

ARTS, CULTURE & HERITAGE SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM FY 2026-2027

For Festivals, Events & Programs Occurring Between October 1, 2026 and September 30, 2027

**Polk County Tourism & Sports Marketing
TDC Arts, Culture and Heritage Committee
2701 Lake Myrtle Park Rd.
Auburndale, FL 33823
863-551-4750**



Purpose of the Arts, Cultural Heritage & Special Events Funding Program

Purpose: Encourage development of programs and special events that will showcase Polk County's unique arts, culture and heritage through various means of expression, interpretation and engagement that will attract visitors, enhance the visitor experience and support the brand "Visit Central Florida" through authentic, high quality presentations.

Culture and heritage can be expressed through our local customs, crafts, cuisine, visual and performing arts, history, literature and oral traditions. Arts and cultural disciplines include, but are not limited to, music, dance, theater, creative writing, literature, architecture, painting, sculpture, folk arts, photography, crafts, media arts, visual arts, museum programs and other such allied, major art forms.

Simply put, the TDC's Funding Program is permitted under state statutes only as a means of advertising and promoting tourism.

"This is not a program to support the arts. It is a program to support tourism *through* the arts." – Jim Shirley, Executive Director, Sarasota Arts Council

Introduction

Sponsorship

The **Arts and Cultural Committee (ACC) of the Tourist Development Council**, is designated by the Polk County Board of County Commissioners as the official committee that oversees Arts and Cultural related marketing initiatives and makes recommendations to the TDC regarding funding for arts and culture special events and marketing initiatives. Established in 2012, in accordance with the amendment of ordinance #86-27, the mission of the committee is to promote, develop and coordinate arts and culture in Polk County.

Tourist Development Council Arts and Cultural Committee Program

The **Tourist Development Council Arts, Culture and Heritage Committee** program offers competitive funding to arts and cultural organizations for the production and marketing of performances, exhibitions and events that attract tourism to Polk County. Monies for the program are provided by up to fifteen percent (15%) of the first two pennies of **Tourist Development Tax (TDT)** dollars collected on Polk County room rentals from tourists whose stay is six months or less.

As authorized by the State of Florida, the purpose of expending TDT dollars is to attract

additional tourists to the state.¹ Offering high quality arts and cultural events bolsters Polk County's tourism offerings and provides additional draw for overnight stays. Therefore, Polk County has specifically designated the aforementioned TDT monies for the reimbursement of eligible expenses for arts and cultural events that appeal to tourists.²

Each year the **Tourist Development Council Arts, Culture and Heritage Committee** will conduct a sponsorship assistance cycle to recommend contract awards to qualifying arts, culture and heritage organizations of Polk County. The committee will convene regularly to guide the program and make recommendations to the TDC. The committee will issue a request for proposals, assemble to review applications, and then make recommendations to the **Tourist Development Council (TDC)** which in turn sends its recommendations to the **Board of County Commissioners (BoCC)** for final approval.

¹ *The Florida State Statute definition of a "tourist": 125.0104 (2) (b) 2. "Tourist" means a person who participates in trade or recreation activities outside the county of his or her permanent residence or (emphasis added) who rents or leases transient accommodations as described in paragraph (3) (a). 125.0104 (3) (a) It is declared to be the intent of the Legislature that every person who rents, leases, or lets for consideration any living quarters or accommodations in any hotel, apartment hotel, motel, resort motel, apartment, apartment motel, rooming house, mobile home park, recreational vehicle park, or condominium for a term of six month or less is exercising a privilege which is subject to taxation under this section...Florida State Statute 125.0101 (5) 2: To promote and advertise tourism in the State of Florida and Nationally and internationally; however, if tax revenues are expended for an activity, service, venue, or event, the activity, service, venue, or event shall have, as one of its main purposes, the attraction of tourists as evidenced by the promotion of the activity, service, venue, or event to tourists*

Dates to Remember

Application Workshop – All applicants are required to attend one of the informational workshops. Attendance is mandatory and applications will not be accepted if your organization does not have either the person writing OR signing the application attend one of the sessions. Attendee must be the person filling out the application and/or the person signing the application.

