

Monday, August 18th

4-6pm

President's Reception - Big Sky Atrium

Tuesday, August 19th - All Sessions Garden City Parlor AB

8:30am



Welcome

Bridger Mahlum, General Manager, BroadbandMT

8:45am

NTCA: Our Voice in D.C.

Mike Romano serves as the Executive Vice President of NTCA, overseeing the association's public policy, government affairs, and business development initiatives, the educational and community-focused mission of the Foundation for Rural Service, and several areas of internal operations including member engagement and information technology. Before joining NTCA, Mike served as the founding vice president and general counsel of GTT Communications, held a variety of positions with AOL and Level 3, and practiced in the telecom, media, and technology group of a Washington DC law firm.



9:30am



Federal Issues Update

Derrick Owens is Senior VP of Government & Industry Affairs at WTA – Advocates for Rural Broadband. He leads its Washington, DC office and manages interactions with Congress and the federal agencies, including the FCC. As the association's lead spokesperson, he directs policy initiatives and industry outreach. Derrick also serves as the staff director for WTA's public policy committee, shaping positions on federal legislation and regulations affecting rural telecom companies. He has served in senior roles at NTIA and on Capitol Hill working for his hometown Congressman. Derrick has a Master's Degree in Public Policy from the University of Maryland and a Bachelor's Degree in Political Science from Allegheny College. Derrick is actively involved on several boards of directors and is honored to be a member of his college and high school athletic halls of fame.

10:15am

Break

10:30am

Economic Outlook

Patrick Barkey has recently stepped down after 16 years as Director of the Bureau of Business and Economic Research (BBER) at the University of Montana. He continues to serve as Director of Research at BBER. He has been involved with economic forecasting and policy research for more than 40 years, in both the private and public sectors. He has authored studies on energy development, tourism, labor markets, tax policy and international trade. He is the Past President of the Association for University Business and Economic Research (AUBER), a national organization of regional business research centers founded in 1947.

The BBER is the preeminent business research center in Montana. Housed in the College of Business, for 46 years it has produced the Montana Economic Outlook Seminar, a half-day program devoted to the national, state and local economic outlook that now is held in 10 cities across Montana in February. Barkey also hosts the Montana Economic Minute, a daily podcast on economic issues that has aired on radio stations throughout the state since 2008. He holds a B.A. and a Ph.D. in economics from the University of Michigan.



11:15am

TBD

12:00pm

Annual Awards Luncheon – Garden City Parlor CD

1:20pm

A Word from Senator Daines' Office *remote*

Joshua Sizemore serves as an advisor to Senator Daines. Born and raised in Billings, Montana, his legislative portfolio includes Tech/Telecommunications, Commerce, Science, Energy and Natural Resources.

1:40pm







USDA Update



Peter Hawkes – Hailey, ID, USDA-RD-RUS-Telecom; General Field Representative for: Montana and Idaho (+/- WY&UT)

Peter was born and raised in Seattle, WA, graduated from Central WA University with his B.S. in Construction Management. He is a tenured Telecommunications Executive and Professional for 30 years that includes business consulting as well. Notably he has architected, launched and operated very large programs for AT&T, Apple and a host of other wired and wireless companies across the country including closing many strategic acquisitions.

In his 5th year, Peter joined RUS in July 2021, and represents Rural Utility Service Telcom borrowers, grant awardees and customers across all of Montana, Idaho including portions of Wyoming & Utah who benefit from Public-Private partnerships.

"I think it's amazing the possibilities RUS program funding can bring to rural areas in support of their development and growth." Peter is honored to be a part of RUS-Telecom's mission to enhance the quality of life and improve economic opportunity in Rural & Tribal communities in Montana and the other areas he serves.

