

Utah Board of Tourism Development
Meeting Minutes
John Wesley Powell River History Museum, Green River
Friday, November 14, 2025

Board Members Present	Joanie Hammer, Graydon Pearson, Nathan Rafferty, Harold Simpson, Melva Sine, Jordan Smith, Kevin Smith, Shayne Wittwer
Board Members Virtual	Lesha Coltharp, Jessica Merrill, CJ Wade, Jennifer Wesselhoff
Board Members Excused	Kaitlin Eskelson, Victor Iverson, Jason Murray
Tourism & Film Staff	Jenica Barber, Rachel Bremer, Ben Cook, Lorraine Daly, Sorell Grow, Todd K. Jenson, Camille Johnson, Denise Jordan, Becky Keeney, Anna Loughridge, Carli Mahas, Christina Martin, Josh Paluh, Laici Shumway, Dave Williams, Liz Wilson, Heather Zang, Stacy Zoller
Public	Terri Bennett, Stacey Boney, Julie Comstock, Machel Devin, Cody Draper, Tina Grange, Paul Jewkes, Marissa Mallory, AnnDee Mead, Chris Newton, Randy Rhodes, Angie Rothen, Jonathan Smithgall, Chad Taylor, Andrew Wahlen, Matthew Watson, Shanny Wilson

WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

Board Chair Nathan Rafferty called the meeting to order, welcomed everyone and asked for board members and audience introductions.

MEETING MINUTES

MOTION: Melva Sine motioned to approve the Sept. 12, 2025, board meeting minutes. Joanie Hammer seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Dave Williams, Associate Managing Director, Utah Office of Tourism

- Announced Anna Loughridge has been promoted to director of communications. Sorrel Grow is moving into the public relations manager role.
- Lesha Coltharp received the Leadership award from the Utah Outdoor Recreation Summit which recognizes an individual who models values-based leadership and creates meaningful impact in their communities.
- Maria Twitchell was recognized as a Utah Rural Rockstar at the One Utah Summit. This award goes to an individual who has made an immediate impact as a recognized leader, and taking the lead on visionary projects that will shape the future of rural Utah. She also serves as the president of UADMO (Utah Association of Destination Marketing Organizations).
- San Juan county outfitter Ancient Wayves was named the best tourism experience in America by JRNy magazine, a UK-based publication.
- Our social media online series "Only in Utah" received a 2025 Magellan Gold award presented by Travel Weekly and the "In Love in Utah" campaign was recognized with a Platinum MarCom award.

- Recently attended the U.S. Travel communicators network meetings in Washington, D.C. Three key points included travel cannot afford a government shutdown so relieved it has ended. Secondly, sharing the America 250 opportunity, and corporate entities and destinations share the same challenges.
- They shared a “travel is essential” one-pager, along with a book of statistics and research on the economic impact of tourism. The CEO talking points included things at a national level but easy to use them in Utah, as well.
- Rachel Bremer was also in Washington, D.C. recently and her meetings included messaging about America being a welcoming place.
- U.S. Travel is included in the conversation and explaining to the administration the importance of travel as Geoff Freeman was summoned to the White House to meet with the vice president and secretary of transportation.
- We reported to the economic and community development appropriations committee and the economic development and workforce services committee during October’s interim meetings. Also hosted a legislative open house at Council Hall.
- Appreciate board member Shayne Wittwer testifying during the committee meetings.
- The legislative district dashboard is on our website travel.utah.com. This is a project Denise Jordan and Jenica Barber have worked hard on and will be a great tool.
- Created video for legislative presentation from the 40+ interviews we did with DMO partners, county commissioners and others. The catalog of interviews will continue to be helpful for other projects
- Natalie was included in the governor’s trade mission to New Zealand and Australia. The group felt like there are a lot of similarities between Australia, New Zealand and Utah with outdoor recreation opportunities, and Australia is a very important market for our ski partners.

