



**FY26 MARKETING PLAN & BUDGET**



## MISSION STATEMENT

**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.**

**LISTEN ~~TO~~ YOUR  
OUTSIDE VOICE**





In 2023, 12.5 million  
visitors to Montana spent

**\$5.45  
BILLION**

at retailers, restaurants and  
bars, gas stations, and lodging  
businesses, to name a few.

**48K JOBS**

Non-resident travel supports nearly  
48,340 jobs in Montana and lowers  
the tax burden on every Montana  
household an average of \$930/year.

**1 IN 12**

Montana workers are supported by  
out-of-state travel.





# MORE THAN EVER, WE MUST PRIORITIZE THE FOCUS ON BILLINGS' TOURISM INDUSTRY.

As Billings continues to evolve as a premier travel destination, prioritizing the growth and sustainability of the city's tourism industry remains essential. With the launch of a new brand, our destination marketing efforts will embrace a renewed vision, reinforcing Billings as a preferred travel destination. A major milestone this year is the integration of sports tourism in the overall rebranding efforts. As part of this initiative, Visit Billings is leading the development of the city's first Sports Commission, uniting sports organizations and stakeholders to streamline and enhance the planning and execution of sporting events across Billings.

Through strategic investment of state lodging facility-use tax and Tourism Business Improvement District funds, Visit Billings will continue to lead destination marketing and management efforts. These initiatives will drive visitor growth, educate residents and stakeholders about the power of tourism, and position the industry as a key contributor to Billings' economic and cultural vibrancy.

Each year, Visit Billings refines its sales and marketing strategies, customer service priorities, and product development efforts to adapt to changing industry needs. In FY26, we will focus on initiatives that support industry resiliency, create a welcoming and inclusive environment for visitors, and cultivate positive resident sentiment toward tourism. With a strengthened brand and the increased focus on sports tourism, we are setting the stage for a more dynamic and sustainable tourism industry that continues to benefit both visitors and the local community for years to come.

## WHAT IS TOURISM?

In the tourism industry, certain terms are often used interchangeably. The United Nations Tourism Organization provides a clear definition that helps clarify these differences, especially in discussions among Destination Leadership Organizations (DLOs) and throughout this document.

Tourism is a social, cultural, and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes. These people are called visitors (which may be either tourists or excursionists; residents or non-residents) and tourism has to do with their activities, some of which involve tourism expenditure. What does tourism look like in Billings? On average, Billings hosts 2.6 million visitors annually who travel to the city for business demands, medical needs, and leisure offerings. This can include vacations, weekend getaways, meetings, conventions, appointments, sports events, or tours. Those 2.6 million visitors typically spend an average of \$621 million in Billings businesses, such as restaurants, hotels, retailers, attractions, campgrounds, outfitters, guides, etc. (Destination Analysts, 2018).

How can tourism grow and strengthen? Well currently, Billings is only playing host to 20.8% of travelers to Montana (ITRR, 2023). In 2023, 12.5 million people visited Montana and spent \$5.45 billion. Billings has the capacity to responsibly host more annual visitors.

## WHAT IS IN IT FOR THE LOCALS?

- Tourism reduces the average tax burden on every Montana household by more than \$930/year.
- 1 in 12 Montana workers are supported by out-of-state travel.
- Non-Montana resident visitors offer \$1.5 billion in direct employee compensation.
- Non-Montana resident visitors support 48,340 Montana jobs.
- Non-Montana resident visitors contribute \$414 million in state and local taxes, much of which goes to the state's General Funds to support budgets for the State of Montana and numerous programs and state agencies.

Tourism plays a vital role in Billings' economy, yet its full impact is often understated. The strategic efforts of Visit Billings, outlined in this plan, enhance the city's competitive advantage, generate quality job opportunities, drive economic growth, and foster a dynamic community that attracts both visitors and residents. Additionally, these initiatives strengthen Billings' tourism brand, instilling a sense of pride among locals and positioning the city as a premier destination.





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## BILLINGS MONTANA

Conveniently located in southeast Montana, Billings is the largest city between Calgary and Denver, and Spokane and Minneapolis, serving a trade area of over 500,000 people. Billings provides unrivaled access to some of the most scenic and historic destinations in the United States including Yellowstone National Park, Bighorn Canyon, national monuments, and the breathtaking Beartooth Scenic Byway. Billings is the perfect gateway to experiencing the best of Montana and the American West.











## BILLINGS TOURISM BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**JEFF SCHOENHARD** – Kelly Inn Hotels

**JOE STUDINER** – Erck Hotels

**GEORGE MARAGOS** – Northern Hotel

**JORDAN CLAYTON** – Home2 Suites By Hilton

**SHELLI MANN** – Boothill Inn & Suites

**STEVE WAHRLICH** – Best Western Plus  
Clocktower Inn & Suites

**JASE MURI** – Billings Hotel and Convention Center

**KATY SCHREINER** – Downtown Billings Alliance -  
Chamber Liaison

## THE VISIT BILLINGS TEAM

**JOHN BREWER, CAE, CATP, CTA**  
President & CEO  
Billings Chamber of Commerce

**ALY EGGART, MSPR, CATP, CTA**  
Executive Director, (Billings TBID & Billings CVB)  
Visit Billings

**MARYA PENNINGTON, PDM, CATP, CTA**  
Marketing Director  
Visit Billings

**CASEY CONLON, CATP, PDM**  
Sports Tourism Director  
Visit Billings

## BILLINGS CHAMBER/CVB EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:

**JEREMY VANNATTA** – Marsh McLennan Agency

**DEBBIE POTTER** – Eide Bailly

**JESS PETERSON** – Western Skies Strategies

**TOBY O'ROURKE** – Kampgrounds of America

**CARMELITA DOMINGUEZ** – Montana Allergy &  
Asthma Specialists

**BRYCE TERPSTYA** – Jones Construction

**NICK STEEN** – Walkers

**POLLY MULVANEY, PDM, CATP, CTA**  
Group Sales Manager  
Visit Billings

**MADDIE MALMSTROM, CATP**  
Content Coordinator  
Visit Billings

**KYRA COUSINS, PDM, CATP, CTA**  
Visitor Services Manager  
Visit Billings

**MEGAN STEVENSON, CATP, CTA**  
Vice President of Finance and Operations  
Billings Chamber/Visit Billings/Visit Southeast Montana



## VISIT BILLINGS

Visit Billings is the brand that represents the Billings Tourism Business Improvement District (BTBID) and the Billings Convention and Visitors Bureau (BCVB). Both organizations are managed by the Billings Chamber of Commerce. The Visit Billings team is committed to growing visitation in Billings region through sales and marketing initiatives. The Visit Billings' mission is to generate room nights for lodging facilities in the city of Billings by effectively marketing the region as a preferred travel destination. Visit Billings is the DLO for Billings, Montana.

## WHAT IS A DLO?

As a destination leadership organization (DLO), Visit Billings is the backbone of the tourism industry for Billings. A DLO protects and fosters the local visitor economy through promotion, marketing, destination management, cautious strategies, and long-term initiatives such as air service development. DLOs exist to promote destinations, grow visitation to a place, and are also responsible for attracting or supporting events, large and small, that increase visitation to a city. For Billings, the Visit Billings staff is considered an extension of its stakeholders (lodging partners) working to provide sales, services, and marketing support to the local hospitality industry and tourism partners.

A destination leadership organization (DLO) is more than a tourism promoter—it's a driving force behind a community's economic and social vitality. As Destinations International's former Chair Maura Gast (Visit Irving, Texas) famously stated in her "If You Build a Place" speech, "If you build a place where people want to visit, you'll build a place where people want to live. If you build a place where people want to live, you'll build a place where people want to work. If you build a place where people want to work, you'll build a place where business wants to be. And, if you build a place where business wants to be, we'll be back to building a place where people want to visit. It all starts with the visit, and that visit doesn't happen without us."

In 2023, Destinations International expanded on this vision with the Community Vitality Wheel—a powerful illustration of how a destination organization's efforts influence a city's trajectory. Through brand management, destination stewardship, strategic investment, and promotion, a DLO determines the pace at which a community grows and thrives. Destination promotion isn't just about tourism—it's a catalyst for building a place where people want to visit, live, work, and play.

## THE WORK OF A DESTINATION ORGANIZATION

### 1. VISIT

If you built a place where people want to visit, then you have built a place where people want to live.

### 2. LIVE

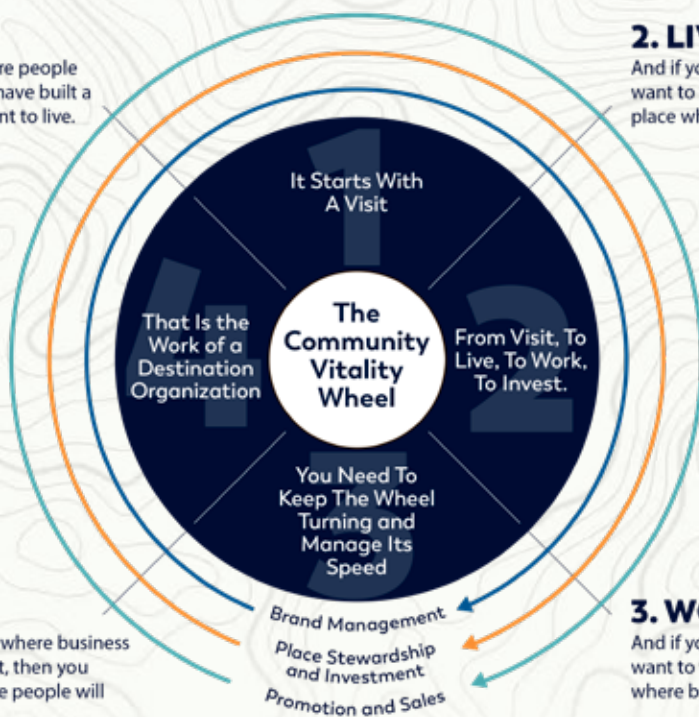
And if you built a place where people want to live, then you have built a place where people want to work.

