Sullivan County & Sullivan County Visitors Association (SCVA) Tourism Grant Program Handbook

FY2025-2026

Purpose

The SCVA Tourism Grant Program exists to reinvest lodging tax revenues into strategic tourism development initiatives that generate overnight stays, strengthen Sullivan County's visitor economy, and enhance the region's appeal through events, culture, and hyper-local storytelling.

Guiding Principles

- Roomnights First: The origin of our funding is lodging tax. Our top priority is supporting initiatives that demonstrably drive overnight visitation.
- Equity Through Structure: Funding is allocated across distinct grant categories to ensure fairness, transparency, and strategic alignment.
- Performance-Oriented: We reward outcomes, not intentions. Post-grant reporting is mandatory.
- Scalable Investment: Grant funding is capped at 25% of SCVA's annual budget to ensure its sustainability.

Total Grant Funding Available: $750,000 *(based on a total budget of $3+ million)*

Category Allocations

Category	% Allocation	Budget Cap
Roomnight-Focused Grants	60%	$450,000
Arts & Culture Enhancement	15%	$112,500
Hamlet & Micro-Brand Grants	10%	$75,000
Events & Festivals Support	15%	$112,500

Roomnight-Focused Grants (Up to $450,000 Total)

Purpose: To support programs, marketing campaigns, and initiatives that increase overnight visitation to Sullivan County.

- Eligible Uses:
    - Lodging-linked promotions or packages
    - Event-driven campaigns with proven visitor draw
    - Tech incentives for lodging data sharing
    - Digital ad co-ops with regional hospitality partners

- Evaluation Criteria:
    - Forecasted roomnights
    - Booking window and LOS (length of stay) targets
    - Inclusion of lodging partners
    - Data capture or analytics proposed

- Reporting Requirements:
    - Proof of lodging impact (e.g., zip code data, hotel partner metrics, Key Data Dashboard exports)

Arts & Culture Enhancement (Up to $112,500 Total)

Purpose: To amplify the county's arts scene as a key amenity for cultural travelers and off-season visitors.

- Eligible Uses:
    - Exhibitions or installations targeting visitors
    - Artist residencies with public-facing programming
    - Venue enhancement for tourism use
    - Arts festivals with multi-day visitor appeal

- Evaluation Criteria:
    - Visitor relevance and public access
    - Alignment with shoulder season objectives
    - Marketing reach outside Sullivan County
    - Contribution to the county's brand narrative

- Reporting Requirements:
    - Attendance demographics
    - Tourism media mentions or campaign metrics

Village, Hamlet & Micro-Brand Grants (Up to $75,000 Total)

Purpose: To help local chambers, civic groups, and businesses develop unique, visitor-facing identities.

- Eligible Uses:
  - Logo/brand development
  - Seasonal campaigns tied to DMO strategy
  - Interpretive signage, wayfinding, storytelling
  - Local walking tours, maps, or history projects

- Evaluation Criteria:
  - Quality and consistency of brand story
  - Link to DMO-wide messaging pillars
  - Ability to improve visitor navigation or awareness
  - Collaboration with businesses or artists

- Reporting Requirements:
  - Brand/toolkit usage by local stakeholders
  - Social/digital performance or engagement

Events & Festivals Support (Up to $112,500 Total)

Purpose: To seed, scale, or sustain high-quality events that increase visitor interest and extend length of stay.

- Eligible Uses:
  - Production support or vendor hiring
  - Ticketing, logistics, or ADA upgrades
  - Event marketing with overnight promotion
  - Traffic management or safety improvements

- Evaluation Criteria:
  - Multi-day visitor potential
  - Geographic draw (especially beyond 60-mile radius)
  - Lodging integration (packages, codes, referrals)
  - Track record or scalability of the event

- Reporting Requirements:
  - Attendance and zip code reporting
  - Visitor surveys or occupancy partner feedback

Grant Timeline

Phase	Date Range One	Date Range Two
Applications Open:	September 1, 2025	January 6, 2026
Info Sessions:	September 10–20, 2025	January 13–23, 2026
Applications Due:	October 15, 2025	February 14, 2026
Awards Announced:	November 15, 2025	March 14, 2026
Funds Distributed:	January 2026	April 2026
Reports Due:	Within 60 days post-project	Within 60 days post-project

Marketing Approval and In-Kind Requests

SCVA Marketing Approval, Consulting, Creative and Media Assistance

- Marketing Approval: For the purposes of developing marketing consistency in the county, SCVA will require marketing plan and creative development to be approved by SCVA in advance of execution.
- Consulting: By request, SCVA will provide marketing consultation by request.
- Creative: By request, SCVA will work with its local agency to provide creative development and execution to grantees.
- Media: By requested, SCVA will provide media in local/regional partner publications with the ability to drive awareness in the region.

Application Requirements

- Completed online application form
- Detailed budget with matching funds (preferred)
- Project plan and timeline
- Expected visitor impact, especially overnight
- Commitment to provide final reporting
- Marketing Approval and In-Kind Requests documentation

Tracks and Scoring

Two Grant Tracks

- *Catalyst Grants:* New ideas, new audiences, innovation (risk-tolerant).
- *Legacy Grants***:** Proven winners with established ROI or roomnight impact (risk-managed).

Post-Grant Accountability

- Require a one-page report including:
  - ✓ Lodging metrics or zip code capture
  - ✓ Visitor-facing outcomes (web visits, walk-ins, etc.)
  - ✓ Learnings or tweaks for next cycle

Communication & Support

- SCVA staff will host grant workshops for first-time applicants.
- FAQs, sample applications, and reporting templates will be posted online.
- Staff is available for 1-on-1 consultations by appointment.

Scoring Rubric (Applied Across All Categories)

Criteria	Weight
Alignment with Category Goals	15%
Visitor/Community Impact Potential	25%
Feasibility and Budget Clarity	15%
Matching Funds	15%
Marketing/Outreach Strategy	15%
Innovation, Equity, or Underserved Area	15%