



*Montana Economic Developers Association
Policy Statements
2020-2022*

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The *Montana Economic Developers Association Policy Statements* are a compilation of opportunities that members have identified for Montana’s economic growth. Issues involving economic and community development are interrelated so actions and strategies to advance these policies are best done in a comprehensive manner.

A policy statement provides guidance to MEDA members, legislators, and the public on its position regarding possible legislation and/or issues that may arise during a legislative session, state or federal and the Interim. The following pages contain a number of statements from MEDA’s strategic plan, committee focus and analysis procured by MEDA and partner organizations.

Our legislative process is structured around the participation and involvement of all members. These policies were shared with MEDA’s membership and present overall agreement with our membership.

Listed items below do not indicate priority.

⇒ ***Diversification and Innovation***

MEDA supports consistent investment in innovation that adds economic stability, and attracts outside investment and talent while supporting Montana's traditional industries. Areas of focus include:

- a. Strategically investing in Montana innovators to assist in developing new technologies and applications that will diversify the economy and the tax base.
- b. Strengthen the Montana brand as an innovative place to work and launch new businesses.
- c. Support the resiliency, sustainability, expansion, diversification and innovation of traditional businesses and industries.
- d. Foster new markets for entrepreneurs.
- e. Capitalize on Montanan's innovation and grit to compete in the global market and create clusters of distinction.
- f. Amplifying development of the manufacturing, green business, and value added agriculture sectors.

⇒ ***Economic Development Infrastructure***

MEDA supports investments in local and regional community infrastructure. Key investments supported include:

- a. Increase connectivity and access to high performance broadband to every home and business in Montana. See Appendix A.
- b. Support the business community that depends on the online marketplace and to improve visitor experience.
- c. Assess all housing needs, but with emphasis on workforce, and build housing developments to attract new families and diversified workforce.
- d. Support programs and initiatives that enhance workforce housing
- e. Invest in infrastructure in expanding cities and towns.
- f. Support programs and initiatives to fund water, wastewater, transportation, and broadband infrastructure.
- g. Continued participation with the Montana Infrastructure Coalition.
- h. Improved local access to passenger and freight rail service.
- i. Support investments in airports throughout the state, especially in rural communities.

⇒ ***Entrepreneurial Development and Small Business Enhancement***

MEDA supports programs that enhance small businesses in Montana and programs that enhance entrepreneurial development. MEDA supports programs that:

- a. Increase capacity through industry research and business counseling
- b. Grow number of start-ups and assist existing businesses
- c. Increase access to traditional and alternative commercial capital
- d. Support development of main streets and downtowns
- e. Streamline state-sponsored programming
- f. Attract business to the state, bringing employment, innovation and economic diversification to the economy

A. MEDA strongly supports existing key economic development tools and supports continual evaluation and improvement to those tools, including but not limited to:

1. Tax Increment Financing (TIF) as an effective local- directed economic development tool.

2. Ensure the state's economic development programs and tools which serve rural and urban areas, are up to date and position the state to be competitive and meet industry needs.
 3. Maintain current funding levels for state economic development programs.
 4. Maintain funding for local and regional tourism entities.
- B. Improving economic development effectiveness.
1. Increase flexibility and ease of use of existing programs.
 2. Enhance statewide teamwork.
 3. Launch effective business attraction partnerships.
 4. Make greater use of Montana Board of Investment.
 5. Expand access to business and seed funding, especially in rural and tribal communities where traditional financing is limited.

⇒ ***Improve Competitiveness, Regionally and Nationally***

MEDA supports ongoing efforts to understand, analyze, strategize, and collaborate to remain competitive and recognizes that our communities and businesses are competing at a regional, national, and international level.

- a. MEDA is committed to the exploration, development and responsible use of Montana's natural resources.
- b. MEDA is committed to efforts to build upon and enhance business sector clusters (industry clusters).
- c. Learn from and consider competitive economic development programs and services in surrounding states and provinces that could be adopted here.

⇒ ***Livability and Main Street Revitalization***

MEDA supports strengthening placemaking initiatives, including Main Streets and downtown development, in urban and rural communities throughout the state. Supported initiatives include:

- a. Renovation of existing infrastructure to reenergize downtowns and to attract people that visit Montana.
- b. Assessment and cleanup of contaminated properties for the redevelopment of our communities and providing a healthy environment.
- c. Reimagining downtowns and main streets so new investments and redevelopment can reenergize a community. Support for ongoing funding for the Montana Main Street Program.
- d. Supporting trail systems and connectivity pathways that link communities to regional assets.
- e. Build and sustain healthy and vibrant communities that include generational housing and access to childcare
- f. MEDA supports high quality health care for all of Montana as well as businesses working in the health care field.

⇒ ***Partnership Development***

MEDA understands and values partnerships and supports continued development of existing relationships and exploring opportunities for new. Specific efforts such as these will strengthen our efforts:

- A. MEDA supports and assists in both establishing and strengthening partnerships between our governments at all levels, the public and private sector to achieve the common goal of a healthy economy and future business development opportunities. These partnerships include the

Montana Association of Counties, Montana Chamber of Commerce, Montana League of Cities and Towns, Montana Infrastructure Coalition and others.

⇒ ***Tribal, Rural and Urban Diversity***

MEDA supports working to bridge the rural/urban divide and supports efforts to better understand, better assist and improve relationships with tribal leadership, tribal economic developers, and tribal businesses.

- a. Communicate with all of the Tribal Nations in Montana regarding their economic development and employment needs.
 1. Work with the STED Commission, Native American development entities, regional Organizations, tribal colleges and tribal economic development entities to identify specific needs.
- b. Assist the tribal entities in identifying issues is essential for growth, including infrastructure, housing and other basic needs.
- c. Recognize Montana is a diverse state and our regional differences as well as urban and rural differences and programs should take this diversity into consideration.

⇒ ***Workforce - Talent Attraction***

MEDA supports statewide collaboration, utilization of tourism marketing resources, and incentives to recruit workforce talent to Montana. Supported or initiated investment strategies include:

- a. Establishment of a statewide talent recruitment program.
 1. Form a taskforce of public and private partners from across the state to spearhead the initiative, develop a strategy, and explore funding mechanisms. Ensure both rural and urban communities have representation on the taskforce.
 2. Leverage Travel Montana's compelling tourism marketing and advertising campaign and resources for talent recruitment.
 3. Explore talent recruitment and retention incentives, especially for remote workers.
- b. Identify and develop talent pipelines that include Montana expatriates and out of state skilled workers.

⇒ ***Workforce Development***

MEDA supports investing in workforce development, especially workforce development that shares and connects communities together. Specifically, supported or initiated investment strategies include:

- a. Establishment of a statewide talent retention program with active involvement by MEDA and developed with/by multiple stakeholders, both urban and rural.
- b. Providing opportunities to educate, equip, retool or retrain existing workforce to adapt to the changing economy with targeted training for new sector clusters that are areas of distinction for Montana, accessing apprenticeship programs, and provide remote work structuring.
- c. Investing in and partnering with K - 12, secondary and post-secondary education.
- d. A remote worker strategy that links business workforce needs to Montana's remote workforce so that jobs go to where the people live.