

**FY 2022**  
**DESTINATION MARKETING PLAN AND BUDGET**  
**KALISPELL, MONTANA**



**Discover Kalispell**  
**Kalispell Chamber of Commerce Convention & Visitor Bureau**  
**15 Depot Park, Kalispell, MT 59901**  
**<http://discoverkalispell.com>**

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## Introduction

As 2021 begins, Kalispell and the world continue to deal with COVID-19's implications and concerns. Discover Kalispell remains focused and nimble to meet the next challenge, to effectively support Montana's travel industry and reopen Kalispell's economy safely and effectively through tourism.

During 2020 Montana tourism fared better than the national average due to the American traveler's continued focus on outdoor and less crowded destinations and experiences. Discover Kalispell anticipated as much as a 40-75% decrease in revenue but ended the year in a more positive position: 30% decrease in bed tax and 19% decrease in TBID revenue. Discover Kalispell's role shifted from a focus on marketing to a destination stewardship and management role, providing information and resources to the local tourism industry and communicating with travelers once they arrived in our region to assure safe and responsible travel.

Factors critical to Discover Kalispell's FY22 business recovery strategy as travel trends and revenue collections move through recovery into more predictable levels:

- Maintaining organizational stability through cash management and effective use of resources.
- Supporting the community as a steward of responsible and safe travel and recreation and serve as a resource for information and destination advocacy.
- Championing community-driven destination growth by celebrating the diversity of our local culture, supporting downtown resurgence projects, and travel and hospitality workforce development.
- Achieving increased brand awareness and connection with travelers to drive visitations and room night stays at Kalispell hotels.

As travel resumes destination promotion competition will be fierce and crowded. To maintain a competitive position in the travel marketing industry, this marketing plan focuses on increasing lodging collections by identifying high-value travelers during 2021 which in some cases are a different geographic and demographic visitor-type for Kalispell. Discover Kalispell will utilize a data-driven marketing strategy and leverage local and regional partnerships with the guidance of our high-level creative and brand content agencies of record, to achieve a strong return on investment on the tourism promotion funding we receive.

## About Kalispell Montana

This is Kalispell, a place where rivers run free, mountains rise high above the valley floor and boundless adventures await. It's big, bold and unfiltered, with a storybook-like charm that comes from being firmly rooted in traditions that are complemented by jaw-dropping landscapes and an authentic way of life. This vibrant mountain town is home to charming accommodations, locally owned shops, touchable history and a robust culinary scene, complete with farm-to-table dining, breweries and more.

Kalispell is a destination that is known for its fierce independence and a frontier spirit, where four-season adventures are easily attainable. From guided winter horseback rides in the Salish Mountains to sunsets in Glacier National Park and kayaking tours on Flathead Lake to trails that weave their way in, around and through this mountain town, jaw-dropping experiences are at your fingertips.

No matter what brings you to Kalispell, we invite you to fall under the spell, make memories and immerse yourself in the magic of Kalispell, Montana.



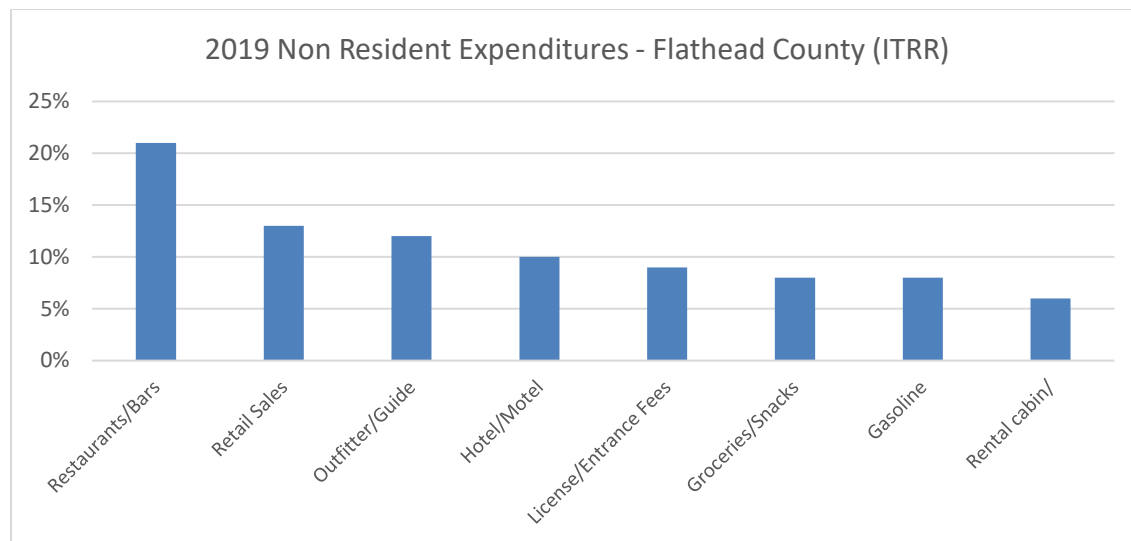
### Kalispell’s Nonresident Visitor Characteristics – ITRR

- Group Characteristics: 20% all first-time visitors; 60% all repeat visitors; 77% plan to return within two years.
- Primary reason for trip: 55% vacation/recreation/pleasure; 26% visit friends/family or attend event.
- If on vacation, attracted for: GNP, mountains/forests, open space, hunting.
- Sites visited on trip: GNP, YNP, Flathead Lake state parks, other MT state parks; Little Bighorn Battlefield.
- Top activities: Day hiking, scenic driving, nature photography, car/RV camping, visit local brewery, museums, wildlife watching, visiting other historical sites, recreational shopping, visiting Indian reservations.
- Residency of origin: MN, UT, WA, CA, MI, ID, WI, NV, PA, TX.
- Age groups represented: average age 51; median age 55; 52% male; 48% female; 28% first time visitor.

