



Facility Rental Fee Grant Funding Program

Policy & 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

Approved by TDC on October 30, 2025

Approved by the Highlands County Board of County Commissioners on December 2, 2025, through Resolution No.: 25-26-029

POLICY:

OVERVIEW

Grant funding is available to organizations for Facility Rental Fees for Tourism-driving Events staged at Highlands County managed facilities that are designed to attract large numbers of visitors from outside Highlands County.

Consideration for grant funding is determined by the application's appeal to the TDC and can be awarded on a per-event basis, or on a multi-event basis, with the understanding that post-event performance measures from one event must be provided to the Highlands County Tourism office staff and deemed acceptable before funding will be provided for the next event.

Facility Rental Fee Grant Criteria

The following requirements apply to a grant for Facility Rental Fees for Tourism-driving Events staged on Highlands County managed properties any time between **April and December** that will increase out-of-county attendees each year:

1. Upon awarding of the grant, the Grantee must enter into a Highlands County Grant Agreement specific to the Event(s), which will incorporate the requirements stated herein.
2. Each Event must be at least a two-day event with at least one overnight (either night or early morning) component
3. The Event must have a minimum of one hundred (100) *actual* participants (the calculation of the required number of participants does not including travelling companions/spectators)
4. At least fifty one percent (51%) of Event participants must originate from outside of Highlands County. The Grantee must submit a list of all Event participants evidencing the fifty one percent (51%) requirement at least fifteen (15) days prior to the Event. Failure to provide this evidence will deem the Grantee in violation of this Grant Policy and will void any grant agreement between Highlands County and the Grantee.
5. This grant is not applicable to exclusive events such as weddings, family reunions, class reunions, birthday parties, etc.

6. Rental fees covered by this grant must originate from the Highlands County Parks and Facilities Department. Therefore, the Event venue must be a Highlands County owned or managed facility.
7. The *Visit Sebring* logo block must appear prominently in all advertising and publicity (written or electronic) for the Event.
8. Room nights reported for the Event must be from accommodations located within Highlands County.
9. Grant funding will be provided as an internal transfer of funds between the Highlands County Tourism department and the Highlands County Parks & Facilities department for the approved rental fee as provided in the Grant Application. The Event organizer will not directly receive any grant funding from Highlands County.
10. Additional rental fees and associated expenses incurred during or after the Event will be the responsibility of the Event organizer and will not be paid for with Highland County Tourism funds.
11. Any expenses incurred due to late cancellation or rescheduling of the Event (as provided for in the Highlands County Parks & Facility Department's Facility Use Agreement) are the responsibility of the Event organizer and will not be paid by Highlands County.
12. To be eligible for future event funding, the Grantee must submit completed post-Event reporting documentation as required by Highlands County Tourism staff not more than thirty (30) days after the Event concludes.
13. The required post-Event reporting documentation includes, but may not be limited to a written report and signed/verified Room Block Report(s)/Room Night Certification Form(s), reflecting the actual room nights generated in comparison to the initial room night guarantee indicated in the Grant Application submitted by the Grantee. It is the responsibility of the Grantee to provide proof of room nights generated by the Event; this is not the responsibility of Highlands County Tourism staff. Highlands County Tourism staff may confirm accuracy of the Room Night Verification Form at staff discretion. Any funds granted to Grantee will be subject to audit by the Highlands County Clerk of the Court – Internal Auditor or other representative the County may designate.
14. Failure to timely submit completed Room Block Report (s)/Room Night Certification Form(s) will result in disqualification for future financial support from Highlands County Tourism.
15. Prior to the Event, Grantee must provide to Highlands County Certificates of Insurance naming "Highlands County" as an additional insured for each policy listed below. The term of coverage must include not only all days of the Event, but set up days and take down days, as well. Required insurance coverages and amounts include but may not be limited to:
 - a. \$1,000,000 General Liability each occurrence
 - b. \$1,000,000 Automobile Liability (Combined Single Limit)
 - c. Workers Compensation with statutorily required limits. The policy must include Employer Liability coverage with limits not less than \$1,000,000 each occurrence, \$1,000,000 each employee, and \$500,000 policy limit for disease.

