



annual report

FY2026

Thomas Dambo Trolls
DETROIT LAKES, MINNESOTA





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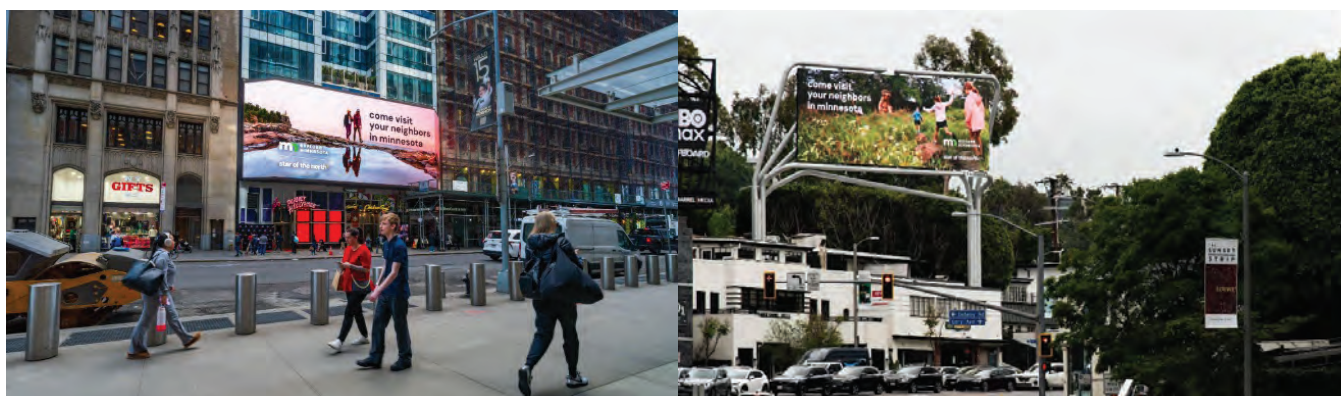


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a message from the director

a year of resilience and meeting the moment

With your support, last fiscal year was our most successful yet. We had record-breaking visitation to Minnesota once again: 82.5 million visitors spent over \$15.2 billion in our state in 2025. Our combined efforts resulted in over \$2.4 billion in state and local tax revenue, or \$1,038 in tax savings for each Minnesota household.

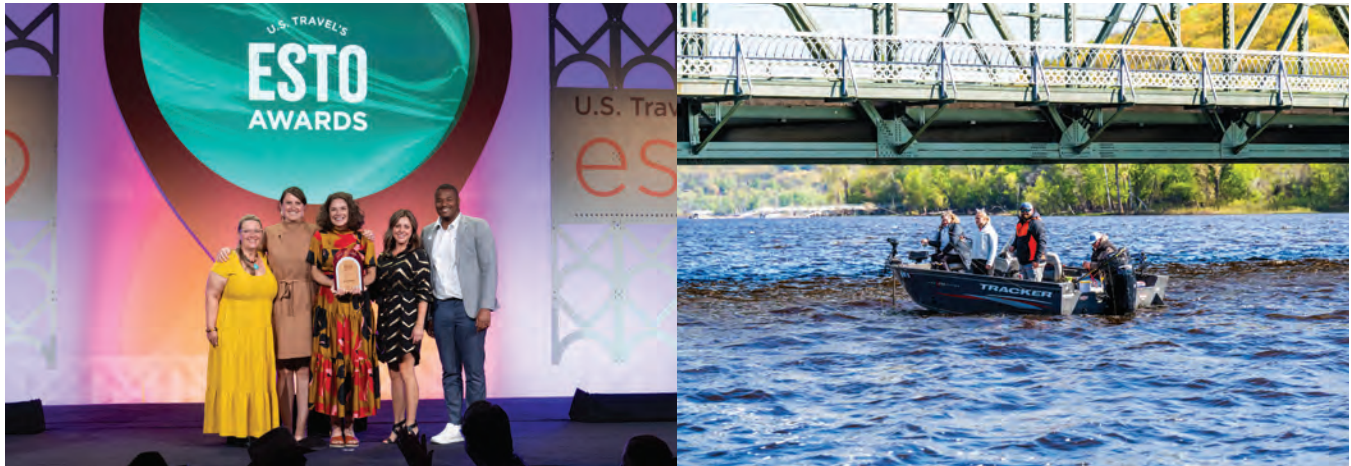


This year, Minnesota and Minnesotans were thrust into the spotlight; we underwent many challenges, with Minnesota across national headlines, most notably during Operation Metro Surge. In March, Explore Minnesota launched a “Come Visit Your Neighbors in Minnesota” campaign, featuring video, earned media, and billboards across the nation. The objective was two-fold: to support our communities experiencing acute economic disruption, and to reframe Minnesota’s narrative by leading with resilience, compassion, and a commitment to welcoming all.

Outside the headlines, we made significant destination marketing progress; we debuted new creative, including video stories featuring ice fishing and meat raffles; a multigenerational family’s trip to experience lake life; and bicycling content along the Root River Trail. In tandem, we refined our media strategy by bundling niche targets into two larger categories – outdoors and culture – and narrowing our spend to the 12-state region. We continued a mini-campaign for workforce attraction, and launched a new content hub initiative, “Destinations”, which highlights 11 Minnesota microregions and can’t-miss opportunities for exploration across our state, while continuing a micro-campaign for workforce attraction.

We also strategically invested in global marketing; we participated in a sales and media mission to Japan and hosted a large media familiarization tour from India in collaboration with Mississippi River Country. Although this year has offered some obstacles, we are proud to be a destination that continues to attract and welcome visitors worldwide. We took home two top honors at U.S. Travel’s ESTO 2025 and were nominated by City Nation Place for Best Communications Strategy, the only U.S. state recognized across all categories

Stakeholder engagement remained a top priority in FY2026. We held more than 230 meetings, presentations and webinars, plus cross-state tourism roundtables. From the Minnesota Governor’s Fishing Opener in Stillwater to events like the inaugural Outdoor Recreation Industry Summit, we strengthened relationships with key partners and expanded our reach. We continued working with Tribal Nations to highlight their cultural destinations and participated in Tribal consultations.



Explore Minnesota Film also had a historic year, allocating over \$38 million to 11 projects. This marks a 1,000% increase in potential economic impact for the state of Minnesota compared to FY2025. We also launched “Minnesota, On the Case Again,” a campaign commemorating 30 years since the release of Fargo, showcasing our iconic film roots and current offerings to catalyze the next golden era of film production in Minnesota.

The success from the previous biennium has allowed us to carry our nationally-recognized Star of the North strategy forward. As we look ahead to FY2027, we are excited to show our region, nation, and the world to come on over and visit their neighbors in Minnesota.

Lauren Bennett McGinty
Executive Director, Explore Minnesota

staff

director's office

Executive Director
Lauren Bennett McGinty

**Deputy Director,
Outdoor Recreation**
Randolph Briley

Tribal Liaison
Dawn Blanchard

Human Resources Director
Roxanne Lane

Executive Aide
Lydia Hollingsworth

operations

**Director of Operations
& Finance**
Mike Meyer

Management Analyst
Melissa DonCarlos

Contract Specialist
Dawn Bushman

Accounting Tech
Christine Voss

Buyer
Sandy Karnowski

**Grants Management
Coordinator**
Eleigh Vazquez

external relations

External Relations Director
Ben Johnson

Government Relations Director
Lyndsey Hanson

Communications Supervisor
Chris Morgan

Media Relations Specialist
Jake Juliot

marketing

Deputy Director
Kathryn Sutton

Project Coordinator
Cathy Pinske

Research Analyst
Gretchen Nussbaum

Senior Marketing Strategist
Frances Fyten

Marketing Strategy Manager
Karina Hill

Campaign Marketing Strategist
Jared Laabs

Partnership Marketing Strategist
Glori Woolley

Multimedia Specialist
Riley Hallaway

Senior Graphic Designer
Melanie Graves

Digital Strategy Manager
Devon Cox

Senior Digital Strategist, Social
Caitlin Hannah

Senior Digital Strategist, Web
Andrew Parks

Analytics Coordinator
Sean Lydon

Digital Strategist
B Schneider

Web Operations Coordinator
Anne Paterson

film

Deputy Director
Nell Lawrenz-Wareham

Film Incentive & Industry Liaison
Douglas Harris

**Film & Television
Production Liaison**
Luke Heikkila

destination development

Deputy Director
Beth Helle

Project Coordinator
Shannon Lukes Hauser

Industry Relations Manager
Nicole Lalum

Metro Regional Coordinator
Chelsey Fey

Northeast Regional Coordinator
Derek Ramthun

Southern Regional Coordinator
Lisa Havelka

**Northwest & Central
Regional Coordinator**
Kari Brumback

Market Development Manager
Jennifer Schak

**Market Development
Representative**
Brenda Maas

Welcome Centers Supervisor
Julie Ramer

**Central & North Welcome
Centers Supervisor**
David Robb

**Southern Welcome
Centers Supervisor**
Linda Vuicich

**Customer Service
Specialists, Intermediate**
Ben Vuicich, Stephen Sarvi

Customer Service Specialists
Gloria DeBenedet, Sally Lundholm,
Stacey Gross, JR Helget

organizational activities

Explore Minnesota staff, who work throughout the state, are some of the most passionate cheerleaders for Minnesota. To ensure organizational excellence, our goal is to provide a working environment where employees can thrive, learn and grow together. We continue to evolve our training opportunities, employee engagement programs and organization to better fit the needs of Explore Minnesota now and prepare us to innovate for the future.

This year, a majority of our staff participated in specialized training, including:

- AP Style Training (by the Associated Press)
- Smart Brevity Training (by Axios)



fostering a culture of growth

As part of our commitment to ensuring employees have the tools, resources and support they need to thrive, we conduct a biannual employee satisfaction survey.

Areas of focus include:

- Professional experience
- Management effectiveness
- Employee engagement with additional focus around diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion

Over time, the employee satisfaction metrics have shown an increase in areas of employee satisfaction around workplace culture, opportunities to communicate across the agency and encouragement to participate in training.