### 3. WORK

And if you built a place where people want to work, then you have built a place where business and residents will invest.

### 4. INVEST

And if you built a place where business and residents will invest, then you have built a place where people will want to visit.







Visit Billings plays a crucial role in elevating the city's presence on both domestic and international stages, driving tourism across the leisure, meetings, group tour, and sporting events markets. As a DLO, Visit Billings increases awareness of the destination by engaging with meeting and conference planners, sports event organizers, media, consumers in key drive and flight markets, and tour operators. Guided by the leadership of the Billings Tourism Business Improvement District (BTBID) and Chamber/CVB boards—as well as partnerships with the State of Montana and the City of Billings—the Visit Billings team executes strategic, research-driven marketing and sales initiatives. These efforts spotlight the region's outdoor adventures, breathtaking landscapes, arts and culture, culinary and nightlife scene, and proximity to iconic attractions such as Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, the Beartooth Scenic Byway, and Yellowstone National Park. Additionally, Billings' meeting and sports facilities position the city as a premier destination for events that drive economic impact and community engagement.

While attracting new visitors to Billings is essential, fostering repeat visitation is equally vital. A positive and memorable visitor experience encourages travelers to return and recommend Billings to others. Visit Billings prioritizes this by enhancing in-market hospitality through customer service initiatives like the Certified Tourism Ambassador (CTA) program, which equips frontline workers with the knowledge and tools to create exceptional guest experiences. Additionally, Visit Billings champions efforts such as the Certified Autism Destination (CAD) program and accessibility initiatives to ensure all visitors feel welcome. By celebrating human differences and educating residents on the value of tourism, Visit Billings strengthens community pride and reinforces the city's reputation as a destination worth revisiting time and time again.

In some parts of Montana, concerns about over-visitation overshadow discussions about tourism. In Billings, however, the visitor economy thrives alongside a business community that welcomes and values travelers. With a strong capacity to serve guests, Billings offers the accommodations, dining, attractions, and hospitality needed to ensure a seamless and enjoyable experience. Visit Billings' strategies focus on enhancing this warm and welcoming environment, ensuring that every visitor feels appreciated and well-served during their stay.

**AS A DESTINATION LEADERSHIP ORGANIZATION (DLO),  
VISIT BILLINGS IS THE BACKBONE OF THE  
TOURISM INDUSTRY FOR BILLINGS.**



## FUNDING

Visit Billings is funded primarily through the Billings Tourism Business Improvement District (BTBID) and through a portion of the State Lodging Facility Use Tax. The BTBID assesses \$4.00 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, to grow visitation, and support local businesses and stakeholders.

This fiscal year will be the first budget year realizing the additional \$2.00 assessment per occupied room per night, which went into effect July 1, 2024. A portion of the increased budget will help execute Visit Billings initiatives outlined in the 2024-2027 Visit Billings Strategic Plan. All funds help Billings remain a competitive destination.

Additionally, there are two Montana taxes imposed on users of an overnight lodging facility (such as a hotel, motel, campground, dude ranch, short-term rental, and/or 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% lodging tax.



## ABOUT BILLINGS

As Montana's largest city, Billings stands as the state's economic and cultural heartbeat. With an estimated population of 122,000, it serves as the county seat of Yellowstone County, home to more than 171,000 residents. Founded in the 1880s and named after Northern Pacific Railroad president Frederick H. Billings, the city quickly earned the nickname Magic City due to its rapid growth. Today, Billings continues to thrive as Montana's City - a thriving hub for tourism, agriculture, energy, healthcare, finance, and education. Known as Montana's Trailhead, it remains the gateway to adventure, commerce, and opportunity in the region.

Billings is shaped by the stunning Rimrocks, sandstone cliffs that rise 500 to 800 feet above the city, offering breathtaking panoramic views. These iconic formations stretch along the north and east sides of downtown, creating a natural skyline unique to Montana's City. Some of the best vantage points can be found at Four Dances National Recreation Area, Swords-Rimrock Park, the Skyline Trail, and Zimmerman Park, where visitors can take in sweeping views of the city, the South Hills, and the distant peaks of the Bighorn, Pryor, and Beartooth Mountains. On a clear day, the vistas extend even farther, revealing the Crazy, Big Snowy, and Bull Mountains on the horizon. Sitting at an elevation of 3,126 feet, Billings offers an elevated perspective—both literally and figuratively—on Montana's vast and diverse landscapes.

Billings offers a vibrant mix of culture, cuisine, and entertainment, creating an experience that is both authentically Montana and uniquely its own. The city's thriving brewery trail invites visitors to explore a diverse craft beer scene, with many taprooms located in the heart of downtown. Dining in Billings is equally enticing, with restaurants showcasing locally sourced ingredients and the creative talents of James Beard finalist chefs. Beyond the culinary scene, the city's rich arts and cultural offerings include contemporary and Western museums, art galleries, and live performances at theaters and music venues. Outdoor community spaces host year-round events and festivals, while boutique shops add to the lively atmosphere. As Montana's largest city, Billings blends urban energy with access to breathtaking landscapes, making it a destination where history, creativity, and adventure converge.



## DESTINATION MT & MARKETING MONTANA

Destination MT is the office of tourism for the State of Montana. Under Department of Commerce leadership, the Destination MT team markets Montana as part of a cohesive Montana brand that also works to sustain and grow Montana's economy. From marketing strategies including promotional campaigns, and major programs like Made in Montana and the Montana Film Office, the Destination MT staff creates awareness about the state as a place to visit and do business.

# TOURISM IS A MAJOR ECONOMIC DRIVER FOR BILLINGS ALONG WITH AGRICULTURE, **ENERGY,** **HEALTHCARE, FINANCE,** AND **EDUCATION.**

## HOW WE MARKET



### INSPIRE

As Destination MT inspires travel to Montana, Visit Billings motivates travel to Billings.



### ORIENT

Once inspired to travel to Billings, Visit Billings helps people find whys and ways to build Billings into itineraries and agendas for leisure, sports, business, meetings, and group tour travel.



### FACILITATE

Once in Billings, it's about the visitor experience. Facilitating visitors to ensure a positive experience and foster a repeat visitor are priorities.





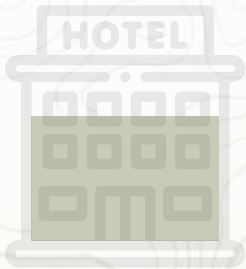


# 2024 KEY BUSINESS METRICS

REPORTING ON PERFORMANCE GIVES US THE DATA WE NEED TO BENCHMARK TOURISM INITIATIVES YEAR-OVER-YEAR, WHILE ALLOWING US TO PROVIDE CRITICAL INSIGHTS FOR OUR STAKEHOLDERS.

## STR DATA BY QUARTER

	Occupancy	Avg Daily Rate	RevPAR
Winter	48.4%	\$117.75	\$57.03
Spring	65.6%	\$134.28	\$88.14
Summer	71.6%	\$145.74	\$104.42
Fall	47.5%	\$120.01	\$56.96

