

Application Guide

Tourism Capital Grants

The Tourism Capital Grants program is funded by the County's Room Tax. Tompkins County Area Development (TCAD) administrators the program with review by the Strategic Tourism Planning (STP) Board and final approval from the Tompkins County Legislature. Applications are accepted at any time of year.

These grants focus on major visitor-generating projects such as museums, performance venues, and other major cultural and recreational tourist attractions. The funds can be used for:

- feasibility studies of potential capital projects
- seed money or one-time investments in unique capital projects
- ongoing debt funding of building projects

It is intended that funds for all three types of uses will be available each year.

Eligibility

Applicant Eligibility: large, tourist/visitor generating not-for-profit or public-purpose projects.¹ Examples of projects include the proposed wine-center, the State Theater renovation, and the Museum of the Earth. The organization must track where visitors are from in order to establish tourism impact. The organization must also market to visitors from outside Tompkins County.

Project Eligibility

A. *Capital Investment Projects:* New construction, expansion, and renovation projects are eligible. The grants are to fund investments in capital projects that will facilitate tourism for a minimum of five years. The grants may not fund general operating expenses such as salaries. The fund cannot be used to pay-down existing debt. The fund will usually participate at the \$25,000 level or higher.

Funds may contribute up to one third of eligible costs which include:

- acquisition of land
- acquisition, construction, and renovation of buildings including architectural design
- acquisition of furnishings, equipment, permanent exhibitions, and other capital improvements designed to serve or promote tourism over a minimum of five years.

B. *Feasibility Studies:* Studies will be for a tourism capital project as described above. Studies can include:

- Assessing and optimizing tourism impact of a capital project, for example:
 - Potential markets and visitor numbers
 - Best use of a site to maximize the tourism impact including architectural concepts
 - Getting the right mix of "tourism product" for a given venture

¹ This guide describes general eligibility requirements. Applicant and project eligibility must be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Under New York State Law, not all entities may receive or are eligible to receive funding from County Government. For example, a County government may award a grant to another municipality or certain not-for-profit agencies. Before completing the application, please consult with your accountant or attorney to confirm that your entity is eligible to receive money from a County government.

- Business viability and planning specific to a tourism capital project

Grants may fund up to 100% of a feasibility study, but usually the applicant will be expected to make a cash contribution toward the study. The fund cannot be used to fund feasibility studies for capital campaigns.

Evaluation Criteria

A. Capital Investment Projects:

The application must demonstrate

- financial feasibility of the project
- organizational capacity to make the project a success
- likelihood of
 - improved visitor experience and/or
 - increased visitors to the facility and/or
 - visitors increasing their length of stay in order to visit the facility

B. Feasibility Studies:

The application must demonstrate

- preliminary research that supports proceeding to a full scale feasibility study
- organizational commitment to the project being studied
- possibility of
 - improved visitor experience and/or
 - increased visitors to the facility and/or
 - visitors increasing their length of stay in order to visit the facility

Reporting Requirements

Successful applicants must provide a report at the completion of the project on how the grant funds were used. For *Capital Investment* projects an annual report on employment and visitors is required for five years, or the duration of a multi-year grant, whichever is longer. Sample reporting forms are included in the application packet.

Recapture Policy

Grant allocations which are not expended on the project must be returned to the Tourism Capital Grants pool. Any change in the project and/or in the use of the grant funds must be reviewed and approved by the grant administrator.

Communication with the TCG Program Administrator

Once an application has been made for a Capital Grant, the applicant must not talk about their project with members of the TCAD Review Committee or the STP Board. All applications and support materials must be distributed through the Administrator. If an individual from these reviewing bodies approaches the applicant for information about the application, the applicant must direct them to the Administrator. When appropriate, the Administrator may ask the applicant to make a presentation to an entire reviewing body.

Other Tourism Grant Programs

Other tourism grant programs include grants to:

- Sustain cultural organizations
- Support beautification, public/outdoor art, and way-finding signage projects
- Support community celebrations
- Market events to tourist
- Projects

For more information, contact Jackie Kippola at County Administration 274-5548.