



Grant Details

125123 - FY24 DMO Plan

128717 - FY24 Visit Billings DMO Budget and Marketing Plan

DOC Office of Tourism

Grant Title: FY24 Visit Billings DMO Budget and Marketing Plan
Grant Number: 24-52-OOT-DMO-010
Grant Status: Underway
Comments:
Applicant Organization: Billings Chamber of Commerce/Convention and Visitors Bureau
Grantee Contact: Alex Tyson
Award Year: FY24
Program Area: DOC Office of Tourism
Amounts:
Contract Dates:

Contract Sent	Contract Received	Contract Executed
06/13/2023	07/01/2023	06/30/2024
<small>Proposal Date</small>	<small>Project Start</small>	<small>Project End</small>

Grant Administrator: Barb Sanem
Contract Number 24-52-OOT-DMO-010
Award Year FY24
Contract Dates

Contract Sent	Contract Received	Contract Executed	Contract Legal
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Project Dates 07/01/2023
 06/30/2024

Project Start	Project End
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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.

BILLINGS, MONTANA: Travel is an economic powerhouse for Billings: Montana's Trailhead.

In Billings, travel fuels every industry, while every industry fuels travel to the destination. From energy and education to finance and medical, business and conference travel is key. At the same time, leisure visitation, sports tourism, and group tours help boost visitation growing the visitor economy year-round.

As a destination marketing and management organization (DMMO), Visit Billings promotes the destination and all its offerings, recruits meetings and tournaments, and helps to grow existing events. When Visit Billings markets and sells Billings as a preferred travel destination, businesses in every corner of Yellowstone County across all sectors are supported.

Tourism enhances the overall quality of life by helping support the local business community while also saving households nearly \$900 in taxes annually. The 2.6 million visitors who add \$621 million annually (Destination Analysts) to the Billings' economy annually is not an accidental impact; It's the return on investment of marketing and sales strategies of the Visit Billings leadership, staff, and partners.

VISIT BILLINGS:

Visit Billings is the brand that encompasses the Billings Tourism Business Improvement District (BTBID) and the Billings Convention and Visitors Bureau (BCVB). Both organizations are managed by the Billings Chamber of Commerce. The Visit Billings team is committed to growing visitation at Montana's Trailhead.

VISIT BILLINGS CVB LEADERSHIP & STAFF*

BILLINGS CHAMBER/CVB EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:

JULIE SEEDHOUSE – Century 21 Hometown Brokers

JEREMY VANNATTA – PayneWest Insurance

DEBBIE POTTER – Eide Bailly

JESS PETERSON – Western Skies Strategies

TOBY O'ROURKE - Kampgrounds of America

NICHOLE MEHLING – Billings Clinic

CARMELITA DOMINGUEZ – Montana Allergy & Asthma Specialists

STAFF:

JOHN BREWER, CAE - President & CEO

Billings Chamber of Commerce

ALEX TYSON, IOM, CATP - Executive Director

Visit Billings (Billings TBID & Billings CVB)

ALY EGGART, MSPR, CATP - Leisure Marketing, Sales, and Social Media Manager

Visit Billings

LUKE ASHMORE, PDM, CATP - Special Projects & Programs Manager

Visit Billings

EVAN DECKER, PDM, CATP - Sports Tourism Manager

Visit Billings

MEGAN STEVENSON - Finance Director

Billings Chamber/Visit Billings/Visit Southeast Montana

**Tourism Business Improvement District leadership is listed at VisitBillings.com.*

VISIT BILLINGS: What We Do

As a DMMO, Visit Billings is responsible for the development and growth of the tourism industry through promotion, marketing, and sales strategy. The staff is an extension of its stakeholders (lodging partners) working to provide sales, services, and marketing support to the local hospitality industry and tourism partners.

Visit Billings works domestically and internationally to develop and enhance sustainable tourism for the city and region in the leisure, meetings, and sporting events markets. The DMMO does this by increasing awareness and engaging with consumers in both drive and flight markets, as well as with media, the travel industry, meeting and conference planners, and sports promoters with research-driven marketing programs. Marketing campaigns highlight the outdoor adventure, incredible landscapes, arts and culture, culinary and nightlife, as well as the meeting and sports facilities. Visit Billings also collaborates with Billings Logan International Airport on air service development initiatives to assist with access to the destination. Visit Billings staff also work closely with tourism partners and stakeholders to ensure positive interactions between residents and visitors to foster repeat visitation, making customer service and visitor facilitation a priority. Staff also work with national and local organizations to strengthen diversity, inclusion, equity, and accessibility practices and mindsets including autism certification efforts.

VISIT BILLINGS: How We Do It

Visit Billings is funded primarily through the Billings Tourism Business Improvement District (BTBID) and through a portion of the State Lodging Facility Use Tax. The BTBID assesses \$2.00 per occupied room 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, to grow visitation and support local businesses and stakeholders. 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% lodging tax.

VISIT BILLINGS: Why Visit Billings?

