



Grant Details

125123 - FY24 DMO Plan

128726 - 2024 Great Falls DMO Plan

DOC Office of Tourism

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Comments
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DMO Plan Narrative

1. Describe Your Destination

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

Great Falls Montana Tourism is the destination management organization for Great Falls, Montana. There are 466 incorporated places in the United States that have a population of between 50,000 to 99,999, Great Falls is 1 of them. There are 741 places with 25,000 to 49,999. That is 1,206 options other than Great Falls that offer travel opportunities. Our job is to make Great Falls known and then make people fall in love with our unique opportunities.

In 2022, Great Falls welcomed 1.3 million overnight from 22 States, 4 Canadian Provinces, and 5 Countries. Market room demand was 517,502, the highest in Great Falls' history. The biggest impact on room demand in 2022 was contractors working at Calumet on the creation of a renewable diesel production operation. In 2021 we saw record overnight visitation at nearly 1.5 million, which is believed to be the pent-up demand for travel from 2020 and the desire to still be in wide open spaces.

Overnight visitation is captured from the Institute of Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR) and shows an 11% decrease over 2021. Room Demand is recorded by Smith Travel Research (STR) and showed a 12% increase. These two divergent trends could be explained by the short-term workforce that was staying in Great Falls not being included in intercept survey data.

Great Falls, Montana is the third largest city in Montana with 60,000 residents. The community has 2,300 lodging rooms available across 30 lodging properties. Construction has started or planned on two additional properties that are expected to bring an additional 155 rooms to Great Falls. There are 2 convention spaces: Montana ExpoPark and Mansfield Center. Additional stand-alone meeting space, as well as hotel-based meeting space, is available through Great Falls. The community has direct flights from Seattle on Alaska, Salt Lake City and Minneapolis on Delta, Denver and seasonally Chicago on United, Las Vegas and Phoenix on Allegiant.

For the fiscal year 2024 (FY24), Great Falls Montana Tourism is expecting a bit of a softening of the growth trends experienced over the past 2 years. The biggest component of the Calumet project is complete and demand for travel is starting to shift back into urban areas. To stabilize tourism in Great Falls and develop long-range growth strategies, Great Falls Montana Tourism is leading an effort to develop the first Comprehensive Tourism Strategic Master Plan for Great Falls, Montana. This process is expected to be completed in late 2023/early 2024.

STRENGTHS

Art

In the broadest sense of the term, Great Falls has art—from statutes and murals on the river's edge trail and downtown, to state parks and museums that capture our history and culture, to restaurants that source local food, to residents who create masterpieces on canvasses or using batik, and our entrepreneurs who create industry-changing products. Great Falls is creative, innovative, and full of art.

Landscape

To the west of Great Falls, travelers find themselves surrounded by mountains. To the east of us, the wide-open plains. In Great Falls, we have the best of both worlds. Travelers get the mix of all the landscapes, making this area the most diverse landscape in Montana. Our community is in the river valley, where the Sun River meets the Missouri River. It is surrounded by the Little Belt, Highwood, Big Belt, and Rocky Mountains. We have grasslands, bluffs, buttes, and ag land.

Affordable

Great Falls has a \$98.89 average daily rate through summer, ranging 15-48% below its Montana peers.

Uncrowded

Even with unprecedented growth in overnight visitation to Great Falls, the wait lines at trailheads, ski lifts, and restaurants remain non-existent or short and museums, events, trails, and lodging facilities have the capacity for more.

OPPORTUNITIES

Air Service

United, Delta, Alaska, and Allegiant are great partners, however, there are opportunities to add carriers and direct flights.

In-Market Experience

We are missing the ability to provide easier access to outdoor recreation and to further the culturally historic stories of Great Falls. Great Falls can benefit from easy access to equipment rentals, tour guides, facilitated experiences, and review-worthy interactions.

CHALLENGES

National Economy

Interest in travel has continued to increase since 2020, however, Government spending on the COVID-19 recovery has thoughts of recession looming nationwide, which could result in the cutting of discretionary spending.

