



**Haywood County Tourism Development Authority,
operating as Visit NC Smokies**

Tourism Promotion Grant Guidelines

FY 2024-2025

All awarded grants must be used between July 1, 2024 and June 30, 2025

Welcome to the Haywood County Tourism Development Authority's Tourism Promotion Grant Program. Our mission is to boost tourism and foster economic growth by providing support to projects that attract visitors to Haywood County. Made possible through the use of occupancy tax dollars, these grants are open to eligible not-for-profit organizations, tourism-related groups, and events that aim to bring in out-of-county visitors for unforgettable experiences. The projects should have the potential to drive new and increased visitation while simultaneously enhancing the local quality of life through the positive impact of tourism.

The program operates annually from July 1 to June 30, offering financial aid for marketing and developing new or existing festivals, events, activities, or attractions. We prioritize initiatives that attract overnight visitors from beyond a 50-mile radius, extend the tourism season, provide exceptional visitor value, and enhance local quality of life.

Definition of "Tourism Promotion" per the State of NC:

To advertise or market an area or activity, publish and distribute pamphlets and other materials, conduct market research, or engage in similar promotional activities that attract tourists or business travelers to the area.

Who Can Apply:

- Not-for-profit organizations, museums, attractions, governmental agencies, or other non-profit tourism entities. Not-for-profit organizations must have a minimum grant match of 50%.
- For-profit, tourism-based organizations may apply with a minimum grant match of 100%.

The Haywood County Tourism Development Authority's Grant Program is designed to enhance tourism through innovative promotion and development of tourism-related events, activities, and experiences. There are three categories of types of funding: 1. Advertising, 2. Market Research and 3. Other Promotional Activities that attract visitors to Haywood County. Here's a guide to help you understand what qualifies for funding, with examples to inspire your proposals.

1. ADVERTISING

- **Marketing Campaigns:** Use multiple channels to target your audience effectively.
- **Promotional Materials:** Create brochures, websites, and other informational resources for visitors.
- **Paid Advertising:** Targeted online campaigns, print ads, and media buys that aim to attract visitors from outside a 50-mile radius.
- **Digital Storytelling:** Develop engaging content like videos or social media campaigns highlighting Haywood County as a great place to visit.

Note: At least 75% of advertising expenses must be geo-targeted to exclude Haywood County, and should focus on those markets we regularly target our advertising to. A maximum of 25% of advertising funding may be spent within Haywood County to ensure our local residents learn about the program. Specific advertising items that may qualify may include:

- Print ads
- Google pay-per-click ads
- Social media ads and boosted posts
- Public relations
- Hosting an influencer
- Brochure distribution
- Radio ads
- Photography that the HCTDA will have full access and rights to
- Videography that the HCTDA will have full access and rights to

2. MARKET RESEARCH

- **Insights Gathering:** Conduct research to understand market trends, visitor preferences, effective promotional strategies, and economic impact. This applies to one-time research and data tool membership up to one year. The HCTDA should have access to the research and studies.

3. OTHER PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES

Please note that this is not an exhaustive list of eligible activities.

- **Special Event Packages:** Develop packages that combine event tickets with overnight stays, possibly including meals or special access to local attractions. This encourages visitors to stay longer to enjoy the full experience.
- **Cultural and Heritage Trails:** Develop guided or self-guided tours that explore Haywood County's cultural, historical, or natural heritage. These can be packaged with lodging discounts for multi-day explorations.
- **Outdoor Adventure Programs:** Package outdoor activities (like hiking, biking, fishing, or kayaking) with accommodations. Offer guides, equipment rentals, and transportation as part of the deal to attract adventure seekers.
- **Arts and Performance Series:** Support a series of performances, art exhibitions, or music festivals with partnerships between local venues and hotels for special stay-and-play offers. This should be for regional or national acts (not local) to potentially drive more visitation.

