

Explore Minnesota DMO Listening Session I 10/22/20

Good morning, everyone. It is 10:00 a.m. We are just going to wait for Max 2 minutes. We have a good group that has trained already. We are going to start at 10:02 and give folks some time to call in. We will get started in just one minute.

Let's begin. Good morning once again. Thank you all so very much for being part of today's listening session. This is the third listening session that we have had so far. This one is primarily throughout the state and anyone else who registered to be a part of this call. We really appreciate you being here. We want to get your thoughts and ideas with the tourism in Minnesota and what is happening during this pandemic and how we can help you explore Minnesota in the months. Last year we held a series of listening sessions throughout the state that were in different locations throughout Minnesota. We enjoyed traveling around and visiting with all of you at specific locations. This year is not possible so we decided to do them in virtually because a lot of meetings, there is happening right now. We had one yesterday dealing with attractions and events and we also had one with hotels. We really look forward to hearing from all of you this morning. A couple of housekeeping items that I want to bring up. First of all, mute your phone unless you are speaking. When you would like to voice say, and we encourage you to go to the participant list on zoom and there is a place for you to raise your hand. Do that. We have staff that will be monitoring that to make sure we recognize you. Feel free to put a comment in the chat box and we will recognize that and try to call on you at that particular time. At the end of this call I want to remind you that there will be a transcript of this entire call as well as a recording you wish to listen to it again at a later date. We would like to begin. One of the things we want to begin with is just a little bit of an icebreaker. The icebreaker is we want to find out who was on the call. Nicole will pop up a poll here and we want to find out what region your location is located. Take a couple quick seconds and check the box of where you are from. We won't get an idea of the weather in the various parts of the state. I know it is thunder storming, it's light drizzling here in central, and I know it's very snowy up in the north. Hopefully you get a chance now to cast your vote. Nicole maybe we can show the results of who is all here on the call. Larry you go up. We have a nice representation throughout the state. 10% Northeast, 8% Northwest, 18% in central, 46% in the metro area, 50% and southern Minnesota and 3% are unsure exactly where they're at. We hope to hear from those folks during the call. Let's pull up a PowerPoint here to kind of guide us through today's discussion. As I mentioned what we are going to do is go to the next slide. What we are going to do is we are going to kind of ground you on what is happening with the tourism industry in Minnesota, reminding you what explore Minnesota's mission is and find out more about your operation, how you're dealing with this pandemic and where you can get more support from explore Minnesota. Things you like and don't like and then were going to have an opportunity for other discussion and feedback. One thing I forgot to mention is that the results of this call will be sent to the Commissioner of Economic Development as well as the governor's office. If there is anything you would like them to know beyond the mission, let us know that will be recorded. Next slide. Next couple. There you go. I think this is all information that everyone on this call knows. How big our tourism industry is. This is something we've been talking about for pretty much every year when we talk to elected officials. \$60 billion in sales come over a billion dollars in taxes, 273,000 jobs from all throughout the globe that have been coming to Minnesota, and 73 million visitors annually. This is the figure here that will pop up in a second. Really showing the direct impact of the leisure and hospitality industry. Since the start of the pandemic in March. Between March and October of this year, the hospitality industry, specifically in Minnesota has lost \$5.4 billion in direct sales. That is huge. We are

