



explore minnesota tourism council meeting

September 15, 2026





agenda

11:00 a.m.: Welcome / Quick intros (new members)

11:05 a.m.: Explore Minnesota Q2 look forward

- Travel + livability marketing (Marketing)
- Education + industry engagement
+ international marketing + visitor services
(Destination Development)
- Communications + media relations
- Outdoor Recreation
- Tribal Liaison
- Film
- Legislative

12:30 p.m.: **Lunch**

tourism council seats expiring 01/2027

At-large Member

Dan Hartman

Travel Agency Representative

LaTasha Reed

Festivals And Events
Representative

Vacated

Arts and Culture Representative

Dr. Heidi Swank

Metro Tourism Region

Courtney Ries

Minnesota Association of
Convention & Visitors Bureau

Beth Fischer

Convention Facility
Representative

Kate Setley

North Central/West Tourism
Region

Rachel Thompson

Resorts Representative

Mr Frank Soukup III

Retail Sales Representative

Molly Luther

Northeast Tourism Region

Beth Pierce

Restaurant Representative

Ms. Stephanie Shimp

Transportation Representative

Jana Webster

Northwest Tourism Regional

Joshua Peterson

Campground Representative

David McArthur

marketing + brand

presented by Kat Sutton



★ fall campaign – live until Oct. 30



What's new?

- Regional targeting for brand, outdoor, culture
- In-state specific messaging
- Atlantic partnership content
- Regional billboards
- Highlights of wildfire-affected areas

in FY2028
Star of the North fall
episode + itinerary in southern
Minnesota



★ winter 2027 campaign

Because we paused our FY2026 winter campaign, we are *refreshing* creative this year and saving funds for other new creative/production needs.

- Nov. 2 – Feb. 8
- Connected TV (CTV), online video (OLV), social media (Instagram, Reddit), rich media, remarketing and SEM
- Continued Atlantic partnership – highlighting why Minnesota thrives and celebrates winter
- Organic content (paused in FY2026) will highlight why Minnesota is the coziest place in the nation



spring/ summer 2027 campaign

👁️ sneak preview of 2027
travel guide cover

destination development

presented by Beth Helle





★ looking ahead

- Industry Relations: **Tourism Conference, Jan. 27–28, 2027, Saint Paul RiverCentre**; registration, sponsorship and scholarship/mentorship applications open Thurs., Sept. 17
- Market Development: **Brand USA Travel Week**, Amsterdam, Sept. 28–Oct. 1
- Visitor Services & Welcome Centers: Hiring **Destination Experience Manager**

external relations

presented by Ben Johnson



local media strategy



- Revamped strategy includes targeted, personalized outreach to media outlets on a weekly basis
- Pitches on travel or tourism topics tailored to seasonal events or newsworthy pegs
- Timed to promote new Substack articles and announcements/events from EM Film and ORIP



★ national media outlook

- Reactive Media Opportunities
- Monthly and Weekly Pitching
- Geographic Strategy
 - Midwest core markets for immediate travel conversion
 - Drive markets aligned with events
 - Flight markets with direct access to Minnesota
 - Select national outreach for cultural credibility and awareness