(Source: ITRR 2020 Quarterly Non-Resident Survey – spent at least one night in Kalispell)

### Expenditure Data

Non-Resident visitors spent \$613.4 Million in Flathead County during 2019.



### Destination Facts

- Kalispell ranks number 21 out of 545 micropolitan cities in the U.S. for economic strength.
- The Kalispell Core and Rail Redevelopment Project is facilitating a vibrant, pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use revitalization with retail, residential, entertainment, and cultural amenities for the downtown core.
- Glacier National Park, the Crown of the Continent, serves as the primary draw for warm season visitations to northwest Montana. The Park struggles with overcrowding in the Going-to-the-Sun Road corridor so is implementing a ticketed entry system for the summer of 2021. Despite limited

services and closer of the east side during 2020 the park saw 60% increases in visitations during the fall season. Discover Kalispell's marketing promotes visits to the park outside of July and August.

- Kalispell's Glacier Park International Airport is serviced by six carriers, Alaska, Allegiant, American, Delta, Sun Country, and United, with flights to a growing number of destinations, including five new seasonal destinations beginning summer 2021. Stronger than anticipated level of performance during 2020 prompted the airport to resume the terminal expansion project in spring of 2021.
- Lodging properties in Kalispell: 23 hotels with 1,938 rooms plus over 390 short term rental (STR) properties active in Kalispell during the peak season (AirDNA). Flathead County has the highest number of STR's in Montana, at 2,814 during Sept 2019-Sept 2020 (ITRR).
- Groups of 10-500 can be comfortably and adequately accommodated in Kalispell. Two conference hotels that can accommodate up to 280 rooms per night with over 26,000 square feet of meeting space. Kalispell is receiving a growing number of event and group venues such as the Ashley Creek Historic Venue at Snowline Acres.

### Kalispell Strengths

- Downtown Kalispell is experiencing a resurgence with the addition of new businesses, a burgeoning art scene including new street art and sculptures, and strong interest by out-of-area developers to invest in the CORE area redevelopment.
- Arts and Culture offerings: Conrad Mansion Museum, Hockaday Museum of Art, Northwest Montana History Museum, Glacier Symphony and Chorale, Alpine Theater Project, Bigfork Summer Playhouse, KALICO Art Center.
- Montana's iconic natural landmarks located in Kalispell's backyard: 32 miles from the entrance to Glacier National Park, 10 miles to Flathead Lake, surrounded by 2 million acres of Flathead National Forest.
- State Parks: Kalispell is surrounded by eleven state parks providing trails, activities, interpretative visitor services, and water-based activities.
- Increased availability of non-stop flights: Glacier Park International Airport passenger count remained strong and lead the state in year-over-year growth. By February 2021 enplanements had returned to 2019 levels. GPIA is seeing continued growth and expansion through the attractiveness of the destination, airport leadership, and Glacier AERO, a board represented by the Flathead Valley business and tourism industry serving to provide incentives for enhanced air service.
- Logan Health (formerly Kalispell Regional Healthcare) is a leading health services provider serving the northern Montana region. The region's only university level academic medical center and includes including Montana Children's Medical Center, the region's first pediatric hospital.
- Investments in education: Flathead Valley Community College's recent additions include the Broussard Library and Learning Commons, new on-campus housing, and the Wachholz College Center which will include a fitness center, gymnasium, event space, performing arts education and a performance and lecture hall. Scheduled to be completed spring 2022.
- Completion of major infrastructure projects: continued completion of the Kalispell bypass and the designation of the Hwy 93/Reserve to improve freight and passenger vehicle mobility.

## Kalispell Challenges

- Sized between a larger Montana city and a resort town, Kalispell is neither. It's a burgeoning, thriving community that is best viewed and described as a small city with mountain-town amenities and culture. This distinction is an integral part of what sets Kalispell apart and vital to understand the competitive dynamics when setting expectations for seasonality of visitation, occupancy and room rates.
- Availability of short-term rentals (STR) such as AirBNB and VRBO influences traditional lodging occupancy and average daily rate. As of September 2020, over 12,000 STR's were active in Montana during the preceding 12 months with Flathead County receiving the highest number at 2,814 units. Kalispell STR activity during the peak summer season shows the average rental size as a 2.7-bedroom unit housing 7 guests, an average daily rate of \$215/night and average occupancy of 90%. (Source: AirDNA and ITRR – The State of Short Term Rentals in Montana)
- The Canadian border closed March 20, 2020. Visitors from Alberta and British Columbia are a year-round key market for Kalispell and the Flathead Valley. Top activities by those visitors include recreational shopping, day hiking, visiting local breweries, golfing, motorboating, skiing, and events (ITRR). Due to the border closure, credit card spending in Kalispell from Canada averaged a 94% decrease between April-December 2020. At this time a border reopening date has not been announced.
- Kalispell Chamber/CVB works with partners and key stakeholders to convene discussions and create strategies for workforce housing needs including the promotion of public-private partnerships and other tools to incentivize a growing supply of mixed-use housing options.
- Weather conditions are deviating from historical patterns which poses a challenge when promoting outdoor recreation and outdoor events. The impact of national media headlines around wildfires in GNP, as well as the wildfire smoke from surrounding states impacts visitations to our area.
- Aquatic Invasive Species pose a threat to the Flathead basin waterways. The impact to Montana from zebra mussels alone is estimated at \$234M in mitigation costs and lost revenue. (Source: Flathead Lake Biological Station)

## Kalispell Opportunities

- Discover Kalispell is undertaking a visual brand refresh in 2021. In addition, we are working with our parent organization, the Kalispell Chamber of Commerce to develop a co-brand, a partnership for community success, growth and sustainability.
- The natural landscape is the foundation of Kalispell and its tie to agriculture and recreation. Discover Kalispell's commitment to be an advocate for sustainability of natural resources will be integrated in our communication and promotional strategy directed to travelers as well as our alliances and partnerships with area non-profits and businesses.
- Equity, diversity and inclusion will be a cornerstone for Discover Kalispell's strategy during FY22. The marketing and community stewardship initiatives will focus on fostering a welcoming environment to all, both to the community and the outdoor recreation landscape. This includes the development of content and programming to promote all aspects of the local culture by honoring diverse residents and by informing travelers on ways to safely enjoy Montana's outdoors.