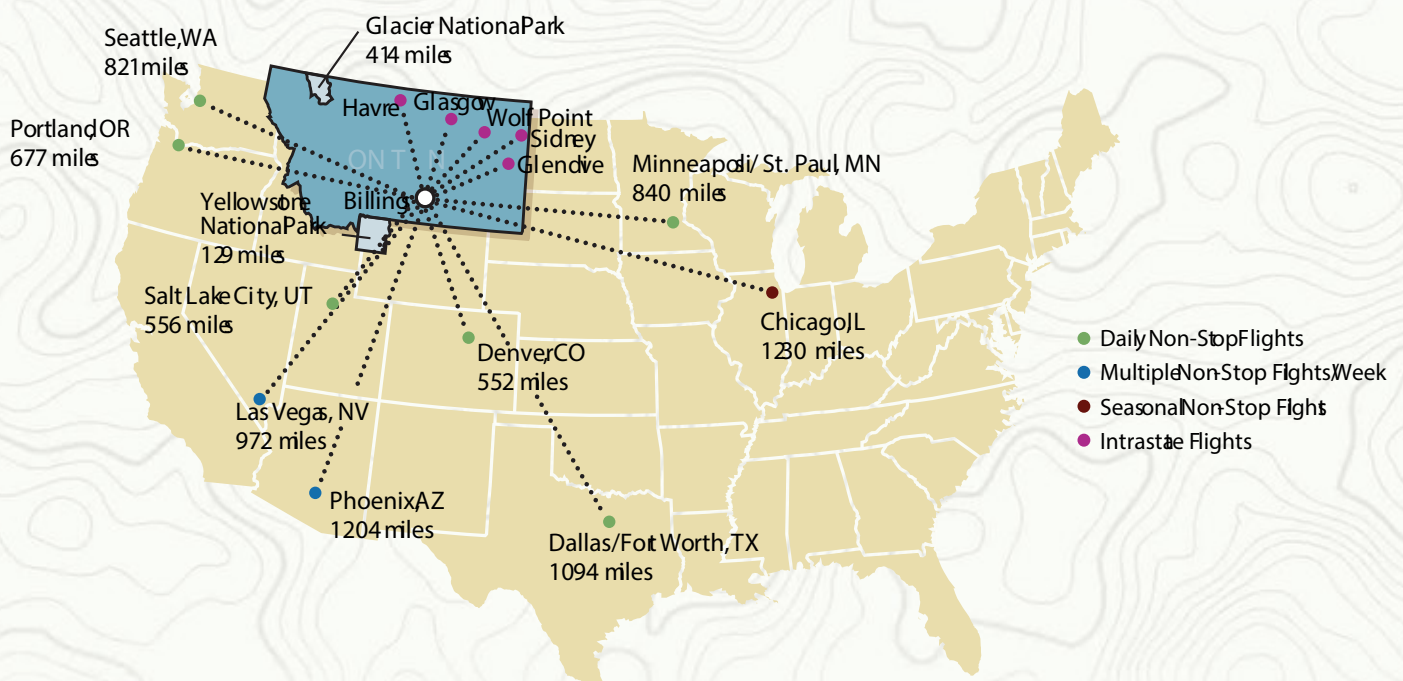


**ANNUAL OCCUPANCY: 58.2%**

**ANNUAL ADR: \$131.43**

**ANNUAL REVPAR: \$76.53**

## TARGET MARKETS





**23%** THE AMOUNT OF TRAVELER SPENDING GENERATED BY NON-RESIDENT TRAVELERS, THE 2ND HIGHEST PERCENTAGE IN THE STATE

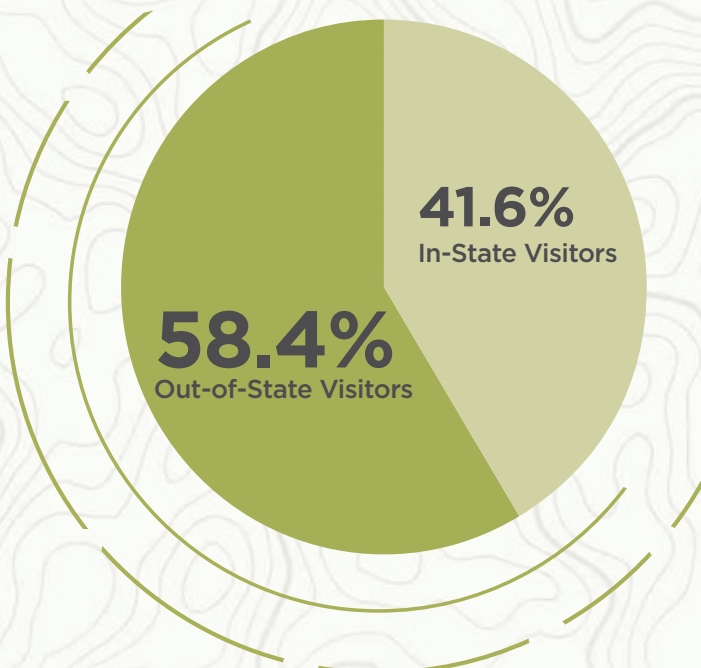
**4.6%** OUTDOOR RECREATION ACCOUNTED FOR 4.6% OF MONTANA'S GDP IN 2023, THE THIRD HIGHEST PERCENTAGE OF ANY STATE

\*Source: ITRR, The Montana Travel Industry 2023 Summer and Economic Contribution 2022/2023 report

## NUMBER OF PASSENGERS FLYING INTO BILLINGS IN 2024



## IN-STATE VS. OUT-OF-STATE VISITATION



## VISITOR PERSPECTIVES

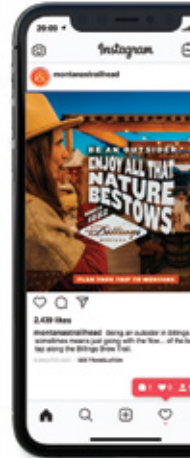
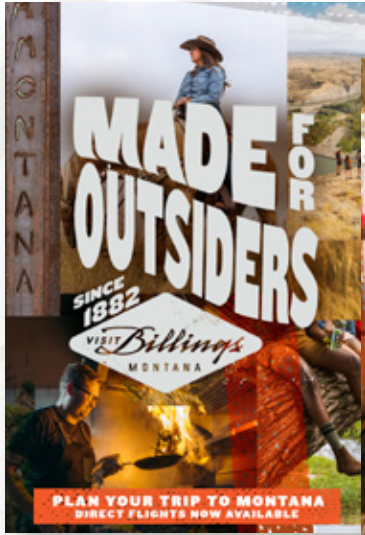
**47.5%** FOUND BILLINGS, MT AN APPEALING PLACE TO VISIT

**42%** WHEN ASKED ABOUT THE TOP 10 BILLINGS ATTRACTIONS, 42% SAID "ROADTRIPPING AND SCENIC DRIVES," FOLLOWED CLOSELY BY "ENJOYING LOCAL FOOD OR DRINKS, EXPLORING THE CITY ITSELF, VISITING STATE OR LOCAL PARKS, AND HIKING."



# 2024 KEY PERFORMANCE METRICS

## SPRING/SUMMER - NATIONAL ADVERTISING



WEBSITE TRAFFIC

480K

IMPRESSIONS

45.5M

ACTIVITIES GENERATED

501K

SEARCH CLICK-THROUGH-RATE (CTR)

12.27%

\*INDUSTRY AVERAGE IS 4.68%

DIGITAL OUT-OF-HOME (DOOH)

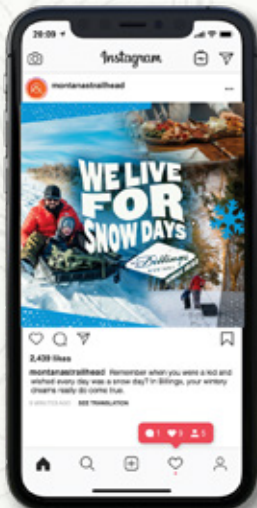
2.75M

## FALL/WINTER - REGIONAL ADVERTISING

**+96%**

INCREASE IN TOTAL SITE ACTIVITY DUE TO ADDING CONNECTED TV (CTV) TO THE MEDIA MIX

YouTube delivered over **1.9M impressions** with over **933,000 people** who actively viewed the videos resulting in **1,936 conversions**.



SEARCH CTR

18.1%

SOCIAL GENERATED ACTIVITIES

45K

ACTIVITIES GENERATED

211K

IMPRESSIONS

28.1M

DISPLAY CONVERSIONS

+9K

VIDEO VIEW RATE

47.81%

\*With an industry benchmark of 29.1%





## WEBSITE

WEBSITE TRAFFIC	AVG. SESSION DURATION	CLICKS TO PARTNER PAGES	VISITOR GUIDE VIEWS	VISITOR GUIDE REQUESTS	E-NEWSLETTER SIGN-UPS
<b>939K+</b>	<b>59S</b>	<b>31K+</b>	<b>10.6K+</b>	<b>1.8K+</b>	<b>983</b>

## TOP ONLINE MARKETS FOR WEBSITE VISITATION

**DALLAS 85K CHICAGO 77K DENVER 37K**  
 PHOENIX 28K SEATTLE 23K

## PUBLIC RELATIONS



## EVENTS - REGIONAL ADVERTISING



- Generated more than 48 million media impressions and an earned media score of 80 (goal was 70).
- Highlights included placements in *RoadRUNNER*, *Men's Journal*, *USA Today* and Fox News (online).
- Hosted a VIP earned media tour focusing on Billings and Yellowstone National Park for journalists representing publications such as *AFAR*, *Lonely Planet*, *US News & World Report* and *Food & Wine*.
- Established relationships with key national and interest-specific journalists and influencers to cultivate future earned media results.

Social reached **883,000 users** generated **5.3 million impressions** had a CTR of **1.5%** and generated **78,000 activities**.

WEBSITE TRAFFIC	IMPRESSIONS	ACTIVITIES GENERATED
<b>88K</b>	<b>15M</b>	<b>105K</b>
DISPLAY ACTIVITIES	REACH	BREW TRAIL & EVENTS
<b>+127%</b>	<b>3M</b>	<b>+227%</b>



# STATE OF THE AMERICAN TRAVELER

MARCH 2025, FROM FUTURE PARTNERS



The Global Hotel Alliance (the world's largest alliance of independent hotel brands) recently released new data on the biggest travel trends for 2025. 99% of travelers are planning leisure getaways next year, with business travel increasing by 13%.

72% of travelers are prioritizing relaxation, over and above last year's explorative focus. Travelers, once again strapped for cash due to inflation and hoping to make the most of their trips, desire activities and experiences that allow them to relax, explore new destinations and cultures (62%), and escape everyday life (46%). As business travel continues its long recovery and longer leisure stays take center stage, we're seeing a clear shift towards blending work and relaxation.

## TRAVEL TRENDS IN 2025

**Buy Now Pay Later** A trending topic that was examined in the latest wave of *The State of the American Traveler* is the adoption of "Buy Now, Pay Later" (BNPL) payment plans to finance trips in 2025. More than one-in-five American travelers (21.2%) say they are likely to use "Buy Now, Pay Later" payment plans for some of their trips this year, although 62.8% say they are unlikely to. As you might expect, usage of BNPL for travel is driven by age. Some 45% of Gen Z say they are likely to use BNPL to finance their trips in 2025, followed by 33.2% of Millennials and 21.2% of Gen X. Meanwhile, just 7.8% of Baby Boomers said they were likely to.

**AI** Nearly 62% of American travelers feel it's likely or certain that usage of AI tools like ChatGPT and Gemini to plan travel will become much more popular in 2025, up 3 points in the last year. While the expectations are clearly there, perhaps the available AI tools and their benefits may need to catch up to them. American travelers' deliberate usage of AI tools for travel remains at 14.2% - still below the record high of 17% in November 2023.

**School Holidays** Future Partners also recently asked parents who typically travel with their school-aged children about the role of school holidays in how they schedule their family vacations. Over half (57.9%) of these travelers reported that school holidays indeed dictate when they schedule their family vacations completely or quite a bit, while only 7.5% said not at all. Among those who reported having some level of flexibility around scheduling their family vacations regardless of school holidays, the most commonly selected factors behind this were parents' flexible work schedules (57.2%), supportive school policies (41.2%), technology that allows children to complete schoolwork remotely (36.9%), and the benefit of lower travel costs during non-peak seasons (34.4%).

