



IOWA TRAVEL INDUSTRY PARTNERS

ANNUAL REPORT FY25



iTIP
Iowa Travel Industry Partners



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MESSAGE FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

iTIP members, partners, and friends:

As we close out the fourth year of Iowa Travel Industry Partners (iTIP), I want to extend my sincere thanks for your continued trust in our association. FY25 was not without its challenges - but in many ways, it was a defining year for iTIP. It tested our resilience, deepened our commitment, and sharpened our focus on what truly matters: advocating for and amplifying the impact of Iowa's tourism industry.

A significant portion of our time and energy this year was dedicated to executing a vendor agreement with the Iowa Economic Development Authority. Through this partnership, iTIP promoted Iowa on a national stage - engaging meeting planners, group tour operators, and sporting event rights holders. These efforts helped elevate the visibility of our state and created valuable opportunities for destinations and partners across Iowa.

We also launched and managed the new Elevate Iowa Tourism: Education Scholarship program in partnership with the Iowa Tourism Office. This initiative provides critical support to Iowa tourism professionals seeking to attend regional and national professional development opportunities - ensuring that our industry continues to grow with strong, informed, and connected leaders.

At the same time, advocacy remained at the core of our work. We engaged in critical conversations to protect and preserve funding programs that have proven essential to our members, while also pushing for new investments that align with the industry's evolving needs. These efforts are ongoing, and we remain deeply committed to representing your voice at every level.

None of this would be possible without the dedication of our board of directors, committee members, and volunteers. Their time, insight, and leadership have been instrumental in shaping our path forward and ensuring that iTIP remains responsive, effective, and member-driven. I am grateful for their continued service and unwavering belief in the power of tourism to fuel Iowa's communities.

While this year presented real obstacles, it also reaffirmed the strength of our statewide community. The FY25 Annual Report outlines the work that has shaped this past year and the partnerships that have kept us moving forward.

As we look ahead, iTIP remains focused on building strategic programs, forging meaningful connections, and delivering value to those working every day to make Iowa a place people want to visit, meet, and explore.

Yours in tourism,

Chelsea M. Lerud

Chelsea Lerud

Executive Director

clerud@iowatravelindustry.org

515-207-0009





MISSION

Tourism's Champion;
increasing visitation
and improving Iowa's
economy through
partnerships.



VISION

A united team of
travel professionals,
providing resources
to foster diverse
communities that
inspire travelers.



VALUES

COLLABORATE
INNOVATE
WE, NOT ME
BE DIRECT
GIVE IT A CHANCE
LEAD

IOWA TRAVEL INDUSTRY PARTNERS FY25 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