- The increased number of sports and conference and event facilities being developed within our competitive destinations highlight the need for Kalispell to prioritize the expansion of indoor and outdoor event venues and other tourism assets.

## About Discover Kalispell

Discover Kalispell, a destination marketing and stewardship organization, strengthens the economic health of Kalispell by promoting the community as an attractive travel destination and therefore enhancing its public image as a dynamic place to live and work.

### Structure

Discover Kalispell, the Kalispell Convention & Visitor Bureau, is a division of the Kalispell Chamber of Commerce. The Kalispell Chamber has served as the official tourism agency for the City of Kalispell since 1987. Discover Kalispell is funded through two contracts with public agencies and generates private funds through registration fees and sponsorships. The Chamber has contracted with the State of Montana for Kalispell's share of the lodging facility use tax since 1987. In 2010, the Kalispell Chamber/CVB assumed administration of the Kalispell Tourism Business Improvement District under an agreement between the City of Kalispell, Kalispell hoteliers, and the Kalispell Chamber.

### The Discover Kalispell/Kalispell Convention & Visitor Bureau Team

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### Purpose of Marketing Plan

The FY22 marketing plan serves to direct the initiatives and spending for Discover Kalispell and inform and educate the Kalispell Chamber and TBID board of directors, community stakeholders, Tourism Advisory Council, City of Kalispell and the state legislature. Kalispell's two funding sources, Bed Tax and TBID, work collaboratively to support this marketing plan.

### 2020 Discover Kalispell Highlights

- Discover Kalispell contracted with The Abbi Agency as creative agency of record to direct seasonal and year-long campaigns and enhancements to Discover Kalispell's visual brand assets.
- Maintained brand awareness through COVID-19 travel restrictions and achieved strong engagement and conversions.
  - Implemented web chat feature for enhanced visitor information touch points.
  - 54% increase in visitor guide requests (Y/Y), 2,942 new newsletter subscribers.



- 80% of Discover Kalispell’s group event bookings scheduled for 2020 rescheduled for 2021 and 2022.
- Renewed the Kalispell TBID with the City of Kalispell through 2030 to provide funding for tourism and group sales marketing.
- Maintained success cash and expenditure management which will continue as Bed Tax and TBID revenues corrects through 2021 towards more predictable levels.
- Hotel occupancy and revenue collections performed better than anticipated in 2020:
  - 17% decrease in occupancy, versus a projected 40-75% decrease.
  - 13% decrease in TBID revenue.
  - 29% decrease in Bed Tax gross collections.
- Served as a resource for information and industry advocacy through the CARES Act Grant Funding promoting the Montana Aware and Safety First Adventure Second campaigns. For example: shop small campaigns, a variety of PPE resources made available to local businesses, and public service announcements on radio, billboards, geotargeted paid digital, and informational newsletters.



## Why Destination Marketing Is Important for Communities

Tourism is a competitive industry. When selecting a mountain community for a vacation destination there are many states and cities to choose from. A destination can no longer assume that if they build it they will come. Destination Marketing Organizations (DMO) such as Discover Kalispell strive to implement a tourism promotion strategy that over time will increase the competitiveness of the destination, and in turn increase revenues, taxes and local employment. New residents often began as visitors creating a virtuous cycle of economic benefits which begins with travel promotion.

Impacts of destination promotion for a community are far-reaching. Non-resident visitors spent \$3.77 billion in Montana (2019) and \$613 million in Flathead County (2019) (ITRR). Those dollars impact a wide range of local business such as restaurants, retail, hotels, outfitters and guides, groceries, gasoline, and rental cars.

Investment in tourism assets provides long term benefits. New businesses such as restaurants and breweries are an important part of the local experience's that visitors are attracted to but are also enjoyed by residents. When a community creates the right conditions for destination development, investment, and promotion, tourism is an economic lever that supports a strong sustainable economy.

Discover Kalispell works as a community partner to support and develop assets that are attractive to visitors but also support the quality of life for residents. Discover Kalispell's comprehensive regional and national campaigns raise Kalispell's profile, which assists the community in receiving new and expanded air service, new industries and employers, and the economic impact of recruiting conferences and events. Travelers' wants and needs as well as their methods of trip planning are constantly changing. The promotional tactics used by a DMO to reach potential visitors need to be current, effective, and genuine to the destination's local culture to garner visitor engagement as well as support and buy-in from the local community. This is achieved with adequate funding and organizational structure and expertise within the DMO.

The role of a DMO has evolved to extend beyond just marketing. A destination's tourism marketing brand works closely with local organizations and governments to be an active partner in the holistic health of the community. Some of the current priorities include:

- Sustainable Growth – Residents are questioning a DMO's contribution to peak seasons and the impact to resources and infrastructure. Discover Kalispell prioritizes its marketing spend to promote the fall, winter and spring seasons. The summer peak season is not actively promoted through paid advertising and instead is highlighted through the use of earned media, social media and newsletter marketing to promote areas and activities outside of Glacier National Park and actively guide visitors to off-the-beaten-path experiences.
- Development – DMO's are not just marketers, they are advocates and stewards of the destination's community resources. Discover Kalispell is actively supporting the following initiatives: Glacier AERO to develop new and expanded air service, the Kalispell core area and downtown development

projects, providing event and visitor asset development grants, serving as an advocate for Kalispell’s expanding arts and culture scene including our three downtown museums, educating in-market and potential travelers on Recreate Responsibly principles to help protect our natural resources, and honoring and promoting a variety of aspects of the culture and heritage of northwest Montana.

