

State Tribal Economic Development Commission

Billings Hotel and Convention Center
1223 Mullooney Lane
Billings, MT 59101
9:08 a.m.-2:59 p.m.
Friday, Aug. 8, 2025

The official meeting minutes may be accessed on the [recording](#).

Commissioners Present: Gerald Gray (Chair), Jennifer Finley (Vice-Chair), Shawn Backbone, Delina Cuts The Rope, Bryce Kirk, Melissa Lonebear and Marta Bertoglio.

Commissioners Present Virtually: Mark Blasdel

Montana Department of Commerce Staff Present: T.J. Altekruze, Rachelle Brown, Mackenzie Espeland and Josh Bennett

Montana Department of Commerce Staff Virtual: Angie DeYoung and Olivia Kettenring

Guests Present:

Alonzo Grant – NADC Apex

Andrew Huff – Center for Indian Country Development – Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis

Alicia Smith – NADC Apex

Shawn Real Bird – Montana Indigenous Tourism Alliance

Titus Takes Gun – Metal Solutions, Inc.

Guests Present Virtual:

Glenna Hartman – Institute for Tourism & Recreation Research

Carter Bermingham – Institute for Tourism & Recreation Research

Tash Wisemiller – USDA Rural Development

Buc (Jacob) Turcotte – Turcotte Food Bus

Andrew Huff – Center for Indian Country Development – Federal Reserve Bank of
Minneapolis

Andrew Cutler

Gayle Lammers

Heather LaTray

Mary Descheeny Reyna

Call Meeting to Order

18:23 Chair Gray called the meeting to order.

19:02 Mr. Altekruse called the roll for Commission members.

Opening Prayer

19:58 Commissioner Backbone

Welcome

21:14 Chair Gray welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Public Comment on Non-Agenda Items

21:29 Chair Gray requested public comment on non-agenda items. Commerce Director and STED Commissioner Marta Bertoglio introduced herself.

Approval of Minutes

24:28 Presenter: Chair Gray
Motion to approve: Commissioner Kirk
Second: Commissioner Backbone
Chair Gray called for a vote.
All commissioners present voted yes. Motion passed.

Commissioner Round Robin Discussion

26:09 Commissioner Backbone stated the Crow Tribe is having issues with Indian Health Services with budgeting. Chair Gray asked if they would be revamping some of the coal. Commissioner Backbone stated it should be because of the Big Beautiful Bill. He also stated there is nine billion tons of coal on the Crow Reservation.

28:08 Commissioner Cuts The Rope stated the Fort Belknap Indian Community is focusing on housing as they are facing a housing shortage. She stated that affordable housing is a challenge because of a lot of things including capital banking, lending, homeownership and other things. They are working on several different housing development projects. They are just finishing



construction of 24 homes on the Eagle Valley Housing Development at the Fort Belknap Agency, northwest of the airstrip at Fort Belknap. They are working on some policies for rent to own so working people can afford to put equity into the homes and eventually own them.

Commissioner Cuts The Rope also stated they are also putting up seven new homes in the Old Hayes housing area and 12 homes in the Lodgepole Leggins area. They are developing in the northeast corner, next to Dotson on the east end of the reservation.

Commissioner Cuts The Rope stated they are in the middle of broadband connectivity. Eventually, they will be able to offer low-cost internet access. She stated they also received the Vocational Rehabilitation award from the Department of Education which is a four-year project for about \$4 million. Commissioner Cuts The Rope stated that it is for five years for vocational rehab workforce development for those with disabilities.

Commissioner Cuts The Rope stated when they submit applications, they are staying away from climate change, solar development and other similar things due to this current administration. Additionally, Commissioner Cuts The Rope stated they are working on the reuse of a building for a commodity warehouse. They are looking for funds for that project.

32:21 Commissioner Kirk stated the Fort Peck Tribe is building a casino and a meat cutting company. They are waiting for some electricity and water. They are also trying to extend more of the Buffalo Trail.

Commissioner Kirk stated they tried to get into data mining but were stopped.

Commissioner Kirk stated it seems like they are fighting Nemont when it comes to funding. He stated they are going back to satellite in the western part of the reservation.