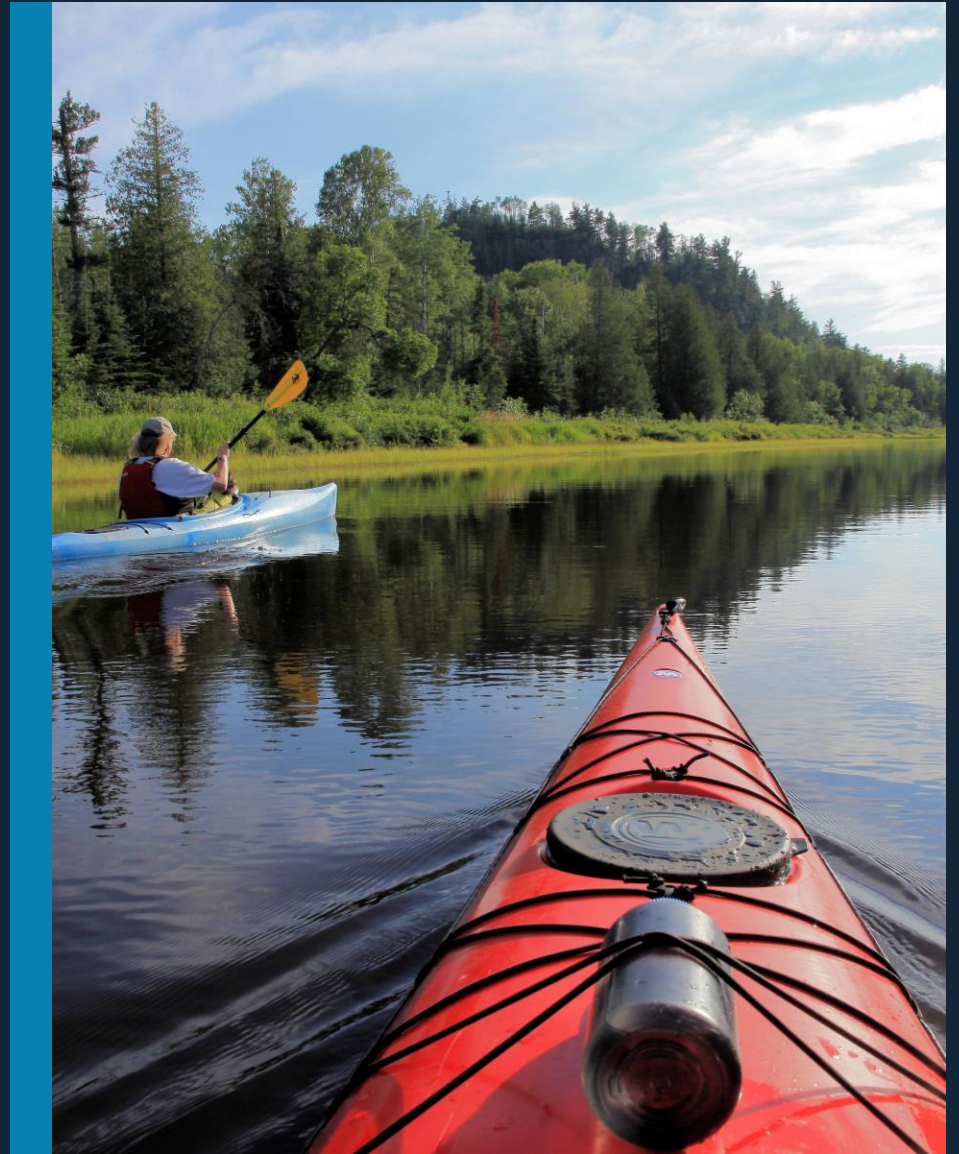


★ **subject matter expert database**

- Roster of subject matter experts who can serve as credible third-party voices in media opportunities.
- Flexible, organized and easy-to-activate network of trusted voices for media opportunities
- SMEs receive onboarding, training and potential national media opportunities
- EMN cultivates a deep bench of authentic, informed voices who offer compelling perspectives on why Minnesota is a great place to visit, live and do business in.

outdoor recreation

presented by Randolph Briley





★ looking ahead

Outdoor Retailer

announced their plans to continue calling MN home with the 2027 show scheduled for August 18-20.

The ORIP Roadmap will roll out in December setting a course for the next four years of our work growing Minnesota's outdoor recreation economy.

