



New Event Grant Funding Program Guidelines & Application

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 August 10, 2023

*Approved by the Highlands County Board of County Commissioners
on September 19, 2023, through Resolution No.: 22-23-186*

NEW EVENT GUIDELINES

Funding is available for New Events staged in Sebring/Highlands County by organizations that attract large numbers of visitors from outside Highlands County.

Consideration for New Event funding is determined by scoring, the number of room nights and the overall economic impact the Event will bring to Sebring/Highlands County. Any per room funding level will be determined strictly based on \$20 per each verified room night that the Event brought to Sebring/Highlands County lodging partners.

New Event Criteria

For New Events (years 1-3) in Sebring/Highlands County, which have not been held previously in Highlands County, with plans to be a re-occurring event that will increase out-of-county attendees each year during April-December - grant program requirements include:

1. At least a two-day event with at least one overnight (either night or early morning) component
2. Funding is not intended to support administrative costs. Funding is intended to support marketing and promotional efforts, venue/site rentals and costs directly related to hosting the event, etc.
3. The Visit Sebring logo block must appear prominently in all advertising and publicity (written or electronic) for the Event.
4. Hotels/accommodations secured for the Event must be located within Highlands County.
5. Funding shall be provided as reimbursement for approved actual expenditures upon completion of the Event. Proof of payment must be provided. Proof of payment may be submitted in the form of a vendor receipt and a front and back copy of cleared check or credit card receipt. Cash receipts will not be accepted for reimbursements.
6. The TDC will only pay the agreed upon facility fees directly to the Applicant upon submission of the receipt showing payment in full.
7. To be eligible for payment, Applicant must timely submit completed, signed and verified Room Block Report(s)/Room Night Certification Form(s). Failure to submit completed Room Block Report (s)/Room Night Certification Form(s) will result in disqualification for support. Applicant must provide the written report including documentation of the actual room nights generated in comparison to the initial room night guarantee indicated in the application not more than 60 days after the Event/Project concludes. It is the responsibility of Applicant to provide proof of room

nights generated. This is not the responsibility of Visit Sebring. Visit Sebring staff may confirm accuracy of the Room Night Verification Form at staff discretion. Any funds granted will be subject to audit by the Highlands County Clerk of the Court – Internal Auditor or other representative the County may designate.

8. To qualify for reimbursement, Applicant must provide proof of liability and/or medical insurance from the host organization. A Commercial General Liability Insurance Policy should be obtained for the Event of \$500,000 / \$1,000,000 limits, or in an amount as otherwise required by Highlands County, with the “Highlands County, a political subdivision of the State of Florida, its officials, employees and volunteers” being named as an additional insured on the policy. The term of coverage must include not only all days of the Event, but set up days and take down days, as well.
9. The TDC may lend assistance or administer funds approved in the form of advertising, public relations, promotions or marketing programs through an outside vendor on behalf of Applicant.
10. Recognition of Visit Sebring must be included where appropriate on all marketing materials, on Applicant’s website & referred to in public relations activities. All printed materials with the Visit Sebring logo must be presented with the reimbursement request.
11. Upon approval of funds, Applicant must provide at least four (4) media passes for use by TDC staff to attend and cover the Event for the TDC’s marketing and public relations purposes.
12. Applicant is to have only one designated contact (Designee) for the duration of the Event Funding process. Designee is responsible for turning in all application documents, as well as follow up paperwork needed prior to the Event. Additionally, Designee will be responsible for executing the funding contract and providing a W-9 for Applicant. Funds will be released only to Designee upon completion of post-Event documentation and room night certification. Should Designee change at any point during the process, written notification to the TDC office is required. Failure to provide notification will adversely affect funding.
13. If any details (date, time, name of event, etc.) change prior to the Event execution, a letter must be sent to the TDC office advising of the changes. Date changes require a vote by the TDC and Amendment to Grant Agreement and must be submitted 90 days prior to the originally approved date or new date (whichever is first).
14. By submission of an application, the Applicant 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, videotapes or recordings made at or made in relation to the Event/Project, including those of Applicant’s employees, volunteers, invitees, and those that contain Applicant’s name, artwork, logo or trademark, for use by Highlands County, and the right to copyright and/or use, reuse and/or publish, republish photographic pictures, digital images, videos or recordings. Applicant affirms that Applicant is the legal owner of any artwork, logo or trademark used by Applicant 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, Applicant will indemnify and hold Highlands County and its representatives harmless as to any such claim or damages arising from such claim. Applicant 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. Applicant 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. Applicant 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. Applicant shall inform its invitees of Highlands County’s intentions and rights as described in this paragraph and obtain executed Release and Waivers from the Applicant’s invitees, as a requirement to participate in the Event.

