

Application Summary

Application: FY26 DMO Plan - Gardiner Chamber of Commerce

Applicant: Gardiner Chamber of Commerce

Funding opportunity: FY26 DMO Plan

Application Responses

Organization Name: Gardiner Chamber of Commerce CVB/DMO

First Name: Terese

Last Name: Petcoff

Street Address 1: 216 Park St.

Street Address 2: POB 81

City: Gardiner

State: MT

Zip: 59030

Funding Opportunity: FY26 DMO Plan

Amount Requested: 108,076

Application: FY26 Annual Certificate of Compliance_Gardiner DMO.pdf

TAC Approved Budget: 108,076

General Description Information

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

1a. Destination:

The small hamlet of Gardiner, known as "Nature's Favorite Entrance to Yellowstone National Park", is located in southwest Montana at the North Entrance to Yellowstone National Park. Nestled between the Absaroka-Beartooth and the Gallatin Mountain ranges, Gardiner is surrounded by approximately 10 million acres of public lands. The community enjoys year-round access to the Yellowstone River--the longest free-flowing river in the lower 48 states. Since the early 1880's, Gardiner has served as the original entrance to Yellowstone National Park and is graced by the historic Roosevelt Arch, dedicated by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1903.

Our community's small-town Montana charm, natural splendor, and abundant wildlife make it a unique "home on the range" for our nearly 900 residents. Year-round access to Yellowstone's Northern Range truly differentiates Gardiner from other Yellowstone gateway communities. The community also enjoys a rich history as the original entrance to Yellowstone National Park, which has left a flavor of Old West heritage evidenced by historic buildings and the Roosevelt Arch.

1b. Strengths:

Our charming small town offers relaxing hospitality while providing full-service amenities. Many Gardiner restaurants offer local and sustainably grown produce and Montana raised beef. Visitors will find a diverse selection of accommodations including modern hotels and inns, rustic cabins, quaint cottages, relaxing B&B's, and vacation rentals. Some guest lodging experiences offer for our visitors horseback riding and fishing by day, and cowboy cookouts and campfires by night.

Year-round access to Yellowstone National Park and easy access to Forest Service, BLM lands, and MT FWP lands provide visitors with an array of recreation opportunities. These include whitewater rafting, ziplining, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing, snowcoach tours, photography, wildlife watching, hiking, and fishing. Between Gardiner and Paradise Valley there are two unique hot springs experiences in which visitors can unwind after a long day participating in various recreation activities. In response to visitor interests our area has begun to offer even more recreation activities like e-biking, optics rentals, and night sky watching tours.

1c. Opportunities:

Gardiner continues to navigate small hurdles related to the challenges our community experienced from 2020 – 2022 including extreme highs or record breaking visitation levels to extreme lows of nonexistent visitation due to a historic flood that reminded our community of the traveler's significance to Gardiner. We will continue to highlight this appreciation by communicating to visitors that their dollar goes further in a town comprised of small family businesses.

We continue to see our largest opportunities for tourism growth in the winter and shoulder seasons, respectively November – April. According to National Park Service in 2024/25 recreational visits, December through March, only contributed to approximately 8.85% of the total North Entrance visits for the calendar. This is slightly down from 2023/24 in which approximately 10.94% of the total North Entrance visits happened from December – March.

During this time frame the GDMO will look at expanding or improving upon event opportunities and continue gearing our marketing towards the drive markets, additionally, marketing to peak season travelers to return in the winter time while they are attending events in the summer.

Additional opportunities for growth could be increased marketing towards Gardiner as an extended basecamp for winter wildlife photography or artists in residence, (winter) anglers as the Gardner River in YNP is now permitted to fish year round, and increasing winter visitation leads to the potential for more businesses to stay open year round.

