Visit Bend Business & Marketing Plan FY2024 (text-only)

1: Acknowledging History

While Bend is breathtakingly beautiful, there's history that isn't so pretty. The Indigenous tribes of this region fished, hunted, and recreated on these lands for generations before any of us donned skis or dropped a kayak in the Deschutes.

That history is not lost on us, and we recognize we're inhabiting and recreating on the traditional lands of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, Wascoes, and Paiutes. We are working to acknowledge their experiences and their relationship to this land.

2: Introduction

Visit Bend contributes to a vibrant community through initiatives in tourism and hospitality that affect the economic, social, and environmental health of the town and its environment.

Driven by the transformational power of human relationships, the inclusion of diverse voices, and a desire to preserve the land for which we are all stewards, Visit Bend is a local and national catalyst for tourism management with a positive impact.

In a world consumed by possessions rather than experiences, the Visit Bend team strives to amplify voices of those working toward a welcoming Bend for future generations.

COMMUNITY VOICE

Visit Bend strives to be a leader in destination management globally and to protect what makes Bend a world-class destination: the environment, community, and the visitor experience.

— Todd Montgomery, Board Chair

Guiding Principles

Economic

We inspire visitors to engage with local businesses and the community, generating returns to the city's general fund to support vital city services.

Social

We strive to nurture a safe and supportive community that is inclusive and welcoming.

Environmental

We partner with community organizations and actively work toward environmental responsibility and sustainability.

COMMUNITY VOICE

"COTA's grant from the Bend Sustainability Fund allowed us to complete the final section of the new 11-mile Cascade View trail system. When you see a mountain biker or hiker on the Cascade View trails with a huge smile on their face, that's the impact of the Bend Sustainability Fund." — Emmy Andrews, Executive Director, Central Oregon Trail Alliance

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3: Successes From Fiscal Year 2023

In FY23, Visit Bend strengthened its commitment to long-term sustainability. Thanks to record tourism activity and lodging tax revenue, Visit Bend increased the percentage of funds allocated to its two grant programs, the Bend Sustainability Fund (BSF) and the Bend Cultural Tourism Fund (BCTF), deepening visitors' positive impact. As Visit Bend resumed marketing activities, new inspirational content allowed visitors to connect with Bend, while new partnerships with organizations like Leave No Trace and Embrace Bend solidified Visit Bend's commitment to community.

COMMUNITY VOICE

"Visit Bend is a leader in Oregon in reaching visitors and residents with critical Leave No Trace messaging that is proven to influence positive, recreation-related behavior change. They have inspired other destinations in Oregon to follow in their footsteps and amplify these important messages." — Faith Overall, Community Engagement Manager, Leave No Trace

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Marketing

In FY23, Visit Bend restarted its consumer-facing marketing efforts following a long hiatus from the COVID-19 pandemic. As we sought to balance positive economic, social, and environmental impacts, our marketing strategy focused largely on mid-funnel stages.

Building off of new partnerships with Leave No Trace and Protect Our Winters, Visit Bend redoubled its commitment to the environment, while building relationships with groups devoted to equality issues in our community, including Embrace Bend and The Father's Group. These commitments brought fresh balance and social responsibility to our toolkit as we continued delivering industry-leading metrics. The Visit Bend team also brought content creation in-house, creating more efficient use of room tax dollars while allowing us to provide more value to community stakeholders and organizations.

Based on data collected by the Tourism Sentiment Index (TSI), Bend is one of the most highly-indexed communities in the world, with a positive reputation among visitors and locals alike. These metrics are based on billions of conversations happening around the web and analyzed to create this index.

High Level Numbers From FY23

- Website traffic to visitbend.com was up 112.68% year over year (YOY).
- Website users were up 29.75% YOY, while the number of engaged sessions increased 197%.
- At the time of publication, Visit Bend has produced more than 30 videos highlighting local businesses, places, and people making this place special, which is well above our targeted goals for content creation.
- Visit Bend's influencer marketing campaign has seen nearly 10,000% return on investment. With just over $100,000 spent, the media value is estimated at more than $10,000,000.

