

POLICIES & PROCEDURES  
PROPOSED REVISED JUNE 24, 2021

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**Leon County Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee  
Special Events Grant Program**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

The Leon Country Tourist Development Council (TDC) was created pursuant to the State of Florida Local Option Tourist Development Act and Leon County Ordinance #88-01. The TDC administers funds collected from a local option tourist development tax (TDT) on transient lodging sales, i.e. hotels/motels, campgrounds and condominiums. The funds are designated to promote Tallahassee/Leon County as a preferred visitor destination for meetings and conventions, group leisure travel, special events, cultural activities and amateur sporting events.

Per section 125.0104 of the Florida Statutes to be an authorized use of Tourist Development Tax revenue, an event “shall have as one of its main purposes the attraction of tourists as evidenced by the promotion of the activity, service, venue or event to tourists.” By statute, a tourist is a “person who participates in trade or recreation activities outside of the county of his or her permanent residence, or who rents or leases transient accommodations including any living quarters or accommodations in any hotel, motel, apartment motel, resort motel, apartment, apartment hotel, rooming house, mobile home park, recreational vehicle park, condominium or timeshare resort for a term of 6 months or less.”

The Leon County Division of Tourism annually allocates funds to four separate grant programs for local groups and organizations that coordinate events with a demonstrated history of or significant potential to draw visitors to the area. The Special Events Grants and Signature/Emerging Signature Grants are reviewed by the TDC Grant Review Committee and Sports Events Grants are reviewed by the Tallahassee Sports Council (TSC). The TDC Grant Review Committee is comprised of TDC members which may include tourism and hospitality leaders and marketing professionals. Legacy Event grants are approved by the TDC and the Leon County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC). Legacy and Signature/Emerging Signature Event Grants are for festivals and events that can demonstrate the potential to bring a significant number of room nights and economic impact to the community.

The Leon County Division of Tourism grants programs are funded by the Tourist Development Tax (TDT) which is generated from hotel room nights. Grant programs administered by the Council on Culture & Arts (COCA) are also funded by the TDT revenue and are designed to support year-round arts and culture programming.

Each application will be evaluated against established criteria and historic precedent. The number and extent of these grants will depend upon the availability of designated funds and specific allocations. Ideally, the funds allocated by the TDC will eventually be

returned through increased transient lodging sales resulting from these special events and the tourist development tax generated from those sales.

## **II. DEFINITION**

A “Special Event” is defined as “a new or existing organized concert, exhibition, festival, fair, conference or celebration which is conducted according to a prearranged schedule and of interest to the general public. For the purpose of this grant program, the public interest should extend to Tallahassee/Leon County residents and to those living outside Tallahassee/Leon County who would visit the destination and stay overnight to observe or participate.

## **III. STATEMENT OF POLICIES**

- A. Grant funds are intended to supplement the organization’s budget for the event referenced in the application.
- B. Applicant must provide a statement of sustainability and growth for the event (i.e. How do you define success for the event and what is your long-term plan to sustain and grown the event over the next five years?).
- C. Applicant must provide an event public health and safety plan. The plan should include strategies to maintain healthy environments and operations for all event staff and attendees.
- D. Application must provide a statement of need for grant funding.
- E. Hotels secured for the event must be located within Leon Country.
- F. Funding does not support administrative costs or private events. Funding supports marketing and promotional efforts, venue/site rentals and costs associated with visiting artists and/or exhibits.
- G. Grant applications will only be received during the advertised cycle. One application will be accepted per event, per fiscal year with the exception of a once-a-year event that may coincidentally occur within the same fiscal year due to scheduling. An example would be an early October event that is scheduled for late September the following fall, both occurring the same fiscal year. Applicants receiving grant funds from the Council on Culture & Arts (COCA) may not receive grant funding for the same event through the TDC. Applicants may make requests to the TDC and COCA, but these must be for a different event or activity.
- H. Events will not be considered for funding if the event occurs during peak visitor periods. Peak Visitor periods are generally defined as FSU home football game weekends in the fall semester, FAMU homecoming weekend, FSU or FAMU graduation weekends, and Monday through Thursday during the state legislative session.

