



Grant Details

118486 - FY23 DMO Plan

122506 - FY23 Visit Billings/Billings CVB DMO Plan

DOC Office of Tourism

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DMO Plan Narrative

1. Describe Your Destination

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

BILLINGS: VISITOR ECONOMY

Tourism is a vital economic driver for Billings. More than 2.6 million people visit Billings annually, spending \$621 million (Destination Analysts).

As Montana, southeast Montana, and Billings continue to emerge from the pandemic's impacts, it's time to turn the page and look ahead. The future of Billings, Billings' tourism, and Visit Billings is competitive and will continue to positively impact stakeholders, tourism partners, and the business community as a whole.

The city of Billings is positioned geographically in a key section of the region that offers goods and services to eastern and central Montana residents as well as northern Wyoming, North Dakota, and South Dakota visitors. As the state's largest city, this position also directly impacts the visitor economy building Billings' tourism industry and supporting tourism partners.

Visit Billings leadership and staff continue to build from post-pandemic opportunities. Strategies and tactics are being analyzed and adjusted constantly to ensure investments are driving visitation to Billings – Montana's Trailhead. Steady growth in occupancy and average daily rate have been realized for stakeholders since June 2020 (Smith Travel Research [STR]). This shows that the national and regional leisure campaigns, sports sales efforts, and assisting meeting hotels with conference recruitment are effective in successfully capturing overnight visitors, while continuing to elevate the destination. Collections and assessment revenue as well as key visitation data show Billings travel industry at, and in some data sets beyond, 2019 travel levels (STR). Staff are successfully marketing and selling Billings as a travel and tourism destination with regional and national leisure campaigns, sports events bookings, and the slow and steady recovery in the meetings and group tour market segments.

In FY23, the Visit Billings team continues their work leading the regional travel and tourism industry to sustained growth while supporting the local businesses that depend on this industry. Leisure and sports tourism efforts are offering strong returns on investments, while the business and meetings segments are slower to rebound. As many companies and workers have grown accustomed to the ease of virtual meetings, travel and in-person meetings and events are important. Visit Billings staff members continue to work with local sales teams at meeting hotels to help boost conference bookings as well as position Billings as a strong small market meetings consideration with planners through CVENT, HelmsBriscoe, ConferenceDirect, and other meeting or reunion groups.

BILLINGS

Billings, population of more than 115,000, is the county seat of Yellowstone County and the largest city in the state. As Montana's Trailhead, it is the region's economic hub. Major industries including agriculture, energy, healthcare, finance, education, and as previously noted, tourism, drive the local economy. Conveniently positioned in southeast Montana as the largest city between Calgary and Denver, as well as Spokane and Minneapolis, Billings proudly serves a trade area of more than 500,000 people.

Popular attractions locally include the Rimrocks which are the 70-million-year-old sandstone rock formations which surround much of the community and offer space to take in the incredible views of the region. The city also boasts a walkable brewery district in historic downtown Billings, Montana's only zoo and Botanical Park, contemporary and western museums, galleries, several theaters, music venues, a state-of-the-art public library, and several outdoor community venues and festivals.

Billings offers nearly 50 miles of multi-use trails and 24 miles of bike lanes. From the Rimrocks to the Yellowstone River, which is the longest free-flowing river in the lower 48, residents of Billings invite visitors to experience the magic of Montana's Trailhead. Billings sits near the intersection of Interstates 90 and 94 and offers a first-class airport with numerous daily flights to major U.S. cities via Delta, United, American Airlines, Allegiant, and Alaska Airlines. Regional carrier Cape Air also plays a role in air travel and connectivity in the state.

Amazing summer weather and snowy winters with bluebird days offer ample opportunity for outdoor enthusiasts to experience all four seasons and the accompanying adventures. Nearly 4,500 hotel rooms as well as numerous retail and restaurant offerings (Billings offers an incredible food scene), flexible meeting space, and sports venues are ready to accommodate any traveler or planner's needs and preferences.

Billings is Montana's city and serves as the trailhead to unparalleled access to some of the most breathtaking natural and historic attractions in America including Yellowstone National Park, the Beartooth Scenic Byway, Bighorn Canyon Recreation Area, Little Bighorn Battlefield and Pompeys Pillar National Monuments, as well as amazing state parks. The region is an idyllic destination for those seeking out the best that Montana and the western U.S. offers. From history and art to outdoor recreation and exploring, Billings serves visitors well particularly in a post-pandemic travel environment where travelers tend to choose wide open spaces with less populated areas. But there is more to Billings' travel scene than the leisure visitor. Sports tourism and convention recruitment along with the international and domestic tour-goer also are driving success in Billings' tourism landscape.

VISIT BILLINGS

Visit Billings is the brand built to represent the Billings Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Billings Tourism Business Improvement District (BTBID). Visit Billings is managed by the Billings Chamber of Commerce.

Together with the Billings Chamber of Commerce/Convention and Visitors Bureau (BCC/CVB) and Billings Tourism Business Improvement District boards, the Visit Billings team is committed to growing the markets which drive visitation to Montana's Trailhead. The staff is an extension of its stakeholders (lodging partners) working to provide sales, services, and marketing support as a destination marketing and management organization which boosts the local economy.

