

ANNUAL REPORT

FISCAL YEAR 2024

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RECORD- BREAKING



VISION:

Grow our economic impact at a higher rate than our competitors

MISSION:

Inspire visitors to experience Wisconsin

View the full strategic plan [here](#).

ABOUT US

Wisconsin Council on Tourism

The 21 members of the Wisconsin Council on Tourism advise the Secretary of the Department on matters related to tourism. For a full list of current members of the Wisconsin Council on Tourism, please visit [our website](#).

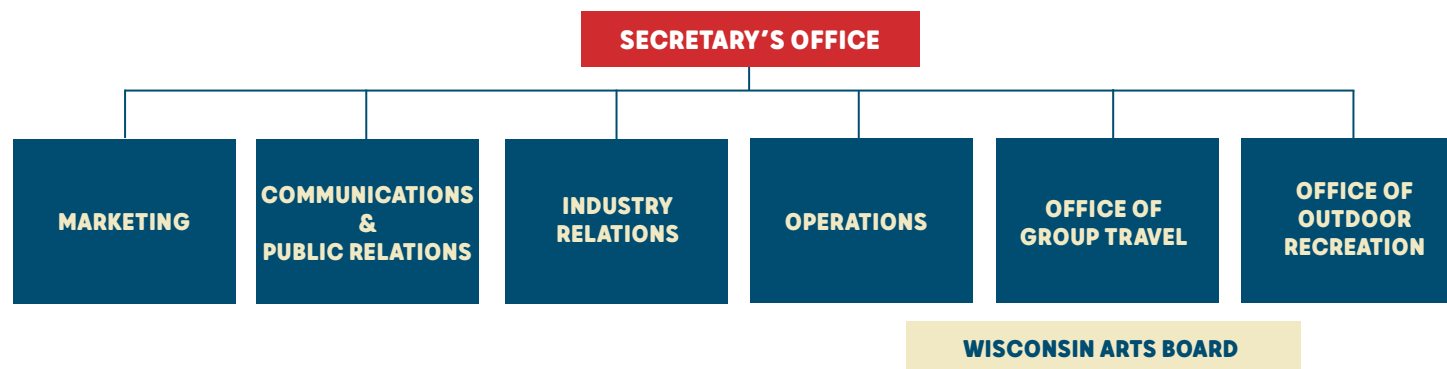
Tourism Committees

Six committees advise the agency in supporting the Wisconsin Department of Tourism's strategic plan.

- [Marketing Committee](#)
- [Joint Effort Marketing Grant Committee](#)
- [Group Travel Committee](#)
- [Tourist Information Center Grant Committee](#)
- [Outdoor Recreation Committee](#)
- [Inclusion, Diversity, Equity & Accessibility Committee](#)

Staff

The Wisconsin Department of Tourism has position authority for 27 full-time staff and a varying number of project positions. The Wisconsin Arts Board employs four staff. For a full list of current staff members, please visit our [staff directory](#).



AWARDS

ESTO Mercury Award, Public Relations Campaign

U.S. Travel Association

Tasty Makers Public Relations Campaign

Adrian Awards

Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International (HSMAI)

Gold Award for Public Relations Feature Placement Article: Ashlea Halpern - for online article in [Condé Nast Traveler](#)

Gold Award for Public Relations Consumer Campaign: Tasty Makers

Silver Award for Digital - Social Media Campaign: Wisconsin in Color

Silver Award for Integrated Campaign Business to Consumer: Events Campaign

Bronze Award for Advertising Brand Campaign: Wisconsin Tourism Brand Campaign

Top 25 Most Extraordinary Minds in Hospitality Sales, Marketing and Revenue Optimization

