

# Application Summary

**Application:** FY26 DMO Plan - Destination Yellowstone (West Yellowstone Chamber of Commerce)

**Applicant:** Destination Yellowstone (West Yellowstone Chamber of Commerce)

**Funding opportunity:** FY26 DMO Plan

## Application Responses

**Organization Name:** Destination Yellowstone (West Yellowstone DMMO)

**First Name:** KATRINA

**Last Name:** WIESE

**Street Address 1:** PO BOX 458

**Street Address 2:**

**City:** WEST YELLOWSTONE

**State:** MT

**Zip:** 59758

**Funding Opportunity:** FY26 DMO Plan

**Amount Requested:** 401831

**TAC Approved Budget:** 401831

## 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:**

Tourism is the vital economic driver for West Yellowstone. More than 4.5 million people visited Yellowstone National Park last year and approximately 75% of those came through the West Entrance (nps.org), making West Yellowstone the most visited gateway town for Yellowstone National Park. This makes West Yellowstone a tourism giant for not only Gallatin County and Yellowstone Country, but for Montana as a whole.

As the closest entrance to Old Faithful and Grand Prismatic in Yellowstone National Park, West Yellowstone has identified itself as the central location, and the closest location, for exploring the Park and surrounding area. Visitors can go from Parked to Park in minutes. Sharing a border with Yellowstone and surrounded on all other sides by the Custer-Gallatin National Forest, the town is the heart of amazing adventure, in all seasons. Clean air and water, abundant wildlife, scenic beauty, geothermal wonders, abounding outdoor recreational opportunities, and historical reference have made West Yellowstone a national and international destination of small-town charm and welcoming hospitality.

**DESTINATION YELLOWSTONE** is the brand that encompasses the West Yellowstone Convention and Visitors Bureau, West Yellowstone Chamber of Commerce and the West Yellowstone Visitor Information Center. All organizations are managed by the West Yellowstone Chamber of Commerce. As a destination marketing and management organization (DMMO), Destination Yellowstone focuses on responsible marketing to promote the destination and its offerings, help grow existing events, and to protect the area's natural resources.

**ABOUT WEST YELLOWSTONE:** West Yellowstone, population 1,200 is a small town on the West Entrance to Yellowstone National Park. While we have only 1,200 year-round residents, during our peak season, May – October, we serve approximately 12,000 per night in the nearly 3,000 hotel/motel rooms within our town limits.

West Yellowstone offers visitors an amenities-rich, safe platform for breathtaking experiences. Visitors can fish blue ribbon trout streams, hike in pristine wilderness, experience real western horseback riding, go whitewater rafting or mountain bike on hundreds of miles of single track and forest service roads. In the winter months there are over 50km of groomed ski trails for Nordic skiing and over 400 miles of groomed snowmobile trails for recreation, including snowshoeing and sled dog rides and races. There is also the opportunity to ice fish on a frozen Hebgen Lake.

Those looking for fun, family-friendly activities can visit the Yellowstone Giant Screen Theater, presenting a six-story high screen with stereo surround sound or the Grizzly & Wolf Discovery Center, open 365 days a year, offering an educational experience and viewing area for visitors to watch live grizzly bears, wolves, raptors and a world-renowned riparian exhibit with river otters and other native wetland species in their own natural habitat. We like to say, this is the only place we can guarantee that you will see a live grizzly! Seasonal events like the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, Music in the Park concerts, the Annual Rod Run, Nordic Ski Races, Dog Sled Races, Kids'N'Snow and an Ice Fishing Tournament enhance visitors' experiences.

The Museum of the Yellowstone, located in the original Union Pacific Depot, features the history of visitation and transportation to our nation's first national park. The Museum is open daily from the middle of May through the middle of October. Visitors can also experience early West Yellowstone through the free, self-guided historic walking tour – just follow the green bear tracks through Town! Behind the Depot is the trailhead to the newly finished Yellowstone Shortline Trail and boasts a historic railcar, which has become the perfect picture taking stop in downtown West Yellowstone. Nearby other historic attractions include the 1959 Madison River Canyon Earthquake Area & Visitor Center, Nevada and Virginia Cities, and the Nez Perce Trail.