BILLINGS IS MONTANA'S TRAILHEAD. Shaped by the Yellowstone River and sheltered by the sandstone Rimrocks, Billings is a place of forever views and forever memories, where urban amenities and modern conveniences meet the edge of the genuine frontier, and the adventure of the untamed wilderness and history are at your front door. Conveniently positioned in southeast Montana as the largest city between Calgary and Denver, Spokane and Minneapolis, Billings proudly serves a trade area serving more than 500,000 residents. Warm, genuine people take the time to welcome you and greet you with a smile. Unparalleled access to some of the most breathtaking and historic places in the United States including Yellowstone National Park, Bighorn Canyon Recreation Area, national monuments, and the Beartooth Scenic Byway make Billings an idyllic destination for connecting to the best that Montana and the region offer.

ABOUT BILLINGS:

Billings, population 117,000, is the county seat of Yellowstone County (pop. 167,000) and the largest city in the state. As Montana's Trailhead, it's the region's economic hub. Major industries including agriculture, energy, healthcare, finance, and education drive the local economy, and tourism is integrated into each of them.

Popular attractions include the Rimrocks or rock formations which surround much of the community and offer incredible views of the region. The city also boasts a brewery district in historic downtown Billings, restaurants featuring local flavors, Montana's only zoo and Botanical Park, contemporary and western museums, galleries, several theaters, music venues, outdoor community venues, boutique retail, and year-round festivals.

Billings is home to 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, travelers 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, Frontier, and Alaska Airlines. Regional carrier CapeAir also plays a crucial role in air travel and connectivity to eastern Montana.

Amazing summer weather and snowy winters with bluebird days offer ample opportunity for outdoor enthusiasts to experience adventures during all four seasons. Nearly 4,400 hotel rooms, flexible meeting space, and sports venues are ready to accommodate any traveler or planner's needs and preferences.

2. Align with Montana Brand

Briefly describe how your destination aligns with the Montana Brand.

BRAND MT – MARKETING MONTANA:

The Tourism Marketing Bureau at the Montana Department of Commerce promotes Montana as a travel destination to potential domestic and international visitors through advertising and promotional campaigns. These strategic campaigns create awareness about Montana, generate an interest in visiting, and influence travel intention. Nationwide tourism trends, statistics from the Institute of Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR) at the University of Montana, syndicated research, and the results of contracted research studies help determine a data-driven overall

marketing strategy to reach target audiences and measure the success of marketing efforts to create demand for Montana as a global travel destination.

Brand MT facilitated a statewide initiative to unify, under a single brand, the diverse collective of organizations working to market Montana. The Montana Brand consists of three pillars which Visit Billings also takes into consideration for alignment:

- More spectacular, unspoiled nature than anywhere else in the lower 48
- Vibrant and charming small towns that serve as gateways to our natural wonders
- Breathtaking experiences by day, and relaxing hospitality at night

Additionally, Visit Billings prioritizes joint venture opportunities when/where applicable with Brand MT and its partners.

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 if offerings align to grow visitation to 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).

Supporting travel to Billings, media planning will include increased investment and expansion of geo-targeting to support fly and drive markets while also optimizing audience and expanded targeting tactics with existing channels.

Visit Billings will target audiences who offer strong reach and site engagement. On top of contextually relevant content placement, buyers will use behavioral segments to narrow the target ensuring the right message gets in front of the right user.

Behavioral Targeting:

Investments will be made to leverage audiences and targeting tactics that have previously driven strong performance for Visit Billings initiatives. From a behavioral targeting point of view, Visit Billings will leverage frequent travelers, outdoor enthusiasts, in-market and previous visitation, and adventure travel buyers. Behavioral targeting (a.k.a. audience targeting) is the practice of segmenting customers based on web browsing behavior, including pages visited, searches performed, links clicked, and products purchased.

-Frequent Travelers: Users who frequently fly or stay in hotels.

-Outdoor Enthusiasts: Users who like outdoor activities like hiking.

-In-Market and Previous Visitation: Leverage Adara to reach users who are planning or have previously taken related trips to Montana, Billings, or adventure locations.

-Adventure Travel Buyers: Users who have previously bought from REI, Cabela's, etc.

Contextual Targeting:

Visit Billings will reach users who are researching or dreaming their next getaway by aligning the Visit Billings message with the right content through contextual targeting. Contextual targeting is the practice of displaying ads based on a website's content. Think: placing an ad for dishware on a recipe site. Sample categories include:

-Adventure Travel

-Travel Guides

-Tourist Destinations

-Localities in the USA and in Montana

Retargeting:

Visit Billings will capture users who visit Visit Billings webpages or links but have not yet taken action. Visit Billings will serve ads later while they are browsing other sites online to keep Billings and the destination top of mind.

Additionally:**Target Audience/Targeted Demographics:**

Adults 35-65 with an annual household income of \$75+.

Note that according to Zartico, the visitors representing the highest spend in market are with a:

1. HHI of \$101-150k (26.7%)
2. HHI of \$151k+ (24.6%),
3. HHI \$41-60k (16.4%)
4. HHI \$61-80K (15%)

Which age groups are spending the most?

1. A65+ (25.2%)
2. A55-64 (23.7%)
3. 35-44 (20%)
4. A45-54 (18.7%)

Across all HHI, A35-44 spend the highest, according to Zartico.

Therefore, the visitor with the highest impact are those A65+ with a HHI of \$101+ followed closely by visitors A55-64 with a HHI of \$101+.

According to the Visit Billings Profile for 2023 conducted by Goodway, the Visit Billings target audience is primarily Gen X, parenting-focused, working families. They're educated and describe themselves as open-minded, and value spending time with their families. They're confident using new technology and are comfortable navigating the internet to research and book their travels.

