



annual report

FY2025



Winona Ice Park
WINONA, MINNESOTA



- 02 introduction
- 07 grow minnesota's economy
- 31 advance and champion welcoming experiences for all
- 35 provide industry leadership and maximize partner collaboration
- 43 foster state stewardship
- 49 ensure organizational excellence

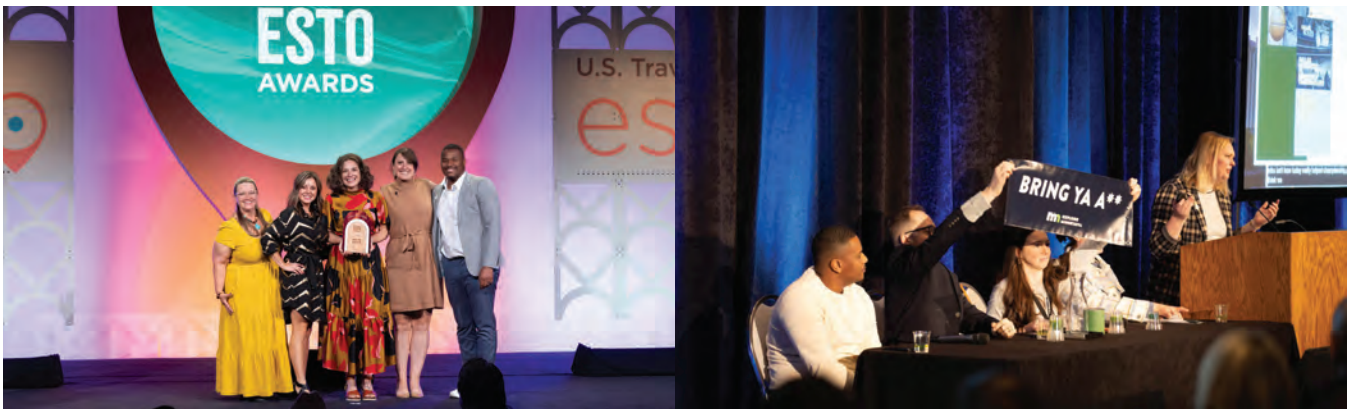


table of contents

a message from the director

a year of continued growth and gratitude

With your support, last fiscal year (July 1, 2024–June 30, 2025) was our most successful yet. High off the launch of Star of the North™, our award-winning and most ambitious campaign ever, we were happy to announce record-breaking visitation to Minnesota: 81.6 million visitors spent over \$14.7 billion in our state. Our combined efforts resulted in over \$806 million in incremental tax revenue for the State of Minnesota, or \$1,031 in tax savings for each Minnesota household.



In FY2025, we may have set a record for the coldest Explore Minnesota Tourism Conference. Held in Minneapolis, we also had record attendance with nearly 400 in-person and 150+ virtual attendees. Not only did we make conference recordings available, we developed even more educational programming to support learning year-round.

This was another year of firsts, as we welcomed Explore Minnesota Film, the state's first film office, to our agency. The small but mighty team hit the ground running by administering tax incentives, launching a first-ever marketing campaign for film production in Minnesota and creating our Film Ready Community program. And, in response to positive results from previous campaigns, we continued our successful livability and business initiatives. We also added a resident retention campaign to ensure that young adults in Minnesota decide to stay and build their careers here. Additionally, we launched a revitalized newsletter program to smashing success and the delight of our loyal readers.



Stakeholder engagement remained a top priority in FY2025. We held more than 250 meetings, presentations and webinars to connect with partners across Minnesota. From the Minnesota Governor’s Fishing Opener in Crosslake to events like the inaugural Outdoor Recreation Industry Summit, we strengthened relationships with key stakeholders and expanded our reach.

We introduced a formal consultation program with the 11 federally-recognized Tribal Nations that share geography with Minnesota. By adding a Tribal Liaison staff member and initiating purposeful collaborations, Explore Minnesota is excited to continue working with Tribes to highlight their important cultural assets and destinations.

Over the year, we increased our global presence, targeting trade and consumer programs in high-yield international markets. We welcomed new nonstop flights from Copenhagen and Rome to MSP and launched in-market campaigns to support the new routes, and participated in a trade mission to India to learn more about this rapidly-growing inbound market. We’re proud to be a destination that continues to attract and welcome visitors worldwide.



Thanks to one-time funding in FY2025, we could make bolder choices, attract top talent and invest in assets that showcase the best Minnesota has to offer. We have built a successful framework to carry this nationally-recognized marketing forward. As we look ahead to FY2026, we remain excited and ready to show the region, the nation and the world why Minnesota is the best state for travel, quality of life and economic opportunity.


Lauren Bennett McGinty
Executive Director, Explore Minnesota

staff

director's office

Executive Director
Lauren Bennett McGinty

**Deputy Director,
Outdoor Recreation**
Randolph Briley

Tribal Liaison
Dawn Blanchard

Government Relations
Lyndsey Hanson

Human Resources Director
Roxanne Lane

Executive Aide
Marya Barsanti

film

Deputy Director
Nell Lawrenz-Wareham

Film & TV Production Liaison
Sarah Gebeke

operations

**Director of Operations
& Finance**
Mike Meyer

Management Analyst
Melissa DonCarlos

Contract Specialist
Dawn Bushman

**Grants Management
Coordinator**
Eleigh Vazquez

Accounting Tech
Christine Voss

Buyer
Sandy Karnowski

marketing

Deputy Director
Kathryn Sutton

Research Analyst
Gretchen Nussbaum

Project Coordinator
Cathy Pinske

Campaign Marketing Manager
Karina Hill

Senior Marketing Strategist
Frances Fyten

Campaign Marketing Strategist
Jared Laabs

Partnership Marketing Strategist
Glori Woolley

Video & Photo Specialist
Riley Hallaway

Communications Manager
Chris Morgan

Public Relations Specialist
Jake Juliot

Senior Graphic Designer
Melanie Graves

Digital Strategy Manager
Devon Cox

Senior Digital Strategist, Social
Caitlin Hannah

Senior Digital Strategist, Web
Andrew Parks

Associate Digital Strategist
B Schneider

Analytics Coordinator
Sean Lydon

Web Operations Coordinator
Anne Paterson

destination development

Deputy Director
Beth Helle

Project Coordinator
Shannon Lukes Hauser

Industry Relations Manager
Nicole Lalum

Metro Regional Rep
Chelsey Fey

Northeast Regional Rep
Derek Ramthun

Southern Regional Rep
Lisa Havelka

NW & Central Regional Rep
Kari Brumback

Market Development Manager
Jennifer Schak

Market Development Rep
Brenda Maas

**Welcome Centers (WC)
Network Supervisor**
Julie Ramer

WC Regional Supervisors
David Robb, Linda Vuicich, Gail Walkowiak

**Customer Service Specialists
Intermediate**
Megan Jahnke, Stephen Sarvi,
Ben Vuicich

Customer Service Specialists
Gloria DeBenedet, Janice Eppler,
JR Helget, Sally Lundholm,
Jenny McKinley, Ruth Olson,
Fiona Walker

strategic direction



vision

Position Minnesota as the premier state for travel, quality of life and economic opportunity.



mission

We sustainably grow Minnesota's economy by welcoming all through innovative and inclusive marketing, storytelling and industry partnerships.



position

We lead Minnesota's growth by fostering collaboration and promoting the state for the economic benefit of all Minnesotans.



values

Teamwork | We collaborate, harnessing unique talents and strengths, to share the workload and trust each other to deliver the best results.

Creativity | We challenge the status quo, find innovative ways to solve problems and use our talents for the benefit of Minnesota's economy.

Agility | We remove roadblocks and respond quickly to new opportunities; we are nimble and dynamic.

Inclusivity | We welcome all, respect individuality, treat each other with dignity, and seek to ensure a safe, inclusive and equitable environment at Explore Minnesota.

strategic goals & objectives



grow minnesota's economy

Increase economic opportunity for Minnesotans by promoting the state for travel, quality of life and economic development.



advance and champion welcoming experiences for all

Increase the number of diverse vendors used, increase spend in diverse markets, create content celebrating diverse cultures and foster relationships with underserved cultural and heritage communities.



foster state stewardship

Build partnerships to identify areas of growth and sustainability and create new educational opportunities related to maintaining the cultural, environmental and economic integrity of Minnesota's top destinations.



provide industry leadership and maximize partner collaboration

Grow stakeholder participation in our programs, increase private and in-kind contributions, and prioritize opportunistic marketing.



ensure organizational excellence

Prioritize employee growth through educational opportunities and improve employee satisfaction as well as engagement.



**grow
minnesota's
economy**

annual budget

general fund operating budget for FY2025

\$15.269 million (base)

one-time funding for FY2025

\$5.5 million NEW initiatives*

\$2 million 2026 Special Olympics USA Games**

\$1.25 million Taste of Minnesota**

\$600,000 Hmong International Freedom Festival event grant**

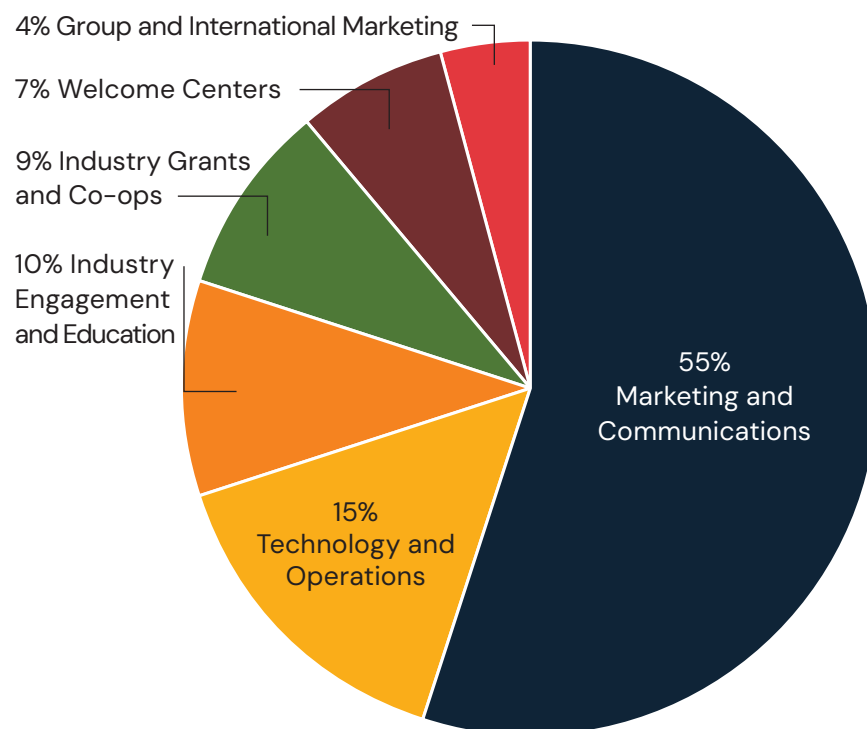
private industry match

Cash	\$1.51 million
In kind	\$6.84 million
Total	\$8.35 million

explore minnesota film

\$825,000 annually (base)

allocation of budget



*One-time funding: Tourism industry marketing grants (11%), Tribal nation grants (35%), New marketing projects & additional support for ongoing programs (54%)

**Legislatively appropriated pass-thru grants

economic impact by the numbers

in 2024, tourism saved each Minnesota household \$1,031 in taxes



+7%
compared
to 2023

Unless noted, this data was sourced from Explore Minnesota's 2024 Tourism Economics Economic Impact Data.

