

Utah Board of Tourism Development
Meeting Minutes
Salt Palace Convention Center, Salt Lake City
Friday, August 8, 2025

Board Members Present	Lesha Coltharp, Joan Hammer, Jessica Merrill, Jason Murray, Graydon Pearson, Harold Simpson, Melva Sine, Jordan Smith, Kevin Smith, Jennifer Wesselhoff, Shayne Wittwer
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Board Members Virtual	Nathan Rafferty, C.J. Wade
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Board Members Excused	Kaitlin Eskelson, Commissioner Victor Iverson
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Tourism & Film Staff	Tera Atwood, Rachel Bremer, Ben Cook, Rachel Creer, Lorraine Daly, Crystal Garza, Shayna Godfrey, Sorell Grow, Kim Heys, Melissa Jackson, Todd K. Jenson, Camille Johnson, Denise Jordan, Becky Keeney, Anna Loughridge, Carli Mahas, Ben Mangelsdorf, Cristina Martin, Derek Mellus, Jeff Moss, Josh Paluh, Virginia Pearce, Natalie Randall, Arianna Rees, Laici Shumway, Jasmine Simpson, Dave Williams, Heather Zang, Stacey Zoller
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Public	Sarah Benedict, Stacey Boney, Megan Christensen, Julie Comstock, Alexis Cortes, Lindsay D'Alessandro, Raelene Davis, Machel Devin, Nycole Durfey, Blaine Fackrell, Megan Fox, Terra Girvin, Tina Grange, Colin Greenberg, Alison Harford, Brittany McMichael, Shanna Memmott, Chris Newton, Falyn Owens, Janette Peatross, Angie Rothen, Emily Rovello, Jen Shakespeare, Bridget Siebert, Whitley Schlichte, Mick Soleta, Matt Sterzer, Sara Toliver, Maria Twitchell, Nancy Volmer, Allison Yamamoto-Sparks
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WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

Vice Chair Lesha Coltharp called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone.

MEETING MINUTES

MOTION: Joan Hammer motioned to approve the July 11, 2025, board meeting minutes. Jason Murray seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

MANAGING DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Natalie Randall, Managing Director, Utah Office of Tourism

- Thank you to the Visit Salt Lake team for hosting our meeting here at the Salt Palace Convention Center. We appreciate Dan Hayes, General Manager of the SPCC, for stopping by and welcoming us.
- Special thank you to the Co-op Marketing committee as well as the CaPR team for all the work they've put in over the past two months.
- Thank you to the Marketing Committee and the Marketing & Communications team in preparing the marketing plan for the year ahead.
- Governor Cox officially appointed our new chair, Nathan Rafferty, and vice chair Lesha Coltharp.
- First time together with our two new board members – Jessica Merrill and Harold Simpson. Excited for the expertise that they will bring to the board.
- Our numbers for 2024 were recently announced:
 - \$13.1B in direct visitor spending
 - supporting 164,600 jobs

- \$2.5B in local and state tax revenue
- Looking ahead, the landscape is changing and we are navigating the federal nexus of executive and secretarial orders, public lands, visitor and workforce visa programs, etc.
- The wildfires throughout the state have a significant impact on many partner communities. Thinking about how we support the communities as they face these challenges and more challenges ahead.
- Internally we are seeing tighter budgets within our office and across the state. But our visitors also are seeing tighter budgets – what they have to spend and the ways that they are spending.
- As a state, experiencing significant growth changes. The Olympics are on the horizon but key pieces we have heard from the governor include housing and workforce. How do we navigate these and what is the industry's role?
- Our office continues to be an industry convener in all of these conversations.
- Another key piece that has been rolled out is how we are telling the tourism story.
- Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute new piece called the visitor generated tax revenue report. This report breaks down the \$13.1B impact, which is hard to understand what that actually means for Utahns. This explains how much of those taxes from the visitor spend goes to education, roads, outdoor recreation, etc.
- Reflecting on why we do the work we do. It goes back to the people, both who we get to work with to move this great work forward as well as the people that benefitted from it, and what it means to have life elevated in Utah.
- Traveled with the governor to Virgin and talked to nationally ranked mountain biker Tyler McCaul and had an interesting conversation about public lands and how it can drive a local community economy. Also why public lands need to be utilized and preserved.
- In Washington, D.C., had the opportunity to speak about the Stars Act and how it will establish a visit to national parks free day in conjunction with the America250 program. It is another catalyst to talk about the importance of public lands, why people need these spaces to visit, why tourism and experiences are so important especially to the gateway communities to national parks.
- Visited Moab with the film “Zeus” project and saw the economic impact and positive diversification of it on the community.
- Thank you to all the partners that came to Council Hall for co-op interviews and sharing plans and ideas. It inspires our team.

