



Grant Details

118486 - FY23 DMO Plan

122500 - FY23 Gardiner DMO PLAN

DOC Office of Tourism

Grant Title: FY23 Gardiner DMO PLAN
Grant Number: 23-51-047
Grant Status: Underway
Comments:
Applicant Organization: Gardiner Chamber of Commerce
Grantee Contact: Terese Petcoff
Award Year: FY23
Program Area: DOC Office of Tourism
Amounts:
Contract Dates:

<small>Contract Sent</small>	<small>Contract Received</small>	<small>Contract Executed</small>	
Project Dates: 06/15/2022	07/01/2022	06/30/2023	
<small>Proposal Date</small>	<small>Project Start</small>	<small>Project End</small>	

Grant Administrator: Barb Sanem
Contract Number 23-51-047
Award Year FY23

Contract Dates

Contract Sent Contract Received Contract Executed Contract Legal

Project Dates 07/01/2022
 06/30/2023

Project Start Project End

Comments

Amendment Comments

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.

The small hamlet of Gardiner, known as "Nature's Favorite Entrance to Yellowstone National Park", is located in southwest Montana at the North Entrance to Yellowstone National Park. Nestled between the Absaroka-Beartooth and the Gallatin Mountain ranges, Gardiner is surrounded by approximately 10 million acres of public lands. The community enjoys year-round access to the Yellowstone River--the longest free-flowing river in the lower 48 states. Since the early 1880's, Gardiner has served as the original entrance to Yellowstone National Park and is graced by the historic Roosevelt Arch, dedicated by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1903.

Our community's small-town Montana charm, natural splendor, and abundant wildlife make it a unique "home on the range" for our nearly 900 residents. Year-round access to Yellowstone's Northern Range truly differentiates Gardiner from other Yellowstone gateway communities. The community also enjoys a rich history as the original entrance to Yellowstone National Park, which has left a flavor of Old West heritage evidenced by historic buildings and the Roosevelt Arch.

Strengths: Our charming small town offers relaxing hospitality while providing full-service amenities. Many Gardiner restaurants offer local and sustainably grown produce and Montana raised beef. Visitors will find a diverse selection of accommodations including modern hotels and inns, rustic cabins, quaint cottages, relaxing B&B's, and vacation rentals. Our all-inclusive guest ranches offer our visitors horseback riding and fishing by day, and cowboy cookouts and campfires by night.

Year-round access to Yellowstone National Park and easy access to Forest Service and BLM lands provide visitors with an array of recreation opportunities. These include whitewater rafting, ziplining, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing, photography, wildlife watching, hiking, fishing, and soaking in hot springs.

Challenges: Over the last two years Gardiner has experienced significant impacts both economically and in terms of visitation. In part this is due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as people sought open spaces and recreational opportunities like never before. However, as the country has begun to transition into a new post-pandemic normal, in 2021 our area's visitation continued to rise bringing unanticipated challenges. Specifically, the North Entrance recreational visit counts from April – November were up 36.7% year over year when comparing 2020 to 2021. Yellowstone experienced their highest visitation on record in 2021 with 4,860,537 recreational visits, of those visits 1,006,375 or 20.7% came through the North Entrance of Gardiner. With higher visitation, Gardiner experienced a new type of traveler(s), many that had never come to a national park before, many that did not plan ahead, and many that were unaware of how to properly respect the landscape and how to recreate responsibly.

This new type of traveler has been a challenge within itself. The overuse of the recreational areas surrounding Gardiner has resulted in problematic behavior of dispersed and non-dispersed campers that included leaving human waste, camping in hazardous roadways, illegal camping, illegal fires, and trespassing. As campgrounds filled in Yellowstone, they also filled outside the park, in response to this all campgrounds in YNP have moved to reservation only and, our most popular local campground operated by the USFS moved to reservation only as well. We anticipate that this change to reservation only will help mitigate the negative actions of others, however, communicating this to change to visitors could be a challenge as more and more travelers, from our experience, are not planning ahead.

