

# FY 25-26

Public Relations Plan

V5– May 20, 2025



DVA ADVERTISING & PUBLIC RELATIONS

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# CURRENT STATE OF TRAVEL

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There are a number of current and potential challenges facing the travel industry in general, as well as destinations in the West and U.S. destinations at or above the 46th Parallel. Being mindful of these challenges, proactive in addressing them, and purposeful in mitigating them through earned media efforts will serve to soften their impacts.

## 1 RECESSION

There is an increasingly real chance of an economic downturn or even a recession in 2025.

## 2 CANADA

Growing anti-U.S. travel sentiment among Canadians, combined with a weak exchange rate.

## 3 USFS

USFS layoffs will likely have a big impact on outdoor recreation in and around the West's public lands.

## 4 OTHER

Are there other threats, such as a post Yellowstone dip, to keep in mind when evaluating challenges?

# ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES

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**Booking Windows:** Among travel planners, booking windows are less predictable now than at any time in recent memory.

6

**Budget Consciousness:** Travelers' personal financial situations, as well as the cost of travel, continue to be at the top of the list of concerns among the traveling public.

7

**Hospitality Staffing & Workforce Housing:** The combination of living wages and limited affordable housing continues to make hiring seasonal and/or part-time employees challenging.

8

**Resident Sentiment:** While this may not be an issue for Great Falls at the moment, resident sentiment toward tourism is a trend that requires constant attention and nurturing to minimize disconnect.



# 2025 TRAVEL TRENDS

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Travel trends shape the ways in which people travel, the places they chose to travel to, and the experiences they have once there. Following is a list of some key travel trends for 2025, compiled from Expedia, U.S. Travel, Conde Nast Traveler, Travel + Leisure, and other sources:

## INDIGENOUS HISTORY & CULTURE

Tourism that allows us to learn about the culture, traditions, and homes of our nation's first inhabitants will continue to gain in popularity.

***VGF: Highlight the rich history of the Plains tribes through experiences at First Peoples Buffalo Jump State Park, the CM Russell Museum Indigenous exhibits, Native-led tours, and community events that celebrate the culture of the region's original stewards, and more.***

## ASTRO-TOURISM

There's an increasing desire to broaden our horizons in the real (vs. virtual) universe by traveling to lands devoid of pollution, crowds, and traffic, to gaze at the stars, planets, and constellations overhead.

***VGF: Great Falls offers expansive, unobstructed skies and minimal light pollution—ideal for stargazing, night photography, and celestial events. With its central location and easy access to remote areas, Great Falls is perfectly positioned to attract travelers looking for awe-inspiring night sky experiences.***

## EMBRACING AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES

Travelers are increasingly seeking authentic adventures, and Great Falls delivers a true Montana experience with a hard working community that supports its residents and visitors.

***VGF: Leverage Great Falls' historic downtown, local businesses, Western-themed public art, and community members to inspire visitors with the towns determined and authentic spirit.***

## COOL-CATIONING

2024 surpassed 2023 as the hottest year on record. With the intense, record-breaking temperatures of recent years, many are considering traveling in the opposite direction: booking "coolcations" in temperate destinations.

***VGF: Even in the height of summer, Great Falls offers a refreshing alternative to scorching heat—with crisp mornings, low humidity, and river breezes. Spring and fall bring mild temps perfect for hiking, biking, and exploring without breaking a sweat, making Great Falls a smart pick for heat-weary travelers.***

# 2025 TRAVEL TRENDS – CONT.

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## STATE PARKS VS. NATIONAL PARKS

There are nearly 4,000 state parks scattered across the United States. The two things state parks often lack? Big crowds and big prices. State parks are affordable alternatives, and you can usually find a great state park within an hour of most urban centers.

**VGF:** *While National Parks will continue to attract people to Great Falls, there is an opportunity to leverage the numerous state, county, and city park experiences to be had in the region.*

## PEAK SEASON GETS A COLD SHOULDER

A dramatic increase in shoulder season travel is driven by a combination of social, economic, and environmental factors. Fewer crowds, greater authenticity, higher value, flexible working, and even cooler temperatures are all driving this trend.

