



I. Background & Overview

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 (“BCC”) has developed a Tourist Development Plan (“Plan”) to guide how these proceeds are spent. Bed Taxes are spent, in large part, on marketing Pinellas County as a destination for leisure, business, conference, sports, film production, and other tourist 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 administrated by Visit St. Petersburg/Clearwater (“VSPC”) on behalf of the TDC is the **Elite Event Funding Program** for major events meeting the criteria to receive funding from TDT funds. The genesis of the Elite Event program was called “New Product” funding, which then became “Special Events” funding and is now operated under the current name. Prior to the New Products program, events were funded on an ad hoc basis. The New Product (now Elite Event) program was created with the intent to provide a more systematic means for funding applications, review and recommendations for funding. The goal moving forward is to continue the program to allow maximum 1) **consistency**; 2) **return on investment and sustainability of the individual events and the overall program**; and 3) **transparency**.

Examples of events that have received funding in the past include the Clearwater Jazz Holiday, Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg, Outback Bowl, St. Petersburg Bowl, Tampa Bay Rays, Valspar PGA Golf Tournament, Clearwater Super Boat National Championship, and the Rock ‘n’ Roll Half Marathon of St. Petersburg. 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.

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.

II. Definitions

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

A. “Elite Event” shall mean a new or existing organized sporting event, concert, exhibition, festival, fair, special event 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, generating at least the minimum number of required room nights in Pinellas County and unique event attendees for funding eligibility as set out herein.

B. “Marketing” shall mean advertising (print, electronic, digital, etc.), direct sales, public relations, promotions, or research, exclusive of professional fees and services, designed to increase tourist-related business activity from outside Pinellas County.

C. “Sponsorship” shall mean a mutually beneficial business arrangement between VSPC, on behalf of the County, and an eligible applicant producing an Elite Event, wherein VSPC receives event assets and opportunities to promote VSPC brand and the Pinellas County destination not included in the Marketing Plan.

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

III. Funding Categories & Eligibility

- A. Funding Categories are as follows:
- i. **Category I** – generate at least 50,000 “unique” paid, credential and/or otherwise documented attendees AND at least 25,000 room nights in Pinellas County with maximum funding eligibility up to \$125,000. Category 1 events must be broadcast on national television.
 - ii. **Category II** – generate at least 20,000 “unique” paid, credential and/or otherwise documented attendees AND at least 10,000 room nights in Pinellas County with maximum funding eligibility up to \$75,000.
 - iii. **Category III** - generate at least 10,000 “unique” paid, credential and/or otherwise documented attendees AND at least 5,000 room nights in Pinellas County with maximum funding eligibility up to \$25,000.
- B. To be considered eligible for funding, each applicant must:
- i. conduct, produce, manage, and/or operate an Elite Event at a venue in Pinellas County, generating the required room nights in Pinellas County as set forth herein, regardless of attendance at the Elite Event;
 - ii. demonstrate it will attract Tourist to Pinellas County;
 - iii. provide Marketing and/or Sponsorship benefits that satisfies the Marketing rating criteria in Section V. C. and that has a media value equal to or greater than the Sponsorship payment or Marketing plan funding, as determined by VSPC and/or its advertising agency of record; and
 - iv. provide VSPC exclusivity as the only CVB and Destination Marketing Organization (“DMO”) recognized supporter of the Elite Event.
- C. Funding Availability:
- i. Year 1 – Applicants are eligible to receive up to 100% of the funding request.
 - ii. Year 2 – Applicants who are receiving funding for the 2nd year are eligible to receive up to 75% of the funding maximum in the category applied for.
 - iii. Year 3 - Applicants who are receiving funding for the 3rd year are eligible to receive up to 50% of the funding maximum in the category applied for.
 - iv. Applicants are not eligible for funding after the event’s 3rd year, but will be considered for marketing/advertising funding under VSPC’s annual operations budget, as negotiated by VSPC staff.

IV. Conditions of Funding

- A. Funds may only be used in accordance with Chapter 125, Florida Statutes for the Marketing and/or Sponsorship benefits as agreed upon with VSPC. Funds may not be utilized towards operating expenses.
- B. Applicants receiving Elite Event funding will be required to enter into and sign a Tourism Promotions Agreement prepared by the Pinellas County Attorney’s Office. This Agreement will include Marketing and/or Sponsorship benefits to be negotiated and received by VSPC.
- C. Applicant’s Marketing and/or Sponsorship proposal must have a direct correlation with VSPC’s targeted markets and should specifically indicate how that correlation exists.
- D. For Elite Events held 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.
- E. By accepting Elite Event funding, the applicant agrees to allow the VSPC’s staff and/or 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.
- F. Funding will be paid in a lump sum on a post-event basis subject to submittal of a fully completed and signed **Post-Event Report Form** acceptable to VSPC.
- G. Elite Events utilizing Pinellas County property during their event must 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>.

V. Application Process & Review

- A. Application Submittal.
 - i. Each applicant must submit a fully completed **Funding Application** (“Application”) per the **Application Requirements & Instructions**.
 - ii. All Applications must be submitted by the deadline established in the **Program Process Flow Chart & Timeline**.
 - iii. Incomplete or late Applications will disqualify the applicant.

- B. Review & Evaluation Process.
 - i. County Attorney.
 - 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.
 - ii. TDC Committee Review.
 - a. The TDC Chair shall appoint, in addition to the TDC Chair, no more than six (6) TDC members, of which four (4) must be tourism industry appointees, to serve on the Elite Event Committee (“Committee”).
 - b. Each application deemed eligible by the County Attorney will be reviewed and scored at a meeting of the Committee, at which:
 - 1. The Committee will determine funding recommendations for each application within the TDC’s recommended budget and in accordance with these Guidelines and Rating Criteria below.
 - 2. Applicants may be invited to attend, make presentations and answer questions of the Committee members.
 - 3. At conclusion of applicant presentations, Committee members will complete scoring.
 - 4. Category 1 applications will be scored first by the Committee, followed by Category 2, and then Category 3.
 - 5. The average score of each remaining Committee score will be announced by VSPC staff as the applicant’s score.
 - 6. Once all applications have been reviewed and scored, VSPC staff will provide a ranking of highest to lowest scoring applicants.
 - 7. Beginning with the highest scoring applications, the Committee will determine recommended funding amounts for each application on an “up to” not-to-exceed basis.
 - c. The Committee will present its funding recommendations to the TDC for approval. Funding recommendations will be a maximum “up to” not-to-exceed amount and subject to negotiation by VSPC staff.
 - iii. TDC Review & Recommendations.
 - a. The TDC will review and consider approval of the funding recommendations presented by the Committee.
 - b. The TDC will vote on funding recommendations for review and consideration of approval by the BCC.
 - iv. BCC Review.
 - a. The BCC will review the funding recommendations provided by the TDC.
 - b. Funding recommendations will be considered for approval by the BCC.

- C. Rating Criteria.
 - i. Unique Attendees / Room Nights (200 points) – Ability of the Elite Event to generate unique attendees AND room nights in excess of the threshold established to be eligible for funding.
 - ii. Marketing & Advertising Plan (200 points) – The value of the applicant’s proposed Marketing & Advertising Plan in promoting Pinellas County as a tourist destination and the extent the value of the plan exceeds the funding request.
 - iii. Media & Digital Plan (200 points) – The value of the applicant’s proposed Media & Digital Plan in promoting Pinellas County as a tourist destination and the extent the value of the plan exceeds the funding request.
 - iv. Event Onsite Benefits (200 points) – The value of the applicant’s proposed Event Onsite Benefits in promoting Pinellas County as a tourist destination and the extent the value of the benefits exceeds the funding request.
 - v. Timing of Event: Peak vs. Offseason & Non-Conflicting (100 points) – Timing of the Elite Event to coincide with non-peak or shoulder seasons in Pinellas County tourism. 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. In addition, timing of the Elite Event should not conflict with other Elite Events or other special events taking place in Pinellas County.

- vi. Event History & Community Support (100 points) – Demonstration of widespread community support and charitable contributions by the Elite Event applicant that benefit the Pinellas County community. Ability of the Elite Event to fulfill any previous contractual obligations with Pinellas County. Ability of the Elite Event to attract high caliber and high profile artists, athletes and/or participants to perform and/or attend in Pinellas County. Ability of the Elite Event to enhance the overall image of Pinellas County.

D. Application Scoring.

- i. Committee members will base their scores on the substance of the applications relative to the goals and objectives of the Elite Event Funding Program for each of the categories above in the following rating scale:

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

- ii. 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.

E. Program Timeline

- i. VSPC staff, with TDC approval, will annually establish a schedule for consideration and award of funding, which will generally comply with the following timeline:

March	Commence application process
April	Deadline for receipt of applications
May	Legal, Staff and Committee review of applications
May/June	Initial Elite Event Committee meeting
May/June	2 nd Committee Meeting to Determine Funding (if necessary)
June/July	TDC reviews and considers the Committee report
July	BCC final funding approval
TBD	Elite Event Funding Agreement executed

- ii. Each year's timeline will be published in the **Program Process Flow Chart & Timeline**.

VI. Key Documents

In addition to the Funding Guidelines, the Elite Event Funding Program is supported by other key documents, including:

- A. Program Overview
- B. Application Requirements & Instructions
- C. Funding Application
- D. Program Process Flow Chart & Timeline
- E. Post-Event Report Form
- F. Elite Event Funding Agreement