- Workforce – adequate workforce is a key initiative for the Kalispell Chamber of Commerce Convention & Visitor Bureau. The Chamber’s 2021 workforce initiative includes a multi-year program supporting Kalispell’s three top industry sectors: tourism and hospitality, manufacturing and occupational trades, and bioscience and being a leading voice to develop effective strategies to address workforce housing and childcare needs.



## FY 2022 DISCOVER KALISPELL MARKETING WORK PLAN AND BUDGET

### The Montana Brand and Kalispell

Kalispell fits perfectly with the Montana Brand enabling Discover Kalispell to work cooperatively with the Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development and Montana region and CVB partners.

***More spectacular unspoiled nature:*** Kalispell is surrounded by 10 mountain ranges, a national park, two national forests, one wilderness area, and the largest freshwater lake in the west.

***Vibrant and charming small town:*** Kalispell’s vibrant downtown offers Montana-inspired dining, spirits and brews. Situated perfectly between Glacier National Park and Flathead Lake, blending four-season adventure and soul-stirring beauty for an unforgettable experience.

***Breathtaking experiences by day, relaxing hospitality at night:*** Making waves on Flathead Lake, rafting the Middle Fork, cycling the Going-To-The-Sun road, exploring ‘The Bob’, or viewing fall’s dramatic transformation in the Flathead National Forest. However you choose to spend the daylight hours, your evenings will be full of hearty food and homey accommodations in Kalispell.

### Cooperative Programs

Discover Kalispell partners with MOTBD in digital and print campaigns and research joint ventures. Other cooperative projects include press trips, trade shows and photo and video asset sharing. Discover Kalispell partners with Glacier Country and in-region CVB’s on a variety of projects such as media events, press trips, meeting planner FAM’s, trade shows, and crisis management planning.



## The Travel Decision Process

The travel industry is recognizing the pent-up demand consumers are feeling which is leading to an increased desire to travel again in 2021. With the [increasing world-wide vaccination rates](#) and pandemic fatigue, it is believed that recovery will begin in earnest during 2021. [Longwoods Travel Sentiment Study](#) indicates that 84% of American travelers have travel plans in the next six months. Skift reports that [United, Delta, and Alaska Airlines are near break even or positive cash flow](#). Meetings and other types of group travel has restarted with bookings from 2020 contracting for the second half of 2021 and into 2022. The [Trip Advisor 2021 Traveler Trend report](#) states, “For destinations and tourism operators, the message is clear: however you choose to market your offering to travelers this year, don’t wait. Every day, more and more travelers aren’t just dreaming of their next trip abroad, they are planning and booking it.” Destination marketing has restarted across the U.S. and competition for the attention of travelers will be fierce.

This is being called the Year of Travel Rebound and northwest Montana is anticipated to receive a high number of visitations as a desirable outdoor destination and with the increased number of non-stop flights to Kalispell. Steps to insure a safe and healthy trip will continue to remain a priority for travelers. Discover Kalispell’s [Travel Safe, Recreate Responsibly](#) and Travel Tips resources will continue to play an important role providing current information to travelers and local businesses. Although the travel landscape has changed and the nation is still moving through recovery, when it comes to destination marketing and the ability to competitively reach travelers in the planning cycle, many of the strategies Discover Kalispell typically employs will remain constant.

### Discover Kalispell strategies to reach consumers throughout the planning cycle:

#### Stage 1 - Inspiration

Messages: Speak to the desire for a trip that includes a mountain community, outdoor recreation, relaxation, friendly-small town feel, and free-spirit adventure while also addressing safety, availability of modern comforts, and dispelling perceptions of Montana being difficult to access. Include messaging in our promotions that shows the affordability of a Montana vacation once they arrive and the unique experiences and memories they’ll receive (Glacier National Park, Flathead Lake). Highlight family-friendly events and activities. Tell an inspiring story of what makes our community special. Most travelers are also considering the trip in the inspiration stage and the budget continues to have a strong influence throughout the planning cycle.

#### Tools:

- Destination websites – [discoverkalispell](#), [visitmt](#), [glaciermt](#).
- Targeted content and search marketing.
- Discover Kalispell social media channels: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, You Tube.
- Blogs, articles, and inspiring photos & videos to demonstrate the unique Kalispell culture.
- Sponsored content in targeting and retargeting campaigns.
- Newsletter marketing to keep followers engaged.
- Travel shows to generate one-on-one conversations with potential travelers in key markets.
- Earned media to let others tell your story.

## **Stage 2: Orientation – Planning**

Messages: Highlight the diverse events and activities, downtown Kalispell, variety of dining choices, locally made products, and suggested itineraries. Soften the perception that they will be isolated (being without common amenities) and the perceived challenges of harsh weather. Highlight local food, craft beverage scene, arts and entertainment, recreation, and natural resources.

Tools:

- Discoverkalispell.com
- Consumer reviews and ratings on travel platforms.
- Be present on popular travel sites.
- Strong call to action in all content.
- Customized content for newsletter database.
- Local events calendars.
- Video to highlight events and activities so they can imagine themselves in the picture.
- Checklists to incentivize trip planning – ex. 10 day-hikes within 30 minutes of Kalispell.

## **Stage 3: Facilitation – Booking**

Messages: Travelers are interested and motivated but probably have not finalized trip plans. Goal is to not lose them to another destination by making it easy for them to book. Connect travelers with hotels and activity providers, highlight events during their travel dates, promote activities outside of Glacier National Park to extend the trip, and make the transaction as smooth and seamless as possible.

