



Arts and Cultural Destination Enhancement Funding Program

The Ocala/Marion County Visitors & Convention Bureau (OMCVCB) accepts, reviews and processes funding requests from tourism-related, Marion County-based organizations on behalf of the Tourist Development Council (as qualified per Florida State Statute 125.0104).

Goals of the Program

The Arts and Cultural Destination Enhancement Funding Program is a multi-faceted approach to enhancing the tourism product within Ocala/Marion County. Its primary purpose is designed to support and enhance Marion County as a culturally engaging and vibrant destination. With that in mind, the Marion County Board of County Commissioners has allocated a portion of the Tourist Development Tax revenue to aid in the programming and promotions of arts, cultural, history, heritage and nature experiences that, as one of their main purposes, attract tourists, as evidenced by the promotion of the experience to tourists.

The Arts and Cultural Destination Enhancement Funding Program is open for applications on an annual basis to organizations/programs which promote Ocala/Marion County's appeal as a tourist destination by sponsoring tourist-oriented cultural programming and special events (visual and performing arts, including theater, concerts, recitals, opera, dance, art exhibitions, and festivals). The OMCVCB's objective in funding events is to position Marion County as a must-experience destination through quality events and projects that attract tourists from outside of Marion County into the area; have a strong cultural component; encourage overnight stays in Marion County motels, hotels, RV parks/campgrounds, and/or short-term rentals; and perpetuate an environment for growth in the tourism industry in Marion County.

The OMCVCB administers the funds collected from the tourist development tax on transient lodging sales and designates it to promote Marion County as a preferred visitor destination. Ideally the funds allocated by the TDC will eventually be returned through an increase in transient lodging sales and the tourist development tax generated from those sales. Events funded through this program must demonstrate the intent and ability to attract out-of-county visitors to Marion County. The TDC investments are focused on further developing exemplary existing programs and stimulating new activities. Applicants not meeting these criteria should consider applications to other programs.

Additionally, this program is designed to create a portfolio of activities which:

Attract Visitors During Year-Round or Non-Peak Periods:

Priority consideration will be given to Proposals for programming that is year-round. Events and programming will be evaluated based on their timing to be held when tourism is relatively slow. Generally speaking, months of January, February and March are peak for tourism. -Therefore, events or programming during this timeframe will not be considered within this program.

Encourage Increased Visitor Spending:

Visitor spending supports jobs and generates tax revenues. Events should stimulate additional economic activity rather than displace normal expenditure patterns.

Reinforce Existing Positive Images:

Programs and events which set Ocala/Marion County apart from other destinations by focusing attention on the area's unique tourism offerings and marketing the destination. Applicants should focus funding requests on programs and events that are not typically available in a visitor's home community and



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therefore establish a reason to visit Ocala/Marion County.

Provide Added Value to the Ocala/Marion County Visitor Experience:

Value can be defined in two ways. Events may provide “emotional value” by exceeding the anticipated satisfaction level of visitors. Events can also provide “financial value” by providing no-cost or low-cost activities of interest to visitors during otherwise slow times.

Events, performances or programs must be promoted to the public and should not be unreasonably restrictive through admittance fees, public access or crowd capacity, which limits participation by visitors. One of the main purposes of the events must be to attract overnight visitors to Ocala/Marion County.

To be eligible to apply, an organization must:

- Be active and in good standing with regard to its registration status with the Florida Division of Corporations pursuant to Chapter 617, Florida Statutes;
- Have both a strong tourism and cultural component as depicted in the Letter of Intent and Proposal;
- Ensure that projects are open and accessible to Ocala/Marion County tourists and residents; utilize hotels located within the boundaries of Ocala/Marion County as their “event hotels;” and be in full compliance with funding agreement requirements of any previous program funds provided through the Tourist Development Council or other Ocala/Marion County funding sources, including timely and satisfactory submission of all reports.

The Arts and Cultural Destination Enhancement Funding Program is being implemented to create more economic prosperity for Marion County. The events and programs supported by this funding mechanism through Tourist Development Tax (TDT) will be expected to generate economic impact, both directly and indirectly, and will be challenged to compete and deliver high brand recognition for Ocala/Marion County.

