

Leon County Division of Tourism



Visit
Tallahassee

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SIGNATURE & EMERGING SIGNATURE EVENTS

FY24 GRANT PROGRAM



POLICIES & PROCEDURES
REVISED MAY 4, 2023

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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, 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.

Grant funding is based upon the potential to generate room nights. 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.” By Statute, “Promotion” means marketing or advertising designed to increase tourist-related business activities.

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 of Commissioners (BOCC). Legacy and Signature/Emerging Signature Event Grants are for festivals and events that 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). Grant programs administered by the Council on Culture & Arts (COCA) are also funded by 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 amount of grant funds awarded 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 events and the Tourist Development Tax generated from those sales.

II. DEFINITIONS

Signature Event:

- A. An event that offers programming for the public over one or more days while demonstrating the potential to generate a minimum of 1,500 hotel room nights; Multiple day events, because of their broader economic impact to all aspects of the local economy, are preferred.
- B. Grant funding will not be considered for events that occurs during peak visitor periods. Peak visitor periods are generally defined as FSU home football game weekends anticipated to fill existing hotel room inventory, FAMU homecoming weekend, FSU or FAMU spring and fall graduation weekends, and Monday through Thursday during the regular legislative session. Sports and Special Events grants may be permitted during some FSU home football game weekends except for those games anticipated to fill existing hotel room inventory. Each year the Director of Tourism will provide the recommended “peak period” dates to the TDC for consideration/approval prior to the start of each grant cycle application period. (See page 6 for FY24 specific dates).
- C. An event that significantly distinguishes and elevates the appeal of Tallahassee/Leon County and has the potential to generate state, national and international media exposure.
- D. An event that has broad visitor and public appeal for motivating travel.
- E. An event that has an established organizational structure to fully plan, market and produce the event.
- F. An annual event.

Emerging Signature Event:

- A. When an existing event meets the definition of a Signature Event, yet only estimates generating between 1,250 – 1,499 hotel room nights, and historically generates near that amount, the event may apply to be considered for designation as an Emerging Signature Event that may be eligible for increased funding and marketing support from the Leon County Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee.
- B. An Emerging Signature Event is an existing event with a record of growing attendance and room nights whose organization is interested, willing and able to grow their event to generate at least 1,500 room nights.
- C. Organizations must work with Leon County Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee staff to identify event enhancements and marketing opportunities to transition from Special or Sports Event status to Emerging Signature event grant status and funding levels.
- D. Organizations must be able to identify and document in their grant application what new features or aspects will be added to help grow the event, i.e. add another day of activities.

- E. Organizations must also agree and allow Leon County Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee’s Research firm of record to conduct an economic impact study of the event to substantiate/verify the event generated at or around 1,250 hotel room nights. If the initial study indicates the room nights generated did not reach the 1,250 target for hotel room nights, the organization will move back into the Special Event grant program for one year before they may reapply for the Emerging Signature Event status again.
- F. Grant funding will not be considered for events that occurs during peak visitor periods. Peak visitor periods are generally defined as FSU home football game weekends anticipated to fill existing hotel room inventory, FAMU homecoming weekend, FSU or FAMU spring and fall graduation weekends, and Monday through Thursday during the regular legislative session. Sports and Special Events grants may be permitted during some FSU home football game weekends except for those games anticipated to fill existing hotel room inventory. Each year the Director of Tourism will provide the recommended “peak period” dates to the TDC for consideration/approval prior to the start of each grant cycle application period. (See page 6 for FY24 specific dates).

