

Tourism Partner Group: Eligibility & Guidelines

Presented by Visit Hickory | Hickory-Conover Tourism Development Authority (HCTDA)

The mission of the HCTDA (Visit Hickory & the Hickory Metro Convention Center) is to market and enhance the economy of the Hickory Metro by promoting a dynamic destination with sports, conventions, events, and leisure travel. As such, inclusion in the Tourism Partner Group is guided by our mission to promote:

- Conventions and meetings
- Sports tourism
- Leisure travel
- Places and events that showcase the area as a **dynamic, welcoming destination**

Who Qualifies as a Tourism Partner?

Tourism Partners are local businesses, organizations, or venues that contribute to the visitor experience in Catawba County and the metro area. These partners may be included on the Visit Hickory website, promoted via social media, and eligible to submit events to the visitor-facing Calendar of Events, among other benefits.

- Be a legal business entity
- Be located within the Hickory Metro Area: Catawba, Burke, Alexander, or Caldwell Counties
- Be in compliance with the North Carolina Department of Health guidelines and local ordinances
- Not promote nudity, lewd behavior, drunkenness, illegal activities, or other behaviors not in line with the Visit Hickory brand standards.
- Be original and locally based—third-party organizations, affiliate websites, or out-of-market groups are not eligible
- Membership in any association is not required
- Partners must help to inspire day-trip or overnight travel and visitation from 50+ miles away
- Website links must directly point to the business/event listed (not to a parent organization or unrelated host site)

In addition to the criteria above, to qualify as a Tourism Partner, your business or organization should fit into one of the following categories:

1. **Directly Serves Visitors** – These partners provide goods and services that are commonly consumed by leisure or business travelers.
 - **Accommodations:** Hotels, bed & breakfasts, short-term rentals (VRBO, Airbnb, etc.), campgrounds
 - **Food & Beverage:** Restaurants, breweries, wineries, distilleries, cafés, specialty food shops

- **Attractions & Entertainment:** Museums, cultural sites, historical sites, performing arts theatres/venues, music venues, galleries, entertainment centers, botanical gardens, zoos, etc.
 - **Retail & Shopping:** Locally owned or unique shops and boutiques, artisan markets, souvenir or specialty stores.
 - **Recreation & Outdoors:** Parks, trails, golf courses, adventure providers, equipment rental companies, guide services, etc.
 - **Experiences & Activities:** Artisan/specialized workshops, culinary experiences, guided outdoor adventures, escape rooms, agritourism, etc.
2. **Facilitates Visitor Access or Planning** – Partners in this category help travelers find, access, or plan their visit.
- **Tour Operators & Guides:** Walking tours, winery tours, heritage trails, group travel planners, etc.
 - **Event Producers:** Concerts, festivals, sports tournaments, and cultural events open to the public that would attract visitation from over 50 miles away (local events that focus primarily on local residents do not fit in this category)
 - **Transportation Services:** Shuttle operators, bus or motorcoach rental companies, bike rental companies, private car hire companies, rideshare operators.
 - **Travel Services:** Visitor information centers, travel agents, tourism media, travel writers/bloggers.
 - **Event Suppliers:** AV companies, rental services, caterers—if serving public-facing events
3. **Supports Visitor Infrastructure** – These partners enhance the visitor experience even if they don't directly serve tourists daily.
- **Event & Meeting Venues:** Convention and Conference Centers, banquet halls, public event producers, meeting venues, wedding and event venues
 - **Event Suppliers/Vendors:** AV Companies, decorators, caterers, rental companies such as pipe and drape, staging, entertainment agencies, etc.
 - **Local Arts & Culture Organizations:** Festivals, public art initiatives, historical societies, Arts Councils, etc.
4. **Invested in Destination Development** – Some partners support tourism through community development or placemaking.
- Downtown Development Organizations/Associations
 - Chambers of Commerce
 - Tourism coalitions and regional Tourism Development Authorities
 - Cultural & Heritage Societies
 - Municipal & County Councils, Government officials, marketing/PIO representatives, and tourism councils.
5. **Optional Exclusions or Considerations** – Some partners can be considered on a case-by-case basis.

- **Businesses or organizations that may not fit the mission** of Visit Hickory's visitor-facing
 - Businesses without a physical presence in your region
 - National Chains or franchises, unless locally owned/operated (based on a case-by-case basis)
 - Industrial or Service businesses not marketing to visitors (e.g., law offices, banks, etc.)

Visit Hickory Rights & Disclaimers

- Visit Hickory (HCTDA) reserves the right to approve or decline membership opportunities for organizations or businesses.
- Inclusion is not guaranteed and is subject to the discretion of the Visit Hickory team.
- Visit Hickory may update these guidelines at any time in accordance with strategic priorities that impact the organization and tourism development of the area.