

# 2026 TOURISM GRANT GUIDELINES



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The Tourism Grant provides funding to support tourism marketing campaigns and initiatives of primary Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) for the economic benefit of their communities.

### ELIGIBLE ORGANIZATIONS

- Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) defined as:
  - » Legally organized, nonprofit (501c6 or 501c3) Minnesota organizations whose primary purpose is to market their community or area for tourism or have been appointed this authority by the area(s) they represent. Examples of eligible organizations include, but are not limited to, convention and visitor bureaus, chambers of commerce and resort associations.
    - › Nonprofit applicants must submit the most recent copy of their 990 form, filed within the last two years, and a current incorporation statement from the [Minnesota Secretary of State](#).
  - » Municipal DMOs must be the primary tourism marketing organization in their community, have designated city staff that devote time to marketing their community for tourism and have a tourism-focused website separate from their city website.
- Tribal Nations: The eleven federally recognized Tribal Nations that share geography with Minnesota.

### Ineligible Organizations

Statewide associations and collaborative initiatives are not eligible entities under this grant program.

### Multiple Applications from the Same Community

If more than one eligible organization applies for funding in the same community or area, applicants must decide which organization will receive funding. Neither organization's grant application will be considered until a decision is received in writing to the grant's email inbox.

### Border Communities

Qualifying border communities with a Minnesota Tax ID number may apply, but grant award funding must be used to market or support their Minnesota product or event only.

## PROGRAM SPECIFICS

### Grant Maximum

A maximum of one grant award per organization.

### Award Levels

- Award levels for nonprofit DMOs and Tribal Nations are determined by the total organizational budget.
- Municipal DMOs may receive a maximum award amount of \$2,000.
- Organizations may request less than the maximum award of their eligible funding level. If requesting less than the maximum grant award, additional funding can not be requested after the grant contract is executed.

### Match Dollars

This grant application requires a 1:1 cash match, meaning for every dollar awarded, the grantee must contribute an equal amount of funding from their own resources.

Organization Total Budget	Max Award Amount	Grantee Total Spend 1:1 Match
\$99,999 or less & Municipal DMOs	Up to \$2,000	\$4,000
\$100,000 to \$499,999	Up to \$3,500	\$7,000
\$500,000 to \$999,999	Up to \$5,500	\$11,000
\$1,000,000 to \$4,999,999	Up to \$8,500	\$17,000
\$5,000,000 and higher	Up to \$11,000	\$22,000

### Reimbursement

Grant funds are disbursed through reimbursement only. Before submitting reimbursement requests to Explore Minnesota, the grantee must incur and pay for all eligible expenses.

### Notice of Grant Awards

A complete report of grantees and award amount, including any canceled or returned grant funds, will be posted on the [Explore Minnesota Industry Website](#). All grantee information is public data per Minn. Stat. §13.599.

## GRANT PROCESS

### Open Solicitation Period

Grant applications will be accepted during the Open Solicitation Period beginning **April 21, 2025, at 9 a.m. CT** and will continue until all funds are awarded or **June 20, 2025, at 4 p.m. CT**.

### Grant Application

Applications will only be accepted electronically via email at [emtgrant@state.mn.us](mailto:emtgrant@state.mn.us). Grants will be awarded based on application review and acceptance in order they are received in the electronic queue. PLEASE NOTE: This mailbox is for applications and reconciliation only and is not monitored for questions.

Applications must include:

- Complete and adequate responses to the application and budget worksheet
- Authorized Representative Signature (handwritten or PDF digital ID)
- IRS form 990
- Secretary of State incorporation statement
- Project Summary Worksheet
- Budget Worksheet

At the discretion of the Explore Minnesota grants review team, applications which fail to include any of the above information or documents will be considered incomplete. If an application fails to meet minimum requirements, the applicant will be rejected and the contact listed on the grant application will be notified via email.

Please direct questions regarding the program to [your regional representative](#).

### Electronic Queue

Applications received during the Open Solicitation Period will be electronically time- and date-stamped and will be automatically placed in the electronic queue for review. An auto-generated email response indicating that an application has been received will be sent to the email from which the application was sent. This confirmation of receipt does not imply a grant award has been approved.