2:00pm	<p>Montana Broadband Office (MBO) Update</p> <p>Misty Ann Giles currently serves as the Director of the Montana Department of Administration and state's Chief Operating Officer (COO) under Governor Greg Gianforte. She also leads the state's ConnectMT broadband program. She was appointed in December 2020 and confirmed during the 2021 and 2025 legislative sessions.</p> <p>In her role as Director and COO, Giles oversees government operations that provide business services to other state agencies. In addition, her purview includes broadband, information technology, the regulation of banks and other state financial institutions and operates to provide a wide range of additional services to citizens, businesses, and other government entities. While serving as Director, Giles has worked to streamline agency operations and continues to lead renewed efforts to bring better and more efficient services to Montanans. She also serves on the Executive Committee as an At-Large Director for the National Association of State Chief Administrators (NASCA).</p> <p>Giles has over a decade of state and federal government experience. Before assuming the COO and Director role, Giles served as the Chief of Staff for Rural Development at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Before joining USDA, Giles served in leadership roles under former governors Sonny Perdue and Nathan Deal in the state of Georgia.</p> <p>Giles holds a Juris Doctorate from the University of San Diego and a Master of Arts and Bachelor of Arts from Georgia Southern University.</p> 
2:45pm	Break
3:00pm	<p>Demystifying Compensation: Leveraging every employee conversation to maximize recruitment, retention, loyalty, and performance. In today's competitive employer landscape, compensation packages are multifaceted and often complex. Set the stage for being an employer of choice and leverage those recruitment compensation conversations, and all employee conversations, on the investment you make in employees with wages and benefits. With existing employees often shopping wage and opportunities, this presentation will also explore the importance of investing in your workplace culture and living it out loud in your community at large.</p> <p>Jane Wigen is the Director of Member Relations at NTCA. She joined NTCA as a member relations manager in 2008 and serves the states of Alaska, Hawaii, Montana and North Dakota. She serves as the primary facilitator and educator for the comprehensive retirement and financial wellness seminars offered through NTCA Benefits.</p> 
3:45pm	<p>"Cyber For Real": What REALLY happens in the event of a claim?</p>  <p>Peter Elliot, President & CEO of Telcom Insurance Group, has 38 years in the insurance industry; 25 with TIG. He has worked for mutual, stock, and captive insurance companies and has authored all or parts of 15 different insurance policy types. He has been a certified CPCU since 1990, and is a frequent speaker at various telecom trade events on risk and other insurance matters.</p> <p>Moderator: Sean Benefiel, Account Executive at Telecom Insurance Group, has been with TIG since 2022, and has been licensed since 2020. He enjoys getting to know his clients and their organizations in order to better understand their needs. Sean lives in Derby, KS with his wife, Kylee, along with their two dogs and one cat. He's a big Oklahoma Sooner/Dallas Cowboy fan and loves to travel to new places.</p> 
4:30pm	<p>Showcase Topics Discussion</p> <p>Bridger Mahlum and Charlotte Hilton; GM and COO, BroadbandMT</p>
Wednesday, August 20th - All Sessions Garden City Parlor AB	
7:00am	Trustee Roundtable Discussion
8:30am	<p>AI on the Frontier: The Critical Role of Rural Broadband in Montana's Future</p> <p>AI is coming to rural Montana--and broadband providers are opening the gate. AI holds the promise to supercharge industries like education, healthcare, agriculture, and ranching, but without reliable, high-speed internet and data transfer, none of these tools can operate. Broadband companies are not just utilities--they will become key enablers of a smarter, more resilient rural economy.</p> <p>Erik E. Guzik, Ph.D. Assistant Clinical Professor of Management and Entrepreneurship University of Montana College of Business</p>
9:15am	<p>69th Legislature Recap</p>  <p>Mark Lambrecht is Chief Executive Officer of the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association. MECA provides safety, education, communications and government relations services to the 25 member-owned electric cooperatives providing safe, affordable and reliable electricity to more than 400,000 Montanans.</p> <p>Lambrecht was most recently MECA's Director of Government Relations. He has 35 years of experience in energy and natural resource policy, government and public affairs and organizational management. His previous positions include Assistant Director of National Conservation Lands and Community Partnerships for the federal Bureau of Land Management, Director of Government Affairs for the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Executive Director of the Treasure State Resource Industry Association, Regulatory Affairs Manager for PPL Montana and Legislative Assistant to former U.S. Senator Max Baucus.</p> <p>Mark earned a master's degree in resource conservation from the University of Montana College of Forestry and a bachelor's degree in political science from Gonzaga University.</p>

	<p>On May 1st, 2019 – Todd O’Hair officially took over as President and CEO of the Montana Chamber of Commerce. In this capacity, Todd represents over 2000 business members – representing every size, industry, and region in the state.</p> <p>A Montana native, Todd hails from Livingston where his family owns a multi-generational family ranch. Before being named President and CEO of the Montana Chamber, Todd was the Senior Manager of Government Affairs for a major coal mining company, Cloud Peak Energy. While at Cloud Peak, he served on the Montana Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors and was the chair of the board in 2016-17. Before Cloud Peak Energy, Todd worked in Gov. Judy Martz’s office for four years. He also served as the Natural Resources Policy Advisor for Congressman Rick Hill in Washington DC and later as State Director.</p> <p>Moderator: Bridger Mahlum</p> 
10:00am	Break
10:15am	 <p>Montana Department of Transportation Updates</p> <p>Chris Dorrington now serves as the Director of the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), appointed by Governor Gianforte in June 2024. To fulfill MDT’s mission, Director Dorrington is focused on organizational excellence, clear and consistent communication, and accountability. He is actively advancing efficiencies and effectiveness of MDT programs while honoring our most valuable assets – our people. In July 2022 Governor Gianforte also appointed Director Dorrington as the Chair of the Housing Task Force, with an objective of quickly researching and then proposing improvements that both the Montana Legislature, Executive branch and locals could implement to address Montana’s housing crisis. Prior to his current role as MDT Director, he led the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) as Director for 3.5 years, and the Air, Energy, and Mining Division at DEQ for 4.5 years prior. He started his state career at MDT, working for 10.5 years in the Planning Division. In total, Director Dorrington has nearly 19 years in leadership with the state and six in private industry. He earned his Bachelor’s of Science in mechanical engineering from Gonzaga University, and a master’s degree in transportation policy, operations and logistics from George Mason University.</p>
11:00am	TBD
11:45am	Concluding Remarks and Rural Education Fund Drawing
Session descriptions & speaker bios available online: https://www.broadbandmt.com/annual-meeting	