1d. Potential Challenges:

Political Climate & International travel

With the recent change in federal administration the Gardiner DMO has begun to receive a slight influx of international travelers (particularly Canada) voicing their frustrations and refusal to travel to our area via

email. While this could happen with any change this is the first time our organization has received feedback of this nature. Lodging entities have also shared with us that they have received cancellations solely based on the patrons dissatisfaction with the political climate in the US. See Attachment FY25 Visit Gardiner MT_Support Research_Internal: Contact Us Form

Winter Visitation/businesses open/expectations

While the mission of the Gardiner DMO is to capitalize on the opportunity to expand visitation in the shoulder and winter seasons this can be challenging as there are fewer and fewer businesses willing to be open, notably November – March. While we will market for visitors to come, especially when over snow road travel in YNP is open, we must also manage expectations while they are here and strongly look at if marketing travel in the months of November & March should even be considered.

Gardiner construction/vacant lots/& parking

Key properties within the downtown Gardiner area have recently changed ownership and development/construction has either already begun or is slated to begin in the next one-two years. While planned new dining, lodging, activity, and retail establishments are incredibly welcome in our community the construction of several properties at once in the same area that is the main focal point upon exiting/entering YNP through Gardiner could impede visitors' from fully experiencing our community. Additionally, in the past when there has been any semblance of construction there has been extreme issues with Google maps and visitors have outright not come because of incorrect information displayed on various navigation platforms. While we hope that this does not happen we will prepare for the potential of it.

J1 visa Program changes? Workforce Housing & Staff:

Workforce continues to decrease in the Gardiner area the lack of affordable, residential, and year-round housing continues to be the biggest threat to hiring and retaining employees. In the winter and shoulder seasons, the lack of year-round staffing and a much lower visitation rate make it difficult for businesses to remain open resulting in a shortage of accessible visitor amenities. Our staff consistently receives feedback from visitors that are disappointed and frustrated that a variety of businesses are not open in both the winter and shoulder seasons that they would like to support. Showcasing that undoubtedly, the lack of a strong workforce has directly impacted the visitor experience.

North Entrance Road Alignment & Climate Change:

As stated in the FY24 & FY25 plan, in 2022 as Gardiner businesses prepared for what reservations were forecasting to be the busiest season to date. All businesses were forced to pivot their businesses practices. Businesses built more or created employee housing, gave significant raises to those currently employed, and increased starting pay to maintain, attract, and expand their workforce; some leased sections of their land to food vendors; others expanded their activity and retail offerings – this was all done in effort to meet not only the needs of the record breaking increased visitation of 2021 but improve the overall visitor experience. Then on June 13, 2022 our small community's economy came to a virtual standstill when unprecedented flood levels of the Yellowstone River and its tributaries damaged homes, bridges, highways

in Yellowstone and along US HWY 89, and more. It's damage was so severe that access into Yellowstone via the North Entrance Road from Gardiner was cut off from June 13 until the eventual reopening of a newly constructed road that reopened on October 30, 2022. Reconnecting Gardiner back to Yellowstone National Park for unlimited visitor access was crucial for our gateway community and we are incredibly grateful for the reconnection, but the flood and it's ensuing damage brought countless challenges that continued into 2023. With the final alignment of the North Entrance having yet to be announced the businesses in our small community hope that whatever alignment is to be chosen does not limited visitor use of the North Entrance Road during construction. We foresee that if an alignment is chosen in which 30 - 60 minute construction delays are proposed our towns economic viability during new construction would once again come into question as visitors would avoid our entrance all together. Finally, it is important to note the role climate change plays in our challenges. Not only do YNP officials sight climate change as a cause of the 2022 flood but climate change leads to other YOY challenges, such as lack of snow, which not only could cause winter travelers to postpone or cancel their trip but also impacts water levels and recreation in the peak summer season. Additionally, a low snow year could lead to a higher likelihood of wildfires in which guests could also postpone or cancel their peak season travel.