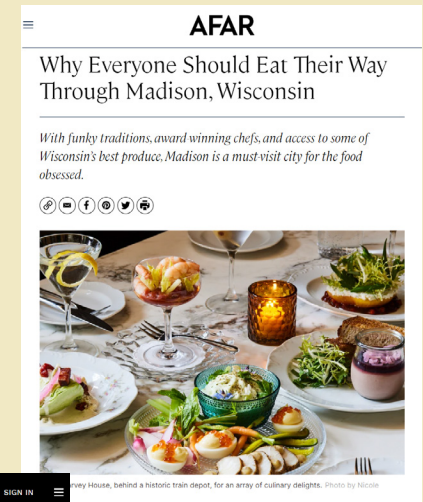
HSMAI

Craig Trost, Communications Director

WisCOMsin Awards, Communicator of the Year

Public Relations Society of America, Madison and Northeast Wisconsin Chapters

Craig Trost, Communications Director



FROM TOURISM SECRETARY ANNE SAYERS



Wisconsin isn't just having a moment; we've officially arrived on the national stage (hello, Top Chef, more on that on page 8)! As I reflect on the past year, I realize this is only possible because of the destinations, places and, importantly, the people who make up the Wisconsin tourism industry. There's no doubt tourism powers our economy - to the tune of a record-breaking \$25 billion in economic impact in 2023! But tourism also connects our communities in seen and unseen ways. Tourism gives entrepreneurs an outlet to pursue their passions. It allows families to pass on beloved businesses generation after generation. It creates an ecosystem of driving economic prosperity, of perpetuating joy and, in turn, strengthening the fabric of our entire state. This [video](#) does a great job of telling just a few of the personal stories that make up our magnificent industry.



I'm so appreciative of our industry partners, from destination marketing organizations to business owners, our outstanding hospitality workers, and everyone in between. I'm grateful for the support of Governor Evers. No one holds a deeper passion for tourism, and his enthusiasm for our sector consistently shines. I also want to thank the incredible bipartisan group of elected officials, without whose support, none of our work would be possible. Finally, thanks to the hardworking staff of the Department of Tourism. Not only are they dedicated to data-informed strategies, but the team also operates with a profound sense of pride for our state. We are privileged to have the responsibility of showcasing Wisconsin as the ultimate destination for travelers looking to create shared moments of joy with loved ones.

My heartfelt thanks go out to everyone who plays a part in sustaining this essential pillar of Wisconsin's economy.



Take care and happy trails,

Anne N. Sayers

Secretary Anne Sayers



2023 ECONOMIC IMPACT

The Department of Tourism is Wisconsin's smallest cabinet agency, with a base budget of just \$18,245,500 * out of Wisconsin's total \$48.9 billion appropriations for fiscal year 2024-2025. Despite this, tourism's economic impact is tremendous. Wisconsin tourism's record-breaking \$25 billion economic impact in 2023 marks back-to-back record years for tourism and demonstrates an incredible return on investment for Wisconsin. All 72 counties saw year-over-year growth. The data shows that consumers are prioritizing travel and when they do, they're choosing Wisconsin. The historically strong economic impact was fueled by record-setting overnight visitation driven by savvy, strategic marketing investments, as well as investments tourism businesses made in goods, supplies and services.



\$25 billion
total economic
impact



113 million
visitor trips

**The Arts Board is an attached board to the Department of Tourism for budgeting purposes, but operates independently of the Department. This figure is not inclusive of the Arts Board's budget.*



INTEGRATED CULINARY CAMPAIGN

Landing the Wisconsin season of Bravo's reality TV cooking competition, Top Chef, thrust our culinary chops right where they belong: the national (and international) spotlight. The "Top Chef effect" had an immediate impact and is expected to last for years. Over its previous 20 seasons, the show has been broadcast and streamed in 185 different territories. Its massive, dedicated audience, results in viewership of up to 6 million people per episode.

Altogether, twelve 75-minute episodes served as infomercials to global audiences, showcasing the undiscovered, flavorful food scene in Wisconsin that impresses everyone from families to foodies to James Beard judges. It spotlighted Indigenous communities and Wisconsin's Frank Lloyd Wright Trail, introduced Wisconsin as the cranberry capital of the world, and featured the largest producer-only farmers market in America, which perennial judge Tom Colicchio described as "probably the best farmers market in the world."