DAVE HERRELL (President)
Visit Quad Cities

KEVIN BOURKE (Vice President)
Discover Ames

JENNIFER PICKAR (Treasurer)
Cedar Falls Tourism

GINGER WILLIAMS (Secretary)
Charles City Chamber & Tourism

KIM GRZYWACZ (Past President)
CIT Signature Transportation

NICKI BRUS
Visit Quad Cities

JESSICA DUNKER
Iowa Restaurant Association

MARK ECKMAN
Council Bluffs Convention & Visitors
Bureau

GREG EDWARDS
Catch Des Moines

WES EHRECKE
Iowa Gaming Association

KRISTI FRANZ
Explore Siouxland

CARRIE KOELKER
Travel Dubuque

NICK PFEIFFER
Think Iowa City

JULIE STOW
Cedar Rapids Tourism

JOHN VALLIERE
Iowa PGA

KOREY WOODBURY
Hotel Millwright

STAFF & SUPPORT

CHELSEA LERUD
Executive Director

DAVID ADELMAN
Lobbyist

5 PILLARS

DEVELOPMENT | RESOURCES | EDUCATION | ADVOCACY | MARKETING

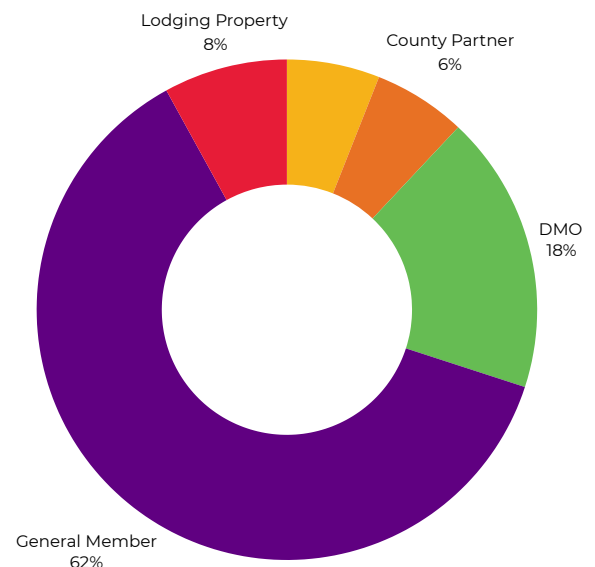
DEVELOPMENT

Nurturing relationships and collaboration

- Achieved 7% year-over-year membership growth, welcoming 130 member organizations representing all membership levels and regions across the state.
- Hosted booths at both the Iowa Tourism Conference and Iowa Museum Conference to raise awareness and educate attendees about iTIP's mission and programs.
- Developed and launched the Elevate Iowa Tourism: Education Scholarship in partnership with the Iowa Economic Development Authority, allocating \$40,000 to support tourism professionals in pursuing professional development opportunities.



31 Scholarships Awarded



RESOURCES

Providing technical tools

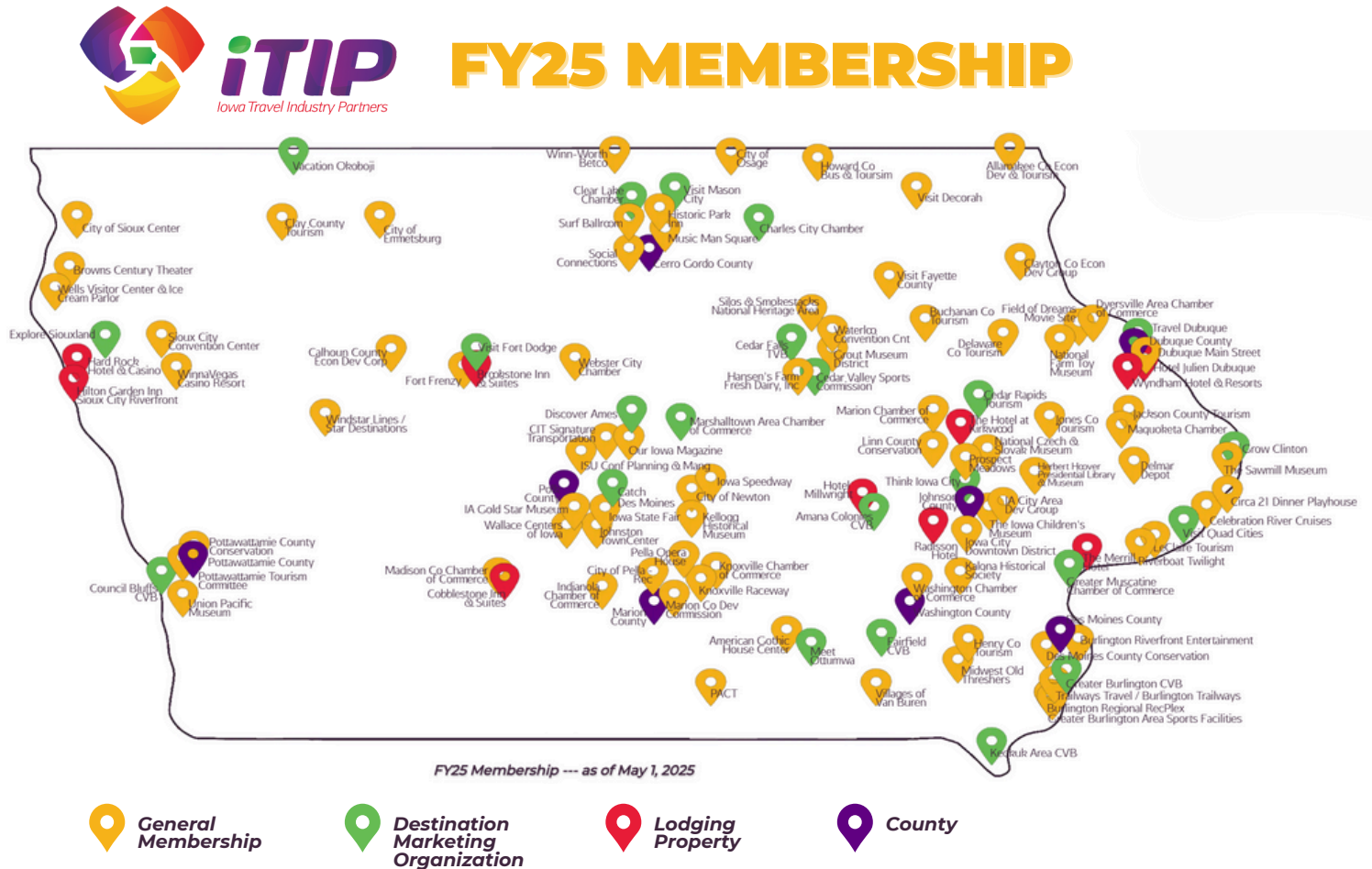
- Expanded the Resources page in the Member Portal by launching new toolkits on group tour preparation, partnering with a DMO, museum resources, and low-cost promotional ideas for businesses. Also added a "Presentations Worth Sharing" section and curated additional tools, including grant assets, Iowa Department of Education Career Pathways, and onboarding resources for new employees.
- Updated the Economic Impact Calculator in partnership with CyBiz Labs to ensure multiplier figures align with current economic conditions.
- Facilitated two mentorship pairings to foster industry knowledge exchange and professional growth among members.



