



Visit Sebring/Highlands County TDC Water Experience Development Grant Funding Program

Guidelines

This program is administered by the Highlands County Tourist Development Council (TDC), which is an advisory council to the Highlands County Board of County Commissioners established pursuant to Florida Statutes, Section 125.0104. The TDC is charged with overseeing the funds generated through the Highlands County Tourist Development Tax.

Approved by TDC on October 31, 2024.

Approved by the Highlands County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) on November 7, 2024, through Resolution No.: 24-25-017.

Since 2020, the Highlands County TDC has been committed to fostering sports and recreational activities within Highlands County. Recognizing the significance that water-based recreation plays in Highlands County's community and economic development, the TDC continually seeks innovative ways to enhance water-based recreation for visitors and residents. In the TDC's 2023 Tourism & Recreation Facility Study, there was an overwhelming response for more water-based activities on Highlands County's lakes and waterways.

About the Water Experience Development Grant Program

The Water Experience Development Grant Program is a part of the TDC's mission to enhance local water recreation opportunities and support the development of a temporary or permanent water park/experience to increase tourism and community engagement. Recreation on Highlands County's nearly 100 freshwater lakes have been deemed as one of the top experiential activities for visitors during the off-season months of April-December and particularly our lowest visitation months of June-August.

The primary objective of this program is to assist in the development and/or enhancement of water-based recreation within Highlands County.

The grant aims to provide financial assistance to organizations seeking to develop a permanent or temporary water park/experience that will attract out-of-county visitors to Highlands County particularly during the summer months. By providing reimbursable financial assistance, the TDC can enhance recreational activity and further promote Highlands County as a summer recreation destination, which will help stimulate the Highlands County economy.

If more than one grant request is submitted, the grant will be awarded based on a comprehensive evaluation and scoring matrix of the required materials.

Water Park Development Criteria

For the Water Park Development Grant Program, the development must be staged in Sebring/Highlands County and attract overnight visitors in county. Grant request requirements include:

1. Operate water park for at least the summer months of June-August for three consecutive years.
2. Operator must be able to track water park users by zip code and provide zip code data to the TDC to provide proof of out-of-county visitation.
3. Maximum reimbursable funding: \$50,000 (fiscal year 2024-2025). Additional funding may be requested by the applicant for FY 2025-2026 and 2026-2027 in their proposal.
4. Application deadline: January 15, 2025
 - Provide a Letter of Intent: This should outline the proposer's water park concept, key terms of the proposed business, experience and/or qualifications of proposer.
 - Provide Business Plan for where and how the water park will operate (hours of operation, user fees, safety, insurance, permission from any applicable property owner(s), how users will find pertinent information, etc). This should also outline a detailed budget, timeline and how the proposed project will help amplify the TDC's Strategic Plan. (View at VisitSebring.com/About)
 - Provide a detailed Marketing Plan outlining how the water park will be marketed to potential users outside of Highlands County. This must include digital platforms, advertising spends and customer surveys that collect zip codes.

Eligible applicants & grant process

Eligible applicants include non-profit organizations, for profit organizations, municipalities and/or other entities that are interested in owning/managing a water park in Highlands County.

If awarded the grant, the grantee will be reimbursed from the County after the expenses have been paid and paid receipts are submitted to the TDC office. Funding is not intended to support administrative costs. Funding is intended to support the development of a Highlands County water park/experience plus out-of-county marketing and promotional efforts via reimbursement.