36:52 Chair Gray stated that the Little Shell Tribe is in the design phase of their 18-acre housing development that they are calling the “Good Medicine” project. It will be 35 single family homes, 18 duplexes and 50 apartments.

Chair Gray stated the Little Shell Tribe assumed their clinic. He also stated the ceremony center is currently being constructed and they are about 60-70% finished. It is located next to the eight-acre housing development.

Chair Gray stated they are looking into data mining. However, they will be buying into a company in Oklahoma and transferring that and a solar farm which is already up and running in Texas. He also stated the resort is still in progress. They met with the Department of Interior to try to get the notice of the EA study out.

39:15 Vice-Chair Finley stated CSKT is dealing with some unpredictability. Some of the highway funding that was going to go through the reservation was clawed back. She stated that this makes it where the necessary improvements to their infrastructure not happened and jobs that were going to be created are not. Vice-Chair Finley stated that some of the impacts are unknown like the impacts to their tribal college where it appears the tribal college funding is going to be cut by 90%.

Vice-Chair Finley stated the new 400 Horses Casino is in the process of being constructed and should be finished by next spring. She also stated

that the Tribe is talking about possible reorganization or restructuring so that will determine how they move forward with economic development.

44:08 Commissioner Lonebear stated the Northern Cheyenne Tribe is still adjusting to the election. She stated they were able to get their craft center completed. They received transportation funding to enhance the area.

Commissioner Lonebear stated they had issues with the BIA with the right of way for the broadband. She stated the construction should start at the end of the summer season.

Election of Officers

47:01 Commissioner Lonebear moved to elect Gerald Gray as Chair of the STED Commission.

No action taken.

47:50 Commissioner Kirk moved to keep Gerald Gray as the Chair of the STED Commission and Jennifer Finley as the Vice-Chair.

Second: Commissioner Backbone.

Chair Gray called for a vote: All yes. Motion passed.

50:37 Chairman Gray stated that former STED Commissioner Richard Sangrey be invited to the next STED Commission meeting and be given something for his service on the STED Commission. The Commissioners agreed.

Institute for Tourism & Recreation Research

52:52 Carter Birmingham is a social scientist with the Institute for Tourism & Recreation Research created in 1987 along with the lodging and facility use

tax. He stated they work closely with the Tourism Advisory Council who oversee much of their budget allocations and their projects.

Mr. Birmingham stated that every fall they ask the public through a solicitation process if they can send in any sort of research projects they have. They take those projects and narrow them down to find out if they have worked on similar projects in the past, something that someone else is already working on, if the research project is something someone else is working on or if this is a project they should be doing. After narrowing the research projects down, they then take those projects to the TAC and receive approval for those projects.

Mr. Birmingham stated in the fall of 2024, they received a research project entitled, “Empowering Communities: The Role of Native Tourism in Montana’s Economy” from the Montana Indigenous Tourism Alliance. He also stated that the true economic impact of native tourism within the state remains unmeasured. To address this gap, MITA submitted a proposal in 2025 for the ITRR to look at and lead a comprehensive research study funded by Montana lodging tax to better understand and quantify the value of native tourism in Montana. Mr. Birmingham explained that much of what they do is visitor research or onsite visitor research. They do a lot of onsite standardized research where they look at folks that are visiting the event and ask them several questions that have to do with how much money they are spending in the local community, where they are coming from, their trip planning timelines, how long they took to plan things out, their satisfaction of the event, satisfaction of the infrastructure and other questions.

Mr. Birmingham stated that the goal of this project is they would like to attend four to five different native hosted events across the state between

now and the end of next August. This project is funded by the lodging facility use tax, so it doesn't cost the tribes. They want to use this as case studies to find out the economic impact of the individual events, see how many people they are bringing in and how much money they are bringing in, the tax impact, how many jobs and other questions. They would like to cover a diversity of events.

Mr. Birmingham stated that they have a very detailed and specific IRB at the University of Montana when they are working with tribes. They are not allowed to complete research on a reservation or with Native American members unless they have approval from the tribes themselves. Once they have approval from the tribe, they can then take the approval to the Institution Review Board and then they can begin the research.