MEMBERSHIP STRENGTH

Thank you to each of the **130 organizations** that chose to engage with iTIP through membership in FY25. We are grateful for your investment and belief in our mission. Your support fuels our work and reinforces the value of a strong, united voice for Iowa's tourism industry.

The growing membership represents all corners of the state and every sector of the tourism economy - ensuring iTIP remains truly statewide in both reach and perspective. Together, we are building a more connected and resilient future for Iowa tourism.



AFFILIATE ASSOCIATIONS:

Association of Iowa Fairs
 Iowa Bicycle Coalition
 Iowa Gaming Association
 Iowa Museum Association
 Iowa PGA
 Iowa Restaurant Association
 Iowa Tourism Office
 RAGBRAI

MEMBERSHIPS:

Affiliate Association.....8
 County.....8
 DMO.....23
 General.....80
 Lodging Properties.....11

VENDOR PARTNERS:

Group Tour Magazine
 Group Travel Leader
 Huddle Up Group
 KDSM
 Madden Media
 McDaniel's Marketing
 Neapolitan Labs
 Orange142
 Premier Travel Media
 Small Market Meetings Magazine
 Tempest

EDUCATION

Creating networking opportunities and statewide professional development

- Networked with 540 industry professionals across 9 in-person and 15 virtual events organized by the association.
- Hosted a breakout session during the Iowa Tourism Conference to support the industry in the meetings and conventions sales and hosting process.
- Provided members with access to industry insights and best practices through guest speakers, peer learning, and topic-driven discussions across all hosted events.



ADVOCACY

Leading & inspiring a legislative agenda that prioritizes tourism

- Hired CIVITAS to draft Tourism Improvement District (TID) legislation and provide expert guidance to elected officials and the lodging industry on the national model. Successfully secured the Iowa Hotel & Lodging Association as a partner, recognizing the direct benefit to hotels from increased visitor-generated revenue.
- Mobilized grassroots member advocacy to ensure continued funding for Regional Sports Authority Districts (RSAD) in the FY26 state budget.
- Championed the Iowa Major Tourism & Events Fund as a critical tool to attract national-level sporting events and meetings/conferences, enhancing Iowa's competitiveness with surrounding states.
- Engaged Cornerstone Government Affairs as iTIP's trusted lobbying team, whose strategic advice and strong relationships have kept Iowa's tourism industry relevant and top of mind with state policymakers.





