



# Destination Cleveland Strategic Planning Report

Prepared by EY  
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# Executive summary

This strategic planning report contains a description of Destination Cleveland's refreshed vision, mission, why statement, and guiding principles; goals, strategies, and key performance indicators. These were developed through engagement with Destination Cleveland staff, Board of Directors, community partners, and other stakeholders. They articulate Destination Cleveland's purpose and describe how Destination Cleveland's work can contribute to lasting, positive impacts across the community. As Destination Cleveland's strategies and tactics change to match needs and opportunities in the future, its vision and mission keep the organization focused on its core values and objectives. Below is a summary of each key element:

***Vision*** - *Everyone loves Cleveland as much as we do!*

***Mission*** - *We are unapologetic promoters of Cleveland. By attracting people and connecting them to experiences that illustrate Cleveland's diversity, creativity, and contagious passion, we stimulate economic growth.*

***Why?*** - *We believe that by inspiring visitors and locals to experience the region, we cultivate a passion for Greater Cleveland that contributes to equitable growth.*

## **Goals -**

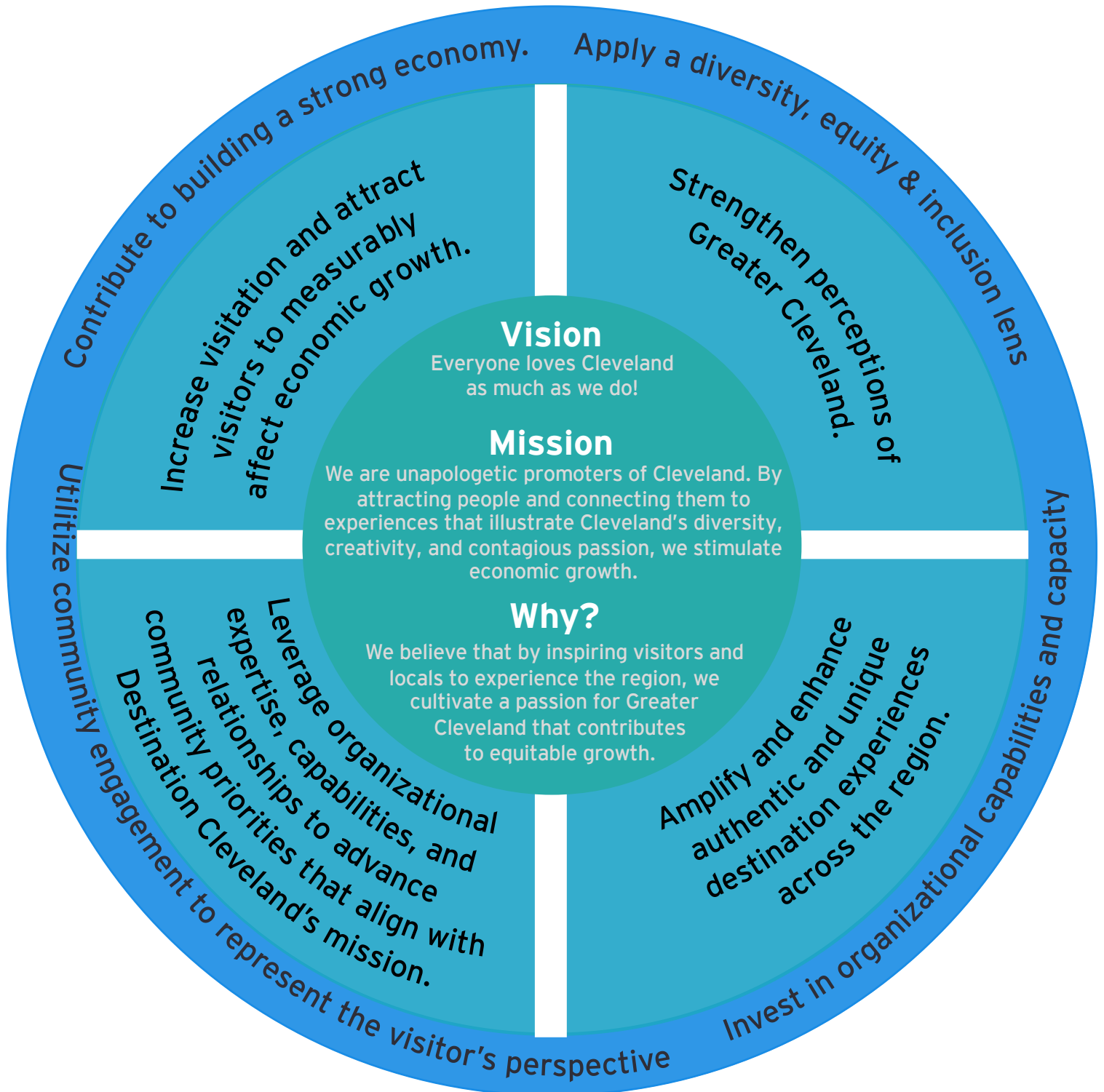
1. Increase visitation and attract visitors to measurably affect economic growth
2. Strengthen perceptions of Greater Cleveland
3. Amplify and enhance authentic and unique destination experiences across the region
4. Leverage organizational expertise, capabilities, and relationships to advance community priorities that align with Destination Cleveland's mission