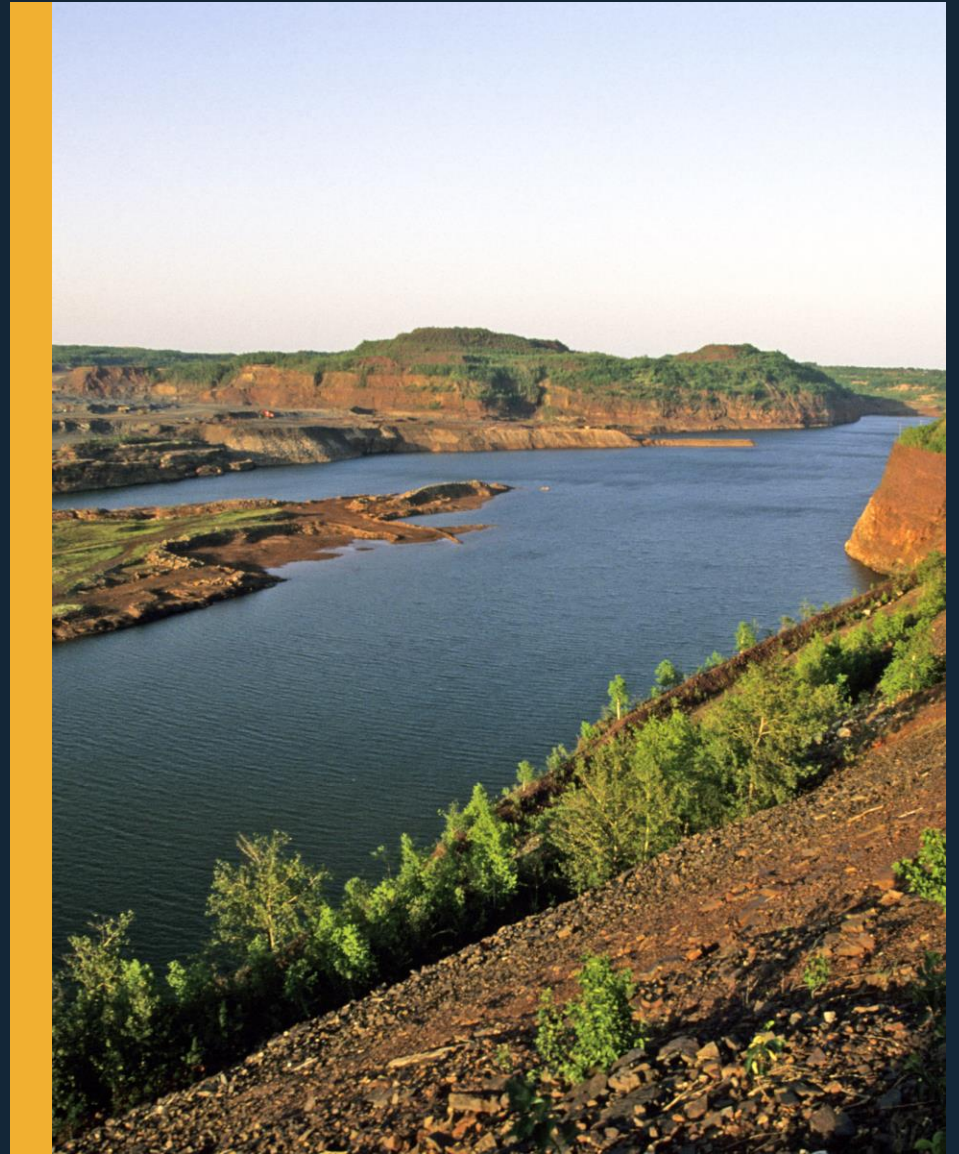
The Outdoor Industry Summit

is September 24 at Hyland Hills, in Bloomington. We currently have a 33% increase in registrants from 2025.

Explore MN More is up to 50 episodes! And we have many more stories to tell. Upcoming episodes include, accessibility in the outdoors, WMA 75th, downhill mtb at Giant's Ridge, the Cannon Valley Trail, and more!