NEW EVENT FUNDING REQUEST LEVELS

There is a maximum funding level of \$20,000 for year #1 and \$10,000 for years #2 and #3 based on scoring with opportunity for an additional \$20/verified room night reimbursement based on verified rooms. The guaranteed number of room nights stated by the Applicant does not guarantee the level of funding at which the Event may be approved. The final funding recommendation will be based on the TDC's soles and absolute discretion. As an example, if the TDC believes Applicant has overstated the room nights, the TDC has the right to place the application at a lower funding level without providing justification for its decision. All requests will be submitted as a recommendation by the TDC to the Highlands County Board of County Commissioners which makes the final decision.

Exceptions for Extraordinary Circumstances

While it is not possible to legislate for the unknown, it is possible to identify and anticipate the potential for exceptional 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 Highlands County Board of County Commissioners for final approval.

For Grant Funds tied to Room Verifications, the TDC will only reimburse for actual, verified room nights only. For example:

If the TDC approved a grant for \$22,000 (\$20,000 base + \$2,000 for verified room night) for an event that guaranteed 100 room nights and the event actually only generated 30 total room nights, the TDC would determine the total percentage of what was produced based upon what was guaranteed by taking $30/100=30\%$. The maximum total amount awarded in this case based upon the % formula would be 30% of \$2,000 which equals \$600. Therefore, the maximum awarded would be \$20,600.

ELIGIBLE USE OF FUNDS

The following outlines how TDT funds are to be used to promote tourism for Highlands County.

1. Out-of-County Advertising Expenses

Advertising and publicity outside of Highlands County to increase participation, attendance and awareness of the Event and generate hotel room nights. The Visit Sebring logo must appear with or in the ad, which must be pre-approved by TDC staff. Advertising examples include:

- Digital Online Advertising: geofencing, social media, retargeting, SEO/SEM, display ads, targeted email campaigns, digital content creation via online storytelling, etc.
- Print: advertising, direct mail, flyers/posters, etc.
- Radio & TV Advertisements placed outside Highlands County
- Public Relations/Media Events
- Targeted Audience Outreach, such as trade show booth rental

2. Promotional Items

TDC funds designated for promotional items must be tied to a direct "experience" with the event (i.e. themed reception, activity, etc.) and the Visit Sebring logo must be included on the promotional item. These items must be pre-approved by TDC before they qualify for reimbursement. Promotional items will only be funded with a robust marketing plan as generating

attendance is the TDC's priority. Please consult TDC staff regarding any direct experience ideas.

3. Event Fees

- A/V equipment rental, entertainment (for events open to public)
- Facility fees - for Events that take place at Highlands County facilities.
- Necessary event-related operational expenses, as approved per Florida State Statute 125.0104 and indicated in the final motion by TDC to approve funding.
- Event fees will only be funded with a robust marketing plan as generating attendance is the TDC's priority.

4. Trophies, Plaques, and Non-Monetary Awards

Items must include Visit Sebring's logo in the design, and be pre-approved by the TDC staff before they qualify for reimbursement. Items will only be funded with a robust marketing plan as generating attendance.

5. Field/Facility Related Expenses

Must be outlined in grant application and will be approved at the discretion of the TDC.