- I. If the requested grant amount exceeds \$10,000, applicant's budget must reflect at least a 25% dollar-for-dollar match (in-kinds services will not be allowed). Applicants will be required to identify the amount of matching funds in the event budget submitted and the amount must be verified and sourced in the Post-Event Report. The grant award amount may be reduced for the next cycle proportionately to the shortfall of funds raised if the 25% matching funds were not received.
- J. Funding shall be provided as reimbursement for the 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 front and back copy of cleared check, credit card receipt, bank or credit card statement, ACH transfer or digital wallet receipts. Cash receipts can be accepted for reimbursements. However, using a check or credit card is preferred. Written confirmation from vendor that expenditure has a paid in full is necessary for if only a copy of the front of the cleared check so provided.
- K. If an event must be cancelled, event organizers are required to make that determination at least 60 days prior to the event's originally scheduled date. Tourism will only reimburse for allowable expenses incurred before 60 days prior to the original event date. Any expenses incurred after that date will not be reimbursed.
- L. If an event needs to be rescheduled, the new dates must be between October 1 and September 30 of the current fiscal year to be eligible for reimbursement.
- M. To be eligible for payment, a completed Post-Event Report must be submitted within 60 days after the event has taken place. The Report must include tracking statistics regarding out-of-town visitors and their use of transient lodging facilities and occupancy. Failure to submit a complete Post-Event Report will result in disqualification for support. If the event occurs near the end of the fiscal year, requests for reimbursement must be received by September 30.
- N. Any funds granted will be subject to audit by the Leon County Auditor.
- O. Indemnification: By submitting this Grant application, the applicant agrees that upon final approval of the Grant the applicant shall indemnify Leon County Florida, a charter county and political subdivision of the State of Florida (the "County"), to the extent provided as follows:
  - 1. Except as otherwise provided herein below, the applicant shall indemnify, save and hold the County, its officials, officers and employees harmless from any and all actions, obligations, claims, damages, expenses, costs of any kind, debts, negligence, and liabilities arising from, or in any way related to, acts or omissions of the applicant, its employees, volunteers, subcontractors, employees of subcontractors, or clientele, in the performance of, or failure to perform under, this event for which the Grant was approved. Should the County, as a result of the performance or lack thereof by or on behalf of the

applicant, be required to reimburse any sums to any local government entity, contribute funds to the performance of this event for which the Grant was approved, or expend County funds to complete or correct such performance, the applicant, upon demand by the County, shall refund and reimburse the County for all sums so reimbursed or expended by the County.

2. If the applicant is a governmental entity or other such organization to which the protection of sovereign immunity is applicable, the indemnification requirements set forth in subparagraph (1) above shall apply to such applicant only to the extent as allowed in Section 768.28, Florida Statutes and nothing herein shall be deemed to be a waiver of such applicant's sovereign immunity beyond those statutory limits provided therein.
  3. If the event for which the Grant was approved is to take place on property owned by the County and/or is sponsored by the County, the applicant shall, in addition to these indemnification requirements, be required to provide to the County a certificate of insurance showing that the applicant has procured insurance against claims for injuries to persons or damages to property which may arise from, or in connection with, the performance by the applicant, its employees, volunteers, subcontractors, employees of subcontractors, or clientele, of this event for which the Grant was approved, in the minimum coverage and amounts as follows, and that the County has been named as an additional insured:
    - i. Commercial general liability insurance coverage with combined single limits for the bodily injury, personal injury, and property damage of no less than \$1,000,000 per occurrence and a \$2,000,000 annual aggregate; and
    - ii. If applicable, workers' compensation insurance covering all employees meeting statutory limits in compliance with all applicable state and federal laws.
- P. The combined Leon County/Visit Tallahassee Logo must be included on all printed and online advertisements and promotional materials for the event. Promotional materials include: banners, signs, t-shirts, programs, brochures, event website, social media posts, etc. Online material developed for the event must include a link to the VisitTallahassee.com website. Before these materials are produced, a draft or design proof **MUST BE SUBMITTED AND APPROVED** by the Leon County Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee to assure that the combined Leon County /Visit Tallahassee Logo appears properly.

- Q. Leon County Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee is dedicated to supporting worthwhile local events through our grant programs and other promotional opportunities but reserves the right to reduce or eliminate grant funding for organizations that do not receive prior approval for the correct logo use.



