



2024
**ANNUAL
REPORT**



Letter from the Board Chair

This past fiscal year, I am especially proud of the role the Missoula Economic Partnership has played in fostering business growth and innovation, facilitating commercial real estate development, and continuing to cultivate a high-quality workforce within our community. Like many others, this year has brought significant challenges and opportunities, and I was honored to serve as the Chair of MEP during this transformative period.

This report offers a detailed overview of the strategic accomplishments we have achieved together—from facilitating critical infrastructure discussions in Midtown Missoula to advancing the redevelopment of the Old Library Block. Our efforts to expand air service to Missoula and encourage new business growth have been essential in ensuring that Missoula remains a vibrant and dynamic place to live and work. With the support of our investors, MEP continues to drive economic development that benefits all residents.

I am particularly pleased with the work MEP has done in responding to real-time community issues, such as addressing the economic impact of homelessness on the business community and navigating the challenges posed by two recent mill closures. MEP's engagement on these issues highlights the critical connection between the well-being of our community and Missoula's economic health. As I reflect on my time as Board Chair, I am deeply appreciative of the collaboration and dedication of our board members, staff, and community partners. This will be my final term as Chair, and I am confident that MEP will continue to thrive and make meaningful impacts under new leadership.

Thank you for your continued support of MEP. Together, we are ensuring an economically vibrant Missoula.



JASON WILLIAMS
CEO, Blackfoot Communications

Strategic Accomplishments

New Opportunities in Midtown

MEP worked with private landowners to accelerate delivery of Midtown Master Plan brownfield redevelopment goals. Going forward, MEP is identifying potential private development partners to expedite site transformation. This led to the City entering into a purchase and sale agreement for 10 acres south of the mall, potentially allowing for housing development, a park, and transportation connections.

Old Library Block Redevelopment

MEP continued collaborating with the development team of deChase Miksis and Edlen Co., selected by the City, to support the Old Library Block's redevelopment. MEP assisted by identifying and introducing business partners and capital resources. MEP facilitated introductions to grocers, childcare providers, restaurateurs, and retailers to explore market needs, participating in various planning and public meetings throughout 2023-24.

Missoula Infrastructure Coalition

MEP founded the Missoula Infrastructure Coalition, a quarterly meeting of industry and public infrastructure agency leaders. The group is regularly assessing long term strategies to address critical issues with infrastructure needs, sustainable industry workforce development, and coordinate efforts among public and private stakeholders to deliver infrastructure improvements County-wide.



STRATEGIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Business Expansion Visits

This year, MEP connected with over 70 businesses across Missoula County, offering tailored assistance to help them navigate expansion opportunities. Each business expansion visit focuses on delivering customized resources, whether related to securing capital, identifying new markets, or connecting local employers with workforce training programs. For example, MEP worked closely with YOUER to help the company navigate the purchase and design of their new clothing manufacturing center, the Youiverse.

Fostering New Business Growth

In addition to established businesses, MEP engaged with 20 potential startups, offering direct support in areas like business planning, access to funding, and mentorship. For example, last year's annual meeting featured Orange Eyed Owl Wild Snacks introduction to Consumer Direct Care Network. This past year, these partners completed a new commissary kitchen and café space at Consumer Direct's headquarters. Known as Kitchen In The Wild, this vibrant new venue has become a hub for culinary creativity and community engagement.

Good Jobs Great Cities Academy

MEP led Missoula's participation in the National League of Cities Good Jobs Great Cities Academy, a competitive yearlong technical assistance program to enhance job quality and create equitable employment opportunities, ensuring that local economic growth benefits all residents.

MEP Works With Partners to Expand Air Service to Missoula

Missoula Montana Airport (MSO) has taken a significant step forward in securing year-round air service to Chicago—a key route that would enhance Missoula’s access to the entire East Coast—by submitting an application for a new Small Community Air Service Development (SCASDP) Grant.

This application is the result of months of dedicated planning and collaboration among MEP, MSO, and Take Flight Missoula partners, who successfully raised more than \$150,000 in local match to support this critical initiative.