INTERNAL DEAI TASK FORCE

The DEAI Committee at Explore Minnesota created and maintains the Equity Change Plan, which was introduced to staff in September 2024. We are committed to working towards building a culture of anti-racism, allyship and inclusion by offering DEAI training and leadership development opportunities. These include LinkedIn Learning courses and other resources provided in our weekly Director's Updates; special trainings and conversations during all-staff meetings; connecting with other agencies to join their DEAI learning opportunities; and attending Tribal State Relations Training (TSRT).

strategic direction



vision

Position Minnesota as the premier state for travel, quality of life and economic opportunity.



mission

We sustainably grow Minnesota's economy by welcoming all through innovative and inclusive marketing, storytelling and industry partnerships.



position

We lead Minnesota's growth by fostering collaboration and promoting the state for the economic benefit of all Minnesotans.

strategic goals & objectives

grow minnesota's economy

Increase economic opportunity for Minnesotans by promoting the state for travel, quality of life and economic development.

advance and champion welcoming experiences for all

Increase the number of diverse vendors, increase spend in diverse markets, create content celebrating and foster relationships with underserved cultural and heritage communities.

foster state stewardship

Build partnerships to identify areas of growth and sustainability and create educational opportunities related to maintaining Minnesota's cultural, environmental and economic integrity.

provide industry leadership and maximize partner collaboration

Grow stakeholder participation in our programs, increase private and in-kind contributions, and prioritize opportunistic marketing.

ensure organizational excellence

Prioritize employee growth through educational opportunities and improve employee satisfaction as well as engagement.



**grow
minnesota's
economy**

annual budget

general fund operating budget for FY2026

\$17.156 million (base)

one-time, pass-thru funding for FY2026

\$5 million Minnesota Sports and Events (MNSE)*

\$671,000 2026 Special Olympics USA Games*

\$400,000 MN Humanities Center**

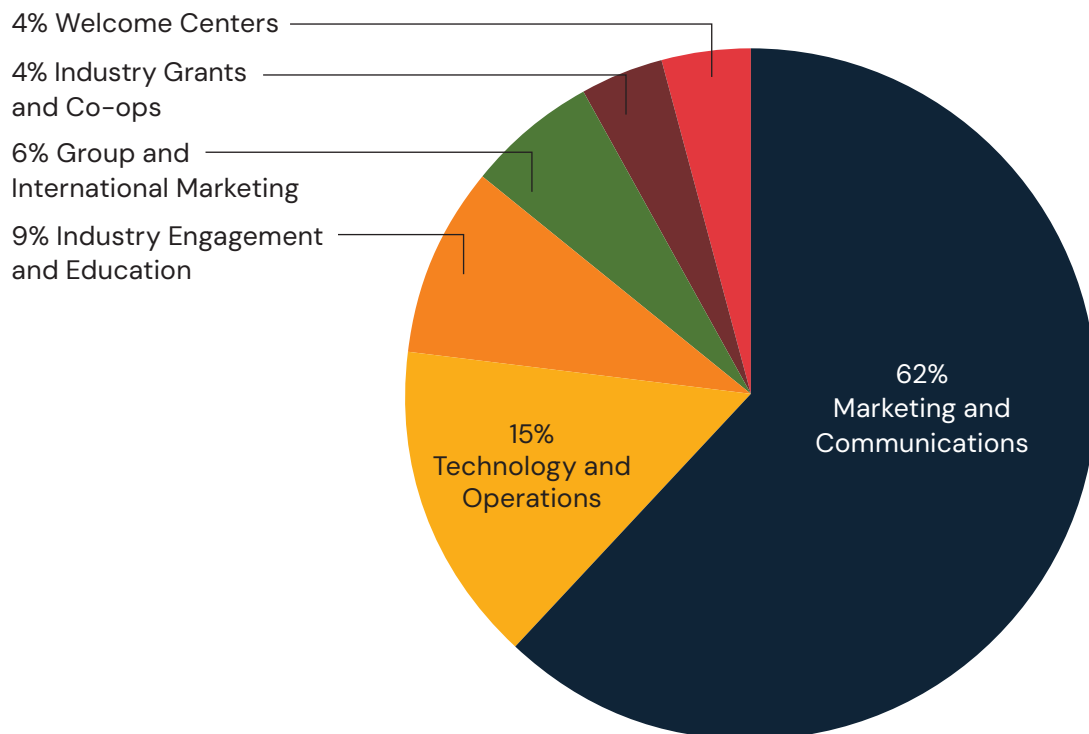
private industry match

Cash	\$1.087 million
In kind	\$5.165 million
Total	\$6.252 million

explore minnesota film

\$825,000 base (annually)

operating budget



*Legislatively appropriated pass-thru grants

**Includes MNIT Odyssey budget \$479,800

economic impact by the numbers

in 2025, tourism saved each minnesota household \$1,038 in taxes

✶
**82.5
MILLION**
visitors

✶
**\$15.2
BILLION**
visitor spending

✶
**\$25.2
BILLION**
total economic
impact

✶
180,514
jobs supported

✶
**\$2.4
BILLION**
state & local
taxes generated

✶
**35
MILLION**
passengers at MSP
airport in 2025*

Unless noted, this data was sourced from Explore Minnesota's 2025 Tourism Economics Economic Impact Data
*Source: Minneapolis-Saint Paul Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC)

key travel growth metrics

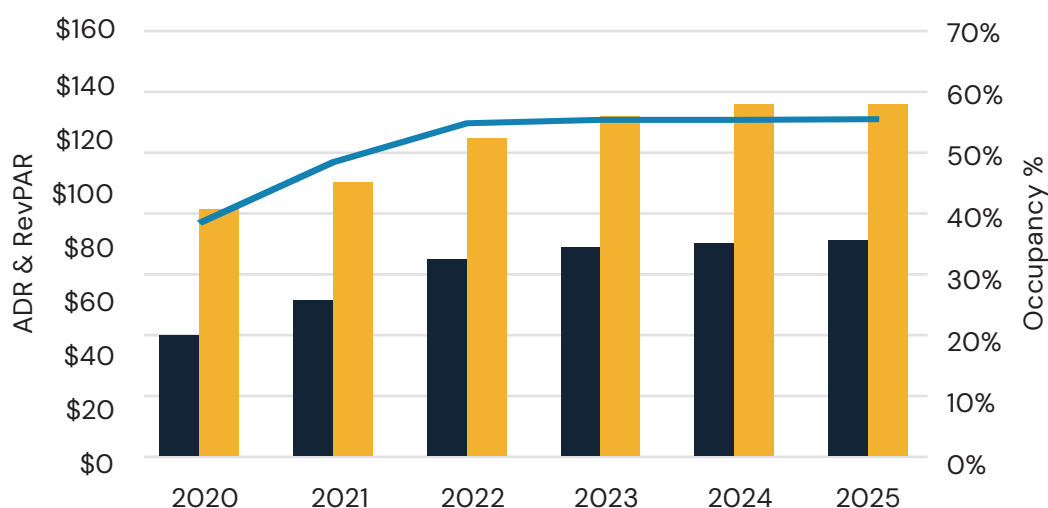
hotel occupancy, revPAR and ADR

Minnesota's average monthly hotel occupancy rate was 56% in 2025. This is the same as the 2024 occupancy rate.

The 2025 average monthly hotel RevPAR[†] of \$75 was slightly above the 2024 Rev PAR of \$74.

The 2025 Minnesota ADR[^] of \$134 was that same as the 2024 ADR.

state hotel metrics comparison over time



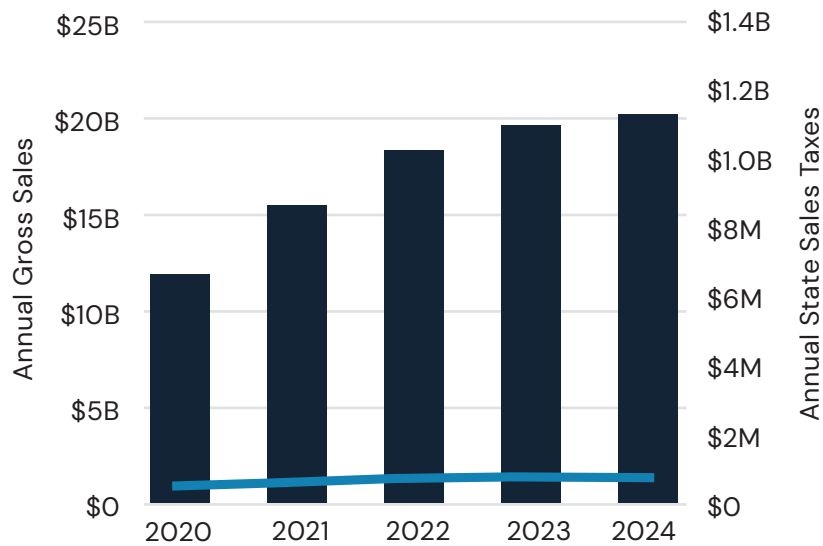
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
RevPAR	\$33	\$50	\$67	\$72	\$74	\$75
ADR	\$89	\$101	\$119	\$129	\$134	\$134
Occupancy %	36%	48%	55%	56%	56%	56%

Source: Smith Travel Research (STR)

[†] RevPAR (Revenue Per Available Room) = total room revenue generated from the sale or rental of rooms.

[^]ADR (Average Daily Rate) = room revenue divided by rooms sold, displayed as the average rate for a single room.

industry L&H° sales & taxes over time



Source: Minnesota Department of Revenue (MDOR)



°The leisure and hospitality (L&H) industry sector includes a broad category of fields within the service industry such as lodging, food services, event planning, theme parks, transportation and other tourism oriented products and services. This sector is highly sensitive to economic and competitive market conditions and can have steep seasonal fluctuations during the year.

star of the northTM ★

In FY2026, Explore Minnesota continued to build on the success of our award-winning Star of the North strategy, which uses real, first-person accounts to share the Minnesota story. By highlighting local places, people and ways of life, we're inviting people to be a part of Minnesota.

Star of the North serves as an overarching brand campaign for both travel and workforce attraction campaigns, positioning the state as a leader within the region and the country – a top place to travel, live, work, and do business.

tourism marketing

The Star of the North tourism campaign features an authentic, optimistic Minnesota travel message across a multitude of platforms, including broadcast and connected TV, digital video, social media, display, and native, plus sponsorships with well-known content partners. In FY2026, we shifted additional dollars to drive greater regional travel, increasing ad frequency. Our regional audience extended from Colorado to Ohio and as far south as Missouri. Regional targets received brand messaging featuring both winter and summer lake life experiences, and niche campaigns reached regional travelers passionate about the outdoors or cultural activities like museums, and performing or culinary arts. We also targeted flight markets in Dallas and Chicago and launched major national partnerships with Roku, Afar and The Atlantic to connect with tastemakers across the nation.

To increase incremental travel spend, we added a complementary campaign to connect travelers coming to Minnesota for major events with trip planning information to expand their itineraries. This campaign incorporated advanced event advertising and stay extenders, as well as geo-fenced messages to encourage return travel.

TRAVEL STORIES



experience the magic of lake life in minnesota



a winter ice fishing trip to minnesota

responsive campaign: come visit your neighbors in minnesota

Following Operation Metro Surge, it was crucial that Explore Minnesota shift the narrative around Minnesota and invite travelers back to our state. Leading with the values Minnesotans had demonstrated on a global stage (resilience, compassion, and an authentic lived commitment to welcoming all), we quickly developed strategies in-house.