INELIGIBLE USES OF FUNDS:

1. Prize money, scholarships, monetary awards
2. Shirts that are not pre-approved by TDC staff and/or do not include the Visit Sebring logo
3. Any and all travel expenses (includes, but is not limited to, mileage reimbursement, car rental fees, airline tickets, hotel/accommodations, food, luggage fees, etc.)
4. Private entertainment, food, beverages, or any type of concession
5. Annual operating expenditures not directly related to the Event/Project
6. Legal, medical, security, engineering, accounting, auditing, planning, feasibility studies or other consulting services
7. Employee salaries
8. Real property or capital improvements to facilities
9. Tangible personal property including but not limited to office furnishings or equipment
10. Interest or reduction of deficits and loans
11. Expenses incurred or obligated prior to or after the grant Event period
12. Advertising/promotional materials distributed in Highlands County, during or after the Event
13. Receptions/social functions not specifically designed for pre-event promotional purposes
14. Sales tax
15. Website design
16. Ongoing or annual facility maintenance
17. Any use not authorized as determined by the Florida State Statute 125.0104

AUTHORIZATION HISTORY:

Created pursuant to Highlands County Ordinance 17-18-13 and operates in accordance with [Florida Statute 125.0104](#), The **Highlands County Tourist Development Council (TDC)** is a nine-member advisory board to the Highlands County Board of County Commissioners. The TDC (also known as **Visit Sebring**) 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 Sebring/Highlands County as a preferred visitor destination and assist with increasing tourism to the county in the non-peak tourism months.

Uses of the Tourist Development Tax 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 program must demonstrate the intent and effect of attracting visitors to Highlands County.**

Event Grant Funding Program

Visit Sebring leads and supports the Highlands County tourism industry by providing innovative marketing programs and promotions to ensure the continued growth of tourism and travel from visitors. The purpose of the High Impact Signature Event Grant Program is to position Highlands County as a must-experience destination in Florida through quality events and initiatives. The TDC recognizes high impact events as a major contributor to the overall tourism economy. In order to assist these high impact tourism events, the TDC has guidelines for events seeking funding.

All requests for funds from organizers (Applicants) seeking to host an Event must be reviewed and approved by TDC Staff, the TDC and the Highlands County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC). Funds that will be submitted for TDC reimbursement cannot be spent until final approval by BOCC has been granted and contract with County has been fully executed. Once a funding amount has been approved, funds tied to room verifications will not be disbursed until after the Event has been completed and both a post-event economic impact report and the final Room Night Verification Form(s) and/or Attendee Verification Form(s) have been produced and timely submitted to the TDC for review.

APPLICATION DEADLINE AND GUIDELINES:

Applications will be reviewed quarterly at TDC meetings as outlined in the schedule below. Applications are due no later than the deadlines listed herein. If the deadline falls on a weekend or holiday, then the applications are **due the last County business day prior to the posted deadline**. One application will be accepted per Event/Project. The application **must be completely filled out**. Not Applicable or N/A should be marked if needed. **To be considered for the maximum award available, applications shall be submitted at a MINIMUM of six (6) months prior to the Event/Project start date**. Exceptions can be made for tournaments with late notice by host organization.

The TDC Staff and TDC will review funding for New Event Funding Requests as outlined on the next page:

Submittal & Meeting Schedule for New Event Funding

Grant Application Submittal Deadline	TDC Meeting*
October 10	Last Thursday in October
January 10	Last Thursday in January
April 10	Last Thursday in April
July 30	Second Thursday in August

ALL FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS REQUIRE FINAL APPROVAL BY THE HIGHLANDS COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS *Dates are subject to change

You may e-mail, mail or hand deliver the **ORIGINAL** application to:
Highlands County Tourist Development Council (TDC)
Attn: Reagan Fultz
501 S. Commerce Ave.
Sebring, FL 33870
RFultz@highlandsfl.gov
(863) 402-6909