**Politics** More than half of American travelers (52.3%) feel it's likely that an increasing number of travelers will avoid (or select) destinations based on their personal politics. Although this is down 4 points from last year, it remains something to watch and consider in travel motivations.



## RESEARCH ON MEDIA PLATFORMS MOST USED BY TRAVELERS

Future Partners explored deeper trends around how the top marketing channels have tracked over time for specific generations. There are clear divides.



The most recent survey by Future Partners revealed that movies and TV series have an impact on travel decisions, with nearly 30% of American travelers reporting visiting destinations specifically because they were featured on screen. Over 11% have been motivated by movie locations, 10.7% by both movie and TV series locations, and 8.3% by TV series alone. With the continued focus on “Yellowstone” and its spin-offs, all of Montana can benefit from this trend.

**Instagram** ranks highly among Millennial (35.3%) and Gen Z (32.2%) travelers, but significantly lower among Gen X (22.9%) and Baby Boomer (7.7%) travelers.

More than a third of Gen Z travelers (34.9%) and nearly one in four Millennial travelers (23.7%) would be receptive to destination marketing on **TikTok**, but just 11.9% of Gen X and only 3.1% of Baby Boomer travelers say the same.

**Email** does not make an appearance on Gen Z’s list, but is ranked second for Gen X and Baby Boomer travelers, and is fourth on the list for Millennial travelers.

**Facebook** is the only social media platform to make the Top 5 list for all generations, though it only ranks fifth for Baby Boomers.

Gen Z travelers have historically demonstrated a higher preference for short-form video social media platforms TikTok and Instagram versus their other top channels (Facebook, online content, websites found via organic search).

**To track and measure campaigns, Visit Billings staff in partnership with agency colleagues monitor the following data:**

Smith Travel Research (for demand, occupancy and ADR), TBID Assessments, Collections from State Lodging Facility Use Tax, Destinations International Economic Impact Calculators, VisaVue Spending Trends, AirDNA Data and Future Partners.





# FY26 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

## GROWING VISITATION

Increasing visitation is Visit Billings' highest priority, and all the strategies listed below will contribute to that visitor growth from all segments - leisure, sports and meetings/conventions. Visit Billings' success and the success of local lodging partners leads to growth in the visitor economy by elevating restaurants, retailers, and attractions - while also encouraging new opportunities.

## FOSTER VISITOR GROWTH

- INCREASE LEISURE VISITATION
- THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE
- ADVANCE SPORTS SALES & SUPPORT
- RECRUIT MEETINGS & CONVENTIONS
- GROW GROUP TOUR TRAVEL
- SUPPORT AIR SERVICE

## THE '24-'27 STRATEGIC PLAN - FY26 PRIORITIES

- SPORTS TOURISM LEADERSHIP
- EXECUTE LOCAL TOURISM EDUCATION CAMPAIGN
- SIGNATURE EVENT OPTIONS DURING NEED PERIOD(S)
- RESEARCH AND DATA
- INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAIN BICYCLING ASSOCIATION (IMBA) RESEARCH
- NATIONAL TRAVEL & TOURISM WEEK CELEBRATION
- BRAND EVOLUTION







## INCREASE LEISURE VISITATION

Leisure travel remains a cornerstone of Billings' tourism economy, supporting hotels, motels, and campgrounds, as well as key tourism partners, including restaurants, retailers, attractions, and event organizers. To drive visitation, Visit Billings implements targeted regional and national marketing strategies designed to inspire travelers from diverse segments—road trippers, outdoor adventurers, history enthusiasts, arts and culture seekers, and food lovers, among others.

Through strategic campaigns, Visit Billings promotes authentic itineraries that showcase both the city's distinct identity and its role as a gateway to the broader region. Storytelling efforts will emphasize events, iconic attractions, and the personalities that make Billings a one-of-a-kind destination while strengthening the connection between the community and its visitors.

Billings' prime location along the I-90 and I-94 corridors makes it an essential stop for travelers exploring Yellowstone National Park, the Badlands, and the Black Hills. Billings offers unparalleled access to outdoor recreation, rich history, and cultural experiences, making it a natural draw for those seeking adventure and connection. Visit Billings will continue to evolve its approach through dynamic marketing, digital engagement, and in-person activations to elevate Billings as a premier leisure travel destination and ensure sustained tourism growth and economic impact.





## THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Exceptional service leads to repeat visitation and extended stays, making visitor experience a top priority for Visit Billings leadership and staff. Ensuring that travelers feel welcome and enjoy their time in Billings is essential to fostering a thriving tourism economy.

Visit Billings enhances the visitor experience through initiatives like the Billings Trail Guides program, Meet the Locals, and the Certified Tourism Ambassador Destination commitments with Mickey Schaefer & Associates. These efforts prioritize quality customer service, strengthen local knowledge, and ensure positive interactions between visitors and the community.

Additionally, Visit Billings is leading efforts to make Billings a more inclusive and autism-friendly destination. By working with local organizations and businesses, the initiative aims to create a welcoming and accessible environment for travelers of all abilities.

A positive visitor experience also extends to sports events and meetings, which bring thousands of attendees to Billings each year. Visit Billings provides key support services, including hosted site inspections, registration assistance, city and regional tour planning, financial incentives, grant options, and confidential hotel sourcing, helping meeting planners and tournament organizers successfully host events in the city.

By prioritizing accessibility, service excellence, and event support, Visit Billings continues to elevate the visitor experience, ensuring that every traveler leaves with a positive impression and a reason to return.





## ADVANCE SPORTS SALES & SUPPORT

Sports tourism continues to be a major driver of economic impact in Billings, bringing athletes, teams, and fans to the city while benefiting hotels, restaurants, retailers, and attractions. To remain competitive, Visit Billings Sports focuses on strategically positioning the city as a premier sports destination, targeting events that align with the region's facilities, accommodations, and strengths. Additionally, supporting the growth of existing events ensures long-term success for tournament organizers and increased visitor spending.

Infrastructure plays a critical role in advancing sports tourism. In 2018, Visit Billings led a sports feasibility study conducted by Victus Advisors, which identified the need for additional sports facilities to expand the city's ability to attract and host larger tournaments and events. After the unsuccessful bond measure for a Multigenerational Recreation Center, the demand for enhanced venues remained. Recognizing this need, local sports organizations and user groups have stepped up to privately develop new facilities, such as the Yellowstone Ice Foundation's Signal Peak Ice Arena, a planned two-sheet ice facility that will meet the growing demand for hockey, figure skating, and ice sports in the region.

The Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID) is actively supporting these facility development efforts, understanding that investing in new venues will strengthen Billings' ability to host larger and more diverse sporting events. Improved infrastructure not only increases Billings' competitiveness for event bids but also generates economic benefits by attracting more visitors to the city. Visit Billings remains committed to elevating Billings as a leading sports tourism destination, ensuring long-term economic vitality for the city and county.





## RECRUIT MEETINGS & CONVENTIONS

Meetings and conventions drive significant year-round economic impact for Billings, supporting hotels, restaurants, and local businesses. To remain competitive, Visit Billings will implement innovative sales strategies and strengthen partnerships to attract planners and decision-makers.

In FY26, efforts will focus on securing meetings for 2026, 2027, and beyond, working closely with hotels and venue managers to position Billings as a premier destination. Exceptional visitor services remain a top priority, providing planners with hands-on support that enhances the meeting experience and reinforces Billings as a trusted host city.



# GROW GROUP TOUR TRAVEL

Billings continues to be a premier destination for group travel, offering a mix of history, culture, outdoor adventure, and accessibility. Whether it's a motorcoach tour or small group expedition, Billings serves as an essential stop along the Great American Road Trip, connecting travelers from the Badlands to Yellowstone National Park.

As group travel demographics evolve, itineraries have expanded to include younger, more active travelers seeking immersive experiences. Visitors want more than just a guided tour—they crave the stories behind the landscapes, landmarks, and local culture. Outdoor recreation is a growing priority, with tour operators incorporating flexible, nature-focused itineraries that allow travelers to explore independently or participate in small-group adventures.

With its proximity to Yellowstone National Park, Little Bighorn Battlefield, and Pompey's Pillar, Billings is a gateway to Montana's rich history and breathtaking landscapes. According to the American Bus Association (ABA) Foundation, Yellowstone County welcomed over 160,000 motorcoach group visitors in 2022, generating more than \$5.18 million in direct sales. As international inbound travel rebounds, there is growing potential to attract fly/drive visitors who begin their journeys in major hubs like Denver and Salt Lake City before exploring Montana.

Visit Billings remains committed to strengthening relationships with tour operators and ensuring Billings is recognized as a must-visit destination. By embracing storytelling, active itineraries, and flexible group experiences, Billings will continue to attract diverse travel groups and expand its role as a hub for domestic and international tourism.





# SUPPORT AIR SERVICE & BIL

Air service is essential to the continued success of the tourism industry in Billings. The completion of Billings Logan International Airport's (BIL) \$55 million expansion and renovation has significantly improved the traveler experience, making it a more appealing gateway to the region. However, for Billings to remain competitive as a top-choice destination, consistent air capacity, connectivity, and reasonable fares are crucial factors influencing both leisure and business travelers. Reliable air service plays a pivotal role in the decision-making process for visitors, meeting planners, and sports tourism, all of which drive economic impact for the city.

Visit Billings has made air service expansion a top priority, recognizing that strong air connectivity directly supports tourism growth. The organization's commitment includes financial contributions toward Small Community Air Service Development (SCASD) grant applications, marketing support in new markets, and a strong presence on the Billings Air Service Committee.

