

Leon County Division of Tourism



Visit  
*Tallahassee*

*Pretty. Unexpected.*

# SPECIAL EVENTS

FY25 GRANT PROGRAM



GRANT GUIDELINES  
REVISED July 12, 2024

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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, apartment hotel, motel, resort motel, apartment, apartment motel, rooming house, mobile home park, recreational vehicle park, condominium, or timeshare resort for a term of 6 months or less.” By Statute, “Promotion” is defined as “marketing or advertising designed to increase tourist-related business activities”.

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.

The Leon County Division of Tourism annually allocates funds to 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. The TDC shall appoint a Sports Grant Review Committee annually comprised of 3-5 members of the Tallahassee Sports Council to review the Sports Grants applications. The TDC Grant Review Committee is comprised of TDC members. Legacy Event grants are reviewed by the TDC and recommendations for approval are made by the TDC to the Leon County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC).

The Leon County Division of Tourism grants programs are funded by the Tourist

Development Tax (TDT) to support hosting events that have visitor appeal. Some 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.

Applicants receiving grant funds from the Council on Culture & Arts (COCA) may not receive grant funding for the same event through the TDC. In order to prevent confusion, no applicant may apply to TDC and COCA for funding related to the same event or activity. Applicants may make requests for grant funds to the TDC and COCA, but these must be for a different event or activity.

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 TDT 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. Events are significant motivators for travel that increase destination visibility regionally and visitation/visitor spending in the community.

## II. STATEMENT OF POLICIES

- A. 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.
- B. Grant funds are intended to supplement, not fully fund, the organization's budget for the event referenced in the application.
- C. Each application will be evaluated against established criteria, past performance and historic precedent.
  - a. 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?).
  - b. Application must provide a statement of need for grant funding.
  - c. Hotels secured for the event must be located within Leon County.
  - d. In 2024, Tallahassee/Leon County will commemorate and celebrate its 200-year anniversary. For Bicentennial events held from October – December 2024, applicants are encouraged to include Bicentennial anniversary into their event, either through inclusion of the Bicentennial logo/URL or including Bicentennial programming.
- C. Grant Funding shall not be utilized to support administrative costs or private

events that are not open to the public. Allowable Funding uses (described in further detail on page 7) include marketing and promotional efforts, venue/site rentals and costs associated with visiting artists and/or exhibits.

- D. Grantees are required to spend 20%, or more, of all awarded grant funding on paid out-of-market marketing/advertising for all events (i.e. festivals, concerts, celebrations) except for certain sporting tournaments or sport meets as determined by County staff. Up to 80% of awarded grant funding is available to use on operations as long as such use is consistent with these guidelines and 125.0104, Florida Statute.
- E. Applicants receiving grant funds from the Council on Culture & Arts (COCA) may not receive grant funding for the same event through the TDC. In order to prevent confusion, no applicant may apply to TDC and COCA for funding related to the same event or activity. Applicants may make requests to the TDC and COCA, but these must be for a different event or activity.
- 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.

Events will not be considered for funding if the event occurs during the following peak visitor periods defined for County Fiscal Year 2024-2025:

October 5-6, 2024	FSU Football Game vs. Clemson
November 1-2, 2024	FSU & FAMU Football Game (FAMU Homecoming)
November 22-23, 2024	FSU Football Game (Homecoming)
November 29-30, 2024	FSU Football Game vs. University of Florida
December 13, 2024	FSU/FAMU/TSC Graduation
March 4 – May 2, 2025	Florida Legislative Session (Monday – Thursday)
May 2-3, 2025	FSU/FAMU/TSC Graduation

- G. If the requested grant amount exceeds \$10,000, applicant’s budget must reflect at least a 25% dollar-for-dollar match (in-kind services will not be allowed). Applicants shall identify the amount of matching funds in the event budget submitted and the amount must be verified and sourced in the Post-Event Report. Failure to meet the 25% match requirement will be considered a breach of the requirements of the grant award.
- H. 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.

- J. 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.
- K. To be an 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 but in no case shall it be submitted any later than September 30. 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 and must include all receipts of expenditures and proof(s) of payment.
- L. 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 every event receiving over \$10,000 in grant funding. Event organizers must allow for face-to-face interviews with spectators and participants in order to be eligible for payment of grant funding.
- M. Grantees are not eligible to request funding above the projected room nights as outlined in the table on page 10. The Grant Review Committee has the authority to adjust anticipated room nights and funding levels based on the previous record of an applicant.
- N. Non-government organizations must be registered with the Department of State, Division of Corporations, through their Sunbiz.org platform, or be able to provide proof of an exemption under law from such registration. Additionally, each applicant shall use their organization's legal name, exactly as registered in Sunbiz.org, in their application.
  - 1. The name, title, email, and phone number of one of the organization's officers, listed in the Officer/Director Detail section of the organization's current annual report, is responsible for signing the grant agreement for an awarded grant.
- O. Government entities, including public schools, colleges, and universities, must provide the name, title, email, and phone number of the person who is authorized to sign the grant agreement on behalf of the organization in the application.

Additionally, documentation from the organization showing the person has designated signing authority is required, this documentation could come in various forms, including through adopted policies or a specific delegation.

- P. Any funds granted will be subject to audit by Leon County, Florida or their designee.
- Q. Indemnity: By submitting a Grant Application each applicant agrees that upon final approval of a Grant the applicant/grantee shall indemnify Leon County, Florida, a charter county and political subdivision of the State of Florida (the 'County') to the extent provided in their grant agreement which will contain language substantially similar to the following:
  - 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. Should the County, as a result of the performance or lack thereof by or on behalf of the Grantee, be required to reimburse any sums to any organization, or reimburse funds to any Federal, State or local governmental 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 Grantee, upon demand by the County, shall refund and reimburse the County for all sums so reimbursed or expended by the County. 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. Grantee shall maintain Insurance with limits no less than the following: **General Liability:** \$1,000,000 combined single limit per occurrence for bodily injury, personal injury, and property damage with a \$2,000,000 annual aggregate.
- 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. The correct logo is provided below:



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 for guest speakers, performers, judges, event officials, or referees 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 and approved by the Leon County Division of Tourism/Visit Tallahassee office **PRIOR** to the purchase and the event. Purchases made without **PRIOR** written approval from staff will not be allowed.

U. Prohibited expenses include:

1. General and administrative expenses,
2. Building, renovating and/or remodeling expenses,
3. Permanent equipment purchases,
4. Debts incurred prior to the fiscal year of the grant period/in which the approved event takes place,
5. Food or beverages,
6. Advertising that primarily reaches Tallahassee/Leon County and its residents,
7. Lodging or travel 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 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 rating criteria outlined in the Evaluation Form on the following page.



### Grant Review Score Sheet

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

Special 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. (25 points)	25	
Description, Sustainability	Event description includes goals for event and a statement of sustainability and growth. (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 must include that at least 20% of the budget will be spent on out-of-market advertising and the plan shall be well defined thorough and realistic. (25 points)	25	
<b>Total possible points:</b>		<b>100</b>	

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 - \$2,999
100 – 199	\$3,000 - \$5,999
200 – 499	\$6,000 - \$10,499
500 – 1,000	\$10,500 - \$17,499
1,001 – 1,499	\$17,500 - \$26,250

#### IV. 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, 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. For purposes of these grant guidelines “out-of-market” means outside of a 30-mile radius of Leon County.
- E. Applicant must provide a detailed event budget that includes details about how 20%, or more, of any grant funding received, will be spent out-of-market.

#### 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 an 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 - \$2,999
100 – 199	\$3,000 - \$5,999
200 – 499	\$6,000 - \$10,499
500 – 1,000	\$10,500 - \$17,499
1,001 – 1,499	\$17,500 - \$26,250

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 \$5,000, the initial award would be \$4,500.
- E. The same process will be followed for each application and the total of potential initial awards will be calculated.
- F. If the total amount of potential grant allocations exceeds the total budgeted for all grants, staff will adjust all of the proposed 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. SPECIAL EVENT ANNUAL GRANT TIMELINE**

**July 23** – Grant Application Cycle Opens (30 day cycle)

**July/August** – Mandatory Grant Application Workshops

**August 22** – Grant Application Cycle Closes

**September 10** – Public Meeting of TDC Grant Review Committee

**September 12** - 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 or they will not be eligible for a grant award.**

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.

## VII. 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** located on the Visit Tallahassee Grants website to gather the requested information. Each participant/group should sign his or her name, list the hotel in which they are residing, the number of rooms secured, number of days, and the number of guests staying in each room.
- 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.**

## VIII. POST-EVENT REPORT

Funding shall only be provided as reimbursement for approved expenditures upon completion of the event. Reimbursement will not be issued until all necessary post-event information is provided. Such information is the responsibility of the grantee to provide and includes:

- 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 including invoices for out-of-market advertising (equaling at least 20% of the grant funding).
- C. Copy of proof of payments such as cleared checks, or detailed credit card receipts. For all out-of-market media buys equaling 20% of the grant funding, provide tears sheets, copies of advertisements, schedules, and signed station affidavits. Proof of payment must match invoices submitted.
- D. Visitor/Room Nights Documentation as listed in Section VII.
- F. Copies of marketing or advertising materials, and social media showing Leon County Tourism/Visit Tallahassee logo usage.

**IX. CONCLUSION**

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. Applicants shall not contact members of the TDC Grant Review Committee.

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

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