Having the west entrance to Yellowstone National Park mere blocks from downtown funnels over two million visitors annually through West Yellowstone. We continue to develop ways to entice these travelers to stop and enjoy the amenities our town has to offer, before moving on to other locations. One way we secure visitor experience and entice those visitors to enjoy all that West Yellowstone has to offer is through our Visitor Information Center, where visitors can speak directly with local residents, pick up printed planners, plan their trip and experience the genuine hospitality our Town offers. Our VIC plays host to over 250,000+ visitors annually – making it the busiest VIC in the state!

West Yellowstone also enjoys having a local airport just miles outside of the footprint of town, Yellowstone Airport, open seasonally, May – October. Delta Airlines, service to Salt Lake City, begins in May and United Airlines, service to Denver, begins in June with 2 flights per day. Yellowstone Airport currently went under construction and now has a new terminal, with its Grand Opening taking place this summer. Having this airport operational during our busiest travel months of the year allows our visitors to arrive in town and be on the river fishing, hiking a trail or viewing Old Faithful within an hour of landing. And, I must say, it is of the utmost convenience for residents or seasonal laborers coming in to work in our Town!

## **1b. Strengths:**

- West Entrance to Yellowstone National Park - we are seen by some visitors as synonymous with Yellowstone Park and can effectively market ourselves as —**Yellowstone Plus!**
- Close proximity to Teton National Park and situated on the primary corridor between Glacier National Park and Grand Teton/Yellowstone National Park
- Access to outstanding natural assets such as mountains, lakes, rivers and trails, all which provide amazing outdoor recreation opportunities
- A nationally recognized, well-developed groomed system of winter snowmobile and Nordic ski trails, many of which have both Regional and International recognition
- Ideal family vacation spot - fun, educational, clean, safe with a variety of activities
- West Yellowstone seasonal airport - served by two regional carriers, Delta & United, offering daily jet service mid-May through mid-October
- Proximity to Bozeman Yellowstone International Airport with year-round service
- Home of the Museum of the Yellowstone
- A host of year-round and annual events
- Central location to area downhill ski resorts – sandwiched nicely between Big Sky Resort and Jackson
- Additional community marketing resources and partnerships. Town of West Yellowstone Marketing & Promotions, West Yellowstone Tourism Business Improvement District, West Yellowstone Foundation, etc. Tourism partners – local DMOs, Montana regions and chambers

## **1c. Opportunities:**

- Use our proximity to the park, as *“The Quickest Route to the Geysers”* as well as using our local airport to push *“Fly-in and be at Old Faithful by lunchtime”* Or *“Go from Parked to Park in minutes”*.
- Increased plane capacity for Yellowstone Airport means the ability to bring in more visitors
- Amazing outdoor recreation opportunities and events during our shoulder seasons that we can promote to increase visitation during those times when our visitation decreases.
- New residents to the state and region, plus those from urban areas have continued to expand our niche activity-based outdoor enthusiast markets.

## **1d. Potential Challenges:**

- Perception that West Yellowstone is only a gateway into the Park and not a destination
- Perceived distance and lack of easy access from major population centers
- National and world event impacts on tourism (ex: high inflation, transportation/fuel costs, terrorism, infectious diseases, natural disasters and geopolitical tension)
- Negative press (ex: wildlife, climate, natural events and Park access)
- Perceived limited or lack of restaurants, nightly entertainment & family friendly activities/events
- Visitors and traffic flow management during peak warm season
- Campgrounds, trails, and public lands access in the national forests

- Legislation and public policy decisions (budget cuts, work visas)
- Effective means of communicating with visitors passing through
- Fluctuating lodging prices
- Fewer RV space and services
- Non-resident ownership and partnerships, resulting in limited community involvement
- Public transportation regionally and through Yellowstone National Park
- Market competition in neighboring communities and states

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

### **SPECTACULAR UNSPOILED NATURE, VIBRANT & CHARMING SMALL TOWNS AND BREATHTAKING EXPERIENCES**

With Yellowstone Park in our "backyard" and our "front yard" composed of three national forests, *we can offer* more spectacular unspoiled nature than anywhere else in the lower 48. As the west entrance to Yellowstone National Park and geographically located adjacent to the National Forests, just two miles from Wyoming and 12 miles from Idaho, we are uniquely positioned to be a vibrant and charming small town that serves as a gateway to natural wonders.