## **Guiding principles -**

- Contribute to building a strong economy.
- Apply diversity, equity, and inclusion lens to all activities.
- Utilize community engagement and collaboration to seek feedback and represent the visitor's perspective.
- Invest in enhanced organizational capabilities and capacity while ensuring fiscal responsibility.

## Strategic framework illustration

This graphic illustrates Destination Cleveland's strategic framework and is designed to be read from the smallest center circle to the largest outer circle. The core of what Destination Cleveland does is fulfilling its mission to bring the vision and why statement to fruition. Destination Cleveland can accomplish this by pursuing the four goals established in this strategic plan. Destination Cleveland will apply its guiding principles to all aspects of this work.



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# 1 Introduction

Over the past eight years, Destination Cleveland has helped transform perceptions of Cleveland - inside and outside of the region - and brought new energy and economic momentum through the power of the visitor. From 2011-2019 Cuyahoga County experienced a 31.5% surge in annual visits; 47% increase in direct tourism spending; 45% growth in economic impact; 14% more jobs supported by tourism in 2019 vs. 2011; and a 40% increase in tax revenue based on D.K. Shifflet's 2011-2019 Visitor Volume reports and Tourism Economics' 2011-2019 Annual Economic Impact of Tourism in Cuyahoga County reports.

The COVID-19 pandemic slowed this momentum, created significant new challenges for destination marketing and management organizations across the world, and hurt many travel and tourism businesses. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic in 2020, Cuyahoga County experienced a 30% decrease in annual visits; 27% decrease in economic impact; and 17.4 loss in jobs supported by tourism based on D.K. Shifflet's 2020 Visitor Volume report and Tourism Economics' 2022 Annual Economic Impact of Tourism in Cuyahoga County report. Additionally, Destination Cleveland experienced a 60% loss in budgeted revenue.

As the world and Cleveland began to emerge from the pandemic, Destination Cleveland asked, "How is the travel and tourism industry changing and what can we do to best prepare ourselves and the community for the future?" While starting to explore these questions, dynamics within Cleveland also began to change. With new leadership at many anchor institutions and new Federal investments coming to the region, many saw a unique opportunity to harness the power of the moment for positive change.

In September 2021, Destination Cleveland hired Ernst & Young LLP (EY) to assist in creating a new, three-year strategic plan. Staff and the Board of Directors asked EY to help create a strategic plan that would re-examine Destination Cleveland's mission, vision, why statement, principles, and goals and chart a path forward for the organization. This strategy is aligned with community priorities and will help staff focus on the work that matches their capabilities and contributes to positive impacts for everyone in Cleveland.