Our Neighbors campaign launched in February, featuring an organic social video serving as a “love letter to Minnesota”. Positive sentiment flowed in immediately, and we planned out a larger multi-channel initiative. At the end of March, after the de-escalation of Operation Metro Surge and timed with our traditional spring/summer tourism marketing flight, we launched a boosted video on social channels, alongside digital billboard units with a “Come Visit Your Neighbors” message in national markets. This launch was timed with an earned media initiative featuring Minnesota community voices like Chef Yia Vang and Olympic gold-medalist, Jessie Diggins.

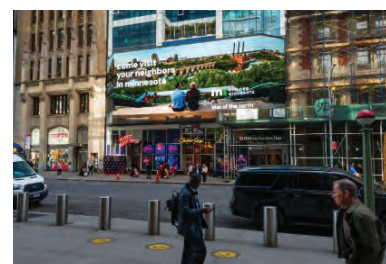
neighbors impact	6-week period
Social impressions	885,488
Social engagements	3,418
Website sessions	29,551
Website click-throughs	13,173
Billboard impressions	9,000,000

The campaign ran simultaneously with our spring and summer advertising, which was already live in 13 regional states via CTV, social media, programmatic video, and national partnerships with Roku. The dual deployment created a layered presence across both traditional drive markets and six entirely new national markets in a single flight period, an unprecedented reach expansion for a campaign of this budget size.



come visit your neighbors in minnesota

Watch the video and see what Minnesota “neighborism” is all about.



times square, new york city



fenway stadium, boston



sunset blvd, los angeles

FY2026 spring–summer campaign results

Between March and June 2026, we spent approximately \$2.6 million on video, digital and social media advertising—our largest campaign of the year. We partnered with a third-party vendor, SMARI, to assess campaign impact.

AD AWARENESS

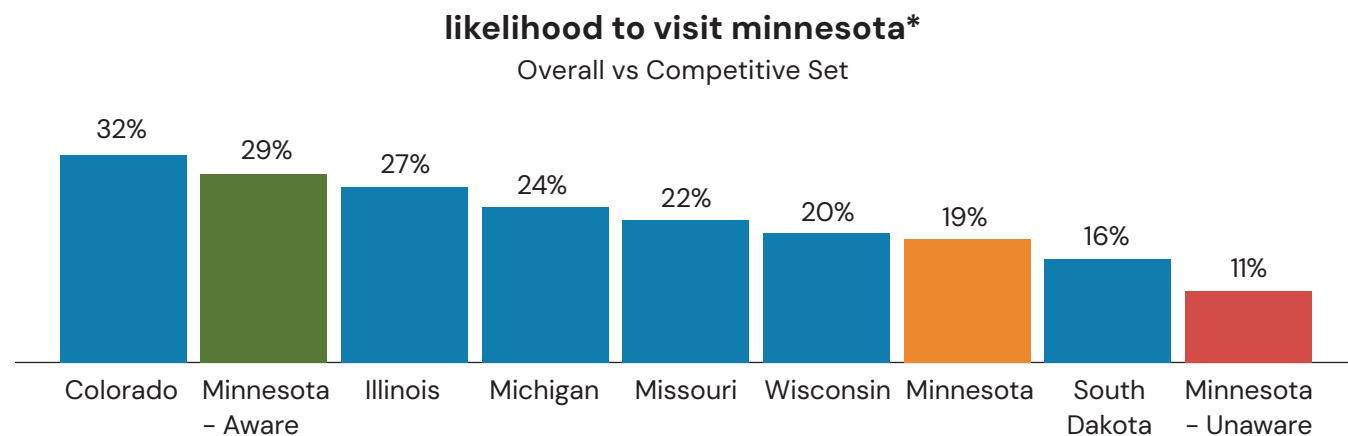
We placed greater emphasis on regional markets, driving 30% brand campaign recall and 43% niche campaign recall in the region. This led to excellent cost-per-aware-household efficiencies of \$.17 for brand and \$.32 for niche—far below the \$.42 national benchmark.

Outdoor and culture ads also performed well in Chicago and Dallas flight markets, with 43% and 40% awareness. 45% national awareness of niche custom content also drove a cost per aware household of just \$.06.

	regional niche	regional brand	national niche custom content	national benchmark
Cost-per-aware-household efficiency	\$.32	\$.17	\$.06	\$.42

CAMPAIGN RESPONSE AND IMPACT

Reactions to Star of the North creative were overwhelmingly (more than 70%) positive, indicating effectiveness in shifting our brand image. In fact, exposure to a Star of the North ad more than doubles the likelihood that a traveler will visit Minnesota, catapulting Minnesota over competitive destinations for intent to visit, placing us only behind Colorado. Almost 30% of national travelers who are aware of an Explore Minnesota ad are likely to visit Minnesota in the next twelve months.

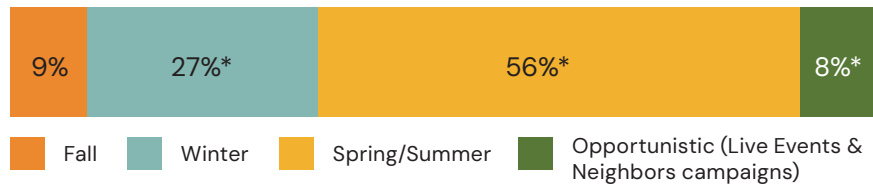


† SMARI 2026 spring/summer campaign advertising effectiveness study (this is the citation for all data points on this page).

media spend breakouts

media spend by seasonal campaign

Percentage of full year media spend

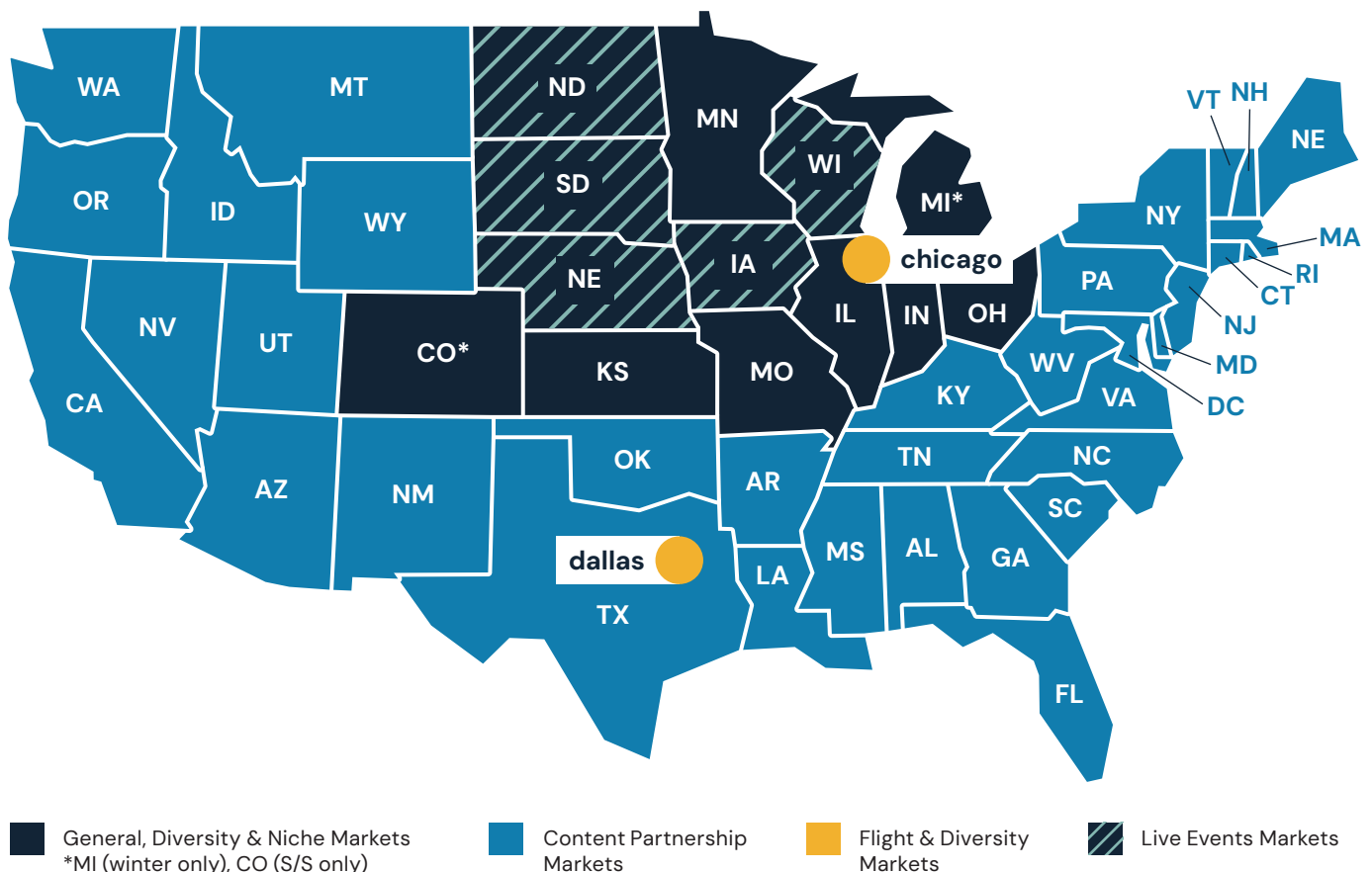


Additionally, 11% of the total campaign spend was dedicated to enhancing reach among diverse audiences.

FY2026 annual campaign spend

- Regional Outdoor & Culture Niches: 36%
- Regional Brand: 29%
- National: 26%
- Neighbors (includes Canada): 5%
- Live Events: 4%

FY2026 annual campaign map



*Due to Operation Metro Surge and ensuring we effectively and respectfully spend media dollars, we sent funds originally slated for our winter campaign to our spring/summer campaign flight.

workforce attraction and livability marketing

In FY2026, Explore Minnesota continued marketing the state for workforce attraction and livability through organic and limited paid efforts.

FOCUSED PAID CAMPAIGN

We ran a mini campaign from May 1 – June 30, 2026, targeting individuals who are working within high-demand industries in the Madison, Wis. and Chicago markets and have expressed a willingness to relocate. Using results from the FY2025 workforce attraction campaign, media tactics this year included Meta (Instagram), TikTok, Google, and online video and display ads. In addition, we tested new channel-native creative assets on TikTok, focused on cost-of-living comparisons.

