Haywood County Tourism Development Authority,
operating as Visit Haywood

FY 2027-2028 Tourism Promotion Grant Guidelines

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

Welcome to the Haywood County Tourism Development Authority's Tourism Promotion Grant Program. Our goal 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 advertising and 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 support for advertising, market research, and for developing new or existing festivals, events, activities, or attractions. We prioritize initiatives that occur primarily within Haywood County and attract overnight visitors from beyond a 50-mile radius, align with the Visit Haywood brand, 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% (ie: for every $1 requested, the organization must match $0.50)
- For-profit, tourism-based organizations may apply with a minimum grant match of 100% (ie: for every $1 requested, the organization must match $1).

The Tourism Promotion Grant Program is designed to enhance tourism through innovative promotion and development of tourism-related events, activities, and experiences. There are three categories of grant funding: **1. Advertising, 2. Events, 3. Market Research, 4. Travel & Trade Shows**

Here's a guide to help you understand what qualifies for funding, with examples to inspire your proposals:

1. ADVERTISING

Funds may be allocated for advertising that encourages visitors to explore Haywood County and stay overnight in local lodging accommodations. Advertising efforts may encompass a variety of platforms and strategies to effectively reach target audiences and highlight the unique offerings of the area. Examples of advertising include, but are not limited to:

- **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.
    - Municipalities may apply for 1% funds to purchase an ad in the Visit Haywood Visitor Guide.
- **Digital Storytelling:** Develop an engaging digital content campaign highlighting the attraction, event, etc. that attracts overnight visitation.

~~***Note: At least 75% of advertising expenses must be geo-targeted to exclude Haywood County and should focus on those markets the HCTDA regularly targets with advertising. 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 include:***

- Print ads
- Google pay-per-click ads
- Social media ads and boosted posts
- Public relations
- Hosting an ~~influencer~~ content creator
- 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

~~**If using grant funds for advertising or promotional materials, the HCTDA must approve all advertising creative design at least 7 days in advance to ensure that the Visit Haywood logo is used appropriately and that the ads being placed are in alignment with Visit Haywood approved language and branding guidelines.**~~
All applicants must submit a marketing plan that fully adheres to the grant advertising requirements, found here.[LINK]

Advertising & Project Examples:

- **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.

- **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.
- **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.
- **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.

2. EVENTS

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

- **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

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.

This grant does cover event production costs. However, in all cases, events must include a complete marketing plan and meet advertising guidelines and requirements, linked here. [LINK]

3. 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 for up to one year. The applicant must provide HCTDA access to the research and studies.
- **Master Plans:** Develop long-term strategic plans that guide tourism development and destination management. This applies to downtown or district revitalization plans, heritage or trail system master planning, recreation master planning, etc. The applicant must provide the research and final documents with HCTDA.
- **Feasibility Studies:** Conduct research to assess the viability of proposed tourism projects, events, or capital improvements. This applies to outdoor recreation infrastructure planning, cultural site activation studies, lodging demand analysis, and event venue feasibility.

4. TRAVEL & TRADE SHOWS

Funding may be used to support participation in business-to-business (B2B) travel and tourism trade shows that promote Haywood County to travel industry professionals with the potential to generate new and increased overnight visitation.

Eligible shows may include those targeting group tour operators, meeting and event planners, travel advisors, sports tournament organizers, and other tourism industry buyers. Priority will be given to trade shows that reach new markets and generate opportunities for future tourism business.

Eligible Expenses:

- Trade show registration, participation, exhibit space, and booth rental fees.
- Advertising and PR in relevant trade publications and outlets.

Ineligible Expenses:

- Professional development conferences, educational seminars, or networking events without a direct tourism sales or marketing component.

Funding Prioritization

Our priority is to support projects that align with our Destination Master Plan and Visit Haywood brand, with a strong potential to attract new and increased overnight visitation to Haywood County. Proposals for multi-day projects and/or off-season projects will be favored over single-day initiatives or projects during peak seasons. There is preference for projects that primarily occur within Haywood County.
For Branding Pillars, refer to pages 42 through 64 of the Destination Master Plan.
For Product Development Pillars, refer to pages 65 through 85 of the Destination Master Plan.