Jefferson Moss, Executive Director, Governor's Office of Economic Opportunity

- Thank you to Natalie for the great job she and her team are doing.
- We have an incredible brand and thank you to the board for the role they play in the state.
- Grew up in Utah and still spend a lot of time in Southern Utah and sure, sometimes get frustrated as it is not as easy to get to places as it was when younger.
- Appreciate that we are giving something back to the world as Utah is now so well known as this incredible place and now, opening up all of these new opportunities with our state parks.
- Many conversations on the film side and the great work in the creative industry space. It is an important role within our economy and we need to have creative thinkers.
- If Utah wants to be truly innovative and create big, new, exciting things we need more creative people in the room.
- First start by truly listening and find out what we are doing well and what is good in the state. Also identify the gaps we have.
- During the next few months, convening a number of groups to get out and really understand.
- The first step in the Stanford design thinking process is empathy and trying to understand people's experience.
- The goal is to have a 10-year definitive, actionable plan for the state and something we can lean on.
- Things used to be more in isolation but now we are dealing with really big policy issues. In trying to bring more people to the state, we are wondering if we have enough affordable housing, power and water. These things play into what this board is trying to accomplish.
- Having the background and understanding of what this industry is doing will help as we are navigating through it. Maybe lean more into the perspective of what we are seeing and why it is more important to the state.
- So lucky to live in Utah and everywhere you travel you hear this. Believe we have something very special in Utah, and maybe sometimes take it for granted, but we all get along and work well together to solve problems.
- Look where we are moving with the economy, it is happening so much faster and so many more things we need to stay on top of. Utah has a unique opportunity to work together, be nimble and move fast. This is what I hope to continue to bring to the GOEO team and help support the great work of this team and board.

MARKETING REPORT

Ben Cook, Director of Marketing & Communications, Utah Office of Tourism

Julie Comstock, Creative Director, Love Communications

FY26 Marketing Plan

- Acknowledged the marketing and communications team members that have assisted in creating this plan over the previous months.
- Recognized the marketing committee members and new chair Jennifer Wesselhoff. The committee has reviewed and discussed the plan in depth prior to this presentation.
- The “why” for our office, and possibly the industry, is a bold statement: Visitors make life better in Utah. Economically it helps the state but also the cultural exchange, pride of place and visitors test us and test our values of welcoming the world to our state.
- The advertising industry “why” is because it works. Research, experience and data shows that people are influenced by brands and marketing of brands when making decisions.
- Marketing is abstract and means different things to different people so we have to get very clear on what it is for our efforts.
- Marketing needs to be centered on the customer, and UOT’s role in the customer journey is the awareness and consideration phases.
- We meet customers along their journey across four types of media – paid, earned, shared and owned (PESO model). It is important to be involved in all four of these areas.
- Focus a lot on the paid type as this is where we have the most control of the message and it is where the money is involved. Equally, if not more, important is the earned, shared and owned because this is where customers engage.
- Two-step approach to creating a marketing plan – strategic foundation and activation.

