

Application Summary

Application: FY25 DMO Plan

Applicant:

Funding opportunity: FY25 DMO Plan

Application Responses

Organization Name: Columbia Falls DMO

First Name: Laura

Last Name: Gadwa

Street Address 1: 233 13th Street East

Street Address 2: Box 312

City: Columbia Falls

State: Montana

Zip: 59912

Funding Opportunity: FY25 DMO Plan

Amount Requested: 38,961.00

General Description Information

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

1a. Destination:

Columbia Falls, Montana is a fast-growing community in Northwest Montana. Columbia Falls is comprised of small, locally owned businesses, mixed with a few larger corporations and manufacturing businesses. Based off the 2022 census results, the population of Columbia Falls is estimated to be 5,656.

The people here are vibrant and passionate about their ability to call this place home. Free time is spent getting out into the great outdoors. Day-to-day life in Columbia Falls is adventurous and neighborly. Our forests, rivers, and fresh air offer year-round recreation opportunities.

Although Columbia Falls and the surrounding smaller communities are at the edge of wilderness, we are not without our comforts. Locals enjoy breweries, open air markets, and live music at both indoor and outdoor venues. Our growing array of restaurants offer delicious local fare of incredible quality. There is one anchor hotel that complements the array of cabins and vacation rentals in the area.

1b. Strengths:

- Columbia Falls is conveniently located within ten minutes of Glacier International Airport, the only airport that services the Flathead Valley and surrounding communities.
- Columbia Falls is close in proximity to Glacier National Park (GNP): With an increase in visitation to

the national park over the last few years, Columbia Falls has continued to grow in restaurants, lodging, and recreational businesses. According to the Glacier National Parks statistics page, 2,933,616 visitors visited Glacier National Park in 2022. This is important as Columbia Falls is the largest city closest to the West entrance of Glacier National Park.

- Columbia Falls offers ample opportunities for year-round recreation. Columbia Falls has multiple City Parks within city limits, access to State Parks, and Forest Service public land all located within a 45-minute radius of Columbia Falls.
- River Access: The Flathead River runs through Columbia Falls, offering numerous river access points.

1c. Opportunities:

Columbia Falls has higher visitation in the summer season so an opportunity is to increase lodging occupancy and visitor spending during the fall, spring, and winter seasons through marketing campaigns. This can be done in part by working with local stakeholders and regional and state tourism partners to increase and grow fall, spring, and winter visitation as well as an increase in targeted, direct marketing efforts during these seasons. The expansion of the revenue through multiple seasons is a key factor in sustainable tourism and the continued growth of local businesses and our community.

Marketing and promoting recreational areas tourists can visit outside of GNP is another opportunity. A few areas we can help disperse tourists to is the Cedar Flats trail system. This trail system, spearheaded by Gateway to Glacier Trails, is planned to be a 25-mile connected system of non-motorized, multi-use trails on Flathead National Forest land north of Columbia Falls. Over ten miles are currently developed for public use with additional trails under construction. Mountain bikers, trail runners, dog walkers, and other outdoor adventurers are already experiencing this local trail system. The continued growth and expansion of this trail system is vital to our area.

Other areas within a 45 minute radius include the Hungry Horse Reservoir, Flathead National Forest Land, and Flathead River. An opportunity is to create a targeted marketing plan that provides opportunities for visitors to stay in Columbia Falls as their home base and then visit attractions outside of Glacier National Park while coming back to Columbia Falls to stay, eat, and shop.

1d. Potential Challenges:

- At times our community, especially during the winter/fall seasons, can be overshadowed by the larger communities in the Flathead Valley.
- Unpredictable weather can make it more challenging for travelers to know what to do in our area during the fall/winter months.
- Helping tourists navigate the status of construction projects, vehicle reservation systems, and road closures in Glacier National Park.
- Bringing awareness to other recreational areas that are potential tourist attractions.
- Education on safety while in the outdoors and knowing how to recreate responsibly.
- Sustainable tourism that the existing infrastructure can handle.

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2. Briefly describe how your destination aligns with the Montana brand or describe the Brand strategy for your DMO.:

The mission of the Columbia Falls Destination Marketing Organization is to promote economic growth, cultural enrichment, and community prosperity by effectively marketing our destination, attracting visitors, and supporting local businesses, while preserving and celebrating our unique heritage and natural resources.

