

Utah Board of Tourism Development
Board Meeting Minutes – June 5, 2026
Mona – Mt. Nebo Botanical Farm | Juab County host

Board Members Present – Lesha Coltharp, Joanie Hammer, Jessica Merrill, Jason Murray, Nathan Rafferty, Melva Sine, Jordan Smith, Jennifer Wesselhoff, Shayne Wittwer

Board Members Virtual – Kevin Smith

Board Members Absent – Kaitlin Eskelson, Victor Iverson, Graydon Pearson, Harold Simpson, CJ Wade

Staff – Tera Atwood, Jenica Barber, Ben Cook, Michelle Evans, Todd K. Jenson, Camille Johnson, Denise Jordan, Becky Keeney, Anna Loughridge, Carli Mahas, Christina Martin, Derek Mellus, Josh Paluh, Virginia Pearce, Liz Peck, Natalie Randall, Laici Shumway, David Williams, Heather Zang

Others – Stacey Boney, Machel Devin, Cody Draper, Terra Girvin, Jordan Hewitt, Erin Judd, Brittany McMichael, Shanna Memmott, Clinton Panton, Jeanette Peatross, Mike Roe, Angie Rothen, Bridget Siebert, Chad Taylor, Matthew Sterzer, Rachel West, Allison Yamamoto-Sparks, Courtney Yazzie

Welcome and Introductions

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

Juab County Tourism Director **Shanna Memmott** welcomed everyone and thanked the board for holding the meeting in the county.

MOTION: Nathan Rafferty motioned to approve the April 24, 2026 board meeting minutes. All board members were in favor.

Managing Director Report

Natalie Randall

- Recently a new agritourism study was released and first of its kind for Utah.
- Utah is estimated to generate the following economic impact from agritourism:
 - \$44.8M in economic activity
 - 300 jobs
 - \$11.2M in earnings
 - \$26.5M in value added to the state's GDP.
- The potential agritourism market is estimated at 150K-300K visitors per year.
- The team just wrapped up work at IPW and great to see partners there as well during this hard time to be navigating our global presence.
- Continue to keep Utah top of mind for international visitors.
- Team members also traveled to Santa Fe to attend WESTO. Share and learn best practices from western states colleagues.
- Recently launched *Adventure Safe Day* and the *Always Adventure Safe* campaign. This is part of the broader Utah Forever framework that was funded by an EDA grant.
- Becky Keeney led out on the strategy of the *Utah Forever* framework.

- Ben Cook and Anna Loughridge designed the marketing and communications to launch this day.
- Sent 12 team members that activated the Adventure Safe Day at state parks.
- Also sharing that the tourism and film teams are moving out of Council Hall at the Capitol Complex.
- The building is being repurposed as part of a “Freedom Trail” style plan called the Pioneer Trail. The initiative, led by a foundation www.pioneertrail.org, received legislative funding this session.
- The walking trail will connect West Temple Street up State Street up to the Capitol Complex. It will eventually lead into Memory Grove.
- Our teams will be shifting to the Governor’s Office of Economic Development space at 60 East South Temple, 3rd floor, this fall.
- **Jessica Merrill** asked if it is a permanent move to the GOED offices. Yes, it is.
- **Nathan Rafferty** asked about the timeline. July 10 is the date the tourism and film teams will no longer work from Council Hall, with the week of July 17 being a transition week.
- Beginning July 20, move into temporary office space in the West House Building while GOED space is refigured to accommodate our team.
- Move into GOED space in September.
- **Lesha Coltharp** asked if the gift shop and visitors center was staying. Do not have Pioneer Trail’s plan for Council Hall but the gift shop is closing.
- Will share the Pioneer Trail Foundation website and a Desert News article with the board that discusses their plan.
- **Jessica Merrill** asked if the Council Hall plan will include a new visitor center. Will not have that.
- Do work very closely with the Division of Culture and Community Engagement (CCE) that is opening the new Museum of Utah in the North Capitol Building.
- Originally there was a distinct difference between our visitor center and the museum. The Museum of Utah is meant to celebrate Utah and our residents. Our visitor center welcomes visitors and connects and engages the visitor experience throughout the state.
- **Jennifer Wesselhoff** asked who is leading out on this. The non-profit group Pioneer Trail Foundation and they have brought on an executive director.
- May have the opportunity to have him present to the board. They have extended opportunities to sit on planning committees.
- The foundation has an executive team and they say tourism is a priority.
- **Lesha Coltharp** asked if there would be a state visitor center anywhere with offices relocating.
- **Joanie Hammer** acknowledged that the new museum is a great opportunity for visitors but not having a visitors center for the state on Capitol Hill is a big loss.
- **Jason Murray** voiced concerns about not having the visitor center at Capitol Complex at the same time the Salt Palace is shutting down for renovation.
- **Lesha Coltharp** commented that during co-op marketing grant interviews in Council Hall, seeing the visitors from all over the world coming into Council Hall for visitor information was amazing. Had no idea how many visitors there were.
- **Nathan Rafferty** asked if the museum could also operate as a visitors center.
- **Jessica Merrill** asked what visitor center space is like in other states. Tourism is an agency within the state that is front-facing and needs to be accessible to visitors. Where the presence of Utah tourism is going to have been on the world stage in the years ahead.
- **Nathan Rafferty** asked if there was space within City Creek shopping center to establish a visitor center.
- The current visitor services space and gift shop is on a contract and that is ending. The convenience of being in the same building was the staff were trained but could reach out to our team members to get additional information and support.
- Natalie acknowledged the concern from the board and will discuss future opportunities and plans with the board.

