Virginia Tourism Corporation
Summer 2026
Special Events & Festivals Sponsorship Program (SEF)
Terms & Conditions

Applicants must attest to these terms and conditions at the time of application. For information on how to apply to this program, please refer to this document, the sample application, and webinar recording.

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General SEF Grant Program Overview & Guidelines

The Virginia Tourism Corporation Special Events and Festivals Sponsorship Grant Program (SEF) is for the marketing and production of Virginia based special events and festivals. The events and festivals must be at least two consecutive days, have at least two years of prior attendance since 2022, and must have a minimum of 500 attendees. The events and festivals must show a positive and significant impact on tourism, and the marketing plan must be designed to drive visitation to Virginia.

Eligible applicants can only submit one application proposal per FEIN.

This round of SEF is only for events that occur between January 1,2027 – December 31, 2027.

SEF Grant Application Opens: September 22, 2026 | 9:00 a.m. ET

SEF Grant Application Closes: October 29,2026 | 5:00 p.m. ET

Three Award Tiers:

- **Tier 1 - $5,000** for special events & festivals with **500-4,999** attendees
- **Tier 2 - $10,000** for special events & festivals with **5,000-19,999** attendees
- **Tier 3 - $20,000** for special events & festivals with **20,000** attendees

Matching Requirements

The SEF program is a reimbursable grant program that requires a minimum of 50% cash or in-kind match for each award tier. Ony items listed in the **Eligible VTC & Match Marketing & Production Plan Expenses** section of this document can be used as cash or in-kind match. Earned or owned media may be counted as in-kind match; refer to the **Eligible In-Kind Match Expenses** section of this document to learn how to value earned and owned media.

No more than 50% of the VTC Marketing Plan and the Matching Marketing Plan can be used for production costs; eligible production costs can be found on pages 11-12. Production costs shall be used to expand festival capacity (i.e., add a stage, enhance visitor experience, add artisan markets, concessions, food trucks, or other revenue generating activities.

Required Materials

- Signed Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) Letter of Support
- Signed Lodging Letter of Support
- Clear marketing message to support the event/festival

- Complete Hub & Spoke (6 partners-includes lodging partner)
- 50% cash or in-kind marketing plan
- Research & data for in-state and out-of-state target marketings and target audiences
- Proof of prior event attendance (minimum of 500 attendees to be eligible)
- Proof of liability insurance with *Virginia Tourism Authority* listed as "additional insured" on the applicable policy

Eligible Applicants Requirements

Successful Special Events & Festivals grant applicants must meet the definition of an eligible applicant. The Code of Virginia (§ 2.2-2320.2) defines eligible applicants based on the criteria below. Eligible applicants can only submit **one application proposal** per Federal Employer Identification Number (FEIN) or Social Security Number (SSN) if they are a sole proprietor. Eligible applicants for the Special Events and Festivals Sponsorship Program include the following:

- Virginia Localities
- Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs)
- Non-profit organizations
- Tourism-related businesses
    - Brick-and-mortar locations in Virginia that are open, operating, and have appropriate local licensing
- Chambers of Commerce

Non-profit organizations, tourism-related businesses, and chamber of commerce must be serving as a regional attraction's marketing agency to promote an event or festival.

A vendor of service, such as an advertising agency, PR firm, printing agency, television channel, web developer, influencer, marketing consultant, federal agency and/or state agency may not apply for or directly receive Special Events and Festivals Sponsorship Program funding for any event or festival.

Event Eligibility

The eligible applicants (Virginia locality, Destination Marketing Organization, or Regional Attraction's Marketing Agency) must apply for an event or festival that meets the following requirements:

- Must have occurred in two or more years since 2022.
- Must be a minimum of two consecutive days.
- Must increase overnight event visitation and visitor spending.
- Must show a significant and positive economic impact on the surrounding community.
- Must have a minimum of 500 event attendees.
- Must have liability insurance with *Virginia Tourism Authority* listed as "additional insured" on the applicable policy

Events and festivals that do not meet these requirements can apply for the Marketing Leverage Program (MLP); however, production expenses are not eligible, only marketing related expenses are eligible for the MLP grant program.