Tools:

- Mobile-friendly website.
- Lodging booking engine on DiscoverKalispell.com.
- Activity booking links on DiscoverKalispell.com.
- Reliable sources for questions - VIC, travel guide, website chat, responsive to comments on social media.
- Season-specific and niche activity content on website and social media.
- Links to a variety of maps on DiscoverKalispell.com.
- Resources – Book Your Adventure web page and list of businesses that fit a variety of categories.
- Visitor Information Center that is open year-round and available through a variety of electronic and one-on-one platforms.

## **Stage 4: The Experience**

Messages: Travelers rely on mobile to get their bearings once arriving at a destination. Once they are here, a destination and other tourism businesses need to be present with resources on websites, apps, and social media, including a way to tap into local knowledge.

Tools:

- Mobile-friendly website with up-to-date event calendar and sample itineraries.

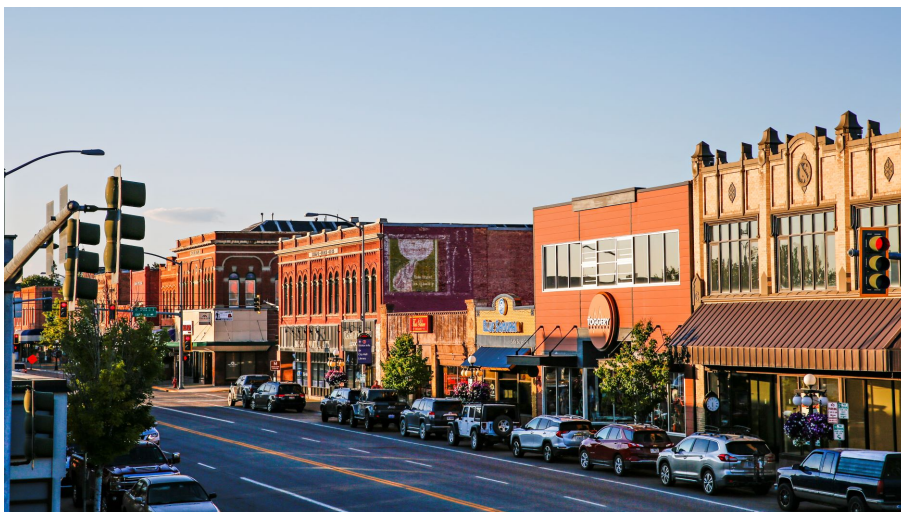
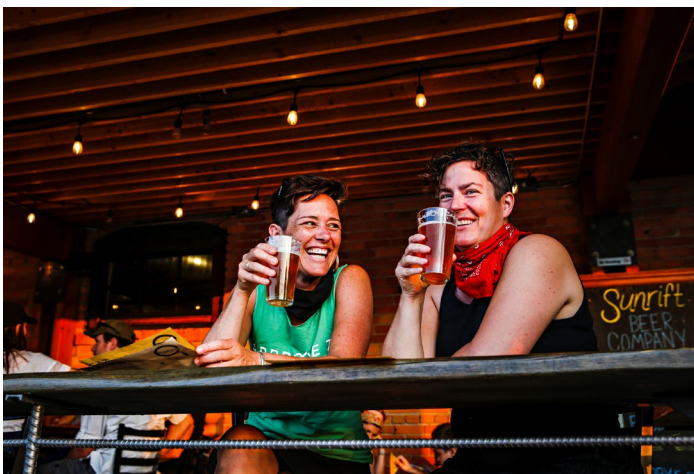
- Wayfinding signage.
- Restaurant and Brewery, Winery, Cidery and Distillery map guide.
- Making sure that local businesses know what Discover Kalispell is and what resources we have available so they can refer their customers.
- Visitor Information Center that is open year-round with maps, itinerary suggestions and knowledgeable travel coordinator to find the answers to their questions. Also accessible via web chat, phone and email.

### **Stage 5: Sharing**

The goal is to create loyal fans that will share trip photos on social media and tell stories about their adventures at the next party and family gathering.

**Back to Stage 1** with the next traveler







## Destination Marketing Industry Trends and Research

### Leisure Travel Trends

2020 upended the tourism industry, changing the predictability of visitation seasonality and the definition of Kalispell's typical visitor. In 2021 success needs to be redefined, using this time to ask questions, identify the ideal target consumer and go after it, build business. Tread carefully but with purpose into the adjusted normal.

[Destination Analysts](#) provides weekly COVID-19 Travel Insights which outline trends in traveler sentiment and factors involved in restarting the travel industry. The April 5<sup>th</sup> weekly update on American Travel in the Period of Coronavirus showed:

- On average, American travelers believe the United States is 52.6% back to normalcy right now. Nearly half believe their life will be back to "normal" by September.
- About two-thirds of Americans are highly open to travel inspiration right now and the number of Americans actively dreaming about and planning travel reached a 2021 peak at 77.7%.

Many travelers will continue to prioritize a destination and businesses within that destination that continue to exhibit health and safety protocols. Destination Analysts survey indicated that 73.5% feel that wearing a mask is still necessary after vaccination. When asked how confident are you that you can travel safely in the current environment 36.2% were confident or very confident. Desire to travel is there but hesitations for health and safety still are a factor.

In 2021 DMO's will need to maintain a community-first focus. Destinations need to continue to demonstrate their community's commitment to safety and preserving the local culture and way of life. ITRR Residents' Attitudes Towards Tourism – 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2020 report shows that 61% agree or strongly agree that because of COVID-19, I am more concerned about visitors in my community. That sentiment is heightened in regions such as northwest Montana where residents also expressed that "my community is becoming overcrowded because of more visitors during the summer tourism season." Discover Kalispell will continue to communicate the health and safety guidelines for city, county and state, as well as federal lands - Glacier National Park and Flathead National Forest. Travelers also want to be aware of the percentage of residents that have been vaccinated and availability of testing.

Discover Kalispell's FY22 marketing plan addresses the importance of a community-first focus by 1) continuing to support a sustainable destination through targeted messaging about responsible recreation and safe travel, 2) develop community advocacy initiatives that promote equity, diversity and inclusivity and 3) continue to be an active participant in initiatives that add to the viability and smart growth of Kalispell and the downtown core.

