

Board of County Commissioners

Leon County, Florida

Policy No. 21-6

Title:	County Tourism Policy
Date Adopted:	January 23, 2024
Effective Date:	January 23, 2024
Reference:	Section 125.0104, Florida Statutes, Tourist Development Tax; Development procedures for levying; authorized uses; referendum; enforcement.
Policy Superseded:	Policy No. 21-6 “County Tourism Event Grant Programs” adopted on July 13, 2021; revised on July 12, 2022

It shall be the policy of Leon County, Florida, that Policy No. 21-6 entitled “County Tourism Event Grant Programs” adopted on July 12, 2022, is hereby amended, and a revised policy entitled “County Tourism Policy” is adopted in its place, to wit:

I. County Tourism Policy

A. Purpose, Intent and Authority

The overall purpose of this Policy is to promote Tallahassee/Leon County as a preferred visitor destination and to generate significant revenue for the local tourism economy, including business for the commercial lodging industry (hotels/motels, campgrounds, condominiums, short-term vacation rentals, etc.) as well as restaurants, retail establishments, and other businesses.

This overall purpose will be met in two general ways, through the coordinated administration of County Tourism grant programs and through County supported or hosted events.

1. County Tourism grant programs are funded by the Tourist Development Tax (TDT), which is generated from overnight lodging. The intent of this Policy is to define the types of events that may receive funding, describe the grant programs, and identify eligibility criteria. County Tourism grant funds are allocated at the sole discretion of the Board.
 - a. The County Administrator or designee shall have delegated authority to approve, modify, execute and extend any County Tourism Event Grant Program agreements that have been reviewed, and processed consistent with the procedures described herein.

- b. Such delegation is subject to continued compliance with all County Tourism Event Grant Program review and funding requirements, the availability of funding, and legal review by the County Attorney's Office.
2. County supported or hosted events must attract tourists as a main purpose and enhance the region's economic growth and quality of life by collaboratively inspiring the vitality of Leon County's local tourism economy through ongoing efforts to generate overnight stays and tourism-related activities (meetings, conferences, sports tournaments, etc.). Such events may be created and initiated by the Division of Tourism or they may be events applied for, requested by, or bid upon through submissions or applications of the Division of Tourism on behalf of the County but shall always be consistent with the main purpose.
 - a. It is the intent of this Policy to place into the hands of the County Administrator, or designee, the multitude of details which arise from the County's need to transact a wide-range of tourism-related activities including the execution of agreements and applications to secure hosting rights, or obtain specific goods or services to support tourism events.
 - b. To that end, such goods and services purchased by the Division of Tourism to recruit, implement, or support the events described herein are exempt from the competitive procurement portion of the County's Purchasing Policy (Policy No. 96-1).
 - c. Additionally, in support of tourism-related activities and Tourism Event Grant Programs described below, the County Administrator, or designee, is hereby delegated the authority to procure, approve, execute, extend, and modify applications and agreements, subject to legal review by the County Attorney's Office. This delegation does not apply to any commodities, goods or service valued in excess of \$250,000.

II. County Tourism Event Grant Programs

A. Definitions

1. **Emerging Signature Event** – For purposes of this Policy, an Emerging Signature Event is an event that meets the criteria for a Signature Event and is both historically and currently on the cusp of generating between 1,250 and 1,499 hotel room nights, but is not yet able to generate the same economic impact as a Signature Event. To be recategorized as a Signature Event, an Emerging Signature Event must have generated the same economic impact as a Signature Event in the previous year and must have been taking place in the community for a minimum of three years with a demonstrated increase in visitation over that period.
2. **Legacy Event** – For purposes of this Policy, a Legacy Event is an event, festival, or tournament that has been taking place in the community for a minimum of five years and

annually generates a high number of room nights and significant economic impact for the community, out of the categories of events supported or hosted by the County. These events are large, multi-day events that are well known and draw visitors from across the country and internationally.

