

2023-2024

State Tribal Economic Development  
Commission

Report to the Montana Legislature

**SEPTEMBER 2024**

**MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

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## Commission Responsibilities

Launched under the Native American Economic Development Act of 1999 and permanently established by the 2007 Legislature, the State Tribal Economic Development Commission is administratively attached to the Montana Department of Commerce.

The commission is tasked with:

- Assisting to develop business enterprises on reservations;
- Identifying the availability of federal, state, and private sector funds for tribal governments, Indian business enterprises, and communities located on Indian reservations in Montana;
- Conducting a comprehensive assessment of economic conditions on each of the Indian reservations in the state;
- Applying for or assisting tribal governments in applying for grants listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance for which either the commission or the tribe are considered eligible and would supply tangible economic benefits to any or all Indian reservations in Montana; and
- Working cooperatively with tribal government officials, the Director of Indian Affairs, and appropriate state officials to help foster state-tribal cooperative agreements (Title 18, Chapter 11, part 1) that enhance the economic development on Indian reservations and to help the Department of Commerce fully implement and comply with the economic development provisions tasked to the Department of Commerce at MCA 90-1-105.

In carrying out the duties listed above, the Commission actively:

- Works with the tribal governments and the State of Montana to support, develop, and grow Indian-owned private sector businesses on Montana Indian reservations and across the state;
- Provides the Department of Commerce information and advice on investments of economic development funding in Indian Country;
- Consults with each tribal nation of the State Tribal Economic Development Commission and the State of Montana on avenues to improve the economic well-being of Indian citizens and businesses;
- Discusses and shares best practices in economic development that have been implemented by tribal governments in Montana; and
- Provides a venue for Indian people and tribal governments to learn about local, state and federal resources that are available for projects and activities in Indian Country.

## STED Commission Board Membership

The commission is comprised of one member from each of the eight federally recognized tribes in Montana. Commission terms are - three years. Upon expiration of a term, a tribal government may advertise for individuals interested in serving on the commission and develop a list of applicants from which it may choose its nominee to recommend to the Governor. In place of choosing from a list of applicants, a tribal government may select an elected tribal official to recommend for membership on the Commission. If a tribal government nominates or otherwise recommends more than one person for membership on the Commission, the Governor shall select one individual from among those recommended persons. The current Board is comprised of the following members:

### **BLACKFEET TRIBE**

Vacant

**CHIPPEWA CREE TRIBE**

Richard Sangrey.....Term ending July 2026

**CONFEDERATED SALISH & KOOTENAI TRIBES**

Jennifer Finley, STEDC Vice-Chair.....Term ending July 2026

**CROW TRIBE**

Shawn Backbone.....Term ended June 2024

**FORT BELKNAP INDIAN COMMUNITY**

Delina Cuts The Rope.....Term ended June 2024

**FORT PECK ASSINIBOINE & SIOUX TRIBES**

Bryce Kirk.....Term ended June 2024

**LITTLE SHELL CHIPPEWA TRIBE**

Gerald Gray, STEDC Chair.....Term ended June 2024

**NORTHERN CHEYENNE TRIBE**

Melissa Lonebear.....Term ending June 2026

**GOVERNOR'S OFFICE**

Misty Kuhl, Director of Indian Affairs

Mark Blasdel, Director of Economic Development

**MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

Paul Green, Director

Current appointments can be found at: <https://boards.mt.gov>

A consistent focus for the commissioners is addressing the barriers of accessing capital for tribal and individually owned tribal member businesses and expanding the tribal private sector.

## Office of Indian Country Economic Development

Funding for the family of OICED programs under the Indian Country Economic Development Indian Equity Fund Small Business Grant, and the Native American Business Advisors Grant was passed by the 67th Montana State Legislature as part of House Bill 2. These programs allow the Indian Country Programs to continue to articulate measurable success for investing in business and economic development activities on reservations in partnership with tribal governments for the benefit of tribal communities and members.

The grants funded under the ICED program include the Tribal Business Development Grant, Indian Equity Fund Small Business Grant, Native American Business Advisors Grant, Tribal Tourism Grant, Native American Collateral Support Program, and the Production Assistant Training Scholarship Program.

