



# YORK COUNTY TOURISM GRANT PROGRAM

## General Information and Guidelines

Rev. 3/5/2026

### Background and General Information

Explore York and the York County Commissioners established a matching grant program aimed at boosting tourism (visitation from beyond a 50-mile radius) in York County. The program, which is funded through a room tax enacted by the York County Commissioners, provides financial support to initiatives deemed capable of generating broad and substantial benefits to York County tourism. The York County Tourism Grant Committee will be accepting applications for projects aimed at expanding and/or improving tourism promotion and development in York County. Non-profit, for-profit and government agencies are eligible to apply.

The committee seeks proposals that collectively represent a broad range of approaches to grow tourism and enhance the visitor experience in York County. It will be looking for proposals that reflect creativity and innovation, an understanding of the tourism industry and current trends, and that present a clear and convincing case for how the proposed initiative will expand tourism or broadly enhance the visitor experience. Funding will be prioritized for proposals that describe a compelling case for maximizing the economic impact of tourism in York County by increasing overnight stays.

Request Types: Event, Marketing, Development, Research

Some areas of interest to the committee include:

- Strengthening the competitiveness of existing attractions or events
- Innovating existing attractions or events to drive new visitors or drive increased tourist spending.
- Support the development of new attractions or events with potential for substantial impact through increased overnight stays.
- Broadly enhancing the visitor experience

The committee is particularly interested in proposals that will leverage grant dollars by:

- Attracting additional funding sources
- Collaborating partners to align strategies, leverage consistent messaging and amplify impact.
- Increasing organizational capacity to drive greater impact
- Advancing a high potential project or event to the next level or phase

Successful applicants will be able to articulate/provide most of the following:

- A clear vision of the impact their project will have on tourism in York County
- A realistic sense of what it will take to execute their project successfully.
- Reliable data or evidence to support the proposed approach.
- Relevant consumer/visitor input or feedback
- A strategic plan that describes the organization's direction and key goals
- Internally generated reports that reflect a financially stable organization without significant operating deficits or an unsustainable level of debt
- Evidence of experience and success with project design, management and execution
- Understanding and integration of York County Destination Brand Grant applications

## Requirements and Restrictions

1. The grant program is intended to market or help position York County as a sports, leisure, business, convention or meeting travel destination. All grant funding must be used to exclusively benefit York County attractions and hotels.
2. All grant applications must be submitted via our online grant portal, accessible on [www.yorkpa.org/grants](http://www.yorkpa.org/grants)
3. There is no set number of grant awards to be made in any fiscal year.
4. This grant program is not intended to be a sustaining operating funding source for the applicant or the proposed project.
5. Ineligible Expenses:
  - Expenses incurred prior to grant approval
  - Staff / Payroll Expenses (see also no. 10)
  - Indirect Expenses not directly associated with grant project (office supplies, utilities, administrative fees)
  - Grant Management Fees (Internal or External)
  - Cost of Products Sold (Retail Items)
  - Hotel Rooms for Event Attendees
  - Property / Building Maintenance for normal wear and tear
  - Cash Awards
  - Charitable Donations
  - All expenses not specifically listed on a grant contract.
6. Tourism or travel marketing or promotion program, expenditure or project must not unduly compete with private-sector tourism or travel efforts. \*
7. All grant recipients will be required to make a cash or in-kind match of at least 25% of requested grant amount. \*
8. This program accepts applications from non-profits, for-profits, and governmental agencies. All applicants must have an EIN and be organized and registered to do business in Pennsylvania. Fiscal sponsorships may not charge fees against their grant award.
9. All grant recipients will be required to provide liability insurance in the amount of \$1 million naming Explore York as additional insured. Grant funded events serving/selling alcohol will also need to provide liquor liability insurance in the amount of 1 million, naming Explore York as additional insured.
10. Grant recipients are prohibited from using grant funding to pay other businesses (directly or indirectly) operationally affiliated to their own. These payments are also ineligible towards match requirements.
  - By way of example - businesses with shared staff, ownership or subsidiary interests, office space or similar relationships.
  - Exceptions may be made on a case-by-case business at the discretion of Explore York leadership. Applicants must clearly state any conflicts of interest with paid vendors within their application and provide contextual info as to why there is no outside access/availability to similar services.
11. Signage that promotes a specific private entity on the situs of that entity is not a permitted use of grant funds, except where the signage also carries the logo of Explore York. \*
12. To promote collaboration and the overall destination:
  - All marketing material including but not limited to printed ads, postcards, promotional, video, TV, banners or digital, funded by the grant program, must contain the Explore York logo and website.

