



2020 ANNUAL REPORT

Abilene Convention
& Visitors Bureau





2020 RECAP

It's a great day in Abilene!

Like communities worldwide, Abilene's tourism industry faced unprecedented challenges in 2020. The Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau adapted to the challenges and continued to market Abilene and achieve success despite the pandemic. With 2020 at an end, we celebrate our successes and look forward to the future of tourism in Abilene!

The Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau's Annual Report highlights our efforts to market Abilene and provide assistance to visitors and groups to Abilene.

In this report, we focus on four types of marketing:

1. **Earned** - media, blogger, and influencer relations
2. **Owned** - website, blog, and content generated in-house
3. **Shared** - social media, word of mouth, and referrals
4. **Paid** - advertising

We also showcase new and continuing projects, grants, partnerships, visitation, and the economic impact of tourism in Abilene.

We look forward to continuing building upon this foundation and look forward to 2021.

Julie Roller Weeks

#AbileneStrong

Julie Roller Weeks, director
Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau



2020

SUMMARY

- Best Historic Small Town runner-up by *USA Today*
- Abilene Strong campaign receives Travel Industry Association of Kansas award
- City of Abilene grants \$132,000 to 28 business affected by COVID-19
- Abilene CVB receives \$35,800 SPARKS grant for outdoor digital kiosk
- Abilene CVB receives an \$8,489 Tourism Marketing Grant from the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism and a \$5,000 grant from the Community Foundation of Dickinson County for a new 2021 visitors guide.
- Visit Abilene Kansas social media campaign wins award from Midwest Travel Network
- Abilene CVB coordinates Shop Small - All Season Long campaign
- *True West Magazine* named Abilene's Old Abilene Town "Best Wild West Show"
- AbileneKansas.org named one of the "best tourism websites in the US" by *Everyday Wanderer*
- Abilene CVB budget ends the year in the black despite a significant decrease in Transient Guest Tax collections.





PROMOTION EARNED

The Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau continues to capitalize on earned media through coordinating with media outlets, responding to inquiries, and positioning itself on journalists' radar.

Stories are available at AbileneKansas.org/news



2 ABILENE Kansas

Abilene is the hometown of Dwight D. Eisenhower, a 5-Star General and 34th President of the United States, and that's just the start of this town's historical appeal. Besides the Eisenhower Presidential Library, Museum & Boyhood home, visitors can ride the state's only operational steam locomotive, tour the Historic Seelye Mansion, take a spin on the oldest known Parker Carousel and step back into the Wild West in Old Abilene Town.

Photo courtesy of Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau

- Best Historic Small Town (runner up)– *USA Today*
- The Best Tourism Websites in the US – *Everyday Wanderer*
- 11 Charming Midwest Towns You Must Visit – *Travel Awaits*
- America's Coolest Small Towns by State – *Far & Wide*
- Cool Cities and Small Towns to Visit in the Midwest – *The Haute Seeker*
- The coolest little town in Kansas - *MSN.com*
- Best Wild West Show - *True West Magazine*



PROMOTION EARNED

A screenshot of the Salina Journal website. The header includes "SUBSCRIBE NOW" and "SALINA JOURNAL". The navigation bar lists categories like News, Sports, Entertainment, Lifestyle, Opinion, Nation / World, Obituaries, E-Edition, and Legals. The main content area shows a local news article titled "Holiday happenings this weekend in Abilene" with a sub-headline "The Salina Journal" and a timestamp "Published 2:37 p.m. CT Dec 2, 2020". The article text describes various holiday events in Abilene, including Christmas Tours, a firetruck parade, and Santa Claus visits. An advertisement for "Brenda's Day Spa" is visible on the right side of the article.

Television

The Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau shared stories, photos, and videos with Kansas television stations featuring Abilene stories.

Radio

The Abilene CVB participates in KABI 1560's Inside Dickinson County interviews on Monday mornings to share weekly news and events in Abilene. We also invite event organizers to join us in sharing information about their events.

Newspaper

From press releases to feature stories, calendars, or photos, the CVB happily partners with area newspapers to promote Abilene to their readership.





PROMOTION PAID

Recognizing its budget limitations and the rising cost of traditional advertising, the Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau strategically purchases ads.



