



Grant Details

Grant: 24-52-OOT-DMO-001 - FY24 Central Montana DMO Plan - FY24

Status: Underway
Program Area: DOC Office of Tourism
Grantee Organization: Central Montana
Program Officer: Barb Sanem
Awarded Amount: \$576,917.00

Narrative Evaluation

FY24 was another year filled with leadership transitions, having two different Executive Directors lead the efforts of Central Montana between 7-1-2023 to 6-30-2024. This caused delays in projects, shifts in messaging, unclear direction to partners, and missteps in strategies.

FY24 did establish a solid foundation from which Central Montana will be able to grow. An established Strategic Plan and strategies from a regional resiliency plan will help Central Montana devise strategic annual plans with realistic metrics. With consistent, seasoned leadership at the helm of the organization, through the process of securing a management partner that started 10-1-2024, it is anticipated that the organization will produce better results for its efforts moving forward. The organization has lacked the necessary talent to connect the pieces of strategy to all efforts being deployed.

FY24's paid media was 40% less than FY23. There was no leveraged spending on developed partnerships, like Trail to the Stars or Montana Dinosaur Trail. These could be contributing factors to the declines in website traffic, along with the GA4 analytics transition. The continual investment and marketing strategies for regional joint ventures is a topic of discussion and will lead to strategies in FY26 to sustain these projects after the initial grant funding to establish them is complete. Currently, Central Montana Tourism is part of four joint ventures, initially started with grant funding and not funded consistently or strategically in subsequent years.



Grant Details

Grant: 24-52-OOT-DMO-002 - FY 24 Glacier Country DMO Plan - FY24

Status:	Underway
Program Area:	DOC Office of Tourism
Grantee Organization:	Glacier Country Regional Tourism Commission
Program Officer:	Barb Sanem
Awarded Amount:	\$4,846,000.00

Narrative Evaluation

Western Montana's Glacier Country: FY 2024 End-of-Year Report

Introduction

In FY 2024, Western Montana's Glacier Country made progress in balancing tourism growth with community well-being, environmental stewardship and responsible visitor engagement. This year, we leveraged comprehensive marketing strategies, implemented proactive management initiatives and executed stewardship programs to address challenges and promote sustainable tourism across Western Montana.

The rebranding of Western Montana's Glacier Country marked a pivotal moment, aligning our mission, vision and strategies with the evolving needs of our communities and audiences.

This report provides an in-depth analysis of our work under the four roles—destination marketing, destination management, destination stewardship and destination development—and offers detailed evaluations of outcomes, challenges and opportunities moving forward.

Rebrand: A Foundation for Sustainable Tourism

In FY 2024, Western Montana's Glacier Country underwent a transformative rebranding process. This effort was more than a redesign of our name and logo—it represented a strategic alignment with our role as a **destination stewardship organization**, emphasizing responsible tourism practices and stronger connections between residents, businesses and visitors.

Key Highlights of the Rebrand

- Mission Alignment:** The rebrand reinforced our commitment to sustainability, showcasing Glacier Country as a destination that values environmental preservation, cultural respect and community well-being.
- Visual Identity:** A bold logo, natural color palette and authentic imagery reflected the beauty and diversity of Western Montana while promoting responsible recreation.
- Voice and Tone:** Informative, trustworthy and welcoming messaging resonated with our audiences, including visitors, residents and partners.
- Strategic Pillars:** The rebrand incorporated four pillars—enhancing community, fostering inclusivity, sustaining nature and championing stewardship—that guided our programs and campaigns.

The focus of the rebrand on stewardship and collaboration has been integrated into all facets of our operations, from campaign messaging to community engagement.

1. Destination Marketing

Connecting potential visitors to Glacier Country through strategic campaigns, creative messaging and targeted promotions.

Western Montana's Glacier Country's destination marketing initiatives are designed to inspire visitation while emphasizing responsible recreation and respect for local communities. Campaigns are tailored to highlight seasonal opportunities, specific visitor segments and the unique cultural and natural experiences Western Montana offers. Our efforts aim to build an emotional connection with visitors and provide the tools they need to plan their trips with ease.

Key Activities and Performance Metrics

- Consumer Campaigns:**
 - Winter Wisely Campaign:** Encouraged responsible recreation, safe winter activities and kindness toward local communities.
 - In-State Campaign:** Promoted Montana residents' economic contributions while inspiring them to explore their state.

- **Seasonal and Specialized Campaigns:** Targeted meeting planners, wedding planners and shoulder-season visitors to distribute tourism more evenly throughout the year.
2. **Performance Metrics:**
 - **Social Media Growth:** Achieved a 2.9% increase in social media audience, building awareness and engagement.
 - **Blog Readership:** Surged by 84%, showcasing the relevance of storytelling content in educating and inspiring visitors.
 - **Digital Travel Guide Readership:** Declined by 6%, reflecting temporary disruptions from the website transition.
 - **Website Traffic:** Dropped 29.6% due to the new webpage launch and GA4, though 8.6% of website visitors later traveled to Glacier Country, underscoring its role in trip planning.
 3. **Tourism Sales:**
 - Hosted familiarization tours and maintained strong trade show attendance, resulting in a 7% increase in B2B leads.
 4. **Earned Media:**
 - Collaborated with travel writers and influencers to secure \$8.77 million in earned media value (+65%).

Evaluation

1. **Consumer Campaigns:** Tailored messaging successfully balanced visitation trends and encouraged responsible behavior. To further optimize campaign effectiveness, continued segmentation of audiences is recommended.
2. **Tourism Sales:** B2B lead growth reflects the strength of partnerships. Expanding these efforts to meetings, group tour and international markets will enhance future outcomes.
3. **Earned Media:** Growth in earned media value underscores the impact of partnerships and storytelling. Future goals include diversifying content platforms.
4. **Website Metrics:** While web traffic temporarily declined, new site features are expected to improve performance.

2. Destination Management

Guiding tourism to minimize impacts on local communities, natural resources and infrastructure.

Western Montana's Glacier Country's destination management strategies ensure that tourism is a positive force in Western Montana, addressing challenges like overcrowding, environmental impact and crisis preparedness. Through collaboration with partners, we implement initiatives to educate visitors, engage stakeholders and align tourism activities with the region's capacity.

Key Activities and Performance Metrics

1. **Crisis Communications:**
 - Expanded messaging for the "Recreate Responsibly" initiative.
 - Messaging included kiosk signage, PSAs and business toolkits to address fire safety, Leave No Trace principles and trip preparedness.
2. **Community Engagement:**
 - Conducted eight town halls to gather input on tourism's impact and align strategies with community needs.
3. **Visitor Behavior Metrics:**
 - Improvements noted in fire safety awareness (+9%) and pre-trip planning (+15%) based on resident feedback.

Evaluation

1. **Crisis Communications:** Messaging reduces the negative effects of visitor misbehavior.
2. **Community Engagement:** Town halls provided valuable feedback, though summer overcrowding remains challenging. Continued community dialogue is essential.
3. **Visitor Behavior:** Efforts successfully raised awareness, but persistent issues like waste management require targeted strategies.

3. Destination Stewardship

Promoting sustainable tourism practices that preserve the region's natural beauty, cultural heritage and community character.

Western Montana's Glacier Country's stewardship efforts focus on aligning tourism growth with the long-term well-being of local communities and the environment. Our initiative aims to build stronger stakeholder partnerships, encourage responsible recreation and ensure that tourism benefits both residents and visitors.

Key Activities and Performance Metrics

1. **Strategic Framework:**
 - Implemented initiatives under five pillars, including rural community enhancement, visitor dispersion and stakeholder collaboration.
2. **Resident Sentiment Metrics:**
 - Positive perceptions of tourism's benefits increased by 8%.
 - Concerns about crowding remained significant, with 68% of residents citing summer tourism as a strain.
3. **Short-Term Rentals:**
 - Nights available increased by 15%, with notable growth in Mineral (+26%) and Sanders (+31%) counties – regionally, the average daily rate was \$259 (up 3%) and occupancy was 24.6% (down 4%).

Evaluation

1. **Strategic Framework:** Enhanced collaboration and progress on stewardship goals. Expanding engagement with underserved areas will improve outcomes.

2. **Resident Sentiment:** While positive trends are evident, addressing concerns about crowding is crucial for long-term support.
 3. **Short-Term Rentals:** Tracking provided insights into market trends, but solutions to mitigate affordability are challenging.
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4. Destination Development

Investing in tourism infrastructure, resources and programs that enhance visitor experiences and community vitality.

Destination development focuses on building a vibrant, resilient tourism ecosystem that benefits local economies and ensures high-quality visitor experiences. Western Montana's Glacier Country is critical in shaping the region's future by improving infrastructure, funding local projects and addressing community challenges.

Key Activities and Performance Metrics

1. **Infrastructure and Grants:**
 - o Funded nine visitor centers.
 - o Awarded cooperative marketing grants to projects like Cut Bank brand development.
2. **Visitor Spending and Density Metrics:**
 - o Visitor spending declined 13%, averaging \$329 per trip; 64.2% of visitors are nonresident.
 - o While regional visitor density remained level, Glacier County had the highest visitor-to-resident ratio (1.08), indicating significant pressure on infrastructure – this is likely due to no vehicle reservation needed for the east entrance of the Going-to-the-Sun Road in Glacier National Park.

Evaluation

1. **Infrastructure and Grants:** Investments support community infrastructure but should put more emphasis on future planning.
 2. **Visitor Spending and Density:** Efforts should focus on enhancing visitor value propositions and dispersing visitors geographically and seasonally to reduce strain on infrastructure.
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Conclusion and Recommendations

Successes

- Campaigns like "Recreate Responsibly" promoted responsible tourism and improved visitor behaviors.
- Resident sentiment showed positive trends and infrastructure investments supported local communities.

Challenges

- Persistent concerns about overcrowding and affordability require strategic attention.
- Visitor spending declines indicate a need to enhance the region's value propositions.

Recommendations

1. **Optimize Campaigns:** Build on the momentum to promote off-peak travel and visitor dispersion.
2. **Enhance Visitor Value:** Develop premium experiences to increase spending while sustaining community benefits.
3. **Strengthen Data Collection:** Re-evaluate using existing housing metrics for housing, income and visitor metrics for actionable insights; most recent credible data is two years behind.
4. **Expand Stewardship Education:** Continue integrating stewardship principles into all programs.

Western Montana's Glacier Country remains a responsible tourism and community stewardship leader by aligning our initiatives with the brand's pillars and addressing key challenges.

CONCLUSION

FY 2024 highlighted Western Montana's Glacier Country's commitment to balancing tourism growth with community and environmental well-being. While some challenges, like the new webpage launch, GA4, impacted metrics, successes in responsible recreation messaging, resident engagement and economic impact metrics underscore the effectiveness of our strategies. Western Montana's Glacier Country will continue to innovate and adapt, fostering sustainable tourism practices that benefit visitors and residents.



Grant Details

Grant: 24-52-OOT-DMO-003 - FY24 Missouri River Country DMO Plan - FY24

Status:	Underway
Program Area:	DOC Office of Tourism
Grantee Organization:	Montana's Missouri River Country
Program Officer:	Barb Sanem
Awarded Amount:	\$332,859.00

Narrative Evaluation

FY24 Narrative Evaluation

Bed Tax Collections

Bed tax collections showed significant growth, increasing by **5% from FY23 to FY24**, indicating strong tourism activity and effective promotional efforts. We conservatively predicted to increase by 2%.

Photo/Video Library

We enhanced our visual assets with **seven new landscape photos** from Rick and Susie Graetz and an **ice fishing photo** by Jason Mitchell, enriching our media library for promotional use. We also obtained photos from our Great Wide Open partnership. We consider this a successful project knowing the need to continue to increase our photo library.

Radio Advertising

Our radio campaigns proved successful and we will continue to do radio advertising.

- Advertisements on the **MT Outdoor Radio Show with Mark Ward** aired across **26 stations in 75 cities**, showcasing Missouri River Country and encouraging overnight stays in our region.
- A promotional sponsorship with **Northwestern Outdoors Radio** spanned **20 weeks**, featuring interviews with MRC residents, outfitters, guides, museum operators, and motel owners. These interviews, combined with MRC ads, were also included in **America Outdoors Radio, Northwestern Outdoor Radio, and KJR 93.3 FM**. This campaign reached audiences in **33 states**, targeting major markets and podcast listeners.

Trade Shows

While weather conditions prevented participation in planned trade shows, including one in **Regina, Saskatchewan**, we prioritized safety over attendance this year, but we realize the success we had in the past when we were able to do shows so we will continue to budget for Trade Shows in the future.

Digital and Print Advertising

- **Digital Advertising:** Generated **7.2 million impressions, 63,911 clicks**, achieving a **0.89% CTR**, a **\$5.64 CPM**, and an impressive **\$0.64 CPC**.
- **Print Advertising:** Reached **210,000 circulation** at a **\$6.60 CPM reach** and **\$17.77 CPM circulation**.

With our limited Media Plan budget we find this successful and the need to continue to do a Media Plan with the help of our Agency of Record.

Travel Guide

We produced a **beautiful 72-page travel guide**, printing **30,000 copies**. The guide features stunning imagery and comprehensive information about MRC, enhancing its appeal to visitors. We collected 14,899 leads and travel planners were sent to them all. We invite you to take a look for yourself. <https://missouririvermt.com/interactive-travel-guide> We see success in our travel guide and will continue design and print as needed. We have had many compliments on them.

Joint Ventures

Collaborations with **Destination MT** and other partners were successful, including efforts with **Lewis and Clark, Pinterest, Teads, Jun Group, and Sojern**. These ventures stretched our reach and strengthened our marketing strategy. We will continue to do joint ventures realizing that our marketing dollars go further when partnering with Destination MT and other tourism partners.

4,241,156 impressions, 24,867 clicks, .59% CTR, \$3.47 CPM and \$.59 CPC

Social Media

Our social media presence saw substantial growth:

- **123.6% increase in impressions**
- **56.3% increase in engagements**
- **18.3% increase in post link clicks**

- **Top-performing Facebook posts** showcased the history and character of the region, resonating with audiences.
- Gained **667 new followers** across Facebook and Instagram. Consistent postings about Missouri River Country contributed to these positive and successful results and we will continue to budget funds for Social Media and continue to have the Marketing Personnel person post two times a week with our Agency of Record filling in the other days. Time doesn't allow for the Marketing Person to take on the full duties of Social Media.

Website

The website achieved remarkable success, far surpassing its goal of a **3% growth**. We know the need to continue to budget funds to keep our website up to date. We continue to add new content.

- **94% increase in unique visitors**
- **77% increase in page visits**

E-Newsletter

The e-newsletter maintained a solid **31% open rate**, which is consistent and reflects strong engagement with subscribers. While we didn't increase our open rate we still feel a 31% open rate is successful and we will continue to create an e-newsletter once a month and as time allows.

Education and Outreach

Continued support for **Voices of Montana** and active community engagement by the Executive Director helped educate residents on the importance of tourism, fostering regional support. We see the value in education and outreach and the success in the past. We will continue to put this important method in the budget.

Product Development

Innovative tourism products continue to be successful, including:

- **Talking Trail App**
- **Montana Trail to the Stars**
- **The Great Wide Open**
- **Montana Dinosaur Trail**

These initiatives remain critical to enhancing visitor experiences and we plan to continue to promote these new developments.

Beyond the 49th Parallel

This cross-border initiative promotes the concept of a "two-nation vacation," providing itineraries and a dedicated website to encourage visitation on both sides of the border. To date we haven't seen a lot of success, being in the early stages, but we will continue to get this project in the spotlight. www.beyondthe49thparallel.com

Administration and Budget Administrative expenses remain within the **20% allowed budget**, reflecting sound financial management. Having an administrative budget is necessary and proves successful.

Cooperative marketing efforts empowers local communities to promote events and attractions. In FY24 we helped 3 communities to have successful events and signage. We will continue to budget funds to help our communities because when the communities benefits, MRC benefits.

Marketing Personnel

The Executive Director continues to handle additional marketing duties efficiently, ensuring no overlap or overtime is incurred between roles. It's important to have this position and success has been proven in all our marketing efforts. We will continue to have the Executive Director also handle the Marketing Personnel position.

Billboard Advertising

Board members are enthusiastic about continuing **billboard advertising**, which serves as an effective tool in Northeast Montana, where they are impactful and uncluttered, aiding road travelers. The Oswego sign provided 267K impressions over the year. This is a successful number and we will continue to do billboards in the future as our board members think they provide valuable information to the travelers on Hwy 2.

Supporting Local Businesses

MRC prioritizes supporting local businesses, recognizing their role in bolstering community economies and overall regional vitality. Our FY24 DMO Plan has helped our local businesses and we will continue to support them as funding allows.

Summary

In summary, FY24 has been a successful year of progress and innovation. With continued commitment to strategic planning and collaboration, we look forward to building on this momentum to drive further growth and strengthen Missouri River Country's position as a premier tourism destination.



Grant Details

Grant: 24-52-OOT-DMO-005 - FY24 Southwest Montana DMO Plan - FY24

Status: Underway
Program Area: DOC Office of Tourism
Grantee Organization: Southwest Montana
Program Officer: Barb Sanem
Awarded Amount: \$1,301,065.00

Narrative Evaluation

*****SEE ATTACHMENT IN ATTACHMENTS COMPONENT FOR FULL REPORT*****

The visuals didn't show up on the copy here so it was forwarded to Barb Sanem.

