

Explore Minnesota Tourism Council Meeting
Tuesday, December 10, 2024
Virtual Meeting

Attendees

Council Members: Rep. Dave Baker, Bob Bierscheid, Ashlee Ciora, Dan Hartman, Marianna Khauv, Paul Larsen, Nick Leonard, Molly Luther, Shannon McKeeth, Laura Mullen, Beth Pierce, Xinyi Qian, Courtney Ries, Erika Rivers, Mike Schwieters, Kate Setley, Stephanie Shimp, Colleen Smith, Sara Soli, Frank Soukup, Laurie Staiger, Cheyanne St. John, Heidi Swank, Rachel Thompson, Danyl Vavreck, Jana Webster

Explore Minnesota Staff: Marya Barsanti, Lauren Bennett McGinty, Dawn Blanchard, Randolph Briley, Kari Brumback, Devon Cox, Frances Fyten, Lyndsey Hanson, Lisa Havelka, Beth Helle, Michael Hernandez, Karina Hill, Jill Johansen, Jared Laabs, Nicole Lalum, Shannon Lukes Hauser, Sean Lydon, Mike Meyer, Gretchen Nussbaum, Derek Ramthun, Jen Schak, Kat Sutton

Agenda

Welcome

Approval of Minutes:

- The Council voted to approve the minutes from the September 10, 2024 Council meeting.

Updates from Council Committees:

- Education and Industry Resources Committee:
 - Any Council members who are interested in joining this committee should contact Beth Helle.
 - The Committee met to discuss industry education, including degree programs, certifications, continuing and practical education, whether fee-based or free.
 - There are many resources available, and Explore MN shares a selection of these resources in its weekly industry newsletter.
 - The Committee identified a gap in resources, noting that there is no central location for the industry to find educational resources, and suggested that Explore MN and the Committee could help fill this gap.
 - This would help better identify any gaps in educational resources.
 - Explore MN is conducting a national audit of the resources of other states to identify potential models for creating a central resource location in MN.
 - After the audit is complete, the Committee will help identify how to move forward (during their meeting in early 2025).
- Legislative Committee:
 - Explore MN received an increase in base budget for the next biennium.
 - Explore MN is proposing continued funding for the Outdoor Recreation Industry Partnership, Tribal Relations, Tourism Industry Grants, and for increased funding for international and digital marketing.
 - Explore MN is proposing additional funding for Explore MN for Business

- (previously received one-time funding).
 - Tourism is bipartisan and affects all communities in MN.
 - Explore MN is creating “suitcase” collateral with information about the economic impact of tourism in MN.
 - The Committee would like to create a statewide map of tourism taxes.
 - This would help track local impacts of marketing campaigns and external factors on revenues.
 - Council members may be asked to testify during the legislative session.
 - The Committee discussed MACVB’s legislative priorities, including use of lodging tax for tourism marketing, closing the loophole between the price of rooms and OTAs, tightening enforcement around collection of lodging taxes, and legislation around public park land which is currently used for tourism.
 - The Convention industry is looking to build a convention center group to focus on legislative matters that impact the industry.
- Livability Committee:
 - The Committee discussed resident retention, and how to eliminate identified outreach gap to 18-25 age group to encourage them to stay in MN or move or return to MN.
 - This is key to ensure MN workforce is representative of all age groups.
 - Technical colleges could be a good resource to reach this age group.
 - Climate change is starting to produce slight migration from warmer states.
 - The Governor’s presence on a national ticket and MN laws protecting specific communities have increased the national profile of the state.
 - It could be helpful to have people in this age group tell the story of why they moved to MN or decided to stay in MN.
 - People in this age group tend to leave their communities from the Twin Cities, and people in the Twin Cities tend to leave for other states, and strategies should be developed to attract them to return.
 - Families of residents and high school counselors in this age group are significant influencers in their lives, and could be targeted by campaigns.
 - It would be helpful to match people in these groups with educational funding and internships to incentivize them to move to or stay in MN.
 - The Committee discussed ways to counter the perception of MN as a high cost state in which to do business.
 - Retaining and attracting younger residents would help businesses find the workforce they need.
- Marketing Committee:
 - Metro region had a strong fall with normal seasonal taper.
 - 3 home Vikings games in December should make it a strong month.
 - Resort business was especially strong into September due to warmer weather in early fall; some were able to stay open longer.
 - 2024 spring/summer campaign generated over 400,000 incremental trips to MN.
 - Niche travelers can be more difficult to target but spend more on average.
 - Paid content partnerships and social media performed well over the past quarter.
 - Reddit initially wasn’t performing as well as some channels, but this was turned around by the end of fall through customization of content.
- Outdoor Recreation Committee:

- The Committee discussed the latest outdoor recreation economic numbers from the Bureau of Economic Analysis, which reflected significant economic impact of the industry on Minnesota’s economy.
 - The Committee discussed how to best highlight the importance of outdoor recreation to the economy for legislators.
- The Committee discussed working with the new MN Outdoor Business Alliance to foster outdoor recreation activities in MN.
- The Committee discussed the June 26, 2025 Outdoor Industry Summit and the April 2, 2025 Outdoor Industry Education Day at the Capitol Rotunda.
- The Committee discussed how to create more opportunities for people to experience outdoor recreation in MN.

Explore MN Team Updates

Destination Marketing:

- Explore MN has started to develop a local communications strategy by boosting media appearances in print, television and radio to highlight destinations around the state and promote what is being done on the national stage locally.
 - The strategy will help build stronger relationships with local media in a changing local media environment.
 - The goal is to have several local media appearances every month.
- Explore MN is starting a website “facelift” to launch by July 1, 2025.
 - Website code base must be updated to ensure functionality and speed.
 - There will also be rebranding of design elements for the purpose of ensuring a great user experience and improving navigation.
 - This project is led by Explore MN staff designers and will begin January 2025.
- Explore MN’s 2025 Travel Guide is printed and available in some welcome centers.
 - The 2025 Travel Guide has a new, streamlined look.
 - Several proposals were submitted in response to the RFP for the 2026 Travel Guide; the proposals are currently under review.
- The Summer 2025 campaign will launch in March and will focus on the Metro area and live events, as live events have driven significant tourism recently.
 - The campaign will highlight sites related to the Bob Dylan movie and the Prince musical, as well as the Voyageurs National Park 50th anniversary, Lake Bde Maka Ska, Surly Brewing Company, and Hočokata ȩi (the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Cultural Center).
 - Summer niche campaigns will feature new partners, including Rolling Stone magazine and the Smithsonian Institute.
- The Star of the North campaign has been very successful, and Star of the North assets will be used to create an evergreen campaign with a broader, non-seasonal story.
 - This campaign will feature “big hits” such as Lake Superior, the Boundary Waters, and Mississippi Bluff Country to comprehensively show the whole state.
 - The goal is to give people who are unfamiliar with MN a fun, energetic way to learn more about what the state has to offer.
 - Advertising winter in other seasons hasn’t typically performed well; the team is working on ways to better integrate winter into general marketing assets.
- People surveyed who have seen MN tourism marketing report they would consider moving to MN (particularly diverse audiences, golfers, fishers and paddlers).

Livability Marketing:

- The current workforce attraction campaign launched in March 2024 and will continue until June 30, 2025.
 - The campaign has produced strong results in creating more awareness for what MN has to offer, highlighting quality of life with docu-style videos of people who have relocated to different parts of the state.
 - The campaign is continually monitored and optimized as needed, and the team is working to identify stories that could be added in the future.
 - The team is evaluating geographic targeting to ensure that spending is focused in the areas that produce the most engagement.
 - There have been discussions about ways to target “boomerangs”, who are interested in moving back to the state, in order to get them to move back sooner.
 - There have been very promising results from LinkedIn content, and the strategy on this channel is being continually optimized.
 - Research has shown that the campaign is viewed positively by 84.2% of viewers surveyed (over a benchmark of 70%).
 - People who were aware of the ad campaign had a 23% lift in positive ratings of MN over people who were unaware of the campaign.
 - 78% of website visitors said it was very useful, and 97% said it improved their perception of MN.
- The business attraction campaign launched September 9, 2024 and will continue until June 30, 2025.
 - New content was launched at explore.mn.com/business.
 - This a Star of the North campaign which uses docu-style assets of different businesses in MN to tell their stories (Polar Semiconductor, Rosenbauer USA, the Mayo Clinic, and Microbiologics).
 - The focus is on key people who make decisions about where in the country they will locate their businesses.
 - The campaign highlights what MN has to offer for businesses and their employees and families, including a high quality workforce and quality of life.
 - Forbes placements for this campaign have performed very well.
- The next livability marketing campaign will focus on retaining residents in MN, particularly in the 18-25 age group.
 - People in the 18-22 age group are the largest movers.
 - The team is compiling research and information and meeting with stakeholders to help create an effective campaign to target this population.
 - The campaign will likely look very different from other campaigns to ensure relevance to younger residents.
 - The campaign will be piloted by the end of FY25 but will officially debut in FY26.
- The tourism numbers for 2023 reflected record-breaking growth for the state, and exceeded 2019 numbers for the first time post-COVID.

Destination Development:

- The 2025 Explore MN Tourism Conference will be held February 18-19 at the Minneapolis Convention Center.
 - Half day of programming February 18; full day of programming February 19.
 - The cost to attend is \$250, and there will be a free live virtual broadcast option.

- Tourism Council members are invited to attend the conference at no charge.
- Sponsorship opportunities are available, including the vendor marketplace.
- Two scholarship programs provide free attendance and travel reimbursement (one for Tribal Nations, and one for post-secondary enrolled students).
- Council members are invited to mentor scholarship students at the conference.
- Keynote and breakout sessions will be recorded and made available to the industry after the conference.
- Upcoming events in Market Development:
 - January
 - American Beats Twin Cities Episode (Brand USA series hosted by a British DJ and vocalist who travel across the US to discover American music).
 - The episode highlights traditional African music in the Twin Cities and musical history including Prince, the Basilica Block Party and the Little Africa Festival.
 - Group Tour Ad in Destinations Magazine's January/February 2025 issue.
 - Brand USA India Sales Mission (Explore MN will attend for the first time).
 - This will facilitate contacts in the fast-growing Indian market, which is the top arrival market to MN.
 - February
 - American Bus Association Annual Convention in Philadelphia.
 - Explore MN will meet with group coach travel leaders to develop this sector of the market.
 - Filming episode of "Amazing Train Journey" (French series) in Twin Cities.
 - The episode will highlight ice fishing and winter culture.
 - In-Market Campaigns (Jan-Mar).
 - Italy – New RMI contracted campaigns begin in January.
 - There is potential for growth in this market due to Delta's new MSP-FCO flight starting in May 2025.
 - Germany – Radio Broadcast and Podcast Feature.
 - United Kingdom – JRNY Magazine (article); National Geographic Traveler Magazine Feature (print and digital).
 - Nordics – FDM Tour Operator Co-Op Campaign.
 - In support of Delta's new MSP-CPH flight starting in May 2025.
- Visitor Services update:
 - The St. Croix Welcome Center construction is scheduled to be completed in February or March 2025.
 - New MNDOT facility has been under construction for over a year; Welcome Center staff working from a trailer during construction.
 - Two partnership welcome centers are ceasing operations in January 2025.
 - Partnership welcome centers are operated under special agreements which provide some funding support.
 - Partner centers are currently located in Worthington, Grand Portage, St. Cloud and Fishers Landing.
 - The Fishers Landing center has been operated by the Crookston Chamber, which will cease to operate at the end of 2024.
 - The St. Cloud center has been operated by St. Cloud State University and has elected to withdraw from operations and staffing of the center.

- Visit St. Cloud team will step in to ensure statewide brochures are maintained at the St. Cloud Welcome Center, although it will be unstaffed.
- MDH operates the Safe Harbor program to provide training and resources to prevent human trafficking.
 - Safe Harbor training will be provided to Welcome Center employees on January 30, 2025.