## STRENGTHENING STATE TRIBAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT NETWORKS

The Office of Indian Country program manager and OICED staff provide outreach to the reservations to address tribal councils, discuss projects with tribal staff and Indian businesses and to share with the tribal communities the various funding and technical assistance opportunities that are offered through the state and beyond. The program manager and staff have participated in intra-agency meetings and economic development events, including the Montana Economic Developers Association presentations, Governor's Conference on Tourism, and State Tribal Relations Interim Committee meeting.

## NEW TRIBAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT GRANT

To provide a greater economic impact for tribes, Commerce replaced the Tribal Business Planning Grant, a \$30,000 grant given to all eight tribes, for a total of \$240,000 for planning. In FY 2023, this grant was changed to the Tribal Business Development Grant, a competitive grant intended to assist Montanais tribally owned businesses in deploying shovel-ready projects.

### Blackfeet Tribally Owned Mini-Mall, East Glacier

*Blackfeet Tribe, FY23 Awardee*

Description of activity:

Repair and roof replacement of the tribally owned mini-mall in East Glacier. If the costs for the roof are less than the grant award amount, the tribe is authorized to utilize remaining funds toward other project goals outlined in its application.

Timeline, location, and amount awarded:

The TBDG award to the Blackfeet Tribe was granted on 6/28/23; the contract terminates on 7/31/25. The project is located on US Highway 2, East Glacier Park. The total award amount is \$140,000.

### Construction of a Commercial Building, Belgrade

*Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians, FY23 Awardee*

Description of activity:

Construction of a commercial building in Belgrade, MT.

Timeline, location, and amount awarded:

The TBDG award to Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indian was granted on 6/27/23; the contract terminates on 8/31/26. The project is located approximately one-half mile

from the Bozeman Yellowstone International Airport in Belgrade. The total award amount is \$100,000.

### Northern Cheyenne Arts & Crafts Center, Lame Deer

*Northern Cheyenne Tribe, FY24 Awardee*

#### Description of activity:

Funding is being used for the Northern Cheyenne Arts & Crafts Center. The venue will operate as a tribal business and will host a plethora of cultural arts and heritage pieces. The Center will sell items to tourists and visitors and will provide jobs for tribal members to manage the venue.

#### Timeline, location, and amount awarded:

The TBDG award to Northern Cheyenne was granted on 3/22/24; the contract terminates on 8/30/24. The project is in the heart of Lame Deer near the busy intersection of Hwy 212/Hwy 39. The total award amount is \$160,000.

### Pray Travertine Project, Pray

*Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians of Montana, FY24 Awardee*

#### Description of activity:

This project entails the use of state funding to erect a 120 feet x 60 feet manufacturing plant building equipped with specialized equipment to produce standard and custom wall-cladding products. This venture will provide sustainable revenue to the Little Shell Tribe while creating jobs for interested and qualified tribal members.

#### Timeline, location, and amount awarded:

The TBDG award to the Little Shell Tribe was granted on 5/23/24; the contract terminates on 5/17/25. The project is located in Pray. The total award amount is \$80,000.



## **ADDITIONAL SUCCESSES WITHIN OICED:**

### **Montana World Affairs Council**

Academic WorldQuest is our multi-day global education summit, which feeds students' curiosity about the world and broadens their understanding of international affairs. In FY24, OICED sponsored twelve students and teachers from Hays Lodge Pole, twelve students and teachers from Harlem and seven students and teachers from Browning to attend the Academic World Quest Conference in Missoula on March 4 & 5, 2024. The covered costs amounted to \$4,650.

### **Implementation of House Bill 19**

House Bill 19 provides that in collaboration with the state-tribal economic development commission, tribal governments, and other partners, [the Department of Commerce shall] develop a system for the gathering of data allowing the department to quantify on an ongoing basis the economic contributions of the tribes in Montana.

The OICED program has been tasked with implementing the measures put forth in HB19 through collaborations with the State Tribal Relations Committee and STEDC. January 2024 through May 2024 was marked by several discovery meetings to learn how we could develop a dashboard system that would display economic tribal data and what it would look like. Ultimately, we partnered with Commerce's Research and Information Services to create a dashboard model based on Salesforce data. We will present this model to the STRC in early FY25.