- 36.7% typically find out about new brands and products through word of mouth recommendations through friends or family members.
- 49.1% expect brands to listen to customer feedback
- 46.5% use Facebook more than once a day
- 33% of domestic vacationers are thinking of booking a vacation in the next 3-6 months (as at Dec 2022)

General Demographics:

- 45% A35-44
- Mostly suburban dwelling consumers
- 52% are married
- 57% have children

3b. What research supports your DMO strategy?

KEY TRENDS:

The U.S. Travel Foundation is forecasting an increase in travel spending in 2023 compared to 2022 (and 2019). Destination Analysts found that Americans' excitement for travel is at record levels and they say they will prioritize leisure travel in their household income's spending – over home improvements, clothing, entertainment and even dining out in restaurants.

American travelers express excitement for cities (47.7%), small towns (44.8%) and national parks (41.2%), according to Destination Analysts. *Travel + Leisure* found there is a renewed emphasis on food-focused travel, wellness and self-care on vacation, and traveling off the beaten path.

About one-third of American travelers overall report they used online video specifically for trip planning purposes. For destination inspiration, Millennial and GenZ age travelers are particularly open to content through video sources like TikTok and streaming services.

A Virtuoso study found that travelers are, on average, booking trips farther ahead for 2023 than they did back in 2019. Experts are recommending travelers should book ahead of time.

"Hush" trips may be the newest travel trend with remote workers packing up and going somewhere new for a week or two, without ever telling their employer, according to *Forbes*. Travelers login, get to work, and save some time to

explore. Traditional hotel properties are marketing to remote workers by offering discounts on extended stays - along with the perks of having pools, bars and fitness centers on a workcation.

According to a survey by GetYourGuide, 90% of travelers want to experience a destination “like a local” and two-thirds of Millennial respondents specifically worry about whether it’s an authentic experience.

“Set-jetting” is still on the rise - 70% of Gen Z and Millennial respondents have “been inspired to travel to a destination after seeing it featured in a TV show, news source, or movie” like Yellowstone, according to a report by American Express Travel.

Surveyed travelers say they want to shop at small businesses and spend more during a vacation if they know it supports the local community.

Travelers have a new appreciation for the physical and mental health benefits of nature as a “soul-restoring, endorphin-eliciting, stress-relieving outlet,” according to Afar. Forest bathing, or meditative walks in nature, are being integrated into back-to-basic wellness treatments and experiences.

Additionally, throughout a fiscal year, Visit Billings tracks and measures campaigns. Visit Billings staff in partnership with agency colleagues from Sunshine & Bourbon (Agency of Record) and buying group, Goodway Group, monitor the following data:

- Smith Travel Research - demand, occupancy and ADR
- TBID Assessments
- Collections from State Lodging Facility Use Tax
- Destinations International Economic Impact Calculators
- VisaVue Spending Trends
- AirDNA Data
- Destination Analysts reporting
- Zartico and Affinity Reporting
- ITRR

3c. What are your emerging markets?

Visit Billings will increase investment and expand geo-targeting to support fly markets and will engage in three new markets.

Approach:

Leverage channels that have previously driven success for fly markets including search, display, and social (Pinterest and Meta).

Increase investment to build brand awareness to drive brand knowledge in markets where Billings is a lesser-known travel destination.

Existing Markets:

-Minneapolis, MN

- Denver, CO
- Salt Lake City, UT
- Chicago, IL
- Dallas, TX

Emerging Markets (New Market Tests):

Please note the approach with the emerging markets is to leverage channels that have previously driven success for fly markets. This includes search, display, and social with Meta and Pinterest.

Visit Billings will increase investment in the upper-funnel tactics to drive awareness in markets where Billings is a lesser-known travel destination (see three markets here). Strategies will include increased investment in expanding geo-targeting to support fly markets and secondary national markets where research from Zartico and Goodway Group show strong potential.

- Phoenix, AZ
- Houston, TX
- Portland, OR

National strategies are listed above. Drive market details include:

Approach:

Use channels best for events including search and display to drive awareness and site traffic (no new markets for drive).

- Montana (excl city of Billings)
- North Dakota
- South Dakota
- Wyoming
- Idaho

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.

FY24 - Visit Billings Priorities:

- 2023-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN

- INCREASE LEISURE VISITATION
- FOSTER SPORTS TOURISM
- THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE
- RECRUIT MEETINGS, CONFERENCES, AND REUNIONS
- THE INTERNATIONAL MARKETPLACE
- BILLINGS LOGAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The strategic plan will carry forward the momentum and successes of Visit Billings and local tourism today. Critical areas of focus and new areas to concentrate on will be identified, while also revealing strategies to ensure Visit Billings' efforts and investments are set to position the destination and its partners through 2027.

THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Exceptional service leads to repeat visitation and extended stays from guests to the city. Making sure travelers feel welcome and enjoy their stay at Montana's Trailhead is a top priority for Visit Billings leadership and staff. The Visit Billings team works in many ways to help create a positive experience for visitors including the Billings Trail Guides program, Meet the Locals, and Certified Tourism Ambassador Destination commitments with Mickey Schaeffer & Associates. Such priorities ensure quality customer service and positive visitor experiences. Additionally, Visit Billings is leading destination efforts to offer autism-friendly travel options for visitors to the city. ZooMontana, the Historic Billings Depot, the Boothill Inn & Suites, the Billings Chamber, and the United Way of Yellowstone County have already joined this effort with Visit Billings.

