



## **McDowell County Tourism Development Authority Event Sponsorship Policy and Application Guidelines**

### **McDowell County Tourism Development Authority**

The mission of the McDowell County Tourism Development Authority (TDA) is to promote travel and tourism in McDowell County through state, regional, and national advertising, and promotions. The TDA was created in 1985 and the occupancy tax legislation was amended in 2007 by Senate Bill 18, which also mandates the Board structure and the proper use of its tax revenues. It is funded through a 5% room occupancy tax collected and administered by the County Government. The ability to fund the event sponsorship program, is a result of occupancy tax collected and generated from overnight stays in lodging facilities within McDowell County.

### **Event Sponsorship Purpose**

- The TDA Event Sponsorship grant provides funds to organizations and agencies producing events that attract visitors from more than 50 miles outside of McDowell County generating overnight stays, through the placement of media or other promotional exposure. Sponsorship funds shall be used for creative event marketing focusing on cities/towns more than 50 miles away. Funds shall be used for promotional activities, including, but not limited to, printing of promotional media, the purchase and production of marketing/advertising, digital marketing (including social media marketing and social media ads), and direct marketing. Up to 25% of the marketing and promotion funds may be used for local advertising within the 50-mile radius.

Funds may also be used for execution of a successful event (within recommended guidelines determined by the McDowell TDA Board).

Event sponsorship funding may not be used for staff salaries, capital acquisitions, or to assist with an organization's existing debt.

### **Who Can Apply:**

- Not-for-profit organizations, museums, attractions, governmental agencies, or other non-profit tourism entities. Not-for-profit organizations must have a minimum grant match of 50%.
- For-profit, tourism-based organizations hosting events in McDowell County that draw significant attendance and increase overnight occupancy.

- For-profit businesses or entities hosting festivals, events, competitions, or sporting events that take place in McDowell County and increase in-county overnight visitation significantly (with measurable outcomes).
- Event Venues, businesses specifically aligned with event planning, hosting, or creative development of activities in McDowell County.
- Applicants must be an active federally recognized non-profit with a corresponding tax identification number.

### **Eligibility and Requirements**

No funding will be provided for events outside of McDowell County, unless the event includes locations within McDowell County as a Stopping or Starting Point. Events hosted within McDowell County receive priority.

Events are eligible for one event sponsorship per fiscal year (July 1- June 30).

Events that have already been completed, prior to the grant cycle are not eligible for funding.

Sponsorship funding is for short term seed money to grow annual events. There is no guarantee of multi-year support. Events are expected to be self-supporting, after three years.

Events must be open to the public and not promote a specific religious background, political candidate, party, or political platform.

- Events with restricted access or limited appeal to a broader audience with the exclusion of Sporting Events that require advance registration, as long as these events sustain attendance numbers yOy (year-over-year).

Fund recipients are responsible for all liability issues resulting from event activities.

Sponsorship recipients may not promote facilities located outside McDowell County.

**Events must generate overnight stays.** Organizations must provide evidence that the event draws visitors to the county, increases use of lodging, restaurants, shopping venues, historical sites or enhances visitor experiences in the county. Be prepared to provide the aforementioned information.

Describe the event and its goals.

Specifically describe how the project will be marketed.

The event, activity or sponsorship need should enhance tourism to the county. These are some of the key areas we'll consider when awarding support:

- **Overnight Visitation:** Marked overnight visitation within the county.

- **Visitor Attraction and Economic Impact:** Ability to attract new and increased overnight visitation and potential for economic impact, including its ability to generate revenue, create jobs, and boost local businesses.
- **Innovation and Uniqueness:** Creativity, uniqueness, and its contribution to diversifying McDowell County's tourism offerings. Projects that offer new, novel experiences or fill a gap in the current tourism landscape score higher.
- **Collaboration and Community Support:** Demonstrating strong collaboration between multiple entities (e.g., local businesses, non-profits, government agencies) and having significant community support or involvement are awarded higher points.
- **Seasonal and Off-Peak Promotion:** The project/event aims to extend the tourism season by attracting visitors during off-peak times, contributing to a more even distribution of tourism throughout the year.
- **Marked or Sustainable Event Growth:** Events that will continue to grow due to subject matter, attendance, or event practices (outcomes). Examples include festivals that have increased attendance year-over-year, but also include sporting events or music venue events (concerts) that require ticketing or registration. As long as the event continues to experience sustained attendance levels (like/same signups or ticket sales every year), the event qualifies.

#### **Non-Qualifying Event Elements:**

- Administrative expenses (ie: salaries or benefits for event staff), memberships or dues, mortgage payments, facility maintenance.
- Regular, anticipated expenses including staff or volunteer travel and accommodation.
- Promotional items like t-shirts, hats, or other giveaways unless they are integral to a unique visitor experience.
- Prizes and awards like cash prizes or expensive giveaways for event competitions; plaques, trophies, or awards certificates; scholarships or prize money.

#### **Overall Ineligible Activities and Expenses:**

- Ongoing operational costs, including routine administrative expenses, staff salaries, utilities, and rent of place of business/organization.
- Lobbying, political activities, or initiatives.
- Major capital expenditures, purchases, or leases of equipment.
- Fundraising activities that do not demonstrate a clear impact on travel.
- Events with restricted access or limited appeal to a broader audience (Exclusion: Sporting Events that require registration).
- Family reunions (with the exception of Family or Heritage Reunion events with an expected attendance of over 200).