- **February 23, 2026 9am-11am
Tourism & Sports Marketing Office in Auburndale**
- **March 16, 2026 2:30pm-4:30pm
Tourism & Sports Marketing Office in Auburndale**

Application Deadline

- Applications must be submitted online no later than Noon on **Friday, April 17, 2026**. Late applications will NOT be accepted.

Application Review Period

- Beginning Thursday, May 7, 2026 the scoring committee will review all applications. If there are questions regarding the content of an application, PCTSM staff will contact the applicant for clarification and report back to the committee. At the committee's request, applicants will have a 3-minute opportunity to "update" their request directly to the committee at the scoring workshop, followed by a question and answer period. This time is not to attempt to present your entire application. What you submit should stand by itself. "Update" means add new information such as sponsorships or sponsorships received since submission.

Preliminary Decision

- Announcement of recommended funding will be made following approval of the Arts and Culture Committee, the Tourist Development Council and the Polk County Board of County Commissioners.

ACH Committee Members

Brian Yates, Chair (Non-Scoring Member)

Martha Santiago, Polk County Commissioner (Non-Scoring Member), Vice Chair

David Cash, City of Auburndale

Tommy Frank, Lake Wales Arts Council

Rebecca Murphy, Lakeland

Ken Nelson, Winter Haven

Andy McEntire, Indie Atlantic Films

Robert Puterbaugh, Peterson & Myers

Cindy Rodriguez, Republic Services

Deanna Rhodes-Tanner, Food Partners Inc.

Sara Roberts McCarley, City of Lakeland (Non Scoring Member)

Melissa Tyrone, Bok Tower Gardens

It will be the responsibility of the committee to oversee and evaluate the entire sponsorship process and to make recommendations for the continuation of the sponsorship program. The committee will also advise and assist staff with arts and culture marketing strategies and will make recommendations as to the sponsorship of special events that are related to arts and culture. **Committee meetings are open to the public.**

Any conflicts of interest on the part of any Committee member must be disclosed on the potential committee member's application. Committee members subject to any such conflicts shall recuse themselves during any discussion and/or consideration of any project and/or organization that gives rise to such conflict. A conflict of interest occurs when any committee member is on the operating board of an organization requesting funds, an employee, or a spouse of a board member or employee of that organization, or anyone with a contractual relationship with that organization. All committee meetings are open to the public and will be recorded.

PROGRAM GOALS:

- 1. Generate Incremental Overnight Stays in Paid Accommodations**
- 2. Generate Incremental Economic Activity within Polk County**

Objectives of the program are:

Create a portfolio of activities which...

1. Attract Visitors During Periods With Moderate to High Growth Capacity

Because of the impact on the quality of visitors' experience, priority consideration will be given to proposals for events which will attract visitors when tourism is relatively slow. These periods will vary by geographic areas of the County, but generally speaking, major holidays and the months of March, April and July are peak tourism months in Polk County.

2. Reinforce Existing Positive Images

Events which set Polk County apart from other destinations by focusing attention on the area's unique tourist offerings.

3. Encourage Increased Visitor Spending

The TDC wishes to avoid programs that compete with private sector businesses. Events should stimulate additional economic activity rather than displace normal expenditure patterns.

4. Provide Added Value To A Polk County Visit

Value can be defined in two ways. First events may provide "emotional value" by exceeding the anticipated satisfaction level of visitors (...*that was a pleasant surprise.*) Events can also provide "financial value" by providing no-cost or low-cost activities of interest to visitors during otherwise slow times.

To assist in achieving these goals, proposals will be evaluated in the following categories:

Economic Benefits

Appropriateness

Growth Potential

Community Support

Sustainability

Image Enhancement

Event Quality

Eligibility For Funding Consideration

1. ALL EVENTS, PERFORMANCES, OR PROGRAMS FUNDED BY THE TOURIST DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL MUST BE OPEN & ACCESSIBLE TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC.