The Arts and Cultural Destination Enhancement Funding Program supports the Marion County Board of County Commissioners’ (MCBCC) philosophical position that the OMCVCB role of out-of-area marketing is the priority for TDT funding. Also, TDT funding of special events and ongoing programs generally should be provided only on a limited term basis, as “seed funding”, not as a perpetual revenue source. This is to encourage organizations to develop their programs in ways that help them become self-sufficient regarding their promotional expenses. In doing so, funding is made available to assist other events and organizations, thereby enhancing the overall tourism product.

To request support from the Arts and Cultural Destination Enhancement Funding Program, an organization (Applicant) must prepare and apply as part of the competitive annual award cycle. To ensure proper budgeting procedures, the TDC will receive and review submitted applications on an annual basis.

The TDC will then determine the recommended contract award dollar amount and forward that recommendation to the Marion County Board of County Commissioners for approval.

LETTER OF INTENT

Applicants must submit a “Letter of Intent” to the OMCVCB no later than **October 1st. If October 1st falls on a weekend, the Letter of Intent must be provided no later than the last business day preceding October 1st.** The Letter of Intent should:

- Briefly describe the project/event and how it meets the criteria described above.



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- Describe your organization (please include the size of your operating budget), and the purpose for which funding is being sought.
- Demonstrate the applicant's ability to carry out the programming/project during the funding period (may include: event production experience, volunteers involved, in-kind support and sponsor/community support)
- Include the total project costs and the requested grant amount.
 - If a standard sponsorship proposal exists, please submit it with the Letter of Intent.

The OMCVCB will notify you by email as to whether or not a full proposal will be invited for consideration. OMCVCB staff will conduct a "technical review" to determine if the proposed program or event meets the overall goals and requirements of the Arts and Cultural Destination Enhancement Funding Program.

Proposals that are determined not to achieve these standards will be rejected as part of the Arts and Cultural Destination Enhancement Funding Program, but may still be applicable for other funding opportunities that will be outlined to applicants based upon individual criteria requirements for OMCVCB programs.

New/Repeat Events

For the purpose of OMCVCB funding programs, a new event is defined as a specific event named in the application that has not been held in Ocala/Marion County during the previous two consecutive years and a repeat event is defined as a specific event named in the application that has been held in Ocala/Marion County at some point during the previous two consecutive years.

The criteria for the recurring funding of events are, as follows:

New Events: (First- and second-year events) These events will be eligible for the maximum amount of funding associated with the corresponding funding scale.

Repeat Events: (Repeat events with a continuous 3-5 funding year history) These events/programs will be eligible for 80% of the amount of funding associated with the corresponding funding scale. **Partners who have received five (5) years of funding (consecutive or non-consecutive) must defer participation in the program for two funding cycles (once the two-year deferment has been satisfied, the partner is eligible to re-apply for funding)**

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The number and amount of each award will be dependent upon the availability of funds and specific allocations associated within the annual Tourist Development budget. The maximum award will be no more than 10% of the allocated budget for the Arts and Cultural Destination Enhancement Funding Program, based on available revenue. FY 25-26 budget will be \$100,000 – but this number may change in subsequent years.

EXAMPLE: 10% of \$100,000 is \$10,000 – therefore \$10,000 is the maximum amount that will be eligible for an individual request.

Awards will be funded on a sliding scale reflective of the point values outlined in the section titled Arts and Cultural Destination Enhancement Funding Program Application. For example, if Applicant requests \$10,000 and scores 45 (averaged) out of 100 points, the VCB staff will recommend the Applicant receive a maximum funding amount of \$4,500 (45% of \$10,000).

EVALUATION METRICS

Annual applications will be evaluated on these metrics:

- Total visitation (see Proposal's quantifiable / measurable data requirements per Section III);



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- Generation of incremental economic activity;
- Marketing exposure for Ocala/Marion County and the Event/Project;
- Event/Project site must be located in Marion County;
- Applicant must be based in Marion County (as confirmed on W-9); and,
- Narrative on how quality will be delivered (i.e. production values - presented, performed, exhibited, etc.)
- Examples of eligible exposure:
 - Marketing mediums such as:
 - Newspapers;
 - Mass audience magazines;
 - Social media;
 - Travel journals;
 - Trade magazines;
 - Radio;
 - Television;
 - Website;
 - Visit Florida advertising or promotional co-op opportunity;
 - Other opportunities deemed in accordance with F.S.S 125.0104.

