



Grant Details

118486 - FY23 DMO Plan

122497 - FY23 Helena DMO Plan

DOC Office of Tourism

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Contract Dates

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Comments
Amendment Comments

DMO Plan Narrative

1. Describe Your Destination

Describe your destination (who you are, who you wish to attract and why they would come) addressing your strengths, opportunities, and potential challenges.

Introduction and Current Situation

The following marketing plan is developed under the direction of the Helena CVB Executive Committee in conjunction with the Helena Area Chamber of Commerce Leadership and our marketing firm, The Wendt Agency. We welcome the designation of DMO and will continue our marketing-focused work by building awareness of the Helena area as a destination that offers travelers an array of activities, events, culture, history, and adventure. We will lean into the successes of the past and seek new and innovative opportunities and tactics to reach our audiences in immersive and impactful ways. It is important to recognize that there are lingering challenges in our community and industry due to the pandemic and current worldly unrest. We will do our best to navigate these challenges and find ways to focus on long-term strategies that are supported by research, current data, and the good counsel of our stakeholders and leaders.

Helena Montana's Strengths and Opportunities

Helena was founded as a gold mining camp in 1864. Now, as our state capital, we humbly brag on the lively community we have today. The opportunity to experience outstanding recreation is right out our back door. We are surrounded by iconic mountains, plentiful waterways, scenic trails, and ample wildlife. We are a community that is growing, and with that growth, we are gaining more opportunities for Montanans to show their craftwork through distilleries, breweries, restaurants, and musical events. We are proud to continue to honor our deep history and celebrate that along with our bountiful arts and culture scene.

To attract tourists to our destination, Helena offers the following:

- Outdoor recreation abounds with fishing, hunting, hiking, camping, boating, rafting, downhill and cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, mountain biking, golfing, and horseback riding. Visitors can enjoy Gates of the Mountains, the mighty Missouri River, Holter Lake, Canyon Ferry Lake, Hauser Lake, Spring Meadow Lake, Great Divide Ski Area, Montana WILD, and over 80 miles of trails on readily accessible public lands.
- Helena has received several designations that make it desirable to visitors, including International Mountain Bicycling Association Ride Center's Silver Level Designation, Rand McNally Best of the Road for Geocaching, USA Today's 10th Best State Capital Worth Visiting, and many more.
- Arts and culture, such as Grandstreet Theatre, Montana Shakespeare Company, Great Northern Carousel, Holter Museum of Art, Myrna Loy Center for the Performing and Media Arts, Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts, ExplorationWorks, Clay Arts Guild of Helena, Cathedral of Saint Helena, Carroll College, Queen City Ballet, Helena Symphony Orchestra and Chorale, and Civic Center events.
- Helena is central to Montana history with historical attractions such as Montana's Museum at the Montana Historical Society, "Montana's Most Historic Mile" Last Chance Gulch, Original Governor's Mansion, Historic Mansion District, Reeder's Alley, nearby ghost towns, Gates of the Mountains, Lewis and Clark Trail, Montana Military Museum, Montana's State Capitol Building, and the Last Chance Tour Train.
- Special events and festivals throughout the year, including the Last Chance Stampede and Rodeo, Governor's Cup Race, Farmers' Market, Downtown Helena's Art Walks and Wednesday's Alive at Five, Symphony Under

the Stars, Made in Montana Trade Show, Montana Learning Center's Beyond the Big Sky astro-tourism events, state sports tournaments, and many other regional events.

- Conveniently and centrally located, Helena is a perfect stop for activities and overnight stays for those traveling all across the state and specifically between Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks.