[Emtgrant@state.mn.us](mailto:Emtgrant@state.mn.us) is an electronic mailbox created and hosted by the State of Minnesota MNIT, for the sole purpose of receiving and reconciling grants. The time and date stamps are electronically generated and cannot be changed or manipulated. Replies from this mailbox will be automatically generated. Explore Minnesota is not responsible for electronic outages or faults outside its control.



**Application Review**

Explore Minnesota will review applications in the order received. Email communication regarding acceptance or rejection of the application will be sent to the primary contact email address listed on the application. In the case of a rejected application, this email will include reasons and potential next steps. Rejected applications may be resubmitted and will be reviewed in the order received until all funds have been awarded or the Open Solicitation Period has ended.

**Award Letter**

Upon acceptance of an application, an award letter indicating the contingent award amount and next steps will be emailed to the grantee. All grant awards are contingent until a fully executed grant contract is received.

**Contract Effective Date**

All contracts will be effective **June 1, 2025**. Work cannot begin and expenses cannot be incurred prior to this date.

**Progress Report**

Progress reports are due **December 5, 2025**.

**Contract End Date**

A fully executed contract does not guarantee reimbursement of expenses. To be eligible for reimbursement under this program, all work must be completed by **April 17, 2026**.

**Reconciliation and Reimbursement**

The reimbursement request and all proper reconciliation documentation can be submitted any time during the program cycle but no later than **May 22, 2026**.

Reimbursement will not be paid until the grantee has submitted all eligible and necessary documentation required and the grant packet has been approved by Explore Minnesota. Please contact [your regional representative](#) anytime if you have questions about grant status.

## ELIGIBLE MARKETING EXPENSES

### Consumer Advertising

General consumer marketing projects targeted to the individual leisure traveler/consumer.

- Print advertising.
  - » A current Explore Minnesota logo must be used, and its size must be legible and proportionate to the size of the ad.
- Digital advertising.
  - » A current Explore Minnesota logo must be used, and its size must be legible and proportionate to the size of the ad. Mobile Ads sized 320px x 50px and Native Advertising campaigns where the Explore Minnesota logo cannot be accommodated must link to a landing page where the Explore Minnesota logo is present.
- Television and video advertising.
  - » A current Explore Minnesota logo must be used at the beginning and ending frame of the video or in a corner throughout the video, and its size must be legible and proportionate to the size of the video.
- Radio and audio streaming advertising.
  - » Audio must include the phrase “Explore Minnesota” in the script/voiceover.
- Out-of-home and billboard advertising.
  - » A current Explore Minnesota logo must be used, and its size must be legible and proportionate to the size of the billboard.
- Paid social media advertising.
  - » Paid social ads require including the Explore Minnesota handle in the post or ad copy/text.
    - › Facebook @exploreminnesota
    - › Instagram @exploreminnesota
    - › Pinterest @exploreminn
    - › TikTok @exploreminnesota
    - › Threads @exploreminnesota
    - › YouTube Shorts @exploreminnesota
- Google AdWords and search engine marketing.

## **Travel Trade, Meetings and Conventions and Sports Advertising**

Travel Trade, Meetings & Conventions and Sports projects with a primary business to business audience, advertising in meeting & convention media, and targeted sports media. Marketing and/or sales activities to secure or promote group business, such as meetings, conventions or sporting events.

- Participation in travel trade, meetings & conventions and sports & events platforms for acquiring leads and business (such as Playeasy, Cvent, TravMedia).
- Print advertising.
  - » A current Explore Minnesota logo must be used, and its size must be legible and proportionate to the size of the ad.
- Digital advertising.
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- Television and video advertising.
  - » A current Explore Minnesota logo must be used at the beginning and ending frame of the video or in a lower corner throughout the video, and its size must be legible and proportionate to the size of the video.
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- Google AdWords and search engine marketing.

## Trade Shows:

- Registration fees.
- Booth space rental.
- Utilities, furniture rental, carpet, and cleanup costs.
- Shipping of materials or display elements to the show site.

## ELIGIBLE SERVICES CONTRACTED THROUGH A THIRD-PARTY VENDOR

### Website Development and Enhancement

- Content creation.
- Accessibility audits or improvements.
- Search Engine Optimization.