RESEARCH UPDATE

Denise Jordan, Director of Marketing Analytics & Research, Utah Office of Tourism

- Started the statewide resident sentiment survey project in 2021 and released the first report in 2022. Conduct the survey annually and tap into different communities throughout the state. The value of doing this annually is we get boots on the ground perspective.
- Note areas for improvement each year from the results including sustainable tourism metrics. It measures residents’ values and needs and helps inform community-led development.
- Survey topics include perception of tourism, environmental sustainability, campaign awareness, economic importance, role of government, and visitor related tax use. EDA funding has helped with conducting the survey since 2022-23.
- In the most recent survey we learned 75% of residents say tourism has a positive effect on Utah’s overall reputation. Also 63% say positive effects of tourism outweigh the negative effects. All results are positive.
- Ninety percent of the surveys are interviews over the phone and a lot of rich verbatim comments are recorded.
- The visitor experience survey aims to better understand the visitor experience and what leads to visitor satisfaction. We have had a high number—88%, satisfied with their experience but now digging into this result more to understand what part of the experience is delivering satisfaction.
- Have done six waves of this survey and do it every quarter. Inexpensive way to utilize the first-party data. Able to see satisfaction levels and the underlying factors that drive experience and purpose of trip. Listen for changes over time and note comments.
- Ask two questions about crowding to gather information and feedback about it and ask if they felt welcomed when visiting the state.
- Talking to stakeholders is important to understand what is happening currently in the community. Working to look more at current situations and looking forward.
- Partnering with IORT (Institute of Recreation and Tourism), Jordan Smith and team to launch a quarterly pulse survey and IORT will assist in compiling the data so it can be made public. Looking for actionable items that stakeholders can see and it will encourage more participation.

- Intent is to better understand recent trends and future trends of visitation, revenue changes, understand the work force, marketing effectiveness and future outlook. Going live next week.
- Review our advertising effectiveness twice per year and just received the return on investment (ROI) effectiveness wave two report. It is written in statute that we do this but it also is very beneficial for our planning.
- Work with Strategic Marketing and Research Insights (SMARI)--a very well-respected source in the industry. UOT has worked with them for a long time.
- Great results from the parks and beyond urban and outdoors campaign for spring and summer of 2025 including 53% ad awareness for the campaign. This is a new high as we have never seen above 50%. We reached almost 53 million households as well.
- The \$3.3B of economic impact also is a new highest result with advertising trip spending, and the efficiency of our campaign was \$0.10 cents per household and the industry benchmark is \$0.23.
- The ROI of \$654 per dollar spent is our highest on record.
- The entire report has very interesting information about different audiences and how they are responding to the advertising. Those that are ad aware extend their trips, spend more per day, increase the number of activities booked, and are more likely to share their experiences on social media.
- Recently completed a project with Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute to better understand tax benefits from out of state visitor spending--new money into the state.
- Removed the resident spending and FY24 out-of-state visitor spending was \$10.6B. Put that through the economic model to see what taxes resulted from it.
- Resulted in a detailed way to talk about the impact of the visitor economy in Utah and communities including \$1 in \$10 state tax dollars coming from out of state visitors, you can see the miles of roads that we are supporting and additional interesting information.
- This fact sheet can be found on travel.utah.gov and gardner.utah.edu.
- Looking at the legislative district dashboard, the county portion is dynamic and an elected official can look up their areas to get specific information. The film facts are also very interesting.
- Nathan Rafferty commented about the visitor impact spending slide suggesting one fact be selected to use as a main talking point. Legislators are so overwhelmed with information that the message needs to be simple.
- Dave Williams added a reason for having a variety of items defined so one item can be selected specific to that legislator. Provides flexibility to use the fact that is most meaningful to them.
- Select a special project every year with KCG and next one will take a look at specific counties using this format.
- Shayne Wittwer commented that these numbers are very helpful to all communities and counties when speaking not only to elected officials but community members.
- Joan Hammer commented that this information will be super impactful.