Finally, a positive visitor experience is also directly impacted by how sports events and meetings are supported. Staff offer convention and tournament servicing options like hosted site inspections, registration assistance, city and regional tour planning, financial incentives, grant options, and confidential hotel sourcing to assist meeting planners and tournament owners who want to host events in Billings.

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, attractions and event owners. Regional and national marketing campaigns will focus on encouraging unique itineraries that elevate the destination and the region to road trippers, outdoor enthusiasts, history buffs, arts and culture aficionados, and foodies - to name a few. Promotion of events and must-see attractions to regional audiences is key as is elevation of Great American Road Trip-type itineraries to potential visitors in national markets. Billings is a stop along the route from Badlands to Yellowstone and every park, byway, and monument in between.

Visit Billings staff expect higher travel demand during the warm season of 2023 as gateway communities reopen following June 2022's historic floods that impacted the north and northeast entrances to Yellowstone as well as sections of the Beartooth Scenic Byway south of Billings. The team will attend leisure travel shows in addition to executing several national and regional strategic marketing campaigns and publicity opportunities.

FOSTER SPORTS TOURISM

Sports tourism happens when a person or group travels from one community to another to compete, support, and celebrate sports and athletes. This is one of the fastest growing sectors in tourism for Billings. Efforts to support local tournament owners, governing bodies, and growing existing events, while recruiting new sports events to cultivate this market, are key priorities for the destination and staff. Furthermore, ensuring Billings has appropriate and competitive venues is also a priority of the BTBID and the Billings CVB leadership and staff. Namely, supporting the City of Billings in its efforts to build a sports facility. Such a state-of-the-art venue for the community and destination is critical to the future of sports tourism growth. Strategies also will include marketing, lead generation, and attending appointment-based conferences to strengthen relationships with event owners to elevate Billings as a sports tourism destination.

RECRUIT MEETINGS, CONFERENCE, AND REUNIONS

Visit Billings staff strive to be innovative in meeting the needs of meeting planners and incentivizing 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 to book meetings and conferences in Billings in 2024, 2025 and 2026. This segment can continue to have a strong economic impact on the community. The team will attend conferences and tradeshows to elevate the Meet Me in Billings campaign effort.

THE INTERNATIONAL MARKETPLACE

International inbound travel was brought to a halt in March 2020. While it has since partially recovered, it is not expected to fully recover until 2025. With Billings being a part of the Great American Road Trip - Badlands to Yellowstone – Montana has seen a stronger increase in international travel and group tours since 2020 particularly with fly/drive visitors. 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. Visit Billings works with Brand MT and partners like Visit Southeast Montana and Rocky Mountain International to foster this market.

BILLINGS LOGAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT (BIL)

Air service continues to be a direct route to foster success in the tourism equation for Billings. Billings Logan International Airport (BIL) has enhanced the traveler's experience with the \$55 million airport expansion and renovation in recent years. This investment has elevated BIL in many ways. At the same time, from a destination marketing and management point of view, any lack of consistent air capacity or high fares can negatively impact a traveler's decision to make Billings part of their business, leisure, or sports itinerary. The BIL experience is strong, but continuing to work on flight options, fares, and capacities is key to community organizations like Visit Billings.

For Billings to continue to compete as a tourism destination, air service including capacity and subsequent competitive fares must be addressed. Accessibility to a destination is a key factor that affects volume of visitor traffic to Billings. Direct flights have grown visitation to Billings' regional competitive set. Direct flights to and from a region offer momentum to a destination for tourism development. If people can't get to your destination, they won't. If it's easier to go to a different destination, they will take the route of least resistance. The I-90 and I-94 corridor is important for roadtrippers, regional conferences, medical tourism, and some business/sports travel, but the airline passenger is critical to visitor growth in Billings and to at least maintain the visitation we see today. Visitor growth increases new money and spend into the city which can be assisted by increased air service.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION PERTAINING TO GOALS:

FY24 GOALS FOR:

ADVERTISING AND PROMOTIONS

Goal:

- Drive year-round visitation by increasing awareness for Billings as an ideal travel destination, with big skies and outdoor adventure.

TRADITIONAL AND DIGITAL MEDIA

Goals:

- Increase awareness for the destination that encourages target audiences to deepen consumer engagement with the destination's brand.

Increase awareness for the direct flights to Billings from Chicago, Dallas/Fort Worth, Denver, Minneapolis, Phoenix, Salt Lake City, and Seattle. While introducing emerging markets of Phoenix, AZ, Houston, TX, and Portland, OR.

INTERACTIVE AND SOCIAL

Goals:

- Increase brand interaction with informative and engaging digital content that builds awareness and loyalty, while ultimately motivating consumer travel.
- Provide meeting planners and sports event planners with the information and materials they need to choose Billings as their preferred destination for meetings, conventions and sports events.
- Increase website visitation.
- Grow the audience on Visit Billings' social platforms.
- Increase contacts in Visit Billings email database and encourage an open rate of over 20% for email marketing initiatives.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Goals:

- Generate earned media and influencer coverage for Billings, positioning the destination as an authentic, welcoming city giving visitors access to modern amenities, outdoor adventure, family fun and exquisite food/beverage options while preserving the Montana feel they are seeking.
- Increase traffic to the Visit Billings website through earned digital media placements including the destination URL.
- Place earned media features in target publications with a total audience impressions value of at least 10 million.