For Destination Cleveland's board and staff, its ultimate goal is attracting people to Cleveland - including increased hotel occupancy - and maximizing visitation's positive effects on all communities in Greater Cleveland. This work is done with a clear passion for all things Cleveland and a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion that will help Destination Cleveland advance community priorities, including improving economic vitality for all people and communities.



# Vision, mission, why and guiding principles

## Vision

A vision statement describes a future state: the ultimate outcome of an organization's successful efforts. The statement should be aspirational but logical, describing an attainable world shaped by your actions. It should be simply written, clear in purpose, and inspirational to motivate action.

Through numerous conversations exploring the ultimate purpose of the organization, Destination Cleveland stakeholders developed the following **vision statement**:

*Everyone loves Cleveland as much as we do!*

This statement describes a future Cleveland that results from Destination Cleveland's work. This is the ultimate destination. If the organization successfully pursues the mission, goals, and strategies laid out in this report, this will be the result.

This statement reflects the true passion of Destination Cleveland staff and board for the community: a passion that if the organization is successful in its work, will be spread to everyone inside and outside of Cleveland.

This captures a commonly expressed view that if people come to Cleveland, they fall in love with Cleveland. As Destination Cleveland seeks to attract more visitors and contribute to building a stronger economy for all Clevelanders, this will naturally lead to the results described above.

If everyone loves Cleveland as much as Destination Cleveland, they will have accomplished their job.

## Mission

While a vision statement describes an organization's destination, the mission statement maps how an organization will get there. The mission statement should clearly convey what an organization does and inspire others to get involved, answering simple questions like, what do you do, why do you do it, and who is it going to serve?

In aspiring to reach the vision of everyone loving Cleveland, stakeholders developed the following **mission statement** for Destination Cleveland:

***We are unapologetic promoters of Cleveland. By attracting people and connecting them to experiences that illustrate Cleveland's diversity, creativity, and contagious passion, we stimulate economic growth.***

This mission statement describes the What, Why, and Who for Destination Cleveland:

- **What:** Destination Cleveland **promotes Cleveland to attract visitors and connects them to experiences.** Yes, there is more to the organization's work as illustrated in the following report, but these actions are at the core of Destination Cleveland's role and should be easy to communicate.
- **Why: to stimulate economic growth.** Destination Cleveland does not attract visitors for their own sake or for an abstract purpose. Visitation is a tool that contributes to building a strong economy. It is important to remember the why that drives the what: attracting visitors.
- **Who: For Cleveland.** This statement intentionally captures the character of Cleveland, which is unapologetic, diverse, creative, and passionate. By embracing that passion for Greater Cleveland, Destination Cleveland will be able to drive visitation in an authentic way and stimulate economic growth that serves all its constituents.

## Why statement

The Why statement speaks to the motivation and inspiration that drives an organization to fulfill its mission. Destination Cleveland's staff and board are truly passionate about helping Cleveland and Clevelanders. This comes out in the updated Why statement below:

***We believe that by inspiring visitors and locals to experience the region, we cultivate a passion for Greater Cleveland that contributes to equitable growth.***



## Guiding principles

The following guiding principles were identified as foundational imperatives that should be considered throughout all Destination Cleveland's activities. They were developed through many conversations in the community and reflect commitments the organization made to diversity, equity, and inclusion through its 2021 Racial Equity & Inclusion Roadmap. They require Destination Cleveland to apply its values internally and externally, staying focused on continuously advancing the organization's positive impact in Greater Cleveland. The guiding principles are not presented in any order of priority.

**Contribute to building a strong economy.** As part of the region's economic development ecosystem, Destination Cleveland can increase tourism's impact on the overall economy while helping to stimulate economic impacts across all communities in Greater Cleveland.

**Apply a diversity, equity, and inclusion lens to all activities.** By integrating diversity, equity, and inclusion into the organization's DNA and making it part of how it operates to increase tourism and strengthen Cleveland's reputation as a destination city, Destination Cleveland can help advance community priorities, including improving economic vitality for all people and communities.

