



2025-2026 Report to the Montana Legislature

State Tribal Economic Development Commission

Sept. 1, 2026

Montana Department of Commerce

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2025 – 2026

Report to the Montana Legislature

State Tribal Economic Development Commission

In accordance with 90-1-132, MCA, the following contents of the FY25-26 Biennium Report include the State Tribal Economic Development Commission activities within the Office of Indian Country Economic Development at the Montana Department of Commerce.

This report can be found at <https://commerce.mt.gov/Business/Indian-Country/State-Tribal-Economic-Development-Commission>.

This is a digital report; the cost for distribution was \$0.

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 in developing 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 economic development on Indian reservations and to help Commerce fully implement and comply with the economic development provisions tasked to Commerce in 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 Commerce information and advice on investments of economic development funding in Indian Country;
- Consults with each tribal nation of the STEDC 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.

STEDC 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

Paulette Butterfly, term ending July 1, 2027

Chippewa Cree Tribe

Ted Whitford, Sr., term ending July 1, 2026

Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes

Greg Dumontier, term ending July 1, 2026

Crow Tribe

Yolanda OldDwarf, term ending July 1, 2027

Fort Belknap Indian Community

Delina Cuts The Rope, term ending June 30, 2024

Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes

Bryce Kirk, term ending June 30, 2024

Little Shell Chippewa Tribe

Gerald Gray, STEDC Chair, term ending June 30, 2024

Northern Cheyenne Tribe

Melissa Lonebear, term ending July 1, 2026

Governor's Office

Misty Kuhl, Director of Indian Affairs

Mark Blasdel, Director of Economic Development

Montana Department of Commerce

Marta Bertoglio, Director

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

Commission Meetings

STEDC meets on a quarterly basis throughout Montana. During FY 2025-2026, meetings occurred on the following dates and locations:

2025-2026 Report to the Montana Legislature

- Aug. 28, 2024, in Wolf Point
- Nov. 13, 2024, in Billings
- Feb. 11, 2025, in Helena
- May 8, 2025, in Great Falls
- Aug. 8, 2025, in Billings
- Nov. 14, 2025, in Polson
- Feb. 6, 2026, in Helena
- May 1, 2026, in Great Falls

Past Indian Equity Fund Grant Awardee Presenters

STEDC invited past Indian Equity Fund Small Business Grant recipients to present at its meetings to discuss how these funds have helped them start and grow their businesses.

The IEF Small Business Grant helps new or expanding Native American businesses in Montana. The money can be used in a variety of ways, such as the purchase of new equipment or the development of a new product line.

Commerce's Office of Indian Country Economic Development, which administers the IEF grants, has helped hundreds of Native American entrepreneurs statewide achieve success.

IEF grant recipients who presented at STEDC meetings included:

- **Diamond Hanging 7 Guest Ranch** (Larry FallsDown) — Crow Tribe, 2021 IEF grantee.
- **KillEagle Construction** (Clayton KillEagle) — Fort Belknap Indian Community, 2021 IEF grantee.



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- **Metal Solutions** (Titus Takes Gun) — Crow Tribe, 2021 IEF grantee.
- **Nate's Gonna Fix It Inc.** (Nathan Chandler) — Chippewa Cree Tribe, 2021 IEF grantee.
- **OC Welding and Fabrication, LLC** (Jonilee Running Fisher) — Blackfeet Tribe, 2020 IEF grantee.
- **Plains Soul** (Carrie McCleary) — Little Shell Tribe, 2022 IEF grantee.
- **Rose Hollow Catering** (Ashley Woodward) — Little Shell Tribe, 2020 IEF grantee.
- **Rosebud Tipi Campground** (April Martin) — Northern Cheyenne Tribe, 2021 IEF grantee.
- **Smoke Signal Studio** (Scott Smoker) — Fort Peck Tribe, 2023 IEF grantee.
- **Turcotte Food Bus** (Buck Turcotte) — Fort Peck Tribe, 2021 IEF grantee.
- **Water People Tours** (Keya Birdsbill) — Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, 2020 IEF grantee.
- **Wolf Point General** (Kathy Deserly and Matt Deserly) — Fort Peck Tribe, 2023 IEF grantee.

