

ROOM TAX FUNDING GUIDELINES

All applications for room tax funds should be submitted at least 60 days prior to the date of the event for which funds are being requested. Applications for Room Tax Funding are to be given to the ~~Director of Planning and Development~~ **Community and Economic Development Director or their designee**, City Hall, 105 N. Dickason Blvd., Columbus, WI 53925.

- 1) The purpose of room tax proceeds is to foster tourism promotion and development within the City of Columbus. Priority will be given to events which will attract overnight visitors to the community.
- 2) Funds are granted to non-profit organizations or organizations that can provide proof of insurance or have the ability to obtain insurance, if required.
- 3) Room tax funds shall NOT be used to offset general operating expenses of any group or organization. **General operating expenses refer to insurance, licensing, staffing/personnel, any expense not directly associated with the event listed in the application, and rentals. The Tourism Commission may make exceptions on a case-by-case basis and has final say in what qualifies as general operating expenses.**
- 4) Applicants must leverage a minimum of \$2.00 of private funds for every \$1.00 of room tax funds requested.
- 5) Within 60 days of completion of the event for which room tax funds are **[granted or applied for]**, applicants shall provide the Tourism Commission a final report detailing room tax eligible expenditures, including receipts for the expenditures for which they are seeking reimbursement. The report should also provide examples of the project/program and its effectiveness in promoting the City of Columbus. Failure to provide this report will result in the group not being eligible for the receipt of room tax funds for that grant year ~~and for 18 months following the event~~ **in which they applied**.
- 6) Within 60 days of completion of the event for which room tax funds are granted, applicants shall provide the Tourism Commission multiple photos of the event, including the rights to the photos.
- 7) Applicants are encouraged to have a mechanism in place to track effectiveness of their event, including statistics related to attendance and overnight stays generated.
- 8) Applicants are required to be present when the Tourism Commission considers their request.
- 9) The Tourism Commission will review applications and will make their decision based on:
 - a. How well the event meets these guidelines;
 - b. How well the organization makes use of its own resources along with the proposed use of funds.

The Tourism Commission will operate without discrimination as to age, race, religion, gender, national origin, or sexual orientation in the consideration of funding requests and will recommend funding only to organizations which do not discriminate as to age, race, religion, gender, national origin, or sexual orientation.

~~Strike thru and red are what was removed in the previous version of the guidelines and will be in effect until the end of 2024 due to pending applications this year.~~

Highlighted and yellow are what will be in effect in 2025 due to changes made by the Tourism Commission on August 12, 2024.

Highlighted and blue are staff recommended additions.

The Guidelines may need to be tweaked further to align with the process of how the Tourism Commission would like to distribute room tax funding. Listed below are possible options for how the process can go.

ROOM TAX FUNDING PROCESS # 1 (Single Meeting - Reimbursement)

Applicants for room tax funding will follow this process:

- 1) All applications for room tax funds should be submitted at least 60 days prior to the date of the event for which funds are being requested. Applications for Room Tax Funding are to be given to the Community and Economic Development Director or their designee, City Hall, 105 N. Dickason Blvd., Columbus, WI 53925.
- 2) Staff will review the application to make sure it follows the guidelines established by the Tourism Commission.
 - a. Staff may decline the application if it does not meet the guidelines. Staff will notify the applicant of why it was declined and the applicant may resubmit the application if it meets the guidelines.
 - b. Staff may forward the application to the Tourism Commission for a discussion only review at its next meeting and for official documentation.
- 3) The Applicant will need to procure the necessary materials as requested in the guidelines for their final report. The applicant will need to coordinate with staff for their in-person final report at a Tourism Commission meeting within 60 days of completion of the event.

- 4) At a Tourism Commission meeting within 60 days of completion of the event for which room tax funds are applied for, applicants shall provide the Tourism Commission a final report detailing room tax eligible expenditures, including receipts for the expenditures for which they are seeking reimbursement. The report should also provide examples of the project/program and its effectiveness in promoting the City of Columbus. Failure to provide this report will result in the group not being eligible for the receipt of room tax funds for that grant year in which they applied. The applicant or their representative must be present in order to answer any questions the commission may have. Once the report is done, the Tourism Commission will deliberate and decide on whether or not to award the funding and how much to award up to the amount requested by the applicant.
 - a. If awarded, the applicant will provide photos of the event and agree to allow the Tourism Commission and designated City staff rights to the photos.

ROOM TAX FUNDING PROCESS # 2 (Two Meetings - Upfront)

Applicants for room tax funding will follow this process:

- 1) All applications for room tax funds should be submitted at least 60 days prior to the date of the event for which funds are being requested. Applications for Room Tax Funding are to be given to the Community and Economic Development Director or their designee, City Hall, 105 N. Dickason Blvd., Columbus, WI 53925.
- 2) Staff will review the application to make sure it follows the guidelines established by the Tourism Commission.
 - a. Staff may decline the application if it does not meet the guidelines. Staff will notify the applicant of why it was declined and the applicant may resubmit the application if it meets the guidelines.
 - b. Staff may forward the application to Tourism Commission for review and decision at its next meeting and for official documentation.
- 3) At a Tourism Commission prior to the date of the event for which funds are being requested, the applicant or designee will be required to attend in order to present their application. After reviewing the application, the Tourism Commission will deliberate and decide on whether or not to award funding and determine an amount up to what is requested by the applicant.
 - a. If approved, the applicant will deliver an invoice to the City in which staff will send the invoice to the Finance Department for processing and payment. Staff will include the granted funding in the next meeting's financial update.
- 4) The Applicant will need to procure the necessary materials as requested in the guidelines for their final report. The applicant will need to coordinate with staff for their in-person final report at a Tourism Commission meeting within 60 days of completion of the event.
 - a. The applicant will need to share copies of photos of the event and give the Tourism Commission and designated City staff rights to use them within 60 days of the completion of the event.

- 5) At a Tourism Commission meeting within 60 days of completion of the event for which room tax funds were granted, applicants shall provide the Tourism Commission a final report detailing room tax eligible expenditures, including receipts for the expenditures for which they are seeking reimbursement. The report should also provide examples of the project/program and its effectiveness in promoting the City of Columbus. Failure to provide this report will result in the group not being eligible for the receipt of room tax funds for that grant year in which they applied. The applicant or their representative must be present in order to answer any questions the commission may have.

ROOM TAX FUNDING PROCESS # 3 (Two Meetings - Current)

Applicants for room tax funding will follow this process:

- 1) All applications for room tax funds should be submitted at least 60 days prior to the date of the event for which funds are being requested. Applications for Room Tax Funding are to be given to the Community and Economic Development Director or their designee, City Hall, 105 N. Dickason Blvd., Columbus, WI 53925.
- 2) Staff will review the application to make sure it follows the guidelines established by the Tourism Commission.
 - a. Staff may decline the application if it does not meet the guidelines. Staff will notify the applicant of why it was declined and the applicant may resubmit the application if it meets the guidelines.
 - b. Staff may forward the application to Tourism Commission for review and decision at its next meeting and for official documentation.
- 3) At a Tourism Commission prior to the date of the event for which funds are being requested, the applicant or designee will be required to attend in order to present their application. After reviewing the application, the Tourism Commission will deliberate and decide on whether or not to move forward in the process to reimburse the applicant.
- 4) If approved to move forward, the Applicant will need to procure the necessary materials as requested in the guidelines for their final report. The applicant will need to coordinate with staff for their in-person final report at a Tourism Commission meeting within 60 days of completion of the event.
- 5) At a Tourism Commission meeting within 60 days of completion of the event for which room tax funds were granted, applicants shall provide the Tourism Commission a final report detailing room tax eligible expenditures, including receipts for the expenditures for which they are seeking reimbursement. The report should also provide examples of the project/program and its effectiveness in promoting the City of Columbus. Failure to provide this report will result in the group not being eligible for the receipt of room tax funds for that grant year in which they applied. The applicant or their representative must be present in order to answer any questions

the commission may have. After the report, the Tourism Commission will deliberate and either award (with possible modification) or deny the grant.

- a. If awarded, the applicant will need to give the Tourism Commission and designated City staff rights to use event photos.