

## **I. Background & Overview**

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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”), with input from the Tourist Development Council (“TDC”), 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 **\$3,000,000** annually for marketing special events and programs.

Visit St. Pete-Clearwater (“VisitSPC”) administers the **Elite Event Funding Program** in an effort to attract and maintain large-scale events that drive visitation and market the County to audiences outside of Pinellas. Funding is awarded in a manner that maximizes **return on investment** and **transparency**.

**The County’s fiscal year begins on October 1 and ends on September 30 of the following year. Therefore, applications for 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**

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

- A. “Elite Event” shall mean an 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;
  - (ii) Is conducted at a venue in Pinellas County, generating at least the minimum number of tourists to Pinellas County and/or unique event attendees for funding eligibility as set out herein.
- B. “Event Marketing” shall mean pre-event advertising media (print, digital, social, outdoor, etc.), promoting the event and appearing primarily outside of Pinellas County and deemed eligible by VisitSPC in the funding application process. (Only media costs are eligible)
- C. “Sponsorship” shall mean a mutually beneficial business arrangement between VisitSPC, on behalf of the County, and an eligible applicant producing an Elite Event, wherein VisitSPC receives assets and opportunities, including but not limited to on-site benefits, to promote VisitSPC brand and the Pinellas County destination not included in the Marketing Plan.
- D. “Tourist” shall mean a person who resides outside a 20-mile radius from the Elite Event location.
- E. “Unique Attendees” shall mean a single individual attending the event whether for a single day or multiple days. Examples of Unique Attendees:
- a worker issued a 2-day credential is considered one (1) Unique Attendee
  - an individual purchasing a 3-day package is considered one (1) Unique Attendee
- F. “Broadcast” shall mean a national broadcast of the event on terrestrial TV, cable, premiere streaming service or other Connected TV (“CTV”), Online Video (“OLV”), Over-the-Top (“OTT”), deemed eligible by VisitSPC
- G. “Broadcast Assets” shall mean independently valued, promotional assets made available to VisitSPC for the purpose of promoting Pinellas County (TV ads, TV visible signage, digital content, etc.).

### III. Funding Categories & Eligibility

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A. Funding Categories are as follows:

- i. **Category I, up to \$250,000** – Meets both (2) sets of eligibility requirements.
  - i. 40,000 Unique Attendees and 16,000 Tourists
  - ii. 500,000 Broadcast Views and Broadcast Assets with promotional value to VisitSPC
- ii. **Category II, up to \$150,000** – Meets one (1) out of two (2) eligibility requirements.
  - i. 40,000 Unique Attendees and 16,000 Tourists
  - ii. 250,000 Broadcast Views and Broadcast Assets with promotional value to VisitSPC
- iii. **Category III, up to \$75,000** – Meets the eligibility requirements.
  - i. 15,000 Unique Attendees and 6,000 Tourists
- iv. **Category IV, up to \$50,000** – Meets the eligibility requirements.
  - i. 7,500 Unique Attendees and 3,000 Tourists
- v. **Category V, up to \$25,000** – Meets one (1) out of two (2) eligibility requirements.
  - i. 5,000 Unique Attendees and 2,000 Tourists
  - ii. 7,500 Unique Attendees

\* Unique Attendee and Tourist figures will be based on third party data gathered for VisitSPC at the most recent instance of the event.

\* If an applicant believes these figures are not accurate, they must provide VisitSPC staff with verifiable data that will be assessed for accuracy and a determination will be made whether the submitted data is acceptable.

\* If the prior year event was negatively impacted by weather or other extraordinary circumstances, the applicant must explain in their application. If this is not disclosed at the time of the application submission, the circumstance will not be considered.

B. Funding Allocation

- i. For Category I events, 100% of awarded funds will be allocated towards Event Marketing and/or Sponsorship at VisitSPC's discretion.
- ii. For Category II through V events, 50% of awarded funds will be allocated towards Event Marketing or Sponsorship at VisitSPC's discretion. The remaining 50% of awarded funds will be allocated towards event costs.
- iii. **For FY27 only**, funding for a returning FY26 Elite Event may not drop below 50% of its previous year's funding level.

C. To be considered eligible for funding, each applicant must:

- i. Conduct, produce, manage, and/or operate an Elite Event at a location in Pinellas County.
- ii. Generate the required unique attendees and/or Tourists in Pinellas County as set forth herein.
- iii. Not utilize funding towards other VisitSPC programs (e.g. co-op programs, etc.).
- iv. Disclose any other public funding sources in the application process.

D. Additional Considerations/Disclaimers:

- i. Applications do not guarantee funding. Final funding determination is at the discretion of VisitSPC.
- ii. Festivals that occur multiple times within the same year or regularly scheduled programming will generally not be considered.
- iii. First-time events or first-time funded events will be evaluated based on projected attendance, documented success of comparable or past events, and estimated economic impact to Pinellas County as determined by VisitSPC data.
- iv. Any unallocated funds may be used for marketing purposes at VisitSPC's discretion.
- v. VisitSPC may spend additional marketing dollars with qualifying events at its discretion and in compliance with Florida Statutes and the Tourist Development Plan.

## IV. Conditions of Funding

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- A. Funds may only be used in accordance with Chapter 125, Florida Statutes and Chapter 118 of the Pinellas County Code for the Marketing and/or Sponsorship benefits agreed upon with VisitSPC. Funds are to be used to market and promote an event to potential tourists outside of Pinellas County and may not be used for event operating expenses (except for any funds received by applicant expressly allocated by VisitSPC for sponsorship benefits).
- B. Applicants receiving 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 VisitSPC.
- C. Applicant's Marketing and/or Sponsorship proposal must have a direct correlation with VisitSPC's targeted markets and should specifically indicate how that correlation exists.
- D. For 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 Event is held if expressly allowed in the Funding Agreement.
- E. By accepting Event funding, the applicant agrees to allow the VisitSPC'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 or as otherwise provided in the Tourism Promotions Agreement, subject to submittal of a fully completed and signed **Post-Event Report Form and any other documentation** acceptable to VisitSPC.
- G. Events utilizing Pinellas County property during their event must adhere to and abide by the County's Special Use and Event Guide available at <http://www.pinellas.gov/special-use-and-event-guide>.

## V. Application Process & Review

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- 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 may disqualify the applicant.
- B. Review & Evaluation Process.
  - i. Staff review and evaluation.
    - a. Each application will be reviewed by VisitSPC staff and the County Attorney's office, as may be needed, to ensure compliance with state statutes, county ordinances and these Guidelines regarding proper usage of Bed Tax funds.
    - b. Select VisitSPC staff along with VisitSPC's advertising agency of record will evaluate each application using the criteria in these guidelines and determine the tourism and marketing value of the event.
  - ii. VisitSPC staff will then make its funding recommendations to the entire TDC who will then review and finalize their funding recommendations for BCC review and approval.
  - iii. BCC Review.
    - a. The BCC will review the funding recommendations of both VisitSPC staff and the TDC.
    - b. Funding recommendations and negotiations of funding agreement terms will not begin until BCC review and approval of those recommendations.
- C. Rating Criteria.
  - i. Total Attendees – Ability of the Event to generate attendance in excess of the thresholds established to be eligible for funding.
  - ii. Tourists – Ability of the Event to generate Tourist attendance in excess of the thresholds established to be eligible for funding.
  - iii. Broadcast Value – Ability of the Event to generate promotional value to VisitSPC via Broadcast Assets.
- D. Program Timeline

- vi. VisitSPC staff, with TDC approval, will annually establish a schedule for consideration and award of funding, which will generally comply with the following timeline:
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| March     | Commence application process                                      |
| April     | Deadline for receipt of applications                              |
| May       | Staff and advertising agency of record evaluation of applications |
| May/June  | TDC reviews and votes on funding recommendations                  |
| June/July | BCC reviews and votes on funding recommendations                  |
| July      | VisitSPC staff negotiates terms of the funding agreements         |

\* Timeline is subject to change

- vii. Events applying outside the application window can be considered if funds are available and may be recommended at VisitSPC's discretion.
- viii. Each year's timeline will be published and available online at <https://partners.visitstpeteclearwater.com/resource/funding-opportunities/elite-event-funding-program>.
- ix. Funding for any event is based on availability and is limited by the provisions of Florida Law and the Pinellas County Code.