Strategic Foundation

- Looking back at previous year campaign results, the advertising awareness has increased. In spite of the budget cut two years ago, the campaigns are well above where they were. Says a lot about the collaboration efforts of the team and agency partners.
- Incremental trips are people who were not planning to come to Utah but changed their behavior as a result of the advertising. For the Ski & Winter campaign, incremental trips increased by 7.1%.
- For the Parks & Beyond and Urban & Outdoors, incremental trips were down just a little bit but with decreased spending and media efficiency, consider this a good result.
- Visitors who see our advertising across planning, spending and experience, do more of what we want them to do while they are here. They do more advanced planning, they spend more and they have better experiences, turning into advocates.
- Brand awareness is an area to be aware of as measurements are down over prior years. A big piece to building awareness is spending money to get name recognition and we have seen that decrease.
- Travel demand is still very high as people are excited to travel but budgets can be limiting. People are more particular about how they spend and where they spend their money.
- As an organization, more pressure on our budget and trying to do more with less.
- Video and tech continue to disrupt the media landscape. Operating in a space that is changing and evolving so quickly.
- Three trends that align to our campaigns:
 - Parks – Seeing more visitation in the shoulder seasons. State Parks visitation is growing faster than National Parks. Mixed visitation within *The Mighty 5*®.
 - Skiing – Fewer skiers last season but they spent more so how to inspire them creatively.
 - Urban cities – People are traveling for sports and concerts. The Taylor Swift effect is real. How do we take advantage of gen Z and millennials that are drawn to urban areas?
- Looking at our competitors, Arizona and Colorado are primary and secondary ones include Nevada, Idaho, Wyoming and Montana. We offer a lot of the same things but we offer great value.
- Utah and competitive states all have beautiful landscapes so must tell a compelling story.
- Have to know what we are trying to achieve with this marketing plan. The goal and objective is to enhance the economic impact of leisure travel in Utah.
- Secondary goal is to strengthen Utah travel brand associations across audiences.
- Mapping out strategic initiatives and focus on inspiring awareness and interest in Utah travel; increase visitor length of stay and spend; and, encourage visitor planning and preparation.
- Using a travel analogy, the goals or objectives are the destination. The strategic initiatives are the major highways traveled to get there, and the tactics are the mile-by-mile directions.
- Did primary research with Love Communications to define the target audiences. Using national surveys and focus groups, collected qualitative and quantitative data.

- Data shows that the three primary audiences we have previously identified - adventurers, families and skiers - are consistent. New audience identified – venturistas.
- Brand position is something used to inspire agency partners and internal teams. It was originally set in 2022 but focusing on key differentiators.
 - *From The Mighty 5® to The Greatest Snow on Earth®, Utah's breathtaking and contrasting places offer incredible access to transformation, exploration and connection. No matter what kind of "adventurer" you are, in Utah, you will encounter experiences that will challenge, awaken and define you.*

Activation

- Historically different campaigns have had different creative messages.
- SMARI insight that more than 60% of ad-aware travelers see multiple campaigns, and this year looking at a more united approach.
- Each of the brands still exist and three campaigns still exist but a united theme "*Are You a Utah Person?*"
- **Julie Comstock**
 - Reviewed a lot of strategy and research when thinking about the creative.
 - 73% of people traveling are looking for an authentic experience.
 - 72% said traveling is core to their identity.
 - Many travelers are looking for drive destinations as 67% want to maximize their budget.
 - We thought a lot about where Utah is, where it wants to go and what Utah wants to be.
 - The idea of building state pride and Utahns becoming advocates as well as help Utahns define what it means to be a Utah person.
- **Ben Cook**
 - Will share assets of the three campaigns at future board meetings.
 - An executive summary of the marketing plan has been shared with board members.
 - Run three core advertising campaigns again this year – Parks & Beyond, Ski & Winter, Urban & Outdoors.
 - For Parks & Beyond invites travelers to experience *The Mighty 5®* but to not stop there and experience more - dark skies, state parks, Utah Film Trail and more.
 - The media budget is \$3.4M which is a 28% reduction from last year but paid social remains the same at \$195K.
 - Winter flight: 10/15/25 through 1/15/26
 - Holiday Blitz: 12/26/25 to 1/10/26
 - Spring: 2/1/26 to 6/15/26
 - For Ski & Winter, the media buy budget is \$1.8M which is a 29% reduction from last year and paid social remains the same. The campaign flight dates are 10/1/25 through 3/15/26.
 - The Urban & Outdoors flight dates are 4/15/26-6/30/26 and the media buy budget is \$804K. The budget appears that it went up from last year but is actually the same. The Days of '47 Rodeo sponsorship previously came out of this campaign, but it has been reallocated.
 - Love Communications compared data from multiple sources and put a lot of thought and planning into the flight dates for all three campaigns.
 - Looking at other media channels and the efforts, earned media and public relations target travel and tourism outlets including Conde Nast Traveler, Travel+Leisure, The Los Angeles Times, Outside magazine, and a few more.
 - Set a monthly calendar pitch looking at travel trends and cultural themes to pitch journalists nationally.
 - Plan media missions each quarter to key markets, and host 15-20 individual media members in the market to give them a first hand experience of our product.
 - Looking at shared media and social media efforts. Have main platforms of Instagram, Facebook and Pinterest but testing YouTube shorts and Reddit.
 - Social includes organic, paid and partnerships.
 - Website, email and content are the owned media elements. Our team keeps the information updated and fresh. A lot of work is done with search engine optimization (SEO).
 - The website is a space being disrupted by AI and seeing decreases in overall traffic.
 - More than 100K subscribers to our email newsletter.
 - Also working on a stewardship messaging campaign using EDA funding. This will run in-state in spring of 2026.
 - Jennifer Wesselhoff complimented the thorough, thoughtful presentation. Noted the continued need for funding for tourism marketing efforts. Developing a return on investment for the entire state.

