

YMCA of the Rockies Visitor Engagement Best Practice Guide

This guide has been created as an accompanying document to YMCA of the Rockies Sustainability Action Plan. The purpose of this document is to share best practices for **implementing visitor engagement strategies across YMCA of the Rockies' campuses, programs, and events**, utilizing community based social marketing strategies to communicate YMCA's sustainability story and foster sustainable behavior among visitors.

1. Guide Usage

This document will briefly introduce the reader to community based social marketing strategies to affect sustainable behavioral change in visitors to augment the implementation of YMCA's Sustainability Action Plan. The reader can then recognize the principles at use via the coordinating icons below.

Please also note that suggested tactics are broken out into **short-term** and **long-term**. The guiding thresholds for what constitutes a short-term and a long-term tactic are two-fold, based on YMCA's existing capabilities in the year 2023. The first threshold for a long-term goal is if it involves recycling. At the time of writing this guide, YMCA is working on improving waste diversion infrastructure and processes. Once this is finalized, the tactics involving waste diversion can be employed. Similarly, the second threshold for a long-term goal is based on the capacity of people and resources over time. If a tactic is *not* labeled with short-term and long-term, it is meant to be an ongoing strategy.

2. Principles

The principles below are pulled from community-based social marketing strategies, strategic communication principles, and Lotus' internal expertise. For ease of use, we have consolidated all of this knowledge into **7 best practices to foster behavior change around all sustainability-related touchpoints.**



- a. **Social Norms:** Human beings are social creatures. We internalize the behavior of those around us as normal and follow suit. An example of how social norms used in communication campaigns can affect behavior is the example of trying to promote the use of wearing seatbelts in a car for adults in Montana. The campaign's slogan was "Most of Us Wear Seatbelts" and ran from 1987 to 1990. The campaign resulted in an estimated increase in seatbelt use and an increase in perception of others wearing seatbelts. An example of how social norms could be employed at YMCA of the Rockies could be conducting a survey on visitor or staff values around protecting the earth's natural resources. The results of the survey could be showcased to demonstrate caring for the planet is a social norm. If the survey showed that the vast majority of people on YMCA of the Rockies' campuses care about the planet, guests would think of this as the norm and may feel more empowered to protect it.

- i. More information: [Three Myths of Behavior Change – What You Think You Know That You Don't: Jeni Cross at TEDxCSU](#) **Scroll to 13:30, at which time social norms start.**
 - ii. [MOST of Us® Wear Seatbelts Campaign: 2002-2003 – Center for Health and Safety Culture](#)
- b. **Prompts:** Have you ever found yourself pausing before the recycling bin, unsure if your particular waste item is eligible for recycling? In those situations, we love pictures and explanations that help us feel confident in where to put our items. Research shows that people are much more likely to adopt new behaviors if that option becomes immediately available at the point of decision-making. That may look like pictures, or even YMCA program instructors standing by the waste bins in the cafeterias and helping guests learn where to dispose of each item. This is an interactive way to teach guests about the importance of waste diversion and may help them remember next time they throw something away. Importantly, **place signage, feedback, or reminders close in proximity and time** to the targeted action to help people confidently move toward climate action.
- i. More information:
 1. [EPA WaterSense Label](#)
 2. [Resources for Prompts : Community-Based Social Marketing : Doug McKenzie-Mohr](#)
- c. **Social Diffusion:** We tend to adopt the behavior of those we trust. Social Diffusion is about employing the influence of friends and family to change behaviors. This is perhaps best exemplified in the explosive popularity and efficacious use of influencer marketing or even yelp reviews. However, you don't need a team of influencers to leverage social diffusion. For example, YMCA could utilize a well-known and well-liked person, such as a Board Member or popular programs instructor, and use their actions and voice to help influence the behaviors of visitors. We will discuss the use of this further in the document.
- i. More information:

1. [Climate Matters](#) - A program from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) that enlisted meteorologists, well-known on local news channels, to discuss climate change.
 2. [Recycle Across America](#) - A campaign for recycling that used actors/actresses to pose in pictures to help encourage people to care about properly sorting waste.
- d. **Commitments:** Research shows that commitments can increase adoption of new behaviors. "Further, if a small commitment is requested, participants will be more likely to adopt something bigger [...]" Written commitments are typically more effective than verbal ones, and group commitments are more effective than individual ones. Publicizing the group's commitment, such as through the Internet or print media, increases effectiveness even more. YMCA can utilize commitments through programs or other in-person engagements on campus. Before or after programs, staff could ask visitors to write down one commitment to sustainability they could own during their visit, whether it be recycling properly, turning off lights, etc. Commitments that are publicized are more often followed through, so those commitments could be placed in a public space to remind folks of their commitment.
- i. More information:
[AEC491/WC154: Using Audience Commitment to Promote Behavior Change](#)
- e. **Convenience:** Humans are creatures of convenience. Make doing the 'green thing' convenient to see maximum results. To illustrate, having sufficient trash and recycling infrastructure that is visible and easily accessible around the campus will help visitors properly divert their waste. Similarly, providing water bottle fill stations at strategic locations and selling reusable water bottles around the campus will help to prevent visitors from relying on plastic water bottles.
- i. More information:
 1. [Recycling, Norms, and Convenience: A Bivariate Probit Analysis of Household Data From a Swedish City.](#)

2. [Convenience improves composting and recycling rates in high-density residential buildings](#)
 3. [Making bins more convenient boosts recycling and composting rates -- ScienceDaily](#)
- f. **Storytelling:** Some of the most core lessons we have learned about humanity we have learned through storytelling. Storytelling remains a powerful marketing tool. Emphasis on real people and real stories has out performed simple fact-sharing campaigns from public health campaigns to selling a product, and in one study, was shown to be 22 times more memorable than facts or figures alone¹. Make your audience care through stories. YMCA already has an exciting sustainability story to tell. Consider identifying locations where different parts of the story can be shared. On a smaller scale, consider leveraging YMCA's social media platform to highlight staff or visitors who have participated in sustainability efforts around the campus.
- i. More Information:
 1. [Forbes: Storytellers For Sustainability Needed](#)
 2. [What is Storytelling in Marketing? The What, Why, and How](#)
 3. [Andrew Stanton: The clues to a great story](#)
- g. **Consistency:** What do bears have to do with consistency? Turns out 'bear aware' messaging in campgrounds has been an interesting (and critical) place to explore the efficacy of consistent signage. In the environmental behavioral studies we included below, researchers attempted to understand if positive or negative framing affected bear-friendly behavior change. What they ultimately found was that no matter the tone of voice, the real crux of

¹ International performance results for story-telling:
<https://www.care.org/news-and-stories/ideas/covid-19-and-meta-social-and-behavioral-change-communication-learnings-from-20-countries/>

Corporate Executive Board Study:
<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/power-storytelling-marketing-campaigns-michael-chmielewski#:~:text=According%20to%20a%20study%20by,to%20a%20report%20by%20HubSpot.>

efficacy was consistency; consistency in the physical place but also with the visitor's values. "Message content and consistency are crucial in determining the effectiveness of a sign (Marion & Reid, 3 2007). The types of information placed on those signs and how they are constructed, or framed, can influence how likely visitors are to change their behavior to comply with the message."