Heritage Events

Great Falls has been fortunate to host long-standing signature events, some established over 40 years. As events mature, there is a potential for the end of their lifecycle or for interest to decline, reducing or eliminating overnight visitor attendance.

2. Align with Montana Brand

Briefly describe how your destination aligns with the Montana Brand.

The Great Falls, Montana Brand

From every direction, Montana's spectacular, unspoiled nature calls you closer – from two of America's most amazing national parks, a short drive in either direction, to the miles of trails along the Missouri River and beyond, to the independent mountain ranges surrounding and the larger than life Rocky Mountain Front, it is all accessible beginning right in Great Falls. This community is in the heart of some of the most diverse Montana landscapes. It beckons you to discover the variety of Montana's rugged and alluring outdoors freely with independence.

One of the greatest things about our community is we are welcoming, down-to-earth, and proud of what we have. We are forward-thinking and unapologetic about creating a future based on our potential. Great Falls is the third largest city in Montana, but still, a place where you feel more independent, more liberated from conformity and convention.

You are freer to pursue your passion, from outdoor recreation to embracing your inner artist. It's where you can be in the middle of an evolving and vibrant downtown life near the riverfront and yet never far from getting away from it all.

Great Falls offers world-class cultural experiences. Home to 12 museums that include North America's Largest Buffalo Jump, North America's most extensive collection of the Lewis & Clark Expedition, and North America's most extensive collection of famed cowboy artist Charlie Russell's art, the only place in the world you can tour his studio and the home he shared with his wife Nancy. The 53 miles of river's edge trail is home to 27 works of art.

Downtown contains murals, sculptures, decorated parks, street art, and live music. Our symphony performs original works of music each season and Broadway shows grace the stage of the Mansfield Center for the Performing Arts. Great Falls is the Western Art Capital of the world during Western Art Week, showcasing over 700 artists through 16 shows. We sing along with Piano Pat and blow kisses right back at the mermaids that swim at the world-famous Sip 'n Dip Lounge. Our local chefs prepare meals using food made by our neighbors and our brew masters create masterpieces from the barley grown and malted within minutes of Great Falls.

Great Falls Montana is a place for independent, outdoor adventurers looking for a true, authentic Montana experience. It is a community located on the Missouri River in the heart of Montana that provides a basecamp for a wide range of outdoor adventures and offers a haven of rich arts, culture, and history in a vibrant, modern community where an expansive, unspoiled, diverse landscape renews one's spirit!

3. What is the strategic role of your DMO?

Select all that apply: Destination Marketing, Destination Management, Destination Stewardship, Destination Development).

Destination Marketing, Destination Management, Destination Development

Based on the strategic role you serve, provide the following information.

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

LEISURE TARGET MARKET

We've trimmed the target markets for FY24 to focus on more interactions per

campaign to gain repeated exposure for message retention and recall. How many times do you see an ad once and it doesn't necessarily warrant acting, but then after the fact you think about it and can't find the ad ever again? The target markets and media strategies will be focused on creating more exposures to our messages.

Fly Markets

- Phoenix/Scottsdale
- Chicago
- Los Angeles
- Dallas

Drive Markets

- Spokane
- Boise
- Lethbridge
- Calgary
- Edmonton

Montana Markets

- Billings
- Missoula
- Kalispell

The psychographic target for Great Falls Montana Tourism within these geographic markets are:

- Active Independent Adventurers, 35-65 years old
- Culture and History Buffs, 50-65 years old
- Event Experiencers, 25-45 years old
- Shop & Diners, 25-65 years old

GROUP TARGET MARKET

Great Falls Montana Tourism wants to work with one person that could bring a group of people to Great Falls. This could be meetings, conventions, trade shows, sporting events, and tours. On the meeting side, Great Falls Montana Tourism will focus on associations west of Mississippi River that host meetings and conventions with 200+ attendees within the following industries:

- Agriculture
- Arts
- Culture
- Outdoor Recreation

Additionally, Great Falls Montana Tourism will target:

- Montana Associations who are open to considering new locations.
- Montana regional sporting events.

