

VISIT BILLINGS  
MARKETING PLAN & BUDGET

FY23

FORGE  YOUR  
VISIT *Billings*  
OWN  PATH





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ESTABLISHMENT OF THE  
TOURISM DESTINATION



# Tourism is a vital economic driver for Billings. More than 2.6 million people visit Billings annually, spending \$621 million.

(Destination Analysts)

As Montana, southeast Montana, and Billings continue to emerge from the pandemic's impacts, it's time to turn the page and look ahead. The future of Billings, Billings' tourism, and Visit Billings is competitive and will continue to positively impact stakeholders, tourism partners, and the business community as a whole.

The city of Billings is positioned geographically in a key section of the region that offers goods and services to eastern and central Montana residents as well as northern Wyoming, North Dakota, and South Dakota visitors. As the state's largest city, this position also directly impacts the visitor economy building Billings' tourism industry and supporting tourism partners.

As Visit Billings leadership and staff continue to build off post-pandemic opportunities, strategies and tactics are being analyzed and adjusted constantly to ensure investments are driving visitation to Billings - Montana's Trailhead. Steady growth in occupancy and average daily rate have been realized for stakeholders since June 2020 (Smith Travel Research [STR]). This shows that the campaigns are effective in successfully capturing overnight visitors, while continuing to elevate the destination. Funding and visitation data shows Billings is at 2019 travel levels (STR) and growing following successful leisure campaigns, sports events bookings, and the slow and steady recovery in the meetings and group tour markets.

In FY23, the Visit Billings staff continues their work leading the travel and tourism industry to sustained growth while supporting the businesses that depend on this industry. Leisure and sports tourism efforts are offering strong returns on investments, while the business and meetings industries are slower to rebound. While many companies and workers have grown accustomed to the ease of virtual meetings, travel and in-person meetings and events are important. Visit Billings staff continues to work with sales teams at meeting hotels to help boost conference bookings.

## BILLINGS

Billings, population of more than 115,000, is the county seat of Yellowstone County and the largest city in the state. As Montana's Trailhead, it is the region's economic hub. Major industries including agriculture, energy, healthcare, finance, education, and as previously noted, tourism drive the local economy.

Conveniently positioned in southeast Montana as the largest city between Calgary and Denver, as well as Spokane and Minneapolis, Billings proudly serves a trade area of more than 500,000 people.

Popular attractions locally include the Rimrocks which are the 70-million-year-old sandstone rock formations which surround much of the community and offer space to take in the incredible views of the region. The city also boasts a walkable brewery district in historic downtown Billings, Montana's only zoo and Botanical Park, contemporary and western museums, galleries, several theaters, music venues, a state-of-the-art public library, and several outdoor community venues and festivals.

Billings offers nearly 50 miles of multi-use trails and 24 miles of bike lanes. From the Rimrocks to the Yellowstone River, which is the longest free-flowing river in the lower 48, residents of Billings invite visitors to experience the magic of Montana's Trailhead. Billings sits near the intersection of Interstates 90 and 94 and offers a first-class airport with numerous daily flights to major U.S. cities via Delta, United, American Airlines, Allegiant, and Alaska Airlines. Regional carrier Cape Air also plays a role in air travel and connectivity in the state.

Amazing summer weather and snowy winters with bluebird days offer ample opportunity for outdoor enthusiasts to experience all four seasons and the accompanying adventures. Nearly 4,500 hotel rooms as well as numerous retail and restaurant offerings (Billings offers an incredible food scene), flexible meeting space, and sports venues are ready to accommodate any traveler or planner's needs and preferences.

Billings is Montana's city and serves as the trailhead to unparalleled access to some of the most breathtaking natural and historic attractions in America including Yellowstone National Park, the Beartooth Scenic Byway, Bighorn Canyon Recreation Area, Little Bighorn Battlefield and Pompeys Pillar National Monuments, as well as amazing state parks. The region is an idyllic destination for those seeking out the best that Montana and the western U.S. offers. From history and art to outdoor recreation and exploring, Billings serves visitors well particularly in a post-pandemic travel environment where travelers tend to choose wide open spaces with less populated areas. But there is more to Billings' travel scene than the leisure visitor. Sports tourism and convention recruitment along with the international and domestic tour-goer also are driving success in Billings' tourism landscape.



Visit Billings is the brand built to represent the Billings Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Billings Tourism Business Improvement District (BTBID). Visit Billings is managed by the Billings Chamber of Commerce.

Together with the Billings Chamber of Commerce/Convention and Visitors Bureau (BCC/CVB) and Billings Tourism Business Improvement District boards, the Visit Billings team is committed to growing the markets which drive visitation to Montana's Trailhead. The staff is an extension of its stakeholders (lodging partners) working to provide sales, services, and marketing support as a destination marketing and management organization which boosts the local economy.

Visit Billings is funded primarily through the BTBID. The BTBID assesses \$2.00 per occupied room per night on all hotels and motels in the city of Billings with six (6) or more sleeping rooms. The BTBID funds stay local for the marketing and promotion of the city as a destination. This marketing helps grow visitation and supports stakeholders, tourism partners, and general businesses in the destination. Additionally, there are two Montana taxes imposed on users of an overnight lodging facility (such as a hotel, motel, campground, dude ranch, and guest ranch), which are collected by the facility and remitted to the Montana Department of Revenue. These two taxes are a 4% Lodging Facility Use Tax and a 4% Lodging Facility Sales Tax, for a combined 8% state lodging tax. Most of the Lodging Facility Sales Tax goes to the State of Montana's General Fund while Visit Billings receives a small portion of the 4% Lodging Facility Use Tax as the Billings CVB. As a destination marketing organization (DMO), Visit Billings is charged with representing Billings as a tourism destination, helping with the development of the industry through promotion of the city.

## MISSION

The mission of Visit Billings is to generate room nights for lodging facilities in the city of Billings by effectively marketing the region as a preferred travel destination.

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★ **SHELLI MANN**  
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**FY23 PLAN PROCESS**

Visit Billings is currently navigating the strategic plan process. The product of the process will include deliverables to be revealed and adopted in late summer or early fall of 2022. The intention is, following the release of that plan, leadership and staff will evaluate the relation of the strategic plan findings to the current FY23 marketing plan and adopt any recommendations that will strengthen Visit Billings marketing and sales strategies for the current fiscal year and into future years.

The strategic plan will carry forward momentum and the successes of Visit Billings and local tourism today, while at the same time revealing the strategies for better destination positioning through 2027. Critical areas of focus and new areas to concentrate on will be identified to ensure Visit Billings, a destination management and marketing organization with major commitments to the marketing and sale of the destination, are set to position Billings and tourism partners for continued success in travel and tourism.



**THE VISIT BILLINGS STRATEGIC PLAN (VBSP)**

Visit Billings and the entire travel and tourism industry have undergone dramatic changes over the last decade, with the pandemic serving as a catalyst for the creation of different growth and change. As the industry and the destination move into the next three to five years, the travel marketing landscape is adjusting. Traveler motivations, behaviors, and financial considerations have shifted, which creates new opportunities for Visit Billings.

At the same time, the city of Billings and its stakeholders also have evolved. Billings is a regional economic hub, well-known for its diverse economy to include healthcare, energy, agriculture, education, financial headquarters, and of course tourism. Yet previous research has identified challenges to tourism such as public safety, air service weakness, workforce, funding sources and taxing structure, as well as facility offerings in comparison to the competitive set.

However, visitation is surging - at times, beyond even 2019 data sets. Key stakeholders in Billings are undergoing or considering product development opportunities. For example, the Pub Station's construction of a new outdoor pavilion, South Billings Urban Renewal Association/City of Billings' sports facility, new residential projects in downtown Billings, and MetraPark is in the process of developing a new Master Plan to reimagine the complete 189-acre campus to add new facilities and amenities along with management assessments. This landscape creates the perfect opportunity to develop a new Destination Strategic Plan for Billings, designed to share a sharp vision for the future.

Experience has shown Visit Billings and Sunshine & Bourbon, Visit Billings' agency of record, that a successful strategic plan requires the involvement and engagement of the Visit Billings team and industry stakeholders, but also those of visitors, meeting and sports planners, as well as the local community. Therefore, the VBSP approach is designed to collaborate with each of these critical audiences, so that the final deliverable is embraced - and each audience feels the passion needed to move the plan from recommendations to action.

Ultimately, the Destination Strategic Plan will be designed to accomplish the following objectives:

- **Identify actions and activities that will benefit the local economy, as well as improve the quality of life for the community.**
- **Assess gaps in the tourism, sports, meetings and cultural infrastructure to identify potential new or enhanced tourism demand generators.**
- **Recommend actions and activities to increase visitor flow across all segments (leisure, meetings, sports).**
- **Assess and define product development needs while also identifying growth and expansion opportunities for Billings.**
- **Create a management tool and information resource that allows leadership and internal teams to prioritize the resources needed to achieve the goals and objectives, and the process required to do so.**
- **Create consensus among stakeholders of tourism trends that directly impact the destination, while at the same time understanding the threats as well as the opportunities those trends present.**
- **Focus on funding and program development alignment among Visit Billings, its partners, other government entities and the community.**

The phases of plan, currently in process as of winter 2022:

**Phase I:** Defining the Process

**Phase II:** Discovery

**Phase III:** Defining the Strategy

**Phase IV:** Creating the Strategic Path Forward

The final report will present an overview of the project, the current landscape, a discussion of the process and those involved in the process, and an explanation of the Strategic Plan itself. The report will include a summary of the Situational Analysis, the state of the Billings tourism industry, trends and developments, a framework for planning, as well as challenges and opportunities. From there, the Strategic Plan will offer overall objectives in major focus areas alongside detailed recommendations on ways to move toward those goals. Those recommendations will be prioritized along with the implementation actions. Finally, the report will define a framework for measurement to determine if the Strategic Plan is moving forward.