- Depending on the project some recipients may be asked to incorporate additional elements of the county brand such as use of the split circle, color palette, fonts and including “have it made here.”
  - Digital materials must link to [www.yorkpa.org](http://www.yorkpa.org). Grant recipients must also provide a link on their website to [www.yorkpa.org](http://www.yorkpa.org)
  - All logos are located on the website. <https://www.yorkpa.org/grants/brand-standards>
  - Press Releases to announce funded events must include acknowledgement of funding through the York County Tourism Grant Program.
13. Grant applications are not confidential. If information within the application needs to be kept private, please indicate on the application what documents need to remain private. Successful applicants must sign a grant contract in order to receive their initial check.
14. At the time of contracting, grant recipients must have an active membership with Explore York. Membership is mandatory throughout the project period. This gives all recipients equal access to Explore York resources and support.
15. Grant recipients are required to submit a post grant report within 90 days after project completion that must include the following:
- Itemized receipts for project expenses totaling at least the grant award plus the required match, paired with a corresponding Closeout Budget
  - Data that shows the effectiveness of your initiative such as hotel-use reports, marketing campaign reports, zip code data, and attendance data.
  - Evidence of work performed such as photos, ad copy, branding,
  - Responses to open ended questions about project impact
16. Grant recipients who have not submitted the required reporting (including receipts) will be ineligible for future grants and will be subject to our Contract Breach Policy that culminates in legally enforceable repayment of grant funds.

*\* Act 18 legal requirement*

## Publicity & Logo Guidelines

To promote collaboration, Grantee shall include the York County Destination Brand and/or Explore York logos and web addresses in all print and digital media as it relates to the awarded grant project. Explore York must be recognized as a sponsor for all awarded projects. **Explore York requires drafts of any printed materials and publicity be emailed in advance of printing or distribution to [melissa@yorkpa.org](mailto:melissa@yorkpa.org) no less than 10 business days before approval is required.**

The Grantee shall follow the [Tourism Grant Program Brand Standards](#) when designing advertising (print or digital) or communication pieces. Full instructions and logos are available online: [York Destination Logos \(yorkpa.org\)](http://www.yorkpa.org).

**For more information, contact Elizabeth Fisher, Grant Program Manager  
[elizabeth@yorkpa.org](mailto:elizabeth@yorkpa.org) or 717-852-9675, Ext. 113.**

## Grant Match

ACT 18 requires recipients to provide at least a 25 percent match, cash or in-kind, of the requested grant amount.

### **A cash match can be derived from:**

- Applicant dollars
- Sponsorships
- Donated dollars
- Leveraging another grant

### **An In-Kind match could include:**

- Donated physical items - examples: rental venue, printed collateral.
- Donated professional services - classified as a business who routinely provides that service. Examples: accounting services, legal services, painting, IT development
- Staff time OR Volunteer hours will NOT be accepted as an in-kind match.
- Standard operational expenses will NOT be accepted as an in-kind match.

All in-kind matches need to be valued and documented by the donating organization(s). In-kind service documentation must include work performed, date/dates of the services and hourly rate and hours donated.

## Scoring Criteria

### **Program Impact - 50 %**

- Demonstrates strong potential to drive overnight tourists (visitors from 50+ miles of from the York County border) to York County, PA
- Aligned with Explore York's Strategic Plan & existing tactics for collective impact.
- Maximizes economic impact by steering audiences to other York County businesses.
- Funding request offers competitive economic return on expected impact.
- Longevity of impact

### **Program Plan - 16.6%**

- Program design and action plan are feasible and understandable
- Clear, understandable statement of need that aligns with program's outcomes & indicators
- Does not replicate existing services or compete with private sector
- Increases Economic Impact by patronizing York County businesses for project costs
- Budget is logical and balanced - Showing appropriate pricing, required match, and does not include ineligible or operational expenses-
- Makes best use of other available resources and partnerships.
- Collaborative effort that capitalizes on specific visitor interests and travel behaviors

### **Agency/Project Capacity to be Successful- 16.6%**

- Agency is capable of carrying out project and is prepared to take on proposed program.
- Project is consistent with agency mission.
- Implementation timeline is reasonable.

### **Outcomes - 16.6%**

- Project has measurable outcomes, indicators and evaluation criteria in place.
- Project will have significant impact that is positive and measurable (i.e. "move the needle")