MOTION: Jennifer Wesselhoff motioned to approve the FY26 Marketing Plan as presented and Shayne Wittwer seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

UTAH FILM COMMISSION

Virginia Pearce, Utah Film Commissioner

- Project codename “Zeus” is the new Godzilla movie. Moab is the only city in the U.S. that it did production in. Hosted a set visit for many county, city and state officials.
- Opportunity to show what all happens on the ground – many jobs, a lot of local economic impact.
- The crew spent 10 days in Moab and used more than 2,000 room nights.
- A project approved for incentive in 2022, is coming out in theaters for a limited release, “The Streak”. It is a documentary about the Salt Lake Trappers baseball team. The team holds the record for longest winning streak – 29 – in professional baseball.
- New economic impact figures for FY26 that began July 1 is at \$4.1M. A result of the \$942.5K incentive awarded.

MOTION: Graydon Pearson motioned to approve \$1,652,758 for incentives for the following productions which have met the criteria defined by statute. Joan Hammer seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

Production	Estimated Utah Spend	Incentive Amount Per Production	Locations (counties)
<i>Gabriella</i>	\$105,000	\$21,000 – 20%	Davis, Salt Lake and Utah
<i>Halloween Pizza Party</i>	\$292,179	\$58,436 – 20%	Salt Lake, Utah and Wasatch
<i>Strasbourg</i>	\$446,984	\$89,397 – 20%	Utah and Wasatch
<i>Navajo Highways S2</i>	\$505,154	\$101,031 – 20%	Grand and Salt Lake
<i>Mystery at Blind Frog Ranch S5</i>	\$1,289,472	\$257,894 – 20%	Uintah
<i>Slay Day</i>	\$4,500,000	\$1,125,000 – 20%	Salt Lake
	\$7,138,789 TOTAL spend	\$1,652,758 TOTAL incentives	

CO-OP COMMITTEE REPORT

Lesha Coltharp, Chair

Co-op Marketing Award Allocation

- Applications and projects were very strong this year.
- A few to highlight – Cache County, Garfield County, Utah Valley CVB, Kayenta Arts Foundation, National Ability Center and Ballet West.
- The five member committee – Lesha Coltharp, Kym Buttschardt, Joan Hammer, Jordan Smith and Kevin Smith – give a lot of hours to read and score the applications and conduct interview sessions with all of the applicants.
- Received 57 eligible applications. Thirteen requested \$20K or under while 44 requested more than \$20K.
- More than \$6M funds were requested but \$4.1M was available to be awarded.
- Board members Nathan Rafferty, Lesha Coltharp, Jennifer Wesselhoff, Jessica Merrill, Kevin Smith, Joan Hammer and Jordan Smith disclosed that they are employed by one of the applicants.
- Non-profit applications had \$750K available but an ask of more than \$1.2M. Any application that requested more than \$150K was lowered to \$150K.
- DMO applications had \$3.4M available but the ask was more than \$4.5M. Any application that requested more than \$200K was lowered to \$200K.

MOTION: Joan Hammer motioned to approve \$4,157,525.13 for the Round 25 Cooperative Marketing Awards. Jessica Merrill seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Joan Hammer

- Box Elder County is celebrating 100 years of the fair, and preparations are moving forward with the installation of the Golden Spike.
- UTIA is knee-deep in the planning process for the Utah Tourism Conference, Oct. 1-3 in Bryce. Registration is still open. Destination discovery activities are complimentary due to the efforts of Falyn Owens and Garfield Co. Keynote speaker is Josiah Brown. The silent auction is a very important part at the conference as it helps fund all the advocacy work we do.

Jessica Merrill

- Rich Co. and Bear Lake are hosting annual Raspberry Days this upcoming weekend. Note that construction is occurring during the week in Logan Canyon.
- Western Sports Park in Davis County is officially open. Having a community grand opening event on Sept. 17.

Jennifer Wesselhoff

- Having a strong summer season but concerned with possible tourism visas having to include a bond payment. Working with the federal delegation and keeping the conversation going about visa concerns.
- Received VISA spending data and for international visa spending in June, it is down almost 10%.

Lesha Coltharp

- It is fair season in the NE counties. Uintah also has hot air balloon festival coming up. Also our paranormal conference is coming up.

