



Grant Details

125123 - FY24 DMO Plan

128713 - FY24 Columbia Falls DMO Plan

DOC Office of Tourism

Grant Title: FY24 Columbia Falls DMO Plan

Grant Number: 24-52-OOT-DMO-013

Grant Status: Underway

Comments:

Applicant Organization: Columbia Falls DMO

Grantee Contact: Laura Gadwa

Award Year: FY24

Program Area: DOC Office of Tourism

Amounts:

Contract Dates: Contract Sent 06/13/2023 Contract Received 07/01/2023 Contract Executed 06/30/2024

Project Dates: Proposal Date 06/13/2023 Project Start 07/01/2023 Project End 06/30/2024

Grant Administrator: Barb Sanem

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Project Start Project End

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.

Columbia Falls, Montana is a fast growing, charming community in Northwest Montana. Columbia Falls is comprised of small locally owned businesses, mixed with a few larger corporations and manufacturing businesses. Based off the 2021 census results, the population of Columbia Falls is estimated to be 5,545.

The people here are vibrant and passionate about their ability to call this place home. Free time is spent getting out into the great outdoors. Day-to-day life in Columbia Falls is adventurous and neighborly. Our forests, fields and fresh air offer endless recreation year-round.

Although Columbia Falls and the surrounding smaller communities are at the edge of wilderness, we are not without our comforts. Locals enjoy breweries and distilleries, summer open air markets, and see live music at indoor and outdoor venues. Our growing array of restaurants offer incredible quality and delicious local fare, and there are several anchor hotels to complement the array of cabins, lodges and vacation rentals in the area.

Strengths:

- Columbia Falls is conveniently located within ten minutes of Glacier International Airport, the only airport that services the Flathead Valley and surrounding communities.
- Columbia Falls is close in proximity to Glacier National Park: With an increase in visitation to the national park over the last few years, Columbia Falls has continued to grow in restaurants, lodging and recreational businesses. According to the Glacier National Parks statistics page, 2,908,458 visitors visited Glacier National Park in 2022. This is important as Columbia Falls is the largest city closest to the West entrance of Glacier National Park.
- Columbia Falls offers ample opportunities for year-round recreation. Columbia Falls has multiple City Parks within city limits, access to State Parks and Forest Service public land within a 45-minute radius of Columbia Falls.
- River Access: The Flathead River runs through the city of Columbia Falls.

Opportunities:

- Cedar Flats Trails: This trail system, spearheaded by Gateway to Glacier Trails, is planned to be a 25-mile connected system of non-motorized, multi-use trails on Flathead National Forest land north of Columbia Falls. Currently, 4 miles are developed for public use with an additional six miles planned to be completed in 2023. Currently, mountain bikers, trail runners, dog walkers, and other outdoor adventurers are already experiencing this local trail system. The continued growth and expansion of this trail system is vital to our area.
- High summer season visitation patterns allow Columbia Falls to increase lodging occupancy and visitor spendings during the fall and winter seasons through marketing efforts. This can be done in part by working with other local stakeholders, regional and state tourism partners to increase and grow fall and winter visitation as well as increased marketing efforts during these seasons. The expansion of the revenue through multiple seasons is a key factor to sustainable, continued growth of local businesses and community.

Potential Challenges:

- Our community at times, especially during the winter/fall seasons, can be overshadowed by the larger communities in the Flathead Valley.
- Unpredictable weather can make it more challenging for travelers to know what to do in our area during the fall/winter months.
- Helping tourists navigate the status of construction projects, vehicle reservation systems, and road closures in Glacier National Park.
- Bringing awareness to other recreational areas that are potential tourist attractions.

Who We Wish to Attract:

The Columbia Falls Area Chamber recognizes that our area needs to attract travelers who are respectful and value the authenticity of our natural resources, such as national forests, national parks, rivers, parks, etc. as well as travelers who are looking to eat in local restaurants, attend local events and support the lifestyle of the Columbia Falls community. Summer season alone, July 1st-September 30th, 2022, based off the bed tax document provided by the department of commerce, brought in \$173,504 dollars. These months, largely in part due to Going to the Sun Road being fully open, is peak season. Many of our local businesses have asked us to help promote fall and winter seasons to spread out the influx of travelers and/or to increase visitation during those months. In 2022, revenue collected from the bed tax from January 1st-March 31st was \$14,940 and from October 1st-December 31st was \$19,596.