Take Flight Missoula—a collaboration between the Missoula Economic Partnership, Missoula Montana Airport, Destination Missoula, Glacier Country Tourism, and the Montana Department of Commerce—is committed to enhancing our region’s connectivity and economic vitality by increasing the number of direct flights to and from MSO.



Year-round service via Chicago would significantly improve scheduling options, reduce travel costs for residents, businesses, and visitors, and strengthen Missoula’s economic ties. While United and American Airlines currently offer seasonal flights between Missoula and Chicago, securing year-round service would mark a significant advancement for the region.

Airport Director Brian Ellestad expressed optimism about the potential for American Airlines or United Airlines to introduce a new year-round route, enhancing connectivity to the East Coast—a key strategic goal for the airport.

The success of this initiative was driven by the dedicated leadership of David Bell, CEO of ALPS Insurance and MSO board member, and Sue Williams, CEO of SG Long Financial and MEP board member, who co-led the Take Flight Missoula fundraising campaign.

We are deeply grateful to our major contributors—First Security Bank, First Interstate Bank, Stockman Bank, Blackfoot Communications, Clearwater Credit Union, ALPS Insurance, and Bank of Montana. Their generous contributions, supplemented by \$75,000 in matching funds from the Federal Home Loan Bank of Des Moines’s Member Impact Fund, were pivotal in reaching our fundraising goals. We also extend our thanks to the Montana Department of Commerce for their substantial \$50,000 sponsorship.



Addressing Economic Challenges: MEP’s Strategic Response to Mill Closures in Missoula County

In response to the closures of Roseburg Forest Products (RFP) and Pyramid Mountain Lumber, the Missoula Economic Partnership (MEP) took decisive action to address the economic impact on Missoula County. Recognizing the significance of these closures, MEP engaged with an RFP representative to assess market conditions and identify redevelopment opportunities for the site, with a focus on commercial development, housing, and transportation goals.

To further support the affected industries and workers, MEP convened a meeting with more than 30 industry, government, and nonprofit stakeholders at Missoula College. This meeting was crucial in helping stakeholders gain a comprehensive understanding of the implications of the mill closures. The discussion also explored potential strategies to support purchasers of Pyramid Mountain Lumber and provide assistance to the dislocated workers from both mills.

By bringing together key leaders and facilitating critical discussions, MEP demonstrated its commitment to mitigating the impact of the mill closures and exploring viable solutions to sustain the wood products industry in Missoula County. MEP will continue to work with wood products investors and business ventures to explore long term industry opportunities in western Montana.



Growth through Collaboration

Headwaters Tech Hub

The Headwaters Tech Hub, awarded \$41M in funding through the U.S. Department of Commerce, aims to position Montana as a leader in smart, autonomous, photonic remote sensing technologies. The consortium includes photonics companies, the Montana Chamber of Commerce, Tribal and two-year colleges, and Missoula Economic Partnership. The Hub's initiatives focus on leveraging regional assets and fostering economic growth through technology, which is expected to create high-quality jobs and spur innovation across multiple industries.

Clean Energy Workforce Coalition

MEP played a pivotal role in the Clean Energy Workforce Coalition, driving initiatives to support clean energy job growth and training in Missoula. CEWC consists of five core partners: Climate Smart Missoula, City of Missoula, Missoula County, Missoula Economic Partnership and Mountain Home Montana. The CEWC was awarded second place in the national American-Made Community Clean Energy Coalition Prize to develop a new, supportive training program at Missoula College for low-income women in the clean energy sector in Missoula County.

Downtown Business Improvement District Partnership

MEP's collaboration with the BID provided one-on-one support, resources, mentorship, and guidance to more than 40 downtown businesses, while focusing on enhancing downtown commerce and emerging issues for businesses such as the new parking plan, the Downtown Safety and Mobility grant, commercial rent increases, and the Brooks Street Corridor Project.