### IMPACT OF TOURISM

While strength and growth are being realized in Billings by Visit Billings leadership and staff as well as stakeholders, there is work to do. Visit Billings will continue to assess and improve its sales and marketing efforts and strategies, while at the same time, working with local, state, and federal leadership to help elevate the importance the visitor economy has on business communities. Again, 2.6 million people visit Billings, annually spending \$621 million. The pandemic was a setback, but it's also an opportunity to reimagine the travel industry. If elected officials can plan for the future by prioritizing the tourism industry today, businesses in Billings can grow and help rebuild the travel industry to be more dynamic, innovative, sustainable, and competitive than ever before.

Billings as a tourism destination, can be likened to a retail store filled with goods, services, and opportunities. However, sales are only as good as products, marketing of the products, and diversification of what's being offered to the customer. If products don't compete with what is offered elsewhere, the store will suffer. That is a simple example to help one visualize the importance of Visit Billings' mission to support destination marketing, destination management, and product development.

Billings is only as viable a destination in its competitive set as its offerings. If the community and leadership don't invest to build and offer competitive products, the economy will suffer. The link between tourism and economic development are key components to the successful equation of the health of a destination and the community. Public and private entities can work together to grow a destination and its products for its visitors. Those same products build the community for its residents, workforce, and businesses. The same reasons one wants to visit Billings are in many ways relational to the reasons a person would want to call Billings home or choose Billings to open a business.

Opportunities for growth sit with product development and overall destination development including venues, facilities, events, and infrastructure and development.



A scenic photograph of three people sitting on a colorful blanket on a grassy mountain peak. They are looking out over a vast landscape of snow-dusted mountains under a clear blue sky. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

# FY22 MOMENTUM





## CERTIFIED AUTISM CENTER | CERTIFIED AUTISM DESTINATION

Visit Billings and the Billings Chamber of Commerce are proud to lead efforts to become the region's first Certified Autism Destination (CAD). Stakeholders, staff, and board members are thrilled to partner with the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES) to ensure visitors to Billings with autism or sensory needs feel safe and enjoy their stay. Whether enjoying outdoor recreation offerings, museums, historic points of interest, and shopping, or on their way to a national or state park, Visit Billings and the Billings Chamber of Commerce welcome autistic individuals and their families.

In FY22, Visit Billings staff became certified autism travel planners (CATP) working with the IBCCES which provided the training and certification to help staff better engage with individuals with cognitive disorders. Billings tourism leaders are working with IBCCES to ensure all visitors to the city feel welcomed and have accessible options.

Visit Billings is currently Montana's first destination marketing organization to become a certified organization and, similarly, the Billings Chamber of Commerce is the region's first chamber of commerce to become a certified organization. Visit Billings' goal is to become a Certified Autism Destination to benefit residents and visitors alike, as well as the business community.

The next step of destination certification requires a representative number of stakeholders within key industry segments such as lodging, dining, shopping, attractions, and interactive educational venues to become Certified Autism Organizations, which is achieved by training and certifying their staff through the IBCCES like Visit Billings has. Once a threshold of representation in each segment is met, the city or community can be designated as a Certified Autism Destination and eventually an Autism Certified City. The Boothill Inn & Suites is the first lodging partner to join Visit Billings' efforts officially.

If a business or tourism partner is interested in joining this important certification effort, they can find out more details at [VisitBillings.com/autism-friendly](https://VisitBillings.com/autism-friendly).

## LANDON'S MIRACLE FIELD

The BTBID Board of Directors and Visit Billings staff are proud supporters of Landon's Legacy Foundation (LLF) for the newly constructed Landon's Miracle Field opening in June 2022. LLF and its partners, Billings Kiwanis and Billings Parks and Recreation, and donors, have built a "Miracle League" baseball field at 38th Street West and Poly Drive to serve children and adults with mental and/or physical disabilities on a specially-designed, latex-free, rubberized turf field that accommodates wheelchairs and adaptive equipment.

This field is only the second such venue in the state of Montana and will accommodate families from all over the region making a difference in the lives of children and adults

who are unable to play in other baseball leagues. This project, along with Visit Billings' efforts for the community to be autism certified, are two more steps toward being a more inclusive community to visitors and residents.

With partnership and commitment, Billings can make a positive difference in travel confidence for families and individuals who have neurological disadvantages and physical and/or mental disabilities. Visit Billings staff will incorporate this venue in marketing and sales efforts to ensure regional and national visitors are aware of its location.

## DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSIVITY IMPLEMENTATION

Visit Billings continues to work with the Billings Chamber of Commerce and other community leadership groups to identify and dismantle conscious and non-conscious systemic bias and discriminatory actions within the community through education, training, advocacy, mentorship, and conversations. This is the organization's Diversity and Inclusion mission and is woven into greater strategies and day-to-day conversations with staff and stakeholders.

## ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE

The COVID-19 pandemic has taught the organization many lessons and, one includes the importance of organizational

resilience. Visit Billings was able to withstand the global disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic well and has emerged stronger with engaged stakeholders, increased community presence, and a larger visitor market share. That being said, the importance of resilience can't be forgotten when crises and disasters aren't in the top stories or headlines. Visit Billings leadership continues to evaluate and prepare for disruptive changes that threaten funding and mission execution. Proper resource allocation and being sensitive to operational challenges or opportunities will help identify ways to combat any future economic, health, and other impacts to the industry or destination.





# FY22 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

**Strong Growth:** in Occupancy, Average Daily Rate, BTBID Assessments, and State Lodging Facility Use Tax Collections throughout FY22.

**Minneapolis Marketing Partnership with Visit Southeast Montana:** Visit Billings and Visit Southeast Montana travel brands came together in the spring of 2022 to create a dramatic and highly visual takeover in Minneapolis that launched the spring/summer campaign in that market and ultimately worked to increase visitation from this key fly/drive market. The Southeast Montana Travel Provisions Co. creative was also installed during the 2022 NCAA Women's Final Four at Target Stadium in downtown Minneapolis.

**HSMIA Award:** Visit Billings along with Sunshine & Bourbon creative agency won Bronze in the Integrated Marketing Campaign category in HSMIA's (Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International) Adrian Awards.

**Destination of the Year Nominee:** Montana Governor's Conference on Tourism and Recreation, Brand MT, Department of Commerce, and other Montana tourism leadership helped place Visit Billings in the running for this coveted award highlighting the staff's successful efforts to market Billings as part of the Great American Road Trip spanning from Badlands National Monument to Yellowstone National Park.

**Billings Buddies: Explore Like a Local:** As part of the successful Trail Guides program, Visit Billings kicked off the Billings Buddies program at VisitBillings.com. The Billings Trail Guide program introduces visitors to local proprietors, giving travelers an in-depth look at Billings' culture.

**Above the Rim:** 3x3 Basketball Tournament Success - Visit Billings supported Big Sky Ballin', a regional sports leader, in efforts to move the annual outdoor, 3v3 basketball tournament to the streets of downtown Billings. It was a huge success for BSB, Visit Billings, Downtown Billings Partners, businesses, fans, and competitors. This was the tournament's tenth year, but its first in the heart of downtown.

**Welcome to BIL:** Stronger Passenger Facilitation Offering - Visit Billings is grateful for the opportunity to install welcome signage in the newly renovated and expanded Billings Logan International Airport. The signage highlights vistas of Billings, the Billings Brew Trail, and scenic drives that start and end in Billings to help welcome visitors to the destination.

**Zartico Data Partnership:** Visit Billings has partnered with Zartico. This research and data company is allowing Visit Billings staff to monitor highly trafficked points of interest and visitor travel habits like never before. Data is a powerful tool for shaping destination performance and Zartico uses a special operating system to use third-party data that offers major insights to better identify and drive marketing strategies.

**Host: Montana Governor's Conference on Tourism and Recreation:** It was two years in the planning (and COVID-19 postponing) process, but Visit Billings was proud host to the 2022 Montana Governor's Conference on Tourism and Recreation. Despite an unfortunate Easter Sunday kick-off, hundreds of Montana tourism partners, vendors, and colleagues converged on Billings to meet for the first time since 2019. The last time Billings hosted this conference was 2013.

**Niche Market - Road Race Destination:** Whether a visitor plans to "run to Billings" for the weekend or keep resolutions on the right track, Billings has a road race for everyone. From the Queen Bee Montana Marathon and Montana Women's Run to the Heart & Sole Run and Big Sky State Games events, Visit Billings boasted the community's races during a spring 2022 niche market media campaign that aimed to drive sign-ups for all the race days on the Montana's Trailhead Race calendar.



VisitBillings.com

# MAJOR PROJECTS AHEAD FY23

**Billings Brew Trail: The Bandwango App:** Montana's only walkable brewery district is located in the heart of downtown Billings. This self-guided tour is made up of breweries, distilleries and a cider house, all within easy walking distance with galleries, retailers, museums, restaurants, hotels, and historic sites along the way. There are also establishments "off the brewed path" including more breweries, distilleries, and a winery across town. So Visit Billings staff created the Billings Brew Trail app for visitors to conquer the trail, safely and over time. The app will officially be launched in the 2022 warm season.

**Yellowstone International Air Show:** The community is coming together for the 2023 Yellowstone International Air Show. Visit Billings is a proud partner of this mega event planned for August 12-13 at Billings Logan International Airport. Visit Billings will be hosting an event in the fall of 2022 to ensure tourism partners and the business community are aware of the event with YIAS leadership offering ways to get involved. This will be a huge opportunity for Billings, southeast Montana, and Montana to host this event. Visit Billings will also help market the YIAS.

**Visit Billings Strategic Plan:** The final report will offer a road map for Visit Billings as the organization navigates the next three to five years of marketing and selling Billings as a travel destination identifying tourism industry trends and developments to offer a strong framework for planning and continued successes.

**Sports Facility Planning:** In 2017, Visit Billings partnered with Big Sky Economic Development and the City of Laurel to conduct a sports facility feasibility study. The outcome of this study, executed by Victus Advisors, identified the South Billings Urban Renewal Association as a group to assist with sports facility weaknesses in Yellowstone County. The SBURA group along with the City of Billings and Billings Parks and Recreation are now working with agencies like A&E Architects to design a community sports facility that will also better position Billings in the sports events market segment.