The following events and festivals are not eligible for VTC grant funding:

- Non-tourism related events
- Cannabis related events
- Political events
- Private events (i.e., family reunions, weddings, birthday parties, and members only events)

Eligible Partner/Spoke Eligibility Requirements

The Hub & Spoke model encourages eligible applicants to build partnerships that connect primary tourism attractions, businesses, events, or destinations (the Hub) with complimentary tourism partners such as lodging, dining, attractions, retail, outdoor recreation, and experiences (the Spokes). Both the Hub & Spokes must be specific, identifiable tourism entities. This approach creates meaningful partnerships that strengthen the visitor experience, increase visitation, overnight stays, and visitor spending.

Eligible Hub & Spoke Partners must meet the following requirements:

- Must be a brick-and-mortar tourism-oriented business/attraction that is open, operating, and has appropriate locality licensing in Virginia.
- Licensed food trucks are also eligible and are not required to maintain a brick-and-mortar location. The food truck must be licensed to operate in Virginia.
- Can be a state or federal entity, such as a state or national park.

Personal health and wellness businesses, nail salons, gyms, massage parlors, yoga studios, psychics, therapy businesses, advertising agencies, public relations firms, printing agencies, television channels, podcasts, web developers, influencers, marketing

consultants, event/festival sponsors, etc. are not eligible spokes or partners for the Special Events and Festivals Sponsorship grant program.

VTC retains the right to determine applicant and partner/spoke eligibility.

**All partners/spokes must be clearly identified in the application, and the Hub & Spoke model must include a lodging partner. Applications with an incomplete Hub & Spoke model, including those without an identified lodging partner, will be deemed ineligible.*

Partner/Spoke Participation

Using the Hub & Spoke model, the partners/spokes you list in your application must contribute to your program initiative, either through a financial commitment to the marketing initiative or through marketing collaboration. These contributions and/or collaborations must be documented in the application narrative and will be evaluated.

Signed Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) Letter of Support

To apply for this program, applicants must have a letter of support from their local or regional DMO that clearly states their support for the program and must be signed and on the DMO's official letterhead. If the applicant is physically located in a different jurisdiction than where the event or festival will take place, the applicant must attain a letter of support from the DMO where the event or festival is being held.

The list of Virginia DMOs can be found on vatc.org/dmolist.

If you do not have a local or regional DMO serving your area, you must obtain a letter of support from your locality leaders such as the town manager, city manager, or county administrator.

**The letter must be provided on the DMO's official letterhead and signed by an authorized DMO representative. Letters submitted without a signature will result in the application being deemed ineligible.*

Signed Lodging Partner Letter of Support

To apply for this program, the applicant must list a lodging business as a partner in the application. This can be a hotel, bed & breakfast, resort, campground, or state park. The lodging partner listed in in the Hub & Spoke mode must provide a letter of support for the program. This letter must clearly state the lodging partners support for the program and must be signed and on the lodging partner's official letterhead.

If you, as the applicant, are a lodging business, you will need to list yourself as the lodging partner and write a letter of support on your behalf.

**The letter must be provided on the lodging partner's official letterhead and signed by an authorized representative of the entity. Letters submitted without a signature will result in the application being deemed ineligible.*

Eligible VTC & Match Marketing & Production Plan Expenses

The expenses in this section are eligible to be covered in your **VTC and Match Marketing Plan** for which you may receive reimbursement and be deemed eligible for match.

Eligible Marketing Expenses

- Social Media Advertising
- Digital Media Advertising
- Radio Advertising
- Podcast Advertising
- Print & Digital Newspaper Advertising
- Print & Digital Magazine Advertising
- Printing & Distribution of Brochures, Rack Cards, & Flyers
- Window Clings
    - Must be 50 miles or more away from the location of the business organization
    - Window Clings listed in the application must have the exact location stated
- Contracting a Photographer/Videographer
    - All photography and video marketing materials created used VTC grants should include usage rights for VTC in perpetuity. You can secure those rights for VTC in one of two ways:
        1. When creating your for-hire contract, include language that allows you to transfer usage right to partners (like VTC). This agreement allows us to share phot assets with VTC partners.
        2. You can have the copyright owner complete the VTC photo & video release form. This must be completed by the copyright owner, not by the licensing entity.
    - For information on planning your photo shoot, please see our How to Plan a Photo Shoot document. Here, we break down our planning process while giving recommendations and tips on maximizing your budget, staying organized, and considering the details.
    - For an example of the language we use in our contracts, see section 3 in our licensing terms & conditions. Please feel free to copy and adapt this language for your own contracts