### **Transition to ServiceNow Portal for all OICED Grants**

In FY24, all OICED programs (TBDG, NABA, IEF, TTG) transitioned or started to transition over to the ServiceNow portal. Formerly, our programs existed and operated out of the Submittable portal. This transition to ServiceNow allows for more effective monitoring of the grant application process and more tools to delve into analytics. Starting in FY25, the NABA and IEF grants are the final remaining offerings of OICED that are transitioning into ServiceNow.

## Monette Farms

On June 3, 2024, the OICED program was represented at a day of collaboration in Helena among Monette Farms, the Crow Tribe, Commerce, the Business Attraction team and other stakeholders. Monette Farms has shown keen interest in partnering with the Crow Tribe to roll out a business model that would drastically benefit Montana's economy and the Crow Tribe. All parties were able to discuss the strategic plan of this new venture with the governor, gaining his approval as well.

## Broadband Bootcamp

The OICED program helped some of Montana's tribal leadership to explore workforce development in the broadband realm by sponsoring attendance at a broadband "bootcamp" in San Diego on June 16-18, 2024. OICED sponsored Little Shell Chairman Gerald Gray, CSKT Chairman Michael Dolson, Little Shell Director of Planning & Economic Development/NABA Brian Adkins, and Blackfeet tribal member/Montana Department of Labor & Industry Tribal Liaison Donnie Wetzel to tour the tribal broadband facility in San Diego. The facility has real-life replica equipment and conditions where people train and gain the skills for broadband work. The intent of the tour was to initiate the idea to build a facility here in Montana that would give tribal members a clear path to education and certification in broadband industry jobs. Also, collaborations with tribal colleges are being explored to give youth a curriculum pathway toward certification.

## Indian Equity Fund Small Business Grant

The Indian Equity Fund Small Business Grant assists start-up or expanding Native American businesses in Montana. Awards of \$6,000 to \$14,000 help with costs related to building, equipment, assets, technology, operational costs or sometimes working capital.

## FISCAL YEAR 2023

### Blackfeet

- **C&C Meat Processing** in Babb received \$14,000 to purchase a smoker, scale and labeler and upgrade air its conditioning unit as well.
- **Sweet Pine Outfitters** in Browning received \$14,000 to purchase a shed and pay for initial startup expenses.
- **Blackbones Boutique** in Browning received \$12,000 to purchase supplies and inventory.
- **Iron Shield Creative** in Browning received \$12,000 to purchase a camper and upgraded video equipment.

### Chippewa Cree

- **Central Machine** in Big Sandy received \$13,200 to purchase equipment, including a new hydraulic shear and a large toolbox.
- **Double E** in Box Elder received \$12,800 to help purchase a new mobile food trailer.
- **Log Creations** in Box Elder received \$14,000 to purchase a sawmill with a swing blade.
- **Chachiis Tacos** in Box Elder received \$14,000 to purchase commercial kitchen equipment, including a Halifax hood system, a four-burner 60" range with a 36" griddle, two standard ovens, a fridge and freezer and an ice machine.
- **Inspired Life** in Box Elder received \$12,000 to purchase equipment, supplies and to pay for startup expenses.

### Confederated Salish and Kootenai

- **All American Autoworks** in Ronan received \$12,000 to purchase equipment including an electric welder, plasma cutter, welding set and other tools.
- **Arrow Rock** in Polson received \$14,000 to purchase a dump trailer with 10,000-pound capabilities.
- **Hair to the Throne** in Polson received \$14,000 to purchase equipment and supplies.

### Crow

- **Juiced Up** in Crow Agency received \$14,000 to purchase a 16 feet x 26 feet trailer for a drive-up café.
- **Real Bird Trail Rides** in Garryowen received \$14,000 to purchase equipment and supplies.
- **TruColors P&C** in Havre received \$12,000 to purchase a new work truck and equipment.

### Fort Belknap

- **Crasco & Crasco Construction** in Dodson received \$13,000 to purchase a side dump trailer.
- **Marlin's Heating** in Harlem received \$14,000 to purchase equipment, including a hydraulic liftgate.
- **Rezolution** in Harlem received \$13,000 to purchase a new camera and equipment.

### Fort Peck

- **365 Design** in Wolf Point received \$14,000 to purchase a new printer.
- **Lien Windshield** in Wolf Point received \$12,000 to build a shop expansion to service multiple vehicles.

