



## Marketing Assistance Funding Program Guidelines

### General instructions:

Requesting agencies must attend one of the application workshops, review the attached guidelines and submit the application and all supporting information electronically by the deadline.

### Fiscal Year 2026/2027 Application Timeline:

June 1, 2026	VCB Marketing Assistance Application Opens
June 11, 2026   11:30 AM-1PM	Marketing Assistance Funding Program Application Workshop 1
June 23, 2026   9-10 AM	Marketing Assistance Funding Program Application Workshop 2
July 15, 2026   2-3PM	Marketing Assistance Funding Program Application Workshop 3
July 31, 2026	Deadline for Application submittal
August 27, 2026	TDC formalizes funding recommendations at their regular meeting
September 2026	BCC budget approval
October 2026	Notification of funding results
November 16, 2026	LAST DAY TO SUBMIT NOTARIZED CONTRACT FOR BCC APPROVAL
March 1, 2027	Marketing materials must be approved and published/deployed
September 30, 2027	Reimbursement documentation must be submitted to OMCVCB

**Funding Limit: Eligible organizations may request a maximum of \$5,000, unless they are the secondary applicant utilizing a DBA/same FEIN of the primary applicant, whereby their eligibility will be limited to a maximum of \$2,500.\***

\* If a tourism business has multiple sub-businesses which share a FEIN, they can submit an application for funding of up to \$5,000 for their primary eligible business and an application for funding of up to \$2,500 for a singular, eligible secondary business.

## **Marketing Assistance Funding Program Guidelines**

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 Marketing Assistance Program is designed to enable tourism-related businesses in Marion County to enhance their marketing opportunities leveraged with the Ocala/Marion County destination brand. The goals of the program are to enrich the visitor experience, encourage repeat visitations through local business promotions, inspire brand adoption and support tangible marketing materials highlighting tourism activities in Marion County.

The Marketing Assistance Program is meant to assist site-based businesses such as attractions, outfitters and restaurants or relating to art, heritage/history and culture, that provide service to visitors beyond events, and by the nature of their existence, attract visitation to the region or offer reasons for visitors to extend their stay in the destination.

### **OMCVCB partners funded through this program are expected to:**

- Assume a leadership and advocacy role in the community to advance tourism.
- Enhance the visitor experience and encourage repeat visitations through promotions and dissemination of information regarding tourism offerings available in Marion County.
- Participate in cooperative promotional efforts with the Ocala/Marion County VCB, where applicable.

### **To be eligible for this program, an organization must meet the following minimum criteria:**

1. The organization must be a business that provides services to visitors which either attract visitation to Marion County or offer reasons for visitors to extend their stay in Marion County.
2. The organization must be authorized to transact business in the State of Florida in accordance with Florida law.
3. The organization must provide a current IRS form W-9.
4. The tourism-based organization's facilities, programs or services must be available to visitors throughout the year. While an organization's major program(s) or service(s) may occur primarily during a specific time of year, other services and programming should occur and benefit visitors throughout the remainder of the year.
5. The organization must have a dedicated administrator responsible for managing the organization.
6. It is the responsibility of the applicant to show proof of eligibility. Applications should also show how the organization brings visitors to Marion County throughout the year. Organizations must be able to show results of program dollars spent (e.g. Increased out-of-town visitation, increased website traffic, etc.) with specific data.