Additionally, the workforce has been dramatically reduced for the Gardiner area. In part this was due to the inability to hire foreign J-1 employees in 2020 and 2021. However, the lack of affordable, residential, and year-round housing continues to be the biggest threat to hiring and retaining employees. In the winter and shoulder seasons, the lack of year-round staffing and a much lower visitation rate make it difficult for businesses to remain open resulting in a shortage of accessible visitor amenities. Undoubtedly, the lack of a strong workforce has directly impacted the visitor experience.

The lack of dining options in Gardiner has also become a considerable challenge. On July 14, 2020, Gardiner's downtown was severely impacted by a devastating fire that started in the kitchen of one of our dining establishments. It destroyed 4 buildings, 8 businesses, many jobs, and residential apartments. There were three dining establishments destroyed (two of which held liquor licenses), and in an already small community with limited dining and beverage options, the loss of these establishments severely impacted the visitor experience in town. In addition, the amount of rooms has steadily rose over the last two years bringing in more guests who also wish to dine out on their vacation. Pairing the effects of the fire with increased rooms and visitation, workforce shortages, and nationwide supply chain delays have led our dining establishments to, at times, have sporadic hours leaving visitors and the establishments themselves feeling frustrated.

Lastly, public/private wildlife controversies are an added challenge for Gardiner and the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem as a whole. While wildlife issues are not a new challenge, they can cast a harmful shadow to the area's tourism economy when they arise. For example, in February of 2022, due to a recent change in Montana Legislation regarding wolf hunting and trapping quota, nearly all of Yellowstone's Phantom Lake Pack was killed. Leading to national coverage of the area that for the most part was in an unfavorable light.

Opportunities: While 2020 and 2021 visitation exceeded expectations, we still see the largest opportunity for tourism growth in Gardiner to be in the winter and shoulder seasons. According to National Park Service in 2021 recreational visits, December through March, only contributed to approximately 9.6% of the total North Entrance visits for the calendar. The primary goal of our long-term marketing efforts will continue to be focused on attracting more visitors in this time frame.

March 1, 2022, marked the 150th anniversary of Yellowstone earning the designation of the world's first National Park. With the publicity that such a milestone brings there is an opportunity to not only highlight Gardiner but also bring awareness to the issues that our small town faces while emphasizing responsible recreation practices to a national audience.

Overall adding in an element of education and management to ensure that our landscape remains intact for future visitors to enjoy is an opportunity we most look forward to.

2. Align with Montana Brand

Briefly describe how your destination aligns with the Montana Brand.

Brand Pillars: Gardiner aligns perfectly with the state's brand pillars. Located at the heart of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, Gardiner is surrounded by unspoiled nature with beautiful vistas and landscapes that are home to some of the most abundant and diverse wildlife in North America. Gardiner prides itself as the historic gateway to Yellowstone's natural wonders. Our messaging focuses on the area's abundant wildlife, destination management and education, authentic and local hospitality, and year-round recreational activities as the only year-round entrance to Yellowstone National Park.

3. What is the strategic role of your DMO?

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

Destination Marketing, Destination Management, Destination Development

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

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

The target market for both increasing visitation and managing our destination remains the geo-traveler (defined below). Efforts will target promoting the outdoors to the authentic experience seeker and wildlife enthusiast, while incorporating more educational messaging toward responsible recreation.

Geo-traveler:

The National Geographic Society defines Geotourism as "tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place—its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its residents."

Specific to our area, the geo-traveler is a visitor who supports local businesses, respects our residents and wildlife, understands the potential challenges of our environment (weather, travel time, etc.), and seeks out experiences unique to the area. They place a high-value on preserving the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE) and assist in its preservation by having a low-impact themselves and educating others on the importance of responsible recreation practices.

Adventurous Couples or Families:

Couples and families, ages 35-54

College-educated

United States: typically from California, Texas, Utah, Washington and the Midwestern Region.

Household Income \$80,000 + per year

Interested in traveling to areas rich in outdoor recreational experiences, especially in the winter.

Mature Nature-Based Travelers:

Median Age 60

Interested in visiting Yellowstone National Park and partaking in activities such as scenic driving, day hiking, wildlife watching, and nature photography.