We will do research to find our targets for other group markets and determining our competitive advantages.

3b. What research supports your DMO strategy?

According to the sentiments in the State of the American traveler provided by Destination Analysts, there is some concern looming regarding the US Economy and the probability of a recession. That coupled with record setting room demand numbers as reported by Smith Travel Research (STR) last year and a slight decline in overnight visitation from 2021 to 2022 according to Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR), Great Falls Montana Tourism is taking a more conservative approach to maintain after the growth seen after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Great Falls saw a 47% growth in overnight visitation in 2021 over 2019. In 2022, overnight visitation dipped 11% against 2021, however, is still 32% higher than 2019.

Great Falls saw 2% decline in 2021 room demand against 2019. In 2022, room demand was 9% higher than 2019.

According to ITRR, 51% of overnight stays were in a hotel/motel. In 2021, that dropped to 47% and in 2022 dropped again to 46%. That could indicate year over year over year room demand decline, however, STR reports a dip then an increase. It is our assumption that ITRR's data did not include the temporary workforce staying long-term in Great Falls lodging properties which was captured in the STR data.

Our owned and paid marketing efforts are producing increased results. According to Google Analytics, in 2019, our website received 121,898 users with 269,190 pageviews. In 2021, users grew 57% to 191,928 and pageviews grew 551%, to 1,752,683. In 2022 users grew 20% against 2021 while pageviews dropped 3%, however, still 84% above 2019.

In FY22, Great Falls Montana Tourism spent \$205,059.42 on paid media, generating 27 million impressions and a .51% click through rate. In FY23 (to date), we've spent \$142,937.30 to generate 20 million impressions and a .86% click through rate. The assumption is that our landing pages provide more information for the user, thus no need to search the site as much to find what they are looking for.

As Great Falls Montana Tourism has seen some inconsistent trends, but overall large growth, and as we embark upon Tourism Master Planning for Great Falls, Montana to better understand the tourism industry locally and how our organization can help foster and grow tourism, our conservative, stay the course, approach makes the most sense until we have a master plan that will better inform our direction.

3c. What are your emerging markets?

Great Falls Montana Tourism is seeing good interest with Active Independent Adventurers, 25-35 years old.

4. Define and describe your overall goals.

A goal is an idea of the future or desired result that a person or group of people envisions, plans and commits to achieve.

Goal 1: Maintain record-setting room demand levels of FY23 measured by Smith Travel Research reports, Maintain overnight visitation of FY23 measured by Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research, and Grow lodging tax collections 2%.

Goal 2: Maintain 90% of groups staying overnight in Great Falls are with repeat visitors as measured by Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research.

Goal 3: Review and act on every champion-led opportunity presented.

Goal 4: Clean audit with zero findings.

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

Goal 1 Tactics

Paid Media

Great Falls' paid media strategy will consider social, niche print publications with digital support, video-based placements, native articles, retargeted placements, and opportunities that leverage Glacier and Yellowstone National Park trip planners and visitors. All placements will take advantage of custom landing pages for tracking. The focus will be on creating more exposures to our messages.

LocalHood

This tactic is a Crowdriff platform that is available in partnership with BrandMT. Great Falls Montana Tourism will leverage this tactic to publish itinerary ideas and tips of things leisure travelers can do. As appropriate, this content will be downloaded and shared to Great Falls Montana Tourism's Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts.

Printed Material

Great Falls Montana Tourism will develop and make available four printed resources to educate and orient travelers about Great Falls, Montana. Those pieces are:

- Montana's Basecamp Magazine – the official visitor guide for Great Falls which contains everything someone needs to know about Great Falls.
- Great Falls Map Pads – tear off sheets for navigating the streets of Great Falls.
- The Falls of Great Falls Map Pads – tear off sheets for navigating to all 5 falls on the Missouri River in Great Falls.
- Highlight Sheet – a one page piece to use with groups to showcase the must dos of Great Falls.