SPORTS MARKETING

Goals:

- Generate new room nights from sports events recruited to the area that will impact room demand and increase revenue while creating even greater awareness for Billings as a choice sports destination.
- Grow or expand existing sports events with current event and tournament owners.
- Retain existing sports events.
- Successfully partner with collegiate partners for NCAA and NAIA event bids.
- Book or support 30 sports events in Billings.

MEETING AND CONVENTION RECRUITMENT

Goals:

- Generate meeting and convention bookings and room nights as a result of sales initiatives to raise awareness of Billings as a choice meeting destination, and by providing meeting planners with the knowledge and logistical support they need to make meeting in Billings a success.
- Generate new room nights from meetings or conferences that will impact room demand and increase revenue while creating a stronger Meet Me in Billings brand.
- Support existing state association and corporate meetings in Billings.
- Support Billings' five meeting hotels in efforts to recruit new and retain existing meetings and conferences.
- Book, support, and/or retain 25 meetings or conferences in Billings.
- Service 20 meetings, conferences, or events in Billings.

GROUP TOUR MARKET (INTERNATIONAL & DOMESTIC TOUR OPPORTUNITIES)

Yellowstone National Park was the seventh most visited national park in the United States in 2022 with Glacier National Park rounding out the top 10, according to the National Park Service. In Montana, Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument is the third most-visited site (Brand MT). Billings as a tourism destination is a trailhead along many routes to and from key attractions like Yellowstone, Bighorn Battlefield, and Glacier National Park – to name a few – and can offer many amenities to international and domestic tour operators and their clients.

Goal:

- Build relationships with domestic and international tour operators to continue the recovery of the group tour market.
- Elevate Billings as a competitive stopover city for the motorcoach industry and continue to work with tour operators and bus tour companies to elevate Billings as a major western tour destination.
- Work with international market representatives to be quick to assist international visitors with longer itineraries for those who may be on fly/drive trips in the west and request more time in the city to explore more products including the brew trail, food scene, and outdoor recreation.
- Foster relationships with existing and new tour operators to continue to grow the domestic and international tour markets. The incubation period for successful leads and marketing strategies is demanding and important to the Visit Billings team to grow this segment.
- Offer insights to operators regarding new products in the destination and refreshing itineraries.

HOSPITALITY EDUCATION

Goals:

- Raise awareness of the value of tourism throughout the community, and support stakeholders and front-line staff by providing tourism education.
- Support initiatives that foster diversity and inclusion.

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

FY24 Tactics

ADVERTISING AND PROMOTIONS

Tactics:

- Execute Visit Billings' research driven, consumer-focused brand platform, "Forge Your Own Path," to build marketing campaigns and promotions that showcase rich visuals of the entire destination
- Launch new "Be an Outsider" marketing campaign to increase awareness of the big skies and unspoiled outdoor adventure found in a visit to Billings, as well as the natural attractions surrounding the city.
- Create niche marketing campaigns such as Summer Events as well as creative that focuses on amenities such as the Brew Trail to encourage visitors to discover all the cultural attractions, events and culinary delights found in the city of Billings with its unique urban downtown and hospitality offerings.
- Continue promoting the Great American Road Trip and its itineraries to remind repeat visitors and inform first-time visitors that Billings, Montana is the most scenic route into Yellowstone with incredible proximity to iconic attractions.
- Promote the current and any emerging flight markets through grant opportunities, paid media, as well as through digital and social platforms.
- Showcase Billings in fall and winter through a combined indoor/outdoor tactic through the Keepers of the Cool creative including #hibernate? #hibernope! tag.
- Develop a storytelling strategy leveraging content like Trailguides to showcase the locals and their warm, genuine nature, while sharing with visitors a locals' perspective on life that is uniquely Montanan.
- Develop a placemaking strategy that begins creating more of an understanding and demand for Billings' individual districts and neighborhoods that include Downtown, the West End, the Heights, and Central.
- Through public relations, drive media coverage for the destination that profiles Trailsetters who can share the locals' perspective on how to best enjoy Billings as a destination for adventure-seekers, foodies and cultural enthusiasts.

TRADITIONAL AND DIGITAL MEDIA

Tactics:

- Use a multi-channel media strategy approach that utilizes Native / Display, Meta, Pinterest, Search and TripAdvisor, while also increasing investment and expanding geo-targeting to support drive and flight markets.
- Launch a Discovery Campaign that utilizes Google's audience and customer intent signals to deliver highly visual, inspiring personalized ad experiences to people who are ready to discover and engage with the Visit Billings' brand.
- Strategically place content in front of the target audience by seamlessly weaving it in throughout the Tripadvisor ecosystem using Boost, where the brand message will be natively integrated into the Tripadvisor experience.
- Optimize audiences and expand targeting tactics within existing channels and test new tactics on new channels.
- Prioritize Meta and Display to promote awareness and drive website traffic as social and display performed well historically, which creates efficiencies in maximizing impressions and leading users to the website to learn more and take a specific action
- In drive markets, use channels best for events - search and display - to drive awareness and site traffic.
- In flight markets, leverage channels that have previously driven success for those markets - search, display, and social (Pinterest and Meta).
- Also for flight markets, increase investment in upper-funnel tactics to drive awareness in markets where Billings is a lesser-known travel destination.