- **Jennifer Wesselhoff** noted that Park City and Summit County are moving in the opposite direction. Developing long range plans that includes many levels of visitor services including visitor centers, kiosks at transit centers, roaming ambassadors, etc.
- **Lesha Coltharp** commented the timing of this is crazy since over the next nine years inviting the most visitors ever to Utah with the reopening of the Temple and the Winter Olympics returning.

Utah Film Commission

Film Incentive Program

Virginia Pearce

- Current projects to watch include *Skinwalker Ranch season 7*. It came out in May on the History Channel and it did receive the rural incentive.
- *The Mystery at Blind Frog Ranch season 6*, premiered at the end of May on Discovery. It did not receive an incentive but was filmed in Utah.
- *Iconoclast* is a film we supported last fiscal year and it premieres June 9 at Tribeca Film Festival. It was filmed in Salt Lake and Utah counties.
- Also noting that the official Cannes Film Festival poster celebrates *Thelma & Louise* with a photo from Dead Horse State Park. It premiered at Cannes 35 years ago and is still going strong.
- Heading into a new fiscal year and we have \$11M in film incentive funding. FY26 we had \$20M so this will influence our plan for this upcoming year.
- Wrapping up FY26, the board approved 39 projects spread over 18 counties.
- The economic impact as a result was almost \$143M.
- **Shayne Wittwer** asked if projects come to us or if we go out and entice them. It is a combination and proactively reaching out to producers that have worked in Utah before.
- **Jennifer Wesselhoff** noted the economic impact Park City and Summit County film projects bring in. Benefits small business owners, hotels, restaurants, etc.
- **Jason Murray** asked about funds available for FY27 moving forward. There is some cash and tax credit left although we have allocated funds to large projects like Marshals. However, after audits are completed funds may come back to use.

Production	Estimated Utah Spend	Incentive Amount Per Production	Locations (Counties)
<i>A New Address</i>	\$100,000	\$20,000 - 20%	Salt Lake, Utah
<i>Abide With Me</i>	\$130,166	\$26,033 - 20%	Juab, Salt Lake
<i>Runners High</i>	\$2,005,072	\$501,268 - 25%	Salt Lake, Summit
<i>One of Us</i>	\$2,509,000	\$627,250 - 25%	Salt Lake, Utah, Wasatch
<i>Quitters</i>	\$4,471,848	\$1,117,962 - 25%	Summit, Wasatch
	\$9,216,086 TOTAL Spend	\$2,292,513 TOTAL Incentive	

MOTION: Jason Murray motioned to approve \$2,292,513 for incentives for the five productions presented which have met the criteria defined by statute. Lesha Coltharp seconded the motion. The motion was approved.

Marketing Report

Adventure Safe

Becky Keeney

- The *Always Adventure Safe*™ campaign is a Utah stewardship initiative designed to inspire residents to care for their state and recreate responsibly.
- Result of the *Utah Forever* framework using EDA grant funding.
- Goal to reach Utah residents—children, adults, new residents and established residents.
- Campaign Objectives and Strategy
 - Inspire stewardship: The campaign aims to build a "community of care" by focusing on four core principles of planning and preparation.
 - Positive tone: Rather than being "preachy" or using fear-based tactics, the messaging is designed to be empowering, inclusive, friendly, and upbeat.
 - Target audience: The initiative focuses on Utah residents, specifically targeting children, new residents who moved to the state during the COVID-19 pandemic, and established residents who may need reminders.
 - Statewide reach: The campaign features both southern desert environments and northern alpine mountains to ensure it resonates across the entire state.