Goal 2 Tactics

Guest Services

Great Falls Montana Tourism will provide services to guests coming to 15 Overlook Drive throughout the year, during regular operations, as staff time allows. This would be Monday – Friday between the hours of 9 am and 4 pm, excluding holidays, board meetings, and extenuating circumstances.

- Offer Welcome Booth at event with Great Falls resources to provide attendees information about things to do after conference.
- Develop pre/post conference itineraries for distribution to meeting attendees.

- Provide Family/Partner itineraries to increase add-on attendance.

Coming Soon Display

Great Falls Montana Tourism will maintain a digital coming soon display visible within and from outside of 15 Overlook Drive.

Goal 3 Tactics

Partnership Proposals

Great Falls Montana Tourism will accept proposals throughout the year to fund projects that will generate NEW room nights in Great Falls lodging properties. There is no minimum or maximum amount for a request, however; funding decisions will consider the potential revenue Great Falls Montana Tourism will generate and the cost per one thousand impressions of marketing that will be received. There is no set number of proposals that will be awarded in any year. Great Falls Montana Tourism is not a continuous source of funding. There is no set number of grants awarded in any year.

Resource Clearinghouse

Great Falls Montana Tourism will provide bulk printed resources upon request to partners who will be working with guests on our behalf. This tactic also includes inventory management by Great Falls Montana Tourism to ensure materials produced by our organization as well as partner organizations are in-stock and available.

Goal 4 Tactics

Board, Partner Communication

Great Falls Montana Tourism will create and deliver weekly Tourism Tuesday emails for interested parties and Board of Directors that highlights the team's results and pertinent items that affect Tourism, from the previous week. Great Falls Montana Tourism will maintain a weekly and monthly paid media performance dashboard, a weekly owned media dashboard, and a monthly goal dashboard supported by data of visitation, lodging tax collection, and TBID assessment collection.

Board of Directors Management

The Board of Directors and Executive Committees will meet monthly to monitor financials, review progress towards goals, discuss pressing issues, review strategy, and adopt changes in strategic efforts. Great Falls Montana Tourism will provide Director orientation and opportunities for new Directors to be mentored by more seasoned Directors.

Policy and Procedure Review

Along with the Board of Directors, Great Falls Montana Tourism will review and update policies and procedures and add new governance as needed.

Financial Management

Great Falls Montana Tourism will follow financial management policies in managing the organization's funds. Staff will oversee:

- annual audit of assessment and tax funds.
- coordinate 990 preparations for Great Falls Convention and Visitors Bureau.

- submit annual reports for both Great Falls Tourism Business Improvement District and Great Falls Convention and Visitors Bureau.
- deliver quarterly financial reports for Great Falls Convention and Visitors Bureau.
- complete the annual marketing evaluation report for Great Falls Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Customer Management

Great Falls Montana Tourism will track all activity for inquiries, leads, projects, and partners through iDSS customer relationship management system.

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FY23 YTD Paid Media Results.pdf

Objectives/Metrics/Evaluation

Objectives	Measurable Metrics for Success	Report the Metric Achieved	Evaluation of Measurable Metrics for Success
Generate overnight stays in Great Falls.	<p>Maintain record-setting room demand levels of FY23 measured by Smith Travel Research reports.</p> <p>Maintain overnight visitation of FY23 measured by Institute for Tourism and</p>	<p>FY24 room demand in Great Falls was 485,267, 5% below FY23. The final quarter of FY24 had an 8% increase in room demand over the same quarter in FY23.</p> <p>According to ITRR, FY24</p>	<p>Yes. Great Falls met its objective. The marketing method was successful. It will be used again.</p> <p>With the oddity in the ITRR second half of FY24 data, documented strong demand in rooms in Q2 2024, and secondary data showing an increase in visitation, Great Falls may have leveled out after the pent-up demand from COVID-19 and skilled labor impacts from construction projects.</p> <p>According to STR, the average daily rate grew by 6% on average, which would account for the lodging tax collection growth. Only 44% of visitors stayed in a hotel/motel, according to ITRR.</p> <p>Across all marketing campaigns for FY24, we saw a .84% CTR, a reach of nearly 3.4 million, and 29.5 million impressions. A full report of media, messaging, markets, and results can be seen here: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1J4FU0JHxXHyQTh9RwGZ43rrDBvSCjk5D/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=111946429007962456076&rtpof=true&sd=true</p>