Visit Southwest Montana deployed various promotional tactics and campaigns to achieve the goals stated in the Marketing Plan for FY24.

Goal 1: Increase visitors to the region – *Destination Marketing*

The region did not see an increase in bed tax collections over FY23, but bed tax collections for FY24 still exceeded FY22 numbers. Visitation to the region in FY24 was still considered vital.

We used multi-media marketing, including print, online, digital, and printed materials. Please refer to the attachments for placements, costs, statistics, and value-added programs. The programs deployed were successful, as reported in the Webgrants spreadsheet for FY24.

Calgary Outdoor Show was March 16 & 17; over 14K paid people attended this expo showcasing outdoor activities, locations, and equipment. Our booth at this show was larger as we put Butte and Helena on each side of the Visit Southwest Montana booth. The response was very good for our region.

We attended and met with travel writers in Missoula during the **Travel & Words Conference**, November 12-14, 2023. This was an opportunity to meet with 26 writers one-on-one. Part of the conference agenda included a seminar on ways to be a better writer. We are still working on the leads from this conference after following up with emails, letters, and calls. There is still interest.

We participated as a sponsor in the **Old Salt Festival** in Helmville. This year was the event's second year featuring locally sourced food and music. <https://www.oldsaltco-op.com/pages/about>

LIVESTOCK AND LAND STEWARDSHIP

Livestock make it possible to be agriculturally productive while maintaining and improving the fertility of land over time (i.e. capacity for water capture, hosting of robust microbial, vegetative and wildlife communities). Old Salt ranches monitor changes in key ecological indicators, working to discern the degree to which management is responsible and to continuously improve stewardship. The idea is to work with nature rather than fighting it with chemicals.

Ruminants convert grassland forage into nourishing and useful products, mimicking the symbiotic role that native ruminants had with grasslands. Livestock can also make valuable use of grain byproducts (e.g. hulls, screenings, brewers grain, etc) unfit for human consumption while fertilizing soil and terminating crops in place of synthetic fertilizers, herbicides and fungicides that damage land.

Old Salt espouses husbandry that relies on handling skills and techniques to work primarily with an animal's mind rather than relying on force. Injecting growth hormones into animals unnecessarily risks detracting from overall well-being in the same way steroids would in humans. Consistent access to open space and adequate shelter is important for quality of life.

Furthermore, sub-therapeutics (i.e. antibiotics used for disease prevention instead of treatment) are avoided to prevent antibiotic resistance. Skillful balancing of genetics, feeding and management is key for raising livestock that produce exceptional nourishment at a good value.

Ultimately, animal-based agriculture has the power to produce nourishing food while maintaining and improving long term ecological health, leaving space for the wildlife that share the landscape. That's a win-win, that's Old Salt.

'Land is kin': Old Salt Festival celebrates local food and open landscapes

The Teads Agency hosted its **River Summit** in Ennis, Montana, in May. Jocelyn Dodge attended the event on behalf of our region. During this 2 day event, she could meet and converse with the following sponsors, experts, and brands.

River Summit Attendees

OFFICIAL SPONSORS

OnWater
 Mustad
 YETI
 Visit Southwest Montana
 FarWide Outdoors
 Warriors & Quiet Waters

PRODUCT SPONSORS

Coast Products
 Crazy Creek
 Montucky

OTHER

Madison Valley Ranch
 TREAD Agency

Attendee

SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS

Alex Leone

Creigh Greene

Mike Duncan

Chris Eaton

Hilary Hutcheson

Ashley Brubaker

BRANDS

Hannah Kilbrade

Emily Ann Martin

Steve Raymond

Jocelyn Dodge

Alex Maier

Shane Stalling

Brian Gilman

Jesse LeNeve

MEDIA

Hilary Hutcheson

Amanda Caldwell

Rachelle Schrute

Doug Paton

Rihana Cary Stark

Garrett Gvyrigoyen

John Snow

Hannah Truby

STAFF

Dan Kahn

Beth Brennan

Ally Palmer

Sam Overturf - Videographer

Tyler McManus - Chef

Jackon Bland - Photographer

Affiliation

Public Land Water Access
 Assoc.
 Scoute Arms, Repping
 Mustad
 Fishery Manager, Montana
 FWP
 Eaton Outfitters
 Guide, Outfitter, AFFTA, BHA,
 POW
 Trout Unlimited

YETI
 YETI
 FarWide Outdoors
 Visit Southwest Montana
 OnWater
 OnWater
 Warriors & Quiet Waters
 Warriors & Quiet Waters

Flyfisherman Mag
 Content Creator
 Gear Junkie
 Men's Journal, Nat Geo
 Content Creator
 Content Creator
 Outdoor Life
 Mountain Gazette

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Goal 2: Provide information to assist locals, travelers, and aspiring travelers to the region. *Destination Marketing, Destination Development.*

We continued to print our travel guide, birding brochure, tear-off itinerary sheet, and paranormal map for visitors to use during their trip to make navigating the region more accessible. These printed pieces are popular and in demand, especially for the birding and paranormal niche markets. Campgrounds in the region use and continually request the tear-off itinerary sheets.

New to the region in FY24 was the opportunity to fund **Visitor Information Center (VIC) staffing**. Butte, Virginia City, and Anaconda participated in this program. To be eligible for this program, each VIC had to track visitors' location of origination and information given out. Each VIC had to be open at least 6 days a week for 7 hours daily. We reimbursed payroll expenses with approved invoices and payroll reports. Due to future funding, this program will not be continued but was considered a success.

In FY23, the **Call Center** was awarded to the Butte Chamber of Commerce/Visitor Information Center. The call center is responsible for answering 800 numbers and sending information as requested by visitors by phone and email. The Call Center has personnel available Monday through Friday, 9 am to 5 pm; however, in the warm season months, the Call Center phone is answered seven days a week.

Inquiries by Source

Bird Watcher's Digest	40
Box Orders	26
Glacier Country	2318
Misc Sources	4
Southwest Travel Guide	39
Southwest Website	2915
Yellowstone Journal	1580

Inquiries by Interest

Locations	
Anaconda	695
Boulder	
Butte	412
Canyon Ferry	34
Deer Lodge	109
Dillon	155

Ennis	99
Helena	320
Lincoln	
Phillipsburg	85
Virginia City	213
USA	4335
Canada	155
Total all	4490

We continued using **Certified Folder** to distribute our travel guide to 925 sites in Montana, Idaho, Eastern Washington, and Northern Utah.

On June 18, a **Frontline Tour** was organized from Butte to Virginia City. Highlights of the trip included St. Mary of the Assumption in Laurin, Nevada City Music Hall, a Firetruck Tour in VC, time to explore VC and lunches in various restaurants, and a quick stop at Norris Hot Springs. This tour was open to anyone seeking more information on this portion of our region. Another benefit of this excursion was sharing community events, new businesses, and happenings with others on the bus. We had 17 people on the trip. This type of tour will be organized again in FY25.

Goal 3: Offer our rural and regional partners cooperative marketing and connecting/collaboration opportunities. *Destination Marketing, Destination Development.*

Working with our Southwest Montana partners with limited budgets, we further spread their promotion monies with our Cooperative Marketing program. We had three grant cycles in FY24.

Communities and non-profits participating in FY24 were:

- Discover Anaconda - trails and tourism maps, winter boost, brochure & Certified Folder

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/64a2fc51cb10ca11d3d55be9/t/662a6b841dc985096081446f/1714056095813/2024+quickguide>

<https://anacondatrails.com/resources/trail-maps>

- Boulder Area Chamber of Commerce – billboard

Copper Village Museum and Arts Center (Anaconda) - marketing dollars

The project includes advertising the special events on the radio and through an advertisement in an Anaconda Tourist Guide. This advertising will target both Montana residents and tourists. The project also helped build a website for the Copper Village Museum and Arts Center. Main Home - Copper Village Museum and Art Center. Expanded publicity included targeted emails.

- Montana Learning Center (Canyon Ferry) – event sponsorship

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/64a2fc51cb10ca11d3d55be9/t/662a6b841dc985096081446f/1714056095813/2024+quickguide>

- Powell County Museums (Deer Lodge) – brochure and distribution

Total amount awarded in FY24: \$14,614.92.

In the spring of FY24, the region began a hard push to have more **events** placed on our website. This allowed all communities to promote, free of charge, happenings of interest to visitors. Calendar of Events | Southwest Montana Tourism Information

Goal 4: Increase our film, video, and photography inventory. *Destination Marketing, Destination Development.*

In FY23, we contracted with **Crowdriff**; this platform has made it easier to access and source the content needed for social and paid media platforms. With

Photographer Jim Ward was hired to get stills for the region, he gathered quality photos: 93 skiing at Discovery Basin and 163 motorcycle stills. All this content is on Crowdriff

Billboard for Virginia City, located near Ennis MT

Additionally

The **Marketing/Publicity Personnel** position was filled in February. We have already secured more stories and films and increased connections with our regional partners.

We worked with **Tim Montana** to feature Southwest Montana in his video for Devil You Know. Tim is a native of Butte and lives in Nashville and Wise River, Montana. He recently sang the National Anthem at a Pittsburgh Steelers football game.

(320) Tim Montana - Devil You Know (Official Music Video) - YouTube



Grant Details

Grant: 24-52-OOT-DMO-004 - FY24 Southeast Montana DMO Plan - FY24

Status:	Underway
Program Area:	DOC Office of Tourism
Grantee Organization:	Visit Southeast Montana
Program Officer:	Barb Sanem
Awarded Amount:	\$1,188,199.00

Narrative Evaluation

Narrative for Strategic Goal #1

Overall, the results of our FY24 are impressive and the result of key targeting, optimizing, a diversity of media buys and sharp creative. In fact, we launched a new campaign: *Nowhere Better* in FY24 to emphasize that there's *Nowhere Better* to...

- gain perspective (wide open spaces)
- hit the open road (road trips)
- horse around (Western adventures)
- for epic adventures (outdoor rec)
- for a bucking good time (rodeo)
- to dig in (dinosaurs)
- to dig into history
- to find some space (stargazing)
- to honor traditions (tribal culture)
- to dig in (Burger Trail)
- to get a taste of Montana (Burger Trail)

See the *Creative Suite* attachment for creative samples; see the *FY24 Media Plan Performance report* for details.

We also add more video to the paid media plan, using new and accumulated footage. For example, the streaming video campaign was especially effective:

- 1,724,432 impressions
- 1,470,330 videos completed
- 87.18% VCR (video completion rate)
- Compared to benchmark of 75%

In another example, *True West* magazine continued to be strong for history content with a 31.75% open rate (compared to industry standard of 19.5%) on a native article email promotion. While a newer buy with *SmithsonianMag.com* performed well with 46-53% open rates (vs. 19.5% industry standard).

Our paid social media efforts continue to perform well with an overall 2.22% CTR and low CPC (cost per click). Specifically, the MonDak (Montana-Dakota Motorcycle Route) promoted around Sturgis Bike Rally in August 2023, garnered an outstanding 6.55% CTR and incredibly low CPC at \$.36/click.

Lastly, we supplemented the Southeast Montana Burger Trail paid media campaign, which was funded by a Tourism Grant, and gained more solid results. The overall mini-campaign produced 1.89% CTR with nearly 100,000 impressions and 1:28 time-on-site via a Minnesota Monthly. Following this thread, Minnesota is the number one state (other than MT) downloading the Burger Trail passport and also the first state to have a resident awarded a Burger Trail T-shirt for checking into 8 Burger Trail locations.

Overall, we are quite pleased with the FY24 Paid Media Campaign and will continue to build on this momentum.

Narrative of Strategic Goal #2

The numbers truly tell the story with this method. In FY24, we increased website visitors by 26.15% and page views 45.5% over FY23. This not only exceeds the 10% increase goal but also indicates a strong and

integrated marketing plan, supported by a solid paid media performance (as indicated in Strategic Goal #1 above).

In addition, we dramatically increased seasonal content with a few major projects:

- Social media influencers during winter months/weather
- Partnering with a major fishing outlet for spring content
- Executing a photo shoot, using “empty nester” models during the fall season

In total, between photo shoots, photo call/purchases and partnerships, we added an astounding 815 new images to the Visit Southeast Montana photo library. That includes 37 winter images; 60 fall images; and 292 spring images, plus a plethora of b-roll. *See [semt sample images attachment for examples](#).*

Equally important, southeastmontana.com website performance continues to increase YOY. In the past three years, since FY22, we have increased website visitor traffic by 167% and pageviews by 378%.

While we did not hit the goal on news releases, we realize that the bandwidth of staff is maximized. To increase earned media, we would need to shift staff time from other ventures or add staff. Both options are being considered.

At the same time, the news releases we sent were well received. Topics included:

- Art Installation at BIL airport
- Burger Boss/Southeast Montana Burger Trail Passport Launch
- Bighorn River Featured on The New Fly Fisher
- Makoshika State Park Featured on RV There Yet?
- 2024 Travel Guide Released

The Burger Trail news release garnered the most attention, including a radio segment on Yellowstone Public Radio - *Flavors Under the Big Sky* by Stella Fong and a front-page feature by Jake Iverson that ran in the *Billings Gazette* and across the Lee Enterprise network.

The (5) releases averaged a 30.20% open rate, which is in line with industry averages. Overall, we feel this method was successful and we will continue to build on these strategies and assets.

Narrative to Strategic Goal #3

While we were a bit short of the goal of adding 10,000 new emails to our database, we know, as observed while importing spreadsheets each month, that we often have duplicate email addresses. It is likely that visitors may be interested in multiple locations in Montana, specifically YNP and GNP (as targeted) or opt-in to more than one source of information, thus creating duplicate contacts. In addition, individuals often unsubscribe from email lists, so there’s continual natural attrition with the database. (See Attachment)

FY24 was our first full year with the Windfall Call Center, which tracked:

- Travel guide mailings
- Bulk mailing destination
- Top states of inquiry origin
- Top areas of interest
- Top ad codes
- Top contact method

The Top 5 states: Texas; Illinois; Florida; Wisconsin and Michigan (3 Midwestern states) align with our paid media geo-targets (with the exception of Florida). We added Travel Guides Free to our paid media strategy, which is the top ad code, along with Yellowstone Journal and the Glacier NP Conservancy partnership; this indicates success with these buys.

Lastly, the Top Contact Method – website guestbook—demonstrates the success of our strategies to drive traffic to the website with the outstanding results reported in Strategic Goal #2 [above]. This is an ideal example of how our integrated marketing plan is woven together in multiple ways.

Strategic Goal #4 Narrative

The information provided by our annual Conversion Survey guides decisions and growth for Visit Southeast Montana. For example, the FY24 survey indicated growth in the number of visitors who spent more than one day in the region and who had a SEMT base during their visit (Q3). We also learned that the those surveyed used the annual travel guide as their primary source of information, followed by the website (Q5).

Of those surveyed, 8% are from Texas and 7% from Minnesota – we are spot-on with geo-target markets (Q7). In terms of activities, similar to state data, the survey reported the top five as:

- Hiking (51%)
- Historical Sites (44%)
- Wildlife Watching (42%)
- Camping (22%)
- Fishing (21%)

Lastly, we learned that non-peak times, like September, are important for travel (Q2). As thus, we continue to stretch the paid media budget past June for those planning fall travel. This data is region-specific and often supports what we already know, allowing us to continue building and executing a strong annual marketing plan. *See [One-Sheet_FY24 FINAL attachment for details](#).*

Strategic Goal #5 Narrative

Although we were unable to complete this method as originally described, we feel that Visit Southeast Montana, as an organization, is recognized as a regional leader in tourism. We have increased participation in tourism grants offered by the Department of Commerce; our Board of Directors is dynamic and includes tribal representation; and our destination development projects, specifically the Southeast Montana Burger Trail, have created a synergy from Billings, the largest city, to Ekalaka, the smallest community.

In addition, the work done via the Resiliency Task Force in FY24 set the stage for a region-wide Tourism Ambassador Program – a top priority on the plan (*Page 8/Imperative 3: Community Stewardship on the Resiliency Plan attachment*) along with a region-wide database or digital asset management (DAM) system for all tourism partners to access. More details on that via the Resiliency Plan Implementation Grant Application.

Additionally, we worked steadily in the agritourism realm, with staff serving on the Agritourism Advisory Committee and twice guiding the MSU Tourism Fellows (research project lead by Dr. Shannon Arnold) on tours within the region, including a breakfast between the Billings Chamber of Commerce's Ag Committee (largest in the state) and the Fellows. Outreach, education and connection remains a priority for Visit Southeast Montana to serve as the conduit between Destination MT and all community and partners across the region.



Grant Details

Grant: 24-52-OOT-DMO-006 - FY24 YELLOWSTONE COUNTRY DMO Plan - FY24

Status:	Underway
Program Area:	DOC Office of Tourism
Grantee Organization:	Yellowstone Country Montana, Inc.
Program Officer:	Barb Sanem
Awarded Amount:	\$3,674,004.00

Narrative Evaluation

In FY24 Montana's Yellowstone Country utilized the following marketing methods: administration, agency services, cooperative marketing, earned media, education/outreach, Joint Ventures, marketing resources, opportunity marketing, paid media, product development, research, travel/trade shows, visitor services and website development. Of the marketing methods included in our approved FY 24 DMO Plan, we identified the following objectives and metrics for evaluating and reporting.