AWARENESS IMPACT

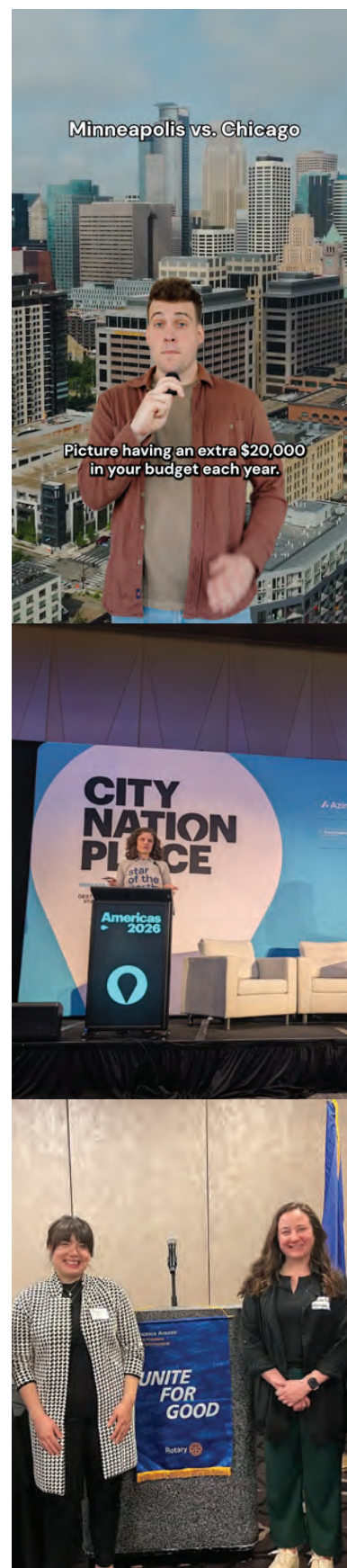
Concluding June 30, 2026, the mini campaign successfully drove awareness and consideration of Minnesota as a top place to live amongst a more targeted regional audience:

Campaign impressions	20.28 million
Net newsletter subscribers	11,234

DRIVING RESULTS, ORGANICALLY

Limited budgets for paid marketing efforts meant that much of this year's work focused on organic activities, including strengthening relationships with similarly focused organizations across Minnesota and continuing to create resources to market Minnesota's quality of life. Specific examples include:

- Life in Minnesota newsletter expansion – the team expanded a newsletter drip about life in Minnesota from four to 11 information-packed email newsletters for those considering a move to the state.
- Renewed public relations activity – we began pitching Minnesota's quality of life nationally and developing a subject matter expert panel in partnership with our public relations agency.
- Stakeholder engagement – we attended meetings with industry stakeholders across Minnesota, including presentations about Explore Minnesota's Star of the North campaign (promoting visitation, quality of life and economic development). We also had the opportunity to present out our award-winning marketing results globally, including at the City Nation Place Americas Conference in Vancouver, Canada.



marketing partnerships

Explore Minnesota expanded its presence in neighboring states and key drive markets during FY2026 through strategic partnerships with professional and collegiate sports organizations, major events, airlines, publishers, and media companies, leveraging more than \$1.6 million in partner-contributed media and promotional value.

Partnerships with organizations including Audacy, Badger Athletics, Chicago Bears, Hawkeye Sports Properties, Milwaukee Brewers, Minnesota Frost, Minnesota Lynx, Minnesota Twins, Northwestern Athletics, Outfront Media, St. Paul Saints, Sun Country Airlines, USA TODAY, and others expanded the reach of Minnesota's tourism messaging, increased brand awareness, and inspired travel across regional and national audiences.

Major event partnerships further elevated Minnesota's profile through promotions tied to PGA of America, 2025 Ryder Cup, 2026 KPMG Women's PGA Championship, and the road to the 2029 Ryder Cup at Hazeltine.

Additional collaborations supporting Farm Aid, IIHF World Junior Championship, RAGBRAI, Special Olympics USA Games, Taste of Minnesota and the USA Cycling National Gravel Championships showcased the state's hospitality, outdoor recreation, culture, and world-class events to visitors from across the country and around the world.

NOTABLE PARTNERSHIPS



best-in-class website

In FY2026, Explore Minnesota took a test-and-learn optimization approach to its new website launched at the end of FY2025. Closely watching user interactions on key landing pages, we implemented strategic user experience updates that led to our highest time on site average of all time.

We also shifted our focus from traffic acquisition to Generative Engine Optimization (GEO) and Answer Engine Optimization (AEO) search engines, ensuring the website is future-proofed against AI and the state's brand image is well represented.

In FY2026, our total AI audience grew from 26.1 million to 116.3 million, placing us first in our top 5 state competitive set, a comfortable 34% difference from our closest competitor Travel Wisconsin (total audience 82 million). We also increased our total AI visibility score from 37 to 45, our mentions from 1.5K to 3.2K, and citations from 16.7k to 27.5k. Crucially, 37.5% of those mentions were from a Google AI overview, allowing us to keep the Minnesota brand front-and-center, even in the new world of zero-click searches.

Our internally-designed website won the 2026 WebAward for Outstanding Website.

The WebAwards are the premier industry-based website awards. Judges praised the site as a "beautiful renewal," saying there was a "consistent visual language with focus on important content" and "clean user interface."

web analytics	FY2026	FY2025
Total sessions	6,701,178	7,617,404
Average session duration	3 min. 35 sec.	2 min. 36 sec.
Users	6,190,917	5,994,026

top traffic sources	
Organic search	3,065,405
Direct/unknown	913,262
Social	1,732,573
Paid search	259,764

95-100

We currently maintain a near perfect Lighthouse Accessibility score between 95-100. We are compliant up to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2*.

#9

#9 of all 50 state DMOs in first page keywords on Google



top age groups
25-34
35-44



gender mix
56% MALE
44% FEMALE



top cities (outside of MN)
FARGO
OMAHA
CHICAGO
DALLAS
ATLANTA



top interests
FOOD & DINING
NEWS & POLITICS
SHOPPING
LIFESTYLE & HOBBIES

*100 is the highest level of accessibility standards. The state currently requires compliance up to WCAG 2.1.

sharing minnesota through social

social media overview

This year, our team continued to focus on human-centered short-form video to increase algorithmic visibility and reach new audiences. Using a multi-channel approach that integrated web, newsletter, and social media, we strengthened our wraparound storytelling, diversified our asset portfolio through content commissions and industry collaboration, and increased engagements, video views, and brand lift. We were pleased to see a significant year-over-year (YOY) increase across Instagram and TikTok as we continue to produce short-form video content.

We completed the first full year of Explore Minnesota’s new LinkedIn strategy, which launched in May 2025. Priorities for the channel include increasing awareness of the breadth of work we do as the state’s promotional office and increasing engagement with our internal and external stakeholders.

📷 instagram	FY2026	FY2025
Engagements	362,086	356,300
Video views	8,120,292	5,958,692
Video saves	50,109	44,150
Video shares	77,907	79,280

🎵 tiktok	FY2026	FY2025
Engagements	101,338	18,144
Video views	1,010,533	305,578
Video shares	11,646	3,286

📘 facebook	FY2026	FY2025
Impressions	5,237,831	3,591,372
Engagements	1,195,640	3,465,390

🌐 linkedIn	FY2026
Impressions	261,756
Engagements	7,994

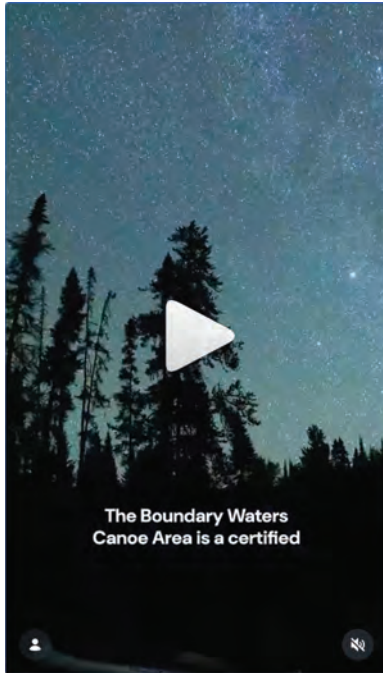
📷 + 📘 + 🎵 + 🌐 total	FY2026	FY2025
Engagements	1,671,418*	1,570,084

* In FY2025 we were establishing LinkedIn impression and engagement benchmarks.

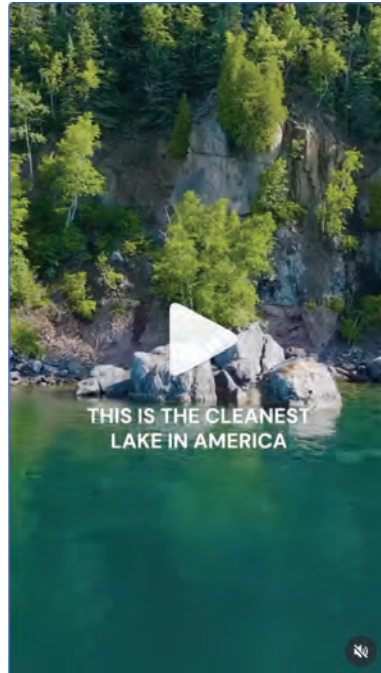
top performing posts

INSTAGRAM

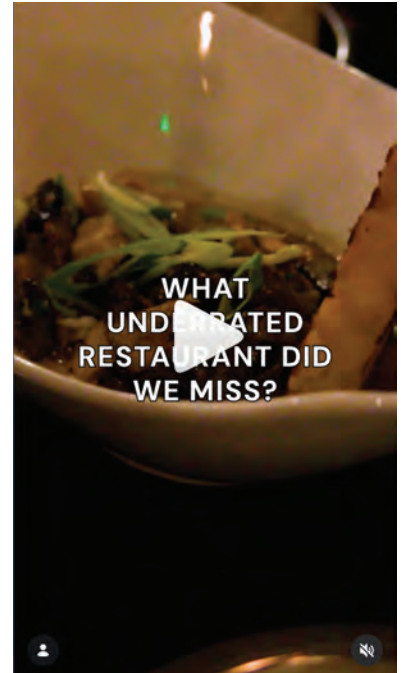
dark skies: 323k views



cleanest lake: 192k views

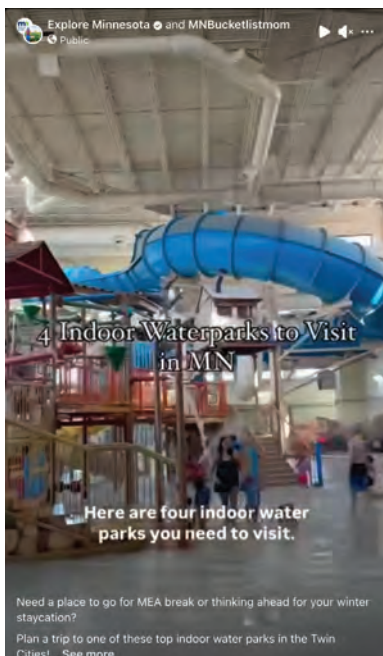


restaurants: 291k views



FACEBOOK

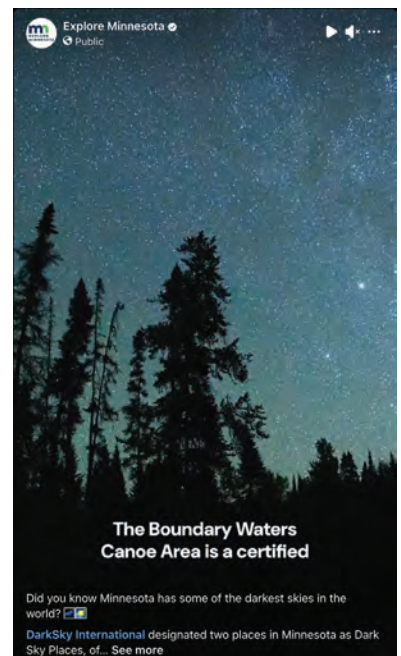
waterparks: 542k views



hot sam's: 437k views



dark skies: 243k views



direct-to-consumer newsletter program

In FY2026, the newsletter continued to build on its high-performing FY2025 relaunch. We strategically repeated seasonal and timely content, increased partner collaborations, and refreshed the “Life in Minnesota” welcome flow to focus on answering real questions asked by prospective new residents.