Helena's marketing efforts are often challenged by the following:

- Many of our businesses are still struggling with a shortage of labor, causing limited hours and long wait times for services
- The increased cost of gasoline will make travelers choose vacations closer to home this year
- The cost of airfare, limited flights, and flexibility of connections
- Limited public transportation, both from outside and inside the city of Helena
- Limited large-scale convention and event facilities
- Limited signage directing visitors to Helena attractions on interstate highways and within the city
- Helena events are seeing increased competition from other Montana towns' events
 - Helena is working to secure High School events, such as State cross country, soccer, and other events that fit into the limited infrastructure and space availability in the community
- Lack of extended store, shopping, and attraction hours to accommodate tourists
 - While still an issue, storeowner education and downtown events have made headway in resolving this challenge

2. Align with Montana Brand

Briefly describe how your destination aligns with the Montana Brand.

Montana's Brand Pillars are a perfect match with what Helena offers visitors.

- More spectacular unspoiled nature than anywhere else in the lower 48 states.
- Vibrant and charming small towns that serve as gateways to the state's natural wonders.
- Breathtaking experiences by day and relaxing hospitality at night.

Nestled against the Rocky Mountains, opening into a lush valley, and surrounded by pristine mountains, rivers, and lakes highlights the spectacular unspoiled nature that can be found just outside the city limits.

Helena has all the amenities of a big city but with a small-town feel. Whether it is the panoramic views from atop MacDonald Pass or watching a resident artist create their next piece at Archie Bray, Helena offers visitors unique and breathtaking experiences that can't be found elsewhere. Stroll along the walking mall to explore the many local shops. Or relax and enjoy some Helena flavor at a local restaurant, brewery, or distillery.

And at the end of the day, visitors can choose from historic bed and breakfasts or established hotels offering hometown Montana hospitality.

3. What is the strategic role of your DMO?

Select all that apply: Destination Marketing, Destination Management, Destination Stewardship, Destination Development).

Destination Marketing

Based on the strategic role you serve, provide the following information.

3a. Define your audience(s) (demographic, geographic, and psycho-graphic).

Consumer Target Geographic Markets:

Based on inquiries from our marketing and advertising efforts, visitors to the Helena Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, direct flights to Helena Regional Airport, and the Destination Analysis report, Southwest Montana Arrivalist data, hotels and attractions, the Helena CVB will target the following states and provinces: Washington, Idaho, Utah, California, Texas, Oregon, Illinois, Colorado, Wyoming, North Dakota, Minnesota, Arizona, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Montana outside of the Helena area.

Consumer Target Demographics:

A) Travelers visiting family and friends: These are adults 35+ years of age, traveling with or without children. They have a household income of \$75,000+, participate in scenic trips, photography, biking, hiking, fishing, wildlife viewing, skiing, and snowmobiling. These travelers enjoy outdoor activities, hands-on experiences, and tend to visit state parks, museums, historic trails, and nature areas. They enjoy unique dining experiences, craft breweries, and music venues.

B) Leisure travelers: Adults 35+ years of age. They have a household income of \$75,000+ and travel with or without children in the summer months. They participate in shopping, attend social/family events, outdoor activities, rural sightseeing, and visit historic places and museums.

- Family travelers: Affluent households with children under the age of 18.
- History buffs: Travelers who rate “historic attractions” as an extremely important attribute in selecting travel destinations.

C) Adventure travelers: Adults 30+ years of age, traveling with or without children. They have a household income of \$75,000+. They enjoy and participate in outdoor activities, such as mountain biking, fishing, hiking/backpacking, camping, water recreation, skiing, and snowmobiling. They also enjoy unique dining experiences, craft breweries, and music venues.

Consumer Target Psychographics:

The psychographic characteristics of Helena CVB’s target market include those who appreciate the great outdoors and who want to have room to roam, explore, hike, bike, fish, and connect with nature. They also enjoy unique dining experiences that are chef-owned/operated and that use food that is sourced locally; craft breweries and distilleries that offer an authentic connection with artisan brewers; and varied music offerings from small groups within a pub to medium-sized concerts at the fairgrounds.

3b. What research supports your DMO strategy?

The Helena CVB utilizes the following research resources when planning and executing our DMO Marketing Plan.

