



2021 ANNUAL REPORT

Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau







2021 RECAP

It's a great day in Abilene!

Like communities worldwide, Abilene's tourism industry faced unprecedented challenges in 2020 that continued into 2021.

The Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau's 2021 Annual Report highlights our efforts to market Abilene, assist visitors and groups to Abilene and generate economic growth through tourism.

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 building upon this foundation in 2022.

#AbileneStrong

Quie Rollex Weeks

Julie Roller Weeks, director Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau



2021 SUMMARY

In 2021, the Abilene Convention and Visitors Bureau:

- Named Best U.S. Small Town by TravelAwaits
- Completed a new visitors guide (print and digital)
- Installed a digital kiosk for visitors
- Led efforts to install new benches and trashcans in downtown Abilene
- Updated its photo library, including holiday photos
- Named #4 Best Historic Small Town by *USA Today*
- Earned Travel Industry Association of Kansas awards for Visitors Guide and Event Marketing
- Created a campaign to bring the Bulls Head Saloon
 Longhorn home
- Coordinated the Shop Small First Pink Friday effort
- Named Best Promotion of a Historic Place by True West Magazine
- Received a \$25,000 Jeffcoat Foundation unrestricted grant
- Ended the year in the black, adding to reserves despite a continued 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



- #4 Best Historic Small Town USA Today
- Best U.S. Small Town Travel Awaits
- Feast Your Eyes on America's Top Destinations for Outdoor Art – Men's Journal
- 9 Best Places to Visit in Kansas Trips to Discover
- Abilene, Kansas Queen of the Cowtowns Legends of America
- Tour the Award-Winning Town of Abilene, Kansas One Delightful Life
- A Cowtown Winter Wonderland Kansas Tourism
- Abilene, Kansas: Wild West to White House Follow the Piper



PROMOTION EARNED



Television

The Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau shared stories, photos, and videos with Kansas television stations featuring Abilene stories, resulting in news stories on KSN, KSNT, WIBW, KWCH and KAKE.

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

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







PROMOTION PAID

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

2021 Ad Purchases

- Kansas Travel Guide
 (back cover) 350,000
 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.
- TrueWest Magazine
- KSN Summer Road Trip series tv ads
- Visit the Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum claim is that ram from Philipper.

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 Visit the Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum to experience like and Mamie's atory in their own words.

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- Cowtown Christmas event promotion radio ads
- Salina Journal / Evvnt The CVB utilized Evvnt to promote destination events in various interest-driven media outlets.
- Destinations Magazine The CVB partnered with Tour Kansas on a coop ad in Destinations Magazine marketing Abilene as a group tour destination.
- Great Plains Theatre Playbill Ad



PROMOTION PAID

Billboards

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



In 2021, the CVB updated the skins on three boards.

According to 2021 data from the Kansas Department of Transportation, the daily traffic count for these locations ranges from 15,000 - 22,000 vehicles.

Visitors Guide

In 2021, the Abilene CVB launched a brand-new visitors guide that not only reflects its updated branding but also includes new professional photos. Listings in the guide are at no cost to Abilene businesses and attractions.

The new visitors guide is also available digitally on the CVB's website AbileneKansas.org/visitorsguide.









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) and other state-designated Travel Information Centers throughout Kansas.





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 on the CVB website at AbileneKansas.org/newsletter.

2021 Abilene Tourism Advocate

2021 editions sent: 43 Individual sends: 249,151 Total unique opens: 39,712 Total link clicks: 5,782

Brochure Requests

The Abilene CVB mails information about Abilene to anyone requesting information. In 2021, the CVB received more than 350 inquiries from throughout the United States via phone, mail, and website requests.

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 550 bags.







PROMOTION OWNED

Website

In 2020, the Abilene CVB launched its new website. This website is an incredible addition to our marketing efforts.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the CVB maintained a page noting which attractions and businesses were open. This page, AbileneKansas.org/travel-updates, provides visitors with the necessary information to help them plan their trips.