COMMUNITY VOICE

"Visit Bend is a tremendous partner in all we do. Not only do they help support the various businesses in the Old Mill District and events at Hayden Homes Amphitheater, but they make sure guests to Bend know the values of our community. Programs like the Bend Cultural Tourism Fund and Bend Sustainability Fund are fantastically innovative programs that not only benefit tourists, but support the arts and outdoors for all of us that call Central Oregon home." — Beau Estes, Marketing Director, The Old Mill | Hayden Homes Amphitheater

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Bend Sustainability Fund

During FY23, the Bend Sustainability Fund (BSF) invested $1.45 million into nine projects creating sustainable experiences in and around Bend. We also celebrated the completion of six BSF projects this year. Since its inception, BSF has awarded $2,290,000 to 17 projects.

Visit Bend's Bend Sustainability Fund grant to Petrich Properties for The Catalyst project proved to be more than just a grant. It became a catalyst of its own, bringing together land owners, business owners, local nonprofits and the City of Bend to save a business, protect local jobs, and to serve as a cornerstone for the envisioned Bend Central District. The project is just one example of Visit Bend reinvesting Transient Room Tax (TRT) to benefit all who spend time in Bend, galvanizing diverse groups around a common goal.

COMMUNITY VOICE

"Because of Visit Bend's grant program, we are creating a community gathering spot that will also include the iconic Spoken Moto Pine Shed building and business. The Bend Sustainability Fund helped move the Catalyst Project from concept to

reality, while also bringing invaluable energy, publicity, and optimism to the Central District from all corners of the Bend community." — Kurt Alexander, The Catalyst

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Bend Cultural Tourism Fund

During FY23, the Bend Cultural Tourism Fund (BCTF) invested $400,000 in 19 cultural events and projects, helping local organizations leverage marketing resources to attract more cultural tourists during the off-season and enhancing arts and culture offerings in Bend. The program started in 2015 and historically funds between $200,000 and $400,000 per year. This seventh round of awards pushed the total BCTF funding over the $1.5 million-dollar mark, infusing local organizations with $1,628,335 in total.

Strategic Partnerships

Visit Bend invested $100,000 into seven organizations in FY23, providing substantial financial support to organizations working to enhance Bend's future as a sustainable, economically vibrant, livable, and inclusive destination.

COMMUNITY VOICE
"Visit Bend goes above and beyond to ensure its strategic partners have the resources needed to succeed. From helping to amplify advocacy opportunities, to teaching our team to enhance the visibility of our website, the level of support it provides is unmatched. COLW's Strategic Partnership with Visit Bend is having a marked impact on Bend's future as an economically vibrant and sustainable destination." — Corie Harlan, Cities and Towns Program Manager, Central Oregon LandWatch

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Economic Impact

Travel spending in Bend increased 13.6%, from $336.3 million in 2021 to $382.2 million in calendar year 2022.

Tax receipts generated by travel spending increased to $25.4 million, up 13.5% over 2021.

Accounted for 12.9% of total employment in Bend in 2021.

4: Visit Bend's Economic, Environmental, and Social Sustainability Model

Visit Bend is a small but mighty group of passionate people (and dogs) who still get goosebumps as they glimpse the Cascades peeking out over the high desert. Humbly behind the scenes, but deeply networked, the Visit Bend group is a curious, quiet, steady force to be reckoned with. We've chosen a new lane in the tourism sector — a new "why" that is less about self-promotion and more "let's do this because it is the right thing" — when it comes to supporting the place we call home. Visit Bend strives to tell the story of improving a destination and managing visitors in ways that are meaningful to residents and visitors. We do this through research, relationships, and strategic communications that both disrupt and influence how people think about the industry. Considering all humans are visitors on these lands, Visit Bend values a bigger picture of health for the community. We believe if you love Bend, you might also love travelers, since we are all travelers at heart.

Seeking Balance

Economy:
Tax Revenue
Consumer Spending
Wages Earned

People:
Supported Workforce
Resident Sentiment
Guest Satisfaction

Place:
Environmental Stewardship
Responsible Recreation
Thriving Spaces

5: Marketing Strategy

[Economy]

Visit Bend has evolved to focus on a broader scope of work that ultimately benefits us all through sustainability.

There is no doubt that visitors contribute in many ways that make Bend better for all and we don't have to look much further than the positive economic impact they provide. When visitors stay in a hotel or short-term rental, they pay an overnight tax which then becomes available for unrestricted budgetary needs.

This economic activity — along with the goal to maximize returns to the city's general fund – drives the economic portion of Bend's sustainable model. We understand a strong visitor economy is critical to the city's health and vibrancy. This year's evolved marketing strategy keeps these needs in mind as we strive to attract new guests while ensuring Bend remains top-of-mind for repeat visitors.

