

# NGWB Grant Final Report (FY24-25)

**Contract** #18-13-282 - NWGGA – Marketing

**Grant Amount** \$101,250.00

## Contact Information

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## Issue of Interest

The Nebraska Winery and Grape Growers Association (NWGGA) continues to address a core issue facing the Nebraska wine industry: lack of statewide and regional consumer awareness and promotion. While recognition of Nebraska's wine industry is growing, many Midwestern consumers are still unaware of the quality, availability, and tourism opportunities associated with Nebraska wineries.

NWGGA's marketing plan aimed to increase awareness, engagement, and demand through robust digital and print campaigns, consumer-focused programs like the Wine Passport, and targeted support of member marketing efforts.

## Approach to Problem

During the 2024–2025 grant cycle, NWGGA focused its marketing efforts on four strategic goals designed to elevate the visibility and impact of Nebraska wines:

### 1. Raise General Consumer Awareness:

A major emphasis was placed on promoting the Nebraska Wines brand through digital advertising, SEO, and social media, with a particular focus on the Nebraska Wine Passport program. The digital Passport was enhanced and promoted as a year-round tool to help consumers explore Nebraska wineries.

### 2. Maintain and Boost TOAST Nebraska Ticket Sales:

Targeted digital marketing campaigns helped maintain ticket sales in a declining market for both the 2024 Holiday TOAST Nebraska and the 2025 TOAST Nebraska wine festivals.

### 3. Increase Retail Demand:

NWGGA initiated retail market research and explored strategic partnerships with retailers like Wine, Beer & Spirits & Wall to Wall Wine to test promotions and identify new distribution opportunities.

### 4. Support Member Marketing Efforts:

Mini-grants were distributed to wineries for competition entries, wine writing, and booth upgrades to enhance visibility and increase sales.

To support these goals, NWGGA expanded its digital presence by nurturing the Nebraska Wine Fans email list and leveraging paid social media and SEO placements. Partnerships with community and statewide organizations such as Visit Omaha and the Nebraska Tourism Commission amplified reach, while collaborations with media outlets including KeTV, Nebraska Public Media, NRG Media, and the Omaha World-Herald boosted event and Passport program promotion. RAAM Marketing, a subsidiary of Advanced Association Management, led the execution of creative assets, advertising, moderation, and digital audience growth.

**Goals/Achievement of Goals**

**1. Raise General Consumer Awareness**

Since early March 2021, the RAAM marketing staff has fostered a consumer-focused email list called “Nebraska Wine Fans.” Email marketing is one of the highest-converting and lowest-cost marketing strategies for NWGGA. By building this list, the NWGGA is able to:

- Market directly to a highly specific and interested group of consumers
- Gain demographic information on what markets in Nebraska are converting
- Cross-reference and upload the list to optimize sponsored ad placements on social media
- Engage regularly (weekly) with target audience through Weekend at the Winery email

**List Growth**

February 2021	1,195
June 2021	6,157 (+415% from start)
June 2022	15,412 (+91.9% annual growth)
June 2023	20,338 (+31.9% annual growth)
June 2024	23,762 (+6.8% annual growth)
June 2025	27,729 (+16.7% annual growth)

**Lead Generation**

The emails are captured one of three ways:

- Digital passport enrollment (2,665 enrolled as of 6.6.25)
- Direct link sign ups on social media posts
- TOAST Ticket Purchases
- Onsite event booth QR Code
- Promotional Website Pop-Up
- Nebraska Tourism Website Ads for Nebraska Wine Fans List
- Passport rack cards & flyers sent to Convention & Visitors Bureaus and partners throughout the state

**Passport Engagement**

The highest converting lead generator is the Nebraska Wine Passport. By offering this free program in exchange for their email, NWGGA is capturing information from their target market – someone interested in wine and visiting Nebraska wineries – while simultaneously promoting traffic to the wineries. It is imperative to continue to be able to promote the passport specifically via the online platform through the summer and fall of 2025 when traffic is the highest. To date 2,665 consumers have enrolled in the digital passport program. Participants from 19 different states participate in the digital passport program, further contributing to Nebraska Wines reach throughout the country. This year Passport rack cards and flyers with QR Codes we also sent out to member wineries, NE tourism brochure locations, and locally owned Nebraska small businesses and boutiques that have promoted the paper passport in the past.

