



Events Marketing Funding Application Guidelines

PROGRAM TIMELINE - Fiscal Year 2025/26	
Application Webinar	Wednesday, April 9 @ 3:00pm
Application Deadline	Friday, May 9 @ 5:00pm
Subcommittee Workshop <i>Discussion to determine funding recommendations</i>	Thursday, June 12 @ 10:30am (following TDC)
Consideration by TDC	Thursday, August 14 @ 9:00am
Budget Approval by BoCC	September, 2025
Funding Agreements Issued	October, 2025

* Items added to the guidelines January 2025

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Revised: February 2025

www.leevcb.com

*Sanibel & Captiva Islands, Fort Myers Beach, Fort Myers, Bonita Springs, Estero, Cape Coral
Pine Island, Boca Grande & Outer Islands, North Fort Myers, Lehigh Acres*

Dear Lee County event organizer,

On behalf of the Lee County Tourist Development Council (TDC), the Visitor & Convention Bureau (VCB) invites you to apply for funding budgeted to support fiscal year 2025/26 multi-day events in Lee County. The Events Marketing program provides reimbursement on approved out-of-area promotions and advertising efforts. Please read the entire application packet carefully to ensure your event meets all requirements of the program.



Things to note:

- Attractions Marketing funding recipients who produce eligible events may also submit a funding request through the Events Marketing program.
- An eligible Lee County nonprofit may submit a maximum of two funding requests per year through the Events/Attraction Marketing programs.
- Organizations who are awarded funds may receive VCB cooperative marketing credits (in addition to the funding awarded) that may be used toward the purchase of VCB media buys specifically designed for this program.
- Sports related events that market to teams, may request funding guidance through the Lee County Sports Development Office. Please contact Jeff Mielke jmielke@leegov.com or 239-533-5273
- Finally, we continue to request collaboration for the creation of special offers with accommodation partners for your event. ***Please participate in VCB marketing meetings and Team Tourism events that will allow for such collaboration. For more information, please call or log on to www.leevcb.com.***

We look forward to working with you for a successful 2025/26 fiscal year.

Sincerely,

Tamara Pigott
Executive Director

ELIGIBILITY

Funding is available under the following categories:

1. ORGANIZATIONS

To be eligible to apply, an organization must be legally incorporated as a **Not-For-Profit** under section 501 of the Internal Revenue Code. (Note: First-time applicants must provide a copy of the IRS determination letter of federal tax-exempt status.) Organizations must also have significant county ties and be established primarily to produce cultural programs, festivals, or special events. Additionally, they must use private sector financial support and volunteers, as well as paid staff to carry out the objectives of the organization.

2. EVENTS

Multiple-day programs, festivals or special events that have a history of, or the potential for, attracting out-of-county visitors are eligible. Events must occur in Lee County between October 2025- September 2026 and be consecutive multiple days. Attendees may be participants or spectators, and the event should generate measurable hotel/motel/campground room nights. Priority will be given to those events that occur during non-peak months as detailed on page 5. Multiple day events that can generate national, state, or regional media exposure for Lee County and its tourist offerings are strongly encouraged to apply.

MAXIMUM FUNDING

The maximum amount an event may be awarded is \$25,000. Events are required to have a 75% marketing match with no more than 50% of that match being in-kind contributions. The Events Marketing Program Budget for fiscal year 2025/26, as established by the TDC pending approval by the Board of County Commissioner (BoCC), is \$200,000. Any remaining funds not allocated to a specific event will be utilized by the VCB to explore the development of new events and marketing initiatives.

PROGRAM GUIDELINES

- Incomplete applications without the required documentation will not be considered.
- If a request is not funded, the organization will not be permitted to ask the TDC to reconsider its decision (per Council action of March 11, 1994).
- This program is managed by reimbursement. The maximum award an event may receive is \$25,000 for qualifying applicants.

- All material submitted as part of an application will be a matter of public record open to inspection by any citizen of the State of Florida, subject to Chapter 119 Laws of Florida.
- Each organization receiving funding must designate an event coordinator. He or she will work with the VCB to ensure that all marketing assistance and resources made available to the funding recipients have been implemented.
- A final event report and reimbursement workbook is due no later than 60 days after the last date of the event. If the event is scheduled later than June of the fiscal year, the report and final reimbursement request will be due no later than September 10, 2026. The report should:
 - Elaborate on how the scope of work was met.
 - Explain any variances within the budget.
 - Share the results of each marketing effort and indicate how its success was tracked.
 - Present documentation on the number of “**Revenue Producing**” room nights generated. * (See Appendix A for Room Night Certification Form.)
 - Provide results of surveys conducted to gauge attendance, visitor origin and length of stay. (See Appendix B for Survey Form)
- Room night information must be reported in numbers generated by event and not occupancy percentage.
- **TDC CREDIT and LOGO REQUIREMENTS:** Credit to Lee County TDC must be included on all marketing material (per VCB logo/graphic specifications) this includes web & print advertisements when listing sponsors. Social and digital ads should tag @VisitFortMyers. Radio ads over 30 seconds “In Partnership with VisitFortMyers.com” Logo files and guidelines can be obtained at <https://www.visitfortmyers.com/lee-vcb/education-and-resources/web-image-guidelines/guidelines-for-vcb-image-library>

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

- Requests for fiscal year 2025/26 Event Marketing funds must be submitted online between April 9, 2025 and May 9, 2025 at www.leevcb.com/funding
- Attendance at the Application Webinar on April 9, 2025, is mandatory for all requesting agencies. [Click here](#) to register.
- Repeat applicants must include the new ROI Summary Sheet (Appendix F) with their submissions.
- Prior to submission, event organizers are encouraged to share marketing plans with the VCB marketing team for initial review.
- The TDC Events Marketing Subcommittee Workshop is tentatively scheduled for TBD. Recommendations for funding will be formalized by the TDC at their August meeting.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Funding requests will be judged on the below criteria

1. Commitment to the expansion of tourism in Lee County

- The event attracts visitors that generate revenue producing room nights.
- Events that generate room nights during **non-peak season: (January 2-30 or Mid-April-December 23)**

2. Soundness of proposed event

- The committee will assess the extent to which the organization has realistically conceptualized and presented a viable project plan and assigned responsibilities and accountability.
- The applicant must include commitment statements and examples of event packages/deals with web links from accommodation partners and a marketing strategy for placement.
- The applicant must provide evidence that the event is sustainable by showing that funding sources have been identified, and the required match is available.

3. Organization stability and evidence of event management capability

- The organization must have a successful history of service in Lee County, demonstrate the ability to administer public funding, have the necessary staff and internal financial controls to accomplish the activity with the budget, and be able to provide regular, timely reporting to the TDC on the progress of the event.
- Repeat requesting events must show evidence of room night* and attendance numbers, and their increases in subsequent years. (*generated by the event, not occupancy).
- Events must have made a concerted effort to implement all requested VCB initiatives and display effective use of VCB/TDC theme logos and web links in their promotions.

4. Out of market promotion

- A detailed out-of-area marketing plan and budget must be included as an attachment (using forms in Appendix F) to the application submission. *(Please see the allowable uses of funds in Appendix C and include a 75% marketing match component.)*
- Evidence showing the rationale behind the media placement decisions.

5. Quality and uniqueness of the proposed event

- Based on how much heritage, cultural, environmental and/or artistic significance the event brings to the county.
- Unique and/or uncommon elements such as green initiatives, out-of-the-box campaigns and ride sharing promotions etc. also will be considered.

6. New Events

- Less than 3 years

7. Established events & past recipients –Success will be measured by:

- Substantial growth in room nights year over year
- Demonstrated success in developing financial partnerships with sponsors.
- National media attention has been gained for the destination.

PROCEDURES FOR REIMBURSEMENTS

Funds will not be reimbursed until a VCB budget is approved, and a Final Report must accompany the Request for Reimbursement. Reimbursements will not be made for any expenses incurred prior to the approval of the FY2025-26 VCB Events Marketing budget by the TDC.

Request for reimbursements must be completed and submitted to the VCB no later than 60 days after the event. Reimbursement instructions are detailed in a separate document.

Approved expenditures may not be substituted for other opportunities unless they are approved by VCB. Reimbursement may be requested only for marketing placements specifically included in the event's scope of work and in the marketing plan approved by the TDC.

AUDITS AND RECORDS:

The organization receiving funds must 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 shall 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 any 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.

APPENDICES

The forms that follow are for use in requesting funds and final reporting.

<u>Appendix</u>	<u>Form</u>	<u>Page:</u>
A-	<i>Eligible Expenses</i>	9
B-	<i>ROI Summary Sheet</i>	10
C-	<i>Marketing Plan & Budget forms</i>	11&12
D-	<i>Progress/Final Report</i>	13
E-	<i>Participant Survey</i>	14
F-	<i>Room Night Certification Form</i>	15

Appendix A: ELIGIBLE EXPENSES (* added January 2025)

TDC Funding is restricted to out of market advertising and promotion of your approved event. Advertising and promotion must take place in areas that are at least 140 miles away or two hours driving time in an effort to generate room night revenue.

Eligible costs	Ineligible costs
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Funding is for expenses incurred within the designated funding period. 2. Creative design of advertisements. 3. Media buys for ad placement in newspapers, magazines, radio and television, digital and social medium. * 4. Brochure or program creation and distribution out of market.** 5. *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. 6. Development of event’s dedicated website NOTE: See #14 regarding ineligible website maintenance fees. <p><i>* Please provide publication/media outlet or digital site and location where the ad will be placed.</i></p> <p><i>**Direct mail must provide the addresses to show they are eligible</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Operating expenditures. 2. Fees for contractors, consultants, professional, legal, engineering, accounting, auditing, or PR services. 3. Staff Salaries 4. Capital improvements, including but not limited to, new construction, renovation, restoration and installation or replacement of fixtures. 5. Tangible personal property i.e.: office furnishings or equipment, permanent collections, or pieces of art. 6. Interest or reduction of deficits or loans, expenses incurred or obligated prior to or after funding period. 7. Prize money, scholarships, awards, plaques, event bags, certificates, posters, t-shirts, or other giveaways. 8. Travel, accommodations, and personal expenses. 9. Purchase of VCB coop with TDC funds 10. Payments or reimbursements for goods or services purchased for previous or other events. 11. Advertising and promotion within Lee County and/or surrounding counties that are less than two hours driving distance away. 12. Other event expenses including but not limited to tent rental, travel or accommodations for participants, security, food, entertainment, insurance, sanction fees, etc. 13. Marketing placements without the TDC logo. 14. Website development/ management for general organization purposes (membership, donations, selling of merchandise, hosting fees, domain fees or recurring fees).

Appendix B: ROI SUMMARY SHEET

This section must be completed by events that have received TDC funding in the past. All other events should start measuring moving forward.

Measurements	Yr. 2022-23	Yr. 2023-24	Yr. 2024-25
Event attendance			
Number of paid room nights generated			
Media impressions print, digital, radio/tv			
Social media reach and engagement			

Name of event: _____



Appendix C: EVENT MARKETING BUDGET TEMPLATE - Please present in two parts (C #1 and #2).

1. **Show total event budget.** This allows the Tourist Development Council to determine what percentage of the total budget is dedicating to promoting the event.

Budget Line items	TDC Request	Agency Contribution	TOTAL
<i>Marketing Expenses</i>			
<i>Operating Expenses</i>			
TOTAL			



Appendix C: EVENT MARKETING BUDGET TEMPLATE

2. **Show your marketing budget breakdown.** This allows the Tourist Development Council to determine how the Events Marketing funds will be utilized.

Marketing Activities	Brief description	Amount requested	Agency Contribution	Number of ads/impressions
Ad placement List out of market areas.				
Graphic design				
TV/ Radio List out of market areas.				
Social media tactics List out of market areas.				
WEBSITE				
Other				
Other				

TOTAL

Agency contribution must equal 75% of amount requested

*Refer to Appendix A for other eligible expenses

Appendix D: FINAL REPORT FISCAL YEAR _____ *Due within 60 days of completion of event.

Event Name: _____

Reporting Date: _____ Organization: _____

Funding Manager: _____ EMAIL: _____

Address: _____ Phone: _____

=====

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS FOR EACH ELEMENT IN YOUR SCOPE OF WORK. ATTACH ADDITIONAL NARRATIVE OF EVENT IF NECESSARY.

FINAL – Required for reimbursements - Answer each question as it relates to the Scope of Work for the event.

1. What is the overall assessment of the event? Did the event have the anticipated results?
 - a. Number of participants and attendees from out of the Lee County area. (appendix E)
 - b. Total Number of revenue producing room nights generated by the event (appendix F.)
2. Did expenditures fall within the most recent event funding budget categories?
3. How and what were the results of the marketing efforts proposed in funding request? (Impressions, tracking, surveys, analytics) (appendix B & C2)
4. List efforts made to ‘green’ your event and the benefits derived.
5. What recommendations do you have for improved results in the future?
6. What VCB workshops and assistance did you participate in and find helpful?

Appendix E: Sample PARTICIPANT SURVEY (suggested questions, feel free to add more)

Thank you for attending the _____
Please take a moment to fill out this brief survey so that we can continue to make this experience great for all our attendees.

1. How did you hear about the event? (select all that apply)
 - a. Attended last year!
 - b. TV/Radio: Which station: _____
 - c. Print publication: Which one _____
 - d. Website: Which one _____
 - e. Social Media- Which platform(s)? _____
 - f. Other _____

2. Where are you from? (city/state) _____

3. What was your mode of transportation to Lee County?
 - a. Fly into RWS
 - b. Drive
 - c. Local Resident

4. What is your age group?
 - a. Centennial (born 1996 and later)
 - b. Millennial (born 1977 to 1995)
 - c. Gen X (born 1965 to 1976)
 - d. Baby Boomer (born 1946 to 1964)
 - e. Traditionalist (born 1945 and before)

5. How many nights of local accommodations did you book to attend this event?
 - a. None
 - b. One night
 - c. Two nights
 - d. Three nights
 - e. Four or more nights

6. Would you like to receive more information about our next event and destination information?
 - a. If Yes. Provide your email address here _____.

Appendix F: Sample ROOM NIGHT CERTIFICATION FORM-

***VCB Sales team will assist with the verification of room nights for the upcoming year.**

To:

The purpose of this form is to quantify the actual number of room nights booked in Lee County as a result of _____. Your cooperation in helping us to document these room nights will enable us to fulfill important Tourism Development Council requirements and assist the Lee County VCB in its marketing efforts.

Hotel Name: _____

Hotel Location: _____

Event Name: _____

Tracked room nights

Date						
Paid room nights						
Complimentary room nights						

**Kindly add date columns if the event lasted longer than six days.*

Total number of PAID room nights for duration of event _____

Please provide any noteworthy comments: _____

Hotel Representative Signature:

Date: _____

Print Name and Title:

Tel: _____