



EX OFFICIO

Barb Neilan

Destination
Missoula/CVB/TBID
Missoula, MT

Diane Medler

Discover Kalispell/CVB/TBID
Kalispell, MT

Dylan Boyle

Explore Whitefish/CVB
Whitefish, MT

Partnerships: Glacier Country Tourism benefits from a culture of collaboration among its many partners who work together to build awareness of Western Montana as an authentic destination, while adding value to the travel experience. These public and private partners include - but are not limited to - our historical heritage sites, arts and culture organizations, agritourism entities, businesses and organizations that locally source and produce products and services in all 75 communities, transportation entities, destination marketing organizations, tribal nations, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, Montana State Parks, Glacier National Park and conservation associations.

We know destination marketing cannot be done independently. We must work together to not only ensure we are all at the table but to also share resources and leverage each other's programs – maximizing effectiveness and efficiency. In fact, we are currently leveraging over \$200,000 from our budget with partner DMOs.

GCT has a strategic marketing plan specific to its rural corridors and serves as a cornerstone of our overall program. We identify nine corridors covering our smaller communities and tribal nations. Our marketing plan implemented in FY 2019, consists of paid media marketing, earned media, tourism sales, social media, online blogs posts, workshops, trainings and cooperative marketing grants. We have invested over \$300,000 the last two years developing this program and each year we invest more into building awareness of our rural and tribal communities.

A strength we bring to our entire region is experience and expertise. We are a resource to our communities as they explore how to identify and develop tourism products and services as well as provide workshops, customer experience trainings, cooperative marketing grants and visitor information center staffing grant funding. DMOs are limited to promotion efforts per the rules and regulations, but we help connect them to resources available from our public agencies and partners as they work to develop or expand their product.

Another way we can help is to use our resources to help communities in times of crisis. Two years ago, we launched a campaign for the communities that were so dramatically impacted by the wildland fires in our region. We created and implemented an entire campaign letting people know our communities were open for business! Unfortunately, we had to do this two-years in a row but with the assistance our of community partners and MOTBD, we made it happen and many of our businesses let us know it helped turn a potentially “devastating” year into one that was “below” average.

Challenges: Industry and marketing challenges are constant, but destination marketing organizations have a clear mission and for the DMOs who have been operating for longer periods of time, we are able to excel at what we do. Regions and CVBs must follow the rules and regulations outlined by the Tourism Advisory Council (TAC). These are subject to ARMS and thus have the power of law. In some ways, they are restrictive and require a great deal of administrative time to provide the detailed information required to remain in compliance with them. In other ways, region/CVBs have more flexibility because we are not a state agency, answering to our Boards who represent our communities. Each and every region and community have different needs and opportunities. The marketing efforts best for Glacier Country are very different than the marketing efforts best for Southeast Montana – the same can be said for Kalispell compared to Miles City. One size does not fit all. There is a significant learning curve associated with developing a strong destination marketing program. I,



along with many of my associates across the state, have the benefit of having worked with the TAC Rules and Regulations for many years. People new to working with lodging tax are at a disadvantage – there is easily a two to three year learning curve for anyone new to working with the rules and regulations. There is no way around that except for TAC, MOTBD and the regions and CVB's to continue to look at streamlining and simplifying the processes and procedures outlined in them while still making sure these funds are being used appropriately. We recently reviewed the rules and regulations and there were significant changes made. That said, there is always room for improvement and that is where I feel we can make the most changes. I do not recommend any change in statute related to distribution.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

Destination marketing is a type of marketing that promotes a destination (town, city, region, country) with a purpose to increase the number of visitors.

Destination Marketing (or Management) Organization (DMO) is often a convention and visitors bureau (CVB) or tourism board/bureau that is responsible for promoting a location as an attractive travel destination and enhancing its public image as a dynamic place to live and work.

Destination marketing organizations are essential to the economic and social-well-being of the communities they represent, driving direct economic impact through the visitor economy and fueling development across the entire economic spectrum by creating familiarity, attracting decision makers, sustaining air service and improving the quality of life in a place.

The ultimate customers DMOs serve are the residents of Montana. We promote Montana to encourage travelers to visit our communities – supplying our communities with new revenue and providing opportunity for economic development. Travelers add to the lifestyle many Montanans enjoy by providing better air service (creating competitive fares) and increasing the quality and quantity of restaurants, retail shopping, special events, recreation opportunities and attractions. What we enjoy now is far more than what the state's population could support on its own.

DMOs create a yearly marketing plan to establish a promotion strategy for all travel related advertising, trade sales and publicity to:

- Reach identified markets and audiences
- Present them with a unified message
- Create a desire to visit
- Get visitors to come and stay in the state, region or community area
- Encourage them to keep coming back



Board of Directors: GCT's Board of Directors is made up of businesses owners and community leaders from all eight counties. There can be up to 24 voting with no more than four from any one county and up to six nonvoting board members with no more than two from any one county. This structure ensures there is a balance of representation on the board. All three CVBs in our region serve as nonvoting members of our Board.