Key performance indicators used during FY22 to optimize marketing and promotional campaigns:

- Smith Travel Reports – hotel occupancy, ADR, demand and revenue on a weekly basis for Kalispell and competitive set.

- Destination desirability – paid and organic media engagements and conversions, visitor guide requests, newsletter subscriptions and earned media.
- Website analytics – regular tracking of unique visitors, pages/session, session duration to retain engagement with destination and monitor campaign results through landing page activity.
- Mobile location data – track visitations daily utilizing geolocation data at a micro-destination specific level.
- Visitor spending – monitor visitor spending via credit card transactions in Kalispell gauging geographic market seasonal impacts based on overall spend and lodging spend.

## Meetings Industry Trends

The meetings industry took a major hit with the 2020 pandemic and required planners to relearn and rethink everything from business models and sponsorship to event technology and content delivery. A survey of 929 planners by Northstar Meeting Group taken February 18 to March 2, 2021 found that 81% of all planners will hold their next in-person event sometime in 2021. Most of that business (59%) will fall in the second half of 2021 and just 19% will hold their next real-life gathering in 2022 or later.

Associations are leading in this progress towards recovery, followed by independent planners and sports. Respondents from those market segments are more confident that vaccine rollouts will speed the industry’s recovery, more likely to hold their next in-person events in the second quarter of 2021, more apt to be planning hybrid meetings, and much less likely to hold all-virtual gatherings. Corporate meetings will be slow to return mostly due to restriction on employee travel. Liability concerns of employees with underlying health issues and budget issues are both significant factors relative to the restrictions.

Sporting events were among the few market segments that did not come to a halt in 2020. “Youth sports, in particular, have been a gift to destinations that reopened quickly, and that business remained strong even during the pandemic”, points out Al Kidd, president and CEO of the Sports Events and Tourism Association. Evidence that children are less susceptible to the virus gave parents more confidence in letting their kids participate in events, and organizers followed the example of professional leagues to minimize risks and control outbreaks.

As the dust clears a bit and Discover Kalispell looks forward to the future of meetings and events in 2021-2022, one thing is clear: virtual and hybrid events are here to stay, and alongside traditional in-person events will become fixtures in most go-forward meetings and event programs. In a recent study through PCMA, 76% of planners said that they are going virtual for 2021. In another survey with Northstar Meeting Group survey, they found that 54% are now planning meetings with both online and in-person components or planning to do so.

Discover Kalispell Strategies:

- Meeting and group business will pick up starting in the fall of 2021 with Association market likely to return the quickest to in-person meetings. Discover Kalispell’s primary market for meeting business is the Montana and Pacific Northwest region. Targeted paid media campaigns connect with planners

booking group sizes best served by Kalispell’s group venues and amenities. Quarterly newsletters to meeting planner database retains connections and communicates the services, expertise in event planning assistance, and incentive programs that Discover Kalispell offers.

- Sporting events didn’t come to halt during 2021 and will continue to be strong for destinations. Discover Kalispell will retain and build connections with state and local sports organizations, regional and national promoters and tournament directors, by soliciting new destination events, assisting with specific requests and providing grant funding for new and expanding local events.
- The biggest hurdle and obstacle for the future of in-person meetings are general hesitation and uncertainty related to COVID-19 by event hosts and potential attendees. With this uncertainty, virtual and hybrid meetings continue to evolve and become more important. Discover Kalispell’s hybrid meeting resources help planners and groups [start a connection in Kalispell](#). Providing resources and knowledge on industry trends, local vendor resources, keeping up-to-date with meeting industry articles and working closely with hotel sales departments.

### Group Tour & Travel Trends

As the world slowly recovers from Covid-19, borders gradually start to open, the expectation of travel will look different than it did pre-pandemic. Most guided travel companies say they are confident people eventually will return to more traditional group travel but the trend toward more intimate tours has spread quickly.

Collette, who was one of the few major tour operators running trips this year, reduced its maximum capacity for the near term and most major operators say they expect smaller groups to be the norm, at least initially. The Globus family of brands, for instance, has expanded small-group departures across almost all of its guided itineraries next year, meaning guests will have the option to travel in groups that average 24 people rather than the standard size of about 40.

Many U.S. tour companies will look to domestic tours and destinations with wide-open spaces and create more FIT itineraries. What used to be considered travel hot-spots, areas that were popular prior to the pandemic, may be put on the back burner for a while. The popular destinations will be those destinations that have controlled the coronavirus and more off-the-beaten path locations will become more popular.

Discover Kalispell Strategies:

- Tour companies are reducing the capacity of tours to comply with COVID-19 guidelines and instill confidence in travelers. Discover Kalispell connects with domestic tour companies through paid and organic media placements promoting Kalispell as the perfect destination to experience wide-open spaces, outdoors and off-the-beaten path activities and experiences.
- International travel will take some time to return. Discover Kalispell will continue the relationship and marketing partnership with Rocky Mountain International (RMI) which has representatives in France, Germany, Australia, Italy, UK, Benelux and Nordic Regions. Discover Kalispell’s quarterly tour operator newsletters retain connections with tour operators and highlights itineraries, group resources and amenities.

*With a rich mountain culture and small-town charm, Kalispell combines the conveniences of city amenities with a destination that's genuine, welcoming and service-oriented. Kalispell's soul-stirring beauty and full-service offerings make it easy for attendees to connect to the spirit of this place year-round, from local business to the wild outdoors, as well as to each other.*



## Key Market Segments

Discover Kalispell utilizes a variety of marketing and promotional strategies to reach leisure travelers and implements a targeted group sales strategy to grow the meetings, convention and group travel segments. The goal: to introduce travelers to the numerous offerings in and around Kalispell, while also encouraging them choose to overnight in Kalispell.

