

## City of Columbus, WI Tourism Commission Room Tax Funding Guidelines – Staff Proposal

### Objective:

This grant is intended to foster tourism promotion and tourism development in Columbus, WI. Tourism promotion and tourism development is defined as marketing projects, transient tourist information services, and tangible municipal development that is significantly used by transient tourists and reasonably likely to generate paid overnight stays at more than one lodging establishment in Columbus, WI.

### Application Categories:

The applicant shall apply for one or more of the following categories per event in which the Tourism Commission may have room tax funding available and cannot be used for an applicant's general marketing expenditures or organizational operating expenses. The categories are:

- **Development Funding** - funding for the creation, enhancement, or recruit a tourism facility, service, or attraction, etc. including their direct non-operational costs.
- **Event Funding** - funding for the creation, production, or recruitment of an event, convention, etc. including their direct costs.
- **Promotional Funding** - funding for the marketing and promotion of an event, production, convention, etc. excluding costs to create, produce, or recruit the event.
- ~~**Sponsorship** - funding to allow the Tourism Commission (Visit Columbus) market itself in conjunction with an organization, event, convention, development, etc.~~ **Sponsorship will be built into the other categories.**

### Process: (VERSION 1)

The process for applicants to apply for room tax funding is as follows:

1. **Initial Application** - Applicants will fill out an online form as part of an initial application that will go to City staff.
2. **Pre-Application Meeting** - Applicants will be contacted by City staff to go over the initial application, go over scoring criteria, and final reporting, and address any questions. Staff may advise on improvements to the application or possibly explain why the application does not meet the objective.
3. **Application Submission** - The Applicant may need to resubmit their proposed application with any discussed changes from the pre-application meeting to City Staff for review and possible additional consultation if needed.
4. **Review** - Once the application is ready for official submittal, staff will forward the application to the Tourism Commission for review, scoring, and awarding. If the application is rejected, the applicant may schedule time at a Tourism Commission meeting to appeal the decision in-person.
5. **Awarding** - If an application is awarded funds, City Staff will reach out to the applicant to request an invoice and breakdown of expenses as per the request. Once the invoice is received, staff will forward it to the City's Finance Department for processing and disbursement. The Tourism Commission may publicize award winners with a press release.

6. **Post-Award Meeting** - The applicant will be contacted by City staff for a post-awarding meeting to go over what will be needed for final reporting and address any other questions. Staff and the applicant will schedule a meeting to review the final report similarly to the initial application. This meeting will take place within 30 days after the event.
7. **Final Report Submission** - Similar to the application submission step, the applicant may need to make revisions or add requested information. Once revisions (if needed) are complete and accompanying data and materials are attached, the Applicant submit the final report to City Staff for review and any additional consulting if needed. If the final report is ready for official submittal, staff will forward it to the Tourism Commission for review and any pending action.
8. **Final Reporting** - The Applicant has until 60 days after the event to submit their final report detailing how the funds awarded were used with accompanying receipts, along with a narrative of how their event fulfills the objective of this grant with accompanying data, and marketable event photos to be used in future tourism marketing by the City. The Tourism Commission and City Staff will review the final report and take possible action. The Applicant may be requested to appear in person to address their final report to the Tourism Commission. If the final report is not submitted to be reviewed by the Tourism Commission or is significantly lacking requested materials or fails to meet criteria and grant objective as awarded, or fraudulent use, the applicant may be required to repay the monies they were awarded. Final reports may aid future applications.

#### **Timeline and Process: (VERSION 2)**

The timeline (OPTION 1) for applications is:

- Initial application will be due March 31
- Application meeting will take place in April
- Application will be reviewed at the May and June Tourism Commission meetings
- Pre-awarding meeting will take place September
- Final report will be due December 31
- Final review and reimbursement awarding at January Tourism Commission meeting

-OR- The timeline (OPTION 2) for applications is:

- Initial applications will be submitted at least 60 days prior to need
- Application meeting will take place within 30 days of submittal
- Application will be reviewed and possibly earmarked at the next Tourism Commission meeting following completion of the application meeting
- Pre-awarding meeting will take place within 30 days of need conclusion
- Final report will be due within 60 days of need conclusion or by January Tourism Commission – whichever comes first
- Final review and reimbursement awarding will take place at next Tourism Commission meeting following receipt of final report or at the January Tourism Commission meeting – whichever comes first

The process details for applicants applying for room tax funding is as follows:

1. **Initial Application and Application Meeting** - Applicants may fill out an online form as part of an initial application that will go to City staff. Applicants will be contacted by City staff to go over the initial application, scoring criteria, final reporting, and address any questions. Staff may advise on improvements to the application or possibly explain why the application does not meet the objective. Once completed, the application will be forwarded to the Tourism Commission for review.
2. **Commission Review** - The Tourism Commission will review, score, and award, modify, or reject the application. If the application is rejected, the applicant will be notified and may be scheduled to appear at a Tourism Commission meeting to appeal the decision. If an application is awarded funds, those funds will be disbursed as reimbursement pending the commission's review of the applicant's final report.
3. **Final Reporting by Applicant** - The applicant will be contacted by City staff for a post-review meeting to go over what will be needed for final reporting and address any other questions. Once completed, the applicant will send staff their final report for review and forwarding to the Tourism Commission.
4. **Awarding and Reimbursement** - Pending Tourism Commission approval of the applicant's final report, City Staff will reach out to the applicant to let them know if they've been awarded or not. Or if the award has been modified from the application. If awarded, staff will request an invoice that includes a breakdown of expenses as per the Tourism Commission awarding. Once the invoice is received, staff will forward it to the City's Finance Department for processing and disbursement. The Tourism Commission may publicize award winners with a press release.

### **Scoring Criteria:**

The grant will score on a scale from 1 (least) to 5 (most) on the following criteria to ensure fair and consistent scoring of each application. Funding will be prioritized for applications scoring highest.

- Meeting the objective of this grant
- Likelihood to generate paid overnight stays at multiple in-city lodging establishments
- Method to measure paid overnight stays generation
- Likelihood of economic impact to in-city businesses (excluding lodging)
- Method to measure economic impact
- Likelihood to attract out-of-town visitors to the city
- Method to measure visitor attraction
- Promoting Columbus, WI

### **Final Report Materials:**

Awarded applicants will need to submit a final report along with the appropriate materials that support the scoring criteria and directly relevant to the category applied for:

- Receipts directly related to the application
- Relevant analytics to support scoring criteria
- High-quality, marketable event photos granting permission to the City of Columbus, WI allowing for tourism marketing

- Draft and final marketing materials with Visit Columbus branding
- Mail / email lists granting permission to the City of Columbus, WI allowing for tourism marketing