In order to maximize this all-eyes-on-us moment for Wisconsin, the Travel Wisconsin team cooked up an integrated paid, earned and owned media campaign. This included Travel Wisconsin's first national TV ad and its largest national public relations effort. Through broadcast and digital ads, social media, a dedicated landing page on TravelWisconsin.com, a culinary sweepstakes, Travel Wisconsin's Foodie Pass, out-of-home advertisements, print inserts, earned media stories and partnerships with social media content

creators, we introduced travelers to even more of Wisconsin's unexpected culinary destinations.

A collaborative relationship with Bravo led to a red-carpet premiere that included all three on-camera Bravo talent and several of the "cheftestants." In fact, Bravo said they've never had a destination be so creative about - and dedicated to - creating lift from the show's exposure.

Thank you to the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, Visit Milwaukee, Dairy Farmers of Wisconsin, Destination Madison, Destination Door County and Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association for being champions of Wisconsin's culinary scene and helping us leverage this national moment.



PUBLIC RELATIONS HIGHLIGHTS

118 billion

earned media impressions

12,560

earned media articles

21

media hosted

MARKETING HIGHLIGHTS

249.8 million

impressions across paid media driving to culinary content

650,000

visitors to culinary content on TravelWisconsin.com

9.3 million

estimated impressions for the national broadcast ad

MARKETING

Travel Wisconsin's campaigns continued to champion the brand idea of "Here's to Those Who Wisconsin," highlighting Wisconsin's celebratory spirit and unforgettable experiences with both a geographically and demographically expanded footprint. One-time funds allowed us to add Marquette, Michigan, as a 13th media market and broaden the age range of our target audience.

In addition to the brand campaigns, two new content series launched with supporting digital campaigns. The Wonders of Wisconsin campaign promotes the diverse and captivating places that leave people saying, "Wow, that's in Wisconsin!?" through a variety of channels and tactics. The Wonders of Wisconsin is a bucket list of sorts, to motivate travelers to book the trip and build out itineraries that take in nature, art, culture, culinary attractions and more in the surrounding areas.

Here's to Being Here is Travel Wisconsin's episodic travel series designed to showcase the unique experiences and shared moments of joy that await travelers in Wisconsin. Through immersive storytelling, we invite travelers to envision themselves and their travel partners experiencing our state. The first-person narrative technique captivates audiences, ultimately inspiring them to plan their next unforgettable vacation and create lasting memories. This unique approach speaks directly to the viewing preferences of our target audience, who value authentic, real-life experiences and seek a destination with a lot of activities and options.

FISCAL YEAR 2024 KEY METRICS

1.7 billion

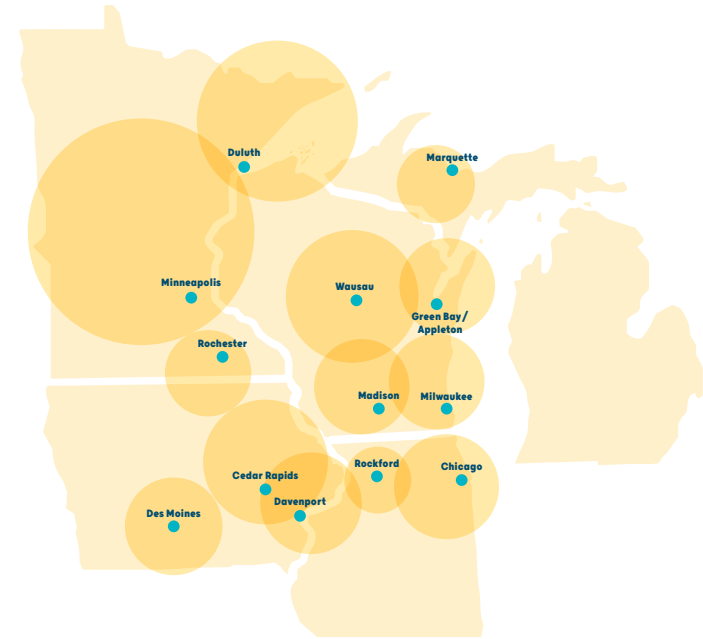
advertising impressions

13.2 million

record-breaking web sessions

313.8 million

social media reach (*Facebook and Instagram*)



