

Red Lodge Group Travel Website



"When You're Here, You're Local"

Section 1: Economic Need

The Red Lodge Area Chamber of Commerce/Visitors Center (the Chamber) is seeking \$28,000 to fund the “Red Lodge Area Group Travel Website”. The website project is designed to position Red Lodge in front of event and group coordinators during the crucial decision making moments of research and planning. Our goal is to educate and entice guests to the myriad of assets and amenities in the Red Lodge Area as an event and group destination.

At the present time, Red Lodge does not offer a centralized, professional resource for event planning. This project is deemed to be the ultimate online group resource, answering questions for every type of group or event. Our goal is to provide advocacy by establishing e-marketing and technology-based resources through the Chamber on behalf of local services and businesses. The website will use the latest web standards including Responsive Web Design to ensure the site is usable on all devices.

- The Chamber is a member based organization. A project such as this will potentially increase our budget by 15%.
- With this project, anticipated growth in Membership would allow us to use a portion of this revenue to be designated towards a marketing budget .
- The anticipated increase in revenue from this project would ideally create the need for another full-time employee at the Chamber. Job growth would be another positive economic impact of this project.
- We host 85.5% of our visitors during the summer months. There is a huge potential to increase Red Lodge as a conference and vacation destination throughout winter and shoulder seasons.

Funding assistance through the Montana Office of Tourism’s E-Marketing Technology grant is a tremendous opportunity for us to expand upon what is currently being offered through the Chamber and Visitors Center. This opportunity would allow us to invest in the future of Red Lodge, creating a sustainable project that specifically targets an untapped market.

This project is intended to increase overnight, extended, shoulder season, midweek, low-impact stays that will ultimately increase Montana lodging tax revenues as well as having a positive impact on local businesses. Achievement of this attainable goal would increase overall number of visitors to Red Lodge and to the state of Montana.

The Chamber will be responsible for management and complete project oversight, as well as incurring all costs of web hosting and domain registration - total administrative cost \$6,300. The Red Lodge Tourism Business Improvement District(TBID) and other community organizations have committed \$8245 in capital and time. By using Creative Design Works(CDW), experienced local professionals to complete and maintain this website, we will save approximately \$5,000-\$7,000.

(Please see Section 7: Detailed Budget for a complete listing)



Section 2: Clarity and Feasibility of the Project's Vision

This project will create a website as the ultimate online group resource representing the Red Lodge Area as a group/conference destination.

Specific details of the site include:

- Allow the group planner and attendees to navigate the local area from anywhere in the world. As listed in the State of Montana Office of Tourism Cooperative Marketing FY14 Plan, once the State Level provides the “Inspiration”, the Town Level provides the sense of location, “Orientation”, and then the Business/Resort Level provides the “Facilitation”.
- Provide general area information complete with maps and links to use at their discretion.
- Address “Getting Here” including highway information, weather advisory links, airports and transit services in different areas such as Red Lodge, Billings, Cody and Bozeman.
- Group resources listed by individual categories so group planners will have all pertinent materials specific to their group. Some of the groups identified will include but are not limited to Arts/Culture, Business/Associations, Military, Reunion/Getaways, Specialty Groups, Sporting Events/Tournaments, Travel Professionals, Weddings.
- Include sample itineraries to assist group planners, streamline the planning process, encouraging additional overnight and extended stays for attendees. This may be used as an additional sales tool and resource by planners. Itineraries will include food, arts/culture, wildlife, and other activities.
- Customer testimonials, reviews and comments from other planners.
- Online Request for Proposal (RFP) form submission. The requests will be distributed to all applicable facilities for quotes.
- Searchable information on individual businesses.
- Multiple downloadable, printable guides, in PDF format, with current information that is tailored to specific groups. The individual guides will contain information specific to Professional Meeting Planners, Professional Group Travel Planners, Wedding Planners, and Sporting Event Planners.
- PDF Guides will be designed to be easily updated. This will ensure accurate, current information that will never expire.
- Content management system, easily updatable by multiple parties as needed.
- Utilize Responsive Web Design, which adjusts the content to multiple devices.
- Employ Google Analytics to track site visitor demographics.
- The website will provide the necessary platform to position Red Lodge for group/event E-Marketing Campaigns to attract groups and conferences.



Section 3: Uniqueness of the Project

The “Red Lodge Area Group Travel Website” is unique in that Red Lodge currently does not have a centralized group travel resource or cohesive group travel marketing effort.

The Chamber website offers the promotion of Red Lodge businesses to the public and general area information. RedLodge.com caters to the traveler offering more broad-based travel information. The City of Red Lodge’s website offers community business services and resources. This proposed website will focus on fulfilling the group travel niche which the other Red Lodge area websites do not fully address.

Many Montana cities have excellent online resources for the group travel planner, marketing their area as group travel destinations. Each city and small town in Montana offers their own unique experience. We researched other Montana cities for ideas to build upon. We will use these sites as a benchmark while illustrating the unique experiences we provide visitors.