*Source: Minneapolis–Saint Paul Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC)

key travel growth metrics

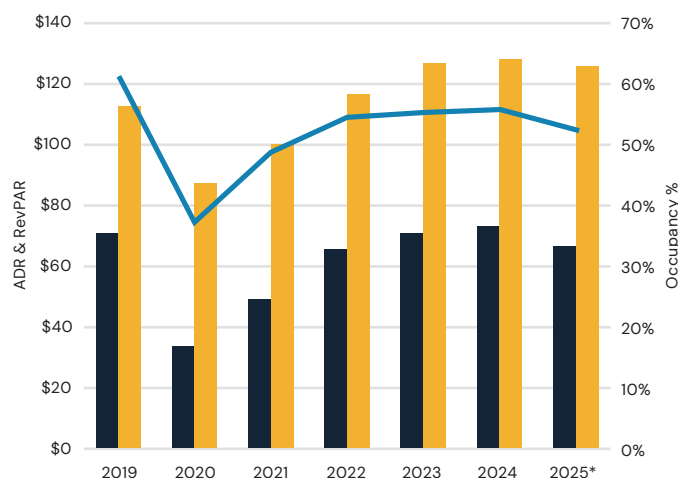
hotel occupancy, revPAR and ADR

Minnesota's average monthly hotel occupancy rate was 56% in 2024. This is the same as the 2023 occupancy rate.

The 2024 average monthly hotel RevPAR[†] of \$74 is slightly above the 2023 RevPAR of \$72.

The 2024 Minnesota ADR[^] of \$131 was slightly above the 2023 of \$129.

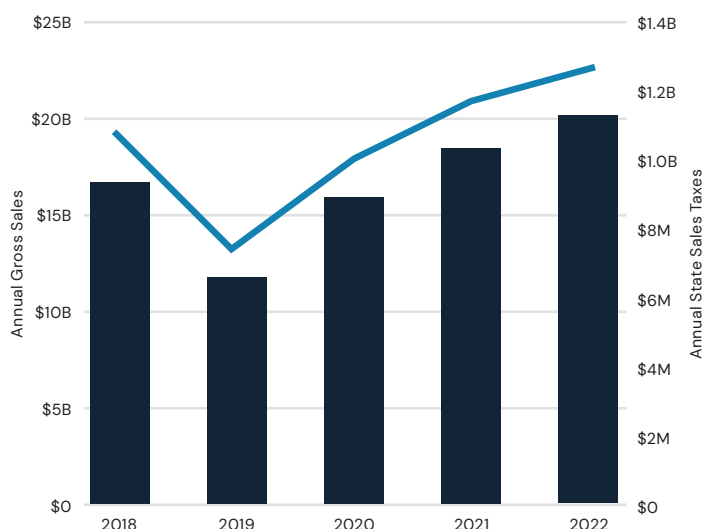
state hotel metrics comparison over time



	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025*
RevPAR	\$72	\$33	\$50	\$67	\$72	\$67	\$68
ADR	\$115	\$89	\$101	\$119	\$129	\$129	\$128
Occupancy %	62%	36%	48%	55%	56%	52%	53%

Source: Smith Travel Research (STR)

industry recovery I&h° sales & taxes over time



	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
L&H gross sales	\$16.6B	\$11.7B	\$15.7B	\$18.3B	\$19.9B
L&H sales tax	\$1.1B	\$731M	\$998M	\$1.2B	\$1.3B

Source: Minnesota Department of Revenue (MDOR)

[†] RevPAR (Revenue Per Available Room) = total room revenue generated from the sale or rental of rooms.

[^] ADR (Average Daily Rate) = room revenue divided by rooms sold, displayed as the average rate for a single room.

* 2025 numbers are taken from the end of June 2025, and do not reflect an entire calendar year.

° The leisure and hospitality (L&H) industry sector includes a broad category of fields within the service industry such as lodging, food services, event planning, theme parks, transportation and other tourism oriented products and services. This sector is highly sensitive to economic and competitive market conditions and can have steep seasonal fluctuations during the year.

star of the north[★]

Explore Minnesota continued to build on the success of Star of the North, expanding its use beyond tourism and workforce attraction to include business attraction and resident retention.

More than an advertising campaign, Star of the North is an immersive content strategy that uses real, first-person accounts to share the Minnesota story.

By highlighting local places, traditions, businesses, people and ways of life, we're inviting people to be a part of Minnesota.



tourism marketing

The Star of the North tourism campaign features an authentic, optimistic Minnesota message across a multitude of platforms, including broadcast and connected TV, digital video, social media, display, and native, plus sponsorships with well-known content partners. Regional audiences extending as far west as Montana and as far east as Ohio, as well as audiences in Canada, were targeted with our seasonal campaigns focused on promoting itineraries for winter sports and wellness, as well as music, food, and live events. By partnering with media vendors who are uniquely capable of reaching diverse audiences, we helped to communicate the welcoming and inclusive travel opportunities in the state. A flight market campaign ran in Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas which was selected for direct flight access, high levels of diverse travelers and past positive performance.

A national digital media strategy behaviorally targeted travelers by their passion activities with seasonal niche campaigns promoting hiking, mountain biking, winter sports, performing arts, food and drink, live music/events, lake life and state and national parks. A full external assessment and return on investment (ROI) report on the FY2025 campaign will be available by the winter 2025 timeframe.

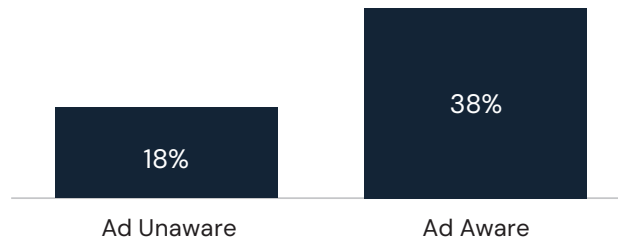
FY2025 spring–summer campaign results

Explore Minnesota partnered with SMARI to help assess the impact of our Spring/Summer tourism campaign. Engaging with a third-party research vendor is important to ensure that public money is used responsibly. Between April and June 2025, we spent approximately \$3.2 million on video, digital and social media advertising.

REGIONAL BRAND AND NICHE CAMPAIGN IMPACTS

Within the region, 38% of surveyed leisure travelers were able to recall our Star of the North ads. Additionally, regional travelers aware of Star of the North ads are more than twice as likely to visit Minnesota in the next year, compared to regional travelers who have not viewed an Explore Minnesota ad.

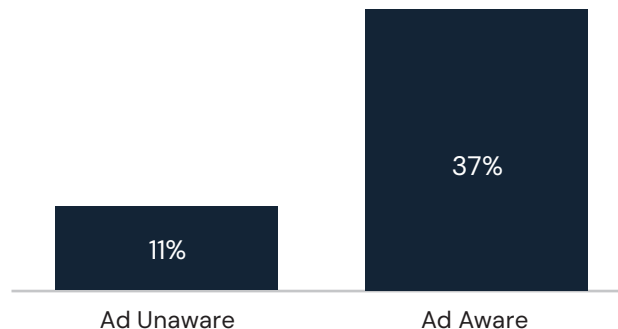
likelihood to visit minnesota



DIVERSITY CAMPAIGN IMPACTS

In research, the Dallas market is used as a proxy to measure the performance of Explore Minnesota's diverse audience media targeting. Dallas findings were positive, with 37% aware of general SOTN ads and 36% were aware of niche ads. Additionally, after viewing our ads, the likelihood of visiting Minnesota more than tripled.

likelihood to visit minnesota

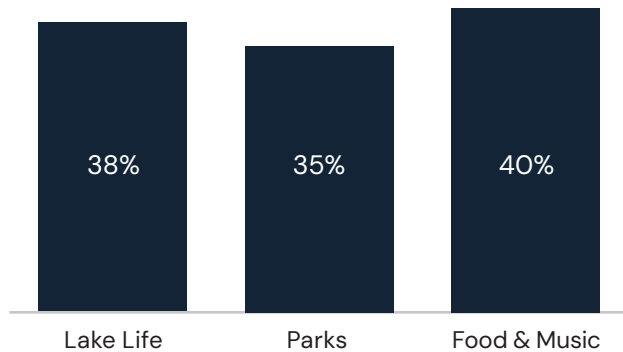


NATIONAL NICHE CAMPAIGN IMPACTS

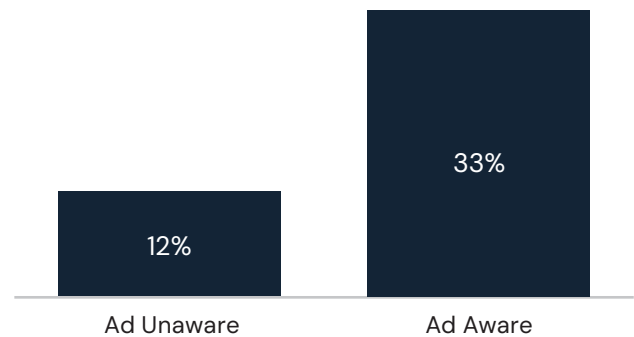
Beyond the region, targeted national audiences were exposed to three niche campaigns. Ad awareness was strong and ranged from 35 to 40% by niche. Those interested in food and music related events had the highest rate of ad recall.

