

4.1. Conduct ongoing research and analysis of evolving best practices for delivering visitor information

This Strategic Action strengthens Montana's tourism marketing efforts.

Recommended Tactics

TAC, ITRR, MTOT

- » Track changes in what sources of information are used by visitors in destination selection and trip planning, including emerging technologies. Draw upon ITRR's nonresident survey data, web analytics, academic research, and reporting in non-academic trade press.
- » Track changes in how those sources are used by visitors. Draw upon ITRR's nonresident survey data, web analytics, academic research, and reporting in non-academic trade press.
- » Track emerging best practices among DMOs for delivering visitor information. Draw upon academic research and reporting in non-academic trade press. Examine practices adopted by industry leaders, and those used by destinations similar to Montana, assessing effectiveness and cost.
- » Evaluate and benchmark current delivery of visitor information against emerging best practices (e.g., cost-effectiveness, ability to meet Montana's strategic goals, and viability of best practices in the context of Montana's resource and infrastructure constraints).
- » Make resulting information, insights, and guidance available to stakeholders.
- » Modify the Montana Tourism and Recreation Strategic Plan as needed to reflect evolving visitor information needs and best practices.

Regions, CVBs, Communities, Tribes, Businesses & Organizations

- » Keep abreast of evolving visitor information needs and DMO best practices as reported by MTOT, TAC, and ITRR.
- » Carry out web analytics and other analysis to help guide your visitor information distribution practices.
- » Share useful information and resources with MTOT and the TAC.

Indicators of Success

- » MTOT, ITRR, and the TAC effectively disseminate insights from research and analysis that are easily understood and applied by stakeholders.
- » Montana tourism stakeholders understand the emerging visitor practices for obtaining information and planning trips.
- » Montana tourism stakeholders make decisions about the provision of visitor information based upon valid academic and market/trade research and analysis.

- » Montana tourism stakeholders adopt a system of providing visitor information that is effective and uses resources optimally.
- » Montana tourism stakeholders are confident in their adoption and use of emerging technologies.
- » The Montana Tourism and Recreation Strategic Plan is updated and modified as needed to reflect evolving visitor information needs and best practices.

Background & Rationale

New information and communications technologies have changed how travelers obtain information, what information they want, and how they use that information. Because patterns of use are still evolving, meeting the information needs of visitors has become particularly challenging. The challenge involves not only the effectiveness of marketing and promotion, but also the cost. During this transition period, multiple new technologies are *supplementing*, not replacing, traditional information sources; adopting new technologies often involves a high cost in capital and labor; and the effectiveness and longevity of emerging technologies is uncertain. In the current environment, Montana's tourism stakeholders can neither afford to ignore new technologies; nor afford to invest heavily in technologies whose benefits are not fully proven. They must also not adopt technologies haphazardly. Each information source must have a specific role that it can fulfill effectively; and all sources must work as an integrated system.

Strategies and decisions regarding the provision of visitor information *must* be guided by sound research and analysis. An effective and viable visitor information system requires a commitment to evaluating and re-evaluating the best way to meet the evolving visitor needs and preferences. Thankfully, because this is a central issue for the global tourism industry, it is the subject of much research and analysis (both academic and trade research). The Montana tourism community can cost-effectively gain an understanding of the trends by monitoring published findings from peer-reviewed academic research and from open-source trade and market research. Reviewing this literature and extracting relevant insights can provide much of the guidance needed by Montana's stakeholders. Where insight is needed that is in some way particular to Montana, ITRR may be able to provide answers based upon existing non-resident survey data. ITRR and private research firms can also be engaged to undertake specific research on a key topic (e.g. conversion rates).

Effective distribution of insights from this research is critical to helping Montana's tourism stakeholders understand and respond effectively to the changing dynamics of providing visitor information (see Strategic Action 5.3).