- Harness the power of advanced analytics to inform media performance and strategy.
- Engage with local media publications for the promotion of Billings and supporting local businesses.
- Strategically place out-of-home billboards within and around Billings to engage local and regional audiences.
- Sponsor content development and niche digital targeting the two-wheel audience.
- Utilize advanced analytics to inform media performance and strategy, while also developing ROI tracking on key advertising/marketing initiatives, that strives to deliver increased impressions through the fiscal year and garners a significant increase in engagements with a click-thru rate that is well above industry average.

INTERACTIVE AND SOCIAL

Tactics:

Social Media/Email

- Share the destination's story in a compelling, consistent and editorial manner, with storytelling as the driving characteristic.
- Extend the Visit Billings' voice into the online space as a persona – the approachable and lighthearted Billings Trail Guide.
- Annually develop an integrated editorial content calendar to consistently plan and prepare content (e.g. copy, photos, videos, etc.), streamlining and integrating social content development efforts across all channels.
- Integrate seasonal messaging, key events, new local businesses, etc. across all digital channels.
- Increase video content on all owned channels - which also will be used in paid and earned channels - which engage a variety of local personalities.
- Through Facebook, encourage dialogue by asking followers questions while also highlighting partners and special events.
- On Instagram, curate and utilize consumer-generated photography and video, while also posting editorial photos, videos and engaging "Stories" highlighting destination experiences and offerings. Promote the #VisitBillings and #MontanasTrailhead hashtags while encouraging visitors and stakeholders to do the same.
- Expose travelers to editorial content, blog articles and social content through email marketing.

Website

- Develop a new Plan Your Trip section on the site to better help visitors make traveling to Billings as easy as possible. Content to include: maps of the flight markets and insight on the I-90/I-94 corridor; highlight the different neighborhoods found in Billings; showcase itineraries and blogs; provide transportation information including Uber/Lyft/rentals; and continue promoting visitor guide/digital guide downloads and e-newsletter sign-ups.
- Promote new blog content on the website, featuring experiences that align with the interest-based personas from History Buffs to Foodies and Outdoor Enthusiasts - as well as Winston The Sloth's page.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Tactics:

- Identify new, cost-effective means to achieve similar ends of traditional travel/tourism media outreach.
- Explore offering digital experiences to media and influencers to reach a broader audience.
- Develop earned media tactics that tie directly to paid media efforts to amplify seasonal campaigns, and vice versa.
- Leverage evolving industry trends such as multi-generational travel, solo travel and self-improvement trips as a framework for earned media content.

- Share brief news and story ideas with greater frequency about Billings events, award nominations and other news with target media and influencers.
- Explore partnerships with Brand MT and Visit Southeast Montana to share earned media costs.
- Attend PRSA event(s) or Brand MT sponsored opportunities.

SPORTS MARKETING

Tactics:

- Attend sporting event trade shows like SportsETA (May 2023 and May 2024) and TEAMS (fall 2023) to build relationships and create awareness for Billings sports and leisure offerings.
- Generate new leads for sports events by collaborating with IMM to build a Billings sports planning guide/booklet to use as follow-up or leave behind (digital or print) when booking planner appointments.
- Develop email templates and e-postcard for sports marketing that helps to build and sustain relationships with sports planners.
- Focus on Collegiate Sports (RMC/MSUB) and collaborate with Frontier Conference regarding NAIA bids that will be live mid-2023.
- Grow and retain sports events that Visit Billings is already assisting with by meeting with local, state, or regional contacts and asking them how you can help them grow a tournament by a day(s) or by changing venues (say high school gym to a MetraPark building), etc.
- Develop and build upon sports sales toolkit for efficiencies in follow-up. Those tools can include:
 - Create a marketing and advertising plan to promote sports marketing in Billings, and include directories in the plan.
 - Build a new section of Visit Billings website that showcases Billings as a sporting events destination and provides planners with the tools and information they need to book events in Billings.
 - Receive certification with STS through SportsETA.
 - Continue subscription with Destinations International Economic Impact Calculator.
 - Develop a sports planning booklet and business cards for appointments and follow-ups.
 - Capture new photography to help continue to build sports image library for Visit Billings.
 - Begin planning logistics for a 2024 sports planner Fam tour in Billings (invite top leads to Billings and host for two days and two nights showcasing Billings like a hosted site inspection).
 - Become active in Midland Roundtable.
 - Research the possibility of creating a sports advocacy committee to assist with any volunteer needs, etc. (to launch possibly in Spring 2024).
 - Continue to work with key stakeholders on the development of more product development for sports facilities.

MEETING AND CONVENTION RECRUITMENT

Tactics:

- Attend meeting and convention appointment-based national and regional events to build new and foster existing relationships with meeting planners including 2023 Small Market Meetings.
- Generate new leads for meetings by collaborating with Integrated Media Marketing or IMM and fostering relationships with new leads.
- Continue to develop and fine tune digital and printed sales materials for meeting recruitment toolkit.
- Maintain efforts on Cvent and other platforms to better accommodate meeting planners looking to book in small market meeting destinations.
- Use e-communications like e-postcards to build relationships with state, regional, and national meeting planners.
- Look at consideration of a potential meeting planner familiarization tour in the next 12 months.