2022 Printed Passport as of 12.31.2022	2022 NE Reds Digital Passport as of 12.31.2022	2023 Printed Passport as of 12.31.2023
676 Paper Passports returned	Digital Pass soft launch in Dec. 2022	397 Paper Passports returned
Completed ALL Stops: 54	Passport Signups: 194	Completed ALL Stops: 17
Completed 15-31 Stops: 231	Check-Ins: 259	Completed 30-33 Stops: 20
Completed 10-14 Stops: 386	Point Redemptions: 28	Completed 15-29 Stops: 141
Under 10 Stops: 5		Completed 10-14 Stops: 219

2023 Digital Passport as of 12.31.23	2024 Digital Passport as of 12.31.2024	2025 Digital Passport as of 6.6.25
Passport Signups: 2,129	Passport Signups: 3,200	Passport Signups: 2,665
Check-Ins: 10,306	Check-Ins: 11,025	Currently Active: 1,012
Completed 30+ Stops: 5	Completed 30+ Stops: 33	Check-Ins: 3,164
Completed 15-29 Stops: 119	Completed 15-29 Stops: 208	Completed 30+ Stops: 0
Completed 10-14 Stops: 91	Completed 10-14 Stops: 432	Completed 15-29 Stops: 21
Under 10 Stops: 895	Under 10 Stops: 1,232	Completed 10-14 Stops: 37
		Under 10 Stops: 955

## Email Engagement Rates

The data collected from the previous year is leveraged to convert new subscribers for the following year (i.e. 2024 data is leveraged to collect 2025 data). As we leverage more and more fine-tuned lists on social media ad buys, we find that we collect better quality subscribers. As email engagement rates seem to fall, we have engaged SMS direct companies for text marketing but need to ensure alcohol marketing compliance prior to engaging.

	Open Rate
Current Full List Average	31.8%
2019 Initial List	27.1%
2020 NE Wine Fans Subscriber List	30.5%
2021 NE Wine Fans Subscriber List	31.5%
2022 NE Wine Fans Subscriber List	42.4%
2023 NE Wine Fans Subscriber List	34.0%
2024 NE Wine Fans Subscriber List	32.0%
2025 NE Wine Fans Subscriber List	31.2%

\*The average email open rate for all industries as analyzed by Mailchimp's 2024 report is 21.33%. Segmented audiences may impact based on TOAST emails.

## SEO Optimization

Ad placement funds were also used for SEO optimization on Google Ads. A direct ad was placed to combat confusion due to the toastnebraska.com domain redirect.

	Impressions	Clicks	Conversion
2022 TOAST Nebraska Ad	13,171	1,230	9.3%
2023 TOAST Nebraska Ad	22,400	2,630	11.7%
2024 TOAST Nebraska Ad	9,900	3,890	39%
2025 TOAST Nebraska Ad	48,500	2,750	5.7%

## Social Media Marketing

Social media remains a valuable channel for promoting the Nebraska wine industry. A portion of the grant-funded advertising budget was used for targeted Facebook ads. Nebraska Wines manages two Facebook pages, Nebraska Wines and TOAST Nebraska Wine Festival—to engage with different audiences. Throughout the year, the Nebraska Wine Fans email list is periodically uploaded to Facebook to build and maintain lookalike audiences. This strategy allows Facebook to exclude existing subscribers from ad targeting (reducing wasted ad spending) while reaching new users with similar interests. This approach has proven highly effective in growing the audience. Additionally, ongoing audience monitoring and engagement analysis allow NWGGA to adjust tactics in real time, ensuring the most efficient use of marketing dollars.