Tribal relations

presented by Dawn Blanchard





★ looking ahead

- FY2027 Tribal Consultation Update
- Native Film Guide
- Tribal Tourism Office discussions continue
- Tribal Liaison Governor transition planning



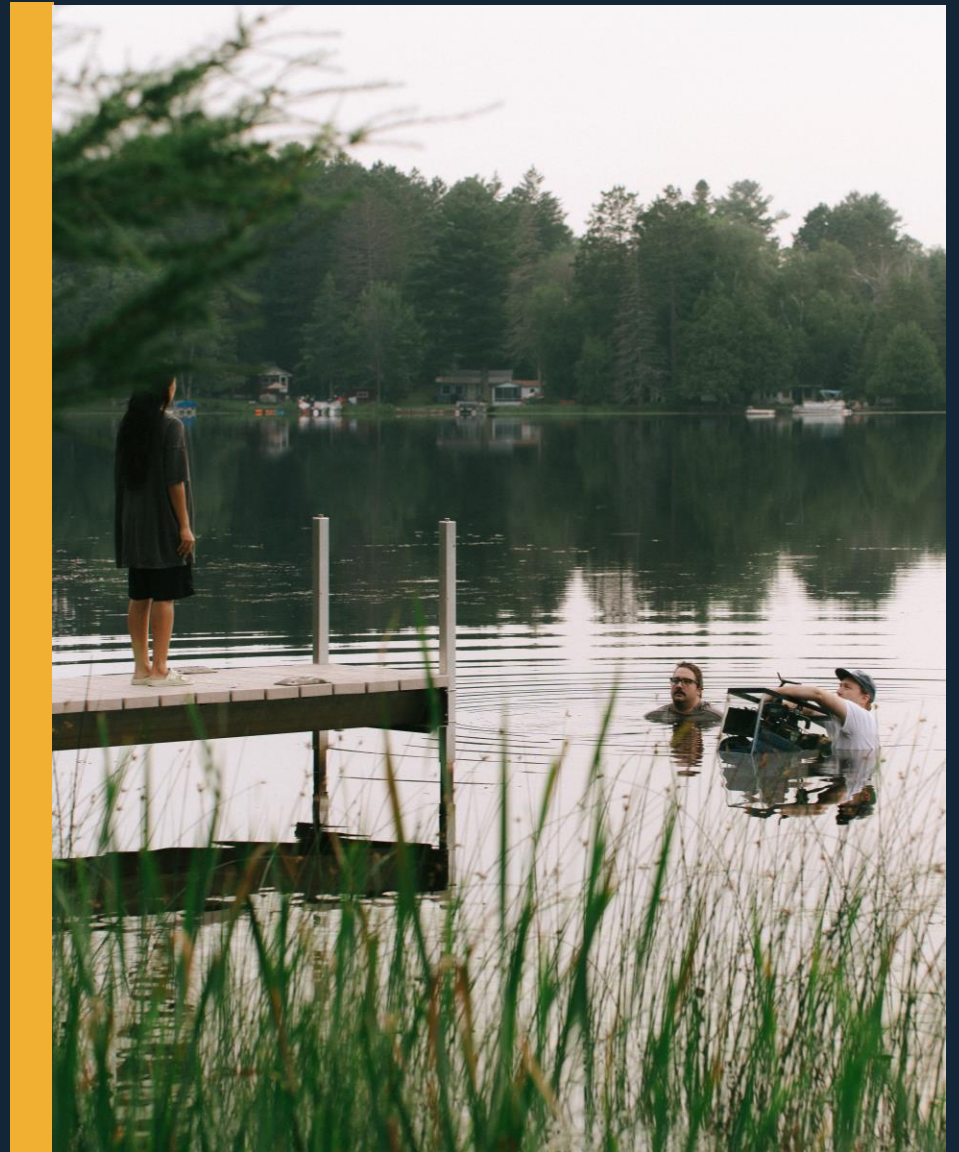
★ tribal nation content project

Beginning with formal Tribal Consultations in summer 2025, this project is slated to launch in winter 2026.

