



**Sports ETA**  
SPORTS EVENTS & TOURISM ASSOCIATION

## The Untapped Power of Endurance Sports

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## Table of Contents

|                                                         |    |
|---------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Executive Summary .....                                 | 1  |
| The Value Endurance Sports Bring to a Destination ..... | 2  |
| The Endurance Event Collaboration Framework .....       | 5  |
| When it works... ..                                     | 8  |
| The Cost of Inaction .....                              | 10 |
| Final Thought: Endurance Is a Relationship .....        | 11 |





# Executive Summary

## Endurance sports events are one of the most underutilized engines of economic growth, community wellness, and destination branding in today's tourism landscape.

From triathlons and marathons to open water swims and cycling races, these events attract high-value visitors, generate repeat tourism, and create lasting infrastructure and legacy programs when integrated with local priorities.

Cities that successfully host endurance events see measurable returns: millions in tourism revenue, revitalized downtowns and waterfronts, increased volunteerism and civic pride, and new opportunities to promote healthy living.

These benefits extend far beyond race day—strengthening local economies, attracting new demographics, and positioning destinations as leaders in outdoor adventure, sustainability, and vibrant active lifestyles.

This white paper introduces a proven framework for aligning communities, stakeholders, and event organizers to unlock the full potential of endurance sports.



Photos courtesy of Ashley De Latz on Unsplash

## 1

# The Value Endurance Sports Bring to a Destination

- **Economic Impact:** These events drive measurable gains in tourism revenue, create seasonal traffic in shoulder months, highlight unique areas in a destination, and support local businesses. A single well-executed race weekend can generate millions in visitor spending and spark repeat visitation.
- **Community Health & Engagement:** Endurance events inspire local participation, wellness culture, and pride. They promote physical activity, mental resilience, and a sense of shared achievement, especially when locals train for, volunteer at, or spectate at the events.
- **Destination Branding & Visibility:** Hosting premier endurance events puts a destination on the map—literally and figuratively. Media coverage, athlete-generated content, and tourism marketing collaborations can extend far beyond race day.
- **Sustainability & Legacy:** These events leave a footprint. When planned with community input, infrastructure improvements, and long-term vision, the legacy includes enhanced parks and trails, improved accessibility, and sustainable event practices that uplift the whole region.

**A single well-executed race weekend can generate millions in visitor spending and spark repeat visitation.**



## WHY STRONG PARTNERSHIPS MATTER

The most successful endurance events are born from deep alignment between three essential groups:

**Community:** Residents, volunteers, local clubs, schools, and health organizations must feel included and heard. Their support is foundational to event success and legacy.

**Stakeholders:** These include city & county officials, tourism boards, permitting agencies, and business associations. Their strategic buy-in ensures the event fits with the destination's brand, calendar, and resources.

**Event Organizers:** Professional race directors bring expertise in logistics, safety, athlete experience, and global marketing. They rely on community and stakeholder partnerships to deliver authentic, high-quality events.





## THE CHALLENGES

Destinations and endurance event owners face a unique set of **shared and distinct challenges**, especially as the industry evolves through political change, in a climate-conscious era, and amid rising expectations from athletes and communities alike.

### Challenges for Destinations Hosting Endurance Events

#### 1. Community Pushback & Resident Fatigue

- Concerns over road closures, noise, traffic, and crowd control can lead to tension with residents—especially if events aren't well-integrated into local culture.
- If benefits are not clear or tangible to the community, support erodes over time.

#### 2. Resource Constraints

- Many cities face budget limitations, staffing shortages, and a lack of internal event expertise, making it hard to support event logistics, permitting, or infrastructure demands.
- Competing priorities—housing, safety, transportation—can make endurance events seem non-essential unless economic impact is well proven.

#### 3. Permitting Complexity

- Navigating multi-agency approvals (police, parks, transportation, emergency services) can stall or limit the scale of events, especially in urban or environmentally sensitive areas.
- Environmental impact reviews and insurance burdens are increasing.