Objective:

Implement a multi-layered winter campaign that targets our desired winter audience. This campaign would showcase the multitude of winter recreation activities available in the region.

Metric:

Increased bed tax collections for the entire region by 2% over 2022 figures.

Result:

We surpassed our 2% goal of year over year lodging tax collections, with collections increasing 4% year over year.

Our paid media performance for the year demonstrated outstanding results, particularly with our warm season campaign, which was crucial in driving overall success. With a total of 170 MM impressions and an additional 37 MM bonus impressions, we achieved over 1 MM clicks and an average click-through rate (CTR) of 0.60%, significantly surpassing the industry average of 0.06% to 0.12%.

The campaign's cost per thousand Impressions (CPM) was \$6.74, while our average cost per click (CPC) was notably low at \$1.13, well below our goal of \$3.50 CPC and a reduction from last year's \$1.43 CPC. This indicates highly effective ad spend management. Specifically, our warm media campaign delivered 99.5 MM impressions and 469,544 clicks, contributing to an average CTR of 0.47% and a CPM of \$6.03.

The paid ad traffic significantly boosted our website's performance, leading to a 33% increase in users and a 120% increase in engagement time from March to August 2024. The Summer Landing Page alone achieved 216,992 page views, an impressive climb from last year's 57,735 views, driven largely by our targeted ads. Additionally, pages such as Backstories and Plan Your Trip also experienced heightened traffic, with 89,977 and 9,797 page views, respectively, thanks to the support of our paid media efforts. Overall, the success of our warm season campaign was instrumental in enhancing our overall performance and engagement metrics on the website.

FY24 Paid Media Performance Report

Objective:

Participate in a minimum of 3 Joint Venture campaigns with other BrandMT/DMOs.

Metric:

1. # of joint ventures we participated in.
2. We'll be able to track the analytics of each campaign/project to help determine success.

Result:

We tripled our goal of participating in three Joint Ventures ending the fiscal year with nine Joint Venture projects.

We successfully partnered with Glacier Country and SWMT for the Glaciers to Geysers Warm and Winter season campaigns, creating itineraries to move people through the western part of the state from Yellowstone to Glacier National Parks.

- Glacier to Geysers

Examples of other JV campaigns with regional DMOs and Commerce:

- BrandMT JV: Sojern, Jun, Pinterest & Pandora
- Glacier JV
- GC Premium Web Ad
- SEMT Nativo JV
- Destination Missoula JV
- Bozeman Direct Flight JV

Through full-page advertisements in key partner travel guides such as West Yellowstone, Visit Big Sky, Red Lodge, Destination Missoula, SEMT and Glacier Country, Yellowstone Country not only extended its reach into new markets but also strengthened valuable relationships with fellow DMOs, enhancing the collective ability to promote Montana as a premier travel destination.

- Red Lodge Travel Guide
- Visit Big Sky Travel Guide
- West Yellowstone Travel Guide
- Gardiner Travel Guide

The media performance of our joint venture campaign has demonstrated significant reach and engagement, thanks to valuable partnerships with Western Montana's Glacier Country, Southeast Montana, Destination Missoula, Brand MT and others, including an impactful airport promotion. Our campaign has delivered over 48 MM impressions, supporting both domestic and international audiences. We achieved 234,142 clicks, and with a click-through rate (CTR) of 0.48%, which was above our benchmark of 0.06%, indicating strong interest in our offerings. Notably, our cost-per-click (CPC) was \$0.75, well below our goal of \$4.00, showcasing the effectiveness and efficiency of our media strategy as we continue to drive traffic and engagement through these strategic partnerships. Our joint venture campaigns supported both national and international strategy.

Joint Venture Performance Report

Objective:

Develop 1-2 cooperative campaign options in which public/private partners have an opportunity to collaborate with Yellowstone Country.

Metric:

1. # of cooperative campaigns
2. Track the analytics of the campaign.

Result:

We exceeded our goal, creating five cooperative advertising campaigns for DMOs to participate in including Powder Magazine, Northwest Travel and Life, Lee Enterprises, paid social media, and Sojern. Participants included Red Lodge DMO, Red Lodge Mountain, Livingston DMO, Livingston Songwriters Festival, Gardiner DMO, West Yellowstone DMO, and Yellowstone Hot Springs.

The performance of our cooperative campaign opportunities with West Yellowstone CVB/TBID, Red Lodge Chamber/CVB, Yellowstone Hot Spring, Gardiner CVB, Livingston TBID, Red Lodge Mountain and Livingston Songwriter Festival have yielded impressive results, reflecting the strength of collaboration with our regional partners. Placements were offered with Lee, Sojern, Meta, and print. Five partners participated in the print co-op, five in Lee, five in Meta, and four in Sojern. Each partner's campaigns surpassed their impression goals and excelled in cost-per-click (CPC) and click-through rate (CTR) beyond industry standards. This collective success showcases the effectiveness of our cooperative approach and the commitment to our partnerships.

Co-Op Performance Report

Objective:

Complete the Badlands-Breaks-Beartooths scenic route project with Southeast Montana, Central Montana and Missouri River Country.

Metric:

1. Determine complete/not complete status of the project.
2. Track the project status through the planned phases.

Result:

This product development project successfully launched in FY24. Named "The Great Wide Open," the initiative seeks to promote the off-the-beaten path areas of the eastern side of the state. Eight itineraries guide visitors through different loops and routes, offering trip ideas, maps, and local attractions. Paid digital and social media campaigns, along with organic social media supported the launch which includes a comprehensive travel planning website, and 10,000 printed maps delivered to visitor centers throughout the regions.

The product has been very well received with the website drawing 54,000 unique visitors within the first two months of launching.

Great Wide Open's paid media campaign surpassed expectations, achieving a CTR of .76%, 6x above the .12% industry average. Efficient cost management led to a CPC of \$.45, well below industry standards of \$1.00. The programmatic display campaign with mobile and standard desktop banners secured over 4MM impressions with targeted audiences interested in Montana, travel, National Parks, road trips, outdoor recreation, and family travel across drive and fly markets.

Meta's results were equally impressive, with an average CTR of .48%, exceeding Meta's .4% average, and a CPC of \$.39, well below the \$2 industry average. The Meta campaign received over 6MM impressions and over 34,000 clicks.

The paid media campaign helped attract over 54,000 unique website visitors within the first two months of launching and drive traffic to custom itineraries that focus on lesser-known destinations within Montana's Yellowstone Country.

Great Wide Open Performance Report

Objective:

Work with CVBs to host a minimum of one community outreach event focused on sustainability topics.

Metric:

1. # of events held.
2. Determine if any sustainability projects are implemented at a local/regional level as a result of this outreach.

Result:

Yellowstone Country hosted one community event in Livingston on June 6, 2024, to present our Strategic Resiliency Plan. Since then, the Livingston DMO has begun their own resiliency planning, inviting Yellowstone Country to the table to share resources and insights from our own efforts and to collaborate with other local organizations as they develop and implement their resiliency efforts.

Objective:

Conduct a research project, with the goal of soliciting feedback from visitors pertaining to their experiences in the region. This data would then be used to help develop strategy and specific projects that are paramount to address. This survey would be sent to our social media audience, our website users, and our direct email database.

Metric:

1. Completion of the research project.
2. Analyze research data received to help determine management & stewardship projects for Yellowstone Country to undertake.

Result:

1. Yellowstone Country completed the collaborative research project: **Greater Cooke City Area Outdoor Recreation/winter access (plug plowing)**
2. The resident & non-resident data was analyzed & presented to the collaborating parties' respective Board of Directors. Yellowstone Country BOD will use this data to determine how best to work with the community to promote the area for visitation, based on the needs of the community by seasons.

Yes, our objective was met. Yellowstone Country undertook this project as a means of obtaining baseline data for the Cooke City/Silver Gate area regarding the seasonality of visitation. The research surveys were conducted to determine both resident and non-resident sentiment regarding year-round outdoor recreation and the viability of plowing "the plug" to allow winter access via Chief Joseph/Beartooth Hwys. Re the Research Method evaluation, this data will be used to help Yellowstone Country develop marketing & promotion campaigns, which may include: media campaigns, community outreach, and public relations.

Two Primary Objectives: Provide neutral, unbiased research to help the region better understand the potential decisions and impacts of changes on winter access. Explore other recreation access topics to benefit the region year-round in serving their guests. Five Linked Studies: 1) Local community survey of Cooke City, Silver Gate, Colter Pass, and Crandall Residents 2) Regional survey of Park County MT/WY Residents 3) Summer 2023 survey of Cooke City visitors 4) Winter 2024 survey of Cooke City visitors 5) Secondary analysis of economic impacts

Objective:

Continue to participate in stewardship programs such as Leave No Trace and Recreate Responsibly, implementing the appropriate messaging & tactics into our campaigns and programs.

Metric:

Yellowstone Country already participates in the Recreate Responsibly initiative and is interested in participating in the Montana partnership with Leave No Trace, so we'll be successful if we're able to implement and/or blend both of these initiatives into our own stewardship efforts.

Result:

Building on the Recreate Responsibly and Leave no Trace initiatives, Yellowstone Country created and launched our (unofficial) Ranger campaign. Using local talent, the (unofficial) Ranger puts a face to Yellowstone Country, and serves as an outlet to deliver recreate responsibly messaging, answer questions from the community, and guides visitors to both the highlights, and lesser-known areas of our region. The (unofficial) Ranger has a presence on the YC website, Instagram, and through paid and organic social media campaigns. Two videos highlighting the messaging were utilized for paid media and on YouTube.

The campaign has been very well received with increased interactions, and shares from region's DMOs.

- Unofficial Ranger Instagram Recreate Responsibly Posts
- Unofficial Ranger Video YouTube
- Unofficial Ranger Video 2 YouTube

The video ads exceeded performance benchmarks in paid media:

- Meta Video Ads
 - 1.31% CTR
 - \$.92 CPC
 - 204 conversions
- MNTN CTV Multi-Touch Campaign
 - 9,465 verified visits to the website
 - .46% visit rate

- 320 conversions

The (unofficial) Ranger campaign has received positive feedback from visitors with a higher-than-normal request for Travel Guides. YOY guide orders have increased from 1,600 to 5,300 within the same time frame.

Objective:

Collaborate with Glacier Country Tourism and Southwest Montana to jointly fund call center activities to help capture data from visitors to both national parks and the corridor in between.

Metric:

1. Generating data reports that can be used for strategic planning pertaining to Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks, and the areas of the three regions between them is key; success is measured by being able to implement this partnership.

Result:

The Glacier Country and Southwest Montana Call Center has been a highly productive resource for capturing new leads and generating interest in Yellowstone Country. Prompted by the Glacier National Park Conservancy to help assist travelers, the call center fielded over 30,000 calls in FY24, with 5000 inquiries into YC. In addition, 5,000 travel guides were sent on behalf of YC through the call center.

The strategy behind this included being able to redirect travelers who may not be able to get a reservation to Glacier and encourage them to visit Yellowstone instead, to overlay the data with other visitor data about where to direct our marketing dollars, understand top visitor inquiries, minimize cancellations, and enhance the travel experience.

Objective:

Attend a minimum of one consumer tradeshow and assist a minimum of 3 DMO regional partners to attend shows that meet our overall goals and target audiences.

Metric:

1. Yellowstone Country attendance/participation in our strategic choice of consumer tradeshows.
2. A minimum of 3 regional DMO representatives attend a show.

Result:

YC staff/representatives attended one tradeshow:

- Travel & Words Writers Conference, held in Missoula, November 12-14, 2024, is a premier event for Travel and Lifestyle writers to enhance their skills and network with other industry professionals
- Participated in the Northwest Travel and Words Tradeshow; met with approximately 25 travel writers
- We also helped host one journalist from Travel & Words--Michael Fagin, Foodista | Big Sky Montana: Summer Outdoor Fun and Great Cuisine <https://www.foodista.com/blog/2024/09/18/big-sky-montana-summer-outdoor-fun-and-great-cuisine>

Provided support for three regional DMO partners:

- Provided funding to Visit Big Sky to support their media trips; this ensures partners are able to participate in these events and generate impactful stories
- Paid registration/travel costs for 4 Bozeman and 1 West Yellowstone DMO's to attend IPW conference

Number of leads:

- A minimum of 40 leads were captured from the collective travel/trade show efforts
- Bozeman results from IPW:
Meeting Outcomes: Bozeman DMO averaged 42 pre-scheduled 20-minute appointments during the event. In total, the event facilitated over 100,000 business meetings. After the initial scheduling

phase, additional opportunities allowed participants to fill gaps in their schedules, maximizing networking and business opportunities throughout the event's three days.
Leads Generated: ~700 leads generated.

Visit Big Sky also reported very successful coverage:

The funding Montana's Yellowstone Country provided to Visit Big Sky led to crucial coverage in national and international markets. These media trips played a key role in generating impactful stories, as detailed in the content (linked here) for FY24. While much of the focus centered on the National Brotherhood of Snowsports (NBS), there were notable contributions from two Australian writers who provided an international perspective.

Below are links to the itineraries developed for NBS as well as for the three Australian writers:

NBS

- VRBO Media Guests (Tonya Russell, Dayvee Sutton, Tomeka Jones), NBS Media
- Shayla Martin Itinerary, NBS Media
- Martinique Lewis, NBS Media
- Adrienne Jordan, NBS Media
- Colby Holiday, NBS Media
- NBC Team, (Natasha Hines, Jarret Manigault, Julian Simonson)
- Kayla Brock, Conde Nast, NBS Media

Australia Media

- Ricky French Itinerary, Story: The US ski resort set to rival Aspen and Jackson Hole, The Australian (PDF also attached in case you hit a paywall)
- Jim Darby Itinerary, Story TBD
- Rowena Ryan Itinerary, Story: I skied at Big Sky Montana, the USA's best ski resort without crowds | escape.com.au

Number of Leads:

The leads captured in FY24 led to quality coverage throughout the fiscal year and opened the door for ongoing opportunities in FY25 and beyond.



Grant Details

Grant: 24-52-OOT-DMO-007 - FY24 Anaconda DMO Plan - FY24

Status:	Underway
Program Area:	DOC Office of Tourism
Grantee Organization:	Discover Anaconda
Program Officer:	Barb Sanem
Awarded Amount:	\$21,527.00

Narrative Evaluation

In its first year as a CVB, Anaconda identified target markets, goals, strategies, and projects that appeared consistent with SW MT Tourism and Brand MT strategies. KPIs were based on potential measures of success using 2023 as a baseline.

Realistically, Anaconda has a limited budget, staff, and technical capacity, rendering several of the KPIs logistically difficult to measure or achieve. For example, visitor expenditure data is extremely useful if timely. But accurate and timely data can be expensive to acquire and requires some expertise to interpret and to determine implications for future marketing strategies. ITRR data is available at no cost, but it is delayed, so it serves to reveal past trends upon which future decisions can be made rather than real-time data.

Like many other DMOs, Anaconda relies heavily on printed materials and ads for promotion, despite traveler research (ITRR and others) indicating that travelers increasingly use online/digital sources to plan their trips. Anaconda needs to focus more narrowly on strategically targeted visitors. We could benefit from additional technical assistance from Brand MT and its data and agency resources to inform that process.

Partnerships in advertising and information distribution like YellowstonePark.com and SW MT Tourism generated significant views and clicks, but Discover Anaconda needs data analysis tools like Google Analytics, VisaVue, Zartigo's Digital Campaign Optimization, and others to better understand user interests, patterns, demographics, and conversions.

These data tools are needed to track end-to-end visitor data from initial views to clicks, information-gathering, conversions, bookings, spending, etc. Those insights can be used to adjust strategies in real time and also help local businesses/attractions better understand their visitor markets, messaging, and effective strategies.



Grant Details

Grant: 24-52-OOT-DMO-008 - FY24 Belgrade DMO Plan - FY24

Status: Underway
Program Area: DOC Office of Tourism
Grantee Organization: Belgrade Chamber of Commerce
Program Officer: Barb Sanem
Awarded Amount: \$136,155.00

Narrative Evaluation

In FY24, the Belgrade DMO underwent a period of revitalization. With no leadership or staff for the first three months of the year, we faced a significant challenge in establishing a strong foundation. The hiring of an Executive Director with no prior DMO experience added to the learning curve. As a result, much of the year was dedicated to internal education and acclimation.

Despite these early challenges, we were able to meet many of our lower-level goals, laying the groundwork for a more successful future. The internal focus on development and understanding was crucial for the long-term viability of the organization.

However, certain initiatives, such as the development of a photo and media library, wasn't accomplished. We struggled to define clear objectives for these projects early on, which hindered it's progress.

We also explored digital wayfinding efforts with mixed results. One initiative, encouraging local businesses to claim their Google listings, was a success, driving positive engagement. However, another effort—a mobile tour guide—fell short of expectations. It was over-promised and under-delivered, and we had to pivot after minimal response.

While FY24 may appear unproductive at first glance, the lessons learned and the steps taken to build a solid foundation were essential for the future growth and success of the Belgrade DMO. The year was filled with valuable learning experiences, positioning us for stronger outcomes in the years ahead.



