
DESTINATION FORWARD

FY26 GRANT GUIDELINES

The Destination Forward Grant (DFG) is a competitive grant that supports the long-term destination development and rejuvenation of community-based, sustainable tourism infrastructure projects across New Mexico.

The DFG helps to empower New Mexican communities to become viable, welcoming, and high-quality destinations, as well as to enhance existing destinations, for tourism.

The DFG focuses on funding tourism infrastructure, assets and experiences that help build resilient, vibrant communities and that **align with the New Mexico True Brand promise of “adventure steeped in culture.”**

The DFG will award projects that convey strong community-based leadership and benefits that **support local tourism business revenue growth** as well as **enhance health and well-being**. The tourist and resident experience should be of high quality.

The DFG aims to deliver on sustainability by focusing on an evidence-based approach to development. The DFG intends to give New Mexico and its various tourism projects and destinations more **national and global relevance** in sustainable tourism development and management.

The DFG will consider applicants to be more competitive by meeting our goals of improving local communities’ socio-economy and culture as well as the local **environment**.

WHAT IS “DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT”?

The strategic advancement to support the expansion of amenities, facilities and services which provide unique experiences for visitors while, simultaneously, contributing to the improvement of residents’ well-being at the destination.

WHAT DOES “VIABLE” MEAN?

Demand can be sustained organically within the community, organization, environment, and by affected parties, stakeholders, and ecosystems. Benefits are experienced equitably across community, stakeholders, and ecosystems (financial, social, economic, cultural, environmental access, quality of life, etc.).

WHAT QUALIFIES AS TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE?

“*Tourism Infrastructure*” includes but is not limited to:

- Development of outdoor recreation infrastructure including
 - interpretation
 - trail development
 - connectivity
 - wayfinding
 - water recreation, etc.
- Recreational improvements
- Signage and wayfinding that align with community branding and marketing.
- Tourism-related parking and transportation
 - airport passenger enhancements
 - marking installations with collateral
 - accessibility (ADA compliant parking and sidewalks)
 - RV parking upgrades
- Tourism attraction facilities:
 - restroom facility upgrades
 - ADA accessibility
 - systems upgrades and replacements
 - waste management
- Dark skies viewing area
- (Re)development of historic assets
 - museum
 - theater
 - public space
 - historic locomotive
 - industrial district
 - other cultural/historic assets and facilities
- Rehabilitation, maintenance and conservation of cultural sites/Indigenous sacred sites/archaeological sites
- Bike, pedestrian and equestrian transportation and other related developments
- Camping and RV-related accommodation
- Beautification and conservation
 - sustainable park design and re-developments
 - sustainable landscaping
 - wildlife refuges and rewilding areas
 - conservation education centers/information centers
- Fairgrounds, convention center/facilities, performance venues and other event spaces and venues
- Public art on tourism infrastructure
- Agritourism farms, food trails or other related facilities
- Innovative (re)developments leveraging technology to showcase authentic New Mexican culture (and nature if applicable).
- Kiosks

- digital signage, etc.
- Visitor information centers and their improvements
- Other tourism-related infrastructure

DESTINATION FORWARD GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Destination Forward Grant aims to adhere to its commitments to communities and the environment by delivering on five main goals and their objectives:

1. INCREASE VISITATION

- 1.1. Increase sustainable visitation rates.
- 1.2. Increase repeat stays.
- 1.3. Increase extended stays.
- 1.4. Increase visitor spending at the destination.
- 1.5. Bring a visitor experience or service to market readiness.

2. IMPROVE OR ENHANCE THE VISITOR AND RESIDENT EXPERIENCE

- 2.1. Increase positive reviews from tourists.
- 2.2. Increase positive reviews from residents and enhance community's quality of life via tourism (re)development.
- 2.3. Increase accessibility for residents and tourists.
- 2.4. Provide visitor-oriented services that are open for use to the public and not limited to private membership.
- 2.5. Ensure resident support for tourism development through collaboration.
- 2.6. Ensure cultural respect and sensitivity in tourism development.
- 2.7. Ensure high quality, diversity, and authenticity of interpretation to tourists.
- 2.8. Support legacy opportunities, including the enhancement of existing tourism infrastructure or new construction e.g., visitor facilities and attractions.