Office of Indian Country Economic Development Program

Montana World Affairs Council is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering global understanding and awareness in Montana's communities and classrooms. The OICED Program partnered with MWAC and Executive Director Nikki Geiszler in FY 2025 and FY 2026 to bring high school students to its marquee calendar events.

Academic WorldQuest is a multi-day international affairs event that gives students an opportunity to engage with global experts including ambassadors, international thought leaders, policy experts and practitioners covering a wide range of topics, such as Montana's role in the global economy, global conservation efforts and current events.

The OICED Program provided a \$7,500 sponsorship to AWQ in FY 2025 to support the following schools' transportation, lodging and substitute teacher costs: Browning, Frazer, Harlem, Lame Deer and Polson. In FY 2026, the OICED Program provided a \$7,500 sponsorship to AWQ to support the following schools' transportation, lodging and substitute teacher costs: Browning, Lame Deer and Lodge Grass.

EconoQuest is a ground-breaking international economic literacy program that excites high school students about real-world economics and career opportunities. The program fills a gap in statewide economic education and explores college-to-career pathways with Montana industries and is a unique opportunity to engage local companies and government leaders about economics, international trade and workforce development.

The OICED Program provided a \$7,500 sponsorship to EQ in FY 2025 to support the following schools' transportation, lodging and substitute teacher costs: Browning, Frazer, Harlem, Hays Lodge Pole and Polson.

Don Addy Memorial Park: The OICED Program provided the Fort Belknap Tribe with an FY 2026 sponsorship of \$1,140 to upgrade park signage and continue the legacy of Don Addy. The park, located in Harlem, serves as a memorial of hope and renewal, physically central to the Tribe's infrastructure and economic revitalization efforts.

Tribal Business Development Grant

The Tribal Business Development Grant is a competitive grant program to connect participating tribes of Montana with the resources necessary to advance shovel-ready projects that will provide a measurable, beneficial economic impact for the community. The TBDG is awarded to the governing bodies of Montana's eight tribal governments or tribally owned businesses and is intended to help deploy shovel-ready business projects – meaning planning is more or less complete, approval permits are in place and laborers can get to work once sufficient funding is secured.

FY 2025 TBDG Awardees

The CSKT was awarded \$150,600 to purchase and set up a meat processing office and retail modular unit in Ronan.

The Blackfeet Tribe was awarded \$89,400 to bolster the operational capacity of the Blackfeet Tribe Buffalo Program located in Browning. The Tribe will implement two freezer units and one freezer transport unit as part of its food security efforts for tribal citizens.

FY 2026 TBDG Awardee

The Chippewa Cree Tribe was awarded \$240,000 for its “C&C Markets Modernization and Safety Improvement Project.” The Tribe will use this funding to modernize and renovate two tribally owned, for-profit enterprises – C&C Agency Market and the C&C Firehouse Market. The project will include upgrading aging infrastructure, improving accessibility and operational efficiency, reducing inventory loss and power-related disruptions, and ensuring reliable food and fuel access for 3,000-4,000 residents across the Rocky Boy Reservation and surrounding Box Elder area.



C&C Agency Market in Box Elder. Photo credit: Ian Windy Boy.



C&C Firehouse Market in Box Elder. Photo credit: Ian Windy Boy.

Indian Equity Fund Grant and Native American Business Advisors

Indian Equity Fund Program Overview – FY 2025 and FY 2026

Over FY 2025 and FY 2026, the Indian Equity Fund invested \$640,000 in Native-owned small businesses across Montana. A total of 51 businesses received awards during this two-year period, supporting startups, expansions and critical capacity improvements in both reservation and urban Indian communities.