2020 ad purchases

- Kansas Travel Guide (back cover) - 400,000 guides are distributed annually to people who request them, at rest stops, visitor centers, and events in and out of Kansas. Additionally, an online guide is available for download on TravelKS.com.
- KANSAS! Magazine
- TrueWest Magazine
- Society of American Travel Writers directory



PROMOTION

PAID



Billboards

The Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau maintains **ten** billboards along Kansas I-70, as well as one on Highway 15. In addition, our partnership with the Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum, increases Abilene's presence by an additional ten boards.

According to 2020 data from the Kansas Department of Transportation, the daily traffic count for these locations range from 15,000 - 22,000 vehicles.

Visitors Guide / Rack Card

Due to COVID-19 and decreased revenues, the CVB postponed its 2020 Visitors Guide. Abilene rack cards remain in distribution.





PROMOTION

PAID

Brochure Distribution

The Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau contracts with *Certified Folder* and *Central Brochure Distribution* to place the Abilene Visitors Guide in more than 250 distribution racks in hotels, restaurants, and gas stations. The brochure is also available in Kansas' two welcome centers (Belle Plaine and Goodland), as well as other state-designated Travel Information Centers throughout Kansas.





PROMOTION

OWNED



Abilene Tourism Advocate E-Newsletter

The Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau creates an electronic newsletter celebrating Abilene. The newsletter is sent to anyone who requests information about Abilene. It is also shared on social media and in the blog on the AbileneKansas.org website. In 2020, the CVB launched a redesigned e-newsletter consistent with its new brand standards.

2020 Abilene Tourism Advocate

2020 editions sent: 44 2020 individual sends: 295,995
Total unique opens: 41,962

Brochure Requests

The Abilene CVB mails information about Abilene to anyone requesting information. In 2020, the CVB received more than 150 inquiries from throughout the United States.

Visitor Bags

The Abilene CVB provides visitor bags for groups and events. Due to canceled events, the CVB fulfilled minimal requests for a total of 610 bags.





PROMOTION

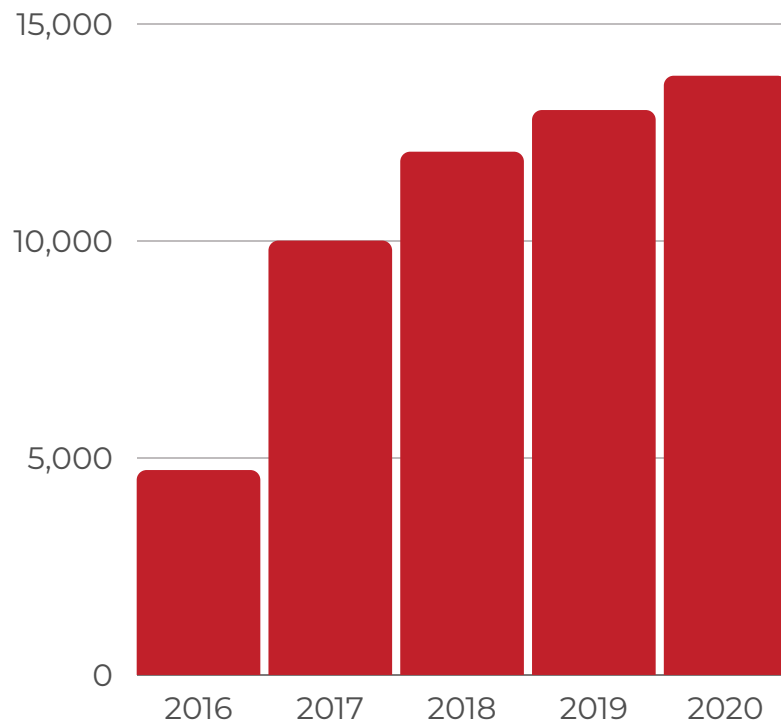
SHARED

Social Media

The Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau uses social media to reach new audiences, including the use of Facebook Live to film and share special events.

Comparatively, the Visit Abilene, Kansas Facebook page has significantly more page likes and engagement than other communities.

Facebook Page Likes



Abilene is also on Instagram @AbileneKansas and Twitter @VisitAbilene. Videos are also shared on the Visit Abilene Kansas YouTube Channel.