REIMBURSEMENT/ACCOUNTABILITY:

- Within 60 days after the completion of the Event/Project, Applicant must submit the following:
 - Completed Post Event Report (Page 9-10)
 - Room Night Verification Forms (Page 8) reporting all room nights generated by the event. This includes all staff, competitors, volunteers, spectators, officials, etc. that stayed in paid accommodations, verified directly by a hotel, motel, or vacation rental.
 - Invoice from Grantee to Visit Sebring / Highlands County for reimbursement of TDC/BCC approved funds (addressed to Visit Sebring / Highlands County Tourist Development Council).
 - Collateral supporting the expenses grantee is requesting reimbursed (Vendor receipt(s); or Invoices/Orders with proof of payment in form of front and back copy of cleared check, online payment confirmation, credit card receipt or bank statement). Please refer to Eligible/Ineligible Use of Funds from grant application.
 - Copies/samples of advertising or promotional materials TDC funds are reimbursing expenses for, and proof of Visit Sebring logo included in said advertising or promotional item.
- If original award amount must be prorated due to the actual room nights being less than the guaranteed room nights, an updated invoice will be required with the new award amount.
- The TDC will conduct audits to promote accuracy of attendance and room nights reported in Post Event Report.
- Incomplete reports will not be considered. A request for an extension of the 60-day deadline will require approval from the part of the Tourist Development Council.

ROOM NIGHT TRACKING:

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

Applicant will be required to provide all Highlands County based accommodations where attendees may be staying with room night certification forms and submit the **Room Night Certification Form** (page 8) to the TDC at the conclusion of the Event. Applicant is strongly encouraged to conduct their own room night surveys to verify room nights and hotels in order to complete the **Room Night Certification Form** for back up documentation should there be any discrepancies in determining the total number of room nights generated from the event. All documents verifying room nights must be signed by an authorized representative of the lodging partner.

NOTE: For the purpose of calculating creditable overnight stays, only rooms subject to 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, the TDC reserves the right to conduct an audit of information presented for each funded Event. All lodging accommodations listed may be contacted to confirm the number of room nights generated for the Event/Project. **PLEASE NOTE THAT ANY MISLEADING OR FALSE INFORMATION PRESENTED CAN AND WILL ADVERSELY AFFECT CURRENT AND FUTURE FUNDING AWARDS.** Not tracking your rooms and/or visitors could void your post-event funding.

CONCLUSION:

Applicants are encouraged to not contact members of the TDC, Board of County Commissioners or non-TDC County staff in order to provide a fair and equitable process of consideration of each applicant. Applicant may make contact with TDC staff to address any concerns or deliver updates. Additionally, the Event director, fiscal administrator or other contact person may be called upon by TDC staff at any time during the review process.

TDC meetings are held (unless otherwise noticed) on the last Thursday of October, January, April and, and the second Thursday of August. Applicant is required to attend the TDC meeting (either in person or via phone) for which the Event application is scheduled for review. This will be the only opportunity to speak directly to the TDC in regard to the Event application.



**Highlands County Tourist Development Council
Room Night Certification Form**

*A form should be completed by each accommodation that housed event attendees/staff.
Due to the TDC office no later than 60 days after the end of event.*

Attention: Hotel Representative / Contact

The Event, _____, was awarded Funding through the Highlands County Tourist Development Council (TDC) to assist in the advancement of bringing additional economic impact through tourism into our community. The purpose of this form is to certify the number of room nights in Highlands County that were attributable to the Event.

Name of Hotel/Accommodation: _____

Contact Person: _____

Telephone: _____ **Email:** _____

TRACKED ROOM NIGHTS							
EVENT NAME							
DATE (s)							
PAID ROOM NIGHTS							
COMP ROOM NIGHTS							

Hotel Contact Signature: _____

The TDC thanks you for your help and partnership in making Highlands County a choice destination!

GRANT APPLICANT: I certify that Event listed above consumed the reported room nights.