Midtown Master Plan Implementation

Following the completion and approval of the Midtown Master Plan, MEP joined the Midtown Master Plan Implementation Committee to execute and deliver priorities supporting housing and commercial development in Midtown.

Parking Plan Outreach

MEP collaborated with Missoula's new parking director to educate downtown businesses about the FY2025 parking plan. A roundtable discussion was hosted with 15 business owners to present and discuss the plan.



The Economic Impact of Homelessness in Missoula

Over the past several years, homelessness has emerged as a prominent concern in Missoula, sparking widespread discussions among community members and leaders alike. However, despite the attention it has garnered, there remains a significant gap in understanding among the general populace regarding the complexities surrounding the issue.

To address this challenge, the Missoula Economic Partnership (MEP) commissioned economist Bryce Ward to compile a comprehensive study, aiming to ground discussions on homelessness in data and research-backed insights.

The study delves into three critical questions:

1. The Magnitude of Homelessness: While quantifying the homeless population presents challenges, it's estimated that only a fraction of one percent of Missoula's population is homeless at any given time. However, over a year, a larger share, closer to one percent, may experience homelessness. While Missoula's homelessness rates exceed the national average and those of other urban areas in Montana, they remain below regions with the highest rates.

2. Economic Costs: Homelessness exacts significant tolls both on individuals experiencing it and the broader community. Daily hardships faced by those without homes include finding shelter, food, protection, and transportation while grappling with health issues and societal stigma. Moreover, homelessness impacts public safety, economic activity, and property values, incurring substantial fiscal costs for taxpayers.

3. Addressing the Issue: The study outlines various strategies to reduce homelessness, encompassing improving market conditions, strengthening safety nets, fostering supportive social networks, and empowering individuals to lead productive lives. By targeting these areas, communities can work towards mitigating homelessness and its adverse effects.



As Missoula endeavors to tackle the complex issue of homelessness, the insights gleaned from this study will serve as a roadmap for informed decision-making and collaborative action. Through concerted efforts and community-wide engagement, MEP aims to pave the way for a more resilient and inclusive future.

This study was made possible through contributions from Montana Timber Products, United Way of Missoula, Hope Rescue Mission, the City of Missoula, and Missoula County. Additionally, MEP staff supported the City's initiatives to address homelessness by raising funds for the Johnson Street Shelter, joining the Mayor's urban camping task force, sponsoring the economic impact study, and maintaining regular communication with the business community on this issue.



Expanded Communications and Engagement

Newsletter Audience Growth

MEP's bi-monthly newsletter, "The Indicator," reached **800 subscribers**, delivering updates on events, business developments, resources, trends, and initiatives, with a **60% engagement rate**.

Monthly Radio Program

MEP's participation in a monthly KGVO NewsTalk radio program reached **20,000 listeners**, covering economic issues like homelessness, infrastructure, and childcare resources.

Listening Sessions with Government Leaders

At Senator Jon Tester's request, MEP hosted a listening session for local business leaders to **communicate growth challenges directly to the Senator** and his staff. At the request of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, MEP also hosted a listening session for local business leaders to share their feedback with bank president Neel Kashkari.