Grant Details

Grant: 24-52-OOT-DMO-009 - Visit Big Sky FY24 Marketing Plan - FY24

Status:	Underway
Program Area:	DOC Office of Tourism
Grantee Organization:	Visit Big Sky
Program Officer:	Barb Sanem
Awarded Amount:	\$825,000.00

Narrative Evaluation

Provide a narrative of your measurable objectives and metrics. Were they successful? What would you do differently?

As we reflect back on our previous marketing plan we can't help acknowledge that we checked the boxes on almost every one of our objectives for our FY24 plan.

We exceeded our goals recruiting and hosting key journalists from all over the world. Those targeted journalists delivered over 40 articles in key publications and continue to generate visitor for years to come.

The Big Sky sales team was able to connect with thousands of skiers at both domestic and international ski shows in the fall and spring show seasons.

Our marketing campaigns had superior conversion rates and attribution that turned into room nights that exceeded our goals. In the truest sense our marketing and earned media efforts are firing on all cylinders and Big Sky continues to grow in reputation and visitation as a world-class winter destination.

As mentioned in our plan narrative Visit Big Sky is walking a fine line on meeting the expectations of our visitors but also recognizing the needs of our community and residents. The launch of our Destination Strategy Plan has opened several indicators that we will continue to use when defining the success of this effort.

Overall the greatest tool in building a Destination Strategy was the implementation of our Resident and Visitor Sentiment Survey. The participation in the survey was amazing and the data that we collected was a real success. However, this effort exposes the successes and the very real shortcomings of our community. Where we have an amazing average nightly rates, record high occupancy and very positive feedback on the visitor experience, we can't deny the fact that our residents don't have the same feedback. This is the very real issue that mountain communities in the West have been suffering since COVID.

Over the next year we'll continue to learn from our challenges and engage the community to find a compromise between residents and the visitor economy in Big Sky.

Other opportunities that were evident in FY24 and will continue to be a work in progress is addressing the severe seasonality of a resort community such as Big Sky. As pointed out the future is bright with a new gondola that will be serving our new Tram for the summer of 2025 and extend our seasons. The addition of our future meeting and convention space that will secure the construction of 500 rooms in our TownCenter area will be another tool in our management of the seasonality issues facing the community.

Our multi-year investment in data collection will continue to expand and keep our efforts on target and show us opportunities for future promotion.

Overall, Big Sky will continue to be a successful partner in Montana's tourism economy and host visitors from all over the world.



Grant Details

Grant: 24-52-OOT-DMO-010 - FY24 Visit Billings DMO Budget and Marketing Plan - FY24

Status:	Underway
Program Area:	DOC Office of Tourism
Grantee Organization:	Billings Chamber of Commerce/Convention and Visitors Bureau
Program Officer:	Barb Sanem
Awarded Amount:	\$496,857.00

Narrative Evaluation

FY24 provided new challenges than years past for the team, stakeholders, partners, and the marketing and sales strategies outlined for Visit Billings as a Destination Leadership Organization (DLO).

Smit Travel Research reports, which offer benchmarks Visit Billings' uses to evaluate the citywide performance of hotels and motels in the city of Billings, reflected a slightly down year in room demand. Citywide room demand decreased 3.7% over 2022 (Smith Travel Research (STR)). As 2021 and 2022 were record years for many of Billings Lodging Facilities, the staff expected to see a ceiling to that success as more of the nation's largest cities returned to the fold in competing for visitation and visitors began to feel comfortable in busier destinations again. 2023 proved to be that year.

Visit Billings staff monitors monthly and weekly STR reports which offer insights into trends as well as direct impacts of certain meetings, sporting events, or leisure events on the destination, demand was only briefly impacted and seemed to rebound well. STR reports allowed Visit Billings staff to monitor and continue to track data sets including Occupancy, Room Demand, and Average Daily Rate to help foster strengths and successes of each campaign's impact. This is a continued strong investment of Visit Billings (Billings CVB) funds.

Annually, the team works to witness an increase in room demand by 3% in a running 12-months of the year which Billings met in FY23 at 6.1% growth. For reference, the following are room demand percentages for running 12-month periods for previous years and the year being reported here which was 2023:

- 2017: 0.6%
- 2018: 4.9%
- 2019: -1.9%
- 2020: -26.6%
- 2021: 34.1%
- 2022: 6.1%
- 2023: -3.7%

Billings CVB funds support the Visit Billings contract with Smith Travel Research for the monthly and weekly citywide reports. This investment is key and remains active in the current FY25.

PAID MEDIA

OUTSIDERS CAMPAIGN

Visit Billings launched the Outsiders Campaign, which has been one of the top performing campaigns Visit Billings has seen. Inviting visitors to enjoy the Outsider spirit that built Billings. The narrative focused on what makes Billings unique.

"To us, the best people in the world are outsiders. People who embrace pure, unencumbered Montana in all its forms. Rock walls. Mighty rivers. Mountains stretching into big, blue skies. But it's also people who go against the grain and believe that normal just isn't good enough. People who crave boldness and authenticity, rather than settling for the same old. Billings was built on that outsider spirit. Despite appearances and naysayers, no climb was too steep. No trail was too rocky. No burger was too juicy. On the idea of staying true to our roots is more important than fitting in with everyone and everything else. That's what is great about Billings. We've been authentic Montana since 1882. And maybe that makes us the outsiders of the bunch. Not sure about you, but that's just fine with us. Because as we say, Forge Your Own Path."

Visit Billings strategies focused on adults 25-65 with an annual household income of \$75,000+.

Geographic Markets:

Primary: Key feeder flight markets include Minneapolis, Denver, Salt Lake City, Chicago and Dallas. New markets added this year are Phoenix, Houston and Portland, OR. All with interest in travel to Montana and the western region of the U.S., including monuments, state and national parks, and western heritage.

Secondary: Regional close drive markets, *Montana (excl. city of Billings), North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming and Idaho.*

Behavioral targeting on domestic travelers, those looking for a long weekend escape to their metro area, those interested in nature-related trips, and those looking for a rural escape into their surrounding outdoor paradises. Focusing on families with HHI \$75K+.

The staff and buying agency were quick to react when the Discover campaign was not performing well. Switching tactics to test PMAx which proved to be very successful for this campaign and has continued to be a strong tool in Visit Billings campaigns. All goals were met, and the campaign was deemed successful by staff, buyers, and the agency of record.

Metrics achieved were reported for the Outsiders campaign in the Webgrants section/columns.

Creative examples for the Outsiders Campaign in attached narrative version.

Fun video accessible here:

<https://youtu.be/cTZ6YAI4QJE?si=P9jiORTQnLoI25xx>

<https://youtu.be/2GbbJ2XbkMs?si=EVdTswAuLtBhOdVI>

More here: <https://www.visitbillings.com>

REGIONAL EVENTS CAMPAIGN TO COMPLIMENT NATIONAL STRATEGIES

After a successful events campaign in the wake of the 2022 flooding, Visit Billings learned that supporting the event scene in Billings provides great return on investment in growing room demand but also in being a strong partner to our community event organizers. The Events campaign has continued to grow and expand in season. Leveraging our regional visitation to enjoy the various events happening throughout the year is laying the groundwork for Billings to become a year-round destination.

REGIONAL EVENT CAMPAIGN - TARGET AUDIENCE

Visit Billings strategies focused on adults 25+ who have an annual household income of \$75k+.

Focus on couples, friends, and empty-nesters eager to travel as well as families looking for weekend and week-long getaways. Target in-market behaviors for Beer Trail, Events, What's on, Shows, Outdoor Enthusiasts, Sightseeing, Sporting Events and Farmers Markets. They've traveled to Montana in the past 12 months.

Geo-Targeting: Regional drive markets, within in-state and neighboring states:

- Montana (excluding city of Billings)
- North Dakota
- South Dakota
- Wyoming
- Idaho

Creative examples for the events campaign in attached narrative version.

April 17 – October 31st, 2023, Web Traffic

All Traffic:

- 343,020 SESSIONS
- 93.73% ENGAGEMENT RATE
- 3.21 PAGEVIEWS PER USER
- :48 AVG. SESSION DURATION
- 256 NEWSLETTER SIGNUPS
- <https://www.visitbillings.com/events>

Top Metro Markets for all traffic during this campaign included **Denver, Dallas, Chicago, Houston, Billings, Phoenix**

Other paid media efforts for FY24 that proved successful and will be part of the mix in future investments included:

- Yellowstone Journal
- RoadRUNNER
- Great American West
- Montana destination visitor guides like Destination Missoula and Glacier Country Tourism guidebooks
- Visit USA Parks

Highlighting the Visit USA Parks investments, the first of which ran April 2023 – October 2023. The campaign was a success as impressions and clicks both exceeded campaign deliverables of 300,000 and 5,000 respectively. Cost per click of \$0.12 is well below the travel/hospitality industry average of \$0.63. This investment focused on outdoor and in-town experiences for all seasons of visits.

The second campaign was positive as impressions and leads both exceeded campaign deliverables of 75,000 and 2,000, respectively. The cost per click of \$0.20 was well below the travel/hospitality industry average of \$0.63. The CTA Ads were the best performing content, followed by social stories, and itinerary ads. This investment focused on a partnership with our nearby State Parks. This year we also tested the international markets with this buy, which resulted in Germany being the top international performing market.

Of course, all placements are in partnership with the Visit Billings agency of record Sunshine and Bourbon and buyer Goodway Group who assist with strategies, briefs, creative, etc. Billings CVB funds also support the Visit Billings Leisure Marketing Director's position.

As far as leads are concerned, Visit Billings staff foster leads. Additionally with the Yellowstone Journal guide requests, visitor guides are mailed to thousands of prospective visitors annually using Billings CVB funds for fulfillment/postage. Speaking of fulfillment, contracts with Certified Folder remain a top priority to help make visitor guides available. Design and print of the 70,000 Visit Billings visitor guidebooks are paid for with private funds then Billings CVB funds support the shipping and fulfillment. It is a strong reciprocal means to manage the project, publications, and fulfillment.

One other proof of performance worth noting is the continued efforts in the two-wheel or motorcycle market for Billings.

TWO-WHEEL DRIVE MARKET

This market is extremely important to Billings. Billings is a proven stop along the itineraries of motorcycle enthusiasts across North America for many reasons including access to amazing byways and rides as well as proximity to Sturgis.

The Beartooth Scenic Byway continues to help grow the two-wheeled market. The 68-mile stretch of U.S. Highway 212 has been described as "the perfect definition of what a great bike ride should be" by National Geographic and is consistently in the Top 10 best motorcycle rides in the U.S. The Great American Road Trip campaign builds awareness of the destination's proximity to the most scenic route into Yellowstone National Park, aligning with the 2-wheeled market which is drawn to curvy roads, riding long distances, and experiencing the epic journey.

National parks are key drivers of visitation in this segment as is the destination's position along the I-90 and I-94 corridor to and from Sturgis every summer. FY24 plans included additional sponsored content development and niche digital targeting of the two-wheel audience.

Visit Billings saw success in drawing the two-wheel audience with publications like RoadRUNNER Magazine and having a presence at Sturgis Bike Rally. In addition to the paid strategies, Visit Billings hosted two RoadRUNNER journalists on an 8-day itinerary of the area to help produce a video that would assist in future buys with RoadRUNNER Magazine.

DISPLAY RESULTS for RoadRUNNER:

Promoted Website Editorial

- Published 7/21/24 and highlighted at the top as featured for 1 month.
 - <https://www.roadrunner.travel/tours/drop-your-kickstand-in-billings-mt/> (*live sharable link*)
 - Email stats: 69,900 sent, 21,450 opens, 133 link clicks
 - Web traffic: 14,500 visits on web

Custom Newsletter

- Sent 5/2/24
 - <https://www.roadrunner.travel/email/9c303da4-8631-4b69-83a9-27d51fd8492e/> (*private view link*)
 - Email stats: 60,800 sent, 21,750 opens, 251 link clicks

Newsletter Banners

- April 2024
 - 4/3 RoadRUNNER Weekly
 - Email stats: 63,300 sent, 23,400 opens, 86 link clicks
- 4/10 RoadRUNNER Weekly
 - Email stats: 61,100 sent, 21,700 opens, 126 link clicks
- 4/17 RoadRUNNER Weekly
 - Email stats 62,900 sent, 22,900 opens, 145 link clicks
- 4/24 RoadRUNNER Weekly
 - Email stats: 60,900 sent, 21,300 opens, 53 link clicks
 - July 2024
 - 7/3 RoadRUNNER Weekly
 - Email Stats: 61,300 sent, 19,200 opens, 154 link clicks
- 7/10 RoadRUNNER Weekly
 - Email Stats: 61,900 sent, 20,730 opens, 82 link clicks
- 7/17 RoadRUNNER Weekly
 - Email stats: 59,700 sent, 18,880 opens, 76 link clicks
- 7/24 RoadRUNNER Weekly
 - Email stats: 69,900 sent, 20,500 opens, 39 link clicks
- 7/31 RoadRUNNER Weekly
 - Email stats: 69,430 sent, 20,900 opens, 68 link clicks

Social Posts

- Shared 7/17
 - https://www.instagram.com/p/C9iQwWRtO4/?fbclid=IwY2xjawF2P0xleHRuA2FibQIxMAABHQ8KB-a0aVGjboV5RD_T6jmEvH6KRyhYFFtsOjvrDGxbTd815TN9Aju0sA_aem_OUlkaSNiNvwuCqQb9pnhiA
 - IG Impressions: 2,437
 - IG Engagement: 39
- <https://www.facebook.com/RoadRUNNERMag/posts/pfbid0h1W2KtoyNUDXWP4x7muqVf4aeFVHGiab6tbb87f3imxo9gWpVgdAvwYyuX4PeCVwl>
 - FB Impressions: 3,850
 - FB Engagement: 19
 - Shared 8/5
 - https://www.instagram.com/p/C-R3K8oMF3Z/?fbclid=IwY2xjawF2P_5leHRuA2FibQIxMAABHdT_s8eWAbvATWrxYZADtjWouXWDXYeMjM1SzQnV88PxLOEH_T9inDUdg_aem_ji8JfvglOJBKM07reWv0AA
 - IG Impressions: 2,400
 - IG Engagement: 46
- <https://www.facebook.com/RoadRUNNERMag/posts/pfbid0x4XWU2ALkvU4HrRQDJwtQCSqnL6d5ZLxu9zrLM2swYpuobkHwwA5B3wu5u2GGGGGI>
 - FB Impressions: 3,950
 - FB Engagement: 21
 - Shared 8/29
 - https://www.instagram.com/p/C_Q1ROft4sM/?fbclid=IwY2xjawF2QldleHRuA2FibQIxMAABHf16iZxewayrLYhAiP_nrQgpduREIs4mgW5e9wecfxTz7NX_boMJ5q7Vig_aem_uAQKzuBHBgKZDLq-FBNU4A
 - IG Impressions: 2,850
 - IG Engagement: 33
- <https://www.facebook.com/RoadRUNNERMag/posts/pfbid09eiTfRpETx4Tde8NRCuNQ3d94KVJT3HvbwYoACXPeAwxtYutEJ3yZVe9eCn4bH4I>
 - FB Impressions: 5,160
 - FB Engagement: 20
 - Shared 9/20
 - https://www.instagram.com/p/DAJi0OztLrC/?fbclid=IwY2xjawF2QM5leHRuA2FibQIxMAABHYuUHm0_Yflq-yOH7hMKs8YwbkhFDpoGpFtmOrdKuWTKolQFctR6a0D0qA_aem_nbwLKUsKTigMqmqjNtgSbmw
 - IG Impressions: 2,300
 - IG Engagement: 28
- <https://www.facebook.com/RoadRUNNERMag/posts/pfbid02VsvjLJASVKGw3nHVQKt8go4iChQoNXq3YBtDiYjo2eadAJ6UGQpnFdcSbMh3CoUDI>
 - FB Impressions: 4,100
 - FB Engagement: 25

Magazine

2024

Rate Base: 67,000
Readership: 205,521

Creative examples for RoadRUNNER in attached narrative version.

In addition to the RoadRUNNER Partnership, Visit Billings ran a digital campaign during Sturgis Bike Rally as well as in spring 2024 to drive summer traffic. The campaigns were deemed successful delivering 3,746,517 impressions and 5,459 activities. The campaign also tested Digital Out Of Home buys which delivers 1,009,513 of those impressions. These DOOH impressions were delivered through Taxi & Rideshare TV, Gas Stations, Billboards, Subways & Public Transit, Urban Panels, & Convenience Stores.

FY24 PR RECAP

Earned media is a critical part of the marketing mix, as it represents a source of trusted information to consumers and captivates their attention with relevant content. Whether it be articles in their favorite magazine or Instagram posts of their favorite travel influencer, travelers look to these sources of information for travel inspiration.

Additionally, Visit Billings hosted a Yellowstone National Park VIP media tour, which included writers representing publications such as *Matador Network*, *Lonely Planet*, *Food & Wine*, and *Paste*. Coverage resulting from this media tour will represent an additional 5.5 million impressions and is anticipated to be published in early 2025, when many consumers will be making their summer vacation plans.