Name of Applicant: _____

Signature: _____ **Title:** _____

The TDC reserves the right to unilaterally reduce the maximum amount of reimbursement if Applicant's room night guarantee is not satisfied or documented with this Room Night Certification Form. This SIGNED form must be completed and returned before final payment is delivered to Applicant.



**Highlands County Tourist Development Council
Post Event Report**

Due to the TDC office no later than 60 days after the end of event.

Event Name: _____ **Event Date(s):** _____

Event Organizer: _____

1. To the best of your knowledge, please fill in the following with estimates for the number of room nights and attendees resulting from your event:

Total Paid Room Nights: _____

Attendee Origin & Type

	From Out of State	Overnight, From Florida	Day Trip/In State	Average # of Nights Stay
Participant/Coach/Official				
Spectators				
Media				
Totals:				

2. Were there any extenuating circumstances that lead to actual attendance or room night generation falling below projections? If yes, what were those circumstances:

3. Did your event garner any media coverage? If yes, please describe in detail.

4. Was your event a room night generating event? If yes, please submit completed "Room Night Certification Form(s)", found on page 8 of the grant application. One (1) form must be submitted for each participating hotel/accommodation.

Note: If any attendees stayed in Airbnb/VRBO/Short Term Rentals, please complete a form for those as well, with explanation of how you confirmed those numbers.

Event Organizer Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Please submit this completed report within 60 days following your event. To review additional items required to be submitted for reimbursement process, see page 6-7 of Grant Application.

APPLICATION

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

The application **must be completely filled out**. Not Applicable or N/A should be marked as appropriate.

Copies of the following items must be attached to your application:

- List of Applicant’s current Officers and/or Board members (if applicable)
- Applicant’s W-9 tax form for post-Event payment
- Overall & detailed Marketing Plan for the Event. This plan must outline product (event); market position/competitive analysis; target audience; target markets; marketing goals, objectives and tactics; market strategy; budget and evaluation metrics.
- Business plan outlining how the re-occurring event will increase out-of-county attendees each year
- Example of proposed Visitor/Attendee Survey

Please note: All final paperwork as outlined in the application must be submitted to the TDC **within 60 days of the conclusion of the Event**. The request for reimbursement will be considered incomplete until all of the required forms are submitted to the TDC.

HIGHLANDS COUNTY TDC NEW EVENT FUNDING REQUEST APPLICATION

Amount Requested from TDC: \$ _____

I. General Information

1. Name of Applicant:
2. Name of Event:
3. Contact person:
4. Contact person e-mail:
5. Complete address of Applicant:
Cell phone:
6. Applicant’s Chief Official/Event Coordinator:
Title:
Address if different from above:
Cell phone:
Email:
7. Has Event ever received funding from the TDC? Yes No
 - a. If yes – list years and amounts:
8. Amount Applicant is requesting for the Event/Project: \$
9. Intended use of funds:

(Refer to page 7 – Eligible and Ineligible Uses of Funds)

II. Details about Applicant: (describe your business or organization)

III. Schedule of Event:

IV. Event Specific Information

- 1. Event name:
- 2. Type of event:
- 3. Dates of Event:
- 4. Location of Event:

- 1. Number of days: _____ Hours: _____
- 2. Projected number of attendees (if sport, include participants, coaches, officials):
Overnight, out of state: _____ Overnight, in-state: _____ Day Trip: _____
- 3. Projected number of spectators per day (if applicable):
Overnight, out of state: _____ Overnight, in-state: _____ Day Trip: _____
- 4. Projected number of media, staff, officials:
Overnight, out of state: _____ Overnight, in-state: _____ Day Trip: _____
- 5. Event/Project promoter (if other than Applicant):
Name of promoter:
Company name:
Contact name:
Address:
Phone:
Email:
Website:

11. Event Admission Price (if applicable)

12. What is the GUARANTEED MINIMUM NUMBER OF PAID ROOM NIGHTS the Event will bring to Sebring/Highlands County? (This is the minimum number of rooms that must be captured by the Event and documented by submitting the Room Night Certification Form within 60 days of the conclusion of the Event. The TDC reserves the right to reduce the reimbursement amount should the Event fail to meet this minimum room night guarantee.) **Number of Room Nights:** _____

13. What is the GUARANTEED MINIMUM NUMBER OF EVENT ATTENDEES?

Number of attendees: _____

(Please answer each question below or your application will be deemed incomplete).

