



Helena Tourism Business Improvement District Fiscal Year 2021-2022 Work Plan

1 ORGANIZATION SUMMARY

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

The TBID is funded by a room assessment that the hoteliers voted into action to help market Helena. The TBID operates under the direction of the TBID Board of Directors and reports to the City of Helena.

The Helena Tourism Alliance (HTA) is the administrative organization of the TBID. The TBID Board meets monthly on the first Wednesday of every month at 1:30 pm in the Reeder's Alley Conference Center, 120 Reeder's Alley.

Helena TBID Organizational Mission

To promote and preserve Helena as a unique destination in order to increase occupancy for lodging facilities thereby creating vibrant growth in the local economy.

Helena TBID Organizational Vision

The Helena TBID is the premier partner and leading advocate for Helena's quintessential experiences and profound opportunities.

Helena TBID Organizational Values

- Integrity
- Innovation
- Communication
- Participation
- Effective Teamwork

Helena TBID Organizational Goals

1. **Community Partnerships:** Build relationships with the community and make a coordinated effort to communicate effectively.
2. **Market Helena:** Develop a marketing plan that builds awareness, educates, and utilizes extension partnerships.
3. **Big Picture:** Explore additional partnership opportunities by identifying unique travel experiences utilizing unconventional ideas.
4. **Organizational Development:** Create training to develop innovative board members, staff, and stakeholders to enhance participation.

2 COVID 19

We have the safety of residents and visitors in mind, and we will continue to stay informed, engaged and share accurate up-to-date information.

We plan to stay informed by following reputable sources. We know the City of Helena and the State of Montana prioritize the health and safety of citizens and visitors. We will continue to follow their guidance as well as work in coordination with The Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development and our tourism industry to promote the Montana Aware Campaign.

As the economy begins moving, we understand what travelers will be looking for will be very different and we will need to adjust our offerings to succeed. Many aspects of the tourism industry are shifting. We continue to look for ways to provide offerings that make Helena trips attractive for in-state, regional and domestic travelers. For our year-round local businesses and especially seasonal tourism businesses this is critical. We will continue researching and implementing essential strategies to ensure safety and drive success.

3 LEISURE RECRUITMENT

The TBID's overall leisure marketing strategy is to increase year-round visitation targeting regional and national visitors. Strategies and goals will continue to be assessed and expanded and will focus on innovative marketing to reach new and existing travelers.

The TBID will closely monitor opportunities for consumer trade shows such as the Travel and Adventure Shows and Outdoor Adventure & Travel Shows.

The TBID will work with regional and state partners to monitor the international landscape, while continuing to foster partnerships with domestic and international tour operators. In addition, we will weigh the option to participate in international travel recruitment shows like IPW, the travel industry's premier international marketplace and the largest generator of travel to the U.S and Rocky Mountain International (RMI)/The Real America) which markets to travel agents from western European nations such as the UK, France, Italy, Germany, etc.

4 HALF-WAY BETWEEN YELLOWSTONE & GLACIER NATIONAL PARKS

For people exploring Montana's National Parks, Helena offers the perfect half-way destination. Helena is 178 miles from the west entrance of Yellowstone National Park and 187 miles from the eastern portion of Going to the Sun Road in Glacier National Park, making us the perfect location to overnight and/or spend several days.

Helena will continue to position the community as the half-way destination between the parks and highlight that traveling this route offers fabulous scenery; some of Montana's most special heritage places; and an opportunity to relax and take a break. Our Google Adword buys, social media campaigns, SEO and web content are all focusing on Helena as the half-way point.

5 THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Designing a quality visitor experience has been a highly strategic priority of Visit Helena. Now more than ever, the TBID will work to align our destination's stakeholders, businesses and front-line employees to support tourism and assist in facilitating and meeting visitor expectations. Ensuring visitors have positive experiences will directly impact the future of tourism in Helena, Montana.

The goal is to successfully align the following sectors because we all benefit from a positive visitor experience:

- Attractions
- Downtown Merchants
- Hotel / Lodging
- Restaurants
- Shopping / Retail
- Realtors
- Citizens / Volunteers

Making sure travelers feel welcomed and enjoy their stay is a major priority, which is why the TBID offers Front-Line Training to help those working with visitors every day be informed about what Helena has to offer. Front-line employees are given the resources and the knowledge that they need to positively impact the visitor experience as well as increase the length of their stay.

Employees drive the customer experience. By developing and providing this resource for the hospitality industry and business community it will shine a light on the importance of visitor orientation and facilitation which will help elevate the city and champion visitation.

A positive visitor experience is a significant piece in recovery for the tourism industry. Visit Helena understands that the visitor experience plays one of the most important roles in growing visitation at a destination. Exceptional service leads to repeat visitation and extended stays. Making sure travelers feel welcomed and enjoy their stay is a major priority.

As Visit Helena approaches the 2021 warm season, visitor habits will have drastically changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For the Visit Helena Visitor Information Center, concerns potential visitors may have considering the current travel climate may influence traffic to the Center and may influence the reach. We will offer several other means to orient and facilitate the visitor through additional channels of communication.

6 GROUP TRAVEL & MEETINGS

The TBID will reevaluate our efforts on developing the group travel market and will be members of the American Bus Association (ABA) and the National Tour Association (NTA). We will plan on attending NTA Travel Exchange in May of 2022.