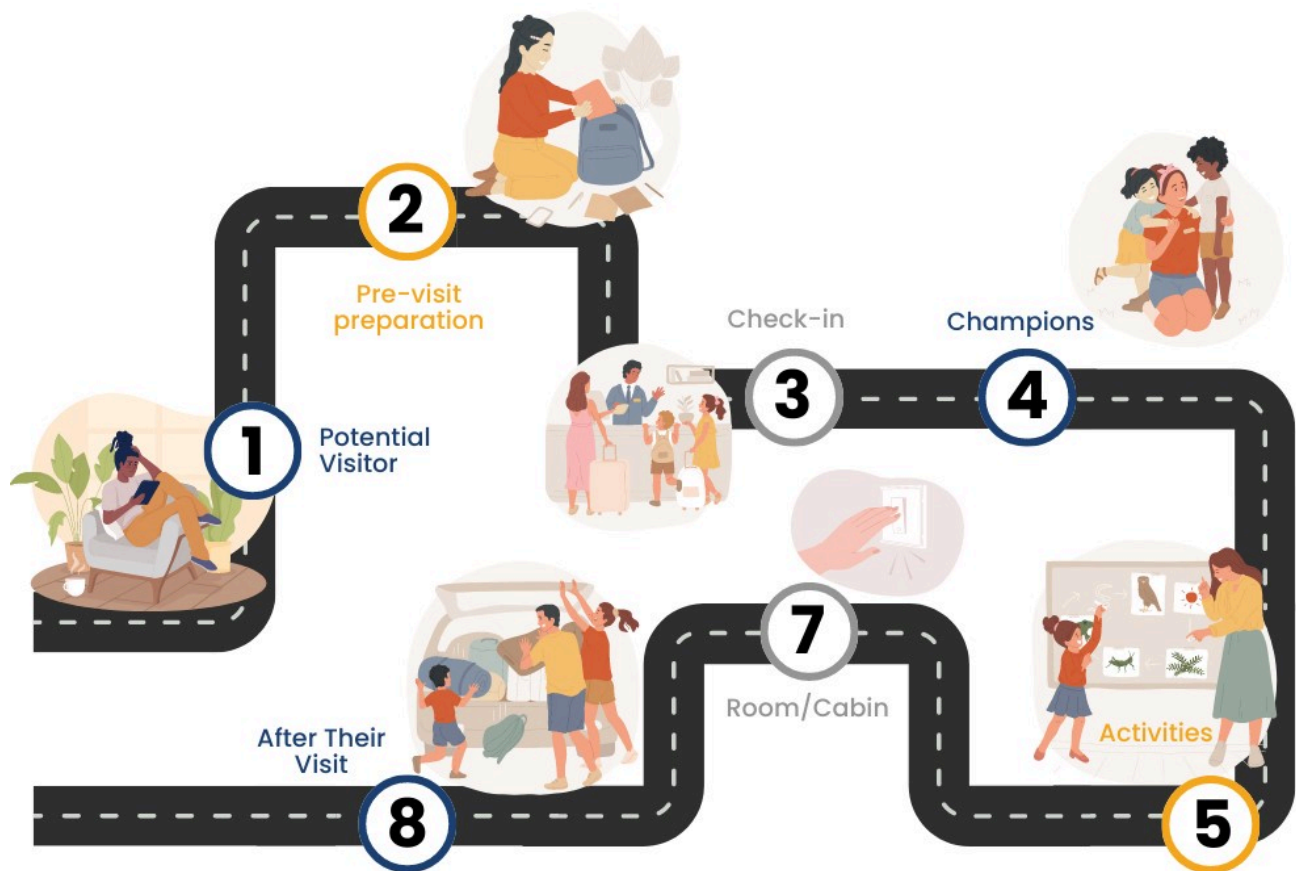
This same body of literature concluded that messages that are *consistent* with visitors' values are also more effective in motivating behavior change. Understanding the core and common values among YMCA visitors through exit surveys will be discussed later in this document. Being consistent in the look and placement of YMCA's signage and systems for sustainable action, as well as being consistent in message framing that aligns with what visitors value, helping visitors better comply. YMCA can use exit surveys to assess common visitor values, and can get creative with consistent signage to communicate sustainability strategies and core values with guests. Examples include signs reminding guests to turn off the lights in a hotel room, educational recycling signage and imagery, or Leave No Trace principles at trailheads.

