



# IOWA TRAVEL INDUSTRY PARTNERS ANNUAL REPORT FY26



**iTIP**  
Iowa Travel Industry Partners



# Looking Back. Leading Forward.

## MESSAGE FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

### iTIP members, partners, and friends:

Five years ago, Iowa Travel Industry Partners was launched with a simple belief: Iowa's tourism industry is stronger when we work together. Today, that belief continues to guide everything we do.

Tourism is built on relationships. Relationships between destinations and attractions. Between businesses and visitors. Between industry professionals who share ideas, solve challenges, and celebrate successes together. At its core, that's what iTIP exists to do.

As we close FY26, we also celebrate an important milestone - the fifth anniversary of Iowa Travel Industry Partners. What began in 2021 as a new statewide association has grown into a recognized voice for Iowa's tourism industry, connecting professionals, advocating for shared priorities, and creating opportunities that strengthen our industry and the communities we serve.

FY26 was a year that reflected how far iTIP has come in five years. The association continued to advocate for industry priorities, invest in professional development, strengthen statewide partnerships, and elevate Iowa's presence in national markets. The year was also marked by the completion of our updated strategic plan, providing a clear roadmap for the future while reaffirming our commitment to serving the evolving needs of Iowa's tourism industry.

The progress highlighted throughout this report is not the result of any one program, initiative, or accomplishment. Rather, it is the result of an industry that continues to show up, work together, share ideas, and invest in a stronger future. Whether through participation in educational programs, engagement in advocacy efforts, collaboration with industry peers, or support of statewide initiatives, our members continue to demonstrate the power of a united tourism industry.

None of this would be possible without the dedication of our Board of Directors, committee members, volunteers, sponsors, and industry partners. Their leadership, expertise, and commitment continue to shape the direction of our association and strengthen the voice of tourism across Iowa.

As you explore this annual report, I hope you take pride in what we have accomplished together - not only during the past year, but throughout the first five years of iTIP's journey. The successes highlighted in these pages reflect the power of collaboration, the importance of advocacy, and the impact of an industry that supports communities in every corner of our state.

Thank you for being part of this journey. While this milestone is certainly worth celebrating, I am even more excited about what lies ahead. Together, we will continue building a stronger future for Iowa's tourism industry.

Yours in tourism,

*Chelsea M. Lerud*

**Chelsea Lerud**

Executive Director

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**iTIP**  
Iowa Travel Industry Partners



# 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 FY26 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**KEVIN BOURKE** (President)  
Discover Ames

**JENNIFER PICKAR** (Vice President)  
Cedar Falls Tourism

**KOREY WOODBURY** (Treasurer)  
Hotel Millwright

**KIM GRZYWACZ** (Secretary)  
CIT Signature Transportation

**DAVE HERRELL** (Past President)  
Visit Quad Cities

**DYLAN DOES**  
Meet in Marshalltown

**JESSICA DUNKER**  
Iowa Restaurant Association

**MARY EARNHARDT**  
Iowa Gaming Association

**MARK ECKMAN**  
Unleash Council Bluffs

**TRINA FLACK**  
Catch Des Moines

**CARRIE KOELKER**  
Travel Dubuque

**KERRIE KUIPER**  
Visit Fort Dodge

**JEREMY PARSONS**  
Iowa State Fair

**NICK PFEIFFER**  
Think Iowa City

**JULIE STOW**  
Cedar Rapids Tourism

**VAL REINKE**  
Allamakee Co Econ Dev & Tourism

**EMILY STARNES**  
Villages of Van Buren

### STAFF & SUPPORT

**CHELSEA LERUD**  
Executive Director

**DAVID ADELMAN**  
Lobbyist

# 5 PILLARS

DEVELOPMENT | RESOURCES | EDUCATION | ADVOCACY | MARKETING

## DEVELOPMENT

Nurturing relationships and collaboration

**91%** member retention rate

- Welcomed **29** new member organizations from communities across Iowa.
- Expanded Development Committee participation and welcomed a Membership Coordinator contractor to support member engagement and growth.
- Awarded **\$40,000** through the *Elevate Iowa Tourism: Education Scholarship* program, in partnership with the Iowa Tourism Office, supporting **28** tourism professionals.
- Raised more than **\$4,500** through member raffles, adding fun, friendly competition, and additional support for the association.

