



**Hillsborough  
County Florida**  
Arts Council

## **FY 2025 SPECIAL EVENTS PARTNERSHIP GRANT GUIDELINES**

### **IMPORTANT DATES (FY 2025, Cycle 2)**

- **January 6, 2025**      **Cyle 2 Application Period Opens**
- **January 6 – 10, 2025**      **Courtesy Meeting Period**
- **January 24, 2025**      **Application Deadline**  
(Applications due no later than 5 PM EDT)
- **March 7, 2025**      **Cultural Assets Commission Meeting**

*\*The above timeline is subject to change.*

### **OVERVIEW**

It is Hillsborough County’s (“County”) intention and desire to strengthen and promote community-wide Cultural Assets through the Cultural Assets Commission (“Commission”) which is charged with growing and supporting Special Events (“Events”) that encourage place- making and community-building via the Special Events Partnership Grant Program (“SEPG Program”). The SEPG Program is a grant award that supports Arts and Cultural Events (“Events”) held in the County and is available only to nonprofit organizations. These Events communicate the authentic County story, activate public spaces, enrich the lives of residents, and leverage private sector financial support while aligning to economic development objectives of achieving greater patron spending and maximizing visitation to our market.

**The County does not intend for this program to support charitable fundraisers.**

### **ELIGIBILITY**

To be eligible for SEPG Program funding, the applicant must be a nonprofit organization classified by the Internal Revenue Service as a tax-exempt, charitable organization under one of the following sections of the United States Internal Revenue Code: 501(c)(3), 501(c)(4), or 501(c)(6). To be an eligible project, the Event must:

- Be a one-day event, a multi-day event occurring on consecutive days, or a related series of events over an extended period.

- Be inclusive (no barriers on who may purchase tickets or attend).
- Take place in Hillsborough County.
- Be held in a publicly visible and accessible location.
- Not already receive County funding through certain County programs offered by the Arts Council of Hillsborough County or through other direct County funding arrangements. (Refer to the “Leveraging County Funding” section of this policy.)
- Be ticketed or non-ticketed.
- **Charitable fundraising events are not eligible for this grant.**

**Examples of Eligible Events:**

- Art Festivals
- Local Food Festivals
- River Celebration Events
- Film Festivals
- Celebration of Local Authors
- Music Festivals
- Local Community
- Historic Events

**Examples of Ineligible Events:**

- Charitable Fundraisers
- Trade shows, conventions, conferences, workshops, classes, etc.
- Annual lunches, galas, conferences, holiday parties, etc.
- Class or family reunions
- Sporting Events
- Beauty pageants
- Events organized around political or religious purposes
- Festivals or events based solely on alcohol, drugs, sexually oriented content, etc.

**EVALUATION CRITERIA**

All applications will be evaluated according to the criteria below which relate to the applicant’s overall ability to successfully accomplish the program objective described earlier in these Grant Guidelines.

**Requirements**

This program is intended for new, emerging events and efforts to significantly expand the impact of existing events.

**Pilot Effort Special Event (“Pilot Effort”):**

The Pilot Effort category is intended for new and emerging events.

### **Established or Recurring Special Event (“Established or Recurring”):**

The Established or Recurring category is intended for established or recurring events that are seeking to grow and enhance their offerings above and beyond their current level to significantly increase attendance, community-wide impact, and appeal. It is the intent that County funds are used as investments to produce noticeable growth in the event’s impact to bring greater returns to the community.

### **IRS 990 Requirement**

All organizations must provide the most recently filed IRS form 990.

If you are a new organization and have not yet filed a 990, you may provide a letter of explanation with the following:

- Date the organization was formed,
- And acknowledgement that the organization will provide a 990 as soon as it is available.

### **POINTS AWARD CRITERIA**

The Cultural Assets Commission utilizes a points-based system to score each application based on the following criteria: (*Refer to SEPG Scoring Rubric for additional details.*)

#### **1. Ability to Strengthen and Promote Cultural Assets (25 Points)**

All applicants are required to indicate the cultural asset being supported through the event. Types of cultural assets include:

- Fine Arts
- Historic
- Natural and/or Recreational
- Lifestyle, Culinary, and/or Creative Industries

Describe the event, how it strengthens and promotes cultural assets, any partnerships the event encourages, and how your organization will measure the success of the event.

#### **2. Fiscal Responsibility and Organizational Capacity (25 Points)**

Details of the full budget for the event are required, including both revenue and expenses with descriptions of each. Additional information required in this section includes whether

the event is a new event or recurring event. If the event is recurring, how it will demonstrate growth and/or increased impact. Permit information for the event is also required.

### **3. Accessibility to the Public and Community Benefit (20 Points)**

Describe how the event is accessible to Hillsborough County residents and how the event will increase tourism revenue. A Safety Plan is required for the event. Examples of what this plan can address include a site map or plan of the event, crowd management, use of security personnel and other information that would support safety during the event.

### **4. Accessibility and Diversity of Local Vendors and Talent (15 Points)**

Describe how your event will utilize local talent and entertainment, and local vendors and small businesses for support of the event. Provide the economic impact of using local talent and vendors including the return on investment to the community.

