Haywood County Tourism Development Authority,
operating as Visit Haywood

FY 2027-2028 Tourism Capital Grant Guidelines

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

Welcome to the Haywood County Tourism Development Authority's Tourism Capital Grant Program. Recognizing that a great place to visit begins with a great place to live, this program is designed to support capital projects that align with the priorities outlined in the Destination Master Plan, enhance quality of place for both residents and visitors, and contribute to the economic vitality of our region. By investing in strategic capital projects, we endeavor to create destination infrastructure that inspires travelers to explore our five mountain towns and stay overnight, fostering long-term growth for Haywood's tourism industry.

Program Intent & Scoring Criteria

The Tourism Capital Grant Program seeks to fund impactful capital projects that:

- Enhance the destination experience for all by developing amenities and infrastructure that benefit both locals and visitors.
- Support the mission and vision outlined in the Haywood County Destination Master Plan.
- Attract overnight visitors from more than 50 miles outside Haywood County.
- Drive economic growth and create meaningful destination impact for the region.

Who Can Apply:

- Not-for-profit organizations, museums, attractions, and governmental agencies. Non-profit organizations must have been in operation for at least 2 years at the time of the application.
- For-profit tourism-based organizations.

Definition of a Capital Project

A capital project is a significant investment in physical infrastructure or facilities that enhances Haywood County's tourism economy with the potential to attract visitors, enhances the local tourism experience, and contributes to the long-term economic vitality of the region.

Prioritization

Applications that demonstrate a clear alignment with the priorities of the Destination Master Plan will receive higher consideration. Additionally, projects that are "shovel ready," supported by a strong financial plan, and able to show a measurable impact on overnight stays and economic activity will be scored higher. Preference will be given to projects that simultaneously enhance the visitor experience and serve the needs of Haywood County residents.

Eligibility Criteria - *To qualify for this program, projects must meet the following requirements:*

- **Location:** The project must be entirely located in Haywood County.
- **Long-Term Impact**: Projects must demonstrate a lifespan of at least ten (10) years.
- **Tourism Impact**: Projects must have the potential to attract visitors from more than 50 miles outside Haywood County and generate overnight stays.
- **Alignment with Destination Master Plan**: Projects must align with the strategic pillars and goals outlined in the Haywood County Destination Master Plan.
- **Minimum Budget**: Projects must have a minimum total budget of $100,000
- ~~**Match Requirements:** Applicant must provide a 100% match to the grant funding (i.e., for every $1 requested, the organization must match $1) and must show how the 1:1 match will be achieved. In-kind contributions (i.e., the value of donated goods, services, or volunteer labor) do not count toward the match requirement.~~
- **Match Requirements:** Applicants must provide a 100% (1:1) match to the grant funding. For every $1 requested from HCTDA, the applicant must demonstrate $1 in eligible matching project costs.

  Eligible matching costs must be directly related to the approved project scope and have a documented value. Match may include applicant funds, other grant funds, partner-funded project expenses, or work performed by the applicant when the work is included in the approved project scope and supported by a professional cost estimate or other documentation acceptable to HCTDA.

  General volunteer labor, donated services or materials, and other contributions without a documented project cost do not count toward the match requirement.

  - **Procurement Process:** Applicants must provide proof of bids received during the reimbursement process.
    - Purchases between $30,000 to $90,000 trigger an informal bidding process per NC G.S. §143-131, requiring at least three (3) bids or quotes from qualified vendors with documentation of solicitation. The project should be awarded to the lowest responsible and responsive bidder that meets specification and quality requirements.
    - Purchases over $90,000 trigger a formal bidding process per NC G.S. §143-129, requiring public advertisement at least 7 days prior to opening bids, using sealed bids and opening publicly. The project should be awarded to the lowest responsible and responsive bidder that meets specification and quality requirements.
    - Contracts may not be divided into smaller components to avoid the competition requirements.
- **Lodging Restriction:** Per state law, project must not solely benefit a single lodging owner or property or be situated on a lodging property.
- **Proof of Ownership / Rights to Use Property:** At the time of application, the applicant must have legal control of the property through a recorded deed or long-term lease agreement. If property is owned by a municipal partner, applicant must provide a letter of support or other agreement from the municipality.