impacted perhaps more than any other industry in the state. We did a survey as we do every year at the end of the summer to find out how summer revenue is this year, 2020 compared to 2019. There are certain segments of our industry that I will explain, they did pretty well, the particular campgrounds. The majority has been 50% and many businesses have gone under. Next slide. When we ask, and I thought this was interesting to share, this is the question we asked at the end of last summer about when people participate we will get back to pre-COVID levels. The plurality of the response is, basically it's during the second half of 2021 or even beyond that may be more pessimistic today given what is happening with the pandemic in our state and throughout the country. Next slide. This slide I think is the most interesting to me. I think it came from most of the state. It kind of shows really what has been happening in our industry. Resorts and campgrounds have done fairly well. They had a lot of cancellations. People born sure, could they get up? They thought, I can social distance, I can get to the outdoors, maybe I should go to a campground. Restaurants did not fare well as well as retail and then the segment of our industry that has been more severely impacted his business travel, group travel, meeting and conventions as well as leisure travel particularly from neighboring states. Next line. This last lied about what is going on really shows what is happening with occupancy and hotels throughout Minnesota. You will see our occupancy for the state of Minnesota for the entire year through September has been down 41%. Rates are down, revenue is down, supply, the number of hotels has increased. Interesting timing of putting a new property in place. Overall it is down and we have been impacted as a state. The metro area is worse than others, but this is just not business as normal and it's a challenge we are all having to deal with moving forward. Next slide. The next two slides really briefly talks about who we are and you are all familiar with explore Minnesota, we try to promote Minnesota through marketing, we try to inspire people to facilitate their travel and within the state of Minnesota. And do it in a way that values all individuals no matter who they happen to be. Next slide. Our strategic direction, this is what came out of our listening session that we had last year brought the state. We were trying to get the industry's input on where we should be focusing our efforts. Basically what all of you were told is that we need to focus on brand awareness, consumer engagement and partner collaboration. All of our programs basically within these buckets and we have some goals that we try to achieve in terms of visitor sales, taxes and jobs. That was before the pandemic and now it's a different situation. Next slide. This last slide about our situation, explore Minnesota, this shows the budget of explore Minnesota for the last 15 or so years. You will see the powers off to the right, this is our budget for each two annual year period. That is the middle of the pack right now. There are states with bigger budgets and less budgets, but essentially our budget has not changed much for the last eight years. If we look at the upcoming legislative session which will determine our budget, state agencies are looking to make reductions. While we are asking some very specific things for aid for the industry such as events, meeting, conventions, crisis grants, operational dollars I do not believe will be coming in the next two years. That's the situation that we are essentially faced with right now. It's important more than ever that we promote our state. We can go to the next couple of slides. This is where we get into discussion. The first question we want to ask, how is your organization evolving? How are you dealing with the challenges of today? What is happening with your budget? What is happening with you where you are marketing? This is an open-ended question and we want to hear from all of you. It's important for us to come up with the right programs to find out how all of you are faring for both today and planning for the future. That is the question that we have before you today. I'm looking at the list of participants. If folks don't want to raise their hand, I would be happy to call on someone. As Lisa just pointed out in the

chat box, raise your hand as a way to be recognized. One of my staff will recognize you. Let's see. Did I see Bill Deef?

I knew you were going to call on me. Thank you for the opportunity. First of all, I would like to thank you. The best it has been on our calls since every Friday, that is been helpful to have a voice with EMT to find out what is happening with your organization, and also find out what is happening with all of us around the state. We appreciate that. I think you know as you referenced in your earlier material here, the metro area has been hit harder than greater Minnesota and Minneapolis in particular. We are sitting at 18% occupancy last week, the highest we have had since March. We have lost 85% of our business this year and I think 350-400 cancellations with meetings and events in the city. That continues to roll forward. Now the first quarter is looking awfully rough. At a time when we have public trade shows, those might not be able to happen this year. Particularly with the 250 limit and place in a Minnesota and having things like the Salvation Army event happened this last week doesn't help that situation when people are not practicing wearing masks. That situation continues. As an organization we have lost about 23% of our budget. We are adjusting that way. We have lost 15 staff. They have been laid off. We don't anticipate any more layoffs, but we are sizing for the future. We have recovery plans and place that we hope when the time is right to get them started. In the meantime we have done a local effort to try to get locals to come to our businesses, small businesses, restaurants to make sure that they survive this pandemic. You see a little bit of spike in the weekends at our hotels which are very local, people want to get out of the house for some reason. Otherwise it's a tough situation in Minneapolis. Everyone is aware of the George Floyd situation and that has made things a little bit tougher for all of us. That is my update.

Thank you. Sorry to call on you first. I think it's important to talk about this, certain things are doing well, resorts and campgrounds. The metro area is severely impacted. We have to really understand that. When people think about what is going in Minneapolis, it is not the entire state, but that is the brand and the challenge we are having to deal with. How about, Nick Leonard? I see you on the call. What is going on up at ottetail?