- ITRR to refine target audiences, including why visitors are attracted to Montana.
- Destination Analysis and Southwest Region Arrivalist providing information about Montana's potential high-value visitors and to create targets and strategic messaging. This data we have is from 2018/2019, so it provides a historical viewpoint as we continue to move through the effects of the pandemic.
- The Helenamt.com website analytics help measure the success of tactics used in our consumer marketing and advertising efforts by measuring current users, new users, session time, and campaign timing statistics.
- National Park Service Visitation Stats provides data on visitation for Glacier and Yellowstone, which guides our focus on being a hub between the two parks.
- marketmt.com – for Montana brand usage and joint venture opportunities.
- ustravel.org – providing articles and data on U.S. travel and the effects of our nation's economy. Also provides information regarding the challenges and lost revenue we're still experiencing post pandemic.
- geocaching.com/blog – confirmation that geocaching is still relevant in 2022. There are over 3 million geocache sites worldwide.
- brewersassociation.org – providing information regarding the economic impact of breweries in the U.S. economy. A resource for content development of blogs and native content.
- destinationanalysts.com – travel outlook, insights, and updates. This includes current travel and visitation challenges, such as the war in Ukraine, and Covid travel insights.
- voicesoftourism.com/research – providing specific tourism-related data and legislative actions for Montana.
- Helena Regional Airport Monthly Visitor Device Data – keeping us up-to-date on airline usage and travel in and out of Helena.
- Smith Travel Research Report – Monthly STR Report revealing the slow but steady rebound with our lodging facilities.

The Helena CVB also relies on our agency partner to make recommendations that fit our targeting with the comprehensive research resources they have access to, such as Nielsen Ratings and Nielsen Digital Ad Ratings, CEB Iconoculture Consumer Insights, Scarborough Research, SQUAD broadcast CPP forecasting, ComScore, and Quantcast. These tools provide access to radio and TV ratings, print circulation numbers, web usage stats, core forecasting information, consumer psychographics, and media usage trends. These resources help The Wendt Agency create highly targeted and cost-effective media strategies.

At the time of planning, we are still gathering data for the spring 2022 deployments. However, in 2021 we launched two email deployments and the following data was collected:

-HTML email title: Helena Montana, Where Adventure Happens-deployed May 2021, open rate 9.1%, opened 853, clicked 38

-HTML email title: Experience Helena Montana, Montana Possibilities-deployed June 2021, open rate 18.0%, opened 1673, clicked 71

3c. What are your emerging markets?

Helena has one main emerging market. We will reach these markets through our planned tactics included in our marketing plan and through our creative execution.

Emerging:

Astro-tourism: The Montana Learning Center (MLC) at Canyon Ferry Lake is in the process of expanding its programs and observatories. It will include the largest public-access telescope in Montana and a robotic telescope equipped with a camera specifically designed to capture stellar objects. The Montana Learning Center will also add two additional state-of-the-art telescopes, one for solar viewing and the other for lunar and planetary observation. These additions will ensure that visitors have access to a broad range of astronomical observations, including solar, lunar, planetary, and deep space. The Montana Learning Center has also been named a “Dark Sky Destination” by the Montana Chapter of the International Dark-Sky Association. This state-of-the-art observatory, coupled with our dark skies, will offer tourists a truly unique experience. In May of 2021, the Montana Learning Center was awarded a \$67,000 grant from the Department of Commerce. These funds are being used to upgrade telescopes in the existing observatories, enhance public outreach, and promote awareness of this exceptional facility. This summer, MLC is offering night sky public viewing experiences. These events are scheduled throughout the summer and are being marketed as "Beyond the Big Sky" events. In August of 2017, a University of Michigan study estimated that 215 million Americans viewed the eclipse, and it was calculated that 7 million people traveled to get in the path of totality. This is concrete evidence that there is a great deal of interest in astro-tourism and provides an opportunity to cultivate experiences that showcase what outer space has to offer in Helena, Montana.

