

## **ELITE EVENT FUNDING GUIDELINES**

### **I. Background**

Pinellas County collects a six-percent Tourist Development Tax (“Bed Tax”) on all overnight tourism accommodations in the County. This tax is levied on customers of hotels, motels, condominiums, campgrounds, apartments and private homes that rent accommodations for less than six months in duration.

The Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners has developed a Tourist Development Plan (“Plan”) to guide how these proceeds are spent. In addition to reserve funds, contributions to debt service on Tropicana Field and spring training facilities in Clearwater and Dunedin, and beach nourishment, Bed Taxes are spent on marketing Pinellas County as a destination for leisure, business, conference, sports and film production travel. In support of these tourism marketing efforts, the Plan authorizes the expenditure of up to \$2,000,000 annually for: (i) marketing special events and programs; (ii) providing promotional or operating support for exhibits or programs provided by museums owned and operated by not-for-profit organizations and open to the public; (iii) providing promotional support for zoological parks that are owned and operated by not-for-profit organizations and open to the public; and (iv) event and program sponsorships.

The Pinellas County Tourist Development Council (“TDC”) was established to make recommendations on how best to spend Bed Tax proceeds, including proposing an annual budget and funding for marketing and promotion activities related to special events.

One of the marketing programs operated by Visit St. Petersburg/Clearwater (“VSPC”) is the Elite Event funding program for major events meeting the criteria to receive funding from VSPC. These events generally have had at least 25,000 attendees generating substantial room nights in Pinellas County, and are marketed to tourists outside of Pinellas County, thereby generating a significant positive economic impact for Pinellas County. The sum of \$600,000 was allocated for Elite Events in FY 11/12. Examples of events that have received Elite Event funding in the past include the Honda Grand Prix of St. Petersburg, Outback Bowl, St. Petersburg Bowl, Tampa Bay Rays, and the Transitions PGA Golf Tournament.

In addition to these Elite Events, the VSPC previously provided marketing funding for Special Events (formerly known as New Product). This program was in place for many years, but has not been funded since FY 08/09 because of budgetary constraints. The VSPC has also provided marketing funding on an ad hoc basis for events, including the Clearwater Super Boat National Championship and the Rock ‘n’ Roll Half Marathon of St. Petersburg (through the Sports Commission), and the Outback Bowl Beach Days. Many of these events either generated or are projected to generate significant attendance and/or room nights, although not necessarily at the level of traditional Elite Events.

Expanding the Elite Event funding program to create two (2) categories of Elite Events as provided in these Guidelines will maximize the economic benefits of the tourism marketing

associated with these events within the available Bed Tax funding as budgeted annually, and will provide fair and equitable funding opportunities for all events.

Beginning with FY 12/13, events that are eligible for funding will be evaluated and ranked as provided in these Guidelines. Available funding will be determined annually as approved in the VSPC budget by the Board of County Commissioners. Events that were not eligible for funding or did not apply for Elite Event funding will not be funded on an ad hoc basis during the budget year, unless otherwise authorized in the Plan and approved budget. Elite Events operated by not-for-profit entities will be eligible to receive either sponsorship funding in exchange for marketing benefits, or marketing plan funding. Elite Events operated by for-profit entities will be eligible to receive funding for an approved marketing plan only.

Prior to the application process each year, VSPC will hold a public information session to inform eligible candidates of the program and provide detailed information, guidelines, the application forms and respond to any questions. The informational meeting and the program will also be promoted through press releases, VSPC's electronic newsletter, and other communication tools available through resources at Pinellas County.

## **II. Definitions**

In the context of this tourism marketing/promotion program, the following definitions apply:

A. "Marketing" shall mean advertising, direct sales, public relations, promotions, or research, exclusive of professional fees and services, designed to increase tourist-related business activity from outside Pinellas County.

B. "Elite Event" shall mean a new or existing organized sporting event, concert, exhibition, festival, fair or celebration which is conducted according to a prearranged schedule that is generally less than seven (7) days in duration, and that: (i) is marketed to tourists that would consider visiting the destination and staying overnight to observe or participate in the Elite Event; and (ii) is conducted at a venue in Pinellas County, or if not conducted at a Pinellas County venue, generates at least the minimum number of required room nights in Pinellas County for funding eligibility as set out herein. Elite Events conducted by either for-profit or not-for-profit entities, or a municipality are eligible for funding. Category 1 Elite Events project or have a history of at least 25,000 paid or documented attendees or project or have a history of at least 10,000 room nights, and are nationally televised. Category 2 Elite Events project or have a history of at least 15,000 paid or documented attendees or project or have a history of at least 5,000 room nights. Events, concerts, exhibitions, festivals, fairs or celebrations that extend over a season of more than thirty (30) days are not eligible for Elite Event funding.

C. "Sponsorship" shall mean a mutually beneficial business arrangement between the County, on behalf of VSPC, and an eligible applicant producing an Elite Event, wherein the County pays a fee or provides in/kind services in return for Marketing benefits associated with the Elite Event.

D. "Tourist" shall mean a person who participates in trade or recreational activities outside the county of his/her residence or who rents or leases transient accommodations in Pinellas County as described in Section 125.0104(3)(a), Florida Statutes.

### **III. Eligibility**

A. The applicant must conduct, produce, manage, and or operate an Elite Event at a venue in Pinellas County, or if not conducted at a Pinellas County venue, the Elite Event must generate the required room nights in Pinellas County as set forth herein, regardless of attendance at the Elite Event.

B. The applicant must be a legally established not-for-profit organization or a municipality to be eligible for Sponsorship funding. Not-for-profits, municipalities and any entity producing an Elite Event that is not eligible for Sponsorship funding shall be eligible to receive funding for an approved Marketing plan.

C. The applicant for Elite Event funding shall:

1. Demonstrate that it will attract Tourists to Pinellas County;
2. Have the ability to generate positive international, national and regional coverage for the destination.
3.
  - a. Have at least 25,000 paid or documented attendees and/or generate at least 10,000 room nights for Category 1 Elite Events.
  - b. Have at least 15,000 paid or documented attendees and/or generate at least 5,000 room nights for Category 2 Elite Events.
  - c. Specify whether applicant is applying for Category I or Category 2 funding.
4. Provide Marketing benefits or a Marketing plan that satisfies the Marketing rating criteria in Section VII. B. and that has a media value equal to or greater than the Sponsorship payment or Marketing plan funding, as determined by the VSPC advertising agency of record.

### **IV. Funding Standards**

A. Based upon eligibility, funding requests for Elite Events may be provided in the form of either Sponsorships or for funding a Marketing plan. Marketing plan funding may not be expended on wages, travel expenses, operating or capital costs, permits, rental fees, webpage development or maintenance costs, and other similar costs or expenses not related to Marketing.

B. Preference will be given to Elite Events which occur during "off season" periods, including January 1 through February 15, May 1 through June 30, and September 1 through December 31. Events must have a direct correlation with VSPC's targeted markets and should specifically indicate how that correlation exists.

C. For Elite Events held in between October 1 and December 31, expenditures incurred prior to the beginning of the fiscal year may be reimbursed in the fiscal year the Elite Event is held if expressly allowed in the Funding Agreement.

D. The County's fiscal year begins on October 1 and ends on September 30 of the following year. Therefore, applications for Elite Event funding are for annual events that are held within the next fiscal year after the application submittal date between October 1 and the following September 30. However, events that are annually held during either the last week of September or the first week of October are eligible to apply for funding for two annual events in those instances when both annual events fall within the same fiscal year.

E. The maximum funding available for any Category 1 Elite Event is \$250,000 or 20% of the total VSPC Elite Event budget, whichever is less. The maximum funding available for any Category 2 Elite Event is \$100,000 or 10% of the total VSPC Elite Event budget, whichever is less.

F. Applicants will only be considered for, and compete within, the funding category applicant applied for, and will not be eligible for funding in another category.

G. By accepting Elite Event funding, the applicant agrees to allow the VSPC's research firm of record access to the venue to conduct on site intercepts with attendees to determine the value of the event, festival, program, or project to tourism and its potential for future growth.

H. Applicants receiving Elite Event funding will be required to sign an Agreement that has been prepared by the Pinellas County Attorney's Office. This Agreement must include either a Marketing plan or specify the Marketing benefits to be received by the VSPC.

## **V. Required Documentation**

**FAILURE TO PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING ITEMS WITH THE APPLICATION WILL DISQUALIFY THE APPLICANT:**

A. For not-for-profit corporate applicants, proof acceptable to the VSPC of the legally established not-for-profit status.

B. A completed application that addresses each Rating Criteria.

C. A Marketing plan, or if the application is for a Sponsorship, a proposal outlining the Marketing benefits to be received for the Sponsorship, that specifies the proposed advertising, direct sales, public relations, or promotions, that will reach VSPC-targeted audiences and satisfies the rating criteria.

## **VI. Evaluation Process**

A. Each application will be reviewed by the County Attorney's office to ensure compliance with state statutes, county ordinances and these Guidelines regarding proper usage of Bed Tax funds.

B. Prior to the meeting referred to in subsection D. herein, each application will be reviewed and scored by members of the Elite Event Committee (“Committee”) and the VSPC Director or designee, based on the rating scale shown later in these Guidelines.

C. The Committee and staff will hold a meeting to rank all applications that score at least 700 points, and determine funding recommendations for each Elite Event within the TDC’s recommended budget and in accordance with these Guidelines.

D. Applicants may be invited to make a presentation to the Committee if requested.

E. Staff will then announce the total points and the average score for each application and then provide a ranking of highest to lowest scoring applicants.

F. After review of all applications, public comment will be requested.

G. Committee members will then complete a final review of all qualifying applications and have an opportunity adjust scores based on any new information.

H. Any score changes will be recorded and a new average score announced if scores were revised.

I. Members of the Committee will begin with the highest scoring applications and determine recommended funding amounts for each application.

J. If necessary, a second meeting may be called to make the funding determinations for each application.

## **VII. Rating Criteria**

A. The ability of the Elite Event to generate attendance or room nights in excess of the threshold established to be eligible for funding. 400 points

B. The value of applicant’s Marketing plan or Marketing benefits (in the case of Sponsorships) in promoting Pinellas County as a Tourist destination, as measured by: (i) how the Elite Event Marketing specifically complements the VSPC’s Marketing programs and key markets of origin; (ii) the ability of the Elite Event Marketing to enhance the overall image of the County as a preferred destination for leisure, business, conference, sports or film production travel; and (iii) the ability of the Elite Event Marketing to generate positive international, national or regional publicity. 300 points

C. The extent to which the media value of the Marketing exceeds the Sponsorship or Marketing plan funding request. 100 points

D. Timing of the Elite Event to coincide with non-peak or shoulder seasons in Pinellas County tourism as defined in Section IV.B. of these Guidelines. 100 points

E. Demonstration of wide spread community support and contributions to not-for-profits by the Elite Event applicant that benefit the community. Community support can be demonstrated by showing public (governmental) or private monetary support, either through cash or in-kind contributions, volunteer base, or in other ways. 100 points

All those rating the applications will base their scores for each of the six items in the rating scale as follows:

0%	unresponsive to the requirements of that item being rated
10% - 30%	does not meet current requirements of the item being rated
40% - 60%	partially meets requirements of that item being rated
70% - 90%	fully responsive to the requirements of the item being rated
100%	exceeds all requirements of the item being rated

Note: All applications receiving an average score of 700 points or above out of the maximum 1000 points will be considered eligible for funding consideration. A score of 700 points or higher does not guarantee funding.

**VIII. Timeline for Grants**

The TDC will annually establish a schedule for consideration and award of grants, which will generally comply with the following timeframes:

January/February/March	Notification and public Information Sessions/applications available
April	Deadline for receipt of applications
May	Legal, Staff and Committee review of applications
May/June	Initial Elite Event Committee meeting
May/June	2 <sup>nd</sup> Committee Meeting to Determine Funding (if necessary)
June/July	TDC reviews and considers the Committee report
July	Board of County Commissioners' final approval of funding awards
TBD	Elite Event Funding Agreement executed

**IX. Payment Procedures**

Marketing Plan Funding recipients will be reimbursed for payments authorized by the Funding Agreement and its Marketing plan. Recipients should submit original invoices to VSPC and provide proper backup to show that the approved advertisement or service was provided. Payments will only be made as reimbursements, not directly to supplier companies. Elite Event funds approved and allocated for specific purposes shall not be expended or disbursed in lump-

sum form. Disbursements will be made upon invoices presented to the VSPC and Pinellas County for approval for services rendered. Funds cannot be disbursed in advance for services not yet rendered. However, deposits required for delivery of goods and services can be reimbursed.

Sponsorship payments may be paid in a lump sum, or in installments, as determined by the VSPC and as set out in the approved Funding Agreement. Payment of Sponsorships shall be made no earlier than 45 days before the date of the Elite Event.

## **X. Miscellaneous**

Any and all Elite Events utilizing County Property during their event will adhere to and abide by the County's Special Events & Facilities Use Guide available at <http://www.pinellascounty.org/Events/pdf/Special-Events-Users-Guide.pdf>.

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