    - High resolution photography and videography should be shared with the VTC team. Visit How to Share Photos and Video with VTC - Virginia Tourism Corporation to learn more about this process.
    - The cost of purchasing equipment for photographic and video production is not an eligible expense.
    - The cost of food and other props during a photo shoot is not an eligible expense.
- Contracting a Marketing Consultant
- Contracting a Creative Agency
- Contracting an Influencer
    - Influencer fees must be invoiced under one all-encompassing document when submitted for VTC reimbursement. VTC will not reimburse individual receipted expenses for influencers such as lodging receipts, meal receipts, transportation receipts, etc.
- Website/Apps Development/Updates
    - Hosting and maintenance fees are not eligible
    - Invoices for websites development must include a scope of work
    - *Virginia is for Lovers* logo is required on the website
- Expenses related to participating in the VTC Partnership Marketing & Advertising Program (PMAP)
- *Virginia is for Lovers* Promotional Items
    - Maximum of 10% of VTC award can be used
    - Promotional items must be acquired using Creative Color, VTC's Contractor of Record for merchandising.
    - Virginia is for Lovers® Merchandising - Virginia Tourism Corporation
- Outdoor billboards
    - Must be 50 miles or more away from the location of the business organization
    - Billboard listed in the application must have the exact location stated
- Tradeshow Booth Rentals
- ASCAP/BMI Fees
    - Maximum of 10% of VTC award can be used
- Event Liability Insurance
    - Maximum of 10% of VTC award can be used
- Mobile Vehicle Wrap Advertising
    - Must be managed by a third-party marketing agency and the vehicle must be driven 50 miles or more away from the applicant's destination

**All marketing consultants, website/app developers, photographers, videographers, and influencers require proof of payment and VIFL proof of placement on the content that is produced through the applicable contracted services.*

Eligible Production Expenses

The expenses in this section are eligible to be covered in your **VTC and Match Production Plan** for which you may receive reimbursement and be deemed eligible for match. **All production expenses must be accompanied by a vendor contract to be eligible for reimbursement and match.**

- Artist/Performer Fees
- Temporary Stage Rentals
- Rental of Event Space or Parking Lots
- Temporary Fence Rentals
- Tent Rentals
- Table/Chair Rentals
- Contracted Audio/Video Services
- Contracted Sound Engineering Services
- Contracted Lighting Services

Purchase of permanent equipment and any other marketing or event production is ineligible.

**No more than 50% of the VTC Marketing Plan and the Matching Marketing Plan can be used for production costs. Production costs shall be used to expand festival capacity (i.e., add a stage, enhance visitor experience, add artisan markets, concessions, food trucks, or other revenue generating activities.*

**All production expenses and contracted marketing expenses must include copies of contracts to be eligible for reimbursement.*

**Eligible VTC & Match Marketing Plan & Production Exepnses have a lookback period of 6-months from your project start date. Expenses incurred from your project start date to 30-days past your project end date are eligible for reimbursement.*

Match Requirements

Special Events and Festivals Grant Sponsorship Program funds must be matched with private, public, or in-kind resources to demonstrate the applicant's investment in the project's success. A strong match demonstrates the applicants' commitment to the project and the event or festival's sustainability.

To receive the award amount requested, the applicant must list cash and/or in-kind matching expenses that are at least 50% (half) of the amount requested in the application.

No more than 50% of the Matching Marketing Plan can be used for production costs. Production costs shall be used to expand festival capacity (i.e., add a stage, enhance visitor experience, add artisan markets, concessions, food trucks, or other revenue generating activities.