Visit Billings is funded primarily through the BTBID. The BTBID assesses \$2.00 per occupied room per night on all hotels and motels in the city of Billings with six (6) or more sleeping rooms. The BTBID funds stay local for the marketing and promotion of the city as a destination. This marketing helps grow visitation and supports stakeholders, tourism partners, and general businesses in the destination. Additionally, there are two Montana taxes imposed on users of an overnight lodging facility (such as a hotel, motel, campground, dude ranch, and guest ranch), which are collected by the facility and remitted to the Montana Department of Revenue. These two taxes are a 4% Lodging Facility Use Tax and a 4% Lodging Facility Sales Tax, for a combined 8% state lodging tax. Most of the Lodging Facility Sales Tax goes to the State of Montana's General Fund while Visit Billings receives a small portion of the 4% Lodging Facility Use Tax as the Billings CVB. As a destination marketing organization (DMO), Visit Billings is charged with representing Billings as a tourism destination, helping with the development of the industry through promotion of the city.

MISSION

The mission of Visit Billings is to generate room nights for lodging facilities in the city of Billings by effectively marketing the region as a preferred travel destination.

FY23 PLAN PROCESS

Visit Billings is currently navigating the strategic plan process. The product of the process will include deliverables to be revealed and adopted in late summer or early fall of 2022. The intention is, following the release of the plan, leadership and staff will evaluate the relation of the strategic plan findings to the current FY23 marketing plan (this document) and will adopt any recommendations that will strengthen Visit Billings marketing and sales strategies for the current fiscal year.

The strategic plan will carry forward momentum and the successes of Visit Billings and local tourism today, while at the same time revealing the strategies for better destination positioning through 2027. Mission 2027 is part of the first renewal process of the BTBID planning for the next decade of travel marketing since 2017. Critical areas of focus and new areas to concentrate on are currently being identified to ensure Visit Billings, a destination management and marketing organization with major commitments to the marketing and sale of the destination, are set to position Billings, Visit Billings stakeholders, and tourism partners for continued success in travel and tourism into 2027.

2. Align with Montana Brand

Briefly describe how your destination aligns with the Montana Brand.

THE MONTANA BRAND | BRAND MT

The State of Montana's tourism brand plays a major role in destination marketing for the state and region. The marketing strategies and programs led by Brand MT, formerly the Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development, help boost not only Montana's tourism brand, but also those brands of Montana's cities, towns, and regions. Visit Billings works to align with Brand MT tourism marketing pillars and strategies in all the integrated marketing efforts. Brand MT is a key partner with Visit Billings. The Brand MT strategies help identify and guide areas of opportunity in travel promotion.

Visit Billings is committed to keeping the Brand MT key brand pillars front-of-mind in all marketing efforts to present a holistic Montana experience to visitors.

There are many ways the Brand MT plan speaks to Billings as a destination. In other instances, Billings will seek to position itself as a valuable contributor to the state's tourism efforts as some elements of the strategies below are difficult to adorn onto Montana's largest city. As Montana's largest and most urban community, it can be difficult for Visit Billings to 'fit' Billings into the Brand MT mindset at all times, however staff strategize ways to support the strategies as a major city under Brand MT.

STRATEGY 1

COMMUNICATE AND DELIVER MONTANA'S SPECTACULAR UNSPOILED NATURE IN A WAY THAT MAKES IT REAL, TANGIBLE AND ACCESSIBLE TO THE VISITOR.

The Montana “Big Sky” experience ranks high as a wish or bucket list destination. Travelers also prefer to have the creature comforts of civilization and hospitality. Visit Billings leisure strategies focus on Billings’ proximity to the surrounding unspoiled nature without sacrificing the modern hospitality travelers appreciate.

Positioned as Montana’s Trailhead, drive one hour in any direction from Billings and you are offered access to iconic attractions like Pompeys Pillar, Bighorn Canyon, Little Bighorn Battlefield, and the scenic Beartooth Highway, to name a few. Billings pairs these recognized “Big Sky” attractions with modern hotel amenities, great brunch spots, the Billings Brew Trail, outdoor recreation opportunities, amazing museums and galleries, entertainment, and dozens of beautiful parks, all framed between Billings’ own remarkable 70+ million-year-old sandstone Rimrocks and the Yellowstone River, the longest free-flowing river in the lower 48 states.

STRATEGY 2

HIGHLIGHT AND HELP DEVELOP VIBRANT AND CHARMING SMALL TOWNS THROUGHOUT MONTANA.

Billings may boast big city amenities, but the community also has a truly small-town feel. Billings offers travelers a destination for shopping, nightlife, dining, accommodations, and culture, particularly in downtown Billings. As the largest community between Calgary and Denver, Spokane and Minneapolis, Billings is a vibrant community with access to small towns via Southeast Montana and Yellowstone Country Regions highlights. An important Visit Billings’ program is called Trail Guides. This program, led by staff, invites front line staff to get to know Billings better as residents to have stronger reciprocated conversations with visitors encouraging them to participate in the spirit of the destination highlighting local businesses, local artists, and artisans, or simply locating the “locals favorite” trails and burger spots.

STRATEGY 3

INTEGRATE NATURE AND TOWNS TO OFFER AND DELIVER A BALANCE OF “BREATHTAKING EXPERIENCES” AND “RELAXING HOSPITALITY.”

Whether visitors seek adrenaline pumping adventure or easy paced experiences, Billings is the perfect place to set up home base. With 4,500 hotel rooms, a wide variety of local attractions, and access to breathtaking views and Montana icons, Billings will delight visitors.

TRAVEL PROCESS: THREE PHASES - INSPIRE, ORIENT, FACILITATE

Brand MT and Visit Billings consider how the potential traveler contemplates trip planning and execution of a trip itinerary as:

INSPIRATION: Inspire potential visitors. Inspiration is the process of being mentally stimulated to do or feel.

ORIENTATION: Orient potential visitors and assist them with questions and itinerary needs. To orient someone is to help with the relative physical position or direction of something.

FACILITATION: Welcome to Billings! The action of facilitating something to make it easy or easier.

THE INSPIRATION PHASE is where the traveler is made aware of the general product and develops a desire to visit the destination.