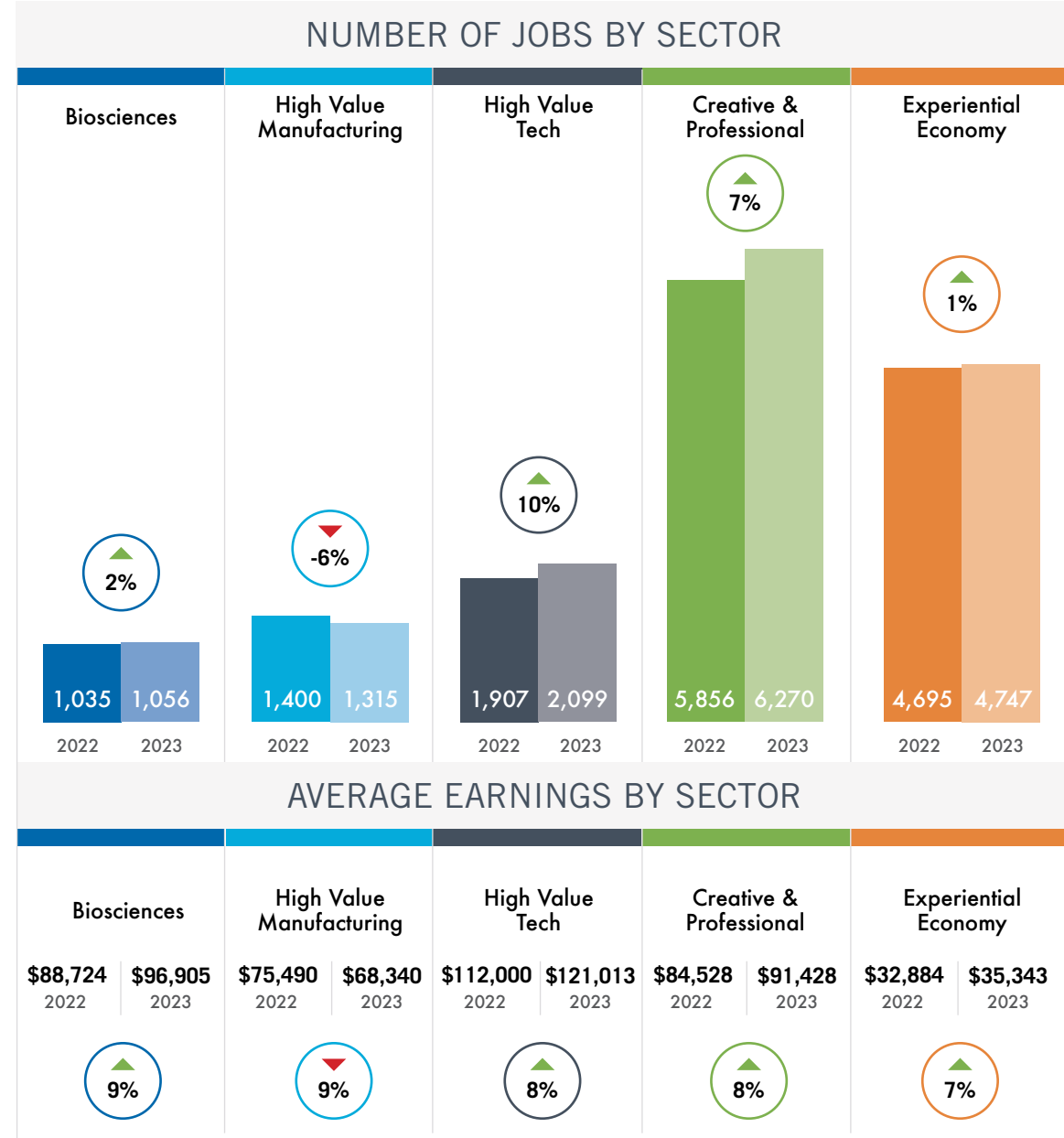
Fast Action Conversations

Early in 2024, MEP hosted the first of a new event series called Fast Action Conversations. The event focused on the results of a study MEP commissioned with Dr. Bryce Ward titled The Economic Impact of Homelessness in Missoula. Attendees participated in a panel discussion and Q&A with experts working to address homelessness. This event series aims to foster ongoing dialogue and engagement on critical community issues, furthering MEP's mission to support economic growth and community well-being in Missoula.