A request to be exempt from the requirements of the insurance requirements listed above must be submitted with the grant application. The request for exemption must include a detailed explanation justifying the request, and will be reviewed by Highlands County on a case by case basis.

16. Highlands County reserves the right to lend assistance or administer approved grant funds in the form of advertising, public relations, promotions or marketing programs directly or through an outside vendor on behalf of the Grantee.
17. Recognition of the *Visit Sebring* brand must be included where appropriate on all marketing materials for the Event, on the Grantee's website, and referred to in public relations activities.
18. Upon award of the grant, the Grantee must provide Highlands County with at least four (4) media passes for use by Highlands County Tourism staff to attend and cover the Event for the Highlands County Tourism's marketing and public relations purposes.
19. The Grantee is to have only one designated contact ("Designee") for the duration of the grant process. Designee is responsible for submitting all required documents, including the Facility Use Agreement provided by the Highlands County Parks & Facilities department and any follow up paperwork needed prior to the Event. Additionally, Designee will be responsible for executing the Highlands County Grant Agreement and providing a W-9 for the Grantee. Should the Designee change at any point during the grant process, written notification to the Highlands County Tourism office is required. Failure to provide notification will adversely affect funding.
20. Grant funds will be released only to the Highlands County Parks & Facilities department up to an amount approved by the TDC. Any additional expenses incurred before, during or after the event beyond what the TDC approves is the responsibility of the Grantee. If the fee to rent the facility increases after the Grant Application is approved, but before the Event, Highlands County will only pay the amount previously approved by the TDC; any overage is the responsibility of the Grantee and not that of Highlands County. If the fee to rent the facility decreases after the Grant Application is approved, but before the Event, Highlands County will only pay the required amount and any additional funding that was previously approved for the grant will be forfeited by Grantee.
21. After the awarding of the grant, any changes to the details of the Event (date, time, name of event, etc.) must be approved in writing by Highlands County Tourism. A request to change the date of the Event must be submitted to the Highlands County Tourism office ninety (90) days prior to the current approved date or the proposed new date (whichever is first). Highlands County Tourism staff is authorized to decide whether or not to approve one (1) date change for the Event. Any additional date change will require a vote by the TDC. All date changes will require an Amendment to the Grant Agreement to reflect the new date.
22. By submission of the Grant Application, the Grantee grants Highlands County and all of its employees, officers, contractors, subcontractors, volunteers, and agents (collectively referred to in this paragraph as "Highlands County representatives"), the right to use and reproduce any and all photographs, digital images, videos or recordings made at or made in relation to the Event, including those of Grantee's employees, volunteers, invitees, and those that contain Grantee's name, artwork,

logo or trademark. This include the right of Highlands County to copyright and/or use, reuse, publish, and republish photographic pictures, digital images, videos or recordings. Grantee affirms that it is the legal owner of any artwork, logo or trademark used by Grantee for the Event and acknowledges that Highlands County is relying on this representation and to the extent there is any claim by any third party against Highlands County or its representatives, Grantee will indemnify and hold Highlands County and its representatives harmless as to any such claim or damages arising from such claim. Grantee is required to grant Highlands County permission for the photographs, digital images, video, or recordings to be used in their entirety and/or edited versions as deemed necessary by Highlands County. Grantee accepts and understands those items will become the property of Highlands County and all rights to inspect or approve those items, as well as any royalties or other such compensation are waived by Grantee. Grantee further grants Highlands County permission to use the photographs, digital images, videotapes or recordings at any time in the future without provision of notice. Highlands County's use may include use for trade, commercial and advertising purposes, to promote the product or service of Highlands County, and to simply report happenings in Highlands County, and may include the use of items on Highlands County websites. Grantee shall inform its invitees of Highlands County's intentions and rights as described in this paragraph and Grantee shall obtain executed Release and Waiver forms regarding the same from all event participants.