As an active member of the Air Service Committee, Visit Billings collaborates closely with community partners and airlines to advocate for enhanced connectivity and expanded routes. The committee has developed targeted communication strategies that engage both the local community and airline partners, reinforcing the region's demand for improved air service. This includes marketing campaigns, community engagement initiatives, and direct airline outreach to promote existing routes while demonstrating the need for additional flights.

Airlines look to communities for demonstrated support when considering new routes, and Visit Billings' presence within the Air Service Committee underscores the destination's commitment to air service success. Through strategic marketing, public relations efforts, and collaborative partnerships, Visit Billings will continue to champion air service expansion, ensuring Billings remains accessible and competitive in the regional and national tourism landscape.





# THE '24-'27 STRATEGIC PLAN

In the fall of 2021, Visit Billings began developing a strategic plan to guide both organizational and destination growth through 2027. Released in early 2024, the resulting three-year plan outlines core objectives and key strategies designed to enhance visitor-driven economic impact in Billings. That same year, Visit Billings leadership and the BTBID Board of Directors identified priority initiatives for FY25 implementation. While the full plan remains a dynamic roadmap for the organization, the BTBID Board designated the following items as top strategic priorities for FY26.

## FY26 STRATEGIC PLAN PRIORITIES:

Visit Billings' continued success as a high-performing organization is essential—not only for stakeholders of the Billings Tourism Business Improvement District (BTBID) and the Billings Convention and Visitors Bureau (BCVB), but for the long-term economic vitality of Billings as a tourism destination. Growing visitation fuels local businesses, supports jobs, and enhances the city's brand both regionally and nationally.

As previously noted, the importance of prioritizing tourism in Billings has never been greater and evolving visitor expectations demands a strategic approach focused on budget efficiency, targeted marketing and sales, and exceptional visitor experience. The 2024–2027 Visit Billings Strategic Plan provides a framework of key objectives to guide the organization through 2027, leading up to the BTBID's renewal.

While the plan allows for continual evaluation of goals, initiatives, and outcomes, FY25 marked the beginning of implementation, with identified priorities already underway. However, to sustain and scale successful programs, expand staff capacity, and elevate Billings as a leading destination, adequate funding is vital. Execution of the Strategic Plan—and the broader mission of Visit Billings—relies on the ability to invest in high-ROI marketing, sales, and visitor support initiatives that drive demand in the meetings, sports, and leisure markets.

Recognizing this need, the BTBID Board of Directors engaged in a 24- to 36-month review of funding options leading into the 2023 warm season. After extensive stakeholder input, the Board voted in fall 2023 to increase the BTBID assessment by \$2.00, bringing the total to \$4.00 per room, per night, effective July 1, 2024. Fiscal Year 2026 will be the first year Visit Billings realizes the full benefit of this additional revenue. These funds will allow the BTBID Board to ensure the organization's mission is achieved—for both District members and the broader destination.

## SPORTS TOURISM LEADERSHIP IN FY26 AND BEYOND

In 2012, the BTBID Board of Directors took deliberate steps to diversify Visit Billings' investment strategy by developing Billings as a sports tourism destination. Over the past 13 years, the segment has delivered consistent wins—from hosting NCAA and NAIA collegiate events to the expansion of youth and travel sports, all contributing to a growing sense of community pride and visitor impact.

Today, sports tourism remains one of the strongest opportunities for visitation of Billings. In FY26, Visit Billings will build on this momentum through targeted initiatives, made possible by the increased BTBID assessment and resulting budget.

A key milestone in FY26 will be the launch of a dedicated brand for the sports segment, signaling Billings' continued commitment to attracting and hosting premier events. Visit Billings will also strengthen city-wide sports collaborations and work closely with both existing and emerging sports venues to create new opportunities for growth. Among these efforts:

- Supporting the Yellowstone Ice Foundation and the development of the Signal Peak Ice Arena, which introduces an entirely new market segment for Billings sports tourism.
- Continuing engagement with the Amend Park Recreation Campus and the City of Billings Courts Facility, both of which expand the city's hosting capacity.

These investments are not only expanding Visit Billings' ability to sell the city for events—they are also fueling an important conversation: What does the future structure of sports tourism leadership in Billings look like? With momentum growing and new facilities coming online, FY26 will be a year of action and evaluation. Building on FY25's foundational research, Visit Billings will further explore the formation of a formal sports council, committee, or authority—a collaborative body dedicated to strengthening Billings' reputation as a premier sports destination.

As outlined in the 2024–2027 Strategic Plan, understanding the right model for leadership and coordination in sports tourism is essential to long-term success. FY26 marks the next step in bringing that vision into focus—powered by enhanced resources and a strong community of partners ready to shape the future of sports in Billings.



## EXECUTE LOCAL TOURISM EDUCATION CAMPAIGN

Resident engagement is imperative to success in tourism for a destination. Destination leadership organizations that engage well with their residents, community groups, business owners, elected officials, tourism partners, and visitors are well positioned for growth. These partnerships not only help communities better understand the power of tourism, but they also foster a sense of pride among residents as they recognize the industry's contributions to the local economy and quality of life. When locals feel informed and connected to the success of their destination, they become advocates for growth, allowing tourism boards and staff to focus on advancing strategic initiatives rather than continually justifying the value of marketing efforts, projects, and DLO resources.

Visit Billings is a collective voice for tourism in Billings and empowers the destination on big and small tourism-related issues at the local, state, and federal levels. In May 2025, Visit Billings will execute its first tourism education campaign aimed at increasing local awareness of the industry's positive impact. This marks the beginning of an ongoing commitment to community education and engagement that will remain a strategic focus for the team in the years ahead.

## RESEARCH AND DATA

A core recommendation of the 2024–2027 Strategic Plan is the execution of updated research to better inform marketing and sales strategies. In FY26, Visit Billings will conduct a comprehensive Visitor Profile Study - the first since 2018. This research will provide critical insights into who is visiting Billings, how they travel, what they spend, and what influences their decision-making. With refreshed data, Visit Billings can refine its focus on high-value target markets - those that yield longer stays, higher spending, and greater lifetime visitor value, while identifying the most cost-effective regions to generate new and repeat visitation. This work will sharpen destination messaging, improve ROI, and guide decisions across all program areas.

## SIGNATURE EVENTS DURING NEED PERIODS

Visit Billings continues to collaborate with existing events and festivals to enhance high-quality visitor experiences, particularly during need periods such as the shoulder seasons. In FY25, discussions explored the potential for a signature event or festival that could capitalize on Billings' strengths—whether as a hub for outdoor adventure under the Big Sky or as a premier brew trail and culinary destination. The goal is to develop an event that attracts overnight visitors during traditionally lower-demand periods. FY26 will serve as a critical research year to evaluate the feasibility of such an event and identify opportunities for growth.

Successful models from similar climates include Anchorage's Fur Rendezvous, Grand Rapids' World of Winter and Art Prize, Steamboat Springs' Winter Carnival, the Portland Winter Light Festival, St. Paul Winter Carnival, Breckenridge's International Snow Sculpture Championships, and Aspen's Wintersköl—a four-day celebration of Nordic culture. Other potential concepts include a dedicated restaurant week or expanding an existing event during a need period to increase its impact and visitor draw.

Additionally, Visit Billings has focused on amplifying emerging events that align with the city's strengths. A key example is **Billings Craft Beer Week**, which showcases the **Billings Brew Trail**. With marketing support from Visit Billings, the event—scheduled for May 11–18—is positioned to grow year after year, further solidifying Billings as a must-visit destination for craft beer enthusiasts.





# INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAIN BICYCLING ASSOCIATION (IMBA) RESEARCH

The International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) remains the global leader in mountain bike advocacy and the only U.S. organization dedicated exclusively to trail access and development for riders of all skill levels. While still a hidden gem in some circles, Billings has grown as a sought-after mountain biking destination, offering an extensive network of single-track and dirt trails maintained by the city, county, and Bureau of Land Management—many of which are found in northwest Billings and along Highway 3 near Acton.

With IMBA Ride Center applications expected to open sometime in 2025, Visit Billings will continue its pursuit of Ride Center designation, further solidifying the city's reputation as a premier biking destination. In the coming year, Visit Billings will work alongside Pedal Unite, Billings TrailNet, local businesses, and the mountain biking community to refine strategy, assess trail readiness, and ensure Billings is well-positioned for certification when the application process begins. This designation would provide greater recognition for Billings' mountain biking assets, attracting more riders and increasing visitor engagement with the city's outdoor recreation offerings.

## BRAND EVOLUTION

A recommendation in the Visit Billings Strategic Plan was to consider the evolution of the Visit Billings brand. Visitor and stakeholder research identified a need for the Visit Billings brand to amplify the city's attributes and not focus specifically on its location as Montana's Trailhead currently does, which may unintentionally be encouraging visitors to explore outside the city. The brand positioning will reflect the city's authentic identity, as defined by collectively its visitors, residents and stakeholders while building from the foundation of the current brand pillars. Visit Billings plans to launch the rebrand in 2025.





# NATIONAL TRAVEL & TOURISM WEEK AND LOCAL TOURISM EDUCATION CAMPAIGN

Resident engagement is imperative to the success of tourism in Billings. Destination leadership organizations that actively educate and engage residents, business owners, elected officials, and tourism partners help foster a deeper understanding of tourism's economic value. By building positive sentiment within the community, Visit Billings can focus its efforts on advancing the destination rather than continuously justifying the need for tourism marketing, funding, and projects.

National Travel & Tourism Week (NTTW), established by the U.S. Travel Association, serves as a key moment to amplify these efforts. Visit Billings will use this annual celebration in May to share impactful data—such as visitor spending, job creation, and tourism's contributions to quality of life—through earned and owned media, social channels, and stakeholder outreach. The 2025 campaign will introduce new strategies to highlight the industry, celebrate its champions, and better connect with the local community.