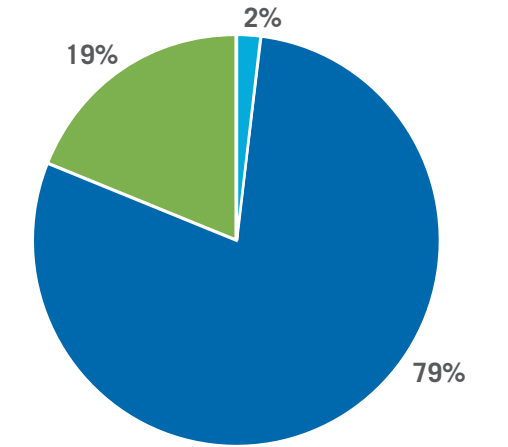
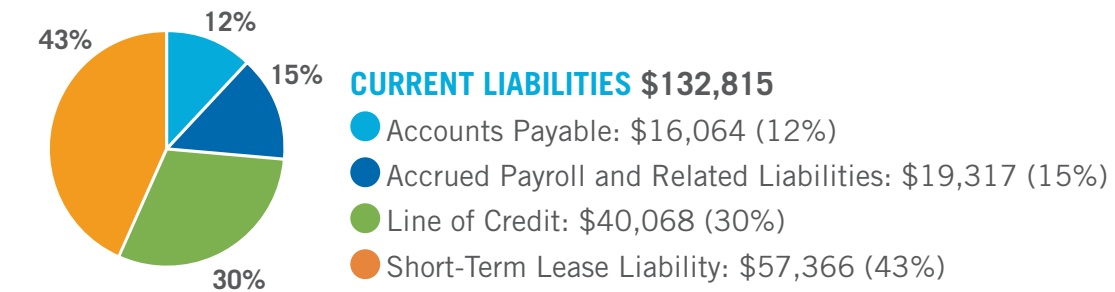
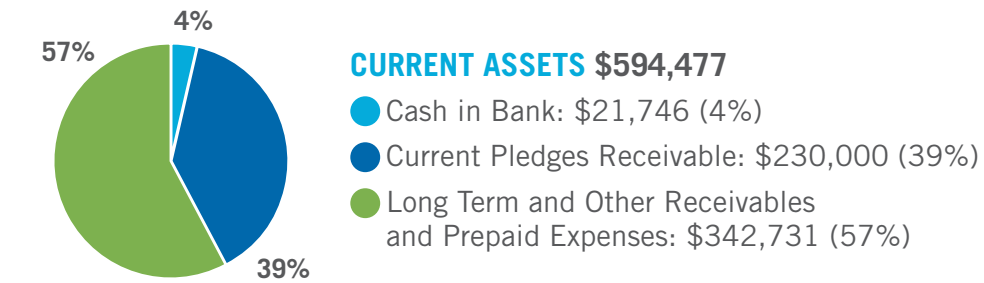
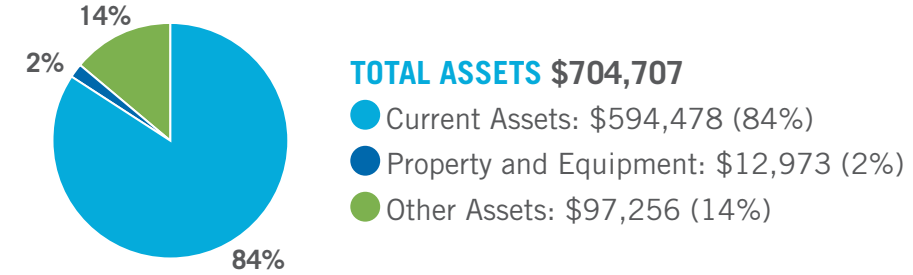
Missoula by the Numbers

OVERALL NUMBER OF JOBS		
72,513 2022	74,282 2023	+1,769 2%
OVERALL AVERAGE EARNINGS		
\$61,881 2022	\$65,678 2023	+\$3,797 6%



Statement of Financial Position

MEP continues to operate under the five year strategic plan laid out in 2022. It identifies CEDS goals and strategies that our organization will lead and be accountable for through 2026. View the strategic plan on our website: missoulapartnership.com



Letter from the President & CEO

Meeting challenges with opportunities.



GRANT KIER
CEO, Missoula Economic Partnership

As this annual report shows, MEP accomplished much in the past fiscal year. We know that chief among our roles is recognizing strengths in our public and private sector partners and inspiring collaboration that allows all of us to punch above our weight. Trusted partnerships and collaboration don't just expand our capacity but offer us a way to balance agility with a commitment to our longer-term strategic priorities.