**Certified Tourism Ambassador Destination:** A visitor's experience in a city is only as good as the people the visitor encounters. This is why Visit Billings started the Billings Trail Guides program in 2010 which successfully helps share key visitor insights with residents to help build repeat visitation. The nationally recognized Certified Tourism Ambassador program is a next step to work in unison with the Trail Guides efforts. CTA is an international, industry-recognized certification program for the city's front-line workers and volunteers. Visit Billings continues to look at the investment to become an accredited and licensed community through the Tourism Ambassador Institute®. It is designed as a lasting program that mobilizes a destination's front-line to turn every visitor encounter into a positive experience and also help build community pride.

**Sports Tourism:** Billings is a sports events destination. Whether it's the Big Sky State Games, college or high school competitions, youth or amateur events, or you're a fan wanting to see the best in competition at all levels, sports activities are important to Billings and are part of the destination's identity. Visit Billings will continue efforts to grow the sports market as noted in the strategic priorities later in this document.

**Certified Autism Destination:** As previously noted, the next step of destination certification requires a representative number of stakeholders within key industry segments such as lodging, dining, shopping, attractions, and interactive educational venues to become Certified Autism Organizations, which is achieved by training and certifying their staff through the IBCCES like Visit Billings has done. Once a threshold of representation in each segment is met, the city or community can be designated as a Certified Autism Destination and eventually an Autism Certified City. The Boothill Inn & Suites is the first lodging partner to join Visit Billings' efforts officially. This important work continues in FY23.







HOW WE MARKET AND  
SELL BILLINGS



# THE MONTANA BRAND



The State of Montana's tourism brand plays a major role in destination marketing for the state and region. The marketing strategies and programs led by Brand MT, formerly the Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development, help boost not only Montana's tourism brand, but also those brands of Montana's cities, towns, and regions. Visit Billings works to align with Brand MT tourism marketing pillars and strategies in all the integrated marketing efforts. Brand MT is a key partner with Visit Billings.

The Brand MT pillars, which will help identify and guide areas of opportunity in travel promotion, are as follows:

## STRATEGY I

COMMUNICATE AND DELIVER MONTANA'S SPECTACULAR UNSPOILED NATURE IN A WAY THAT MAKES IT REAL, TANGIBLE AND ACCESSIBLE TO THE VISITOR.

## STRATEGY II

HIGHLIGHT AND HELP DEVELOP VIBRANT AND CHARMING SMALL TOWNS THROUGHOUT MONTANA.

## STRATEGY III

INTEGRATE NATURE AND TOWNS TO OFFER AND DELIVER A BALANCE OF BREATHTAKING EXPERIENCES AND RELAXING HOSPITALITY.





# THE TRAVEL PROCESS: THREE PHASES

## INSPIRE, ORIENT, FACILITATE

THE PROCESS IS DEFINED BY USE OF THE FOLLOWING TERMINOLOGY AND CORRESPONDING DEFINITIONS:

### INSPIRATION

The process of being mentally stimulated to do or feel something, especially to do something creative.

### ORIENTATION

The relative physical position or direction of something.

### FACILITATION

The action of facilitating something to make it easy or easier.



**THE INSPIRATION PHASE** is where the traveler is made aware of the general product and develops a desire to visit the destination.

Brand MT is responsible for the foundation of the Montana visitor marketing strategies via Montana’s tourism brand marketing.

Brand MT markets Montana’s key tourism pillars to encourage potential travelers to visit the state with inspirational imagery and copy focusing on Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks as well as adventures – which align with the outdoor recreation travelers are seeking.

In the inspirational phase, Visit Billings staff strategize to position the destination as a competitive city to include on a Montana itinerary. Any Brand MT efforts to elevate eastern Montana towns and attractions always assist with this phase for the region.

Billings is well situated between the historic landmarks of southeast Montana and the awe-inspiring landscapes of the Yellowstone River valley. Working to compliment Brand MT efforts, Visit Billings leverages stunning imagery, targeted messaging, and compelling calls to action in the integrated marketing materials including the Great American Road Trip campaign which speaks well for those visitors who may be only now re-engaging in travel.

Billings is an access point to the Beartooth Highway which Charles Kuralt called “the most beautiful drive in America.” As a destination, Billings offers stunning vistas via the sandstone Rimrocks and access to the Yellowstone River, which are all reasons to choose southeastern Montana as part of one’s route. Targeted marketing and out-of-home (OOH) programming aim to help boost Billings as a must-stop city along western and national park trips.

Regionally, Billings is the perfect vacation destination for many neighboring communities. Ongoing “long weekend” campaigns inspire and invite the driving audience to explore and enjoy all Billings has to offer in entertainment, outdoor activities, cultural and historic interests, and recreation. In FY23, Visit Billings will build from gains made in the drive markets (MT, WY, SD, ND, ID) and grow the Great American Road Trip campaign from the south and Midwest, as more people choose to road trip, despite higher fuel prices.

**THE ORIENTATION PHASE** is where the traveler begins researching the details of his or her trip. This phase focuses on the route the traveler will take to arrive at the chosen destination and the mode of transportation used to get there. Montana’s visitors have multiple destinations to consider within the state and bordering states when building trips and researching travel to this part of the West. Montana’s destination marketing and management organizations (DMMO) like Visit Billings, provide tools to help the visitor plan a route while encouraging a longer stay.

### VISITBILLINGS.COM

The Visit Billings website is the destination’s primary branding and communications tool, where the destination’s “Forge Your Own Path” brand has been brought to life to orient potential visitors. In today’s digital landscape, destination marketing websites must work even harder to engage the consumer. While travelers filter through user-generated content (UGC), TripAdvisor reviews, Instagram posts, and travel blogs, a destination website should be positioned as a trusted resource for travel inspiration and planning. VisitBillings.com is designed to ensure the content is consistently updated and relevant to the individual needs of potential travelers. What’s your travel personality? That’s a question Visit Billings asks of the potential visitor. New persona-driven web content is developed to guide prospective History Buffs, Outdoor Enthusiasts, Foodies,

Shopaholics, Arts & Culture Aficionados, and Wellness-Seekers to Billings. Simultaneously, the Great American Road Trip microsite also inspires travelers to hit the road and choose Billings as their vacation destination.

### VISIT BILLINGS VISITOR GUIDEBOOK

The Visit Billings Visitor Guidebook is available digitally via the website and is mailed upon request at no charge by Visit Billings staff and contractors. The guidebook focuses on the “Forge Your Own Path” branding and encourages travelers to seek adventure and live life to the fullest. With the assistance of beautiful imagery, maps, recreational listings, and more, Visit Billings’ focus is to provide accessible and authentic information. There is no advertising included in Visit Billings publications or collateral materials. Additionally, Visit Billings staff and partners are available to assist potential travelers with their needs via phone, email, and text at (406) 245-4111 or Info@VisitBillings.com.

### BILLINGS LOGAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT (BIL)

Visit Billings is working closely with BIL leadership to monitor the concerns of limited air capacity to business-travel destinations like Billings. As more leisure marketing promotes access to southeast Montana and Billings via air, air capacity, options, and competitive airfare are major priorities for Visit Billings staff and leadership. If travelers can’t get to Billings easily or at a good fare, the destination will easily lose travelers to other Montana airports like Bozeman and Missoula losing major pre-pandemic gains.

BIL continues to deliver exciting news, however, regarding the remodeling project which will expand the capacity of the facility and offer a modern look and feel with more capacity for partners. Such renovations and expansions with major carriers offering direct flights in markets that include Denver, Minneapolis (MSP), Seattle (SEA), and Dallas/

Fort Worth (DFW), Chicago (ORD), Portland, Phoenix, San Diego, and Salt Lake City (SCL) help define Billings as a strong destination for leisure, sports, meetings, and business travelers. Cape Air is also an important partner in the regional market serving smaller eastern Montana communities where residents may choose to fly to Billings to shop, schedule services, and enjoy events.

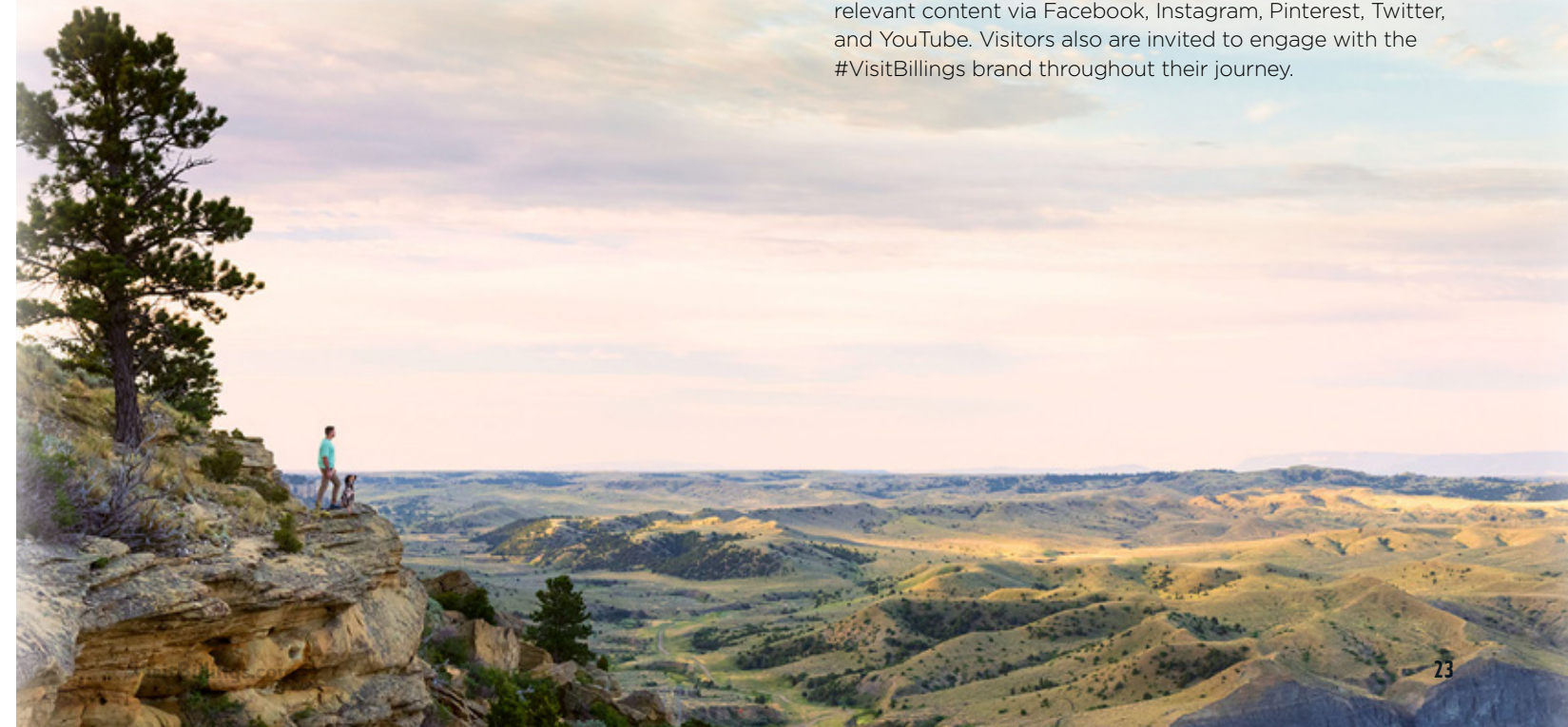
**THE FACILITATION PHASE** is where the traveler seeks experiences en route to a destination and during a stay. DMMOs, communities, and organizations must all work together to make visitors aware of the full array of experiences available to guests. The Visit Billings team is knowledgeable, welcoming, and on-the-ready to facilitate visitor queries via phone, text, or email. The goal is to foster successful stays and future Montana travels.

