

Application Summary

Application: FY25 DMO Plan

Applicant: Great Falls Montana Tourism

Funding opportunity: FY25 DMO Plan

Application Responses

Organization Name: Great Falls Montana Tourism

First Name: Rebecca

Last Name: Engum

Street Address 1: 15 Overlook Drive

Street Address 2:

City: Great Falls

State: Montana

Zip: 59405

Funding Opportunity: FY25 DMO Plan

Amount Requested: 215,524

General Description Information

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

1a. Destination:

Great Falls is a basecamp for art and adventure. The city of 60,000 residents sits on the banks of the Sun and Missouri Rivers and has quick access to the Rocky Mountain Front, Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex, Little Belt Mountains, and the Highwood Mountains. It is home to Montana's most visited State Park, Giant Springs, and is minutes away from North America's largest Buffalo Jump Site, First People's Buffalo Jump State Park. Great Falls has twelve museums that include North America's most extensive collection of the entire Corps of Discovery Expedition, the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center, and the C.M. Russell Museum, one of only 50 museums in the world where a visitor can get access to the artist's home, studio and works of art in one location. In addition to the museums, Great Falls has 43 murals that grow every year and 29 works of art on the 53 miles of River's Edge Trail. Great Falls is a destination for history buffs, active outdoor enthusiasts, and the solo traveler of all ages.

1b. Strengths:

Art

In the broadest sense of the term, Great Falls has art—from statues and murals on the River's Edge Trail and downtown, to state parks and museums that capture our history and culture, to restaurants who 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 had a slight increase in average daily rate in 2023 to \$103.45, still ranging 15-48% below its Montana peers.

Uncrowded

The wait lines at trail heads, ski lifts, and restaurants remain non-existent, or short and museums, events, trails, and lodging facilities have capacity for more.

Available

Great Falls, Montana has capacity in lodging facilities year-round. Very few of our days are at 80% occupancy or above.

1c. 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 equipment rentals, tour guides, facilitated experiences, and review worthy interactions.

Contract Labor

Great Falls will see more workers coming into the market to help with the Sentinel missile upgrade at Malmstrom Air Force Base, growth of medical services in Great Falls, and new housing developments. In 2023, 42% of overnight stays were connected to business or skilled workers. These workers could be return leisure travelers.

New Amenities

Great Falls will have a new aquatic and recreation center that will offer opportunities for swimming groups and potential indoor track sports. A new bike track is planned that would open up bicycle competitions for Great Falls.

1d. Potential Challenges:

Impression

Immediate thoughts of Montana include mountains, roaming wildlife, and backpacking adventures, and Great Falls is a modern community on the Missouri River with an industrial history. Additionally, high ADR's in other parts of Montana

have pushed travelers to assume all of Montana has high lodging prices and limited availability. This leads many travelers to opt to camp instead of staying in local properties.

Detractors

Great Falls residents hold a low-self-image of and are negative about the community being a great place to visit.

National Economy

We are seeing a softening of the travel economy locally and are ever focused on the potential of a looming recession nationally that could still be connected to Government spending on the COVID-19. In the event of a weakening economy across the United States or Canada, travelers could opt to save any discretionary income that would be used on non-essential travel, resulting in less overnight visitation to Great Falls, Montana.

Heritage Events

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

:

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

Great Falls is a genuine Montana community that is simple and straightforward. It is grounded by its diverse landscapes of river valleys, mountains, and high plains that offer guests and residents breathtaking experiences by day and relaxing hospitality at night, all just 2.5 hours south of the east entrance to Glacier National Park and 3.5 hours north of the north entrance to Yellowstone National Park. Our marketing uses simple headlines, a sense of humor, a conversational tone, in an honest approach as we tell stories about Great Falls. The images we share focus on landscapes, hospitality, and unique assets in our community.