**VGF:** *Position Great Falls as a year-round destination by highlighting fall colors along the River's Edge Trail, winter birding at Benton Lake, skiing nearby, and even classic Montana experiences like ice fishing. Cozy downtown stays and off-season cultural events round out a winter getaway that's big on adventure, low on crowds.*

## ENGAGING WITH OUTDOOR ART

Americans continue to want to incorporate open spaces into their travels, and the many outdoor sculpture gardens around the U.S. are a perfect and low-key way to do it.

**VGF:** *Showcase Great Falls' vibrant Mural Trail, striking roundabout sculptures, riverfront installations, and downtown public art as must-see stops that blend creativity with wide-open Montana landscapes.*



# TARGET MARKETS

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DVA will prioritize regional drive markets, direct flight markets, and national media markets. Areas of emphasis are outlined in themes below, and are intended to position Great Falls as a year-round, affordable, and uncrowded alternative to Montana's resort towns.



## **DRIVE**

Montana  
Alberta  
Idaho  
Spokane  
The Dakotas  
Wyoming  
Calgary  
Lethbridge



## **DIRECT FLIGHT**

Denver  
Minneapolis  
Salt Lake City  
Seattle  
Las Vegas  
Phoenix



## **NATIONAL**

Los Angeles  
SF Bay Area  
NY/NJ  
Dallas/Houston  
Chicago  
Atlanta  
Portland  
Washington, D.C

# AUDIENCES & THEMES

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Audiences and themes will emphasize general and niche travel themes as broadly defined below. While it is nearly impossible to avoid promotion of summer travel altogether, PR efforts will focus on shoulder, off-season, and winter travel and activities.

## **GENERAL**

Mainstream leisure travel audiences and messaging.

## **ENTREPRENEURIALISM**

Start, expand, grow, or relocate your business in Great Falls.

## **NATIONAL/STATE PARKS**

Yellowstone. Glacier. And the perfect basecamp for both.

## **OUTDOOR REC**

Activities and adventures for every season.

## **BLEISURE**

Combining business with an extended leisure stay.

## **DARK SKIES**

Stargazing, astro-tourism, and nighttime adventures.

## **FAMILY TRAVEL**

A safe, enriching, affordable, and family-friendly value.

## **MEETINGS/GROUPS**

Corporate meetings, group travel, conferences, and more.

## **AUTHENTIC MONTANA**

What Montana is made of. Grit. Sense of Place.

## **HISTORY/CULTURAL**

Leaning in to Great Falls history, Indigenous, art/arts, etc.

## **QUALITY OF LIFE**

Raise a family, work remotely, or enjoy your golden years here.



# PR TACTICS

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**PR Editorial Calendar** – Execute a proactive calendar for public relations related deliverables.

**Press Releases/Pitches** – Drafting and distribution of press releases, pitches, and related content to regional and national media.

**Inbound Media/Influencer Outreach** – Actively recruit in-market visits and editorial coverage from prioritized media and influencers through ongoing outreach. Includes both proactive and reactive efforts.

**Media Visit Coordination** – Develop itineraries and coordinate logistics for media/influencer visits to the region.

**Media Invitations** – Develop and distribute FAM and themed media invitation.

**FAM Tours** – Coordinate one themed, strategically timed in-market media/influencer FAM tour to share the Great Falls experience with diverse media audience.

**Outbound (virtual) Media Event** – Implement one virtual media event for journalists and influencers in key Visit Great Falls markets.

**Monitoring & Reporting** – Monitor media coverage of the destination utilizing the Muck Rack platform, as well as short monthly calls for internal and external audiences.



# PR EDITORIAL CALENDAR

## Goal:

Communicate timely and newsworthy information to media, while maintaining top-of-mind awareness via a consistent presence in their inboxes.