As part of the outreach to writers for the Yellowstone media tour, several journalists and writers who were invited yet unable to attend due to scheduling conflicts indicated they would be interested in a press visit to Billings in the future. This includes writers from *Men's Health*, *Thrillist* and the *Los Angeles Times*, as well as influencers including *Planet with Sara*, *Ricky Roams* and *Kids are a Trip*.

In addition to inviting media and influencers to Billings first-hand to experience the destination, the team met with writers in-person and virtually, including journalists from *National Geographic Traveler* and *Forbes*.

The Visit Billings team continues to build upon the relationships we've cultivated with media and influencers to generate even more coverage going forward. These efforts include quarterly "what's new in Billings" press releases, ongoing virtual meetings, and fulfilling media requests for information.

SUMMARY OF FY24 PR EFFORTS

SEASONAL AND EVENT PITCHES

Information about seasonal travel to Billings as well as events taking place within the city at different times throughout the year were shared with regional media and influencers. These events and travel ideas were bucketed into three seasonal categories: fall, winter and spring/summer. The result of this outreach was additional interest from journalists and influencers in a virtual briefing and/or future press visit.

PRESS VISIT(S)

In September 2023, Visit Billings hosted Traveling Mel to cover our annual Ales for Trails event and to promote fall at Montana's Trailhead. In exchange the organization received a blog post, social content, as well as photos to add to the Visit Billings photo library.

Hosted RoadRUNNER Magazine June 2024 for an 8-day familiarization tour of Billings and the greater area. The host resulted in an article to be published in early spring 2025 touching on the Shamrock tour of the area. This also resulted in a couple of videos which Visit Billings will use to promote the 2-wheel market for years to come.

Built relationships with Amelia Edelman and John Sizemore for a hosted trip in August of 2024. Amelia writes for Lonely Planet, Travel & Leisure, US News & World and has a collective impression range of 3,700,000. John Sizemore writes for Past and Matador Network and has a collective impression range of 1,250,000. Both visited Billings in August 2024.

Billings was featured in SIP Magazine in April 2024. SIP Magazine is a Northwest based publication. Other features included Wherever Family (a blog), USA Today and Men's Journal. Collectively these had just over 5 million impressions.

Articles resulting from PR Efforts are reflected in the Webgrants section/columns.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Along with direct outreach to the media, additional activities from the public relations plan called for the updating of the VisitBillings.com press page to encourage stories and press visit requests from media. The update was successful, and the team has seen successful requests from high performing journalists such as Amelia Edelman through this tool.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

Additionally, the overall quality of FY24 earned media coverage was strong. One of the goals of this earned media strategy was to create a scoresheet to help benchmark and measure the quality of articles. The team introduced the Barcelona Principles to result analysis.

Visit Billings' earned media campaign built upon the success of the FY 2023 program, generating significant placements in top-tier publications including *Sip Magazine*, *USA Today*, *Men's Journal* and *RoadRUNNER*. These placements generated more than 5.4 million impressions and an earned media score of 79.2 (Goal: 70) on the Barcelona Principles scale.

JOINT VENTURE EFFORTS

Joint Venture programs are important to Visit Billings marketing efforts. Sojern placements, data partnerships, and other opportunities with the State and Montana tourism partners like Visit Southeast Montana, Glacier Country, and Destination Missoula will continue to be considered. Opportunities to team up and grow visitation to the southeast region as a whole equates to wins for Billings.

THE INTERNATIONAL MARKET

Yellowstone National Park and Little Bighorn Battlefield, along with the Lewis and Clark Trail, are key attractions positioning Billings as a trailhead to access Montana's iconic sites. These points of interest make Billings a group-friendly destination for the domestic or international traveler. Billings' proximity to the Beartooth Scenic Byway, as well as the northeast and north entrances to Yellowstone National Park, position the city well as a fantastic stop for a group tour itinerary.

Travel and Tradeshows continue to be an important piece of the International and Group Marketplace for Visit Billings. The relationships built over the years at IPW, IRU, and ACGI help build tours that result in room nights for Billings lodging facilities.

Visit Billings in partnership with Visit Southeast Montana hosted a familiarization tour post IRU in Casper. Four international tour operators explored the Southeast Montana region and learned more about where they can send their guests. The opportunity to host international visitors in partnership with the state is important to Visit Billings and something the organization will continue to support.

Visit Billings attends ACGI each year to help build relationships with group tour operators and tour receptive. In 2023 the event took place in Boise. Visit Billings is proud to be the 2025 ACGI host. Attendance of this event is done with private funds.

IPW and IRU are supports with Billings CVB funds as well as placements and partnerships with Great American West.

AIR SERVICE

Supporting Air Service expansion is a priority for Visit Billings as direct route growth fosters tourism success. From a destination marketing and management point of view, any lack of consistent air capacity or high fares can negatively impact a traveler's decision to make Billings part of their itinerary. For Billings to continue to compete as a tourism destination, air service support is critical. In FY24 Visit Billings staff actively supported the Billings Air Service Committee by serving on the marketing committee as well as participating in 3 airline headquarters visits and the Mead & Hunt Air Service Conference to meet with airlines about expanding service to Billings Logan International Airport (BIL). As a result of those meetings Billings welcomed Sun Country seasonal direct service to Minneapolis and Allegiant returned their season direct service to LAX. Visit Billings assisted in marketing these new routes by partnering with BIL for marketing buys within the LA Dodgers Yearbook.

Billings was awarded a SCASD (Small Community Air Service Development) Federal Grant to secure additional service to LAX or SFO. Visit Billings is committed to promoting that new flight market when the route becomes available.

Creative examples for air service promotion in attached narrative version.

CONCLUSION

As previously noted, FY24 was a down year for Billings as a destination, however the Visit Billings team hasn't stopped growing and working to build demand for the lodging facilities. While the product in the Billings destination 'store' is a constant conversation and priority together with other community leadership organizations, along with destination stewardship and long-term strategic planning, at the heart of what the DLO does focuses on marketing and sales. At the start of the new Fiscal Year, Visit Billings onboarded a Group Sales Manager position, which will focus on growing group tours, international visitation, and meeting and convention sales. The Visit Billings team is working to diversify the visitation to help build year-round visitation. Destination marketing remains key to the success of mission for our partners. Whether the leisure market or sports tourism and meeting recruitment segments, marketing is critical to growing visitation. Stewardship, long-term strategies, development, and management are absolutely part of our core priorities, but ensuring we are boasting about Billings and driving traffic to the destination to create repeat visitors, is what the team does best to support mission, stakeholders, and partners. Visit Billings is proud to work closely with Brand MT, the Tourism Advisory Council, state, regional, and national colleagues, and local partners to foster visitation to Montana's largest city. Billings CVB funds are extremely important and appreciated.



Grant Details

Grant: 24-52-OOT-DMO-011 - Bozeman DMO Marketing Plan_FY24 - FY24

Status:	Underway
Program Area:	DOC Office of Tourism
Grantee Organization:	Bozeman Area Chamber of Commerce
Program Officer:	Barb Sanem
Awarded Amount:	\$637,264.00

Narrative Evaluation

Destination Marketing

Objectives

Refocus our national marketing on primary and secondary markets to increase visitation from core direct flight markets.

Re-engage in-state and regional audiences to nurture visitation to Bozeman.

Metric

Increase bed tax dollars by 5% over FY22 (State of Montana)

Evaluation

7/1/23-9/30/23:	\$1,958,037 (+2%)
10/1/23-12/31/23:	\$949,835 (-6%)
1/1/24-3/31/24:	\$983,686 (-6%)
4/1/24-6/30/24:	\$1,328,258 (-5%)

While the warm season started out well, unusually low snowpack affected our winter visitation, resulting in lower bed tax dollars than in FY22. While the first part of this objective was not met, our focus on direct flight markets, in-state, and regional drive markets did prove to be fruitful in both website traffic and actual visitation, with particular growth from New York, Los Angeles, Spokane, Seattle, Idaho, and Phoenix.

Of our visitors, the top ten markets by origin are all direct flight or regional drive markets, illustrating the success of targeting our paid media to these areas:

- Montana
- Washington
- California
- Colorado
- Idaho

- Utah
- Minnesota
- Texas
- Oregon
- Arizona

Metric

Increase Airport deplanements by 10% over 2022, to 1.23 million people (Bozeman Airport)

Evaluation

- **2023 Deplanements - 1,232,410**

Even though visitation was affected by low snowfall, we did achieve the desired goal for airport deplanements due to the high volume of business travelers, as well as people who come to Bozeman to visit family and friends. Our airline marketing efforts continue to support the direct flights, and growth at the Bozeman Yellowstone International Airport.

Metric

Increase website sessions by 5% over FY23 projected to 742K (Google Analytics)

Evaluation

- **FY24 Sessions - 813,075**

Our website traffic continues to grow, and our FY24 goals were achieved. Organic search accounts for the largest driver in traffic at 36%, with a large focus on content including Yellowstone National Park. Other contributions driving the increase include paid social, paid search, paid media, and email newsletters.

Metric

Increase new contacts by 10% over FY23 projected to 6500 (Hubspot)

Evaluation

- **FY24 Contacts Created - 8,644**

Our new contacts well exceeded our goal, with an increase in people signing up for our blogs and newsletters. A robust retargeting campaign helped drive signups, as well as blog content and localized itineraries.

Metric

Increase occupancy rate of hotels from 65% to 67% (STR Reports/ CoStar Reports)

Evaluation

- **Average Monthly Occupancy for FY24 - 67.2%**

We did achieve our occupancy rate goal, with the help of shoulder season events such as the Spartan Race, and opt-in hotel promotions such as the special Montana rate for local residents.

Destination Stewardship

Objectives

Maintain key cooperative partnerships with local organizations to expand communications around stewardship of Bozeman and its people, businesses and places.

Create a quarterly dashboard for business owners and residents illustrating estimated economic impact through tourism. (We were not able to acquire key data pieces until April of FY23. Now we have the full capabilities to create this asset in FY24.)

Metrics

Partner on 5 co-op media buys or placements targeting both locals and visitors.

Create the quarterly dashboard and make it accessible on the Visit Bozeman website in FY24.

Evaluation

We exceeded our goals in Destination Stewardship through local partnerships collaborating to share recreate responsibly messaging, increasing shoulder season events such as the Spartan Race, and creating a quarterly dashboard that hoteliers can monitor to view average occupancy and ADR, website traffic, marketing conversions, and visitor states of origin.

Partnerships

We successfully partnered with Crosscut Mountain Sports Center and Yellowstone Country to bring the Spartan Race to Bozeman. The race brought 8,311 adult racers, and 1,036 kid racers accounting for almost 2,000 hotel nights during the spring shoulder season.

Maintaining a partnership with Crosscut Mountain for the Spartan Race during Bozeman's shoulder season months is a valuable strategy to boost economic impact thoughtfully and sustainably. This collaboration can expand communication efforts around stewardship, aiming to support Bozeman's people, businesses, and unique places while being mindful of the community's needs and the area's natural landscape. By scheduling the race in the less-busy shoulder season, we can alleviate peak-season pressures, directing economic benefits to local businesses without overwhelming the community. Additionally, coordinating closely on timing and logistics with respect to the melt season will help preserve the integrity of the terrain, reducing erosion and environmental impact. We can craft messages that educate participants about responsible recreation and highlight the importance of supporting Bozeman's businesses, fostering a culture of care for the land and the people who make Bozeman special.

We also partnered with 3 organizations to promote stewardship and product development in FY24:

- Bridger Ski Foundation - Be Good To Bozeman partnered the BSF nordic trail passes and had logo placement on the back of the passes
- Outside Kind - Partnered on 4 seasonal magazine ads in Outside Bozeman which included Be Good to Bozeman logo placement

- Downtown Bozeman - Partnered on promotions for Restaurant Week to grow exposure of that event to help promote it outside of Bozeman to attract in-state visitation
- Downtown Bozeman - Partnered with the DBA to promote Be Good to Bozeman with a banner across Main Street over the 4th of July week

Tourism Resource Dashboard:

We have been publishing our monthly report on the Visit Bozeman website December 2023 on the tourism resources page, which includes a monthly report for the hotels and other tourism partners: <https://visitbozeman.com/tourism-resources>

Example: https://s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/bozeman-cvb/Resources/Visit-Bozeman_Executive-Summary-September-2024.pdf

Destination Management

Objectives

Understand in-state perspective of Bozeman and its value to in-state visitation.

Understand how vacation rentals are positively and negatively impacting visitation in our market.

Understand how Bozeman's increase in hotels/rooms is impacting overall occupancy rates, affordability, and perception.

Metrics

Complete in-state perception research.

Develop benchmarks on vacation rentals vs. hotels. Create a report to measure impact. Chart trends in key metrics to measure Bozeman's hotel room growth, occupancy rates, ADR, and compare to in-state perception results.

Evaluation

Resident Sentiment Research Study

- Completed a resident sentiment research study in October of 2024. Reviewing these results now and will utilize the information to continue to target and attract in-state visitors in the future as well as use the information for strategic initiatives to strengthen Bozeman's appeal to our in-state residents.

Develop benchmarks on vacation rentals vs. hotels. Create a report to measure impact. Chart trends in key metrics to measure Bozeman's hotel room growth, occupancy rates, ADR, and compare to in-state perception results.

- We have completed these reports and are updating/reviewing/presenting this data monthly. In regards to the hotel room growth, we have been tracking these numbers on an infrequent basis

and watching the projected new hotel developments coming to the Bozeman/Belgrade markets. The number of new/under construction projects currently sits at approximately 26.

- Hotel Occupancy Rates:
<https://app.databox.com/datawall/185d3a93752fa5b669e2fc63ec6c06a14d7e0fc65ad7405>
- Hotel ADR:
<https://app.databox.com/datawall/0bedef72c3357be2b94d084b941f320f1084fac65ad76c4>
- Hotels vs. Short Term Rentals:
<https://app.databox.com/datawall/da2c1424c01c716a96d7c20c8f6afb1b53497c065ad792b>

Understanding the effects of increased hotel inventory

- With Bozeman's rapid increase in hotels and rooms, our Destination Management Organization (DMO) is actively assessing how this growth affects occupancy rates, affordability, and local perception. As the hotel inventory expands, this benefits visitors by providing more choices and occasionally driving competitive pricing. This influx of accommodations can place pressure on smaller, independent lodging providers, challenging them to stay competitive. From a community perspective, the growing hotel presence brings both opportunity and concerns. While this provides an economic benefit, the growth also puts strain on infrastructure and natural resources.
- Our DMO has proactively met with all hoteliers across the community. Connecting with them has provided valuable insights into occupancy trends, pricing challenges, local perspectives, and community concerns about the projected growth over the next four to five years. Bringing our stakeholders together allows our DMO to develop a strategic approach that aligns with the community's values, ensuring Bozeman's hospitality growth is managed responsibly and continues to benefit both visitors and residents.
- Bozeman DMO has launched several targeted, opt-in promotional offerings. These initiatives are designed to help hoteliers maintain health occupancy levels and strengthen community alignment with tourism goals. These promotions can be opted into during the shoulder months, encouraging visitors during traditionally slower periods to visit. This supports consistent occupancy year-round while reducing peak season pressure and focusing on promoting extended stays that drive deeper economic engagement with local businesses, benefiting both the tourism and retail sectors. These opt-in promotions not only assist hotels in filling rooms but also foster a sustainable growth model for Bozeman's tourism industry.



Grant Details

Grant: 24-52-OOT-DMO-012 - FY24 Butte CVB DMO Plan - FY24

Status: Underway
Program Area: DOC Office of Tourism
Grantee Organization: Butte Silver Bow Convention and Visitors Bureau
Program Officer: Barb Sanem
Awarded Amount: \$219,112.00

Narrative Evaluation

The new Butte Director of Tourism, Kehli Hazlett, began her role on Monday, May 20, 2024. She is still familiarizing herself with her responsibilities within the CVB and TBID boards. Her predecessors, Maria Porchervina and Stephanie Sorini, continue to offer their support as she transitions into her new position.

During this reporting cycle, some of our goals have been met, but as with any transition, there have been shifts in focus and priorities. The director hopes the reviewers will understand these adjustments and recognizes the effort made to gather data. She will follow up on any questions that arise.

A key accomplishment for the director has been completing the state report, ensuring timely payments, exploring new advertising and website opportunities, and successfully completing the FY2024 audit. With ongoing support from Barb Sanem, the director has gained valuable insights into regulations, fund reporting, and how to provide accurate information to the state of Montana.

Looking ahead, the director aims to conduct the FY2025 audit independently, improve proficiency with online QuickBooks, and focus on increasing month-to-month growth in hotel stays.



Grant Details

Grant: 24-52-OOT-DMO-013 - FY24 Columbia Falls DMO Plan - FY24

Status: Underway
Program Area: DOC Office of Tourism
Grantee Organization: Columbia Falls DMO
Program Officer: Barb Sanem
Awarded Amount: \$30,780.00

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.



Grant Details

Grant: 24-52-OOT-DMO-014 - FY24 Marketing Plan Dillon CVB - FY24

Status: Underway
Program Area: DOC Office of Tourism
Grantee Organization: Beaverhead County Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture
Program Officer: Barb Sanem
Awarded Amount: \$53,003.00

Narrative Evaluation

2024 was a good year from a marketing standpoint. We were able to advertise in the final publication of Hemispheres with United Airlines, we were able to advertise in the Hunt & Fish Guide with USA Today as well as the Winter Travel Guide. We again advertised with National Park Trips on their digital platform. Most of our advertise if display advertising to elevate awareness of Dillon Montana and provide a more affordable travel alternative. We may not be the most expensive and lavish destination, but we still have Rocky Mountain powder in the winter and great hunting and fishing in the warmer months. A nice alternatives for families.