- i. More information: (BEARS) [EFFECTIVENESS OF PROMOTION OR PREVENTION MESSAGE FRAMES ON FOOD STORAGE MESSAGES ABOUT BLACK BEARS](#)
- ii. Observed environmental behavior between the negative and positive framing. [Informational Nudges to Encourage Pro-environmental Behavior: Examining Differences in Message Framing and Human Interaction](#)

Though each of these principles could operate on its own, they are most effective at driving behavioral change when implemented together. The following section identifies tactics that deploy these principles at different visitor touchpoints. Each tactic is accompanied by the corresponding principle icon.

3. Visitor Touch Points

When imagining how to utilize the principles enumerated above, we mapped out the visitor experience of an average YMCA guest. Below we will discuss a few best practices in accordance with the community based social marketing strategies discussed above at different visitor touch points through the visitors journey. Here is an overview of the journey:



Best Practices & Strategies

8. Exit surveys: Why are you seeing #8 first? Sometimes exit surveys can be thought of as the last thing, but we actually recommend strategizing here first. Using

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this cache of existing data on what your visitors expect can help the marketing professional to identify communication gaps. Also, adding a few questions around visitor values can aid in creating salient and effective messaging (more on that below).

- i. **Short-Term Tactic:** We mentioned in the principles that consistent signage that aligns with individuals values is the most effective in achieving behavior change. We recommend adding some exit survey questions designed to identify unifying values among your seemingly disparate audiences. Do they value the serenity and beauty around them? Do they value the safe and quaint wildlife encounters they enjoyed during their stay? Is saving money while saving the planet a value for them? How important is recycling to them? Do they believe that little steps can make a big environmental impact? Did their stay or experiences with YMCA sustainability efforts impact their views on environmental stewardship? Even including some A/B Testing on types of message framing in the survey would be helpful to understand what types of sustainability-related messaging visitors enjoy.

1. **Potential Visitor:** We encourage sharing YMCA's sustainability wins with potential visitors whenever possible, through social media and newsletters. We also recommend taking a storytelling approach to sharing sustainability efforts. We understand that YMCA currently schedules social media posts according to missions and pillars, one of which is already sustainability. This could be an easy opportunity to integrate story-telling for sustainability from a guest and staff perspective.



Storytelling



Consistency



Social Norms

- i. **Short-Term Tactic:** Incorporate planned, ongoing, and completed sustainability projects and accomplishments into the editorial calendar.
- ii. **Long-Term Tactic:** Expand sustainability marketing efforts to the general public through any paid marketing budgets already established.

- iii. **Short-Term Tactic:** Add a page on the website for sustainability updates (or generally for the buckets for YMCA's mission), to show important data and benchmarks for YMCA's sustainability plan.

2. Pre-visit preparation (after reservation): These tactics assume that visitors eagerly check their reservation notifications to prepare for their arrival. Pre-visit is an excellent time to establish the social norm and start the cadence of regular, consistent reminders to behave in an environmentally friendly way. Use YMCA's available marketing tools, such as Campaign Monitor, to understand how visitors interact with these emails.



- i. **Short-term Tactic:** Select an icon, character, or a color that is the symbol of all sustainability-related initiatives and communications. This symbol makes its first appearance during the pre-visit part of the visitor journey and accompanies the guest throughout.
- ii. **Short-term Tactic:** When the visitor receives an immediate "thank you for booking" or confirmation email, take this opportunity to invite the guest to join in YMCA's sustainability mission and goals, and visit the webpage dedicated to sustainability.
- iii. **Long-Term Tactic:** Once touch points have been increased between YMCA and visitors, we recommend the following communications. 1) 1-year out, depict the incredible things YMCA is doing to meet its climate action plan, and invite visitors to interact with the climate goals on the website. 2) 1-month out, invite visitors to sign up for activities and include some sustainability elements including the packing lists.
- iv. **Short-Term Tactic:** Utilize the Welcome Emails that are sent out prior to a guests arrival to brief guests on what kind of sustainable initiatives and activities they will be a part of and how to prepare (bring water bottles, plan to attend events, etc.)

3. Check-in: Check-in is another critical time to establish the social norms of life on YMCA campuses and introduce visitors to the option for a commitment to a

sustainability initiative during their stay. Other principles can be integrated at this point in time, as identified in the tactics below.