III. STATEMENT OF POLICIES

- A. Grant applications will only be received during the advertised cycle. No applicant may be considered for or receive more than one Signature/Emerging Signature Event Grant 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.
- B. Grant funds are intended to supplement the organization’s budget for the event referenced in the application. Signature/Emerging Signature events must meet community standards and align with the County’s Tourism marketing objectives and positioning.
- C. Signature/Emerging Signature events should not receive support from County general revenue through the BOCC or the Council on Culture and Arts (COCA) with the exception of in-kind support. No other funds from the BOCC can be used for the match requirement.
- D. Each application will be evaluated against established criteria, past performance and historic precedent.
 - 1. 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 grow the event over the next five years?).
 - 2. Applicant must provide an event public health and safety plan. The plan should include strategies to maintain healthy and safe environments and operations for all event staff and attendees.
 - 3. Application must provide a statement of need for grant funding.

- 4. Hotels secured for the event must be located within Leon County.
 - 5. In 2024, Tallahassee/Leon County will commemorate and celebrate its 200-year anniversary. Applicants are encouraged to include Bicentennial anniversary into their event, either through inclusion of the Bicentennial logo/URL or including Bicentennial programming.
- E. For new events that demonstrate the potential to generate the minimum 1,500 hotel room nights, the TDC has the option to fund the event through a Signature Event grant in its initial three (3) years.
 - 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 (see allowable/unallowable expenses on page 8).
 - G. 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 completely different event or activity
 - H. Events will not be considered for funding if the event occurs during the following peak visitor periods:

October 6-7, 2023	FSU Football Game (Parents Weekend)
October 27-28, 2023	FAMU Football Game (Homecoming)
November 10-11, 2023	FSU and FAMU Football Game
December 15, 2023	FSU/FAMU/TCC Graduation
January 9 – March 11, 2024	Florida Legislative Session (Monday – Thursday)
May 3-4, 2024	FSU/FAMU/TCC Graduation
 - I. Applicant’s budget must reflect at least a 25% dollar-for-dollar match (in-kind services will not be allowed). Applicants should 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 are allowed for reimbursement however, a check or credit card is preferred. Written confirmation from vendor that expenditure has been paid in full is necessary if only a copy of the front of the cleared check is 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. Leon County Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee staff will direct the County's marketing research firm of record to conduct an economic impact study of an event receiving Signature/Emerging Signature Event grant funding. Event organizers must allow for face-to-face interviews with spectators and participants in order to be eligible.
- N. It is the intent of the TDC to discourage the support of two competing Signature/Emerging Signature events. This includes events that take place during the same week/weekend or similarly-themed concerts or festivals.
- O. To be eligible for payment, a completed Post-Event Report must be submitted. The Report should 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 in a timely manner may result in disqualification for support. All Post-Event Reports, including requests for reimbursement must be received no later than September 30.
- P. Any funds granted will be subject to audit by the Leon County Auditor.
- Q. Indemnity: 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. The applicant agrees to indemnify, defend and hold harmless the County, its officials, officers, employees and agents, from and against any and all claims, damages, liabilities, losses, costs, or suits, of any nature whatsoever arising out of, because of, or due to any acts or omissions of the Grantee, its delegates, employees, subcontractors, volunteers and agents, arising out of or under this Agreement, including a reasonable attorney's fees. The County may, at its sole option, defend itself or require the Grantee to provide the defense. The Grantee acknowledges that ten dollars (\$10.00) of the amount paid to the Grantee is sufficient consideration of the Grantee's indemnification of 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 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.

To qualify for reimbursement, proof of liability/medical insurance must be provided by the host organization in the amount of \$1 million. The host organization must have proof of liability insurance in effect and the County listed as additional insured.

- R. The combined Leon County/Visit Tallahassee Logo must be included on all printed and online advertisements and promotional materials for the event.

Events held in 2024 are strongly encouraged to include the Bicentennial logo on all printed and online advertisements and promotional materials to help increase awareness of the Bicentennial anniversary.

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.

- S. 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.



T. 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 substantial 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.