Exposure to an Explore Minnesota ad almost triples the likelihood that a national traveler will visit Minnesota. Overall, one in three national travelers who is aware of a niche ad is likely to visit Minnesota in the next twelve months.

ad recall by target audience



likely to visit minnesota



FY2025 star of the north campaign



what to do on a music-oriented trip to minneapolis

With a literal raspberry beret in tow, Chicagoans Kristen and Alexis explore Minneapolis's rich music and cultural scene. From Prince's Paisley Park to the world-famous Walker Art Center, the couple enjoys an immersive weekend away sans kids.



how to take the ultimate self care trip to nisswa

Californians Nathan, Kiola and son Ezekial, along with Kiola's parents take a restorative winter trip to the Brainerd Lakes area to see what the "whole winter in Minnesota vibe and culture is all about."



things to do on a sporty winter road trip from minneapolis to winona

From curling to ice climbing, Canadians Robin, Jordan-na and Diana, discover incredible winter activities, take in the beauty of bluff country, and shop Minnesota brands along the way.

media spend breakouts

Fall Niches

- Hiking
- Biking

Winter Niches

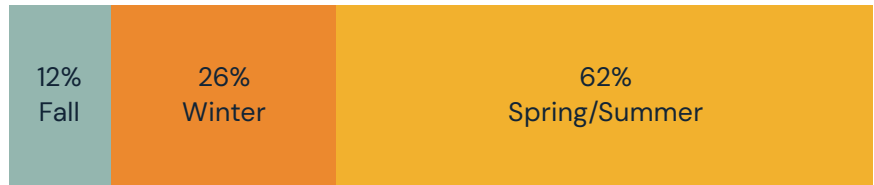
- Winter sports
- Performing arts

Spring/Summer Niches

- Lake life
- National and state parks
- Food, drinks and events

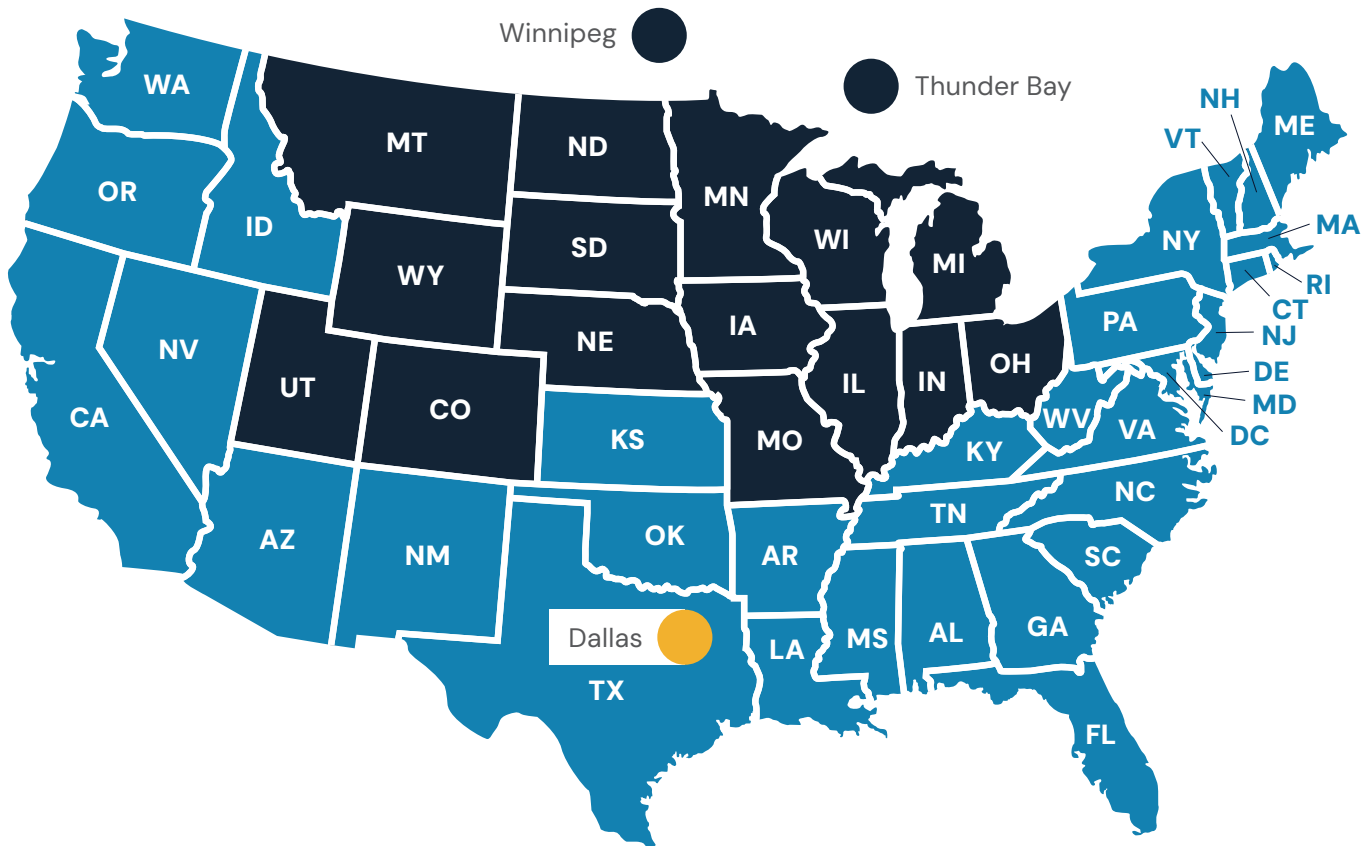
media spend by season

Percentage of full year media spend



Additionally, 17% of the total campaign spend was dedicated to enhancing reach among diverse audiences.

FY2025 annual campaign map



General & Diversity & Niche Markets

Niche Expansion Markets

Flight & Diversity Markets



workforce attraction and livability marketing

In FY2025, we continued our first-ever workforce attraction and livability campaign, showcasing videos and stories of newcomers who moved to Minnesota for job opportunities and chose to stay for the high quality of life. The campaign targeted national audiences with similar values and a willingness to relocate. In spring 2025, we also focused our attention on generating more 'boomerang' Minnesotans, or former Minnesotans who may be interested in returning back to the state to work and raise a family.

Media tactics included YouTube AI, connected TV, social media, paid search and digital audio, as well as partnerships with *Condé Nast*, *The Atlantic* and *Wired.com*.

MINNESOTA AWARENESS IMPACT

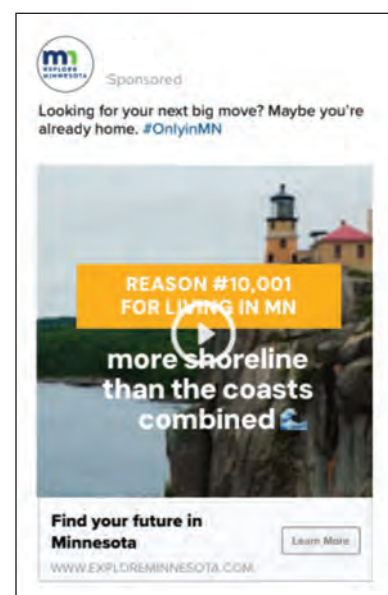
Concluding June 30, 2025, the campaign successfully drove awareness and consideration of Minnesota as a top place to live, and established strong benchmarks on which we can build:

Web sessions to exploreminnesota.com/live from paid campaign (95% of total web traffic)	620,790
Campaign impressions nationwide	161.44 million
Average time on site	02:13
Net newsletter subscribers	7,688

REACHING NEW AUDIENCES: RESIDENT RETENTION PILOT

In May 2025, we expanded the livability campaign to a new audience: young adults in their final year of college or recent Minnesota graduates.

The six-week pilot aimed to identify messaging that positions Minnesota as a leading location to launch and build a career, and determine what factors influence young adults' decisions to remain in Minnesota.



business attraction marketing

In September 2024, Explore Minnesota, in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) and local Minnesota businesses, launched a first-of-its-kind multichannel Star of the North campaign to attract businesses to locate or expand in Minnesota. The goal: to help drive more companies to consider Minnesota and grow the state's economy.

Building on the story that Minnesota is a top place to visit and live, the campaign highlighted why Minnesota is a top state for business.

NEW ASSETS, NEW MARKETS — ONE UNIFORM MESSAGE

The campaign targeted C-Suite executives, site selectors and other location and expansion stakeholders nationwide and included ad placements with:

Forbes

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

n p r

**Business
Facilities**
The Source For Site Selectors

LinkedIn

YouTube

Google

In addition, Explore Minnesota worked with DEED to redesign marketing assets, including webpages, digital PDFs and PowerPoint presentations, among others. Across channels, the state is uniformly marketing Minnesota as the Star of the North for business.

CAMPAIGN RESULTS — ESTABLISHING BENCHMARKS

As this was a first-of-its-kind campaign, we now have established baseline benchmarks from which to build.

Qualified leads	1,240*
Total web sessions	67,539
Average session duration (benchmark: 01:30)	01:42

| *Leads added as subscribers to DEED's Business Development e-newsletter list.

WALL STREET JOURNAL ONE-DAY BUYOUT EXCEEDS BENCHMARKS

On Jan. 28, 2025, Explore Minnesota ran a Business front buyout of WSJ.com. Results from a recall survey conducted following, showed that the ad outperformed benchmarks by an average of 12 pts.

MEET THE MINNESOTA BUSINESSES

We capture the stories of four leading businesses across key industries:



Rosenbauer America, Wyoming



Polar Semiconductor, Bloomington



Microbiologics, St. Cloud



Mayo Clinic Business Development and Destination Medical Center, Rochester

creative testing

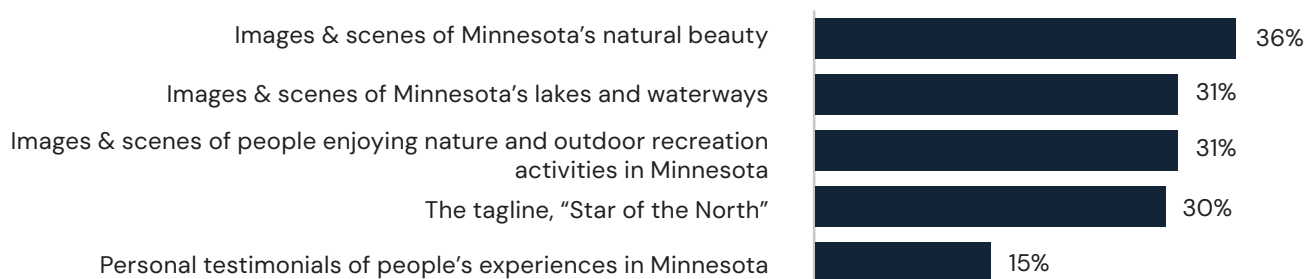
Explore Minnesota worked with the research agency W5 to get feedback on our Star of the North™ tourism and livability campaigns. This survey-based research gained input from prospective travelers and residents on campaign messaging, themes, and imagery plus tactical assets. Findings from this study will help guide branding and the Star of the North campaign as we move forward.

TOURISM FINDINGS

Results were overwhelmingly (~90%) positive, with tourism ads rated as believable, appealing and interesting. Additionally, it was confirmed that the campaign clearly and memorably presents Minnesota (and not other comparable destinations) as a dynamic and inviting destination.