### BILLINGS TRAIL GUIDES

When a resident greets a visitor, it’s important to consider them a temporary local as well as a future resident. Visitor facilitation, or how we welcome and care for visitors, is how we foster the future of tourism and workforce.

The Visit Billings staff keeps an open dialogue of communication and information with tourism partners, area hotels, attractions, businesses, and the community to provide exceptional customer service for visitors. This initiative is spearheaded by the Billings Trail Guide program of Visit Billings. This civic-minded program works to unite and motivate the Billings community in raising the bar and level of service for visitors. It provides frontline employees training and support so they can easily communicate and provide hospitality and experiential options for visitors in and around Billings and southeast Montana.

Visit Billings continues to foster connectivity within different social media platforms by offering visitors current and relevant content via Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, and YouTube. Visitors also are invited to engage with the #VisitBillings brand throughout their journey.





# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES – FY23

## GROW VISITATION

Visit Billings is focused on the future of travel for Billings. Tourism is vital to the success of the local business community. Tourism supports more than 10,000 jobs locally and enhances the overall quality of life by helping support business. 2.6 million people spending \$621 million in new money to the local economy annually in Billings is not an accidental impact. It's the return on investment of marketing and sales strategies of the Visit Billings leadership, staff, and partners.

Growing and fostering visitation is crucial to the health of the lodging and hospitality industries even more so as the economy recovers from the pandemic impacts in Billings.

While the industry was hit hard by the challenges of the past two years, Visit Billings and its stakeholders and partners are recovering and positioning the industry for growth. There is great optimism among American travelers and destination marketers like Visit Billings staff. We have overcome many obstacles, and the future is bright. The investment in tourism marketing by Visit Billings remains key. Appropriate marketing and sales efforts and strategies work to elevate Billings as a travel destination supporting stakeholders and tourism partners including retailers, restaurants, and local attractions. If Visit Billings' lodging partners (hotels, motels, campgrounds) are booked, that means attractions, retailers, restaurants, and bars are full. This is the positive economic outcome of tourism marketing.

The role tourism plays in Billings is significant. The economic impact is priority, but so is the opportunity to host visitors

from all parts of the world. People come to Montana and Billings to experience the culture, traditions, and gastronomy. At the same time, residents can welcome guests and make them feel included no matter their hometown, home country, or background. Tourism creates a cultural exchange between local citizens and tourists. Such enrichment is important to the future of the destination and visitor growth as well as the quality of life and health of the Billings community as a whole.

Visit Billings continues to work with the Billings Chamber of Commerce and other community leadership to identify and dismantle conscious and non-conscious systemic bias and discriminatory actions within the community through education, training, advocacy, mentorship, and conversations. This is the Chamber's and Visit Billings' Diversity and Inclusion Mission and is woven into greater strategies as well as every conversation and decision contemplated and made by Visit Billings. Visit Billings staff have graduated from the Billings Chamber of Commerce's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Implementation course. Visit Billings staff have also become Certified Autism Travel Planners (CATP) with the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES). This is part of an overarching goal to be an inclusive and welcoming DMMO.

## THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Visit Billings leadership and staff understand the visitor experience plays one of the most important roles in growing visitation as a destination. If we don't treat visitors well as a community, they will not choose Billings in the future. Exceptional service leads to repeat visitation and extended stays. Making sure travelers feel welcome and enjoy their stay at Montana's Trailhead

is a major priority for Visit Billings. The Visit Billings staff works in many ways to help create a positive experience for visitors; one effort is the Billings Trail Guides program.

Creating the best visitor experience imaginable is a top priority for the destination, and the Billings Trail Guides program leads the way in the local tourism industry. This program continues to foster a sense of pride and place for residents by educating them about all that Billings has to offer as a community and tourism destination. As noted, for the last decade in Billings, research has previously reflected a weakness in civic pride among Billings' area citizens. Staff members continue to work to grow this program and not lose momentum by graduating Trail Guides who are ready to help visitors feel welcome in the community. Billings' residents have the capacity to elevate Billings which can significantly impact visitor growth and the visitor experience.

The purpose of the Billings Trail Guides program is to give residents the opportunity to become brand ambassadors for Montana's Trailhead. All Trail Guides should have extensive knowledge of the best of Billings and are able to share the local flair with visitors they encounter. As guests come to Billings, and seek to connect with the city and locals, Visit Billings staff want to make sure the community is prepared to help. That's why exclusive resources for Trail Guides have been created to provide insightful recommendations for residents, which are available at [VisitBillings.com](http://VisitBillings.com).

Additionally, successfully hosting people from varying backgrounds and/or with differing needs or with disadvantages is a priority for Visit Billings staff and leadership as well. As mentioned, together with the Billings Chamber of Commerce executive committee and the TBID Board, Visit Billings staff have become Certified Autism Travel Planners. This work lays the foundation for Billings to become a certified autism destination or CAD, which is a major priority for Visit Billings. Support staff and leadership with Visit Billings,

the TBID, and Billings Chamber of Commerce leadership and colleagues have also received valuable training to assist neuro-diverse visitors. More to come on this effort in FY23 for the destination and tourism partners.

## INCREASE LEISURE VISITATION

Leisure travel marketing strategies remain the highest priority for the organization as leisure visitation supports all Visit Billings' stakeholders (hotels, motels, campgrounds) as well as tourism partners including restaurants, retailers, and attractions. Regional marketing campaigns will focus on road trip itineraries and partnerships with attractions like ZooMontana, Alberta Bair Theater, MetraPark, and cultural entities to name a few.

This year, leisure marketing efforts are going to the dogs. With the development of the "Rick" video, Visit Billings staff are evolving the Great American Road Trip campaign to fully reach the creative's potential. The FY22 and FY23 warm season creative campaign is designed to promote a vacation in Billings through the eyes of a faithful canine companion. "Rick's Travel Tips" will leverage a playfulness in tone and stunning visuals to help showcase Billings as Montana's Trailhead - a city without limits, born in the shadows of the Rimrocks, with a path for every personality. The spring/summer national and regional campaigns will highlight the untamed adventures found along the Rimrocks and the Yellowstone River, while highlighting the unique vibe found only in Billings, featuring Montana's only walkable brew trail and all the comfort travelers are seeking in hotel amenities, outdoor recreation, and a chance to explore the museums, galleries, events, and urban Montana amenities Montana's Trailhead offers.





## SPORTS TOURISM

Writers with the Sports Planning Guide said it best recently:

*'...Sports saved the tourism industry's bacon in 2020 and 2021.'*

This is not only a true statement on the national level, it's also a major point to make locally. Next to leisure visitation, sports tourism did and continues to play a large role in the economic recovery of Billings as a travel destination following COVID-19 transitions and impacts. Local sports events were strong in Billings prior to the pandemic, in the pandemic, and post-pandemic. Therefore, positioning Billings as a sports events destination will remain a top priority for Visit Billings in FY23. Staff will continue to foster growth in this segment by supporting partners like the Montana High School Association, MSU Billings, Rocky Mountain College, area school districts, local tournament directors and owners, as well as the City of Billings and Yellowstone County. Visit Billings has a large vision for sports in the destination. While Visit Billings is responsible for marketing Billings as a sports events destination and assists with nearly 30 events annually, the opportunity to grow this segment and build the sports identity for Billings is incredible. The efforts being made with Landon's Legacy Foundation for Landon's Mircle Field, South Billings Urban Renewal Association efforts to build a sports facility, School District #2 planning to better accommodate high school sports events at Daylis Stadium, TrailNet's plans for the Skyline Trail, and MetraPark Master Planning considerations all build on Billings' capacity to be a competitive destination for sports events and for sporting enthusiasts. It's an exciting time!

## MEETINGS, REUNIONS, GROUP TOURS, & SERVICING

Visit Billings staff strives to be innovative in how to meet the needs of meeting planners and incentivize decision-makers to choose Billings as their meetings destination. Staff work closely with meeting hotel sales staff to help inspire and orient meeting professionals with thoughtful sales strategies. This segment can continue to have a strong economic impact on the community as it rebounds from pandemic impacts. The Visit Billings staff also assists planners who are in-market to execute meetings in the destination by helping facilitate their needs with attendance-building, travel reassurances, registration needs, welcome activities, and in some cases, financial incentives.