January 1 - December 31, 2021, Analytics

• Users: 71,942

New Users: 70,936Sessions: 95.026

• Number of Sessions per User: 1.32

Pageviews: 281,678Pages/Session: 2.96

Of note, website users more than doubled from 2020 to 2021.

Top cities where website visitors are located:

- 1. Kansas City
- 2.Abilene
- 3. Chicago
- 4.Salina
- 5. Wichita
- 6. Manhattan
- 7. Denver
- 8.Topeka
- 9. Overland Park
- 10. Dallas



OWNED

Blog

The CVB utilizes its blog to share unique stories about Abilene. In 2021, the CVB wrote 52 blogs. These stories are shared on the website, social media, Abilene Tourism Advocate enewsletter, and with the Abilene Reflector-Chronicle.

Top blogs include:

- 5 Selfies to Take in Abilene, Kansas (January 20, 2021)
- 5 Antique Stores You Absolutely Must See! (February 16, 2021)
- Celebrate Women's History Month in Abilene (March 23, 2021)
- 5 Places to Enjoy Breakfast in Abilene (April 16, 2021)
- 5 Things You Need to Know About Visiting the Eisenhower Museum (May 26, 2021)
- 5 Tips for an Enjoyable Summer Trip (June 14, 2021)
- 5 Ways to Re-Live the Old West at Old Abilene Town (July 27, 2021)
- Locally-Sourced in Abilene, Kansas (August 25, 2021)
- 5 Events to Fall in Love With (September 7, 2021)
- 3 Spooky Events You Won't Want to Miss (October 7, 2021)
- 2021 Holiday Guide (October 25, 2021)
- 3 Fun Experiences to Give this Holiday Season (December 7, 2021)

Read these stories at AbileneKansas.org/blog.







PROMOTION SHARED

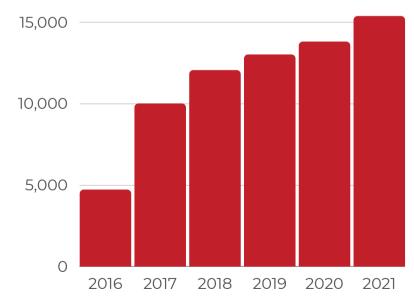
Social Media

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 Kansas communities.

Facebook Page Likes





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



SHARED



2021 Cowtown Christmas

Videos

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

- 2021 Pink Friday
- 2021 Cowtown Christmas
- 2021 Homes for the Holidays Tour
- Historic Seelye Mansion
- 2021 Abilene Boutique Crawl
- 2021 Abilene, Kansas Oktoberfest
- 2021 National Travel & Tourism Week
- 2021 Eisenhower Marathon
- Happy Kanas Day







PROMOTION PARTNERSHIPS

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

- Travel Industry Association of Kansas (Abilene CVB director served as President-Elect of the Association in 2021) The Association supported the Governor's Executive Reorganization Order to return Kansas Tourism to the Kansas Department of Commerce. TIAK also endorsed a letter to the Governor to stop the additional Unemployment Insurance payments to put Kansans back to work to help the tourism industry. The CVB director participated in U.S. Travel's Day on the Hill activities and met (virtually) with Senators Moran and Marshall and Representative Mann to share industry updates and updates about our individual communities. The CVB also sponsored the Kansas Tourism Conference.
- Kansas I-70 Association (Abilene CVB director served as Vice President of the Association in 2021) – The Abilene CVB hosted travel writer, One Delightful Life, through a partnership with the Kansas I-70 Association and a Marketing Grant from Kansas Tourism. The Association also completed a reprint of its brochure.
- North Central Kansas Tourism Coalition The Abilene CVB coordinated a hosted travel blogger, Travel with Sara, to visit and write about North Central Kansas communities.
- Tour Kansas The Abilene CVB participated in Coop Advertising opportunities through Tour Kansas.
- Kansas Association of Public Information Officers The Abilene CVB participated in their annual conference.
- Flint Hills Tourism Coalition The CVB maintains listings on the Coalition's website via TravelKS.com.



