

**Explore Minnesota Tourism Council Meeting**  
**Tuesday, March 12, 2024**  
**Virtual Meeting**

**Attendees**

**Council Members:** Rep. Dave Baker, Bob Bierscheid, Ashlee Ciora, Justin Graddy, Dan Hartman, Ed Hoffman, Nort Johnson, Marianna Khauv, Paul Larsen, Nick Leonard, Laura Mullen, Beth Pierce, Erika Rivers, Mike Schwieters, Colleen Smith, Sara Soli, Laurie Staiger, Cheyanne St. John, Heidi Swank, Rachel Thompson, Danyl Vavreck, Cindy Wannarka, Jana Webster

**Explore Minnesota Staff:** Marya Barsanti, Randolph Briley, Devon Cox, Jacqueline Lloyd Cunningham, Lyndsey Hanson, Beth Helle, Michael Hernandez, Jared Laabs, Nicole Lalum, Roxanne Lane, Sean Lydon, Lauren Bennett McGinty, Michael Meyer, Chris Morgan, Julie Ramer, Derek Ramthun, Kathryn Sutton

**Guests:** Lisa Anderson, Laura Boberg, Matt Cerar, Jaye Peterson

**Agenda**

**Welcome**

- Lauren Bennett McGinty welcomed council members.
- Council members will receive updates from staff covering the previous quarter before each meeting, and meetings will be used to discuss new and forward-looking issues.

**Introductions – Explore MN Leadership:**

- Explore MN leadership team members introduced themselves to council members.

**Roll Call - Full Council Roster; New Council Members:**

- New council members were announced, and members in attendance introduced themselves.

**Council Resources on Tourism Industry site:**

- Council resources are available on the industry website: [Tourism Council / Tourism Industry Minnesota \(mn.gov\)](https://www.tourism.mn.gov).
- Council members are appointed in official seats representing specific sectors of the Minnesota tourism and hospitality industry and are asked to represent the broad interests and viewpoints of their assigned sectors.
- Council members are asked to represent broad interests and viewpoints of their assigned sectors and should regularly interface with stakeholders in their sector.
- Council members may be asked to serve on council committees or task forces.
- There is no compensation or reimbursement of expenses related to serving as a council member.
- Council members' seats are appointed to them (not their organizations) and cannot be transferred.
- If council members are unable to represent the sector seat they were appointed to, they may choose to send resignations to Lauren Bennett McGinty, Beth Helle, Marya Barsanti, or the Governor's Office.
- Council members are appointed to four-year terms and may continue to serve and vote

- until the governor reappoints someone to their seat.
- Quarterly meetings are open to the public and are public record, with recordings and minutes posted on the website.

#### **Quarterly reports:**

- Council members are asked to share a brief quarterly sector report by the first day of the month in which a council meeting is scheduled.
- The first sector reports are due June 1, 2024.
- Staff will review the reports and bring forth any topics for the group to discuss and will share out the sector reports with all council members.

#### **Explore MN team updates**

##### **Destination Marketing:**

- Explore MN previewed the new Star of the North travel and livability campaign at the February 2024 Tourism Conference.
  - There has been a great response to the campaign since it formally launched on March 4, 2024, with significant press coverage.
  - Assets for this campaign are documentary-style and feature real travelers who have not been to Minnesota for a long time or have never been to Minnesota having conversations as they travel through Minnesota.
  - Ads will be broadcast in select cities, such as Chicago, Winnipeg and Thunder Bay.
  - There will be digital ads in the region surrounding Minnesota and in Dallas, plus paid search.
  - Local partners include the Minnesota Twins.
- The next launch (April 1, 2024) will focus on niche markets targeting travelers with specific interests nationwide (e.g. paddling, fishing and golf).
  - These ads will be on social media and publications that focus on targeted activities.
  - Niche market campaigns have produced great return on investment.
- There will soon be new Star of the North travel stories, and assets from these stories will be used to build out itineraries for trips to Minnesota.
  - A new video will feature a multigenerational family of wellness seekers and activities targeted to travelers of all ages and interests.
  - A new video will feature travels in the Twin Cities and southern Minnesota with sporting enthusiasts from Toronto who are surfers of the Great Lakes.

##### **Livability Marketing**

- Explore MN for Business is a new division of Explore MN with the goal of marketing the state for overall livability, workforce attraction and economic opportunity.
- The first ever Star of the North livability campaign simultaneously with the tourism campaign.
- The campaign will leverage a complementary and integrated approach to travel marketing and promoting Minnesota to job seekers in key strategic industries.
- There will be targeted partnerships and a variety of digital first tactics to reach audiences in more markets than ever before, including a multi-platform partnership with Conde Nast.
- This campaign includes documentary style videos featuring recent transplants to

Minnesota who work in key industries, including a vice president of engineering for Cirrus Aircraft in Duluth, a couple who are glass makers in Minneapolis, and a renewable energy worker in St. Cloud.