When asked about the most resonant content, prospective travelers were drawn to images of Minnesota's natural beauty and its diverse cultures, food and urban experiences. As expected, winter themes had slightly lower (71-78% positive), but solid performance relative to summer and fall ads (74-83% positive).

most resonant tourism ad content



LIVABILITY FINDINGS

Results were also very (~80%) positive, with the vast majority of ads rated as both believable and appealing. Additionally, approximately 60% of survey respondents said the campaign inspired them to consider moving to Minnesota. When asked about the most resonant content, prospective residents reported that ad images effectively highlight the range of experiences Minnesota offers and suggest that it is a great place to live.

Within banner ads, third-party statistics stood out as particularly compelling. Research participants were drawn to quality of life and economic opportunity accolades, such as "Minnesota is ranked 4th for quality of life."

Finally, feedback on our new Star of the North branding and tagline conveyed that Minnesota stands out as a place of opportunity, natural beauty and pride. Our state is a guiding light for those seeking purpose or a fresh start.

"Minnesota is the best place up north, the place up north with the best of everything."

—Prospective Traveler

"It conveys that Minnesota is the best place to live in the northern U.S., full of opportunity and a bright future."

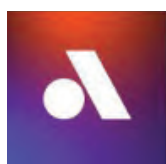
—Prospective Traveler

marketing partnerships

Explore Minnesota continued to expand its presence in neighboring states in FY2025 through impactful promotions with sports teams, associations, major attractions, airlines, publishers, media companies and more. These strategic partnerships delivered a total in-kind value exceeding \$1 million.

We formed several exciting regional partnerships to expand its reach and visibility. Key collaborations included the Milwaukee Brewers, Hawkeye Sports Properties, Iowa Wolves, Northwestern Athletics, Outfront Media (Chicago billboards), Good Karma (ESPN Milwaukee), Audacy (Chicago Cubs Radio) and Pride Journeys. Additionally, local partnerships with the Minnesota Frost, two-time champions of the Professional Women's Hockey League (PWHL), and the Minnesota Twins featured targeted efforts specifically aimed at attracting out-of-state audiences. Collectively, these partnerships played a vital role in amplifying Explore Minnesota travel campaigns, and driving increased awareness and exposure alongside meaningful in-market recognition.

NOTABLE PARTNERSHIPS



seize the day: opportunistic marketing



brat minnesota

In spring FY2025, we successfully pitched an entertainment editor from *Elite Daily* for a Charli XCX “brat” tour stop in Minneapolis—one of the only U.S. cities on the artist’s 2025 schedule. The trip was designed to showcase Minneapolis as a vibrant destination for music, nightlife and pop culture, with curated experiences including a behind-the-scenes tour of First Avenue, a VIP visit to Paisley Park, and of course, the Charli XCX concert. The resulting feature “I Took A Brat Pilgrimage to Minneapolis & Lived That Life Von Dutch,” reads as a true love letter to Minneapolis’ music scene, highlighting the city’s music and cultural assets.

“Could a locale that’s literally known for its signature ‘nice’-ness appreciate the decidedly un-Midwestern concept of brat? After a weekend soaking in the city’s music scene, thanks to an opportunity from Explore Minnesota, I finally saw the vision.”

Elite Daily shared the story with its 3.4 million Facebook followers, and a downtown “brat” minnesota billboard elicited over 150 direct pick-ups to our city guide over the course of the concert weekend.

state of hockey

When the Minnesota Frost once again advanced to the PWHL Walter Cup Championship against the Ottawa Charge, we acted swiftly to secure in-arena signage and amplify the Frost’s playoff presence through gameday Instagram posts—making sure every viewer saw Minnesota front and center.

awwwwoooooo

Fresh off the momentum of last year’s Bring Ya A** campaign, the Minnesota Timberwolves returned to the Western Conference Finals—this time facing off against the eventual champions, the Oklahoma City Thunder. We acted quickly to secure strategic billboard placements near the Oklahoma City arena, reminding fans that Minnesota is just a straight shot up I-35.

In addition, we amplified our presence through a targeted, sports-centric programmatic display and video campaign, which outperformed benchmarks in key regional markets including Oklahoma, Colorado and Iowa.

communications & media relations

national coverage

In FY2025, the estimated ad value of Explore Minnesota’s earned media increased by more than 70%. Our efforts garnered print, digital and social coverage in news, travel and lifestyle outlets—both national and regional. Key earned placements appeared in *USA Today*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *CNN Travel*, *Forbes*, *Business Insider*, *Elite Daily*, *Condé Nast Traveler*, *Travel Noire*, *Midwest Living*, *Travel + Leisure*, *AFAR* and more.

Our most successful pitches included Voyageur’s National Park, which celebrated its 50th anniversary; Minnesota’s lake life appeal; seasonal wellness and recreation offerings; and coverage of the Minneapolis scene during the spring’s Charli XCX concert. Over half of our 80+ national media placements were syndicated, leading to more than double the impressions we garnered in FY2024.

Additionally, press trips we hosted to Stillwater, Minneapolis–St. Paul, Duluth and Voyageurs National Park resulted in 14 earned media placements totaling over 347.6 million impressions and an estimated ad value of over \$2.7 million.

national media & PR metrics*	FY2025	FY2024
Total positive national media impressions	2.85 billion	1.3 billion
Estimated ad value	\$10.2 million	\$1.4 million

local coverage

Explore Minnesota also invested in local news coverage to ensure we highlight all the best Minnesota has to offer in locals’ own backyards (or a quick road trip away). We were featured in a number of local news and radio stories, including on WCCO Radio, Minnesota News Network, MPR, Minnesota Live on KSTP and FOX Good Day on FOX 9, as well as a weekly syndicated radio show on WJON.



WGN Daytime Chicago



FOX 9 Good Day



Minnesota Live

| *Source: Cision database, Weber Shandwick.

best-in-class website

In FY2025, Explore Minnesota embarked on a website refresh. Goals included keeping both our codebase and look current for the next three to five years, while improving user experience and saving the state up to \$800k over a two-year biennium. The new exploreminnesota.com was designed in-house and fully integrates current branding.

We also engaged an SEO consultant to help us prepare for the next era of search and keep Minnesota competitive in an AI-driven landscape. As Google Gemini-generated summaries and zero-click searches become commonplace, it's imperative that we have the internal expertise to execute a forward-looking search strategy.

While total traffic was down in FY2025 due to AI search impacts and reduced total ad spend, time on site—our top KPI—went up. Referral traffic from our newly-refreshed email newsletter program was up as well.

web analytics	FY2025	FY2024
Total sessions	7,617,404	9,765,053
Average session duration	2 min, 36 sec	2 min, 6 sec
Users	5,994,026	8,989,165

top traffic sources	
Organic search	4,261,119
Direct/unknown	1,061,564
Social	578,168
Paid search	257,388

95-100

We currently maintain a perfect (or near-perfect) Lighthouse Accessibility score between 95-100. We are compliant up to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2*.

*100 is the highest level of accessibility standards. The state currently requires compliance up to WCAG 2.1.



#9 of all 50 state DMOs
in first page keywords
on Google



top age groups
25-34
35-44



gender mix
58.6% FEMALE
41.1% MALE



top cities (outside of MN)
FARGO, OMAHA, CHICAGO,
DALLAS, ATLANTA



top interests
FOOD & DINING
NEWS & POLITICS
SHOPPING
LIFESTYLE & HOBBIES

sharing minnesota through social

social media overview

This year, our team continued to focus on short-form video, which Instagram considers their “top of the funnel” approach, and the best way to increase your algorithmic visibility. To engage our current followers and keep new followers with us, we maximized brand-safe trends, and expanded our storytelling by fully integrating web, social and newsletter content. This multi-channel approach—posting highly engaging short-form vertical videos focused on our audience’s areas of interest, and sharing a mix of original, user-generated and commissioned creator content—paid off. In FY2025, we increased impressions, engagement, video views and overall brand lift.

Our focus on Instagram aligns with our target audiences for the website and workforce attraction, ages 25–45. Per updated guidance, we refreshed our KPIs to prioritize saves and shares as best indicators of travel intent.

We were pleased to see a significant year-over-year (YOY) increase across TikTok as we continue to produce short-form video content. While some statistics were down year-over-year on Facebook due to Meta algorithmic changes (an ongoing concern for all brands), organic reach is a lower priority for Explore Minnesota compared to paid impressions.

📷 instagram	FY2025	Compared to FY2024
Impressions	23,472,619	+43.4%
Engagements	356,300	+11.5%
Video views	5,958,692	+59.3%
Video saves	44,150	+120.3%
Video shares	79,280	+37.8%

🎵 tiktok	FY2025	Compared to FY2024
Impressions	305,578	+477.9%
Engagements	18,144	+696.8%
Video views	305,578	+477.9%
Video shares	3,286	+820.4%

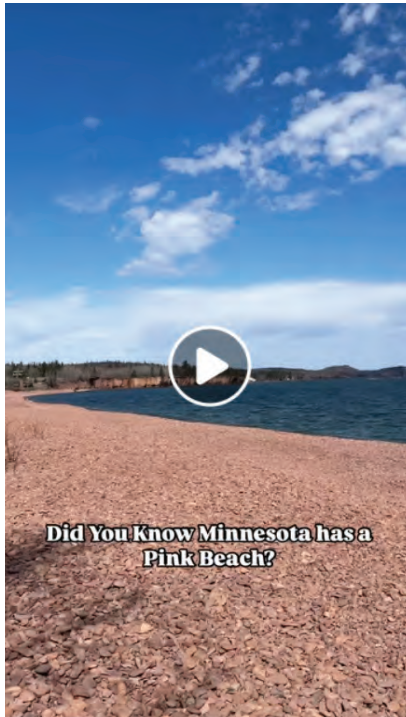
📘 facebook	FY2025	Compared to FY2024
Impressions	3,591,372	-53.7%
Engagements	65,282	-93.6%