PROMOTION

SHARED



Videos

Abilene CVB continues to create short videos to reach new audiences on social media.

- Shop Small - All Season Long
- Abilene Gives Thanks
- Ida Stover Eisenhower Virtual Quilt Show
- Old Abilene Town Reopening Saturday, June 20
- What's Open in Abilene, Kansas
- Memorial Day Weekend Ideas
- Historic Seelye Mansion
- Abilene, Kansas: Open for business
- Brown Memorial Park Waterfall
- The Faces of #Abilene Strong





PROMOTION

PARTNERSHIPS



The Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau is a member of organizations that help promote and advocate for tourism.

Memberships

- Travel Industry Association of Kansas (*Abilene CVB director served as Vice President of the Association in 2020*)
- Kansas I-70 Association (*Abilene CVB director served as Secretary of the Association in 2020*)
- Flint Hills Tourism Coalition
- North Central Kansas Tourism Coalition
- Tour Kansas

In 2020, the Kansas I-70 Association celebrated the 50th anniversary of the completion of I-70 in Kansas. Plans for a cross-Kansas blogger tour were postponed to 2021.

The director also presented to Meredith Media editors on behalf of the North Central Kansas Tourism Coalition.

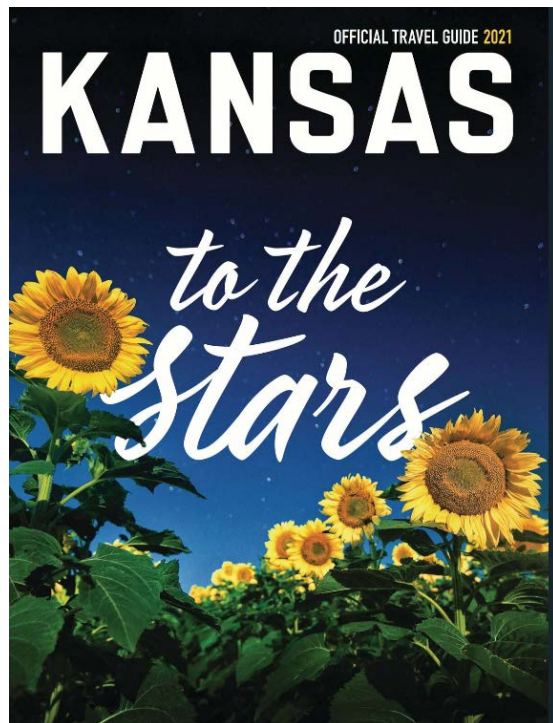


PROMOTION PARTNERSHIPS

Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism

The Abilene CVB maintains listings on TravelKS.com for Abilene attractions and businesses at no cost on the TravelKS.com website. In 2020, these listings received 3,828 views and 2,217 clicks.

The CVB also coordinated 20 paid listings in the Kansas Travel Guide for Abilene businesses and attractions.



Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau
303 NW 2nd, (781) 263-3231, abilenekansas.org

3rd Street Deli & Market
108 NW 3rd St, (781) 263-8227. Find us on Facebook. Fresh-made deli sandwiches featuring local meats, homemade salads, tacos, breakfast, cold drinks, including beer. Indoor/outdoor seating. Open Monday-Saturday. ☑

Abilene & Smoky Valley Railroad
200 SE 5th, (888) 426-6687, osvr.org. Historic diesel train and restored steam engine offering excursion and dinner trains, charters and school trips, plus railbus and country home and barn tours. ☑

Amanda's Bakery & Bistro
302 N Broadway, (781) 263-6622. Find us on Facebook. Enjoy homemade baked items, pastries, espresso and specialty teas. Gift shop. Open for breakfast and lunch Tues.-Fri. 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m.; Sat. 9 a.m.-3 p.m. ☑

Brookville Hotel
101 E. Lafayette, (781) 263-2244, brookvillehotel.com. A James Beard Foundation Award winner, our fabulous fried chicken dinners have been served the old-fashioned, family-style way by the same family since 1915. ☑

Dickinson County Heritage Center
412 E. Campbell St., (781) 263-2681, dickinsoncountymuseum.org. Relive history. Ride a 1903 Parker Carousal with hand organ. Tour the one-room school, blacksmith shop, cabin and stone. Marvel at the village telephone museum. ☑