**Utilize community engagement and collaboration to seek feedback and represent the visitor's perspective.** As professionals focused on travel and tourism trends, needs, and opportunities, Destination Cleveland provides a unique perspective within Greater Cleveland. By sharing this insight while also seeking input and other viewpoints through community engagement and collaboration, the organization can advance its mission and goals.

**Invest in enhanced organizational capabilities and capacity while ensuring fiscal responsibility.** Investing in the organization, its people, its storytelling, and innovative technologies - in a fiscally responsible manner - will help Destination Cleveland to ensure job satisfaction among staff and organizational sustainability while working to advance its goals and build support for its work.



## Goals and strategies

Establishing clear goals and strategic objectives is how an organization begins to operationalize its mission. Each of these goals provides measurable objectives on which Destination Cleveland can focus the strategic activities that support its mission. This helps keep the organization focused on short-term activities that build toward its long-term vision: everyone loving Cleveland as much as they do.

During strategic framework discussions, Destination Cleveland staff and board examined goals and strategic objectives through the lens of Destination Cleveland's role as Lead, Contributor, Convener, or Advocate based on the organization's capabilities and capacity.

Through these conversations, Destination Cleveland decided to focus on four goals. In most strategic objectives under these goals, Destination Cleveland would take a **Lead** role, as they match the organization's mission, capabilities, and capacity.

In other strategic efforts, Destination Cleveland may be part of a larger collaborative effort, in which the organization serves as a **Contributor**, helping achieve collective goals but not leading the effort; a **Convener**, bringing other organizations together to achieve goals but not necessarily leading the work; or an **Advocate**, providing support, context, and prioritization for activities conducted by others.

Roles may change in the future, and Destination Cleveland can establish an internal process to evaluate new strategic objectives and determine the organization's role. A suggested filtering process is included on page 15 of this report.

Notably, these goals are not presented in order of priority. In fact, the strategic objectives under each goal are inherently linked together and reinforce each other as they provide the framework through which Destination Cleveland will fulfill its mission and ultimately achieve its vision.

# Goal 1: Increase visitation and attract visitors to measurably affect economic growth.

Attracting visitors is considered by many to be the most important of Destination Cleveland's activities and is at the core of its mission. Destination Cleveland would take a Lead role in most strategies pursued to increase visitation to Cleveland. Visitation in this case refers not only to individual visitors but also meetings and conventions that bring large groups to the region. Importantly, the travel and tourism market is changing, with visitors becoming more racially diverse and seeking more authentic and varied experiences in the markets they visit.

## *Strategic objectives*

**1.1:** Evaluate industry trends and incorporate leading practices into work and education of community and industry partners. **(Lead)**

**1.2:** Launch an evolved Cleveland brand that is representative of target audiences to attract diverse people, meetings and conventions to Cleveland. **(Lead)**

**1.3:** Enhance branding and marketing activities to highlight memorable experiences that authentically represent Greater Cleveland. **(Lead)**

**1.4:** Convene organizations that represent areas of specialization for Cleveland, such as healthcare, manufacturing, and IT/tech, to identify, attract and promote related conventions and events. **(Lead)**

**1.5:** Collaborate with regional partners to maximize the economic impact and opportunities of the convention center and surrounding area. **(Convene)**

## *Key performance indicators (KPIs)*

- ❑ Number of visits (with disaggregated demographic information if possible)
- ❑ Economic impact of tourism and hosted meetings/conventions (includes jobs, tax revenue, direct sales)
- ❑ Meeting and convention room nights booked (disaggregated by demographic information if possible)

## Goal 2: Strengthen perceptions of Cleveland.

Attracting visitors to Cleveland and measurably affecting economic growth will partially depend on continuing to strengthen perceptions of Cleveland as a place to visit, live, and invest. Throughout the planning process, stakeholders acknowledged that Destination Cleveland has done a tremendous job improving perceptions of Cleveland over the past eight years. Going forward, they would like to see Destination Cleveland continue to strengthen those perceptions and enhance them by raising awareness of more diverse, authentic local history, assets, and experiences. Part of this effort includes improving perceptions among residents. When residents feel encouraged to share their own unique views on what makes Cleveland special, their stories can weave together and contribute to Cleveland's authentic, memorable and one-of-a-kind brand identity.