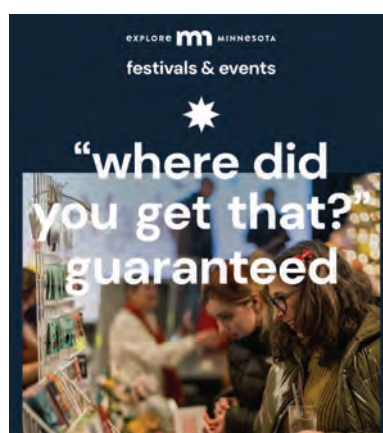
We also conducted a survey of our newsletter audience, and found that 53% of respondents had attended, booked, or visited a destination or event after seeing it in our newsletter.

top newsletters

TOP OPEN RATE – 59.4%



TOP CLICK RATE – 8.0%



TOP SHARES – 1,559



Minnesota Explorer connects highly engaged travelers with seasonally curated bucket-list activities, helpful itineraries and exclusive stories.

	FY2026	Industry Standard
Subscribers	184,696	
Open rate	44.1%	34.5%
Click rate	4.0%	3.1%

Minnesota Outdoors reaches active, experience-driven travelers with tips, personal stories and guides to the state’s best outdoor adventures.

	FY2026	Industry Standard
Subscribers	110,369	
Open rate	45.0%	35.6%
Click rate	2.5%	3.1%

Festivals & Events helps travelers discover Minnesota’s diverse lineup of festivals, performances, exhibits and community celebrations.

	FY2026	Industry Standard
Subscribers	64,267	
Open rate	41.8%	35.6%
Click rate	4.3%	3.2%

Life in Minnesota helps prospective residents explore like a local by addressing frequently asked questions, regional highlights and Star of the North culture.

	FY2026	Industry Standard
Subscribers	11,352	
Open rate	43.3%	34.6%
Click rate	7.1%	3.4%

communications & media relations

national coverage

FY2026 was a year of transition for Explore Minnesota’s earned media program. We paused national outreach in January and February under an aligned crisis strategy due to Operation Metro Surge, and brought on a new national agency of record. Across eight active months, earned media generated an estimated ad value of \$9.8 million, within 4% of the prior year’s full 12-month total.

Coverage appeared in national travel, lifestyle and business outlets, including USA Today, Forbes, Travel + Leisure, AFAR, Oprah Daily, Parade, Skift, AdAge, Fast Company, Midwest Living, The Root and TheGrio, with broad syndication through MSN, Yahoo!, AOL and NewsBreak.

The year’s strongest work included the 30th anniversary of Fargo, which drew 127 placements and more than 106 million in reach; the launch of the Come Visit Your Neighbors campaign, covered by Skift, Travel Weekly and AdAge; and a November press trip tracing Prince’s legacy from Paisley Park to First Avenue, hosted with Meet Minneapolis, which reached a combined social audience of more than 500,000.

In the first full quarter of working with our new agency of record, we secured 33 national placements, reaching more than 444 million impressions and generating over \$4.1 million in estimated ad value, nearly half the year’s total.

national media & PR metrics*	FY2026 (8 active months)	FY2025
Total positive national media impressions	1.07 billion	2.85 billion
Estimated ad value	\$9.8 million	\$10.2 million



local coverage

Explore Minnesota also invested in local news coverage to ensure we highlight all the best Minnesota has to offer in locals’ own backyards (or a quick road trip away). Staff made regular appearances on KSTP and WJON highlighting timely travel destinations. Proactive media outreach landed coverage in numerous local outlets, including WCCO Radio, Minnesota News Network, MPR, Fox 9, WCCO-TV, The Minnesota Star Tribune, Minneapolis–St. Paul Business Journal, Axios Twin Cities, and more.

* Source: Cision database, Weber Shandwick (July–November 2025) and BVK (April–June 2026)

a top state



Explore Minnesota's vision is to position Minnesota as the best state for travel, quality of life and economic opportunity. Here's how we measured up:

who's interested in the star of the north?

among regional travelers* minnesota is a top 10 state for:



lake life



winter outdoor recreation



shopping

among national travelers, minnesota is a top 10 state for:



lake life



shopping



winter outdoor recreation

KEY MINNESOTA NATIONAL RANKINGS



quality of life[^]



state for healthcare[†]



state to raise a family[†]



least-stressed state[†]



best park system[‡]



best state overall[‡]

*Regional travelers are defined as travelers from Minnesota, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, & Wisconsin Source: SMARI 2026 Spring/Summer Ad Effectiveness Study

[^] Source: State of the Nation

[†] Source: WalletHub

[‡] Source: U.S. News & World Report

an international icon



It has been a challenging year for inbound international travel to the U.S., driven by geopolitical tensions, shifting media coverage, fluctuating oil prices, and broader consumer caution. Despite these headwinds, 2025 international inbound results exceeded initial expectations. According to Tourism Economics' May 2026 International State Travel (IST) report, overnight international visitor arrivals to the U.S. declined by just 5.5% in 2025—yet, a notable improvement over the -8.2% forecast issued in September 2025.

Attracting international visitors remains vital to supporting key air service routes and driving Minnesota's overall economic vitality. To navigate these evolving market conditions, Explore Minnesota proactively adapted its international marketing strategy. Working in close collaboration with our agency of record, in-country marketing network, and global partners, we combined real-time consumer and trade sentiment with global data to identify high-impact market sustainment opportunities.

We prioritized targeted paid and earned media exposure to reinforce Minnesota's position as a unique, welcoming destination. Key achievements include launching a monthly media newsletter and online press room, hosting four media familiarization (fam) tours, and executing 27 distinct activations across six European markets (UK, Germany, Benelux, France, Nordics, and Italy). These efforts encompassed digital campaigns, tour operator co-ops, booking partnerships, trade education, and fam trips. Furthermore, we maintained a strong presence in key primary and secondary markets—including India, Japan, South Korea, and Australia—through strategic partnerships with Great Lakes USA, Mississippi River Country, and Brand USA.

international marketing results

cooperative newsletters	
Sent	20
Recipients	2,111,980
Click rate	5%
Open rate	35%

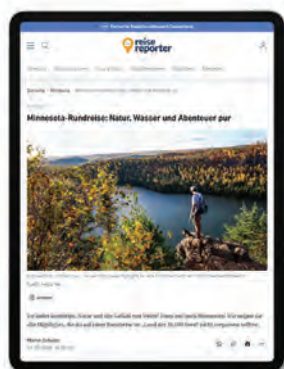
social media	
Reach	3,409,303
Impressions	5,418,168
Engagement	93,694

media	
Articles	31
Print reach	2,902,032
Digital reach	3,304,839

digital advertising*	
Impressions	4,418,266
Clicks	9,076

websites	
Page views	912,313
Clicks	7,073

product development	
New itineraries	5



Reisereporter, Germany



Courants d'Air, France



AmerikaNu, Benelux



Active Traveller, UK



Touring Club, Italy

| *Includes paid advertising on airline, media and tour operator, plus business forums

global partnerships

Explore Minnesota maintained its memberships in:

- American Bus Association (ABA)
- Great American West (gateway cities membership)
- Great Lakes USA (GLUSA)
- Cruise the Great Lakes
- International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association (IGLTA)
- International Inbound Travel Association (IITA)
- Mississippi River Country (MRC)
- National Tour Association (NTA)
- U.S. Travel Association (USTA)

Visit USA Committees:

- Visit USA Australia
- Visit USA Belgium
- Visit USA France
- Visit USA Germany (includes Austria and Switzerland)
- Visit USA Ireland
- Visit USA Italy
- Visit USA Netherlands
- Visit USA UK
- Discover America Nordic

additional trade activities

Brand USA – Travel Week in London, UK, Oct. 20–23, 2025

The Explore Minnesota team conducted 43 trade appointments with tour operators and travel distributors from Europe. It included a mix of long-time partners and new companies from various countries.

American Bus Association (ABA) – Marketplace in Reno, NV, Jan. 10–13, 2026

Motorcoach and group travel companies met with Explore Minnesota during 34 prescheduled meetings to develop products, strengthen relationships and increase awareness of Minnesota as a group leisure travel destination.

Mississippi River Country Cooperative (MRC) – Mission in Tokyo, Japan, Feb. 16–20, 2026

In partnership with MRC, Explore Minnesota met with trade and media partners to promote the nonstop MSP–Tokyo flight and inspire Japanese trade partners to feature Minnesota and other Mississippi River Country states.

Mississippi River Country Cooperative (MRC) – Mission in Los Angeles, CA, March 25–27, 2026

As an extension of the February mission to Japan, Explore Minnesota met with Los Angeles-based travel trade professionals from receptive inbound companies. These companies work with Japanese-based tour operators to facilitate individual and group travel in the United States.

Circle Wisconsin – Midwest Marketplace in La Crosse, WI, April 19–21, 2026

Explore Minnesota met with 32 group and motorcoach tour operators from the Midwest during pre-scheduled meetings.

U.S. Travel – IPW in Fort Lauderdale, FL, May 17–21, 2026

IPW is the USA's largest international inbound travel trade show with over 5,000 participants from over 50 countries. Explore Minnesota conducted 80 pre-scheduled appointments with travel trade, marketing and technology representatives, plus another 40 appointments with media from around the world.

All appointment summaries and business leads are made available to Minnesota's tourism and hospitality industry at no charge.

hosted familiarization (fam) tours



TRADE

Sept. 23–25, 2025 – Brand USA Travel Agent Fam (Germany, Switzerland, Austria): In partnership with Brand USA, Explore Minnesota hosted nine travel agents on a multi-day itinerary that included Minnesota, Wisconsin and Illinois. The fam tour included Minneapolis, St. Paul, Bloomington and the Great River Road (Red Wing, Lake City, Wabasha and Winona), with the goal of deepening the agents' knowledge of Minnesota, creating product and inspiring travel to Minnesota.

