



# Helena Tourism Business Improvement District Fiscal Year 2027 Work Plan

## 1 ORGANIZATION SUMMARY

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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.

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

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Destination Organizations, like Visit Helena, continue to evolve in response to the changing landscape. Effective destination management requires a coalition of diverse organizations and stakeholders working toward a shared goal: ensuring the competitiveness and sustainability of our destination.

Significant progress has been made through strong collaboration with the City of Helena and community partners, helping to maintain momentum around a unified brand and consistent messaging. Building on this foundation, we will continue advancing the strategic roadmap 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

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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.

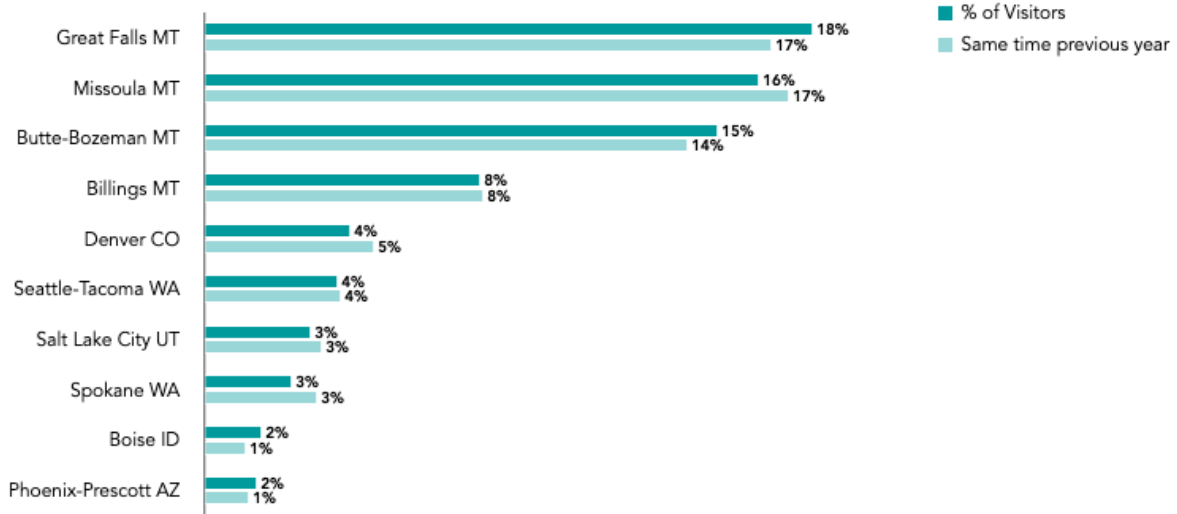
The TBID will closely monitor opportunities for consumer trade shows including the Denver Travel and Adventure Show, Seattle Travel and Adventure Show, and The Outdoor Adventure & Travel Show in Calgary, among others.

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.

# Visitation & Economic Impact

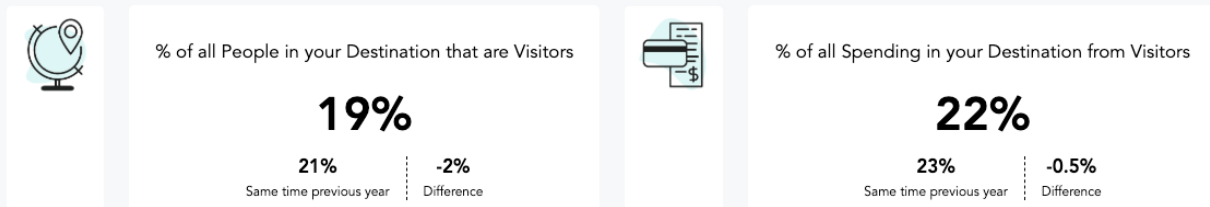
Date range  
5/1/2025 – 5/1/2026

## Top Visitor Markets ▼



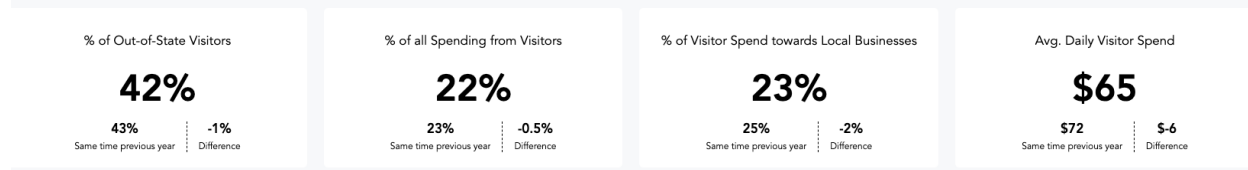
## How do visitors impact your economy?

