



Visit Sebring/Highlands County TDC Sports Facility Improvement Grant Program

Guidelines

This program is administered by the Highlands County Tourist Development Council (TDC), which is an advisory council to the Highlands County Board of County Commissioners established pursuant to Florida Statutes, Section 125.0104. The TDC is charged with overseeing the funds generated through the Highlands County Tourist Development Tax.

Approved by TDC on October 31, 2024.

Approved by the Highlands County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) on November 7, 2024 through Resolution No.: 24-25-016

Since 2020, the Highlands County TDC has been committed to fostering sports and recreational activities within Highlands County. Recognizing the significant role sports play in community and economic development, the TDC continually seeks innovative ways to enhance local sports infrastructure and attract sports tourism-driving events. While the goal is to help venues located in Highlands County conduct long-term planning and make improvements to support sports tourism, the program incidentally will help provide improved facilities and equipment for the citizens of Highlands County.

About the Sports Facility Improvement Grant Program

The Sports Facility Improvement Grant Program is a part of the TDC's mission to enhance local sports facilities and support the development of sports infrastructure to increase tourism and community engagement.

The primary objective of this program is to assist in the development and improvement of existing sports facilities within Highlands County. The grant supports projects that enhance the capacity to host sporting events, thereby increasing the potential for economic impact within Highlands County through sports tourism.

The grant aims to provide financial assistance to organizations seeking to: 1) develop a strategic or long-term plan for their facility, and 2) improve or expand their sports facilities specifically to enable the hosting of more sports tourism events.

By providing financial assistance, the TDC can enhance local sports facilities, attract new sports tourism events, expand established sports tourism events and further promote Highlands County as a sporting destination, which stimulates economic activity in Highlands County.

Grants are awarded based on a comprehensive evaluation of the [Huddle Up Group's facility assessment](#), each facility's needs, the capacity to attract events that drive tourism and economic activity, and the potential impact on the community. By offering these grants, the TDC will not only improve the physical infrastructure, but also promote community engagement and support for the local economy.

Eligible applicants & grant process

Eligible applicants include non-profit organizations, for profit organizations, municipalities and/or other entities that manage sports facilities located in Highlands County.

Eligible facilities are those that could, with the appropriate enhancements, become “tournament friendly” or an “anchor facility” pursuant to the Highlands County Venue Inventory & Analysis included in [Huddle Up Group's Sports Tourism Facility Audit \(2023\) for Highlands County](#). Eligible facilities must also demonstrate a current tourism market for sport tourism events, which includes currently hosting at least one tourism-driving event in the past three years.

Eligible projects must first develop a strategic or long-term plan for the facility that includes tourism goals and objectives. The plan must demonstrate a clear benefit to the tourism community, such as the ability to attract new sports tourism events, increase participation in current sport tourism events or improve the overall quality of the facility for visitors to Highlands County.

The sports tourism facility grant process consists of two parts:

- 1) Strategic Plan Development - Applicants must first apply for and be granted TDC matching funds to develop a strategic or long-term plan for the existing sports facility. The grant will provide a seventy-five percent (75%), up to \$22,500.00, reimbursable match for completion of the facility strategic plan.

The applicant/recipient shall execute an agreement in the form acceptable to the County Attorney. Final grant approval shall be subject to recommendation by the TDC and final approval of the agreement by the BOCC. Upon approval, the planning phase can begin.

TDC matching funds will be reimbursed to the applicant after the facility's strategic plan has been presented to and accepted by the TDC. Proof of payment must be submitted to TDC staff prior to reimbursement.

- 2) Facility Enhancements for Sports Tourism - After the planning phase is completed, the applicant must present the completed plan and recommendations to the TDC. The presentation must include study findings and recommendations regarding proposed facility improvements for attracting new sports tourism events and the economic impact of those events. The presentation must also include a facility management plan, marketing plan and proposed schedule for renovations along with a proposed budget. As part of the presentation, the applicant may request funding from the TDC for the facility enhancements.

If funding is approved, the applicant/recipient shall execute an agreement in the form acceptable to the County Attorney. Final grant approval shall be subject to recommendation by the TDC and approval of the agreement by the BOCC

Program Goal: Targeted sports tourism events must take place in Highlands County's tourism need months of April-December.