



Montana Nonprofit Association

MONTANA



WHY TOURISM MATTERS TO YOUR NONPROFIT

And How to Get Started — Montana Rural Tourism Partnership Guide

Unlock New Potential

Your mission is stronger when visitors value it.

You already know what you do. You preserve local heritage. You protect land. You celebrate culture. You build community. Now imagine if visitors—people who stay overnight, eat locally, and spend money in your town—became supporters of your mission.

That's what tourism partnership does. It doesn't change your mission. It funds it.

The Opportunity

Montana has **\$1+million in annual tourism grants** that explicitly fund nonprofits. The state has tourism agencies in every region, all funded by bed-tax dollars and all hungry for authentic experiences to market—the kind of experiences you already offer.

The translation gap is real: nonprofits speak *mission and community*. Tourism agencies speak *visitor spending and economic impact*. When you learn to speak both languages, doors open.

This is not about selling out. It's about sustainability.

What Your Nonprofit Can Gain

- ✓ **Earned revenue** —charge for admissions, tours, workshops, or volunteer experiences
 - ✓ **Access to tourism grants** — funding streams your donors haven't heard of
 - ✓ **Free marketing reach** — your event in regional guides and itineraries you can't afford
 - ✓ **Partnership capacity** — co-apply for larger grants, borrow reach, share costs
 - ✓ **Visitor diversity** — new audiences beyond your usual donors
 - ✓ **Resilient funding** — layer visitor revenue on top of grants and donations
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Real Examples (Montana nonprofits doing this now)

- A **heritage museum** now draws 2,400 annual visitors, 60% from outside the county, generating ~\$70k in local spending over festival weekends—thanks to regional promotion and a revenue-share with a local lodge.
- A **land trust** partners with outfitters to lead paid volunteer-tour work trips that both fund conservation and build community support.
- A **cultural organization** joined a statewide Made in Montana program and now sells products to visitors through the state tourism website.

None of these nonprofits changed their mission. They just learned to position it so tourism partners saw the value.

Your First Three Steps

1. Know what you have

Visitors care about: a historic site, an event, land access, a cultural experience, a product, a workshop. What have *you* been undervaluing as "just" community work?

2. Learn the language

"We preserve heritage" becomes "We draw 800 visitors per year who stay overnight and spend money locally."

"We protect 5,000 acres" becomes "We offer a unique outdoor experience that extends visitor stays in an under-visited town."

3. Reach out to your regional tourism organization

One conversation. No strings. See if a co-marketing partnership, joint grant, or volunteer-tourism model makes sense for you.

Your Action Toolkit

Montana's Six Tourism Regions — Who To Call

Each region is a non-profit, bed-tax-funded organization hungry for authentic partnerships. They manage guides, itineraries, events calendars, and grant programs.

GLACIER COUNTRY (*Western Montana: Missoula, Kalispell, Flathead Lake*)

📞 **800-338-5072** | 🌐 glaciermt.com
PO Box 17631, Missoula, MT 59808

CENTRAL MONTANA (*Great Falls, Lewistown, Fort Benton, Augusta*)

📞 **800-736-5276** | 🌐 centralmontana.com
15 Overlook Dr, Great Falls, MT 59405

MISSOURI RIVER COUNTRY (*Northeast: Glasgow, Fort Peck, Malta, Wolf Point*)

📞 **800-653-1319** | 🌐 missouririvermt.com
PO Box 118, Fort Peck, MT 59223

SOUTHWEST MONTANA (*Helena, Butte, Dillon, Deer Lodge, Townsend*)

📞 **800-879-1159** | 🌐 southwestmt.com
PO Box 28, Deer Lodge, MT 59722

YELLOWSTONE COUNTRY (*South-central: Bozeman, Livingston, West Yellowstone, Red Lodge*)

📞 **406-556-8680** | 🌐 visityellowstonecountry.com
PO Box 3048, Bozeman, MT 59772

SOUTHEAST MONTANA (*Billings, Miles City, Wolf Point; Dinosaur Trail, Little Bighorn*)

📞 **800-346-1876** | 🌐 southeastmontana.com
815 S. 27th Street, Billings, MT 59101

Three Types of Partnerships to Know

CO-MARKETING	Your event in their guides, website, social. You handle the work; they handle the reach.
REVENUE-SHARE	Partner with a lodge or outfitter. They book a visitor into your experience; you split the fee.
JOINT GRANTS	You + the tourism region co-apply. Several Montana programs reward this pairing and unlock money neither wins alone.

Funding You Can Apply For (*And You're Eligible*)

Tourism Grant Program —\$1M+ annually for projects that strengthen tourism and recreation. Open to nonprofits, Tribal governments, and municipalities.

👉 Deadline: Typically fall. Apply at brand.mt.gov/tourism-grants

Pilot Community Tourism Grant Program (PCTGP) — For rural communities building new tourism products.

👉 Every 2 years. Next cycle: Check with your regional org for dates.

Regional Assistance Program (RAP) — For nonprofit tourism groups and visitor bureaus.

👉 Biennial, roughly March cycle.

Economic Impact and Destination Event Grant Program — Up to \$15k to scale a festival or event.

👉 For multi-day arts, culture, outdoor recreation, history events.

👉 **Full calendar and details:** Visit your region's website or call — they can walk you through what's current and what fits.

Questions to Ask Yourself (Before You Call)

- ☐ Do we have something a visitor can experience?(site, event, land, cultural experience, product, class)
- ☐ Do we have basic liability insurance and visitor-facing capacity?
- ☐ Could visitors realistically stay an extra night or detour because of us?
- ☐ Do we have attendance or attendance estimates we can cite?
- ☐ Are we interested in earned revenue, grants, marketing reach, or all three?

If you checked even one box, you're ready to call.

What To Say When You Call

"Hi — I run [nonprofit name], and we offer [what you do]. I'm curious whether there are opportunities to partner with your region through co-marketing, joint grants, or other models. Do you have a few minutes?"

That's it. They're used to these calls. They're nonprofit people too. They'll either say yes or point you toward someone who can help.

Key Takeaway

Tourism isn't destiny. It's an option. You don't have to build a gift shop or become a tour operator. You just need to see what you're already doing through a visitor's eyes — and position it so the people whose job it is to bring visitors can help you reach them.

The translation gap is narrow. It just takes a conversation to cross it.

Questions? Start here:

- Your **regional tourism office** (see back side)
- Montana Office of Tourism: **brand.mt.gov**
- This resource: Montana Nonprofit Association **<https://mtnonprofit.org/>**

This page is part of a larger partnership playbook for rural Montana nonprofits. For templates, case studies, and deeper guidance, see the full resource.