Eisenhower Presidential Library, Museum and Boyhood Home
209 SE Fourth St., (781) 263-4290, eisenhowercenter.org. Learn about the five-star general and 34th president. Explore the all-new museum exhibit: see rare artifacts and hear Ike and Mamie's story in their own words. ☑

Great Plains Theatre
215 N. Campbell St., (781) 263-6271, greatplains.org. Presenting professional live theatre productions Mar.-Dec., special events, youth productions and cinema. Celebrating 27 years of enriching lives through theater. ☑

Greyhound Hall of Fame
407 S. Buckner, (781) 263-4000, greyhoundhalloffame.com. A museum of the greyhound breed and racing history. Ten-minute film. Two resident greyhounds greet you at the door. Admission by donation. ☑

Hitching Post Grill, Saloon & Steak House
100 SE 5th St., (781) 263-3868. Find us on Facebook. Located in Old Abilene Town, featuring homemade food, hand-cut steaks and a full bar. Breakfast and lunch Sun.-Thurs. and Thurs.-Sat. Dinner available Fri. and Sat. ☑

Jeffcoat Photography Studio Museum
222 N. Broadway, (781) 263-9882, jeffcoatstudio.com. Step back in time and explore the world of three generations of photography. See exhibits of people and places of Abilene and displays on cameras. ☑

M & R Grill
1720 N. Buckner, (781) 263-9819. Find us on Facebook. A family-friendly bar and grill with a large menu including burgers, steaks and salads. Patio and bar seating available. Open Tues.-Sun. Locally owned. ☑

Mr. K's Farmhouse Restaurant
402 S. Sun Street, (781) 263-7993, mrksfarmhouse.com. Formerly known as Lena's, one of Abilene's favorites. Come enjoy our cozy country setting, delicious home cooking, and friendly faces. Groups and walk-ins welcome. ☑

Old Abilene Town
400 SE 5th St., (781) 263-2641, oldabilenetown.com. Relive the Wild West at Old Abilene Town. Enjoy the Alamo Saloon and General Store. Shop and enjoy refreshments and gunfighters. ☑

Ortus Cafe & Gallery
148 NW 2nd St., (781) 263-2271, ortuscfe.com. Specialty coffee and fresh-made crepes. Local art. ☑

Seelye Mansion & Patent Medicine Museum
1015 N. Buckner Ave., (781) 263-1084, seelyemansion.org. Georgian mansion listed on the National Register of Historic Places and 8 Wonders of Kansas. Original furniture, Edison light fixtures and 1904 bowling alley. ☑

The Shivering Sheep
308 N. Buckner, (781) 263-7501. A full-service pet shop that began in 2002. We have the best yarn and knitting supplies available. We also serve the crocheting and spinning communities. ☑

Wild Heart Carriages
877 6600 Ave., (781) 432-2245, wildheartcarriages.com. We provide safe and fun carriage, wagon, and stagecoach rides for weddings, birthday parties or just a romantic date night. ☑

Alma Crossroads: Change in Rural America Exhibit
24098 Volland Rd., (781) 745-5557, ruralcrossroads.com. Crossroads: Change in Rural America, a Smithsonian exhibit. March 13-April 25. Experience local history, culture and innovation; spark conversations about the future. ☑

The Volland Store
24098 Volland Rd., (781) 499-3646, thevollandstore.com. The perfect day trip. Bring a picnic and explore art, the nature trail, the historic townsite and country backroads of the Flint Hills. The Loft is available to rent. ☑

Alma Vista Ag Heritage Park
101 S. Main, (781) 482-3865, agheritagepark.com. Take a step back in time. Early horse-drawn and tractor machinery, log cabin, museum and schoolhouse. Experience early agricultural life. April tractor show. ☑

Arma Albers Marine
401 N. Burgin, (816) 347-8853, albersmarine.com. New Motor Truck GunTucker, Talow boats, Tracker off-road utility vehicles, Fishing tackle and live bait. An outdoor show is also held at the end of January. ☑

Atchison Visit Atchison
201 S. Main St., (816) 347-3425, atchisonks.com



PROMOTION

SPECIAL PROJECTS



Website

In 2020, the Abilene CVB's new website - AbileneKansas.org - became an incredible asset. The website not only lists places to visit, shop, dine, and stay in Abilene, it also hosts robust News and Blog pages.