PROMOTION PARTNERSHIPS

Midwest Travel Network

The Midwest Travel Network continues to be a valuable resource in connecting us with travel writers. The CVB sponsored lanyards for their conference. While they canceled the in-person meeting, the sponsorship remains. The CVB director also presented during their virtual conference.

Community Support

The CVB wrote letters of support for Prospect Park Farm's Heritage Trust Fund Grant, Tossed n Sauced Pizza's HEAL Grant and Old Abilene Town's Attraction Development Grant applications.

The CVB also wrote and recruited letters of support for the City of Abilene's 14th Street Kansas Department of Transportation \$1 million grant.

In addition, the CVB nominated Rod Riffel for the Community Foundation of Dickinson County's Volunteer of the Year Award and Rawhide Portable Corral for the Kansas Chamber's Coolest Thing Made in Kansas contest.

The CVB director also served on the Community Foundation of Dickinson County's Community Philanthropy Innovation Network (CPIN) working group and as Vice-Chair of Dickinson County Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities (CEO) program.







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 2021, these listings received 6,251 views and 2,406 clicks.

The CVB also coordinated 15 paid listings for the 2022 Kansas Travel Guide for Abilene businesses and attractions.





SPECIAL PROJECTS



Downtown Benches

Thanks to the unanimous approval from the Abilene City Commission, the CVB ordered 36 benches and 16 trash cans for downtown Abilene with unallocated grant funds from the Kansas Department of Commerce's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)-CV reimbursement. The City of Abilene's Public Works Department installed the benches in time for the return of the Central Kansas Free Fair.

Photo Library

The CVB hosted photographer David Mayes to update its photo library, emphasizing additional business photos, and Cowtown Christmas events. These photos are used on the CVB website, newsletter, social media and shared with news outlets and writers.

KSN TV Summer Road Trip Series

The CVB hosted KSN TV's Summer Road Trip Series at Little Ike Park and shared 100 Abilene t-shirts with attendees.





SPECIAL PROJECTS



National Travel & Tourism Week

In addition to a social media campaign NTTW t-shirts for tourism partners and new red "open" signs for tourism attractions, the CVB coordinated a Cameo video with Kansas native, Logan Mize, to give an Abilene shoutout during National Travel & Tourism Week.

Maps

The CVB created maps of murals, shopping opportunities, and Parks and Recreation Facilities in Abilene. These maps are available online at AbileneKansas.org/maps.

Hosted Travel Writers

The Abilene CVB hosted *Amy the Piper, Travel with Sara*, and *One Delightful Life* travel writers in 2021. Their stories are shared on the CVB website at AbileneKansas.org/news, on social media, and included in the Abilene Tourism Advocate e-newsletter.



PROMOTION SPECIAL PROJECTS



Bulls Head Saloon Longhorn

The CVB raised \$12,980 from 79 donors to bid and return this special piece of history to Abilene. The Longhorn is on display at Old Abilene Town. Learn more about this project at AbileneKansas.org/longhorn.

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. Learn more about this project at AbileneKansas.org/flags.







SPECIAL PROJECTS



Shop Small First – Pink Friday Campaign

The CVB coordinated Abilene's first Pink Friday event, complete with a social media campaign, 3rd Street banner, t-shirts for participating businesses, and local and statewide publicity. Learn more about this event at AbileneKansas.org/pinkfriday.

Pink Friday encouraged shoppers to think local first. It encouraged them to support the businesses that support the community.