Jason Murray

- Utah high school mountain bike racing season is starting. Many events throughout the rural areas.

Harold Simpson

- Recently worked with a Japanese film group, sponsored by Disney+ Japan.
- San Juan County fair is coming up.

MEETING ADJOURNED

The next board meeting will be held virtually on Friday, Sept. 12 at 10am.

**Utah Co-op Marketing
ROUND 2025 CO-OP MARKETING GRANT AWARDS FY 25/26
AWARDED 8/09/2025**

DMO APPLICANT	AWARDED	NON-DMO APPLICANT	AWARDED
Beaver County Travel Council	\$76,000	Ballet West	\$34,100
Blanding City	\$13,000	Cache Valley Chamber	\$7,500
Box Elder County Government	\$48,750	Casino Star Theater Foundation	\$6,250
Brian Head Town	\$134,964	Friends of the Moab Folk Festival	\$5,700
Cache Valley Visitors Bureau	\$72,410	Grand Staircase Escalante Partners, Inc	\$6,000
Carbon County Office of Tourism	\$32,500	Historic 25th Street Foundation DBA Ogden Downtown Alliance	\$5,000
City of Provo	\$37,924	Joe's Valley Fest	\$12,090
Discover Davis	\$182,250	Kayenta Arts Foundation	\$19,096
Emery County Office of Tourism	\$46,314	Kimball Art Center	\$61,846
Explore Utah Valley	\$182,250	Moab Museum	\$2,178
Garfield County Office of Tourism	\$182,250	Moab Music Festival	\$24,180
Grand County Government	\$146,250	Murray Area Chamber Foundation	\$5,980
Greater Zion Convention & Tourism	\$182,250	National Ability Center	\$100,500
Heber Valley Office of Tourism	\$182,250	Ogden First, Inc.	\$18,200
Juab County Tourism & Travel	\$88,730	Ogden Valley Adaptive Sports	\$16,988
Kane County Office of Tourism & Film	\$146,250	Ogden's George S Eccles Dinosaur Park	\$15,000
Morgan County Economic Development	\$73,906	Park City Opera	\$5,700
Ogden/Weber CVB	\$182,250	SUU Shakespeare Festival	\$67,000
Park City Chamber/CVB	\$182,250	The Living Planet Aquarium	\$52,000
Piute County Government	\$13,000	Tuacahn Center for the Performing Arts	\$100,500
San Juan Office of Economic Development & Visitor Services	\$182,250	United States Ski & Snowboard Association	\$85,500
Sevier County	\$146,250	Utah Festival Opera & Musical Theater	\$37,336
Ski Utah	\$182,250	Utah State University (USU)	\$9,806
South Salt Lake	\$12,788	Utah Symphony & Opera	\$31,000
Tooele County	\$125,938	Weber Cultural Legacy Foundation	\$20,100
Uintah County Travel & Tourism	\$180,488	Total Award	\$749,550
Visit Cedar City - Brian Head	\$95,000	THANK YOU CO-OP COMMITTEE!	
Visit Salt Lake	\$182,250		
Wayne County Office of Tourism	\$94,380		
Total Awarded	\$3,407,342		

Traditional Co-op 25/26 Marketing Summary

Total Funds Requested - \$6,015,467

Total Award Amount Available - \$4,157,525.00

FY 25/26 Appropriation: \$4,064,560

Carry Over from FY 23/24: \$92,965.13

Shortfall amount- \$1,857,935

Total Amount Awarded - \$4,156,892

DMO award amount - \$3,407,342

Non DMO award amount - \$749,550

Balance - \$633

Will be carried over into FY 26/27

Summary

A total of **58** applications were received requesting \$6,015,467. Thirteen (**13**) of the applications requested \$20K or less, and were reviewed and scored by UOT staff. Funding was recommended for **11** of the 13.

The committee held interviews over three days with the **44** applications (one application was withdrawn) asking for more than \$20K. Interviews were in-person and on Zoom. Immediately following the interviews, the committee met to review the scores and budgets. The committee recommended funding **43** applications that requested more than \$20K, and **11** applications requesting less than \$20K. A total number of **54** applications were recommended to be funded.

Special thanks to the Co-op Committee (Lesha Coltharp, chair; Kym Buttschardt, Kevin Smith, Jordan Smith, and Joan Hammer) for their time and energy reviewing and scoring the applications, as well as, spending several days away from their offices for the interviews.