- Blog Posts - 73 posts
- News Stories - 54 posts

January 1, 2020 - December 31, 2020

- Users: 32,379; Sessions - 41,806; Page Views - 152,509
- Average Pages/Session - 3.65
- Visitors - 87.7% (New User) and 12.3% (Returning Visitor)
- Top Channels - 48.9% (Organic Search), 24% (Direct), 20.4% (Social), and 6.6% (Referral)
- Top Cities - Abilene, Kansas City, city unavailable, Chicago, Wichita, Salina, Manhattan, Topeka, Andover, and Dallas.
- Gender - 60.7% (Male) and 39.3% (Female)



PROMOTION

SPECIAL PROJECTS



Abilene Strong Campaign

In what now seems like a lifetime ago, the Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau launched the #AbileneStrong campaign to promote Abilene to Abilene residents and future visitors.

What started as a \$5 logo and Facebook Profile Picture Frame, quickly gained popularity and visibility with requests for logo usage on banners, window displays, and yard signs throughout Abilene. Streets and storefront windows were lined with #AbileneStrong signs and the conversation changed to supporting local.

The Travel Industry Association of Kansas recognized this effort by awarding the Abilene CVB the best Community Awareness Campaign - medium budget category.





PROMOTION

SPECIAL PROJECTS



Shop Small - All Season Long

In true 2020 fashion, the Abilene CVB pivoted during the holiday season to spearhead a shop local campaign.

"While holiday activities may look different this year, the CVB is encouraging everyone to support Abilene businesses this season," said Julie Roller Weeks, Abilene CVB director. "With travel to Abilene limited, the CVB is redirecting its marketing efforts to encourage keeping dollars local. The CVB's Shop Small - All Season Long campaign celebrates Abilene's small businesses."



PROMOTION

SPECIAL PROJECTS



Eisenhower Legacy Trip

In 2019, the Abilene CVB partnered with Denison, Texas to coordinate the Eisenhower Legacy Trip in honor of the dedication of the new Eisenhower Memorial in Washington, D.C. in 2020. Due to COVID-19, the trip was canceled.

American Flags

Each year the Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau coordinates a fundraising campaign to purchase 200 new American flags for Buckeye Avenue and 3rd Street.





PROMOTION

GRANTS



Community Development Block Grant - CV

In 2020, the Abilene CVB spearheaded a grant application to the Kansas Department of Commerce's CDBG-CV program. The City of Abilene received \$132,000 and granted funds to 28 businesses affected by COVID-19.

Visitors Guide

With transient guest tax collections down, the Abilene CVB looked for new opportunities to fund projects. The Abilene CVB was the recipient of an \$8,489 Tourism Marketing Grant from the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism, and a \$5,000 grant from the Community Foundation of Dickinson County to complete a new 2021 visitors guide.



PROMOTION

GRANTS



Digital Kiosk

In addition, the CVB received a \$35,800 SPARKS grant to assist with the design and purchase of a new, interactive digital tourist information kiosk. The kiosk's operating system is designed and the kiosk will be installed in early 2021.





PROMOTION

AWARDS



Best Community Awareness Campaign

During the (virtual) Kansas Tourism Conference, the Travel Industry Association of Kansas (TIAK) named the Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau's Abilene Strong campaign the best Community Awareness Campaign - medium budget category.

Best Social Media Campaign (Destination)

We love celebrating our Midwest Travel Network friends, but in December, our friends celebrated us! The Midwest Travel Network named Visit Abilene Kansas the Best Social Media Campaign (Destination) of the year!



VISITATION

Travel Information Center (TIC)

The Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau maintains a state-designated travel information center to serve visitors. Due to COVID-19 and budget constraints, the TIC temporarily closed in March.

Abilene Civic Center

The Abilene CVB is also responsible for Civic Center rentals and maintenance. In 2020, the Civic Center was rented for 14 different events ranging from meetings to family reunions, weddings, and other special events.

In light of cancellations, the CVB embraced the opportunity to complete maintenance work by repainting the interior of the building.