Grant Details

Grant: 24-52-OOT-DMO-015 - FY24 Gardiner DMO Plan - FY24

Status:	Underway
Program Area:	DOC Office of Tourism
Grantee Organization:	Gardiner Chamber of Commerce
Program Officer:	Barb Sanem
Awarded Amount:	\$89,881.00

Narrative Evaluation

After a difficult year during FY23, FY24 proved much more successful for the Gardiner CVB. Visitation picked up after the devastating flood of June 2022 and visitors' concerns about the disaster began to fade. Fully connectivity was restored to the greater Yellowstone area.

GCVB staff continued cooperative marketing efforts with Montana's Yellowstone Country and with the folks in Cooke City through the Northern Range Cooperative. The former Executive Director, Terese Petcoff, launched projects and partnerships that I'm continuing into FY25.

Several highlights of the year include hiring the Visitor Experience and Community Engagement Coordinator, finalizing Visitor Center sign production, and starting the Plastic Free YNP partnership.

The VECE Coordinator was an invaluable resource for visitors with her extensive knowledge of the region and passion for helping visitors get the most out of their trip. Fran was instrumental in bringing the Northern Rockies Nature Journaling 2024 conference to Gardiner.

At long last, we're installing new Visitor Center signs on Monday, November 25, 2024. This will complete the project that Terese designed in FY24. The installation occurs just in time for the annual Gardiner Christmas Stroll. Staff and board members are excited to enhance the look of the Visitor Center with attractive signage using our current branding.

Plastic Free YNP will reduce the usage of single use plastic and increase plastics recycling in Yellowstone National Park and in gateway communities, such as Gardiner. The partnership with multiple high-profile stakeholders will bring positive media attention to Gardiner and elevate the visitor experience in Gardiner.

These represent just a few of the "wins" for FY24 and staff is already building on that work for FY25.



Grant Details

Grant: 24-52-OOT-DMO-016 - FY24 Glendive DMO Plan - FY24

Status:	Underway
Program Area:	DOC Office of Tourism
Grantee Organization:	Glendive Area Chamber of Commerce & Agriculture
Program Officer:	Barb Sanem
Awarded Amount:	\$29,618.00

Narrative Evaluation

Fiscal Year 2024 marked significant achievements for the Glendive DMO, providing valuable insights and setting the stage for future growth. Despite challenges like road construction and temporary closures, our efforts to promote Glendive's attractions, events, and unique experiences successfully drove visitation, enhanced our digital presence, and established a strong foundation for the future.

Our marketing focus centered on positioning Glendive as a unique destination, with Makoshika State Park at the heart of our tourism strategy. Recognizing its importance as a leading driver of visitation and hotel stays, we printed trail maps to be distributed at both the Chamber Visitor Center and the Makoshika State Park Visitor Center, helping tourists navigate and fully appreciate the park. Nearly all our advertising campaigns highlighted Makoshika, emphasizing its pivotal role in attracting travelers.

In collaboration with Windfall, we launched our primary marketing campaign, "The Glendive 5," which promotes five key reasons to visit Glendive: Makoshika State Park, the Yellowstone River, Dinosaur Digs, Short Pines OHV, and Art, Museums, and History. These themes were seamlessly integrated across print advertising, social media, and window displays at the downtown Chamber building. This cohesive branding ensured Glendive remained top of mind for both locals and prospective visitors.

This year, we also partnered with Datafy, a SaaS and Ad Tech platform, to gather data analytics that will shape our future marketing strategies. We ran an ad campaign from September 29 to October 29, 2023, targeting late summer and early fall travelers. Although the campaign was short, it provided valuable data on visitor spending patterns, travel origins, and the effectiveness of our targeted advertising. These insights are already helping us refine our approach to ensure future campaigns reach the right audiences and deliver optimal results.

In addition to traditional marketing, we've worked to strengthen our digital footprint. Since launching the Discover Glendive website, we've made regular updates to improve its functionality and user experience, transforming it into a comprehensive resource for trip planning. At the same time, we've been growing our social media following, which has helped us engage more effectively with a broader audience. Through our website and social media, our DMO actively promotes large-scale events that draw visitors to Glendive, such as the Makoshika Basketball Tournament, the Journey to the Badlands Triathlon, Buzzard Days, and the Dawson County Fair, among others.

The DMO also completed several impactful projects to enhance the visitor experience and elevate Glendive's appeal. The updated Chamber building downtown now features large-scale photographs showcasing Glendive's attractions, along with a wayfinding window to provide additional information to visitors. We also redesigned and updated the Discover Glendive brochures, ensuring they reflect our brand and highlight the unique experiences available in the community. These brochures are key tools for connecting with visitors and showcasing everything Glendive has to offer.

Through strategic marketing, event support, and partnerships, our DMO has successfully increased awareness of Glendive, driving visitation and surpassing our hotel stay goal for Fiscal Year 2024. The positive growth in bed tax collections reflects the community's collective efforts and the appeal of Glendive as a destination for outdoor recreation, history, and memorable events. By continuing to emphasize key attractions like Makoshika State Park, fostering partnerships with organizations like the Dawson County Airport and Visit Southeast Montana, and supporting local events, our DMO remains committed to enhancing Glendive's reputation as a must-visit destination in Eastern Montana. Fiscal Year 2024 has set the stage for continued growth and success.



Grant Details

Grant: 24-52-OOT-DMO-017 - 2024 Great Falls DMO Plan - FY24

Status: Underway
Program Area: DOC Office of Tourism
Grantee Organization: Great Falls CVB
Program Officer: Barb Sanem
Awarded Amount: \$252,211.00

Narrative Evaluation

The fiscal year room demand started with substantial declines year over year. FY23 was the highest room demand in Great Falls' history, so maintaining that number coming off the pent-up demand from COVID-19 and the construction projects that brought in long-term stays was going to be tough. Demand increased year over year in April and has continued since. Currently, Great Falls is sitting 6% ahead of the previous year. We feel comfortable establishing FY24 the new baseline and retiring FY19 as the previous baseline.

Paid Media tactics were leveraged with TBID Assessment funds and were successful for FY24, maintaining a strong click-through rate of 0.84% and generating a total campaign reach of 3,398,488 and impressions of 29,544,607.

FY24 website active users topped 229,000. Of the top 7 pages on the website, 5 of them were paid media landing pages, supporting that paid media drives traffic to the website.

ITRR showed a 1% decline year over year in visitors between the ages of 25-34. We saw good engagement with our Snapchat and TikTok placements, however, did not see an increase in that age demographic for overnight visitation.

With the completion of the Travel Industry Growth Plan, we continue to work through the plan, onboarding partners to accomplish great things for Great Falls.

One of the four quarterly payments was missed, causing us to not expend all of our funds the way we had wanted. The missed payment was received. Lodging Tax payments are estimated until the final payment. With a missed payment and the low room demand numbers, the final payment, which is in essence all the funds left, up to the budget number, Great Falls Montana Tourism was conservative in its spending over the final two quarters, working to ensure it had enough funds to cover its planned expenses. The final payment arrived in June at the end of the fiscal year, for the amount expected, leaving little time to expend the budget.



Grant Details

Grant: 24-52-OOT-DMO-018 - FY24 HAVRE DMO PLAN - FY24

Status: Underway
Program Area: DOC Office of Tourism
Grantee Organization: Havre Area Chamber of Commerce
Program Officer: Barb Sanem
Awarded Amount: \$20,538.00

Narrative Evaluation

FY24 was a rebuilding time for the Havre DMO, as we faced challenges in employee and board member turnover. Havre Beneath the Streets-one of our main area attractions, also encountered significant flooding and unexpected closures due to excessive rainfall. Our other area attractions had difficulty at times maintaining consistent hours of operation due to shortages of employees and volunteers. We continue to partner with these organizations to showcase the attractions that make Havre special.

We did experience a YOY double digit percentage (14.3%) increase in our social media presence, a slight increase in website traffic (1.1%), and an increase of walk in visitors to our Havre visitors center (4% based on guest book entries). The publication and distribution of the new Havre visitors guide, as well as a revamping of our website (the first major update since 2018) are also highlights to our FY24. Overall, despite the challenges we faced, we overcame several obstacles in the promotion of Havre tourism. Overall our digital footprint has increased, and continues to increase.

The Havre DMO also continued to host and/or promote several events to encourage visitation to Havre. The Bear Paw Marathon, Living History Day, Art Alley Celebration, Sounds on the Square, Saturday Market, and Havre Festival Days are all events that encourage visitors to travel to Havre.



Grant Details

Grant: 24-52-OOT-DMO-019 - FY24 Helena CVB DMO Plan - FY24

Status:	Underway
Program Area:	DOC Office of Tourism
Grantee Organization:	Helena Area Chamber of Commerce CVB
Program Officer:	Barb Sanem
Awarded Amount:	\$235,000.00

Narrative Evaluation

Our goals this year were to:

- 1) Increase awareness of Helena as a recreational and leisure travel destination, ultimately increasing the lodging tax collections for FY24 over FY23.
- 2) Develop a strategic advertising campaign that promotes Helena during the summer (June-August) and the Fall shoulder season (September-October). This campaign will include a small print component, coupled with a comprehensive digital communications outreach plan.
- 3) Utilize the Cooperative Marketing Effort with the Helena TBID. The DMO Cooperative Marketing program is designed to allow organizations to promote an event on a cooperative basis with a nonprofit tourism-related organization.

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 through the work we did to develop a strategic campaign and the efforts that were put into attracting the right audience, we were able to see the benefit through an increase in ADR that led to an increase in bed tax collections. In conjunction with our partners at Helena TBID, we were able to capitalize on the brand strategy that has allowed for more consistent communication between 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, travelers with were 35+ and with a household income of 75K+, who were interested in Montana travel, family and leisure vacations, breweries and outdoor recreation travel. Post-pandemic, Helena saw 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 to direct flights and included both Alberta and Saskatchewan this year after getting feedback from our hotel partners.

The continuation of our 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, with a focus on streaming audio, YouTube shorts and a focus on our HTML e-mail list.

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, we decided to utilize the Opportunity Marketing efforts and work with three events that took place throughout the summer to increase opportunities for visitors to experience Helena as a local. In conjunction with the Helena TBID, we supported the marketing efforts of the Alive@5 music series that took place from June 2024-August 2024, Grandstreet Theatre's August Production of Little Shop of Horrors, and the July Symphony Under the Stars event. We did see an increase Year over Year of visitation at these events that resulted in an increase in occupancy as well as visitor spend. Overall, the dates of Alive@5 contributed to an increase of overnight trips by 10.9% year over year. The two-week run of Little Shop of Horrors showed a 2.1% increase in occupancy and the Symphony Under the Stars resulted in 21.2K visitors, an increase of 17% YOY. This Opportunity Marketing effort also helped educate our locals on the importance of the visitor economy and the impact visitors have in Helena each summer.

In addition to the Opportunity Marketing, we also took advantage of the Cooperative Marketing. This year, in partnership with 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. The rework of our travel planner allows us to promote Helena year-round and includes not only our more popular summer activities, but highlights winter and fall activities as well. 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 efforts. I believe that we were able to try some new marketing techniques that helped show growth in our lodging collections and gave us great footing to move forward. While we might not have seen a growth in occupancy numbers, we did see growth in the ADR, which reflects success in our targeting a demographic with disposable income willing to spend extra time in destinations. This year, we increased our lodging collections from \$171,000 in FY23 to \$235,000 in FY24. 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.



Grant Details

Grant: 24-52-OOT-DMO-020 - FY24 Kalispell DMO Plan - FY24

Status:	Underway
Program Area:	DOC Office of Tourism
Grantee Organization:	Kalispell Area Chamber of Commerce
Program Officer:	Barb Sanem
Awarded Amount:	\$293,025.00

Narrative Evaluation

Discover Kalispell FY24 Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) Plan Narrative Summary

In FY24, Discover Kalispell implemented a dynamic and multifaceted DMO plan to promote Kalispell as a premier travel destination. This plan seamlessly integrated paid, earned, and owned media strategies with Destination Stewardship and Development initiatives. The overarching goal was to enhance visitor experiences, support the local community, and drive room night stays through targeted marketing, group sales and event funding.

The methods and tactics implemented during FY24 successfully achieved the destination marketing, stewardship and development objectives and goals outlined in the DMO plan.

Destination Marketing Highlights

- **Campaign Focus:** Marketing efforts prioritized winter travel, unique Kalispell experiences, and responsible recreation. Campaigns promoted direct flights, group travel, and guided adventures. The introduction of the *Wander Map* offered travelers an engaging way to discover local businesses and enrich their visits.
- **Paid Media:** Evergreen campaigns achieved strong results, including 94,984 website clicks, 9.7 million impressions, and a 0.97% click-through rate (CTR), marking a year-over-year (YoY) increase of 0.35%.
 - Notable winter campaigns featured a ski pass incentive, generating 23,316 clicks and a standout 22.61% CTR via the JunGroup platform.
 - Direct flight promotions utilized out-of-home displays in Sonoma County and geo-targeted ads in Los Angeles.
 - Group travel campaigns leveraged search engine marketing (SEM), LinkedIn ads, custom articles, newsletters, and industry publication placements.
- **Owned Media:**
 - The creative library expanded with vibrant new photos and videos showcasing downtown dining and outdoor experiences.
 - Completed a website SEO audit to improve site structure, improve use of keywords and content driven optimization.
 - Quarterly newsletters to traveler opt-in database achieved an average open rate of 43% and average click rate of 3%.
- **Earned Media:**
 - Hosted press trips and participation in travel media conferences resulted in significant coverage in high-profile publications for Kalispell, including *Redbook*, *AARP*, *Barron's*, and *303 Magazine*.

Destination Stewardship and Management

- Visitor management initiatives included the production of the *Kalispell Adventure Guide*, table-top travel information displays, and trail map in support of the Flathead Trails Association.
- Initiatives to promote voluntourism encouraged travelers to give back to help protect our natural resources.

Destination Development Achievements

- Event grants funded initiatives such as the Frosty the Brewfest, Kalispell Art Challenge, rodeos, youth sports tournaments, and ranger-led snowshoe hikes in Glacier National Park.
- Group sales initiatives successfully contracted 1,639 room nights at Kalispell hotels in FY24. In total, 2,278 room nights were actualized during FY24, stemming from both current and prior year contracts. These efforts generated a substantial economic impact for local tourism businesses.

Kalispell Lodging Data Insights

- **Hotels:** While Q1 saw a 4.6% YoY occupancy increase, occupancy declined 11% between October 2023 to March 2024. Early spring continued the decline in occupancy however, strong

group business in June led to a 9% increase.

- **Short-Term Rentals:** Occupancy rates decreased by 17% YoY, but a surge in supply (67%) and demand (37%) highlighted growing interest in Kalispell's vacation rental market.

Impact and Outlook

Through robust marketing campaigns, strategic partnerships, and community-focused initiatives, Discover Kalispell has bolstered its reputation as a travel destination while addressing challenges in lodging trends. Looking forward, these efforts lay a solid foundation for sustainable growth and continued promotion of Kalispell's unique offerings.

Examples of Discover Kalispell's FY24 marketing campaigns is available as a PDF.



Grant Details

Grant: 24-52-OOT-DMO-021 - FY24 Livingston DMO Plan - FY24

Status:	Underway
Program Area:	DOC Office of Tourism
Grantee Organization:	Livingston Business Improvement District
Program Officer:	Barb Sanem
Awarded Amount:	\$86,538.00

Narrative Evaluation

DMO FY 23/24

1) Destination Marketing Objective: Increase year-over-year lodging tax collections and visitor spending in the cooler months for the Livingston DMO.

Proposed Tactics and Projects: Develop and execute a cool season marketing campaign, building on the success of the FY23 cool season marketing campaign, highlighting the mixture of small town experiences that includes arts, culture, events, history, food and recreation, reaching the Experience Seeker target audience through paid, owned and earned media tactics.

Destination Marketing: Increase year-over-year lodging tax collections by 5% during Q4 2023 and Q1 2024 vs. Q4 2022 and Q1 2023 for the Livingston CVB.

<https://marketmt.com/Programs/Industry-Services-and-Outreach/Lodging-Facility-Use-Tax> and see attached graph for more details. *Please note that because we are partners with the Livingston Tourism Business Improvement District, we are able to compare and determine increases due to occupancy levels versus increases in lodging rates.

Destination Marketing: Increase out-of-state and in-state visitor spending in Livingston by 5% between Nov 2023 through March 2024 (vs. Nov 2022 through March 2023). (See Department of Commerce RIS attached page graph.) Spending in Livingston by out-of-state visitors in Q4 2022 and Q1 2023, as measured by Zartioc Affinity Card Spending, equaled \$469,121. A 5% increase during Q4 2023 and Q1 2024 would result in a total of \$492,577 in out-of-state visitor spending.

Our metric for year over year lodging tax collections was a 5% increase in the cool season, Q1-4 FY 23/24 over the previous fiscal year. Or increase was 12% year over year in the cool season, when the industry needs the business most. Warm season Q2-3 FY 23/24 was up 50% over the previous fiscal year and is approaching overvisitation conditions.