Events, performances or programs must be promoted to the public and cannot be unreasonably restrictive through admittance fees, public access or crowd capacity, which limits participation by visitors. One of the main purposes of the events must be to attract overnight visitors to Polk County. Events which require a visitor to purchase a ticket to a third-party venue will not be considered for funding.

2. IMPACT BENEFITS POLK COUNTY.

Events, performances or programs must take place in Polk County. If these events, performances or programs are to be used for fund raising purposes, profits must go wholly to programs that benefit Polk County residents or charities.

3. MUST BE A NOT-FOR-PROFIT ORGANIZATION QUALIFIED TO DO BUSINESS IN FLORIDA.

- a. Applicant organization must be legally incorporated in Florida or must qualify with the Florida Department of State to be authorized to do business in Florida.
- b. Applicant organization must be recognized as a tax-exempt organization by the IRS under the Internal Revenue Code, Section 501c, subsections 3,4,5,6 or 7.
- c. A copy of the most recent IRS determination letter must be provided to confirm your organization's federal tax-exempt status.
- d. All organizations must have a bank checking account.

4. PUBLIC SCHOOLS OR OTHER GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS ARE ALSO ELIGIBLE.

K-12 Public schools support organizations such as PTA's, Education Foundations are eligible to apply. Individual Schools are ineligible. Units of Higher Education or Government or other municipal/county government organizations within Polk County are eligible to apply, however the program, event, or activity must fall with the definition of Arts/Culture/Heritage.

Event Classifications

The following classification of events will assist both the members of the Arts and Culture Committee (ACC) and the applicant by providing consistent evaluation criteria for all requests. The Tourist Development Council, at its discretion, may consider funding requests other than those described below and may exceed published funding levels.

Program Category:

A) ACH Ongoing Programs (Event/Program is 15 days or more -OR- If your event is less than 15 days and you plan to spend 100% of your sponsorship on out of county advertising)

(Examples in this category include but are not limited to: Exhibitions, Series of Events, Seasonal Events, etc.)

Maximum Request of up to \$60,000 of which 50% must be spent targeting out of market audiences. If your plan involves spending less than 50% targeting out of market audiences, you must sufficiently explain why and must spend a minimum of 25% targeting out of market audiences. Consortium or collaboration partner events are eligible but ACC sponsorship funds from one partner may not be used to match ACC sponsorship funds for the event or activity. Requires a minimum 1:1 match of which not more than 25% may be in-kind documented services or products. In-kind volunteer hours are not eligible to be included in the match. If you apply in this category for an event that is less than 15 days, you MUST spend 100% of your sponsorship award on out of county advertising.

B) Regional Events – Multiple Consecutive Day Recurring Events (Event is 14 Days or Less)

Maximum Request up to \$40,000 for not-for-profit cultural institutions for support of *extraordinary*, visitor-related programming, of which 50% must be spent targeting out of market audiences. If your plan involves spending less than 50% targeting out of market audiences, you must sufficiently explain why and must spend a minimum of 25% targeting out of market audiences. Programs may consist of significant traveling exhibits, or a sustained presentation of literary, performance or visual arts representative of Polk County's culture. Sponsorships under this program require a minimum \$1 cash match for every \$1 provided by the TDC. Expenses not directly related to securing or staging exhibits or special programs will not be reimbursed (the TDC will not pay for ordinary operational expenses of the institution.)

Extraordinary presentations – not part of your organization's usual presentations. There must be a clear line between your organization's special program and normal programming. Cannot be used for operational expenses not related directly to special programs or

exhibits. TDC will not consider normal staffing or “rent” paid to institutions for staging special exhibit or programming as part of the organization’s matching amount or for reimbursement.

C) Enhancement Events that have little or no income potential

Enhancement Events have relatively low tourist draw, yet are an appealing activity for visitors who come here for another reason. These events enhance an area’s image by reinforcing positive “selling points” about the area’s tourist appeal, and differentiating one destination from any other option available. The draw for enhancement events is their uniqueness based on local culture and heritage, high quality, and value to the visitor.