MARKETING

Sharing iTIP's story & promoting niche markets

- Partnered with Travel Iowa to execute a comprehensive niche marketing campaign targeting meeting planners, group tour operators, and sporting event rights holders.
 - Conducted a group tour market analysis with Whereabout to inform a statewide group tour marketing strategy. Engaged tour operators and in-state suppliers through surveys and interviews, supported by consultant-led research and data analysis.
 - Conducted a meetings and conventions market analysis with Whereabout to guide strategy development. Input from meeting planners and Iowa-based suppliers, combined with consultant insights, shaped the final recommendations.
- Ran a digital campaign to raise awareness of iTIP's benefits by geofencing national industry conferences. The effort earned 80,598 impressions, 642 clicks, and a 0.80% CTR.
- Produced a new Iowa Meeting Guide in collaboration with Small Market Meetings Magazine, featuring five articles and five sidebar pieces to showcase Iowa's offerings to national planners.
- Executed a digital marketing campaign targeting national planners, generating 1,374,641 impressions and 6,043 clicks to the website (0.44% CTR).
- Distributed press releases highlighting key initiatives such as the launch of Elevate Iowa, advocacy work, and award announcements - resulting in multiple media interviews and broader visibility for iTIP's story.



iTIP in Action

Over the past year, the Iowa Travel Industry Partners Board of Directors and staff have focused on building a strong, sustainable association to support the long-term success of Iowa's tourism industry. In partnership with the Iowa Tourism Office, we executed a comprehensive niche marketing campaign targeting group tour operators, sporting event rights holders, and meetings/convention planners. Conducted on behalf of our members and partners—many of whom are unable to attend these shows independently—this collaborative effort highlights Iowa's unified tourism community and our shared commitment to growing the state together. These efforts have elevated Iowa's visibility and reinforced its reputation as a premier destination for events and travel experiences.



7

showcased Iowa at
national tradeshows



309

Iowa profile sheet
packets distributed to
planners



171

one-on-one
appointments
conducted



1737

planners exposed to
the Iowa brand



iTIP IMPACT

In FY25, iTIP hosted three in-person events that brought tourism professionals, vendors, and speakers together from across the state - and beyond. These events not only advanced professional development and industry collaboration, but also generated measurable economic impact for host communities through hotel stays, local dining, and retail spending.

Quantifying the economic return of these gatherings is essential. By telling the story of tourism's direct contributions - whether through delegate spending, increased visibility for local businesses, or community engagement - we demonstrate the real value of our work to stakeholders, sponsors, and supporters. These conservative numbers help validate continued investment in the industry and underscore the ripple effects of even short-term gatherings.

IOWA TOURISM NIGHT

January 2025 - Des Moines



99

attendees



20

room nights



\$5,642

direct spending



\$3,144

labor income



\$8,797

total impact

ILEAD LEADERSHIP SYMPOSIUM

February 2025 - Mason City



32

attendees



54

room nights



\$6,480

direct spending



\$2,807

labor income



\$8,779

total impact

SUMMER CELEBRATION

June 2025 - Winterset



66

attendees



27

room nights



\$3,322

direct spending



\$1,466

labor income



\$4,547

total impact

Tourism means business, and through these events, iTIP continues to create meaningful opportunities that support both the industry and the communities we serve.

KEY GOALS FOR FY26

FY25 marked the second year of iTIP's three-year strategic plan, a roadmap designed to grow the association, strengthen financial sustainability, and elevate the impact of Iowa's hospitality and tourism industry. This strategic framework continues to guide our work under three core pillars: Expanding Value, Amplifying Industry Voice, and Ensuring Organizational Sustainability. As we look ahead to the plan's final year in FY26, we remain committed to measurable progress and invite all members to stay engaged, contribute their expertise, and help shape the future of Iowa tourism through this collaborative effort.

