

Tourism Advancement Grants

Spring 2025 Guidelines



Funding Purpose + Overview

This grant supports events, projects, and marketing campaigns that attract overnight visitors to Tompkins County. We're particularly interested in initiatives that generate travel demand during periods where our market has the capacity to accommodate additional travelers.

Award Information

- Grants range from \$2,500 to \$20,000.
- Applications are due by Feb. 27, 2025, at 11:59 PM ET.
- Grant activity period runs from May 2025 to April 2026.

Contact: Email the [Tourism Program](#) or call 607-274-5560.

Supported Activities

This grant can fund a variety of projects that attract tourists, including:

- Large-scale and high-profile events, marketing campaigns, art installations, guided tours, and exhibits
- Festivals, outdoor theatre, website redesigns, guided tours, museum exhibits, and musical performances

How to Apply

- [Common Grant Application](#) (scroll to Tourism Advancement).

Funding Source + Eligibility

This grant is funded by [Hotel Room Occupancy Tax](#) collected in Tompkins County, New York, and provides a total of \$99,000 to support activities taking place between May 2025 and April 2026.

Who can apply?

- Nonprofit organizations with 501(c)3 designation
- Municipalities within Tompkins County
- Other organizations with a fiscal sponsor meeting the above criteria

All applicants must have an adopted diversity, equity, and inclusion policy.

What is eligible for funding?

Projects aligned with the [Strategic Tourism Plan](#) or other tourism implementation plans are eligible for Tourism Advancement grants. Examples include:

- Artistic performances and installations
- Heritage tourism events
- Agriculinary events
- Outdoor recreation events
- Events that attract a niche audience
- Festivals
- Temporary exhibits
- Guided tours
- Sporting events and tournaments
- Marketing campaigns

Limitations + Conditions:

- **Geographic focus:** Marketing campaigns must target audiences beyond a 50-mile radius of Tompkins County. Marketing expenses within this radius are ineligible. A map and list of zip codes are available on the [Tourism Program website](#).
- **Matching funds:** Both marketing and product development expenses require a 50% financial match (cash, in-kind donations, and volunteer time¹). Matching funds for marketing can be used to reach local audiences.
- **Eligible expenses:** Marketing (print, radio/TV, digital, website development, public relations consulting) and product development (equipment rental, artists and performers, event production, exhibit design, volunteer coordination, temporary signage, venue rental, transportation).
- **Ineligible expenses:** Operational expenses, staff time, utilities, rent, fundraising without documented travel impact, events with restricted access, conferences/meetings, general entertainment.

¹ Where the specific value of the service is not known, use an estimate of \$33.49 per hour. Source: Independent Sector. <https://independentsector.org/resource/value-of-volunteer-time/>

- **Grant review:** Marketing plans and budgets will be reviewed by the [Ithaca/Tompkins County Convention and Visitors Bureau](#) (CVB) and may be subject to modification prior to award.
- **Restrictions:** Projects exclusively promoting specific religious traditions, political causes, or candidates are prohibited. Events must be open to the public and not require membership. Conferences should use CVB services.

Evaluation Criteria

- **Travel demand:** Will your project generate overnight stays in Tompkins County, especially during low travel times like mid-week or winter?
- **Organizational capacity:** Does your organization have the personnel, resources, and funding to execute the project successfully? Are you aware of necessary permits and approvals?
- **Strategic Tourism Plan alignment:** How well does your project align with the goals and actions of the [Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Plan 2021-2027](#)?
- **Marketing plan:** Does your application present a clear and effective marketing strategy that identifies target audiences and communication channels?
- **Product development proposal:** Does your application clearly explain how and why your project will attract tourists?
- **Outcomes and cost-effectiveness:** Are your project's potential benefits significant compared to the requested funding?
- **Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging:** Does your project promote a sense of belonging for diverse communities? Is it accessible to all people? Does the application demonstrate efforts to attract an inclusive audience?

Additional Key Points

- Consider how your project reflects our community's diversity ([STPB Diversity Statement](#)).
- Focus on attracting visitors from outside Tompkins County (50+ miles away).
- Document past visitor data (if available) and set clear future attendance goals with data collection methods.
- Applicants are strongly encouraged to consult with the Ithaca/Tompkins County Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) regarding their marketing plans.
- Source locally when possible.
- Previous funding does not guarantee future support.
- Applicants are expected to clearly describe all required permits or licenses.

Attachments

1. Proof of 501(c)3 Status: Nonprofits only (upload [IRS determination letter](#)).
2. Fiscal Sponsorship Confirmation Letter (if applicable): Must be written on the sponsor's official letterhead. See [guidance regarding fiscal sponsorship](#).
3. Returning Applicant Report (if applicable): If you cannot locate your most recent Tourism Advancement grant report, please email the [Tourism Program](#) for assistance.
4. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Policy: Provide an attachment or link.
5. Supplemental project budget: A more detailed budget that meets the minimum requirements described in the application may be attached.
6. Other relevant documentation (letters of support, promotional materials, etc.).

Award Decision Process

1. Staff review applications for completeness and eligibility.
2. The grant review committee recommends funding for each application to the [Strategic Tourism Planning Board \(STPB\)](#).
3. The STPB recommends funding to the Tompkins County Legislature.
4. The Legislature votes on the grant awards.
5. Staff email applicants with the funding decision and a contract.

Grant Recipient Responsibilities

Contract and funding: Recipients must sign a contract with Tompkins County outlining the terms and conditions of the grant. Grant funds are disbursed after the contract is finalized. All unused funds must be returned to Tompkins County.

Permits and approvals: Recipients must secure all necessary permits, authorizations, and approvals necessary for their event, campaign, or project.

Payments: Grant awards are paid directly to registered nonprofit organizations or municipal governments. If your application was sponsored by a municipality, contact them for specific payment instructions.

Public acknowledgement: Recipients are expected to recognize the support of the Tompkins County Tourism Program in promotional materials, using the standard acknowledgment statement: "*Made possible in part by a grant from the Tompkins County Tourism Program.*" You may also use the Tourism Program logo in accordance with the [recognition guidelines](#).

Grant report: Within 30 days of completing your event, campaign, or project, you must submit a final grant report. The report template (available on request) asks for details about attendance, actual expenses, and event promotion.

Prepare and Submit Your Application

All applications must be submitted through [Common Grant Application](#). Use one of the links below to start an application:

- Already have an account? [Log in to start an application](#).
- First time applying? [Register for a new account and start an application](#).
- Review [other grants](#) offered by the Tompkins County Department of Planning and Sustainability.

Additional Resources

The [Ithaca/Tompkins County Convention and Visitors Bureau](#) (CVB) offers technical assistance related to event promotion. Grant recipients are strongly encouraged to collaborate with the CVB to attract visitors from outside Tompkins County. For more information, contact Peggy Coleman, VP Tourism & Community Relations, peggy@visitithaca.com.