This website will be unique as it not only addresses the “why” but the “how”. For example, if someone were going to book a group they would also be able to book tee times, a river rafting adventure or even purchase ski lift tickets.

The Chamber and CDW have worked collaboratively with other community group leaders to discuss the “Red Lodge Group Travel Website” project. They are all very supportive of this endeavor and have had valuable input determining the theme of the project. All present were very clear on how they wanted the website to represent our community. The key component of what is most valued in Red Lodge by our residents and visitors alike is, “When You’re Here, You’re Local”. This is what makes Red Lodge unique as a group travel destination. The feeling of home, warmth, hospitality, like the guest is not a guest, but a member of our community.

As stated in the Montana Brand initiative in www.travelmontana.mt.gov handbook, “Know-Your-Neighbor, Mainstreet kind of place, it only makes sense that the tone in which we communicate our brand reflects the values of our people.”



Section 4: Montana Brand Support

According to the 2001-2002 Institute for Travel and Tourism Research (ITRR) Montana survey, of the 81% who are vacationing, the majority are attracted to mountains, open space and wildlife. Red Lodge embodies the top 3 (and the top 8/8) attractants to vacationers in Montana which also attracts events and groups. By marketing ourselves as an event and group destination, this will, in turn, generate necessary revenue for the community to contribute to the overall sustainability and economic development of the Red Lodge Area as well as the state of Montana.

Red Lodge has what it takes to be an event and group destination:

Red Lodge is at the base of one of the top 10 scenic drives in America, the Beartooth All-American Road. The most scenic byways are designated All-American Roads. The designation means that they “have features that do not exist elsewhere in the United States and are unique and important enough to be tourist destinations unto themselves.”

According to the Beartooth Highway Economic Impact Study and ITRR reports, final analysis shows that the “Beartooth Highway All-American Road is a significant contributor to the economies, livelihoods and recreation opportunities to the residents and visitors of Red Lodge, Montana.” Our proximity and location at the base of the Beartooth All-American road directly ties to our livelihood. This asset allows us to be a part of the complete, compelling Montana Brand initiative truly captivating visitors and residents alike with an ongoing, ever-present feeling of breathtaking exhilaration.

The theme of this website will incorporate the Montana Brand Pillars through the video representing Red Lodge, photos and convenient links to the myriad of Red Lodge resources. Our statement, “When You’re Here, You’re Local”, upholds the Montana brand focusing on Red Lodge’s small town charm, creating warm, welcoming, breathtaking experiences by day and relaxing hospitality by night. Those experiences make our guests feel like active members of our community. We are not “big city”. We are Red Lodge ~ charming and quaint, offering comprehensive, modern amenities and services, yet natural beauty that beckons all ages, all ethnicities, all groups to take part of and enjoy.

Links and resources to promote the Red Lodge Area, the state and the region:

- **www.redlodge.com** - an online guide to the Red Lodge Area
- An online version of the **Destination Red Lodge Travel Planner** for view and use by planners and attendees
- **www.redlodgechamber.org** including support services such as welcome packets, name badges, downtown storefront welcome flyers, hospitality booths available for their group and a variety of other services
- **www.cityofredlodge.com** for permits and other pertinent information that planners need for hosting certain groups
- **www.travelmontana.mt.gov** and **www.visitmt.com**
- **www.xanterra.com** and **www.yellowstonenationalparklodges.com** promoting the region
- **www.cookechamber.org**, **www.gardinerchamber.com**, **www.destinationyellowstone.com**, **www.ynp.gov/yell** promoting the region’s assets for extended trips and itineraries

The Red Lodge Package includes:

- More than 2,020 pillows to serve our visitors in an array of lodging options, upholding the Montana brand, “relaxing hospitality by night”.
- Charming, historically rich community to cater to the geotraveler, creating that unique experience rather than just a “trip” or “meeting”. We are fulfilling the need to “experience” Red Lodge, to experience the community, not just visit it but become a part of it while they are here.
- No stoplights and only three chain businesses embody our small town feel.
- Modern commerce with individually owned, one of a kind shopping and dining experiences with award winning chefs, lodging experiences such as the historic Pollard Hotel located in the heart of the Red Lodge business district and more.
- Hospitable business owners and residents, “When You’re Here, You’re Local”. The number one comment from visitors at the Visitor’s Center is how friendly everyone is - like nowhere else in the world.
- Spas, health and beauty resources.
- Year-round adventure.
- Abundance of wildlife, moose, turkeys, deer, and bear seen in town and on many hiking trails.
- Walk-ability.
- Family friendly, heart-healthy activities.
- Home to Red Lodge Mountain Ski Resort.
- Nightlife such as local musicians, affordable drinks and entertainment, offering lively, colorful experiences and conversation with locals.

We will utilize the Montana Brand to promote this project and everything that Red Lodge does to bring visitors with the intention of benefitting the state of Montana and surrounding areas.