### Social Media Management

Organic social posts administered by a third-party vendor and paid social ads require including the Explore Minnesota handle in the post or ad copy/text.

- Facebook @exploreminnesota
- Instagram @exploreminnesota
- Pinterest @exploreminn
- TikTok @exploreminnesota
- Threads @exploreminnesota
- YouTube Shorts @exploreminnesota

### Fulfillment pieces such as visitor guides, maps and brochures.

To be eligible, the development, production and distribution of all fulfillment pieces must also be produced in a digitally accessible format, which allows for electronic screen readers - software programs that read aloud most text on the screen of a computer or mobile device.

- Development and creation that includes a digitally accessible format.
  - » The Explore Minnesota logo must also appear on the front cover of your visitor guide, map or brochure and the size of the logo must be legible and proportionate to the size of the piece.
  - › **Accessibility Requirements:** All documents must be produced in an accessible format, regardless of whether they are created internally or by a third-party vendor, to ensure seamless interaction with and access to websites, documents, and presentations. Accessibility is required by state and federal law.



All grantees are required to comply with the [State of Minnesota's Accessibility Standard \(PDF\)](#) for all deliverables associated with this grant. These standards include, in part, the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.1 \(Level AA\)](#) and [Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act](#), as amended.

Explore Minnesota follows guidelines set by Minnesota's Office of Accessibility. Detailed information about Minnesota's accessibility standards and guidance for creating accessible products is at [Minnesota IT Services: Office of Accessibility](#).

If your organization is not familiar with digital accessibility, Explore Minnesota recommends engaging a third-party contractor who specializes in ensuring your digital content is accessible to all individuals.

- Production, printing, digitizing.
- Distribution and mailing.

### **Media and Graphic Design Production**

- Media production, ad creation and graphic design services.
  - » A current Explore Minnesota logo must be used, and its size must be legible and proportionate to the size of the ad. Mobile Ads sized 320px x 50px and Native Advertising campaigns where the Explore Minnesota logo cannot be accommodated must link to a landing page where the Explore Minnesota logo is present.
- Production of photo and video assets.
  - » Photo and video assets must be shared with and licensed for Explore Minnesota use. Contact your industry relations representative with questions.
  - » Include the following in contracts with photographers and videographers regarding Explore **Minnesota Usage Rights**:
    - › Contractor grants Explore Minnesota and its partners unlimited editorial and commercial use in perpetuity of all assets provided under this agreement, including but not limited to websites, emails and print publications.
    - › The contractor grants Explore Minnesota the right to edit submitted materials to fit the size, space and other requirements of different mediums, as determined by Explore Minnesota.
    - › Contractor shall retain copyright and self-promotional rights.
    - › Contractor retains the right to reproduce, in whole or in part, in every manner or form, and circulate, publish, distribute, show, play or otherwise display the assets provided under this Agreement.
    - › Explore Minnesota may use the Contractor's name and likeness in any of the above.

## **Direct Mail**

- Development and creation.
  - » A current Explore Minnesota logo must be used, and its size must be legible and proportionate to the size of the direct mail piece.
- Production and printing.
- Distribution and mailing.

## **Public Relations Services**

- Identify media trends, consumer interests and target markets/media outlets.
- Editorial calendar development and planning.
- Crafting and distribution of news releases and wire releases.
- Development of long- and short-lead media pitches.

## **Research and Data Services**

Any new or existing, one-time or recurring tourism or leisure and hospitality syndicated or custom data or research.

### **Eligible data types:**

- Airport or airline
- Credit card
- Geo-location
- Hotel
- International travel
- Short-term rental

### **Eligible research study types:**

- Advertising effectiveness
- Economic impact
- “Halo effect”
- Recreational activity
- Reputation or brand
- Resident or community sentiment
- Sustainability or stewardship
- Traveler profiles
- Visitation
- Visitor experience

## ELIGIBLE PUBLIC EVENTS MARKETING

Consumer advertising tactics for any new or existing, one-time or recurring event open to the general public. Eligible events are organized to attract visitors to the community, generate revenue for the non-profit organizer, elevate awareness of the community and/or entertain.

