



IOWA TOURISM OFFICE
FISCAL YEAR 2023 REPORT
STATEWIDE TOURISM MARKETING SERVICES AND EFFORTS

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The Iowa Tourism Office is the official voice of the state's tourism industry and is part of the Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA). The office works collaboratively with Iowa's destinations and attractions to increase visitation, enhance economic impact of travel and market Iowa to travelers.

The Legislature appropriated \$2 million to the IEDA in fiscal year 2023 to award contracts to one or more entities to conduct statewide tourism marketing services and efforts, as well as to provide services to campaigns, workshops and conferences that promote travel and tourism throughout the state. Efforts were to meet the following requirements:

- a. The marketing services and efforts shall be of professional quality and shall be coordinated with, and not duplicate, existing programs or services conducted by the authority that are related to tourism marketing.
- b. The marketing services and efforts shall include hosting and leveraging tourism advocacy events.
- c. The marketing services and efforts shall be accessible to tourism-focused organizations.
- d. The marketing services and efforts shall advocate for the travel and tourism industry and the sectors connected to Iowa's visitor economy to leverage public and private partnerships to market and promote the state as a travel destination.

Meet in Iowa Grant Program (\$378,000)

Contracted Entity: Iowa Restaurant Association

The Meet in Iowa grant program was developed to incentivize and increase mid-week meeting and convention sales and room nights for lodging properties. The program offered organizers of events, conferences, meetings and group tours up to \$25,000 reimbursement toward eligible hard costs of hosting a meeting in Iowa. The allocation of \$378,000 above represents the calendar year 2023 program budget. The Iowa Restaurant Association / Iowa Hotel and Lodging Association was selected as administrator of this program through an RFP process in FY22. The program was extended based on calendar year 2022 results, which include:

- 74 total awardees
- 35 communities impacted
- 4,566 additional room nights booked as a direct result of program
- \$819,000 disbursed
- \$120,000 for administration and marketing of program
- Estimated economic impact of additional room nights: \$1,225,423.08

Results represent program success from May 1, 2022 – December 31, 2022. Results for calendar year 2023 will be provided in the September 2024 report.

Niche Tradeshow Partnership (\$321,566)

Contracted Entities: Iowa Travel Industry Partners, Xtreme Exhibits

Funding of \$200,000 was awarded to Iowa Travel Industry Partners (iTIP) to execute a comprehensive niche audience marketing campaign to focus on the recruitment of national meeting planners, sporting event rights holders and group tour operators. iTIP attended five national tradeshows under the Travel Iowa brand, developed a sports digital software program, created a sports tourism highlight video for marketing use and placed advertising to target these niche audiences. iTIP achieved the following results:

- 135 total appointments at tradeshows
- 850 total business leads from tradeshows
- 7 meetings/conferences booked to date
- Average quality of leads valued at 3.9 out of 5

The remaining funding of \$121,566 was utilized to contract with Xtreme Exhibits or tradeshow service and support, including booth purchase, shipping, set up, tear down and storage.

The Travel Iowa tradeshow booth is made available at no cost to industry partners to boost the state's presence at other national and regional tradeshows. In addition to the niche tradeshow partnership, whitewater and paddling industry partners utilized the booth at the Canoecopia tradeshow in Madison, Wisconsin in March 2023.



Marketing & Advertising Extension (\$370,000)

Contracted Entity: Fleishman Hillard

Funding assisted with the extension of FY22 marketing activities, showcasing industry partners and destinations across the state. The funding allowed consistent statewide marketing to continue into September 2022 in alignment with industry marketing. Destinations and attractions from across the state were featured in website content, paid advertising connected TV and online video advertising, display advertising, influencer campaigns and paid and organic social media. In total, the full campaign (March 2022 – September 2022) drove:

- 223.5 million media impressions
- 21 million video plays
- 20 million social media impressions
- 70,000 website visits

Travel Iowa Website & CRM Development (\$205,000)

Contracted Entity: Spindustry Digital

The Iowa Tourism Office worked with long-time digital agency partner Spindustry to develop a custom CRM (customer relationship management) system that ties to the website, traveliowa.com. The CRM system allows Iowa Tourism Office staff to track partner engagement efforts, a key measurable objective of the Iowa Tourism Industry Strategic Plan. The CRM system also allows industry partners a more efficient login process to access and update listings and events on the statewide website, order travel guides and road maps in bulk and access traveler leads. This system will continue to be improved as industry needs develop. This one-time investment replaces the need to budget for an annual licensing fee for a SaaS CRM system.