R. Allowable expenses include:

1. Promotion, marketing and paid advertising/media buys that reach outside Tallahassee/Leon County with potential to drive overnight visitation
2. Event production and technical expenses, site fees/costs (contract help, rentals, insurance) rights fees, sanction fees, non-monetary awards and travel expenses including lodging.

Note: The applicants are required to describe how the grant funds will be used. Any changes to the items submitted in the application MUST be submitted in writing to the Leon County Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee office and will not be allowed without written approval from staff PRIOR to event.

S. Unallowable expenses include:

1. General and administrative expenses,
2. Building, renovating and/or remodeling expenses,
3. Permanent equipment purchases,
4. Debts incurred prior to grant requests,
5. Programs which solicit advertising or sponsorships,
6. Hospitality or social functions,
7. Advertising that primarily reaches only Tallahassee/Leon County and its residents.
8. Sleeping room expenses for attendees

#### IV. **RATING CRITERIA AND SCORING PROCESS**

Each grant application will be reviewed by Leon County Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee staff to ensure that all required materials have been supplied. Failure to supply all the required materials will result in disqualification. Following staff review, the applications will be provided to the TDC's Grant Review Committee for scoring. The committee will score each application on a 100-point scale based on the following:



## Grant Review Score Sheet

Name of Event: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature/Emerging Signature Event

Event Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Grant Reviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Rating Criteria			Scores
Room Night Generation and Visitor Appeal	Event dates coincide with shoulder seasons or periods of low-occupancy and have potential of generating visitation to Tallahassee/Leon County overnight lodging. Event does not occur during peak visitor periods as defined in the grant policies. (30 points)	30	
	Event Proposal includes detailed plan for documenting overnight hotel stays. (15 points)	15	
	Event distinguishes the destination and elevates the appeal of Leon County. (10 points)	10	
Description, Sustainability, and Public Health/Safety Plan	Event description includes goals for event and a statement of sustainability and growth. (10 points)	10	
	Event plan to address public health/safety is included and includes strategies to maintain healthy environments and operation for all event staff and attendees. (10 points)	10	
Event Funding Need and Budget	An appropriate statement of need for funding and a complete budget are included for the event. (10 points)	10	
Marketing Plan	Marketing Plan strategies for attracting out-of-county visitors are well defined and the overall marketing plan is thorough and realistic. (15 points)	15	
Total possible points:		100	

Anticipated Room Nights: \_\_\_\_\_

Funding Amount Requested: \_\_\_\_\_

Reviewer Proposed Amount: \_\_\_\_\_

### Grant Request Funding Level Guidelines

Room Nights	Recommended Tourism Special Event Funding Levels
Less than 100	\$0 – 1,499
100 – 199	\$1,500 – 2,999
200 – 499	\$3,000 – 5,999
500 – 1,000	\$6,000 – 9,999
1,001 – 1,499	\$10,000 – 14,999

*Organizations are eligible for funding above \$60,000, however once recommended by the TDC it would need to be approved by the Leon County Board of County Commissioners.*



## V. FUNDING ELIGIBILITY

The intent of the Special Event Grant Program is to provide funding assistance for events that attract overnight visitors to Tallahassee/Leon County and create business for the commercial lodging industry, (hotels/motels, campgrounds, condominiums, short-term vacation rentals), as well as restaurants, retail establishments and other businesses. To be considered for funding, the following criteria have been established:

- A. Each application must include a signed Certification and Compliance page.
- B. Event must take place between October 1 and September 30 of the upcoming fiscal year.
- C. The event must have the potential to bring-out-of-town visitors that use commercial lodging establishments in Tallahassee/Leon County.
- D. Applicant must provide a marketing/promotional plan.
- E. Applicant must provide a detailed event budget.

## VI. GUIDELINES FOR GRANT REQUEST FUNDING LEVELS

The following table reflects the funding level possible based on the event's estimated number of hotel room nights. **The estimated number of hotel room does not guarantee the level of funding at which the event may be approved. The final funding recommendation will be based on the Review Committee's discretion and the funding available. As an example, if the Grant Review Committee believes the event has overstated the potential room nights, the Committee has the authority to place the application in a lower funding category.**

Room Nights	Recommended Tourism Special Event Funding Levels
Less than 100	\$0 - \$1,499
100 – 199	\$1,500 - \$2,999
200 – 499	\$3,000 - \$5,999
500 – 1,000	\$6,000 - \$9,999
1,001 – 1,499	\$10,000 - \$14,999

The following formula will be used to determine the final grant amounts:

- A. The average score of the panel will be determined for each application based on the maximum of 100 points as outlined above.
- B. Applications scoring above the minimum threshold of %70 will be considered for funding based on the formula outline below.