- A new video will focus on a recent transplant to Minnesota from Florida who is a behavioral specialist at Carver Elementary.
- This campaign will run in more markets than any previous campaigns.
- Research was conducted to understand what residents and nonresidents think about Minnesota and what they consider when thinking about relocation.
- Minnesota is well-poised to recruit residents from areas including the East Coast and West Coast due to factors including a cost of living below the national average, high quality of life, and high health and happiness of residents.
- Phase 1 of this campaign focused on the livability of Minnesota compared to other states.
- Phase 2 of this campaign will focus on business attraction.
  - Explore MN is working with key partners on this phase, including DEED, and the estimated launch date will be in October 2024.
- Phase 3 will focus on college age and resident recruitment, with the goal of attracting workers to the state and retaining workers who are currently in the state.
  - One focus will be encouraging Minnesota residents to remain in Minnesota for college or to return to Minnesota after college.
  - One campaign strategy will be to uplift the stories of Minnesota residents.

#### **Destination Development:**

- The 2024 Tourism Conference was successful, with record attendance (approximately 450 in person plus 200 online attendees).
- Explore MN has received very positive industry feedback along with media coverage regarding the conference and campaign launch.
- The 2025 conference will likely take the same 1.5 day format and will be hybrid.
  - The focus will be on producing an accessible, affordable conference with high quality sessions.
  - Sessions will be recorded and posted for educational purposes.
  - Dates and location have not been selected, but it will be in the Metro area.
  - The conference in odd years (2025, 2027, etc.) Metro location will allow people attending the conference to meet with their legislators during the legislative budget session.
  - Even years (2026, 2028, etc.) conference will rotate to areas in greater Minnesota.
  - The location will need to accommodate a general session of 500 people, 50 booths in the marketplace, and 4 breakouts of 125 people, and be able to support technical requirements.
  - Tourism Council members may attend with complimentary registration.

#### **Outdoor Recreation:**

- The Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights is an enterprise-wide effort to ensure all kids have opportunities for outdoor experiences.
- The Outdoor Recreation Industry Partnership (ORIP) was recently profiled in the Star Tribune.
  - ORIP is a partnership between Explore MN, DNR, DEED and IRRR, with the primary

purpose of growing Minnesota's outdoor recreation economy by supporting and uplifting the industry, including the private, public and nonprofit sectors.

- Three strategic pillars were identified by the foundational document that recommended the creation of the partnership.
  - Building new tools to help support the industry.
  - Community-building and convening across the outdoor recreation ecosystem.
  - Communications to various audiences, including the general public and policy makers, on the significant benefits of outdoor recreation.
- ORIP's short-term work is largely rapid response and activities that take a year or less to develop.
- ORIP's longer term projects, which may take 1-2 years to develop, include initiatives which many other states already have, such as:
  - Developing an outdoor recreation economic impact report for Minnesota.
  - Developing an annual outdoor industry summit, similar to the annual Tourism Conference but focused on outdoor industry stakeholders.
  - Developing an outdoor opportunity fund (grant program).
    - This came out of the Governor's Council on Economic Expansion and would address socioeconomic barriers to people getting outdoors.
- Yesterday, Governor Walz announced SBA disaster loans for businesses impacted by lack of snow this year.
  - This is the first time this program has been used in Minnesota for non-agricultural industries affected by weather, and 81 counties are eligible.
  - More information is available at [lending.sba.gov](https://lending.sba.gov).
  - ORIP was instrumental in moving this forward.
- ORIP is creating a newsletter, expanding our website, and starting a podcast.
- Minnesota is planning to become the 17<sup>th</sup> state in the Confluence of States, a nonpartisan group which comes together around the shared interest of promoting outdoor recreation.
  - This will help Minnesota learn about best practices and build relationships with similarly situated states.
- ORIP is working on establishing a state outdoor business alliance.
  - Many states already have this, and it would help us identify shared interests among stakeholders in the outdoor recreation space.
- Explore MN constantly works to bring new outdoor recreation related events to Minnesota – including the gravel bike national championships and a Major League Fishing tournament.

#### **Legislative/Administrative:**

- According to the February forecast, the state has a larger than expected \$3.7 billion surplus.
  - MMB, the Governor's Office, and House and Senate leadership are urging caution because the state is facing a potential budget shortfall in the next few years,
- Explore MN is awaiting news of the Governor's supplemental budget, with the awareness that new spending will be minimal this year, and difficult decisions are being made.
- Top priorities for the legislature are a bonding bill, technical fixes, and implementation of last session's work.

- Lyndsey Hanson will continue tracking the session, and council members can contact her with any questions.
- Over the last several months Explore MN has updated job descriptions and engaged in strategic hiring to return closer to pre-pandemic staffing numbers.
- Explore MN is working to revise the strategic plan to reflect changing conditions, and there should be information about the updated plan by the June 2024 council meeting.
  - The goal is to ensure all programs connect with each other and connect to the promotion of Minnesota as a destination for tourism and relocation.

**2024 Council meeting dates:**

- Tuesday, March 12 (virtual)
- Wednesday, June 12 (**in person** – Explore MN Office – 121 7th Pl. E., St. Paul, MN 55101)
- Tuesday, September 10 (virtual)
- Tuesday, December 10 (virtual)

**Explore MN Council Committees:**

- Explore MN is seeking additional input from the industry to increase awareness and incorporate it into our work.
- Council members are asked to share their feedback, expertise and experience as stakeholders to impact the agency’s work, and committees will share out at future council meetings.
- The establishment of committees will help make the council more engaging for members and facilitate more of a two-way conversation with staff.
- Committees will likely meet quarterly and will be administered by Explore MN staff.
- A link will be shared for council members to sign up for one of the five new committees:
  - Education / Industry Relations
  - Marketing
  - Legislative
  - Outdoor Recreation
  - Livability