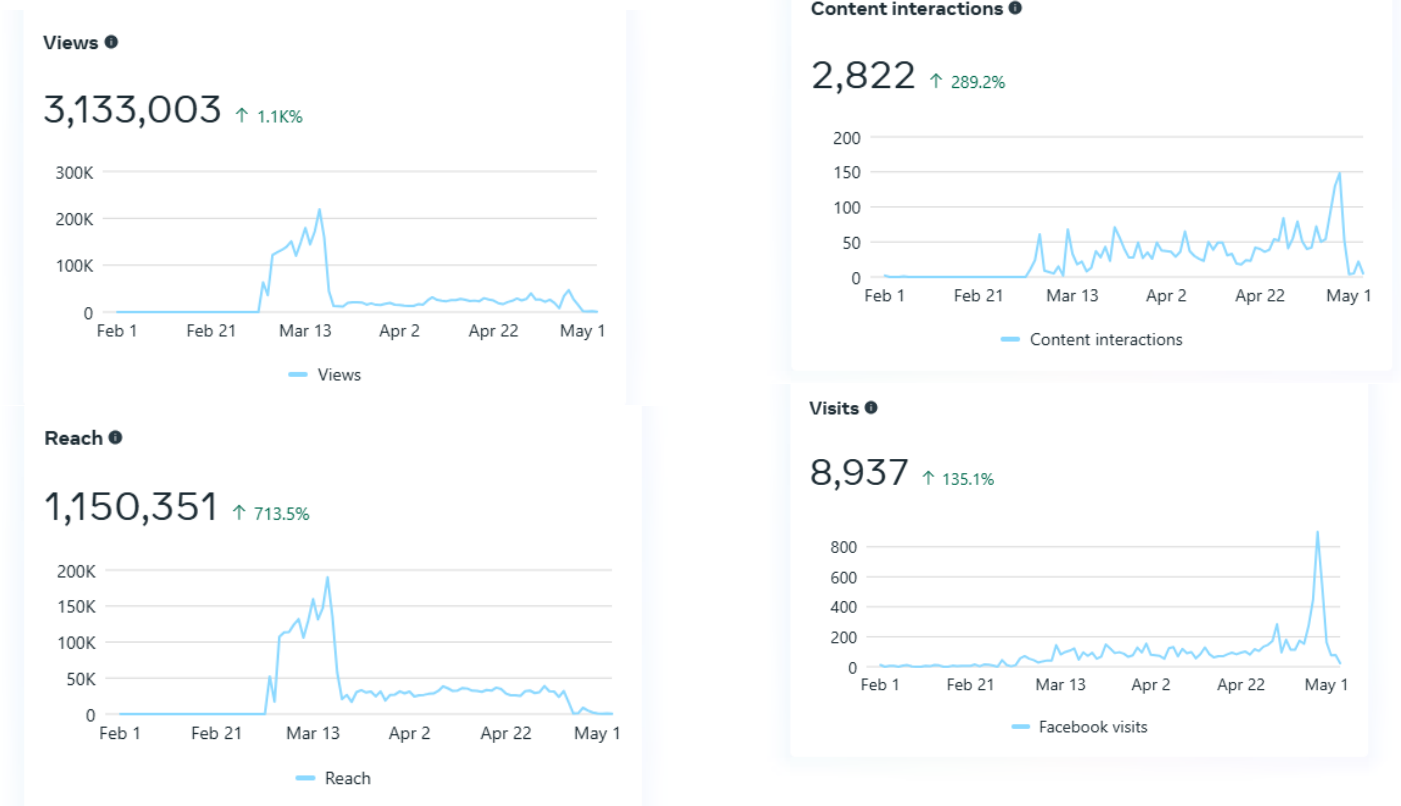
## Current Demographics

The existing audiences on both Facebook and Mailchimp for Nebraska Wine Fans reflect the reach and engagement of our targeted marketing efforts. Our consumer outreach strategy includes:

- Adults aged 21 to 65+
- Lookalike audiences based on current subscribers
- Individuals with interests in wine, beer, or other alcoholic beverages (as applicable)
- Individuals interested in concerts, festivals, bars, and tailgating (as applicable)
- Geographically located in:
  - Nebraska
  - Surrounding states

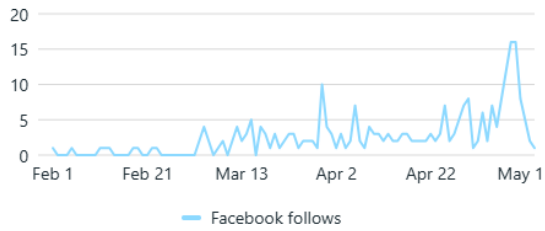
This broad yet targeted approach helps ensure we are effectively engaging potential consumers who are most likely to be interested in Nebraska wines and related events.