📷 + 📘 + 🎵 total	FY2025
Impressions	27,369,569

📷 + 📘 + 🎵 total	FY2025
Engagements	439,726

top posts

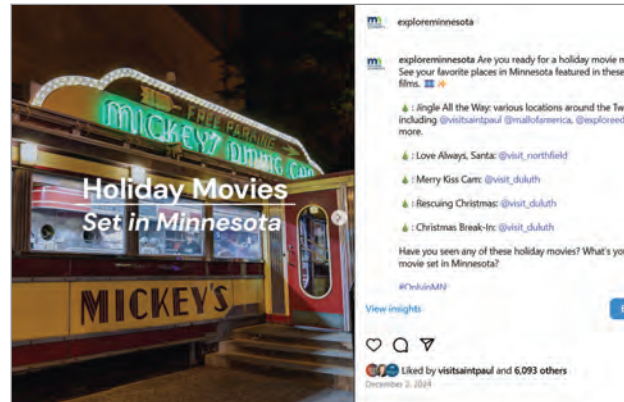
FACEBOOK: PINK BEACH



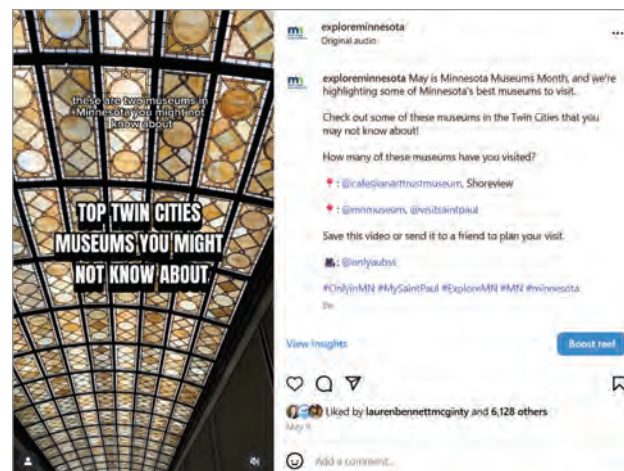
FACEBOOK: SALT LAKE



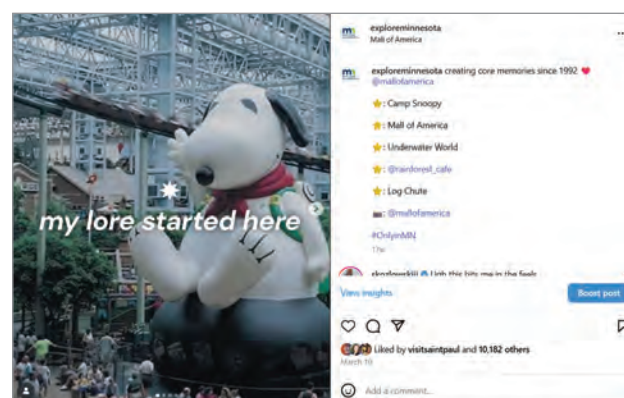
INSTAGRAM: HOLIDAY MOVIES



INSTAGRAM: MUSEUMS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT



INSTAGRAM: MOA NOSTALGIA



direct-to-consumer newsletter program

In FY2025, we revamped our newsletters by introducing seven interchangeable templates and streamlining layout across all direct-to-consumer lists for greater efficiency. We drew inspiration from travel peers and competitors, but also retail, food and news industries. Notable strategic modifications included:

- Responsive scheduling—sending relevant emails when subscribers want them—leading to higher open rates.
- An updated design featuring Star of the North branding, streamlining user experience and helping us boost brand awareness and recognition.
- The addition of more long form pieces, which have increased in popularity due to Substack’s rising dominance. Although we anticipated lower click rates, engagement improved, thanks to the quality of our content.

top newsletters

TOP SHARES



TOP CLICKS



TOP OPENS



STAY IN THE LOOP

See the results for yourself — sign up for our newsletters

exploreminnesota.com/newsletters

Minnesota Explorer connects highly engaged travelers with seasonally curated bucket-list activities, helpful itineraries and exclusive stories. Now, each email features travel inspiration in various visual formats making it easier for our diverse audience to explore, book and go.

	FY2025	FY2024	Industry Standard
Subscribers	171,689*	217,510	
Open rate	52.2%	33.8%	36.0%
Click rate	4.2%	4.0%	3.8%
Engagement rate	68%	52%	

*Note: The revamping process included focused on refining email lists to ensure that we are targeting actively engaged individuals and eliminating any duplication.

Minnesota Outdoors reaches active, experience-driven travelers with expert tips, personal stories and seasonal guides to the state's best outdoor adventures. A new series features outdoor enthusiasts an audience eager to gear up, get outside and discover new destinations year-round.

	FY2025	FY2024	Industry Standard
Subscribers	96,551	88,536	
Open rate	51.4%	36.0%	36.9%
Click rate	3.8%	3.8%	3.6%
Engagement rate	70%	51%	

Festivals & Events helps travelers discover Minnesota's diverse lineup of festivals, performances, exhibits and community celebrations. Each optimally scheduled email inspires trip ideas and cultural exploration statewide.

	FY2025	FY2024	Industry Standard
Subscribers	45,705	46,764	
Open rate	46.5%	31.0%	38.9%
Click rate	4.4%	5.6%	3.4%
Engagement rate	66%	59%	

Life in Minnesota helps adventurers explore like a local through a series of emails addressing frequently asked questions, region highlights and Star of the North culture. [Learn more about Livability Marketing on pg 16.](#)

	FY2025	FY2024	Industry Standard
Subscribers	7,711	2,611	
Open rate	45.4%	47.5%	36.9%
Click rate	8.1%	7.9%	3.6%
Engagement rate	72%	49%	

TOP OPENS



TOP CLICKS



TOP OPENS



TOP OPENS



a top state

Explore Minnesota's vision is to position Minnesota as the best state for travel, quality of life and economic opportunity. Here's how we measured up in FY2025:

who's interested in the star of the north?
among regional travelers* minnesota is a top ten state for:



lake life
(fishing, boating
& paddling)



shopping



**winter
outdoor rec**

key minnesota national rankings



**least-stressed
state[^]**



**state for
health care[^]**



**best
park system[†]**



**state in
the country —
best overall[†]**



**happiest
state[^]**



**best state
for economic
opportunity[†]**

among regional travelers*,
minnesota ranks as follows:



**performing
arts**



**lgbtq+
friendly**



**welcoming to all
races & ethnicities**



**outdoor
recreation**



**accessible
travel**



**professional
sports**



**affordable
vacation**



concerts

*Regional travelers defined as travelers from Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Colorado, Nebraska, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, Ohio, Utah, Wyoming, Winnipeg, Canada and Thunder Bay, Canada. Source: SMARI 2025 Spring/Summer Ad Effectiveness Study

[^]Source: WalletHub

[†]Source: U.S. News & World Report

an international icon



While 2024 continued with a positive outlook for international travel, with forecasts from the U.S. Travel Association and the National Travel and Tourism Office (NTTO) predicting sustained growth, the inbound forecast shifted in early 2025. New challenges, such as consumer caution, affordability concerns and geopolitical tensions, have created a more cautious outlook. Despite this shift, attracting international visitors remains crucial to supporting key inbound air service routes and Minnesota's overall economic vitality.

Explore Minnesota has adapted its international marketing strategy in response to these changing conditions. We collaborated closely with our international agency of record, in-country marketing network, and global partners to monitor consumer and trade sentiment. We integrated on-the-ground insights with global data and conducted an in-depth product audit to identify the best opportunities for market growth.

As a result, we executed 33 marketing initiatives in six European markets: the UK, Germany, Benelux, France, Italy and the Nordics. These initiatives included digital campaigns, traditional and new media, tour operator co-ops, booking partnerships, trade education and familiarization tours. Additionally, we continue to promote Minnesota in key primary and secondary markets of India, Japan, South Korea and Australia through partnerships with Great Lakes USA, Mississippi River Country and Brand USA.

international marketing results

cooperative newsletters	
Sent	35
Recipients	2,692,276
Click-thru	107,691
Open rate	31.58%

media	
Fam tours	6
Articles	38
Print reach	1,254,033
Digital reach	4,078,989

websites	
Page views	912,313
Clicks	7,073

social media	
Reach	4,139,264
Impressions	8,002,216
Engagement	33,227

digital advertising*	
Impressions	5,325,546
Clicks	11,397

product development	
New itineraries	29
Tour operators selling MN	119
Overnights offered	2,016



Outdoor Magazine, Germany



JRNY America, UK and Ireland



Ticket Travel, Nordics



Evaneos, France

*Includes paid advertising on airline, media and tour operator, plus business forums

global partnerships

Explore Minnesota maintained its memberships in:

- American Bus Association (ABA)
- Brand USA
- Great American West (gateway cities membership)
- Great Lakes USA (GLUSA)
- International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association (IGLTA)
- International Inbound Travel Association (IITA)
- Mississippi River Country (MRC)
- National Tour Association (NTA)
- U.S. Travel Association

Visit USA Committees:

- Visit USA Australia
- Visit USA Belgium
- Visit USA France
- Visit USA Germany
- Visit USA Ireland
- Visit USA Italy
- Visit USA Netherlands
- Visit USA UK
- Discover America Nordic

additional trade activities

Brand USA – Travel Week in London, UK, Oct. 21–24, 2024

Our team conducted 40 trade appointments with tour operators and travel distributors from Europe.

National Tour Association (NTA) – Travel Exchange in Huntsville, Alabama, Nov. 17–21, 2024

Explore Minnesota met with 15 domestic tour operators to discuss new and expanding product developments for Minnesota.

Brand USA – Mission in Hyderabad, India, Jan. 20–23, 2025

Explore Minnesota met with 72 travel trade and tour operators to identify the current opportunities for Minnesota for inbound travel growth from India.

American Bus Association (ABA) – Marketplace in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Feb. 1–4, 2025

Motorcoach and group leisure market companies met with Explore Minnesota during 37 pre-scheduled meetings for product development, strengthening relationships, and increasing awareness of Minnesota as a group leisure travel destination.

Circle Wisconsin – Midwest Marketplace in Dubuque, Iowa, Apr. 6–8, 2025

Explore Minnesota met with 35 group tour and motorcoach operators from the Midwest during pre-scheduled meetings to expand product in Minnesota.

U.S. Travel's – IPW in Chicago, Illinois, June 16–18, 2025

IPW is the USA's largest international inbound travel trade show with over 5,000 participants from over 70 countries. Explore Minnesota conducted 134 scheduled appointments with travel trade, travel media and marketing, and technology representatives from around the world.

All appointment summaries and business leads are made available to Minnesota's tourism and hospitality industry at no charge.

hosted familiarization (fam) tours



media familiarization trips (FAMs)

Aug. 17–24, 2024 – Dpa, Germany: Verena Wolff of Dpa (German equivalent to Associated Press), wrote an article focused on Minnesota music. Published by over 50 prominent German outlets, the article highlighted communities across the state, effectively leveraging one of Germany's most influential news channels.

Oct. 4–7, 2024 – America Journal, Germany: Journalists Sascha and Aliki Rettig-Nassoufis wrote an article for the German consumer travel magazine, *America Journal*, covering Duluth, Ely and the metro. Scheduled publication fall/winter 2025.

May 1–8, 2025 – Columbus Travel Magazine, Benelux: Supporting non-stop flights from Amsterdam to MSP, journalist Auke Hulst and photographer Sabrina Gaudio published a 14-page feature for *Columbus Travel Magazine*. The feature appeared in the July 2025 issue and highlighted travel experiences on and around the Mississippi River.