Mr. Birmingham explained that they would like the first event to be the All-American Indian Shootout in Billings. They would like to attend several different events with different tribes. They plan on providing an individual report and an overall report which will be ready next fall.

Commissioner Cuts The Rope asked why they chose five events and not eight. Mr. Birmingham explained that it was due to staffing and budget concerns. Commissioner Cuts The Rope also asked what approval from tribes would look like. He stated that approval varies from tribe to tribe. Each tribe will have their own contact.

Ms. Brown stated that they should discuss with the OICED Program to see if they could help with filling the gap for the budget to ensure all eight tribes are afforded the opportunity to participate.

The commissioners stated that any work they plan on completing on the reservation should come to the tribe first instead of the college.

Ms. Brown said that she would send the links regarding the policies, ethics, procedures and guidelines by the colleges.

Mr. Birmingham showed examples of the questions they would be asking.

Intertribal Data Collaboration and the Survey of Native Nations. Request to Schedule May 2026 STEDC Meeting Date and Location and Invitation to Host Neel Kashkari

01:46:45 Andrew Huff is the senior policy and legal advisor with the Center for Indian Country Development at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis presented on Intertribal Data Collaboration and the Survey of Native Nations. Mr. Huff provided background on the Center for Indian Country Development. One of the jobs of the Center for Indian Country Development is to do the economic research on how economies are functioning in Indian Country, identify what the barriers are, what's working and not working and then provide that research to policy makers. Mr. Huff explained their mission is to advance the economic self-determination of prosperity of Native Nations through actionable data and research. They look at access to credit and financing in native communities, understanding of tribal public finance and closing economic data gaps.

Mr. Huff showed the data tools offered on their website.

Mr. Huff discussed the Survey of Native Nations. They are in the second year of it. Mr. Huff explained that it is like what the census has been doing for 70 years called the Census of Governments. The Census of Governments surveys all state and local governments in the country every

five years. It's a data source for information on how state and local governments assess their finances and help them with many things including budgeting. Mr. Huff explained that tribes have never been included in the Census of Governments. The Survey of Native Nations is supposed to be the tribal government version of the Census of Governments.

Mr. Huff explained the information collected includes revenue data, expenditure data and some non-financial data like enrollment and government employee head counts. They compare local governments and state governments that the tribe identifies with or just gives them to compare, so the tribe can look at their finances as compared to those. This information is confidential. The tribes can determine what they want to do with the report.

Mr. Huff explained that they analyze the aggregate data from all tribes that participate. He explained there have been two rounds. In the first round, five tribes participated, and in the second round, 11 tribes participated.

Mr. Huff described the benefits to tribes participating. It assists in developing tribal budgets and programming. It facilitates governance and program evaluations, including economic development programs. It assesses financial conditions. It is used to perform comparative analyses with local and state governments. It provides data for policy and economic development considerations. Also, over time it measures the changing characteristics of the government sector.

Mr. Huff stated that protecting tribal data is a big part of this project. It is a secure electronic platform requiring multifactor authentication and limited access. Additionally, the report the tribe is given is password protected.

There was no discussion on their request to schedule the May 2026 STEDC meeting date and location and invitation to host Neel Kashkari.

Export Montana

02:32:29 Angie DeYoung from the Department of Commerce discussed the Native American Fashion Trade Mission in Paris, France in June 2025. This was to introduce Montana Native fashion to Parisian buyers, determine market potential, discover France buying and import procedures, materials sourcing and inspiration for innovation. They took a retail tour. They learned what ethnic stores are looking for and sales techniques. They attended the Modern Fashion in France. They participated in fashion industry workshops, fashion industry mentoring and participated in several meetings. They made several connections. There was further discussion.

FY 2021 Indian Equity Fund Recipient

03:05:41 Titus Takes Gun from Metal Solutions presented on the Fiscal Year 2021 Indian Equity Fund Grant he received and shared how the grant has helped his business. Mr. Takes Gun and his brother-in-law went into business together back in 2020 in welding fabrication. The IEF Grant he received helped him purchase a truck, a welder and accessories for it.