Wildlife Controversies

As in prior years public/private wildlife controversies are an added challenge for Gardiner and the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem as a whole. While wildlife issues are not a new challenge and they can cast a harmful shadow to the area's tourism economy when they arise. For example, when a change in Montana Legislation (February 2022) allowed an unlimited wolf hunting and trapping quota, nearly all of Yellowstone's Phantom Lake Pack was killed. This led to national coverage of the area that for the most part was in an unfavorable light. Additionally, the harsh winter of 2022 - 2023 led Yellowstone Bison (which have historically roamed outside of the park's Northern boundary into Gardiner and beyond) to travel out in record breaking numbers. With more Bison outside of the park this led to a higher culling of the animal and more exposure than ever on the controversial hunt and park sending them to slaughter casting yet another harsh spotlight on our area.

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2. Briefly describe how your destination aligns with the Montana brand or describe the Brand strategy for your DMO.:

Gardiner aligns perfectly with the state's brand pillars. Located at the heart of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, Gardiner is surrounded by unspoiled nature with beautiful vistas and landscapes that are home to some of the most abundant and diverse wildlife in North America. Gardiner prides itself as the historic gateway to Yellowstone's natural wonders. Our messaging focuses on the area's abundant wildlife, destination management and education, authentic and local hospitality, and year-round recreational activities as the only year-round entrance to Yellowstone National Park.

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Destination Marketing: ☒

Destination Management: ☒

Destination Stewardship: ☐

Destination Development: ☒

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

The target market for both increasing visitation and managing our destination remains the geo-traveler (defined below). Efforts will target promoting the outdoors to the authentic experience seeker and wildlife enthusiast, incorporating educational messaging toward responsible recreation, managing visitor expectations, and highlighting the resilience and distinctiveness of our community.

Geo-traveler:

The National Geographic Society defines Geotourism as “tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place—its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its residents.”

Specific to our area, the geo-traveler is a visitor who supports local businesses, respects our residents and wildlife, understands the potential challenges of our environment (weather, travel time, etc.), and seeks out experiences unique to the area. They place a high-value on preserving the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE) and assist in its preservation by having a low-impact themselves and educating others on the importance of responsible recreation practices.

Adventurous Couples or Families:

Couples and families, ages 35-54

College-educated

United States: typically from California, Texas, Utah, Washington, Colorado and the Midwestern Region.

Household Income \$80,000 + per year

Interested in traveling to areas rich in outdoor recreational experiences, especially in the winter.

Mature Nature-Based Travelers:

Median Age 60

Interested in visiting Yellowstone National Park and partaking in activities such as scenic driving, day hiking, wildlife watching, and nature photography.

United States: from Washington, California, Idaho, Colorado, Illinois, and Utah

Household Income \$75,000 + per year

May travel in groups and/or in couples.

Young/Midlife Success

Couples& Families, Ages 25-54

Household Income of \$75,000 +

Have a secure homebase

Focused on family/relationship, may have children under 18 in the home

Most completed a college degree

Understand evolving technology and use social media and digital platforms as main trip planning resources and inspiration

Interested in "bucket list" destinations, national parks, and outdoor recreation

Drive Markets

Travelers residing in Canada, Montana, Idaho, Washington, Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

3b. What research supports your DMO strategy? :

Attachment: FY25 Visit Gardiner MT_Supporting Research_Internal.pdf; Contains:

- Visit Gardiner MT.com Contact Us form - Canada X 2
- FY25 VisitGardinerMT.com Google Analytics
- FY24 VisitGardinerMT.com Google Analytics
- FY24 VisitGardinerMT.com Google Analytics – Screen Grabs
- FY23 VisitGardinerMT.com Google analytics
- FY22 VisitGardinerMT.com Google analytics
- FY21 VisitGardinerMT.com Google analytics
- FY25 Social Media Meta Analytics Check in
- FY24 Social Media Yealy Report Visit Gardiner MT
- FY23 Social Media Yearly Report Visit Gardiner MT
- FY22 Social Media Yearly Report Visit Gardiner MT
- FY21 Social Media Yearly Report Visit Gardiner MT
- 2024 Yellowstone Country VIC Grant Completion Summary
- 2023 Yellowstone Country VIC Grant Completion Summary
- 2022 Yellowstone Country VIC Grant Completion Summary
- 2021 Yellowstone Country VIC Grant Completion Summary
- 2020 Yellowstone Country VIC Grant Completion Summary
- FY24 Google Cross Network Campaign
- FY22 Google Keywords Camping Online Campaign Results
- FY22 Spring Awareness Google Online Campaign Results
- FY21 Spring Online Campaign Results
- VisitGardinerMT.com Google Ad Campaign Results Overview
- FY23 VisitGardinerMT.com Google Analytics Emerging Markets US Cities
- Gardiner Chamber of Commerce Building w Current Branding