Reunions and domestic group tours are also important segments that can grow visitation to Billings. Like leisure visitation, meetings, and sports events, opportunities for growth for both the reunion and group tour segments are priorities for Visit Billings staff. Working with tour operators and reunion planners to boast Billings as key partner for their booking needs is a key priority.

## THE INTERNATIONAL MARKETPLACE

As the world continues to reopen, it is important for Visit Billings to remain competitive in the international market segment. Visit Billings plans to attend IPW, ACGI, and International Roundup to help foster pre-pandemic efforts to grow this segment of visitation to Billings. It is important for Visit Billings staff to maintain relationships with international tour operators so overseas visitors who have ranked sightseeing, fine dining, and national parks/monuments as major draws in deciding where to spend time while visiting the United States keep Billings top-of-mind as new travel habits emerge. Visit Billings will work with Brand MT and partners like Visit Southeast Montana and Rocky Mountain International to remain relevant in travel recovery to the international market. Tour operators will be in market warm season of 2022.







IN-DEPTH LOOK:  
FY23 LEISURE MARKETING  
STRATEGY





**SHAPED BY THE YELLOWSTONE RIVER. BORN IN THE SHADOWS OF THE RIMROCKS. WELCOME TO MONTANA'S TRAILHEAD. BE GUIDED BY THE GREATNESS THAT LIES AHEAD. BIG SKIES AND BIG THINGS. FORGE YOUR OWN PATH.**

Leveraging Montana's Trailhead, Visit Billings' "Forge Your Own Path" brand invites visitors to participate in a memorable journey that is authentic to the Big Sky experience.

Billings, Montana is the American West at its very best. Where the mountains meet the plains.

It is what travelers need to soothe their weary souls. This part of the state is rugged yet tamed too, and still has a touch of its wild past brimming from its downtown to the surrounding massive unaltered natural spaces. Adventure is always delivered with remarkably beautiful and vast landscapes. As one media outlet stated, "Montana is a foreign land to some, its wild places unmatched anywhere else in the country." This evokes a sense of exploration and discovery which Visit Billings will embrace in its FY23 leisure marketing strategies.



# WARM SEASON STRATEGY

As noted previously in this document, Montana, southeast Montana, and Billings continue to emerge from the pandemic's impacts. The travel outlook for Billings' tourism is positive and revenue projections are strong which will continue to positively impact stakeholders, tourism partners, and the business community as a whole. The leisure travel market is the strongest market for Billings tourism.

Visit Billings leadership and staff continue to build off post-pandemic opportunities. As mentioned, steady growth in occupancy and average daily rate have been realized for stakeholders since June 2020 (Smith Travel Research [STR]), which highlights how the FY21 and FY22 national and regional leisure campaigns have been and continue to successfully market and sell Billings as a leisure travel destination.

While many parts of the world have not yet realized gains in visitor economies, Billings has recovered from pandemic weaknesses. Low population and Montana's big skies have helped grow the visitor economy consistently since the summer of 2020. Occupancy and room demand are strong and average daily rates are higher and steady.

Heading into year three of the global pandemic, some travelers still have leftover airline credits from canceled trips, some are desperate to go anywhere for an escape, and others continue to feel anxiety around the virus and how safe travel is. Still, 2022 offers travelers hope and optimism.

When looking at the 2022 strategy, it's important to look at what travelers are seeking. Destination Analysts finds: "By far the types of trips Americans are most excited about taking in the next year include family trips and romantic getaways. Millennial and Gen Z-aged travelers exhibit much higher levels of excitement for many different trip types compared to older travelers. In terms of interest in specific activities in the next 12 months, Americans are most interested in enjoying scenic beauty, warm weather outdoor activities, road trips, dining in regional restaurants, visiting historical sites and enjoying street food during their travels."

The destination once again gives access to uniquely powerful encounters with the natural world, alongside the comforts of modern life, which is still what visitors are seeking in 2022. The spring/summer campaign promotes all the adventures that can be found along the Rimrocks and the Yellowstone River, while also highlighting the unique vibe found only in downtown Billings, with the only walkable brew trail.

## GOALS

### Campaign Goals:

1. Increase awareness for Billings as an ideal warm season travel destination, leveraging the destination's brand, "Forge Your Own Path."
2. Increase awareness for the big skies, unspoiled outdoor adventure, a unique urban downtown and hospitality offerings all found in a visit to Billings - while reminding visitors that Billings, Montana is the most scenic route into Yellowstone with incredible proximity to iconic attractions.
3. Encourage visitors to experience the culinary and cultural offerings in the city of Billings paired with the natural attractions surrounding the city.

### Planning Strategy:

1. Drive unique and repeat traffic to the website with a strategy that leverages digital and video-driven channels.
2. Evolve the spring/summer campaign so that it still utilizes some of the elements of the Great American Road Trip, but also speaks to visitors in the flight markets, targeting both drive and flight markets. Utilize the full range of video assets that were produced in 2021.
3. Stay flexible to evolve the campaign as necessary based on travelers' ongoing response to the pandemic situation.



## WE'VE GONE TO THE DOGS: MEET RICK

With the introduction of "Rick" to travelers, Visit Billings has developed this personality to fully reach the creative's potential. The fun landing page at VisitBillings.com and expansion of Rick's videos will allow the Visit Billings marketing team to promote Billings' life seen through a "dog's" eyes, leveraging the playfulness of tone as well as the stunning visuals of the destination which help showcase Billings as the city that has everything you need for four-legged as well as two-legged "animals."

### Specific Marketing Tactics:

- A refresh of the existing landing page to evolve the campaign, align more with the video assets and update the itineraries.
- Use of video will become more prominent, especially within social media. Post analysis from previous campaigns all point to higher conversions with the addition of video so this will play a key role in creative.



## A LOOK AT THE RESEARCH

According to Destination Analysts, travel's outlook for 2022 looks promising. When Americans were asked to describe their travel in 2022, top choices include "hopeful," "excited," "fun" and "more." In fact, 33.2% of American travelers say they will take more leisure trips in the next year and the same proportion (33.4%) say they will spend more money on their leisure travel in 2022.

The average reported leisure travel budget for 2022 is currently \$3,797. Beaches, rural towns and national/state parks destinations will still be where a majority of American travelers head, with more than 70% reporting plans for these types of destinations.

Meanwhile, 66.2% of travelers currently say they plan to visit cities, although 29.3% report that they will increase their urban travel in 2022. However, domestic destinations will face more competition again as 23.6% say they will increase their international travel in 2022.

American travelers also look to continue to take trips to make up for time missed out on with loved ones during the pandemic: 39.2% say they will increase their family travel in 2022 and 32.8% will increase their travel with friends.

The Goodway Group, through the Global Web Index, has provided the following insight into what we can expect from travelers in 2022.

- Travelers continue to lean into domestic travel.
- The industry will see longer/extended vacations as travelers try to maximize the reward to match the effort to travel.
- We will see increases in vacation rentals through sites like AirBnB and VRBO that can promise more seclusion and feelings of safety.



# ZARTICO RESEARCH SHOWS:

## TOP VISITOR MARKETS ARE CURRENTLY:

**Butte-Bozeman**

**Great Falls:**

Visitors spent the most time in Billings of any other origin market (winter 2022)

**Minot-Bismarck, ND**

Visitors spend is the 2nd highest

**Salt Lake City**

**Denver**

**Missoula**

**Seattle-Tacoma**

**Rapid City**

**Spokane**

## POPULAR PLACES\*:

**Yellowstone National Park**

**SCHEELS**

**Zimmerman Park**

**Shiloh Crossing**

**South Park**

**St. Vincent Healthcare**

**Rimrock Mall**

**Costco**

**Wal-mart locations**

**MetraPark**

**Billings International Airport**

**Coulson Park**

**Phipps Diamond X Park**

**Riverfront Park**

\*Top Points of Interest for Billings and Yellowstone County evolve every week based on events, meetings, and weather. Visit Billings staff monitors Zartico listings weekly with a Destination Dashboard, however, at the time of the creation of this document, these were the top POI.

## WHAT WEBSITE CONTENT ARE VISITORS MOST ENGAGED WITH?

**Nightlife/Billings Brew Trail**

**Events**

**Retail**

## OUTSIDE OF BILLINGS, MOST VISITOR TRAFFIC TO THE VISIT BILLINGS WEBSITE IS COMING FROM:

**Salt Lake City**

**Denver**

**Dallas**





# TARGET AUDIENCE

The Visit Billings' target audience for spring/summer (warm season) is primarily a mix of couples and families ages 25-44 with pre-teen/teen children. When they are researching travel, their primary concerns are costs and COVID. With consumers continuing to feel the financial impact from COVID-19, the state of their personal finances is the primary concern for almost half of domestic travelers, followed by the state of the pandemic. Approximately 41% of this audience is thinking about COVID-19 in their vacation considerations in 2022, down from 57% in 2021.

We are targeting travelers who are looking for a long weekend escape to nearby metro areas, who are interested in nature-related trips, and those looking for a rural escape into their surrounding outdoor paradises - as well as the all important road tripper audience.

Flexibility will continue to play an integral part of the media campaign, allowing dollars to be spent where they are generating the most response.

Behavioral targeting will focus on the domestic traveler - those looking for a long weekend escape from their metro area, those interested in nature-related trips, and those looking for a rural escape into their surrounding outdoor paradises. The target audience is families with a household income of \$75,000+.

The geographic markets will follow data and proven key markets to include:

**Primary:** Key feeder flight markets include Minneapolis, Denver, Salt Lake City, Chicago and Dallas with interest in travel to Montana and the western region of the U.S., including monuments, state and national parks and western heritage.

**Secondary:** Regional close drive markets, primarily in-state and Wyoming. Bozeman, MT; Great Falls, MT; Helena, MT; Missoula, MT; Minot-Bismark-Dickinson, ND; Rapid City, SD; Casper, WY; Buffalo WY; Sheridan WY; Billings DMA (excluding city of Billings) + city of Gillette, city of Cody.

# MEDIA

The media tactics this year look to source out new visitors and re-engage with previous visitors, using the creative to showcase why Billings should be their first choice when choosing a vacation destination, with its proximity to an array of outdoor wonders, historic monuments and local arts, cuisine and culture providing a unique experience unlike any other in the competitive set.