Below are examples of marketing and production plan budget for each award tier:

Tier 1 ($5,000) – Budget Example:

VTC Marketing & Production Plan	VTC Request	Match Marketing & Production Plan	Match Amount (50% cash or in-kind)
Meta Ads	$250	Owned Website Clicks	$500
Videographer	$1,000	Social Media Followers (in-kind)	$600
Artist Fees	$2,500	Print Editorial (Half Page)	$500
PMAP Brochures Print & Distribution	$250	Stage Rental	$900
Virginia is for Lovers Merchandise (10%)	$500		
Magazine Ad	$500		
Total VTC Request:	**$5,000**	**Total Matching Funds:**	**$2,500**

Tier 2 ($10,000) - Budget Example:

VTC Marketing & Production Plan	VTC Request	Match Marketing & Production Plan	Match Amount (50% cash or in-kind)
Newspaper Ad	$500	Digital Media Ads	$250
Photographer	$2,000	Artist Fees	$1,500
Marketing Agency	$4,700	Online Listing	$200
Chair Rentals	$800	Online Editorial (Quarter Page)	$500
Tent Rental	$2,000	Table Rentals	$1,000
		Print Editorial (Full Page)	$1,000
		Rack Cards	$550
Total VTC Request:	**$10,000**	**Total Matching Funds:**	**$5,000**

Tier 3 ($20,000) – Budget Example:

VTC Marketing & Production Plan	VTC Request	Match Marketing & Production Plan	Match Amount (50% cash or in-kind)
Spotify Ads	$3,000	Stage Rental	$2,500
Billboard (50 miles away from even location)	$5,000	Artist Fees	$2,500
Brochures	$1,000	Meta Ads	$1,500
Website Development	$1,000	Hulu Ads	$1,500
Artist Fees	$10,000	Magazine Ad	$500
		Photographer	$1,500
Total VTC Request:	**$20,000**	**Total Matching Funds:**	**$10,000**

Eligible In-Kind Match Expenses

Eligible In-kind match can include paid media, owned media, and earned media.

Instructions on how to value earned and owned media are listed below:

- Print editorial – $250/quarter page | $350/third page | $500/half page | $1,000/full page
  - Publication date must be within program dates.
- Online editorial – $500/quarter page | $1,000/half page | $2,000/full page
  - Must still be online.
- Social media followers – 10 cents/each.
  - Screenshot of follower/insights must be during program allowable dates.
- Owned website clicks – 10 cents/each
  - Screenshot must be during program allowable dates
- Print listing – $100/each
  - Publication date must be within program dates.
- Online listing – $200/each
  - Must still be online.
- Social Media Likes/Shares per Post – 10 cents/each
  - Screenshot showing likes/shares must be during program allowable dates.

**Any other in-kind match equivalency values that are not listed above are ineligible.*

Virginia is for Lovers (VIFL) Logo Usage

All marketing materials in the VTC Marketing Plan and the Match Marketing Plan are required to display the *Virginia is for Lovers* logo to be eligible for reimbursement and matching expenses.

Below are the ways you must incorporate the *Virginia is for Lovers* brand into the marketing campaign to receive reimbursement:

- Any social media posts, digital media, or website/app creation must include the *Virginia is for Lovers* logo or a *Virginia is for Lovers* sub-brand logo, link to Virginia.org and/or hashtag #LoveVA to be eligible as match or be approved for reimbursement. Sub-brand examples include but are not limited to *Virginia is for History Lovers* or *Virginia is for Wine Lovers*. Logos can be requested at vatc.org. Google Search expenses must show *Virginia is for Lovers* on the website landing page that is being promoted in Google Search.
- Any print media, like brochures, flyers, magazines, newspapers, etc., must include the *Virginia is for Lovers* logo or a *Virginia is for Lovers* sub-brand logo, link to Virginia.org and/or hashtag #LoveVA to be eligible as match or be approved for reimbursement. Sub-brand examples include but are not limited to *Virginia is for History Lovers* or *Virginia is for Wine Lovers*. Logos can be requested at vatc.org.
- Radio ads that are longer than 30 seconds must include the *Virginia is for Lovers* phrase within the advertisement. This can be included as part of the advertisement narrative, such as *"Everyone knows Virginia is for Lovers, and you're going to love this event."*
- Video ads of any length must include the *Virginia is for Lovers* logo and/or phrase within the advertisement. An example of this can include a banner in the background or an actor/performer wearing *Virginia is for Lovers* apparel purchased through the VIFL wholesale application process.