PUBLIC RELATIONS

Travel Wisconsin's public relations campaigns complemented marketing campaigns by building brand awareness, improving perception and extending the brand's reach beyond the advertising budget. This happens through a continuous cycle of identifying key media contacts, building relationships and proactively pitching unique stories. Wisconsin hosted individual and small group familiarization trips to showcase Wisconsin's tourism offerings firsthand. The team also attended in-person and virtual deskside visits to engage with writers and inspire them to visit Wisconsin to discover deeper opportunities for storytelling.

Travel Wisconsin has effectively harnessed the power of content creators, recognizing their increasing value in adding third-party credibility and weaving authentic narratives. Through ongoing interaction with such creator-driven content, visitors are discovering intriguing aspects about Wisconsin, sparking inspiration for their travel itineraries.

FISCAL YEAR 2024 KEY PUBLIC RELATIONS METRICS

1,068

stories

6.77 billion

impressions

128

virtual or in-person deskside appointments

53

media visits

FISCAL YEAR 2024 KEY CONTENT CREATOR METRICS

15

content creator partnerships

6.27 million

content creator impressions

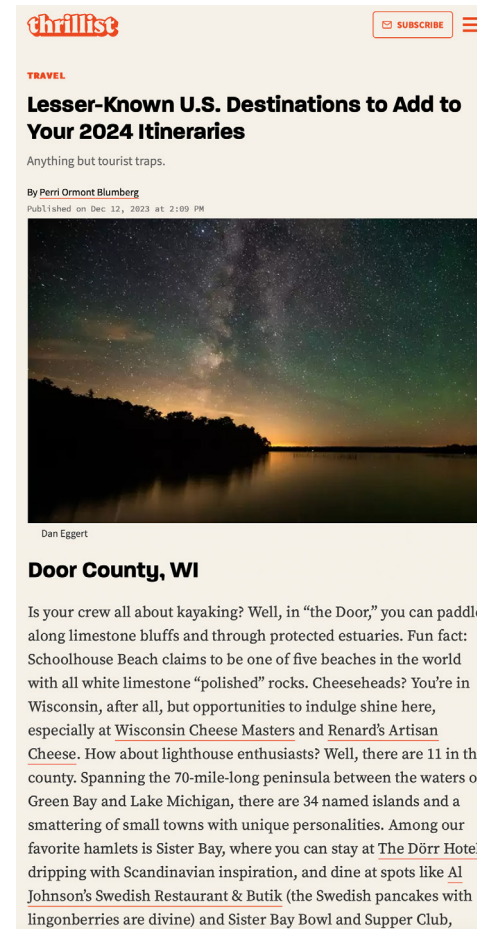
4.34%

engagement rate (1.8% industry standard)



CO-OP PROGRAM

The Travel Wisconsin Co-op is designed to amplify Travel Wisconsin's promotional strategies in partnership with the industry to deliver the greatest economic impact possible. Annual offerings engage partners big and small across the state in shared vision and goals on a calendar year cadence. The Co-op gives partners opportunities to stretch their dollars further, try new promotional tactics and programs, and amplify their promotional strategies that would otherwise be budgetarily unattainable. These promotional program opportunities include email marketing, special offers, content creator partnerships, and broadcast and podcast interviews to name a few. The 2023 Co-op included 302 partnerships with a partner investment of \$180,390.



INDUSTRY RELATIONS

Travel Wisconsin's industry relations programs provide the collaborative communication needed for the industry to share their on-the-ground experience with Travel Wisconsin and for Travel Wisconsin to provide relevant support. Each week, the industry relations team engages tourism partners with resources, including grant programs, website listings, email newsletters, webinars and the Travel Green program. In fiscal year 2024, over 270 partners downloaded the industry toolkit resources for the brand campaign, Here's to Being Here travel series and Travel Wisconsin's Foodie Pass. Additionally, the industry team recruited and coordinated with nearly 300 volunteers to contribute to the Wisconsin Trail, Fall Color and Wisconsin Snow Reports to maintain the popular, consumer-facing seasonal reports on TravelWisconsin.com. In 2023, more than 185,000 people from around the world visited the six state-supported Wisconsin Welcome Centers.