Our messaging is simple: honest and genuine, focusing on adventure and activity-based niches, unique experiences and access to unspoiled nature with modern comforts. We feature direct access to the First National Park and events and activities specific to the different seasons to offer breathtaking experiences by day and relaxing hospitality at night.

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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):**

By utilizing Destination Marketing, Destination Management & Destination Development we focus on responsible marketing to promote the destination and its offerings, help grow existing events, and to protect the area's natural resources.

**Destination Marketing:** is a form of advertising designed to attract customers to a particular place. Instead of focusing on a distinct product or service, it centers around the unique atmosphere and experiences a specific location provides visitors. We use Destination Marketing to:

- Attract visitors by communicating an image consistent with our long-term vision as a vacation destination and one

that places high value on existing assets, amenities, and natural resources of the region.

- Continue to expand our marketing effectiveness by joining our efforts with those of marketing partners.
- Continue to target our market as accurately as possible to assure funding is used to reach an audience that asks for information, travels to West Yellowstone, and spends significant dollars.

**Destination Management:** refers to managing different elements found in one destination. On the most basic level, these elements include physical locations, people, products, and services and then ensure sustainability and consistency in the travel experience. We use Destination Management to:

- Promote responsible travel and recreation messaging to both visitors and residents.

**Destination Development:** is the strategic planning and advancement of defined areas to support the evolution of desirable destinations for travelers, with a sole focus on the supply side of tourism, by providing compelling experiences, quality infrastructure, and remarkable services to entice repeat visitation. We use Destination Development to:

- Improve the visitor experience by providing exceptional visitor interface with the staff of local businesses and the visitor information center, provide accurate and consistent information through our website, printed materials and brochures and maintain and improve the Visitor Information Center.

### **3a. Define your target markets (demographic, geographic and psychographic).**

Our ultimate target market is high-value, low-impact travelers who seek genuine experiences in a location, where they can reconnect with each other and enjoy outdoor recreation and overall value our natural resources.

Our main target audience is Families. Our target markets are Family Travelers, Weekend Getaway Travelers and Winter Enthusiasts, while also incorporating niche messaging into our shoulder season campaigns. Continued potential markets include On the Go Families, Exploring for Adventure, and Our Time for Travel (55+). Our demographics are relatively split between male and female, skewing slightly depending on the season, average ages 35-64.

Our geographic markets include both fly and drive:

- **FLY MARKET:** We plan to continue marketing to San Francisco, San Diego and Los Angeles as well as SLC, Atlanta, Nashville, Denver and Phoenix
- **REGIONAL DRIVE MARKET:** MT, ID, WY, MN, UT, WI & ND

Continued new residents to the state and region, plus those from urban areas have expanded our niche activity-based outdoor enthusiast markets.

### **3b. What research supports your DMO strategy? :**

Forecasts are showing a softer, declining travel season in Montana for 2025/2026. **Tourism Economics** show that 80% of US consumers say their travel behavior will change in the next six to 12 months as a result of the recent financial news. One-third (33%) of this group said they will travel closer to home, 24% will change to a less expensive mode of

transportation, and 22% anticipate adjusting their length of stay. Although travel outcome for later 2025 into 2026 are unclear, we can assume travelers may be holding in a wait-and-see mode and bookings will be delayed and with much shorter travel windows that we have historically seen. While this will ultimately impact our international travel, we have the hope that we will see domestic travel take place, much as we saw happen post-covid. We will strategize our campaigns around the changing travel environments. If covid taught us anything it is how to pivot, and it looks like the experiences we gained back then will help us again in the near future.

The Destination Yellowstone DMMO utilizes many different research resources when planning and executing our Marketing Plan. We track and measure our campaigns and work in partnership with Amplified, Wendt and Bowstern to monitor data. The different resources listed below help us to gauge campaign engagement and statistics, verify our demographics, geographic and psychographic markets and gain insights on new industry trends.