Thank you. At least one other team members on here as well, but what we are noticing in this region is that, as your survey pointed out, smaller resorts and campgrounds did really well this summer. Some are up. The bigger you get as a resort or a hotel the more difficult of the year was. Obviously I think all restaurants were really challenged, my lot of retail were challenged. We are seeing some variability in terms of overall what the impact was. As a DMO, otter Lake, that represents the entire country, it works really well thanks to David Burkman, we have built a strong correlation between all of our communities, especially those with chambers in the community of collaborative. We have tried to work across the region to look at what are the various me and the other thing that we are, I'll be honest, we are very lucky. We have a strong partnership with the county. And so that relationship has allowed us to benefit from the cares act dollars that were available. We had a substantial allocation through cares funding that we are using to land grants to businesses and to chambers in addition to doing substantial marketing, to reposition the region. There in a pretty good -- we are in pretty good shape but we are so looking ahead. We've had a little bit of a windfall as a result of the care dollars, but how are chambers and an organizing like ours that is heavily member base going to continue to be able to provide the necessary revenue that we need to promote the region from a marketing standpoint?

Thank you. If I could follow up, you mentioned how your membership base, are you seeing challenges with retaining members? So many businesses are hurting right now.

I talked to the individual that oversees our membership yesterday and I will tell you, what the organization did and again in part because of the support through the cares dollars, the organization can't number ship and caught advertising in 2021 by 50%, they slashed it knowing that our businesses, restaurants, motels, they need the support. They slashed it to 50%. It is grown with membership and advertising. She has been unable to do that because it subsidized. I said to her, I was not going to work next year when people see essentially a 50% increase or 100% increase? She said, yeah, that's a concern of mine.

Very much a concern and a challenge for the future. Thank you. What about southern Minnesota? Sorry I'm calling on people that I know very well. I want to hear different perspectives from different parts of the state.

I'm happy to chime in. You know, Mankato has fared fairly well in the southern part of the state comparative to others outside of the northern part of the state. What we are doing, most of you probably know, we are housed with the greater Mankato growth which owns visit Mankato and that's the Chamber of Commerce and economic development, organization and our city center partnership. What we are doing is just aligning much more closely with each other and we are having discussions with our restaurants together rather than to visit Mankato talking to them and then the chamber. We are aligning our listening sessions together and advocating together. We are looking at how we are going to market to gather and leverage our financial resources to go further. In that respect it has been an eye-opening opportunity not only for the staff to continue to collaborate much more closely, but also for our volunteer leadership to understand how this can happen. And how we should be more deliberate about working across these areas and leveraging each other's expertise and resources. I would say that is something that we are doing differently moving forward then we have in the past.

and how has your organization fared in terms of less revenue, any staff changes?

Yeah. We are seeing a 54% caught in a revenue. That is a cut that has come primarily from the tax collections, but also the Mankato marathon is an event we own and has been a large part of our revenue. That was a virtual event this year so obviously that had a financial impact. I started the year with six end of ending with and likely that will stay working on two prism marketing going into at least the 12-18 months. What we are picking up and getting collaboration is getting support from other staff from other areas. Some of the slack is being picked up by some of those colleagues in the chamber industry or EDA industry and so forth. That's been helpful.

Good to know. Other comments from any of the other participants?

This is Cleone from Detroit Lakes. Early on the chamber, we caught some hours and cut some staff but we've added back pretty much the way it was. Our tourism Bureau is using the crisis grant dollars so thank you. Those are coming in a very helpful. We continue to advertise. We are dipping into our reserves. We have had news that they are getting bookings next year for meetings and weddings. Resorts and campgrounds did well after memorial day. Not being open for Memorial weekend for campgrounds really hurt them, but they've recovered well after that. Outdoor attractions were crazy busy this summer. Detroit Mountain rented out all their mountain bike equipment one weekend or

more and then one weekend Tamarack wildlife, they were crazy busy. Indoor attractions like home theater really struggled. They just cannot hold events. We are going to, we just had a discussion, we had to area of business that have exposure to the viruses so they had to close totally their business. Our chamber board this morning decided we are going into two shifts. The other three people is one shift and I'm the other shift. I'm going to be working from home just to avoid, we certainly don't want to close the chamber. We are going to start that out. As you all know we are 45 minutes from Fargo in the mask-less state. [Laughs] We continue to invite those people. We will take precautions to keep our staff healthy and keep the doors open.