COUNCIL GOAL ALIGNMENT

Use art and creativity to provoke thought, challenge assumptions, and shape how we define our narrative as a city.

In FY24, Visit Bend will launch a new campaign to have a broader impact at the awareness stage of the visitor journey, offering more in-depth targeting and measurement tools.

COUNCIL GOAL ALIGNMENT

Increase efficiency and transparency through open data, publicly available dashboards, and reporting.

To have a larger impact with FY24's smaller budget, nearly all outbound paid marketing efforts from Visit Bend will focus on markets in Portland, OR and Seattle, WA. This brings the added benefit of curtailing the carbon footprint required for travel to Bend.

We're also taking a more targeted approach to our messaging and demographic targeting, including who is served what messaging at certain times of the year or days of the week.

Primary Marketing Goals + Action Items

1. Produce industry-leading, inspirational, and thoughtful content that properly represents the diverse and growing community.
    a. Actively increase inclusion and representation of more community members and organizations across Visit Bend's entire body of creative work, which will assist in breaking down the barriers of entry to outdoor recreation in/around Bend.
    b. Better communicate with contracted partners, content creators, and influencers to increase education and awareness.
2. Maintain Bend's ranking on the International Tourism Sentiment Index.
    a. Ensure digital communications actively represent the area, visitors, and locals so that all groups can see how they personally benefit from tourism and travel.
    b. Utilize influencer partnership and unique media partners to tell the story of Bend's broad tourism offerings.
3. Build upon strategic partnerships to create equitable marketing assets incorporating responsible, educational messaging across the entire body of Visit Bend's creative work, which represents a destination where everyone feels welcome.
    a. Work with local social justice groups to create support networks for influencers and media partners when they're in town.
    b. Strengthen communications through strategic partnerships and relationships with business owners.

6: Environmental Strategy

[Place]

At Visit Bend, our environmental strategy intertwines with our two other pillars of sustainability: economic and social. Our community depends on all three, and it's vital to balance them.

The foundation of a sustainable and thriving destination is its underlying resources. For Bend, these include open spaces, rivers and trails, mountains, buttes, and green spaces. It's crucial to nurture, respect, and invest in these resources with a big-picture, long-term view and a collaborative effort with diverse stakeholders.

We are working to enhance these resources by first identifying the challenges, along with the individuals and organizations best equipped to mitigate and problem-solve them. We then make investments in one of two ways.

Moving into FY24, we will continue to reinvest TRT dollars into the places and spaces that create sustainable experiences in our community through the Bend Sustainability Fund.

We will also continue to fund partners who help us achieve our environment goals through our Strategic Partnership program.

COUNCIL GOAL ALIGNMENT

Connect with local regional partners, including Warm Springs, on issues of shared interest.

Visit Bend is working to develop educational tools, share resources, and encourage thoughtful behavior for all who spend time in and around Bend. We're also looking at our organization's carbon footprint with the goal of being carbon neutral in the next fiscal year.

COUNCIL GOAL ALIGNMENT

Explore opportunities for programs that reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Primary Environmental Goals + Action Items

1. Develop and promote sustainable tourism practices that minimize negative impact on the environment and encourage conservation and protection of local resources.
    a. Use an environmentally conscious filter — from sourcing to messaging — in all of Visit Bend's marketing.
    b. Use media outlets and speaking opportunities to help share the work of Visit Bend, encouraging sustainable and thoughtful recreation.
2. Support and partner with organizations working to find solutions to the challenges facing Bend as a sustainable destination.
    a. Continue strategic partnerships with Leave No Trace, POW, Central Oregon LandWatch, The Conservation Alliance, and others.
    b. Continue to reinvest in the community through the Bend Sustainability Fund.
3. Foster and support sustainable and carbon-neutral business practices within the industry.

a. Implement sustainable and carbon-neutral business practices within the organization.
b. Advocate for stakeholders to implement carbon reduction policies.

7: Social Impact Strategy

[People]

As Bend becomes more diverse, Visit Bend is committed to ensuring every person feels valued and accepted, whether they're a first-time visitor or a lifelong resident. It is through this lens that we aim to meet the evolving needs of the community and build connections between visitors, community members, and tourism stakeholders, fostering a welcoming and inclusive Bend.

COUNCIL GOAL ALIGNMENT

Recruit and retain a diverse work-force that reflects the community.