To further enhance this initiative, Visit Billings will implement a dedicated tourism education campaign throughout the month of May to coincide with NTTW. This campaign will include:

- Utilizing the Destinations International Advocacy Toolkit to enhance messaging and community engagement.
- Creating a dedicated section on the new Visit Billings website for tourism education materials.
- Developing fact sheets, videos, and other collateral to effectively communicate tourism's impact.
- Producing advocacy materials tailored for government officials to strengthen tourism-related policies.
- Showcasing case studies and blogs that highlight tourism success stories.
- Leveraging both earned and paid media to expand public awareness and engagement.

As Destinations International emphasizes, promoting a destination is an investment in economic development and community well-being. Visit Billings remains a collective voice for tourism, ensuring its role as a key economic driver is recognized and supported. Through strategic advocacy, targeted education, and collaborative partnerships, the May tourism education campaign will reinforce the importance of tourism within the community while celebrating the industry's contributions during NTTW.









**SHAPED BY THE YELLOWSTONE  
RIVER. BORN IN THE SHADOWS  
OF THE RIMROCKS. WELCOME  
TO BILLINGS. BE GUIDED BY THE  
GREATNESS THAT LIES AHEAD.  
BIG SKIES AND BIG THINGS.**





## ADVERTISING AND PROMOTIONS

# FY26 GOALS & TACTICS

## GOAL:

DRIVE YEAR-ROUND VISITATION BY INCREASING AWARENESS FOR BILLINGS AS AN IDEAL TRAVEL DESTINATION, WITH **BIG SKIES** AND OUTDOOR ADVENTURE.





## TACTICS:

Explore the next phase of the “Outside Voice” campaign, utilizing the same messaging platform used in spring/summer 2024 but evolving the visual language and execution to bring fresh energy to the campaign.

Promote the current and any emerging flight markets through grant opportunities, paid media, as well as through digital and social platforms. Develop a storymaking strategy leveraging content like Trail Guides to showcase the locals and their warm, genuine nature, while sharing with visitors locals’ perspective on life that is uniquely Montana.

Execute Visit Billings’ research-driven, consumer-focused brand platform, to build marketing campaigns and promotions that showcase rich visuals of the entire destination.



Leverage yearly events while showcasing all the cultural, culinary, and outdoor experiences that can round out a trip to Billings. Encourage people to visit Billings for all aspects of event date ranges including overnight, weekend, long weekend, and midweek stay.

Drive media coverage for the destination, through public relations initiatives, that profiles Trailsetters who can share the locals’ perspective on how to best enjoy Billings as a destination for adventure-seekers, foodies and cultural enthusiasts.



## TRADITIONAL AND DIGITAL MEDIA

### GOALS:

#### INCREASE BRAND AWARENESS

Increase awareness for the destination that encourages target audiences to deepen consumer engagement with the destination's brand.

#### INCREASE DIRECT FLIGHT AWARENESS

Increase awareness for the direct flights to Billings from Chicago, Dallas/Fort Worth, Denver, Las Vegas, Minneapolis, Phoenix, Salt Lake City, Portland, Seattle and Los Angeles.

### TACTICS:

Use a multi-channel media strategy approach that utilizes Native / Display, PMAx, Meta, Pinterest, Search, while also increasing investment and expanding geo-targeting to support drive and flight markets.

In drive markets, use channels best for events - search and display - to drive awareness and site traffic.

Engage with local media publications for the promotion of Billings and supporting local businesses.

Prioritize Meta and Display to promote awareness and drive website traffic as social and display consistently perform well, which creates efficiencies in maximizing impressions and leading users to the website to learn more and take a specific action.





In flight markets, leverage channels that have previously driven success for those markets - search, display, and social (Pinterest and Meta).

Strategically place out-of-home billboards within and around Billings to engage local and regional audiences.

Harness the power of advanced analytics to inform media performance and strategy.

Place Digital Out-of-Home (DOOH) in key drive and fly markets, capturing new travelers who may not have considered Billings before, providing a powerful way to consistently engage with travelers throughout their day.

Increase programmatic CTV budget to further support driving traffic to the website. 2024 saw that users were 3x more likely to convert on the Landing Page when exposed to a CTV + Display ad versus just Display increasing the total site activities by 96% year-over-year.

Optimize audiences and expand targeting tactics within existing channels and test new tactics on new channels.

For flight markets, increase investment in upper-funnel tactics to drive awareness in markets where Billings is a lesser-known travel destination.

Sponsor content development and niche digital targeting the two-wheel audience.

Utilize advanced analytics to inform media performance and strategy, while also developing ROI tracking on key advertising/marketing initiatives, that strives to deliver increased impressions through the fiscal year and garners a significant increase in engagements with a click-thru rate that is well above industry average.







## INTERACTIVE AND SOCIAL

### GOALS:

#### INCREASE BRAND INTERACTION

Increase brand interaction with informative and engaging digital content that builds awareness and loyalty, while ultimately motivating consumer travel.

#### GROW SOCIAL

Grow the audience on Visit Billings' social platforms.

#### INFORM PLANNERS

Provide meeting planners and sports event planners with the information and materials they need to choose Billings as their preferred destination for meetings, conventions and sports events.

#### GROW EMAIL LIST

Increase contacts in Visit Billings email database and encourage an open rate of over 20% for email marketing initiatives.

#### INCREASE SITE VISITATION

Increase website visitation.







## TACTICS:

### SOCIAL MEDIA / EMAIL

- Share the destination's story in a compelling, consistent and editorial manner, with storytelling as the driving characteristic.
- Extend the Visit Billings' voice into the online space as a persona - the approachable and lighthearted Billings Trail Guide.
- Annually develop an integrated editorial content calendar to consistently plan and prepare content (e.g. copy, photos, videos, etc.), streamlining and integrating social content development efforts across all channels.
- Integrate seasonal messaging, key events, new local businesses, etc. across all digital channels.
- Increase video content on all owned channels - to also be used in paid and earned channels - which engage a variety of local personalities.
- Through Facebook, increase awareness of upcoming events and must-see attractions while also highlighting tourism partners.
- On Instagram, curate and utilize consumer-generated photography and video, while also posting editorial photos, videos and engaging "Stories" highlighting destination experiences and offerings.
- Promote the #VisitBillings and #MontanasTrailhead hashtags while encouraging visitors and stakeholders to do the same.
- Expose travelers to editorial content, blog articles and social content through email marketing.

### WEBSITE

- In 2025, the website will undergo a complete audit and redesign which will help improve navigation and modernize its design to better meet the needs and expectations of users. This will resolve any technical deficiencies, enhance security measures, and align the website with current industry standards, best practices and regulations. Planned launch of new site is end of 2024-2025 fiscal year.
- Promote new blog content on the website, featuring experiences that align with the interest-based personas from History Buffs to Foodies and Outdoor Enthusiasts as well as key events throughout the year.



# PUBLIC RELATIONS

## GOALS:

### GENERATE EARNED MEDIA AND INFLUENCER COVERAGE

Generate earned media and influencer coverage for Billings, positioning the destination as an authentic, welcoming city giving visitors access to modern amenities, outdoor adventure, family fun and exquisite food/beverage options while preserving the Montana spirit they are seeking.

### INCREASE WEBSITE TRAFFIC

Increase traffic to the Visit Billings website through earned digital media placements including the destination URL.

### PLACE EARNED MEDIA

Place earned media features in target publications with a total audience impressions value of at least 10 million.

## TACTICS:



Identify new, cost-effective means to achieve similar ends of traditional travel/tourism media outreach.



Explore offering digital experiences to media and influencers to reach a broader audience.



Develop earned media tactics that tie directly to paid media efforts to amplify seasonal campaigns, and vice versa.



Share brief news and story ideas with greater frequency about Billings events, award nominations and other news with target media and influencers. Reengage with journalists who expressed interest in visiting Billings in previous fiscal years but did not due to scheduling conflicts and/or budget constraints.



Respond to subscription-based media inquiries to provide relevant information about Billings to be included in editorial media.



Explore partnerships with Brand MT and Visit Southeast Montana to share earned media costs.



Leverage evolving industry trends such as multi-generational travel, solo travel and self-improvement trips as a framework for earned media content.

### MONTANA

Attend PRSA event(s) or Brand MT sponsored opportunities.





## EVALUATION/ROI

Utilize the earned media scorecard developed in the previous fiscal year as a basis to compare year-over-year results to determine increases in earned media success. The scorecard is based on best practices developed by the Public Relations Society of America.







## ADVANCE SPORTS SALES & SUPPORT

### GOALS:

#### GENERATE NEW ROOM NIGHTS

Generate new room nights from sports events recruited to the area that will impact room demand, and generate economic impact while creating even greater awareness for Billings as a choice sports destination.

#### PARTNER

Successfully collaborate with local collegiate partners for NCAA and NAIA event bids.

#### GROW EVENTS

Grow or expand existing sports events with current event and tournament owners.

#### RETAIN EVENTS

Retain existing sports events.

#### 30 EVENTS

Book and/or support 30 sports events in Billings.