#### **Acknowledgement & Recognition:**

Recipients must agree to acknowledge McDowell TDA's support in all relevant public relations activities, printed materials, and digital platforms. This checklist outlines acceptable proof of recognition for your Tourism Sponsorship funding. Please ensure you include at least **four (4)** of the following items:

- Visual Recognition:

- **Logo:** Prominently display the Destination McDowell (McDowell TDA) logo on all promotional materials (e.g., flyers, posters, website, social media).
- **Signage:** Include Destination McDowell branding on event signage throughout the venue.
- **On-Site Presence:** Feature McDowell TDA representatives, staff, board members, or materials at the event location.
- **Photos:** Share high-resolution photos showcasing Destination McDowell branding during the event.
- **Verbal or Written Recognition:**
  - **Announcements:** Mention McDowell County TDA/Destination McDowell support in event announcements, speeches, or emcee introductions.
  - **Presentations:** Acknowledge sponsorship during presentations or informational sessions.
    - **Additional Presentation Option:** “Event Funded by McDowell County TDA” or “Event Funded by Destination McDowell” must be present on at least one presentation, event sign, or digital presence or documentation available to the public.
  - **Interviews:** Mention Destination McDowell/McDowell TDA role in media interviews or press releases related to the event.
- **Digital Recognition:**
  - **Website:** Include the Destination McDowell logo and link to the website on your event website.
  - **Social Media:** Tag @DestinationMcDowell in event-related social media posts and use their designated hashtags. #destinationmcdowell
  - **Email Marketing:** Acknowledge McDowell TDA sponsorship in event-related email communications.
  - **Content Share:** Provide Media (photos, graphics, video) via approved Google Drive link or CrowdRiff link that the McDowell TDA can use for future promotional and marketing purposes.

Recipients will be required to submit proof of compliance. Failure to meet these recognition requirements may result in withholding of funds or disqualification from future programs.

#### **Additional Notes:**

- McDowell TDA reserves the right to request additional information from any applicant.
- All material submitted as part of an application will be a matter of public record, subject to Chapter 132. G.S. 132-1 of NC laws.
- Applications are reviewed by the McDowell County TDA Board based on internal criteria outlined in our bylaws and county guidelines.
- A scorecard will be used to evaluate and rate the potential of events and sponsorships that apply for funding. This scoring system is used by the board to determine eligibility for funding.
- All funding/support decisions ultimately rest with the McDowell County Tourism Development Authority Board. Depending on funding available and applications received, we may award less than the requested amount, offer alternative support, or not award funding at all. Projects that best align with our criteria will be prioritized.
- Sponsorship applicants are fully responsible for following these guidelines and meeting deadlines outlined in their sponsorship agreement.

- We reserve the right to modify or adjust our grant programs at any time. While we strive to be transparent and communicative, please be aware that program details are subject to change.

### **Sponsorship Payment Requirements and Deadline**

To ensure smooth access to your awarded funds, please follow these guidelines:

#### *Project Completion and Documentation:*

- Funds are reimbursable and will be disbursed **upon approval of sponsorship**. Should the event or activity get canceled, funds should be returned **within 30 days** of event cancellation.
- **Within 30 days** of the project's conclusion, submit the following documentation to the TDA Board or TDA Executive Director:
  - **Final Evaluation Report:** This report should detail the event's execution, successes, challenges, and overall impact. It is mandatory for future funding eligibility.
  - **Recognition Verification:** Four (4) forms of proof of TDA recognition as required in the agreement (e.g., logos, mentions in promotional materials, etc.).
  - **Digital Submission Required:** All of the above must be submitted digitally via email at [execdirector@destinationmcdowell.com](mailto:execdirector@destinationmcdowell.com) or through a pre-agreed upon Google Drive link.



## EVENT & SPONSORSHIP APPLICATION

### 1) APPLICANT INFORMATION (PLEASE PRINT):

Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization/Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization's Tax ID #: \_\_\_\_\_

Event Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Event or Project Begins: \_\_\_\_\_ Date Event to be Complete: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Person(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Title/Relationship to Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Total Project Budget: \_\_\_\_\_ Total Requested Amount: \_\_\_\_\_

Explain in detail how you will use the grant funds?

Please provide/attach all levels of available sponsorship with this form: \_\_\_\_\_

Expected Attendance: \_\_\_\_\_ Estimated Room Nights Anticipated: \_\_\_\_\_

First Time Event? \_\_\_\_\_ If not, how many years has the event been held? \_\_\_\_\_

Last Year's Attendance: \_\_\_\_\_ Last Year's Estimated Room Nights: \_\_\_\_\_

Event Website:

Event Social Media Links:

Do you have existing marketing already in-place? Please provide examples (links, copies of press release or articles)

**Describe your event and explain how this event/activity promotes overnight tourism. Please note, these answers help determine the impact of your event on tourism.**

**How will your event/sponsorship:**

- (1) Attract tourists to McDowell County
  
- (2) Promote accommodations and/or encourage visitors to stay overnight. (Use separate page if necessary)

**DESCRIBE THE MARKETING PLAN** Include the target audiences and strategies. Provide the names of media outlets, type of advertisements, and plans for distribution. Include social media plans, copies of your organization's logo, associated branding artwork, and other related images representing the organization and your event or project. Please coordinate with McDowell TDA's team to collaborate (including providing event details, links, and photography/media).