Source: Zartico Spend Data, Zartico Geolocation Data



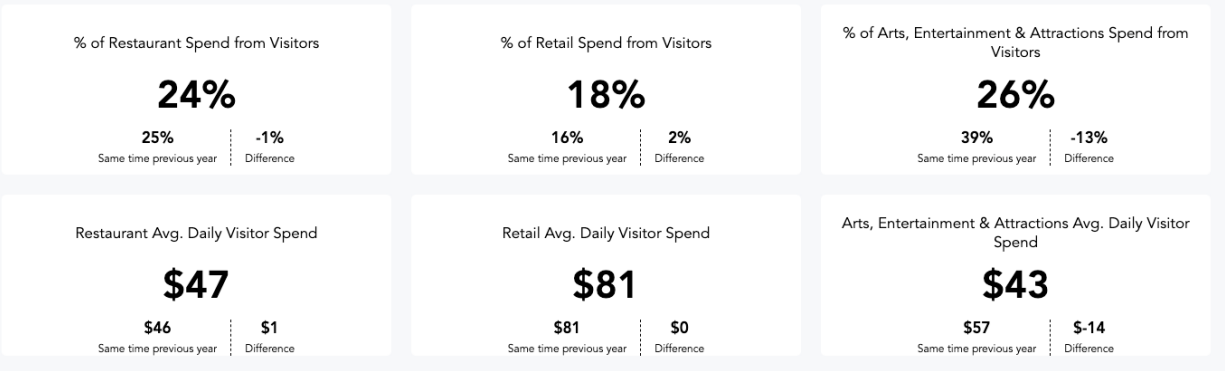
## Key Visitor Insights

Source: Zartico Spend Data, Zartico Geolocation Data



### Share of spending from visitors by category and avg. daily spending

Source: Zartico Spend Data



## 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.

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

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Continuing to focus on a quality visitor experience is a high priority of Visit Helena. The TBID will continue to work even harder 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.

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 in our 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.

We will continue to dedicate time to managing & promoting the [Helena Events](#) webpage for both locals and visitors alike. We want to turn event listings into travel motivation and for in-market visitors, we aim to ensure that they can take advantage of the local opportunities and even extend their stay.

The TBID will continue to operate a **Visitor Information Center** at 105 Reeder’s Alley. Managing resources and information and most importantly, creating a welcoming environment and engaging with visitors are primary.

<b>Visitor Numbers</b>	<b>July 1, 2025- May 4, 2026:</b>	<b>1,926</b>
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We will continue to showcase Helena's oldest documented dwelling, the Pioneer Cabin, by opening it from Memorial Day to Labor Day. We are excited to be able to share this part of this history with locals and visitors alike.



## 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).

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 may 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

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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

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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

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The TBID will continue to 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

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With the **Montana Heritage Center, Montana's Museum**, now open we will work closely with the **Montana Historical Society** and **SW Montana** to create awareness of this attraction and major economic anchor. The Montana Heritage Center captures 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 includes 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.

In addition, we will continue working to carry out the 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.

This year the majority of tours will start at our **Visit Helena's Visitor Information Center in Reeder's Alley**.

The summer of 2026 will include the following tours:

- Breweries & Brothels
- Walking Historic Downtown
- Pedaling through the Past

Tours are offered at regularly scheduled 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.

## **OPEN AUDIO TOURS-Localized Audio Tours**

Visit Helena worked with 52Sierra to expand on the Helena Open Audio Tour App by adding two new collections. The Open Audio Tour app helps locals and visitors explore and learn more about Helena's unique history and architecture.

### **1. Historic Julian Anderson Audio Tour Collection**

- Step into Helena's heritage with the **Historic Julian Anderson Cocktail Trail**, a curated journey through drinking establishments, restaurants, and a craft distillery paying tribute to **Julian Anderson** – the legendary barman of the historic [Montana Club](#). Anderson tended bar in Helena for roughly **six decades beginning in the 1890s**, earning a reputation for refined, "better than the finest" drinks and for educating patrons' palates long before the modern craft revival. Listen to the history of Helena in this specific Julian

Anderson trail at your own pace. Discover the past of the unique participating destinations.

## 2. Helena Landmarks Audio Tour Collection

- Goals: Drive foot traffic from the **Montana Heritage Center** to **Helena's neighborhoods and local businesses**. Ensure that visitors are made aware of all there is to do in Helena. In turn, encourage them to come back or stay the night. There will be 10 landmarks. Visit 7 of the 10 and receive a unique souvenir for the prize from Visit Helena. Businesses can offer a % discount to customers wearing sticker/pin if they choose.

\*\*\*\*Download Open Audio Tours



## 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 . 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 the Helena 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.

Driven by the transformational power of human relationships and the inclusion of diverse voices, Visit Helena will continue to focus on a storytelling initiative 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 leans into the 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

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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.

# TBID Staff & Board of Directors

## TBID STAFF

Andrea Opitz  
Executive Director  
[aopitz@helenamt.com](mailto:aopitz@helenamt.com)  
(406) 449-1270

Jason Burnett  
Program and Event Manager  
[programandeventmanager@Helenamt.com](mailto:programandeventmanager@Helenamt.com)  
(406) 443-2117

Jazlyn Young  
Visitor Services & Events Coordinator  
[VisitorCoordinator@helenamt.com](mailto:VisitorCoordinator@helenamt.com)  
(406) 449-2107

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Cindee Bianchini  
Best Western Premier Helena Great Northern Hotel  
[Cindee@gnhotelhelena.com](mailto:Cindee@gnhotelhelena.com)  
(406) 457-5531

John Lytle  
Double Tree by Hilton Helena Downtown  
[John.Lytle@Hilton.com](mailto:John.Lytle@Hilton.com)  
(406) 443-2200

Shauna Corcoran  
Calmont Hospitality  
[Shauna@calmonthospitality.com](mailto:Shauna@calmonthospitality.com)  
(406) 439-3828

Elise Whittle  
Home2Suites  
[Elise.Whittle2@Hilton.com](mailto:Elise.Whittle2@Hilton.com)  
(406)502-2222

Kris Hoelstad  
Delta Hotels Helena Colonial  
[khoelstad@helenacolonialhotel.com](mailto:khoelstad@helenacolonialhotel.com)  
(406) 443-6709