Section 5: Measurability of the Goals, Objectives and Projected Outcomes

The primary goal:

Red Lodge Area Group Travel Website - the website will be used as the ultimate online resource to promote group travel in the Red Lodge Area.

Measurable objectives for the project include:

- Increase group travel to the Red Lodge Area
- Increase economic impact by approximately \$5 million annually
- Increase Chamber Membership by 15%

We will utilize Google Analytics to obtain pertinent demographic data. We will compare previous year to date reports on occupancy and sales levels through individual businesses, itemized local Resort Tax revenue reports and State Department of Commerce lodging tax reports. Collected data will allow for monitoring growth after the website is published and be a catalyst for continued successful outreach to target markets.

Responsible parties:

The Chamber is responsible for monitoring performance in partnership with CDW.

As a local consultant with more than 15 years experience e-marketing Red Lodge, CDW will streamline the process resulting in more efficient cost and schedule control. CDW is the programmer/facilitator of redlodge.com and Destination Red Lodge. Utilizing this partnership ensures genuine investment and representation of our community.

Operational Targets:

- **September 2013** - Identify local, professional consultant to create the website. Conversations with CDW began September 30, 2013 and several meetings have been held: **Complete**
- **November 2013** - Host community meeting to obtain cohesive vision and accurate, inclusive representation of Red Lodge: **Complete**
- **November 2013** - Contact ITRR for group and event reports: **Complete**
- **December 11, 2013** - Review Grant Application: **Complete**
- **December 13, 2013** - Submit Grant Application: **Complete**
- **February-April 2014** - Project research and development: **Upon funding notification**
- **May-June 2014** - First website draft.
- **July-August 2014** - Final draft "live".
- **October 2014** - Monitor, evaluate, data compilation and review.
- **Sustainability:** All local businesses will be listed with the option of enhancing their listing for a fee that will be used for an operating budget. Increased Chamber Membership will also increase usable marketing budget.



Section 6: Project's Cooperative Marketing Efforts

As noted in section 1, our goal is to create awareness of Red Lodge as a group travel destination by establishing e-marketing and technology-based resources through the Chamber on behalf of local services and businesses. We are currently working with local community organizations to build the best centralized resource to fulfill this identified opportunity in our community. This invaluable resource is to have an accurate, all-inclusive representation of the Red Lodge community to attract events and groups. We are working with the City of Red Lodge, the Red Lodge Merchants and Lodging Association(RLMLA), the Tourism Business Improvement District(TBID), the Red Lodge Area Community Foundation(RLACF), Beartooth Resource Conservation and Development Corporation(BTRC&D), CDW and our Chamber Members to create and promote this website.

The Red Lodge community is equivalent to approximately 2,400 people and is comprised of 55+ nonprofits and small businesses. We work very closely serving on mutual boards with other lead community groups. Red Lodge has a wonderful advantage with the synchronicity within our community. CDW created the Destination Red Lodge travel planner; hosts www.redlodge.com; and through the TBID, has recently created a Beartooth Highway brochure. Thanks to them, these vital components of a destination community have been met. The vision of "Red Lodge Group Travel Website" has identified an area in need of expansion for our community to further develop Red Lodge as a group destination, meeting the needs of consumers through technology based outreach and expansion. The centralized resource also aims to complement all existing travel resources.

We believe that there is tremendous potential to increase the number of room nights annually, along with increased gas, adventure, grocery, restaurant/bar, retail sales. This will be accomplished with a more proactive approach to reach these customers in the initial event and group planning stages. We recognize that working together to increase group travel will benefit all businesses in the area.

Acknowledging the value that this region has to offer, the "Red Lodge Group Travel" website will include links to regional assets as well as local. We will provide these links to increase knowledge of the area ideally resulting in extended itineraries while visiting, supporting our regional partners.



Section 7: Detailed Budget

In kind and other contributions:

- The Chamber has committed funding for Staff payroll/liabilities to date \$875
 - The Chamber will incur all costs of web hosting and domain registration \$120
 - Donated time by Tim and Sherry Weamer, of CDW \$1000
 - Donated time by Joel Bertolino, BTRC&D \$250
 - TBID funding \$1,000
 - Martin Sheen InFocus video showcasing Red Lodge \$5,000
- \$8,245**

Ongoing costs: The “Red Lodge Group Travel Website” project has built in maintenance through building upon the above partnerships and allowing for future contributions. Each Member will be able to individually access their information to ensure accuracy and efficiency on website maintenance. Enhanced Member listings will be available for website sustainability.

Total Current Project Cost Estimate: **\$34,300**

The Chamber will be responsible for content, management and complete project oversight. Total administrative costs: \$6,300

Creative Design Works is the hired contractor to create the website including:

- Website Design and Production
- PDF Design, Creation and Implementation
- Maintenance and Enhancements for One Year \$28,000

Total amount of grant funding assistance requested: **\$28,000**



2014 E-Marketing Technology Grant Application



*Respectfully submitted by the
Red Lodge Area Chamber of Commerce/Visitors Center*

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