- a. How many/what percentage will be traveling to the event from outside the county?
- b. How will you document the attendees and the out-of-county percentage?
- c. Will you be providing the TDC with attendee contact information?

Grant Application Checklist

Please initial next to each item and fill in the blanks below. This list must accompany your grant application.

Initials

_____ This application is being submitted at least four months (120 days) prior to the event start.

Date of Event: _____

Date of Application: _____

_____ I understand that the reimbursement request must be completed and submitted to the Tourism Office with all back up and supporting material no later than 60 days after the event ends, which will be on _____ (date 60 days after event ends).

_____ I will obtain the signatures of the organization's President & Secretary on the proposed grant contract by _____. (date one week after the application is submitted to and accepted by the Tourism Office)

_____ I understand that the "Visit Sebring" logo must appear in any print advertisements that are funded by the TDC. For digital ads, the "Visit Sebring" logo must either be featured on the advertisement or on website/landing page linked to the ad or the ad must link to the TDC's website, VisitSebring.com. I will also use the #VisitSebring hashtag on at least one event social media post.

_____ I have included an IRS **W-9 Form** and a copy of the Florida Division of Corporations form with the application.

_____ I understand that someone representing this grant application must be available at the TDC meeting when it considers the application for funding or the application will not be considered.

_____ I understand that no expenses incurred before the TDC recommends approval of the grant application will be reimbursed under any circumstances. I also understand that no funding has been approved until the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) approves execution of the Grant Contract and that no expenditures will be reimbursed if the BOCC does not approve execution of the Grant Contract.

_____ I understand that reimbursements following the event will only be made for itemized, authorized expenses approved by the BOCC in the fully executed Grant Contract.

_____ I understand each reimbursement request must include copies of paid invoices, screenshots of digital ads, copies of the ad/tear sheets, invoice for reimbursement amount to the Highlands County Board of County Commissioners, copy of front and back of cleared checks paying for advertising, and outreach figures identifying the

number of people your ad reached outside Highlands County and inside Highlands County.

_____ I understand Reimbursement will only be provided at a rate of \$20/verified room night. And all funds will only be reimbursed after the event is complete.

_____ I agree that the funds I receive will ONLY be used in accordance with the eligible and ineligible uses of funds. (pages 3-4)

_____ I understand that I am required to submit a **Room Night Certification Form** from each participating hotel in order to track the number of hotel room nights the Event produces in order to receive funding. (page 8)

_____ I have reviewed the **Highlands County Special Event Permit Flow Chart** and will proceed with any required county permits. (Contact: Rachel Barry; (863) 402-6638)

_____ I have included a list of my business/organization's current Officers and/or Board members (if applicable) with the application.

_____ I will provide the Visit Sebring office with a Certificate of Insurance (COI) naming "Highlands County Tourism Office" as additionally insured no later than 15 days before the event begins. If required, I will also provide the Visit Sebring office with a Certificate of Insurance (COI) naming "Florida Sports Foundation" as additionally insured no later than 15 days before the event begins.

_____ I have included a detailed **Business Plan** for the Event that outlines how the event will increase out-of-county visitors each year.

_____ I have included a detailed **Marketing Plan** for the Event.

_____ I have included a sample **Visitor/Attendee Survey** for the Event, and will submit survey results to the Visit Sebring office no later than 60 days after the event takes place.

_____ As an authorized representative of Applicant, I (the person submitting this application) acknowledge that I am also the person required to execute the contract and prepare the **Post-Event Report** (page 9-10) for the Event within 60 days after completion of event to receive payment. This report should include: total number of participants, total number of coaches, spectators, staff, media, etc., information regarding where attendee came from, feedback about destination (what did they like/not like).