May 31–June 6, 2025 – RonReizen, The Netherlands: Bert Kuizenga and Maurits de Vries of the Dutch broadcast television travel show *RonReizen* filmed a multi-episode travel series in Minnesota, focusing on Minneapolis and Ely. The segments, highlighting music and the outdoors, will air in winter 2025.

June 19–21, 2025 – Mississippi River Country Cooperative: Nine international travel trade and media delegates were hosted on a Mississippi River-themed FAM trip following U.S. Travel's IPW in Chicago, for the purpose of product development and media coverage. The itinerary included the metro area, Red Wing and Winona.

June 24–29, 2025 – Wideoyster, Benelux: Award-winning writer and photographer Hans Avontuur was hosted to write several articles for the Dutch and German online magazine *Wideoyster*. The articles will be published over the next year and cover the metro area, Duluth/North Shore and Grand Marais.

trade FAMs

Oct. 28–30, 2024 – Brand USA MegaFam, South Korea: Brand USA selected Minnesota to host 10 travel agents from South Korea to support and promote the Seoul to MSP non-stop flight. The group visited the metro area as part of a larger Midwest regional itinerary ending in Chicago, Illinois.



**advance and
champion welcoming
experiences for all**



tribal nation engagement

We continue to broaden our engagement with the 11 Tribal Nations that share geography with Minnesota.

In the fall of 2024, we welcomed our first staff Tribal liaison. The Tribal liaison works with Explore Minnesota and Tribal contacts, including Tribal Government leaders, to share information about Explore Minnesota projects and programs, as well as provide support. Explore Minnesota plans to complete government-to-government Tribal consultations with all 11 federally-recognized Tribes in FY2026 to create products and programming.

With \$2.2 million in one-time funding to support Tribal Nations engagement, we developed the first Tribal Nations Tourism Grant Program. The first round began in FY2024, with \$181,800 available to each Tribal Nation. The FY2024 recipients were Bois Forte Band of Chippewa, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, Lower Sioux Indian Community, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, Prairie Island Indian Community and Red Lake Nation.

The FY2025 Tribal Nations Grant made \$65,000 available to each Tribal Nation. Recipients of the FY2025 round of grant funding were Bois Forte Band of Chippewa, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Lower Sioux Indian Community, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe and Red Lake Nation.

We continue to hold space for Tribal voices on both our Explore Minnesota Tourism and Business Councils with dedicated seats for Tribal Nation representatives.

With the addition of Explore Minnesota Film to our agency in FY2025, we took the opportunity to increase Tribal engagement around film production in Minnesota. The teams are collaborating to build guidelines for production companies and their staff to better engage Tribal Nations. Additionally, there have been increased conversations with the Native community around supporting filmmakers and Indigenous creatives who reside in Minnesota.

internal DEAI task force

The DEAI Committee at Explore Minnesota created and maintains the Equity Change Plan, which was introduced to staff in September 2024. We are committed to working towards building a culture of anti-racism, allyship and inclusion by offering DEAI training and leadership development opportunities. These include: LinkedIn Learning courses and other resources provided in our weekly Director's Updates, connecting with other agencies to join their DEAI learning opportunities, and attending Tribal State Relations Training (TSRT).

Explore Minnesota is also committed to building an equitable and inclusive culture by defining inclusive behaviors and using organizational culture change models to shift culture.



integrating diverse perspectives into our content portfolio and media strategy

We recognize the need to highlight specific content about our vibrant communities and what Minnesota has to offer for diverse travelers in an authentic and accurate way. At the same time, we identify an ongoing need to integrate diversity across our campaign and content portfolio by highlighting diverse businesses, hiring writers and creators representative of Minnesota's population, and soliciting feedback from experts.

In FY2025, we took a holistic approach, considering and weaving in diverse perspectives consistently, thoughtfully, and with feedback from staff as well as external partners and consultants. Some examples include:

- A continued focus on ensuring diverse audiences are reached by our media buys, with over 17% of total spend dedicated to reaching Black, Latino, AAPI and/or LGBTQ+ audiences
- The debut of new campaign content highlighting [intergenerational travel](#) and [LGBTQ+ friendly travel](#)
- The creation of specific guides to support and celebrate our diverse communities, such as [Minnesota's Native Community](#) written by Indigenous writer Kate Nelson
- A more robust commissioning strategy for social content from many diverse creators and putting a focus on Minnesota's diverse [attractions](#)
- An internal study of our newsletter program by Minnesota Services for the Blind (which resulted in our work being termed "perfect")
- Newsletter debuts covering diverse topics including [accessible state park adventures](#) (95,706 subscribers, our highest-shared interview); as well as considering diverse travel styles in [sleeping accommodations](#) (157,938 subscribers, 51% open rate), [outdoor activities](#) (44,472 subscribers, 86% open rate), and [travel groups](#) (177,728 subscribers, 51% open rate)

visitors services & welcome centers

Explore Minnesota’s Welcome Center program supports travel throughout the state by providing visitor information and resources at six state–operated welcome centers, three partner–operated welcome centers and 59 affiliate welcome centers.

The state and partner centers are located within Minnesota Department of Transportation rest areas along the state’s major interstate and trunk highway entry points. The affiliate centers are operated by local community organizations and add an integral component to visitor services by connecting travelers with local resources. The combined efforts of the state, partner, and affiliate welcome centers strengthen industry engagement, help to provide a consistent and welcoming experience for travelers, and support Minnesota’s overall travel economy.

visitor services [†]	
Welcome center visitors	1,485,442 [^]
Direct calls serviced	1,423
Voicemails serviced	1,083
Customer emails serviced	1,916
Customer requests for Explore Minnesota Visitor Kits	27,525
Brochures/print materials distributed	424,169 [^]

industry programs	
Number of Partner Welcome Centers	3
Number of Affiliate Welcome Centers	59
Visitors to Affiliate Centers*	769,003
Explore Minnesota Travel Guides and Maps distributed through the Affiliate network	42,586



| Newly Opened St. Croix Welcome Center

[†]Explore Minnesota–operated centers only

[^]St. Croix center construction (Oct. 2023–Aug. 2025) affected overall visitor volume and brochure distribution numbers. Reference visitor volume 2023: 2,041,331; brochure distribution in 2023: 580,847

*Partner Welcome Center visits are included in Explore Minnesota–operated centers total.



**provide industry
leadership and
maximize partner
collaboration**

industry outreach and engagement

The Industry Relations team connected with stakeholders more than 250 times in FY2025, conducting one-on-one and group meetings, making presentations and attending key events. These forms of personal engagement represent a 53% year-over-year increase in outreach.

As part of our commitment to expand education for Minnesota's tourism industry, we created the Continuing Education Series (CES), a series of webinars in spring and fall to provide education on timely topics. The CES spring series featured topics including Minnesota's tourism economy, SEO and the evolution of search, and the importance of implementing digital accessibility.



industry news & resources

Industry News is Explore Minnesota's weekly enewsletter, providing news and tips for the people who market Minnesota and its destinations. Content is housed on our tourism industry website and includes highlights of the agency's work, information on upcoming industry events, research, educational and marketing opportunities, and other tourism-related information.



industry news subscribers



industry website views

research & resources

We continue to provide current data and research to the tourism industry which includes state and county-level visitor economy reports, seasonal travel indicators, hotel occupancy and performance metrics, brand and sentiment data and economic trends. These resources help inform the tourism industry and its stakeholders and illustrate the importance of tourism for businesses within their communities and throughout the state.

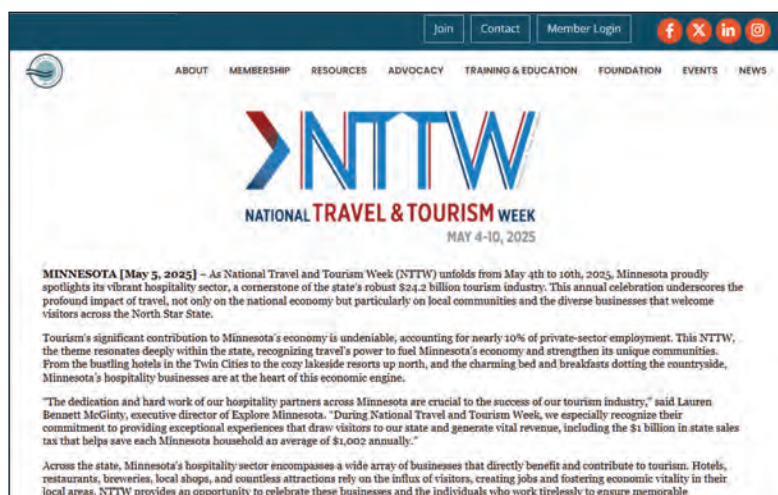
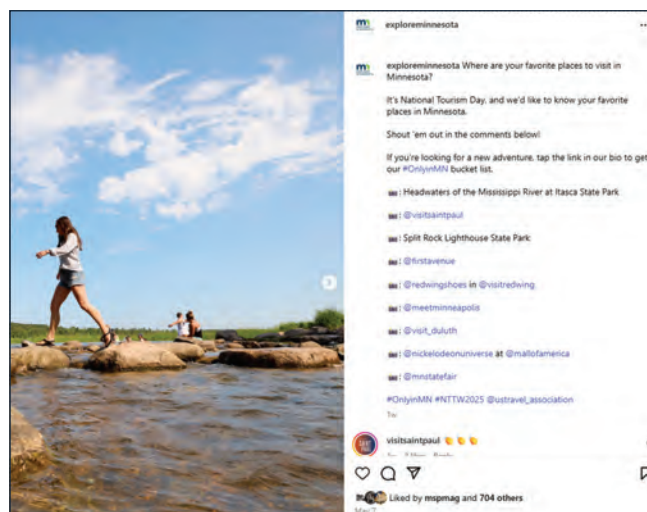
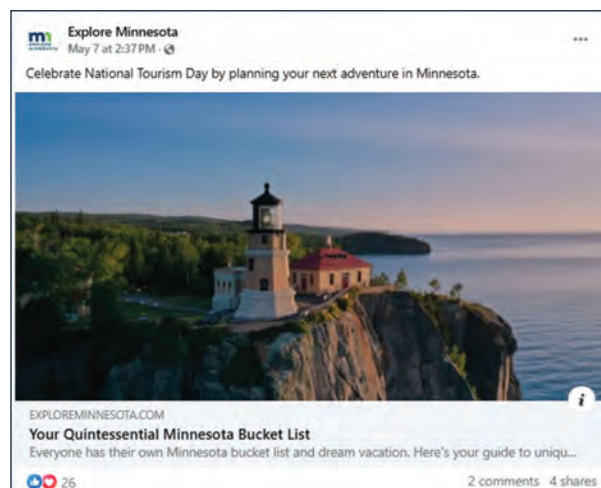
national travel and tourism week

U.S. Travel's National Travel and Tourism Week (NTTW) is a week-long annual celebration that underscores travel's essential role in driving our nation's economy, cultivating vibrant communities and forging connections. This year, NTTW was May 4-10, 2025.

