



## New Event Grant Funding Program Guidelines & Application

*This program is administered by the Highlands County Tourist Development Council (TDC), which is overseen by the Highlands County Board of County Commissioners. Approved by TDC on April 30, 2020; updated November 15, 2021.*

### **AUTHORIZATION HISTORY**

The Florida State Legislature enacted the Local Option Tourist Development Act ([Section 125.0104, Florida Statutes](#)) in response to the growing need of Florida counties to provide additional revenue sources for Tourist Development in an effort to stimulate the local economy. The Highlands County Tourist Development Council (TDC) was created in 1995 pursuant to Highlands County Ordinance 95-4, and it operates in accordance with Section 125.0104, Florida Statutes. The county's 4% Tourist Development Tax (TDT) is levied on occupied transient lodging sales, i.e. hotels/motels, campgrounds and other short-term rental properties. The TDT is not a tax paid by residents unless they are staying in local lodging but, rather, is paid by Highlands County's visitors. The tax also applies to short-term rentals arranged through on-line services such as VRBO and Airbnb. 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.

The nine-member Highlands County Tourist Development Council (TDC) is an appointed advisory group tasked with making recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) on how the TDT funds should be spent to achieve the County's tourist development goals. More information about the TDT can be found in the enabling legislation, Section 125.0104, Florida Statutes.

### Why Tourism Development?

Tourism is an economic development tool that provides great benefits to the citizens of Highlands County including job creation, sales and gasoline taxes, plus millions of dollars in ad valorem tax revenue paid by local tourism businesses, all which help pay for the quality of life we enjoy. So, while overnight visitors pay the TDT, the approximate \$150 million in direct spending that visitors pay annually to local businesses does much more.

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.**

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 New Event Grant Program is to position Highlands County as a must-experience destination in Florida through quality events and initiatives. The TDC recognizes events as a major contributor to the overall tourism economy. In order to assist new tourism events, the TDC has guidelines for new 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. 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 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) have been produced and timely submitted to the TDC for review.

The number and extent of these grants will be dependent upon the availability of designated funds and specific allocations. Ideally, the funds allocated by the TDC will eventually be returned through overnight lodging sales and the TDT generated from those sales. The intent of the New Event Program is to provide funding assistance for new events that attract overnight visitors to Highlands County.

### **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.

Criteria:

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

### **STATEMENT OF POLICIES**

1. To be considered for the maximum award available, applications are due at a MINIMUM six (6) months prior to the Event start date. (Exceptions can be made with special circumstances)
2. Staff will conduct a preliminary review of the application.
3. Incomplete applications will not be considered. Not applicable (N/A) should be marked if needed.
4. 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.
5. The Visit Sebring logo block must appear prominently in all advertising and publicity (written or electronic) for the Event.
6. Hotels/accommodations secured for the Event must be located within Highlands County.

7. 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.
8. The TDC will only pay the agreed upon facility fees directly to the Applicant with a required submission of receipt copy.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. 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.
12. 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.
13. 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.
14. 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.
15. 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 must be submitted 90 days prior to the originally approved date or new date (whichever is first).
16. Applicant must meet with a representative of the Visit Sebring/Highlands County TDC (via phone or in person) prior to submitting an application.
  1. Please contact (863) 402-6909 for an application and/or to set an appointment.
  2. The application is also available at [www.VisitSebring.com](http://www.VisitSebring.com).
17. 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.

**APPLICATION DEADLINE AND GUIDELINES**

Applications will be reviewed 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. The application **must be completely filled out**. Not Applicable or N/A should be marked if needed. Completed applications will be date stamped and added to the TDC agenda in the order that they are received. **To be considered for the maximum award available, applications shall be submitted at a MINIMUM of six (6) months prior to the Event start date.**

The TDC Staff and TDC will review funding for New Event Funding Requests as outlined below:

**Submittal & Meeting Schedule for New Event Funding**

<b>Grant Application Submittal Deadline</b>	<b>TDC Meeting*</b>
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 or email to: [RFultz@highlandsfl.gov](mailto:RFultz@highlandsfl.gov).  
 Questions? Call (863) 402-6909.

## VISITOR 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.

**Room block reports from hotels are the preferred method of reporting room data.** However, a *Room Night Certification Form* (page 9) is an acceptable means of tracking. For the Events that impose an online booking tool and/or event page for direct tracking of host hotels, it is the Applicant's responsibility and make every effort to track room nights from overnight stays at all accommodators, whether or not they were selected as a host hotel. This information will be used to track the number of visitors attending each Event/Project and staying overnight in short term accommodations.

*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. **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 on the last Thursday of each month (unless otherwise noticed) in October, January, April and second Thursday in 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.

## REIMBURSEMENT/ACCOUNTABILITY

- Within 60 days after the completion of the Event, Applicant must submit:
  - >Post Event Report (required form found on [www.VisitSebring.com](http://www.VisitSebring.com)), copy of event collateral displaying approved logo block.
  - >Invoice for TDC/BOCC approved funds (addressed to Visit Sebring/Highlands County TDC) and all supporting reimbursement documentation.
- 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 specific additional action on the part of the Tourist Development Council.

## **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 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 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. All requests will be submitted as a recommendation by the TDC to the Highlands County Board of County Commissioners.

## **NEW EVENT GUIDELINES**

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

### **Exceptions for Extraordinary Circumstances**

It is to be acknowledged that while it is clearly not possible to legislate for the unknown, it is possible to identify and anticipate the potential for exceptional circumstances and to weigh our response to them. 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.

