

2026 Fall Highland Tourism Council Marketing Assistance Grant Guidelines & Application

Deadline: October 31, 2026

The goal of the Highland Tourism Council (Council) is to increase sustainable tourism to benefit and improve the quality of life for current citizens, future residents, and visitors. Highland County is a destination that is welcoming to visitors and provides opportunities to experience its culture, traditions, history, and natural beauty.

The Council has established the Marketing Assistance Grant to provide funding for local organizations and businesses with an emphasis on attracting visitors to Highland County and improving visitors' experiences. Funding for these grants is secured through a Transient Occupancy Tax collected quarterly by short-term lodging facilities within the county. The Council has budgeted up to \$6,000 (\$3,000 twice a year) in available assistance for this program.

Grants will be awarded only for new marketing activities. There is a 6-month "lookback" period on reimbursable expenses that occur before the deadline of the grant application. This means that expenses for new marketing activities can only be reported if they occurred after April 30, 2026. The new marketing activities must be completed within 9 months of approval (a 3-month extension can be granted upon request.) Funds will be awarded in the following ways:

1. In the form of reimbursements upon completion of a marketing effort
2. In the form of payment directly to a vendor upon the presentation of an invoice for a specific marketing initiative.

Expenditures must be made in accordance with the approved application and within the guidelines of the program. **Recipients must submit copies of all paid invoices/receipts and copies of all promotional materials created.** If a recipient relocates outside of Highland County within two years of being initially awarded the grant, they will be required to repay 50% of all grant funds provided. Recipients agree to a short follow-up interview with the Highland Tourism Council within 6 months after the marketing activities are completed. Grant award winners will not be eligible to apply for a new grant until 18 months after the financial close-out of their current grant. Applicants that do not receive grant funds may apply again during the next grant cycle.

Guidelines

The goal of the Marketing Assistance Grant is to increase visitation and the tourism experience in Highland County.

- Marketing activities must benefit Highland County through:
 - Increased revenue for local businesses
 - Increased visitation to and enhanced visitor experience in Highland County
 - Promotion of initiatives that support the culture, traditions, or natural beauty of the county
- Up to \$3,000 will be made available biannually (twice a year) by the Council.

- Applications will be accepted biannually. First applications of the year will be due April 30 to be reviewed by the Council in May. Second applications of the year will be due October 31 and be reviewed by the Council in November.
- Reimbursable marketing expenses for new marketing activities can only be reported if they occurred after April 30, 2026.
- Grants will be made for no less than \$250 and up to \$3,000 per application period.
- A grant could be for total amount to one applicant or for smaller amounts to more than one applicant.
- Only one application is permitted per business or organization.
- Applicant's business or organization must be physically located in Highland County, Virginia or relocate to Highland County within 3 months of grant approval.
- Grants are not open to government entities.
- Application **MUST** be made using the Marketing Assistance Grant Application Form and must be complete in all respects.
- If you are planning to contract with someone for marketing services, a copy of the proposed contract **MUST** be included in your reimbursement submissions.
- Recipients of funding **WILL** meet with the Council to report on their program within 6 months of completion. The Council is looking for a return on investment for funding and want to hear of your successes, challenges, and suggestions. Failure to report renders you ineligible for future grants.
- During the evaluation process the Highland Tourism Council may need to meet with you, or call, for clarifications on your application.
- Applications can be submitted online or in print. Physical copies must be returned to the office of the Highland County Chamber of Commerce, located at 224 W. Main Street in Monterey, by the end of the day on April 30 (Spring) or October 31 (Fall). If the Chamber Office is not open, please leave at the door and contact the Chamber at 540-468-2550 to notify them that you have done so. Applications may be emailed to tourism@highlandcounty.org.

What the Marketing Assistance Grant WILL Fund

- Printed Materials: Brochures, ads, media kits, group tour publications, and other printed information materials
- Website Development: Development of websites to promote the applicant's business or organization are eligible. Maintenance fees for websites are NOT eligible.
- Digital Marketing: Search engine optimization, banner and website advertising, and other electronic marketing initiatives are eligible expenses
- Social media marketing initiatives, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, etc.
- Production of video footage and high-resolution photography
- Travel and Trade Show Booth Rental/Participation Fees: Fees associated with registration at travel and trade shows are eligible
- Tradeshow Displays: Design and production of display units that will be used in conjunction with travel promotions at travel and trade shows are eligible
- Signage

What the Marketing Assistance Grant WILL NOT Fund

- Administrative expenses including office space, salary and personnel costs, office supplies, office equipment, normal office postage, other administrative costs, and overhead costs, are not eligible expenses
- Facility improvements and additions
- General hosting or maintenance fees for websites
- Marketing activities sponsored by government agencies and Council members, or their immediate families

Scoring

There are limited funds for this program; therefore, funding will be awarded on a merit scale. Awarding of funding is based upon information contained in the application and will be scored based upon the Highland Tourism Council's Marketing Assistance Grant Scoring Guidelines (shown below). If a member of the Council is associated with a grant application, they will be ineligible to vote on the application. Since awards are determined from these scores, the application must be as complete as possible. Do not assume that the Council is familiar with your business/organization or marketing efforts and be sure to include all requested information.