FY 2021 Indian Equity Fund Recipient

03:27:34 Buc (Jacob) Turcotte from Turcotte Food Bus presented regarding his Fiscal Year 2021 Indian Equity Fund Grant he received and shared how the grant has helped his business. Mr. Turcotte saw the opportunity to sell food at powwows. He met with Mark Sansaver from the Great Northern Development Corporation who steered them in the direction of the IEF Grant. The IEF Grant allowed them to buy a new bus, a fire suppression

system and a grill. They purchased all new industrial equipment. Their business has boomed since they received the IEF Grant.

OICED Program Update

03:51:39 Mr. Altekruze provided an update on the recent and upcoming events along with whom from the OICED team attended or will be attending.

Mr. Altekruze discussed the Tribal Business Development Grant for Fiscal Year 2026. He stated they are in the process of updating guidelines. The guidelines will be reviewed by various offices, including legal within the Department. Mr. Altekruze stated that on Sept. 2, 2025, all tribal leaders and STED Commissioners will be sent an email informing them about the upcoming TBDG cycle. He stated that according to the May 8, 2025, meeting of the STED Commissioners, he will be sending out information about the letter of intent on Sept. 17, 2025, through Oct. 15, 2025. Oct. 15, 2025, through Dec. 17, 2025, will be the TBDG application cycle.

MCA 90-1-105 (Formerly HB19)

03:56:45 Mr. Altekruze stated that OICED is currently working to reconfigure the web page to host all links and resources to data resources. Mr. Altekruze stated that this is an ongoing project.

IEF and NABA Programs

04:01:28 Mr. Altekruze presented on the Native American Business Advisors Program and the Indian Equity Fund Grant. Mr. Altekruze explained that Bryan Singer has been coordinating monthly calls with the NABAs.

Mr. Altekruze stated the FY26 application period will be from Aug. 18-Oct. 18, 2025. He stated the business plan must be part of the application and

suggested that the applicant demonstrates a strong credit history. Awardees can receive up to 20% of their award upfront to assist with initial purchases. The application will be required to have match documentation for vehicles and large equipment. This will include the applicant providing a current photo of the asset and a copy of the title/registration or other sufficient proof of ownership.

Tribal Tourism Update

04:13:44 Rachelle Brown reminded the STED Commissioners of the upcoming Aianta Conference being held in Choctaw, Mississippi from Oct. 27-30, 2025. Ms. Brown also stated that at the last STED Commission meeting the Commission voted to allow Commissioners to attend the Conference if they wish to go to let her know by Wednesday, Aug. 20, 2025.

Ms. Brown stated the FY2026 Tribal Tourism Grant and Tribal Tourism Small Business Grant is open Oct. 1-Nov. 30, 2025.

Ms. Brown provided her Fiscal Year 2026 and 2027 budget estimates and activities.

Motion to approve the Fiscal Year 2026 budget: Commissioner Lonebear

Second: Commissioner Backbone

Chair Gray called for a vote: All yes. Motion passed.

Motion to approve the Fiscal Year 2027 budget: Commissioner Lonebear

Second: Commissioner Backbone

Chair Gray called for a vote: All yes. Motion passed.

Ms. Brown provided the Tribal Tourism working groups and production update. There are five more visits to Tribal Councils planned for September through November. These include Crow, Fort Peck, Rocky Boy, Blackfeet and CSKT. Work groups will begin meeting virtually October through December, which will include three meetings per tribal working group. She also explained that the Indian Country production phase one is underway this summer with Brockton, Arlee and Browning captured thus far.

Opportunities in Rural Economies Loan Participation Program

04:40:15 Josh Bennett and Olivia Kettenring with the Department of Commerce presented on a new loan participation program called “Opportunities in Rural Economies.” This loan has a focus on rural areas. This is a no minimum loan request. The maximum is \$2 million. It’s a participation loan, so there’s a lender side to it. The guidelines are posted to the website. They are highly encouraging borrowers to work with an economic development organization for the application process. Once that preliminary application has been approved by the committee, then there is a comprehensive application. This is when the lender information comes in, and that is when a borrower must work with an economic development organization. The loan program will open Oct. 1, 2025.

Other Business

No other business.

Adjourn

04:53:38 Presenter: Chair Gray
Motion: Commissioner Backbone
Second: Commissioner Finley
Chair Gray called for a vote: All yes. Motion passed.