market. This is no longer a niche, but rather, a segment that is approaching 25% of total tourism spend."*

*—Bill Forrester, Travability*



### Other Key Insights

- Think like a visitor or prospective employee when creating and posting a policy publicly. There is an opportunity to merge marketing and policies in creative ways. For example, it was mentioned that a brewery had an inclusive message posted in the bathroom stalls to make a statement about diversity, equity, and inclusion in their pub.
- COVID-19 has made the importance of transparent refund and cancellation policy a norm for businesses and an expectation by travellers.
- Showing action and progress in policy areas such as sustainability and DEI is important. Celebrate wins to strengthen your brand and retain and attract employees.
- Sustainability has become a business imperative due to the social and economic upheaval created by the pandemic. Traveler's value and are booking based on tourism operators' sustainability actions and positive impacts on local communities. Think about creating a sustainability policy to show people what you stand for. [Elmhirst's Resort](#) is a great example.
- Communicating your efforts is still a challenge for many in the travel sector, a [Booking.com sustainable travel survey](#) stated that 75% of accommodations say they are doing at least one thing to be more sustainable in their business, only a third actively let their guests know about their efforts
- It is important to think of accessibility more broadly than just wheelchair accessible. It is estimated that there are more than 1.3 billion people with disabilities globally, many who travel for different purposes. The [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Act](#) (AODA) became law in 2005 with the goal to make incremental improvements to achieve an accessible Ontario by 2025.
- DEI policies are crucial to attracting staff and ensuring all people feel welcome at your business. Showing support for Indigenous reconciliation and Black Lives Matter could be reflected in policies. This is a deeper commitment to action than just a social media post.
- Showing action and progress in policy areas such as sustainability and DEI is important. Celebrate wins to strengthen your brand and retain and attract employees
- Not-for-profit organizations often have policies for everything. For some it is important to strike a balance of having policies as a guiding principle for their business, but ensuring they are not too restrictive.
- It is not enough to just have a policy in place to cover the basics. Reference it, embody it, and strive to do better.

### Additional Helpful Links

[Shaping the Sustainable Organization](#). Accenture, in collaboration with the World Economic Forum. 2021

[Booking.com Sustainable Travel Report](#). 2021

[Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity Policy Template](#). Bloomerang.

[Accessible Tourism](#). Tourism Industry Association of Ontario.

[Canadian Federation of Independent Business](#).

[Western Business Law Clinic](#)

[Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion](#)

[Cultural Pluralism in the Arts Movement \(CPAMO\)](#)

[12 Ways To Better Choose Our Words When We Write About Indigenous Peoples](#), Gregory Younging, 2018

Policies samples from tourism businesses: [Westben](#), [Canadian Museum for Human Rights](#), [Spirit Bear Lodge](#), [Trout Point Lodge of Nova Scotia](#), [Vancouver International Airport](#), [Long Point Eco-Adventures](#)

Disclaimer: In providing your business with the information above and other support or advice, including information, support and/or advice relating to the Covid-19 crisis, the Tourism Café, session sponsors and topic specialists are not responsible or liable for decisions made, strategies adopted or third-party program results, and specifically disclaim any responsibility for any consequences, financial or otherwise, of a business relying on our advice or using information we provide. Businesses must understand and agree that they are responsible for all actions they take and decisions they make and that they must do their own due diligence and seek appropriate legal, accounting, tax or other professional advice as they may require.