Ben Cook

- Creative Elements: Frank and Morris
 - Memorable characters: The campaign is centered around two vulture puppets, Frank and Morris, who provide hilarious commentary on outdoor safety.
 - Different perspectives: Frank represents the old-school vulture who benefits from people being unsafe, while Morris is a reformed vulture trying to educate the public.
 - High-quality production: The puppets were built by professional puppeteers (similar to those who work for Sesame Street) and are used in videos and at live events.
- The creative was led by Love Communications and Julie Comstock.
- The campaign drives home six primary practices for adventuring safely in Utah:
 - Bring enough water for the specific adventure.
 - Tell a friend what your plans are.
 - Download a map before heading out.
 - Go with a professional guide when appropriate.
 - Stay on the trail to protect the environment.
 - Check the forecast ahead of time.
- Confirmed trademarks for *Adventure Safe*™, *Always Adventure Safe*™.
- **Jennifer Wesselhoff** asked if we purchased the puppets.
- They were purchased but very elaborate as created by artists who work with Jim Henson. Can be used at events but is complicated as it takes multiple people for the puppets to perform.

Anna Loughridge

- Collaboration: The project involved multiple agencies, including the Utah Department of Natural Resources, Utah State Parks, and the Department of Outdoor Recreation.
- Partner toolkit: Assets were designed without the *Utah Life Elevated* branding so that local partners and businesses could easily utilize and share the materials.
- Media mix: While social media first, the campaign also utilizes broadcast TV, radio, podcasts, billboards, and a dedicated microsite (adventuresafe.org).
- *Adventure Safe*™ Day: Launched on May 16th, this day included an official declaration from the Governor and 12 physical "activations" at trailheads and parks across the state.
- Support from so many DMO partners, businesses and staff at the activations.

- Kilby Block Party: The campaign had a major presence at this event, reaching 90,000 attendees and generating approximately 3 million impressions through water station sponsorships and on-stage appearances.
- Distributed more than 31K branded water bottles and had 3000+ contest entries for Adventure Safe giveaways.
- Hope to recreate *Adventure Safe*™ Day for at least two more years to build campaign momentum, foster statewide collaboration and continue to bring Adventure Safe message directly to Utahns.
- **Nathan Rafferty** shared that he loves it and hopes a winter campaign can be included.
- **Jessica Merrill** noted this has been beneficial and appreciates the versatility. Partners that have limited resources could participate since assets and toolkits were already created.
- **Joanie Hammer** noted that doing it again next year would give partners more time to plan and strategize to make an even bigger impact.
- **Kevin Smith** congratulated the team on the campaign and the cleverness of the two characters, Frank and Morris.
- **Jordan Smith** commented that it is a real strategic way to educate.

Tourism Marketing Performance Fund

FY27 Budget

Natalie Randall

- Two buckets to look at. Standard TMPF which is \$20.3M and historical carryforward.
- The historical carryforward was approved by the board in previous fiscal years and allocated. But pulling it all together and bringing it back to the board.
- Will walk through the budget and these are the initial buckets to dedicate the funds. Work with the board, marketing committee to invest the funds in specific campaigns throughout the year.
- **Jessica Merrill** asked if the legislature cut over the past two years was earmarked for something specific or just an overall cut.
- Do not have a direct line of where the funding went. The reduction did educate the industry to better inform the legislature on the value of the TMPF.

Dave Williams

- Prior to the TMPF, had a low marketing budget and the industry worked creatively to find a way to fund office efforts.
- Nan Anderson pulled together senators and stakeholders to create a plan. TMPF is a performance based funding model of state funds.
- Industry increased sales tax revenue and the fund was close to growing. Went from \$900K to \$10M budget in FY2000.
- The fund was defined as if the industry qualified for the growth, it was required to grow by \$2M a year—one-time funding but was up to the legislature and did not always work that way.
- The fund was also supposed to collect interest and it was given for one year, and then the legislature modified the code so that the interest went to the General Fund.
- TMPF amount dropped during the Great Recession (2010-2012).
- In 2019, they quit following the funding formula. They would just reward the funds and become ongoing funding.
- Big decline in 2021 when Covid hit. It is misleading to cut down the TMPF but made it up with the ARPA EDA funds.
- In 2022 legislature bumped it back up in 2022 and then cut it again by \$1M in 2025 and another \$1.5M in 2026.
- When the TMPF peaked at \$25M we did not ask for that much but Rep. Wilson saw the value of investing in the industry.