IEF funding strengthened Native entrepreneurship across a wide range of industries, including agriculture and ranching, food and beverage, tourism and experiences, construction and trades, automotive services, creative media, retail and ecommerce, manufacturing and processing, transportation and logistics, professional services, and personal and wellness services. Businesses used IEF capital for equipment purchases, technology upgrades, refrigerated and storage units, commercial kitchen tools, food trailer and espresso buildouts, shop tools, transportation assets, safety gear, media and design software, facility improvements and inventory and branding for Native fashion and retail ventures.

Individual grants of up to \$14,000, matched dollar-for-dollar through cash or in-kind contributions, helped leverage local investment and demonstrated strong business readiness among awardees. These investments supported long term capacity building, improved service delivery, expanded operations and increased economic opportunity throughout Native communities.

The program served entrepreneurs from all eight tribal nations in Montana: Blackfeet, Chippewa Cree (Rocky Boy's), CSKT, Crow, Fort Belknap, Fort Peck, Little Shell

Chippewa and Northern Cheyenne. Leading sectors included food and beverage, agriculture and ranching, tourism, construction and trades.

IEF's continued success in FY 2025 and FY 2026 reflects a robust demand for business development resources and the ongoing commitment to strengthening Native-owned enterprises and tribal economies across the state.

Two-Year Snapshot: FY 2025-FY 2026

- Total IEF grant funding awarded: \$640,000
- Native-owned businesses supported: 51
- Tribal nations served: 8
- Leading sectors: food and beverage, agriculture and ranching, tourism, construction and trades

FY 2025 IEF Grantees

Blackfeet

- **Divide Mountain BBQ:** \$7,000 to purchase appliances for its mobile kitchen.
- **Johnson's of St. Mary, LLC:** \$10,000 for hosting and accommodations business expenses.
- **Old North Trail Enterprises, LLC:** \$13,400 for technological upgrades.
- **Omie's Pizza:** \$14,000 to buy kitchen equipment.

Chippewa Cree

- **Dusty Welding:** \$5,600 to purchase welding tools and safety equipment.

- **Rockin Ridge Construction:** \$14,000 to buy a dump truck.
- **SSW Beadwork:** \$10,000 for renovations, inventory expansion and a new POS system.

CSKT

- **Cutting Edge Solutions, LLC:** \$14,000 to purchase new auto shop equipment.
- **Lemon Drops & Treats:** \$14,000 to buy commercial-grade kitchen and display equipment.
- **Ty's Malt Shop:** \$14,000 for renovations.

Crow

- **Big Crane Outfitters:** \$14,000 to upgrade safety equipment and machinery for enhanced outfitting experiences.
- **K-M Livestock:** \$14,000 to build a new storage facility to protect livestock feed and ranch supplies.

Fort Belknap

- **Garrett Doney, LLC:** \$14,000 to upgrade equipment for efficient hauling.
- **Kevin Hawley:** \$14,000 for shop renovations to increase business capacity.
- **Wasniya Massage Therapy:** \$14,000 to expand to a new and improved spa facility.

Fort Peck

- **653 Custom Designs:** \$12,000 to acquire a Roland VersaSTUDIO for expanded design capabilities.

- **Baby Lonnie's Beer Mug:** \$14,000 to purchase a new central air conditioning unit.
- **Whatever Construction:** \$14,000 to buy new welding equipment.
- **Wolf City Auto Inc.:** \$14,000 for new sidewalks to improve accessibility.

Little Shell Chippewa

- **E-1 Towing:** \$14,000 to purchase new tools and diagnostic technology.
- **Bougie Paws, LLC:** \$12,000 to buy new equipment and technology.
- **The Kinder Cowboy LLC:** \$12,000 to purchase a new vehicle for transporting horses.
- **Mad Hatter Sweets and Treats:** \$14,000 to buy a generator and a food truck vehicle wrap.
- **Milk River Meats & Eats:** \$14,000 to purchase meat processing equipment.

Northern Cheyenne

- **PAMS Ag Service:** \$14,000 to acquire a drone system to improve agricultural precision and efficiency.

FY 2026 IEF Grantees

Blackfeet

- **Evening Star Outdoor Adventures, Browning:** \$14,000 to purchase rental boats and safety gear, as well as improve booking and operations infrastructure.

