



**HELENA**  
M O N T A N A

# Helena Tourism Business Improvement District Fiscal Year 2023-2024 Work Plan

## 1 ORGANIZATION SUMMARY

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The Helena Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID) continues to base our marketing and product development strategies on our mission.

The TBID is funded by a room assessment that the hoteliers voted into action to help market Helena. The TBID operates under the direction of the TBID Board of Directors and reports to the City of Helena.

The Helena Tourism Alliance (HTA) is the administrative organization of the TBID. The TBID Board meets monthly on the second Wednesday of every month at 1:30 pm in the Reeder's Alley Conference Center, 120 Reeder's Alley.

### Helena TBID Organizational Mission

To promote and preserve Helena as a unique destination in order to increase occupancy for lodging facilities thereby creating vibrant growth in the local economy.

## Helena TBID Organizational Vision

The Helena TBID is the premier partner and leading advocate for Helena's quintessential experiences and profound opportunities.

## Helena TBID Organizational Values

- Integrity
- Innovation
- Communication
- Participation
- Effective Teamwork

## Helena TBID Organizational Goals

1. Community Partnerships: Build relationships with the community and make a coordinated effort to communicate effectively.
2. Market Helena: Develop a marketing plan that builds awareness, educates, and utilizes extension partnerships.
3. Big Picture: Explore additional partnership opportunities by identifying unique travel experiences utilizing unconventional ideas.
4. Organizational Development: Create training to develop innovative board members, staff, and stakeholders to enhance participation.

## 2 INTRODUCTION

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The role of the typical Destination Marketing Organization (DMO), like Visit Helena, is evolving to fulfill a new role in communities. DMOs are no longer meant to just develop clever advertising campaigns. Organizations like Visit Helena are expanding from DMOs (Destination Marketing Organizations) to DMMOs (Destination Management and Marketing Organizations). DMMOs still advertise and market their destination, but now they also foster the entire visitor experience from beginning to end. It's not just about bringing people to Helena; it's about elevating the customer experience once they get here.

In addition to traditional marketing channels, Visit Helena will also step into the destination management role by working more closely with community organizations, such as the Helena Area Chamber of Commerce and Convention and Visitors Bureau; Helena Business Improvement District & Downtown Helena, Inc.; Montana Business Assistance Connection; and many more.

One of the ultimate goals of tourism is to increase quality of life for residents of a destination. When Visit Helena brings in visitors, it boosts economic impact. When the Helena area economy thrives, the resident experience also thrives. But it is a delicate balance. Visit Helena will also focus on supporting sustainability and stewardship of the destination.

Visit Helena will work to identify & support destination product development opportunities.

### 3 LEISURE RECRUITMENT

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The TBID's overall leisure marketing strategy is to increase year-round visitation targeting regional, national, and international visitors. Strategies and goals will continue to be assessed and expanded and will focus on creative marketing to reach new and existing travelers.

The TBID will closely monitor opportunities for consumer trade shows including the Denver Travel and Adventure Show, Dallas Travel and Adventure Show, and The Outdoor Adventure & Travel Show in Calgary, among others.

The TBID will work with regional and state partners to monitor the international landscape, while continuing to foster partnerships with domestic and international tour operators. In addition, we will weigh the option to participate in international travel recruitment shows like IPW, the travel industry's premier international marketplace and the largest generator of travel to the U.S and Rocky Mountain International (RMI)/The Real America) which markets to travel agents from western European nations such as the UK, France, Italy, Germany, etc.

### 4 YELLOWSTONE & GLACIER NATIONAL PARKS

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For people exploring Montana's National Parks, Helena offers the perfect half-way destination. Helena is 178 miles from the west entrance of Yellowstone National Park and 187 miles from the eastern portion of Going to the Sun Road in Glacier National Park, making us the perfect location to overnight and/or spend several days.

Helena will continue to position the community as the half-way destination between the parks and highlight that traveling this route offers fabulous scenery; some of Montana's most special heritage places; and an opportunity to relax and take a break.

In addition, our social media, SEO, and web content will also focus on Helena as a great place for starting a Montana vacation, redesigning the Between the Parks message as Montana's Destination. Helena is centrally located and should be the launching point for visitors to explore Montana's true heritage.

## 5 THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

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Designing a quality visitor experience has been a high priority of Visit Helena. The TBID will continue to work to align our destination's stakeholders, businesses, and front-line employees to support tourism and assist in facilitating and meeting visitor expectations. Ensuring visitors have positive experiences will directly impact the future of tourism in Helena, Montana.

The goal is to successfully align the following sectors because we all benefit from a positive visitor experience:

- Hotel / Lodging
- Attractions
- Downtown Merchants
- Restaurants
- Shopping / Retail
- Realtors
- Citizens / Volunteers

Making sure travelers feel welcomed and enjoy their stay is a major priority. Visit Helena is collaborating with our regional partners in Southwest Montana to determine streamlined ways to offer Front-Line Training to help those working with visitors every day be informed about what Helena has to offer. Front-line employees are given the resources and the knowledge that they need to positively impact the visitor experience as well as increase the length of their stay.

Visit Helena understands that the visitor experience plays one of the most important roles in maintaining and growing visitation at a destination. Exceptional service leads to repeat visitation and extended stays. Employees drive the customer experience. By developing and providing this resource for the hospitality industry and business community it will shine a light on the importance of visitor orientation and facilitation which will help elevate the city and champion visitation.

As Visit Helena approaches the 2023 warm season, we are working to offer several ways to orient and facilitate the visitor through additional channels of communication.

With the new Events page on [www.helenamt.com](http://www.helenamt.com), we will continually lean into utilizing this platform to ensure visitors are aware and can take advantage of the local opportunities and hopefully even extend their stay.

## 6 GROUP TRAVEL & MEETINGS

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The TBID works to monitor and evaluate our efforts on developing the group travel market. If appropriate, we will be members of the American Bus Association (ABA) and the National Tour Association (NTA) and will continue to assess whether to attend NTA Travel Exchange or ABA's Marketplace.

TBID will continue to encourage our local community to bring meetings to Helena and will collaborate with the Helena Convention and Visitors Bureau. Efforts will focus on small market meetings. Growth in this segment will help support seasonality in hotel occupancy, and impact the local economy by filling restaurants, retailers, and attractions.

## 7 TBID GRANT PROGRAM

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The TBID Grant Program was revamped in FY22 to build upon the vibrancy of the community and inspire innovative and creative ideas for events or signature experiences; provide funding in the early planning stages; and maximize regional and national exposure by promoting the events early enough for visitors to include in their itinerary. The grant program has provided financial assistance in supporting sports and tournaments, music festivals, outdoor recreation events and a variety of other events.

The TBID is committed to developing a more year-round tourism base and contributing to a healthy local economy by supporting local activities, spending, tax generation and jobs through increased visitation to the area. Therefore, we will actively promote and market this program and invite local organizations and businesses to apply for grant monies with the purpose to grow the local tourism economy through increased visitor spending in Helena's lodging establishments, retail, restaurant, transportation, and attractions.

## 8 SPORT EVENTS & TOURNAMENTS

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The TBID is extremely pleased that Special Olympics of Montana (SOMT) has selected Helena as the site for the State Basketball Tournament which will take place each November from 2023-2025. We will work to support SOMT as well as connect them with local resources.

The TBID will continue to work with the Helena School District on bids for Montana High School Association Events. Even though Helena is limited with indoor facilities, we are keeping Helena actively involved in the bid process and are on the rotation cycle for tournaments. The TBID stays in close contact with the athletic director.

The TBID will continue to build relationships and support local sports organizations and be a valuable resource to tournament directors and associations in efforts to host and grow competitions that draw athletes and fans from across the region generating room nights for lodging partners.

We are centrally located and a community-based town and are in full support of our youth programs. Positioning Helena as a sports event destination remains a priority for Visit Helena with staff looking at new opportunities such as robotics, e-sports competition, etc. and partnerships to help shape the future of sports events and sports tourism in Helena.

## 9 ARTS & CULTURE

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The TBID will promote arts and culture in Helena. We will emphasize that Helena has a great deal to offer those who appreciate the fine arts: The Archie Bray Foundation for Ceramic Arts, Holter Museum of Art, Montana Historical Society Museum, Grand Street Theatre, Myrna Loy Center for the Performing and Visual Arts, and Helena Symphony. Numerous fine art galleries showing all types of art from traditional to contemporary and more, provide Helena with a solid mix of culture that will be highlighted.

## 10 HERITAGE TOURISM & OUTDOOR RECREATION

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Visit Helena is working with the Montana History Foundation to promote a program called Helena History Hikes. This program is designed to promote heritage tourism and outdoor recreation by showcasing Helena's regional history through exploration of its surrounding environment.

Direct beneficiaries include Helena residents and tourists, with the broader economy of Helena serving as a secondary beneficiary. While Helena is surrounded by hundreds of miles of trails and marketed as offering "day hikes, mountain bikes, and Old West history", no combination of these subjects is offered as a guided or interpreted experience. Helena History Hikes is filling this void, offering visitors the opportunity to day hike and explore history. These guided hikes investigate the interrelationships between human activity and the environment, bridging the divide between the urban and the wild, the human and non-human, and the sciences and the humanities.

The summer of 2023 will include the following tours:

- Adventure on the Ambrose Trail
- Breweries and Brothels
- Miners to Millionaires

Tours are offered at regularly scheduled afternoon and evening times. All tours will be available for private group tour bookings as well as a "History Triple Play" offer so that visitors will be encouraged to stay additional nights to participate in all three guided experiences.

## 11 MARKETING METHODS

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Aspects of the tourism industry are forever shifting, so we continue to look for ways to provide offerings that make Helena attractive for in-state, regional, national, and international travelers. Building off the Montana Brand Pillars and the Helena Marketing Plan we will continue to follow the three phases of the travel decision process – inspiration, orientation, and facilitation and highlight strong imagery and stories of people and activities in and around Helena.

There were great strides that have been made with the City of Helena and other community partners working cohesively on a unified brand and messaging and a strategic roadmap. We will continue to work to strengthen community vitality; competitive positioning; and ensure the long-term viability of Helena.

The benefits of technology provide people the opportunity to have a greater choice in deciding where they want to visit and live. Helena's mix of natural resources and recreational opportunities provides the resources necessary to be a premier destination. To establish Helena as a destination in the minds of both consumers and businesses, it is critical to lean into our new brand and utilize a strong, unified brand voice along with messaging and positioning that will raise overall awareness.

Supporting a strong destination brand will help build a sense of community that will support business and economic stability. The new branding and marketing initiative are the first step in a larger vision to strengthen collaboration between the City of Helena, county, community business leaders and organizations into an integrated approach to preserve Helena as well as take advantage of opportunities for future growth.

The TBID understands the critical need for effective content in today's ultra-competitive marketplace and will continue to work closely with the local creative marketing agency SOVRN.

The TBID continues to give Helena a strong presence in social media and grow our audience. Digital marketing continues to be important for our destination marketing organization as we vie against competing markets. The Media Plan will be primarily digital allowing the plan to stay flexible with recurrent changes in creative and messaging. Search engine optimization (SEO), social media marketing, website optimization, and email marketing are a variety of elements we will utilize to help us grow our tourism & destination business.

## 12 MEDIA RELATION AND OUTREACH

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Highlighting Helena in a positive way and ensuring our story is heard is something we value, which is why we want to increase earned media.

Throughout the year, Visit Helena will continue to build relationships with influencers and journalists that will help grow the brand and inspire travel. Visit Helena will proactively reach out as well as respond to appropriate media and influencers with original, relevant, and timely stories. We will also work with other tourism partners and our SW Montana region to uncover opportunities for collaborating.

Attending events such as Public Relations Society of America Travel and Tourism Conference can increase contacts and exposure.

# TBID Staff & Board of Directors

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