Brand MT is responsible for the foundation of the visit Montana marketing strategies via Montana’s tourism brand marketing.

Brand MT markets Montana's key tourism pillars to encourage potential travelers to visit the state with inspirational imagery and copy focusing on Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks as well as adventures – which align with the outdoor recreation travelers are seeking.

In the inspirational phase, Visit Billings staff strategize to position the destination as a competitive city to include on a Montana itinerary. Any Brand MT efforts to elevate eastern Montana towns and attractions always assist with this phase for the region.

Billings is well situated between the historic landmarks of southeast Montana and the awe-inspiring landscapes of the Yellowstone River valley. Working to compliment Brand MT efforts, Visit Billings leverages stunning imagery, targeted messaging, and compelling calls to action in the integrated marketing materials including the Great American Road Trip campaign which speaks well for those visitors who may be only now re-engaging in travel.

Billings is an access point to the Beartooth Highway which Charles Kuralt called “the most beautiful drive in America.” As a destination, Billings offers stunning vistas via the sandstone Rimrocks and access to the Yellowstone River, which are all reasons to choose southeastern Montana as part of one's route. Targeted marketing and out-of-home (OOH) programming aim to help boost Billings as a must-stop city along western and national park trips.

Regionally, Billings is the perfect vacation destination for many neighboring, regional communities. Ongoing “long-weekend” campaigns inspire and invite the driving audience to explore and enjoy all Billings has to offer in entertainment, outdoor activities, cultural, and historic interests and recreation. In FY23, Visit Billings will build from gains made in the drive market (MT, WY, SD, ND, ID) and grow the Great American Road Trip campaign from the south and Midwest, as more people choose to road trip, despite higher fuel prices.

THE ORIENTATION PHASE is where the traveler begins researching the details of his or her trip. This phase focuses on the route the traveler will take to arrive at the chosen destination and the mode of transportation used to get there. Montana's visitors have multiple destinations to consider within the state and bordering states when building trips and researching travel to this part of the West. Montana's destination marketing and management organizations (DMMO) like Visit Billings provide tools to help the visitor plan a route while encouraging a longer stay.

VISITBILLINGS.COM

The Visit Billings website is the destination's primary branding and communications tool, where the destination's “Forge Your Own Path” brand has been brought to life to orient potential visitors. In today's digital landscape, destination marketing websites must work even harder to engage the consumer. While travelers filter through user-generated content (UGC), TripAdvisor reviews, Instagram posts, and travel blogs, a destination website should be positioned as a trusted resource for travel inspiration and planning. VisitBillings.com is designed to ensure the content is consistently updated and relevant to the individual needs of potential travelers. What's your travel personality? That's a question Visit Billings asks of the potential visitor. New persona-driven web content is developed to guide prospective History Buffs, Outdoor Enthusiasts, Foodies, Shopaholics, Arts & Culture Aficionados, and Wellness-Seekers to Billings. Simultaneously, the Great American Road Trip microsite also inspires travelers to hit the road and choose Billings as their vacation destination.

VISIT BILLINGS VISITOR GUIDEBOOK

The Visit Billings Visitor Guidebook is available digitally via the website and is mailed at no-charge upon request by Visit Billings staff and contractors. The guidebook focuses on the “Forge Your Own Path” branding and encourages travelers to seek adventure and live life to the fullest around every corner. With the assistance of beautiful imagery, maps, recreational listings, and more, Visit Billings' focus is to provide accessible and authentic information. There is no advertising included in Visit Billings publications or collateral materials. Additionally, Visit Billings staff and partners

are available to assist potential travelers with their needs via phone, email, and text at (406) 245-4111 or Info@VisitBillings.com.

BILLINGS LOGAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT (BIL)

Visit Billings is working closely with BIL leadership to monitor the concerns of limited air capacity to business-travel destinations like Billings. As more leisure marketing promotes access to southeast Montana and Billings via air, air capacity, options, and competitive airfare are major priorities for Visit Billings staff and leadership. If travelers can't get to Billings easily or at a good fare, the destination will easily lose travelers to other Montana airports like Bozeman and Missoula - losing major pre-pandemic gains.

BIL continues to deliver exciting news, however, regarding the remodeling project which will expand the capacity of the facility and offer a modern look and feel with more capacity for partners. Such renovations and expansions with major carriers offering direct flights in markets that include Denver, Minneapolis (MSP), Seattle (SEA), and Dallas/ Fort Worth (DFW), Chicago (ORD), Portland, Phoenix, San Diego, and Salt Lake City (SCL) help define Billings as a strong destination for leisure, sports, meetings, and business travelers. Cape Air is also an important partner in the regional market serving smaller eastern Montana communities where residents may choose to fly to Billings to shop, schedule services, and enjoy events.

THE FACILITATION PHASE is where the traveler seeks experiences en route to a destination and during a stay. DMMOs, communities, and organizations must all work together to make visitors aware of the full array of experiences available to guests. The Visit Billings team is knowledgeable, welcoming, and on-the-ready to facilitate visitor queries via phone, text, or email. The goal is to foster successful stays and future Montana travels.

BILLINGS TRAIL GUIDES & CTA CONSIDERATIONS

When a resident greets a visitor, it's important to consider them a temporary local as well as a future resident. Visitor facilitation, or how we welcome and care for visitors, is how we foster the future of tourism and workforce.