Great. Thank you. One of the things you just talked about is the challenge with a lot of indoor establishments and how they will struggle given the certain protocols and restaurants in particular. They use to have outdoor seating. That's going to be a huge challenge. That leads me to the question to everybody, what are you seeing for this winter? What are you dreading the winter for? In terms of our industry it's going to be tremendous. We talked about this yesterday, but I would like to hear folks on this call. What they're thinking about in terms of what is ahead for this winter?

It's clearly a tough question.

Obviously. I hate to be calling on people. Whatever thoughts you have.

Obviously you are on a call most recently with that group as well. That is the group that is most concerned because their capacity limits being so, limited and not being able to have so many people and from what I understand even if they wanted to put space heaters out in some kind of outdoor seating, those can't even be purchased right now from what I understand. They're already gone out of the supply chain. So then what do they do? Doing whatever we can to try to increase capacity while doing so safely and looking at the events, the events they may be able to host in their larger facilities and then also that family peace or expanding how many people can be at a table was helpful. We got the response there but it was a challenge.

It certainly is. Any other thoughts?

This is Linda. I think there is a little bit of hesitance and restaurants investing in that move to put up tents and get heaters, not knowing with the growth now with COVID across the state, I think they're hesitant with making that investment and doing all of the heavy lifting to provide a service that might really look different, like no indoor seating. I know of the depleted supply of restaurants in northeastern Minnesota we are encouraging restaurants to do what they can to implement the curbside service again and whatever we can do to help with funding to get the systems and online reservations and ordering in place. That is the direction many are going.

From your perspective winter is looking good. People want to get outdoors and get away and escape. You are in the unique situation there with Lutsen.

Yeah. To that in your car, to put on your boots, they have implemented a seating hourly limit at the show lays so when you come and you are served, paid, everything at the table with the serving staff. There is a limit with the time, a ski bunny shall lay down, that's not going to occur.

Let's hope the weather is not too cold. That will force people to comment and do they even want to go outside?

Exactly.

Lots of snow and temperate weather. I think I saw somewhere that you had a comment.

Thank you. Park Rapids, thanks for putting this together. I think it's a great opportunity for us to visit. One thing we are running into of course with Brainerd as well, we are preparing for our committee fishing derbies which are significant. They are very large events we are very thankful that the DNR is trying to work with us to figure out how to do it instead of how not to do it. That is been very positive. Things are going to be different obviously. I don't think you will have this big warming tent on the ice, it doesn't fit the narrative with having people coming into a warm tanned with moisture and hanging out with large gatherings. It's going to create logistics and big difficulties with how do you get people from one place to the next? We are fortunately DNR is listening. If you have these events we have a big snowmobile race that we do in the month of January. We are preplanning for that. If you haven't started buying out to get ready for that obviously you have to roll. It's really tough stuff. I do want to say to explore Minnesota tourism, thank you for the crisis grant. It has been important for us and that has allowed us to market. We are fortunate. The summer we had most of Minneapolis and our core door. Thank you for coming and visiting. Our outdoor activities are our primary focus now. Itasca State Park was over the top busy this year. I think those outdoor activities and family safe activities is where we continue to focus. We hope to send them down to Minneapolis as soon as we can watch some sporting events. It's definitely been a trying summer, but overall or area did pretty well, but winter will be a tough one for us.

Talking about events, two days ago when we had a call a lot of events and attractions throughout Minnesota, they are uniquely challenged because in the past four explore Minnesota we try to help new events, but the existing events are struggling to survive. Can some of you talk about what is happening with your events? Where is there a need with future survival? Do you see a need for some sort of assistance for events?

Yes.

I knew I would get a comment on that one.

There is a "yes" or "no" in the bottom of the chat button word you can just the yes or no button if you are thinking about existing offense and needing support for those. The votes will come up on the participant list.

Also we've got a couple of questions about funding and basically who applied for care is funding, Mike Meyer is trying to figure out the funding stream, if it was local or does the state play a role. If you wanted to jump to that kind of question.

Does anyone want to talk about that? The process? Sometimes it's not that clear. How do you get care is funding? Through the state or through the County?