MEDIA

Jan. 14–21, 2026 – Dirk Rohrbach (Germany): Explore Minnesota partnered with Great Lakes USA to host Dirk Rohrbach, German journalist, author and host of the "50 States" podcast. The itinerary included Winona, Rochester, Bloomington and Minneapolis. The Minnesota episode, which is part of a larger "Great Lakes Series," is scheduled to launch in early 2027.

May 12–17, 2026 – Latitudes Travel Magazine (Italy): Italian journalist, photographer and editor of Latitudes Magazine, Lucio Luigi Rossi, spent time with our partners in Minneapolis, Bloomington, Duluth and the Lake Superior North Shore. The photo essay-style article was published in September 2026.

May 24–26, 2026 – The Times (United Kingdom): Freelance writer and North American specialist, Jacqui Agate, wrote an article for The Times/UK entitled, "Finding the Real Little House on the Prairie in America's Midwest." Explore Minnesota collaborated with South Dakota and Wisconsin on this project, and Minnesota stops included in Walnut Grove, Spring Valley and Lanesboro. The article was published on July 19, 2026, shortly after Netflix released its revamped "Little House on the Prairie" series.

June 15–18, 2026 – Mississippi River Country Cooperative (India):

As an active member of the MRC cooperative, Explore Minnesota supported a multi-state fam trip for four Indian journalists to boost awareness of Minnesota and the overall region. Media fam participants included:

- Mini Anthikad Chhibber, The Hindu
- Tenzin Choden, Outlook Traveller
- Khursheed Dinshaw, freelance journalist
- Chaitali Patel, freelance journalist

The itinerary included the Minneapolis–St. Paul metro area, the Great River Road (Red Wing, Wabasha and Winona), plus Wisconsin and Illinois. Publication dates are pending.



**advance and
champion welcoming
experiences for all**



tribal nation engagement

In FY2026, we continued to build relationships with Tribal Nations that share geography with Minnesota. Explore Minnesota completed eight Tribal Consultations and introduced our regional coordinators to Tribal staff, strengthening local city and county relationships with Tribal economic and tourism efforts.

We kicked off our first-ever content project in collaboration with Tribal Nations, with a debut slated for Winter 2027. This content will be live on exploreminnesota.com, and feature a special Tribal Nations navigation, an interactive Tribal Nations map, and landing pages for each Nation that feature key travel attractions.

During FY2026 Tribal consultations, participants discussed the potential for Tribal tourism offices, both within the Tribes and statewide. Explore Minnesota is currently holding space for the Tribes to continue these discussions quarterly. Explore Minnesota Film also engaged with Tribes by finalizing the first-ever “Film Production Guide: for Native stories/ Native locations.” The guide provides an overview of best practices when working with Tribal Nations in the film production process.

We continue to develop a relationship with MAICC (Minnesota American Indian Chamber of Commerce) with a goal of increasing tourism-related contacts through the Native communities across the state.

TRIBAL NATION GRANT PROGRAM

As part of the FY2024–25 biennial budget, and reported in the FY2025 Explore Minnesota Annual Report, \$2.2 million in one-time funding was allocated to Explore Minnesota for a new Tribal Nations Tourism Grant Program to support Tribal tourism marketing and development for Tribal Nations located within the geographic boundaries of Minnesota. The program was officially closed out at the end of FY2026. In total, eight Tribal Nations participated in the program.

This one-time funding supported a successful and meaningful investment in Tribal tourism. Completed projects reflected each Tribal Nation’s priorities and tourism goals. Projects included improvements to museums, event facilities, and community spaces; tourism marketing and wayfinding; outdoor recreation development; collateral and website development; and more.

visitor services & welcome centers

Explore Minnesota's Welcome Center program serves the traveling public and supports Minnesota's tourism communities and businesses by distributing travel brochures and information at state-operated and partner welcome centers at no cost.

State and partner centers are located inside Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT) rest areas along the state's major interstates and trunk highways, and are operated in cooperation with MNDOT.

Affiliate welcome centers, operated independently by local community organizations, are an integral part of visitor services by providing travelers with local expertise and resources.

The combined efforts of our state, partner, and affiliate welcome centers help strengthen industry engagement, provide valuable programs and services to the tourism industry, and create a consistent and welcoming experience for travelers.

visitor services	
Welcome center visitors	1,477,483
Customer service: direct calls and voicemail	2,172 (-13.5%) [†]
Customer service: email	1,040 (-46%) [†]
Requests for Explore Minnesota Visitor Kits/Mailed	22,630 (-18%) [†]
Tourism brochures & materials distributed at state-run welcome centers	537,403 (+26%)

welcome centers	
Number of State-Run Welcome Centers	6
Number of Partner Welcome Centers	3
Number of Affiliate Welcome Centers	63 (+7%)



[†] Explore Minnesota-operated centers only



**provide industry
leadership and
maximize partner
collaboration**

industry outreach and engagement



During FY2026, the Industry Relations team conducted over 230 in-person meetings with stakeholders, including one-on-one consultations, agency updates, specialized presentations and attending key events.

stakeholder survey

The Annual Industry Stakeholder Survey was conducted in July 2025 to gather insights that will inform the agency's work and our industry programs.

KEY TAKEAWAYS, INDUSTRY PRIORITIES AND ACTION ITEMS:

Continue the Marketing Grant Program – The agency continues to update and refine this vital grant program to ensure it remains current and meets the needs of destination marketing organizations, is easy to use, and complies with State of Minnesota guidelines and best practices.

Increase focus on small communities – Market smaller and/or more rural parts of the state. Our new "Destinations" marketing initiative, along with the new Substack platform, furthers the agency's expanding coverage of the state. The project divides Minnesota into 11 microregions in order to tell more in-depth stories about these unique areas. Learn more at exploreminnesota.com/destinations.

Expand the Explore Minnesota Tourism Conference – Increase its duration to provide more time for industry networking and peer-to-peer insights. The 2027 conference will be a full two-day program, with more case studies and tactical content.

Provide marketing leadership – Share more marketing content, development and strategy along with best practices and increased industry collaboration. More frequent updates are shared in Industry News, on the industry website, and through regional monthly meetings where our internal subject matter experts overview trends and best practices.

regional roundtables

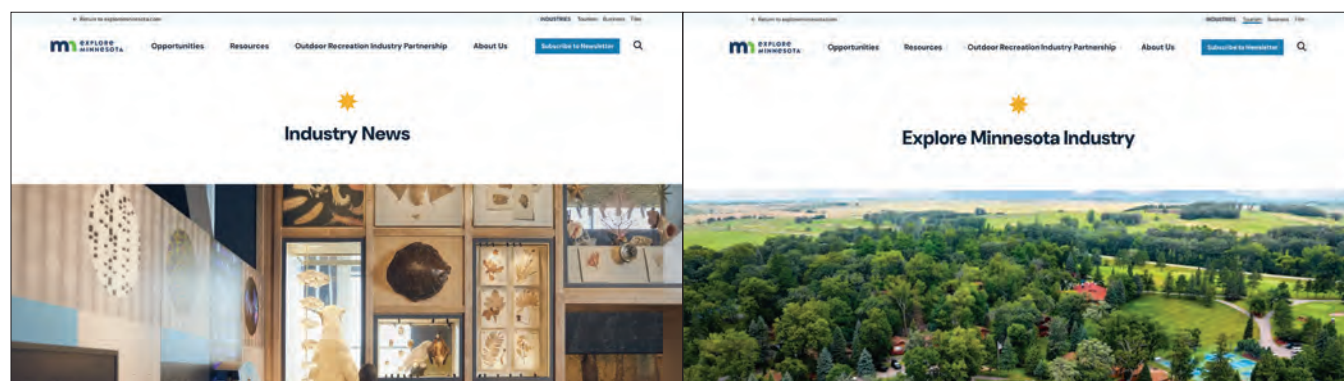
We relaunched our Regional Roundtables in the spring of 2026. Explore Minnesota traveled to each of our five service regions and held in-person discussions with tourism and travel-related businesses, organizations, and community partners. These 90-minute sessions were designed to foster collaboration, share insights, and strengthen our engagement with Minnesota’s tourism industry. An additional virtual meeting was also held. Over 265 stakeholders participated in the roundtables to share important insights about their challenges, opportunities and ideas for collaboration with Explore Minnesota and each other.

industry news & new industry website

Industry News is Explore Minnesota’s weekly email newsletter, providing news and tips for the people who market Minnesota and its destinations. Content is housed on our tourism industry website and includes highlights of the agency’s work, upcoming industry events, research, educational resources, marketing opportunities and other tourism-related information

Industry news subscribers	4,481
Industry news views	70,567

The new industry website launched in July 2026. Accessible at exploreminnesota.com/industry, the Industry website has a refined menu, enhanced search function and expanded educational resources for the industry.



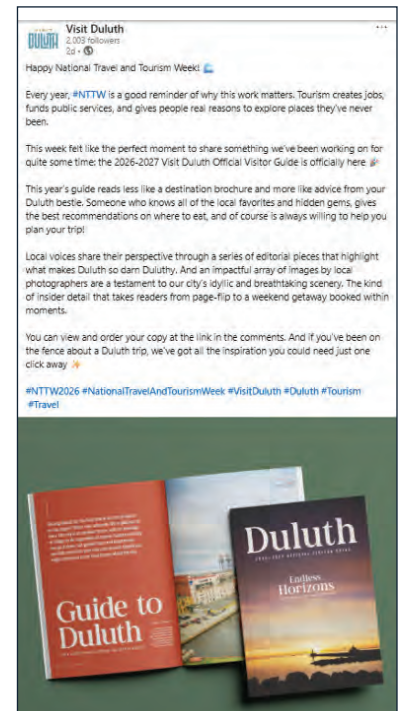
community-specific research & resources

We continue to provide current data and research to the tourism industry, including state and county-level visitor economic reports, seasonal travel indicators, hotel occupancy and performance metrics, brand and sentiment data, and economic trends. This year, we introduced enhanced county-level data to help communities illustrate the importance of tourism and its economic impact on a local level.

national travel and tourism week

National Travel and Tourism Week (NTTW) is U.S. Travel Association's annual public relations event recognizing the essential role travel plays in powering the economy and strengthening communities across the nation.

