



DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM

Wisconsin State Agency 101

A SERIES
PREPARED BY



INSTITUTE FOR
REFORMING GOVERNMENT

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STATE AGENCY FAST FACTS

AGENCY RESPONSIBILITIES

The Department of Tourism is responsible for coordinating state government support of the tourism industry and promotion of Wisconsin as a destination for travelers. It conducts advertising campaigns to increase tourism, provides technical assistance to the business community and awards grants to cultural, entertainment, tourism related organizations, events, and local governments.

- The majority of the Department's budget is spent on tourism promotion through advertisements in print, television, billboard, and on the internet.
- The Department also funds Travel Wisconsin Welcome Centers at rest stops on major highways near the state's borders.
- The Department's annual budget is **\$34 million** and it has **34 employees**.

DID YOU KNOW?

Tourism is a major industry in Wisconsin. In 2021, the Department of Tourism reported that the total economic impact of tourism was **\$20.8 billion**, supports 169,700 jobs and generates **\$1.4 billion in state and local taxes**. Although the COVID-19 pandemic caused massive disruption and losses for the tourism economy in 2020, the industry has recovered, with 2021 tourism direct spending expected to exceed pre-pandemic levels.

TAXPAYER ALERT!

Covid-19 travel restrictions and the lockdowns disrupted the tourism industry, resulting in serious job losses that have not recovered. In 2020, the industry saw a **25.7% reduction in jobs** supported by visitors, falling from 144,657 in 2019 to 107,454 in 2020. In 2021, after the pandemic restrictions on travel eased, jobs supported by visitors have increased to nearly 118,500 but there are still 26,200 fewer visitor supported jobs in Wisconsin than in 2019.

TRAVEL WISCONSIN WELCOME CENTERS



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REFORM HISTORY

Governor Walker's first budget recognized the value of a strong tourism industry to growing Wisconsin's economy and increased tourism marketing funding by \$2.3 million per year over the previous budget, from \$9.9 million to \$12.3 million per year. This level of funding was maintained throughout the Walker Administration and continued under Governor Evers.

KEEP AN EYE ON...

Wisconsin's tourism industry is facing worker shortages similar to many industries across the state. A feature of the tourism industry is the use of foreign student workers on short term J-1 visas. Covid-19 travel restrictions significantly reduced the ability of foreign students to enter the country. By March 2022, approximately 2,600 applications had been submitted to the State Department for J-1 visas for workers in the Wisconsin Dells.

IRG WANTS TO KNOW...

**WHAT WOULD
YOU DO??**

If you were in charge for a day, what reforms would you make to the Department? Email Alex Ignatowski, IRG's Director of State Budget and Government Reform, at ai@reforminggovernment.org.

DEPT. OF TOURISM LEADERSHIP



The Department of Tourism is headed by (featured left-to-right): Secretary-designee **Anne Sayers** Deputy Secretary **Maria Van Hoorn**.

**#DYK WISCONSIN TOURISM IS
ESTIMATED TO SUPPORT NEARLY
170,000 JOBS ACROSS THE STATE??**

TOURISM GRANTS

In Fiscal Year 2022, the Department awarded 92 grants, totaling \$1,510,000!

- Joint Effort Marketing Grant - 37 individual grants for a total of \$784,809.
- Destination Marketing Grant - 21 individual grants for a total of \$345,191.
- Tourist Information Center Grant - 20 individual grants for a total of \$160,000.
- Ready, Set, Go! Sports Marketing Grant - 7 individual grants for a total of \$102,762.
- Meetings Mean Business Marketing Grant - 7 individual grants for a total of \$117,238.

ABOUT IRG



INSTITUTE FOR
REFORMING GOVERNMENT

The Institute for Reforming Government (IRG) is a 501 (c) 3 and Wisconsin-based think tank established to help remove the onerous barriers and red tape separating the individual from an efficient and functioning government.

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