Alignment with Strategic Pillars & Goals

To ensure funding supports the County's long-term tourism strategy, projects must clearly demonstrate alignment with the strategic pillars and goals of the Destination Master Plan (see page 41):

- *Strengthen awareness and perception of the Haywood County Tourism Brand* – enhance brand visibility and reputation through innovative marketing and storytelling, emphasizing Haywood County as a unique gateway to the Great Smoky and Blue Ridge Mountains.
- *Diversify tourism product offerings and experiences that enhance the destination* – develop and promote a wider range of tourism products to enrich visitor experiences and extend stays, focusing on cultural, historical and outdoor recreational activities for all seasons.
- *Support and promote stewardship of natural resources and outdoor recreation opportunities* – advance sustainable tourism and preserve natural resources with initiatives that include educational campaigns and partnerships with local groups for conservation efforts.
- *Enhance HCTDA's evolution while cultivating community engagement and collaboration* – strengthen the organizations' leadership in tourism by improving operational effectiveness and nourishing partnerships with local communities and stakeholders.

Projects that fail to meet these criteria or demonstrate clear alignment with the Destination Master Plan will not be considered for funding.

Project Ideas:

While all projects must meet the eligibility criteria, priority will be given to those that directly support the outcomes of the Destination Master Plan (in particular, refer to section 4.4 "Diversify Tourism Product Offerings", pages 65-85). Eligible project types include, but are not limited to:

- **Outdoor Recreation Development**:
    - Development or enhancement of adventure-based recreation, such as zipline courses, climbing facilities, or water recreation amenities.
    - Pigeon River and other Blueways development
    - New or expanded trails, greenways, or bike paths that enhance access to Haywood County's natural beauty.
- **Cultural and Heritage Tourism**:
    - Preservation or adaptive reuse of historic sites and buildings for the purpose of providing a new attraction to the county.
    - Development of attractions that celebrate Haywood County's Appalachian arts, music, and history.
- **Tourism Infrastructure**:
    - Public amenities that enhance accessibility, such as parking and restrooms.
- **Innovative Tourism Assets**:

- Creative projects that introduce new attractions or experiences, such as interactive exhibits, culinary tourism initiatives, or technology-driven visitor services.
- Development of indoor products, such as bowling alleys, rock-climbing gyms, art demonstration studios, and mini-golf.
- Family-friendly products that provide options for multigenerational families such as zip lining, children's museums, agritourism and animal outings, etc.

Ineligible Projects and Expenses

To ensure that grant funding is focused on projects that meet the intent and goals of the Haywood County Tourism Capital Grant Program, the following types of projects and expenses are not eligible for funding:

- Projects that replicate, or are similar to, programs currently being undertaken by the Haywood County Tourism Development Authority (HCTDA).
- Temporary or short-term projects that do not have a lifespan of at least ten (10) years (ie: installations).
- Expenses incurred or projects completed prior to the grant award date.
- Real estate purchases or acquisition of land or property.
- Feasibility studies or planning such as research, studies, or master planning projects, including market analysis, site feasibility assessments, or preliminary design work.
- Costs associated with obtaining permits, licenses, or fees for zoning, environmental compliance, or construction approvals.
- Operational expenses, including salaries, wages, benefits, utilities, leases, or other day-to-day operating costs of a business or organization.
- Routine maintenance, including but not limited to, repairs or upkeep of existing facilities, such as repainting, replacing HVAC systems, or routine landscaping.
- Installation or upgrades to utilities (e.g., water, sewer, electrical connections) unless directly tied to the capital project and clearly benefiting tourism.
- Purchases of movable or non-fixed items such as office furniture, laptops, or vehicles that are not permanently integrated into the project.
- Projects with specific religious or political purpose.
- Paying off existing loans, mortgages, or other debts.
- Projects that do not demonstrate a clear and measurable benefit to Haywood County's tourism economy or ability to attract overnight visitors.
- Contingency funds for unexpected expenses or overages.

Grant Selection Process:

- *Application:* Access the application form from the HCTDA website at https://haywoodtda.com/grants and submit electronically through the online portal by the posted deadline, with the following required information:
    - **Application:** The application must be completed and signed by a representative with the authority to bind the applicant organization.
    - **Proof of Legal Control of the Property:** The applicant must provide documented proof of property ownership or legal rights to use the site.