Workforce Development

In August 2022, Visit Central Oregon and Visit Bend collaborated on a shared staff position that focuses on workforce development and community engagement. Although workforce challenges have existed in Central Oregon for years, this is the first role dedicated to developing strategies to support the industry's workforce.

Some highlights of the work accomplished in FY23 include meetings with more than 40 regional industry stakeholders — including chambers of commerce, DMOs, resorts, lodging partners, elected officials, attractions and educational institutions — to better understand their needs, challenges, and current strategies. These meetings paved the way for projects like a partnership with Bend Boys & Girls Club for Workforce Wednesday, an eight-week summer program to educate middle school youth on career paths in tourism.

In February 2023, Visit Central Oregon and Visit Bend collaborated with Oregon State University on a workforce needs assessment, surveying the industry on the challenges of filling job vacancies and training Central Oregon's tourism workforce. Using this information, both organizations will explore developing and/or sponsoring training opportunities to help support and retain employees.

COMMUNITY VOICE

"The Leisure and Hospitality industry is a key driver of Central Oregon's economy, with more than 14,500 people working in the sector. In addition to the jobs it generates, the Leisure and Hospitality sector attracts robust investments from visitors from outside the area, making it essential to our thriving economy. That is why I am so excited that Visit Bend/Visit Central Oregon created a dedicated workforce development position to ensure this important industry gets the talent necessary to thrive." — Heather Ficht , Executive Director, East Cascades Works

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Strategic Partners

Visit Bend invests in partner organizations working to secure Bend's future as a sustainable, economically vibrant, livable, and inclusive destination. By aligning ourselves with the mission, vision, and work of these groups, Visit Bend can publicly support and/or advocate for the issues affecting Bend, our community, residents, and visitors.

Learn more about our Strategic Partners here:
https://www.visitbend.com/strategic-partners/

Three key areas of funding

Climate Change and Sustainability

Partners include:

- Protect Our Winters
- The Conservation Alliance
- Leave No Trace (LNT)
- Central Oregon LandWatch

Access and Inclusion

Partners include:

- Embrace Bend
- The Deschutes Trails Coalition

Tribally Led Initiatives

Partners include:

- Warm Springs Community Action Team (WSCAT)

Bend Cultural Tourism Fund

Without cultural events and the folks who make them happen, Bend wouldn't have the robust and captivating arts and culture scene it's known for across Oregon. That's the value of the BCTF, a grant program operated by Visit Bend and funded through transient room tax dollars.

With a focus on events that attract and celebrate diversity and inclusion, the BCTF was created to enhance Bend's economy through cultural tourism. From musical productions to art exhibits to film festivals and more, the BCTF supports cultural opportunities that draw visitors to Bend, while also providing enriching programming for locals.

COMMUNITY VOICES
"Bend Design started because of a grant from the Bend Cultural Tourism Fund. We are fortunate to have a destination organization like Visit Bend who cares so deeply about arts and culture. To have over $2 million dollars allocated to local arts and culture organizations through the BCTF in the past 7 years has been vital to the health and vibrancy of the arts community in Bend and the region." — René Mitchell, Bend Design Founder

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Primary Social Impact Goals + Action Items

1. Foster community engagement and inclusion by providing opportunities for local residents to participate in and benefit from the tourism industry.
    a. Promote cultural events and activities highlighting the diversity of the community both through the BCTF and in day-to-day communications of Visit Bend.
    b. Support educational and employment opportunities for tourism industry workforce, with a focus on underrepresented groups by engaging with strategic partners.
2. Create a culture within the organization that takes into account perspectives of historically marginalized groups.
    a. Expand opportunities for education and learning about the breadth of lived experiences.
    b. Use media outlets and speaking opportunities to amplify the voice and work of community partners.
3. Strengthen our relationships with local organizations, community groups, and residents to strive for a long-term welcoming and equitable Bend.

a. Collaborate with OSU's Sustainable Tourism Lab to obtain qualitative data that informs Visit Bend's efforts to reflect the needs and values of the local community.
b. Use owned media channels to share best practices for all who spend time in Bend.

8: Looking Forward

Visit Bend is transforming what it means to be a destination marketing organization, and in doing so, expanding our definition of success. We are no longer focused only on monthly lodging revenue numbers, but on the long term success of our destination, industry, and community. We are committed to people and place, to serving the needs of our industry, our community, and our environment, within the guardrails of local state statutes. By challenging the status quo, we strive to be better.

Shaping Bend's future is a job for all of us. Visit Bend can't do it alone, and we will lean on partners and experts in areas like climate change, social justice, and inclusion. We strive for a version of Bend that balances short-term desires with long-term priorities.

We're deeply devoted to tending the top-notch team we've built. From enhanced employee benefits to valuing each member's contributions to the team — and to Bend as a whole — we will retain and reward the best and brightest talent.

The biggest certainty for Bend's future is that this town will continue to change. While some may miss Bend of 10 or 20 years ago, our future depends on our ability to evolve. Visit Bend believes every human who wishes to experience Bend should be allowed to do so in a safe, supportive, and responsible way, while doing no harm to our environment or its inhabitants.

Among industry stakeholders and community members, there will always be those who disagree on every point except one: We *all* love Bend.

That's not a bad starting point to find common ground. Visit Bend is committed to using our team's time, talent, energy, and resources to support a future for Bend that is sustainable, economically vibrant, livable, and inclusive..

9: Appendix

Visit Bend is currently operating under a contract with the City of Bend to provide the following scope of work, defined as:

Visit Bend is responsible for the deployment of City of Bend room tax funds designated for tourism promotion and tourism related facility development via Visit Bend as defined in the contract.

Operating as a full-service DMO, Visit Bend is tasked with creating and placing tourism promotion content, developing Bend as a tourism destination, administering grants, performing research on industry trends, and operating a visitor center. These efforts seek to meet the needs of the local lodging industry in enhancing Bend's tourism industry while maximizing room tax revenue for the City of Bend.

The supporting data below is what guides Visit Bend as an organization in doing work that has a positive impact on the industry and community.

Budget FY24

Visit Bend and the City of Bend's finance department is forecasting flat year-over-year Transient Room Tax collections. This year's budget balances a significant decrease in revenue with increased needs across all three pillars of the organization's work.

In FY24, the City of Bend is forecasting total Transient Room Tax Collections of $14,819,700. The portion allocated under contract to Visit Bend is to be $5,216,300 (less a 2% processing fee to the city) which will be reinvested in accordance with Oregon State Statute and Bend City Code into Tourism Promotion and Tourism-Related Facilities. The remainder of the collections are allocated to the City's General Fund and Police + Fire. Total revenue for the organization, which also includes advertising sales, retail sales, and interest income totals $5,216,374.

As a not-for-profit organization, Visit Bend operates a budget on a break-even basis. In FY24, Visit Bend is budgeting $5,216,258 of expenses, which includes:

- $2,868,676 to Marketing
- $271,325 to Visitor Development
- $383,400 to the Bend Cultural Tourism Fund
- $889,196 to the Bend Sustainability Fund
- $449,194 to operate the Visitor Center

- $354,467 to General + Operating Expenses

Transient Room Tax Collections

Transient Room Tax (TRT) serves as the primary measurement of the ebbs and flows of the tourism industy. Due to the demand-driven nature of the industry, which is heavily impacted by economic and environmental disruption, TRT is a blended metric of rate and occupancy, effectively approximating the overall demand for the destination's lodging inventory.

In the City of Bend, a TRT of 10.4% is levied on all overnight stays of less than 30 days and is collected by our lodging operators. That money is then remitted to the city on a montly basis, where approximately 35% is reinvested into the promotion of tourism and tourism-related facilities under a contract with Visit Bend, and the remaining 65% is allocated to the city's general fund and police + fire. Transient room tax collections make up nearly 14% of the city's general fund, with about 85% going to police + fire, 10% to streets, and 5% to other core services. In FY23, visitors, through the taxes they pay on their stays, will contribute nearly $10 million to the City of Bend's general fund.

Additional data sources to measure performance:

- **Zartico:** A Destination Operating System which aggregates and tracks lodging data, visitor spending, marketing campaign performance, and geolocation data
- **OSU Sustainable Tourism Lab:** A partnership with Visit Bend establishing a benchmark to track resident sentiment of tourism through annual community surveys over the coming years
- **Tourism Sentiment Index (TSI):** A real-time reporting tool that tracks visitor sentiment based upon billions of conversations across social and web platforms
- **Smith Travel Research:** Transformative data software that delivers weekly and monthly insights within the hotel and motel industry
- **AirDNA:** Statistically valid data delivered monthly providing insights to track the health of the short-term rental industry in Bend
- **Dean Runyan Associates:** Annual, city-level economic impact data relevant to travel and tourism in Bend