3. SPUR ECONOMIC GROWTH AND CAPACITY OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESIDENTS

- 3.1. Increase capacity building efforts in tourism development at the destination.
- 3.2. Create tourism-related jobs.
- 3.3. Diversify the local tourism economy.
- 3.4. Expand the creative economy.

4. INCREASE NATIONAL AND GLOBAL RECOGNITION OF NEW MEXICO AS A SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DESTINATION

- 4.1. Aid in destination recovery, emergency preparedness, and resiliency.
- 4.2. Diversify the wider, local economy.
- 4.3. Support a thriving tourism economy.
- 4.4. Increase visitor experience and/or services within a community or region.
- 4.5. Foster sustainable tourism development that ensures a balance between economic, social, cultural, and environmental values.
- 4.6. Measure, monitor and/or assess tourism impacts and risks at the destination level across economic, social, cultural, and environmental assets.

- 4.7. Increase the competitiveness of New Mexican visitor experiences and services as well as exposure of New Mexican communities, as desired by the communities.
- 4.8. Spur private sector investment in new and enhanced visitor experiences and services state-wide.
- 4.9. Create sustainable tourism jobs and economic activity in communities state-wide.

5. INCREASE POSITIVE IMPACTS ON THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT WHILE DECREASING NEGATIVE IMPACTS

(ALL PROJECTS REFERENCING GOAL 5 MUST REFERENCE AT LEAST ONE OTHER GOAL)

- 5.1. Utilize green, ethically, responsibly, and sustainably sourced goods, materials, and labor for tourism (re)development.
- 5.2. Rehabilitate, restore, rewild and/or revegetate any disturbed areas caused by the tourism infrastructure project with local, native species.
- 5.3. Ensure minimal disturbance to local, native wildlife and flora/habitat in tourism (re)development.
- 5.4. Engage with local and Indigenous experts as well as other relevant experts and community stakeholders in the safeguarding of local biodiversity throughout the project's development and management.

COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABLE TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE (RE)DEVELOPMENT

Beginning in 2021, the New Mexico Tourism Department (NMTD) began vetting tourism-related infrastructure projects that 1) were of priority to local governments and 2) had potential to positively impact tourism regionally. These recommendations included over 100 tourism-related infrastructure projects totaling over \$300 million in project funding. Leveraging the technical expertise and relationships of the Council of Governments (COGs) with their local governments, NMTD partnered with these organizations to identify the tourism-related infrastructure priorities for each region. Twenty-four out of thirty-three counties currently have projects underway. Additionally, all projects vetted through this process are within the State's Infrastructure Capital Improvement Plan (ICIP).

The next iteration of these recommendations and projects is the Destination Forward Grant (DFG) which dedicates funding towards projects that specifically support tourism. Legislative appropriated funds are available for this grant in FY26 ***(to be confirmed following 2025 Legislative Session)***. Awards are competitive, so it is likely that requests for funding will exceed available funds.

The DFG will provide matching funding to tourism stakeholders within New Mexico to support the development and/or redevelopment of viable tourism infrastructure that celebrates the authentic natural and cultural spirit of New Mexico.

The DFG has the opportunity to support and fund local governments and various members of the public sector. NMTD encourages applicants from **both urban and rural areas** to apply.

WHO CAN APPLY?

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS must be based in New Mexico and include:

- Local governments, including Special Districts
- Tribal governments
- Municipalities
- Non-profit organizations must partner with a government entity to serve as their fiscal agent.

Fiscal agents and signatories must be authorized to sign agreements/contracts on behalf of the organization.