- **RX Carwash** in Wolf Point received \$14,000 to purchase equipment, supplies and a new payment system.

### Little Shell

- **406 Custom Auto** in Havre received \$13,333.34 to purchase equipment and supplies, including a tinting plotter.
- **Indian Paintbrush** in East Glacier received \$13,333.33 to purchase a building and inventory.
- **Plains Soul** in Hardin received \$13,333.33 to purchase a 16 feet x 26 feet storefront building.

### Northern Cheyenne

- **Bark Park** in Billings received \$14,000 to purchase and install artificial pet turf.
- **Hot Rock Healing** in Lame Deer received \$14,000 to purchase a small cabin for services.
- **Warrior Trail** in Lame Deer received \$12,000 to purchase a storage unit for inventory.

## FISCAL YEAR 2024

### Blackfeet

- **Paula's All Occasion Gifts** in Browning received \$14,000 to add a new line of affordable inventory to service more customers.
- **Lone Pine Cabins** in Browning received \$14,000 to purchase an additional cabin and finishing material to offer cabin rentals near Duck Lake.
- **True Grit Tire and Automotive** in Billings received \$12,000 to purchase a hand truck with a crane and additional equipment to increase capacity.

### Chippewa Cree

- **Kis Barbershop** in Box Elder received \$14,000 to purchase a small building structure to convert into a barbershop.
- **Bobbiis Boutique** in Box Elder received \$14,000 to purchase a new line of inventory.
- **Still Here** in Box Elder received \$12,000 to purchase a press, conveyer belt dryer and other equipment and inventory for apparel screen printing.

### Confederated Salish and Kootenai

- **The Ronan Mill** in Ronan received \$14,000 to purchase commercial kitchen equipment to expand and offer coffee and espresso drinks.
- **Meru Artisan Boutique** in Polson received \$14,000 to purchase commercial kitchen equipment and other business equipment to offer more goods and services.
- **Hammer Time Construction** in Ronan received \$12,000 to purchase a work vehicle to a haul utility trailer to increase capacity.

### Crow

- **Studio 27 Salon** in Billings received \$14,000 to purchase commercial salon equipment.
- **Pitsch Cattle** in Crow Agency received \$14,000 to purchase a large portable corral system.
- **Wolf Mountain Storage** in Crow Agency received \$12,000 to purchase equipment to start a storage facility.

### Fort Belknap

- **Bishop Services** in Harlem received \$14,000 to purchase an all-terrain vehicle to be used in operations transporting a chemical sprayer and applicator.

- **Bell Developing** in Harlem received \$14,000 to purchase equipment and machinery to expand capabilities.
- **Carroll Custom Embroidery** in Ekalaka received \$6,000 to purchase machinery and equipment to increase capacity.
- **406 Native Roots** in Billings received \$5,000 to purchase equipment and inventory to provide services for the new store.

### Fort Peck

- **Hi-Line ATM** in Wolf Point received \$14,000 to purchase and install machines.
- **G10 Enterprises** in Wolf Point received \$14,000 to purchase building materials to improve real estate.
- **Kountry Kare** in Billings received \$12,000 to purchase equipment to improve the business.

### Little Shell

- **Dragon Well Acupuncture and H.O.P.E.** in Floweree received \$14,000 to purchase equipment and technology to increase the capacity of the business.
- **Rising Wolf Getaway** in Butte received \$14,000 to purchase raw inventory for production.
- **First Nations Food** in Great Falls received \$12,000 to purchase a food truck.

### Northern Cheyenne

- **Burritos R Us** in Lame Deer received \$14,000 to purchase commercial kitchen equipment.
- **Speelman Construction** in Lame Deer received \$14,000 to purchase machinery and equipment.

- **NC Duct Guys** in Busby received \$6,000 to purchase machinery and equipment.
- **Sage & Oats** in Helena received \$5,000 to purchase furnishings and technology.

## Native American Business Advisors Grant

The Native American Business Advisors Grant is a fund to support the activities of Native American community-based organizations, tribal colleges and tribal government organizations that support private sector business development on reservations and in tribal communities.