Natalie Randall

- **Shayne Wittwer** asked about the funding that goes to the Sports Commission.
- Before the board reviews the allocation for marketing, development and stewardship programs, 10% of the \$20.3M goes to the Sports Commission per a contract between the Utah Sports Commission and GOED.
- GOED's strategic plan includes the goal to improve that relationship.
- **Jessica Merrill** asked if the Sports Commission gets additional appropriations to the TMPF 10%. They do get additional appropriations for other projects.
- **Shayne Wittwer** commented that he looks at this 10% as tourism money. But very little contact or involvement with the Sports Commission and asked who they are accountable to.
- **Utah Sports Commission** reports to GOED. Request for the Utah Sports Commission leadership team and Jeff Robbins to present at a future board meeting.
- **Jessica Merrill** noted that there is a lot of sports tourism bringing dollars into our state and want to make it even stronger.
- **Joanie Hammer** asked if anyone from the UOT office sits on their board. No there is not.
- **Jennifer Wesselhoff** noted that because the Sports Commission does not report to this board, we need to be careful how we manage that relationship. Tremendous opportunity for better cooperation and partnerships as they can negotiate more deals at big events.
- **Shayne Wittwer** mentioned the growth in Davis, Juab and Sevier counties with hosting larger sports events with new facilities.
- **Nathan Rafferty** mentioned he wished the state logo or *Utah Life Elevated* was used during national and international sporting events to tie it all back together.
- **Jason Murray** commented that collaboration between the two boards and two organizations is very important as sports tourism is only going to get bigger.

Becky Kenney

- Looking toward approving the TMPF and historical carry forward. Don't yet know what the exact carry forward will be as we are still using it until June 30.
- Total of \$20.3M for FY27. The sports commission 10% equals \$2.03M; 20 percent goes to Co-op Marketing Grant \$4.06M + 104K carryforward; and, the marketing, development and stewardship programming, the UOT work, is \$14.2M + \$30K carryforward.
- The \$140K carryforward in the co-op program is to give partners a predesigned opportunity to get started if they are not ready to apply for the traditional program and \$80K goes to Visa Destinations Insights that gives partners a discount on data.
- **Joanie Hammer** noted the opportunity for smaller, little budget counties to participate in funding opportunities will be golden.
- **Jennifer Wesselhoff** noted how valuable the Visa data is for destinations and it is one of the only ways to track international spending.
- Agency retainers are down roughly 2% overall due to a successfully renegotiated social media contract.
- Local media relations will see a \$10,000 increase for localized storytelling.
- International social media always-on advertising expenses are down 18% as international social media scopes are paired back slightly, though performance benchmarks remain high.
- International trade show costs are rising due to inflation and the cost of doing business.
- A budget reduction for the Days of '47 rodeo sponsorship is recommended this year because ongoing organizational budget cuts have made it difficult to maintain historical investment levels.
- **Jessica Merrill** asked for an explanation of the Days of '47 sponsorship and how it fits in with the overall strategy.
- Research and development expenses are up roughly 20% year-over-year. This budget covers the research used to plan, optimize and measure marketing campaigns.

- Website visitutah.com serves as the primary destination for all campaign traffic, managing 500+ pages of content and generating 7 million sessions per year.
- Budget money for three campaigns this fiscal year include:
 - Parks & Beyond, \$4,422,139
 - Ski & Winter, \$2,381,152
 - Urban & Outdoors, \$890,000
- Almost \$1.87M in recaptured savings over the past 10 years and reallocate and use these funds before the legislature sweeps them back.
 - **Flight Development:** One-time funds will support a two-year commitment to flight development at the international airport. Board members emphasized that this is a critical pipeline for local bureaus who cannot afford to fund flight recruitment independently.
 - **Global Branding & Olympics:** Funds will be used for a global branding push to leverage the upcoming Olympic spotlight.
 - **Adventure Safe Activation:** Dedicated funding for future activations over the next two years.
 - **LA Campaign Activation:** Funding for a one-year summer campaign targeting the Los Angeles market. Board members suggested looking into statewide collaboration opportunities for this market.
 - **Destination Development:** Funding will continue to build on destination development programs established over the last 18–24 months, which have successfully drawn private sector matching dollars into local communities.
- **Nathan Rafferty** asked if the budget is approved today is it set in stone or if other programs, priorities come up, can it be reallocated. Would come back to the board and committees for review before changes are made.

MOTION: Jason Murray motioned to approve the plan for the Tourism Marketing Performance Fund budget of \$22,197,493 as presented. Shayne Wittwer seconded the motion. The motion was approved.

Announcements

- **Joanie Hammer** reminded everyone that registration for the Utah Tourism Conference is open. It is October 13-16 at the Grand Hyatt Deer Valley. Please register and make hotel reservations.

Meeting adjourned.