



REVISED May 8, 2025

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

**I. INTRODUCTION**

The Leon County 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 tourist 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, roominghouse, 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 tourists 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 tourist 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 found to have submitted applications to both the Tourism and COCA Grant Programs for the same event, must withdraw the application from either the Tourism or COCA Grant program to continue to be considered for the current cycle of grant funding. Applicants receiving grant funds from the Council on Culture & Arts (COCA) may not receive grant funding for the same event through the TDC. Further, 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 tourist spending in the community.

## **II. FUNDING ELIGIBILITY**

The intent of the Special Event Grant Program is to provide funding assistance for events that attract overnight tourists to Tallahassee/Leon County and create business for the commercial lodging industry that collect TDT, (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 tourists 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 awarded, will be spent out-of-market.

### **III. 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. The applicant’s performance on past events will also be included as part of the review to award grant funding.
  - 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 Country.
  - d. Estimates for lodging, attendee and tourist counts must be based on the anticipation of the number of tourists drawn to the event specified in the grant application.
- D. Grant Funding shall not be utilized to support administrative costs. Grantee shall be responsible for all expenses associated with the performance and delivery of Services by this Agreement.
- E. Private events are not eligible for grant funding. Allowable Funding uses (described in further detail on page 9) include marketing and promotional efforts, venue/site rentals and costs associated with visiting artists and/or exhibits.
- F. Grantees are required to spend a minimum of 20% of 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. 80% of awarded grant funding is available to use on allowable operational expenses as long as such use is consistent with these guidelines and 125.0104, Florida Statute. Failure to meet the 20% of the awarded grant funding on paid out-of-market marketing/advertising will be considered a breach of the requirements of the grant award.

- G. 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 2025-2026:

October 3-4, 2025	FSU Football Game vs. Miami
October 10-11, 2025	FSU Football Game vs. Pittsburgh
October 18-19, 2025	FAMU Football Game (FAMU Homecoming)
October 31 – November 1, 2025	FSU Football Game vs. Wake Forest (Homecoming)
November 14-15, 2025	FSU Football Game vs. Virginia Tech
December 12, 2025	FSU/FAMU/TSC Graduation
January 9-17, 2026	World Athletics Cross Country Championships
January 13- March 13, 2026	Florida Legislative Session (Monday – Thursday)
May 2-3, 2026	FSU/FAMU/TSC Graduation

- H. If the requested grant amount is \$10,000 or more, the 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. If the grant funding award is \$10,000 or more, the 25% dollar-for-dollar match must be verified and documented in the Post-Event Report. Failure to meet the 25% match requirement will be considered a breach of the requirements of the grant award.
- I. Funding shall be provided as reimbursement for the approved actual expenditures upon completion of the event. Proof of expenditures must be scans, copies, or pictures of the original receipts and invoices provided by a service provider/vendor. Proof of payment must be provided and 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 and follow the grant guidelines to be eligible for reimbursement. The new date must be provided to Visit Tallahassee to verify continued eligibility for the grant award.
- 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 tourists 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. Post event report submissions found to be intentionally misrepresented will disqualify grantees from grant reimbursement and future applications.
- 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 at least every other year of events receiving \$10,000 or more in grant funding. Event organizers must allow for face-to-face interviews with spectators and participants in order for the marketing research firm to conduct their study and 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 12. The Grant Review Committee has the authority to adjust anticipated room nights and funding levels based on the previous record of an applicant and/or event.
- 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.
  - a. 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. Non-Governmental entities must agree that they do not use coercion for labor or services as defined in 787.06, Florida Statutes, and under penalty of perjury, will attest to such statement through the execution and submittal of a notarized affidavit. Failure to provide the notarized affidavit will be considered a breach of the requirements of the grant award.
- Q. Any funds granted will be subject to audit by Leon County, Florida or their designee.
- R. 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:
  - a. 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.
  - b. 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.

- c. 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.
- S. The combined Leon County/Visit Tallahassee Logo must be included on all printed and online advertisements and prominent 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.

- T. 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:



U. Allowable expenses include:

- a. Promotion, marketing and paid advertising/media buys that reach outside Tallahassee/Leon County with potential to drive overnight visitation.
- b. Event production and technical expenses.
- c. Site fees/costs (venue rentals, insurance).
- d. Contract help such as performers, judges, and parking attendants.
- e. 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.

V. Prohibited expenses include:

- a. General and administrative expenses.
- b. Building, renovating and/or remodeling expenses.
- c. Permanent equipment purchases.
- d. Debts incurred prior to the fiscal year of the grant period/in which the approved event takes place.
- e. Food or beverage.
- f. Paid advertising that primarily reaches and targets Tallahassee/Leon County and its residents.
- g. Lodging or travel expenses for attendees.
- h. In-kind services.
- i. Monetary awards.
- j. Raffle prizes.

**IV. 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 along with the history of applicant's and event's past performances 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 following Grant Rating Criteria.

### Grant Rating Criteria

	Rating Criteria	Possible Points
Room Night Generation	Event dates coincide with shoulder seasons or periods of low-occupancy and have potential of generating Tallahassee/Leon County overnight lodging during periods of low occupancy. The process used for estimating room nights and an achievable plan for documenting overnight hotel stays is provided in the application. Past performance of applicant and/or event will be reviewed. Event does not occur during peak visitor periods as defined in the grant policies. (30 points)	30
Destination Enhancement and Community Impact	Description of how the event will elevate and differentiate the destination and increase overall economic and community impact. (25 points)	25
Description, Event Sustainability	Event description includes event goals, a plan for measurement of success, and a statement of event 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	For Events with open attendance, the application contains a well-defined, thorough, and realistic marketing plan which includes strategies for attracting out-of-county tourists with that at least 20% of the budget appropriated for out-of-market advertising. <b>OR</b>  For Events with pre-registration, the applicant provides a well-defined, thorough and realistic outreach plan to their event participants.  <b>ALL</b> plans include the planned usage of the combined Visit Tallahassee/Leon County logo or audible mention (for radio advertising) of Visit Tallahassee/Leon County funding support for the event. (25 points)	25
<b>Total possible points:</b>		<b>100</b>

#### V. GUIDELINES FOR GRANT REQUEST FUNDING LEVELS

The following table reflects guidelines for 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 and adjust the requested funding amount.**

<b>Room Nights</b>	<b>Recommended Tourism Special Event Funding Levels</b>
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 rating criteria on page 11.
- B. Applications scoring at the minimum threshold of 70% or above will be considered for grant 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/adjusted amount will then be multiplied by the percentage to determine the initial award based on the TDC Grant Review Committee's combined scores. As an example, if Application #1 scored 90% and requested/adjusted \$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. After the preceding steps are complete, to ensure funding for the highest scoring application, the TDC Grant Review Committee reserves the right to adjust recommended grant awards.

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

June 24, 2025	Grant Application Cycle Opens (45-day cycle)
July/August, 2025	Mandatory Grant Application Workshops
August 7, 2025	Grant Application Cycle Closes
August 26, 2025	Public Meeting of TDC Grant Review Committee

September 11, 2025

September 12, 2025

September 15 – December 31, 2025

TDC consideration of Grant Funding Recommendations

Grantees notified of Grant Awards

Grant Agreements sent to Grantees

**Applicants are required to attend the Grant Application Orientation 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 TDC Grant Review Committee meeting in case there are questions or clarifications.

## **VII. VISITOR/TOURIST 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 tourists attending the event.
- a. Room block reports from hotels are the preferred method of reporting room data. The information will be used to help track the number of tourists 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.
  - b. If your event uses an advanced registration procedure, utilize the **Visitor/Tourist 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.
  - c. Include question in the event registration form asking if participant will stay overnight in a Leon County lodging, along with number of rooms and nights booked.
  - d. Conduct a brief survey at check-in, or on-site to confirm if participant is staying in Leon County lodging, including the number of rooms and nights booked.
- 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 be dated and include an invoice number.
- B. Valid invoices for allowable expenses. Open attendance events must include invoices for paid 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 tear sheets, copies of advertisements, schedules, and signed station affidavits. Proof of payment must match invoices submitted.
- D. Visitor/Tourist and Room Nights documentation as listed in Section VII.
- E. 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:**

Wendy Halleck | (850) 606-2331 | [Wendy.Halleck@VisitTallahassee.com](mailto:Wendy.Halleck@VisitTallahassee.com)