The Wisconsin Governor's Conference on Tourism (WIGCOT) is an annual event that connects industry partners, provides expert-led training and shares the excitement and strategy of Travel Wisconsin campaigns. This year's conference at the Grand Geneva in Lake Geneva saw more than 780 registered attendees and 62 nominees for the Governor's Tourism Awards.



**HERE'S TO
BEING HERE**

Discover delicious with Travel Wisconsin's Foodie Pass. Sign up and unlock exclusive deals at tasty locations across Wisconsin including James Beard Award winning and nominated restaurants, iconic Wisconsin supper clubs, craft breweries, local culinary gems and more. Earn points as you travel by fork across Wisconsin and redeem fun prizes along the way.

What are you waiting for? Grab your pass, pack your appetite and get ready to savor the flavors of Wisconsin one bite or sip at a time!

HOW IT WORKS:

- Receive a text or e-mail with a link to your passport
- Show your phone at partner locations to redeem savings
- Check-in at the location to qualify for prizes

TRAVEL WISCONSIN

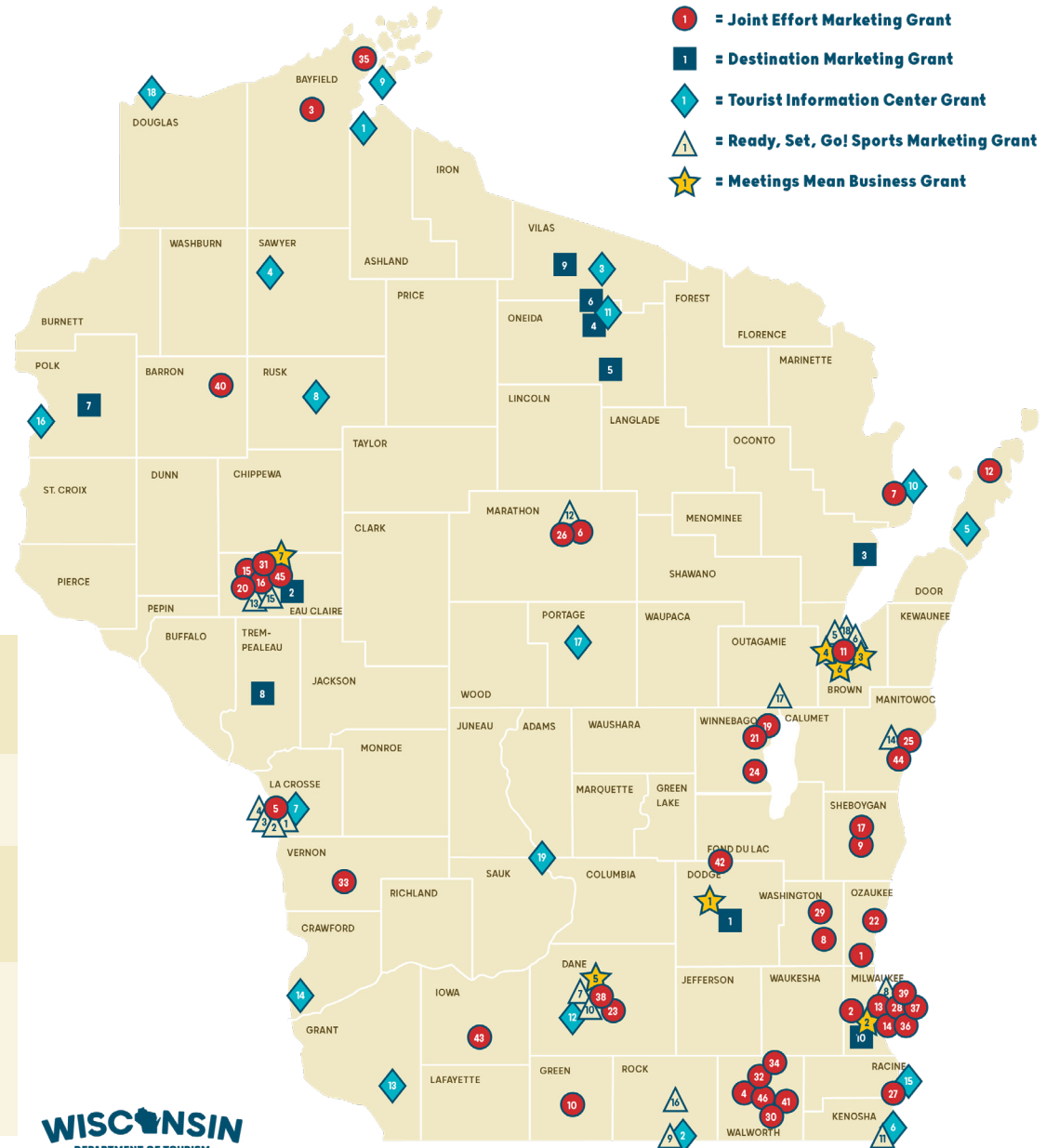
TravelWisconsin.com/FoodiePass

FISCAL YEAR 2024 GRANT AWARDS

Click [here](#) to view all grant reports in detail. The map notes where the grant recipient is located; however, economic impact and reach of each project extends well beyond the community and county. This remains one of the Department's most popular industry programs.

GRANT AWARD AMOUNTS (FISCAL YEAR 2024)

JOINT EFFORT MARKETING	\$1,136,913. ⁸⁴
READY, SET, GO!	\$145,391. ³⁸
MEETINGS MEAN BUSINESS	\$74,608. ⁶²
TOURISM INFORMATION CENTER	\$160,000



WISCONSIN OFFICE OF OUTDOOR RECREATION



Wisconsin's outdoor recreation industry contributed a record-breaking \$9.8 billion to the state's gross domestic product in 2022, according to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA). The industry also supported 94,000 jobs and resulted in \$4.7 billion in employee compensation.