- i. **Short-Term Tactic:** Leverage the check-in QR Code to send visitors to a menu of what sustainable initiatives they can participate in, and remind visitors of certain sustainability expectations and rules (no plastic, etc.). This is a good time to share that this paperless initiative is just another way YMCA is demonstrating its commitment to a vibrant future for all generations. Examples of sustainable initiatives include: YMCA waste diversion goals, recycling rules, clear and visual steps for recycling if you are in a lodge vs cabin, and simple instructions on how to manage thermostat / space conditioning, lighting, and windows in lodge rooms or cabins.
- ii. **Long-Term Tactic:** Add the same QR code to existing campus maps and new sustainability maps. Create a sustainability focused map with information such as: 1) drop-off locations for recycling if visitors are responsible for their own recycling (for when recycling is set up on the campuses), 2) a page to the map with a visual guide of materials that can be recycled on campus, and 3) water bottle filling stations across campus, 4) composting stations, and 5) EV chargers. Note, this map could also be used to give guests a discount on purchasing reusable bottles. Note on the map that plastic bottles are not for sale, and indicate where guests could get aluminum or reusable bottles if needed.
 1. All visitors can positively or negatively impact YMCA's sustainability goals. Providing translated landing pages for guests and clear guidelines on the signage they will see and waste diversion best practices helps everyone make a positive contribution.



Social Norms



Convenience



Prompts



Commitments

- iii. **Short-Term Tactic:** At the point of check-in, invite the visitor to sign the sustainability pledge, which can be something such as a large, public declaration in the 'welcome' spaces, or something small to promote a specific sustainability initiative needing to be promoted. This pledge invites them to "Join us providing life-changing summer experiences for kids, living a healthy life and being socially responsible in a way that ensures each new generation can experience this wonderful YMCA tradition that has existed on our campus since 1907 (EPC) and 1969 (SMR)!" Outline here the social norms, how to recycle (once recycling has been set up), how to Leave No Trace, or any other relevant text related to what the pledge is trying to promote. This is a flexible tactic that can be utilized everywhere from visitor check-in to camper programs to family activities.

4. **Champions:** The naming of green champions is an excellent chance to leverage social diffusion. This tactic involves identifying one or more people in a group that acquaint themselves with the sustainable options on YMCA campuses and help others adopt the new social norm.



Social Diffusion

- i. **Short-term tactic:** Get children involved in the available sustainability opportunities. Create a sustainability badge, or challenge, for kids between 8-14 years old. This challenge can be met in conjunction with the lesson plans included in this plan. This challenge should also include some responsibility of helping their family make sustainable choices (turning off lights, filling up water bottles, sorting recycling). Parents will love the money-saving habits they will form, and YMCA can leverage social diffusion to meet campus-wide goals at places where visitors might congregate, including dining.
- ii. **Short-term tactic:** YMCA of the Rockies' current green team is an excellent use of the champions strategy. Their work continues to drive YMCA of the Rockies' sustainability capacity-building and goals.

5. Activities: Activities include any scheduled events and places that visitors congregate while on YMCA's campuses.

- i. **Short-Term Tactic:** Messaging should remain consistent throughout these spaces. Recycling and waste diversion systems should match in signage included in the instructional material provided at check-in. YMCA of the Rockies' sustainability badge or icon should appear to cue visitors that there is action needed. Everyone loves messaging with a sense of humor. We recommend finding examples of sustainability humor to leverage in YMCA voice and tone.
- ii. **Short-Term Tactic:** Leverage the TV monitors throughout the campus with clear guidelines on how to contribute to the climate action goals.
- iii. **Long-Term Tactic:** It should be acknowledged that YMCA staff is busy and may not have time to assist visitors with sustainability cues. Once recycling has been set up, this tactic can be employed. Successful waste diversion happens when staff feel confident in the system and how to sort their items. Make sure to put brief and easy to read signage in places that staff gather, build brief talking points into group meetings repeatedly, and translate critical material into the top three languages, leaning heavily on clear-to-understand, instructive images.