The visitor spending increase objective could not be measured due to inconsistent availability of visitor spending data at the Livingston level. We were unable to access the sources cited when the plan was written so have pivoted to Yellowstone National Park Northgate entrance data by month from YNP as it is consistently and readily available. Cool season visitation from the North Gate Entrance, the only entrance open year round and visitors must go through Livingston to access, was up 12% in the cool season from FY 22/23 to FY 23/24.

Our objective was met, successful, exceeded expectations and we will continue these successful tactics of a cool season marketing campaign, highlighting the mixture of small town experiences that includes arts, seasonal and cultural events, history, food and recreation, reaching the Experience Seeker target audience through paid, owned and earned media tactics. As you can see, our warm weather season is up 50% without paid marketing during this season. We do no paid marketing for the warm season as there are often no hotel vacancies and summer events are often sold out, but offer up to date info on events, hospitality amenities, weather and condition updates, safety, and good visitor behavior to support a quality of experience for visitors.

Our small destination does not have the budget to pay Visitor Spending data so have pivoted to Yellowstone North Entrance data. We have not included visitor spending data in our current fiscal year plan and will not do so again until they are readily available at the City, not just county or region, level.

2) Destination Management Objective: Create awareness of our "Livingston Like A Local" (working title) campaign among visitors, new residents, and locals and increase year-over-year website traffic and social engagement.

Proposed Tactics and Projects: Develop and execute a "Livingston Like A Local" (working title) campaign, educating visitors and connecting with locals about Livingston's unique but imperiled small town culture and environmental assets. Connect with our warm season visitors both before they arrive through our website, eblasts, and social media platforms and eye-catching visuals throughout the community.

Communication includes personal responses to phone calls, emails, and social media contacts, which are increasingly frequent although our DMO is not the Visitors Center in Livingston.

Destination Management: Increase year-over-year traffic to Explore Livingston's website and social media platforms by 10%. As of March 2023, the Explore Livingston website had seen 17,155 site sessions between Nov 2022 and March 2023. A 10% increase during FY24 would result in a total of 18,871 site sessions.

Destination Management: Incorporate "Livingston Like A Local" content into website and ongoing social media posts (minimum of 25 posts throughout FY24) and highlight "Livingston Like A Local" in email newsletters (minimum of 4 mentions throughout FY24). Although it's difficult within our budget to measure the multi-faceted behavior of a high-value/low impact visitor, we will continue to look for anecdotal indicators including website traffic and email newsletter open rates. Website traffic chart attached.

Our metric was a 10% increase in website traffic FY 22/23 over FY 23/24 year. Our website traffic increase was 28% year over fiscal year for a total of 33,668 site sessions in FY 23/24. Our Facebook and Instagram followers exceeded our 10% increase metric; Facebook Reach was up 49% year over fiscal year, and Instagram Reach was up 41% year over fiscal year.

Our "Livingston Like A Local" objective was met with 32 Livingston Like a Local social media posts (including local events, responsible behavior, and opportunities for voluntourism) and Livingston Like a Local was included in four email newsletters.

Our objective was met, successful and exceeded expectations and we will continue these tactics. Our website traffic continues to grow and we invest significant resources in updating the daily calendar, amenity listings, itineraries, blogs and features so that the website is always an accurate, up to date, and useful tool. Our social media also continues to grow with paid cool season ads, and year round earned media and engagement; we average 12 Instagram posts per week tagging our account (much of it high quality videos and photos from professional photographers and amenity marketers) and 6 tagged posts on our Facebook page, which has fewer followers but higher engagement. See accounts <https://www.explorelivingstonmt.com/> https://www.instagram.com/explore_livingston_mt/ and <https://www.facebook.com/explorelivingstonmt>

"Livingston Like A Local" objective was met, successful, and we will expand these tactics including billboards, swag, social media, print ads and website development. See the attached images. Livingston Like a Local will be one of the product outcomes of our Destination Management and Resilient Tourism Strategic Plan underway.

3) Destination Stewardship Goal: Develop a five-year strategic vision and plan, working with other local organizations to increase the overall resiliency of Livingston's hospitality businesses.

Overall Objective: Proceed with strategic vision planning to build year-round economic resiliency with input from the Livingston area tourism and hospitality stakeholders.

Proposed Tactics and Projects: Tactics expected to include the following: incorporate key learnings and best practices from other strategic planning and resiliency work being conducted across the state; form steering committee of stakeholders; review existing ITRR research and other community-wide data; distribute survey to understand and measure Livingston area hospitality and tourism related businesses' evolving thoughts on tourism (our first tourism sentiment survey was conducted right before the Summer 2022 Flood); conduct listening sessions with community members to gather input; analyze and summarize findings into key takeaways; outline plan to share with stakeholders for review and adoption.

Destination Stewardship: Secure input from 100+ community members via stakeholder engagement, survey and listening sessions to develop the five-year strategic vision and plan. We've begun the process of developing the vision and plan and will be using the research groundwork we completed in year one to complete the process by 2027, remaining responsive and flexible to ongoing situations.

Findings from initial survey (completed pre-2022 floods) attached as reference for groundwork in Stewardship plan.

Our Destination Stewardship goal of input from 100+ community members via stakeholder engagement and listening sessions were not met in this fiscal year due to the slower RFP process of securing a contractor to undertake this ambitious strategic plan. Livingston DMO has only one staff member who could not implement the plan without an outside contractor and following regulations for an RFP.

Due to the plan's scope, an RFP for a Strategic Vision planner needed to be put out, advertised widely, applicants reviewed, and a winning bidder chosen. The winning contractor, Maclaren Latta, began the outline, timeline, stakeholder research and met with peer groups to share data from their tourism-related surveys and data to eliminate duplication and share findings. We will continue to work closely with these peers and outreach to stakeholders in the current fiscal year. The RFP, and contract proposal are attached.



Grant Details

Grant: 24-52-OOT-DMO-022 - FY24 Miles City Marketing Plan - FY24

Status: Underway
Program Area: DOC Office of Tourism
Grantee Organization: Miles City Area Chamber of Commerce
Program Officer: Barb Sanem
Awarded Amount: \$56,057.00

Narrative Evaluation

Over the course of this annual process we have discovered that a quarterly plan makes adjustments and corrections much easier and more timely. We have had solid numbers for the last year and are very happy with our placements in the budget. Our data tracking has been spot on and is helpful for direction corrections. I feel that all of our direction marketing is just and staying the course is sound. We will continue to place strong event marketing, be very cautious in fall quarter to stay visible with outdoor sports but monitor the deer population, deer population, and block management. With the additions of the Indian Relays at the end of FY25 and the Cattle Drive Reunion in early FY26 we are looking forward to strong numbers to add to our already good results.



Grant Details

Grant: 24-52-OOT-DMO-023 - FY 23-24 Destination Missoula DMO Plan - FY24

Status:	Underway
Program Area:	DOC Office of Tourism
Grantee Organization:	Missoula Convention & Visitors Bureau
Program Officer:	Barb Sanem
Awarded Amount:	\$643,938.00

Narrative Evaluation

Marketing & Development

Promote our destination with an emphasis on responsible travel messaging and increasing diversity and inclusion.

It is important that our marketing reflect the values of our community as indicated through our resident sentiment survey. Therefore, responsible travel messaging to all visitors, whether regional, national or international, is extremely important to our community to help preserve the exceptional natural resources we all live here to enjoy. The other thing that was loud and clear in our survey was Missoula has always been a welcoming community, and now, more than ever, Missoulian's want that to be conveyed through our marketing.

Every leisure print advertisement we ran this year featured the message "Travel Safely. Explore Responsibly." This messaging was consistently included across all print materials, ensuring that our commitment to responsible travel reached our audience through traditional media. By integrating this message, we emphasized the importance of safety and sustainability, encouraging travelers to make conscious choices while exploring new destinations. We also carry this messaging throughout our major publication – the Missoula Visitor Guide and on our website – www.destinationmissoula.org. On the website we also feature information and a video in partnership with Fish Wildlife and Parks and the Clark Fork Coalition to educate people how to recreate responsibly on the river.

In response to the goal of increasing diversity in our marketing campaigns, we have been actively collaborating with Here Montana, an organization dedicated to providing outdoor adventures to People of Color and intersecting communities. Their partnership has been instrumental in ensuring that our campaigns feature models from diverse backgrounds, showcasing People of Color engaging in outdoor activities. We have made it a priority to create meaningful opportunities for inclusivity, ensuring that diversity in age, ethnicity, gender, body shape and ability, etc. is represented across all our marketing efforts. This commitment is central to our approach, and we will continue to widen and amplify these voices in all forms of our marketing moving forward.

Destination Stewardship

Balance the needs of visitors and residents through collaborative community engagement to create better visitor experiences, enhanced quality of life for residents and a more sustainable destination.

1. The intent behind the objectives in this goal was to complete the Destination Stewardship Plan that we started in September of 2022, and to create partnerships within our community to help educate our residents and visitors as to the importance of sustainable tourism and to work with those partners to collaborate around the initiatives within the final Stewardship Plan and its implementation.

We hired MMGY NextFactor and Better Destinations to lead us through the Destination Stewardship process. From February through June 30, 2023, we formed a Destination Stewardship steering committee, comprised of 28 leaders representing city, county and tribal governments, economic development, arts, culinary, accommodations, recreation, conservation, land managers, businesses, and nonprofits from across the community. The consultants met with the Steering Committee in April and held one-on-one interviews with our Mayor, 2 of our 3 County Commissioners, and the Director of the Missoula Redevelopment Agency. The consultants returned in May, and we held more one-on-one interviews and the first half of our focus groups and town halls. We held 4 focus groups with representatives from outdoor recreation and conservation, our Front Country land managers, hotel and accommodations, attractions, festivals and events (sporting, recreational). The consultants held one-on-one interviews with the U of M President, economic development director, representatives from our hospitals, and from Logjam Presents – a major music production company in Missoula. We also held two town halls that were open to the public.

Research was concentrated on in the summer of 2023. SMARInsights conducted a national visitor profile survey. The survey targeted 447 visitors and 501 potential visitors, collecting data on 1,174 trips. The survey was designed to help us develop a profile of visitors to identify different visitor segments, key

motivating factors, gauge the role of sustainability as a motivator, assess the image of the destination, and determine how Missoula compares to key competitors.

We also had MMGY NextFactor conduct a resident sentiment survey, released in the spring and fall of 2023, to assess residents' views on tourism before the summer tourism season started and after it was over. Approximately 953 residents participated in the survey.

The consultants also conducted a DestinationNext community assessment of 78 key stakeholders in the community to assess the strengths and alignment of the community as a destination. This assessment was based on a series of 24 variables. This will help us to build on our strengths and point to opportunities.

In the fall of 2023, we conducted 4 more focus groups with Arts, Culture, Heritage and History; Cultural Diversity; Retail, Food and Beverage; Government, Economic Development, Transportation and Sustainability; and Tribal. Additionally, we held more one-on-one interviews and 2 more community town halls.

In total, we created a steering committee comprised of 29 community leaders from all sectors and engaged 1,242 stakeholders and community members. We held 10 focus groups with 92 participants, 16 one-on-one interviews and 4 community town halls.

Our hope was to have completed both the Tourism Destination Stewardship and Implementation Plans by December of 2023. Due to the necessity for multiple rewrites of the Plan to accurately reflect the community input and research, and to develop a Stewardship Plan and Implementation Plan that was comprehensive but not too lengthy, and easy to read and understand, we did not get it completed to take to the Steering Committee for validation until after the beginning of the 2024-25 fiscal year.

1. During this fiscal year, we made additional presentations on the Destination Stewardship Plan throughout our community, including Missoula City Council, Missoula County Commissioners, Missoula Downtown Association, Missoula Chamber of Commerce, Kiwanis, University of Montana, Front Country Recreation Cooperative, Blaine County Idaho Officials, and the Travel and Words Conference to name a few. Additionally, we have presented to high school and University of Montana classes.

We have strengthened our collaboration with the University of Montana to help with recruitment and brand awareness through a multi-page U of M spread in our visitor guide, website content, boosting U of M social content and working with multiple departments in the University from the President's Office, U of M Athletics, ITRR, and Entertainment Management and more.

Barb Neilan, Director of Destination Missoula, sits on the Front Country Recreation Cooperative with land managers surrounding Missoula, including Fish, Wildlife and Parks, BLM, Forest Service, DNRC, Missoula County, City of Missoula Park and Rec, U.S. Forest Service, Five Valleys Land Management, and the University of Montana. The work of the collaborative is centered around sustainable management of resources and tourism initiatives. We also had staff participate in frontline training for all of these organizations so that we share information and resources which is extremely valuable in crises situations. In addition, Barb has served on a focus group for the City of Missoula 2024 Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Trails Plan and making sure that initiatives from the Destination Stewardship Plan are reflected in the final PROST Plan, and been working with both the City and private partners on sustainable transportation options for our river and trail recreation.

Destination Management

Gain a deeper understanding of our visitors and residents through research and use the research to better manage our visitation throughout the year.

1. As you can see from the data contained in our completion reports the data from the specified sources is regularly reported at our monthly board meetings. Numbers for our visitor center, call center, and website are all up year over year. We also completed our Resident Sentiment Survey through MMGY and a national visitor profile research project through SMARInsights as noted above in Destination Stewardship. This information has been extremely helpful in planning both Montana and nationally focused marketing campaigns.
2. We met our objective of maintaining our prior warm season visitation number, but we fell short of our goal of a 1% increase in our shoulder season numbers. In setting these numbers, we had already begun to see a decline in visitation from the pandemic, which we felt was a natural attrition and balancing from pandemic years. That is one of the reasons we were pretty conservative in setting our goals for the year. What we did not expect was a winter with very little snow affecting winter visitation to the whole state. In addition, this caused concern about the spring and summer with fire danger. Missoula was the only city in the State to see an increase in occupancy in December of 2023, and we have started to see a slow increase since April of 2024.
3. As members of Destinations International, 100% of our staff have attended conferences, events, webinars and educational events throughout the year. These events range from DI Annual Convention, Advocacy Summit, DI Sales & Services Summit, DI Advocacy Committee, DI EDI Committee, etc. Additionally, not only did we all attend the Montana Governor's Conference on Tourism, Missoula hosted the event and staff spoke on one of the panels. We also had staff working with the State of Montana Resiliency initiative, taking the Leave No Trace webinar, Leadership Missoula, George Washington University Sustainable Tourism certification classes, and Missoula JEDI Network Committee. Although we have all discussed attendance at all of these educational events, pros and cons, and what we learned, we did not perform a formal written survey of the staff regarding these education opportunities and will do so in the future.

Destination Development

Work in collaboration with the Missoula Montana Airport to design and create an innovative airport visitor center.

We have dedicated significant effort to researching, planning, and ideating several design concepts for the Missoula Montana airport visitor information center, working closely with the airport senior staff. The section of the airport where this visitor information center will be featured is in final construction and this collaboration has continued into 2024/25. The second phase of airport construction is estimated to be

completed in April or May of 2025. Final design concepts have been approved by both Destination Missoula and the Missoula Montana Airport.



Grant Details

Grant: 24-52-OOT-DMO-024 - FY24 Red Lodge DMO Plan - FY24

Status:	Underway
Program Area:	DOC Office of Tourism
Grantee Organization:	Red Lodge Chamber of Commerce/Visitors Center
Program Officer:	Barb Sanem
Awarded Amount:	\$65,095.00

Narrative Evaluation

The Red Lodge Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) executed a successful marketing plan for FY24, which focused on three key tactics: promoting seasonal events and activities, showcasing warm-weather adventures unique to our area (historic town, foodie paradise, wildlife viewing, scenic ride/drives, camping, biking, hiking, star gazing and world class fishing), and enhancing the visitor experience through improved information (updated brochures/travel planner, restroom refresh) and additional Wayfinding signage.

Made possible through the Joint Venture program, we were able to participate in a combination of targeted digital and print advertising campaigns with Yellowstone Country and Windfall. These joint ventures are crucial to leveraging our reach to more high value/low impact visitors that we typically would not be able to market to due to our limited budget. We also advertised in Southeast Montana magazine which has a distribution of over 80,000 copies and an estimated readership of 230,000, Cody Enterprise (distributed in 7 different states including Montana, Wyoming, N Dakota, S Dakota, Idaho, Utah and Nebraska), American Road (audience of over 100,000 readers) and Road Runner Magazine (readership of around 250,000 who use RR to plan their vacation each year). We kept our Agency Services, which ensured our advertising was high quality and eye-catching. These opportunities directly impact our Objective/Method of increasing travel planner requests which was a very successful Obj/Method. Those requests were up by 893 total requests (3082 in FY24 over 2189 in FY23).

In addition to these Joint Venture opportunities, we were able to identify 2 new locations for the Phase II Wayfinding signs (original locations were lost during flooding in 2022) and successfully negotiate with Montana Department of Transportation, City of Red Lodge, and Carbon County for the installation of these signs at those locations. This was a huge win for us and although no signs were installed, it is a step forward in the progress of Phase II of this project. However, due to the fact the signs were not installed as anticipated, this was not a successful Objective/Method for us, but we know based on research and the success of our Phase I Wayfinding project that this collaborative effort will result in better signage at critical points of entry and throughout the area, making it easier for visitors to navigate and discover local attractions, making it a future successful Objective/Method.