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- **Glacier Gateway Vacation Rental & Culture Lodging**, Browning: \$12,000 to complete cabin interiors and buy furnishings, linens and appliances.
- **KayCo BBQ, LLC**, Browning: \$14,000 to upgrade smoker and food trailer equipment and purchase initial inventory to expand event and catering capacity.
- **Rogue Grill & Catering**, East Glacier: \$14,000 to buy a hot holding cabinet, a high-capacity generator and a commercial ice machine.

Crow

- **Jack Rabbit Crossing Audio and Events, LLC**, Wyola: \$14,000 to purchase or upgrade sound, lighting and event production equipment, as well as a trailer and storage for mobile events.
- **Kilo Blends, LLC**, Billings: \$9,000 to buy and install barbershop equipment as well as a laptop.
- **Wolf Mountain Gunworks**, Lodge Grass: \$14,000 to build inventory, upgrade security, invest in marketing assets and purchase a computer.

Fort Belknap

- **Pretty Paint Catering, LLC**, Harlem: \$12,000 to purchase commercial kitchen equipment, storage and serving gear for larger catering jobs as well as to improve food safety.
- **Walking Sun Custom Cuts, LLC**, Dodson: \$14,000 to buy two refrigerated shipping containers to create separate cooler and freezer storage.
- **Water Dawgs Fire, Hays**: \$12,000 for engine repairs and equipment to meet wildland engine contract requirements.

Fort Peck

- **Caffiend to Go**, Poplar: \$5,000 for upgrading espresso and coffee equipment and a trailer buildout.

- **MK Media, LLC**, Poplar: \$11,000 to buy equipment and editing software to professionalize and expand media production.
- **RX Carwash**, Wolf Point: \$12,000 to purchase a new cement foundation for expansion.
- **Turcotte Food Bus**, Wolf Point: \$13,000 to upgrade kitchen equipment, refrigeration on the bus and signage.

Little Shell Chippewa

- **Bamn Junk Removal and Moving, LLC**, Billings: \$14,000 to upgrade trailers and purchase tools for junk removal and moving operations.
- **Elevate Fitness & Wellness Studio**, Havre: \$14,000 for new flooring.
- **SLD Moore LLC**, Havre: \$14,000 to finance a larger trailer and purchase additional food service equipment.

Northern Cheyenne

- **Sunroad Woman, LLC**, Billings: \$14,000 to finance a production order of new apparel styles.
- **Warrior Trail Jewelry & Gifts**, Lame Deer: \$14,000 to purchase inventory and improve displays and branding.

Rocky Boy Chippewa Cree

- **Diamond M Towing**, Box Elder: \$9,000 for towing and safety equipment upgrades.
- **Hood Rescue, LLC**, Box Elder: \$7,000 to buy specialized hood cleaning equipment, safety gear and a vehicle setup for commercial kitchen cleaning services.

- **Log Creations**, Box Elder: \$10,000 to acquire additional woodworking equipment and materials, as well as shop upgrades to enhance production and product quality.
- **Ni-Wah's Kitchen**, Box Elder: \$14,000 to buy kitchen and catering equipment, storage, and mobile setup improvements.

CSKT

- **Rollin Bean V2**, Polson: \$13,000 to purchase espresso equipment, refrigeration, and a generator.
- **Shiny Suds Car Wash**, Arlee: \$14,000 to upgrade wash equipment, install modern payment systems and improve signage.
- **Water People Tours**, Ronan: \$13,000 to upgrade tour boat equipment, safety gear, as well as marketing and booking tools.

Program Impact

The FY 2026 portfolio demonstrated continued demand for practical business investments that improved service delivery, safety, mobility, production capacity and customer reach. Across the awards, businesses used grant funds for equipment purchases, facility improvements, inventory, refrigeration, trailers, safety upgrades and technology, all of which enhanced business operations on Montana Indian reservations and nearby communities.