FACILITY RENTAL FEE FUNDING REQUEST LEVELS

There is a maximum funding level of up to \$5,000 per event. The guaranteed number of room nights, attendees, or participants stated in the Grant Application will not guarantee the level of funding at which the grant for the Event may be approved. The final funding recommendation will be determined at the sole and absolute discretion of the TDC. The TDC has the right to place the application at a lower funding level without providing justification for its decision. All grant funding requests will be submitted as a recommendation by the TDC to the Highlands County Board of County Commissioners ("BCC") or its authorized designee, which makes the final decision. The Highlands County Administrator is authorized by the BCC to approve or disapprove grant funding requests that do not exceed \$50,000.00. Periodically, the Highlands County Administrator shall notify the BCC, by way of an informational agenda item, of any grant funding requests so approved. Approval of any such grant funding request will not be invalidated in the event notice of the approved grant funding request is not provided to the BCC.

Exceptions for Extraordinary Circumstances

The TDC may recommend increasing funding in extraordinary circumstances. These extraordinary circumstances will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis for consideration and recommendation to the BCC or its authorized designee, which makes the final decision.

ELIGIBLE USE OF FUNDS

The grant funds are used to promote tourism within Highlands County by covering facility rental fees for tourism-driving events that take place at Highlands County managed facilities and are designed to attract large numbers of visitors from outside Highlands County.

INELIGIBLE USE OF FUNDS

Any expenses other than approved facility rental fees for tourism-driving events that take place at Highlands County managed facilities.

GUIDELINES:

AUTHORIZATION HISTORY:

The **Highlands County Tourist Development Council (“TDC”)** was established by Highlands County Ordinance 95-4 and operates in accordance with Florida Statute 125.0104. The TDC is a nine-member advisory board to the Highlands County Board of County Commissioners (“BCC”). The TDC administers funds collected from the County’s 5% Tourist Development Tax (“TDT”) levied on occupied transient lodging sales, i.e. hotels/motels, campgrounds, and other short-term lodging rentals. The TDT Revenues are designated to promote Highlands County as a preferred visitor destination and assist with increasing tourism to the county in the non-peak tourism months.

Uses of TDT Revenues are restricted by Florida Statute and County Ordinance. Simply put, the TDC’s Grant Program is permitted only as a means of advertising and promoting tourism. **Therefore, events funded through this Grant Program must demonstrate the intent and effect of attracting visitors to Highlands County.**

Event Grant Funding Program

The Highlands County Tourism department (which operates under the brand name of “*Visit Sebring*”) leads and supports the Highlands County tourism industry by providing innovative marketing programs and promotions to ensure the continued growth of tourism in Highlands County. The purpose of the Facility Rental Fee Grant Program is to position Highlands County as a must-experience destination in Florida through quality events and initiatives. The TDC recognizes sport & special events as a major contributor to the overall tourism economy. In order to assist these sport and special tourism events, the TDC has guidelines for events seeking funding.

All applications for a Highlands County Facility Rental Fee Grant must be reviewed by Highlands County Tourism staff, and reviewed and approved by the TDC and the BCC or the BCC’s authorized designee. Grant funds cannot be administered until final approval by the BCC or its authorized designee has been granted and the Highlands County Grant Agreement has been fully executed.

GRANT APPLICATION COMPLETION:

Only completed Grant Applications will be presented to the TDC for approval. The following must be submitted to the Highlands County Tourism office to consider the Grant Application complete:

1. A **completely filled out** Grant Application, including the Grant Application checklist. “Not Applicable” or “N/A” should only be marked if truly applicable/necessary.
2. A W-9 for the organization applying for the grant.
3. A copy of the Florida Division of Corporations form for the organization applying for the grant
4. A copy of the Final Quote from the Highlands County Parks & Facilities Department for use of the facility(ies) for the Event(s) described in the Grant Application.

APPLICATION DEADLINE AND GUIDELINES:

- Grant Applications will be reviewed quarterly at scheduled TDC meetings. Please refer to **VisitSebring.com/about** for the current fiscal year's meeting schedule.
- Grant Applications are due no later than the Thursday THREE (3) WEEKS before the TDC meeting at which the Grant Application will be considered for approval by the TDC.
- If the above deadline falls on a holiday, then the Grant Applications are **due the last County business day prior to the posted deadline.**
- One Grant Application will be accepted per Event.
- **To be considered for the maximum award available, Grant Applications shall be submitted at a MINIMUM of six (6) months prior to the Event start date.** Exceptions can be made for tournaments that are noticed late by the host organization.