MARKETING UPDATE

Ben Cook, Director of Marketing, Utah Office of Tourism

Andrew Wahlen, Vice President, Data Analytics & Research, Love Communications

- Sharing data driven audience research that the Love Communications team has pulled together with support from our team on a year-long project. It was funded primarily by EDA funding.
- Previously targeted four audiences with marketing – achievers, explorers, repeat visitors and families. These were curated in 2018-19 but had a lot of success with them.
- Wanted to learn more and how to reach specific audiences first understood that change is constant. Asked what are new travelers habits, the trends and new technology. Need to understand who is really falling for Utah and who is not.
- This was a nationwide project. Used surveys to form the foundation of who we are trying to talk to. Who are the leisure travelers that might consider Utah. Did focus groups and in depth interviews talking to travelers from around the country. Then mathematics and algorithms to identify audiences we want to target.

- When devising messaging plans and where to place media, want to understand how to speak to each of the audiences. It is valuable and makes the campaigns more efficient.
- Surveys reached 7.5k people, conducted 32 in depth interviews, eight national focus groups and resulted in four actionable audiences.
- Learned adventurers, families and skiers are very similar to old audiences. The adventurers could be considered the prime audience.
- New audience segment identified as venturistas. These travelers are younger, less aware of Utah and represent the next generation of travelers. Campaigns target a mix of the four audiences with a mix of messages and media strategies.
- Crafted new profile for the venturistas. They prioritize easy outdoor experiences with access to trendy and modern amenities like a local business or an urban experience. This sets them apart from other audiences.
- Venturistas want an experience that can be shared on their social media channels and motivated by external validation, likes on a post, etc. Information on audiences helps make strategic decisions with media partners.
- Have detailed profiles for all of the audiences to share with anyone interested.

INTERNATIONAL TEAM UPDATE

Rachel Bremer, Global Markets Director, Utah Office of Tourism

- The state of the industry around international includes trade friction, concern with border and immigration security enforcement.
- Travelers are feeding into the media hype they are still seeing about political issues and UOT actively trying to counteract that messaging.
- Still seeing trade wars and tariffs that are affecting the economy. Economic factors are the primary reason we see decreases in international inbound visitations.
- Still watching travel visa wait times as are still long in Mexico and India and increased costs occurring for international travelers.
- International visitation is down 3.4%. It is driven by Canada's steep decline of 19% but Mexico is up 13%.
- In September U.S. Travel was forecasting an 8.2% decrease in international visits but it has improved to 6.3%.
- Top six markets (Canada, China, France, Germany, UK and Australia) are all down from 2024 to 2025. Spoke with German tour operators recently and reported they have been down but are optimistic looking to the next year.
- Do see growth potential as we look ahead to 2030 and the next decade of events.
- Nathan Rafferty asked if this was for both summer and winter travelers. Rachel replied that is both but Mexico and Australia are not as low because they have a lot of skiers that travel for the winter.
- Looking ahead we have a big global decade of events and the golden age of travel. Will be leaning more into the great American road trip which resonates across all markets.
- Have good growth potential with the world watching during the 2026 FIFA World Cup and 2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles.
- The primary goal for FY26 is to attract international visitors who spend more and stay longer and another priority is to create avenues for increased partner engagement. Accessing international markets is a heavy lift for smaller DMOs.
- New approach and conduct reverse sales missions as creates more equity and access to global markets for partners and suppliers. Hosted India reverse mission in October and had participation from 43 state partners (DMOs, hoteliers, guides and outfitters, transportation companies and ski resorts). Received very positive feedback.
- Shayne Wittwer asked how much time and money is spent on emerging markets versus growing the established markets.
- In mature markets, alternate missions every other year. Australia is a good example and consider it a mature market. Dedicate budget on emerging markets but it really depends on the market and research. Sending a staff member to India this year with Brand USA and it is a big return on a low cost.
- Worked with Natalie on the governor's trade mission to Australia and then held a virtual trade mission with Australia following that and connected with a lot of DMOs and suppliers throughout the state.
- Continue to build out the agent certification specialist program and have more than 1600 agents certified. Launching a Korean and Dutch incentive program along with another Mexico trade incentive campaign.