Attachments: FY25 Visit Gardiner MT_Supporting Research_External.pdf; Contains

- Yellowstone National Park Visitation December – March 2024 vs. 2025
- Yellowstone National Park Visitation April – November 2023 vs. 2024
- Yellowstone National Park Visitation December – March 2023 vs. 2024
- Yellowstone National Park Visitation April – November 2022 vs. 2023
- Yellowstone National Park Visitation December – March 2022 vs. 2023
- Yellowstone National Park Visitation April – November 2021 vs. 2022
- Yellowstone National Park Visitation December – March 2021 vs. 2022
- Yellowstone National Park Visitation December – March 2020 vs. 2021
- Yellowstone National Park Visitation April – November 2020 vs. 2021
- Yellowstone National Park Visitation July – November 2019 vs. 2020
- Yellowstone National Park, North Entrance Road February 2024, Project Documents
- National Park Foundation and National Park Service Announce \$40 Million Gift to Meet Urgent Need for Employee Housing at Yellowstone National Park
- The Earned Media Opportunity
- “Montana’s Silent Yellowstone Flood: When Tourist Leave” – The Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis
- “Mass Yellowstone Hunt Kills 1,150 Bison” – The New York Times
- “‘Unprecedented killing’: The Deadliest Season for Yellowstone” – The Washington Post
- “Yellowstone: Wolf hunt altered behavior, damaged research” – Wyoming File

Supporting Research: General

[The Montana Travel Industry – 2023 Summary](#)

[2023 Estimates – Nonresident Visitation, Expenditures, and Economic Contribution](#)

[Gardiner Rodeo 2023, Gardiner MT](#)

[Montana Residents: Attitudes Towards Tourism 2021](#)

[Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development – Tourism Spending](#)

[The Impact of DMO Visitor Guide](#)

[Yellowstone National Park Visitor Study Report](#)

[Gardiner, Montana: Resident Perceptions Before and After Development](#)

Supporting Research: Challenges

Page 1 and 2 from FY26 Visit Gardiner MT_Supporting Research_Internal VisitGardinerMT.com
Received Contact Us forms from Canadians

[National Park Foundation and National Park Service Announce \\$40 Million Gift to Meet Urgent Need for Employee Housing at Yellowstone National Park](#) (in Attachment: FY26 Visit Gardiner MT_Supporting Research_External)

[Yellowstone National Park, North Entrance Road February 2024, Project Documents](#) (in Attachment: FY26 Visit Gardiner MT_Supporting Research_External)

[“Montana’s Silent Yellowstone Flood: When Tourist Leave” – The Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis](#) (in Attachment: FY26 Visit Gardiner MT_Supporting Research_External)

[“Mass Yellowstone Hunt Kills 1,150 Bison” – The New York Times](#) (in Attachment: FY25 Visit Gardiner MT_Supporting Research_External)

[“‘Unprecedented killing’: The Deadliest Season for Yellowstone” – The Washington Post](#) (in Attachment: FY26 Visit Gardiner MT_Supporting Research_External)

[“Yellowstone: Wolf hunt altered behavior, damaged research” – Wyoming File](#) (in Attachment: FY26 Visit Gardiner MT_Supporting Research_External)

Supporting Research: Social Media

[How DMO Social Media Drives Travel Decisions](#)

[Social Media and Its Impact on Travelers to Montana](#)

[Global social media statistics research summary 2022](#)

[Global social media stats](#)

Supporting Research: Website Development

[The Impact of DMO Websites](#)

3c. What are your emerging markets?:

Domestic Visitors interested in Yellowstone National Park

Domestic visitors particularly from Denver, Seattle, Englewood area, Chicago, and Phoenix.

