

Highlands County Tourist Development Council

Proposed Grant Funding Categories & Overviews

Are you planning an event or conference in the Sebring, Avon Park or Lake Placid area? We understand that sometimes you need a little financial help to bring your vision to life. That's why *Visit Sebring* offers grant programs to help fund various types of events held in the Highlands County area. Explore our different funding programs and see which one is best for your event. Please ensure that you are using the correct application for your event. It is highly recommended for grant organizers to meet with TDC staff (either in person or via phone) prior to submitting a request for funding. For questions, please call (863) 402-6909.

Quarterly TDC Meeting Schedule

TDC Meeting*
Last Thursday in October
Last Thursday in January
Last Thursday in April
Second Thursday in August

**Dates are subject to change*

ALL FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS REQUIRE FINAL APPROVAL BY THE HIGHLANDS COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

High Impact Signature Events

For re-occurring events in Sebring/Highlands County that: attract visitors during April-December; encourage increased visitor spending in destination; reinforce a positive image of the Sebring area; amplify the experience economy; leverage and promote the Sebring brand; and provide added value to the visitor experience.

Criteria:

1. Attendees: At least 1,000 verified room nights and/or at least 10,000 verified attendees with at least 30% attendees verified from outside the county.
2. Duration of event: At least a two-day event with overnight (either night or early morning) component
3. Minimum funding: \$5,000 based on \$0.50/verified attendee
4. Application period: Must meet with TDC staff in person or via phone. Quarterly at TDC meetings; application must be approved by TDC no later than 6 months before event
5. Meeting: Must meet with TDC staff in person or via telephone.
6. Special consideration: if a request exceeds the maximum threshold, the event organizer must meet with TDC staff to explain the request. If TDC staff deems the request appropriate, they can recommend placement of the request on the TDC agenda for special consideration.

New Events

For new events in Sebring/Highlands County, which have not been held previously in Highlands County, with plans to be a re-occurring event that will increase outside-of-county attendees each year during April-December.

Criteria:

1. Plan: A business plan outlining how the re-occurring event will increase outside-of-county attendees each year
2. Duration: A minimum two-day event with overnight (either night or early morning) component
3. Maximum funding: Year 1 -- Maximum funding for year #1 only: \$20,000 based on scoring; no room night verifications. Opportunity for an additional \$20/room night reimbursement based on verified rooms. Years #2 and #3 - ear #2 & #3: \$10,000 based on scoring; no room night verifications. Opportunity for an additional \$20/room night reimbursement based on verified rooms.
4. Growth: Event must prove growth in attendance and overnight rooms each year.
5. Application period: Quarterly at TDC meetings; application must be approved by TDC no later than 6 months before event
6. Funding: Can b via grant or TDC can pay directly for marketing, entertainment, facility rental, A/V equipment rental, TDC staff approved attendee shirts/promotional items, etc.
7. Special consideration: If a request exceeds the maximum threshold, the event organizer must meet with TDC staff and explain the request. If TDC staff deems the request appropriate, they can recommend placement of the request on the TDC agenda for special consideration.
8. Meeting: Event organizer must meet with TDC staff (either in person or via phone) and discuss the event and their financial request.

Community Events

For events in Sebring/Highlands County that provide community-based recreation during April-December for locals and visitors alike in the Sebring area; encourage increased local and visitor spending; reinforce a positive image of the Sebring area; amplify the experience economy; leverage and promote the Sebring brand; and provide added value to the Sebring area visitors during their stay.

Criteria:

1. Attendees: 500+ verified attendees; event must be open to the public with no entry costs
2. Maximum funding: \$2,500 (years 1-3); 50% of \$2,500 per year (years 4-6). Years based on cumulative # of years the event has been held.
3. Application period: Once per year; based on scoring; application must be approved by TDC at least 120 days before event
4. Funds: Grant can only be used for reimbursable marketing outside Highlands County; 75% of advertising must be digital online advertising approved in advance by TDC.
5. Eligible organizations: Event host and grant applicant must be a Highlands County non-profit organization.

Special Events/Group Meetings or Conferences

For special events or conferences staged in Sebring/Highlands County during April-December that attract overnight visitors; encourage increased visitor spending in destination; reinforce a positive image of the Sebring area; amplify the experience economy; leverage and promote the Sebring brand; and provide added value to the visitor experience.

Criteria:

1. Minimum room verifications: Verified room night minimum: At least 50

2. Special considerations: Exceptions can be made for January events with room nights verified on weekdays
3. Maximum funding: \$10,000 based on \$20/verified room night
4. Application period: Quarterly at TDC meetings; application must be approved by TDC at least 6 months before event
5. Eligible uses for funds: Grant funds can assist with marketing, entertainment (for events open to the public; not for conference attendees only), facility rental, A/V equipment rental, in-county group transportation/tours, etc.
6. Excluded events: Not applicable for exclusive events such as weddings, family reunions, class reunions, etc.

Sporting Events

For sporting events staged in Sebring/Highlands County during April-December that attract overnight visitors; encourage increased visitor spending in destination; reinforce a positive image of the Sebring area; amplify the experience economy; leverage and promote the Sebring brand; and provide added value to the visitor experience.

Criteria:

1. Minimum room verifications: At least 100 verified room nights
2. Maximum funding: \$20,000 based on \$20/verified room night
3. Application period: Quarterly at TDC meetings; application must be approved by TDC at least 6 months before event (exceptions can be made for tournaments with late notice by host organization)
4. Eligible uses for funds: Grant funds can assist with out-of-county advertising and marketing, bid or hosting fees, facility rental, event officials (umpires, judges, etc.), TDC staff approved event shirts or promotional items.

TDC Event Support Without a Grant

Some events attract large numbers of day visitors with little to no overnight room night stays. These events have a positive effect in contributing to the vitality of the Sebring area and attraction of potential tourists. Therefore, the TDC may support these events, at the discretion of TDC staff, that are open to the public through non-grant/non-monetary avenues, such as:

- Collateral fulfillment of area tourism information
- *Visit Sebring* promotional branded material fulfillment
- Request for Proposal (RFP) distribution
- Public relations support
- Photo/video support
- Social media/calendar/website listing
- Referrals to County/City departments
- Research data collection
- Consultation to grow events to attract overnight visitors

Other Grant Funding Sources

- VISIT FLORIDA: <https://www.visitflorida.org/resources/grants/>
- Florida Dept. of State, Div. of Cultural Affairs: <https://dos.myflorida.com/cultural/grants/>
- Sebring Community Redevelopment Agency: <http://downtownsebring.org/cra/grants/>
- Avon Park Community Redevelopment Agency: <http://www.avonparkcra.com>