#### 4. Measuring and Communicating ROI

- Destinations often struggle to quantify the full value of events (economic, wellness, branding), which weakens justification for continued support or investment.
- Without robust data, events are viewed as “costs” rather than “opportunities.”

#### 5. Attracting Signature Events

- Competing with other destinations for high-profile endurance events requires standout assets, incentives, and strong public-private collaboration.
- Lack of experience or past success can lead to missed bids or minimal leverage with event producers.

## Challenges for Endurance Event Owners & Organizers

### 1. Rising Production Costs

- **Inflation in logistics, staffing, security, insurance, and medical support** is squeezing margins.
- Supply chain issues and cost-of-living increases have also affected travel, venue rentals, and labor.

### 2. Volunteer Shortages

- **Volunteer burnout** and lack of reliable, engaged support teams are widespread issues, especially in smaller communities or across multi-day events.

### 3. Participant Decline or Plateau

- After a pandemic-era surge in fitness interest, **participant numbers have stabilized or declined** in some regions and disciplines.
- Changing athlete expectations (e.g., more value, more experience, shorter distances) require format innovation.

### 4. Environmental & Sustainability Pressures

- Increasing pressure from athletes and cities to adopt **zero-waste, carbon-conscious, and eco-certified practices**—which add complexity and cost.
- Single-use plastic bans, course preservation mandates, and sustainability reporting are now common.

### 5. Destination Partnerships Misalignment

- Organizers often face disconnects with host cities that:
  - Don't understand the operational needs of the sport (e.g., transition zones, bike racks, medical setup).
  - Lack enthusiasm or clarity around marketing and tourism goals.
  - Don't prioritize long-term community engagement or legacy-building.



Photo courtesy of Frank Cone on Pexels

# 2

## The Endurance Event Collaboration Framework

*Building Sustainable, Impactful, and Community-Engaging Events*

### 1. SHARED VISION ALIGNMENT

**Goal:** Ensure all partners understand the “why” behind the event and align mutual goals.

**Strategy: Aligned vision statement as part of event negotiations**

- Define shared success metrics (economic, community, tourism, health)
- Develop a joint event mission that ties to local identity
- Identify legacy goals early (e.g., trail restoration, youth programs, civic pride)

**Best Practices:**

- *Vision Mapping Document (Short & Long Term)*
- *Shared Value Proposition – create your North Star*

### 2. MUTUAL EDUCATION & SPORT LITERACY

**Goal:** Bridge the knowledge gap between municipal stakeholders and sport-specific logistics teams.

**Strategy: Two-Way Educational Focuses**

- Sport-specific culture
- Sport-specific needs (transition zones, timing systems, medical layout)
- Local permitting, neighborhood and cultural sensitivities, and destination political climate
- Community calendars, infrastructure capacity, and hospitality rhythms.

**Best Practices:**

- *Pre-event Education Toolkit (guest speakers, slide decks, short videos, site visits)*
- *Webinars / Town Halls with Industry Experts*
- *“Intro to Endurance Sports” training module for DMOs & municipalities*

**Ensure all partners understand the “why” behind the event and align mutual goals.**





### 3. COMMUNITY & STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATION PLANNING

**Goal:** Create proactive, transparent, and inclusive communication channels.

**Strategy: Deliberate and locally aligned communication & storytelling**

- Align the value of the event to the community, define the story
- Host public info sessions and Q&As
- Engage & empower local endurance clubs, coaches, and businesses
- Provide impact forecasts (noise, traffic, business surge)
- Build an ongoing stakeholder feedback loop
- Share local storytelling assets (people, history, land)

**Best Practices:**

- *Create journey/experience maps (athletes, locals, stakeholders)*
- *Use multilingual outreach.*
- *Include schools, small businesses, parks departments, health orgs, and neighborhood associations.*
- *Empower local ambassadors and influencers*

### 4. OPERATIONAL & LOGISTICAL INTEGRATION

**Goal:** Bridge the knowledge gap between municipal stakeholders and sport-specific logistics teams.

**Strategy: Create teams not silos**

- Permitting: Co-create a timeline with check-ins and shared templates
- Course Design: Involve public works, emergency services, and community reps early. Early education makes a difference.
- Vendor & Volunteer Integration: Leverage local suppliers, training programs, and schools
- Sustainability Goals: Align on waste diversion, carbon offsets, and local sourcing.