- **NEW** Tribal Nations navigation on exploreminnesota.com, plus a landing page for each of the 11 Tribal Nations that share geography with Minnesota, featuring key attractions for visitation
- **NEW** Interactive Tribal Nations map will debut on the destinations page
- **MORE** written content about Native culture in Minneapolis–St. Paul, how to respectfully visit a Tribal Nation, and more photo/video assets to bring the project to life

film look-forward

presented by Nell Lawrenz-Wareham





★ let's roll

Proud to report a **5x increase in projects** and a **13x increase** in potential economic impact from FY25 to FY26.

Allocated eight new productions since June, representing **\$37.7M** in potential economic impact. Currently **15 active productions** across the state.

Announced the [10,000 Stories Fund projects](#)

Planning workforce development workshop in spring 2027 with MIGIZI, FDLTCC and UMFO.

legislative + administration

presented by Lauren Bennett McGinty





legislative

- All 201 members of the MN legislature, the Governor and statewide elected officials are up for election in November.
- Session begins on Tuesday, Jan 12, 2027.
- Explore Minnesota will submit policy and budget proposals for review this fall.
- Final proposal decisions will be made by the new administration.

explore minnesota's strategic pillars

Our strategic pillars represent the high-level imperatives that define why the organization exists and where it is headed.



strengthen minnesota's competitiveness

Expand the Star of the North strategy through data-driven marketing, integrated storytelling, and coordinated efforts that grow travel, livability, outdoor recreation, film, and investment.

Goal: Position Minnesota as one of the most competitive states for visitors, residents, talent, entrepreneurs, filmmakers, and investors.



boost minnesota's national and global visibility

Elevate bold, inclusive narratives, expanding digital reach, and showcasing the state's authentic experiences to increase awareness and attract audiences across the country and around the world.

Goal: Establish Minnesota as one of America's most admired and recognized destinations and places to live, work, and invest.



champion minnesota's future together

Deepen collaboration with industry partners, communities, Tribal Nations, and staff to advance stewardship, inclusivity, and a unified approach to growing Minnesota's economy.

Goal: Build a stronger statewide ecosystem for tourism, economic development, film and recreation that benefits all Minnesotans.

explore minnesota's strategic objectives

The five strategic objectives serve as the actionable link between our strategic pillars and the day-to-day decisions about programs, initiatives, and investments, keeping our work aligned and purposeful.



enhance minnesota's competitive position

Projects advance data-driven marketing, integrated storytelling, or demonstrably elevates travel, livability, outdoor recreation, or film investment in Minnesota.



increase national and global visibility

Projects expand awareness of Minnesota — through bold narratives, increased digital reach, or authentic experiences — better positioning the state as a top destination to visit, live, work, and invest.



drive sustainable economic growth across key sectors

Projects contribute to long-term growth in tourism, economic development, film, or outdoor recreation — ensuring that Minnesota's economy thrives for the benefit of all residents.



advance community benefit, inclusivity and stewardship

Projects promote inclusivity, honor diverse perspectives and cultures, support stewardship of natural and cultural resources, and deliver benefits for communities across the state.



foster statewide collaboration and connectivity

Projects deepen collaboration with industry partners, communities, Tribal Nations, or cross-sector stakeholders, strengthening Minnesota's overall economic ecosystem.

current environment + potential

strengths

- World-class natural assets
- Four-season opportunities
- Strong tourism economy with moderate YoY growth
- Strong outdoor recreation economy
- Increased return YoY
- High quality of life; affordable with strong investments into key lifestyle amenities
- Strong brand equity; welcoming, authentic, outdoor-focused

weaknesses

- Overall perception; cold / winter issues, news headlines
- Low national / international visibility
- Low international visitation
- Siloed investment efforts
- Workforce and business environment challenges
- Political and geographical fragmentation locally + nationally
- Lack of competitive + sustained budget for EMN