Outdoor Recreation:

- According to the November 2024 BEA data release, Minnesota’s outdoor recreation economy is \$13.5 billion (a 10.5% increase over last year’s numbers – outpacing the national average of 9% growth).
- Outdoor recreation employment increased 4.2% over last year, which outpaces the national average of 3.3%.
- Trends over the past 6 years show numbers declining slightly, due to the COVID outdoor recreation bubble slowly reversing.
- Minnesota’s first outdoor recreation economic impact report is being developed.
 - A vendor has been contracted, and there will be six distinct phases of work with a projected June launch.
 - The report will also analyze non-economic impacts such as health and wellness and will help tell the story of the industry.
 - After the report is released, Randolph Briley will conduct a comprehensive outreach campaign, with the goal of visiting all 87 MN counties to meet with outdoor recreation industry stakeholders in each county.
- The State Outdoor Business Alliance is hiring a temporary Executive Director.
 - The Alliance is raising funds from founding members with a target of \$50,000 (\$25,000 has been raised so far).
 - A RFP was circulated by the steering committee, and the deadline for Executive Director proposals was December 6.
 - The goal is to select a vendor by the first quarter of 2025.
- Facilitation of the First Annual Outdoor Industry Education Day on the Hill (April 2, 2025 from 1 to 5pm in Capitol Rotunda).
 - The purpose is to educate policymakers on the importance of the outdoor industry to Minnesota’s economic portfolio.
- First annual Outdoor Recreation Industry Summit June 26, 2025 from 11 am to 6pm.
 - The agenda for the summit is being developed; there will be 120 attendees.
- Explore Minnesota More podcast creation and promotion is ongoing.
 - Freelance producer hired to consult on substance and process of the show and perform weekly post-production tasks.

Tribal Relations:

- Created Tribal contact list and SharePoint site with resources for Explore MN Staff.
- Explore MN’s first Tribal Consultation with Prairie Island Indian Community/Tinta Wita went extremely well.
- Explore MN’s first Minnesota Indian Affairs Council Executive Council meeting for introductions and a primer before Tribal Consultations begin in 2025 went well.
- Tribal Leaders are happy to be included in Explore MN activities and eager to know how we can partner.

- Drafting Explore MN's first Tribal Consultation Policy guidelines for film/filmmakers.
- Garnering relationships with Native photographers for culturally appropriate media for our publications and external website.

Film:

- New staff hired: Sarah Gebeke, Production Liaison; Jill Johansen, Incentive Specialist.
- Website launched: exploreminnesota.com/film
- Administration of the tax credit program will transition from DEED to Explore MN on January 1, 2025.
- Film-friendly communities:
 - On the Explore MN website, film and TV are the #1 and #3 searches to find locations where things were filmed; this drives significant tourism.
 - A set of protocols are being developed for communities in MN to welcome film and TV productions and ensure they have the resources they need.
- Introductory film campaign has been launched:
 - Ads in print and/or digital versions of industry publications: Variety, Locations International, Filmmaker, Moviemaker, Compass, The Gotham, and KFTV.
 - Ads scheduled through March 2025 to coincide with awards season, Sundance, SXSW, and several location trade shows.
 - Staff will attend trade shows, industry events, and in-person meetings.

Legislative/Administrative:

- 2025 Legislative Session begins January 14.
 - Budget forecast was lower than expected.
 - 3 budget & 3 policy proposals under review with MMB and Governor's Office.
 - Outreach to House and Senate members has begun
 - Tourism Matters updates will resume.
 - One-time funding received previously was used to develop new marketing assets, which can be reused and repurposed.
- Administrative updates:
 - Fiscal 2024 Annual Report released December 9.
 - 2023 Tourism Numbers released December 10 via press release.

2025 Council meeting dates:

- Tuesday, Mar. 4 (virtual – 10am)
- Tuesday, Jun. 3 (hybrid – 10:30am)
- Tuesday, Sep. 16 (virtual – 10am)
- Tuesday, Dec. 9 (virtual – 10am)