The Visit Billings staff keeps an open dialogue of communication and information with tourism partners, area hotels, attractions, businesses, and the community to provide exceptional customer service for visitors. This initiative is spearheaded by the Billings Trail Guide program of Visit Billings. This civic-minded program works to unite and motivate the Billings community in raising the bar and level of service for visitors. It provides frontline employees training and support so they can easily communicate and provide hospitality and experiential options for visitors in and around Billings and southeast Montana. Additionally, Visit Billings is contemplating the investment of becoming a Certified Tourism Ambassador destination. It would identify Billings as an accredited and licensed community through the Tourism Ambassador Institute®. It would complement the Billings Trail Guide program as it is designed as a lasting program that mobilizes a destination's front-line to turn every visitor encounter into a positive experience and also help build community pride.

Visit Billings continues to foster connectivity within different social media platforms by offering visitors current and relevant content via Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, YouTube, and a plentiful supply of amazing blogs at VisitBillings.com. Visitors also are invited to engage with the #VisitBillings brand throughout their journey.

COOPERATIVE OPPORTUNITIES WITH BRAND MT

Joint Venture programs are important to Visit Billings marketing efforts. Sojern placements, data partnerships, and other opportunities with the State and Montana tourism partners like Visit Southeast Montana, Glacier Country, and Destination Missoula will be considered. To reiterate, partnerships with Visit Southeast Montana like the Minneapolis 2022 market takeover will continue to be considered as budgets allow. Opportunities to team up to grow visitation to the southeast region as a whole equates to wins for Billings.

3. What is the strategic role of your DMO?

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

Destination Marketing

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

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

INCREASE LEISURE VISITATION

Leisure travel marketing strategies remain the highest priority for the organization as leisure visitation supports all Visit Billings' stakeholders (hotels, motels, campgrounds) as well as tourism partners including restaurants, retailers, and attractions. Regional marketing campaigns will focus on road trip itineraries and partnerships with attractions like ZooMontana, Alberta Bair Theater, MetraPark, and cultural entities to name a few.

Leveraging Montana's Trailhead, Visit Billings' "Forge Your Own Path" brand invites visitors to participate in a memorable journey that is authentic to the Big Sky experience.

TARGET AUDIENCE

The Visit Billings' target audience for spring/summer (warm season) is primarily a mix of couples and families ages 25-44 with pre-teen/teen children. Primarily when they are researching travel, their primary concerns are costs and COVID. With consumers continuing to feel the financial impact from COVID-19, the state of their personal finances is the primary concern for almost half of domestic travelers, followed by the state of the pandemic. Approximately 41% of this audience is thinking about COVID-19 in their vacation considerations in 2022, down from 57% in 2021.

We are targeting travelers who are looking for a long weekend escape to nearby metro areas, who are interested in nature-related trips, and those looking for a rural escape into their surrounding outdoor paradises - as well as the all important road tripper audience.

Flexibility will continue to play an integral part of the media campaign, allowing dollars to be spent where they are generating the most response.

Behavioral targeting will focus on the domestic traveler - those looking for a long weekend escape from their metro area, those interested in nature-related trips, and those looking for a rural escape into their surrounding outdoor paradises. The target audience is families with a household income of \$75,000+.

The geographic markets will follow data and proven key markets to include:

Primary: Key feeder flight markets include Minneapolis, Denver, Salt Lake City, Chicago and Dallas with interest in travel to Montana and the western region of the U.S., including monuments, state and national parks and western heritage.

Secondary: Regional close drive markets, primarily in-state and Wyoming. Bozeman, MT; Great Falls, MT; Helena, MT; Missoula, MT; Minot-Bismark-Dickinson, ND; Rapid City, SD; Casper, WY; Buffalo WY; Sheridan WY; Billings DMA

(excluding city of Billings) + city of Gillette, city of Cody.

Other Strategic Priorities:

SPORTS TOURISM

Writers with the Sports Planning Guide said it best recently: "...Sports saved the tourism industry's bacon in 2020 and 2021."

This isn't only a true statement on the national level, it's also a major point to make locally. Next to leisure visitation, sports tourism did and continues to play a large role in the economic recovery of Billings as a travel destination following COVID-19 transitions and impacts. Local sports events were strong in Billings prior to the pandemic, in the pandemic, and post-pandemic. Therefore, positioning Billings as a sports events destination will remain a top priority for Visit Billings in FY23. Staff will continue to foster growth in this segment by supporting partners like the Montana High School Association, MSU Billings, Rocky Mountain College, area school districts, local tournament directors and owners, as well as the City of Billings and Yellowstone County. Visit Billings has a large vision for sports in the destination. While Visit Billings is responsible for marketing Billings as a sports events destination and assists with nearly 30 events annually, the opportunity to grow this segment and build the sports identity for Billings is incredible. The efforts being made with Landon's Legacy Foundation for Landon's Miracle Field, South Billings Urban Renewal Association efforts to build a sports facility, School District #2 planning to better accommodate high school sports events at Daylis Stadium, TrailNet's plans for the Skyline Trail, and MetraPark Master Planning considerations all build on Billings' capacity to be a competitive destination for sports events and for sporting enthusiasts. It's an exciting time!

MEETINGS, REUNIONS, GROUP TOURS & SERVICING

Visit Billings staff strives to be innovative in how to meet the needs of meeting planners and incentivize decision-makers to choose Billings as their meeting destination. Staff work closely with meeting hotel sales staff to help inspire and orient meeting professionals with thoughtful sales strategies. This segment can continue to have a strong economic impact on the community as it rebounds from pandemic impacts. The Visit Billings staff also assists planners who are in-market to execute meetings in the destination by helping facilitate their needs with attendance-building, travel reassurances, registration needs, welcome activities, and, in some cases, financial incentives.

Reunions and domestic group tours are also important segments that can grow visitation to Billings. Like leisure visitation, meetings, and sports events, opportunities for growth for both the reunion and group tour segments are priorities for Visit Billings staff. Working with tour operators and reunion planners to boast Billings as a key partner for their booking needs is a key priority.