The following points are assigned to sections to determine your application score.

Title and Marketing Activity Narrative	20 points
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What do you plan to do with the funds if awarded?

Projected Audience	20 points
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Who is your target audience and how will you reach them?

Impact on Highland	20 points
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How will your marketing activities benefit the local economy & community?

How will you measure the number of people reached and/or the impact of your initiative?

Partners	10 points
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Will you be collaborating with any other business, organization, or entity to achieve your goals? Who? When? How?

Anyone listed as a Partner should be aware they are included in this application.

Marketing Plan, Timeline, and Budget Amounts	30 points
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What are your specific activities, costs, and anticipated deadlines?

Past examples of successful projects supported by the Marketing Assistance Program include:

- 18th Century Trades Fair (<https://visitfairlawnfarm.com/18th-century-trades-fair/>)
- Highland Roots Market
 - Signage and ads
- Big Fish Cider's Wassail (www.youtube.com/watch?v=jgb7dWbrq70)
- Highland Arts Academy (www.highlandartsacademy.com)
- Tol'able David 100th Anniversary (www.highlandcountyhistory.com/tol-able-david-movie)
 - Creation of a brochure, media advertisements, exhibit enhancement, and copyright permission for film

**Highland Tourism Council Marketing Assistance Grant
Application Form**

Title of Your Marketing Plan: _____

Amount Requested: _____

Business or Organization Name: _____

Physical address (Must be in Highland County): _____

Contact Name & Title: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Phone: _____ **Email:** _____

Have you received any other grants in the past 2 years? If so, please name them _____

Title and Marketing Activity Narrative (20 points)

What do you plan to do with the funds if awarded? Please give us the title of your plan and the what, when, where, and why.

Projected Audience (20 points)

Who is your target audience and how will you reach them?

Impact on Highland (20 points)

How will your marketing activities benefit the local economy and community?

How will you measure the number of people expected and/or the impact of your initiative?

Please give specific examples.

Partners (10 points)

Will you be collaborating with any other business, organization, or entity to achieve your goals?

Who? When? How? Anyone listed as a Partner should be aware they are included in this application.

Marketing Plan, Timeline, and Budget Amounts (30 points)

What are your specific activities, costs, and anticipated deadlines? Use as many spaces as needed or add more. * If planning to engage a marketing consultant, please provide their name.

Marketing Plan Item	Timeline	Budget Amount	Projected Audience
Example Only (Please remove this section on submission): Two 1/2 Page Color Ads in The Recorder Newspaper to promote my restaurant's monthly special	June 2023	730	The Recorder is a local newspaper that has 12,000-plus weekly readers, in print and online. It is distributed in six counties and mailed throughout the U.S. It will reach our county's base in order to market to a feeder market within a three-hour drive.
Example Only (Please remove this section on submission): Facebook ad at my page of facebook.com/*** promoting my restaurant's monthly special. Our Facebook page currently has 2,000 likes.	June 2023 – September 2023	1,000	We will target the ad to markets within a three-hour drive with interests in food and rural life.
Example Only (Please remove this section on submission): 2,000 brochures highlighting our restaurant	May 2023	250	These brochures will be placed in local shops and visitor centers in Highland County and neighboring counties of Alleghany, Bath, Pendleton, and Pocahontas to reach our feeder market within a three-hour drive.

[illegible]

TOTAL BUDGET AMOUNT: _____

I hereby confirm that business/organization is or will be located in Highland County, Virginia. I acknowledge that if the business/organization is not currently located in the area, I must purchase or lease and relocate the business/organization to Highland within 3 months of grant approval in order to receive grant funds. If my business relocates outside of Highland County within 2 years of being initially awarded the grant, I must repay 50% of all grant funds provided. I also agree to a follow-up interview to the Highland Tourism Council within 6 months after the marketing activities are completed. I agree to follow my application to accomplish my goals within the guidelines of this grant, including completing the marketing activities within 9 months if funding is awarded. If there are any changes to my plan, I will notify the Highland Tourism Council immediately. I attest that my application is accurate and true.

Applicant Name and Title: _____

Applicant Signature: _____

Date: _____

To be filled out by the Highland Tourism Council:

Date Reviewed by Council: _____

Date of Decision: _____

Award Amount Decided: _____

Notes: _____