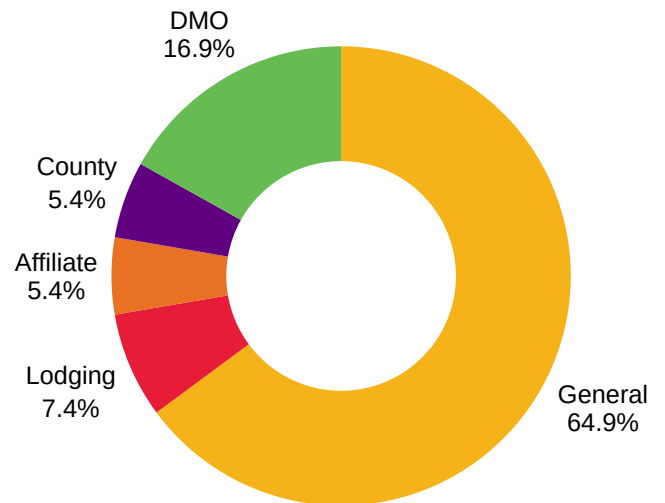
## RESOURCES

Providing technical tools

- Completed the **Meetings Market Analysis**, providing current insights into Iowa's meetings market.
- Published the **Group Tour Market Analysis**, offering insights into opportunities within the group travel market.
- Conducted a **Student Travel Study** to provide members with data and insights on this emerging market segment.
- Enhanced the Member Portal resource library with new tools, including *The Ultimate Visitor Guide Playbook* and *Top 10 Tips for Grant / Scholarship Writing*.



A Diverse Tourism Network



# MEMBERSHIP STRENGTH

Representing more than **600** tourism professionals, iTIP's **146** member organizations form a network that spans Iowa and reflects the diversity of the state's tourism industry.

From urban centers to rural communities, members bring unique perspectives, ideas, and expertise that strengthen iTIP and help advance tourism across Iowa. Together, they create opportunities for collaboration, shared learning, and a stronger voice for the industry.



## FY26 MEMBERSHIP



### AFFILIATE ASSOCIATIONS:

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

### VENDOR PARTNERS:

- Group Tour Magazine
- Group Travel Leader
- Madden Media
- Midwest Travel Network
- Neapolitan Labs
- Orange142
- Premier Travel Media
- Small Market Meetings Magazine
- Tempest
- Travel Unity
- TwoSix Digital

### MEMBERSHIPS:

Affiliate Association.....	<b>8</b>
County.....	<b>8</b>
DMO.....	<b>25</b>
General.....	<b>96</b>
Lodging Properties.....	<b>11</b>

# EDUCATION

*Creating networking opportunities and statewide professional development*

- Hosted **21 programs**, including 7 in-person and 14 virtual opportunities.
- Welcomed **30 attendees** to the iLEAD Leadership Symposium, with nearly half participating for the first time.
- Summer Celebration reached **record registration levels**, reflecting growing interest in peer-to-peer learning and professional development opportunities.
- Delivered timely **webinar programming** on topics including meetings, group travel, student travel, legislative priorities, marketing trends, and alcohol licensing.

# 757

**program participants**



# ADVOCACY

*Leading & inspiring a legislative agenda that prioritizes tourism*

- Member feedback helped shape **four legislative priorities** for Iowa's tourism industry.
- Advocacy 101 welcomed **new participants**, expanding the number of tourism professionals engaged in industry advocacy efforts.
- Iowa Tourism Night and Capitol Visit activities showcased tourism's economic impact while **strengthening relationships** with policymakers.
- Advocacy efforts helped **protect** Iowa's school start date and supported **increased** RSAD funding.