United States: from Washington, California, Idaho, Illinois, and Utah

Household Income \$75,000 + per year

May travel in groups and/or in couples.

Young/Midlife Success

Couples & Families, Ages 25-54

Household Income of \$75,000 +

Have a secure homebase

Focused on family/relationship, may have children under 18 in the home

Most completed a college degree

Understand evolving technology and use social media and digital platforms as main trip planning resources and inspiration

Interested in "bucket list" destinations, national parks, and outdoor recreation

Drive Markets

Travelers residing in Canada, Montana, Idaho, Washington, Wyoming, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

3b. What research supports your DMO strategy?

Attachment: Visit Gardiner MT_Supporting Research_Internal.pdf; Contains:

- FY22 Visit Gardiner MT Social Media Tracking
- FY22 Social Media Yearly Report Visit Gardiner MT
- FY21 Social Media Yearly Report Visit Gardiner MT
- FY22 VisitGardinerMT.com Google analytics

- FY21 VisitGardinerMT.com Google analytics
- 2021 Yellowstone Country VIC Grant Completion Summary
- 2020 Yellowstone Country VIC Grant Completion Summary
- FY22 Google Keywords Camping Online Campaign Results
- FY21 Spring Online Campaign Results
- Gardiner Chamber of Commerce Building w Current Branding

Attachments: Visit Gardiner MT_Supporting Research_External.pdf; Contains:

- Yellowstone National Park Visitation December – March 2020 vs. 2021
- Yellowstone National Park Visitation April – November 2020 vs. 2021
- The Earned Media Opportunity
- “Unprecedented killing”: The Deadliest Season for Yellowstone” – The Washington Post
- “Yellowstone: Wolf hunt altered behavior, damaged research” – Wyoming File

Supporting Research: General

Montana Residents: Attitudes Towards Tourism 2021

Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development – Tourism Spending

The Impact of DMO Visitor Guide

Yellowstone National Park Visitor Study Report

Gardiner, Montana: Resident Perceptions Before and After Development

Supporting Research: Challenges

“Unprecedented killing”: The Deadliest Season for Yellowstone” – The Washington Post (in Attachment: Visit Gardiner MT_Supporting Research_External)

“Yellowstone: Wolf hunt altered behavior, damaged research” – Wyoming File (in Attachment: Visit Gardiner MT_Supporting Research_External)

Supporting Research: Billboards

Commuting & Travel on the Rise in 2022

Supporting Research: Social Media

How DMO Social Media Drives Travel Decisions

Social Media and Its Impact on Travelers to Montana

Global social media statistics research summary 2022

Global social media stats

Supporting Research: Website Development

The Impact of DMO Websites

3c. What are your emerging markets?

Visitors with novice experience of recreating in the outdoors and have not planned far in advance for their trip.

Beginning in 2020 Gardiner experienced a new type of traveler(s), many that had never come to a national park before, many that did not plan ahead, and many that were naive of how to properly respect the landscape and how to recreate responsibly. This continues into today’s market as stated previously with Yellowstone’s record breaking visitation in 2021 of 4,860,537 recreational visits, and 1,006,375 or 20.7% coming through the North Entrance of Gardiner. In tandem with Yellowstone the GCVB also broke records with over 83,000 visitors passing through our doors from May – September 2021, when comparing this to 2020 and 2019 this is almost three times the amount of visitation.

It is important to highlight some differences in operations. In 2019 the GCVB was able to have door counters installed, giving us a valuable insights to our overnight vestibule (public restroom access) visitation and a more accurate number of visitors opposed to the previous hand tallying method. However, these counters were not fully installed until late August. Then in 2020, our visitation numbers were limited because we had to keep vestibule open exclusively during business hours to abide by the health guidance at the time. In 2021 an automatic lock allowed us to keep the doors open from 4:30am to 12:00am, enabling us to track after hour visitors. For these reasons, we could be seeing a disproportionate increase from 2019/2020 to 2021.

International Visitors interested in Yellowstone National Park

International visitors particularly from Canada, Indonesia, China, India, United Kingdom, Germany, and France appear to be an emerging market for Gardiner, Montana.