I can tell you what Park Rapids did. What we did is Hubbard County put together a cares act grant process for which they started very early and that cares act money unfortunately, most people have to have this money spent by the 1st of November and then it reverts back to the county and what they don't use goes back to the state. We had phase one, two, and three in the grand round where they awarded up to \$20,000 for business relief. And then they kind of change the calculation as to how

people could apply. The last and final round was for nonprofits. It was individually on a county by county basis and how the counties took the excess money they had left over from the cares act and applied it. Most often this quarter, most of them apply to grant process. Beltrami didn't have much money left. Clearwater, a lot of those counties had a grant process. That is how we did it. The chamber was very involved with helping them on that committee.

Thank you. I see a few comments in the chat box, a lot of you have gone through a similar process with working with the county. It sounds like in those brief comments that it was a relatively simple process. Or not?

I would say it was simple and with the application we applied for we learned, and that was in Blue Earth County, we are on the line between Blue Earth and Nicolet County. We have also helps get the word out to the businesses that there is cares act dollars there. They still had a big pot of money. We went after them asking for more. Our first round was \$10,000 and when you're \$70,000 short we definitely were hoping to get more to support the rest of our businesses.

I've had some discussions with commissioners, Steve grew up about that, we don't know if some of them will go through, but we did discuss the possibility of the cares money in the next round that we want to be seeing. A lot of state tourism agencies have been able to receive some of those dollars. I'm not talking about just marketing, grant programs, that is what we would use it for if were able to receive some of those dollars. A lot of stuff that you've done already we can maybe learn from.

We have another question. Did the county get it from the state or direct from the federal government?

Except for 2 County statewide, Ramsey and Hennepin, all of the funding came through the state. I think it was just Ramsey and Hennepin were the only two counties that received it directly along with, I think St. Paul and Minneapolis who received direct allocations because of their population.

All right. Need to include 501c6 in the next round. They were not eligible?

Not through our county or city. We were able to work with the city on some of our expenses and get a small amount of money, but so far the county has not included that.

Okay. While we are on the subject I did write to the state and I mentioned it in some of the industry meetings that hopefully if we get another shot down that they will consider chambers and CBCs essential businesses. We truly are essential with contacting our members, working for them, handing out to the PPE. To shutter our doors, I think it should be the other way around. I think they should help us keep them open.

Good point. We will make sure we note that in further discussions with officials or the governor's office. Let's move onto the next question. If we can just throw that out. This is about explore Minnesota. We have talked about some of the things that we been doing in the past, such as the crisis grant program for marketing. If we can pull up the next question. There we go. Basically given the situation that we are in right now, given the pandemic and of the struggles that you are all facing and knowing what you know about what we are doing, how can we as explore Minnesota best support the tourism industry? Support all love you? It's an open-ended question. There is a lot of different things we do. The overall marketing, grants, where do you need the most support?

Can I jump in?

Please.

I'm excited we have these proposals for additional funding. I think it's going to take all of us to, we have an election in a couple of weeks, it's going to take all of us to contact to those either directly or tell our story through the media about the impact on our industry. I don't know if Liz has a publicist or how she is on TV all the time but I think explore Minnesota and all of us can make a real effort, we have a window of time to talk about the impact on all of our organizations and the people that not only our organization, but our industry. We have lost 16,000 hospitality jobs in the state of Minneapolis alone. We have a window here to amplify this information that could hopefully benefit us all at the legislator next year. I know she is a trade association state agency but I think if we can dial up the message. I don't know. Maybe we need to get you a publicist, John. I know you can't advocate necessarily the way we can for this money. Anyway that we can advocate for these dollars, if it looks like it's possible should be happening in the next three months.

Thank you. First of all, that's the beauty of the explore Minnesota tourism Council. A lot of those requests I can advocate that is from the Council. it takes all of us to get those messages out, hospitality, Liz, tourism growth coalition which has done a great job on our behalf. I was talking to them yesterday about some of the things we are asking for. It will take all of us. One question that I think goes from your comment. We are having some discussion about, I guess, I hesitate to use the word advocacy, but information sharing. We have been doing that throughout the last several years. We've been doing that cereal box that basically gives them a hand to elected officials. You can go to pretty much any legislator, Congressional office and he will see that. This year it's a very different situation. The data, we are seeing 16 billion but that is two years ago. We can take information from the Department of revenue, but it just seems that it's tone-deaf to what is happening. We have been talking about, do we need a tool like that and do we need to change the messaging to talk to elected officials about the tremendous impact that this pandemic is having on our industry? Before we move forward with the cereal box, we wanted to get your input. Should we shelve it? Should we come up with something different or should we change the message to reflect what is going on today? Your thoughts.