## **FY26 Legislative Priorities**

- 1. Preserve and Grow State Investment in Tourism**
- 2. Keep Iowa Competitive**
- 3. Maintain Iowa's Summer Tourism Season**
- 4. Make New Tourism Programs Work for Iowa**





# MARKETING

Sharing iTIP's story & promoting niche markets

- Expanded Marketing Committee involvement and launched a digital membership campaign to strengthen awareness of iTIP and the value of membership.
- Produced the Iowa Group Tour Guide and updated the digital Iowa Sports Guide to showcase Iowa destinations to planners and event organizers.
- Expanded promotion of Iowa's sports, group tour, and student travel markets through targeted advertising and industry partnerships.
- Created new opportunities for destination exposure through trade show participation and the launch of the FAM Tour Support Fund.

**TOUR IOWA... WITHOUT THE BUS**  
Study the room, solve each riddle, and confirm your answers to discover the hidden gems.

- This is home to attractions that highlight a waterway larger than life and busier than the nation.
- This destination is home to the world's steepest and shortest railroad.
- This experience pairs Mississippi river views with sticky rolls, prime ribs, and live entertainment.
- In this destination, no one can ride a...
- Welcome to a place where Iowa's tallest mural lovers at a whopping 110 feet!
- This spot is the home that inspired America's most iconic painting!
- This destination is known for something sweet - best experienced one taste at a time.
- These cities are musical hubs; one honors a legendary venue, while the other pays tribute to a renowned...
- This experience offers a serene Mississippi journey with guided storytelling and...

**IOWA**  
2026 GROUP TRAVEL GUIDE

**Hidden Gems of Iowa Reception**  
25 invited group tour planners attended Iowa's first planner reception.

The event connected planners with Iowa destinations through networking, a scavenger hunt, and conversations that sparked future tour opportunities.

**2026 IOWA GUIDE**

**Nontraditional Sports in the Hawkeye State**  
Iowa's communities have invested in alternative athletics

**17 Profiles of Event-Ready Destinations**

**SPG**



# iTIP in Action

Throughout FY26, iTIP worked to strengthen Iowa's tourism industry through advocacy, education, resource development, membership engagement, and niche marketing initiatives. Together, these efforts created opportunities for tourism professionals to connect, learn, grow, and strengthen Iowa's visitor economy.

The highlights below provide a snapshot of the impact generated through the collective efforts of iTIP members, volunteers, partners, and supporters.



# 600+

tourism professionals  
represented across  
the iTIP network



# 25

group tour operators  
connected at Iowa's  
first operator reception



# 3

industry research  
studies released



# 5

years building Iowa's  
tourism industry  
together



# iTIP IMPACT

iTIP events bring tourism professionals together to learn, connect, and strengthen Iowa's tourism industry. They also generate meaningful economic impact for the communities that host them through hotel stays, dining, retail spending, and other visitor-related activity.

The figures below highlight the estimated economic impact generated by iTIP's major FY26 events and demonstrate how even short-term gatherings contribute to local economies.

## IOWA TOURISM NIGHT

January 2026 - Des Moines



**99**

attendees



**25**

room nights



**\$6,361**

direct spending



**\$3,544**

labor income

**IMPACT**

**\$9,917**

total impact

## ILEAD LEADERSHIP SYMPOSIUM

February 2026 - Ottumwa



**30**

attendees



**38**

room nights



**\$9,579**

direct spending



**\$3,905**

labor income

**IMPACT**

**\$12,128**

total impact

## SUMMER CELEBRATION

June 2026 - Amana



**96**

attendees



**40**

room nights



**\$8,017**

direct spending



**\$3,409**

labor income

**IMPACT**

**\$10,891**

total impact

When tourism professionals gather, the benefits extend beyond the meeting room. These events create connections for the industry while generating economic impact for Iowa communities.