VISITATION



In 2020, the Abilene CVB planned to host many new groups, however, those plans quickly changed. Fortunately, several groups were still able to visit including the Christian Motorcyclist Association, Heart of America Greyhound Gathering, bank travel clubs, and other group tours. The CVB assists with itineraries, reservations, welcome bags, and other requests.

Attraction Visitation

Visitation to Abilene's tourist attractions significantly decreased due to COVID-19 and temporary closures.

- Abilene & Smoky Valley Railroad: 2,595
- Dickinson County Heritage Center: 1,055
- Eisenhower Presidential Library *and* Museum: 29,000
- Great Plains Theatre: 2,600
- Greyhound Hall of Fame: 3,477
- Old Abilene Town: 2,500
- Seelye Mansion: 3,579



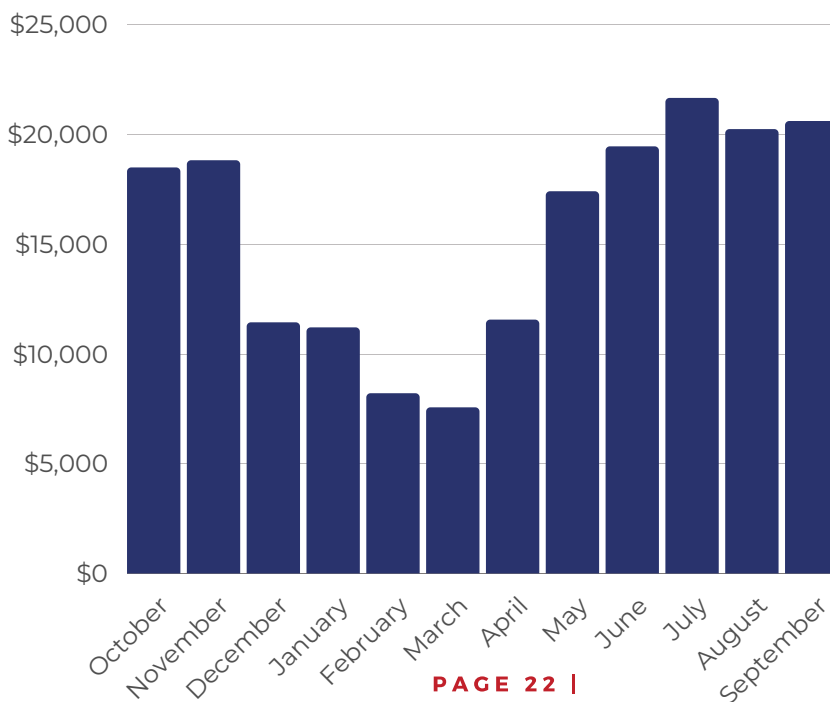
ECONOMIC IMPACT

Transient Guest Tax

The Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau is predominately funded through Transient Guest Tax, a tax paid by travelers when staying in one of Abilene's hotels, motels, bed & breakfasts, or Airbnbs. The Kansas Department of Revenue collects this tax and passes it on to the City of Abilene. I.e.) Fourth-quarter collections are received in January of the following year.

Collections totaled \$137,770.76 with \$1,722.134.50 in sales in 2020. This was a 40% decrease from 2019. In addition, the City of Abilene received \$12,916.01 in Sales Tax collections from rooms sold and Dickinson County received \$25,832.02.

