

Explore Minnesota Tourism Council Meeting

**Tuesday,
June 9, 2026
Virtual Meeting**

Council Members:

Ashlee Ciora, Beth Fischer, Beth Pierce, Colleen Smith, Courtney Ries, Ed Hoffman, Frank Soukup, Heidi Swank, Kate Setley, Laurie Staiger, Marianna Khauv, Mike Schwieters, Molly Luther, Nick Leonard, Paul Larsen, Rachel Thompson, Shannon McKeeth

Explore Minnesota Staff: Lauren Bennett McGinty, Kat Sutton, Beth Helle, Chelsea Fey, Dawn Blanchard, Derek Ramthun, Frances Fyten, Gretchen Nussbaum, Jen Schak, Julie Ramer, Karina Hill, Lyndsey Hanson, Nell Lawrenz-Wareham, Nicole Lalum, Randolph Briley, Shannon Lukes Hauser, Lydia Hollingsworth, Sean Lydon

Other Attendees:

Lisa Anderson, Nick DiLorenzo, Sam Voss

Travel + Livability Marketing (Marketing) **FY2027 Marketing Plans**

What we're continuing

- Star of the North strategy
 - Lots of momentum and success
 - Push to niche bundles: culture and outdoors
 - To increase brand awareness of Minnesota as a destination
 - Lights on livability, resident retention initiatives
- Expand in-house video and photo capabilities
 - Organize assets in an easier way for better partnerships with DMOs
- Building out Destinations
 - Formerly known as Places (11 micro regions) to direct eyes to all parts of the state
 - More itineraries developed
 - Launching a Substack to reach a different demographic
 - Can be repackaged for other channels
 - Launching in the next few weeks
 - Also launching Tribal Nations navigation and landing pages in early CY2027
 - Continuing to optimize paid targeting and conversion goals
 - Evaluate the largest ROI to better understand efficacy
 - What measures are success and what are the right metrics to move the needle in visitation and spend

What we're starting

- Algorithms are changing – requiring new strategy for website and socials
 - Learning as much as we can and modifying as we go so that we surface to those who are interested in traveling to Minnesota
- Exploring more partnerships to share content regarding resident attraction and retention
 - Real estate groups and HR directors as potential first targets
- Recharging efforts and streamlining processes to monetize internal/organic content offerings
- County-level Tourism Economics visitation number data to be delivered to DMOs for the first time this year, helping to understand visitation across the state and leading to opportunities to create multi-county strategies
- Compete Retreats are launching this year
 - How can we beat Wisconsin and Michigan and bring visitors to Minnesota?
 - What do these states offer; how do they message, market and promote; and how does Minnesota differentiate?
- Launching AI pilots to ensure we are using the tool in an ethical way and efficiently
 - AI will not be part of the creative
 - Note-taking, personal admin, coding possibilities
- Further evaluating existing programs to prioritize ROI

FY2027 Media Planning

- Continue targeting outdoor and culture campaigns
- Midwest regional targeting and with potential inclusion of Canadian markets
- Stay the course on tactics, working within the speed of the algorithm

Summer productions: North Lakes

- Potential itinerary:
 - Stop in the metro for food and arts experience
 - Drive north for James Beard restaurant in Grand Rapids / Judy Garland Museum
 - Welcoming artists to the area, unplug on vacation to Lake Vermilion and a stop in Voyageurs National Park / International Falls
 - Including Bois Forte and Ojibwe highlights

Resident Attraction Creative

- In house paid TikTok/Instagram Live videos, focused on Chicago and Madison, WI.
 - Why these locations? Areas closer to Minnesota and have shown positive attraction from Chicago area and Madison, which has a younger population
 - Mini pilot to understand efficacy under midwestern lens
- Launching: “Why we moved to Minnesota” day in the life interviews with newcomers to the state
- Will continue to update livability-related website content

Education + Industry Engagement + International Marketing (Destination Development)

Industry Relations

- Education
 - Education subcommittee did not meet this quarter but was provided an update on education resource center.
 - Resource bank is being built and will be available when new industry site is completed in July 2026
 - Tourism conference 2027 is confirmed for January 27 and 28 at the St Paul River Center
 - Two full days of programming
 - St Paul location is timely with the new administration change
 - Continuing education series in the fall
 - Sept 22: Working with Content Creators/SHRPA, Oct 20: Email Marketing Tips and Tricks, November 17: Place Branding 101
 - Information and registration will be shared via industry news
- Grants
 - Reconciling FY26 grants 104 grantees; \$500K funding
 - Launched FY27 tourism grant
 - \$500k in funding; larger awards available in all categories
 - Application opened last week
 - Funding starts July 1
- Co-ops
 - FY27 reviewing over 90 proposals received (\$750k)
 - Launch in July and available to any tourism-related business or organization
- New industry site migration will be hosted on exploreminnesota.com/industry
 - Content is being built out by digital team
 - Launching in July

Visitor Services

- Beaver Creek is closed for counter service/in person customer service but open to public as MNDOT rest area
- Hiring Visitor Experience Manager to design educational and industry programs to ensure consistent visitor experience and expand footprint around the state
 - Aiming to hire and onboard by end of summer
- FY27 contracts for partner centers at St Cloud, Washington, and Grand Portage