For example, SSW Beadwork received \$10,000 in 2025 and used the investment to grow from an online presence into a physical storefront in Havre. Owner Selena Sandman said the funding enhanced her inventory, expanded displays and fixtures, and helped create a space that also supports other Native artists and small businesses.



SSW Beadwork in Havre is owned by Selena Sandman Wells, an IEF grantee.

Photo credit: Selena Sandman Wells.

Native American Business Advisors FY 2025 and FY 2026

In both FY 2025 and FY 2026, the Native American Business Advisors network served as a critical partner system for Native business development across Montana. NABAs are a statewide system of community-based economic development organizations, tribal credit agencies and business development centers serving Montana's eight tribal regions.

Throughout both years, the network helped Native entrepreneurs with business planning, marketing, financial projections, financing readiness, grant preparation, credit counseling and IEF application support. These services built local capacity for sustainable Native-owned businesses and encouraged entrepreneurship in tribal communities across the state.

FY 2026 Active NABA Roster

- **Blackfeet Nation:** Native American Community Development Corp., Lead Advisor: Darrel Fish, 406-338-2099.
- **Chippewa Cree Tribe (Rocky Boy's):** Bear Paw Development Corp. / SBDC, Lead Advisor: Joe LaPlante, 406-399-1557.
- **CSKT:** Salish Kootenai Business Services, Lead Advisor: James Bible, 406-883-4317 ext. 2.
- **Crow Nation:** Plenty Doors Community Development Corp., Lead Advisor: Charlene Johnson, 406-638-2074.
- **Fort Belknap Indian Community:** Opportunity Link MT, Lead Advisor: Barbara Stiffarm (new appointment), 406-945-4784.
- **Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux:** Great Northern Development Corp., Lead Advisor: Ashley Trottier (new appointment), 406-653-2590 ext. 202.
- **Little Shell Chippewa Tribe:** Little Shell Tribal Economic Development, Lead Advisor: Brian Adkins, 406-690-5852.
- **Northern Cheyenne Tribe:** Native American Development Corp., Lead Advisor: Tally Monteau (new appointment), 406-591-4928.

FY 2026 Network Highlights

- **Fort Belknap:** Barbara Stiffarm of Opportunity Link brought strong institutional knowledge to her region and expanded local credit counseling support, especially for applicants navigating complex matching funds.
- **Fort Peck:** Ashley Trottier of GNDC revitalized Fort Peck outreach efforts and helped applicants complete digital submissions despite year-end timing and seasonal closures.

- **Northern Cheyenne:** Tally Monteau of NADC expanded technical readiness and credit preparedness support for reservation-based and off-reservation Native business owners.

The NABA network strengthened Native entrepreneurship in Montana by offering trusted, place-based guidance in business planning, financing readiness, grant preparation and ongoing technical assistance. With a mix of experienced advisors and new appointments in FY 2026, the network expanded its reach and deepened support for Native-owned businesses across Indian Country.



Participants at an IEF seminar hosted by NABA Darrel Fish at Blackfeet Community College in Browning. Photo credit: Commerce.



Commerce's Native Entrepreneur Development Specialist Bryan Singer speaks at an IEF seminar at the Fort Belknap Credit Department at Fort Belknap Agency. Photo credit: Barb Stiffarm

Economic Development and Infrastructure: Tribal Tourism



In March 2026, representatives from Montana's tribes, economic development sector and Indigenous tourism industry attended the Reservation Economic Summit in Las Vegas. Left to right: Venissa Guardipee, Derek DesRoiser, Tally Monteau, Lailani Upham, Misty Kuhl, Luella Brien and Paulette Butterfly. Photo credit: Commerce

Tribal Tourism Small Business Grant



BABBtized Barista, LLC pictured in Babb in 2025. Photo credit: Cassie Powell, owner.

Funded through Commerce, the Tribal Tourism Small Business Grant is an on-going grant program that encourages hospitality and recreational business development in Montana's Indian Country.