ELIGIBLE PROJECTS must be in New Mexico and must:

- Be “**shovel ready**” – have completed the planning and design phase of the project and can begin construction in the near future.
- If not “shovel-ready,” projects must be “**shovel-worthy**” meaning they have begun the planning and design phase of the project and have demonstrated the support from the local government to begin construction the moment the planning and design phase of the project is complete.
- Align with fund goals and objectives.
- Align with region’s economic/comprehensive or other regional development plan.
- Aim at funding destination development where greatest needs exists.

GRANT STRUCTURE AND REQUIREMENTS

The Destination Forward Grant offers a two-tiered system for applying:

- Tier I A: Planning and Design - up to \$100,000
- Tier I B: Programming - up to \$50,000 (requires no match)
- Tier II A: Construct and Equip – up to \$500,000
- Tier II B: Renovate and Modernize - up to \$500,000

Technical Assistance can and will be available at any time in the application process, even if the applicant is a Tier II applicant.

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS:

- Projects must be compliant with local zoning, protected areas, and cultural heritage.
- Applicants must demonstrate capacity for ongoing monitoring of the site, which is important for mitigating the risk of damage caused by the business’ products and activities.
- If awarded, the applicant must agree to report on the project’s progress and budget as outlined in the executed grant agreement.

MATCH REQUIREMENT:

- Projects should be able to match up to 5% of eligible expenditures for Capital Outlay Projects. Applicants must include a “Resolution of Sponsorship” from a governing body or an official, signed letter from the primary applicant and/or budget authority indicating the availability of the 5% match.

- Applicants that provide a greater match than 5% may be given preference. If unable to meet the 5% match, the applicant may indicate their intention to apply for hardship (match waiver) in their application.
- Projects should also:
 - generate value over a long period of time (10 years at least)
 - provide long-term financial benefit and public access to the community.
 - include long-term intangible and tangible assets and investments.

INELIGIBLE EXPENDITURES:

- Operational expenses cannot be considered for funding through either the Tier I or Tier II programs.
- Donated labor or staff time as well as in-kind funds cannot be counted as local matching funds.

TIER I: STRUCTURE AND REQUIREMENTS

TIER I A: PLANNING AND DESIGN – UP TO \$100,000

Preliminary studies and plans that can be funded in this tier include, but are not limited to:

- GIS maps of proposed site location
- Archaeological studies and reports
- Economic impact studies and reports
- Architectural, engineering/design and structural reports
- Public easement and right of way as well as other legal compliance documents
- Water quality and assurance studies, if applicable
- Other relevant environmental and zoning studies, plans and reports to the tourism-infrastructure project.

TIER I B: PROGRAMMING – UP TO \$50,000

This track requires no match and provides funding for projects that will expand and enhance their tourism infrastructure programming. Programming includes, but is not limited to:

- Brochures
- Collateral materials - Creation and production
- Signage
- Interpretation
- Digital enhancements
- Other programmatic resources
- Other marketing resources

TIER I PROJECTS must:

- Be “shovel-worthy”
- Be ranked on ICIP and/or NMTD dashboards. Higher ranked projects will be prioritized. You may submit proof of current ICIP projects if you are in the process of updating/adding projects to the ICIP system.
- Be completed within the given Fiscal Year (FY) or timeline identified in the grant agreement.
- Include a milestone timeline and itemized budget of the project in the application.
- Include recent letters of support and/or commitment from key stakeholders.

- Include quotes, signed agreements or correspondence with contractors, firms, agencies etc. that will conduct on-site location mapping, planning, analysis and assessment of socio-economic, socio-cultural and environmental risks, impacts, and benefits.
- Funding must be directly connected with capital outlay/ ICIP project and lead to the completion of the project within the required timeframe.