_____ I also acknowledge that I am required to submit documentation that confirms my authority to act on behalf of the Applying Organization, such as a corporate resolution or a copy of a record from the State of Florida Division of Corporations that lists me (the person submitting the Application) as an officer who has statutory authority to represent and bind the Applying Organization.

_____ I acknowledge that any material made or received by Highlands County in connection with my request for Program funding is a public record and subject to public inspection unless there is a legislatively created exemption that makes it confidential and not subject to disclosure. I acknowledge that I cannot dictate to Highlands County what material is open to public inspection or the circumstances under which material is deemed confidential.

_____ I understand that as a requirement to receiving funding, I will execute a release to permit Highlands County to photo and/or record the Event and I must make Event invitees aware of this and make the signing of a release a requirement to participate in the Event.

_____ I understand that all funds received are subject to audit by the Highlands County Clerk of the Court – Internal Auditor or other representative as Highlands County may designate.

_____ I understand that this event may require a Highlands County Special Event Permit, and it is up to me to complete that permit request and pay the required permit fee.

Authorized Agent: _____

Title: _____ *Date:* _____

Authorized Agent Signature: _____

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION OF APPLICATIONS

New Event Grant Program

Applications will be scored by TDC staff with a maximum score of one hundred (100) points per applicant. These staff scores will accompany the grants when presented to the TDC for voting. To be eligible for maximum funding based on scores, the Event must score at least an 85. Scores of 50 or less will not be eligible for funding. Scores from 55-80 will be eligible for 75% of requested funds.

I. Commitment to the Expansion of Tourism in Highlands County – Maximum 25 points

Purpose: Grant will be evaluated based on evidence of the overall tourism impact of out-of-county tourists. Expectation of the required number of estimated overnight room nights & event attendees should be shown & supported by the event marketing plan & any previous event attendee history.

1. High Impact (25 points): Multi-day event that expects to attract 700+ estimated overnight room nights and/or 5,000+ attendees with verification that at least 20% of attendees reside outside Highlands County
2. Medium Impact (15 points): Multi-day event that expects to attract 250+ estimated overnight room nights and/or 2,500+ attendees with verification that at least 10% of attendees reside outside Highlands County.
3. Low impact (5 points): Multi-day event that expects to draw less than 250 estimated overnight room nights and at least 500 attendees with no verified information of how many attendees reside outside Highlands County.

II. Soundness of Proposed Event – Maximum 25 points

Purpose: The grant request is evaluated based on the event illustrating clearly identified objectives, other additional funding sources being used and an out-of-county advertising plan. Please use the SMART Objective Worksheet (on page 9) to complete this section.

1. Objectives are clearly defined on SMART Objective Worksheet (5 points)
2. Objectives are not defined well or not defined on SMART Objective Worksheet (0 points)

Additional Funding Sources/Budget

1. Specific additional funding sources defined on application & confirmed for funding (10 points)
2. Additional funding sources identified but not confirmed for funding (5 points)
3. Not defined or confirmed on the application (0 points)

Out of County Advertising/Marketing Plan

A well-defined marketing plan will include details on market research, target market, positioning/brand perception, competitive analysis, market strategy/tactics, budget and metrics/measurables.

1. Specifically defined on the application (10 points)
2. Identified but not specifically defined on the application (5 points)
3. Not defined on the application (0 points)

III. Stability and Management Capacity – Maximum 25 points

Purpose: The grant request is evaluated based on the event having a proven record or demonstrated capacity of the organization to successfully develop resources, effectively plan, organize and implement the proposed event.

Digital Presence – Considerations - How well is the applying event represented on online, digital platforms designed to attract tourists? For example, does the applying event describe the destination in an enticing way to attract visitors? Does the applying event provide a host hotel or hotel recommendations? Does the applying event suggest other activities to do in the area?