# THE NEXT CHAPTER

As iTIP celebrates five years of growth and impact, we remain focused on the future. During FY26, the Board of Directors, committees, and membership worked together to refresh the association's strategic direction, ensuring our priorities remain aligned with the evolving needs of Iowa's tourism industry.

The updated strategic plan provides a roadmap for the next three years and reflects our commitment to building a stronger, more connected, and more sustainable tourism industry for Iowa.

## EXPANDING VALUE

*Growing the value of tourism and iTIP membership.*

- Helping tourism professionals learn, grow, and lead
- Creating opportunities in sports, meetings, and group travel markets
- Connecting members through scholarships, resources, and peer networks

## AMPLIFYING INDUSTRY VOICE

*Advancing tourism through advocacy, relationships, and industry leadership.*

- Championing tourism through advocacy and education
- Building relationships with policymakers and industry partners
- Elevating tourism's impact across Iowa communities

## SUSTAINING THE ORGANIZATION

*Ensuring iTIP has the resources and capacity to support the industry.*

- Strengthening membership engagement and participation
- Growing revenue and organizational capacity
- Ensuring long-term sustainability and industry support

# ITIP FOUNDATION

The iTIP Foundation was established to support initiatives that strengthen Iowa's tourism industry and invest in its future. Through charitable giving and industry support, the Foundation helps create opportunities that advance tourism professionals, organizations, and communities across the state.

As the Foundation continues to grow, it remains focused on supporting programs and initiatives that help build a stronger future for Iowa tourism.

- Supported **leadership development** through the iLEAD Leadership Symposium.
- Launched the **Internship Scholarship Program**, helping two tourism organizations provide hands-on industry experience for future tourism professionals.
- Presented **18** Foundation Awards recognizing outstanding tourism leaders, organizations, and partners across Iowa.

**18**  
awards  
presented



## ITIP FOUNDATION BOARD OF TRUSTEES

**NICK PFEIFFER** (President)  
Think Iowa City

**LINDSEY JAMES** (Vice President)  
Visit Mason City

**LIBBEY HOHN** (Treasurer)  
Clear Lake Chamber

**LAURA CARRELL** (Secretary)  
Meet Ottumwa

**MARK ECKMAN** (Past President)  
Unleash Council Bluffs

**JENNIFER PICKAR** (Assoc Liason)  
Cedar Falls Tourism

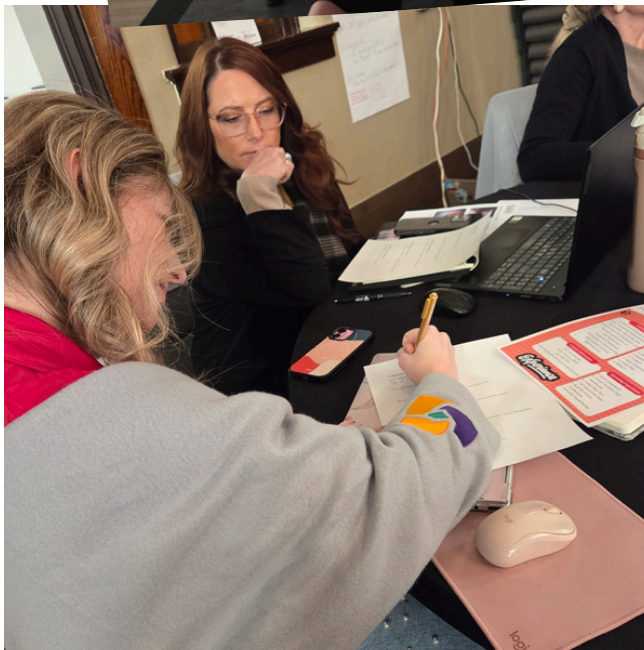
**ELAINE FARWELL**  
Clarinda Chamber of Commerce

**DELANEY KRUZIC**  
PACT

**CARRIE STIER**  
Riverboat Twilight

**JOHN VALLIERE**  
Iowa PGA





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