THE INTERNATIONAL MARKETPLACE

As the world continues to reopen, it is important for Visit Billings to remain competitive in this segment. Visit Billings plans to attend IPW, ACGI and International Roundup to help foster pre-pandemic efforts to grow this segment of visitation to Billings. It is important for Visit Billings staff to maintain relationships with international tour operators so overseas visitors who have ranked sightseeing, fine dining, and national parks/ monuments as major draws in deciding where to spend time while visiting the United States keep Billings top-of-mind as new travel habits emerge. Visit Billings will work with Brand MT and partners like Visit Southeast Montana and Rocky Mountain International to remain relevant in travel recovery to the international market. Tour operators will be in the market during the warm season of 2022.

3b. What research supports your DMO strategy?

A LOOK AT THE RESEARCH

According to Destination Analysts, travel's outlook for 2022 looks promising. When Americans were asked to describe their travel in 2022, top choices include "hopeful," "excited," "fun" and "more." In fact, 33.2% of American travelers say they will take more leisure trips in the next year and the same proportion (33.4%) say they will spend more money on their leisure travel in 2022.

The average reported leisure travel budget for 2022 is currently \$3,797. Beaches, rural towns and national/state parks destinations will still be where a majority of American travelers head, with more than 70% reporting plans for these types of destinations.

Meanwhile, 66.2% of travelers currently say they plan to visit cities, although 29.3% report that they will increase their urban travel in 2022. However, domestic destinations will face more competition again as 23.6% say they will increase their international travel in 2022.

American travelers also look to continue to take trips to make up for time missed out on with loved ones during the pandemic: 39.2% say they will increase their family travel in 2022 and 32.8% will increase their travel with friends.

The Goodway Group, through the Global Web Index, has provided the following insight into what we can expect from travelers in 2022.

- Travelers continue to lean into domestic travel.
- The industry will see longer/extended vacations as travelers try to maximize the reward to match the effort to travel.
- We will see increases in vacation rentals through sites like AirBnB and VRBO that can promise more seclusion and feelings of safety.
- Outdoor recreation destinations have been shown to be safer than indoor activities when it comes to the Coronavirus spread..

Zartico Data Partnership - Visit Billings has partnered with Zartico. This research and data company is allowing Visit Billings staff to monitor highly trafficked points of interest and visitor travel habits like never before. Data is a powerful tool for shaping destination performance and Zartico uses a special operating system to use third-party data that offers major insights to better identify and drive marketing strategies.

ZARTICO RESEARCH SHOWS:

Top visitor markets are currently as of spring 2022 (this insight adjusts week to week based on season, events, and other variables):

- Butte-Bozeman
- Great Falls - Visitors spent the most time in Billings of any other origin market (winter 2022)
- Minot-Bismarck, ND - Visitors spend is the 2nd highest

- Salt Lake City
- Denver
- Missoula
- Seattle-Tacoma
- Rapid City
- Spokane

Popular Places and Points of Interest:

- Yellowstone National Park
- SCHEELS
- Zimmerman Park
- Shiloh Crossing
- South Park
- St. Vincent Healthcare
- Rimrock Mall
- Costco
- Wal-mart locations
- MetraPark
- Billings International Airport
- Coulson Park
- Phipps Diamond X Park
- Riverfront Park

What website content are visitors most engaged with?

- Nightlife/Billings Brew Trail
- Events
- Retail

Outside of Billings, most visitor traffic to the Visit Billings website is coming from:

- Salt Lake City

- Denver
- Dallas

3c. What are your emerging markets?

Road Race Destination - Whether a visitor plans to “run to Billings” for the weekend or keep resolutions on the right track, Billings has a road race for everyone. From the Queen Bee Montana Marathon and Montana Women’s Run to the Heart & Sole Run and Big Sky State Games events, Visit Billings boasts the community’s races during spring niche market media campaigns that aim to drive sign-ups for all the race days on the Montana’s Trailhead Race calendar.

Visit Billings staff also continue to grow the Billings Brew Trail as a product using private dollars which will include the launch of the Billings Brew Trail app during warm season 2022 teaming up with Bandwango. Birding and the two-wheel market are also niche areas for consideration.

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.

WARM SEASON STRATEGY

The travel outlook for Billings’ tourism is positive and revenue projections are strong which will continue to positively impact stakeholders, tourism partners, and the business community as a whole. The leisure travel market is the strongest market for Billings tourism.

Visit Billings leadership and staff continue to build off post-pandemic opportunities. As mentioned, steady growth in occupancy and average daily rate have been realized for stakeholders since June 2020 (Smith Travel Research [STR]), which highlights how the FY21 and FY22 national and regional leisure campaigns have been and continue to successfully market and sell Billings as a leisure travel destination.

While many parts of the world have not yet realized gains in visitor economies, Billings has recovered from pandemic weaknesses. Low population and Montana’s big skies have helped grow the visitor economy consistently since the summer of 2020. Occupancy and room demand are strong and average daily rates are higher and steady.

Heading into year three of the global pandemic, some travelers still have leftover airline credits from canceled trips, some are desperate to go anywhere for an escape, and others continue to feel anxiety around the virus and how safe travel is. Still, 2022 offers travelers hope and optimism.

When looking at the 2022 strategy, it’s important to look at what travelers are seeking. Destination Analysts finds: “By far the types of trips Americans are most excited about taking in the next year include family trips and romantic getaways. Millennial and Gen Z-aged travelers exhibit much higher levels of excitement for many different trip types

compared to older travelers. In terms of interest in specific activities in the next 12 months, Americans are most interested in enjoying scenic beauty, warm weather outdoor activities, road trips, dining in regional restaurants, visiting historical sites and enjoying street food during their travels.”