Sporting Events and Tournaments: There is an opportunity for the Helena DMO to promote sporting events and tournaments to travelers across Montana as well as visitors to the area. With our targeted focus on leisure and family travelers, we believe there are opportunities for families traveling to attend sporting events within our community to extend their stay beyond the sporting event to enjoy our outdoor, cultural and historical activities and attractions. Helena is still an affordable family destination option which cannot be said for every community in Montana, making it a perfect location for those who are attending youth and adult sporting events to enjoy more of what the Helena area has to offer. We will reach this group with our targeted focus on leisure and family travelers in state this fall. Strategic media planning will occur in late summer to reach this audience.

4. Define and describe your overall goals.

A goal is an idea of the future or desired result that a person or group of people envisions, plans and commits to achieve.

Fiscal Year 22/23 Goals

Goal 1) Raise awareness of Helena's recreational, cultural, and historical attractions and activities and increase visitation in the warm and shoulder seasons.

Goal 2) Continue to build upon marketing opportunities with other tourism partners, including the Helena TBID, Helena Regional Airport, Southwest Montana Tourism Region, and Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development.

Goal 3) Increase awareness of Helena as a destination and encourage visitors to Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks to take advantage of Helena as a travel destination hub due to its convenient geographical location.

Goal 4) Develop a strategic and comprehensive digital campaign that will reach our desired audiences and drive them to our website and social channels where we can track usage and engagement.

4a. Describe proposed tactics and projects as related to overall goals and controlled by the organization in its financial statements.

Goal 1) Raise awareness of Helena's recreational, cultural, and historical attractions and activities and increase visitation in the warm and shoulder seasons.

We have been focused primarily on warm season promotion in the past, however, we are experiencing some pressure on attractions and services during the high traffic summer months. We will continue to give attention to the summer season (June - August) and expand our reach and messaging to include shoulder seasons (April - May and September - October) to help ease the pressure on our attractions and service providers. We will develop targeted advertising campaigns for both summer and shoulder seasons.

Goal 2) Continue to build upon marketing opportunities with other tourism partners, including the Helena TBID, Helena Regional Airport, Southwest Montana Tourism Region, and Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development.

Helena TBID – we work closely with the Helena TBID for website content development as it relates to our advertising campaigns. We also share marketing plans with each other to ensure that we're both being efficient with marketing dollars and not duplicating tactics. And lastly, we share creative assets with each other, such as photography and videography. The TBID, Downtown Helena and the City of Helena are working toward the goal of developing a new brand for Helena. As this initiative evolves, the DMO will continue to work with these entities as needed in partnership for this initiative.

The Helena Regional Airport is important to our visitor recruitment efforts and we have had the opportunity to partner together and build successful campaigns to encourage flights in and out of Helena. The Airport is also a great resource for data, such as passenger traffic numbers that support our marketing efforts. We will continue to provide content for the tourism information center that is located at the airport terminal.

Southwest Montana Tourism Region provides an opportunity to share the Helena message through inclusion in the Southwest Montana Travel Planner.

Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development (Brand MT) provides a wealth of research to support our marketing plan along with brand guidance. We also will look forward to Joint Venture opportunities as they become available.

Goal 3) Increase awareness of Helena as a destination and encourage visitors to Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks to take advantage of Helena as a travel destination hub due to its convenient geographical location.

Communicating our convenient geographical location is something that we will do within our creative message and content development for print and digital advertising campaigns.

Goal 4) Develop a strategic and comprehensive digital campaign that will reach our desired audiences and drive them to our website and social channels where we can track usage and engagement.

As a DMO whose focus is the promotion of the Helena area to increase the number of visitors, we will be directing a substantial portion of our marketing funds to develop a strategic digital communications outreach plan. Digital assets

will include eye-catching images that encourage engagement with links to specific pages with relevant content within Helenamt.com. Portions of the digital campaign will also include targeted video and audio messages and native content to drive interest. We have been collecting email addresses for the last 3 years to build our database by using inquiries from our placement in the Yellowstone Journal. This is a cost effective way to reach people who have an expressed interest in traveling to Montana and the Helena area.