- **Capital Project Budget**: The applicant must provide a project budget, including all revenues and expenses. Proof of all committed funds must be provided. A full project budget must be included, even if the project will be completed in phases.
- **Project Timeline or Work Plan:** The applicant must provide a project or work plan that includes the start date, anticipated completion date, and project milestones.
- **Site Plan:** The applicant must provide a site plan, including maps, drawings, photos, or renderings related to the project.
- **Project Marketing Plan (if applicable)**
- **Project Feasibility Study (if applicable)**
- **Maintenance Plan (if applicable):** The applicant should provide a plan for ongoing maintenance of the building/attraction.
- **Sponsorship Forms (if applicable):** The applicant must submit a form showing sponsorship opportunities and benefits offered to potential sponsors.

- ~~*Review:* HCTDA staff will review applications and reach out to applicants if additional information is required. There will be a window of time for the applicant to submit the additional information, if requested by the HCTDA. The HCTDA reserves the right to reject applications that are not properly filled out. Applications will be reviewed by the Product Development Committee and Executive Committee based on the criteria outlined in the Destination Master Plan. Applicants will have an opportunity to present their project to the Product Development Committee and answer questions prior to the Committee recommendation being made. Product Development and Executive Committee recommendations are then forwarded to the HCTDA Board for consideration.~~
- *Review:* HCTDA staff will review applications for completeness and may request additional information or revisions. Applicants will be given a deadline to submit any requested materials; incomplete applications will be disqualified. Complete applications will then be reviewed by the Product Development Committee and Executive Committee based on the criteria outlined in the "Criteria for Tourism Promotion Grant Awards" section. Committee recommendations will be forwarded to the HCTDA Board for final consideration.
- *Award:* The availability of funding does not guarantee that projects will receive funding. All funding decisions will be voted on by the Haywood County Tourism Development Authority Board of Directors. Once the HCTDA Board has voted, applicants will be notified of the decision via email.

Additional Notes

- Grant applicants are fully responsible for following these guidelines and meeting deadlines outlined for the grant program. Applicants should reach out with questions to ensure their project meets the requirements.
- The Haywood County Tourism Development Authority (HCTDA) reserves the right to determine eligibility on a case-by-case basis.
- Businesses must be current on all federal, state, local, and occupancy tax payments, or will be disqualified from receiving grant funding.
- 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.

- Applicants are responsible for retaining copies of all submitted application materials. HCTDA will not provide copies of previously submitted documentation.
- Grant awards are based on the project as approved. Significant changes to the project scope or budget require advance HCTDA Board approval to remain eligible for funding. Applicants must notify HCTDA staff of proposed changes at least 60 days before the project start date.
- The HCTDA reserves the right to request additional information from any applicant.
- If the applicant is unable to fund or complete the project, HCTDA may revoke all or part of the grant.
- If the project is delayed and will not be completed by the deadline, the applicant must contact the HCTDA in writing to request an extension.
- 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.
- The HCTDA Board reserves the right to revoke funding or deny future funding if a project does not meet grant requirements or adequately fulfill the objectives outlined in the approved application.
- ~~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.~~ Visit Haywood reserves the right to modify its grant programs, guidelines, or requirements at any time.
- Failure to meet grant requirements or deadlines may result in forfeiture of all or part of the grant award.

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.
- ~~Grantees must submit the following documentation digitally to the HCTDA **within 45 days** of the project's conclusion or no later than July 10, whichever is sooner:~~ Reimbursement documentation must be submitted digitally within 45 days of project completion and no later than July 10, whichever comes first. Failure to meet the applicable deadline will result in forfeiture of the grant award.
    - 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.
        - Bids: The applicant must provide proof of received bids for the project.
    - Funding Reimbursement Worksheet & Receipts: This Excel sheet should list all invoices/receipts in detail and a copy of all invoices/receipts should be attached in the same order.
    - Recognition Verification: Grantees must work with HCTDA staff to determine the appropriate type of Visit Haywood recognition.

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 Haywood at 828-944-0761 or email Hayley Printz, Administrative Assistant, at Hayley@VisitHaywood.com~~

For questions about grant requirements, reimbursement, or documentation, please contact Visit Haywood at 828-944-0761 or Hayley Printz, Administrative Assistant, at Hayley@VisitHaywood.com.

If you do not see a "Thank You" confirmation page after submitting an online form, please contact us to verify that your submission was received.