The destination once again gives access to uniquely powerful encounters with the natural world, alongside the comforts of modern life, which is still what visitors are seeking in 2022. The spring/summer campaign promotes all the adventures that can be found along the Rimrocks and the Yellowstone River, while also highlighting the unique vibe found only in downtown Billings, with the only walkable brew trail.

GOALS

Campaign Goals:

1. Increase awareness for Billings as an ideal warm season travel destination, leveraging the destination’s brand, “Forge Your Own Path.”
2. Increase awareness for the big skies, unspoiled outdoor adventure, a unique urban downtown and hospitality offerings all found in a visit to Billings - while reminding visitors that Billings, Montana is the most scenic route into Yellowstone with incredible proximity to iconic attractions.
3. Encourage visitors to experience the culinary and cultural offerings in the city of Billings paired with the natural attractions surrounding the city.

Planning Strategy:

1. Drive unique and repeat traffic to the website with a strategy that leverages digital and video-driven channels.
2. Evolve the spring/summer campaign so that it still utilizes some of the elements of the Great American Road Trip, but also speaks to visitors in the flight markets, targeting both drive and flight markets. Utilize the full range of video assets that were produced in 2021.
3. Stay flexible to evolve the campaign as necessary based on travelers’ ongoing response to the pandemic situation.

REGIONAL YEAR-ROUND STRATEGY

Billings is Montana’s largest city and, with that, the opportunities are endless. From arts and culture to the food scene as well as historic points of interest and outdoor recreation, it is easy to fill days with unique experiences. Regionally, Billings is the city travelers will choose as it offers the hustle and bustle of a city without the huge crowds. Cultural attractions such as concerts and art galleries, as well as unique farmers markets, the walkable brew trail, retailers, restaurants, events, and more will engage visitors. The regional year-round strategy is designed to highlight experiences that can’t be found for hundreds of miles and is customized so that it speaks specifically to each unique traveler, encouraging them to “Forge Your Own Path” while exploring the city and the region. There is a path for every personality and these personalities are part of the year-round leisure marketing campaign showcased on VisitBillings.com.

GOALS

1. Increase awareness of “things to do” in Billings for the regional audience and every season.
2. Establish a sense of urgency around seasonal events and attractions.

3. Continue utilizing the creative assets and messaging of the Great American Road Trip, while leveraging “Forge Your Own Path” as the umbrella brand position, inviting prospective visitors to experience Billings.

Creative messaging emphasizes: “Two days off. Time to turn it on.” This messaging encourages state residents to take that weekend escape for which they are yearning. The creative will focus on experiences and activities unique to the city and the region, consistently providing potential visitors new reasons to travel to Billings. The marketing efforts will responsibly establish a sense of urgency in booking for special seasonal features like concerts and shows at Alberta Bair Theater, Pub Station, First Interstate Arena at MetraPark, the Babcock Theater, and other events. Primarily promoted through digital targeting, these travel drivers will be communicated through the brand lens of “Forge Your Own Path.” A social content calendar also outlines key traveler-driving events, activities and attractions by season, and maps out markets and allocated budgets throughout the year.

OTHER IMPORTANT MARKET SEGMENTS FOR VISIT BILLINGS TO NOTE:

MEETINGS AND CONVENTIONS, PLUS SERVICING

Visit Billings staff members strive to be innovative in how to meet the needs of meeting planners and incentivize decision-makers to choose Billings as their meeting destination.

Meeting recruitment continues to be an important priority to Visit Billings but the meetings market hasn’t fully recovered to pre-pandemic levels nor has business travel fully returned. The Visit Billings Strategic Plan will shed more light on the future of this market segment to Billings to find the best strategies to strengthen the destination’s meetings business and support local stakeholders in such a highly competitive market. Additionally, hosting site inspections and pitching Visit Billings meeting opportunities to state, regional, and national meeting planners will continue as will servicing booked events. Every year, Visit Billings staff and volunteers help facilitate and orient convention-goers with registration bags, brew maps, visitor guides, maps, and fun give-a-ways to make their trip to the trailhead of awesome ... awesome.

GOALS

1. Build greater brand awareness of Billings as a meeting destination.
2. Foster relationships with qualified meeting planners looking for support to book small-market meetings, citywide events, and reunions.
3. Service groups with high levels of customer satisfaction and event execution during the recovery, reassuring planners that Billings is an amazing meeting destination from both a support perspective and successful place to execute a meeting agenda for attendees.

POTENTIAL ATTENDANCE - MEETINGS INDUSTRY CONFERENCES/SHOWS

- Small Marketing Meetings
- Military Reunion Network

SPORTS TOURISM

As previously noted, along with the leisure market, sports tourism played a major role in helping Billings’ area businesses recover from COVID-19 impacts. Organized youth sports, amateur and high school events are essential in helping grow visitation to Montana’s Trailhead. As FY22 efforts to better position Billings as a sports events destination remain a priority for Visit Billings staff, the final Visit Billings Strategic Plan will help better identify innovations that will shape the future of sports events and sports tourism. Key to success in sports for Billings is supporting local

tournament directors whose commitment to softball, volleyball, basketball, soccer, and baseball tournaments as well as mountain bike and road races prove to be successful for businesses as major draws for the city.

Also, staff will continue to prioritize the support of governing bodies, executing awarded events like the NCAA DII Cross Country Region Championships in fall of 2022, MHSAs events, local divisional tournaments and more.

Visit Billings appreciates relationships with Montana State University Billings (MSUB), Rocky Mountain College (RMC), the MHSAs, area school districts, local tournament directors, as well as the City of Billings and Yellowstone County (MetraPark).