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Objectives/Metrics/Evaluation

Objectives	Measurable Metrics for Success	Report the Metric Achieved	Evaluation of Measurable Metrics for Success
Increase awareness of Helena as a recreational and leisure travel destination ultimately increasing the lodging tax collections for FY23 over FY22.	Increase lodging tax collections from July 2022 through June 2023 by 3%.	In July 2022, our lodging tax collections were \$123,353. This year, we collected \$171,056 in lodging tax collections. That is an increase of 38%.	Our objective was met. We do feel that we created a comprehensive digital campaign that reached our desired target market and drove them to our website and social channels.
Develop a strategic advertising campaign that promotes Helena during the summer (June - August) and shoulder seasons (April - May and September - October). This campaign will include a small print component, coupled with a comprehensive digital communications outreach plan. This plan will be developed in the fall of 2022.	The tracking metrics for this campaign will meet or exceed industry benchmarks reported at the time of execution of the campaign, and may include engagements, circulation numbers, web usage stats, CPC, CPM, etc. In the FY21 campaign we had a total of 1,938,791 impressions reached, 11,891 actions and engagements,	In the FY23 campaign, we increased our impressions to 3,642,446. The increase is due to the addition of a fall campaign which was very successful. Our overall clickthrough rate	We did meet our objective. The addition of shoulder season campaigns increased our impressions while still keeping our costs in line. We were very happy with how the campaigns performed, particularly the fall campaign, with 14,975 impressions over a week campaign.

	.60% overall click-through rate, and \$3.57 cost per click on all formats and media tactics. We hope to increase actions, engagements and click-through's by 5% and continue to work to keep the overall cost per click under \$5.	stayed flat at .60% average on all campaigns. Total spend was \$3.18 average on all campaigns.	
With our partnership with Yellowstone Journal, we have built a substantial email database that we use to promote Helena to those who are interested in traveling to Montana and Yellowstone National Park. To date we have collected 28,347 email address and we have planned HTML messaging that is deployed using this database during our campaign windows. We will continue to build this database as a strong and targeted outreach tool.	Add an additional 10,000 leads to this database from July 2022 - June 2023.	We were able to generate 8,647 leads.	We did not meet our objective. With that in mind, we have changed up the content in our outreach in the Yellowstone Journal for FY24 to increase our lead generation in this fiscal year.

DMO Budget

Allowable Methods	Amount Budgeted	% of Budget Allocated	Amount Expended	% of Budget Expended
Administration	\$34,500.00	20.0	\$34,211.20	99.2
Education/Outreach	\$4,500.00	3.0	\$912.75	20.2
Joint Venture	\$1,700.00	1.0	\$0.00	0
Opportunity Marketing	\$1,700.00	1.0	\$2,212.35	130.1
Paid Media	\$112,956.00	66.0	\$100,636.65	89.0
Research	\$7,700.00	4.5	\$7,700.00	100.0
Visitor Services	\$8,000.00	4.0	\$1,719.33	21.4
	\$171,056.00	99.50	\$147,392.28	

Narrative Evaluation

Our goals this year were to:

- 1) Raise awareness of Helena's recreational, cultural and historical attractions and activities and increase visitation in the warm and shoulder seasons.
- 2) Continue to build upon marketing opportunities with other tourism partners including the Helena TBID, Helena Regional Airport, Southwest Montana Tourism and Montana Office of Tourism and Development
- 3) Increase awareness of Helena as a destination and encourage visitors to Glacier and Yellowstone

National Parks to take advantage of Helena as a travel destination hub due to its convenient geographical location and 4) Develop a strategic and comprehensive digital campaign that will reach our desired audiences and drive them to our website and social channels where we can track usage and engagement.