## TOAST Nebraska Wine Festival FB Page Analytics (Feb.1 – May 14, 2025)



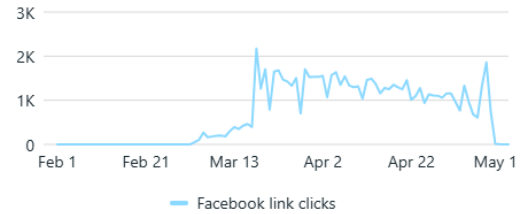
#### Follows ●

261 ↑ 166.3%



#### Link clicks ●

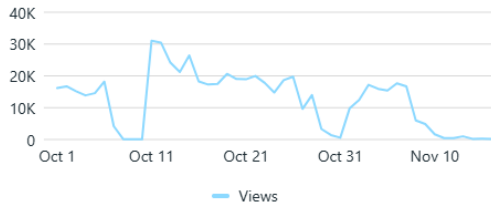
73,005 ↑ 1.6K%



### TOAST Nebraska Wine Festival FB Analytics – Holiday (Oct. 1 – Nov.16, 2024)

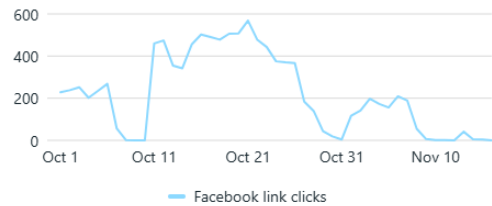
#### Views ●

583,951



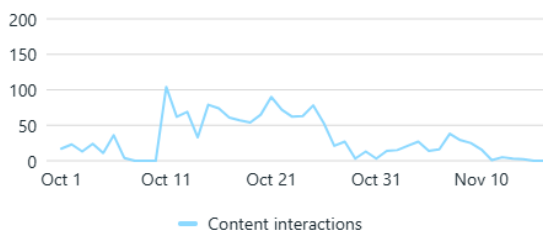
#### Link clicks ●

10,336 ↑ 51.1%



#### Content interactions ●

1,497 ↑ 116.3%



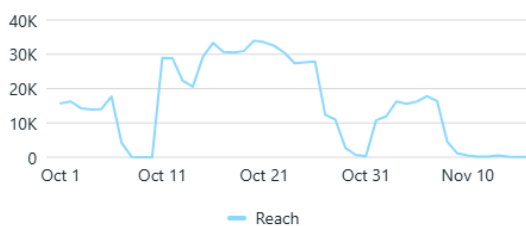
#### Visits ●

5,015 ↑ 184.6%



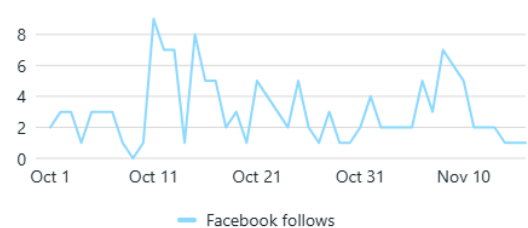
#### Reach ●

209,672 ↑ 66.5%



#### Follows ●

142 ↑ 129%



## **2. Maintain and Boost TOAST Nebraska Ticket Sales**

TOAST Nebraska continues to serve as a premier statewide platform for promoting Nebraska wines, introducing thousands of consumers each year to local wineries. While overall ticket sales have either remained steady or slightly declined compared to peak years, the event has maintained strong consumer interest through strategic enhancements.

Each participating winery benefits from the event through increased on-site bottle sales, valuable face-to-face customer engagement, and expanded brand visibility. These outcomes affirm TOAST's role in driving long-term consumer interest in Nebraska wines, even as broader market trends and competing events continue to evolve.