Application Process

An online application must be entered through vatc.org. The application program can be found at Virginia Special Events & Festivals Program - Virginia Tourism Corporation when the grant officially opens on **September 22, 2026, at 9:00 a.m. ET**.

Interested applicants are strongly encouraged to draft their application using the sample Word document template available on vatc.org before submitting through the online application portal. All required attachments, including the signed DMO Letter of Support, the signed Lodging Letter of Support, and proof of event or festival attendance must be included at the time of application submission. Applications missing required documentation may be deemed ineligible.

All applications must be submitted by **5:00 p.m. ET on October 29, 2026**. Applications submitted after the deadline will not be considered for review.

For questions regarding the application process, please contact the VTC Grants Team at vtcgrants@virginia.org.

Review and Evaluation Criteria

There are limited funds available for this competitive grant program. Therefore, funding will be awarded on a merit scale; only the highest scoring application proposals will be funded. Since awards are determined from these scores, your application must be complete, thorough, and include all required materials for eligibility. Actual award may or may not equal the amount originally requested and are based on the eligibility of expenses and available funds at the time of award.

If substantial changes to your marketing plan and proposal are needed after the time you are awarded, you must submit a **VTC Marketing Plan Revision** for the VTC Grants Team and have it reviewed and approved. These changes include but are not limited to budget adjustments, placement dates, alternate marketing expenses, etc.

When determining the award total for an application, Virginia Tourism Corporation may consider a variety of factors. These include the type and scope of the organization, the audience and message, the number of applications received, the regional distribution of funds, and most importantly, the economic impact of the program and its ability to drive visitation and visitor revenue in the program coverage area.

Do not assume that the review team is familiar with your area, destination, business, event, or festival. You should include all requested information and be as detailed as possible.

Below is the score breakdown for each section:

- Goals & Partnerships – 25 Points
- Research & Data – 25 Points
- Marketing Plans – 50 Points
- Bonus Section – 5 Points

This program is subject to a 20% award limit in each GO Virginia Region per fiscal year. The Code of Virginia (§ 2.2-2484) defines recipients regional qualifying criteria.

Award Notification

If you receive an award in this program, you will receive an email from the VTC Grants team to the email address listed in your application. This email includes an attached letter with your award information, your Grant ID Number, general information regarding your grant account, and access to supporting documents and files that will assist you in completing your grant proposal successfully.

If you have questions regarding your program, you will contact the VTC Grants team and reference the Grant ID Number you are assigned for this program. This allows staff to quickly identify your program materials.

Anticipated award notification for this program is January 2027.

Denial Notification

If you are not awarded in this program, you will receive an email from the VTC Grants team to the email address listed in your application. This email includes an attached letter with the denial information. Applicants can schedule a 1:1 meeting with a member of the VTC Grants Team to discuss your application and how it can be improved in future rounds.

Financial Management

This is a competitive reimbursement-based grant program. Award funds will not be paid out upfront.

All awardees are required to attend the VTC SEF Awardee Webinar on January 12, 2027, at 10:00 a.m. Upon award notice, you will receive a link to this webinar.

Once you receive an award letter via email from the Virginia Tourism Grants Team, your award will be placed in a grant account that you can spend down on your own basis until the final project close date. A maximum of two reimbursements can be requested throughout the program period until the full award balance has been disbursed; this includes an interim reimbursement and final reimbursement.

Awardees will be required to submit appropriate reports, contract, documentation, VIFL proof of placement, and reimbursement forms via Microsoft SharePoint. Each awardee will be assigned a SharePoint Grantee Folder that will have the appropriate forms and a copy of your award letter and application.

Events and festivals must conclude by December 31, 2027. You have 60-days from your program completion date to submit your final report, reimbursement form, proof of payments, VIFL logo proof of placements, proof of insurance, vendor contracts, and applicable documentation.

All SEF funds go to support an event or festival; therefore, you must submit a copy of your liability insurance with *Virginia Tourism Authority* listed as "additional insured" before you can receive reimbursement. Contracts with vendors are also required to be successfully reimbursed.

If you submit your reimbursement request prior to this date for your full award balance, you must include your final report at the time of that submission.