I was incredibly proud of the work the Helena CVB did this year to meet these goals. Helena has struggled mightily to find a place amongst our neighbors as a destination. However, I felt that by the work we did to develop a strategic campaign and the efforts that were put into attracting the right audience, we were able to make some strides and narrow the gap as a tourist destination. In conjunction with our partners at the Helena TBID, we were able to capitalize on the brand strategy that was developed through our community partners. This allowed for a more consistent communication across all of our partners while also presenting Helena in a much more authentic way to our potential visitors.

This year in developing our digital campaigns, we focused on our demographics, particularly adults in the 25-54 age range, who were interested in Montana travel, family and leisure vacations and outdoor recreation travel. Post-pandemic, Helena has seen an increase in travelers who were not only interested in traveling to Montana, but traveling to destinations that they would consider as places to live. With less immediate growth than our neighbors in Bozeman and Missoula, this made Helena a sought after destination for leisure and relocation. In looking at our strategy, we also considered our regional drive markets as we are still limited on direct flights and included both Alberta and Saskatchewan this year after getting feedback from our hotel partners.

The addition of a fall campaign was something I was very pleased with this year. Our hotel partners have been very clear that while the warm season continues to be strong, we still struggle during the shoulder seasons. Our fall campaign was very successful. We focused on that same age range through a google search and adwords campaign, a programmatic digital display campaign and an email campaign where we teamed with Distinctly Montana. The Fall Should campaign had the second highest click through rate of the three (fall, spring and warm season) campaigns at 11.39%. This resulted in 106 conversions with 50 of those being clicks to view the vacation guide. The campaign ran from September 19-October 19, 2022 and we did see an increase of 8.8 points in hotel occupancy per the November 2022 STR Report.

Our spring and warm season campaigns also performed well. This year, streaming audio was included in the spring campaign. It performed very well with an audio completion rate over four percent above benchmark. This level of engagement suggests we should include this tactic throughout FY24. It was exciting to add a new opportunity through Spotify to market Helena. A highlight from the warm season campaign was the Family Adventure Native Content article targeting Wyoming, North Dakota, Idaho, Colorado and Utah. It had a very impressive click-through-rate of .32% which was our most responsive of the two articles and sets of display ads. Historically, we have had good luck with native content and are planning on using it again in our FY24 campaign.

As always, we rely on our partnership with the Yellowstone Journal to generate leads. This placement continues to deliver leads to the Helena CVB for both travel planners and use in future email outreach efforts. This year, in partnership with the Helena TBID, we reworked our travel planner. While the CVB aided in the printing of the travel planner, we also created a flipbook in digital form. Normally, we get many requests for hard copies of our travel planner but because the flipbook was so attractive, we saw the trend switch from hard copies to requests for digital copies. This change, partially because of the change in demographic in our traveler, resulted in us saving more money in postage fees than we have in the past.

Overall, I was very pleased with this year's campaign. I believe that we were able to try some new marketing techniques, streaming in particular, that helped show growth in our lodging collections and gave us great footing to move forward. This year, we increased our lodging collections from \$123,000 in FY22 to \$171,056 in FY23. I think that our focus on raising awareness of Helena as a recreational and cultural hub with proximity to the parks has literally paid off, and I am proud of the work we have done to speak with a voice authentic to Helena.

Reg/CVB Required Documents

Description	File Name	File Size
Helena CVB FY 23 Board of Directors Approval	FY 23 Chamber Board CVB MP & Budget Approval.docx	14 KB
Helena CVB FY 23 Board of Directors Approval	FY 23 Chamber Board CVB MP & Budget Approval.docx	14 KB
Helena Chamber-CVB By-Laws	Helena Chamber-CVB By-Laws 2021.doc	1.8 MB
Helena Chamber-CVB By-Laws	Helena Chamber-CVB By-Laws 2021.doc	1.8 MB
Helena CVB FY 23 Certificate of Compliance	Helena CVB FY 23 Certificate of Compliance.pdf	365 KB
Helena CVB FY 23 Certificate of Compliance	Helena CVB FY 23 Certificate of Compliance.pdf	365 KB