With \$240,000 in funding available for 24 awards per year, this program currently awards up to \$10,000 to each grantee. The program focuses on starting or expanding small businesses across five target areas in Montana's Indian Country tourism region: Native American Made in Montana vendors and producers; hosted accommodations, experiences or tour operators; licensed outfitters and guides in the hunting and fishing industry; licensed food and beverage mobile food trucks or brick-and-mortar stores; and businesses that provide products or services that support tribal tourism businesses.



NAMiM member and FY 2025 TTSB Grant awardee Vicki Bisbee of Assiniboine Books has authored books to promote early learning and Assiniboine language preservation.

Photo credit: Commerce



NAMiM member Selena Sandman received a TTSB Grant in FY 2025 for business expansion expenses for her store, SSW Beadwork, in Havre. Photo credit: Selena Sandman.

In FY 2025, 17 business owners from the Blackfeet, Chippewa Cree, Fort Belknap, Fort Peck, and Northern Cheyenne Tribes were awarded \$10,000 each:



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- **Assiniboine Books** in Wolf Point for NAMiM business expansion expenses.
- **Baby's Got Back BBQ** in Wolf Point for licensed food and beverage business improvement expenses.
- **Backpacker's Ferry, LLC** in Browning for the expansion of tourism experiences.
- **Bluebird Enterprize** in Hays for tourism support services and business expenses.
- **Brew Crew** in Ashland for licensed food and beverage business expenses.
- **Buckaroo Brews** in Cut Bank for licensed food and beverage business expenses.
- **Elliot Ranch Branded Beef, LLC** in Lame Deer for licensed food and beverage business expenses.
- **Iron Shield Creative, LLC** in Browning for tourism experience and business improvement expenses.
- **Johnson's of St. Mary** in St. Mary for hosting and accommodations business expenses.
- **Leaning Tree Camp and Cabins** in Babb for tourism accommodations business expansion expenses.
- **Lemon Drip** in Lame Deer for licensed food and beverage business expenses.
- **Lone Pine Cabin, LLC** in Browning for tourism accommodation business expansion expenses.
- **Redbyrd Designs** in Glasgow for NAMiM business expansion expenses.
- **Sacred Trails Guides and Outfitters** in Browning for the expansion of tourism experiences and business expenses.
- **SSW Beadwork** in Havre for NAMiM business expansion expenses.
- **Stumitsikitsikin Art Collective** in Poplar for NAMiM business location expansion expenses.
- **Wolf Point General Mercantile** in Wolf Point for NAMiM business expansion expenses.

In FY 2026, 21 business owners from the Blackfeet, CSKT, Chippewa Cree, Crow, Little Shell and Northern Cheyenne Tribes were each awarded \$10,000:

- **BABBtized Barista, LLC** in Babb for business equipment and development.
- **Backpacker's Ferry, LLC** in Browning for business equipment and improvements.
- **Bighorn Drift & Fly Company, LLC** in Billings for outfitter and guiding business equipment and development.
- **Generations Forward** in Billings for business equipment and development.
- **Glacier Gateway Vacation Rental & Cultural Lodging** in Browning for vacation rental development and improvements.
- **Glacier Montpacas, LLC** in Browning for retail space construction and alpaca tour development.
- **Good Heart Leads, LLC** in Pryor for mobile restaurant equipment and business development.
- **Hi-Line Hogs & Livestock, LLC** in Cut Bank for Grown in Montana products, equipment and supplies.
- **Imiera, LLC** in Billings for Hunter's Moon Beading & Jewelry's NAMiM product supplies, equipment and business development.
- **Iron Shield Creative, LLC** in Browning for business equipment and product development.
- **Johnson's of St. Mary, LLC** in Browning for business infrastructure improvements.
- **Lil Jittz, LLC** in Box Elder for mobile restaurant business equipment and development.
- **Loudthunder Express** in Box Elder for mobile restaurant business equipment and development.
- **Mudman Creationz, LLC** in Browning for campground and Indigenous workshop business development.