Outdoor recreation is indispensable to Wisconsin tourism, with travelers consistently citing the outdoors as a top reason they choose Wisconsin. As a result, travel and tourism, plus local trips, related to outdoor recreation make up a significant contribution to Wisconsin's outdoor recreation industry. But the industry - and the BEA data - encompass much more than the obvious ways visitors recreate outside in Wisconsin. The industry includes the manufacturers producing equipment and gear, the retailers selling it, the guides leading excursions and a range of businesses and organizations connected to outdoor recreation.

Now in its fifth year, the Wisconsin Office of Outdoor Recreation continues to leverage these marketing strengths to grow all sectors of the outdoor recreation economy through programs like:

- Do-It-Yourself economic impact programming
- Wisconsin Outside e-newsletter
- Wisconsin Outdoor Business Directory
- Data and research library
- Travel Wisconsin seasonal reports
- Supporting Travel Wisconsin's content creator and media strategies
- Annual economic impact analysis
- Wisconsin Outdoor Recreation Inventory tool
- Co-hosting the Wisconsin Healthy Communities Summit

The Office of Outdoor Recreation remained a resource for the outdoor recreation community and, through its efforts, bolstered the resilience and growth of its partners. The Office is committed to supporting a stronger, more cohesive outdoor recreation ecosystem for all and driving economic impact across the state.



TRIBAL TOURISM

The Department of Tourism is proud to help travelers experience the distinct traditions and cultural heritage of Wisconsin's 11 federally recognized tribal nations. Native culture is the foundation of our state's story and provides incredible experiences for travelers to enjoy.