VisitGardinerMT.com Google analytics data from FY22 supports this information; it shows most international website users were from the aforementioned countries – Canada with 1,565 users, Indonesia with 3,489 users, China with 1,248 users, India with 815 users, the United Kingdom with 474 users, Germany with 386 users, and France with 205 users.

As travel resumes to a new post-pandemic normal it is important to keep international markets top of mind.

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

We wish to increase shoulder season visitation from October through March. With a particular focus on when Yellowstone National Park roads are open to over-snow travel respectively Mid-December through end of February.

GOAL #2

Educate and encourage responsible recreation to residents and visitors alike including but not limited to: leaving no trace, planning ahead, packing their patience and being kind humans, building an inclusive outdoors, and respecting wildlife by practicing the proper behaviors advised by Yellowstone National Park Service.

GOAL #3

Improve the visitor experience at the Gardiner Visitor Information Center/VisitGardinerMT.com/Visitor Gardiner MT operated kiosks by updating signage with the current Visit Gardiner MT branding, installing uniform displays, and making handouts downloadable via QR code in turn pushing more traffic to VisitGardinerMT.com and reducing paper waste.

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

GOAL #1

We will achieve this by executing targeted online digital advertising campaigns that drive potential visitors to VisitGardinerMT.com, highlighting events and/or activities unique to the area in the respective winter/spring seasons on VisitGardinerMT social media platforms, building relationships with interested parties through targeted email marketing with leads received from National Park Trips Media Planner, contracting/hiring/working with an agency to help with marketing creative and campaign implementation, and participating in and/or hosting a FAM trip with Brand MT or Yellowstone Country when they are in the area.

GOAL #2

Tactics include creating and distributing recreate responsibly kits (postcard w/tear off, utensils, baggie?), distributing flyers and signage, placing print media, targeted digital campaigns, developing short educational videos to engage across social media platforms, obtaining a billboard on the HWY 89 corridor between Livingston and Gardiner, MT with recreate responsibly messaging, and installing a camera that integrates into VisitGardinerMT.com and provides visitors with a real-time look of conditions.

GOAL #3

Tactics include contracting/hiring/working with an agency to create and install updated signage at the Gardiner Visitor information Center, purchasing lockable display cases for the vestibule to display messaging e.g. QR codes, area event flyers, maps; researching and potentially purchasing a digital informational display if it fits within budget, and update VisitGardinerMT.com with handouts that are not currently downloadable.

FUTURE GOAL/GOAL 4

It is important to note that since the end of FY21 implementing a Wayfinding project for the town of Gardiner has been top of mind at the Gardiner CVB. However, with the major changes that Gardiner has experienced since 2020 eg major fire, changes in business ownership, and there are currently five undeveloped corners in Gardiner and we do not know if now is an appropriate time to begin a project of the magnitude. Funds have been carried over year over year with this larger goal in mind.

ADDITIONAL OBJECTIVES

Expand photo/video library to reflect Gardiner's current state, capture area events, and images of shoulder season offerings.

Collaborate with other CVBs, tourism organizations, or other appropriate entities, especially within Yellowstone Country, to develop and set common goals and foster partnerships.

Optional: Add attachment

Visit Gardiner MT_Supporting Research_Internal.pdf

Here

Optional: Add attachment here

Visit Gardiner MT_Supporting Research_External.pdf

Do you want to add an attachment?

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Objectives/Metrics/Evaluation