VisitGardinerMT.com Google analytics data from FY25 supports this information; it shows that users from these domestic locations were significant users of the site – Denver 8,871; Seattle 4,227; Englewood 3,679; Chicago 3,581, and Phoenix 3,384.

International Visitors interested in Yellowstone National Park

International visitors, particularly from Canada, Germany, the UK, and Australia.

VisitGardinerMT.com Google analytics data from FY25 supports this information; it shows most international website users were from the aforementioned countries – Canada with 4,238 users, Germany with 629 users, the UK with 1,110 users, and Australia with 526 users.

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

GOAL #1 – When referencing Gardiner lodging tax collections based on 2024 increase Q1 of 2026 by 3% to approx. \$57,000 and increase Q4 of 2025 by 5% to approx. \$72,000. Additionally, increase Yellowstone National Park North Entrance gate counts in January and February of 2026 by 1.5% based on 2025 numbers or respectively January 2026 to 25,465 and February 2026 to 30,062. Further increase October and December 2025 by 1.5% or respectively October 2025 to 89,714 and December 2025 to 21,986.

Goal #1 Tactics/Projects We will achieve this by heavily utilizing partnerships and joint venture opportunities with Yellowstone Country and Brand MT, executing targeted online digital advertising campaigns that drive potential visitors to VisitGardinerMT.com, highlighting events and/or activities unique to the area in the respective winter/spring seasons on VisitGardinerMT social media platforms (for example the Gardiner Holiday Stroll or the Yellowstone Summit), building relationships with interested parties through targeted email marketing with leads received from National Park Trips Media Planner, print ads in publications that are distributed both nationally and within regional drive markets that include a digital component, and shipping Gardiner Visitor Guides to interested visitors.

GOAL #2 – Begin strategic/goal development plan for the Gardiner DMO

In FY19 the GDMO had projected collections of \$45,155, for FY26 the GDMO has projected collections of \$103,605. With projected collections increasing by close to 103% in 7 years and experiencing a shift in marketing promotion and travel characteristics felt world wide, the GDMO believes that now is an ideal time to begin (and potentially complete) critical planning and/or strategic/goal development as an organization.

Goal #2 Tactics/Projects

We will achieve by planning a minimum of 3 meetings/retreats with the Board/CVB Committee with

agendas focused on brainstorming new ideas/concepts, goal setting, strategic development, etc. The overall purpose of the meetings is to ensure that we are being effective with our promotion, standing out in the current climate, and that our organization is resilient when considering the amount of challenges our community has endured the past several years. The GDMO will take into consideration whether or not an outside agency or facilitator should be brought in for these meetings as well.

GOAL #3 – Acquire updated high resolution print assets of Gardiner throughout all seasons. Gardiner’s landscape has greatly changed since 2020 with many properties changing ownership, new construction, etc. With some major projects complete and others slated to be completed within FY26 now would be a smart time to begin contracting a photographer to capture updated high resolution images of Gardiner’s landscape, particularly the downtown area.

GOAL #3 Tactics/Projects

Tactics include working with a photographer, area businesses, locals and travelers, to plan photoshoots throughout all seasons. Assets obtained would aim to include Gardiner’s changes while still highlighting our history, wildlife, and small-town warmth that has always attracted travelers.

4b. How will the addition of LFST funds enhance your overall goals?:

By having additional funding the Gardiner DMO will be able to expand both our marketing and management efforts. One example is that, with the projection from LFST alone being \$6,235, this amount covers the entire cost of our annual spend with Yellowstone Journal in which we have a Cooperative Marketing partnership (Yellowstone’s Northern Range with Cooke City MT) as well as a stand alone print ad, digital presence, and we receive travel leads from. This additional funding could enable us to make our ad larger and/or send out more travel planners, enhancing our overall goal to grow winter/shoulder season visitation.