Consistency



Prompts



Social Diffusion



Social Norms

6. Room/Cabin: Decisions inside lodging can greatly impact YMCA of the Rockies' sustainability goals. Help remind visitors of the social norms inside their lodgings using the following tactics:

- i. **Short-Term Tactic:** Positive, consistent messaging around cabins and lodges may sway visitors to be more mindful of their actions such as limiting their time in the shower or the amount of times they ask for fresh linens throughout their



Consistency



Storytelling



Prompts



stay. Consistent but gentle reminders of the benefits of sustainable practices can have a lasting impact.

- ii. **Long-Term Tactic:** Messaging should remain consistent throughout these spaces. Recycling and waste diversion systems should match in signage included in the instructional material provided at check-in. YMCA's sustainability badge or icon should appear to cue visitors that there is action needed.
- iii. **Short-Term Tactic:** This is where the sustainability champion is perhaps most critical in helping their family to recycle, turn off lights, and responsibly manage the temperature of their lodging.
- iv. **Short-Term Tactic:** If lights and temperature cannot be automated to remove the need for smart human choices, be sure to include simple instructions on how to manage thermostat / space conditioning in lodge rooms or cabins. Labels should be placed above or on key instruments, and included in manual information.

Evaluation

Lotus has co-identified four places to evaluate the permeation of new sustainability information and behavior change for visitors: Flowcode, Campaign Monitor, the exit survey, and Waste/Water/Energy metrics. At the beginning stages, we recommend tracking these four questions: 1) Do visitors interact with our sustainability messaging? 2) How long do they interact with our sustainability messaging? 3) Did they find the messaging and systems easy to use and understand? 4) Were they successful in participating in YMCA's sustainability goals?

b. To answer questions one and two:

- i. **Flowcode:** Flowcode analytics comes equipped with geolocation data, API integration, and the ability to ascertain the return on investment in how many people use them. Depending on your plan, you can also use Flowpages to build out your sustainability messaging to analyze your audience.

1. QR codes can replace brochures and handouts for a less expensive, more trackable campaign experience.
 2. Marketing professionals can measure how many people use the QR Code, and leveraging your website analytics, one can monitor how long individuals spend on sustainability landing pages.
- ii. **Campaign Monitor:** The built-in analytics for campaign monitor can help marketing professionals understand how emails perform and how audiences behave when opening emails.
1. YMCA of the Rockies' open rate (which at the time of writing, Lotus understands is at about 40%) is strong but has room for improvement. View email analytics to understand the audience's behavior. Do they usually open the email using their phone? If that is true, make sure the email is quick and easy for a phone-user to navigate, with friendly fonts and sizes and clear headers. Would framing the email subject line as a pressing question yield better open rates? Read more [here](#).
 2. Open rates are only part of the picture when it comes to assessing audience behavior. Campaign Monitor comes equipped with a "heat map" that can highlight which links within the email the visitor clicked on. Do visitors only click links in the first 30 seconds of reading? Do they only click links with a clear call-to-action? Try moving sustainability-related links towards the top, with clear incentives like discounts on aluminum-packaged waters, or a chance to win something from the gift shop.

c. To answer questions two and four:

- i. **Exit Survey:** As was mentioned previously, the exit survey is a powerful tool to identify what visitors value and how they behaved while on campus. Add questions to the survey that will help uncover if visitors

thought the messaging was helpful to them and mine for suggestions on how to improve. One can always measure visitor perception and satisfaction with other data points to understand where communication can be improved.

- ii. **Waste/Water/Energy metrics:** At the time of writing this guide, a complete waste diversion system and other conservation metrics at YMCA of the Rockies is an aspirational goal. With that acknowledgement, the best way to understand the efficacy of sustainability messaging, is to see if it helps YMCA of the Rockies meet their sustainability goals. When these metrics are in place, it will be powerful for YMCA to determine if communication metrics (open rates, click rates, and audience perception) correlate with reduced uses in water, electricity, and successful waste diversion.