GOALS

1. Elevate Billings and Yellowstone County as the strongest sports destination in the region.
2. Be a valuable and innovative resource to tournament directors and associations in efforts to host and grow competitions that draw athletes and fans from across the region while generating room nights for lodging partners during the recovery.
3. Monitor conversations surrounding additional sports facilities in the destination and hire the sports tourism sales manager.

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

MEDIA

The media tactics this year look to source out new visitors and re-engage with previous visitors, using the creative to showcase why Billings should be their first choice when choosing a vacation destination, with its proximity to an array of outdoor wonders, historic monuments and local arts, cuisine and culture providing a unique experience unlike any other in the competitive set.

Planning for this year's campaign includes researching potential new audiences as well as researching new media and content platforms to fully maximize the campaign's success. With knowledge from past campaigns, we have the historical data to know what performs best and optimize against platforms that are under-performing, allowing us to continue strengthening brand awareness for Visit Billings and encouraging visitors to consider this beautiful location as a destination not to miss.

Key Tactics Include:

1. Increase Investment and Expand Geo-Targeting to Support Drive Markets
2. Optimize Audiences and Test New Targeting Tactics within Existing Channels
3. Add one New Media Channel in Q2 to Expand Reach and Drive Awareness
4. Harness the Power of Advanced Analytics to Inform Media Performance and Strategy

Paid media on digital and social platforms including Facebook and Instagram will remain prominent in the integrated campaign. Creative materials will place emphasis on video placement through Instagram stories, Facebook's Instant Experience and a video network, so that impressions are not locked to the content on just one platform but can be optimized to whichever channel is showing the best performance.

Paid search also continues to play a prominent role in driving qualified traffic to VisitBillings.com.

MEDIA KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIS)

To balance quantity and quality of website visitation, the marketing campaign will optimize digital media toward conversion actions and monitor for an efficient CPC (cost per click) and CTR (click-through rate).

The following engagement actions will be tracked:

- Evaluate display, video, social, and search
- Landing page visits
- 3+ minutes on site
- Foot traffic to hotels and key destinations

The campaign(s) will be set up dynamically allowing retargeting of the budget toward the market that is performing the best. This will be closely monitored, so the budget remains spread over the entire campaign.

Visit Billings staff in partnership with agency colleagues will also monitor the following data:

- Smith Travel Research - demand, occupancy and ADR (aim 3% growth in room demand)
- TBID Assessments
- Collections from State Lodging Facility Use Tax
- Google Analytics
- VisaVue Spending Trends or Zartico spend partner
- AirDNA Data
- Destinations International Economic Impact Calculators when applicable
- Zartico - clearing house for all data in destination dashboard

MEDIA STRATEGIES:

In planning media for Visit Billings, staff and agency/buyer reps will look at what resources American travelers are turning to for inspiration and planning travel.

As of winter of 2022, Destination Analysts noted "The typical American traveler has used a wide array of travel planning resources..."

Digital channels naturally dominate destination marketing receptivity. When asked about the channels they'd be most receptive to learning about new travel destinations to visit, website found via a search engine (29.9%), email (24.0%),

Facebook (21.3%), streaming video services such as YouTube or Hulu (19.3%) and online content such as articles and blogs (18.0%) topped the list.

Instagram is also a top resource for Millennials, while printed travel and lifestyle magazines are key for inspiring Baby Boomers. When it comes to travel planning, Americans are commonly using Facebook (27.0%), YouTube (26.0%) and Instagram (20.9%), online travel agencies (24.6%), online content such as articles and blogs (22.4%), printed travel or lifestyle magazines (16.7%) and television programming (14.4%).”

The media tactics should look to source out new visitors and re-engage with previous visitors, using the creative to showcase why Billings should be their first choice when choosing a vacation destination, with its proximity to an array of outdoor wonders, historic monuments and local arts, cuisine and culture providing a unique experience unlike any other in the competitive set.

Planning for the upcoming campaigns will include researching potential new audiences and any other platforms we can utilize to fully maximize the campaign’s success. Reviewing past campaigns which have run over a few years now, we can dig deep within the historical data to know what is working and optimizing against platforms that aren’t performing as well, allowing us to continue strengthening brand awareness for Visit Billings and encourage visitors to consider this beautiful location as a destination not to miss.

When looking at creative strategy, it is also important to look at what travelers are looking for. Destination Analysts finds: “By far the types of trips Americans are most excited about taking in the next year include family trips and romantic getaways. Millennial and Gen Z-aged travelers exhibit much higher levels of excitement for many different trip types compared to older travelers. In terms of interest in specific activities in the next 12 months, Americans are most interested in enjoying scenic beauty, warm weather outdoor activities, road trips, dining in regional restaurants, visiting historical sites and enjoying street food during their travels.”

The destination once again gives access to uniquely powerful encounters with the natural world, alongside the comforts of modern life, which is still what visitors are seeking in 2022. The spring/summer campaign should promote all the adventures that can be found along the

Rimrocks and the Yellowstone River. It also should highlight the unique vibe found only in downtown Billings, with the only walkable brew trail, combined with the comfort that travelers are seeking in hotel offerings.