Matching Funds

Regardless of the funding amount approved for the Event/Project, the reimbursement will not exceed Applicant's documented expenditures. Applicant is required to provide matching amounts from other sources (either in-kind or monetary) equivalent to 50% of the award amount. In-kind services are defined as goods or services provided to the Event/Project for which Applicant would normally have to pay. The value of the match should be based on the difference between what Applicant would normally have to pay for the goods or services, and what Applicant actually has to pay. Documentation of the value will be required from the contributing entity. Applicant is encouraged to list in-kind donations as demonstration of additional community support.

TDC funds allocated to an Applicant cannot be used as matching funds for another Applicant's project or as matching funds for any other Marion County program.

Applicant may not receive funding from more than one TDC program for the same Event/Project in the same fiscal year.

REVIEW PROCESS

A Rank and Review Committee consisting of four (4) members, each from the following Marion County Departments: Tourist Development, Parks and Recreation and Library will be appointed by the County Administrator. Additionally, the Executive Director of the Marion Cultural Alliance (MCA), the designated Local Arts Agency for Marion County will also serve on the Committee. If the Executive Director of the MCA is not available, the County Administrator may approve a designee. This Rank and Review Committee will review and score each proposal.

Tourist Development Tax funds are intended to supplement, not replace, Applicant's Event/Project budget. Applicant must recognize that every application will not be fully funded (or funded in full). This is a highly



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competitive process and there are limited funds available, therefore applications will be reviewed and scored on specific criteria.

Applicants must notify the OMCVCB and TDC of any changes (i.e. date, venue, event content etc.) to their Event/Project plans in writing at least **90 days prior** to the Event/Project start date. Failure to do this can result in termination of the contract and jeopardize future funding. This is necessary to properly promote programs through various marketing platforms and the OMCVCB website www.ocalamarion.com. The TDC/MCBCC will vote to determine if the requested changes are acceptable and whether to maintain or adjust funding accordingly.

All information provided to the TDC in conjunction with the Arts and Cultural Destination Enhancement Funding Program will become a matter of public record, except for information exempt pursuant to Section 125.0104 (9)(d)(2), Florida Statutes.

PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS (Proposals are to be independently written documents provided by the program/event organizer requesting funding). These proposals should include the following five (5) sections, as well as, any attachments outlined within the requirements:

SECTION I. Program Event Summary, Organizational Information and Program Management.

This Section will be worth up to 10 points

This section must contain a Program/Event Summary, as well as, organizational information including: Mission Statement, Economic Impact Information, Financial Request, Financial History of the event (up to three years if applicable), Board of Directors (if applicable) and Authorized Official Signature Page.

SECTION II. Narrative Statement of Program /Event.

This section will be worth up to 35 points

This section will contain information on the nature of the program and/or event (festival, concert, exhibition, etc.), examples of past programs/events conducted by the applicant, and other information to inform the TDC why this program and/or event should be supported through a funding grant.

Be sure to describe the event(s) in sufficient detail to include dates, schedules, venues, and special features. Remember that **Proposals will be judged heavily on this content.**

SECTION III. Tourism Generation/Marketing Plan.

This section will be worth up to 35 points

In this section, Proposals will contain information on why/how the proposed events/activities attract tourists, time of year events are scheduled, marketing and advertising plan that targets tourists (including marketing distribution and impressions), RFP for distribution to lodging industry partners, specific measurable objectives on tourist attraction such as gross attendance and overnight stays, demographic and geographic objectives, methodology on how objectives will be measured, and evaluation criteria. The proposed marketing plan should contain detailed description(s) and itemized costs of "Out-of-County" marketing including media placement in specific markets (electronic and print advertising), public relations (non-paid media such as press releases), additional promotional materials, print and collateral distribution and targeting, signage and way finding. Creative approaches in programming and marketing are encouraged. The proposed plan could include key performance indicators, as well as reporting that showcases the reach for the Arts and Cultural Destination Enhancement Funding Program Event/Program, while including the OMCVCB/MCBCC logo block in each of its marketing platforms, coupled with a significant integrated marketing spend. All creative elements must be pre-approved. This marketing plan is for application review



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purposes only and does not constitute approval of those elements.