The Red Lodge DMO had a notable increase in lodging tax collections, which reflects the area's growing appeal as a tourist destination due to the marketing of our area. Over the past year, lodging tax revenue rose by 19% in FY24 compared to FY23. We attribute this growth to targeted marketing campaigns (Joint Venture and our partnership with the Red Lodge TBID) and the popularity of specific annual events in Red Lodge such as Red Lodge Christmas Stroll, Red Lodge Car Show, Montana Renaissance Festival, Songwriters Festival, Home of Champions Rodeo and Beartooth Rally. All these events saw record attendance numbers.

Our visitor center assisted over 5,000 visitors with varying levels of needs and questions. #1 being, is the Beartooth Highway open? #2, do you have a bathroom? and #3, what hikes do you recommend? We wanted to improve the visitor experience by providing consistent, clear, and concise area information. We were also able to make updates to our visitor restrooms and add LED lighting to our 24-hour brochure room. Providing accurate, clear/concise information as well as a welcoming environment will not only encourage visitors to plan return visits, but also is one of the top compliments we receive at the visitor center. In FY24, we saw visitors from all 50 states and a definite return of our international travelers (Canada is back!) who listed seeing the TV show Yellowstone as the reason they chose to come to Montana, but in researching where to go in Montana, they noted the Beartooth Highway as a "must do" experience. From there, they found Red Lodge to be their choice of towns to stay in based on the wide variety of activities offered in the area. We heard the term "charming town" often. After Canada, France and the UK were the top international points of origin documented on our Visitor Information sheets.

The Red Lodge DMO attended all TAC meetings in FY24 both in person (Anaconda-October, Billings-June and online (February) as well as attending the 2024 Governor's Conference in Missoula and the DMO director attending various meetings with our region, Yellowstone Country. These in person meetings are especially important to staying connected, feeling supported, and sharing ideas. Online meetings do not provide an easy platform for this connection and sharing. Education is a critical component of our plan and will continue to remain a top priority so we can stay informed on trends happening in tourism.

Our ENews subscribers grew by 595 contacts in FY24. We have an open rate of 41% which is 6% above the industry average. E-newsletters are a vital tool for the Red Lodge DMO, playing a key role in its

efforts to promote the town and engage both potential and returning visitors. In the digital age, e-newsletters provide a direct and cost-effective way to connect with a targeted audience, delivering timely updates, event information, and travel inspiration straight to subscribers' inboxes. This type of communication allows the Red Lodge DMO to maintain a consistent and personalized connection with individuals who have already expressed interest in the area, ensuring they are kept informed about seasonal events, promotions, new attractions, and local highlights. Ultimately, e-newsletters are an essential component of the Red Lodge DMO's broader marketing plan, helping to drive visitation, support local businesses, and promote the town's distinctive character year-round.

In conclusion, the Red Lodge Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) has made significant strides in its FY24 marketing efforts, positioning Red Lodge as a key destination for regional, out-of-state and international travelers. Through a combination of targeted print and digital campaigns, strategic partnerships, and local event promotion there was an increase in lodging tax collections. The rise in travel planner requests demonstrates the growing interest in Red Lodge, signaling that the DMO's outreach and promotional strategies are resonating with travelers seeking a distinctive, year-round Montana experience.

Additionally, the successful negotiations with the Montana Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the City/County of Red Lodge to install new wayfinding signage marks a crucial advancement in our effort to move forward with Phase II of our Wayfinding project. The updated signage will help guide visitors to key attractions and businesses, it also improves the overall visitor experience. This in turn enhances the economic impact of tourism in Red Lodge. This collaboration reflects the DMO's proactive approach to ensuring that Red Lodge remains accessible and easy to navigate for both new and returning visitors.

Looking ahead, the Red Lodge DMO is well-positioned to build on the momentum gained in FY24. By continuing to leverage data-driven marketing strategies, fostering community and business partnerships, and expanding its print and digital footprint, the DMO can further highlight Red Lodge's appeal as a premier Montana destination. As tourism continues to be a vital economic driver, the DMO's ongoing efforts will ensure the sustainable growth of Red Lodge's tourism sector, benefiting the local community and economy for years to come.



Grant Details

Grant: 24-52-OOT-DMO-025 - FY24 West Yellowstone DMO Plan - FY24

Status:	Underway
Program Area:	DOC Office of Tourism
Grantee Organization:	West Yellowstone Chamber of Commerce
Program Officer:	Barb Sanem
Awarded Amount:	\$476,325.00

Narrative Evaluation

West Yellowstone DMO/CVB Narrative Evaluation

Destination Marketing, Management and Development

Destination Yellowstone's overarching goal is always 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. This year especially we need to continue to communicate that we are open and focus our attention on actively marketing to eliminate the passthrough town impact that we have begun to see. We set these goals to help us balance our focus between destination marketing, destination development and destination management. We continue to encourage both residents and visitors alike to travel safe, recreate responsibly, leave no trace, focus on wildfire safety, and of course continue our "Be Patient, Be Kind, Be Cool, Be Responsible" campaign.

The tactics that we focused on this year:

- Expanded our marketing effectiveness and social media reach and interaction by joining our efforts with those of marketing partners.
- Created media and messaging around traveling respectfully and responsibly. We incorporated the Leave No Trace principles into our messaging.
- Provided support and funding to our visitor information center both in staffing and projects to improve both the services available and the visitor experience with the remodel of our Visitor Information Center restroom.
- Enhanced the visitor experience by educating them on the activities and events taking place within West Yellowstone. Helped visitors route in and around West Yellowstone and the surrounding areas of Montana to experience all that our State has to offer.
- Educated staff through professional development & educational opportunities, including seminars, trainings and conferences to learn of emerging trends and new products.

One of our top priorities of marketing the Town of West Yellowstone is always to increase our lodging tax collections over the prior year. This past fiscal year we saw our lodging tax collections increase 13.54% and our resort tax collections increase 11.34% over prior year. This is encouraging after a year that we saw decreases in both resort and lodging tax collections due to the flood during the summer of 2022.

Expanding our marketing effectiveness and social media reach and interaction this year was a huge focus for us, and we strategically set ourselves up for success by joining our efforts with those of marketing partners; Wendt for our main paid media and social campaigns as well as email and influencer marketing, Bowstern for our website, SEO and blogs and Amplified for marketing focused on specific events that we partner with and support within our community, helping boost their advertising and reach, such as West Yellowstone Ski Festival, Kids N Snow, West Yellowstone Ice Fishing Tournament, Music in the Park, etc.

Paid Media: We ran a few main campaigns through the year with a Winter Media Campaign and a Spring Media 2024 campaign as well as a Targeted Fall Campaign. Our goals overall were to increase awareness of West Yellowstone as a vacation destination during fall, winter and spring, encourage travel for both families and outdoor recreationalists, position West Yellowstone as a destination and not a passthrough community, the gateway to Yellowstone with lodging options and recreation opportunities and to always drive website traffic.

Our campaign markets were Montana, Salt Lake City, Boise, Idaho Falls, Pocatello, Denver and Wyoming. Our Winter campaign markets focused on the same markets but also included Minnesota, Wisconsin, North Dakota, Atlanta, Austin, Dallas, San Diego, San Francisco & Phoenix. The tactics used throughout all campaigns included online video, paid search, digital display, native content, paid social media, Google ad words and streaming television. We also focused on a targeted Influencer Campaign with influencers from Montana, Utah, Dallas and Atlanta using the Instagram platform.

Our Winter Digital Campaign generated 2,065,633 impressions and 8,071 activities and the Winter Social Campaign generated 407,317 impressions with 17,944 activities. The campaign also saw a video

completion rate of 77.25% (benchmark for Wendt is 65-70%).

Our Spring Digital Campaign generated 948,224 impressions and 5,245 activities and the Spring Social Campaign generated 717,555 impressions with 27,583 activities. The campaign also saw a video completion rate of 84.42% (benchmark for Wendt is 65-70%).

Our Targeted Fall Campaign with Amplified contained PPC, digital display ads for drive market and targeted fly markets in both Los Angeles and San Francisco. This campaign generated 1,103,392 impressions with 17,161 activities.

Our Visit USA Parks campaign was a blend of 50-50 international and domestic markets, targeting the US, UK & Germany. We focused on winter and spring experiences within West Yellowstone. We used 2 itinerary-based stories and pushed out social posts through FB & IG with two rounds of Meta retargeting. The campaign was successful because the impressions and clicks both exceed the campaign deliverables of 300,00 and 6,500. Cost per click of \$0.11 is well below the industry average of \$0.63. Our best performing content was the story ads, they outperformed in both rounds of ads, with the winter campaign having the best results. The domestic market came in with the lowest CPC with \$0.10. The best performing CTR was Germany with 3.14%. We have partnered with Visit USA Parks for many years. They always over-deliver on our campaigns and provide added additional value, this year in the form of Pinterest pins – a social platform that we are now strategically working to grow.

Social Media: Throughout FY24 our goal was to increase our social media engagement of current followers while also attracting new followers for both Facebook and Instagram, while also concentrating on elevating the content that we were putting out. Facebook saw a **5,520,771 Reach (28.65% increase over FY23) 84.75% of the reach is from organic search! 23,596 Follows (28.49% increase over FY23)**. Instagram saw a **126,500 Reach (slight decrease from FY23, however our content interactions are up 3,500 over FY23) 9,076 Follows (24% increase over FY23)**. We utilized user-generated content from the Crowdriff platform to help us stay fresh and relevant.

Email Marketing: We have a very healthy newsletter subscription base of 40,860, up 4.45% from FY23. We saw 596 organic email sign-ups through both online prompts and Visitor Information Center sign-in sheets. In February 2024 we had Wendt, our agency, begin working on an email content strategy which included assessing and reviewing our current strategy. After this review we strategically created geographic segments within our current lists to help us define our drive markets vs. fly markets, so that we can send more targeted smaller lists emails for specific campaign elements. We also standardized our email sign-up forms to include geographic location, traveler interest and season preference. And lastly, we added a "Subscribe Pop-Up" to our website to directly prompt visitors to sign up for our emails.

Website: Our total website sessions this year reached an impressive 367,773 sessions. This achievement reflects our ongoing efforts in driving traffic and engaging users across various channels. Notably, organic search emerged as the leading source, contributing 163,987 sessions, showcasing the effectiveness of our SEO strategies that we have been focusing on this year. While some of this growth can be attributed to seasonal factors driving organic traffic, the substantial improvement underscores the effectiveness of our targeted SEO strategies. This success demonstrates the importance of continually refining and optimizing our content to meet user needs and search engine criteria. Additionally, our conversion rates are on the rise, with a total of 4,052 conversions as well as a resounding 17,000+ downloads/views of our online travel planner, indicating that our audience is not only visiting, but also taking action. Our Authority Score climbed three points from 36 to 39. Authority Score is a comprehensive metric (rated 1-100) that measures a website's overall quality and domain reputation by analyzing backlink quality, organic traffic patterns, and potential spam indicators. Think of Authority Score as a domain's "credit score" for the internet - it tells us how trustworthy and influential our website is in the digital world. When our Authority Score increases, it signals that major search engines and other websites view us as more credible and authoritative, which directly impacts our visibility in search results and our ability to attract quality traffic. This improved reputation not only helps drive more organic traffic to our site but also makes us a more attractive partner for high-value business relationships, ultimately contributing to stronger brand perception and potential revenue growth through improved digital presence.

Travel Planners: We once again printed 45,000 Travel Planners and distributed them throughout Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, and Utah. We had 4,534 PDF downloads and 12,578 views of the new viewable flipbook travel planner created with the IZZU software – this allows for an immediate viewable planner that visitors can flip through, essentially an online live book. This did affect direct downloads, and we saw a decrease, however when you factor in the PDF downloads and the views of the flipbook, we saw a 20% increase over last year. This year we also added pop-ups strategically on a few landing pages to prompt conversions, which created 4,052 conversions. Travel Planners continue to be a driving force for our website.

Destination Management

The ability to educate staff through professional development & educational opportunities, including seminars, trainings and conferences to learn of emerging trends and new products has helped us to learn more about managing our destination correctly with responsible and sustainable travel and has allowed us the opportunity to pass that knowledge onto our community. This year staff attended the Destinations International Annual Convention, the destination organization industry's premier event to meet peers and gain cutting-edge knowledge to tackle the challenges of tomorrow, the ESTO Annual Conference put on by the US Travel Association, a learning and knowledge-sharing forum for destination marketing professionals, and the TTRA (Travel and Tourism Research Association) Annual Conference, "**Global Insights, Local Stories Shaping Tourism Research**," set the stage for an engaging exploration of the latest travel and tourism research trends, data, and technology.

Also, being able to provide support and funding to our Visitor Information Center both in staffing and projects to improve both the services available and the visitor experience has become essential, as seen with the large remodel project that we went through this past summer with the Visitor Information Center restroom; a restroom that sees over 1.5 million visitors throughout the year.

Handling multiple crisis-mode situations throughout the year has become second nature to our organization, this year with the YNP Biscuit Basin Explosion and the YNP July 4th Law Enforcement Involved Shooting. We have found that by using our website, social media and emails as soon as a crisis appears, we are able to own the narrative and get correct information out in a timely fashion to both residents and visitors here in West Yellowstone and potential visitors that are in the process of traveling. This has enhanced the visitor experience by educating them on the activities and events taking place within West Yellowstone, providing essential communication throughout crisis periods, as well as a sense of ease in knowing the truth of the situation.

Overall, FY24 was a successful year for us; we saw significant increases in all our metrics, especially those that enhance the visitor experience by helping to educate them on the activities and events taking place within West Yellowstone such as our website, social media and travel planners. When coupled with pushing out Recreate and Travel Responsible messaging, we saw tremendous positive engagement.



Grant Details

Grant: 24-52-OOT-DMO-026 - FY24 Whitefish DMO Annual Plan - FY24

Status:	Underway
Program Area:	DOC Office of Tourism
Grantee Organization:	Whitefish Convention and Visitors Bureau, Inc.
Program Officer:	Barb Sanem
Awarded Amount:	\$339,471.00

Narrative Evaluation

Explore Whitefish a.k.a. Whitefish Convention & Visitors Bureau FY 2024 Narrative:

Whitefish officially returned to pre-COVID levels of tourism in FY2024. Our annual visitor numbers as reported by ITRR, were 1.1M with just over 600,000 of those visitors staying at least 1 overnight. We continue to estimate the value of our overall visitor economy at \$200M for 59937. Based on VDI/Visa Destination Insights \$0.58 of every dollar spent, was spent by a visitor. Tourism remains Whitefish's #1 economic engine and employer. (COVID VISITATION: '20 1.4M; '21 1.2M)

Our warm season, June - September, continues to be our most economically impactful season. Clearly our summer outdoor recreation and close proximity to Glacier National Park are primary draws.

While our warm season visitation is economically impactful, providing vital tax base to city and state, Explore Whitefish continues to be negatively impacted by the fallout of anti-visitation sentiment by locals. Throughout FY24, we continued to struggle to rebuild lost membership from our local restaurant community. In order to offset the losses, EW developed strategic priorities and campaigns focused to educate our local community on the importance of tourism management, stewardship and crafted 2 new "organic" campaigns highlighting food and cultural activities available during our non-summer months.

Hotel/Lodging Performance - We have just over 1000 traditional lodging rooms in 59937; In the last year due to this grant we were able to enhance our data reporting by contracting with Destimetrics/Intopia Data Management (Smith Travel was only capturing about 30%). We now have more accurate data with just under 70% of our hotels/lodging partners reporting. We finished FY24 with an average occupancy rate of 52.55% and an ADR of \$233.62. Our highest performing month was July '23 at 78% average occupancy and \$470.46 average ADR. Our worst performing month was April '24 at a 21.3% average occupancy and ADR of \$128.22.

Short-term Rental Performance - STRs continue to be concern here in Whitefish. In FY24, we saw additional STR supply growth to an average of 1200 nightly listings with 3 x the number of bedrooms to traditional lodging. STR finished FY24 at a 51.1% occupancy at an ADR of \$467.29. Similar to traditional lodging, July performed the best at 78% occupancy and ADR of \$560. April performed poorly at a 21% occupancy and ADR dropped to an average \$377.76.

Explore Whitefish remains dedicated to building beneficial tourism through inspiration, education, and partnerships to enhance, protect and preserve a viable year-round community. Due to member and private revenue loss we have retargeted our messaging to build inspiring messaging and experiences to not only draw interest but to bring visitors to our destination in compliment to outdoor recreation. As we look to the future, we see our role has transitioned to managing the disruptors associated with our busy season and build managed visitation in our shoulder seasons.

We are fortunate to be located in one of the world's more beautiful locations, yet the warm season alone will not keep community thriving. In order to build beneficial visitation and a year-round visitor economy, we must properly target, message and build interest in more than our amazing outdoor recreation. We have built strategic priorities to compliment our long-term plan by building desirable shoulder season events (Whitefish Food & Wine Festival, Whitefish Songwriters Festival, Winter Carnival), invest in robust and attractive meeting & group assets, focus on external member and group sales to include participation in MICE events and trade shows to draw more corporate meetings, retreats and wellness events to Whitefish.