Explore Minnesota created a National Travel and Tourism Week Industry Toolkit, which included sample social posts that Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) partners could adapt for use throughout the week, along with a customizable press release highlight the impact of travel with local media and stakeholders.

Many DMOs across the state participated in NTTW, including holding annual meetings, organizing tourism events and sharing messages on social media about the power of travel and the Halo Effect of tourism advertising has on increasing the favorability of Minnesota as a place to live and work.

Explore Minnesota focused on National Tourism Day (Wednesday, May 7) as an opportunity to increase our social engagement with consumers, reminding them to plan their Minnesota vacation and request a Travel Planning Kit. Our efforts around National Tourism Day posts resulted in nearly 28,000 social impressions/ views and 207 requests for Minnesota Travel Planning Kits.



strategic partnerships & major events



2024 minnesota governor's pheasant hunting opener

The 2024 Minnesota Governor's Pheasant Hunting Opener (GPHO) was held in Sleepy Eye and Brown County on Oct. 11-12, 2024. Explore Minnesota collaborated with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and the Sleepy Eye Chamber of Commerce and CVB to promote the intersection of tourism, outdoor recreation and hunting activities to the general public and to strengthen short- and long-term relationships with communities, stakeholders, and elected leaders.

82 media interviews were conducted with spokespersons from state agencies and the host community, resulting in earned impressions:

- 666,962 Television
- 630,806 Radio
- 20,392,373 Social media
- 998,707,029 Online

2024 minnesota governor's deer hunting opener

In collaboration with the DNR, the 2024 Governor's Deer Hunting Opener was held at the Osprey Wilds Environmental Learning Center in Sandstone on Nov. 8-9, 2024. With cooperation from Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, Bluffland Whitetails Association and Minnesota Conservation Federation, DNR and Explore Minnesota held a listening session and hunter events including a mentored hunt, brunch and reception attended by the Lieutenant Governor.

2025 minnesota governor's fishing opener

The 2025 Minnesota Governor's Fishing Opener was held in Crosslake May 9-10. Explore Minnesota partnered with the DNR, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Crosslake community members to mark the annual start of Minnesota's fishing season.

Radio, print, TV, and social media covering the event focused on the area's fishing opportunities, natural resources, and highlighted the quintessential tourism destination. The resulting stories inspired fishing and drove awareness of the National Loon Center and the Whitefish Chain's legacy of family-owned resorts.

by the numbers:

- 25 Media outlets participated
- 11M Estimated media reach
- 7.6M Social media platform impressions
- 64.7K Social media influencer audience reach



COMMUNITY PARTNERS:

- Brainerd Warrior Fishing Team
- City of Crosslake
- Crosslake Chamber of Commerce
- Crosslake Community School
- Crow Wing County Emergency Services
- National Loon Center
- North Star Fireworks
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Cross Lake
- Student Angler Tournament Trail
- Whitefish Area Lodging Association
- Whitefish Chain Yacht Club
- Whitefish Properties LLC
- Zorbaz on Crozz Lake

STATEWIDE PARTNERS:

- Captain Ken's Foods
- Old Dutch Foods
- Red Lake Nation
- White Earth Nation
- Xcel Energy

explore minnesota tourism conference

The 2025 Explore Minnesota Tourism Conference was a hybrid event held Feb. 18-19, 2025, at the Minneapolis Convention Center. This premier annual industry education event drew a combined attendance of over 550 tourism industry professionals. Virtual attendees could join a free broadcast of select keynote sessions and the presentation of the Explore Minnesota Tourism Awards.

Recordings of breakout sessions and keynotes are made available on our [tourism industry website](#) after the conference.



The conference program included a look back at Explore Minnesota's 2024 successes and a look forward to the 2025 campaign and agency initiatives. Keynote speakers delivered timely messages on the use and application of AI, new digital strategies and technologies, and ways to share tourism economic impact with stakeholders. There was plenty of time to network with colleagues, vendors and friends, and celebrate the achievements of the industry.

The 2024 Explore Minnesota Tourism Awards celebrated the outstanding people, marketing activities and promotion initiatives that make Minnesota a premier travel destination. Dozens of submissions and nominations were received, with awards presented to:



**outstanding
marketing campaign***
[Visit
Mankato](#)



**outstanding
marketing campaign****
[Visit Cook
County](#)



**social media
excellence**
[Mall of
America®](#)



outstanding video
[Lovin' Lake
County](#)



**best destination
website**
[Bloomington
Minnesota Travel
& Tourism](#)



one minnesota award
[Bicycle Alliance
of Minnesota](#)



**exceptional
grant project**
[Explore Willmar
Lakes Area
Convention and
Visitors Bureau](#)



**exceptional co-op
campaign**
[Visit Lake
City](#)



emerging leader
SABRINA KOELSCH
[Little Falls
Chamber &
Tourism](#)



**tourism
industry leader**
BILL DEEF
[Meet
Minneapolis](#)

| *Total organizational budgets under \$1,000,000, **Total organizational budgets over \$1,000,000

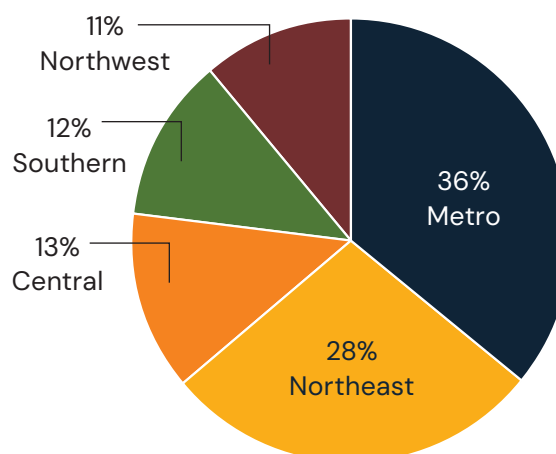
industry programs

co-op marketing

program participants	
Industry participants	114
Placed ads	315
Year-over-year change	+14%

Vendor in-kind contributions	\$2,022,768
Explore Minnesota investment	\$671,510
Industry investment	\$775,937

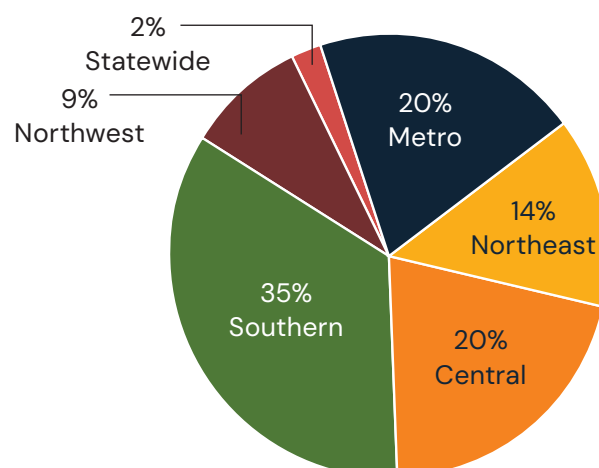
participation* by region



tourism recovery grant program

Explore Minnesota investment	\$893,640
Industry investment	\$453,232 (estimated)
Grants awarded	117

participation by region



| *66% of participants were DMOs, 34% were other tourism-related businesses.

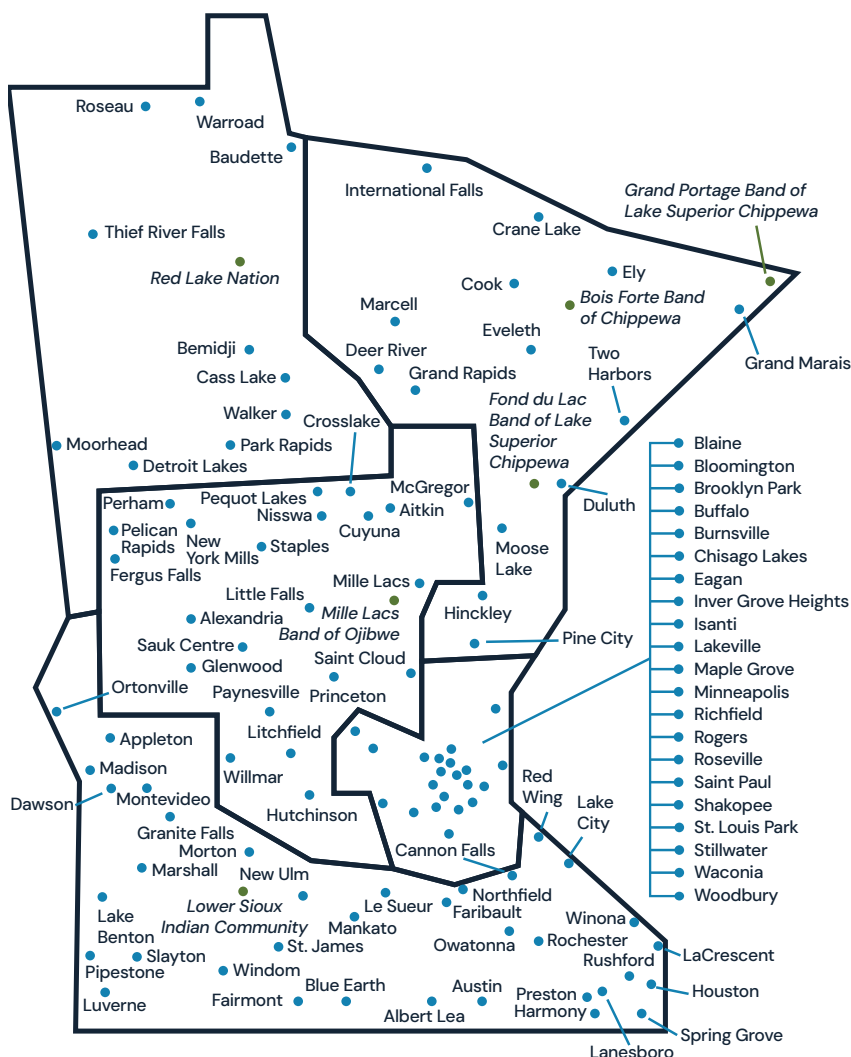
grant programs

FY2025 TOURISM RECOVERY GRANT PROGRAM

The FY2025 Tourism Recovery Grant Program was funded and administered by Explore Minnesota to provide grants to individual or collaborative non-profit DMOs and other tourism promotion organizations. Funds aided the post-pandemic tourism recovery of communities statewide. No match dollars were required to participate in this program.