Florida State Statutes Section 125.0104 requires “evidence” that tax revenues expended on art/cultural destination promotions reflect quantifiable/measurable data that the tourist who participates in the activity is from “outside the county of his or her permanent residence.” The Proposal needs to objectively demonstrate what portion of the applicant’s patrons are tourists that come to enjoy the applicant’s cultural events from outside of Marion County.

The OMCVCB reserves the right to approve any additional sponsors that will share in media exposure to ensure brand integrity.

SECTION IV. Sustainability and Growth Potential.

This section will be worth up to 10 points

Include detailed information outlining the event’s/program’s community support. Also, provide information outlining a plan to grow the event/program and subsequently, attract additional visitors in future years.

SECTION V. Provide a detailed Proposal Budget.

This section will be worth up to 10 points

Failure to provide a detailed budget will result in the Proposal being removed from Arts and Cultural Destination Enhancement Funding Program consideration.

Include event-specific income and expense information with a clear indication of where matching funds are coming from.

The TDC reserves the right to negotiate with organizations or make funding amounts contingent upon issues relative to event scheduling. If your events dates are changed after you have submitted your signed Agreement, your award will be automatically terminated unless you have notified the OMCVCB and MCBCC/TDC 90 days in advance of the program/event and received written permission prior to announcing the new date.

Applicant requesting funding is required to attend in person and must offer a three (3) minute “update” at the assigned TDC meeting in which the application will be voted upon. ***Failure of an Event/Project representative to attend the specified TDC meeting will result in the application being removed from consideration.***

MEETING REQUIREMENTS

All recipients of Arts and Cultural Destination Enhancement Funding Program funding are required to meet at least twice per year (in person or via teleconference) with representatives from the Ocala/Marion County VCB to review marketing plans and coordinate marketing efforts. As part of the cooperative marketing efforts, the event planner must provide 20 tickets (or other negotiated amount) to the OMCVCB to be used for promotional purposes.

Miscellaneous Submission Directions

Upon acceptance of your Letter of Intent, one printed hard copy of the Proposal as well as Arts and Cultural Destination Enhancement Funding Program Application Summary containing original signature(s) of the Authorizing Official(s) must be submitted (via mail to 109 W Silver Springs BLVD Ocala, FL 34475) or hand delivery) to the OMCVCB prior to applications being forwarded to the Rank and Review Committee. EARLY SUBMISSIONS ARE HIGHLY ENCOURAGED. The OMCVCB will conduct a “technical review” of Proposals and notify organizations of deficiencies. Applicants will be notified of any deficiencies and will have 72 hours to



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correct the deficiencies. Applications will only be given **one** technical review. The technical review only includes required forms and documents. The technical review will not correct math or typographical errors in the Proposal.

The OMCVCB cannot assure any applicant their Proposal will be funded. After the technical review period, 15 hard copies of the Proposal and Arts and Cultural Destination Enhancement Funding Program Application Summary must be delivered to the OMCVCB (via mail to 109 W Silver Springs BLVD Ocala, FL 34475 or hand delivery) to be distributed to the Rank and Review Committee for their review and scoring.

CONTRACT PARAMETERS

All contracts are for one year. No contracts are guaranteed to be renewed. The County fiscal year begins October 1st of each year and runs through September 30th of the following year.

Contract Reporting Requirements

Once the TDC award recommendations have been reviewed and subsequently approved by the Board of County Commissioners, all contracts will be issued by and returned to the OMCVCB office. Final Reports and all reimbursement requests are to be submitted to the OMCVCB office.

A final report must be submitted with reimbursement requests within 60 days after the program/event concludes.

Included in the Final Report must be a documented assessment of results measured against the program goals listed as well as the applicant's program and event attendance inclusive of tourism projections as stated in the Proposal.