ALL FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS REQUIRE FINAL APPROVAL BY THE HIGHLANDS COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OR ITS AUTHORIZED DESIGNEE

The **ORIGINAL** application may be submitted via e-mail, USPS mail, or hand delivery to:

Highlands County Tourist Development Council (TDC)
Attn: Reagan Fultz
501 S. Commerce Ave.
Sebring, FL 33870
RFultz@highlandsfl.gov
(863) 402-6909

ACCOUNTABILITY:

- If the Applicant is awarded the Grant, within thirty (30) days after the completion of the Event, or before the next approved event for which grant funding was approved, (whichever comes first), the Applicant must submit the following to the Highlands County Tourism office:
 - A fully completed Post Event Report
 - Room Night Verification Documentation reporting all room nights generated by the Event. This includes all staff, competitors, volunteers, spectators, officials, etc. that stayed in paid accommodations. When reviewing, Highlands County Tourism staff will use the higher results from the options of:
 - Room Night Verification Forms verified directly by a hotel, motel, or for Airbnb/VRBO's, organizers own survey supporting numbers for Airbnb/VRBO's; or
 - Visit Sebring Attendee Surveys (available online). **Only surveys completed within ten (10) days of the Event will be counted.**

- If the fully completed Post Event Report is not submitted in the required timeframe, or the Highlands County Tourism staff finds the Report to be significantly different from the representations made in the Grant Application without reasonable cause, the Grantee may be found disqualified for any future grant funding opportunities from the TDC Grant Funding Program.
- The Highlands County Tourism department will conduct audits to verify accuracy of attendance at the Event and room nights reported in the Post Event Report.
- Incomplete Post Event Reports will not be considered. A request for an extension of the 30-day deadline will require approval from the Chair of the Tourist Development Council.

ROOM NIGHT TRACKING:

In order to assess the impact of each Event on the Highlands County transient lodging industry, the TDC requires the tracking of the number of overnight visitors attending the Event.

The Grantee will have two options for tracking room nights:

1. Provide all Highlands County lodging partners where Event attendees may be staying with **Room Night Certification Forms**. All completed **Room Night Certification Forms** must be submitted to the Highlands County Tourism office at the conclusion of the Event and within the thirty (30) day deadline referenced above. All Room Night Certification Forms require a signature by an authorized representative of the lodging partner.
2. Provide Event attendees with the link to complete the online *Visit Sebring* Post-Event Survey. The Survey will also collect room night data from the Event attendees. **Survey responses will ONLY count towards the verified room nights if they are received within ten (10) days of the completion of the Event.**

It is recommended that the Grantee attempt to use both options above to increase the chances of successful capture of room night generation from the Event.

NOTE: For the purpose of calculating creditable room nights, only rooms subject to the Tourist Development Tax shall be included, i.e., rooms exempt from payment of tax or provided on a complimentary (free of charge) basis shall be excluded from the calculation.

Following the Event, Highlands County reserves the right to conduct an audit of information presented for each funded Event. All lodging accommodations listed in Post Event Reporting may be contacted to confirm the number of room nights generated by the Event. **PLEASE NOTE THAT ANY MISLEADING OR FALSE INFORMATION PRESENTED CAN AND WILL ADVERSELY AFFECT CURRENT AND FUTURE GRANT FUNDING AWARDS.** A failure by a Grantee to accurately track room nights and/or out-of-county visitors may prevent future Event grant funding.

CONCLUSION:

In order to provide a fair and equitable process of consideration of each grant applicant, Applicants are encouraged to not contact members of the TDC, Board of County Commissioners or non-Tourism County staff regarding their application. Applicants may contact Highlands County Tourism staff to address any concerns or deliver updates.

Highlands County Tourism staff may contact the Applicant's Designee at any time during the application review and/or grant process.

TDC meetings are held (unless otherwise noticed) on the last Thursday of October, January, and April each County fiscal year. The fourth quarterly TDC meeting is held (unless otherwise noticed) on the second Thursday of August each County fiscal year. The Grant Applicant Designee is required to attend the TDC meeting (either in person or via phone) at which the Grant Application is scheduled for review and consideration. This will be the only opportunity for the Grant Applicant to speak directly to the TDC regarding the Event(s) and Grant Application.