One of the focuses of the TBID is to encourage our local community to bring meetings to Helena. Efforts will focus on small market meetings. Growth in this segment will result in continued progress in hotel occupancy, average daily rate (ADR) and impact the local economy by filling restaurants, retailers and attractions.

7 TBID GRANT PROGRAM

The grant program has been around since 2013 and has provided financial assistance in supporting sports and tournaments, music festivals, outdoor recreation events and a variety of other events. The TBID Grant Program was revamped in FY20 to build upon the vibrancy of the community and inspire innovative and creative ideas for events or signature experiences; provide funding in the early planning stages; and maximize regional and national exposure by promoting the events early enough for visitors to include in their itinerary.

The TBID is committed to developing a more year-round tourism base and contributing to a healthy local economy by supporting local activities, spending, tax generation and jobs through increased visitation to the area. Therefore, we will actively promote and market this program

and invite local organizations and businesses to apply for grant monies with the purpose to grow the local tourism economy through increased visitor spending in Helena's lodging establishments. Other tourism partners such as retail, restaurant, transportation, and attractions will also benefit from increased visitation.

8 SPORT EVENTS & TOURNAMENTS

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

The TBID will continue to build relationships and support local sports organizations and 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 generating room nights for lodging partners.

Positioning Helena as a sports event destination will remain a priority for Visit Helena with staff looking at new technologies and innovations that will shape the future of sports events and sports tourism in Helena.

9 ARTS & CULTURE

The TBID will promote arts and culture in Helena. We will emphasize that Helena has a great deal to offer those who appreciate the fine arts: The Archie Bray Foundation for Ceramic Arts, Holter Museum of Art, Montana Historical Society Museum, Grand Street Theatre, Myrna Loy Center for the Performing and Visual Arts, and Helena Symphony. Numerous fine art galleries showing all types of art from traditional to contemporary and more, provide Helena with a solid mix of culture that will be highlighted.

10 BIKE HELENA

The Bike Helena brand is well-established in Helena and the TBID continues to highlight Helena as a mountain biking destination.

We work with the City of Helena Parks Department, Helena Open Lands, Helena/Lewis & Clark County National Forest and the Prickly Pear Land Trust to ensure that we are working in the best interests of everyone involved with our incredible assets – our trail system.

The Helena Trail Rider Program is running under the direction of the Helena TBID. This unique, no-fee community shuttle accommodates all trail users including hikers, trail runners and mountain bikers including locals and visitors alike. It is important to note the Trail Rider is a tool to help shuttle riders as well as disperse users throughout the system.

The TBID will continue to partner with Kurt Valiton, Vigilante Shuttles and Tours, to operate the shuttle. Kurt's love of the outdoors, local businesses, and the history of Helena, provides a memorable experience and ensures people's adventures are even more than they had hoped for while utilizing the Trail Rider.

Bikehelena.com will continue to offer information on trail opportunities and promote education on proper trail etiquette.

10 HERITAGE TOURISM & OUTDOOR RECREATION

Visit Helena is staying connected with the Montana History Foundation to promote a program called Helena History Hikes. This program is designed to promote heritage tourism and outdoor recreation by showcasing Helena's regional history through exploration of its surrounding environment.

Direct beneficiaries include Helena residents and tourists, with the broader economy of Helena serving as a secondary beneficiary. While Helena is surrounded by hundreds of miles of trails and marketed as offering "day hikes, mountain bikes, and Old West history", no combination of these subjects is offered as a guided or interpreted experience. Helena History Hikes will fill this void, offering visitors the opportunity to day hike and explore history. These guided hikes will investigate the interrelationships between human activity and the environment, bridging the divide between the urban and the wild, the human and non-human, and the sciences and the humanities.

The Montana History Foundation will also be adding a History Walk Tour: Breweries & Brothels. This tour will showcase Helena's brewing history and historic red-light district.

11 MARKETING METHODS

The TBID understands the critical need for an effective digital marketing strategy in today's ultra-competitive marketplace and will continue to work closely with the local creative marketing agency SOVRN.

The TBID continues to give Helena a strong presence in social media and the web. Facebook campaigns continue to grow our audience. Digital marketing continues to be crucial for our destination marketing organization as we vie against competing markets. The Media Plan is primarily digital allowing the plan to stay flexible with recurrent changes in creative and messaging. Search engine optimization (SEO), pay-per-click advertising, social media marketing, website design and optimization, and email marketing are a variety of services we will utilize to help us grow our tourism & destination business.

After redesigning Visit Helena's website in FY2020, in FY21 we will continue to focus on creating experiences targeting the potential visitor to Helena, providing information on travel and tourism while maintaining the commerce needs of the community. Using the Montana Brand Pillars and the Helena Marketing Plan, the design of the website will provide a user experience that follows the three phases of the travel decision process – inspiration, orientation, and facilitation. Creating an improved experience for website visitors by showing strong imagery and stories of activities in and around Helena is the goal.

12 MEDIA RELATION AND OUTREACH

Throughout the year, Visit Helena will continue to build relationships with influencers and journalists that will help grow the brand and inspire travel. Attending events such as Public Relations Society of America Travel and Tourism Conference can increase contacts and help build the influencer program. Visit Helena will proactively reach out as well as respond to appropriate media and influencers with original, relevant, and timely stories.

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