- **Destination Yellowstone.com Website** – Analytics measure users (current and new), session times, campaign stats, email leads and travel planner downloads as well as site health
- **Local Resort Tax Collection Reports**
- **Yellowstone National Park Service Visitation Statistics**
- **Yellowstone Airport & Bozeman Yellowstone International Airport Monthly Visitor Data**
- **Google Analytics**
- **Zartico** – Provides spending, traffic and travel origination & patterns of visitors
- **Placer.ai** – Provides real time geofencing for data capture
- **ITRR - Institute of Tourism & Recreation Research**
- **Brand MT**
- **Destination Analysts** – State of the American Traveler Yearly & Monthly Reports provide travel insights, outlook and industry updates
- **Destination Think**
- **US Department of Commerce, Office of Travel & Tourism Industries**
- **US Travel Association**
- **TTRA - Travel & Tourism Research Association**

### **3c. What are your emerging markets?:**

**EMERGING TRENDS:** We are seeing trends that travelers are seeking deeper, more meaningful experiences while also looking for adventure activities and natural beauty (Advanced Media).

- Skip-gen Travel – Grandparents taking grandchildren without the children
  - Plan-free Travel – Yes to spontaneity instead of planning every aspect of the trip
  - Group Travel – Post-pandemic desire to gather friends and family and share an experience
  - Empty Nesters and All Female Groups are a continued growing force
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**4a. Describe proposed tactics and projects as related to overall goals and controlled by the organization in its financial statements.:**

Destination Yellowstone's overarching goal is to attract visitors by communicating an image consistent with our long-term vision as a vacation destination and one that places high value on existing assets, amenities and natural resources of the region.

Destination Yellowstone's FY26 priorities:

- Grow our current market share and work to educate our proximity to YNP – helping to eliminate the passthrough visitor, thus increasing occupancy.
- Bolster our shoulder season occupancy – promotion of events and must-see attractions and activities
- The Visitor Experience: prioritize customer satisfaction through exceptional customer service – which will give us a competitive advantage.

Tactics include:

**MEDIA:**

- Use a multi-channel media strategy to support drive and fly markets
- Create niche marketing campaigns for shoulder season regional-drive staycations and winter activities and events
- Promote current flight markets through digital marketing
- Optimize digital media toward conversion actions and monitor for CPC (cost per click) and CTR (click-through rate)
- Continue to participate in joint ventures, leveraging our funds

**SOCIAL & WEBSITE:**

- Increase video content on all social channels and campaign driven website landing pages
- Create quarterly social content calendars – streamlining social content development between Marketing Personnel and Agencies
- Utilize consumer-generated photography and video through the platform Crowdriff
- Create media and messaging around traveling respectfully and responsibly

**VISITOR EXPERIENCE:**

- Provide support and funding to our visitor information center both in staffing and projects to improve both the services available and the visitor experience including safety and responsible recreation
- Enhance the visitor experience and educate them on the activities and events taking place within West Yellowstone. Help visitors route in and around West Yellowstone and the surrounding areas of Montana to experience all that our State has to offer.

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

Additional LFST funds will be used in our Paid Media budget.

#### 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
<b>#1 - Destination</b> <b>Marketing:</b> Track the effectiveness of our marketing programs by monitoring and reporting on our paid and earned media, social media, website usage, travel planner distribution.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>3% increase in Lodging Tax Collections over FY25</b></li><li>• <b>Increase website sessions by 8%</b></li><li>• <b>Increase website site health to 80%</b> (Industry standard for tourism websites is 77%)</li><li>• <b>Increase the Domain Authority Score to 42</b> (Currently at 39, Industry standard for tourism websites is between 40-60)</li><li>• <b>Social Media (Facebook and Instagram) growth of 7% each</b></li><li>• <b>Increase Travel Planner digital downloads by 8%</b></li><li>• <b>Increase the conversion rate of downloads by 2%</b></li><li>• <b>Increase email subscribers (leads) by 5%</b></li></ul>		
<b>#2 – Destination</b> <b>Management:</b> Promote responsible travel and recreation messaging to both visitors and residents to travel safe, recreate responsibly, leave no trace, focus on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Build out a marketing campaign with printed and digital assests for <i>Friends of West</i> to incorporate:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ Friends of the Trails (Recreate Responsibly &amp; Trail Safety)</li><li>◦ Friends to Each</li></ul></li></ul>		