MEP remained agile in our response to emerging economic pressures, such as homelessness and unforeseen major employer closures. We did so without losing focus on fundamental challenges (such as housing costs and lingering workforce shortages) or opportunities (such as helping a local business obtain a permit to open their doors for the first time).

We were thrilled to support several businesses that realized significant expansion this past year, including manufacturing businesses. However, we also saw major job losses in this

sector, leaving Missoula County with an overall deficit in manufacturing jobs year over year. While not easy, growing manufacturing businesses and jobs remains an MEP priority in the year ahead.

Although Montana may have felt like the center of the universe since COVID, for many who do business here, it still feels a long way away from clients and customers. When we launched Take Flight Missoula this past fiscal year, we successfully raised a local private match and look forward to continuing to expand reliable, year-round air service across the country and the world in the years ahead.

While we don't expect a future without headwinds or growing pains, we remain optimistic that Missoula is converging on a vision of its future—one that provides greater opportunities for individuals and is easier on our small businesses. As we prepare for our organization's fifteenth year, we are proud to play a meaningful part in realizing that vision.



Thank You to Our Investors

Thank you to all who invest in the work of the Missoula Economic Partnership. We continue to work to expand prosperity and improve the quality of life in our city by engaging in strategic business development, creating pathways for people to realize their potential, and fostering a culture of diversity and innovation.

A&E Design	Cushing Terrell	Market On Front	Republic Services
Access Property Management/Bike & Type	DCI Engineers	Marsh McLennan Agency	Scheels
ALPS Corporation	Dick Anderson Construction	Martel Construction, Inc.	SG Long Financial
Annelise Hedahl	Diversified Plastics, Inc.	Missoula County	Sova Partners
AT&T Wireless	DJ&A, P.C.	Missoula Organization of REALTORS	Spectrum
Bank of Montana	Downtown Business Improvement District (BID)	Missoula Redevelopment Agency	Sterling Commercial Real Estate Advisors
Bedrock Sandals, LLC.	Drew & Sheena Winterer	MMW Architects	Stockman Bank
Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Montana Properties	First Interstate Bank	Montana High Tech Business Alliance	Summit Beverage
Big Dipper Ice Cream	First Security Bank	Montana Knife Company	The Den 406
Blackfoot Communications	Garlington, Lohn, & Robinson, PLLP.	Montana Timber Products	The Mercantile–Residence Inn by Marriot Downtown
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Montana	Grizzly Disposal & Recycling	Morrison-Maierle, Inc.	The Resort at Paws Up
BlueLine Development, Inc.	Grizzly Liquor	Mostad Construction	The University of Montana
Bonner Property Development, LLC.	Hi-Noon Petroleum, Inc.	Muralt's Travel Plaza	Upslope Group, LLC.
Boone Karlberg, P.C.	Holiday Inn Missoula Downtown	NorthWestern Energy	Western Montana Clinic
City of Missoula	IMEG, Corp.	OZ Architects	WGM Group
Clearwater Credit Union	Jackson Contractor Group	Paradigm 3 Architecture	Williams Law Firm, P.C.
Consumer Direct Care Network Montana	JCCS, P.C.	Park Side Financial Credit Union	Worden's Market and Deli
Craton Consulting–Tom Stergios	Jones Brothers Trucking	Parsons, Behle, & Latimer	ZillaState
Crowley Fleck, PLLP.	Loci Architecture + Design	Pathlabs	
		Providence St. Patrick Hospital	

The Missoula Economic Partnership extends additional thanks to the following community members and organizations for their generous financial and in-kind contributions toward the construction of new bathroom facilities at the Johnson Street Shelter:

Susan and Roy O'Connor | Travis Brier and Kelsey Ochs | Averl Iris Art | Dave Edgell
Hone Architects and Builders | Morrison-Maierle | Taylor Timber



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