



## **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 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.
2. Medium Impact (15 points): Multi-day event that expects to attract 250+ estimated overnight room nights.
3. Low impact (5 points): Multi-day event that expects to draw less than 250 estimated overnight room nights.

#### **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. There should be a focus on out-of-county marketing, that being the audience should be 51% or more residing outside of Highlands County, and should be clearly identified in the plan.

1. Well thought and defined marketing plan submitted with application (10 points)
2. Marketing plan submitted with application but not specifically defined (5 points)
3. No marketing plan submitted (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?

1. Applicant has a mobile-friendly website that is current on website design trends, is already advertising event, and is actively posting quality content (at least once a week) on at least one social media channel (10 points)
2. Has mobile friendly website and social media presence, but is not yet promoting the event on website or social media (5 points)
3. No mobile-friendly website and/or no social media presence (0 points)

Event Documentation – Consideration – Did the applicant submit all required documentation in a timely and complete manner, including all necessary materials, signatures, and formats as outlined in the application guidelines?

1. **Submitted on time and fully complete**, with all required materials, signatures, and attachments in the correct format. (10 points)
2. **Submitted on time but incomplete** — missing required elements (e.g., signatures, documents, or incorrect format). (5 points)
3. **Submitted after the deadline** regardless of completeness, OR not submitted at all. (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 – Established event relocating from another destination with evidence of increasing levels of participation and significant economic impact. Applicant submitted proof of 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 – Established event relocating from another destination with evidence of steady level of participation and economic impact. Applicant has digital presence but presented no evidence of capturing or evaluating data in an effort to attract more visitors. (15 points)

3. Low impact – First year event with level of impact unknown but presented evidence of positive anticipated level of participation and economic impact to the county OR an established event relocating from another destination 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](mailto:RFultz@HighlandsFL.gov) or call (863) 402-6909.