In fiscal years 2023-2024, the NABA grant awarded \$20,000 to each of the following organizations:

- Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians of Montana
- NACDC Financial Services, Inc
- Bear Paw Development Corporation
- Salish & Kootenai Business Services
- Plenty Doors CDC
- Montana Native Growth Fund (2024 only)
- Great Northern Development Corporation
- People's Partner for Community Development



## Native American Collateral Support Program

Following the 2015 legislative session, staff launched the Native American Collateral Support program after researching domestic high-performing collateral support programs. The program addresses a lack of access to capital for Native American-owned businesses. The program has assisted with certificates of deposit to support:

- \$100,000 to support a loan of \$550,000 to purchase the assets, including inventory, rolling stock, equipment and machinery for Polson Auto Parts, Inc. located on the Flathead Reservation ó 65% repaid.
- \$100,000 to support a loan of \$400,000 to fund the purchase of commercial items from Titan Machinery along with tools, compressor, Hydro Clear and Fast Back for Polson Stone and Tile, Inc. located on the Flathead Reservation ó 40% repaid.
- \$100,000 to support a loan of \$288,450 to fund the construction of a meat processing facility and to purchase commercial equipment for Auggies's Meat Processing, LLC for a Little Shell Tribal member ó 20% repaid.
- \$100,000 to support a loan of \$135,000 to fund the purchase of Stageline Pizza in Ronan, with the intent of becoming G&M Pizza Inc. located on the Flathead Reservation ó new.
- \$110,000 to support a loan of \$950,000 to fund the purchase of assets for business expansion. The NAPA Distribution Center or 'hub store' will be located in the Pablo area on the Flathead Reservation ó new.
- \$110,000 to support a loan of \$330,000 to the Blackfeet Lodge Group to fund the purchase of commercial real estate to operate a local laundromat located on the Blackfeet Reservation ó new.

- A NACS award of \$30,000 to support a loan to Sage & Oats Trading Post in Helena was paid off in March 2024.

## Tribal Tourism

The Indian Country tourism activity functions are administered by the Montana Department of Commerce (§ 90-1-104, MCA), to advance tourism development priorities for Montana's Tribes through funding under the Tribal Tourism as authorized by the 65<sup>th</sup> Montana Legislature in 2017 and the terms of Senate Bill 309, and additionally by the 68<sup>th</sup> Montana Legislature in 2023 and the terms of Senate Bill 540.

As the designated seventh tourism region in Montana, Indian Country's tribal tourism program objectives, goals, strategies, and metrics focus on **elevating the brand**, **expanding opportunities** and **inspiring visitation** to the eight tribal nations.

**Elevate** brand recognition through:

- Publications and news stories
- Marketing campaigns
- Content creation with tribal citizens in front of and behind the camera
- Native American Made in Montana Program recruitment, membership and support

**Expand** opportunities in the tribal tourism industry through:

- Tribal community-identified tourism assets and resources to be promoted
- Investment and partnership opportunities
- Featured participation in conferences and tradeshows
- Targeted sponsorships, scholarships, and grants for tourism development
- Promotion of experiences, events, locations and businesses

**Inspire** visitation through:

- VisitMT.com/Indian-country.com website
- Indian Country Guidebook
- Consumer research to inform target markets and demographics
- Marketing campaigns, including social media, billboards and radio ads
- Strengthening the relationship among the tribes and the STED Commission with the Tourism Advisory Council, tourism regional directors, destination marketing organizations, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks and the national parks

## The Tribal Tourism Grant Program

Grant funding for the eight federally recognized tribal governments was authorized by the 68th Montana Legislature in the General Appropriations Act of 2023 (HB 2) and signed into law by Governor Greg Gianforte on June 14, 2023 (Chapter 769). The TTG is a competitive, annual grant program to connect participating Montana tribes with resources necessary to advance one or more self-identified tourism priorities. The program has an average available budget of \$120,000 in funding per year; there is a 50% match requirement per award. Any funds not awarded are repurposed into other initiatives aligned with program priorities.