2020 Transient Guest Tax Collections

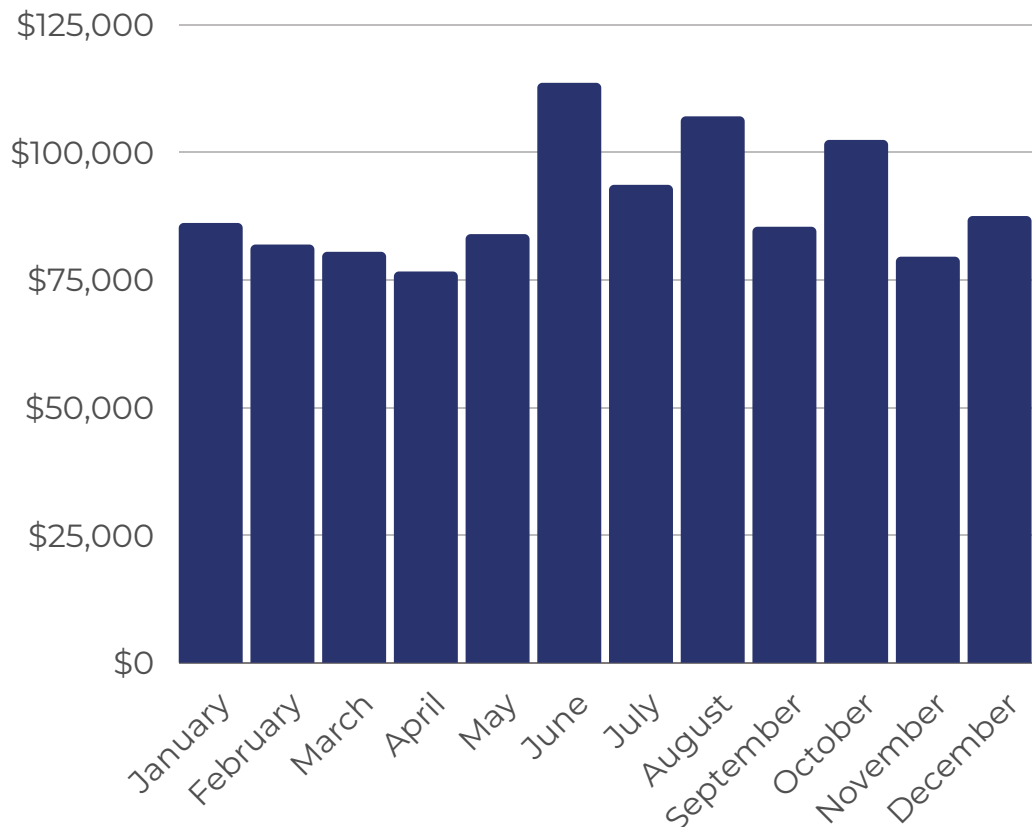




ECONOMIC IMPACT

Sales Tax

The City of Abilene sales tax is .75%. According to the Kansas Department of Revenue, 2020 sales tax collections totaled \$1,077,281.77 from sales at Abilene businesses. This is an 8.5% increase from 2019.





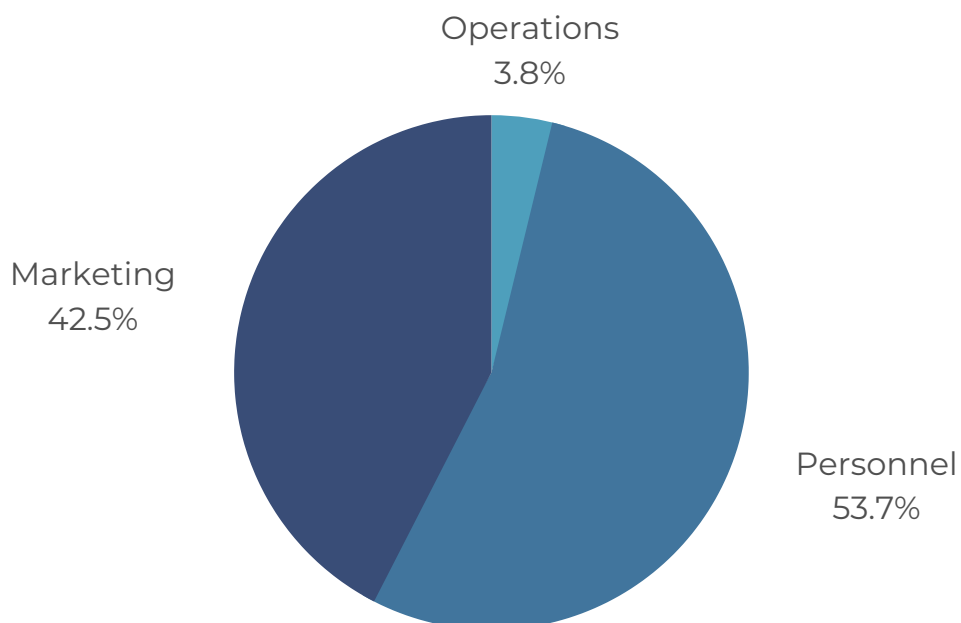
BUDGET

The Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau is predominately funded through Transient Guest Tax, a tax paid by travelers when staying in one of Abilene's hotels, motels, bed & breakfasts, or Airbnbs. Additional revenue is generated from Civic Center rentals, gift shop sales, reimbursed advertising costs, and other initiatives.

