

Application Summary

Application: FY25 DMO Plan

Applicant: Helena Area Chamber of Commerce

Funding opportunity: FY25 DMO Plan

Application Responses

Organization Name: Helena Area Chamber of Commerce

First Name: Callie

Last Name: Aschim

Street Address 1: 225 N Cruse Avenue

Street Address 2: Suite A

City: Helena

State: MT

Zip: 59601

Funding Opportunity: FY25 DMO Plan

Amount Requested: 189,000

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:

Helena exists as a crossroads between past and present, tame and untamed, mountainous wilderness and hometown warmth. A place where you can hike for miles without seeing a soul, stroll through our charming downtown, and enjoy breweries with breathtaking views—all in the same day. Some say Helena has long been blessed. From the early roots of Blackfeet, Salish, Crow and Bannock tribes who found this land abundant with bison and natural resources—to the four lucky prospectors who, in their last efforts, struck gold in 1864—Helena is a place rich with history, beauty, and life. Most importantly, it is the authenticity of the true Montana spirit - welcoming and friendly - that sets Helena apart as a destination. With a thriving downtown full of entrepreneurs with that same "strike it rich" spirit as the prospectors who founded our area, Helena has an energy that sets it apart from the rest of the state (*from visithelenamt.com*).

With the opening of the Montana Museum in late 2025, Helena has a unique opportunity to showcase our city's many other assets to the rest of the state. Working in partnerships with our local economic development agency, Montana Business Assistance Connection (MBAC), Visit Helena (TBID), the Downtown Business Improvement District (BID) and the cities of Helena and East Helena, we have held stakeholder meetings with the Montana Historical Society to discuss best practices in opening the museum, preparing our area for the increase in visitation and how to connect our downtown corridor with the capital complex. We are creative in our solutions, discussing natural wayfinding using the abundance of nature and community support and creative in using the limited funding our organizations collectively

have to pursue front line training and workforce development opportunities.

Since 2022, the CVB worked has worked closely with Visit Helena on their rebranding efforts to give Helena a consistent voice and brand. Simply put, the goal of the rebranding was to enhance the visitor economy. In support of that goal three objectives were established:

- Develop a brand that improves the community experience and product offerings that stimulate long-term growth in tourism, workforce, and business development.
- Define how the visitor economy in Helena can be leveraged more strategically to drive sustainable growth and equitable community development.
- Establish a brand which begets community pride and endorsement.

Through this effort, we have been able to be consistent in our brand marketing, with the Helena CVB deferring to the Visit Helena logo and brand colors in our visitor communication. We have also worked very hard to "speak the same language" and focus on offering an authentic experience when you visit Helena. Our locals are proud of where they live and the amenities that Helena has to offer. We want our visitors to feel that enthusiasm and spirit and feel like they are "one of us" when vacationing here. The brand voice focuses heavily on promoting inclusivity and diversity in Helena, as well as family and small business-friendliness of community.

In the last year, the CVB has focused our marketing efforts on building a pathway for visitors with many interests to discover Montana's hometown, Helena. We were able to incorporate the rebranding initiative from the previous year into our messaging. We developed rich content that was delivered through a variety of outreach tools, including HTML emails, native content, e-newsletters, and video. We targeted adventure travelers with the opportunity to experience mountain biking, fishing, hiking, and camping. Families with children who find joy in social events, outdoor activities, and rural sightseeing along with historic places and museums that offer a treasure trove of knowledge for curious minds. And last, but certainly not least, our treasured history buffs who are drawn to Helena's historical attractions to uncover stories of the past that shaped the Queen City, all set against the backdrop of Montana's natural wonders. Again, this year we timed our messaging to include outreach in the fall, spring, and warm season. We were very pleased that we had another successful fall campaign, and currently we are in the midst of the spring and warm season campaigns for this year. We will be evaluating all three campaigns in early summer and will develop a final FY24 wrap-up report to be delivered in the late summer and prior to FY25 strategic outreach media and message planning.

1b. Strengths:

To attract tourists to our destination, Helena offers the following: Outdoor recreation abounds with fishing, hunting, hiking, camping, boating, rafting, downhill and cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, mountain biking, golfing, and horseback riding. Visitors can enjoy the Gates of the Mountains, the mighty Missouri River, Holter Lake, Canyon Ferry Lake, Hauser Lake, Spring Meadow Lake, Great Divide Ski Area, Montana WILD, and over 80 miles of trails on readily accessible public lands. Helena has received several

designations that make it desirable to visitors, including International Mountain Bicycling Association Ride Center's Silver Level Designation, Rand McNally Best of the Road for Geocaching, USA Today's 10th Best State Capital Worth Visiting, and many more. Arts and culture, such as Grandstreet Theatre, Montana Shakespeare Company, Great Northern Carousel, Holter Museum of Art, Myrna Loy Center for the Performing and Media Arts, Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts, ExplorationWorks, Clay Arts Guild of Helena, Cathedral of Saint Helena, Carroll College, Queen City Ballet, Helena Symphony Orchestra and Chorale, and Civic Center events. Helena is central to Montana history with historical attractions such as Montana's Museum at the Montana Historical Society, "Montana's Most Historic Mile" Last Chance Gulch, Original Governor's Mansion, Historic Mansion District, Reeder's Alley, nearby ghost towns, Gates of the Mountains, Lewis and Clark Trail, Montana Military Museum, Montana's State Capitol Building, The Foundation for Montana History's Walking and Riding Tours, and the Last Chance Tour Train. Special events and festivals throughout the year, including the Last Chance Stampede and Rodeo, Governor's Cup Race, Farmers' Market, Downtown Helena's Art Walks and Wednesday's Alive at Five, Symphony Under the Stars, Made in Montana Trade Show, Montana Learning Center's Beyond the Big Sky Astro-tourism events, state sports tournaments, and many other regional events. Conveniently and centrally located, Helena is a perfect stop for activities and overnight stays for those traveling all across the state and specifically between Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks.

1c. Opportunities:

As we are turning our attention to FY25, we are genuinely excited about the opportunity our visitors will have in late-2025 with the opening of the newly remodeled Montana Historical Society facility. This will provide our visitors with a first-class experience and will create interest in the varied historic experiences Helena offers. We are a community that is steeped in a very rich and intriguing history! We would be remiss not to continue our promotion of the epic outdoor recreation that surrounds the community including iconic mountains, plentiful waterways, scenic trails, and abundant wildlife. And our vibrant community continues to grow and offer attributes, including musical and educational events, culinary exploration, distilleries, breweries, wine tasting rooms, coffee shops, galleries, boutique and specialty shopping experiences, tours, and festivals.

We will continue to partner with our Vision Helena group made up of MBAC, Visit Helena, the BID, and local city governments to work on best practices in opening the museum and supporting our hospitality partners through the increase in visitation. We have opportunities to connect the downtown corridor, the historic Governor's Mansion (located on 6th Ave) and the Capital Complex through wayfinding and walking opportunities. We also have incredible opportunities with our attractions, such as the Tour Train, our Historical Walking Tours (through the Montana Historical Foundation) and the Pedal Pub which also gives historical tours. These opportunities will allow visitors to extend their visit while they are here seeing the museum to take in some of the other history Helena has to offer.

1d. Potential Challenges:

Helena's marketing efforts are often challenged by the following:

Many of our businesses are still struggling with a shortage of labor, causing limited hours and long wait times for services.

The cost of airfare, limited flights, and flexibility of connections as well as limited public transportation, both from outside and inside the city of Helena.

Limited large-scale convention and event facilities.

Limited signage directing visitors to Helena attractions on interstate highways and within the city.

Helena events are seeing increased competition from other Montana towns' events. Helena is working to secure High School events, such as State cross country, soccer, and other events that fit into the limited infrastructure and space availability in the community.

Lack of extended store, shopping, and attraction hours to accommodate tourists. While still an issue, storeowner education and downtown events have made headway in resolving this challenge.

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

Montana's Brand Pillars are a perfect match with what Helena offers visitors.

More spectacular unspoiled nature than anywhere else in the lower 48 states.

Vibrant and charming small towns that serve as gateways to the state's natural wonders.

Breathtaking experiences by day and relaxing hospitality at night.

Nestled against the Rocky Mountains, opening into a lush valley, and surrounded by pristine mountains, rivers, and lakes highlights the spectacular unspoiled nature that can be found just outside the city limits.

Helena has all the amenities of a big city but with a small-town feel.

Whether it is the panoramic views from atop MacDonald Pass or watching a resident artist create their next piece at Archie Bray, Helena offers visitors unique and breathtaking experiences that can't be found elsewhere.

Stroll along the walking mall to explore the many local shops. Or relax and enjoy some Helena flavor at a local restaurant, brewery, or distillery.

And at the end of the day, visitors can choose from historic bed and breakfasts or established hotels offering hometown Montana hospitality.

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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):

Consumer Target Demographics:

A) Travelers visiting family and friends: These are adults 35+ years of age, traveling with or without children. If they are traveling with children, the children are under the age of 18. They are affluent and have a household income of \$75,000+, participate in scenic trips, photography, biking, hiking, fishing, wildlife viewing, skiing, and snowmobiling. These travelers enjoy outdoor activities, hands-on experiences, and tend to visit state parks, museums, historic trails, and nature areas. They enjoy unique dining experiences, craft breweries, and music venues.

B) Leisure travelers: Adults 35+ years of age. They are affluent and have a household income of \$75,000+ and travel with or without children in the summer months. They participate in shopping, attend social/family events, outdoor activities, rural sightseeing, historic tours, and visit historic sites and museums.

C) Adventure travelers: Adults 30+ years of age, traveling with or without children. They have an affluent household income of \$75,000+. They enjoy and participate in outdoor activities, such as mountain biking, fishing, hiking/backpacking, camping, water recreation, skiing, and snowmobiling. They also enjoy unique dining experiences, craft breweries, and music venues.

D) History buffs: Adults 35+ years of age, traveling with or without children. They have an affluent household income of \$75,000+. These visitors rate "historic attractions" as an extremely important attribute in selecting travel destinations. They have an interest in connection to the past to understand how it shapes hopes for the future. Visiting museums and important historic sites puts them in touch with history, inspires curiosity, and fosters learning. Consumer Target Geographic Markets: Shoulder Season: regional drive markets, including WA, ID, WY, ND, MT (outside of the Helena DMA), Alberta, and Saskatchewan. Warm Season: Primary: WA, ID, UT, CA, TX, OR, IL, CO, WY, ND, MN, AZ, WI. Secondary: Montana (outside of the Helena DMA), Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Consumer Target Psychographics: The psychographic characteristics of Helena CVB's target market include:

Travelers – Family/Friends and Leisure Travelers: - Nature and recreation lovers - Activity seekers - Room to roam - Affinity for nature - Seeking connection with family and friends - Enjoy unique culinary experiences, craft breweries/distilleries with connection to artisans - Like varied music offerings from small groups to medium-sized concerts - Want true and authentic experiences - What to relax and unwind

Adventure Travelers: - Nature and recreation lovers - Activity and adventure seekers - Exploration drives

them - Room to roam - What to be outside and have access to mountains, trails, and water activities - Affinity for nature and the environment - Enjoy unique culinary experiences, craft breweries/distilleries with connection to artisans - Like varied music offerings from small groups to medium-sized concerts - Want true and authentic experiences.

History Buffs: - History and preservation lovers - They are curious by nature and want to understand stories of the past - Appreciate the opportunity to hear from experts - Want activities that are immersive and educational - Seeking connection with family and friends - Want true and authentic experiences - What to relax and unwind.

3b. What research supports your DMO strategy? :

The Helena CVB utilizes the following research resources when planning and executing our DMO Marketing Plan.

-ITRR to refine target audiences, including why visitors are attracted to Montana.

-The Helenamt.com website analytics help measure the success of tactics used in our consumer marketing and advertising efforts by measuring current users, new users, session time, and campaign timing statistics.

-National Park Service Visitation Stats provides data on visitation for Glacier and Yellowstone, which guides our focus on being a hub between the two parks.

-Brand.mt.gov – for Montana brand usage and joint venture opportunities.

-brewersassociation.org – providing information regarding the economic impact of breweries in the U.S. economy. A resource for content development of blogs and native content.

-voicesoftourism.com/research – providing specific tourism-related data and legislative actions for Montana.

-Helena Regional Airport Visitor Device Data – keeping us up to date on airline usage and travel in and out of Helena.

-Smith Travel Research Report – Monthly STR Report revealing the steady rebound with our lodging facilities.

-Placer.ai - Database to research where travelers are come from, how they are getting here (most used routes), where they are going during their visit

-The Helena CVB also relies on our agency partner to make recommendations that fit our targeting with the comprehensive research resources they have access to, such as Nielsen Ratings and Nielsen Digital Ad Ratings, CEB Iconoculture Consumer Insights, ComScore, Quantcast, and Resonate Consumer Research and Data. These tools provide access to ratings, circulation numbers, web usage stats, core forecasting information, consumer psychographics, and media usage trends. These resources help guide highly

targeted and cost-effective media strategies.

3c. What are your emerging markets?:

Helena has two emerging markets. We will reach these markets through our strategic planned tactics included in our annual marketing plan and through creative message and content development.

Primary – History and Cultural Heritage: This year we want to put focus on the opening of the newly remodeled Montana Historical Society Museum in early 2025. This is an exciting opportunity to share a new part of Helena’s deep historic and cultural heritage. It is also an opportunity to combine the many other tourism attractions and activities into our messaging, showcasing the abundant history and cultural offerings Helena provides. An example of a sub-set visitor activity that could be included in marketing content surrounding history and cultural heritage is The Foundation for Montana History’s Helena History Tours. These walking and riding tours are offered during the summer and fall with 168 total tours available. Themes of these tours include Adventure on the Ambrose Trail, Pedaling through the Past, Breweries and Brothels, Miners to Millionaires, Rediscover Reeder’s Alley, and the very popular fall tour Ghost Gulch Haunted Tour.

Secondary - Astro-tourism: There is still much interest in astro-tourism, and Helena has the unique opportunity to offer tourists the programs and observatories at The Montana Learning Center (MLC) at Canyon Ferry Lake. This year, MLC is embarking on its third year of offering visitors the chance to enjoy stargazing experiences with the Beyond the Big Sky speaker series. This program allows visitors to gaze at the wonders of the universe through two-state-of-the-art telescopes while hearing from experts in the field of astronomy. This prestigious speaker series is open to the public and provides an exciting connection to the astronomy world that is not commonplace in Montana. From June through August, MLC opens its observatories for these very special events.

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

Goal 1) Raise awareness of Helena's recreational, cultural, and historical attractions and activities and increase visitation in the warm and shoulder seasons. During FY23 and FY24 we expanded our marketing windows to include shoulder season promotion to alleviate some pressure on attractions and services during the high traffic summer months. For FY25, we plan to develop a fall shoulder season campaign (September – October), based on the large success of the previous two years. And we will combine our spring and warm season into one campaign to provide marketing from April – June to reach our audiences in the prime tourism attraction season for Helena. This is an effort to ensure that we’re using our marketing dollars in the most effective and efficient way. We will develop targeted and strategic advertising campaigns for both the fall and warm seasons with the intent to continue to grow visitation to Helena and the surrounding area.

Goal 2) Continue to build upon marketing opportunities with other tourism partners, including the Helena

TBID, Helena Regional Airport, Southwest Montana Tourism Region, and Montana Office of Tourism (Brand MT). Helena TBID – we will continue to work closely with the Helena TBID for website content development as it relates to our advertising campaigns. We have effectively incorporated branding elements from the community brand initiative to ensure that we're being consistent with tourism messaging for the CVB and the TBID. We also share creative assets with each other, such as photography and videography, to help our dollars stretch as far as possible. The Helena Regional Airport is important to our visitor recruitment efforts, and we have had the opportunity to partner together and build successful campaigns to encourage flights in and out of Helena in the past. The Airport is also a great resource for data, such as passenger traffic numbers, that support our marketing efforts. We will continue to provide content for the tourism information center that is located at the airport terminal. Southwest Montana Tourism Region provides an opportunity to share the Helena message through inclusion in the Southwest Montana Travel Planner. As the largest community in the region, it is important that we have a strong presence in that publication. Montana Office of Tourism (Brand MT) provides a wealth of research to support our marketing plan along with brand guidance. As we did in FY24, we will look forward to participating in Joint Venture opportunities as they become available.

Goal 3) Increase awareness of Helena as a destination and encourage visitors to Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks to take advantage of Helena as a travel destination hub due to its convenient geographical location. Communicating our convenient geographical location is something that we will continue to provide within our creative message and content development for print and digital advertising campaigns. Over the last several years, we have partnered with the Yellowstone Journal with ad placement, printed and online content, and a lead generation effort. This has been hugely successful in helping build an extensive database of contacts to share information on the varied travel opportunities in the Helena area.

Goal 4) Develop a strategic and comprehensive digital campaign that will reach our desired audiences and drive them to our website and social channels where we can track usage and engagement. As a DMO whose focus is the promotion of the Helena area to increase the number of visitors, we will be directing a substantial portion of our marketing funds to develop strategic digital communications outreach plans. Digital assets will include eye-catching images that encourage engagement with links to specific pages with relevant content within Helenamt.com. Tactics that we have found success with include Google AdWords, strategic programmatic placement of digital assets, targeted video and audio messages, HTML email distribution, and extensive native content to drive interest.

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 METRICS FOR SUCCESS	REPORT THE METRIC ACHIEVED	EVALUATION OF SUCCESSFUL METRICS
Goal 1) Raise awareness of Helena's recreational, cultural, and historical attractions and activities and increase visitation in the fall and warm seasons	a) Increase overall lodging tax collections from July 2024 through June 2025 by 3% 2) Increase lodging tax collections in our fall season (September 24-		

	December 24) by 2%		
Goal 2) Cooperative marketing effort with the Helena TBID to promote local events as tourist attractions to allow our visitors to "vacation like a local". We have focused on the weekly Alive at 5 event and our Symphony Under the Stars partnerships.	A successful partnership venture between the Helena CVB, Helena TBID, and the selected tourism-related organization will be indicated by increased visitation to their event (tracked by visitor data from Placer.ai) year over year.		
Goal 3) To continue to use the Yellowstone Journal advertisement as a lead generation effort to build on our current HTML email list.	Increase our email list by 500 emails through July 2025.		
Goal 4) Develop a strategic advertising strategy that promotes Helena during the fall shoulder season (September – October) and the warm season (April – August). These campaigns will include a comprehensive and integrated digital strategy coupled with a small print supporting effort.	The tracking metrics for this campaign will meet or exceed industry benchmarks and include engagements, circulation, web usage statistics, CPC, CPM, etc. Beyond these successes, increase website traffic to visithelenamt.com by 10%		

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Budget Form: Helena DMO FY25 budget.xlsx

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DMO Budget:

Helena DMO

Allowable Method	Amount Budgeted	% Budgeted	Amend +/-	Updated Budget	% Budgeted
Administration	\$37,800.00	20.00%	\$0.00	\$37,800.00	20.00%
Agency Services	\$10,300.00	5.45%	\$0.00	\$10,300.00	5.45%
Paid Media	\$98,200.00	51.96%	\$0.00	\$98,200.00	51.96%
Education/Outreach	\$1,700.00	0.90%	\$0.00	\$1,700.00	0.90%
Marketing Resources	\$33,000.00	17.46%	\$0.00	\$33,000.00	17.46%
Opportunity Marketing	\$8,000.00	4.23%	\$0.00	\$8,000.00	4.23%
	\$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%
	\$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	\$189,000.00	100.00%	\$0.00	\$189,000.00	100.00%

Revenue Projection	\$189,000.00
Funds not spent during previous fiscal year	\$0.00
Rollover Funds at Commerce	\$0.00
Allocated Following Audit	\$0.00
Budget increase total	\$189,000.00

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Narrative Evaluation:

Will be used in the evaluation process.