### Consumer – Leisure Travel

Summer is not actively promoted through paid advertising. Discover Kalispell uses earned media and social media primarily to actively guide visitors throughout Kalispell and the valley, introducing them to off-the-beaten-path/unknown experiences.

For winter, Discover Kalispell focuses on the destination’s well-rounded winter offerings and place a larger emphasis on guided experiences that combine the area’s outdoor recreation with indoor amenities like museums, wellness and dining.

Year-round, and especially during shoulder seasons, Discover Kalispell focuses on promoting annual and community events, unique activities, Kalispell’s charming downtown and burgeoning arts scene.

Key Segment/High Potential Visitors:

- Outdoor recreation seekers
- Arts, culture, and history enthusiasts
- Sports and event travelers
- Family travel

Emerging Segments:

- Travelers that are new to outdoor recreation.

Geographical Markets:

Winter	Missoula, Seattle, Spokane, Great Falls, LA, Portland, Dallas
Spring	Missoula, Seattle, Spokane, Portland, Phoenix, southern CA, Dallas
Summer	Southern CA, Seattle, SF-Oakland, Phoenix, New York
Fall	Phoenix, Seattle, LA, Spokane, Portland, Missoula, Dallas

### Sports and Events

Discover Kalispell serves as host and partner to bring numerous sporting and other types of destination events to Kalispell. Events range from large national and international events such as the Montana Spartan Race to regional youth events like Three Blind Refs. Partners include high school athletic directors, venues such as Flathead County Fairgrounds, Majestic Valley Arena and Flathead Valley Community College, community event organizers and national event promoters.

Key Focus: Regional or expanded national events during the shoulder seasons and indoor events taking place in winter.

Grants: Discover Kalispell offers [grant funding](#) for new and expanding events based on an application and scoring process directed by the TBID board of directors.

### **Meetings and Conventions**

Associations will continue to be the focus for Kalispell and is projected to be the market segment most likely to have confidence in returning to in-person meetings. Discover Kalispell will continue to build on existing relationships with regional and national associations and become more involved with our state association, Montana Society of Association Executives, through partnership and sponsorships.

The Pacific Northwest Region will remain our geographical market, which includes Seattle, the Puget Sound area and Oregon. Cities in the Puget Sound area include Tacoma, Olympia and Everett. Seattle is the closest major U.S. city to Kalispell, only an eight-hour drive from Seattle and Glacier Park International Airport offers numerous daily direct flights out of Kalispell to Seattle and a seasonal, daily flight to Portland. Oregon has a large number of regional associations in Salem and Portland. More rural areas such as Montana will benefit with group bookings from extended closures and uncertainty in Washington and Oregon.

Key Segment:

State, national and regional associations

Geographical Market:

Montana, Pacific Northwest region – Seattle, Oregon

### **Group Tour & Travel**

National parks (Glacier National Park), affordability, unique, off-the-beaten path experiences and wide-open spaces are the right elements to attract domestic, regional and international tour companies, clubs, hobby groups and senior travel to Kalispell.

Key Segment:

- Domestic tour operators looking for niche travel to include weekend getaways, senior travel, cultural/historical and motorcycle tours.
- International tour operators that promote outdoor recreation, national parks, cultural and historic experiences for travel planners in their countries. Due to international travel restrictions continuing in 2021 Discover Kalispell will pursue opportunities through organic media, connections and partnerships versus paid media campaigns for this segment.

Geographical Market:

Domestic group coordinators and tour operators that are now focusing on destinations in the U.S. versus international due to travel restrictions.

## Destination Stewardship

During the COVID-19 pandemic Discover Kalispell turned inward – providing information and resources to support local businesses and demonstrating that the health of the local community was of highest priority. That opportunity created a positive connection between the CVB and the community.

Discover Kalispell will continue to serve a destination management and stewardship role during FY22 and beyond to visitors currently in Kalispell/NW Montana, residents and local businesses.

### Key Segment:

Non-resident visitors that are currently in Kalispell/NW Montana.

- Be a resource for travel information (ex. highway construction, rental car shortages).
- Promote Travel Safe and Recreate Responsibly behavior including any currently health guidelines and recommendations.
- Promote things to do outside of Glacier National Park.

### Residents and Business Community

- Provide printable resources on important issues impacting the tourism and hospitality economy (ex. fact sheet on GNP ticketed entry system and summer highway construction projects).



## Key Segments and Methods

Segment	Methods
<b>Administration-Operations</b>	Staffing: wages, insurance, employer expenses Operating costs
<b>Marketing Support</b> (supports all segments)	Research – Smith Travel, Visa Vue, Mobile Location Data, AirDNA Creative agency services Discover Kalispell Grant Program – events and visitor asset development Online booking engine – lodging & activities Training and education
<b>Website Marketing</b>	Maintenance and enhancements Website marketing (SEM and SEO)
<b>Consumer</b>	Photo and video asset acquisition Social media administration Media buy: print, digital and multi-media marketing Travel show attendance and booth display Airport visitor display Newsletter marketing Travel guide, niche brochures and maps
<b>Event Development and Promotion</b>	Montana Spartan Race
<b>Sales - Groups, Meetings &amp; Conventions</b>	Trade shows Familiarization tours Group incentive program to secure events and conferences Media buy: print, digital and multi-media marketing Newsletter marketing Marketing collateral and image asset acquisition Customer relationship management system Sales calls
<b>Visitor Services</b>	Operation of Kalispell VIC Fulfillment services
<b>Cooperative Marketing &amp; Partnership Programs</b>	MOTBD Glacier Country Glacier Natl Park and Flathead Natl Forest Other regional Chambers and CVB's City of Kalispell Trail Crew – Core and Rail Project Kalispell Downtown Association Glacier AERO
<b>PR and Publicity</b>	Travel media and social influencer press trips Media events in key markets PR services – proactive and reactive story pitches, earned media tracking Kalispell branded merchandise



## Goals & Objectives

### Consumer and Event Marketing:

#### GOALS

1. Increase year-round visitations from non-resident domestic and international travelers.
2. Generate earned media for Kalispell in targeted U.S. and International markets.
3. Build relationships with potential and in-market visitors as demonstrated through increased usage, engagement, and conversions on owned media.
4. Continue to position Kalispell as a sports and event destination by building relationships with state and local organizations, regional and national promoters, and tournament directors.