## **3. Increase Retail Demand**

During the 2024–2025 grant cycle, NWGGA advanced its retail research initiative and further developed the "Find Your Taste" program to support the availability and visibility of Nebraska wines in retail settings across the state. This initiative focused on understanding sales dynamics and fostering collaborations with key retailers, including Wine, Beer & Spirits and Wall to Wall Wine and Spirits.

As part of this effort, NWGGA organized in-store tasting activation events where participating wineries provided samples directly to consumers. These events were strategically scheduled prior to major festivals; Holiday TOAST in Grand Island and Spring TOAST in Omaha and Papillion and were hosted at Wine, Beer & Spirits and Wall to Wall Wine locations.

The 2024–2025 activations marked the program's pilot year and were considered an initial success. Retailers, especially Wall to Wall Wine, responded positively and expressed interest in continuing the partnership for future events. While the activations were well-received, NWGGA sees opportunity for growth in winery participation for the 2025–2026 cycle, which would further amplify the impact and reach of the program.

## **4. Support Member Marketing Efforts**

**Wine Competition Reimbursements** – In February 2024, NWGGA launched wine competition reimbursements of up to \$250 for wineries wishing to participate in local or national wine competitions. The goal of this project was to encourage wineries to enter competitions, thereby enhancing their visibility and recognition within the Nebraska wine industry. Due to continued and increasing winery participation, the NWGGA Board has designated this program as evergreen, meaning it will remain available on an ongoing basis as long as funding allows.

**Wine Writer Reimbursements** – Also launched in February 2024, this program offered reimbursements of up to \$500 for wineries that hire a wine writer to promote their business. The goal was to elevate the profile of Nebraska wineries and cultivate broader awareness and appreciation for their products. This program has not been utilized as much as the Wine Competition & Toast Booth programs but has provided value to participants.

**TOAST Booth Mini-Grant** – This initiative, introduced in February 2024, provided financial assistance to wineries to upgrade their booth infrastructure and improve staff training. Enhancements may include improved booth layout and design for higher event traffic, as well as training to boost wine club signups and bottle sales. The goal was to elevate the TOAST Nebraska visitor experience and improve winery engagement and sales.

Due to increasing winery participation, the NWGGA Board has designated this program as evergreen, meaning it will remain available on an ongoing basis as long as funding allows.

## Results, Conclusions, Lessons Learned

Overall, NWGGA continues to monitor marketing strategies and adjust as needed to allow for the highest reach and largest impact for our social media and email messaging, allowing us to stretch marketing dollars further while remaining effective.

We currently are managing the email marketing subscriber list of 20,900+ and a Nebraska Wines Facebook community page of approximately 9k followers and a TOAST Nebraska Facebook community page of approximately 3.7k followers.

## Progress Achieved According to Outcome Measures

Overall, the 2024–2025 promotional efforts were a success, and both the NWGGA Marketing Committee and the AAM/RAAM Marketing team are very pleased with the results. The launch and testing of several new initiatives—including the 2025 Digital Passport, Wine Competition Program, Wine Writer Program, TOAST Booth Program, and Find Your Taste Program—have laid a strong foundation for continued growth. NWGGA is enthusiastic about the momentum these efforts have created and the new opportunities they present for promoting the Nebraska wine industry in the years ahead.

## Financials

Marketing	Description
<b>\$101,250.00</b>	<b>Grant Amount</b>
\$10,510.24	Competition/OWH/KETV – Inv. #421
\$15,080.21	Booth Upgrade/RAAM Mktg/Competition Reimbursement – Inv. #425
\$30,423.48	RAAM Marketing/Research Project – Inv. #433
\$5,404.14	Booth Upgrade; Wine Writer Grant – Inv. #434
<b>NDA Pending Payments</b>	
\$13,798.27	T-shirts & Winery Competition – Inv. #439
\$10,537.67	Winery Comp, Toast Booth Reimbursement, T-shirts – Inv. #441
<b>\$101,957.74</b>	<b>Total Submitted for reimbursement as of 6.5.25</b>
-707.74	Submitted Expenses Left Over After Grant Funds