- A 2.0 version which will be much more culturally immersive. Example of working with trade in improved and more efficient ways.
- Attended Brand USA travel week in London with DMO partners. Very productive, B2B trade show with media and trade meetings and opportunities.
- The media in Europe is still keen to highlight Utah and the United States. A lot of interest in the film trail and local experiences.
- Trying to include partners as much as possible in our marketing campaigns. Maximizes our ROI and helps bring visibility to areas including a Little America Germany and Benelux campaign and Expedia Canada GSOE and Winter Road Trip Campaign.
- Public relations is a very valuable piece for storytelling and diving into what it means to visit Utah. High Barcelona scores on recent media highlights.
- Did pause media pitching and Canadian journalist hosting earlier this year but hosting Canadian journalists again.
- Very busy fall for media FAMs and media hosting and looking ahead to a UK stargazing mission and a multi-market ski FAM.
- The team will stay busy over the next three months attending and hosting missions.
- Nathan Rafferty asked why the Delta flight to Monterrey is temporary.
 - Aeromexico and Delta are working through joining venture opportunities and where it is revenue sharing or code sharing. Hope it performs so well that we will see it extended for a whole ski season.
- Shayne Wittwer asked if how countries see us politically part of the decision making on markets. In spite of many that do not like us right now there are a lot that do.
 - These factors do help tactically prioritize but also look at spending and year-over-year forecasts. India is very resilient.
- Kevin Smith commented about welcoming international travel and first impressions. Customs experiences entering the United States were not as pleasant.
- Salt Lake is more welcoming than other customs in other U.S. airports. We have provided photos of Utah to the airport.
- Kevin Smith asked what the deciding factors or details are when international travelers decide to come to Utah.
 - Cost is a detouring factor. Encourage partners to put out early booking opportunities.
- Jordan Smith asked about the 2028 Los Angeles Games and if we are building relationships with them to learn lessons.
- Capitalize on what we can learn from all the Games. Natalie will be with the official observer program in Italy this February.
- Because of our LOI with the southern region of France we have been collaborating with them for the 2030 Olympic Winter Games.

UTAH FILM COMMISSION

Dave Williams, Associate Managing Director, Utah Office of Tourism & Film Commission

- *Murder at the End of the World* was filmed at Silver Eagle Gas and Whispering Sands Motel in Hanksville and Ray's Tavern here in Green River. This project generated \$2.5M of spend in 17 counties.
- *Thunderbolts* spent \$4.3M over 11 production days and utilized 6,000 hotel nights. It was filmed at 170 Main Street in Green River, filmed on old Cisco highway and at Crescent Junction in Moab. This movie generated \$1.2M spent in Emery County.
- The film incentive program was allocated \$20M for FY26. The rural film program is \$12M, the motion picture program is \$6.79M in tax credit and \$1.5M in cash rebate.
- We have approved 17 projects this fiscal year and these have filmed in Weber, Morgan, Davis, Salt Lake, Summit, Utah, Wasatch, Uintah, Wayne, Washington and Grand counties.
- Have awarded almost \$20.5M which has resulted in more than \$83.7M in economic impact.

MOTION: Joanie Hammer motioned to approve \$210,000 for an incentive for the following production which met the criteria defined by statute. Graydon Pearson seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

Production	Estimated Utah Spend	Incentive Amount Per Production	Locations (Counties)
<i>Halloween Wars</i>	1,050,000	\$210,000 - 20%	Utah
	\$1,050,000 TOTAL Spend	\$210,000 TOTAL Incentive	

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Dave Williams noted that Natalie Randall did an excellent job working through the government shutdown and it was a lot of work. She coordinated everything with the governor's office, Department of the Interior and the National Parks Service.
- Shayne Wittwer recognized the hard work the Utah Office of Tourism & Film did throughout the shutdown and expressed his gratitude.
- Nathan Rafferty asked if the state would get paid back for the money given to keep visitors centers open and what the total amount was. It was \$8K per day and the impact of keeping the centers open.
- Joan Hammer shared that with the bird refuge being closed, the bookstore suffered and they dipped into county savings to pay salaries.
- Emery County DMO AnnDee Mead thanked the board for coming and shared they recently produced a new visitors guide. Invited everyone to spend some time here at the museum.
- Kevin Smith shared that Washington County did a media activation in New York City that was very successful.

MEETING ADJOURNED