We highly encourage collaboration and partnerships across multiple entities and/or municipalities to enhance the impact and reach of your project. Our goal is to foster innovative and unique tourism experiences that complement our existing efforts to promote the county.

Ineligible Projects and Expenses

- Projects that replicate, or are similar to, programs, advertising or research currently being undertaken by the Haywood County Tourism Development Authority (HCTDA).
- Expenses incurred before the grant award date.
- Administrative expenses (ie: salaries or benefits for staff), memberships or dues, mortgage or utilities payments, facility maintenance, and ongoing operational costs, such as website hosting.
- Basic operational expenses such as utilities or equipment at the event venue; catering, travel, or accommodation for event staff or volunteers; general event supplies (tables, chairs, tents); day-of promotion items (event maps, brochures, flyers); wristbands, tickets, or badge-passes.
- 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.
- Lodging and travel reimbursements; Gratuities.
- Lobbying, political activities, or initiatives.
- Major capital expenditures, purchases, or leases of equipment.

- Fundraising* activities that do not demonstrate a clear impact on travel.
- Events with restricted access or limited appeal to a broader audience.
- Church or religious activities.
- School or community-specific programs.
- Family reunions.

Fundraising Events*

If the event or project is a fundraiser and can demonstrate significant tourism impact, the applicant must articulate where the funds will be donated and must show proof of the donation prior to requesting grant reimbursement. Donations must be made to Haywood County organizations that benefit all Haywood County residents, regardless of an individual's political or religious affiliation.

Criteria for Tourism Promotion Grant Awards

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

- **Alignment with Visit Haywood Brand & Destination Master Plan:** Demonstrating a close relationship to both the goals of the Destination Master Plan and the Visit Haywood Brand.
- **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.
- **Better Together:** Demonstrating economic impact beyond a singular business 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. Off-peak times refer to mid-week and anytime between November-April. Holiday weekends are peak visitation times.

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.
  - **Financial Information:** The applicant must fill out the budget template, available on the HCTDA website, in its entirety.
  - **Marketing Plan:** The applicant must fill out the marketing plan template, available on the HCTDA website, in its entirety.
  - **Letters of Support (if applicable)**: If the event/project will take place on Town/County property, or has the potential to impact other businesses, the applicant must submit a letter of support from applicable municipalities and/or other businesses.
  - **Sponsorship Forms (if applicable):** The applicant must submit a form showing sponsorship opportunities and benefits offered to potential sponsors.

- **Fundraising Letter of Intent (if applicable):** If the event/project is a fundraiser, the applicant must submit a letter detailing which Haywood County organization(s) will receive the donations.

- ~~*Review:* HCTDA staff will review applications and reach out to applicants if additional information is requested. There will be a window of time for the applicant to submit the additional information or amend their application and/or budget, 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 "Criteria for Tourism Promotion Grant Awards" section. 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. Once the HCTDA Board has voted, applicants will be notified of the decision via email.

Additional Notes:

- Applicants are responsible for following all grant guidelines and meeting all required deadlines herein.
- Grant requests must be at least $2,000 to be considered for funding.
- Funding is competitive and subject to availability. Applicants may receive less than the amount requested, alternative support may be offered, or no funding may be awarded. Projects that best meet the program criteria will receive priority.
- Applicants must be current on all applicable federal, state, local, and occupancy tax obligations to remain eligible for funding.
- All materials submitted as part of a grant application are considered public records and are subject to North Carolina Public Records Law (N.C.G.S. Chapter 132).
- ~~Visit Haywood reserves the right to request additional information from any applicant.~~
- 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.
- ~~Visit Haywood reserves the right to deny future funding for low-performing events/projects.~~
- ~~Funding may be revoked at any time, for any reason, at the discretion of the HCTDA Board.~~
- 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 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 Visit Haywood **within 45 days** of the project's conclusion and 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. The applicant must be able to articulate the return on investment (ROI) on Tourism Promotion grant funding and show the success of the project or the value to the community through ticket sales, attendance estimate, or other data sources.
- 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: Three (3) forms of proof of Visit Haywood's recognition as required in the grant agreement (e.g., logos, mentions in promotional materials, etc.). Advertising or promotional materials that were not approved in advance by the HCTDA may not be accepted as a form of recognition.

Failure to meet these event evaluation requirements may result in withholding of awarded funds and/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.