Tourism Advancement Grants

Spring 2024 Guidelines

TOMPKINS COUNTY Tourism Program
Promoting Economic Development & Enhancing Our Quality of Life

Funding Purpose + Overview

This grant supports events, projects and marketing campaigns that attract overnight visitors to Tompkins County with special emphasis on activities that create travel demand during periods where our market has capacity available to accommodate additional travelers.

Award Information

- Grants range from $1,000 to $20,000.
- Applications are due February 29, 2024, at 11:59 PM ET.
- Grant activity period: May 2024 to April 2025.

Contact: Email the Tourism Program or call 607-274-5560

Supported Activities

- Large scale and high profile events, marketing campaigns, art installations, guided tours, and exhibits
- Past funded projects include the Ithaca Reggae Festival, Ice and Lights Festival, outdoor theatre, website redesigns, museum exhibits, and musical performances.

Apply Now

- Common Grant Application (scroll to Tourism Advancement)

Funding Source + Eligibility

This grant is funded by Hotel Room Occupancy Tax collected in Tompkins County, New York, and provides a total of $91,000 to support events taking place between May 2024 and April 2025.

Who Can Apply?

- Nonprofit organizations designated as 501(c)3.

- Municipalities within Tompkins County.

- Other organizations with a fiscal sponsor meeting the above criteria.

Note: All applicants must have an adopted diversity, equity, and inclusion policy.

What is Eligible for Funding?

Projects aligned with the Strategic Tourism Plan or other tourism implementation plans are eligible for funding. Examples of eligible uses of Tourism Advancement Grants include:

- Artistic performances and installations
- Heritage tourism events
- Agriculinary events
- Outdoor recreation events
- Events which attract a niche audience

- Festivals
- Temporary exhibits
- Guided tours
- Sporting events and tournaments
- Marketing campaigns

Limitations + Conditions:

- **Geographic focus:** Marketing campaigns must target audiences beyond a 50-mile radius of Tompkins County. Marketing expenses within this radius are ineligible. A map and list of zip codes is available on the [Tourism Program website](#).

- **Matching funds:** Both marketing and product development expenses require a 50% financial match. Accepted sources include cash, in-kind donations, and volunteer time[1]. Matching funds for marketing can be used to reach local audiences.

- **Eligible expenses:**
  - *Marketing:* print, radio/TV, digital, website development, PR consulting.
  - *Product development:* equipment rental, artists and performers, event production, exhibit design, volunteer coordination, temporary signage, venue rental, transportation.

- **Ineligible expenses:** operational expenses, staff time, utilities, rent, fundraising without documented travel impact, events with restricted access, conferences/meetings, general entertainment.

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[1] Where the specific value of the service is not known, use an estimate of $31.80 per hour. Source: Independent Sector. https://independentsector.org/resource/value-of-volunteer-time/

- **Grant review:** Marketing plans and budgets will be reviewed by the [Ithaca/Tompkins County Convention and Visitors Bureau](#) (CVB) and may be subject to modification prior to award.

- **Restrictions:**
  - Projects exclusively promoting a specific religious tradition, political cause or candidate are prohibited.
  - Promoted events must be open to the public, not requiring membership.
  - Groups planning conferences should use the CVB's services.

Evaluation Criteria

- **Travel demand generation:** Will the project attract overnight stays in Tompkins County, especially during low travel times like mid-week or winter?

- **Organizational capacity:** Does your organization have the personnel, resources, and funding to successfully execute the project? Have you utilized technical assistance resources like the [Tompkins Festivals Program](#)? Are you aware of necessary permits and approvals?

- **Strategic Tourism Plan alignment:** How well does the project align with the goals and actions of the [2021-2027 Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Plan](#)?

- **Marketing plan:** Does the application present a clear and effective marketing strategy that identifies target audiences and communication channels?

- **Product development proposal:** Does the application clearly explain how and why your project will attract tourists and generate interest?

- **Outcomes and cost-effectiveness:** Are the potential benefits of your project significant compared to the requested funding?

- **Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging:** Does the project promote a sense of belonging for diverse communities? Is it accessible to all people? Does the application demonstrate efforts to attract a diverse audience?

Additional Key Points

- **Diversity and inclusion:** Consider the [STPB Diversity Statement](#) and how your project reflects the community's richness.

- **Focus on visitors:** Projects must draw tourists, particularly overnight visitors, from outside Tompkins County (50+ miles away). Local-focused projects are less likely to be funded. Document past visitor data (if available) and set clear future attendance goals with data collection methods.

- **Further notes**: Source locally when possible. Previous funding does not guarantee future support. Clearly describe all required permits or licenses in your application.

Attachments

1. Detailed project budget: Please use the provided template on the [Tourism Program webpage](#) to list all major expense categories, revenue sources, and donations.
2. Proof of 501(c)3 Status: Nonprofits only (upload [IRS determination letter](#)).
3. Fiscal Sponsorship Confirmation Letter (if applicable): Must be written on the sponsor's official letterhead.
4. Returning Applicant Report (if applicable): If you cannot locate your most recent Tourism Advancement grant report, please email the [Tourism Program](#) for assistance.
5. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Policy: Provide an attachment or link.
6. Other materials (letters of support, promotional collateral, graphics, and other relevant documentation.

Award Decision Process

1. Staff review applications for completeness and eligibility.
2. The review committee recommends funding for each application to the Strategic Tourism Planning Board (STPB).
3. The STPB recommends funding to the Tompkins County Legislature.
4. The Legislature votes on the grant awards.
5. Staff email applicants with the funding decision and a contract.

Grant Recipient Responsibilities

Grant recipients are required to enter into a contract with Tompkins County. Several of the responsibilities listed below are included in the contract. Grant funds are paid upon contract execution. All unspent funds must be returned.

Grant recipients are responsible for securing all necessary permits, authorizations, and approvals necessary for their event.

Awards will be paid directly to registered nonprofit organizations or municipal governments. (Successful applicants under the fiscal sponsorship of a municipality should contact their individual municipality for payment instructions.)

Grant recipients are expected to acknowledge the support of the Tompkins County Tourism Program in public relations materials, posters, and programs. The standard acknowledgment statement is: "*Made possible in part by a grant from the Tompkins County Tourism Program.*" Grant recipients may use the Tourism Program logo in accordance with the [recognition guidelines](#).

Grant recipients are expected to submit a grant report no later than 30 days after their event, campaign or project completion. The grant report asks for information about attendance, actual expenses, and event promotion. A template report is available on request.

Prepare and Submit Your Application

All applications must be submitted through Common Grant Application. Use one of the links below to start an application:

- Already have an account: Log in to start an application.
- First time applying: Register for a new account and start an application.
- Review other grants offered by Tompkins County Department of Planning and Sustainability.

Resources

The Tompkins Festivals Program is available to help event organizers with:

- Technical event assistance to support budgeting, fundraising, site planning and permitting, volunteer management, site management, succession planning, etc.
- Event equipment loan service
- Tompkins County event vendor lists
- Tompkins County event planning manual

For more information, contact Olivia Pastella at the Downtown Ithaca Alliance: olivia@downtownithaca.com.

The Ithaca/Tompkins County Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) is available to provide technical assistance related to promoting your event. Grant recipients are encouraged to work with the CVB if they would like to attract visitors from outside Tompkins County. For more information contact Peggy Coleman, VP Tourism & Community Relations, peggy@visitithaca.com.