Individual grant awards ranged from \$4,000 to \$20,000 based on organizational budget.

Grant dollars were primarily used to support visitor guides, print ads and digital advertising within Minnesota and in the surrounding states.



Funding awarded	\$893,640
Grantees	117

FY2025 TRIBAL NATIONS GRANT PROGRAM

The FY2025 Tribal Nations Grant Program was funded and administered by Explore Minnesota for the purpose of providing funds to the 11 federally-recognized Tribal Nations who share geography with Minnesota. Grants supported development, promotion and expansion of sustainable tourism assets, culture, heritage, arts, agritourism and outdoor recreation. No match dollars were required to participate. There was a \$65,000 grant cap per Tribal Nation.

Funding awarded	\$389,974
Grantees	6



**foster state
stewardship**

overview



destination stewardship

Destination stewardship is an ongoing effort for Explore Minnesota which involves local communities, governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations and the tourism industry in a multi-stakeholder approach to maintaining our state's cultural, environmental, economic and aesthetic integrity. In FY2025, we:

- Launched an Explore Minnesota Continuing Education Series, alongside our annual Tourism Conference programming, providing the industry expanded educational resources and the opportunity to engage with subject matter experts in environmental and cultural preservation, community and stakeholder engagement, sustainable tourism development and industry best practices. [Learn more on page 36.](#)
- Commissioned the first-ever report that details the total economic, social and non-market impact of Minnesota's outdoor recreation industry to further demonstrate how investing here pays dividends for all. [Learn more on page 45.](#)
- Hosted the inaugural Outdoor Industry Summit at Hyland Hills Chalet in Bloomington to bring together business stakeholders from across the state to network and build a more vibrant outdoor industry sector.
- Continued efforts on the Explore Minnesota More podcast, where we uncover the stories behind our state's incredible outdoor recreation opportunities.
- Initiated Explore Minnesota's first-ever Tribal Consultations, state-to-Tribal Nation formal conversations with the 11 Tribes that share geography with Minnesota. [Learn more on page 32.](#)
- Began work on the first-ever Tribal Nations film guide, which will educate and inform film production companies how and with whom they should be working with at a Tribal Nation when a film is set in Indian Country, has Native characters or storylines.
- Launched a pilot resident retention program for young people who are currently in college in Minnesota or recent graduates, directing them to more information on why to build their life here. [Learn more on page 15.](#)
- Partnered with the DEED to promote Minnesota as the best place to do business. [Learn more on page 16.](#)
- Participated in trainings, conferences and collaboration opportunities with organizations like the Outdoor Rec Roundtable, Great Lakes USA and Cruise the Great Lakes, Mississippi River Country, Mississippi River Parkway Commission, MN Active Transportation Advisory Committee, Minnesota Department of Transportation, Corridor Planning PAC, City Nation Place, University of Minnesota Extension, Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, as well as the State of Minnesota's Tribal State Relations Training.



outdoor recreation industry partnership (ORIP)

In FY2025, ORIP made significant strides in promoting, supporting and growing Minnesota’s outdoor recreation economy.

industry convening and research

We released the Minnesota Outdoor Recreation Economic Impact Report, providing critical data and insights on outdoor recreation’s contribution to Minnesota’s gross domestic product (GDP), job growth and quality of life. The Partnership also held the inaugural Outdoor Recreation Industry Summit (June 26, 2025) which brought together leaders from across the outdoor industry to collaborate on ideas for the future of Minnesota’s outdoor recreation economy.

expanding access to the great outdoors

To provide input and guidance on the positive impacts of outdoor recreation, ORIP participated on committees for the Minnesota Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights and the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). Both committees are working to expand access and participation in the outdoors.

continued engagement

We joined the Confluence of States as the 17th state, held more than 100 stakeholder meetings across the state and launched a monthly newsletter. We also collaborated with unique industry partners to amplify great stories of outdoor recreation businesses, offerings and inclusivity on more than 25 episodes of our Explore Minnesota More podcast.

outdoor recreation impact around the state

Throughout FY2025, ORIP participated in several events aimed at growing interest in outdoor recreation, including the First Annual Paddling Opener and the inaugural Star Tribune Unbound outdoor celebration. We are thrilled to welcome the USA Cycling Gravel National Championships in La Crescent (and La Crosse, Wis.) in both 2025 and 2026 as well as the National Outdoor Recreation Conference in 2026, placing Minnesota at the top of the list for outdoor recreation opportunities in the U.S.

These accomplishments reflect the growing energy, collaboration, and momentum behind Minnesota’s outdoor recreation sector. Explore Minnesota and ORIP remains committed to building a more connected, resilient, and inclusive outdoor economy in the years ahead.





tourism council

The [Explore Minnesota Tourism Councils](#) consists of up to 35 individuals representing various sectors of Minnesota’s travel, tourism and hospitality industries, appointed by the Governor. This advisory council serves the broader interests of tourism in Minnesota by promoting activities that support, maintain and expand the state’s domestic and international travel market, thereby generating increased visitor expenditures, tax revenue and employment. Council members share insights with leadership which help inform strategy for sustainably increasing travel for all areas of the state.



livability and economic development council

The [Explore Minnesota for Business Council](#) launched in June 2024 and consists of up to 14 representatives from economic development, talent acquisition, higher education and business sectors across the state. Appointed by the Governor, the Council members advise Explore Minnesota’s livability, workforce and economic opportunity promotional efforts. As part of their role, Council members provide professional community, business and marketing insights.



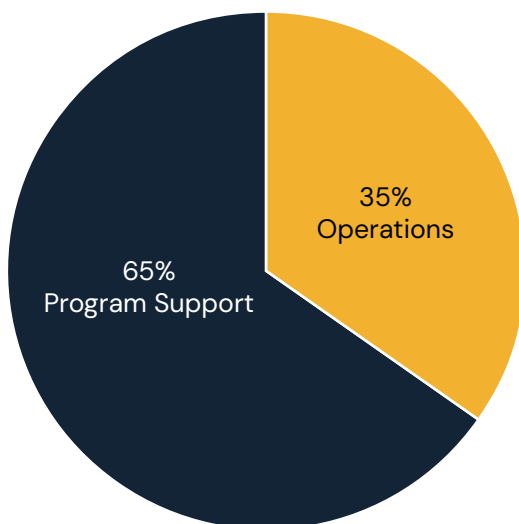


Behind the scenes on the film "Boundary Waters" directed by Tessa Blake, shot in Ely, Minnesota in 2023. The film participated in the Minnesota Film Production Tax Credit Program.

explore minnesota film

Explore Minnesota Film was established as an office within Explore Minnesota on July 1, 2024. As the state's film office, Explore Minnesota Film administers the Minnesota Film Production Tax Credit Program; promotes Minnesota's film crew, talent, and production infrastructure; and provides a database of production locations throughout Minnesota.

FY2025 budget



Explore Minnesota Film operates under a single program mission. Most of its budget activity is tax-credit based and is not reflected in program funding.

The total FY2025 budget was \$825,000. This spending breaks down as \$287,864 for operations and \$537,136 for program support.

Program support includes: marketing campaigns, representing Minnesota at film events and conferences nationally and globally, and work on our Film Ready Community program—which includes liaison training—to better ensure towns across the state benefit from the economic impact of film production in Minnesota.

grow minnesota's film economy

We attracted new projects to the Minnesota Film Production Tax Credit Program that contributed approximately \$6.5 million to Minnesota's local economy and provided jobs to 145 Minnesotans in the film and TV production industry.

We launched our first-ever marketing campaign, including digital, print and video tactics, to promote Minnesota as the next best stage for film production.

We received more than 180 inquiries from producers filming here, scouting their next film here, and seeking to utilize the tax credit program.

Netflix's hit series "Love is Blind" garnered national media attention and viral social media moments — bringing high visibility to Minnesota's culinary scene, culture, shopping, nightlife and quality of life.

promote and grow awareness for Minnesota film

We promoted Minnesota on an international stage at the FOCUS London conference in December 2024. In May 2025, and in collaboration with FilmUSA, we launched an integrated sponsorship and marketing plan at Cannes Marché.

We pitched Minnesota at national industry events including Realscreen Summit in February 2025 and Tribeca Festival's Creators Market in June 2025.

outcomes	
New industry film newsletter subscribers	1007
Potential film projects	12

grow impact around the state

We launched the first ten [Film-Ready Communities](#) across the state with dedicated local film ambassadors and creation of film permits to ease administrative burden for producers and small businesses.

FY2025 participants include: Austin, Bloomington, Duluth, Grand Rapids, Little Falls, Minneapolis, St. Cloud, St. Paul, Stillwater and Waite Park.



minnesota: setting the stage for your next production

See our video promoting Minnesota as the best place for film production.

With generous incentives, diverse landscapes, great crews and film-savvy communities, plus a supportive film office with a track record quickly processing incentives, Minnesota is ready for primetime.



**ensure
organizational
excellence**

organizational activities in FY2025

Explore Minnesota staff, who work throughout the state, are some of the most passionate cheerleaders for Minnesota. To ensure organizational excellence, our goal is to provide a working environment where employees can thrive, learn and grow together. We continue to evolve our training opportunities, employee engagement programs and organization to better fit the needs of Explore Minnesota now and prepare us to innovate for the future.

all-staff in-person meetings

Our staff from around the state gather to experience an in-depth look at a destination or attraction and participate in professional training.

This year, meetings were held at:

- Westwood Hills Nature Center (St. Louis Park)
 - » Key training opportunity: Gallup StrengthsFinder
- National Sports Center (Blaine)
 - » Key training opportunity: Presentation from State Services for the Blind





fostering a culture of growth

As part of our commitment to ensuring employees have the tools, resources and support they need to thrive, we conduct a biannual employee satisfaction survey.

Areas of focus include:

- Professional experience
- Management effectiveness
- Employee engagement with additional focus around diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion

Over time, the survey metrics have shown an increase in employee satisfaction around workplace culture, opportunities to communicate across the agency and encouragement to participate in training.

photo credits

Per annual report page, starting in top left corner, going clockwise.

C	Paul Vincent	31	Paul Vincent
1	Paul Vincent	32	Jaida Grey Eagle Visit Duluth Jaida Grey Eagle Paul Vincent
3	Riley Hallaway Paul Vincent	34	David Robb
5	Paul Vincent	35	Paul Vincent
6	Paul Vincent Explore Minnesota Paul Vincent Riley Hallaway	39	Riley Hallaway
7	Paul Vincent	43	Paul Vincent
11	Paul Vincent	46	Paul Vincent
		48	Paul Vincent
15	Paul Vincent	51	Riley Hallaway
27	Ryan Taylor Emmanuel Canaan		



Explore Minnesota
121 7th Place East, Suite 360
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101, USA

exploreminnesota.com/industry