TIER II: STRUCTURE AND REQUIREMENTS

TIER II A: CONSTRUCT AND EQUIP - UP TO \$500,000

This track will focus on building and constructing:

- Tourism infrastructure
- Visitor amenities
- Tourist attractions

Estimates of standard costs for construction and equipment that must be submitted along with the application include but are not limited to:

- Contractor fees
- Subcontractor fees
- Exterior shell
- Interior buildout and finish
- Plumbing
- Electrical
- Mechanical
- Telecommunication systems
- Site work costs
- Contingency costs - usually 15%
- Other relevant costs and estimates

TIER II B: MODERNIZE AND RENOVATE – UP TO \$500,000

This track will focus on upgrading, renovating and/or innovating **existing** tourism infrastructure and will cover costs and expenses including but not limited to:

- Improving destination competitiveness
- Renovating of historical/cultural attractions
- Modernizing tourism experiences
- Establishing or enhancing internet connectivity
- Adopting and adapting technology to maximize efficiency and operational capacity.
- Enhancing sustainability practices

This track will **NOT** cover any fees, costs or expenses associated with any ongoing recurring repairs or maintenance to any property.

TIER II PROJECTS must:

- Be “shovel-ready”
- Be ranked on ICIP and/or NMTD dashboards. Higher ranked projects will be prioritized. You may submit proof of current ICIP projects if you are in the process of updating/adding projects to the ICIP system.

- Be completed within the given Fiscal Year (FY) or timeline identified in the grant agreement.
- Include a milestone timeline and itemized budget of the project in the application.
- **Have completed Tier I or similar:** provide proof of completion by uploading the required documents as funded in Tier IA.

APPLICATION CHECKLIST

STEP 1: AM I ELIGIBLE?

- Conceptualize and identify an eligible tourism infrastructure project that aligns with the goals and objectives of the DFG.
 - Please note, not all goals and criteria listed may be applicable to your project, but your project should choose to deliver on at least one of the goals (two if you are applying for Goal 5) and its objectives.
- Identify any existing gaps and opportunities and engage further with key stakeholders/partners to hire a contractor, agency, engineer, archeologist, architect etc. to conduct necessary site assessments. A list of contractors, engineers and other industry-related agencies and experts, as well as their contact information, can be found in the [ICIP guidelines](#).
- Gather all necessary letters of approval and support/commitment as well as relevant supporting documents based on the Tier/Sub-Tier you wish to apply for. You can find a list of necessary documents according to your tier in the guidelines above as well as on our website. You can also find additional, “**general requirements**” listed above.

Optional:

- Include a benchmark/SWOT study of the project or of similar projects in another region/state/country.
- Include any photos, news stories, media, branding, or marketing of your project or of a similar project.
- Include a socio-economic and/or socio-cultural management plan.
- Include an environmental management plan.
- Rank your project on ICIP. Their guidelines can be found in the link above. Higher ranking projects will be prioritized. You may submit proof of current ICIP projects if you are in the process of updating/adding projects to the ICIP system. If awarded, the awardee must complete the “Preliminary Plan for Use of Funds” which will be agreed upon by both parties prior to beginning the project.

STEP 2: HAVE I BEEN ACCEPTED AND APPROVED FOR FUNDING?

- If your application meets all program criteria, and based upon fund availability, you and your team of key stakeholders/partners will receive a notification of award for project implementation along with an Agreement letter which must be signed and dated by the project leader.
- Tier IA and Tier II applications require a 5% match from an eligible fiscal agent and a signed letter or “Resolution of Sponsorship” indicating the 5% match availability. Applicants that are able to provide a greater match than 5% may be given preference. If unable to meet the 5% match, applicants may indicate their intention to apply for hardship (match waiver) in their application. Your project will then be listed on the NMTD Tourism Infrastructure Dashboard.

STEP 3: DO I NEED TO CONDUCT ANY PROJECT REPORTING AFTER BEING FUNDED?

- After receiving funding, you will be required to report on your project’s progress and budget on a quarterly basis (at minimum) until your project is complete. NMTD may conduct on-site assessments to ensure that the project is meeting its goals and budget in a timely manner and to identify any gaps that might need further support.
- Once the project is complete, you must provide data-driven reports regarding the positive and negative impacts of the project across all levels, i.e., social, cultural, economic, and environmental impacts, on an annual basis.
- Please include photos, media, press releases, etc. as further evidence of the project’s impact.
- The awardee should adjust and manage the project over time as needed, especially regarding negative impacts at the destination. Awardees must include any adjustments and plans for improvement in the annual report.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Your DFG application will be scored based on the following criteria.