Applicants may choose from one of two eligible “shovel-ready” long-lasting project categories:

1. Destination development and infrastructure upgrades, such as:
  - Establishing new or improving existing campgrounds, expanding rental features like tipi rentals, small cabins, and/or RV parks with upgraded amenities like electrical hook ups, potable water, grey water disposal, restroom facilities, showers, picnic pavilions, fire rings, tent pads, camp host residence, facilities maintenance equipment and/or vehicles, gift shop or visitors center with point-of-sale system for purchases

- Historical markers with shady areas for travelers to stop and rest and/or use the restroom at a vault toilet or access potable water.
- Interpretive trails with informational kiosks about flora, fauna or historical significance
- Agritourism offerings, like certified guided fishing, hiking, hunting, horseback riding, bison range tours, stargazing, bird watching, bicycle tours or boat tours
- Improved ADA accessibility at existing locations

2. Product development and technology systems, such as:

- Certified guide curriculum and course certification program offered at a tribally owned college or within the tribe's Historic Preservation Department
- Tribal tourism website where visitors can explore offerings, events and maps, read frequently asked questions and travel alerts, book tours or campground reservations and make electronic payments

## FISCAL YEAR 2023

### Blackfeet

- \$50,000 for Chewing Blackbones Campground comfort station upgrades to construct ten family-style restrooms with shower combination units to replace existing facilities and for an easier-to-maintain design.

### Fort Belknap

- \$40,000 for Mission Canyon Rest Area to install a vault toilet system, picnic area, covered shelter and informational kiosk for visitors.

### Certified Production Assistant Training Scholarship Program contract with AccelerateMT Rapid Training Center

Following consultation with the STED Commission, unawarded 2023 TTG funds were repurposed into a \$40,000 contract with AccelerateMT's Rapid Training Center. These funds purchased eighty full-ride scholarships for enrolled tribal citizens aged sixteen years old or older, ten per tribal nation, to become certified production assistants for the commercial, film,

television, concert or theater industry. Graduates may opt-in to a database maintained by the Media Training Center and Commerce's Montana Film Office for call-to-work job opportunities. In-person or on-line course delivery is chosen by the awardee. This program ends December 31, 2024.

### Made in Montana Tradeshow featuring Native American Made Pavilion

The annual Made in Montana Tradeshow, held in March in Helena, features new or existing members of the Native American Made Program who have never been sponsored before. These exhibitors are positioned in a designated NAMIM Pavilion at the show. OICED Tribal Tourism provides scholarships for featured exhibitors to attend the show, covering their booth fees, lodging and per diem reimbursement for mileage and meals. Exhibitors must be in a position to entertain wholesale buyers on Day One. Day Two is open to the general public for retail purchases.

The four sponsored exhibitors for the 2023 show were:

- International Traditional Games Society
- Siyeh Corporation's Buffalo linnii Jerky
- BeThunder Creations, LLC
- Barbara Schelling

### Governor's Conference on Tourism

The 2023 GovCon was held at the Delta Hotel in Helena in April. Tribal Tourism had a strong presence with multiple components to contribute to the conference's offerings. OICED Tribal Tourism supported tribal attendees and participants with scholarships covered expenses to ensure their attendance would not create a financial burden. Participants also received compensation for their cultural contributions to the conference.

At the opening reception hosted at the Myrna Loy Theater, a collaborative short film debuted, promoting visitation to Pictograph Cave and Chief Plenty Coups State Parks from an indigenous storytelling perspective. This film was funded and produced by OICED Tribal

Tourism and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, and involved Crow Tribe Historic Preservation Officer Aaron Brien and videographer Marty Lopez.

Additionally, three regional Indian Country breakout sessions focused on tribal tourism in Western, Central and Eastern Montana. Led by tribal representatives, businesses and advocates, these sessions promoted visitation to their communities, familiarized audiences with what tribal tourism looks like in their regions and encouraged partnerships with neighboring organizations.

Lastly, Chippewa Cree tribal citizen Rebekah Jarvey, a fashion designer and NAMIM member, presented a colorful and dynamic fashion show during the awards banquet that left attendees with a bold, contemporary representation of Indian Country.

## **FISCAL YEAR 2024**

### **Confederated Salish and Kootenai**

- \$50,000 for The Bison on Flathead Lake vacation rental interior and exterior repairs and upgrades, including dock repairs and improved safety accessing the lake.