Planning for this year's campaign includes researching potential new audiences as well as researching new media and content platforms to fully maximize the campaign's success. With knowledge from past campaigns, we have the historical data to know what performs best and optimize against platforms that are under-performing, allowing us to continue strengthening brand awareness for Visit Billings and encouraging visitors to consider this beautiful location as a destination not to miss.

### KEY TACTICS INCLUDE:

- Increase Investment and Expand Geo-Targeting to Support Drive Markets
- Optimize Audiences and Test New Targeting Tactics within Existing Channels
- Add one New Media Channel in Q2 to Expand Reach and Drive Awareness
- Harness the Power of Advanced Analytics to Inform Media Performance and Strategy

Paid media on digital and social platforms including Facebook and Instagram will remain prominent in the integrated campaign. Creative materials will place emphasis on video placement through Instagram stories, Facebook's Instant Experience and a video network, so that impressions are not locked to the content on just one platform but can be optimized to whichever channel is showing the best performance.

Paid search also continues to play a prominent role in driving qualified traffic to VisitBillings.com.

### MEDIA KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs)

To balance quantity and quality of website visitation, the marketing campaign will optimize digital media toward conversion actions and monitor for an efficient CPC (cost per click) and CTR (click-through rate).

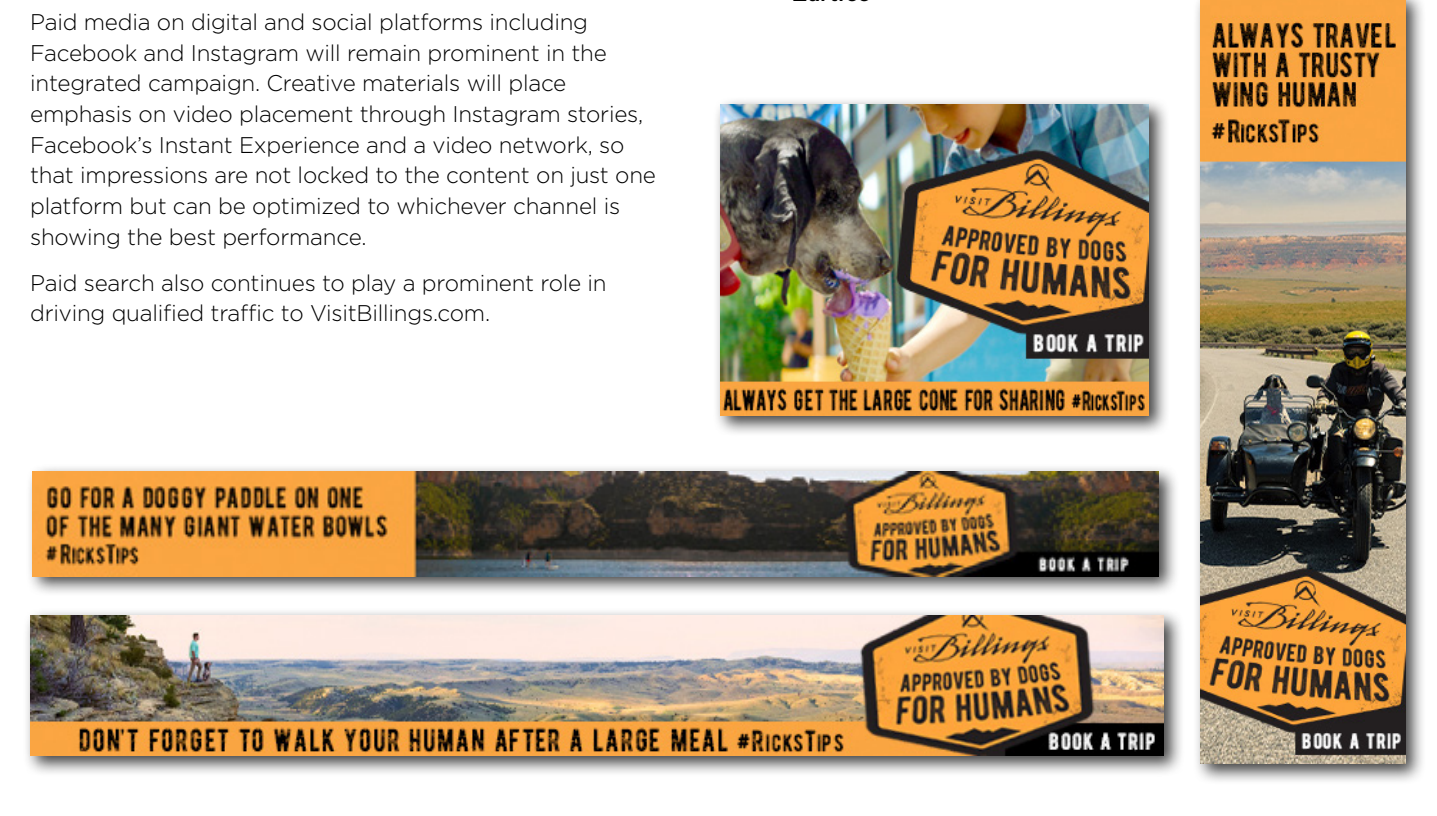
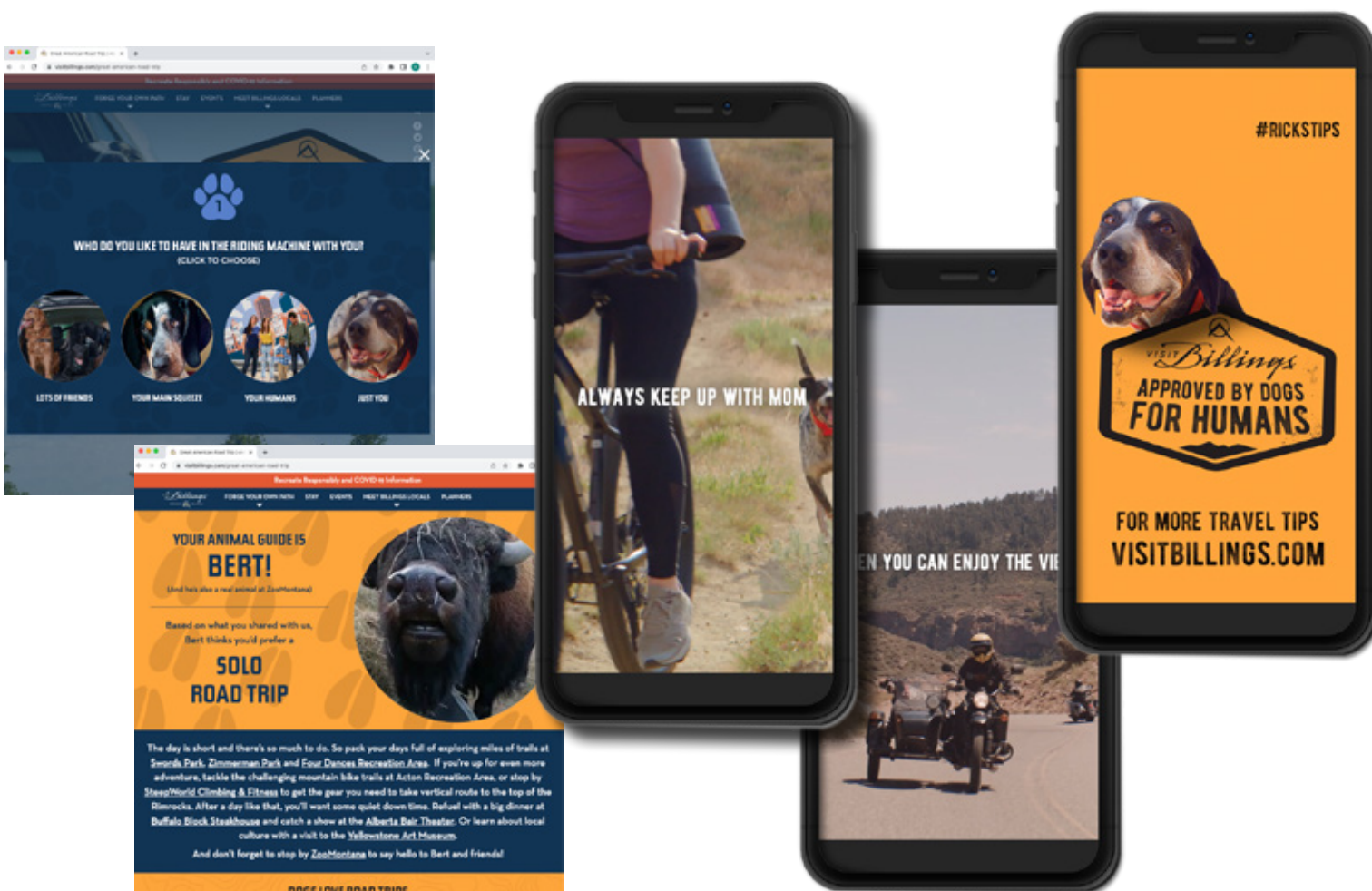
The following engagement actions will be tracked:

- ★ Landing page visits
- ★ 3+ minutes on site
- ★ Foot traffic to hotels and key destinations

The campaign will be set up dynamically allowing retargeting of the budget toward the market that is performing the best. This will be closely monitored, so the budget remains spread over the entire campaign.

Visit Billings staff in partnership with agency colleagues will also monitor the following data:

- **Smith Travel Research - demand, occupancy and ADR**
- **TBID Assessments**
- **Collections from State Lodging Facility Use Tax**
- **Destinations International Economic Impact Calculators**
- **VisaVue Spending Trends**
- **AirDNA Data**
- **Destination Analysts reporting**
- **Zartico**





## REGIONAL YEAR-ROUND STRATEGY

Billings is Montana's largest city and, with that, the opportunities are endless. From arts and culture to the food scene as well as historic points of interest and outdoor recreation, it is easy to fill days with unique experiences. Regionally, Billings is the city travelers will choose as it offers the hustle and bustle of a city without the huge crowds. Cultural attractions such as concerts and art galleries, as well as unique farmers markets, the walkable brew trail, retailers, restaurants, events, and more will engage visitors. The regional year-round strategy is designed to highlight experiences that can't be found for hundreds of miles and is customized so that it speaks specifically to each unique traveler, encouraging them to "Forge Your Own Path" while exploring the city and the region. There is a path for every personality and these personalities are part of the year-round leisure marketing campaign showcased on VisitBillings.com.