### **5. Marketing and Public Relations Plan (15 Points)**

A complete Marketing and Public Relations Plan can be uploaded, if it is available. Otherwise, please select marketing methods used to promote the event, indicate the percentage of budget going toward marketing, intended audience and post-event marketing.

## **FUNDING**

There are four (4) funding categories based on the applicant's **Estimated Cash Expenses per the Event budget** and ratio for required matching funds:

### **CATEGORY 1 (MICRO EVENT):**

- Total Event Estimated Cash Expenses are less than \$50,000
- Required match of 1:1 (Applicant: County)

### **CATEGORY 2:**

- Total event Estimated Cash Expenses between \$50,001 to \$100,000
- Required match of 2:1 (Applicant: County)

### **CATEGORY 3:**

- Total event Estimated Cash Expenses is between \$100,001 to \$500,000
- Required match of 3:1 (Applicant: County)

#### **CATEGORY 4:**

- Total event Estimated Cash Expenses is above \$500,001
- Required match of 4:1 (Applicant: County)

Applicants will be automatically assigned to the appropriate category after review of applications. **The maximum grant award amount per event available for applicants is \$100,000.**

The SEPG Program is intended for Events that are seeking to grow and enhance their offerings above and beyond their current level to significantly increase attendance, community-wide impact, and appeal. It is the intent that these partnerships are the County's financial investments for noticeable growth in the Event's impact to the community. For repeat applicants, past performance and key reporting data from past events will be taken into consideration when evaluating applications by the Cultural Assets Commission.

#### **Leveraging County Funding**

One of the major objectives of this grant program is to achieve funding transparency by combining previous sources of County funding for existing events into one combined ask as part of the Cultural Assets Program funding award. It is encouraged that the applicant considers this Program as a "one-stop shop" for County funding support for their organization's event.

If the Applicant organization currently receives funding through the Arts Council of Hillsborough County's ("Arts Council") Cultural Development Grant Program, then the Applicant is ineligible to accept an award from the SEPG Program. However, the Applicant has the right to decline any funding offered by the Arts Council through the above-named program, making the Applicant eligible to accept an award of funds from the SEPG Program. The Applicant organization can also accept sponsorships from Visit Tampa Bay (or any County-funded organization). A sponsorship for the sake of these guidelines is defined as funding offered by that County-funded organization for purposes of a specific event.

#### **Required Matching Funds**

Applicants must demonstrate a leveraging of the County's investment such that the ratio of other support (funding derived from non-County sources) for event costs to County investment meets the required match for the appropriate funding category. For example, if an event has Estimated Cash Expenses of \$100,000, then the applicant falls under Category 2, and the maximum grant amount the applicant is eligible for is \$33,333.

#### **Disbursement of Funds**

Grant award funds will be disbursed to the Applicant in three (3) installment payments (Payment One, Payment Two, and Payment Three) as follows:

### Payment One:

The Awardee can request installment Payment One prior to the date of the Event in an amount not to exceed forty percent (40%) of the Applicant's approved grant award. In order to receive Payment One, the Awardee must submit to the County a fully completed Exhibit C, Request for Payment Form, Exhibit D, Performance Report, and a pre-event report to include such items as: evidence of securing venue, proposed event schedule, update on talent or entertainment programming, and any material revisions to the budget or Marketing Plan for the event.

### Payment Two:

The Awardee can request installment Payment Two after the Event has occurred in an amount not to exceed forty percent (40%) of the Applicant's approved grant award. In order to receive Payment Two, the Awardee must submit to the County a fully completed Exhibit C, Request for Payment Form, Exhibit D, Performance Report, an event attendance report and evidence the Event occurred. Event Attendance Reports should include information such as number of attendees, number of vendors, and summary of programmed activities, as appropriate. Documentary evidence such as video links, programs, handouts, flyer would be sufficient documentation.

### Payment Three:

The Awardee can request installment Payment Three only after the event described in Exhibit A, Special Events Partnership Grant Program Application, has occurred. In order to receive Payment Three, the Awardee must submit to the County a fully completed Exhibit C, Request for Payment form, Exhibit D, Performance Report, and a financial report to include all actual event-related revenues and cash expenses, final number of attendees and number of vendors.

**\*If final event cash expenses deviate substantially from the event Estimated Cash Expenses submitted with the Awardee's application, or as revised as part of installment Payment One, the County, in its sole discretion, may reduce the final payment. Prior performance of applicants will be considered in future award cycles.**

### Timing of Payment

All requests for payments, including the final request for payment, must be submitted to the County within sixty (60) days of completion of the Event. Requests for payment submitted after this date will not be honored.

### Event Cancellation

If under any circumstance the Applicant fails to hold the Event and Payment One has been paid by the County, then, in lieu of paying the funds back to the County, any future proposals for events and/or awards to the Applicant may be reduced by up to the full amount of Payment One. Payment Two and Payment Three are only available after completion of the Event.