I see Courtney. You go first.

We were saying the same thing. It is much eloquently than mine. I do think that there, we never want to be accused of hyperbole or over exaggerating more things like that, but I think there is a starkness and a bleakness that as the eternal optimist that we are and those who like to sell happy things. I tell people I'm not trying to sell cigarettes to kids, I sell joy and that's an amazing thing to do. When you can't do it whether because it's unsafe or there is restrictions or there aren't people there, it really does create this bleakness and it kind of tones down those memories and adds to this continual challenge or sadness or lack of experiences or connectivity that we are seeing. I do think that, this is the time to put all the bright siding away. Whether it's the cereal box or a different medium that is visual that kind of shows what this looks like for the types of things people know but there is a reason when you go to a charity gala you have someone story on the screen. It does move you. I think it's hard because we don't want to say how bad some things are. At the same time we may need to get to that uncomfortable spot in order to get some movement. Yes. If you need someone to say do something different, not as boastful about the organization, industry, painting a dire picture, I would say yes.

Thank you. The reason we did a cereal box and the reason it's so effective is unlike a video, you look at once and he forget about it, the brochure you throw away, this is something you put on a shelf. To think something like that should continue?

It's only one-third full.

We had a comment, we need to do a single-serving box. That is all that is left.

Single-serving box. Be ago I think it has to be something that is definitely different. It can't lineup the same. I know some of them collect cereal boxes and they have them lined up, but this has to be different and stand out. I would agree with Courtney. and the way I have, I've seen these comments coming from the side as I've been working with folks in the last few weeks, comments that seem to apply, people think tourism is just sugar, the cherry on top, it's just fluff. Not really understand the long-term impacts of our industry on the decline in the long climb out unless we get the boost that we need and support. Somehow we've got to, and I thought the pandemic would do that and to this absolute crash in our industry would wake people up to the importance, but it seems to have disappeared if it was there. I think the research and the information you are talking about is going to be critical to try to drive home what the long-term impact is especially unless there is support given now.

The cereal box concepts, I'm hearing very clearly that we need to think of something different and to really get that message about what is happening with our industry that is not this bright and cheery industry that it's always been. We need to think of something else, but the reason I wanted to get your input, you are the one that most uses it. You talk to your elected official. We want to do something that you think is affected, the right tone. We were questioning, should we do with the same way this year? I don't think so. It has to be different.

I think the single-serving box would make a statement in and of itself. The form factor could be mentioned in a different way. They could still be as impactful.

Courtney, not the creative guy, but you could have the tourism with the \$16 billion industry and then a Band-Aid in front of it showing that we lost \$5.4 billion. there's a lot of ways to do it. We just recently hired a new P.R. agency. Were not ready to announce it yet. We have doubled the amount we put into that. One of the things that we like about their proposal was the way they're dealing with crisis communication. We have to talk in an entirely different way that we have any past.

May be it's a mask instead of a Band-Aid.

There you go. This is what I like about these conversations, all these creative ideas. Back to the overall question. What are the other things you think that explore Minnesota tourism should be focusing on? In terms of marketing? Marketing different seasons? Focusing on conventions, partnership marketing, the grant program. Where do you most need help from us? Or where do you feel that we shouldn't be putting in our effort. Unfortunately I see her face here on the screen. I see you.

I'm assuming you are putting all international marketing on the shelf for now and that makes sense. I think we are seeing some of your plans for winter that you shared. I just think you are in charge of the recovery plan so having that ready to go when the time is right and the second that you travel is greater than it is now in the regions that you currently market. Until that time it's going to be around the state. I don't know about this, you know, Minneapolis has a reputation come I don't know if it's extended to the

state of Minnesota by what's happened here this summer, but that is something we have to consider dealing with here in the metro area.