U. 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,
6. Hospitality or social functions,
7. Advertising that primarily reaches only Tallahassee/Leon County and its residents.
8. Sleeping room expenses for attendees

III. RATING CRITERIA AND SCORING PROCESS

Each grant application will be reviewed by Leon County Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee staff to ensure that the project is eligible to receive grant funding by comporting with 125.0104 Statutory requirements and that all required materials have been supplied. Failure to supply all the required materials may 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 during need periods. 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. (5 points)	5	
Event Funding Need and Budget	An appropriate statement of need for funding and a complete budget are included for the event. (10 points)	10	
Bicentennial Branding	Inclusion of Bicentennial Anniversary logo/url or including Bicentennial programming as part of the event. (5 points)	5	
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 Signature/Emerging Signature Event Funding Levels
1,250 – 1,499	\$10,000 – 14,999
1,500 – 1,999	\$15,000 – 25,999
2,000 – 2,999	\$26,000 – 37,999
3,000 – 3,999	\$38,000 – 49,999
4,000 – 5,000	\$50,000 – 59,999

Organizations are eligible for funding above \$60,000, however once recommended by the TDC it would require approval by the Leon County Board of County Commissioners.

IV. FUNDING ELIGIBILITY

The intent of the Signature/Emerging Signature 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, condominiums, short-term vacation rentals), as well as restaurants, retail establishments and other tourism related business activities. In addition to being compliant with F.S. 125.0104 the following criteria have been established to be considered for funding:

- 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 that demonstrates out-of-market advertising/promotion to reach potential visitors.
- E. Applicant must provide a detailed event budget.

V. 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 Signature/Emerging Signature Event Funding Levels
1,250 – 1,499	\$10,000 – 14,999
1,500 – 1,999	\$15,000 – 25,999
2,000 – 2,999	\$26,000 – 37,999
3,000 – 3,999	\$38,000 – 49,999
4,000 – 5,000	\$50,000 – 59,999

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 in the grant review scoresheet on page 10.
- B. Applications scoring above the minimum threshold of 70% will be considered for funding based on the formula outlined 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, the percentage for Application #1 would be 90%.

- D. The grant requested amount will then be multiplied by the percentage to determine the initial award based on the grant review scoresheet. As an example, if Application #1 scored 90% and requested \$50,000, the initial award would be \$45,000.
- E. The same process will be followed for each application and the total initial awards will be totaled.
- F. If the total amount of grant allocations exceeds the total budgeted for all grants, staff will adjust all the allocations by the same percentage to keep the totals awarded equal to or less than the total available grant funds.
- G. Adjustments may be made if necessary, to reach the total amount in the budget.
- H. The TDC Grant Review Committee reserves the right to adjust the minimum threshold, if necessary, to ensure funding for the highest scoring applications.

VI. SIGNATURE/EMERGING SIGNATURE EVENT ANNUAL GRANT TIMELINE

June 28 – Grant Application Cycle Opens (30 day cycle)

July – Mandatory Grant Application Workshops

July 28 – Grant Application Cycle Closes

August 29 – Public Meeting of TDC Grant Review Committee

September 14 - TDC review/approval of grant funding recommendations

September / October Award letters and Grant Agreements sent to grantees

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

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

VIII. POST-EVENT REPORT

Leon County Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee will instruct its marketing research firm of record to conduct a statistically reliable number of spectator and participant surveys at the event to develop an economic impact study that shows the number of attendees, out-of-town guests, room nights generated and total economic impact from the event.

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

- A. The names of contracted hotels used for participants and spectators.

- B. Room pick-ups (number of rooms secured, number of days, and the number of guests staying in each room) from each contracted hotel.
- C. A written report on how the event measured its success or failure; what were the event goals and what was accomplished.
- D. Leon County reserves the right to conduct a post-audit of information presented on the accommodations listed. All properties listed will be contacted to confirm the number of room nights generated for the event. **Any misleading or false information presented can and will adversely affect future grant awards.**
- E. A post event budget showing revenues and expenses.
- F. Upon receipt and approval of the post event report, Leon County Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee will process the reimbursement request for the verified expenses.

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:

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