Season 21 of Top Chef took an exciting turn with its spotlight on Indigenous foods, incorporating the rich flavors and diverse [culinary traditions](#). Two renowned Wisconsin chefs, Elena Terry from Wild Bearies and Bryce Stevenson of Mijim, were featured as special guests, introducing the contestants and audience to authentic Indigenous dishes. Their participation not only added a unique twist to the culinary competition but also brought important recognition to Indigenous cuisine, showcasing its vital role in the culinary world and Wisconsin.

Throughout the fiscal year, Travel Wisconsin spotlighted indigenous travel in eight social media posts, our official travel guide, advertorials in the Traveler magazine, four TravelWisconsin.com articles and our summer brand campaign where a Red Cliff/Miskwaabikaang family was featured enjoying time together at Frog Bay Tribal National Park. The public relations team pitched and hosted media to experience Wisconsin's tribal offerings which resulted in 16 earned media placements in outlets including [Matador Network](#), [UPROXX](#), [From Scratch](#), [Chicago Tribune](#), [AFAR](#) and [WTMJ](#).



Images courtesy of Bravo's Top Chef



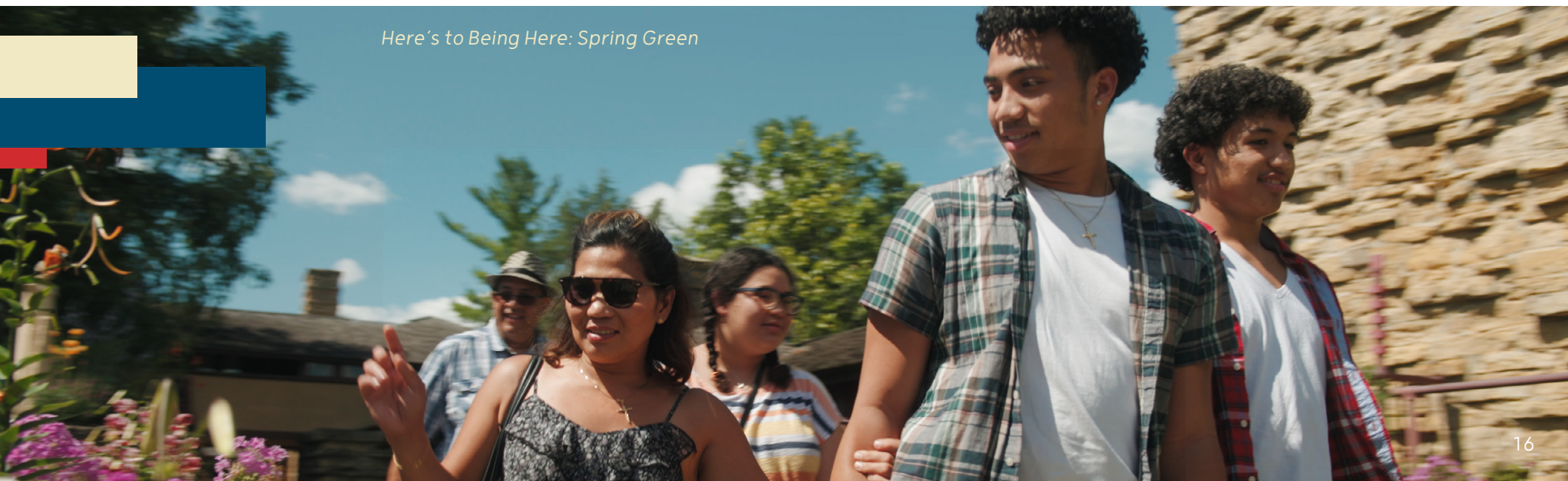
FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT TRAIL

Since its launch in 2017, the Frank Lloyd Wright Trail has been a valuable storytelling opportunity both nationally and internationally, garnering worldwide media coverage and drawing travelers from near and far. The trail took center stage in Season 21 of Bravo's Top Chef during episode four, "[The Wright Way](#)."

Taliesin, Wisconsin's only UNESCO World Heritage Site open to the public, was a highlight of the [fall brand campaign](#) and [Wonders of Wisconsin](#) campaign. It was also featured in the [Spring Green](#) episode of the travel series Here's to Being Here, which saw over 114 thousand views.