Why Would They Come

The Columbia Falls area has local businesses and year-round recreation. Often times, the Chamber of Commerce receives input from travelers thinking that because Going to the Sun Road in Glacier National Park is not fully open that our city is also closed. We want to make it known that other outdoor recreational areas, year-round restaurants/events/retail stores, and other year-round opportunities are in Columbia Falls.

People also love the lower population density of Montana in general and the opportunity to experience our mountains, wildlife, forests and rivers.

2. Align with Montana Brand

Briefly describe how your destination aligns with the Montana Brand.

The vision of the Montana Brand is for residents and visitors to enjoy Montana at it's best. The mission of the Columbia Falls Area Chamber of Commerce is to promote local business and support our community. One of the visions at the Columbia Falls Area Chamber is to "foster a strong economy by supporting, promoting and expanding the business community and the tourism industry". Through this promotion and support, we assist with promoting outdoor and other local recreation, businesses that offer these opportunities, and local hospitality businesses that support those who are traveling here so they can truly enjoy "Montana at it's best". Hospitality businesses in Columbia Falls also focus on being welcoming and friendly to travelers.

Values that Coincide with the Montana Brand:

- Collaboration: We collaborate with various stakeholders in the tourism industry to promote our area.

- Love of Montana: Our Chamber fosters enthusiasm about our local communities to help ensure visitors and residents have a positive, sustainable, and safe experience. We also plan to focus on storytelling about our area through the eyes of our residents, local businesses and the stories of those who have travelled here.

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).

Travelers from across the United States, Canada and internationally, seek our area in large part due to our close proximity to Glacier National Park. Columbia Falls is conveniently located only 20 minutes from the West Entrance to Glacier National Park. In addition to GNP, the Flathead River runs through our city and offers ample fishing, rafting, floating and other river activities to travelers. We are also surrounded by the Flathead National Forest, which provides camping, fishing, and additional recreational opportunities too.

Our Audiences

Demographics:

- Direct flights to Glacier Park International Airport: Washington (Seattle), Oregon (Portland), California (San Francisco, Oakland, Burbank, Los Angeles, San Diego), Colorado (Denver), Utah (Salt Lake City), Minnesota (Minneapolis), Illinois (Chicago) and Texas (Dallas and Houston)
- Based off data from Glacier Country Tourism:
- Drive Markets within 600 Miles: Idaho (Coeur d'Alene), Washington (Spokane) and Wyoming (Based off information from Glacier Country Tourism)

Geographics:

- Data based off Glacier Country Tourism, shows that individual travelers tend to be Mid-30's+, HHI \$75,000, college graduates, take 2+ vacations per year, and are more in-tune with nature. Mature geo-traveler couples tend to be 55+, HHI \$75,000, active, high-value-low-impact couples, and may be group travelers or travelling with extended family. Families tend to be multigenerational families with at least one child under the age of 18, HHI \$75,000. Finally, corporate groups that are active and taking part in our environment.

Psychographics:

- Stewardship and responsible travelers who are respectful to our residents and destination
- Outdoor Recreation and Adventurers - Experiences for all abilities, including but not limited to snowshoeing, snowmobiling, hiking, biking, river access, rafting, fishing, hunting, sight-seeing, camping and ice climbing.
- Authentic Experiences such as local breweries, distilleries and wineries, local festivals/events, dude-ranches, authentic cabin rentals and cultural experiences

3b. What research supports your DMO strategy?

- Based off the Montana Department of Commerce Bed Tax data, the revenue collected through the bed tax data was substantially different in the summer season compared to fall and winter seasons. In 2022, from January 1st-March 31st, \$14,940 was collected, during October 1st-December 31st, \$19,596 was collected, and during the summer season from July 1st-September 30th, \$173,504 was collected.
- 2022 Nonresident Visitation, Expenditures and Economic Impact Estimates (Institute for Tourism's Recreational Research) has data showing the Glacier Country area as a whole and the impact. To narrow down to our county and city of Columbia Falls was to narrow of a target audience so based off the data from the broader Glacier Country region the following data supports our strategy. In quarter 1 of 2022, 1,032 people completed the survey and of those only 5% visited Glacier National Park in comparison to quarter 3 where 3,888 surveys were returned and 42% visited Glacier National Park. The proximity of Columbia Falls to Glacier National Park, gives us the opportunity to increase this visitation and capture some of these travelers and gives us reason to support marketing during the less travelled quarters.
- Our Chamber just launched a new website to further track and gather data. Based off our previous website analytics, during the summer months, July-August the website had substantially more viewers while our fall and winter months saw substantially less viewers.