Objectives	Measurable Metrics for Success	Report the Metric Achieved	Evaluation of Measurable Metrics for Success	Add'l Attchmnt
Use an ITRR survey kit to determine the economic impact of a local event during the peak season.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete and implement the survey kit at the local event. 			
Collaborate with other CVBs, tourism organizations, or other appropriate entities, especially within Yellowstone Country, to develop and set common goals and foster partnerships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend 8 meetings/conferences resulting in 3 completed projects Attend the annual Montana Governors Conference on Tourism and Recreation Attend required TAC meetings 			
Communicate responsible recreation practices to keep the GYE and Montana a safe and intact tourism destination for years to come.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create and distribute 100 Recreate Responsibly kits Secure a billboard on HWY 89 between Livingston & Gardiner Montana to display responsible recreation messaging Installation of live feed camera to VisitGardinerMT.com Complete Google Keywords ad campaign (run June – August) targeting individuals searching camping, dispersed camping, etc. that are either actively planning a trip or currently in the area. That when clicked on it leads individuals to our camping informational landing page. Improving monthly performance over FY21 by a 3% increase in clicks and impressions. Complete a "Know Before You Go" (specific campaign name to be determined) online digital advertising/Google Keywords campaign, run May – September/October depending on performance, targeting travelers actively planning to come to Gardiner/Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. That when clicked on leads them to a dedicated landing page housing communication on what to expect when visiting, safety information, general trip-planning resources, and various area handouts. Placement of at least 3 print ads focused on responsible recreation messaging in a variety of regional, local, or national publications geared toward our target market. 			
We wish to increase shoulder season visitation from October through March. With a particular focus on when Yellowstone National Park roads are open to over-snow travel respectively Mid-December though end of February.	<p>LODGING TAX</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase lodging tax collections in October (2021), November (2021), and March (2022) by 3%. Increase lodging tax collections in December (2021), January (2022), and February (2022) by 5%. <p>DIGITAL ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS</p> <p>Based off the metrics from the FY21 spring digital campaign, which used a mix of photo and video assets, we have set the following goals in terms of engagement for our future FY23 winter and spring campaigns. Additionally, depending on visitation forecast we may run a fall digital campaign as well with the same metrics of success.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clicks: increase clicks by 10% or 7,526 Impressions: increase impression by 20% or 1,659,320 Video engagement rate: maintain video view rate of 35.57% 	NA	NA	

	<p>SOCIAL MEDIA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase Facebook page followers by 7% ending FY23 with at least 50,000 followers • Increase Instagram followers by 19% ending FY23 with at least 10,000 followers • Be active on TikTok ending FY23 with at least 1,000 followers 			
Enhance the visitor experience with cohesive signage and displays that reflects the updated Gardiner brand and encourages environmentally friendly practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Installation of signage at the Gardiner Visitor Information Center reflective of our current Gardiner branding. • Installation of at least one display case either digital or traditional locking case in Gardiner Visitor Information Center Vestibule. • Dedicated area resource landing page(s) on VisitGardinerMT.com that houses corresponding QR code informational downloads. 			
Expand photo/video library to reflect Gardiner's current state, capture area events, and images of shoulder season offerings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain a combination of at least 15 photos/videos of Gardiner in the winter • Obtain a combination of at least 15 photos/videos of Gardiner in the spring • Obtain a combination of at least 15 photos/videos of Gardiner in the peak season (May - October) • Obtain a combination of at least 15 photos/videos of the humans of Gardiner partaking in various area activities, events, dining, shopping, etc. 	NA	NA	

DMO Budget

Allowable Methods	Amount Budgeted	% of Budget Allocated	Amount Expended	% of Budget Expended
Administration	\$6,106.00	6.83	\$0.00	0
Agency Services	\$7,000.00	7.83	\$0.00	0
Cooperative Marketing	\$2,500.00	2.8	\$0.00	0
Earned Media/Tourism Sales	\$1,500.00	1.68	\$0.00	0
Education/Outreach	\$1,800.00	2.01	\$0.00	0
Joint Venture	\$8,000.00	8.94	\$0.00	0
Marketing Resources	\$600.00	0.67	\$0.00	0
Opportunity Marketing	\$178.00	0.2	\$0.00	0
Paid Media	\$37,420.00	41.83	\$0.00	0
Product Development	\$8,587.00	9.6	\$0.00	0
Research	\$700.00	0.78	\$0.00	0
Visitor Services	\$10,050.00	11.24	\$0.00	0
Website Development (Online, Website, Mobile)	\$5,000.00	5.59	\$0.00	0
	\$89,441.00	100.00	\$0.00	0.00

Narrative Evaluation

Reg/CVB Required Documents

Description	File Name	File Size
FY23 Certificate of Compliance Signed.	FY23 Certificate of Compliance_Signed.pdf	63 KB