3. **Permissible Event** - Per section 125.0104, Florida Statutes; to be an authorized use of Tourist Development Tax revenue, an 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.” Legacy Events, Signature Events and Emerging Signature Events, Special Events, and Sports Events, all as defined herein, that meet the eligibility requirements of this Policy, and all applicable requirements of section 125.0104, Florida Statutes, are Permissible Events. Private Events are not Permissible Events.
4. **Private Event** – For the purposes of this Policy, a private event is an event that is not generally open to the public or where participation is restricted to members or invited guests only. An event with ticketed or paid admission that is otherwise open to the general public is not a Private Event.
5. **Signature Event** – For purposes of this Policy, a Signature Event is an annual event that takes place over one or more days and can demonstrate the ability to generate a minimum of 1,500 hotel room nights within Leon County. A Signature Event is a well-established, larger event that has broad visitor appeal encouraging overnight stays from outside of the local market.
6. **Special Event** – A Special Event is a new or existing event or festival that attracts overnight visitors to Leon County/Tallahassee. A Special Event has a history of or can demonstrate the potential to generate overnight stays from visitors outside of Leon County/Tallahassee.
7. **Sports Event** – A Sports Event is a new or existing amateur sporting event that attracts overnight visitors to Leon County/Tallahassee. A Sports Event has a history of or can demonstrate the potential to generate overnight stays from visitors outside of Leon County/Tallahassee.
8. **Tourist** – As defined in section 125.0104, Florida Statutes, a tourist is “a person who participates in trade or recreation activities outside of the county of his or her permanent residence, or who rents or leases transient accommodations.” Such transient accommodations are “any living quarters or accommodations in any hotel, apartment hotel, motel, resort motel, apartment, apartment motel, roominghouse, mobile home park, recreational vehicle park, condominium or timeshare resort for a term of 6 months or less.”
9. **Tourist Development Council (TDC)** –As established in Leon County Resolution No. 23-35, the TDC is a Decision-Making Committee in accordance with the Leon County Policy No. 03-15, “Board Appointed Citizen Committees.” The purpose of the TDC, consistent with Section 125.0104, F.S., is to make recommendations to the Board for effective operation of any special projects or for uses of the tourist development tax revenue. In addition, review expenditures of revenues from the tourist development tax trust fund to ensure they support the objectives of the Tourist Development Plan. Pursuant to this policy, and further described herein, additional duties are assigned to

the TDC including a role in the administration of the grant program.

B. Grant Program Descriptions

1. **Legacy Event Program** – The Legacy Event program was implemented to ensure that these events receiving funding at the levels necessary to consistently produce and market such events separate from Signature Events, Emerging Signature Events, Special Events, and Sports Events and avoid competition for such funding for the different types of Permissible Events.
2. **Signature Events Program** – The Signature Events program was implemented to support annual, single or multi-day public gatherings with a robust organizational framework that occur outside of peak visitor periods, as defined by the Director of Tourism on an annual basis, and possesses the potential for substantial economic impact, state, national, or international media coverage, and significant public and visitor appeal to motivate travel to the region.
3. **Emerging Signature Events Program** – The Emerging Signature Events program was implemented to support established events in Leon County that are actively working with the Leon County Division of Tourism to increase their scale and verify their economic impact, but excluding events occurring during peak visitor periods as determined by the Director of Tourism on an annual basis.
4. **Special Events Program** – The Special Events program was implemented to support organized public activities such as a concert, exhibition, festival, fair, conference, or celebration, scheduled in advance, intended to attract not only residents of Tallahassee/Leon County but also non-residents who would travel and lodge locally to attend or partake in the event.
5. **Sports Events Program** – The Sports Event program was implemented to support an organized public sporting activity, which may include games, exhibitions, competitions, team training sessions, conferences, or celebratory gatherings, that occur as per a pre-set schedule. This event aims to engage not only the residents of Tallahassee/Leon County but also those from other areas who would be inclined to visit and stay overnight for the experience

C. Board Intent Regarding Grants

1. Annually as part of the budget process, the Board may establish an allocation for the County Tourism Grant Programs. The TDC, through the County Administrator or designee, may recommend specific funding levels for each grant program described in Section B. above. The Director of Tourism is delegated authority to adjust budget allocations among the grant programs based on the need and market conditions as demonstrated in the grant applications.
2. The number and extent of the grants offered will depend upon the availability of budgeted funds and specific allocations.
3. The Division of Tourism shall be responsible for facilitating the grant application process and contract management for events awarded County Tourism Grant program

funds. The TDC shall approve any revisions to the Tourism Event Grant Guidelines as deemed necessary prior to the initiation of a grant cycle. Guidelines can be found on the Division of Tourism's website.