Our Board approves our mission and reviews management's operational and marketing performance in achieving it. They are responsible for strategic and long range planning and they assess the ever-changing environment and approve the strategy to be responsive to our communities and the industry. They meet five times per year as a full Board and the committees meet more frequently depending on each committee's responsibilities.

The marketing plan and budget (funded by the lodging tax) is structured around meeting those needs. I am hired by the GCT Board and report to them on a regular basis about what our team is doing to ensure all projects and programs benefiting the entire region are completed according to the annual contract we hold with the Department of Commerce. GCT is annually audited by the Office of Tourism and Business Development and we also conduct an annual independent financial statement audit and internal controls audit.

We have multiple Board positions we are actively recruiting for including finding a partner representing one or both of our tribal nations. We recently lost a representative from Blackfeet Country due to a recent reorganization of the Blackfeet Tourism, Parks and Recreation Department. Our current Board representatives are:

Chase Averill (Chair)

Flathead Lake Lodge
Bigfork, MT

Ramona Holt (1st Vice-Chair)

Holt Heritage Museum
Lolo, MT

Cris Jensen (2nd Vice-Chair)

Missoula International Airport
Missoula, MT

Shannon Brilz (Secretary-Treasurer)

University of Montana
Missoula, MT

Victoria Lee

Glacier Distilling Company
Coram, MT

Matt Lautzenheiser

Historical Museum at Fort
Missoula
Missoula, MT

Karr Bergmann

Red Lion Ridgewater Inn &
Suites Polson
Polson, MT

Mike Johnston

Montana River Guides
Alberton, MT

Jen Kreiner

Sanders County Community
Development
Thompson Falls, MT

Aubrie Lorona

Swan Mountain Outfitters
West Glacier, MT

Tina Oliphant

Kootenai River Development
& Lincoln County Port
Authority
Libby, MT

Amber Pacheco-Holm

Montana Sky (Libby Area
Chamber of Commerce)
Libby, MT

Christina "Riley" Polumbus

Whitefish Mountain Resort
Whitefish, MT

Brenda Schilling

Glacier County Port Authority
Cut Bank, MT

Rick Sinclair

Diamond S RV Park &
Campground
Ronan, MT



Submitted respectfully to **Montana Economic Affairs Interim Committee** regarding **SJ 24**.

February 12, 2020

Racene Friede | President CEO

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Glacier Country Regional Tourism Commission (DBA Glacier Country Tourism) (GCT) is a 501 C (6) nonprofit organization and is the officially recognized tourism region for Western Montana. As the westernmost region of Montana, Glacier Country encompasses 75+ communities within the eight counties of Flathead, Glacier, Lake, Lincoln, Mineral, Missoula, Ravalli and Sanders. Our mission is to be the leading force effectively marketing the region and educating the public regarding the power of tourism while encouraging respect for our outstanding natural environment and quality of life.

GCT is responsible for promoting the communities within our region as an attractive travel destination and enhancing Western Montana's public image as a dynamic place to live and work. Through the impact of travel, GCT and our partners strengthen the economic position and provide opportunity for people in their community.

- Geographic size: 22,000 square miles
- Population: 335,000
- Largest communities: Missoula, Kalispell, Whitefish and Hamilton
- American Indian Tribes: Blackfeet, Kootenai, Pend d'Oreille, Bitterroot Salish
- Rural Corridors: Tour 200, I-90 Corridor, Bitterroot Valley, Flathead Corridor, Northeast Corridor, Seeley-Swan Corridor, Blackfoot Corridor, East Glacier Corridor, Glacier National Park Surrounding Area

Funding: **Eighty nine percent (89%)** of our overall budget is from the **Montana Lodging Facility Use Tax**. **Eleven percent (11%)** is from **private advertising revenue**. Regional DMOs especially benefit from the current distribution method because 50% of the 22.5% collected within the city boundaries of Whitefish, Kalispell and Missoula help fund the projects and programs we use to promote our rural communities. Our private revenue funds the many things lodging tax cannot be spent on. We have no way of estimating revenue we will receive as a result of the 1% increase in the Lodging Facility Sales and Use Tax recently enacted by the legislature. We expect to have a better idea of this as we near the end of the five years set aside for funding the Montana Heritage Museum. We have just recently designed a tracking mechanism to start tracking in-kind services. Our best guess would be we receive between \$25,000 and \$30,000 in comped or discounted services from partners related to earned travel media and tourism sales programs. Regions do not have access to alternate funding sources like resort taxes and tourism business improvement district (TBID) funding.

Industry Experience/Background: I have over 19 years doing destination marketing in Montana. Six years as the Convention and Visitor Bureau Coordinator at the Bozeman Area Chamber of Commerce and 13 years in my current position with Glacier Country Tourism. I also worked seven years as a Marketing Representative with Blackfoot Telephone Cooperative doing community outreach and public relations.