These events and/or programs are generally one-day. Examples of Enhancement Programs are historic reenactment, single day arts & crafts shows, concert programs, etc.

Enhancement events should add value to a visitors stay and stimulate incremental economic activity through the quality of the visitor experience, by encouraging visitors to extend their stay, or providing excellent "word of mouth" exposure.

Maximum Request up to \$10,000. 1:1 Match of which 75% may be documented in-kind services or products, excluding volunteer hours.

D) Fundraising Events that are Arts Culture and Heritage focused

Maximum Request up to \$10,000. 1:1 cash match. 50% of ACC Sponsorship must be allocated to out of market advertising and promotion. If your plan involves spending less than 50% targeting out of market audiences, you must sufficiently explain why and must spend a minimum of 25% targeting out of market audiences.

E) Fundraising Events that are Arts Culture and heritage focused but support projects or programs of non-ACH related applicants.

Maximum Request up to \$10,000. 1 to1 cash match. 100% of ACH Sponsorship must be allocated to out of market advertising and promotion.

Preparing Your Proposals

➤ Please submit your application online only.

Submit only ONE application per event or program. If applying for multiple events or programs, submit one application for each, with all required information included.

➤ Be sure to describe the event or promotion in sufficient detail to include dates, schedules, venues, and special features. Remember that **proposals will be judged heavily on this content.** Be thorough in addressing how your event will help the TDC meet the program

goals. Do not spend a lot of time on what your organization has done in the past or what great things you will do with the money raised by your event.

- Utilizing the budget fields to include event specific income and expense information with a clear indication of where matching funds are coming from.
- Remember the matching fund requirements vary slightly by event categories. Also remember to itemize the budget information were indicated. Remember that in-kind administrative expense cannot be considered part of your matching funds. Expenses must be event specific!
- T-shirts are not considered as advertising or promotion for sponsorship funds. Any items (merchandise, food, etc.) that you intend to sell at your event, cannot be paid for with TDC funds.
- Please review the category descriptions. Your proposals should reflect characteristics outlined in the category descriptions.
- **After the application deadline, Visit Central Florida staff will review all applications to check for missing documents, errors in basic parts of the application, etc. Should an application be returned to applicant(s) to correct errors (Wrong Category, Incorrect Match Amount, Missing Documents, etc.) a five (5) point deduction from the final score will be applied to that application when scoring is complete.**

General Guidelines & Conditions

Scheduling & Event Clustering

Event clustering and non-peak scheduling will be encouraged through funding priorities. The Committee and the TDC reserve the right to negotiate with organizations or make funding amounts contingent upon issues relative to event scheduling. **If your events dates are changed, your award will be automatically terminated unless you have received written permission from the TDC executive director prior to announcing a new date.**

Conditions for Matching Funds

All TDC funding under ACC programs require matching funds. The ratio of matching funds varies by program categories. Most of the programs allow for a percentage of your matching funds to be in-kind services provided by local businesses.

- In-kind services are defined as goods or services provided for the festival, event or program for which you would normally have to pay. The value of the match should be based on what you would normally have to pay for the goods or services, and what you actually have to pay. **The funding amount requested may not exceed 50% of total project costs excluding advertising.**
- If full matching funds are not available at the time of application, recipients must indicate how additional funds will be raised before the end of the funding period.
- In-kind or donated goods and services may be used to provide a portion of the required match. Please refer to the “Events Classifications” section for specific limits.
- Volunteer time or hours are not eligible as in-kind donations.

Miscellaneous

While tourist development tax dollars designated for the Arts, Culture & Heritage Category will remain in the Category, the Tourist Development Council reserves the rights to allocate any portion of the projected available funds based upon quality and appropriateness of the funding requests. Non-allocated funds from these programs will be forward to subsequent fiscal years.

All sponsorships are for one year.