### *Strategic objectives*

- 2.1:** Apply the evolved Cleveland brand essence, personality and story for visit, meet, live and work audiences. **(Lead)**
- 2.2:** Bolster community pride and encourage authentic, memorable storytelling that is representative of community diversity and helps enhance positive perceptions. **(Lead)**
- 2.3:** Connect Cleveland's inspirational history and inspiring stories from diverse communities, with specific attention to BIPOC and immigrant Clevelanders, to the brand of Cleveland. **(Lead)**

### *Key performance indicators (KPIs)*

- ❑ Perception metrics by audience (resident, visitor, meeting planner/attendee, talent; disaggregated by demographic information if possible)
- ❑ Brand engagement score (visitor; disaggregated by demographic information, if possible)

## Goal 3: Amplify and enhance authentic and unique destination experiences across the region.

Destination Cleveland's ability to attract visitors and strengthen perceptions about the region will be made easier if there are attractive experiences to draw people in and hold their attention. Destination Cleveland does not directly host events, but the organization plays an important role in helping other groups enhance the experiences they are hosting and reach larger audiences. Amplifying and enhancing more diverse and inclusive experiences will include helping to develop new, enhanced and collaborative programming to educate and engage Cleveland's hospitality businesses to strengthen Cleveland as a diverse, equitable and inclusive destination.

### *Strategic objectives*

**3.1:** Collaborate with local hospitality businesses, neighborhood organizations, and residents to develop and amplify experiences that are unique to Cleveland and promote economic prosperity throughout Greater Cleveland. **(Convene)**

**3.2:** Consistently capture the consumer experience (visit, meet, live, work) in Cleveland as a destination city. **(Lead)**

**3.3:** Regularly share consumer experience insights with public, private, and nonprofit community leaders to collaborate on solutions to enhance and improve experiences. **(Contribute)**

### *Key performance indicators (KPIs)*

- ❑ Visitor perception of available inclusive experiences
- ❑ Visitor experience in Cleveland (disaggregated by demographic information if possible)

## Goal 4: Leverage organizational expertise, capabilities, and relationships to advance community priorities that align with Destination Cleveland's mission.

As Destination Cleveland focuses on activities it will lead, the organization can also use its unique expertise, capabilities, and relationship to support, advocate for, and advance community projects that are led by other organizations but align with Destination Cleveland's mission. Destination Cleveland's expertise in visitation and familiarity with local assets and challenges provides important insights into which investments could enhance the community and help achieve its goals. This perspective can be used to advance projects that would benefit the entire community. Destination Cleveland's connections in the community can also help staff share the stories of others not often at the table and advocate for investments in people, areas, and businesses that support their mission.

### *Strategic objectives*

- 4.1: Generate interest in Greater Cleveland as a place to live and work by collaborating with community partners to build and operationalize a talent alliance to attract and retain the best talent in Cleveland. **(Contribute)**
- 4.2: Accelerate economic growth by leveraging the economic development ecosystem during relevant meetings, conventions and events to harness the power of the visitor. **(Convene)**
- 4.3: Advocate for local and regional investments that support Destination Cleveland's mission. **(Advocate)**
- 4.4: Regularly share the perspectives of visitors and travel and tourism businesses with Cleveland community. **(Lead)**

### *Key performance indicators (KPIs)*

- Willingness to relocate (disaggregated by demographic information, if possible)
- Partner/collaborator Promotor Score (eg. Industry satisfaction with org engagement)