Any funded event or activity that fails to file reports required in the application will not be eligible for TDC funding during the next funding period. An applicant may choose to withdraw from the program without penalty, however, **under no circumstances will reimbursement payment be made for an event with reports outstanding.**

Eligible Use of Funds:

Funds MAY be used for:

1. Promotional Expense
 - a. Promotional expenses in conjunction with the event to increase participation and bring visitors outside of Marion County to the event.
 - b. Advertising and publicity outside of the Marion County area to increase participation, attendance and awareness of the event and generate hotel room nights. Eligible forms of media include
 - i. Print
 - ii. Radio
 - iii. Online Media
 - iv. Television Advertisements
 - v. Outdoor Signage/Banners
 - vi. Poster/Flyers/Brochures
 - vii. Artwork/Graphic Design
 - viii. Media Events



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- ix. Direct Mail/Event Banners
 - x. Printing Collateral
 - c. OMCVCB logo block and name inclusive on all digital and printed material associated with the event and listed as a sponsor of the event including t-shirts, event merchandise, and or give away items.
2. Operational Expense
- a. Operational expenses are only allowable when they logically and defensibly can be attributed purely to the development/production of the event that specifically targets and promotes out-of-town visitors to come to Marion County. These are reviewed and approved on a case-by-case basis in coordination with the County Attorney's office.

Record Keeping and Audit

Funding recipients agree to allow OMCVCB staff access to their program or event for the purpose of determining economic impact and return on investment. If tickets are required for the program or event, the funding recipient is required to collect either a street address or email address along with the purchaser's name for the purpose of surveying the purchaser about attendance at the program or event. Recipients must cooperate with the OMCVCB staff and/or contractors in providing email addresses of ticket buyers and vendors for the purpose of surveying.

Upon approval of funds, the applicant must provide media passes for use by OMCVCB staff to attend and cover the event for marketing and public relations purposes.

All contracts are subject to programmatic and financial audit by the Marion County Clerk of the Court – Internal Auditor or other County staff or authorized personnel. All programmatic and financial documents that are part of the contract are subject to county inspection and made public record.

Recipients must acknowledge funding by the OMCVCB in all advertising and publicity for the event or program. That can be achieved in the following ways:

- Recognition of the OMCVCB must be included where appropriate on all printed material as well as the organization's website and referred to in public relations activities. A camera-ready logo will be provided. All printed materials with the logo block must be presented with the reimbursement request.

The TDC reserves the right to request additional information beyond that requested in the funding application/guidelines.

REIMBURSEMENT

Funding shall be provided as reimbursement for approved actual expenditures upon completion of the Event/Program. Proof of payment must be provided. Proof of payment may be submitted in the form of a "paid" vendor credit card receipt or a check. If a check is used, a copy of both the front and back of cleared check must be provided. Written confirmation from vendor that expenditure has been paid in full is necessary if only a copy of the front of the cleared check is provided. Requests for reimbursement must be signed by Applicant's authorized agent.

- Partners will be required to submit a detailed final report, including specific information about marketing placements (inclusive of the OMCVCB logo) and results, additional dollars spent, copies of invoices, and proof of payment.



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- Partners 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 will be expected to allow a representative from the OMCVCB's research firm to have access to survey a sample of visitors as mutually agreed upon by the OMCVCB, the Partner, and OMCVCB's research firm. This can be done via brief on-site interviews, email or website questionnaires post-event.
- Funds may be used solely as reimbursement for marketing projects intended specifically to bring visitors from out-of-county (Eligible Use of Funds). Any use of funds for items not listed or approved will result in reimbursement for those items being denied. Failure to comply with the required reporting will impact future funding decisions and allocations.
- Funding is to be expended only within the timeframe outlined as part of the approval and within the cycle for which it was approved.
- All project printed and digital materials, signage or advertising must contain the appropriate logo.
- Funded organization must agree to partner with and/or provide access to the OMCVCB research partners to conduct on-site or email surveys/data collection.
- Funded organization must list/announce OMCVCB as sponsor (if applicable).
- Funded organizations must have a listing on the Ocala/Marion County Visitors and Convention Bureau website (ocalamarion.com). If the organization is not on the website, applicants must advise the OMCVCB staff as part of the application process to ensure this requirement is met prior to funding approval.
- A current signed IRS form W-9 must accompany the application when submitted to the OMCVB for consideration. A Substitute Form W-9 and/or a Tax-Exempt approval letter will not replace the requirement for a signed W-9.
- Applicant's organization will be required to add Marion County Board of County Commissioners and its employees as an additional insured to their General Liability policy. A Certificate of Insurance with Marion County listed as an additional insured must be submitted to OMCVCB two weeks (14 days) after the Marion County contract for funding is approved by the Board of County Commissioners. (Insurance is an absolute requirement. No other insurance policies will be considered as a substitute for the General Liability policy.)