**Failure to utilize the awarded funds by this date will result in VTC releasing your award back to the grant funds.*

Payment and Reimbursement Procedures

During the VTC SEF Awardee Webinar, grantees will receive an overview on accessing their Microsoft SharePoint Grantee Folders where all applicable reimbursement materials will be uploaded in the instructed manner. Grantees will notify the VTC Grants Team via email at vtcgrants@virginia.org to alert the team that appropriate documentation has been uploaded to the grantee folder.

After the VTC Grants Team receives reimbursement documentation it will be reviewed. You will be notified via email regarding the status of your reimbursement request and whether further information is needed.

Only the primary and/or secondary point of contact on your application/grant account can submit reimbursement requests. Reimbursement requests cannot be submitted by partners/spokes or any other parties. Requests submitted by those parties will not be reviewed or processed.

Reimbursement payments will only be sent to the applicant business/organization by desired payment method, direct deposit or check. No other party will receive payment from VTC.

The list below is all required reports and documentation to receive payment of VTC grant award:

- W-9
- ACH Direct Deposit Form (optional)
- Interim Reports (as applicable)
- Final Reports
- Reimbursement Form
- Invoices & Proofs of Payment of expenses being paid
    - *A copy of a paid invoice does not suffice as proof of payment. A copy of an invoice must be accompanied by proof of payment (i.e., credit card statement, bank statement, cancelled check, last four digits for a credit card, etc.).
- Proofs of placement of your marketing, including social media, digital media, radio ads, video ads, etc. These will be uploaded to your designated Microsoft SharePoint Grantee Folder.
- VIFL Proof of Placement on all reimbursable marketing materials
- Photography Release Form (as applicable) – if grant funds were used for photography/videography
- Copies of vendor contracts including but not limited to:

    - Social Media Influencers
    - Photographers
    - Videographers
    - Marketing Agencies
    - Public Relations Agencies
    - Creative Agencies
    - Web/App Developers
    - Artists/Performers
    - Audio Visual/Sound Services
    - Equipment Rentas (chairs, tables, stages, etc.)
- Proof of Liability Insurance with *Virginia Tourism Authority* listed as "additional insured"

Opens Record Policy

As a political subdivision of the Commonwealth of Virginia, Virginia Tourism Authority (DBA Virginia Tourism Corporation) must comply with open records policies per Virginia Code §2.2-3700, and therefore must provide copies of awarded grant applications when requested. If your application is requested by an individual or organization, you will be notified, and any personal and banking information will be redacted.

The grant program terms may be modified at any time. Applicants will be notified of any changes.

Liability

The VTC Grants Team disclaims liability for any costs or damages incurred in the execution of funded proposals. Applicants submitting their grant proposal and their participation in the grant program constitutes agreement to these terms.

Applicants using VTC funds and/or matching funds for the production and/or marketing of events, festivals, meetings, or conventions must maintain liability insurance covering the funded activities. The *Virginia Tourism Authority* must be listed as "additional insured" on the applicable policy, and a copy of the policy, along with documentation confirming the designation, must be submitted as part of the reimbursement process.

Applicants may provide either a comprehensive liability policy that covers all eligible activities or sperate liability policies for each individual event. For localities that maintain general liability policy covering the scope of the proposed event, festival, meeting, or convention, evidence of that coverage may be provided in lieu of a separate event-specific policy.

Failure to provide proof of coverage and documentation listing the **Virginia Tourism Authority as additional insured may result in the applicant being deemed ineligible for reimbursement.*

Recordkeeping & Retention

As a VTC grant recipient, you must keep all records related to your project, including financial documents, invoices, reports, and other relevant files. These records should be organized and accessible during the life of the project and must be kept on file for at least three years after the project has been officially closed.

Technical Assistance and Resources

Interested applicants can view all program guidance materials, templates, and required documents on vatc.org. For questions regarding information in this document and VTC grant programs, contact the VTC Grants Team.

- Kalen Hunter, Managing Director of Grants & Strategic Development (khunter@virginial.org)
- Brittany Brown, Director of Grants (bbrown@virginia.org)
- Shruthi Manimaran, Senior Grants Coordinator (smanimaran@virginia.org)
- Zoë Macgill, Grants Coordinator (zmacgill@virginia.org)
- VTC Grant Reimbursements & Reporting (vtcgrants@virginia.org)