## **Grant Time Limits**

Funding for an approved Event is limited to the period it is proposed and budgeted in the application and/or subsequent Agreement. Extensions are granted only in special cases and should receive prior written approval from the County. However, payments may be requested consistent with the payment schedule described above and with the required documentation.

There are two (2) funding cycles per fiscal year under this grant program. Applicants who apply for and receive funding in Cycle 1 (application period typically opens in June/July) are also eligible to apply for and receive funding in Cycle 2 (application period typically opens in January/February). However, all events must occur between October 1, 2024, through September 30, 2025, the County Fiscal Year. For example, the application period for Cycle 1 closes in August of 2024, therefore projects must occur between October 1, 2024, to September 30, 2025. Likewise, the application period for Cycle 2 is open between January 6 to 24, 2025, and events must still occur by September 30, 2025.

## **APPLICATION PROCESS**

### **Application Development**

The application for this program may be modified from time to time as deemed necessary.

Applications are completed online through the Neighborly Software program.

All grant applications are required to be submitted by the deadline.

Applicants will need to create a login to access the participant portal and the grant application.

### **Call for Applications/Funding Cycle**

A call for applications (“Funding Cycle”) occurs at least twice every fiscal year.

### **Application Deadlines**

Applications that are not received by the County’s posted application deadline will be considered LATE and will NOT be eligible for consideration.

### **Courtesy Meeting**

A pre-application courtesy meeting (“Courtesy Meeting”) is an opportunity for Staff, after having received the applicant’s draft application in sufficient amount of time to review the applicant’s draft application, to offer suggestions and ask questions prior to the application being officially submitted. Staff has the authority to make Courtesy Meetings mandatory to be

an eligible applicant, or strongly encouraged of eligible applicants. The Courtesy Meeting is a service and in no way guarantees that an application will be recommended for funding by the Cultural Assets Commission. The Courtesy Meeting period is available for the first week of applications opening, however, meetings prior to the official Courtesy Meeting period will also be available for applicants who have drafted an application before the grant application period begins. Please contact Staff to schedule a meeting.

### **Application Review**

Staff will review all applications received during a Funding Cycle for completeness and consistency with the program objectives. Additional information may be requested by Staff at any time during the internal review process. Failure on the part of the applicant to provide information at any time during the application review will result in rejection of the application from the Funding Cycle in which it was originally submitted.

### **Award Process**

The Cultural Assets Commission (CAC) will review all applications and decide on funding recommendations at a publicly noticed meeting. The CAC's recommendations will then be forwarded to the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) for final approval. The BOCC has full discretion and authority when deciding final funding amounts regardless of the CAC's recommendations.

The CAC will score applications based on the following Five (5) criteria:

1. Ability to Strengthen and Promote Cultural Assets - 25 Points
2. Fiscal Responsibility and Organizational Capacity – 25 Points
3. Accessibility to the Public and Community Benefit -- 20 Points
4. Accessibility and Diversity of Local Vendors and Talent – 15 Points
5. Marketing and Public Relations Plan -- 15 Points

A point system is used to score applications, earning a maximum number of points as indicated above for each category for a maximum total score of 100 points. An Applicant's final score is the average of individual scores submitted by each member of the Cultural Assets Commission. An applicant must receive a minimum score of 50 to be eligible for funding.

Achieving a minimum score of 50 does not guarantee that an applicant will receive funds, as funding will be distributed from highest score to lowest score until there is no longer funding available.



The award amount will be determined by the following formula:

**Step 1:**

**Estimated Cash Expenses ÷ Match Ratio = Maximum Possible Grant Award**

**Step 2:**

**(Maximum Possible Grant Award x CAC Average Score) ÷ 100 (Total Possible Score) = Recommended Award**

**Examples:**

Category	Match Ratio	Total Score (out of 100)	% of Median Score (out of 100%)	Estimated Cash Expenses Submitted in Application	Recommended Award
Category 1 - Micro Event (Estimated Cash Expenses less than \$50,000)	1:1 Match	98	98%	\$ 35,000.00	\$ 17,150.00
Category 2 - Small Event (Estimated Cash Expenses between \$50,001 to \$100,000)	2:1 Match	89	89%	\$ 65,000.00	\$ 19,283.33
Category 3 - Medium Event (Estimated Cash Expenses between \$100,001 to \$500,000)	3:1 Match	95	95%	\$ 385,000.00	\$ 91,437.50
Category 4 - Large Event (Estimated Cash Expenses over \$500,001) <sup>1</sup>	4:1 Match	97	97%	\$ 650,000.00	\$ 100,000.00

<sup>1</sup>The maximum grant award amount per event available for applicants is \$100,000.

**Funding Process (After approval by the CAC and the BOCC)**

The applicants selected to receive funding must enter into a formal Funding Agreement (“Agreement”) with the County. The Agreement specifies the dollar amount awarded, outcomes that will be measured, contract duration, the terms of payment and other terms and conditions.

**All Agreements must be approved by the Assistant County Administrator, Economic Prosperity and fully executed by both parties or the grant award is considered forfeited.**

**BOCC AUTHORITY**

The BOCC has full discretion and is the final authority as to the availability of Program funds and how available Program funds will be allotted.