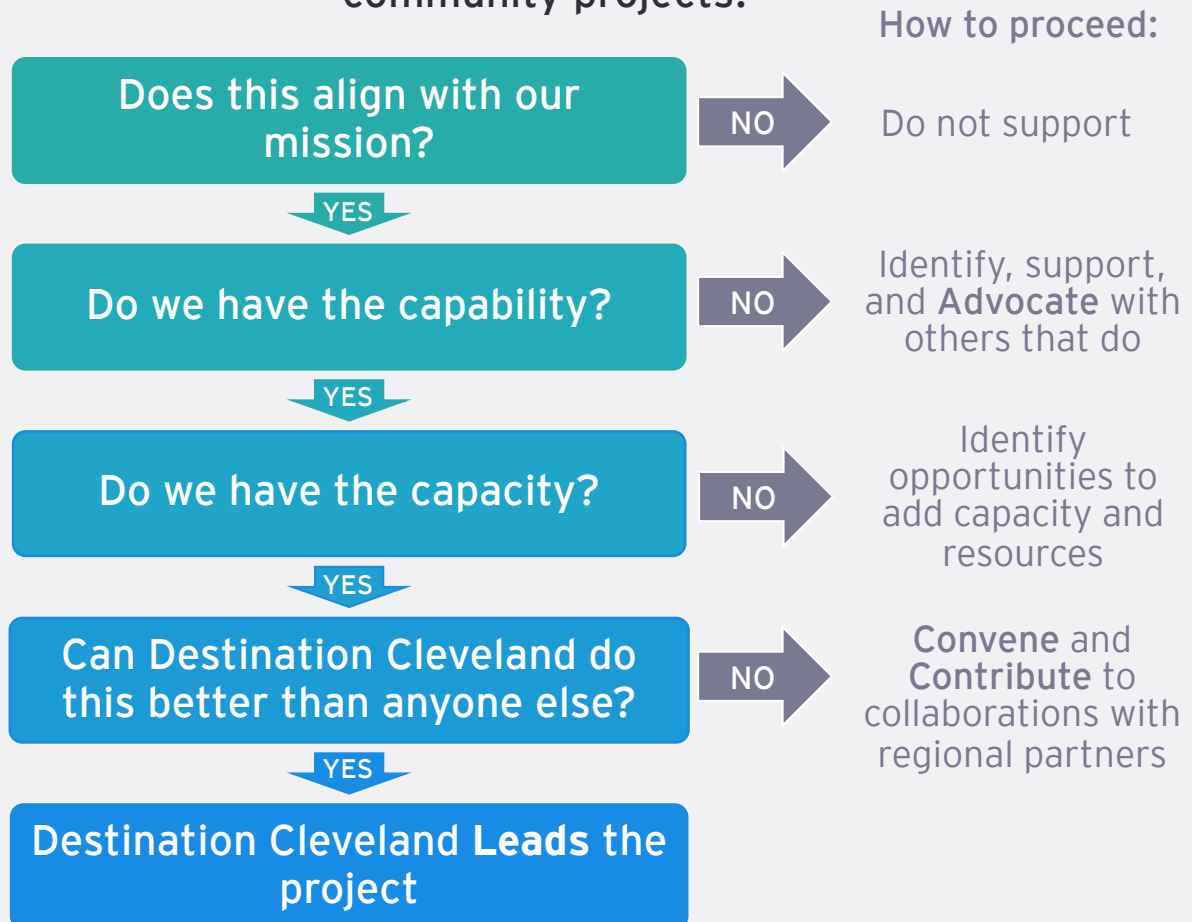
## Determining Destination Cleveland's role

Both stakeholders and Destination Cleveland staff noted that the organization's role in the community can sometimes be unclear. This has resulted in challenges, such as Destination Cleveland being asked to lead projects outside its mission or pulling staff away from work about which they are passionate.

The filter illustrated here provides Destination Cleveland leadership with questions to ask prior to taking on a new project or task. This should allow Destination Cleveland to be intentional about focusing on the work it has the capabilities and capacity to complete. It also allows Destination Cleveland to determine how to best participate in community projects, which requires a filtering process that considers the variety of roles Destination Cleveland could play, such as a convener, advocate, or collaborator.

This framework should help Destination Cleveland more thoughtfully demonstrate why it is focusing on certain activities and why other projects are better suited for another organization.

### Filtering process to evaluate Destination Cleveland's role in community projects:



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