EXPANDING VALUE

- Hire additional staff to support event planning, strengthen member relationships, and grow sponsorship sales.
- Offer scholarships that enable more industry partners to participate in national trade shows.
- Collaborate with affiliate associations to integrate tourism-focused programming into statewide leadership initiatives.

SUCCESS BENCHMARKS:

- **20% year-over-year** membership growth
 - **25% increase** in member event participation
-

AMPLIFYING INDUSTRY VOICE

- Establish and advocate for new, clearly defined state legislative priorities.
- Strengthen engagement with elected officials to identify and support tourism champions in the Iowa Legislature.
- Increase media outreach to elevate iTIP's presence and amplify the industry's voice through public relations efforts.

SUCCESS BENCHMARKS:

- **15% increase** in legislative reception attendance
 - **15% increase** in member engagement with elected officials
-

SUSTAINING THE ORGANIZATION

- Grow fundraising contributions through expanded donor outreach and engagement.
- Secure increased financial support from the Iowa Tourism Office and/or the Iowa Legislature.
- Identify and apply for grant opportunities that align with and enhance existing programs.

SUCCESS BENCHMARKS:

- **30% growth** in county-level involvement
- **20% budget growth** through fundraising and grants

ITIP FOUNDATION

The Iowa Travel Industry Partners Foundation, a 501c3 nonprofit organization, is committed to empowering the Iowa travel and tourism industry through education, research, advocacy, and workforce development. It serves as a support organization for Iowa Travel Industry Partners.

The iTIP Foundation's most significant investment in FY25 was hosting the annual iTIP Foundation Awards Program, which honored **17** outstanding industry leaders and organizational partners for their excellence and contributions over the past year.

EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Arts, Culture & Heritage (small)

Appanoose County History Stitchers, Appanoose County

Arts, Culture & Heritage (large)

Herky on Parade, Think Iowa City

Only in Iowa (small)

Johnny Clock Museum, Jefferson County

Only in Iowa (large)

Hitchcock Nature Center, Pottawattamie County Conservation

Service Excellence (small)

American State Bank Sports Complex

Service Excellence (large)

Cabin Coffee Company, statewide

Sustainability Initiative (small)

Central Gardens of North Iowa

Sustainability Initiative (medium)

Wapello County Adventure Book, Meet Ottumwa/Wapello County Conservation

Sustainability Initiative (large)

Principal Charity Classic, Des Moines

INDIVIDUAL AWARDS

Joe Taylor Vision Award

Greg Edwards, Catch Des Moines

Joe Taylor Vision Award

Wes Ehrecke, Iowa Gaming Association

Abby Kisling Leadership Award

Terry Baker, Visit Fairfield

Elected Official of the Year

Nelson Crabb, Mayor, City of Clear Lake

iTIP Partner of the Year

Kim Grzywacz, CIT Signature Transportation

Rising Star (small)

Delaney Evers, PACT

Rising Star (medium)

Hannah Aussenhus, Visit Mason City

Rising Star (large)

Adam Bolander, Cedar Falls Tourism



24 - 25 ITIP FOUNDATION WORK

- Provided support for the iLEAD Leadership Symposium, advancing leadership development within Iowa's tourism industry.
- Funded the hiring of a consultant to conduct a review of school start date data, supporting the association's research and advocacy initiatives.

ITIP FOUNDATION BOARD OF TRUSTEES

MARK ECKMAN (President)
Council Bluffs Convention & Visitors Bureau

NICK PFEIFFER (Vice President)
Think Iowa City

LINDSEY JAMES (Treasurer)
Visit Mason City

LIBBEY HOHN (Secretary)
Clear Lake Chamber

LAURA CARRELL (Director at Large)
Meet Ottumwa

KEVIN BOURKE
Discover Ames

PAUL RICHEY
Kinseth Hotels

CARRIE STIER
Riverboat Twilight



IOWA TRAVEL INDUSTRY PARTNERS
PO BOX 1173
BURLINGTON, IA 52601

IOWATRavelIndustry.org
info@iowatravelindustry.org
515-207-0009