#### OBJECTIVES

1. Increase occupancy at TBID hotels by 2% during FY22 (as measured by STR Report).
2. Increase engagement of website users on DiscoverKalispell.com through increasing average pages per session and session duration during FY22. FY20 = avg 3.54 pgs/session (20% increase from FY19); 1:32 session duration (4% decrease from FY19).
3. Increase visitor guide requests (mail and digital views) by 25% over FY20. 25% increase equates to additional 1,334 requests. FY20 = 5,338 total requests.
4. Increase consumer newsletter database by 14% over FY20 (Database as of 6/30/2020 = 17,981. 14% increase equates to additional 2,517 subscribers).
5. Measure engagement and reach with Discover Kalispell social media channels by 1) increasing followers on Instagram by 10%; 2) increase views on Pinterest by 5% each month; and 3) obtain an average post engagement on Facebook of 3%.
6. Host minimum of one press or influencer media representative from targeted demographic or geographic markets.
7. Promote Kalispell for sports event travel through key industry publications, direct marketing to tournament organizers and promoters, and the TBID Event Grant program.

### Destination Stewardship/Community Advocacy:

#### GOALS

1. Develop community advocacy initiatives that promote equity, diversity and inclusivity.
2. Be an active participant in initiatives that add to the viability and smart growth of the Kalispell and the downtown core.
3. Support a sustainable destination through messaging about responsible recreation and safe travel within current health and safety guidelines.
4. Play an active role as a voice for tourism in the state and the community through positive publicity and outreach and as an advocate for the tourism industry in state legislative issues.
5. In partnership with Glacier AERO and Glacier Park International Airport, support initiatives to maintain and enhance air service.

## OBJECTIVES

1. Build a library of local stories to be promoted in owned and earned media which highlight diverse cultures, lifestyles, and physical abilities.
2. Promote recreate responsibly communications to visitors in-market, residents, and provide resources for businesses.
3. Be an advocate for downtown programs – public art, historic preservation, Trail Crew, and the development of visitor assets through the Discover Kalispell Grant Program.
4. Support initiatives that address workforce development for the tourism and hospitality industry.
5. In partnership with Glacier AERO, provide financial sponsorship or marketing support towards new and expanded air service for fall, winter and spring.

## M&C and Group Travel Marketing:

### GOALS

1. Promote Kalispell as a destination for domestic and international tour group travel.
2. Continue to build database and relationships with tour operators (domestic and international) and active meeting planners in key markets and segments.
3. Promote Discover Kalispell's group services to local key professionals, businesses, and organizations, educating about the economic impact of group business to Kalispell's economy.
4. Continue to develop resources and knowledge to remain current on hybrid and virtual meetings industry trends.

### OBJECTIVES

1. Increase database of qualified and interested meeting planners and tour operators by 10% over FY20 (equates to additional 111+ opt-in subscribers) and retain engagement through quarterly newsletters.
2. Increase Discover Kalispell Linked In followers by 20% through regular postings, paid and organic campaigns.
3. Attend in-person or virtual trade shows to promote Kalispell as a meeting and group travel destination.
4. Host two individual FAMs (physical or virtual) for qualified planners or tour operators who have never been to Kalispell or Glacier Country.
5. Connect and engage with meeting planners and tour operators through targeted year-long campaigns through Discover Kalispell paid and owned media.
6. Attend Montana Society of Associate Executives meetings, in person or virtual, to create relationships with planners and solicit group business.

## Budget - TBID

TBID Projected Revenue		\$ 525,000	
Rollover from FY21		\$ 100,000	
Total		\$ 625,000	
Program Description	Project		Program Total
<b>Administration and Operations</b>			<b>\$275,250</b>
<b>Marketing Support</b>			<b>\$89,900</b>
Smith Travel Reports	\$8,900		
Organizational Memberships	\$4,000		
Training and Education	\$1,000		
Research	\$8,000		
Grant Program	\$12,000		
Creative Agency Services	\$50,000		
Ares	\$6,000		
<b>Website</b>			<b>\$32,000</b>
Maintenance and enhancements	\$12,000		
Website marketing (SEM-SEO)	\$20,000		
<b>Consumer Marketing</b>			<b>\$74,450</b>
Photo and video library	\$10,000		
Social Media administration	\$8,500		
Media buy: print, digital, multi-media	\$45,000		
Travel show attendance	\$2,450		
Trade show booth display	\$500		
Airport visitor display	\$1,500		
EMarketing	\$1,500		
Niche brochures	\$5,000		
<b>Events and Sports -Operations and Promotion</b>			<b>\$35,000</b>
Spartan Race	\$35,000		
<b>Groups and M&amp;C</b>			<b>\$71,400</b>
Meeting Planner Shows	\$6,000		
Meeting Planner FAM	\$4,000		
M&C and Group incentive program	\$30,000		
Media buy: print, digital, multi-media	\$16,000		
EMarketing	\$1,400		
Group photo and video library	\$2,000		
M&C collateral	\$4,000		
Customer Relationship Mgmt System	\$6,000		
M&C memberships	\$1,000		
Sales calls	\$1,000		
<b>Publicity</b>			<b>\$47,000</b>
Travel media press trips/FAM	\$10,000		
PR - agency services, Meltwater, misc.	\$35,000		
Kalispell branded merchandise	\$2,000		
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>\$ 625,000</b>