- **QuickSet Fly Company, LLC** in Billings for outfitter and guide business equipment and development.
- **Rising Wolf Getaway, LLC** in Babb for vacation rental cabins expansion, construction and finishes.
- **Sage & Oats Trading Post, LLC** in Helena for NAMiM product production equipment and development.
- **The Spoon & Fork, LLC** in Lame Deer for restaurant equipment upgrades.
- **Tommy B Robinson Photography** in Lame Deer for NAMiM production equipment and development.
- **Water People Tours, LLC** in Ronan for campground repairs and improvements.
- **Zander Art Gallery** in Great Falls for NAMiM production equipment and business development.

Tribal Tourism Grant for Tribal Governments



Tipi camping at Buffalo Calf Campground in East Glacier in 2025. Photo credit: Commerce

Funded through Commerce, the Tribal Tourism Grant is an on-going grant program that supports shovel-ready tourism projects owned and maintained by Montana's tribal nations.

With approximately \$150,000 in funding available per year, this competitive grant program currently awards up to \$50,000 to each recipient with a 50% matching funds requirement. It focuses on projects related to existing tourism assets or developing new offerings that encourage visitation to tribal communities, improve accessibility and safety, or provide infrastructure to support Native-owned tourism businesses.

In FY 2025, three tribal nations were awarded:

- **Chippewa Cree:** \$50,000 for replacement and installation of new bucking chutes at the rodeo grounds at Rocky Boy's Agency.
- **Fort Belknap Indian Community:** \$40,301 for vacation rental renovations at a property in Harlem.
- **Little Shell:** \$32,350 upgrades to the powwow arbor's lighting, electrical hook-ups, sound system as well as other additions.

In FY 2026, two tribal nations were awarded \$50,000 each:

- **Blackfeet:** Infrastructure repairs and improvements across four campgrounds owned and operated by the tribe – Buffalo Calf, Duck Lake, Chewing Black Bones and Red Eagle.
- **Fort Belknap:** Powwow arbor repairs and improvements.

Product Development Through Meaningful Consultation: Early and Often Approach



Fort Belknap Indian Community's George Horsecapture, Jr. and Peter Horsecapture discuss critical analysis of current tourism marketing products at the 2026 Tribal Tourism Regional Summit in Havre. Photo credit: Commerce.



Left to right: Attendees Shailee Shambo and William Granado from Fort Belknap Indian Community; Javon Wing, Amy Barcenas, Janice Myers and Brenda St. Pierre from Chippewa Cree Tribe of Rocky Boy's at the 2026 Tribal Tourism Regional Summit in Havre. Photo credit: Commerce.

The current Indian Country videos are over 14 years old, and the Indian Country Guidebook developed in 2017 has had only minor edits since 2023. Therefore, a new 2027 Indian Country Guidebook and video content for VisitMT.com/Indian-country are in development. The goal is to create new products and future campaigns to promote STED Indian Country Region 7 that are informed and crafted with the guidance of Montana's tribal citizens actively engaged in the tribal tourism industry.

The project began in FY 2024 by securing production scope of work contracts with Windfall Studios, Inc., Commerce's agency of record. Presentations to tribal councils started late in 2024 and continued in 2025 in consultation with Montana Indigenous Tourism Trail Project steering committees through 2026. The new products and related promotional campaign will be ready in spring 2027.



At the 2026 Tribal Tourism Regional Summit in Kalispell, MITTP Project Manager Lailani Upham and Shawn Lahr “Split Ears” offer a Blackfeet tribal perspective and critique of current tourism marketing products. Photo credit: Commerce.

To date, the Tribal Tourism Program has presented to all tribal councils, co-hosted over 60 regular biweekly or weekly MITTP steering committee virtual meetings for seven of the eight nations, hosted three separate two-day, in-person Tribal Tourism Regional

Summits for six of the eight MITTP steering committees, and has updated the STEDC and the Tourism Advisory Council on the progress of these engagement activities with tribal citizens, staff and leadership.