In addition to the media articles surrounding the inclusion in Top Chef, the trail was mentioned in media placements in [Midwest Living](#), [Round Trip with Colleen Kelly](#), [Fox News](#) and the [Wisconsin State Journal](#).

The Frank Lloyd Wright trail was included in the 2024 Travel Guide and the Riverview Terrace Cafe is included in the Travel Wisconsin Foodie Pass. Travel Wisconsin also sent two social media content creators to Taliesin to engage new audiences in Wisconsin architecture through social media posts reaching their engaged followers.



OFFICE OF MARKETING SERVICES

The Office of Marketing Services provided marketing consultation services to other agencies, councils, commissions and boards in Wisconsin state government, providing access to skilled staff and resources to help bring big ideas to life. While the Office of Marketing Services was eliminated in the 2023-2025 biennial budget, the staff supported efforts to transition programs and projects already underway.

Projects supported by the Office of Marketing Services in fiscal year 2024 include:

Governor's Conference on Highway Safety

Governor's Cybersecurity Summit

Destinations Wisconsin's Fall Conference on Tourism

Governor's Conference on Emergency Management

Wisconsin Governor's Conference on Tourism



OFFICE OF GROUP TRAVEL

Created with one-time funds allocated in the 2023-2025 biennial budget to grow the economic impact of group travel in Wisconsin, the Office of Group Travel (OGT) will promote bringing more meetings and conventions, sports, motorcoach and international travel to Wisconsin. With meetings and conventions, sports, motorcoach and international visitor spending estimated at \$100-\$150 billion in the US every year, the establishment of this Office is critical to future economic impact growth.

In the last fiscal year, the OGT formed a new Group Travel Committee, hired a program manager, identified priority international markets, created a partnership with Circle Wisconsin and made sure Wisconsin was well represented at the trade shows we attended. New marketing collateral includes the very first video on Wisconsin's Meetings and Conventions market featuring five state-of-the-art publicly owned meeting facilities. These materials were strategically aligned with the well-established Travel Wisconsin brand to bring cohesion to this sector.



FISCAL YEAR 2024 KEY METRICS

20

industry tradeshows attended

14

Wisconsin tourism partners joined us at tradeshows

104

appointments at B2B tradeshows

3,313

users on [Meet in Wisconsin](#) website

2,351

users on [Sports Wisconsin](#) website

23

leads generated from both Meet in Wisconsin and Sports Wisconsin websites, shared with partners throughout Wisconsin



DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM BUDGET



In fiscal year 2024, the Department of Tourism had Program Revenue receipts of \$11,838,403.89, \$39,474,112.69 of authorized General-Purpose Revenue (GPR) and \$1,603,500.00 of authorized Segregated Fund Revenue (SEG) for a total available amount to spend of \$52,916,016.58. The authorized GPR represented an approximate \$33,000,000 increase from Fiscal Year 2023, of which \$32,000,000 was one-time funding, including \$3,000,000 in earmarks for outside entities. In fiscal year 2024, Tourism had total expenses of \$22,753,847.05*, including \$2,462,784.27 of Federal expenses.

** Note: The above data does not include spending from the Arts Board, which is an attached board for state government budgeting purposes but operates independently from the Department of Tourism.*

CONTACT INFORMATION



Wisconsin Department of Tourism

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Travel Wisconsin Social Media



[Instagram.com/TravelWisconsin](https://www.instagram.com/TravelWisconsin)



[Twitter.com/TravelWI](https://twitter.com/TravelWI)



[Facebook.com/TravelWisconsin](https://www.facebook.com/TravelWisconsin)



[Pinterest.com/TravelWisconsin](https://www.pinterest.com/TravelWisconsin)

Tourism Industry Social Media



[LinkedIn.com/TravelWisconsin](https://www.linkedin.com/TravelWisconsin)

The Wisconsin Department of Tourism would like to thank decision makers, agency partners, Wisconsin Council on Tourism members, committee members and industry stakeholders for supporting our mission to inspire visitors to experience Wisconsin.