### Eligible Event Types

- Entertainment
- Exhibitions
- Fairs
- Festivals
- Leisure events
- Meetings and conventions
- Ongoing performance series
- Sporting competitions
- Tradeshows and Expositions

### Ineligible Event Types

- Award Ceremonies and Banquets
- Fundraisers and Benefits
- Political Events

## ELIGIBLE DIVERSITY, EQUITY, ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION MARKETING AND PROGRAMMING (see co-branding requirements)

- Targeted marketing, tactics and services.
- Destination development specifically for inclusion improvements.
- Audit of marketing and advertising materials, destinations or websites.
- Language translation services.
- Focus groups facilitated through a third-party vendor.
- Professional consultants/services (e.g., diversity/accessibility marketing plan development, diversity/accessibility stakeholder communications and outreach planning, cultural sensitivity training, accessibility training, or other diversity, inclusion and equity training or planning programs).

## EXPLORE MINNESOTA PROGRAMS

### Eligible Programs (see co-branding requirements)

- Advertising in Explore Minnesota print publications
- Consumer lead generation (brochure distribution) program on [exploreminnesota.com](http://exploreminnesota.com)
- Advertising on [exploreminnesota.com](http://exploreminnesota.com)
- Advertising in Explore Minnesota newsletters

### Ineligible Programs

- Explore Minnesota Co-ops
- Explore Minnesota Partnerships
- Explore Minnesota Events

Explore Minnesota reserves the right to deny grant funding for ads or content that is political or violates protected class status. This includes content appearing on websites or publications that violate the above. If you are concerned regarding eligibility, please reach out to [your regional representative](#) for eligibility requirements.

## EXPLORE MINNESOTA CO-BRANDING REQUIREMENTS

**ALL GRANTEES ARE REQUIRED TO HAVE A CURRENT EXPLORE MINNESOTA LOGO WITH A LINK TO EXPLOREMINNESOTA.COM ON THE HOMEPAGE OF THEIR TOURISM WEBSITE.**

It is recommended that the grantee place a current Explore Minnesota logo with a link to [exploreminnesota.com](https://exploreminnesota.com) in the footer of their website.

Current Explore Minnesota logos are available in the [Explore Minnesota Brandfolder](#).

### Advertising

All grant projects listed below must use a current Explore Minnesota logo, which must be legible and proportionate to the size of the ad.

- Print advertising.
  - » The size of the Explore Minnesota logo must be legible and proportionate to the size of the ad.
- Digital ads.
  - » Mobile Ads sized 320px x 50px and Native Advertising campaigns where the Explore Minnesota logo cannot be accommodated must link to a landing page where the Explore Minnesota logo is present.
- Television and video.
  - » A current Explore Minnesota logo must be used at the beginning and ending frame of the video or in a lower corner throughout the video, and its size must be legible and proportionate to the size of the video.
- Out-of-home and billboards.
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- Fulfillment pieces such as visitor guides, maps or brochures.
  - » The Explore Minnesota logo must be on the front cover, and it must be legible and proportionate to the size of the printed piece.
  - › **Accessibility Requirements:** All documents must be produced in an accessible format, regardless of whether they are created internally or by an external party, to ensure seamless interaction with and access to websites, documents, and presentations. Accessibility is required by state and federal law.

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## PUBLIC DATA

Per Minn. Stat. §13.599, names and addresses of grant applicants will be public data once proposal responses are opened. All remaining data in proposal responses (except trade secret data as defined and classified in Minn. Stat. §13.37) will be public data after the evaluation process is completed (for the purposes of this grant, when all grant agreements have been fully executed).

All data created or maintained by Explore Minnesota as part of the evaluation process (except trade secret data as defined and classified in Minn. Stat. §13.37) will be public data after the evaluation process is completed (for the purposes of this grant, when all grant agreements have been fully executed).

## RECORDS RETENTION & AUDITS

Per Minn. Stat. §16B.98, Subd. 8, the grantee's books, records, documents, and accounting procedures and practices of the grantee or other party that are relevant to the grant or transaction are subject to examination by the granting agency and either the legislative auditor or the state auditor, as appropriate. This requirement will last for a minimum of six years from the grant agreement end date, receipt, and approval of all final reports, or the required period to satisfy all state and program retention requirements, whichever is later.





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