4. The TDC shall approve all grant award funding with the exception of grant awards for the Legacy Event Program, which shall be approved by the Board.

D. Grant Eligibility

1. Private Events are not eligible to receive County Tourism Grant Programs funding under this Policy.
2. County Tourism Grant Programs funding cannot be used to pay the administrative costs of an entity responsible for a Permissible Event.
3. Any entity with a defined marketing plan for a Permissible Event that demonstrates the potential to attract overnight visitors who will use commercial lodging establishments within Tallahassee/Leon County as a result of the Permissible Event is eligible to apply for County Tourism Grant Programs funding.
4. Grant funding will not be considered for an event that occurs during peak visitor periods. Peak visitor periods are generally defined as FSU home football game weekends anticipated to fill existing hotel room inventory, FAMU homecoming weekends, FSU or FAMU spring and fall graduation weekends, and Monday through Thursday during the regular state legislative session. Sports and Special Events grants may be permitted during some FSU home football game weekends except for those games anticipated to fill existing hotel room inventory.
5. Individual Tourism Event Grant Programs may include specific eligibility requirements such as the type of event (sports, leisure, business, civic, historic, , etc.), the number of anticipated visitors, the estimated number of room nights generated by event , the scale of regional, national, or international media exposure highlighting the destination, or other criteria deemed appropriate by the County in attracting tourists to Leon County in accordance with section 125.0104, Florida Statutes.

E. Grant Procedures

The following procedures shall govern all grant related funding requests made during the fiscal year:

1. The County Tourism Grant Programs are competitive grant programs and subject to the restrictions and fulfillment of requirements set forth in section 125.0104, Florida Statutes and each of the respective program's grant guidelines. Funding will be awarded to organizations that meet the eligibility requirements and are based on a competitive evaluation that considers the description of the event seeking funds and the ability of the organization to fulfill the intended results.
2. Commercial lodging secured for individuals associated with a Permissible Event must be located within Leon County.

3. Tourism Event Grant Guidelines, which are prepared annually by Division of Tourism staff and reviewed by the County Attorney's Office, include definitions, policies, procedures, scoring criteria, appeals process, and reporting.
4. Grant funding is provided on a reimbursement basis and after all required documentation to substantiate payment has been received by the Division of Tourism.
5. Each year the Director of Tourism will provide the recommended "peak period" dates to the TDC for consideration/approval prior to the start of each grant cycle application period.
6. No event may receive grant funding from both a County Tourism Grant Program and the Council on Culture & the Arts (COCA).
7. The Division of Tourism, with guidance from the TDC, shall establish an application period and submittal deadline for Tourism Grant Program funding requests.
8. The Division of Tourism staff shall review grant applications for eligibility and present eligible applications for Permissible Events to the Grant Review Committee(s) appointed by the TDC. The Grant Review Committee reviews and scores applications, then makes recommendations for presentation to the TDC no later than the September TDC meeting.
9. The TDC shall annually review and approve the Tourism Event Grant Guidelines and appoint a Grant Review Committee(s) from its membership to evaluate and score grant applications. The Director of Tourism may authorize a grants program second-cycle if there is grant funding available.
10. Under the Legacy Events Program, Legacy Event applications are presented to the TDC for review and approval before such applications are presented to the Board for final review and approval.
11. Except as provided in this provision, out-of-cycle applications for funding under the Legacy Events Program, Signature Events and Emerging Signature Events Program, and Special Events Program will not be considered and instead be referred to the annual grant cycle to seek funding. However, the Director of Tourism is delegated limited authority to evaluate and recommend application for funding under Emerging Signature Events Program or the Special Events Program for one-time or first time events that demonstrate significant visitation and economic impact. The Director of Tourism shall apply current grant review criteria under the Emerging Signature Events Program or the Special Events Program for consideration of any out-of-cycle application for funding.