Native-owned videography and photography production companies were contracted to capture community content during the summer of 2025. With the evaluation and feedback of this imagery by MITTP steering committee members at the in-person summits held in May 2026, additional content recommendations for summer and fall of 2026 production needs were identified and are currently in the scheduling phase. So far, over sixty MITTP steering committee members from seven of the eight nations have contributed to the creation of these new products by reviewing and recommending guidebook layout, table of contents and imagery as well as evaluating written copy. Their consultations are ongoing; Fort Peck's reengagement and Northern Cheyenne's input was anticipated to begin the summer of 2026.

This project will conclude at the end of 2026. Working with Commerce's agency of record, Windfall Studios, Inc., the new Indian Country guidebook will be ready for print by January 2027. The new videos and ad campaign will launch by March 2027.

Production Assistant Media Training Scholarship Program with AccelerateMT



Production assistants on the set of “Bring Them Home” near Polson in August 2023.
Photo credit: Jason Belcourt.

In FY 2023, the Production Assistant Media Training Scholarship Pilot Program started with contractor AccelerateMT and an investment of \$40,000 in program funds. It was an ambitious two-year initiative to certify 80 enrolled tribal citizens aged 16 years old or older, 10 per tribal nation, as PAs to work in the media production industry. Scholarship recipients were offered their choice of in-person training or on-line course access. Most opted for in-person training.

The program started strong, certifying 22 PAs across Montana’s Indian Country in early 2025; 18 students completed the in-person training and four students finished the on-line course. However, by the summer of 2025, the program’s progress stalled. Contractor AccelerateMT experienced some staffing changes and needed to subcontract the training program as well as request a contract extension. Issues with

the subcontractor and changes to the training delivery systems created additional delays that the program was unable to remedy before the contract expired.

AccelerateMT refunded \$29,000 in unspent funds to Commerce in December 2025. Of the 22 certified PAs resulting from the program, some were hired to work on film productions like Thunderheart Film's "Bring Them Home," and Ikaakimaat, Inc.'s "The Undefeated." They have also been added to the Commerce Film Office's "call-to-work" database for local PAs available for hire. Additionally, the skills learned in the training are transferable to other occupations.

While the program is considered a moderate success due to only 22 of the potential 80 scholarships resulting in certified PAs, interest in the program was strong. It received over 60 submissions, with 23 approved scholarship applicants waiting to be trained before challenges prevented the continuation of the program. If future funding were available, the program could be revived by implementing the lessons learned, addressing the obstacles identified and utilizing a partnership with Commerce's Film Office or the Montana Department of Labor and Industry for administration and promotion.

Made in Montana: Annual Trade Show, Native American Made in Montana Pavilion



Montana RezBred exhibits at the 2026 Made in Montana Trade Show NAMiM Pavilion in Helena. Photo credit: Commerce.

The Made in Montana Trade Show is an annual two-day event in Helena that gives program members an opportunity to exhibit and negotiate contracts in the wholesale market followed by a bonus public day of engagement and retail sales. With the support of the STEDC, the Office of Tourism, OICED and the Tribal Tourism Program at Commerce, the Native American Made in Montana Pavilion at the trade show sponsors and features either newly recruited program members or existing members who have not attended or been sponsored before.

Each year, event organizers plan on sponsoring four to eight new exhibitors in the NAMiM Pavilion. Sponsored exhibitors have their booth fee paid, along with per-diem lodging, meals and travel reimbursed after the trade show. By focusing on NAMiM member and technical support, event logistics and coordination administered through the Office of Tourism paired with funding through OICED Tribal Tourism Small Business Grants and IEF Small Business Grants, this event fosters deep collaboration among multiple Commerce staff in the year leading up to the trade show.

The 2025 NAMiM Pavilion sponsored exhibitors were:

- **MT Sue's Creations:** CSKT
- **Roots & Shoots, LLC:** Blackfeet
- **Shop LS 574:** Little Shell

The 2026 NAMiM Pavilion sponsored exhibitors were:

- **Assiniboine Books:** Fort Peck
- **Grizzly Medicine Herbs:** Blackfeet
- **RezBred:** Fort Peck
- **SnoCap Designs:** Little Shell