**Best Practices:**

- *Course Impact Assessment*
- *Volunteer Recruitment Kit*
- *Sustainable Operations Agreement*





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## 5. IMPACT MEASUREMENT & SHARED REPORTING

**Goal:** Quantify and communicate success beyond just participation numbers.

**Strategy: Define Metrics and Systems for tracking**

- Visitor economic impact: Surveys, mobile data, tourism analytics
- Resident satisfaction: Community feedback, social sentiment
- Legacy outcomes: Follow-up reports on infrastructure, programs, or wellness
- Media & Branding exposure: PR value, social reach, participant content

**Best Practices:**

- *Co-branded Post-Event Impact Report*
- *Executive Summary for city council, sponsors, media*
- *Visual dashboards for public consumption*
- *Local media partner press tools*

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## 6. CONTINUOUS LEARNING & INDUSTRY PARTICIPATION

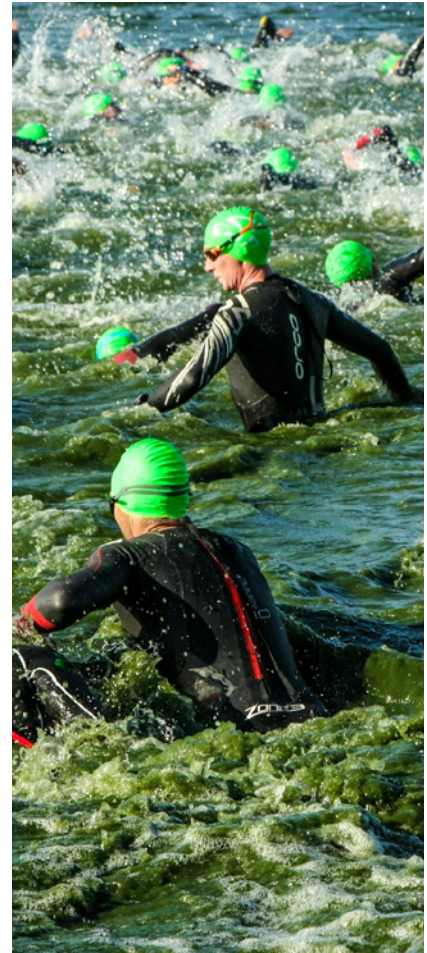
**Goal:** Stay current, improve each year, and contribute to the evolution of the endurance space.

**Strategy: Annual plan for Event Improvement**

- Attend industry conferences & cross-sector summits
- Participate in joint learning with other destinations and organizers
- Share case studies and thought leadership
- Maintain relationships outside of event week

**Best Practices:**

- *Sports ETA*
- *State and local sports tourism stakeholders*
- *Endurance Weekends Industry Network*
- *Sport-specific governing bodies*
- *Online learning platforms & forums*



Photos courtesy of Mario La Pergola on Unsplash

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**Quantify and  
communicate  
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## 3 | When it works...