wildfire safety, and of course, “Be Patient, Be Kind, Be Cool, Be Responsible”.	<p>Other (“Be Patient, Be Kind, Be Cool, Be Responsible” messaging)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Friends of our Town (Recreate &amp; Travel Responsibly)</li> <li>◦ 4-Legged Friends (Animal Safety)</li> </ul>		
<p><b>#3 – Destination Development:</b> Improve the visitor experience by providing exceptional visitor interface with the staff of local businesses and the visitor information center, provide accurate and consistent information through our website, printed materials and brochures and maintain and improve the visitor information center.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a printed and digital <i><b>Huckleberry Trail of West Yellowstone.</b></i> This will encompass all businesses in West Yellowstone that have anything Huckleberry. We will utilize this to drive traffic into our businesses and provide information on a true Montana experience – the Huckleberry!</li> <li>• Continued support of the Visitor Information Center through staffing and visitor support documents</li> </ul>		

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**Budget Form:** West Yellowstone FY26 budget.xlsx

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**DMO Budget:**

**FY26 Destination Yellowstone - West Yellowstone DMO**

Allowable Method	Budget	% Budgeted	Amend +/-	Updated Budget %
<b>Lodging Facility USE Tax (LFUT) Budget</b>				
<b>Administrative</b> (up to 20% of 95% of estimated collection)	\$80,366.20	18.91%		\$80,366.20
<b>Research</b>	\$500.00	0.12%		\$500.00
<b>Joint Ventures</b>	\$5,000.00	1.18%		\$5,000.00
<b>Opportunity Marketing</b> (up to 10% of 95% of estimated collection)	\$100.00	0.02%		\$100.00

<b>Marketing and Professional Services Position</b>	\$26,000.00	6.12%		\$26,000.00	
<b>Paid Media</b> (multimedia, digital, print, social, enews, OOH, OTT, Broadcast, Photo/Video, Promo)	\$137,364.80	32.32%		\$137,364.80	
<b>Earned Media</b> (FAMs/Media Trips, Crisis Comm.)	\$8,000.00	1.88%		\$8,000.00	
<b>Website Development/Maintenance</b>	\$45,000.00	10.59%		\$45,000.00	
<b>Product Development</b> (wayfinding, kiosks, VIC enhancements)	\$2,500.00	0.59%		\$2,500.00	
<b>Visitor Services</b> (VIC Support, Fulfillment - Planner Dist., Print Materials - Maps, Event Posters)	\$79,000.00	18.59%		\$79,000.00	
<b>Education/Outreach</b> (Frontline Training, Staff Training/Workshops/Conferences/ TAC/Gov Conf)	\$8,000.00	1.88%		\$8,000.00	
<b>Travel/Trade Shows</b> (Consumer Shows, IPW)	\$10,000.00	2.35%		\$10,000.00	
		0.00%		\$0.00	
		0.00%		\$0.00	
		0.00%		\$0.00	
<b>TOTAL LFUT Budget</b>	<b>\$401,831.00</b>	<b>94.55%</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$401,831.00</b>	

<b>Lodging Facility SALES Tax (LFST) Budget</b>					
<b>Administrative</b> (up to 20% of 95% of estimated collection)	\$4,631.40	1.09%		\$4,631.40	
<b>Paid Media</b> (multimedia, digital, print, social, enews, OOH, OTT, Broadcast, Photo/Video, Promo)	\$18,525.60	4.36%		\$18,525.60	
		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	
<b>TOTAL LFST Budget</b>	<b>\$23,157.00</b>	<b>5.45%</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$23,157.00</b>	

<b>TOTAL LFUT &amp; LFST BUDGET</b>	<b>\$424,988.00</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$424,988.00</b>	
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LFST Revenue Projection	23,157.00
LFUT Revenue Projection	361,831.00
Funds not spent during previous fiscal year	40,000.00

LFST Rollover Funds at Commerce	0.00
LFUT Rollover Funds at Commerce	0.00
Allocated Following Audit	0.00
<b>Budget total</b>	<b>424,988.00</b>

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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.:**