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### Additional information:

1. A Letter of Intent must be submitted by the applicant outlining the following:
  - Description of the tourism-based business
  - Description of the year-round experiences offered to visitors
  - Description of your current marketing strategies and out-of-county reach
  - What you hope to gain through participation in the program
  - How increased out-of-county visitation could positively impact your business
2. If an effort to be fair and equitable to all Marion County tourism-based businesses, the OMCVCB requires any partner who has received five (5) years of funding (consecutive or non-consecutive), to 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.
3. An approved funding partner may apply for reimbursement of their eligible expenses as follows:
  - Year 1: 100% of the verified eligible expenses up to \$5,000 for the primary business and \$2,500 for an eligible secondary business
  - Year 2: 100% of the verified eligible expenses up to \$5,000 for the primary business and \$2,500 for an eligible secondary business
  - Year 3: 80% of the verified eligible expenses up to \$5,000 for the primary business and \$2,500 for an eligible secondary business
  - Year 4: 80% of the verified eligible expenses up to \$5,000 for the primary business and \$2,500 for an eligible secondary business
  - Year 5: 80% of the verified eligible expenses up to \$5,000 for the primary business and \$2,500 for an eligible secondary business
4. Partners funded through this program will be required to outline, specifically, how funds will be spent before the beginning of the Fiscal Year in which funds are awarded.
5. Change requests regarding usage of funds require prior approval and should be made in writing to the OMCVCB Tourism Development Manager.
6. 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.
7. 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.
8. Funds may be used solely as reimbursement for marketing projects intended specifically to

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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 grant reporting will impact future funding decisions and allocations.

9. Funding is to be expended only within the timeframe outlined as part of the approval and within the cycle for which it was approved.
10. All project printed and digital materials, signage or advertising must contain the appropriate logo, with the words, "Funding provided by Ocala/Marion County Visitors and Convention Bureau."
11. Applicants are encouraged to have marketing plans reviewed by the VCB marketing staff prior to submitting them.
12. 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.
13. Funded organization must list/announce OMCVCB as sponsor (if applicable).
14. To be considered for funding through the TDC, applicants must attend the Marketing Assistance Funding Program Application Workshop prior to submitting application. If the applicant cannot attend one of the Marketing Assistance Funding Program Application Workshop sessions, the OMCVCB staff will make efforts to accommodate a virtual option, if feasible.
15. 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.
16. A current signed IRS form W-9 must accompany the application when submitted to the OMCVCB for consideration. A Substitute Form W-9 and/or a Tax-Exempt approval letter will not replace the requirement for a signed W-9.
17. 18. The tourism partner must select their marketing tactics during the application process. Once the application is signed by the partner and submitted to the OMCVCB, the selection(s) cannot be modified.
19. **A fully executed contract must be submitted to the OMCVCB within 45-days of the program start date (October 1).**
20. 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. Failure to provide the Certificate of Insurance to the OMCVCB within the timeframe denoted will result in voluntary dismissal from the program. If a partner is unable to provide the required documentation in the timeframe allotted, the partner must communicate the reason for delay in writing to the OMCVCB prior to the deadline. The OMCVCB reserves the right to grant or deny an extension to the deadline. (Insurance is an absolute requirement. No other insurance policies will be considered as a substitute for the General

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Liability policy.)

21. Marketing efforts must be approved and begin within three(3) months of the contract's execution. Failure to comply with this timeframe will result in voluntary dismissal from the program.

Eligible and Ineligible use of funds:

### Funds MAY only be used for...

- The design, production and placement of print, television, radio, and billboard ads.
- The design and production of travel guides, attraction maps, rack cards, and direct mailers.
- Digital marketing efforts such as online advertising, social media campaigns, search engine optimization, and e-mail marketing.
- The design and construction of a new website or enhancements to an existing website.  
Note: See below regarding Website hosting fees.
- Photography and video projects that support an approved marketing campaign.

### Funds MAY NOT be used for...

- Capital investments, asset development, or product enhancement
- Salary support, personnel
- Strategic plan development
- Lobbying
- Public Relations/press releases
- Tradeshow registration fees, booth rentals/educational conferences, membership dues
- Travel costs (food, lodging, entertainment)
- Database development
- Market research to identify target markets
- Facility rental/insurance
- Purchase or rental of equipment or supplies
- Food or alcoholic beverages
- Items for resale and promotion items
- Operating costs (including web hosting and domain registration)