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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
<p>Attract overnight visitors to the destination to increase room demand as reported by Smith Travel Research.</p> <p>Demand: The number of rooms sold in a specified time period (excludes complimentary rooms).</p>	<p>Increase room demand by 3% per Smith Travel Research in the running 12-months of the year. This increase of 3% would be growth as shown as an average year to date.</p> <p>The following are room demand percentages for running 12 month periods for previous years:</p> <p>2017: 0.6%</p> <p>2018: 4.9%</p> <p>2019: -1.9%</p> <p>2020: -26.6%</p> <p>2021: 34.3%</p> <p>2022: TBD</p>	N/A	N/A	
<p>Drive unique and repeat traffic to the website with a summer campaign strategy that leverages digital and video-driven channels with the Great American Road Trip (June-September 2023) campaign.</p> <p>Stay flexible to evolve the GART campaign as necessary based on travelers' ongoing response to domestic issues including pandemic headlines, economic concerns (i.e., fuel), other inflationary concerns by travelers.</p>	<p>Increase all traffic sessions by 20% to Great American Road Trip (GART) landing page using the post analysis report from the 2022 warm season campaign (July-October).</p> <p>Metrics for success are fostered off July-October 2021 reporting since such reporting does not yet exist for 2022 (YOY).</p> <p>95,406 Sessions to GART landing page (2021) – Metric for success will be to grow this number by 19,081 to 114,487.</p> <p>Grow conversion rate (number of users who request a visitor guide, signed up for e-communications, or stayed on the site for at least</p>	N/A	N/A	BMT Google Analytics Report Dec 2021 (Jan 2021).pptx

	<p>three (3) minutes) 8% using the post analysis report from the 2022 warm season active campaign (July-October).</p> <p>Metrics for success are fostered off July-October 2021 reporting since such reporting does not yet exist for 2022 (YOY).</p> <p>27% Conversion Rate (2021) – Metric for success will be to grow the conversion rate by 8% to a rate of 35%.</p> <p>Maintain GART campaign video completion rate using the post analysis report from 2022 warm season campaign.</p> <p>Metrics for success are fostered off July-October 2021 reporting since such reporting does not yet exist for 2022.</p> <p>The campaign completion rate averaged 90% in 2021 and used a mix of 10-second and 30-second creative.</p>			
<p>One of the research insights Visit Billings is pursuing in FY23 is to analyze the fly versus drive visitor to understand how visitors experience Billings if they fly into the market versus drive into the market and what impact those visitors also have on cross visitation throughout Montana.</p> <p>Objective is to capture information during 2022 warm season travel to better arm team and agency with information on variances between these two visitor types to assist with future marketing strategies.</p> <p><i>Background: Visit Billings has contracted Zartico for a purpose-driven data approach. Warm season 2022 will be the first warm season with access to the Destination Dshboard which will offer insights to which points of interest are strong for the destination, the visitor to resident ratio in market, and which markets the destination is influencing visitation. Geolocation data reported by Zartico can help answer questions about where visitors come from, what specific locations they travel to, what routes they take, and what days and times they travel.</i></p>	<p>Staff will monitor Zartico data insights and use key insights to help steer strategies, placements, and buying pertaining to the fly versus drive market visitor.</p> <p>Staff will look for ways to collaborate with stakeholders and partners to share and learn how to best utilize the data collected and which insights can be adopted as key indicators for future campaigns, seasons, and marketing initiatives.</p> <p>Measurable Metric for Success, to answer: Which markets are less likely to pass through Billings (BIL)? Which markets are more likely to pass through Billings (BIL)?</p> <p>The Visit Billings' Zartico data will also offer insight on other data sources such as credit card transactions and spend which may also help answer questions about the economic impact of visitation to the area and how it stimulates economic opportunity with visitation trends.</p>	N/A	N/A	

<p>At the creation of this FY23 marketing plan, data from the Visit Billings' marketing investment in Minneapolis with Visit Southeast Montana, which included a media event, is being analyzed. This media event consisted of influencers, but there were some media connections made as well. Staff and agencies are working to mine relationships built with the mutual brand created for this takeover campaign and media event: Southeast Montana Travel Provision Co.</p> <p>Visit Billings will host guests in the region/city focusing on the Great American Road Trip. The readership or followers of hosted guests need to align with GART, SEMT, Visit Billings travel perspectives including outdoor recreation, history buffs, arts and culture amenities, family excursions, etc. to be considered.</p>	<p>Visit Billings staff will host two social media influencers and/or journalists after follow-ups are made with those appropriate leads who attended the Minneapolis media event in spring 2022 in Minneapolis.</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>N/A</p>	
<p>Joint Venture opportunities for the warm season as offered by Brand MT or other regions and CVBs can be great investments. Visit Billings staff always contemplate and assess such chances to team up with other travel brands in Montana for Joint Venture offerings.</p>	<p>Depending on which Joint Venture offerings are made available in FY23, Visit Billings will strongly consider such opportunities to leverage funds and partner with the MONTANA brand or the brands of other regions or CVBs.</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>N/A</p>	

DMO Budget

Allowable Methods	Amount Budgeted	% of Budget Allocated	Amount Expended	% of Budget Expended
Administration	\$92,493.00	20.0	\$0.00	0
Agency Services	\$36,000.00	7.8	\$0.00	0
Earned Media/Tourism Sales	\$10,000.00	2.2	\$0.00	0
Education/Outreach	\$4,000.00	0.9	\$0.00	0
Joint Venture	\$25,000.00	5.4	\$0.00	0
Opportunity Marketing	\$1,000.00	0.15	\$0.00	0
Paid Media	\$147,000.00	31.8	\$0.00	0
Marketing Personnel	\$75,172.00	16.3	\$0.00	0
Research	\$42,300.00	9.1	\$0.00	0
Travel/Trade Shows	\$6,500.00	1.4	\$0.00	0
Visitor Services	\$22,000.00	4.8	\$0.00	0
Website Development (Online, Website, Mobile)	\$1,000.00	0.15	\$0.00	0
	\$462,465.00	100.00	\$0.00	0.00

Narrative Evaluation

Reg/CVB Required Documents

Description

File Name

File Size