Ahead of this year's NTTW on May 3–9, 2026, Explore Minnesota created an industry toolkit of resources and templates to help communities and businesses elevate tourism impact stories through social media and earned media.



strategic partnerships & major events



2025 minnesota governor's pheasant hunting opener

The 2025 Minnesota Governor's Pheasant Hunting Opener was held in Ortonville and Big Stone County, Oct. 10-11. Explore Minnesota collaborated with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the Big Stone Lake Area Chamber of Commerce and Tourism to promote messages about tourism, outdoor recreation and hunting, and strengthen relationships with communities, stakeholders and elected officials.

2026 minnesota governor's fishing opener

The 2026 Minnesota Governor's Fishing Opener was held in Stillwater, May 8-9, marking the 79th year of this tradition. Explore Minnesota partnered with Discover Stillwater, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and over 30 other local and statewide partners to celebrate the start of Minnesota's walleye fishing season.

Radio, print, TV, and social media outlets covered the event, focusing on the area's fishing opportunities along the St. Croix River, as well as Stillwater's unique tourism story and natural resources. The resulting earned media stories highlighted the area's historic downtown, Lumberjack Landing project, Washington County Heritage Center, and fishing on the St. Croix River.

PHEASANT HUNTING OPENER

57 media interviews conducted

- 2M audience reach across all channels
 - » 6.2K total social audience
- 7 media outlets in attendance

FISHING OPENER

179 media interviews conducted

- 1.2B audience reach across all channels
 - » 140K total social audience
- 21 media outlets in attendance

explore minnesota tourism conference

The 2026 Explore Minnesota Tourism Conference was held Feb. 11-12 at the Duluth Entertainment Convention Center. This premier annual industry education event drew a combined attendance of over 550 tourism industry professionals, both in person and via virtual broadcast. All available content was recorded and made available on our tourism industry site as an educational resource at no charge after the conference.



The conference program included our Executive Director's look back at the agency's 2025 successes and a look forward to the 2026 campaign and priority initiatives. Keynote and breakout session speakers delivered timely messages on traveler sentiment, industry trends, practical uses for AI, how to create a social charter and other tactical tourism-related topics.

The 2026 Explore Minnesota Tourism Awards were presented during the second day of the conference. These annual awards celebrate the outstanding people, marketing activities and promotion initiatives that make Minnesota a premier travel destination. The 2026 award winners were:



**tourism
industry leader**
[Beth Pierce,
Iron Range
Tourism Bureau](#)



**emerging
leader**
[Ashlee White,
Visit Mankato](#)



**outstanding
marketing
campaign award
under \$1 million**
[Discover
Stillwater](#)



**outstanding
marketing
campaign over
\$1 million**
[Meet Minneapolis](#)



**social media
excellence**
[International
Falls, Ranier &
Rainy Lake CVB](#)



**outstanding
video award**
[International
Falls, Ranier &
Rainy Lake CVB](#)



**best destination
website award**
[Destination:
Woodbury](#)



**one minnesota
award**
[Visit Bemidji](#)



**exceptional
grant project**
[Experience
Maple Grove](#)



**exceptional
co-op campaign
award**
[Giants Ridge](#)

continuing education series

As part of our commitment to provide destination marketing and destination development educational resources for Minnesota's tourism industry, our Continuing Education Series programming provided three monthly webinars in both spring and fall. These free webinars were broadcast live, recorded and can be found on the tourism industry website.

- **September 2025** – The State of the American Roadtripper with Future Partners
- **October 2025** – Off-season Product Development with Virginia Tech and TourismWORKS
- **November 2025** – Agritourism in Minnesota with the University of Minnesota Tourism Extension
- **March 2026** – Leveraging Local: Creative Ways Communities Are Fueling Tourism with Bandwango and an industry panel
- **April 2026** – Tourism Reimagined: When Creative Risk Sparks Real Growth with Madden Media
- **May 2026** – Research: National Resident Sentiment Towards Sporting Events with Longwoods International and Cimarron Global Solutions

Future Partners



industry programs

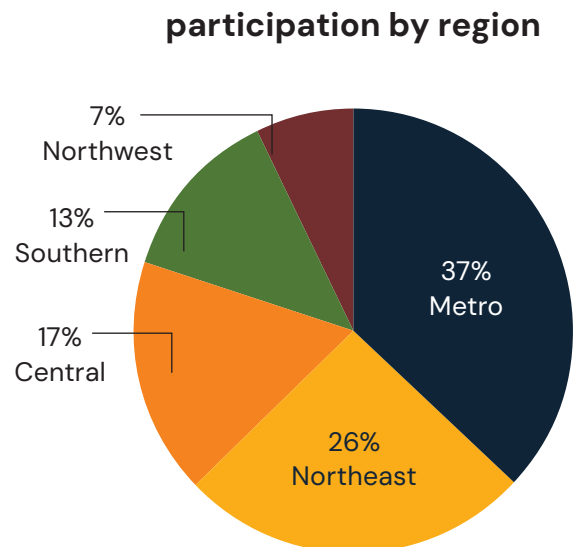
co-op marketing

Our Co-op Marketing Program provides discounted marketing programs to all tourism-related businesses and marketing organizations within Minnesota. Explore Minnesota further leverages its financial contribution to this program by negotiating discounted rates, exclusive packages and shared campaigns, which expand the industry's cooperative marketing power and opens doors to new audiences and opportunities.

The program is available to Minnesota tourism-related businesses, such as:

- Destination Marketing Organizations: convention and visitors bureaus, chambers of commerce, tourism organizations and associations
- Accommodations: Hotels, resorts, and other lodging types
- Hospitality: Restaurants, breweries, wineries, distilleries
- Attractions: Museums, ticketed and non-ticketed attractions, sightseeing companies, retail
- Entertainment: Theaters, venues and performing arts groups
- Events: Open to the public
- Outdoor recreation: Organizations, businesses and outfitters
- Golf Courses: Open to the public

FY2026 program summary	
Industry participants	130
• DMOs	62%
• Tourism-related businesses	38%
Number of campaigns	304
Vendor in kind contributions	\$1,581,567
Explore Minnesota investment	\$643,195
Industry investment	\$777,891





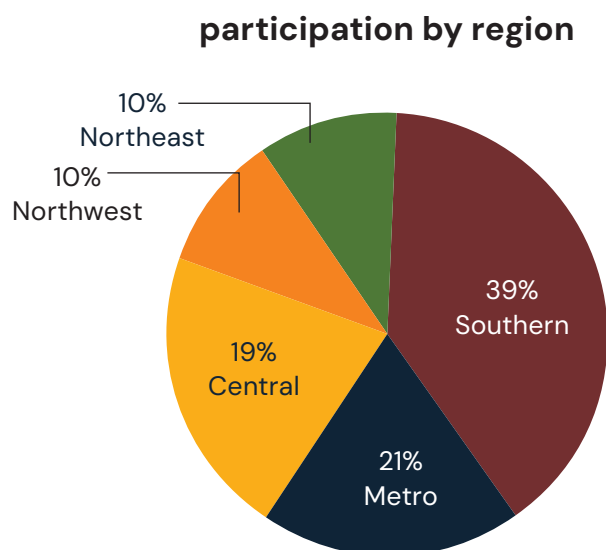
tourism marketing grant program

The FY2026 Tourism Marketing Grant program was funded and administered by Explore Minnesota to provide grants to aid individual destination marketing organizations and other tourism promotion organizations for the economic benefit of their communities.

Individual grant awards ranged from \$2,000 to \$11,000. Grant awards were based on the organization's total budget and required a 1:1 match.

Eligible tactics under the grant program were wide-ranging with no geographic requirements or limitations. Grant reporting shows that funding was used primarily to support traditional media advertising (TV, radio, digital, video/audio streaming, magazines, newspapers, etc.), creation or support of fulfillment pieces (visitor guides, direct mail, brochures, etc.), and organic and paid social media. Geographic placement was primarily within Minnesota and the adjacent states.

FY2026 program summary	
Total Grant Awards: Contribution by Explore Minnesota	\$436,200
Industry Match: Contribution by Grantees	\$710,927
Number of Grantees	104





**foster state
stewardship**

overview

destination stewardship

Destination stewardship is an ongoing effort at Explore Minnesota. It brings together local communities, government agencies, non-governmental organizations and the tourism industry to help maintain the state's cultural, environmental, economic, and visual integrity.



In FY2026, we:

- Launched a national “Come Visit Your Neighbors in Minnesota” campaign, following Operation Metro Surge. Rather than defining Minnesota by headlines, we chose hospitality; through earned media strategy and billboard placements in major markets, we invited visitors to support the local restaurants, shops, attractions and communities that needed them most.

[Learn more on page 13.](#)



- Continued the Explore Minnesota Continuing Education Series, monthly webinars providing the industry with additional opportunities to engage with subject matter experts on environmental and cultural preservation, community and stakeholder engagement, sustainable tourism development and industry best practices.

[Learn more on page 37.](#)

- Released our second annual report that details the total economic impact of Minnesota's outdoor recreation industry. Building on federal data, the report shows the industry generates \$13.9 billion in value added, supports 99,145 jobs and accounts for 2.7% of the state's GDP.

[Learn more on page 45.](#)

- Hosted the inaugural Outdoor Industry Summit to bring together business stakeholders from across the state to network and build a more vibrant outdoor industry sector. Based off the great reviews, we hosted the second annual Summit for September 2027.

- Continued the Explore Minnesota More podcast, telling the stories behind the state's outdoor recreation economy — from the Superior Hiking Trail's 40th anniversary to the whitewater revival on the Cedar River in Austin to Arctic Cat's roots in Thief River Falls.

[Learn more on page 45.](#)



- Launched a mini campaign for resident attraction based on key learnings from the previous biennium, and retooled some of our creative to better resonate with Gen Z. [Learn more on page 16.](#)
- Continued to partner with the DNR to plan and execute the 2025 Governor’s Pheasant Hunting Opener in Ortonville in October, and the 2026 Governor’s Fishing Opener in Stillwater in May. These high-visibility events attract large numbers of media outlets — generating fishing, hunting, conservation, outdoor, travel, business and lifestyle stories — and create a positive and lasting impact for host communities. [Learn more on page 35.](#)
- Continued our partnership with DEED to promote Minnesota as the best place to do business via deep collaboration on the comprehensive user experience between our two web properties. [Learn more on page 46.](#)
- Launched the 10,000 Stories Fund, a program that encourages new Minnesota stories on screen while supporting sustainable careers in the state’s creative industries.
- Continued Explore Minnesota’s Tribal Consultations, state-to-Tribal Nation formal conversations with the 11 Tribes that share geography with Minnesota, initiated regional coordinator introductions, and finalized our Tribal Nations film guide to educate film production companies about working or setting a film in Indian Country. [Learn more on page 29.](#)
- Participated in trainings, conferences and collaboration opportunities with:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » American Bus Association » American Indigenous Tourism Association » Brand USA » City Nation Place » Circle Wisconsin » Community of Minnesota Resorts » Destinations International » Great Lakes USA and Cruise the Great Lakes » Greater MSP » Hospitality Minnesota » Informa Connect » Minnesota Chamber of Commerce » Minnesota Tourism Association » Mississippi River Country 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Mississippi River Parkway Commission » MN Active Transportation Advisory Committee » National Council of State Tourism Directors » National Tour Association » The Outdoor Recreation Roundtable » Public Relations Society of America » The State of Minnesota’s Tribal State Relations Training » Upper Midwest Convention & Visitors Bureau » University of Minnesota Extension » US Travel » Many economic and community development agencies around the state
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explore minnesota film

Explore Minnesota Film was established as an office within Explore Minnesota on July 1, 2024. We administer the Minnesota Film Production Tax Credit Program; promote Minnesota as a production destination and provide a free, statewide database of crew, production services and locations throughout Minnesota.