Here are **four compelling examples** of destinations where endurance events have generated a profound impact, both economically and in terms of quality of life and community benefit:

### WORLD TRIATHLON CHAMPIONSHIP FINALS • Torremolinos, Spain (October 2024)

- **Economic Impact:** Generated **€43.8 million** in total economic output, including **€22.9 million** in direct spending by participants, organizers, and media
- **ROI for Public Investment:** Each euro invested by local authorities returned approximately €33.71 in economic benefit
- **Media Reach & Image Enhancement:** Event coverage reached 333 million people, with an equivalent advertising value of over €18 million
- **Community & Sustainability:** **76%** of surveyed participants noted significant tourism/image benefits, and **75%** of local businesses reported increased sales. Rated as a **Gold sustainability event** with strong community volunteer involvement and eco-friendly practices

**Impact Summary:** Torremolinos leveraged a world-class triathlon to boost tourism, elevate its global profile, strengthen local business revenue, and foster environmental and community stewardship.

### BANK OF AMERICA CHICAGO MARATHON • Chicago, USA (2023)

- **Economic Impact:** Estimated at **\$550 million**, rivaling combined major cultural events like Lollapalooza and NASCAR in economic return.
- **Visitor & Hospitality Boost:** Tens of thousands of runners and their supporters filled hotels, restaurants, and local businesses. Survey findings show high first-time visitation rates tied to long-term tourism growth
- **Local Business Surge:** Spending along the route spiked as much as **40% above baseline** during the event hours, especially in small neighborhood establishments

**Impact Summary:** The event not only drives massive direct economic value, but deepens resident engagement, energizes neighborhoods, and reinforces Chicago's identity as a vibrant, welcoming city.

**Tens of thousands of runners and their supporters filled hotels, restaurants, and local businesses.**

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## TOUR DE YORKSHIRE • Yorkshire, England (2015 – 2019)

- **Economic Impact:** Generated **£50 million in 2015**, rising to **£98 million in 2018**, and **£60 million in 2019**. That sustained influx powered local hospitality and retail growth across multiple host towns.
- **Visitor Engagement & Exposure:** Over **2 million spectators** lined the roads in 2017, climbing to **2.6 million in 2018**, making it one of the UK's largest spectator events at the time.
- **Increased Spending:** Spectators spent **54% more per person in 2018** compared to the previous year, signaling growing engagement and benefit to local businesses.
- **Community & Legacy:** Between roadside hospitality, increased pride in the countryside, and widespread media coverage, the event helped reinforce Yorkshire's brand as a premier cycling and tourism destination.

**Impact Summary:** Tour de Yorkshire transformed regional towns into vibrant hubs, driving tourism, boosting local spending, building community spirit, and positioning the area globally through extensive broadcast and route-side exposure

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## “WE RUN THIS CITY” YOUTH MARATHON PROGRAM — Cleveland, Ohio (2009–2012)

This initiative engaged school teams in training for walking, jogging, or running distances from 1.2 miles up to a half marathon, culminating in participation in the Rite Aid Cleveland Marathon. The program tracked approximately **1,419 students (mean age ~13 years)** over a 12–14 week training period.

### Impact on Obesity:

- At baseline: **17.3%** of students were classified as obese (BMI ≥95th percentile).
- Among students who completed follow-up evaluations, that rate dropped to **12.8%**, a notable **~4.5 percentage point reduction** in obesity prevalence within just a few months.
- Particularly striking: students in the longer-distance groups (10K/half marathon) showed higher follow-up retention and more training mileage, contributing to better outcomes.

### Behavioral Engagement & Fitness Gains:

- Training adherence varied by distance group; 80.7% of 10K/half marathon participants logged at least 25 miles.
- Physical activity uptake was higher overall among overweight and obese participants.
- The structure helped instill routine, goal-setting, and peer-supported training, all important behavioral drivers.



# 4

## The Cost of Inaction

### *What Happens When A Destination Says No to Endurance Events*

In today's increasingly competitive tourism landscape, the destinations that win are those that innovate, take smart risks, and offer meaningful, immersive experiences. Endurance events are no longer niche—they are becoming essential components of destination development. Saying no is not neutral. It is a choice with real, measurable consequences.

#### Missed economic activity

Endurance athletes are not weekend wanderers—they are premium visitors. They stay longer, spend more, and often return with family and friends. One marathon, triathlon, or cycling festival can generate millions in tourism revenue and years of repeat visitation. Cities that decline these opportunities leave those dollars—and the momentum—on the table.