5. Define and describe your overall objectives. Objectives are formed from your goals. They are logical, attainable steps to achieve the goals and are able to be measured.:

Objectives/Metrics/Evaluation:

OBJECTIVES	MEASURABLE METRICS FOR SUCCESS	REPORT THE METRIC ACHIEVED	EVALUATION OF SUCCESSFUL METRICS
When referencing Gardiner lodging tax collections based on 2024 increase Q1 of 2026 by 3% and increase Q4 of 2025 by 5%.	Increase Q1 of 2026 by 3% to approx. \$57,000 and increase Q4 of 2025 by 5% to approx. \$72,000.		
Increase Yellowstone National Park North			

Entrance recreational gate counts in January and February of 2026 by 1.5% based on 2025 numbers. Further, based on 2024 numbers increase October and December 2025 by 1.5%.	Increase Yellowstone National Park North Entrance recreational gate counts by respectively January 2026 to 25,465; February 2026 to 30,062; October 2025 to 89,714; December 2025 to 21,986.		
Begin strategic/goal development plan for the Gardiner DMO	Hold a minimum of 3 meetings/retreats (with or without the help of a facilitator) with the Gardiner Board/CVB Committee having agendas focused on brainstorming new ideas/concepts, goal setting, strategic development, etc. for the GDMO.		
Acquire updated high resolution print assets of Gardiner throughout all seasons that reflect our community's current landscape.	Complete FY26 with at least 200 high-resolution images, respectively 50 updated images for each season, that can be used in multi-media marketing campaigns and on VisitGardinerMT.com via a contracted photographer.		

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Budget Form: DMO Budget Form LST LFUT_Gardiner DMO.1.xlsx

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DMO Budget:
Gardiner DMO

Allowable Method	Budget	% Budgeted	Amend +/-	Updated Budget % Bu
Lodging Facility USE Tax (LFUT) Budget				
Administration	\$20,730.00	18.13%		\$20,730.00
Agency Services	\$5,000.00	4.37%		\$5,000.00

Cooperative Marketing	\$2,500.00	2.19%		\$2,500.00	
Earned Media/Tourism Sales	\$5,000.00	4.37%		\$5,000.00	
Education/Outreach	\$2,000.00	1.75%		\$2,000.00	
Joint Ventures	\$10,000.00	8.75%		\$10,000.00	
Marketing Resources	\$3,000.00	2.62%		\$3,000.00	
Opportunity Marketing	\$846.00	0.74%		\$846.00	
Paid Media	\$35,000.00	30.62%		\$35,000.00	3
Visitor Services	\$20,000.00	17.50%		\$20,000.00	1
Website Development (Online, Website, Mobile)	\$4,000.00	3.50%		\$4,000.00	
		0.00%		\$0.00	
		0.00%		\$0.00	
		0.00%		\$0.00	
		0.00%		\$0.00	
TOTAL LFUT Budget	\$108,076.00	94.55%	\$0.00	\$108,076.00	9

Lodging Facility SALES Tax (LFST) Budget					
Opportunity Marketing	\$235.00	0.21%		\$235.00	
Product Development	\$6,000.00	5.25%		\$6,000.00	
		0.00%		\$0.00	
		0.00%		\$0.00	
		0.00%		\$0.00	
		0.00%		\$0.00	
		0.00%		\$0.00	
		0.00%		\$0.00	
		0.00%		\$0.00	
		0.00%		\$0.00	
TOTAL LFST Budget	\$6,235.00	5.45%	\$0.00	\$6,235.00	

TOTAL LFUT & LFST BUDGET	\$114,311.00	100.00%	\$0.00	\$114,311.00	10
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LFST Revenue Projection	6,235.00
LFUT Revenue Projection	97,415.00
Funds not spent during previous fiscal year	10,661.00
LFST Rollover Funds at Commerce	0.00

LFUT Rollover Funds at Commerce	0.00
Allocated Following Audit	0.00
Budget total	114,311.00

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The Narrative Evaluation report is used to a) provide a written evaluation of the Objectives and Metrics section and b) provide a written summary of how the LFST Funds were spent and the metric(s) achieved.: