



Helena Tourism Business Improvement District Fiscal Year 2026 Work Plan

1 ORGANIZATION SUMMARY

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.

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

Helena TBID Organizational Mission

To promote and preserve Helena as a unique destination 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

The role of Destination Organizations, like Visit Helena, continue to evolve. Destination management calls for a coalition of many organizations and interests working towards a common goal, ultimately being the assurance of the competitiveness and sustainability of the tourism destination.

There have been great strides 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.

Collaborative management of our destination will help to avoid overlapping functions and duplication of efforts in promotion, visitor services, training, business support, and resource management/protection.

Visit Helena will continue to work closely with community organizations, such as the City of Helena, Helena Area Chamber of Commerce and Convention and Visitors Bureau; Helena

Business Improvement District; Montana Business Assistance Connection; and many additional stakeholders.

One of the ultimate goals of tourism is to increase quality of life for residents of a destination. Visitation boosts economic impact. When the Helena area economy thrives, the resident experience also thrives, we understand it is a delicate balance. Visit Helena will work to identify & support destination product development opportunities as well as sustainability and stewardship of the destination.

In a world consumed by possessions rather than experiences, the Visit Helena team strives to amplify the voices of those working toward a welcoming and balanced Helena, reinvesting in our community for future generations while maximizing tourism dollars for a thriving city.

We will work on initiatives in destination management and marketing that focus on the **economic, social, and environmental** health of our town.

3 LEISURE RECRUITMENT

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, Seattle 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 with other Montana DMOs in international travel recruitment shows like IPW, the travel industry's premier international marketplace and the largest generator of travel to the U.S.

4 YELLOWSTONE & GLACIER NATIONAL PARKS

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.

Our social media, SEO, and web content will also focus on Helena, Montana's Hometown, 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

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
- Citizens / Volunteers

Making sure travelers feel welcomed and enjoy their stay will continue to be a major priority. We will work 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.

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.

With the new Events page on 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 even extend their stay.

6 GROUP TRAVEL & MEETINGS

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 our conference facilities. Efforts will focus on small market meetings, and we will attend the Small Market Meetings Conference.

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

The TBID Grant Program will continue to be refined 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 promote and market this program and invite local organizations and businesses as well as seek opportunities for larger events to apply for grant monies.

8 SPORT EVENTS & TOURNAMENTS

Special Olympics of Montana (SOMT) will be in Helena for the State Basketball Tournament which will take place again in November 2025. We will support SOMT.

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

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 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 in Helena.

9 ARTS & CULTURE

The TBID will strongly lean into promoting 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, Grand Street Theatre, Myrna Loy Center for the Performing and Visual Arts, and the 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



With the anticipated opening of **The Montana Heritage Center, Montana's Museum**, in late 2025, we will partner alongside them to create awareness of this attraction.

The Montana Heritage Center will capture the grandeur of the Treasure State by celebrating the natural features, diverse cultures, and stories of our past. The new home for the Montana Historical Society will include expanded museum exhibits, educational classrooms, a public event center, an enhanced research center, and a cafe, plus an outdoor courtyard and rooftop terrace. Visitors from across Montana and the world will experience state-of-the-art displays of their ever-expanding collections.

We will market & support the preparation for their **Grand Opening June 25-28, 2026**.

In addition, we will be working to secure a plan for wayfinding and signage systems to enhance navigational experiences & improve overall connectivity, reinforce community brand, and support local businesses.

Visit Helena will also continue to support the Montana History Foundation to promote their [Helena History Tours](#). This program is designed to promote heritage tourism 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.

The summer of 2025 will include the following tours:

- Rediscover Reeder's Alley
- Pedaling through the Past
- Redlight Rendezvous

- Echoes of the Past
- Wandering the Westside

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 guided experiences.

The Montana History Foundation has a new office located in Reeder’s Alley which will be a wonderful opportunity to book a tour on site, as well as provide an additional opportunity to connect The Montana Heritage Center to Downtown Helena.

11 MARKETING METHODS

Aspects of the tourism industry are forever shifting, so we continue to look for ways to provide offerings that make Helena attractive . Building off the recent Helena Brand Strategy 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.

The benefits of technology provide people the opportunity to have a greater choice in deciding where they want to visit and live. 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. This year will focus on continuing the Hel Yeah Campaign by capturing new summer hype footage as well gathering historical assets to champion the rich history in Helena and connect it to The Montana Heritage Center-Montana’s Museum.

Visit Helena will also work to lean into and expand on Southwest Montana’s already established Drink It In Montana that was established in partnership with Central Montana. *Drink It In Montana aims to capture the story of Montana’s craft beverage industry by helping newcomers experience the unique flavors and locally-owned businesses. As you travel through Montana, Drink It In. Experience Montana the way the locals do and enjoy our regional flavor.*

With the Montana Distillery Trail, trails and trail lines will be added to work as itineraries. Distilleries are the destinations with the goal in between to highlight Montana history and experience other popular attractions (i.e., scenic landscapes, various towns and history, culture).

Driven by the transformational power of human relationships and the inclusion of diverse voices, Visit Helena will also focus on a project called the *Faces of Helena*.

FACES OF HELENA, MONTANA'S HOMETOWN

Storytelling is at the very heart of destination marketing. Visit Helena wants to engage our audience with authentic stories and the inside scoop on the faces of Helena.

Helena's inspirational people are its strongest brand attribute, and the cumulative stories of the Helena community are a key differentiator.

This travel blog will lean into the Visit Helena Brand and focus on authentic experiences, local traditions, hidden gems, and insider tips, and sharing personal stories of individuals who aren't always in the spotlight to help readers immerse themselves in the culture. We aim to peel back the quirky local history and reveal some of the characters and antidotes associated with them, showcase the spirit and unspoken way of life of locals live by here, highlight authentic encounters, convey that hometown, curated Helena feel that represents why individuals love Helena--- the people, build an emotional bond that compels visitations and ambassadors and garners loyalty, and increase awareness and preference of Helena as a travel destination, not as a pass through.

The TBID will continue to implement a well-rounded social media strategy aimed at growing our audience and maintaining engagement with residents and showcasing Helena's history and charm. We will track key performance metrics, audience insights, and overall progress on our accounts.

The media plan will be primarily digital allowing the plan to stay flexible with changes in creative and messaging along with some print. 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.

This year we will continue investing in **The Zartico Destination Operating System** which is a data-powered toolbox of insights for strategic decision-making. It will assist us with:

- Capturing a snapshot of destination performance and visitor profiles.
- Visualize trends in movement, spending, events, and lodging performance.
- Pinpoint opportunities to fine-tune demand and product development.
- Maximize marketing ROI.

12 MEDIA RELATION AND OUTREACH

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 will increase contacts and exposure.

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