The 2023 Chicago Marathon generated over \$550 million in economic impact. What could even 1% of that mean for a local economy?

#### Talent and tourism drain

When a city says no, another one says yes. Athletes, organizers, and sponsors are always looking for the next great host destination. Neighboring destinations—and competitors—are actively bidding, building, and branding themselves as wellness-forward, event-friendly communities. The race does not wait.

**Real Talk:** Once an event finds a home elsewhere, it rarely comes back.

#### Loss of relevance & community pride

Endurance events do not just bring tourists, they energize locals. They activate parks, trails, waterfronts, and neighborhoods. They inspire local participation, foster volunteerism, and unite communities around shared goals. Opting out means missing that magic, along with the opportunity to build long-term health, civic pride, and a regional identity rooted in movement, resilience, and progress.

#### Falling behind in the wellness economy

The global wellness tourism market is projected to exceed \$1.4 trillion by 2027. Endurance sports are part of that surge. Cities without a footprint in this space risk falling behind—not just in sports tourism, but in attracting wellness-conscious travelers, residents, and businesses.



**One marathon, triathlon, or cycling festival can generate millions in tourism revenue and years of repeat visitation.**

## BOTTOM LINE

### **If a destination is not planning to host endurance events, someone else is.**

Athletes will drive elsewhere. Hotels will fill later. Communities will miss out. A destination's brand will not grow. The time to act is now.

# 5

## Final Thought: Endurance Is a Relationship

Endurance events are not transactions; they are relationships. The most successful partnerships are built with empathy, strategic alignment, and shared education at their core. A strong relationship is not limited to the event owner and the sports lead for a destination. Maximum impact comes from a holistic consensus across the community and the creation and continuous evolution of the tools, systems, and teams that create sustainability and protect the mission from distraction.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Endurance events are complex**, two-way education, shared language and strategic planning between event producers, host destinations and facilities is vital for event success.
- **Alignment of short- and long-term goals** should be part of agreement negotiations. (profit vs. public good, short-term tourism vs. long-term community value)
- **Key Elements** (ex. event planning, data collection, community communication) must stay deliberate and collaborative annually. Information silos, gaps in data and a lack of fresh and ongoing storytelling weaken the case for continued collaboration.



Photo courtesy of RUN 4 FFWPU on Pexels

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# ABOUT US



## Our Expert, Casey Taker

A seasoned professional in the endurance sports and sports tourism space, Casey has spent over 15 years working at the intersection of event production, destination development, and community engagement. Known as an endurance sports Swiss Army knife, she has worked with global endurance brands, helped launch new events in complex markets, and advised cities on how to attract, host, and retain high-impact sporting experiences—from international open water swims to grassroots trail events. Her work spans both large-scale global community strategy and on-the-ground execution with DMOs, race directors, and civic leaders.

This framework is not theory; it was built from a career of dedicated learning, real-world wins, brutal misses, and lessons learned from communities who got it right.

Casey is currently overseeing multiple major projects, including being on the executive team for OCEANMAN USA, Founder of Endurance Weekends & Endurance Weekends Industry Network, and Co-Founder of Salty Sports Society.

Written for tourism directors, city planners, and event owners, this white paper and the deeper training it introduces will support the clarity, language, and confidence to turn endurance events into long-term assets for communities who dive in.

## Sports ETA



As the non-profit 501(c)3 trade association for the sports events and tourism industry in the United States, Sports ETA is the most essential resource for sports commissions, sports destinations, sports event owners, and industry partners. We believe sports tourism and the events that our members own and host have the power to transform society for the better. Our passion is to help sports events and tourism professionals achieve previously unimaginable levels of performance. We do this by nurturing a community of smart, creative, and interesting people: our members.

Visit [SportsETA.org](https://SportsETA.org).

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