- Jamie Stroda, Aksent Boutique



SPECIAL PROJECTS



Cowtown Christmas

Thanks to the cooperation of Abilene tourism attractions, businesses, and organizations, the CVB assisted with marketing efforts for a rebranded Christmas event – Cowtown Christmas, which collectively marketed holiday activities during the first weekend in December. The CVB purchased a new 3rd Street Banner, coordinated a social media campaign, created videos, and partnered with Kansas Tourism and media outlets to promote the events. Learn more at AbileneKansas.org/Christmas.







GRANTS



Visitors Guide

The CVB received an \$8,489 Tourism Marketing Grant from Kansas Tourism and a \$5,000 grant from the Community Foundation of Dickinson County to complete this project.

Unrestricted

The CVB received a \$25,000 unrestricted grant from the Jeffcoat Foundation.

Community Development Building Grant

With support from the City of Abilene, the CVB received a Coronavirus Relief (CDBG-CV) \$132,000 grant from the Kansas Department of Commerce – Community Development Division. Through this program, 28 businesses received grants to assist with recovery efforts. The city received the full grant reimbursement from those distributions in 2021.



GRANTS



In 2021, the Community Foundation of Dickinson County's Community Philanthropy Innovators Network (CPIN) working group initiated efforts to expand outdoor reaction opportunities and revitalize downtown through new markets.

To further this effort, the CVB wrote a successful \$35,568 grant to the Sunflower Foundation for the Abilene & Smoky Valley Railroad's Iron Horse (Mary Jane Oard) Trail Phase 1 project. An additional \$49,821.60 grant to the Kansas Department of Wildlife & Parks is pending review.

In addition, the CVB assisted the Central Kansas Free Fair board with obtaining \$10,000 in special funding from the Dickinson County Commission to provide air conditioning for the Heart of America Greyhound Gathering and Christian Motorcyclists Association events which were temporarily relocated to the National Guard Armory.







AWARDS





The Abilene CVB received two Travel Industry Association of Kansas (TIAK) marketing awards at the Kansas Tourism Conference.

- Best Visitors Guide in the Medium Community Marketing Budget Category
- Best Event Marketing (Eisenhower Marathon) in the Medium Community Marketing Budget Category



VISITATION

Travel Information Center (TIC)

The Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau maintains a state-designated travel information center to serve visitors. Due to COVID-19 induced budget constraints and Dickinson County temporarily occupying the Civic Center and Visitors Center areas, the traditional Visitors Center was temporarily moved to the west end of the building.

In 2021, 542 people signed the guest book in the temporary Visitors Center.

The CVB also received SPARK funds from Dickinson County to install an outdoor digital kiosk. Visitors used the kiosk 687 times with an average of three screens per session and an average duration of 4 minutes and 47 seconds.

Abilene Civic Center

The Abilene CVB is also responsible for Civic Center rentals and maintenance. In winter 2020, the CVB arranged for the interior to be repainted and Abilene photos were placed. The CVB also ordered new outdoor banners for the street light poles around the Civic Center.



Dickinson County is currently utilizing this space for offices during its Courthouse renovation.







VISITATION



In 2021, the Abilene CVB planned to host many new groups, however, those plans quickly changed. Fortunately, several groups still visited including the Christian Motorcyclist Association, Heart of America Greyhound Gathering, bank travel clubs, car 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: 5,704 (+3,109 from 2020)
- Dickinson County Heritage Center: 2,339 (+1,284 from 2020)
- Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum: n/a
- Great Plains Theatre: 4,641 (+2,041 from 2020)
- Greyhound Hall of Fame: 3,763 (+286 from 2020)
- Old Abilene Town: 2,875 (+375 from 2020)
- Seelye Mansion: 4,918 (+1,139 from 2020)



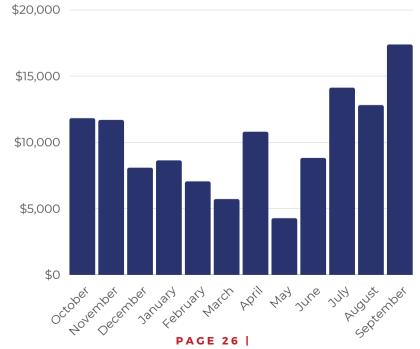
ECONOMIC IMPACT

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. For example, fourth-quarter collections are received in January of the following year.