- 2020 Cash Forward - \$45,426.00
- Revenue - \$183,249.49
- Expenses - \$175,381.00
- End of Year Balance - \$53,294.49

2020 Tourism Budget - Expenses

Note: Staff time spent creating marketing pieces in-house is listed as personnel.

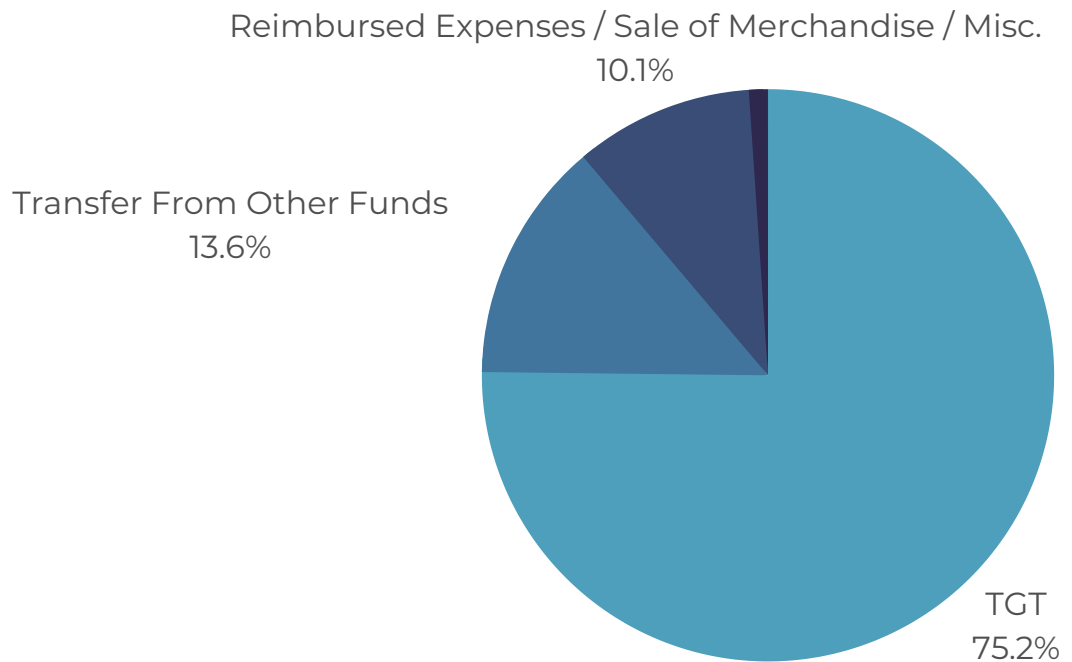




BUDGET

2020 Tourism Budget - Revenue

The CVB started 2020 with \$45,426 in cash carryover, which is not reflected in the chart below.





ABOUT US

As with tourism organizations across the country, the Abilene CVB made significant staff reductions in order to responsibly manage its budget due to decreased Transient Guest Tax Collections. We look forward to the opportunity to operate at full staff again once occupancy returns to stable levels.

Abilene CVB Staff

- Julie Roller Weeks, *director*

Abilene CVB Advisory Board

- Mukul Ghosh Hajra, *Holiday Inn Express*
- Samantha Kenner, *Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum*
- Mary Jane Oard, *Abilene & Smoky Valley Railroad*
- Kimmy Phillips, *Last Chance Graphics*
- Deb Sanders, *National Old West Trails Foundation*
- Elizabeth Weese, *Community Foundation of Dickinson County*





"The proudest thing I can
claim is that I am from
Abilene."

Dwight D. Eisenhower
June 22, 1945

**ABILENE CONVENTION &
VISITORS BUREAU**

201 NW 2nd
Abilene, KS 67410
(785) 263-2231
Julie@AbileneCityHall.com
AbileneKansas.org