## Deliverables:

Development and implementation of following editorial calendar, including six press releases, one FAM tour, two media invitations, one virtual media event, and storyline pitches. Editorial content would be deployed throughout the year according to the following schedule (topics/content be amended as directed by client):

MONTH	DELIVERABLE	TOPIC/CONTENT
April	Sunset Travel Awards	Where to Go Category submission
April	Sense of Place Press RLS	Destination positioning, arts & culture, economic growth & opportunity, history & authenticity
May	Work Life Balance Press RLS	Why Great Falls makes sense for business and lifestyle - Highlight Beth & Chris
May	Media Invitation	Outdoor Rec, History/Culture, Event for visits Sep. - Feb.
June	Pitch	Remote Working Benefits - Great Falls' amenities as a temp resident: trail, museums, events
July	Events & Activities Press RLS	Creating Community with accessible & affordable Events and Activities.
July	FAM Invite	Lifestyle, Entrepreneur, Job Opportunities
August	Expect the Unexpected Press RLS	Superlatives of Great Falls - Crooked Tree, Cassiopeia, Celtic Cowboy, Giant Springs, First Peoples Buffalo Jump, Western Art Week, Sip n Dip
September	FAM	Outdoor recreation and experiences of GF lifestyle
September	Pitch	Turning Passing into Mainstreet Experiences. Farmer's Daughter Fiber + retreats + brick & Mortar experience = online customers, Hi-Line Climbing + lifestyle + pump track + expansion
October	Arts & Culture Press RLS	Source of inspiration for Artist throughout time - Running world Class Museum and Artist Culture - why they live here and their lifestyle. Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center.
November	Virtual Event	Focus on media from direct flight and core drive markets

x5	= Press Release
x1	= Virtual Event
x1	= Media FAM
x3	= Pitch/Sunset Awards
x2	= Invitation/FAM Invite



# NEWSMAKING (PRESS RELEASES/PITCHES)

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## Goal:

Cast a wide net to generate media interest and awareness in Great Falls through the development and dissemination of timely and newsworthy information. Targets will include mainstream travel media as well as niche media focused on themes identified on page 6.

## Deliverables:

- Media list development using the Muck Rack media database to segment out by market, interests, etc.
- Research and drafting of 5 press releases and 3 pitches. DVA to collaborate with client for additional information, insights, and quotes, as needed.
- Content development in appropriate form for each press release and/or pitch
- Edits/revisions as needed, finalize for distribution
- Distribution, monitoring of open rates, and follow-up/retargeting as needed
- Fielding, managing, redirecting, and responding as appropriate to inquiries and/or requests for additional information from media
- Report on media pickup following distribution
- Regular update of distribution list, after initial list is created

# INBOUND MEDIA OUTREACH

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## Goal #1 – Media:

Position Great Falls as one of Montana's emerging travel destinations, draw for business leisure travelers, relocation/entrepreneurship, quality of life, and differentiate Great Falls from the competition through regular outreach to regional/national media encouraging visits and editorial coverage.

## Deliverables:

Monthly outreach to lifestyle and niche category media. Provide individualized content, and timely and relevant subject matter tailored to their readers, viewers, listeners, and followers. Target categories will mirror those of the Audiences & Themes lists on Page 6.

## Goal #2 – Regional/Local Influencers & Content Creators:

Actively recruit visits from travel and lifestyle, entrepreneur focused, and local social media content creators with strong engagement, and a loyal following that mirrors the Visit Great Falls audience/demo.

## Deliverables:

- Recruit hand-picked content creators visits on a product-for-service (unpaid) basis.
- DVA to coordinate with VGF on itineraries, and provide post-visit recap of deliverables.



# MEDIA VISIT COORDINATION

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## Goal:

Develop comprehensive itineraries for media/influencer visits that leverage the region's assets and partners, while providing media with the experiences they want and need based on their interests and story angle.

## Deliverables:

In collaboration with VGF, DVA will build individual media visit itineraries that best reflect the story angle, meet each writer's interests, and accomplish VGF objectives.

- Estimated hard cost incurred: \$400–\$1000 per media visit (includes, flight, lodging, transportation, activities, and meals). This number does not account for complimentary/hosted meals, transportation, or activities.





# MEDIA INVITATIONS

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## Goal:

Encourage regional and national media and influencer visits to Great Falls during specific timeframes, with the intent of generating feature editorial coverage in targeted print, broadcast, online, and social media outlets. **Encourage mid-week and off-peak visits whenever possible.**

## Deliverables:

Drafting and distribution of two media invitations to approximately 75-100 regional/national media and influencers, as follows:

Sept FAM Tour:	Meetings/Conferences, Entrepreneurship, Business Outlets, Economic Development. Distribute in July for September FAM.
General 2025:	Outdoor Rec, National Parks, History/Culture, Events. Distribute in late May for visits in September-February.

