



Attractions Marketing Program Guidelines

Fiscal Year 2025-2026

The Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau (VCB) will annually accept, review and process funding requests from tourism-related, non-profit organizations on behalf of the Tourist Development Council (TDC) (as qualified per Florida State Statute 125.0104).

Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Program Timeline:

May 14, 2025	Attractions Marketing Application Webinar at 3:00pm
June 13, 2025	<u>Application Deadline</u>
August 2025- Date TBD	Subcommittee Review Workshop
August 14, 2025	<u>Formalization by TDC</u>
September, 2025	FY2025/26 budget approval by BoCC
<u>October 2025</u>	<u>VCB issues funding agreements</u>
September 10, 2026	<u>Final Report & Invoice deadline</u>

*** Items added to the guidelines January 2025**

I. Program Goal

The program provides reimbursement for marketing initiatives to 501c3 not-for-profit arts and attractions organizations, and arts and cultural departments of municipal government that enhance tourism opportunities in Lee County. These site-based attractions and organizations provide a different level of service to visitors than events, with year-round programming that attract visitation to the region and/or offer reasons for visitors to extend their stay in the destination.

II. Funding Limit (Per TDC action May 11, 2023)

1. Eligible organizations with verified annual attendance averaging over 100,000 visitors may request up to a maximum of \$50,000.
2. Eligible organizations with verified annual attendance averaging less than 100,000 visitors may request up to a maximum of \$25,000.

III. Funding Period

Eligible expenses will be those costs incurred in the 12 months of October through September, following the funding award approval. Exceptions to this rule must be approved in writing by the program manager and attached to the reimbursement request.

IV. PRE-Application requirement

Requesting agencies must attend the application webinar, review the attached guidelines, and submit the application and all supporting information electronically by deadline. [Click here](#) to register for the application webinar.

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V. **Application criteria**

1. The organization must be:
 - a. In Lee County AND
 - b. Legally organized as a nonprofit, holding a federal 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status OR
 - c. A local government
2. The organization will demonstrate evidence of the following:
 - a. Assume an advocacy role in the community to advance tourism.
 - b. Develop unique visitor experiences that encourage repeat visitations through promotions and dissemination of information regarding arts and cultural offerings available in Lee County.
 - c. Participate in marketing workshops and cooperative promotional efforts with the Lee County VCB, wherever applicable.
 - d. Maintain a listing and post events on the Lee County Visitor and Convention Bureau's consumer website: <https://www.visitfortmyers.com/>.
 - e. The tourism-based organization's facilities, programs or services must be in Lee County and available to visitors throughout the year.
 - f. **LOGO REQUIREMENTS & TDC CREDIT** All marketing materials must include credit to the TDC with current logo including attraction websites.
 - i. Logos available here: <https://www.visitfortmyers.com/lee-vcb/education-and-resources/logos-and-image-library>
 - ii. Social and digital posts should tag @VisitFortMyers. Audio spots (radio/podcast) of 30 seconds or more should credit as follows:
 1. OUT-OF-AREA: "In partnership with VisitFortMyers.com"
 2. LOCAL: "In partnership with the Lee County Tourist Development Council"
 - g. Marketing plans should include a diverse mix of tactics. Applicants are encouraged to have marketing plans reviewed by VCB marketing staff prior to submitting.
 - h. It is the responsibility of the applicant to show proof of eligibility. Applications should elaborate on how the attraction enhances the stay of visitors to Lee County throughout the year. Organizations must be able to show results of awarded dollars spent (i.e., increased out- of-town visitation, increased website traffic, etc.) with specific data.
 - i. Provide financial and management oversight to assure compliance with program guidelines, effectiveness of marketing outcomes, and accuracy of reimbursement requests.
 - j. Maintain records and accounts, including property, personnel, and financial records, as are deemed necessary by Lee County to ensure proper accounting for all TDC funds. These financial records should be made available for audit or inspection purposes at any time during normal business hours, and as often as the TDC deems necessary. The TDC's right of inspection and audit will also apply to any audits made by other agency whether local, state, or federal. The VCB will retain all its records and supporting documentation pertaining to the funding application for five years for inspection.