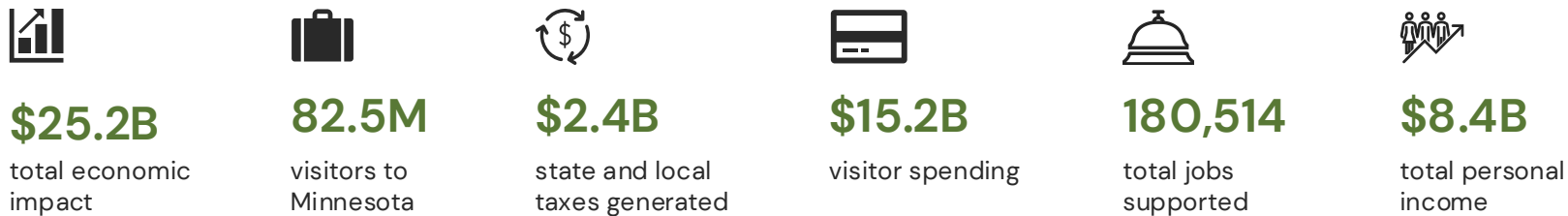
opportunities

- Remote work and climate migration
- Outdoor recreation as a mechanism for rural growth
- Film production expansion
- Rural tourism development
- Major events attraction
- Increased awareness and visitation as a state revenue driver
- Increased collaboration with Tribal Nations, communities of color, and accessibility advocates

threats

- Other states increasing investment in tourism / marketing
- Increased politicization of nonpartisan efforts
- Economic downturn
- Climate change impacts
- Aging workforce / staff succession
- Lack of federal investment in partner organizations

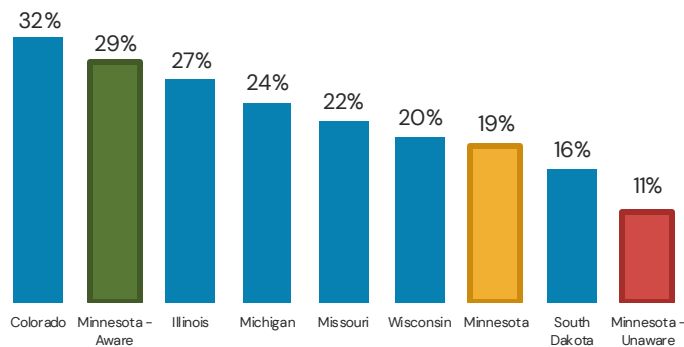
2025 visitor economy



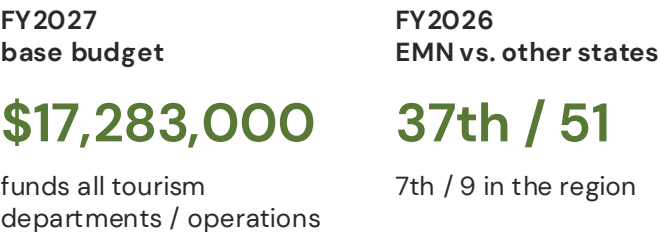
outdoor recreation economy



likelihood to visit among regional competitors



explore minnesota's budget



overall national rankings



Topic 1: Strengthen Minnesota's Competitiveness

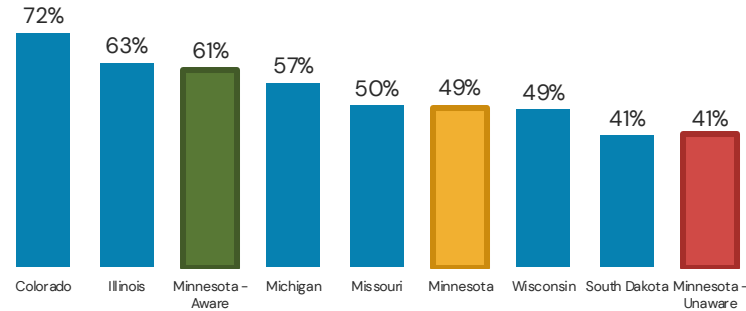
Questions to consider:

- What key strengths or unique assets should Minnesota elevate to better compete with other states?
- What is one way your organization or association could more intentionally support statewide competitiveness?