- Consider sponsorship opportunities with associations or organizations to offer more of an impact for attendees.
- Provide planners services to better facilitate attendees including visitor guidebooks, brew trail maps, off-agenda options, etc.

GROUP TOUR MARKET (INTERNATIONAL & DOMESTIC TOUR OPPORTUNITIES)

Tactics:

- Attend an American Bus Association (ABA) event.
- Attend international events hosted in the U.S. including International Round-Up (IRU 2024), IPW 2024, and ACGI 2023.
- Work with Brand MT for 2024 opportunities to host familiarization tours or in the market when applicable.
- Elevate Billings in the Great American West (GAW) publications to garner exposure for Billings to the German, French, Italian, Belgium, Denmark, the UK, and Australia markets. Visit Billings works closely with Brand MT and international Travel and Trade staff at the State of Montana's Department of Commerce.
- Continue to advocate on a national level to shorten Visa interview wait times with the U.S. Travel Association.

HOSPITALITY EDUCATION

Tactics:

- Continue encouraging stakeholders within key industry segments such as lodging, dining, shopping, attractions, and interactive educational venues to become Certified Autism Organizations, which is achieved by training and certifying their staff through the IBCCES like Visit Billings has done.
- Introduce the national Certified Tourism Ambassador Program to the community (CTA)
- Develop a full advocacy campaign that educates the Billings community and residents on the benefits and economic impact of tourism.

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Objectives/Metrics/Evaluation

Objectives	Measurable Metrics for Success	Report the Metric Achieved	Evaluation of Measurable Metrics for Success
<p>Objective: Increase visitation to destination</p> <p>Attract overnight visitors to the destination through marketing, sales, event and meeting recruitment, and tourism partner support to increase room demand as reported by Smith Travel Research (STR). Room Demand includes the number of rooms sold in a specific time period and excludes complimentary rooms. Increase room demand by 3% for running 12 months via STR report.</p>	<p>Visit Billings prioritizes a 3% increase in room demand for the running 12 months per the Smith Travel Research citywide report. See previous years' room demand data includes:</p> <p>2018: 4.9% (exceeded goal by 1.9%)</p> <p>2019: -1.9% (-4.9% to goal)</p> <p>2020: -26.6% (-29.6% to goal)</p> <p>2021: 33.9% (exceeded goal by 30.9%)</p> <p>2022: 7.1% (exceeded goal by 4.1%)</p>	<p>Not Available</p>	<p>Not Available</p>
<p>Earned Media and Publicity:</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generate earned media and influencer coverage for Billings, positioning the destination as an authentic, welcoming city giving visitors access to modern amenities, outdoor adventure, family fun and exquisite food/beverage options while preserving the Montana feel they are seeking. Increase traffic to the Visit Billings website through earned digital media placements including the destination URL. Place earned media features in target publications with a total audience impressions value of at least 10 million. 	<p>Metrics: Meet or exceed previous years' efforts to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure four (4) journalists/influencers for a press visit scheduled for spring/summer/fall 2023 for outdoor adventure and Billings Brew Trail feature articles Virtual meetings introducing Billings to five (5) or more journalists/influencers representing at least 5 million earned media impressions 	<p>Not Available</p>	<p>Not Available</p>
<p>Paid Media:</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a new spring/summer campaign, targeting both drive and flight markets. Utilize data from previous campaigns to help guide and build creative. Visit Billings will target audiences who offer strong reach and site engagement. On top of contextually relevant content placement, buyers will use behavioral segments to narrow the target ensuring the right message gets in front of the right user. Objective includes driving site traffic and building awareness via search, search- 	<p>Successful metrics include successful execution of campaign(s), site engagement, site visits, and downloads of visitor guide.</p> <p>Visit Billings will look to meet or exceed success from previous warm season campaign Key Performance Metrics:</p> <p>2022 Key Performance Metrics</p> <p>Spring/Summer - Warm Season National Advertising - GART</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traffic to website was 285,717 22,829,512 impressions delivered 222,519 activities generated Display CTR was 0.09% (benchmark for Travel/Tourism is 0.05%) Video completion rate averaged 95.14% (benchmark is 87%) 	<p>Not Available</p>	<p>Not Available</p>

- discovery, native/display, and Meta.
- Drive unique and repeat traffic to the website and subpages with the 2023 warm season campaign strategy that leverages digital and video-driven channels with Be an Outsider/Made for Outsiders campaign

Also, for Paid Media:

- Meeting and Convention Marketing through Cvent.
- Sports Marketing and Sales through Integrated Media Marketing (IMM)
- International/Group Tour Marketing through Great American West Cooperative Marketing Program

Website

- Traffic to website was 391,674
- Average Session Duration: 1:42
- 32,665 click to partner pages
- Visitor Guide views: 4,571
- Visitor Guide requests: 1,143
- E-Newsletter Sign ups: 257
- Top Markets:
 - Chicago - 41,124
 - Denver - 30,464
 - Dallas - 28,883
 - Billings - 26,355
 - Salt Lake City - 20,270

Increase all traffic sessions during warm season campaign run from previous period to home page and subpages using the post analysis report from buying group- The Goodway Group - and agency of record - Sunshine & Bourbon.