3c. What are your emerging markets?

One of our goals in this first year, as being recognized as a DMO region, is to be able to better identify specific emerging markets so we can gather a baseline that enhances our organization to become more data driven in our marketing efforts.

We would like to acquire more data on GPIA new direct flights, visitor demographics, psychographics and emerging markets.

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.

Our overall goal is to grow and help increase shoulder season visitation to help support our business community and the tourism industry year-round. We want to focus on the fall and winter seasons to help better develop an understanding to residents and travelers to the opportunities that are available during these months. This will be done through a comprehensive marketing strategy including content development, video drone, social media, printed materials, search engine optimization, storytelling, and other promotional opportunities.

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

Goal 1: Hire a photographer and/or content developer to acquire visual content of our area.

Goal 2: Hiring a website developer to increase the SEO on the Columbia Falls Area Chamber's website.

Goal 3: Work with a local company to develop a map featuring recreational activities that are outside of Glacier National Park.

Goal 4; Work with local stakeholders to promote local recreational areas outside of Glacier National Park.

Goal 5: Develop a storytelling marketing strategy that focuses on local resident and business input to tell the story of our community

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Objectives/Metrics/Evaluation

Objectives	Measurable Metrics for Success	Report the Metric Achieved	Evaluation of Measurable Metrics for Success
Increase visitation during fall and winter by promoting recreational activities in the area, including cross country skiing, snowshoeing, ice climbing, snowmobiling, ice fishing, mountain	Increase visitation in the fall and winter seasons measured by in increase in lodging bed tax	Yes.	1. Yes. Objective was met. 2. 1/1 - 3/31 Increased 13% from 2023-24 and 10/1 - 12/31 Increased 8% from 2022-23

biking, ATV usage, hiking, hunting and camping. There are multiple recreational areas close to Columbia Falls, such as Cedar Flatts, designed for multiuse activities that should be promoted for more off season usage.	revenue by 1% compared to FY23. Note: This is a stretch goal for FY24 due to it being the first year with a DMO plan.		3. Continue objective.
Educating and promoting visitors on year-round opportunities in our area that are separate from Glacier National Park. This could include a map that outlines hiking, biking, river access, snowshoeing, and country skiing for visitors, creating a platform for local business off season promotion and event promotion.	Track the digital map downloads and track the number of printed maps distributed through mailed packets and local distribution. Since this is the starting year, we will be collecting baseline data to use for comparison during future years.	In progress.	1. In progress into FY25. 2. The map project so far has been successful. 3. Finish in FY25.
Develop strong SEO to the Columbia Falls Area Chamber website for fall and winter tourism by creating engaging content showcasing fall and winter seasons. including photo, video, and content generation.	Finalize the launch of new website content and implement a website traffic tool by end of 2024 fiscal year.	Yes.	1. Yes metric was achieved, 2. Website designed and launched and analytics created. www.discovercolumbiafallsmt.com 3. Increased SEO will continue into FY25.

DMO Budget

Allowable Methods	Amount Budgeted	% of Budget Allocated	Amount Expended	% of Budget Expended
Administration	\$6,156.00	20.0	\$5,629.00	91.44
Cooperative Marketing	\$1,539.00	5.0	\$0.00	0
Education/Outreach	\$2,462.00	8.0	\$1,735.44	70.49
Opportunity Marketing	\$3,078.00	10.0	\$500.00	16.24
Paid Media	\$10,157.00	33.0	\$13,760.06	135.47
Visitor Services	\$4,926.00	16.0	\$0.00	0
Website Development (Online, Website, Mobile)	\$2,462.00	8.0	\$0.00	0
	\$30,780.00	100.00	\$21,624.50	

Narrative Evaluation

As a first year DMO, we accomplished many objectives, metrics and tasks. We developed a marketing content library, video and images, to use for promoting winter and fall recreation. We also developed a logo to use as branding for the Discover Columbia Falls.

Our brand new website was designed, www.discovercolumbiafallsmt.com, and it is live and being utilized.

Stakeholders meeting were held and a recreational map plan and design was developed to promote recreation outside of Glacier National Park. This objective is continuing on our FY25 plan and is in the final stages of development.

Our first year was successful and positive.

DMO Plan Attachments

Description

File Name

File Size