Collections totaled \$137,770.76 with \$1,863.279.13 in sales in 2021. This is an 8.2% increase from 2020. In addition, the City of Abilene received \$13,974.59 in Sales Tax collections from rooms sold and Dickinson County received \$27,949.19.

2021 Transient Guest Tax Collections



ABILENE CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU ANNUAL REPORT

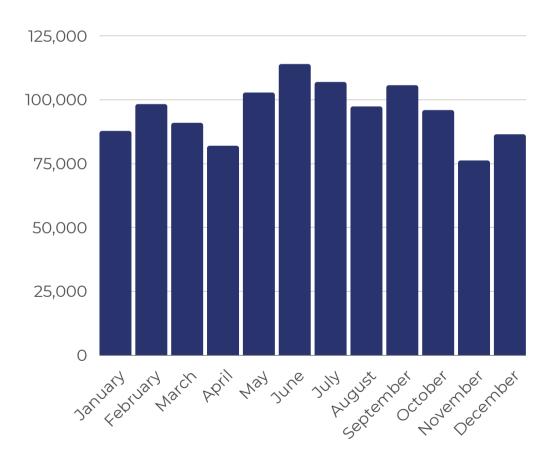




ECONOMIC IMPACT

Sales Tax

The City of Abilene sales tax rate is 0.75%. According to the Kansas Department of Revenue, 2021 compensating use sales tax collections totaled \$1,143,197.27 from sales at Abilene businesses. This is a 6.1% increase from 2020.





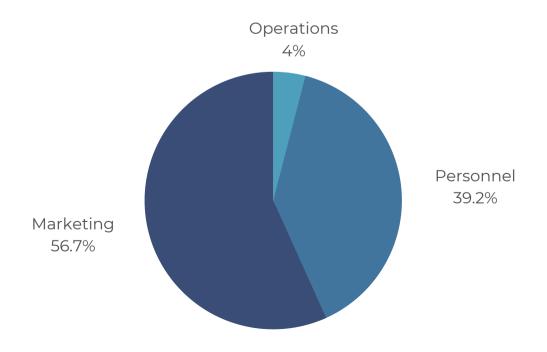
BUDGET

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 and breakfasts or Airbnbs. Additional revenue is generated from Civic Center rentals, gift shop sales, reimbursed advertising costs, and other initiatives.

- 2021 Cash Forward \$52,181.00
- Revenue \$238,796.79
- Expenses \$215,097.20
- End of Year Balance \$75,880.59

2021 Tourism Budget - Expenses

Note: Staff time spent creating marketing pieces inhouse is listed as personnel.





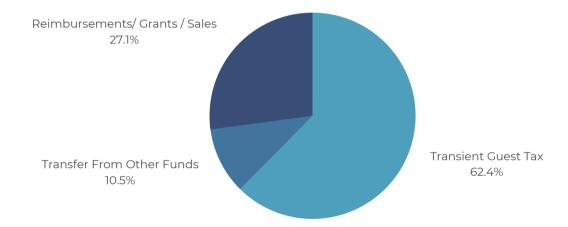




BUDGET

2021 Tourism Budget - Revenue

The CVB started 2021 with \$52,181.00 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 lodging occupancy returns to stable levels.

Abilene CVB Staff

- Julie Roller Weeks, director
- Vacant, tourism assistant
- Vacant, travel information center ambassadors

Abilene CVB Advisory Board

- Sarah Anderson, former Old Abilene Town board member, Oktoberfest volunteer
- Mukul Ghosh Hajra, Holiday Inn Express
- Samantha Kenner, *Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum*
- Kim McDowell, former Office Manager, Great Plains Theatre
- Kimmy Phillips, Last Chance Graphics
- 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

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