- **Educational Workshops and Retreats:** Collaborate with local experts to offer workshops or retreats (in areas like photography, cooking, or yoga) that include overnight stays as part of the experience.
- **Agritourism Experiences:** Partner with local farms and restaurants to offer tours, tastings, and farm-to-table dining experiences, encouraging visitors to stay overnight in nearby lodgings.
- **Eco-Tourism Initiatives:** Develop eco-friendly tours and activities that highlight the natural beauty and biodiversity of Haywood County, including bird watching, nature hikes, and conservation workshops, with options for overnight lodging.
- **Attractions, Exhibits and other things to do:** Produce a grand opening for new attractions or exhibits that draw attention and from both locals and tourists alike. The Tourism Promotion Grant will fund rental fees for significant temporary exhibits that provide a reason to come visit Haywood County, however it will not cover capital construction costs.
- **Passport Programs:** Collaborate with businesses or community organizations to develop a program to raise awareness of and drive business to a variety of local themed businesses or entities around the county.
- **Themed Events*:** Create, produce and execute an event or festival of interest to the traveling public. Existing events and festivals with a new feature, change or enhancement that has the potential to drive new and increased visitation may be considered. Examples of themed event topics include:
 - Heritage Tourism Events
 - Agritourism or Agri-culinary Events
 - Outdoor Recreation Events
 - Events Attracting Niche Audiences
 - Sporting Events and Tournaments

***Themed Events Additional Guidelines**

Qualifying Event Elements:

- **Marketing & Promotion:** Activities attracting visitors from beyond a 50-mile radius, such as marketing materials creation, paid advertising, radio ads, photography and videography that the HCTDA will have full access and rights to. Up to 25% of the marketing and promotion funds may be used for local advertising within the 50-mile radius.
- **Programming & Activities:** Engaging features like artist performances, guest speakers, and interactive visitor experiences.

Non-Qualifying Event Elements:

- Administrative expenses (ie: salaries or benefits for event staff), memberships or dues, mortgage payments, facility maintenance.
- Basic operational expenses such as utilities at the event venue, catering for event staff or volunteers, general event supplies (tables, chairs, tents), day-of promotion items (event maps, brochures, flyers), wristbands, tickets, badge-passes
- Regular ongoing expenses including standard audio/visual equipment rental, basic event program printing, and staff or volunteer travel and accommodation.
- Promotional items like t-shirts, hats, or other giveaways unless they are integral to a unique visitor experience.
- Prizes and awards like cash prizes or expensive giveaways for event competitions; plaques, trophies, or awards certificates; scholarships or prize money.

Overall Ineligible Activities and Expenses:

- Ongoing operational costs, including website hosting, routine administrative expenses, staff salaries, utilities, and rent.
- Expenses incurred before the grant award date.
- Lobbying, political activities, or initiatives.
- Major capital expenditures, purchases, or leases of equipment.
- Projects or events that promote one specific individual private business.
- Fundraising activities that do not demonstrate a clear impact on travel.
- Events with restricted access or limited appeal to a broader audience.
- Family reunions
- Church or religious activities
- School or community-specific programs

Funding Prioritization

When applying for funding, remember that our priority is to support projects with a strong potential to attract new and increased overnight visitation to Haywood County. Proposals for multi-day events and those planned for the off-season will be favored over single-day initiatives or projects during peak seasons. We highly encourage collaboration and partnerships across multiple entities to enhance the impact and reach of your project. Additionally, it's important to note that we will not fund projects that replicate programs currently being undertaken by the Haywood County Tourism Development Authority (HCTDA). Our goal is to foster innovative and unique tourism experiences that complement our existing efforts to promote the county.

Criteria for Tourism Promotion Grant Awards

These are the key areas we'll consider when awarding grant funding:

- **Visitor Attraction and Economic Impact:** Ability to attract new and increased overnight visitation and potential for economic impact, including its ability to generate revenue, create jobs, and boost local businesses.
- **Innovation and Uniqueness:** Creativity, uniqueness, and its contribution to diversifying Haywood County's tourism offerings. Projects that offer new, novel experiences or fill a gap in the current tourism landscape score higher.
- **Collaboration and Community Support:** Demonstrating strong collaboration between multiple entities (e.g., local businesses, non-profits, government agencies) and having significant community support or involvement are awarded higher points.
- **Seasonal and Off-Peak Promotion:** The project/event aims to extend the tourism season by attracting visitors during off-peak times, contributing to a more even distribution of tourism throughout the year.