## TACTICS:

- Expand Industry Presence & Brand Awareness – Attend key sporting event trade shows and appointment-based conventions such as SportsETA, The Invitational by SPORTS Relationship Conference, and SPORTS Relationship Conference to strengthen relationships, enhance the Visit Billings Sports brand, and increase awareness of Billings' sports tourism offerings.
- Lead Generation & Outreach – Develop new sports event leads through strategic collaboration with IMM and targeted engagement with sports planners.
- Enhanced Digital Marketing – Utilize email marketing templates and e-postcards to maintain and build relationships with sports event organizers.
- Collegiate Sports Partnerships – Strengthen collaboration with Rocky Mountain College (RMC), Montana State University Billings (MSUB), the Frontier Conference, and GNAC Conference to attract collegiate sporting events.
- Retention & Growth of Existing Events – Support and expand sports events already hosted in Billings through ongoing collaboration with local, state, and regional stakeholders.
- Refine Sports Sales Toolkit – Continuously update and optimize the sports sales toolkit to improve efficiency and effectiveness in sales outreach and follow-ups.
- Strategic Sports Marketing Efforts – Maintain and enhance Visit Billings Sports marketing initiatives to further establish Billings as a premier sports destination.
- Data-Driven Economic Impact Analysis – Continue subscription and utilization of the Destinations International Economic Impact Calculator to assess and showcase the economic benefits of sports tourism in Billings.
- Sports Planner Familiarization Tour – Organize a two-day hosted site inspection for top sports planners, providing an immersive experience of Billings' sports facilities, hospitality, and amenities.
- Community & Industry Engagement – Strengthen involvement in Midland Roundtable to build stronger regional sports connections.
- Special Olympics Montana State Summer Games – Successfully execute year two of hosting the 2025 Special Olympics State Summer Games, focusing on community engagement to enhance the athlete and fan experience.
- Sports Infrastructure Development – Collaborate with key stakeholders on advancing new sports facility development to enhance Billings' ability to attract and host major sporting events.
- Strategic Initiatives from the 2024-2027 Visit Billings Strategic Plan:
  - ❖ Conduct feasibility research on Billings becoming an International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) Ride Center, with applications expected to open in 2025.
  - ❖ Assess best practices for structuring a sports-focused organization or committee to optimize sports tourism development and leadership in Billings.





# RECRUIT MEETINGS & CONVENTIONS



## GOALS:

### BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Generate room nights as a result of sales initiatives to raise awareness of Billings as a choice meeting destination and by providing meeting planners with the knowledge and logistical support they need to make meetings in Billings successful.

### ELEVATE BILLINGS

Generate new room nights from meetings or conventions that will impact room demand and increase revenue while creating a stronger “Meet Me in Billings” and “Big Skies Mean Big Attendance” in Billings.

### STAKEHOLDER SUPPORT

Support Billings’ six meeting hotels in an effort to recruit new and retain existing meetings and conventions. Where applicable, highlight new meeting space, meeting space expansions, or renovations at meeting hotels or offsite venues to meeting planners and in industry print and digital publications.

### BOOK MEETINGS OR CONVENTIONS

Book, support, and/or retain 30 meetings or conventions in Billings.

### CONFERENCE SERVICES

Service 20 meetings, conventions, or events in Billings.





## TACTICS:

- Expand Industry Presence & Relationships – Attend national and regional appointment-based meeting and convention events, including Connect events and Small Market Meetings, to strengthen relationships with meeting planners and generate new leads.
- Secure Multi-Year Conference Commitments – Collaborate with local hotel sales teams to secure multi-year contracts with state associations and organizations, ensuring repeat business for Billings.
- Leverage Lead Generation Partnerships – Work with Integrated Media Marketing (IMM) and industry partners to identify and develop new meeting leads.
- Enhance Sales & Marketing Materials – Continue to refine digital and print materials in the meeting recruitment toolkit to effectively communicate Billings' strengths as a meeting destination.
- Establish a Dedicated Group Sales Role – Develop a group sales position to increase focus and success in securing meetings and conventions.
- Maximize Cvent & Booking Platforms – Strengthen efforts on Cvent and other industry platforms to increase visibility for meeting planners seeking small-market destinations.
- Strengthen Digital Communications – Utilize e-communications, e-postcards, and personalized outreach to build and maintain relationships with state, regional, and national meeting planners.
- Expand Sponsorship Opportunities – Explore strategic sponsorships with associations and organizations to increase impact and visibility at key industry events.
- Provide Comprehensive Meeting Services – Offer planners visitor guidebooks, Brew Trail maps, off-agenda activity options, and other resources to enhance the attendee experience.
- Promote Key Meeting Campaigns – Continue "Meet Me in Billings" and "Big Skies Mean Big Attendance" campaigns through industry-focused print and digital publications and directories.
- Prepare for Major Events – Ensure successful hosting of the 2025 National Association of County Agricultural Agents (NACAA) convention and related subset meetings in June 2025.
- Improve Conference Servicing & Communication – Enhance outreach to meeting planners by clearly communicating customer service offerings and conference servicing options for a seamless event experience.
- Strengthen National Association Partnerships – Continue engagement with HelmsBriscoe, ConferenceDirect, and other national meeting associations to elevate Billings as a leading West-region meeting destination.
- Plan a Meeting Planner Familiarization Tour – Host top meeting planners for an immersive warm-season familiarization tour, showcasing Billings as a premier meeting destination.





(INTERNATIONAL & DOMESTIC TOUR OPPORTUNITIES)

## GROW GROUP TOUR TRAVEL



According to *U.S. News & World Report*, Yellowstone National Park ranks #2 among the Best U.S. National Parks for 2024. While millions visit its 2.2 million acres each year, the park also remains a top choice for domestic and international tour operators. Billings serves as a key access point to Yellowstone's northeast and north entrances, with convenient proximity to the east entrance, national monuments, and major interstates (I-90 and I-94). With dozens of hotels and group-friendly restaurants, Billings continues to be a strategic stopover for tour operators looking for economical, accessible, and experience-rich destinations. Visit Billings actively works to ensure that tour operators planning Western U.S. itineraries recognize Billings as a premier stop—whether for small, private groups or full motorcoach tours. In FY26, efforts will focus on expanding and strengthening relationships with tour operators who prioritize sightseeing, fine dining, and national park-themed tours for their clients.

### GOALS:

#### BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Strengthen connections with domestic and international tour operators to position Billings as a must-visit stopover destination.

#### SUPPORT EXTENDED STAYS

Collaborate with international market representatives to encourage longer stays for fly/drive visitors, showcasing Billings' brew trail, food scene, and outdoor recreation.

#### ENHANCE ITINERARIES

Offer insights on new attractions, experiences, and itinerary refreshes to maintain relevance in the evolving group travel market.

#### EXPAND TOUR OPERATOR ENGAGEMENT

Cultivate relationships with new and existing tour operators, recognizing the long incubation period for successful lead conversion and market growth.

#### ELEVATE BILLINGS IN THE MOTORCOACH INDUSTRY

Work closely with tour operators and bus tour companies to increase Billings' visibility as a major Western U.S. tour destination.





## STRATEGIC INITIATIVES & TACTICS:

- Host the America Cup Golf Invitational in August 2025, welcoming domestic and international tour operators to experience Billings while conducting business meetings on the course.
- Attend international trade shows such as the U.S. Travel Association's IPW to connect with inbound operators.
- Participate in the American Bus Association (ABA) Marketplace to maintain and grow Billings' presence in the motorcoach industry.
- Leverage partnerships with Destination Montana (Destination MT) for 2025 familiarization tour opportunities.
- Work closely with Destination MT and Montana's Department of Commerce Travel & Trade staff to further educate stakeholders and refine marketing efforts for the group travel market.
- Advocate on a national level with the U.S. Travel Association to reduce visa interview wait times, ensuring continued growth in international inbound travel.

**BY POSITIONING BILLINGS AS A DYNAMIC, ACCESSIBLE, AND ENGAGING DESTINATION, VISIT BILLINGS WILL CONTINUE TO GROW ITS PRESENCE IN THE GROUP TRAVEL MARKET, ENSURING LONG-TERM SUCCESS IN ATTRACTING BOTH DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL VISITORS.**





# ENHANCING THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

A welcoming and informed community is key to ensuring memorable visitor experiences and strengthening Billings' reputation as a premier destination. Visit Billings is committed to raising awareness, fostering inclusivity, recognizing industry excellence, and supporting visitor-facing staff to enhance tourism's impact on the local economy and community.

## GOALS:

### EXPAND TOURISM EDUCATION

Grow the Certified Tourism Ambassador (CTA) Program to elevate the value of tourism, support stakeholders, and provide essential training for front-line staff.

### PROMOTE SOCIAL INCLUSION

Participate in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, supporting Destinations International's efforts to create a tourism industry that celebrates diverse communities while embracing shared experiences.

### ENSURE SERVICE EXCELLENCE

Equip Billings' visitor-facing workforce with the tools and training necessary to deliver consistent, high-quality customer service.

### RECOGNIZE EXCEPTIONAL PARTNERS

Highlight businesses and organizations that actively engage with Visit Billings' education initiatives, reinforcing their contributions to positive visitor experiences.

## STRATEGIC TACTICS

- Encourage industry engagement with Visit Billings' certification programs (CTA, Tourism Ambassador Institute, Certified Autism Organizations, International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards).
- Champion DEI efforts to cultivate a welcoming environment for all travelers and visitors.
- Align CTA educational content with Trail Guides communications to better showcase community experts and businesses that provide exceptional service.
- Expand Visit Billings' presence at key events, such as Harvestfest, Strawberry Fest, and other major local events, ensuring visitors and residents have direct access to tourism information and resources.
- Enhance in-market visitor support by exploring new ways to meet travelers where they are, ensuring seamless trip facilitation and positive experiences.