10 minutes

regional perception

MN ranks just behind MO and <1% ahead of WI in familiarity. Among those aware of Minnesota's creative, the state moves ahead of both MO and MI, highlighting the impact of advertising.



international perception of the united states

canada

- Complex, conflicted relationship with the U.S.
- Cited culture, attractions, natural beauty, etc., as reasons to go
- Politics, tariffs, anti-Canada rhetoric, border anxiety, reception concerns, cost pressure
- Still view people, communities, and destinations positively; destination-level messaging outperforms national

national perception

- **58%** of travelers are at least **somewhat familiar** with MN (higher for those closer)
- Of the two-thirds of travelers who have visited MN, **77%** say they had a **positive experience**
- **56%** of prospective travelers view MN **favorably as a vacation destination**
- **Associations:** Lakes, cold, Mall of America, sports, beautiful nature, friendly
- **Likelihood to visit MN increased 3–22%** after reading statements about what MN has to offer

Source: Explore Minnesota Reputation & Travel Preferences Survey, KRC Research, April 2025; surveyed travelers from Fargo, Moorhead, Sioux Falls, Des Moines, Cedar Rapids, Chicago, Denver, Detroit, Dallas, Green Bay, LaCrosse, Eau Claire, Madison, and Los Angeles

europa & other markets

- Some markets (U.K., Ireland) are performing better
- Of travelers not considering the U.S. right now, the top deterrents are cost (24%), the desire to visit other countries first (23%), and the political climate (22%)
- Overseas arrivals decreased 7% year over year in July 2026.

Source: Brand USA

Topic 2: Boost Minnesota's National and Global Visibility

Questions to consider:

- What barriers do you see that limit Minnesota's visibility nationally or globally?
- How could your organization better align or collaborate with statewide marketing efforts to amplify Minnesota's brand?

10 minutes

marketing & branding

- Co-ops
- Grants
- Marketing resource guide
- Industry relations
- FAMs
- Media opportunities
- Intra-regional planning
- Destination development opportunities
- Collaborative certifications

statewide engagement

- Industry intersections: outdoor recreation, film, business
- MN colleges & universities
- EDCs
- State agency engagement: Star of the North branding to external audiences for state agency events
- Major sporting events and conferences: branded booths or materials?

legislative presence

- Multiple associations and industries present with different priorities
- Key priorities have included:
 - Tourism policy: school start, lodging tax protection, social districts, etc.
 - Training program funding
 - Business policy: PFML, taxes, etc.

success in other states

- “Tourism caucus”: TX, CT, VT, NV, IA, VA
- Oregon is the first state to be “Accessibility Verified” by Wheel the World
- Specialized “trail” programs: Oregon Food Trail, Tennessee Music Pathways, Virginia LOVEWorks, Mississippi Freedom Trail, etc.

Topic 3: Champion Minnesota's Future Together

Questions to consider:

- What collaboration opportunities across sectors or communities could meaningfully strengthen Minnesota's tourism ecosystem? What have you seen that works?
- How can we ensure tourism growth is inclusive and benefits underrepresented communities?

10 minutes

new council meeting format

Goals:

- Build a more focused, more engaged meeting; keep recaps & look forwards focused on key details
- Center meetings around critical feedback periods, create space for more discussion
- Ensure meetings happen during less busy times during the season
- Aim for maximum participation based on interest
- Provide recap materials to all members through several outlets

Council requirements:

The council is only required to meet four times per year, the cadence is not in statute, this allows for greater flexibility on scheduling meetings. Quorums and minutes approvals are not required.

December

- Legislative, marketing & conference previews (1 hour, virtual)

Late February/March

- Legislative updates, marketing overview for the year (major updates from members), NTT0 planning (1.5 hours, virtual)

Late April

- Legislative session ending plans, business conditions into summer, major event awareness, mid-year performance updates (1 hour, virtual)

Early October

- Fiscal year-end performance, new data, legislative and conference planning, summer recap (up to 2 hours, virtual)



thank you!

