



Tourism Advisory Council Meeting
Thursday, October 23, 2025 | 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM
Virtual Google Link | Meeting Minutes

TAC Members Present: César Chávez, Heidi Hansen, Jerry Harper, Lonnie Lillie, Chad Makovsky, Michael Searle

TAC Members Absent: Mila Besich, Caleb Blaschke, Jose Felipe Garcia, Terry Gorton, Phil Lovas, Daniel Ruiz II, Cal Sheehy, Robert Uribe, David Wade

AOT Staff Present: Alix Skelpsa Ridgway, Kiva Couchon, Tyler Lopez, Tina Wilson

Welcome, Announcement and Call to Order - Alix Skelpsa Ridgway, Interim Director

Alix Skelpsa Ridgway welcomed council members, guests and staff and called for a brief introduction by meeting attendees.

Presentation of the 2024 International Data & Economic Indicators - Alix Skelpsa Ridgway, Interim Director

Alix Skelpsa Ridgway shared the 2024 International Data & Economic Indicators presentation that provided an update on Arizona's tourism performance and future strategies. The presentation can be viewed [HERE](#). Key takeaways include:

AOT Updates - Alix Skelpsa Ridgway, Interim Director

Alix Skelpsa Ridgway highlighted Arizona Office of Tourism program successes and industry strategic planning insights.

- ❖ New Travel Campaign: "Alive with Color" launched domestically in October and internationally in November; It highlights Arizona's diverse landscapes and aims to buck old stereotypes
- ❖ International Marketing Campaign: Going live in November in six countries
- ❖ Co-op Marketing Program: 46 participants this year, including the highest number of tribal participants ever
- ❖ Sports Marketing: AOT is increasing support for sports events, with "Team Arizona" attending trade shows and partnering with events like the Cactus League, Fiesta Bowl, Arizona Bowl, and Women's Final Four
- ❖ Route 66 Centennial Celebrations: Big plans and a separate campaign are underway, especially important for international markets
- ❖ Trade and Media Teams: Actively participating in international and domestic trade missions, with upcoming trips to Brain USA Travel Week UK, Mexico, Taiwan, Canada, Germany (ITB), Go West, and IPW
- ❖ Industry Strategic Plan: A new plan is being developed with industry stakeholders. Five strategy meetings held to date. The goal is a plan "for the industry by the industry"
- ❖ Public Awareness Campaign: An organic public awareness campaign is planned to highlight the value of tourism and hospitality to Arizona residents and industry professionals

- ❖ Social Media Team: Expanded with a dedicated social media director and a full-time content creator to produce videos and stills for agency and community use

Good of the Order - Council Members and AOT Staff

- ❖ Heidi Hansen requested the presentation slides with additional notes, Flagstaff-specific ads from the new campaign, and Coconino County lodging and short-term rental data
- ❖ Heidi Hansen inquired about the shift from targeted cities to a national marketing strategy, and Alix Skelpsa Ridgway offered to have Jamie (marketing director) provide more details
- ❖ Lonnie Lillie asked about AOT's campaign strategy for the Canadian market, noting a significant drop in Canadian visitors at his local visitor center
- ❖ Alix Skelpsa Ridgway shared that AOT is maintaining funding for the Canadian market to gain market share while other states pull back; the strategy targets millennials and gen z, as boomers and older Canadians are traveling less to the US
- ❖ Chad Makovsky shared September numbers for Canadian carriers, showing WestJet down 2% year-over-year and Air Canada down 15% year-to-date, confirming a "pinch" in the market
- ❖ Alix Skelpsa Ridgway mentioned that AOT is looking into purchasing an OAG data platform to provide more up-to-date data on air carrier and passengers
- ❖ Alix Skelpsa Ridgway mentioned that AOT requested \$5 million from the governor's office for international support (marketing, flight support, FTEs) and will keep the group posted on its progress
- ❖ Jerry Harper asked about AOT's role in attracting major events versus supporting already secured events. Alix Skelpsa Ridgway shared that Jenna Lehman leads AOT's sports trade and marketing, and AOT collaborates and provides funding support where possible, such as for Mesa's MLS Fest event
- ❖ Lonnie Lillie and Heidi Hansen offered support for Alix Skelpsa Ridgway's permanent directorship
- ❖ Tyler Lopez confirmed that the governor's budget will be released on January 16, 2026

Next Steps - Alix Skelpsa Ridgway, Interim Director

- ❖ The 2024 International Data & Economic Indicators Presentation along with the TAC meeting minutes will be posted on tourism.az.gov
- ❖ Alix Skelpsa Ridgway will coordinate with Jamie Dear to provide a write-up explaining the national marketing strategy
- ❖ AOT will explore ways to track specific Canadian drive markets
- ❖ AOT will update the Advisory Council on the OAG data platform acquisition and the progress of the international support request
- ❖ The Tourism Advisory Council Members will be invited to the Industry Strategic Planning draft unveiling meeting in December 2025

Closing - Alix Skelpsa Ridgway, Interim Director

Alix Skelpsa Ridgway extended a gracious thank you to the Advisory Council Members for their service.

Next meeting date to be determined.

Meeting adjourned at 1:00 pm