- \$105,000 for development of CRM (completed May 2023)
- \$100,000 to complete redesign and relaunch of traveliowa.com (completed September 2022)

Localhood Story Creator Tool (\$150,000)

Contracted Entity: Crowdriff

The Iowa Tourism Office purchased a license to provide complimentary access to the Localhood Story Creator tool, which is a first-of-its-kind content creation tool for tourism entities. Localhood access allows tourism partners to create vertical stories and utilize them on several social media channels, on digital website properties and become discoverable via Google's search network. Results include:

- 120 tourism partners using Localhood, 350 total stories created
- 2.2 million Google impressions of Iowa stories
- Average interaction rate of 60%
- Average click-through rate of 5.6%

Agritourism Development and Marketing Support (\$125,000)

Contracted Entities: Iowa State Fair, Emerge Marketing Solutions

The Iowa Tourism Office sponsored two agritourism-related events in August 2023, utilizing funds from FY23. Travel Iowa was a champion sponsor of the 2023 Iowa State Fair (\$75,000) and presenting sponsor of the 2023 Evolution of the Heartland event (\$50,000).

Iowa State Fair sponsorship components:

- Choose Iowa Brunch, in partnership with Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship and Iowa Restaurant Association to highlight farm-to-table restaurants, encourage nominations of Iowa chefs to James Beard Awards and to help launch the Choose Iowa program.
- Travel Iowa booth in the Varied Industries Building, staffed entirely by industry partners and providing them free promotional opportunities..
- Eight "selfie stands" sponsored by Travel Iowa around the Fairgrounds.
- First annual "Tourism Day at the Fair," providing networking and development opportunities for tourism industry partners.
- Logo and recognition on Iowa State Fair marketing materials.

Evolution of the Heartland is an event developed by industry partner Emerge Marketing Solutions and the communities of Manning and Audubon to showcase agricultural heritage and rural community businesses to travelers. The Iowa Tourism Office was the presenting sponsor of the August 2023 event and received primary brand promotion in print publications and advertising, speaking opportunities at the event, and a seat on the event planning committee. The event was attended by 140 people.

State of the Industry Surveys (\$50,000)

Contracted Entity: University of Northern Iowa Institute of Decision Making

A key imperative of the Iowa Tourism Industry Strategic Plan outlined the need to unify the tourism industry around a shared long-term vision. As part of this initiative, a method of regularly gathering feedback and information from the tourism industry was developed and the annual State of the Industry survey was launched. The survey report was completed in May 2023.

- 545 total survey respondents
- 62.8% of respondents rated the promotion and growth of tourism in the state as “excellent” or “good” with average mean rating of 3.74 (out of 5.0)
- Overall tourism marketing rated 3.7 out of 5.0
- Tourism product development rated 3.55 out of 5.0
- Tourism maintenance activities rated 3.46 out of 5.0

Tourism Conference Support (\$50,000)

Contracted Entity: American Program Bureau, Inc.

The Iowa Tourism Office contracted with American Program Bureau, Inc. to secure a keynote speaker for the 2023 Iowa Tourism Conference. Shawn Johnson East, former Iowan and Olympic Gold Medalist, assisted in promoting the tourism conference to attendees, the Soul of Iowa campaign to her Instagram audience, and was the final keynote speaker.

- Average speaker rating of 4.5 out of 5 (111 total respondents)
- 88% of survey respondents attended final keynote (anecdotally, final keynote speakers at the conference have attendance of approximately 70-75% of total attendees)

Bandwango Digital Passport Licenses (\$20,000)

Contracted Entity: Bandwango, LLC

The Iowa Tourism Office has developed several digital passports to encourage and incentivize visits to locations around Iowa. Passports have been developed in partnership with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Iowa Department of Transportation Scenic Byways program and the Iowa Wine, Beer and Spirits Promotion Board. Total passport sign-ups since January 2021: 23,118

Current active users of the passport program include:

- Iowa State Parks Passport: 3,662 (launched May 2023)
- Iowa Scenic Byway Passport: 610 (launched July 2023)
- Iowa Wine Passport: 1,447 (launched May 2021)
- Iowa Craft Beer Passport: 2,163 (launched May 2021)
- Iowa Distillery Passport: 1,081 (launched June 2021)

Travel Iowa Marketplace Sponsorship (\$10,000)

Contracted Entity: Central Iowa Tourism Region

The Iowa Tourism Office was presenting sponsor of the annual Travel Iowa Marketplace, held in November 2022. This event allows Iowa travel industry suppliers to opportunity to meet one-on-one with tour planners for bank clubs, senior groups, motorcoach companies, church groups and more. Suppliers attending the marketplace included Iowa attractions, hotels, destinations and group tour service providers.

- 31 tour planners in attendance
- 50 travel suppliers in attendance
- 100% of tour planners in attendance indicated on evaluation form that they would incorporate a destination in a future tour as a result of marketplace.