

2025/2026 Winter Grant Report

Introduction: Visit Helena worked to advertise and connect with organizations to better explain our grant opportunities. This is the first round our new Program and Event Manager has worked on. Although we reached out to several more organizations and events we know that would fulfill our goals and mission of TBID Grant. Overall, we received **4 applications totaling \$31,000 for winter 2025/2026.**

Montana Outdoor Expo

Date: March 27th- 29th, 2026

Total Attendance: 5,100 (1,000 out-of-towners)

Hotels: 250

Grant Dollar Request: \$5,000 (Est. Total Event Budget: \$135,750)

Grant Award: _____

Prior Grant Award/s: \$5,000 (from Butte TBID)

Details:

The Montana Outdoor Expo is a three-day event celebrating Montana's outdoor heritage by bringing together outdoor enthusiasts, brands, outfitters, and families for an immersive experience. Scheduled for March 27–29, 2026, at the Lewis and Clark County Fairgrounds in Helena, the Expo is expected to feature more than 100 vendors and attract over 5,000 attendees from across Montana and neighboring states. With interactive exhibits, educational seminars, family-friendly programming, and hands-on product showcases in hunting, fishing, camping, conservation, and more, the event provides a valuable platform for businesses to connect directly with consumers while driving visitation during the shoulder season. Attendees and vendors traveling from out of town will stay in local lodging, dine in restaurants, and shop at area businesses, creating a meaningful economic boost for Helena. In addition, Helena-based vendors and organizations will gain visibility and strengthen connections with a wide audience. Beyond its immediate economic impact, the Expo enhances Helena's reputation as a hub for outdoor recreation by introducing new visitors to the community and encouraging future tourism. By blending commerce, education, and family-friendly activities, the Montana Outdoor Expo will generate both short-term revenue and long-term visibility for Helena's hospitality, tourism, and business sectors.

Helena Shootout

Date: January 17th & 18th, 2026

Total Attendance: 2,500

Hotels: 150

Grant Dollar Request: \$5,000 (Est. Total Event Budget: \$31,460)

Grant Award: _____

Prior Grant Award/s: None

Details:

This two-day youth basketball tournament in Helena brings together boys' and girls' teams from across Montana, ranging from 3rd through 8th grade. In the past, participation has averaged 90–100 teams, but this year's goal is to reach the full capacity of 120. To make that possible, additional funding is needed to cover essential elements like awards, shirts, tournament brackets, and photography/videography, all of which enhance the overall experience. The event is expanding into a bracket-style format with champions crowned in each division, requiring more games, trophies, and banners that will further highlight court sponsors. A key investment will be the development of a more interactive website with scores, schedules, and sponsor advertising, providing visibility for local partners, Visit Helena, and TBID. Improvements will also include meals, drinks, and apparel for officials, as well as photography and social media videos to elevate professionalism and expand promotion for future tournaments. Overall, the goal is to create a premier event

that attracts teams statewide and delivers a memorable, high-quality experience for players, families, and supporters alike.

2026 Montana Beer Awards

Date: March 25th – 28th, 2026

Total Attendance: 300

Hotels: 450 hotel room nights

Grant Dollar Request: \$10,000 (Est. Total Event Budget: \$28,000)

Grant Award: _____

Prior Grant Award/s: \$5,000 (2025)

Details:

The Montana Beer Awards is the largest celebration of made-in-Montana craft beer, an exclusive competition for Montana breweries that recognizes gold, silver, and bronze medalists across more than twenty categories. The third annual event will span four days in March 2026, culminating in an awards ceremony at Lewis & Clark Brewing Company on March 28. Before winners are announced, a panel of highly qualified judges—certified beer judges, professional brewers, and Cicerone experts from across North America and beyond—will carefully evaluate each entry. The Saturday evening ceremony, open to the public and livestreamed statewide, will honor medalists along with the Brewery of the Year, with Visit Helena highlighted as the official livestream sponsor. Beyond celebrating Montana beer, the event provides breweries with detailed feedback to refine their craft while also generating significant economic impact for Helena. Hundreds of brewers, partners, and beer enthusiasts attend, spending the day dining, shopping, and visiting local breweries before the evening celebration. Judges and staff staying throughout the week enjoy planned meals and social events at local establishments, further supporting Helena businesses and showcasing the community. The 2025 event generated nearly \$50,000 in local economic impact, and with returning judges, enthusiastic breweries, and strong public interest, the 2026 Montana Beer Awards is poised to grow its influence, strengthen the local economy, and continue positioning Helena as a hub for Montana’s thriving craft beer scene.

Helena Holiday MADE Fair

Date: December 5th – 6th, 2026

Total Attendance: 6500 (750 out-of-towners)

Hotels: 200 rooms

Grant Dollar Request: \$11,000 (Est. Total Event Budget: \$36,000)

Grant Award: _____

Prior Grant Award/s: none

Details:

The Helena Holiday MADE fair is a curated modern handcrafted market that showcases over 175 artists, makers, and non-profits from Montana and the surrounding region. Since its debut in 2017, it has grown into a beloved two-day tradition at the Lewis & Clark County Fairgrounds, drawing thousands of eager shoppers in search of unique, locally made holiday gifts. Scheduled for December 5–6, 2025, the fair offers more than shopping—it provides an opportunity to meet the makers, discover one-of-a-kind items, and support Montana’s thriving creative economy. Each year, the event also gives back by donating a portion of VIP and Early Bird ticket sales to a local nonprofit; in 2024, the Helena fair raised \$5,400 for Girls Thrive, contributing to over \$32,000 donated statewide through MADE fair events, with Cohesion Dance Project set as the 2025 beneficiary. Through its six annual markets and retail store, MADE fair generates an estimated \$2 million annually for Montana artisans, keeping dollars circulating locally and fostering direct connections between makers and buyers. The fair is also a powerhouse for Helena’s economy, with 80% of vendors and many visitors traveling from across Montana and beyond, filling hotels, dining at restaurants, and exploring the city while extending their stays. For artists, it represents one of the premier sales opportunities of the year, while for attendees, it creates lasting connections to Helena as a destination for culture and creativity. By amplifying nonprofit causes, driving tourism, and celebrating Montana artistry, the Helena Holiday MADE fair

spreads holiday cheer while cementing Helena's reputation as a must-visit hub for authentic, community-driven experiences.