### **Tribal Tourism Event Sponsorships**

Unawarded 2024 TTG funds were repurposed for Tribal Tourism event sponsorships valued at \$8,000 each. They were contracted with six of the eight tribal nations who accepted the sponsorship offer. The agreements provide the tribes with monies to offset the expenses associated with hosting public tourism events between June 1 -October 31, 2024, such as pow wows, Indian relay races and rodeos. In consideration for these funds, the tribes allow up to five vendor booths to pop-up at these events, including Commerce, regional tourism partners and agencies for non-profit outreach to tribal citizens on programs that support tourism business development and grant funding opportunities. One tribe declined the sponsorship; another chose to utilize the funding for its 2025 events with funding from fiscal year 2025.

## Made in Montana Tradeshow featuring Native American Made Pavilion

The four sponsored exhibitors for the 2024 show were:

- MT Designs, LLC
- Laughing Water Designs, LLC
- Confuzed Glass, LLC
- Blue Ribbon Nets, LLC

## 2024 Governor's Conference on Tourism

The 2024 GovCon was held in April in Missoula. Tribal Tourism followed last year's strong presence with a focus on bringing Indian Country to the attendees with sights, smells, tastes, sounds and emotions to leave a lasting impression. Multiple components were coordinated to achieve this goal and contribute to the conference's content. OICED Tribal Tourism supported tribal participants with speaker agreements that covered expenses to ensure their attendance and to compensate them for their cultural contributions to the event.

The 'Cultural Heritage Entrepreneurship in Indian Country' breakout session featured five businesses and services presenting on their unique offerings. Attendees received an introduction to Plains Indian Sign Language; wildcrafted salves of juniper, mint, yarrow and sage; an invitation to visit a museum; take an indigenous storytelling hike; or receive a guided tour around tribal lands. Another breakout session focused on sports tourism, where Indian Country basketball tournaments were discussed as potential tourism events for shoulder season visitation.

The University of Montana Kyiyo Pow Wow Committee performed a mini-grand entry and dance demonstration at the awards banquet accompanied by a drum circle and singing. Mainstage presenter Mariah Gladstone's IndigiKitchen offered a cedar tea and maple syrup service to over 350 attendees, followed by a wildcrafted tea making workshop breakout session to educate attendees about indigenous plant knowledge and the culinary or medicinal applications of Montana's plants.

## The Great Western International Round-up International Tradeshow

The 2024 IRU Tradeshow offers Montana-based tour operators the opportunity to meet with international booking agents and tour operators to pitch their businesses to potential international travelers looking to experience the American West.

OICED Tribal Tourism sponsored Sun Tours, LLC from East Glacier to attend and meet with representatives from the UK, Australia, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Edinburgh, Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden, Finland, New Zealand and Canada. Sun Tours, LLC General Manager Derek DesRoiser presented his unique Blackfeet interpretive bus tours in and around Glacier National Park to inspire booking agents to consider including a tour with his company on the itineraries of their customers.

Tribal Tourism Officer Rachelle Brown was there to answer questions and provide information about how international visitors can plan their vacations through Montana to include an Indian Country experience. She also promoted the use of [VisitMT.com](https://www.visitmt.com) for trip planning and the Indian Country Guidebook for reference and itineraries. Many agents expressed their customers' desire to have an authentic Indian Country experience as a cultural component of their future visit to America. International travelers have a desire to support local businesses and communities with the monies they intend to spend.

Sun Tours, LLC General Manager Derek DesRoiser also networked with other representatives from across Montana, making connections and further marketing his business to Montana's hoteliers, regional directors, and destination management organizations to promote his offerings to customers across their channels. Derek's business includes ten buses and employs ten Blackfeet tribal citizens every season; he found the event to be educational and a good opportunity to market his business internationally and regionally.

## Scope of Work Contracts with Commerce's Agency of Record

As Commerce prepares to rebrand Visit Montana in 2027, Tribal Tourism signed two contract scopes with Windfall, Commerce's Agency of Record. These contracts combined, valued at



approximately \$290,000, will create new photography and videography content to be used in a new Indian Country Guidebook and eight new short videos - one per tribal nation - to be featured on the rebranded VisitMT.com website.

The content will be informed by meaningful consultations with each tribe between 2024-2026; by meeting with tribal councils, historic preservation departments, STED Commissioners, and the Indian Education for All staff at the Office of Public Instruction. The information gleaned will be utilized in future marketing campaigns and press releases and will be shared with each tribe. Additional project components will include production editing, contracted tribal talent and certified production assistants, scripting, audio recording, guidebook formatting, publication, distribution and marketing campaigns.