- The sponsorship year begins October 1st of each year and runs through September 30th of the following year.
- No payments or reimbursements for expenses occurring outside of that time period are allowed without the consent of the TDC.
- No sponsorships are guaranteed to be renewed.
- Projects must be completed within the sponsorship year for which funds are awarded.

Requests for payment must be signed by the organization chief officer.

TDC funds are intended to **supplement, not supplant** the sponsoring organization's project budget.

Reporting Requirements

1. Recipients (1) must submit all post event paperwork provided by PCTSM, completely filled out when applying for reimbursement, detailing the progress of their event and status of matching funds and (2) must file the report within two months (60 days) after the event. In the case of events that are “season-long” or “annual” events that end less than 60 days before the close of the Fiscal Year (September 30), all post event paperwork is due no later than September 15, even if the “event/s” are not complete. **An automatic 15 day extension will be provided IF the event organizers request one in writing at least 7 days prior to the original due date.**

2. Any funded event or activity that fails to file reports required in the application will not be eligible for TDC funding during the next funding period. **Under no circumstances, will payment be made for an event with reports outstanding.**

3. Recipients must provide, at least **90 days prior** to the event, any event detail not included in the application including any changes in dates or program information. Failure to do this can result in suspension of the sponsorship and jeopardize future funding.

4. All information provided to the TDC in conjunction with the sponsorship program will become a matter of public record.

Information required in post event paperwork:

- Post event forms provided by PCTSM (Economic Benefits Report, Reimbursement Request Form, Affidavit and completed event surveys).
- An Invoice from your organization for the amount of the sponsorship
- Documentation of your event expenses
- Survey results, ads placed (with tearsheets), attendance numbers and zip-codes of attendees, etc.

Miscellaneous

1. Funding recipients agree to conduct event surveys and/or otherwise collect visitor related information from event attendees.

2. Recipients must give credit to the Polk County Tourist Development Council in all advertising and publicity for the event (using Visit Central Florida logo). a. For in-county advertising & promotion, the Visit Central Florida logo must be used or the words: **“Supported in part by Visit Central Florida”**.

b. Out-of county advertising and promotion must include the Visit Central Florida logo.

3. **The TDC reserves the right to request additional information beyond that requested in the funding application.**

RESTRICTIONS

All applicants should be aware that fireworks, parades, barbeque competitions and camps will not typically be considered “cultural” unless there is a clear Arts, Culture and Heritage component to the overall event. In every case, the applicant must show how these events are both cultural AND tourism related.

Funding cannot be provided for any of the following:

1. Capital improvements, including expenditures for the acquisition, construction or alteration of a facility, unless allowed by Florida Statutes, Chapter 125.0104, Paragraph 5 Authorized Uses of Revenue.
2. Mortgage payments.
3. Purchase of equipment, which has a useful life of one year or more and a unit cost of \$100.00 or more.
4. Payment of past deficits.
5. Administrative costs, which includes salaries.
6. Activities and events intended only for the applicant’s membership or local community.
7. Activities and events, which do not promote and advertise tourism in Polk County.
8. Food, lodging, and personal transportation for traveling out-of-county.
9. Rent paid to a sponsoring organization for hosting a special event.
10. Scholarships, plaques or awards
11. Food or beverages for the event or activity

REVIEW PROCEDURE

The Arts and Culture Committee, appointed by the Board of County Commissioners, will begin reviewing and scoring the submitted applications on May 7. A Scoring Panel of the ACH Committee, consisting of seven (7) ACH Committee Members and two (2) out of county at large members, will review and score all applications. Funding applications must be submitted by Noon, April 17. The Arts and Culture Committee, as an appointed Board under Florida Statutes, must advertise each meeting and be open to the public. Applicants requesting funding are invited to attend **but will not participate in discussions unless called upon to do so**. Attendance by applicants at the Application Review Workshop is optional but highly encouraged. The Committee will complete its review on July 9, 2026 and forward its recommendations to the Tourist Development Council. Once approved by the TDC, the recommendations will be sent to the BoCC for final approval.