- C. The average score for each application will first be converted into a percentage of the 100 maximum points possible. As an example, if Application #1 scored 90 – 100, the percentage for Application #1 would be 90%.
- D. The grant requested amount will then be multiplied by the percentage attained to determine the initial award based on the categories above. As an example, if Application #1 scored a 90% and requested \$5,000, the initial award would be \$4,500.
- E. The same process will be followed for each application and the total initial awards will be added.
- F. If this total amount exceeds the total budgeted for all grants, then staff will adjust the initial scores of all recipients by a percentage. All initial grants will be adjusted by the same percentage to determine the final grant score and award.
- G. Additional adjustments will be made if necessary, to reach the total amount in the budget.
- H. The Tourist Development Council Special Event Grant Committee reserves the right to adjust the minimum threshold, if necessary, to ensure funding for the highest scoring applications.
- I. Applications for grants \$5,000 and more must itemize the amount requested on the application.

## **VII. SPECIAL EVENT ANNUAL GRANT TIMELINE**

**June 28 – July 30** Grant Application 30-day cycle open

**July 30** – Grant cycle closes

**August** – Public Meeting of TDC Grant Review Committee

**September** TDC review/approval of grant funding recommendations

**September / October** Award letters and Contracts sent to grantees

**Applicants are required to attend at least one Grant Application Workshop either in person or online/virtually.**

It is strongly encouraged that applicants be in attendance or send a representative to the Grant Review Committee meeting.

## VIII. VISITOR TRACKING

- A. To assess the impact of each event on the Tallahassee/Leon County transient lodging industry, the TDC emphasizes the importance of tracking the number of overnight visitors attending the event.
  - 1. Room block reports from hotels are the preferred method of reporting room data. The information will be used to help track the number of visitors attending the event. Furthermore, this information helps determine the growth of a particular event. Subsequently, an event's growth can impact the future funding level of the grant awarded to the organization.
  - 2. If your event uses an advanced registration procedure, utilize the **Visitor Tracking Form** to gather the requested information. Each participant/group should sign his or her name, hotel in which they are residing, number of rooms secured, number of days, and the number of guests staying in each room.
  - 3. If either of the above (advanced registration or hotel room blocks) is not used, a third option requires 100 completed five-question surveys of event attendees. Tourism will provide questions and assist with analysis.
- B. The County reserves the right to conduct a post-audit of information presented on the **Post-Event Report**. All lodging accommodations listed will be contacted to confirm the number of room nights generated for the event. **ANY MISLEADING OR FALSE INFORMATION PRESENTED CAN AND WILL ADVERSLEY AFFECT FUTURE GRANT AWARDS.**

## IX. POST EVENT REPORT

It is the responsibility of the grant organizer to provide post event information including:

- A. An invoice from the awarded organization to the Leon County Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee for payment of the awarded grant amount. This invoice must have an invoice number.
- B. Valid invoices for allowable expenses.
- C. Copy of proof of payments such as cleared checks, or detailed credit card receipts. For all media buys, provide tears sheets, copies of advertisements, schedules, and signed station affidavits. Proof of payment must match invoices submitted.
- D. Visitor Documentation as listed in Section VIII.
- E. Room Nights Documentation as listed in Section VIII.
- F. Copies of marketing or advertising materials, and social media showing Leon County Tourism/Visit Tallahassee logo usage.

## **X. CONCLUSION**

Applicants are asked not to contact members of the TDC Grant Review Committee. The event director, fiscal administrator or other contact person may be called upon by any one of these groups or their staff at any time during the review process.

**For questions or additional information, please contact:**

Terri Messler (850) 606-2331 [Terri.Messler@VisitTallahassee.com](mailto:Terri.Messler@VisitTallahassee.com)

<b>For Gadsden, Jefferson, Franklin, Wakulla, and Thomas (GA) County Events</b>
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To qualify, event must:

1. Utilize or demonstrate the potential to utilize Tallahassee/Leon Country lodging establishments.
2. Have secured a funding commitment from the same county of Tourism Development Councils.