I think we are all in this spirit particularly the farther you get away people just think of that, what is going on in the local area and extended to the entire state. I think whatever P.R. recovery we have to do it has to touch on the entire state because we are all in this together. One thing I just saw, this is very much in keeping with what Minneapolis is doing with your, we need us campaign. We are really trying to, were going to do this in November shortly after the election, around Thanksgiving time. We want to thank Minnesotans for supporting hospitality businesses. They have been keeping our industry afloat. They probably will for a short period of time. We want to instill consumer confidence to say it is okay to go to your local shop and restaurant. You have to put a mask on and social distance, it's okay to go to a restaurant, resort. That campaign has a certain life that we are going to be running. Did I see John Scholz? Are you on the call? He is the person behind the campaign. Maybe we can provide more information to you after this call. Stay tuned for that. I see that campaign, that messaging going on all throughout the state.

Jean has a comment.

Good morning. Thank you to Nicole for reminding me. I asked this a couple of weeks ago. This year you have not charged us for lead generation and that has been really helpful. I'm sure that's a different dollar figure for each community. Our lead requests have been up to this year as people are dreaming from their computers. The quality of those leads from the partnership has been a lot better than I've seen in the past because I've had very few return to sender addresses. Anything we can do to continue that at a reduced or free cost would be really helpful.

Great. Thank you. We've been talking about how we can possibly do that. There has been and were trying to make adjustments, we have to bring in certain dollars from the private sector and were probably not going to hit our match necessarily. We are looking to change that because we do feel it, we hear you. You need help. We are hoping to do that.

Thank you.

I can add to that. We are going to extend that until the end of June for sure. I mean, if you're looking at budget, you know, if it's important to you I would earmark some money. We will have to assess it. That's as far as we can go at this time. Thank you, and on. We will let you know as the 2021 progresses. We are happy that it's providing so many leads, substantially, and we have more communities engaged with that program. It's all good. The reason you're getting better leads, people do have to fill out the thing, that is more or less verifying that they are real. I'm glad to hear that. Thank you.

Thank you.

Can I just add a comment going back to the messaging piece? I don't know if you were on that call when our CEO brought up a comment that had come from our local restaurants when we had listening sessions with them and that being about the negative messaging that is coming out in the AP press and saying, here's the list of all the restaurants that have hot spots now. People immediately are stopping going to especially those restaurants or retracting from going out dining at all. That is why I think the messaging you are doing to talk about this is okay. And from what I understand it really is the primarily, the bars that are ones that are struggling, the late-night activity that is happening at those bars. There is

drinking and inhibitions that may be causing more of that spread as opposed to just a family restaurant. I know that's a struggle and I know there was a list that was released last week and there were a number of Mankato restaurants there. There were a few others, but that is hard. It's hard on our businesses.

This campaign that we are doing, there will be a television spot. We are using images which we are finalizing getting the permission from the users, real Minnesotans experiencing attractions, bars, restaurants and things like that. It's not just focused on that, its outdoor resorts and things like that. We do want to kind of subtly reinforce that it's okay. If you're safe, you social distance, we have images with people with masks, I know that's a hot button with folks. We do have images showing that people are living in this pandemic, there are still trying to function and they're still trying to support our businesses. We want to thank them for that.

Thank you.

Linda again. One place if at all possible is the Canadian border, continuing to be closed until November 21st. That points to international travel and I don't know if explore Minnesota can influence the tourism principles they are or not it might be worth reaching out. Canadian traffic throughout the state is significant. It's nonexistent right now. Maybe the message of, it's okay to travel here because we're being as safe as we can be. I'm not sure. Definitely something where we could use some help.

Right. Noted.

Want to comment. You guys have done a nice job with education and there is a lot of good education floating around within the tourism industry. One thing I think about one of the webinars I listen to on Tuesday, the comment was made about how people are hurting, people have been laid off, people are overworked. The COVID thing has been hard on the human spirit. It's interesting how business affects personal and personal effects business. It would be interesting to have education or something dealing with the human spirit. We are so different as tourism organizations based on North, South, Metro, everything. One thing is we are all human beings. I wonder if it would be helpful to have some expertise working with us on, I don't know if it would be motivation for something to help the human spirit during a time like this that could help the existing people we have within Minnesota tourism to become more effective and stay up.