Market Development

- Mississippi River Country India Media fam (June 14-18) will include four writers including from large daily The Hindu and
 - Focused on Mississippi river itinerary with MN, WI, IL
- American Bus Association Destinations magazine: worked on story focused on Alexandria, MN to be published in the July-August issue
- Reviewing international marketing activities for FY27
- Industry meeting July 21 with FY27 plan
 - Will share registration and meeting information in industry news in the

coming weeks

Outdoor Recreation

- Summit 2026: Finalizing panels and promoting registration.
- Outdoor Retailer: Coordinating (w/ MNSOBA) the Minnesota Pavilion (Aug 19-21)
 - Largest B2B show
 - Major reboot
 - Focused on innovation and manufacturing
 - Highlighting MN made recreation products
- 4-Year Strategic Roadmap: outreach/engagement phase completed. Drafting the roadmap by September
- Explore MN More: Continue to publish two episodes a month. Most recent includes Superior Hiking Trail 40th anniversary and Kari Gibbons.
- Stewardship Campaign:
 - Difficult for users to approach so working on ease of messaging
 - Very early stages developing project goals and RFP to start in CY27
- Preparing for release and promotion of annual participation trends from Outdoor Industry Association (released in June)
 - Best indicator to learn who is showing up, how often, and what they're interested in.
 - Use in messaging and program development
 - Will host a panel about this at the summit

Tribal Relations

- Regional Coordinator Meeting completed
 - Connecting tribes to local resources and meetings to get to know CVBs and destinations better for a stronger partnership
- Assets for Tribal Websites
 - Each tribe gets their own page
 - Gathering outlines and assets
 - Up and running by early next year
- Native Film Guide
 - Near completion, by mid to late June the guide should be uploaded to the film website
 - For film makers to learn more about the tribes and how to work with them/share their stories
- 2026 Tribal Consultations
 - Scheduling is in progress
 - Second round of consultations to figure out goals and priorities
- Tribal Tourism Office Discussions
 - Expressed desire for tribal tourism office of their own or in collaboration with others
 - EMN is creating space for these discussions but cannot fund the office itself
- Leading People and Investing to Build Sustainable Communities (LPIBSC)

- Dawn attended this program to bring back info and to tailor to tribes' needs/interests under tourism context
- American Indigenous Tourism Association Board membership
 - Dawn will be joining the board soon

Film

Production ramps up for summer

- Seven films currently in production across the state
- New projects include:
 - Target summer commercials filming in Minneapolis-St. Paul
 - Shove Your Motivation Up Your Tailpipe filming in Hibbing
 - Mystery Science Theatre 3000: The Rifftrax filming in North Minneapolis
- 10,000 Stories Fund applications closed 6/5, projects announced 8/3
- 20 certified film ready communities, streamlining training
- Outreach: Participated in the Minneapolis-St Paul International Film Festival and Zeitgeist, hosting filmmaker panels and industry events
- Launched new qualified production facility intake process
- Out of state: meetings with studio execs, productive trip to LA for AFCI Studio Week and looking to attend TIFF Market in Toronto or Film Independent Forum in LA.

Legislative/Administrative

- Efforts to streamline the council structure, reduce overlapping council seats, and decrease the number of meetings to improve productivity did not pass during the legislative session. A separate film industry-introduced bill aimed at expanding eligibility for production tax credits in MN also did not pass.
- EMN conducted roundtables across the state to gather feedback from industry partners. Insights from these discussions will help shape future legislative priorities, strategic plans, and agency initiatives.
- With a new governor expected next year, we are developing flexible plans that incorporate feedback and anticipate unknown policy priorities.
- Although our bills did not pass, the legislative session brought valuable new relationships and an increased awareness of our work, and positive discussions about potential future budget support.
- We are making plans to organize council meetings around specific topics and strategic discussions. Future meetings may be less tied to a quarterly schedule and more focused on collaboration, planning, and member engagement. We'll have more details ironed out before the next council meeting and want to make sure meetings are fruitful and helpful to everyone on the call

Q&A

We're always trying to figure out the process for evaluation and what success looks like.

Are you doing a landscape surveillance? Are you coming to any initial conclusions?

It's too soon to tell, we're noticing changes in web traffic and how the algorithm is

working. Partnership articles have been positive, such as with the Atlantic as well as Roku, which is national. People are watching through the end of the series. There might be a new mix of national tastemaker partnerships and maybe social media might look different or can become a bigger endeavor. Right now we're open to a lot of different ways to adapt. We have more info than we've ever had before.

Do you foresee opportunities to share the algorithm info you glean with CVBs and Tourism business to adopt similar strategies?

Yes absolutely. The speed at which it moves is so fast that after the knowledge sharing, there may be new needed strategies. If you're interested in something particular, please reach out.

Comment: Meet Minneapolis is running a campaign through June, which aims to generate 100 million impressions in 100 days, promoting Minneapolis and the broader metro area through a "show up" theme tied to events, experiences, and anticipation around the arrival of the Michelin Guide in 2027. Eleven influencers have been brought into the market—the largest concentrated influencer effort to date—and marketing activities continue through the end of the month in partnership with local agency. Minneapolis hotels are now generating additional marketing funds through the city's Tourism Improvement District, supporting expanded branding and advertising efforts aimed at increasing visitation and strengthening tourism demand following a softer-than-expected spring season.

Upcoming Council meeting dates:

- Tuesday, September 15, 2026 (hybrid in person / virtual – 10:30am)
- Tuesday, December 8, 2026 (virtual – 10am)