Explore Minnesota Film operates under a single program mission. Most of its budget activity is tax-credit based and is not reflected in program funding.

Program support includes:

- Marketing campaigns, representing Minnesota at film industry markets and conferences regionally, nationally and globally
- Supporting workforce development opportunities for Minnesotans

operating budget

\$825,000 base (annually)

GROW MINNESOTA'S FILM ECONOMY

In FY2026, we attracted 11 new major projects to the Minnesota Film Production Tax Credit Program. These projects contributed \$38,130,075 to Minnesota's local creative economy.

metrics	FY2026	FY2025
Number of tax credit film projects	11	3
Credits allocated	\$8,801,871	\$989,772
Potential economic impact	\$38.1 million	\$3.9 million

PROMOTE MINNESOTA AS A TOP PRODUCTION DESTINATION

We launched a successful marketing campaign celebrating the 30th anniversary of the iconic Minnesota-made film, “*Fargo*”, blending vertical video and nostalgia to reintroduce Minnesota as the best state for film, life and visitation, and reached over a million unique viewers. The video “Minnesota, On the Case Again” quickly became Explore Minnesota’s highest-viewed video ever on YouTube and drove nationwide engagement, speaking requests, and new tax credit film projects.

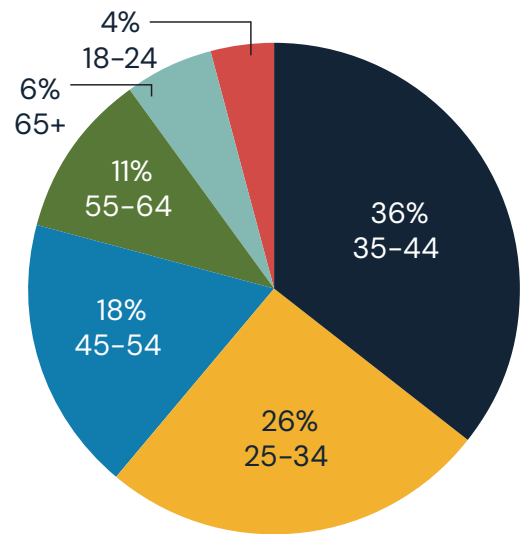
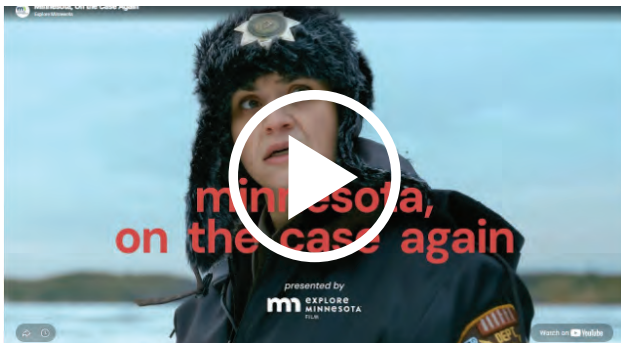
- Press release reach – 106,370,64
- Advertising Value Equivalency – \$983,928.48

instagram reach	views	interactions
Organic	139,413	8,440
Paid	458,477	1,880,615

We pitched Minnesota at national industry events including AFCI Week in Cincinnati, Ohio; True/False Film Fest in Columbia, Missouri; South by Southwest in Austin, Texas; and AFCI Studio Summit in Los Angeles, California.

In state, we pitched the film tax credit program, workforce development opportunities and the free, statewide production directory to filmmakers, business owners and crew attending Twin Cities Film Festival, Mama Papaya Cinefilm, Ely Film Festival, Minneapolis–St. Paul Film Festival and Zeitgeist Minnesota Film Festival.

TOP AUDIENCES BY AGE



minnesota, on the case again

See our video celebrating 30 years of “*Fargo*” and promoting Minnesota as the best place for film production.

With generous incentives, diverse landscapes, great crews and film-savvy communities, plus a supportive film office with a track record quickly processing incentives, Minnesota is ready for primetime.



outdoor recreation industry partnership (ORIP)

In FY2025, ORIP made significant strides in promoting, supporting and growing Minnesota's outdoor recreation economy.

INDUSTRY CONVENING AND RESEARCH

We released the [Minnesota Outdoor Recreation Economic Impact Report](#), providing critical data and insights on outdoor recreation's contribution to Minnesota's gross domestic product (GDP), job growth and quality of life. We also held the inaugural Outdoor Recreation Industry Summit (June 26, 2025) which brought together leaders from across the outdoor industry to collaborate on ideas for the future of Minnesota's outdoor recreation economy.

EXPANDING ACCESS TO THE GREAT OUTDOORS

To provide input and guidance on the positive impacts of outdoor recreation, we participated in committees for the Minnesota Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights and the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). Both committees are working to expand access and participation in the outdoors.

CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT

We joined the Confluence of States, held more than 100 stakeholder meetings across Minnesota, and launched a monthly newsletter. We also collaborated with unique industry partners to amplify great stories of outdoor recreation businesses, offerings and inclusivity on more than 25 episodes of our [Explore Minnesota More podcast](#).

OUTDOOR RECREATION IMPACT AROUND THE STATE

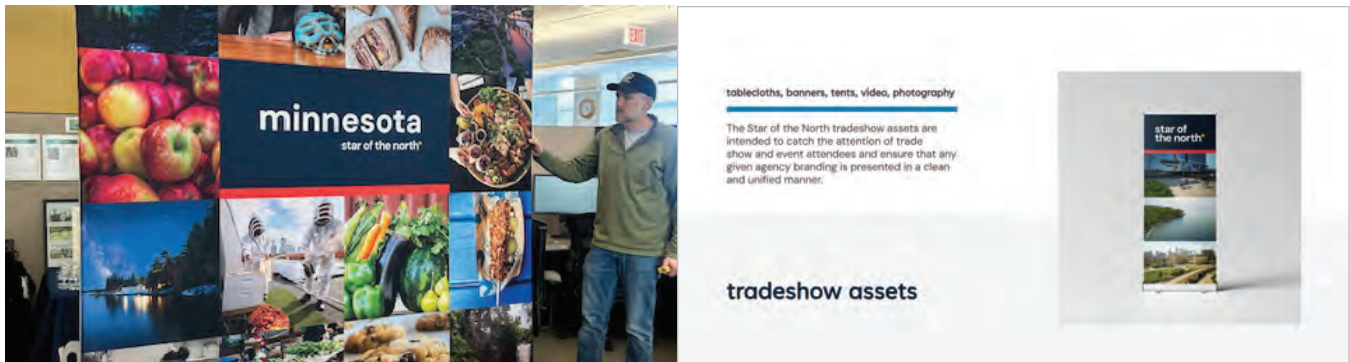
We participated in several events aimed at growing interest in outdoor recreation, including the First Annual Paddling Opener and the inaugural Star Tribune Unbound outdoor celebration. We are thrilled to welcome the USA Cycling Gravel National Championships in La Crescent (and La Crosse, Wisconsin) in both 2025 and 2026, as well as the National Outdoor Recreation Conference in 2026 and America's most influential outdoor recreation trade show, Outdoor Retailer, placing Minnesota at the top of the list for outdoor recreation opportunities in the U.S.

These accomplishments reflect the growing energy, collaboration, and momentum behind Minnesota's outdoor recreation sector. Explore Minnesota and ORIP remains committed to building a more connected, resilient, and inclusive outdoor economy in the years ahead.

strategic interagency partnerships

BUSINESS ATTRACTION ALIGNMENT

In lieu of a paid business attraction campaign, Explore Minnesota continued working with the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) to align materials and more uniformly market Minnesota as the Star of the North for business. One significant outcome included a redesign of both DEED and Explore Minnesota’s business-focused website assets to improve user experience.



TRADE SHOW TOOLKIT LAUNCHED

As the state’s promotional agency, Explore Minnesota has a long history of marketing the best of Minnesota. In 2026, we launched a first-of-its-kind Minnesota Trade Show Toolkit to help other state agencies market Minnesota to non-Minnesotan audiences at trade shows and events worldwide.

The toolkit includes assets and templates — e.g., logos, messaging, banner designs, tablecloths — to help market Minnesota as the Star of the North. This Toolkit is intended as a guide and resource for agencies to use to promote the state with one cohesive voice and look.

strong early results

Five agencies supported:

- Minnesota Department of Administration, Risk Management
- Minnesota Department of Agriculture
- Minnesota Department of Public Safety
- Minnesota Department of Transportation, Aeronautics
- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

Due to initial positive interest around this offering, Explore Minnesota also began supporting requests from in-state events, including participating in a MedTech-events focused working group through MedTech 3.0. An in-state events strategy will launch in FY2027.



tourism council

The [Explore Minnesota Tourism Council](#) consists of up to 35 individuals representing various sectors of Minnesota’s travel, tourism and hospitality industries. Appointed by the Governor, this advisory council serves the broader interests of tourism in Minnesota by promoting activities that support, maintain and expand the state’s domestic and international travel market, which generates visitor expenditures, tax revenue and employment. Council members share insights with leadership, helping to inform strategy to sustainably increase travel across all areas of the state.



livability and economic development council

The [Explore Minnesota for Business Council](#) consists of up to 14 representatives from economic development, talent acquisition, higher education and business sectors across the state. Appointed by the Governor, Council members advise Explore Minnesota on its promotional efforts for livability, workforce development and economic opportunity. As part of their role, Council members provide professional insights into community, business and marketing.



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C	Paul Vincent	29	Explore Minnesota Staff Jaida Grey Eagle
1	Paul Vincent		Explore Minnesota Staff
3	Riley Hallaway	30	Explore Minnesota Staff
5	Riley Hallaway	31	Riley Hallaway
6	Paul Vincent	35	Riley Hallaway
7	Paul Vincent	36	Riley Hallaway
11	Paul Vincent	39	Experience Rochester
23	Paul Vincent	42	Riley Hallaway Explore Minnesota Staff
24	Ryan Taylor Explore Minnesota Staff Emmanual Canaan	47	Paul Vincent
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