**BY PRIORITIZING EDUCATION, INCLUSION, AND SERVICE EXCELLENCE, VISIT BILLINGS WILL CONTINUE TO STRENGTHEN VISITOR EXPERIENCES AND DEEPEN CONNECTIONS BETWEEN TRAVELERS AND THE BILLINGS COMMUNITY.**







# VISIT BILLINGS STATE LODGING TAX (CVB) FY26 BUDGET

## LODGING FACILITY USE TAX (LFUT)

Administration	\$104,442
Agency Services	\$30,000
Earned Media/Tourism/Publicity	\$5,000
Education/Outreach	\$3,500
Joint Venture	\$15,000
Opportunity Marketing	\$500
Paid Media	\$154,000
Marketing Personnel	\$86,000
Research	\$93,000
Travel/Trade Shows	\$5,000
Visitor Services	\$24,771
Website Budget	\$1,000
	<b>\$522,213</b>

## LODGING FACILITY SALES TAX (LFST)

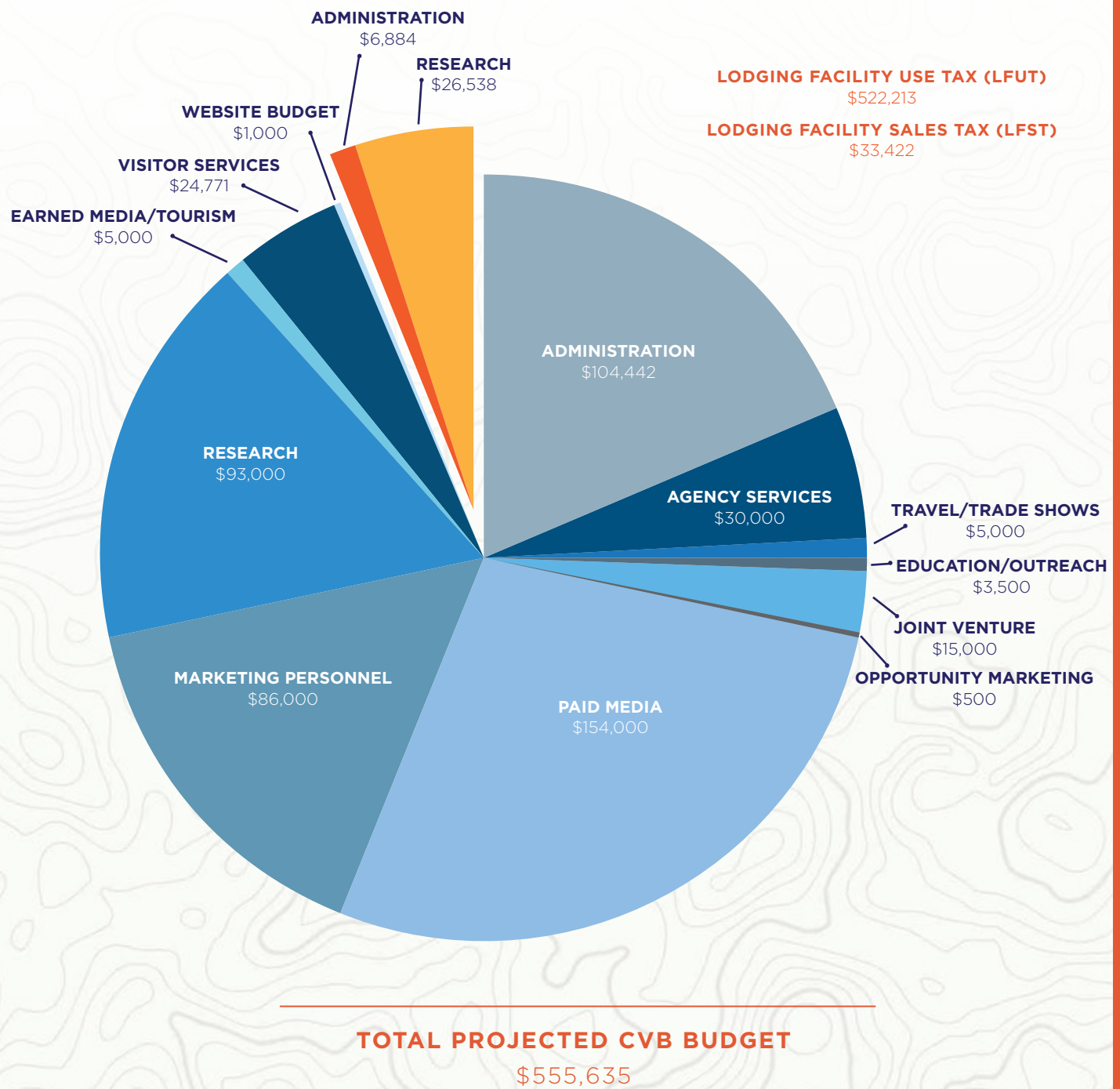
Administration	\$6,884
Research	\$26,538
	<b>\$33,422</b>

Lodging Facility Use Tax (LFUT)	\$522,213
Lodging Facility Sales Tax (LFST)	\$33,422
<b>TOTAL PROJECTED CVB BUDGET</b>	<b>\$555,635</b>





## FY26 BUDGET VISIT BILLINGS STATE LODGING TAX (CVB)





# BILLINGS TOURISM BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT (BTBID) FY26 BUDGET

EXPENSE CATEGORY	AMOUNT
Leisure Visitation	\$856,700
Group Sales	\$454,300
Sports Tourism	\$1,037,100
Web/Digital Assets	\$69,300
Publicity/Advocacy	\$165,500
Reserves/Grants/Opportunity	\$100,000
Visitor Experience	\$339,400
Administrative	\$392,700
<b>PROJECTED BTBID FY26 BUDGET</b>	<b>\$3,415,000</b>

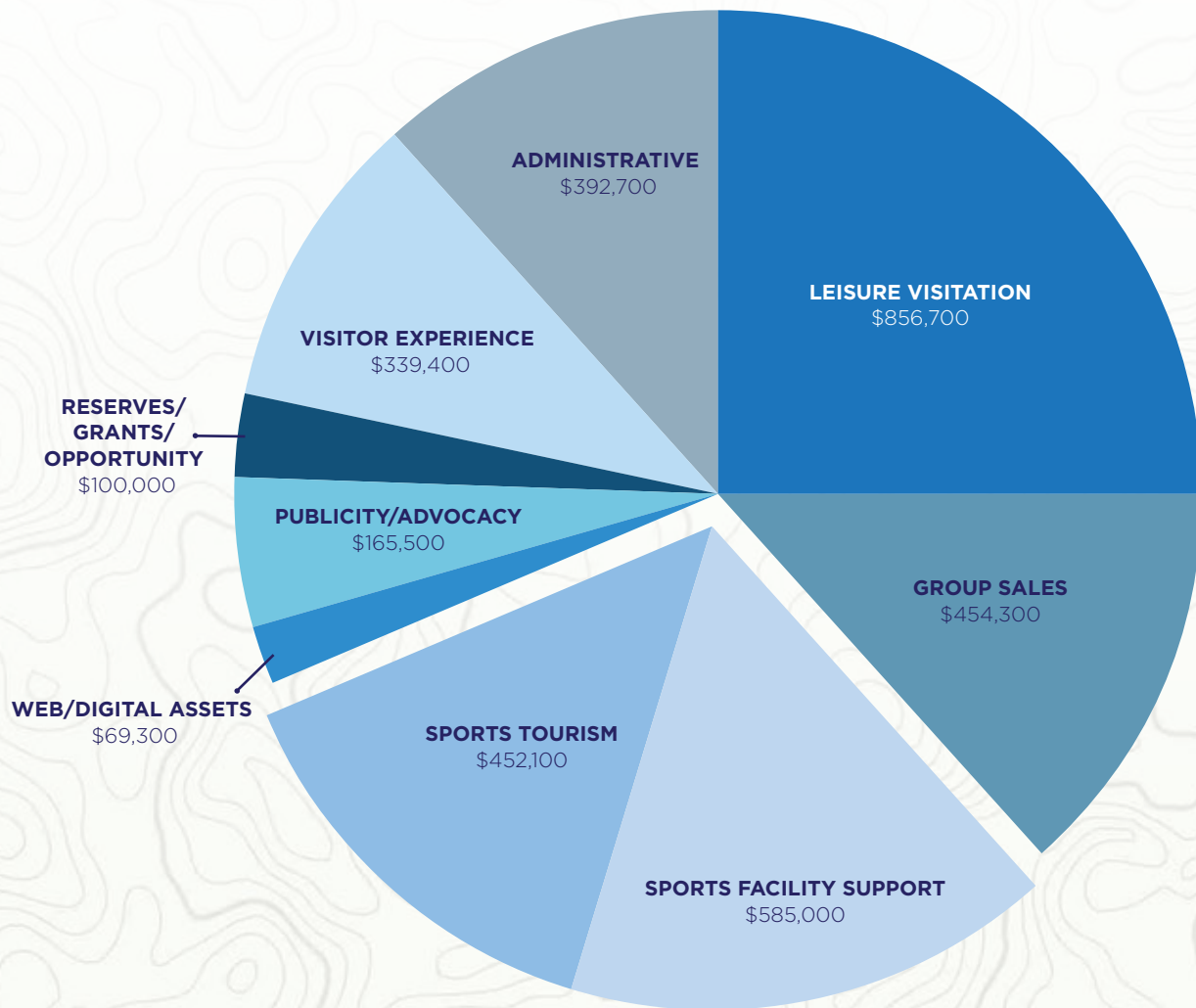
## Other BTBID Notes:

BTBID Board Restricted Reserves for BIL/Air Service  
Commitment: \$375,000  
General BTBID Board Restricted Reserves: \$125,447





## FY26 BUDGET BILLINGS TOURISM BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT (BTBID)



**TOTAL PROJECTED BTBID FY26 BUDGET:**  
\$3,415,000





**GETTING OUTSIDE FEELS GREAT ON THE INSIDE.**

**WE'LL SEE YOU OUT THERE IN BILLINGS, MT.**

In Billings - a big city born under big skies - you'll discover authentic Montana adventure just about everywhere. Ride along the famed Beartooth Highway and take in Montana scenery as far as the eye can see. Let the trails guide you along 50 miles of hiking and biking excursions that treat you to even more Montana beauty. And of course, all good trails lead to a brewery along the deliciously refreshing Billings Brew Trail. Your bucket-list Montana getaway awaits in Billings. The best part - direct flights are now available to Billings Logan International Airport.

*VISIT Billings*  
MONTANA'S  TRAILHEAD