:

Destination Marketing:

Destination Management:

Destination Stewardship:

Destination Development:

:

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

Great Falls Montana Tourism's leisure marketing will be focused on the following drive markets:

- Montana, primarily Billings, Kalispell, Missoula, & the Hi-line

- Alberta, primarily Lethbridge, Calgary

And the following fly markets:

- Chicago
- Los Angeles
- Dallas

Psychographic Targets

Within the geographic targets, we will target groups that are active by day as they are most likely to be active in the evening. The targets would be:

- DINKs
- Active Outdoor Enthusiasts
- Solo Traveler

3b. What research supports your DMO strategy? :

Great Falls Montana Tourism uses a mix of research to support its strategy. The Institute of Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR)'s annual visitor survey, along with annual economic impact reports, Smith Travel Research (now Co-Star), our own paid media performance reports, and results of past efforts. This year, Great Falls Montana Tourism has custom research from our strategic planning efforts to develop a comprehensive strategic plan for our organization and a travel industry growth plan for Great Falls. This research showed that 42% of Great Falls' lodging nights stays in the previous year were business or work related. It also found that 160 days in 2023, Great Falls' lodging occupancy was below 57%. Smith Travel Research data showed 2023 room demand in Great Falls was 6% lower than room demand in 2022. ITRR tells us that the 63% of the 2023 group size for Great Falls was 2 people and 86% of the travelers were aged 55-74. The top activities the Great Falls traveler engaged in were scenic driving at 47%, day hiking at 38%, visiting historical sites at 25% and visiting art museums was 14%.

Strategic Planning Research: <https://visitgreatfallsmontana.org/plan/>

Paid Media Performance:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1J4FU0JHxXHxQTh9RwGZ43rrDBvSCjk5D/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=11194>

3c. What are your emerging markets?:

Great Falls Montana Tourism has started researching the opportunity within the competitive cycling market. Great Falls has diverse bike terrain offering road riding, trail riding, and mountain biking. With the guidance of our local bicycling club, we are evaluating their events and testing if additional attendance is feasible and worthwhile for Great Falls.

4. Describe proposed tactics and projects as related to overall goals and controlled by the

organization in its financial statements.:

Great Falls' 2023 room demand was down 6% from 2022 and year to date room demand for 2024 against the same time period in 2023 is down 9%. The proposed tactics and projects for Great Falls are focused on generating overnight stays and supporting local businesses that are bringing travelers to Great Falls for work. The strategy for the worker market is to inform the workers of all the unique experiences here so they leave with a good opinion of Great Falls that will eventually lead to a return visit with their family.

The tactics include placing paid media on social and digital platforms to provide for the greatest reach for our budget. Great Falls Montana Tourism will leverage joint venture opportunities that align with our strategies.

The tactics working with local businesses are to provide printed copies of our Montana Basecamp Magazine. This is the official travel guide for Great Falls and contains the answers for the most asked question of what to do in Great Falls. As we work with businesses, we have been and will be responsive to their ideas and needs and work to meet them. We update and reprint the Magazine annually. The demand from Great Falls' travel industry to use the Magazine as a tool makes this a valuable tactic.

5. Define and describe your overall objectives. Objectives are formed from your goals. They are logical, attainable steps to achieve the goals and are able to be measured.:

Objectives/Metrics/Evaluation:

OBJECTIVES	MEASUREABLE METRICS FOR SUCCESS	REPORT THE METRIC ACHIEVED	EVALUATION OF SUCCESSFUL METRICS
Generate overnight stays in Great Falls lodging properties using paid media that leverages joint ventures and campaigns during off-peak room demand times.	<p>Grow market room demand by 2% during the months of January, February, April, May, November, December, when occupancy is lower, year over year. March is intentionally not a focus as 52% of March's historic occupancy is over 60%.</p> <p>Grow lodging tax collections 2% year over year.</p>		
Provide temporary contract	Grow return visits to Great Falls by		

:

Narrative Evaluation: