

NOTICE OF FUNDING AVAILABILITY

2027 Tourism Program Tompkins County, New York

Proposals Due April 21, 2026

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Contact:

Nick Helmholdt
Tompkins County Tourism Program Director
121 E. Court St., Ithaca, NY 14850
tourism@tom-pkins-co.org
607-274-5560

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Purpose and Background

The Tourism Program budget, supported by hotel room occupancy tax (room tax) collection, is a unique component of the County's budget. It invests these taxes into initiatives that promote economic growth and improve local quality of life. The Strategic Tourism Planning Board (STPB) provides guidance to the County Legislature on tourism matters, including the annual Tourism Program budget.

The uses of the County's room tax are defined by local law¹ and a companion state law². Specifically, Local Law 4-1989 § 150-20 reads:

The revenue derived from the tax, after deducting the amount provided for administering such tax, as so authorized by this article, shall be allocated to enhance the general economy of Tompkins County, its cities, towns, and villages, through promotion of tourist activities, conventions, trade shows, special events, and other directly related and supporting activities.

Tompkins County has established a Strategic Tourism Plan outlining goals and focus areas for tourism in our area. The Strategic Tourism Plan can be found on the [Tourism Program website](#).

The Tompkins County Tourism Program has issued this Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) to determine how to allocate anticipated room tax funds in the 2027 budget.

Eligible Uses of Funds

Activities funded as a part of the annual budget are expected to satisfy the following criteria:

- Align with *multiple goals* stated in the Strategic Tourism Plan.
- Support *multiple focus areas* in the Strategic Tourism Plan.
- Occur over the course of a *full year*.

Room tax funds may support annual programs, grant administration, and general operating expenses for eligible organizations.

Annual Programs

All expenses must directly support program operation. Parties proposing annual programs will be asked to provide documentation to support cost estimates. The following are eligible uses of funds for annual programs.

- Staff payroll
- Equipment, supplies, and materials required to operate program
- Contracted services
- Marketing, advertising, and promotion

¹ L.L. No. 4-1989 <https://ecode360.com/8412557>

² Consolidated Laws of New York, Chapter 60, Article 29, Part 1, Subpart A, Section 1202-F, Hotel or motel taxes in Tompkins County <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/TAX/1202-F>

Grant Administration

Please refer to the appendix for a list of established grant programs. Eligible grant administration expenses include:

- Staff payroll
- Contracted services

Note: Grant administration funding is capped at 10% of the annual grant program awards. The past year's budget will be used as a reference. (For example, if \$200,000 was awarded from the Tourism Capital Grants last year, then a maximum of \$20,000 will be provided to administer this program in the current year.)

General Operating Support

Organizations considered critical to the success of the tourism sector may be eligible for general operating support. Organizations requesting general operating support must be able to demonstrate how their mission supports overall goals in the Strategic Tourism Plan. Eligible uses of general operating support funds include:

- Staff payroll
- Overhead expenses such as rent and utilities

Note: General operating support awarded to an organization will not exceed 40% of the organization's annual operating budget (defined as the past year's total operating expenses).

Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants include:

- Nonprofit organizations
 - Documentation of tax exempt, 501(c)3 status is required.
- Tompkins County departments
- Municipalities within Tompkins County

Ineligible applicants include:

- Individuals
- Businesses
- Organizations applying through a fiscal sponsor

If you are unsure of your eligibility, please contact the Tourism Program Director prior to preparing a proposal. Inquires may be sent to tourism@tompkins-co.org. Proposals from ineligible applicants will be rejected.

Decision Process

Proposals submitted by eligible applicants will be reviewed by the STPB Budget Committee and the Tourism Program Director. All proposals will be screened to determine if they comply with the existing laws governing the use of room tax.

The Tourism Program Director may compile historic data on expenditures and outcomes for established programs to present to the Budget Committee.

To determine if a proposal should be considered for inclusion in the annual budget, the Budget Committee will use the evaluation criteria described in this document. Organizations seeking funds may be requested by the Budget Committee to provide additional information through either a written submission or a live interview before a determination is made.

The Budget Committee first compiles a draft budget, which is then reviewed by the full STPB. Prior to voting on the budget, STPB board members may propose amendments. The budget recommended by the STPB at its June meeting is subsequently submitted to the County Administrator for inclusion in the annual County budget.

In early September, the County Administrator presents the draft budget to the County Legislature. Subsequently, the Expanded Budget Committee of the Legislature typically reviews budget proposals throughout September and October. Finally, the County Legislature usually votes to adopt the annual budget in early November. Additional detail about the County's budget development process can be found in [section 5 of the Administrative Policy Manual](#).

FUNDING AMOUNTS

The amount of hotel room occupancy tax available to allocate to programs is determined annually following a review of historical data and market forecasts.

For 2027 between \$298,000 and \$407,000 of hotel room occupancy tax funding is anticipated to be available to allocate to annual programs, grant administration, and general operating support.

Annual Programs

Organizations may request up to 100% of the operational costs for an annual program. A detailed program budget describing the expenditure of funds is required.

Grant Administration

Organizations may apply for up to 10% of the total grant program funding awarded in the past year to cover administration expenses. (For example, if \$200,000 was awarded from the Tourism Capital Grants last year, then a maximum of \$20,000 can be allocated for program administration in the current year.)

General Operating Support

Organizations may request up to 40% of their annual operating budget from the most recently completed fiscal year for general operating support. Capital costs and other non-operating expenses are not considered part of the organization's operating budget.

Organizations seeking general operating support must furnish supporting documentation to verify their annual organizational budget.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Eligible applicants include nonprofit organizations, Tompkins County departments, and municipalities within Tompkins County. Individuals, businesses, and other organizations are not eligible to request funding in the Tourism Program budget. Organizations may not request funding through an eligible fiscal sponsor.

Nonprofit organizations will be required to execute a contract with Tompkins County. A sample contract can be provided on request.

Nonprofit organizations will be obligated to maintain insurance as determined by County Administration. Insurance requirements vary based on program and are described in the contract.

Funds will be paid to organizations in quarterly installments or based on milestones. Additionally, organizations will be responsible for securing all necessary permits, authorizations, and approvals necessary for their program activities.

Organizations are expected to acknowledge the support of the Tompkins County Tourism Program in public relations materials related to funded programs. Organizations are encouraged to use the Tourism Program logo in accordance with the [recognition guidelines](#).

As part of their contractual obligations, all organizations included in the annual budget must submit quarterly progress reports. A template for these reports will be included in the contract.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Budget Request Form

Organizations requesting funding in the 2027 Tourism Program budget must complete an [online budget request form](#). This form collects essential information, including:

- Program name
- Detailed program description
- Amount of funding requested (minimum and maximum)
- Program objectives and deliverables
- Timetable for activity
- Relation to goals in the strategic tourism plan
- Known risks, constraints, and assumptions
- Human resource requirements
- Additional resources required

Supplemental Materials

In addition, the following supplemental materials may also be required:

- Budget
 - For annual programs and grant administration: a detailed program budget spreadsheet ([download a template budget spreadsheet](#))
 - For general operating support: the organization's adopted budget for past year
- For nonprofit organizations only:
 - Documentation of tax-exempt status (IRS determination letter or form 990)
- For organizations funded by the Tourism Program in the past year:
 - Documentation of fund balance as of January 1, 2026

All supplemental materials should be emailed to tourism@tompkins-co.org. The deadline for submitting the budget request forms and supplemental materials is **6:00pm on April 21, 2026**.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

The STPB Budget Committee will apply the following criteria in its evaluation of budget requests:

Alignment with Strategic Tourism Plan	How does the proposal support the goals and objectives outlined in the plan? To what extent does it support a wide range of goals and focus areas?
Alignment with STPB Diversity Statement	How does the proposal advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging? Does the proposal align with the STPB Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Statement ?
Cost	What is the proposed cost in the current budget? What are the anticipated long-term expenses? Are other partners contributing to the program costs?
Benefits	What are the anticipated short-term and long-term benefits? Do the anticipated benefits outweigh risks?
Organizational Capacity	Is the organization able to perform the proposed activity? Would substantial organizational changes be necessary?
Performance History	For past Tourism Program funding recipients only: has the organization met prior goals and performance targets? Have they submitted accurate and timely reports?

In addition, the committee will consider whether the proposed activity could be funded through an existing tourism grant program. If so, the organization will be asked to present its proposal as a future grant application.

APPENDIX

- A. Established Tourism Grant Programs
- B. Template Budget Spreadsheet

Summary of 2027 Tompkins County Tourism Program Grants

	Community Celebrations	Tourism Advancement	Tourism Capital	Arts & Cultural Organizational Development	Tompkins Outdoors
Award Range	\$500 to \$2,500	\$2,500 to \$10,000	\$5,000 to \$100,000	\$2,500 to \$35,000	\$1,500 to \$19,000
Average Award (2015-2025)	\$1,269	\$7,565 **	\$25,345	\$17,213	\$12,765
Match Required	Yes, half of total cost	Yes, half of project cost	Capital projects require two thirds of total project costs to be matched.	No, grant limited to 10% of org. budget	No, grant limited to 10% of org. budget
Eligible Applicants	Non-profit orgs., TC Municipalities	Non-profit orgs., TC Municipalities	Non-profit orgs., TC Municipalities	Eligible non-profit orgs.	Eligible non-profit orgs.
Purpose / Eligible Activities	Local events that convey unique culture and history	Marketing and product development to attract visitors to TC	Feasibility studies and capital investment projects	Enhance County's brand as an artistic & cultural destination	Enhance County's profile as outdoor recreation destination
Application Cycles	2: Spring & Fall	2: Spring & Fall	1: Fall	1: Winter	1: Spring
Award Term	Approx. 9 months or until event date	Approx. 9 months or until event date	Variable, up to 36 months	Approx. 2 years	Approx. 10 months
Most Recent Budget	\$31,000	\$85,000	\$250,000	\$330,000	\$55,000
Contact	Nick Helmholdt, TCDPS tourism@tompkins-co.org 607-274-5560	Nick Helmholdt, TCDPS tourism@tompkins-co.org 607-274-5560	Kurt Anderson, IAED, kurta@ithacaareaed.org	Megan Barber, CAP, director@artspartner.org	Nick Helmholdt, TCDPS tourism@tompkins-co.org 607-274-5560

* This table provides summary information about matching funds, eligibility and limitations. See [grant guidelines](#) for additional details.

** This represents the average of all Tourism Advancement grants awarded from 2023-2025

2027 Budget Request - Tompkins County Tourism Program

Organization Name _____

Annual Program Name _____

See *INSTRUCTIONS* tab for guidance.

REVENUE	2024 Actual	2025 Actual	2026 Budget	2027 Request	Notes
Tompkins County Tourism Program					

TOTAL REVENUES	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	
TCTP* Share	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	

EXPENSES	2024 Actual	2025 Actual	2026 Budget	2027 Request	Notes
Personnel Wages					
Personnel Fringe					
Materials					
Services					
Occupancy and Utilities					
Travel					
Administration					
<i>Other</i>					
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	
TOTAL TCTP*	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	
TCTP share	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	

REVENUES LESS EXPENSES	2024 Actual	2025 Actual	2026 Budget	2027 Request	Notes
	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	

FUND BALANCE	Jan 1, 2026	Notes
Total program account fund balance as of January 1 of current year.		
Amount of fund balance encumbered for expenses anticipated in curent year (describe in notes).		
UNENCUMBERED FUND BALANCE	\$0	

*TCTP-Tompkins County Tourism Program

Instructions for the Tourism Program Budget Request Form

Purple Text Replace all *purple text* as appropriate for your organization and program. Feel free to change the font color and style to your liking.

Green Cells Your budget request amounts go in this column.

Grey Cells These are calculated automatically and **should not be edited**.

Organization Name Please make sure the organization name matches your budget narrative

Annual Program Name Please make sure the program name matches your budget narrative

Other If you have a category of expense or revenue not listed on the template, please **re-name these lines** with descriptive titles.

Multiple Programs Use a separate tab (worksheet) for each individual program. Update the titles accordingly for each program

Adding Rows Add additional rows to the Expense and Revenue tables as necessary. Add descriptive titles and notes for new rows.

In-Kind Costs & Revenues Ensure in-kind expenses and revenues balance out. If any expenses are in-kind, they should also be listed clearly as in-kind revenues.

Fund Balance The fund balance is the amount of unspent money from the past year(s) received from the Tourism Program. This is sometimes referred to as a "reserve." For any fund balance over \$1,000 please include supporting documentation from your accounting or financial system to validate the amount.

What is an encumbrance? If you expect to spend funds this year that were provided in a past year from the Tourism Program please estimate the amount of these expenses and describe them in the notes section.

Previous Years For previous years budgets, use modified budget amounts.

Need More Help? For additional assistance contact Nick Helmholdt
607-274-5560 or nhelmholdt@tompkins-co.org