Application Process:

- Complete the Application Form: Access the application form from the Haywood County Tourism Development Authority website at <https://haywoodtda.com/grants/>
- Submit by the Deadline: Applications must be submitted electronically through the online portal by May 15, 2024
- Required Information:
 - All required fields must be completed accurately and truthfully.
 - The application must be signed by a representative with the authority to bind the applicant organization.
 - Provide the requested financial information, including event budget, projected revenue and expenses, and any available historical financial data.
 - Clearly describe any sponsorship opportunities and benefits offered to potential sponsors (if applicable).

Recognition:

Grant recipients must agree to acknowledge Visit NC Smokies' support in all relevant public relations activities, printed materials, and digital platforms. This checklist outlines acceptable proof of Visit NC Smokies' recognition for your Tourism Promotion funding. Please ensure you include at least **three (3)** of the following items:

- Visual Recognition:
 - **Logo:** Prominently display the Visit NC Smokies logo on all promotional materials (e.g., flyers, posters, website, social media).
 - **Signage:** Include Visit NC Smokies branding on event signage throughout the venue.
 - **On-Site Presence:** Feature Visit NC Smokies representatives or materials at the event location.
 - **Photos:** Share high-resolution photos showcasing Visit NC Smokies branding during the event.
- Verbal Recognition:
 - **Announcements:** Mention Visit NC Smokies' support in event announcements, speeches, or emcee introductions.
 - **Presentations:** Acknowledge Visit NC Smokies' sponsorship during presentations or informational sessions.
 - **Interviews:** Mention Visit NC Smokies' role in media interviews or press releases related to the event.
- Digital Recognition:
 - **Website:** Include the Visit NC Smokies logo and link to the website on your event website.
 - **Social Media:** Tag @VisitNCsmokies in event-related social media posts and use their designated hashtags.
 - **Email Marketing:** Acknowledge Visit NC Smokies' sponsorship in event-related email communications.

Recipients will be required to submit proof of compliance. Failure to meet these recognition requirements may result in withholding of grant funds or disqualification from future grant programs.

Additional Notes:

- Grant applications must be a minimum of \$2,000 to be considered for funding.
- Visit NC Smokies reserves the right to request additional information from any applicant.
- All material submitted as part of an application will be a matter of public record, subject to Chapter 132. G.S. 132-1 of NC laws.
- Applications are reviewed by the Product Development Committee (PDC) based on the criteria outlined in the "Criteria for Tourism Promotion Grant Awards" section. PDC recommendations are then forwarded to the HCTDA Board for consideration.
- All funding decisions ultimately rest with the Haywood County Tourism Development Authority Board. Depending on funding available and applications received, we may award less than the requested amount, offer alternative support, or not award funding at all. Projects that best align with our criteria will be prioritized.
- Grant applicants will be notified of the decision via email by June 28, 2024.
- Grant applicants are fully responsible for following these guidelines and meeting deadlines outlined herein.
- We reserve the right to modify or adjust our grant programs at any time. While we strive to be transparent and communicative, please be aware that program details are subject to change.

Accessing Awarded Funds:

To ensure smooth access to your awarded funds, please follow these guidelines:

Project Completion and Documentation:

- Funds are reimbursable and will be disbursed **only after the project has concluded** and all related activities are completed.
- **Within 45 days** of the project's conclusion, submit the following documentation to Visit NC Smokies:
 - Request for Payment Form & Final Evaluation Report: This report should detail the event's execution, successes, challenges, and overall impact. It is mandatory for future funding eligibility.
 - Recognition Verification: Three (3) forms of proof of Visit NC Smokies' recognition as required in the grant agreement (e.g., logos, mentions in promotional materials, etc.).
 - Digital Submission Required: All of the above must be submitted digitally via JotForm.

Failure to meet these event evaluation requirements may result in withholding of awarded funds or disqualification from future programs.

Contact:

If you have any questions regarding the documentation process or fund disbursement, please contact Visit NC Smokies at 828-944-0761 or email Hayley Printz, Administrative Assistant, at Hayley@VisitNCsmokies.com