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3. The organization must provide the following:

- a. Qualifying Non-profits, a current IRS form 990 and local governments, a SAM's number.
- b. Applicants funded through this program will be required to outline specifically how funds will be spent for the Fiscal Year in which funds are applied for.
- c. Applicant must provide attendance of out-of-county vs. local visitation from the organization's most recently completed fiscal year.
- d. Applicant will be required to provide specific information about how out-of-county visitation data is collected. Partners may use admission, ticket sales, etc. to track visitation, and should survey a representative sample of visitors at events/programs that are not ticketed. This can be done via brief on site interviews, via email or website questionnaires post event.

VI. Evaluation Criteria

Funding request applications must show evidence of the following:

- a. Commitment to the VCB's mission of enriching arts & culture of the communities of Lee County.
- b. Visitor facing authentic, unique immersive experience.
- c. Presents diverse marketing tactics.
- d. Organization is open to the public and offers visitor-facing programming year-round-
- e. History of collaborative partnerships.
- f. Agency contribution- Evidence of the agency's financial contribution to the marketing budget.

VII. Additional requirements

- a. Expenses reimbursed and later deemed as ineligible must be returned within 60 days of being deemed ineligible.
- b. Change requests regarding usage of awarded funds require prior approval and should be made in writing to Alison Giesen at agiesen@leegov.com.
- c. Recipient will be required to submit a detailed Final Report, including specific information about marketing placements and results.
- d. Failure to comply with the required reporting will impact future funding decisions and allocations.

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VIII. Reimbursements

- a. Lee County as a government has a strict reimbursement policy. Each recipient will be provided a Reimbursement Workbook to assist with the process. Refer to the Reimbursement Instructions within the Workbook for more information.
- b. * Lee County reserves the right to determine eligibility of requests, and reimbursements may be short paid due to ineligible expenses which lack adequate documentation/deliverables to demonstrate complete compliance with program guidelines.
- c. Reimbursement requests and status reports should be submitted in a timely manner, quarterly is preferred to ensure timely processing.
- d. The final date to request reimbursement for the fiscal year is September 10, no exceptions.
- e. Reimbursements require certification by the chief financial officer of the organization.

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IX. Eligible and Ineligible items (* added in 2025)

Eligible costs	Ineligible costs
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Funding is for expenses incurred within the designated period (<i>October – September</i>) 2. *Marketing expenses may be in market or out of market if they are approved in the marketing plan. 3. *Third Party Marketing Agency fees directly related to the placement of marketing tactics listed in the approved marketing plan – not to exceed 15% of the amount awarded that is utilized. 4. Design, production, and placement of print, television, radio, digital and billboard advertisements. 5. Digital marketing efforts such as online advertising, social media campaigns, search optimization and e-marketing. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Digital marketing efforts are further explained as: electronic billboards, streaming tv and radio commercials, search engine ads (SEO), pay-per-click campaigns (PPC), in-app ads. b. E-marketing efforts are further explained as: website pop-ups, social media ads, influencer marketing, and creative design for email campaigns and blogs. 6. The development of a new visitor facing website or enhancements to increase traffic to an existing website. Note: See #5 regarding ineligible website maintenance fees. 7. Photography and video projects that support an approved marketing campaign. 8. Other- Eligible items not listed in expense categories above yet approved in the marketing plan by the TDC. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Seasonal brochures, playbills & member newsletters. 2. Printing or mailing/distribution costs for travel guides, attraction maps/ signage, rack cards, and direct mail project. 3. Capital investments, asset development or product enhancement. 4. Indirect Costs: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Salary support (payroll) b. Recipient administration costs c. Vendor maintenance (often recurring) d. Commission fees 5. Operating costs, including: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Web hosting; maintenance b. domain registration c. Third party costs such as Paypal d. Subscriptions 6. Strategic/ social media plan development 7. Lobbying. 8. Public relations/press releases. 9. Tradeshow registration fees, booth rentals/educational conferences, membership dues. 10. Travel costs (food, lodging, entertainment) 11. Costs associated with Membership and Volunteer programs including fundraising events. 12. Database development/ ticket platforms/ point of sale systems. 13. Market research to identify target markets. (VCB can provide this) 14. Facility rental/insurance. Purchase or rental of equipment or supplies. 15. Food or alcoholic beverages. 16. Items for resale and promotional items/ costs associated with retail operations. 17. International Marketing – contact the Lee County VCB for assistance. 18. Ads without TDC logo recognition. 19. Ads advertising programs or venues outside of Lee County.