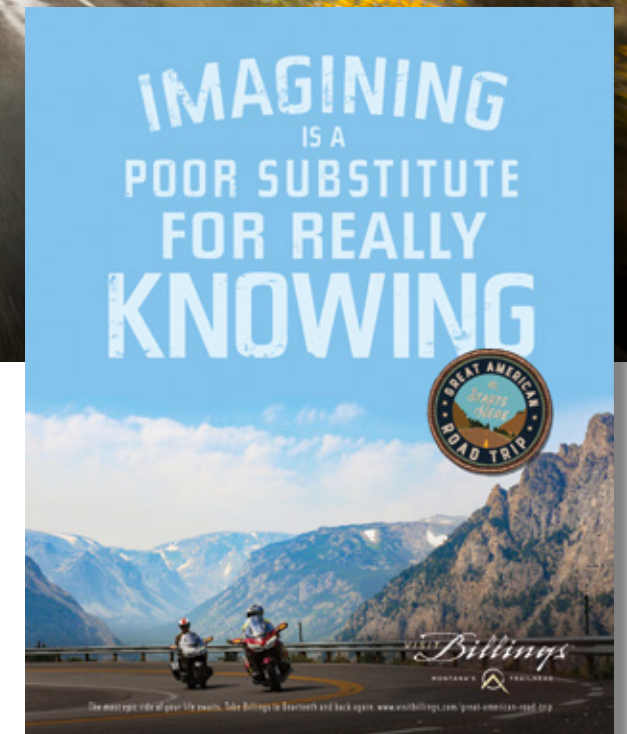
### GOALS

1. Increase awareness of "things to do" in Billings for the regional audience and every season.
2. Establish a sense of urgency around seasonal events and attractions.
3. Continue utilizing the creative assets and messaging of the Great American Road Trip, while leveraging "Forge Your Own Path" as the umbrella brand position, inviting prospective visitors to experience Billings.

Creative messaging emphasizes: "Two days off. Time to turn it on." This messaging encourages state residents to take that weekend escape for which they are yearning. The creative will focus on experiences and activities unique to the city and the region, consistently providing potential visitors new reasons to travel to Billings. The marketing efforts will responsibly establish a sense of urgency in booking for special seasonal features like concerts and shows at Alberta Bair Theater, Pub Station, First Interstate Arena at MetraPark, the Babcock Theater, and other events. Primarily promoted through digital targeting, these travel drivers will be communicated through the brand lens of "Forge Your Own Path." A social content calendar also outlines key traveler-driving events, activities and attractions by season, and maps out markets and allocated budgets throughout the year.



## MOTORCYCLE ENTHUSIASTS



This market is extremely important to Billings. Billings is a proven stop along the itineraries of motorcycle enthusiasts across North America. The Beartooth Scenic Byway continues to help grow the two-wheeled market. The 68-mile stretch of U.S. Highway 212 has been described as "the perfect definition of what a great bike ride should be" by National Geographic and is consistently in the Top 10 best motorcycle rides in the U.S.

The Great American Road Trip campaign builds awareness of the destination's proximity to the most scenic route into Yellowstone National Park, aligning with the 2-wheeled market which is drawn to curvy roads, riding long distances and experiencing the epic journey. National parks are key drivers of visitation in this segment as is the destination's position along the I-90 and I-94 corridor to and from Sturgis every summer.

FY23 plans include additional sponsored content development and niche digital targeting of the two-

wheel audience. Billings' hospitality amenities and access to surrounding Big Sky Country roads elevate its position with groups like BMW Motorcycle Owners of America, Gold Wing Road Riders Association, Harley Owners Group, and Yamaha Star Motorcycles. Visit Billings saw success in drawing the two-wheel audience with publications like RoadRUNNER Magazine and having a presence at Sturgis Bike Rally. Finally, one other note, Billings is the proud host of the 2022 InZane Rally which is part of the Valyrie family.



# GROUP TOUR MARKET

Yellowstone National Park and Little Bighorn Battlefield, along with the Lewis and Clark Trail, are key attractions positioning Billings as a trailhead to access Montana's iconic sites. These points of interest make Billings a group-friendly destination for the domestic or international traveler. Billings' proximity to the Beartooth Scenic Byway, as well as the northeast and north entrances to Yellowstone National Park, position the city well as a fantastic stop for a group tour itinerary.

The Visit Billings team and stakeholders are fortunate to have a level of group tour business returning in 2022. Visit Billings will remain strong in efforts to build relationships with domestic and international tour operators by attending events such as ACGI, IPW, and International Roundup, which all help the team maintain relationships with both international and domestic tour operators.

Additionally, partnerships are critical to the continued success and growth of the group tour market. Regional partnerships with Visit Southeast Montana and the Red Lodge business community help to facilitate strong routing. Local partnerships with hotels, Western Heritage Center, Yellowstone County Museum, the Billings Depot, ZooMontana, and others attractions ensure guests receive the best possible experiences while spending time at Montana's Trailhead.



# MEETINGS & CONVENTIONS PLUS SERVICING



Visit Billings staff members strive to be innovative in how to meet the needs of meeting planners and incentivize decision-makers to choose Billings as their meeting destination.

Meeting recruitment continues to be an important priority to Visit Billings but the meetings market hasn't fully recovered to pre-pandemic levels, nor has business travel fully returned. The Visit Billings Strategic Plan will shed more light on the future of this market segment to Billings to find the best strategies to strengthen the destination's meetings business and support local stakeholders in such a highly competitive market. Additionally, hosting site inspections and pitching Visit Billings meeting opportunities to state, regional, and national meeting planners will continue as will servicing booked events. Every year, Visit Billings staff and volunteers help facilitate and orient convention-goers with registration bags, brew maps, visitor guides, maps, and fun give-a-ways to make their trip to the trailhead of awesome ... awesome.

## GOALS

1. Build greater brand awareness of Billings as a meeting destination.
2. Foster relationships with qualified meeting planners looking for support to book small-market meetings, citywide events, and reunions.
3. Service groups with high levels of customer satisfaction and event execution during the recovery, reassuring planners that Billings is an amazing meeting destination from both a support perspective and successful place to execute a meeting agenda for attendees.
4. Visit Billings staff is an extension of meeting hotel sales managers working in tandem to help book meetings and citywide events in future years.

## POTENTIAL ATTENDANCE - MEETINGS INDUSTRY CONFERENCES/SHOWS

Small Marketing Meetings • Military Reunion Network





## SPORTS AND TOURISM

As previously noted, along with the leisure market, sports tourism played a major role in helping Billings' area businesses recover from COVID-19 impacts. Organized youth sports, amateur and high school events are all essential in helping grow visitation to Montana's Trailhead. As FY22 efforts to better position Billings as a sports events destination remain a priority for Visit Billings staff, the final Visit Billings Strategic Plan will help better identify innovations that will shape the future of sports events and sports tourism. Key to success in sports for Billings is supporting local tournament directors whose commitment to softball, volleyball, basketball, soccer, and baseball tournaments as well as mountain bike and road races prove to be successful for businesses as major draws for the city.

Also, staff will continue to prioritize the support of governing bodies, executing awarded events like the NCAA DII Cross Country Region Championships in fall of 2022, MHSAA events, local divisional tournaments and more.

Visit Billings appreciates relationships with Montana State University Billings (MSUB), Rocky Mountain College (RMC), the MHSAA, area school districts, local tournament directors, as well as the City of Billings and Yellowstone County (MetraPark).

### GOALS

1. Elevate Billings and Yellowstone County as the strongest sports destination in the region.
2. Be a valuable and innovative resource to tournament directors and associations in efforts to host and grow competitions that draw athletes and fans from across the region while generating room nights for lodging partners during the recovery.
3. Monitor conversations surrounding additional sports facilities in the destination and hire the sports tourism sales manager.

## COOPERATIVE OPPORTUNITIES WITH BRAND MT

Joint Venture programs are important to Visit Billings marketing efforts. Sojern placements, data partnerships, and other opportunities with the State and Montana tourism partners like Visit Southeast Montana, Glacier Country, and Destination Missoula will be considered. To reiterate, partnerships with Visit Southeast Montana like the Minneapolis 2022 market takeover will continue to be considered as budgets allow. Opportunities to team up to grow visitation to the southeast region as a whole equates to wins for Billings.

## CONTENT STRATEGY

A strong content strategy continues to play a vital role in Visit Billings' marketing strategy. Social media has proven to be effective in the inspirational phase of travel decision-making. Paired with the Visit Billings blog and email channels, the team is able to tell a complete story to potential visitors.

Visit Billings' social media strategy is focused on sharing the destination's story in a compelling, consistent and editorial manner, thus strengthening awareness for Billings' culture and heightening its position within the online space and among its competitive set.

With storytelling as its driving characteristic, the content strategy focuses on extending the Visit Billings' voice into the online space as a persona - the approachable and lighthearted Billings Trail Guide. "Forge Your Own Path" represents the Billings mentality and is rooted in the local way of life. Visit Billings combines a friendly familiarity with a down-to-earth tone, finding a path for any personality.

Visit Billings' owned channels rely on an integrated editorial content calendar. The content calendar provides the opportunity to plan and prepare content (e.g. copy, photos, videos, etc.) ahead of time, week-by-week - streamlining social content development efforts across all channels and seeing how they all interrelate (i.e. from e-newsletters to media outreach). It will further facilitate the integration of seasonal messaging, key events, new local businesses, etc. The calendar assists the team in planning future videos to create content that engages a variety of personalities on social channels. Visit Billings also will increase exposure through the tagging of relevant accounts and hashtags to piggyback on timely industry conversations.



