



Grant Details

125123 - FY24 DMO Plan

128724 - FY24 Helena CVB DMO Plan

DOC Office of Tourism

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Grantee Contact: Callie Aschim
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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.

Introduction and Current Situation

After our first year with the designation of Destination Marketing Organization, we intend to continue our marketing-focused work by building awareness of the Helena area as a destination that offers travelers an authentic array of activities, events, culture, history, and adventure. In this last year, we had the opportunity to expand our marketing windows by adding fall and spring shoulder season strategies to complement our traditional warm season strategy. We are wrapping up the spring shoulder season campaign currently and will begin evaluation of that campaign in May/June. We are fully into the warm season campaign strategy at the time of the FY24 plan development process, and will be evaluating that effort this summer. We were pleased with the success of the fall campaign and will outline elements of success of that effort in the final campaign wrap-up report of all FY23 campaigns in the fall.

In the last year, through efforts spearheaded by Visit Helena (TBID), there is a new brand initiative that is just being launched. The intention of this effort is to grow the Helena visitor economy by:

- Developing a brand that improves the community experience and product offerings that stimulate long-term growth in tourism, workforce, and business development.
- Defining how the visitor economy in Helena can be leveraged more strategically to drive sustainable growth and equitable community development.
- Establishing a brand which begets community pride and endorsement.

It is our intention to align our messaging with the brand as we execute our FY24 strategic marketing plan at the level appropriate and based on the resources we have available to us.

Helena Montana's Strengths and Opportunities

Helena was founded as a gold mining camp in 1864. Now, as our state capital, we humbly brag on the lively community we have today. The opportunity to experience outstanding recreation is still right out our back door. We are surrounded by iconic mountains, plentiful waterways, scenic trails, and ample wildlife. Additionally, we are a community that is steeped in rich history. We are excited about the opportunity that will be available to our visitors in early 2025, with the opening of the newly remodeled Montana Historical Society. Not only will that be a star attribute for our visitor experience, it will also shine a light on the other historical experiences Helena has to offer. We are growing, and with that growth, we are gaining more opportunities for Montanans to show their craftwork through distilleries, breweries, restaurants, and musical events. We are proud to continue to honor our deep history, our stunning outdoor adventures, and celebrate that along with our bountiful arts and culture scene.

To attract tourists to our destination, Helena offers the following:

- Outdoor recreation abounds with fishing, hunting, hiking, camping, boating, rafting, downhill and cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, mountain biking, golfing, and horseback riding. Visitors can enjoy the Gates of the

Mountains, the mighty Missouri River, Holter Lake, Canyon Ferry Lake, Hauser Lake, Spring Meadow Lake, Great Divide Ski Area, Montana WILD, and over 80 miles of trails on readily accessible public lands.

- Helena is an authentic, people driven destination. Our local events and attractions help promote vacationing like a local by taking in many of our homegrown breweries, restaurants and niche shopping areas.
- Helena has received several designations that make it desirable to visitors, including International Mountain Bicycling Association Ride Center's Silver Level Designation, Rand McNally Best of the Road for Geocaching, USA Today's 10th Best State Capital Worth Visiting, and many more.
- Arts and culture, such as Grandstreet Theatre, Montana Shakespeare Company, Great Northern Carousel, Holter Museum of Art, Myrna Loy Center for the Performing and Media Arts, Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts, ExplorationWorks, Clay Arts Guild of Helena, Cathedral of Saint Helena, Carroll College, Queen City Ballet, Helena Symphony Orchestra and Chorale, and Civic Center events.
- Helena is central to Montana history with historical attractions such as Montana's Museum at the Montana Historical Society, "Montana's Most Historic Mile" Last Chance Gulch, Original Governor's Mansion, Historic Mansion District, Reeder's Alley, nearby ghost towns, Gates of the Mountains, Lewis and Clark Trail, Montana Military Museum, Montana's State Capitol Building, The Foundation for Montana History's Walking Tours, and the Last Chance Tour Train.
- Special events and festivals throughout the year, including the Last Chance Stampede and Rodeo, Governor's Cup Race, Farmers' Market, Downtown Helena's Art Walks and Wednesday's Alive at Five, Symphony Under the Stars, Made in Montana Trade Show, Montana Learning Center's Beyond the Big Sky astro-tourism events, state sports tournaments, and many other regional events.
- Conveniently and centrally located, Helena is a perfect stop for activities and overnight stays for those traveling all across the state and specifically between Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks.