- Eligibility - please review the list of general requirements as well as eligible applicants, projects, and expenditures in the guidelines above.
- Your narrative. In your project summary, this is your chance to shine and provide as many specifics as possible about what has been done, what is happening now and what will be done in the future concerning your infrastructure project. How do you and your project stand out? What are the “needs” that will be met with this funding vs. the “wants” - what is the relative community impact over the long-term?
- **Project readiness aka “shovel-readiness or shovel-worthiness”** – you will be scored heavily on how soon you are able to begin your project. Include an up-to-date timeline of milestones in your application.
 - Quality and quantity of supporting documents. Be sure to include up to date (no older than 6 months or than the previous FY, whichever comes first) supporting documents, which may include:
 - Proof of eligibility e.g., W9s, W9 subs, Resolution of Sponsorship, etc.
 - Letters of support, approval and/or commitment to your project from key stakeholders.
 - Proof of compliance with regulations, zoning permits, approvals etc. from the relevant authority which will be verified as part of your application plus engineering, structural and archaeological reports, studies, and maps of the site area. (This criterion is especially applicable to Tier II applicants who must demonstrate they have completed Tier I or similar.)
 - Any relevant economic, social, cultural and/or environmental plans as well as business and community action plans that have already been made and/or any indication of future plans according to your Tier/Sub- Tier.
 - Any and all data collected regarding the impacts of tourism and the project.
- Sustainability of the project across all levels i.e., economic, social, cultural,

environmental impacts.

- Quality of itemized budget detailing what you wish to have funded through the DFG and which of the goals and objectives these items aim to address. The more specific and itemized the better. (Please see a list of our goals in “**Purpose**” above).
- Projects on the NMTD dashboard as well as those on ICIP will be prioritized. Please provide evidence in your application.
- Applications must be complete, must include all required documents and be submitted through the online portal by the deadline in order to be considered.
- NMTD shall review and verify equivalent work and determine eligibility.
- *****Projects that are included on the [ICIP Dashboard](#) as well as those included on the [NMTD's Tourism Infrastructure Dashboard](#) will be given additional preference. Please contact your local Council of Government (COG) representative for more info. ***** You may submit proof of current ICIP projects if you are in the process of updating/adding projects to the ICIP system.

The following evaluation matrix can be used as a tool for you to ensure that your project application is complete and competitive before submission.

DESTINATION FORWARD GRANT EVALUATION MATRIX

<u>Scoring Criteria</u>	<u>Weighting</u> (out of 100%)
<p>Eligibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be an eligible applicant and project according to guidelines and its various conditions and tiers • Project must be located in New Mexico • Support the tourism sector 	Required to move forward in review process
<p>Meeting DFG Goals and Objectives - See Full List in Guidelines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal 1: Increase visitation • Goal 2: Improve or enhance the visitor and resident experience • Goal 3: Spur economic growth and capacity opportunities for residents • Goal 4: Increase national and global recognition of New Mexico as a Sustainable Tourism destination • Goal 5: Increase positive impacts on the local environment while decreasing negative impacts 	45%
<p>Innovative Approach to Partnership and Community Building</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of strong community support • Evidence of innovative partnerships and collaboration 	20%
<p>Organizational Capacity/ “Shovel-Readiness or Shovel-Worthiness”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of previous and current experience in completing projects on time and within budget • Evidence of previous project planning engagement and completion with NMTD, ICIP or similar • Evidence that the applying organization has necessary documents, resources, and capacities to undertake and complete the project being applied for • Evidence of legal compliance, financial reliability, strong partnerships, team governance, key stakeholders in tourism and other industries, as well as other relevant information will be evaluated 	20%
<p>Measuring and Reporting Success and Sustainability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of appropriate, reliable, accurate and precise measurements of short-term and long-term impacts at the destination including adjustments and management of said impacts over time 	15%