Facebook serves as a Billings Trail Guide, posting consistent updates and addressing followers' inquiries in a timely manner. The type of content will include information on events, photography/video, details on attractions, closings/openings, what's new, user-generated content, and third-party endorsement through press coverage, etc. The Facebook channel will:

- Encourage dialogue by asking followers questions.
- Be a channel for highlighting partners when special events are happening through ticket giveaways when possible.
- Include links within posts, when relevant, to help drive traffic to the Billings blog and website.

Tag relevant hospitality partners, attractions, events and visitors in posts, when applicable, to maximize visibility and reach.

### NEW IN FY23: RICK TOKS



Instagram is the inspiration channel for Visit Billings with nearly 6,000 followers, guiding travelers on their dreaming and ultimately planning phases. The Instagram channel features compelling imagery and videos, both branded and consumer-generated. The Instagram channel will:

- Curate and utilize consumer-generated photography and video.
- Create editorial photos and videos aimed to highlight destination experiences and offerings in a visually-compelling way.
- Leverage the existing #VisitBillings and #MontanasTrailhead hashtags while encouraging visitors and stakeholders to do the same.
- Create engaging and authentic "Stories" to show followers real-time activities and inspire them to follow upcoming events.
- Engage with traditional media through the use of designated hashtags to aggregate related content and join in on relevant and timely social media conversations.

### EMAIL

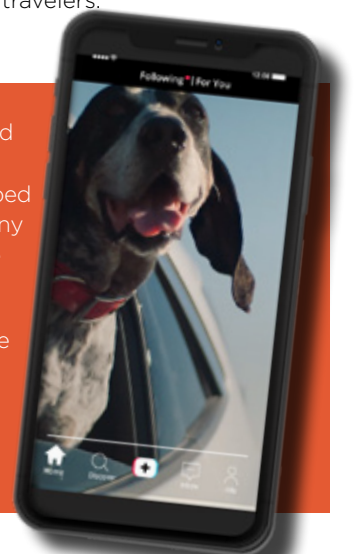
Email marketing is an effective way to reach those travelers who have specifically expressed interest with Visit Billings, connecting with them in a valuable and cost-effective way. The Visit Billings team educates, engages, and inspires them to travel to this destination by exposing travelers to editorial content, blog articles and social content. Visit Billings has a 22% open rate with a database of just over 35,000 contacts.

### VISIT BILLINGS BLOG

Visit Billings will continue to utilize social and email channels to promote new blog content, featuring experiences that align with the interest-based personas established for the website, from History Buffs to Foodies and Outdoor Enthusiasts. Visit Billings team members along with tourism colleagues and stakeholders will have the opportunity to be blog post authors and feature their own unique Billings Trail Guide experiences. Additionally, VisitBillings.com hosts a page dedicated to Winston The Sloth that is actively updated with travel blogs and itineraries recommended to travelers.

Using the footage already gathered from Rick's shoot, as we go to the dogs, the creative team has developed a series of videos where Rick's many Billings adventures can live and be shared.

Staff will edit these clips to show the wide range of activities in "choose your own adventure" short-style films. These can also be shared on Instagram.





# EARNED MEDIA



Visit Billings' public relations strategy has been a major focus in order to drive tourism through generating earned media coverage and influencer engagement for the destination.

While more insights to PR and publicity will be noted in the VBSP, until then momentum in this area of destination marketing will continue in target markets, with editorial stories and influencer commentary that focuses on the many experiences Billings' visitors can enjoy in a way that brings the "Forge Your Own Path" brand to life. Local writers

and content creators can help tell local stories about Billings and the region. Visit Billings partners with Brand MT as well as other tourism and hospitality partners, and neighboring regions, in promoting visitation to Billings through earned media initiatives.

In FY23, data from the Minneapolis investment with Visit Southeast Montana, which included a media event, will be analyzed with follow-ups and activation with media and influencers interested in the Great American Road Trip and Billings.

## MEDIA RELATIONS AND OUTREACH

Throughout the year, Visit Billings will continue to build relationships with influencers and journalists that will help grow the brand and inspire travel. In FY22, Visit Billings created successful partnerships with journalists representing: *Men's Journal*, *Matador Network*, *Conde Nast Travel*, *Chicago Parent* and more. This will include attending events like the Public Relations Society of America Travel and Tourism Conference and perhaps the North America Travel Blog Exchange which have allowed the team to build relationships for the influencer program previously. Visit Billings will regularly and consistently reach out to regional and national media with news angles and stories to help promote the destination. This frequent contact will help further develop critical relationships with travel media and influencers, and generate an increase in editorial coverage for the destination.

The VisitBillings.com press page has been updated to include sample itineraries for niche audiences (outdoor adventure, culinary, couples, families, etc.), story ideas, trail guide videos and more video and image assets. This is part of the necessary steps of developing media/influencer relations content to promote Billings.



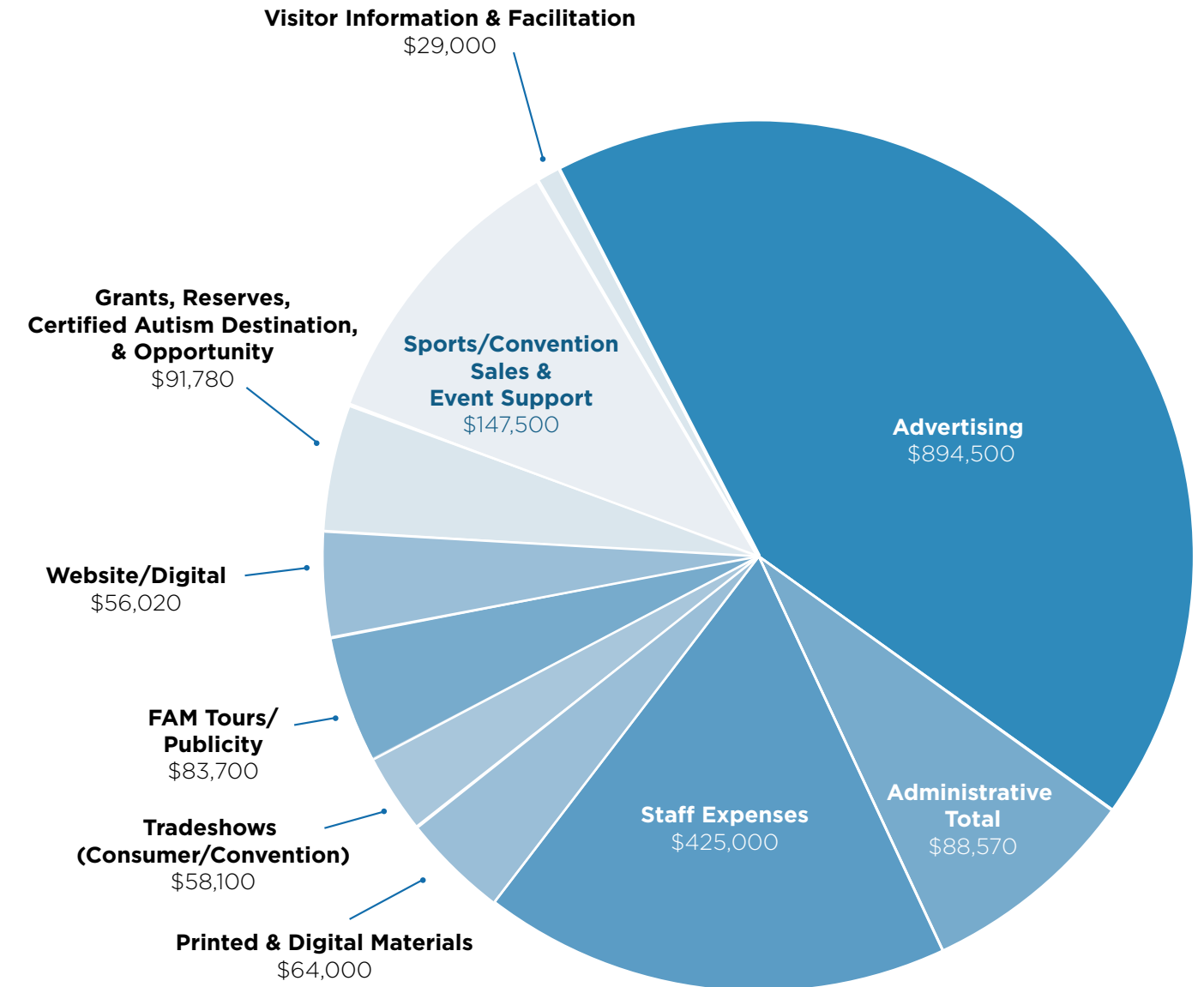


# 2023 BILLINGS TOURISM BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT (BTBID) BUDGET

<b>PROJECTED REVENUE</b>	<b>\$1,939,170</b>
<b>MARKETING &amp; SALES TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1,425,600</b>
Advertising	\$894,500
Grants, Reserves, Certified Autism Destination, & Opportunity	\$91,780
Printed & Digital Materials	\$64,000
Sports/Convention Sales & Event Support	\$147,500
Tradeshows (Consumer/Convention)	\$58,100
FAM Tours/Publicity	\$83,700
Website/Digital	\$56,020
Visitor Information & Facilitation	\$29,000
Film Recruitment	\$1,000
<b>STAFF EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$425,000</b>
<b>ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$88,570</b>



## BILLINGS TOURISM BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT (BTBID) DOLLARS - BUDGET FY22



**PROJECTED REVENUE: \$1,939,170**



# FY23 CVB BUDGET

<b>PROJECTED REVENUE</b>	<b>\$462,465</b>
<b>MARKETING &amp; SALES TOTAL</b>	<b>\$369,972</b>
Advertising	\$280,172
Fulfillment	\$19,000
Printed Materials	\$3,000
Sales Expenses	\$6,500
Publicity	\$12,500
Research	\$42,300
Opportunity	\$1,000
Film Recruitment	\$500
Meeting Expenses	\$2,000
Website	\$1,000
Staff Expenses	\$2,000
<b>ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$92,493</b>



## STATE LODGING TAX DOLLARS (CVB)