Helena's marketing efforts are often challenged by the following:

- The service and retail industry continues to rebound but inconsistent hours frustrate locals and tourists alike
- The increased cost of gasoline will make travelers choose vacations closer to home this year
- The cost of airfare, limited flights, and flexibility of connections
- Limited public transportation, both from outside and inside the city of Helena
- Limited large-scale convention and event facilities
- Limited signage directing visitors to Helena attractions on interstate highways and within the city
- Helena events are seeing increased competition from other Montana towns' events
 - Helena is working to secure High School events, such as State cross country, soccer, and other events that fit into the limited infrastructure and space availability in the community
- Lack of extended store, shopping, and attraction hours to accommodate tourists
 - While still an issue, storeowner education and downtown events have made headway in resolving this challenge

2. Align with Montana Brand

Briefly describe how your destination aligns with the Montana Brand.

Montana's Brand Pillars are a perfect match with what Helena offers visitors.

- More spectacular unspoiled nature than anywhere else in the lower 48 states.
- Vibrant and charming small towns that serve as gateways to the state's natural wonders.

- Breathtaking experiences by day and relaxing hospitality at night.

Nestled against the Rocky Mountains, opening into a lush valley, and surrounded by pristine mountains, rivers, and lakes highlights the spectacular unspoiled nature that can be found just outside the city limits.

Helena has all the amenities of a big city but with a small-town feel. Whether it is the panoramic views from atop MacDonald Pass or watching a resident artist create their next piece at Archie Bray, Helena offers visitors unique and breathtaking experiences that can't be found elsewhere. Stroll along the walking mall to explore the many local shops. Or relax and enjoy some Helena flavor at a local restaurant, brewery, or distillery.

And at the end of the day, visitors can choose from historic bed and breakfasts or established hotels offering hometown Montana hospitality.

3. What is the strategic role of your DMO?

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

Destination Marketing

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

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

Consumer Target Geographic Markets:

The Helena CVB will target the following states and provinces: Washington, Idaho, Utah, Oregon, Illinois, Colorado, Wyoming, North Dakota, Minnesota, Arizona, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Montana outside of the Helena area.

Consumer Target Demographics:

A) Travelers visiting family and friends: These are adults 35+ years of age, traveling with or without children. They have a household income of \$75,000+, participate in scenic trips, photography, biking, hiking, fishing, wildlife viewing, skiing, and snowmobiling. These travelers enjoy outdoor activities, hands-on experiences, and tend to visit state parks, museums, historic trails, and nature areas. They enjoy unique dining experiences, craft breweries, and music venues.

B) Leisure travelers: Adults 35+ years of age. They have a household income of \$75,000+ and travel with or without children in the summer months. They participate in shopping, attend social/family events, outdoor activities, rural sightseeing, and visit historic places and museums.

- Family travelers: Affluent households with children under the age of 18.
- History buffs: Travelers who rate "historic attractions" as an extremely important attribute in selecting travel destinations.

C) Adventure travelers: Adults 30+ years of age, traveling with or without children. They have a household income of \$75,000+. They enjoy and participate in outdoor activities, such as mountain biking, fishing, hiking/backpacking, camping, water recreation, skiing, and snowmobiling. They also enjoy unique dining experiences, craft breweries, and music venues.

Consumer Target Psychographics:

The psychographic characteristics of Helena CVB's target market include those who appreciate the great outdoors and who want to have room to roam, explore, hike, bike, fish, and connect with nature. Those that are history buffs at heart, and who specifically enjoy learning about Montana's rich history and culture. They also enjoy unique dining experiences that are chef-owned/operated and that use food that is sourced locally; craft breweries and distilleries that offer an authentic connection with artisan brewers; and varied music offerings from small groups within a pub to medium-sized concerts at the fairgrounds.

3b. What research supports your DMO strategy?

The Helena CVB utilizes the following research resources when planning and executing our DMO Marketing Plan.

- ITRR to refine target audiences, including why visitors are attracted to Montana.
- The Helenamt.com website analytics help measure the success of tactics used in our consumer marketing and advertising efforts by measuring current users, new users, session time, and campaign timing statistics.
- National Park Service Visitation Stats provides data on visitation for Glacier and Yellowstone, which guides our focus on being a hub between the two parks.
- marketmt.com – for Montana brand usage and joint venture opportunities.
- ustravel.org – providing articles and data on U.S. travel and the effects of our nation's economy. Also provides information regarding the challenges and lost revenue we're still experiencing post pandemic.
- brewersassociation.org – providing information regarding the economic impact of breweries in the U.S. economy. A resource for content development of blogs and native content.
- destinationanalysts.com – travel outlook, insights, and updates.
- voicesoftourism.com/research – providing specific tourism-related data and legislative actions for Montana.
- Helena Regional Airport Monthly Visitor Device Data – keeping us up-to-date on airline usage and travel in and out of Helena.
- Smith Travel Research Report – Monthly STR Report revealing the slow but steady rebound with our lodging facilities.