You are suggesting something relative to a webinar to have someone lead us through that process?

Perhaps. Given the example. We have more of a motivational speaker, goalsetting and different things. That was a little bit different than dealing with marketing or rooms, it was more of the personal side of what we do. I suppose in today's world it would be a webinar I'm guessing.

I am just noticing, a lot of Zoom calls you can see people's reactions, Beth was reacting to your comment because right now we are in the process of planning the tourism conference which will be a virtual conference. We are looking, we haven't made final decisions on speakers yet. If you have specific things on that, give that's too Beth. That is something we can certainly consider adding to the events.

Thank you.

Thank you. Unless there is anything else specifically about explore Minnesota, let's go to the third and final question in the interest of time. The third question really kind of goes beyond what you are doing, what explore Minnesota is doing. What, any other concerns you would like to communicate to others? I

heard about this a little bit during the last discussion, border closing, care funding. This gets outside of explore Minnesota, but I want to hear other issues we should be communicating to others. I want to remind you the results from this webinar, the summary of the comments will be sent to the Commissioner and I will have a discussion with him about that as well as the governor's office. Regarding the broader issues of what we should be communicating to others in the state, specifically with the administration.

This is Butch from Park Rapids. I think we have to focus on us from the state of Minnesota from a mental health standpoint. With the winter months, if this continues to carry on, this is having a significant impact on our kids, families, mental health. Finding a message that can be out there, sharing from explore Minnesota tourism, we can still do things with families. We can still do some things in a safe environment, trying to convey that. We have to take care of ourselves first before we worry about if they come from Italy or wherever. Within the state, how do we make ourselves and our own state healthy and support each other, mental health and making sure. This is having a significant impact on kids. My daughter's are educators. The impact of the family is tremendous. It tugs hard. Any time you can add to that and how they can do things in the state of Minnesota to make their family healthy, it will be very important.

Thank you. What I heard from that is you are talking about the messaging from explore Minnesota. Specifically it should be focused on Minnesota. We are not going as far as we have in the past, but we tell Minnesotans it's okay to support these businesses. I think it goes beyond explore Minnesota, trying to convey those messages to others. We were talking about care funding. The majority is a large portion went to the Department of Health. In other states that went to state tourism offices, to sell tourism as well as health together, we are separating that. If we can get more messaging and health department messaging, you can be safe and still have fun. It would be a good message to convey. Is that what you're saying? Got it. Thank you. Other comments? Any further thoughts about protocols or things going on with what you can and cannot? This is going into the difficult area for us. We want things to open up, but we want things to be safe too. That is the dilemma we are in right now. Protocols, meetings, restaurants.

The thing about masks and to the enforcement of masks is going to become, it is an issue. I've had two calls in the last week, someone who stayed at a hotel where housekeeping was going in and out of her room and not wearing a mask. The other one was a restaurant. I come back to the Salvation Army thing. That does not go well for us trying to promote large sized events or meetings or weddings. Unless there is no enforcement around masks. The people that made those complaints said they talked to the Department of Health and said we are not enforcing that. You can make your complaint or your issue. I agree with Butch, we have to focus on getting Minnesotans to think about Minnesota. Business owners are not going to enforce or make sure that, not just cleanliness protocol is in place, but mask wearing is in place. The situation with the Salvation Army. I do think that's an issue and it's going to become more of an issue over time.

We need some sort of enforcement. Some sort of mechanism.

It safe to travel. it's safe to stay in a hotel. I think we do.

Thank you. Or safe to go to a meeting.

Anything else? Any follow-up questions from any of my staff at all? Unless there is any other comments, we don't want to be one and done, if you have any thoughts about what we are doing, what we should be communicating, we want to hear from that. Whether it's a call like this or any other format moving forward. We really appreciate your input and your thoughts. There is going to be another call this afternoon. I don't know if any of you, think of something you forgot to say or wanted to say, you will have an opportunity later on to make those comments. Anything further, Nicole? Beth? Thank you, everybody for being a part of today's call. It was a great discussion. I really appreciate it. It will be a difficult road ahead, but working together we can overcome as best as we can read thank you very much. Have a great rest of your day.