This aligns with Destination MT's marketing and strategic goals as detailed below:

The Montana Brand consists of three pillars:

1. More spectacular, unspoiled nature than anywhere else in the lower 48.
 1. The Columbia Falls DMO works to market our unspoiled nature, as we have ample opportunities around us, including Flathead National Forest, Flathead River, Hungry Horse Reservoir, North Fork of the Flathead, and of course 20 minutes from Glacier National Park. We offer year-round recreational opportunities.
2. Vibrant and charming small towns that serve as gateways to our natural wonders.
 1. Columbia Falls is the epitome of this pillar. We are 20 minutes from Glacier National Park and we provide small-town etiquette, locally-owned restaurants, including one of the best breweries in the state, and local shopping experiences.
3. Breathtaking experiences by day, and relaxing hospitality at night
 1. This is something our DMO is working to promote moving forward. While the town itself is small, the opportunities around us are not. We are working to promote day trip ideas that partner with dinner, live music, and community events in the evening, so visitors explore and then come back to eat, play, and stay in Columbia Falls.

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Destination Marketing:

Destination Management:

Destination Stewardship:

Destination Development:

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

Demographics:

- Based on 2023 data from Xanterra, travelers who had interests in travel, lifestyle and hobbies, media and entertainment, shoppers, and news and politics were the top five user categories by

interest. Also based on their data, travelers aged 35-44 were the most frequent visitors, followed by travelers aged 45-54. 53.4% were female and 46.6% were male.

- Based on Glacier Country Tourism Data:
 - Individuals – Mid-30s+, HHI \$75,000, college graduate, active and affluent, take at least two vacations per year, may be traveling in groups of two or more.
 - Mature geo-traveler couples – 55+, HHI \$75,000, active, and affluent, high-value low-impact couples, may be traveling as groups with other friends and/or extended family Families –
 - Multigenerational travelers, 1 child under the age of 18, HHI \$75,000, active and affluent, in-tune with nature.
 - Repeat Montana target traveler – Has previously visited Montana. Very likely to vacation within U.S. in the next 12 months. Average age 50. HHI \$125k. In-tune with nature.
 - Preserving the environment. Groups – Affinity

Geographics:

- Six major airlines —Alaska, Allegiant, American, Delta, Sun Country, and United — serve the Flathead Valley, with service to hubs in Seattle, Salt Lake City, Minneapolis, Denver and Las Vegas. These carriers link travelers to national and international destinations. In addition to daily and weekly service through these main hubs, direct seasonal flights with various carriers are also available to New York, Los Angeles, Dallas, Chicago, Houston, San Francisco, Minneapolis / St. Paul, Oakland, Phoenix, San Diego, Burbank, and Portland.
- Drive Markets within 600 Miles: Idaho (Coeur d'Alene), Washington (Spokane) and Wyoming (Based off information from Glacier Country Tourism)
- Canada: Calgary, Edmonton, Alberta, Vancouver, and British Columbia

Psychographics:

- Stewardship and responsible travelers who are respectful to our residents and destination.
- Outdoor Recreation and Adventurers - Experiences for all abilities including, but not limited to, snowshoeing, snowmobiling, hiking, biking, river access, rafting, fishing, hunting, sight-seeing, camping, and ice climbing.
- Travelers seeking authentic experiences such as local breweries, distilleries and wineries, small town date nights, outdoor recreation, local festivals/events, dude-ranches, authentic cabin rentals, and cultural experiences.

3b. What research supports your DMO strategy? :

- Based off our 2023 bed tax revenue received, the revenue collected through the bed tax data was substantially different in the summer season compared to fall, spring, and winter seasons. In 2023, our FY23 1st quarter revenue was \$6,200, 2nd quarter revenue was \$19,091 and 3rd Quarter revenue was \$2,864.00. As shown by these numbers, our summer season is substantially higher, so a focus on fall, spring, and winter is vital.

- Data from Glacier Park International Airport (GPIA) also reflects the need for additional targeted marketing in the non-summer season.

Enplanement data from GPIA for 2023 by month is as follows:

- Jan 2023: 30,846
- Feb. 2023: 28,310
- March 2023: 30,880
- April 2023: 22,261
- May 2023: 27,287
- June 2023: 46,773
- July 2023: 69,786
- August 2023: 67,576
- September 2023: 50,506
- October 2023: 31,122
- November 2023: 24,843
- December 2023: 25,633

3c. What are your emerging markets?:

Emerging markets for our area include outreach to Canada, local Montana's, drive markets, and direct flight markets targeting audiences that are coming to visit who will recreate responsibly, be respectful of people here live here, respect our natural resources, and engage in our communities and local lifestyles. Based off information from Zartico, targeting areas that spend and engage in respectful ways with our local events and lodging is an emerging market for us. Looking at what they are doing, where they staying, what they are spending money on is important and a way to target another market. Last year was our first year as a designated DMO. During that year, we were finding platforms that helped us to find the research. This year we will dive into using and focusing on specific data found on those platforms.