The Helena CVB also relies on our agency partner to make recommendations that fit our targeting with the comprehensive research resources they have access to, such as Nielsen Ratings and Nielsen Digital Ad Ratings, CEB Iconoculture Consumer Insights, SQUAD broadcast CPP Forecasting, ComScore, and Quantcast. These tools provide access to ratings, circulation numbers, web usage stats, core forecasting information, consumer psychographics, and media usage trends. These resources help guide highly targeted and cost-effective media strategies.

3c. What are your emerging markets?

Helena has two main emerging markets. We will reach these markets through our planned tactics included in our marketing plan and through our creative execution.

Emerging:

History and Cultural Heritage:

History and cultural heritage have long been a pillar of Helena's tourism allure. In the last several years, the Helena CVB has put heavier focus on the outdoor recreation offerings in the community and surrounding area. As we move forward into the next marketing year, we will be bringing back focus on our deep offerings in the history and culture arena. The catalyst for this direction is the anticipation of the opening of the newly remodeled Montana Historical Society and Museum in early 2025.

Astro-tourism:

The Montana Learning Center (MLC) at Canyon Ferry Lake has recently expanded its programs and observatories. MLC has the largest public-access telescope in Montana and a robotic telescope equipped with a camera specifically designed to capture stellar objects. MLC also has two additional state-of-the-art telescopes, one for solar viewing and the other for lunar and planetary observation. These telescopes ensure that visitors have access to a broad range of astronomical observations, including solar, lunar, planetary, and deep space. The Montana Learning Center has also been named a "Dark Sky Destination" by the Montana Chapter of the International Dark-Sky Association. This state-of-the-art observatory, coupled with our dark skies, offer tourists a truly unique experience. There is a great deal of interest in astro-tourism which provides an opportunity to cultivate experiences that showcase what outer space has to offer in Helena, Montana.

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) Raise awareness of Helena's recreational, cultural, and historical attractions and activities and increase visitation in the warm and shoulder seasons.

Goal 2) Continue to build upon marketing opportunities with other tourism partners, including the Helena TBID, Helena Regional Airport, Southwest Montana Tourism Region, and the Montana Office of Tourism (Brand MT).

Goal 3) Increase awareness of Helena as a destination and encourage visitors to Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks to take advantage of Helena as a travel destination hub due to its convenient geographical location.

Goal 4) Develop a strategic and comprehensive digital campaign that will reach our desired audiences and drive them to our website and social channels where we can track usage and engagement.

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

Goal 1) Raise awareness of Helena's recreational, cultural, and historical attractions and activities and increase visitation in the warm and shoulder seasons.

During FY23, we expanded our marketing windows to include shoulder season promotion to alleviate some pressure on attractions and services during the high traffic summer months. For FY24, we still feel that there is value in giving attention to the summer season (June - August) and expanding our reach and messaging to include shoulder seasons (April - May and September - October) to help ease the pressure on our attractions and service providers. We will develop targeted advertising campaigns for both summer and shoulder seasons with the intent to continue to grow visitation to Helena and the surrounding area.

Goal 2) Continue to build upon marketing opportunities with other tourism partners, including the Helena TBID, Helena Regional Airport, Southwest Montana Tourism Region, and Montana Office of Tourism (Brand MT).

Helena TBID – we work closely with the Helena TBID for website content development as it relates to our advertising campaigns. We will be working with the TBID to incorporate branding elements from the newly released brand initiative to ensure that we're being consistent with messaging to support that effort. We also share creative assets with each other, such as photography and videography, to help our dollars stretch as far as possible.

The Helena Regional Airport is important to our visitor recruitment efforts and we have had the opportunity to partner together and build successful campaigns to encourage flights in and out of Helena in the past. The Airport is also a great resource for data, such as passenger traffic numbers, that support our marketing efforts. We will continue to provide content for the tourism information center that is located at the airport terminal.

Southwest Montana Tourism Region provides an opportunity to share the Helena message through inclusion in the Southwest Montana Travel Planner.

Montana Office of Tourism (Brand MT) provides a wealth of research to support our marketing plan along with brand guidance. We also will look forward to Joint Venture opportunities as they become available.

Goal 3) Increase awareness of Helena as a destination and encourage visitors to Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks to take advantage of Helena as a travel destination hub due to its convenient geographical location.

Communicating our convenient geographical location is something that we will do within our creative message and content development for print and digital advertising campaigns.

Goal 4) Develop a strategic and comprehensive digital campaign that will reach our desired audiences and drive them to our website and social channels where we can track usage and engagement.

As a DMO whose focus is the promotion of the Helena area to increase the number of visitors, we will be directing a substantial portion of our marketing funds to develop a strategic digital communications outreach plan. Digital assets will include eye-catching images that encourage engagement with links to specific pages with relevant content within Helenamt.com. Portions of the digital campaign will also include targeted video and audio messages and native content to drive interest.

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Objectives/Metrics/Evaluation

Objectives	Measurable Metrics for Success	Report the Metric Achieved	Evaluation of Measurable Metrics for Success
Increase awareness of Helena as a recreational and leisure travel destination, ultimately increasing the lodging tax collections for FY24 over FY23.	Increase lodging tax collections from July 2023 through June 2024 by 3%.	This year, we increased our total lodging taxes from \$171,000 in FY23 to \$199,996 in FY24. Which was a 14% increase year over year.	We did meet our objective of increasing lodging tax collections. I believe that the success of the objective came from the targeted demographic of our paid media. Because we targeted a demographic with more disposable income, we were able to see an increase in our Average Daily Rate (ADR) which led to an increase in tax collections. We hope to continue this trend in FY25.
Develop a strategic advertising campaign that promotes Helena during the summer (June - August) and shoulder seasons. Spring (April - May) and Fall (September - October). This campaign will include a small print component, coupled with a comprehensive digital communications outreach plan. This plan will be developed in fall of 2023.	<p>The tracking metrics for this campaign will meet or exceed industry benchmarks reported at the time of execution of the campaign, and may include engagements, circulation, web usage stats, CPC, CPM, etc.</p> <p>At this time, we are still gathering data from our FY24 campaigns.</p> <p>The FY23 campaign reflected some of the following success metrics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Total digital impressions: 3,019,467- Total actions/engagements: 8,683	We are still waiting for our FY24 metrics to be delivered. However, based on the success we saw in the growth in our lodging tax collection, I believe this effort was successful.	We are still waiting for our FY24 metrics to be delivered. However, based on the success we saw in the growth in our lodging tax collection, I believe the effort was successful. We will continue this effort in FY25, including a fall campaign again. Historically, we have seen success in the use of YouTube shorts and streaming audio and will continue this effort as we feel it reaches our target demographic in an authentic way. The redesign of the Helena Chamber website has incorporate our Visit Helena website well and we are seeing more traffic driven to that website.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Print readership: 871,500 - Google Search: CPC \$2.92 with a CTR of 9.30% (very good) - Digital Campaign: Average CTR .17% - .29% - Video Preroll: Video review completion rate: 85% <p>GOAL: Year over year website traffic growth - increase of 10%</p> <p>Because of the redesign of the Helena Chamber Website to increase visitors to our Visit Helena website, we were able to track the amount of visitors and with the new design, increases traffic to the Visit Helena website.</p>		
Cooperative Marketing Effort with the Helena TBID. The DMO Cooperative Marketing Program is designed to allow organizations to promote an area or event on a cooperative basis with a nonprofit tourism-related organization.	A successful partnership venture between the Helena CVB, Helena TBID, and the selected tourism-related organization.	The collaboration between the Helena TBID resulted in a rework of the Visitor Guide and a reprinting that was delivered to our hotel partners, the airport visitor station, the TBID Visitor Center in Reeders Alley, the Chamber of Commerce and other tourism partners.	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.

DMO Budget

Allowable Methods	Amount Budgeted	% of Budget Allocated	Amount Expended	% of Budget Expended
Administration	\$42,867.00	18.24	\$39,999.20	93.3
Agency Services	\$10,300.00	4.38	\$7,361.44	71.5
Cooperative Marketing	\$26,033.00	11.08	\$19,703.05	75.7
Education/Outreach	\$2,000.00	0.85	\$2,368.44	118.0
Marketing Resources	\$33,000.00	14.04	\$21,140.00	64.1
Opportunity Marketing	\$21,300.00	9.06	\$11,248.00	52.8
Paid Media	\$99,500.00	42.35	\$100,614.00	101.1

	\$235,000.00	100.00	\$202,434.13	
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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.

DMO Plan Attachments

Description

File Name

File Size