PEAK / NEAR PEAK / MODERATE DEMAND PERIODS

NOTE: The application scoring criteria encourages events and activities that promote cultural tourism in off-peak periods. Year-round offerings, or “season long” programming applications are scored based on the percentage of events during the season of programming that take place in peak periods and the percentage of events during the season of programming that take place in non-peak periods.

The following periods are based upon historical data of tourism tax collections, by month, as well as taking into account other demand driving factors throughout the year. These demand periods are outlined in the online application as well.

Peak Months

February
March
April
July

Near-Peak Months

January
August
June
May

Off-Peak Months

September
October
November
December

DEADLINE

All completed applications must be submitted by Noon on Friday, April 17, 2026.

Late applications will not be considered, and absolutely no exceptions will be made. Applicants are encouraged to submit applications early.

Kris Keprios
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DEFINITIONS

Admissions: Revenue from the sale of admissions, ticket subscriptions, and memberships for the program.

Paid Media: Paid advertising placements in traditional publications such as newspapers or magazines; web-based placements on commercial sites; paid broadcast spots on television or radio; and/or event-specific direct mail (electronic or traditional).

Earned Media: Public relations / publicity costs associated with efforts to generate editorial mentions in traditional media.

Application Cash: Funds from Applicant's present and/or anticipated resources that Applicant plans to provide to proposed project.

Budget Detail: Itemized breakdown of proposed program expenditures and income.

Contracted Services Revenue: Revenue derived from fees earned through sale of services. Include sale of workshops, etc., to other community organizations, government contracts for specific services, performance or residency fees, etc.

Event: a temporary occurrence, either planned or unplanned.

Festival: a public themed celebration.

Foundation Sponsorships: Revenue from sponsorships by private foundations.

Fundraisers: Events that produce revenues beyond what is needed for event expenses and intended proceeds are designated for other purposes.

Government Sponsorships - Federal: Revenue from sponsorships by agencies of the federal government.

Government Sponsorships - State/Regional: Revenue from sponsorships by the State government and/or multi-state consortiums of state agencies.

Government Sponsorships - Local: Revenue from sponsorships or appropriations by city, county and other local government agencies including the Polk County Tourist Development Council.

Holidays: New Year's week, one week prior to Palm Sunday to one week after Easter Sunday, Memorial Day weekend, July 4th weekend, Labor Day weekend, Thanksgiving weekend, Christmas week.

In-Kind Contributions: Donated goods and services for which a fair market value shall be calculated, if an organization chooses to use them as partial matching funds. **Do not include volunteer / administrative personnel.**

Multi-Day Event: Any event that lasts longer than one day and less than 32 days.

Other Private Contributions: Revenue from cash donations including gross proceeds from fund raising events.

Outside Professional Services - Cultural: Payments to performers, guest speakers or curators whose services are specifically and exclusively engaged for a funded program performed by non-employees.

Outside Professional Services - Other: Payments to firms or persons for non-cultural services that are specifically and exclusively incurred for a funded program or festival performed by non-employees.

Personnel: Payments for administrative, marketing, curatorial, technical/promotion employees including salaries, wages, fees and benefits to organization staff, specifically identified with the funded program.

Pooled Advertising: Several events may be listed in one advertisement or brochure.

Promotion: Activities for the purpose of disseminating tourist information and attracting visitors.

Publicity: News releases, event or program specific newsletters, photography for promotional

purposes.

Remaining Operating Expenses: All expenses not entered in other categories.

Space Rental: Payments specifically identified with this project

Special Event: an infrequently occurring event outside the normal program of activities of the sponsoring or organizing body

Total Operating Budget: Gross itemized summary of organization's probable or actual expenditures and income for a proposed current or completed fiscal year.

Travel: Costs directly related to travel of an individual or individuals specifically identified with the program. Costs must be in accordance with Florida State Statute 112.061.

Tourist: A person who participates in trade or recreation activities outside the county of his or her permanent residence or who rents or leases transient accommodations.