Includes media list development and prioritization, drafting and distribution of invitation, and follow-up with invitees. Once a visit is secured, it will be transitioned to the Media Visit Coordination tactic and will fall under that budget line item.

# FAM TOUR

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## Goal:

Coordinate a themed, strategically-timed FAM tour across a diverse audience of influencers and media.

## Deliverables:

DVA will identify and invite up to four media and/or influencers based on their audience, content, and engagement. Each will experience a hosted group trip to Great Falls, with expectations to provide a minimum of assets to be defined and agreed upon prior to confirmation of attendance. Invitee media lists and FAM itineraries will incorporate business/leisure, entrepreneurship, authentic montana experiences, and quality of life tactics to align with broader VGF themes.

- Estimated hard cost incurred: **\$1500 per attendee** (includes, flight, lodging, transportation, activities, and meals). Estimated 4 attendees. This number does not account for complimentary/hosted meals, transportation, or activities.

## Themes/Timing:

Multifaceted journalists who cover more than one audience (example: covers meetings/events and travel for multiple outlets). September 2025.

# OUTBOUND (VIRTUAL) MEDIA EVENT

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## Goal:

Educate, inform, and inspire media through curated events for journalists and influencers in key Visit Great Falls markets.

## Deliverables:

DVA will implement one virtual media event for the 25/26 fiscal year. Hoping to keep the event intimate. 10 - 15 media. Proposed timing is as follows:

- November 2025

Deliverables would include, but not be limited to:

- Theme development
- Agenda/partner development
- Media invitations & follow-up
- Event co-hosting
- Post-event follow-up, invitation to visit, and recap

# MONITORING & REPORTING

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## Goal:

Monitor editorial coverage related to Great Falls as a travel destination, and assign value to earned media placements. Recap and report on efforts on a monthly/campaign end basis as outlined below.

## Deliverables:

Utilizing Muck Rack, DVA will monitor, track, and report on all earned media coverage generated through December 2025. Results will be tracked and reported in the following formats:

- **Monthly status call** – monthly calls to review editorial calendar and discuss plans/efforts/initiatives for the month ahead
- **Ongoing monitoring** – daily print and online coverage monitoring provided through the Muck Rack third party platform



# BUDGET:

Following is the proposed public relations budget for the requested deliverables, including all time required to deliver on the stated scope of work. With the exception of the monthly Muck Rack media monitoring charges (\$165/mo), this budget does not include approved hard costs such as paid collaborations, transportation, hosted meals & activities, etc. (note: hard costs are outlined below budget)

DELIVERABLE	COST
<b>PR Editorial Calendar</b> Development of editorial calendar that defines key tactics and deliverables on a month-by-month basis for the budget allocated.	\$975
<b>Press Releases &amp; Pitches</b> Per editorial calendar, draft and distribute a total of <u>five</u> press releases. <u>Three</u> of the press releases would be adapted for specific pitches to media.	\$8,085
<b>Inbound Media Outreach</b> Actively solicit visits and editorial coverage through ongoing, proactive outreach to media and influencers.	\$4,750
<b>(Outbound) Virtual Media Event</b> Execute a virtual media event prioritizing travel, lifestyle, and business media in Great Falls' direct flight markets.	\$5,000
<b>Media Visit Coordination</b> Develop comprehensive itineraries and coordinate logistics for media/influencer visits to the region.	\$12,000
<b>Media Invitation/ FAM Invitation</b> Includes media list development, drafting, distribution, follow-up, and management of inquiries. One general media invitation, and one FAM specific invitation.	\$3,200
<b>Media FAM Tour</b> Coordinate one strategically-timed FAM tour for a select group of media and/or influencers, including travel and business. Does not include hard costs.	\$8,000
<b>Monitoring &amp; Reporting</b> Monthly monitoring and reporting of media coverage. Produce monthly recaps. Assumes 2 hours per month, plus Muck Rack hard costs.	\$2,375
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$44,385</b>

Estimated additional hard costs for FAM Tour:  
Estimated additional hard costs for Media Visits:

**\$6,000**  
**\$4,000**



# THANK YOU

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