Metrics for success are fostered off April to September 2022 campaign insights and dashboard. However, the 2023 warm season campaign is evolving from the previously used *Great American Road Trip (GART)* to *Be an Outsider/Made for Outsiders* campaign. This new creative includes a fresh landing page so no previous data exists for the new campaign. However, the success of the former GART campaign will offer insights to the success of the new campaign. Staff seeks to maintain or exceed the following GART breakdown for the same period in 2023:

GART campaign run from 4.15.2022 through 9.15.2022 netted (eCPA: effective cost per acquisition):

Category	eCPA Activities
Landing Page GART	66,389
Landing Page Views	45,724
Page view	33,164.6
Spring Road Trip - Page View	28,483.55
Visit Billings GART Landing Page	7,542
Visit Billings Landing Page	7,491
Events - Page view	6,638.38
IP2139433_Visit Billings Event Page	3,212

	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>GART- Landing Page</td> <td>2,246</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Landing Page Homepage</td> <td>1,670</td> </tr> </table> <p>Additional Paid Media Metrics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Continue placements and marketing package with Cvent to help elevate Billings as meetings and conference destination booking at least 25 meetings and servicing 20 meeting. -Work with IMM to garner leads for sports events bookings and foster tournament owner relationships helping book, grow existing, or retain at least 30 sports events in Billings. -Continue with Great American West buys to achieve maximum exposure in the following international markets: UK, Germany, Benelux, France, Italy, Australia, New Zealand, and the Nordics. 	GART- Landing Page	2,246	Landing Page Homepage	1,670		
GART- Landing Page	2,246						
Landing Page Homepage	1,670						
<p>Joint Ventures:</p> <p>Objective: Identify joint venture opportunities with Brand MT and/or other Regions/CVBs to partner and elevate mutual goals to attract visitors to destination(s) and/or increase awareness of travel to a destination(s).</p> <p>Visit Billings typically partners with Glacier Country Tourism, Red Lodge CVB, Destination Missoula, and Visit Southeast Montana as well as Brand MT on projects that can be executed as joint venture opportunities.</p> <p>Visit Billings is selective of joint venture opportunities with Brand MT as they vary from year to year, yet it's important to have budget ready if/when an appropriate offering is made available by the Brand MT team. At the same time, opportunities like the Visit Southeast Montana/Visit Billings MSP take-over from spring of 2022, resulted from a collaboration after a standard meeting with VSEMT and VB staff in fall of 2021. These are such opportunities that play out during a fiscal year and are usually not yet known or available at the creation of a budget in Q3 or Q4 of a fiscal year.</p>	<p>Success will be measured by engaging with Brand MT, Regions, and/or CVBs based on joint venture opportunities that align with Visit Billings strategies.</p> <p>Visit Billings staff will collaborate with four (4) Montana DMO partners and Brand MT/Hoffman York (based on FY24 offerings that would align with Visit Billings marketing strategies) on opportunities that are identified for collaboration during FY24.</p> <p>Visit Billings staff will actively pursue partnerships with at least two (2) local businesses, venues, and/or industry leaders where collaborations with such stakeholders are feasible for strategy and/or mission execution. Additional KPIs can be established once opportunities are identified.</p>	<p>Not Available</p>	<p>Not Available</p>				
<p>International Marketplace:</p> <p>Objective: Grow and/or maintain relationships with international tour operators to support Billings stakeholders.</p> <p>it is important for Visit Billings to remain competitive in this segment. Visit Billings plans to attend IPW, International Roundup, and ACGI to help foster efforts to maintain and grow this segment of visitation to Billings.</p>	<p>Metrics for Success:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend IPW 2024 • Attend IRU 2024 • Attend ACGI 2023 (private fund expense) • Host tour operator fams with Brand MT as allotted or available 	<p>Not Available</p>	<p>Not Available</p>				

<p>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 post-pandemic travel habits emerge.</p> <p>Visit Billings will work with Brand MT and partners like Visit Southeast Montana and Rocky Mountain International to remain relevant in the international travel market and to maintain use of current product in the destination.</p>			
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DMO Budget

Allowable Methods	Amount Budgeted	% of Budget Allocated	Amount Expended	% of Budget Expended
Administration	\$98,496.60	20.0	\$0.00	0
Agency Services	\$36,000.00	7.31	\$0.00	0
Earned Media/Tourism Sales	\$33,386.40	6.78	\$0.00	0
Education/Outreach	\$4,000.00	0.81	\$0.00	0
Joint Venture	\$25,000.00	5.08	\$0.00	0
Opportunity Marketing	\$1,000.00	0.2	\$0.00	0
Paid Media	\$148,000.00	30.05	\$0.00	0
Marketing Personnel	\$75,100.00	15.25	\$0.00	0
Research	\$37,000.00	7.52	\$0.00	0
Travel/Trade Shows	\$6,500.00	1.32	\$0.00	0
Visitor Services	\$27,000.00	5.48	\$0.00	0
Website Development (Online, Website, Mobile)	\$1,000.00	0.2	\$0.00	0
	\$492,483.00	100.00	\$0.00	0.00

Narrative Evaluation

Not available until reporting period.

DMO Plan Attachments

Description

File Name

File Size

Reg/CVB Required Documents

Description

File Name

File Size