## **INELIGIBLE USES OF FUNDS/ FUNDS MAY NOT BE USED FOR:**

1. Prize money, scholarships, awards, plaques, trophies, certificates
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. Rental Items: tents, barricades, toilets, etc.
9. Real property or capital improvements to facilities
10. Tangible personal property including but not limited to office furnishings or equipment
11. Interest or reduction of deficits and loans
12. Expenses incurred or obligated prior to or after the grant Event period
13. Advertising/promotional materials distributed in Highlands County, during or after the Event
14. Receptions/social functions not specifically designed for pre-event promotional purposes
15. Sales tax
16. Website design
17. Ongoing or annual facility maintenance
18. Any use not authorized as determined by the Florida State Statute 125.0104

## ROOM NIGHT TRACKING

Applicant will be required to provide all hotels with room night certification forms and submit the **Room Night Certification Form** (page 9) 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.

**For all Events that receive grant funds from the TDC, the following procedure must take place to secure hotel accommodation verifications:**

1. Applicant must include the Visit Sebring logo block and link [www.VisitSebring.com](http://www.VisitSebring.com) on the Event website (if applicable).
2. When Applicant has selected the participating hotel or hotels, Applicant must notify the TDC. **It is up to Applicant to set up a tracking code or system so that the hotel front desk and sales staff can track and document all Event related room nights.**
3. Applicant may list as many, or as few, “participating hotels” on the Event website, and may post as much information, including pictures, amenities, etc. for these hotels as long as the listed hotels on the Event website are hotels located in Highlands County.
4. Applicant may utilize a third-party housing provider for accommodations as long as the selected accommodators are within Highlands County. Applicant may not list hotels outside of Highlands County unless it receives special permission from the TDC.
5. After the Event, Applicant will submit the Room Night Certification Form from all of the hotels that generated room nights from the Event. This form is what the TDC uses to verify actual number of room nights generated from the Event. This form, which can be found herein, needs to be filled out and signed by an authorized representative of the lodging partner.





**Attention: General Manager and/or Director of Sales**

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:** \_\_\_\_\_

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

**Hotel Representative Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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

**Name of Applicant:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

Your cooperation in completing this form is greatly appreciated.

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.

**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  
>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:
5. Number of days: Hours:
6. Projected number of out of town participants:  
Out of state:  
In-state:
  
7. Projected number of attendees per day:
  
8. Projected number of media, staff, officials:  
Out of state:  
In-state:
  
9. 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.)
  
13. What is the GUARANTEED MINIMUM NUMBER OF EVENT ATTENDEES? How many/what percentage will be traveling to the event from outside the county? How will you document the attendees and the out-of-county percentage? Will you be providing the TDC with attendee contact information? *(Please answer each question or your application will be deemed incomplete).*
  
14. Provide the previous year's event information, (if applicable):  
  
Previous Event or Project:  
Date:  
Location:  
Total Room Nights:  
Contact Name/Phone:  
Funding amount awarded:  
Economic Impact (If available):



## EVENT EXPENSES

Provide an itemized summary indicating the intended use of TDC funds at the bottom of this page. Please be as detailed as possible, including intended media outlets, promotional materials, etc. and the dollar amount that will be expended (tentatively) for each category. This chart will reflect the total amount of the grant you have requested. Use additional sheets if necessary.

<b>Expense Type</b> (Event Speakers, Signage, Insurance, etc.)	<b>Expense Amount</b>
	\$
<b>TOTAL EVENT EXPENSES</b>	\$
<b>Intended Use of Tourist Development Tax Funds</b> (provide details)	<b>Amount</b>
<b>TOTAL TDC EXPENSES</b>	\$

## 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.

\_\_\_\_\_ 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.

\_\_\_\_\_ 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.

\_\_\_\_\_ 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.

\_\_\_\_\_ The funds Applicant receives will ONLY be used in accordance with the eligible and ineligible uses of funds. (page 7)

\_\_\_\_\_ Applicant understands that it is required to submit a Room Block Report/Room Night Certification Form in order to track the amount of rooms the Event produces in order to receive funding for Verified Rooms. (page 9)

\_\_\_\_\_ Applicant has included a list of its current Officers and/or Board members (if applicable) with the application.

\_\_\_\_\_ Applicant will provide the Visit Sebring office with a Certificate of Insurance (COI) naming “Highlands County Tourism Office” as additionally insured no later than 10 days before the event begins.

\_\_\_\_\_ Applicant has included a detailed **Business Plan** for the Event that outlines how the event will increase out-of-county visitors each year.

\_\_\_\_\_ Applicant has included a detailed **Marketing Plan** for the Event.

\_\_\_\_\_ Applicant has included a sample **Attendee Survey** for the Event.

\_\_\_\_\_ As an authorized representative of Applicant, the person submitting this documentation acknowledges that he/she is also the person required to execute the contract and prepare the Post-Event Report 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).

\_\_\_\_\_ Applicant acknowledges that any material made or received by Highlands County in connection with Applicant’s 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. Applicant acknowledges that it cannot dictate to Highlands County what material is open to public inspection or the circumstances under which material is deemed confidential.

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

\_\_\_\_\_ Applicant understands 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.

\_\_\_\_\_ Applicant understands that this event may require a Highlands County Special Event Permit, and it is up to the applicant 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](mailto:RFultz@HighlandsFL.gov). or call (863) 402-6909.

# SMART Objective Worksheet

Draft Goal:

---



---

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

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: \_\_\_\_\_ County: \_\_\_\_\_

Before me this day personally appeared \_\_\_\_\_ (name) as  
\_\_\_\_\_ (title) of \_\_\_\_\_ (applicant) to  
me well known or produced identification \_\_\_\_\_ (type of ID) and who executed  
the foregoing instrument, and who acknowledged that he/she did so freely and voluntarily for the uses and  
purposes herein expressed.

Witness my hand and seal (date)

My Commission expires (date)

Signature of Notary