	<p>Recreation Research.</p> <p>Grow lodging tax collections 2%.</p>	<p>overnight visitation was 907,000, 57% below FY23. Q1 and Q2 of 2024 only recorded 1,000 visitors, which is unlikely. Using Placer.ai data, FY23 visitation to Great Falls was 420,700, and FY24 was 440,400, a 5% increase. Although this data set shows growth, it does not capture international travelers.</p> <p>Lodging Tax Collections grew 6%.</p>	
<p>Increase return overnight visits and trip extensions.</p>	<p>Maintain 84% of groups staying overnight in Great Falls are with repeat visitors as measured by the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research.</p>	<p>ITRR indicated that 86% of overnight visitors had been to Great Falls previously, for a 2% increase over FY23.</p>	<p>Yes, the objective was met. Yes, the method was successful. It will be used again.</p> <p>The methods used by the tourism team and partners to educate travelers about what is happening in Great Falls is inspiring return visitors.</p>
<p>Create alliances with championed efforts that enhance Great Falls' competitiveness for overnight visitation and further the mission of Great Falls Montana Tourism.</p>	<p>Review and act on every opportunity presented.</p>	<p>Great Falls Montana Tourism reviewed 11 opportunities and with the lodging facility use tax funds, approved two opportunities. The first with the Great Falls Museum Consortium for \$1,000 and the second with</p>	<p>Yes, the objective was met. Yes the method was successful. It will be used again.</p> <p>The Museum Consortium was a matched social media campaign focused on the markets of Billings, Missoula, Kalispell, Havre, Malta, Glasgow and Great Falls for a total spend of \$2,000 on Snapchat and Facebook for 2 months each. The Museum Consortium contributed half the spend and Great Falls Montana Tourism matched and used Great Falls Montana Tourism's creative to design the assets, with approval from the Museum Consortium.</p> <p>The results for SnapChat were a 3.78% CTR with 13,862 impressions and Facebook has a 0.71% CTR with 108,917 impressions.</p> <p>The Mimosa Showdown saw an increase in sold mimosas from 1,000 to 1,500. This continues to be a collaboration that produces good results for retail, dining, and drinking establishments.</p>

		Downtown Great Falls Association for Mimosa Showdown shared design costs.	
Maintain a highly functioning, accountable, mission-focused, organization with educated staff and informed Directors, members, and partners.	Clean audit with zero findings.	Clean audit with zero findings.	Yes, the objective was met. Yes, the method was successful. It will be used again. It will be used again. Great Falls prides itself in making the audit process simple for the reviewer and has worked diligently to ensure a clean audit for the past 8 years. Previous to that, audits were time-consuming and difficult with findings.

DMO Budget

Allowable Methods	Amount Budgeted	% of Budget Allocated	Amount Expended	% of Budget Expended
Administration	\$50,442.00	20.0	\$47,734.21	95.0
Agency Services	\$37,269.00	14.8	\$27,288.75	73.0
Joint Venture	\$10,000.00	4.0	\$10,000.00	100.0
Opportunity Marketing	\$1,000.00	0.4	\$0.00	0
Paid Media	\$133,500.00	52.9	\$94,253.81	71.0
Visitor Services	\$20,000.00	7.9	\$18,012.42	90.0
	\$252,211.00	100.0	\$197,289.19	

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.

DMO Plan Attachments

Description

File Name

File Size