- a. Event has a mobile-friendly website that is current on website design trends and actively posting quality content (at least once a week) on at least one social media channel as the event itself (not host organization) (10 points)
- b. Has event-specific website with event specific URL and an Event Page on Facebook (5 points)
- c. No event-specific website or social media presence (0 points)

Event History Documentation – Consideration - For past events hosted by Applicant and funded by the TDC, were all TDC grant documentation requirements submitted and adhered to as published in policy?

1. All documentation was properly submitted and grant funds were appropriately used as outlined in the grant request (10 points)
2. Documentation was submitted but incomplete and/or grant funds not fully used as outlined on the grant request. (5 points)
3. Documentation was not submitted as required and/or grant funds not used as agreed. (0 points)

Visitor Survey – Considerations - Does the event plan to use a visitor survey to capture data for future improvements and was a sample copy provided in the application package?

1. Yes, a sample survey was included in the application with an agreement to share zip code information with the TDC post-event. Survey should acquire attendee information that is helpful to capture visitor data, such as home zip code, feedback on event, length of stay in destination, quality of experience, location of stay at hotel or other accommodations, etc. (5 points)
2. No survey planned (0 points)

IV. Quality of Proposed Event – Maximum of 25 points

Purpose: The grant request is evaluated based on the event's attraction of visitors to Highlands County with a high-quality guest experience (prior to arrival through departure) thereby providing a significant economic benefit to Highlands County.

1. High Impact – Recurring event with increasing levels of participation and significant economic impact. Event uses a systemic approach to data collection and analysis, such as attendee survey, hotel room night verifications, data capturing website and digital communication with evaluations, etc. (25 points)

2. Medium Impact – Recurring event with steady level of participation and economic impact. Has digital presence but not capturing or evaluating data in an effort to attract more visitors. (15 points)

3. Low impact – First year event with level of impact unknown, does have positive anticipated level of participation and economic impact to the county OR a recurring event with a declining level of participation, low economic impact to the county, and no or very little digital presence. (5 points)

Bonus Points

Up to 10 additional points may be earned for submission of a quality Special Event Emergency Response Plan. Submissions should include traffic and parking plans, inclement weather plan; security plans; evacuation plans; hazard identification and mitigation tactics; identified leadership roles, responsibilities and reporting relationships; emergency response procedures; etc.

For all questions related to the New Event Grant Program and the application, please contact Reagan Fultz at the Highlands County Tourist Development Council (TDC) at RFultz@HighlandsFL.gov. or call (863) 402-6909.

SMART Objective Worksheet

Draft Goal:

Definition	Your Objective
Specific <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do I want to accomplish with this event? Why? • What is the desired result? 	
Measurable <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will you quantify (numerically or descriptively) success? • How will you measure progress? 	
Achievable <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What skills are needed? • What resources are necessary? • What factors impact goal achievement? • Does the goal require the right amount of effort? 	
Relevant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the goal aligned with the overall mission or strategy to increase economic activity in Highlands County? 	
Time-bound <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How much time will be available to complete this SMART Objective? • Is the deadline realistic? 	

Final Goal:

CERTIFICATION OF APPLICANT

Applicant has reviewed this Application for Funds from the Highlands County Tourist Development Council. Applicant is in full agreement with the information contained herein. To the best of Applicant's knowledge, the information contained in this Application and its attachments is accurate and complete.

Applicant Name: _____

Date: _____

By: _____
(Signature)

Its: _____
(Title)

STATE OF FLORIDA
COUNTY OF _____

The foregoing instrument was acknowledged before me by means of physical presence or online notarization this ____ day of _____, 20__ by _____ (name) as _____ (title) for _____ (applicant, name of party on behalf of whom instrument was executed).

(NOTARY SEAL)

(Signature of Notary Public-State of Florida)

(Name of Notary Typed, Printed, or Stamped)

Personally Known _____ OR Produced Identification _____

Type of Identification Produced