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

Our overall goal is to grow and help increase shoulder season visitation to help support our business community and the tourism industry year-round. We want to focus on the fall, spring, and winter seasons to help better develop an understanding for residents and travelers of the opportunities that are available during these months. This will be done through a targeted marketing campaign consisting of multiple media and targeting direct flight and drive markets. A second overall goal is to focus on current resident sentiment and educate on the importance and value of sustainable tourism to our local economy.

Destination Marketing:

Targeting local markets, direct flights, and drive markets, we will develop paid media campaigns to promote the areas recreation, lodging, attractions, trip planning ideas, and provide a recreational printed map to promote activities outside of GNP. The largest piece of our plan will focus on destination marketing and promoting areas in the shoulder seasons outside of GNP.

Educational Component: We plan to work directly with local stakeholders in the tourism industry and create a resident survey to gather data so we can develop a marketing campaign for “why tourism matters” and “why it is important to our local economy”.

Consumer Messaging: An important piece of our messaging will focus on the safety of the traveler and how to recreate responsibly. Learning about the region and how to recreate safely is a vital piece of successful tourism marketing and campaigns.

Goal 1: Develop a social media campaign to promote fall, spring, and winter visitation to target market audiences, based on drive and flight markets.

Goal 2: Work with a website developer to increase the search engine optimization (SEO) on the Columbia Falls DMO website and landing pages.

Goal 3: Print and distribute a year-round recreational map featuring opportunities outside of Glacier National Park and distribute it to local, direct flight, and drive markets.

Goal 4: Host resident round table discussions and stakeholder meetings to gather input and develop a resident sentiment survey. This information will be used to further the discussion on the value and importance of tourism to our local community and economy. Data will also be used to help promote sustainable tourism.

5. Define and describe your overall objectives. Objectives are formed from your goals. They are logical, attainable steps to achieve the goals and are able to be measured.:

Objectives/Metrics/Evaluation:

Objectives	Measurable Measure for Success	Report the Metric Achieved
Enhance reach and promotion through social media and website platforms for fall, spring, and winter tourism by creating engaging and educational content showcasing fall, spring, and winter seasons, including photo, video, drone, and overall content generation and distribution.	Increase Columbia Falls bed tax for FY25 by 2% during fall, winter and spring.	

Hold round table discussions and develop a resident sentiment survey from Columbia Falls Residents on tourism.	Create and distribute a resident sentiment survey by the end of FY25.	
Print and distribute a year-round recreational map featuring opportunities outside of Glacier National Park and distribute it to local, direct flight, and drive markets.	The map is printed and distributed to a minimum of 20 local businesses, 5 drive market locations, and 3 direct flight market locations by end of FY25.	

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Budget Form: FY25 DMO Budget Form.xlsx

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DMO Budget:

Columbia Falls DMO

Allowable Method	Amount Budgeted	% Budgeted	Amend +/-	Updated Budget	% Budgeted
Administration	\$7,792.20	20.00%	\$0.00	\$7,792.20	20.00%
Education/Outreach	\$2,337.66	6.00%	\$0.00	\$2,337.66	6.00%
Opportunity Marketing	\$3,896.10	10.00%	\$0.00	\$3,896.10	10.00%
Marketing Personnel	\$2,337.66	6.00%	\$0.00	\$2,337.66	6.00%
Paid Media	\$8,961.03	23.00%	\$0.00	\$8,961.03	23.00%
Visitor Services	\$7,792.20	20.00%	\$0.00	\$7,792.20	20.00%
Website Development (Online, Website, Mobile)	\$2,337.66	6.00%	\$0.00	\$2,337.66	6.00%
Research	\$2,727.27	7.00%	\$0.00	\$2,727.27	7.00%
Earned Media/Tourism Sales	\$779.22	2.00%	\$0.00	\$779.22	2.00%
	\$0.00	0.00%	\$0.00	\$0.00	0.00%
	\$0.00	0.00%	\$0.00	\$0.00	0.00%

	\$0.00	0.00%	\$0.00	\$0.00	0.00%
	\$0.00	0.00%	\$0.00	\$0.00	0.00%
	\$0.00	0.00%	\$0.00	\$0.00	0.00%
	\$0.00	0.00%	\$0.00	\$0.00	0.00%
TOTAL BUDGET	\$38,961.00	100.00%	\$0.00	\$38,961.00	100.00%

Revenue Projection	\$38,961.00
Funds not spent during previous fiscal year	\$0.00
Rollover Funds at Commerce	\$0.00
Allocated Following Audit	\$0.00
Budget increase total	\$38,961.00

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Narrative Evaluation: