



# **Festivals & Cultural Events Support Fund**

## **Program Guidelines**

Updated September 15, 2025

# INTRODUCTION

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Festivals & Cultural Events Support Fund was launched in 2016 by the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority (BCTDA) and is designed to provide financial support for events that both serve the residents of Buncombe County and the visitors that travel to the Asheville area for the sense of authenticity and welcoming spirit Asheville exudes.

The primary purposes of this fund are to:

- Support and preserve cultural identity within Buncombe County;
- Stimulate the creation of new or expansion of existing festivals and cultural events; and
- Contribute to the financial viability and long-term sustainability of the area's festivals and cultural events.

The Festivals & Cultural Events Support Fund uses a competitive application process. The number of grant awards is limited by available funds, which will vary from year to year and does not have to be fully appropriated.

The grant application process as outlined in this program guide is valid for festivals and cultural events occurring between January 1, 2026 and December 31, 2026. Although applicants will receive funding commitment notification in November 2025, funds will not be disbursed until after the successful completion of the event.

## SOURCE OF FUNDING

A bill filed in June 2022, by Senators Chuck Edwards, Warren Daniel, and Julie Mayfield and passed as HB1057 (effective July 2022) changed the occupancy tax split from 75% to be invested in travel promotion and 25% for community capital projects, to a split of two-thirds/one-third, increasing the percentage for community capital projects. This legislation also expanded the use of the travel promotion portion of occupancy tax revenue to be used to further the development of events in Buncombe County.

Prior to FY24, the Festivals & Cultural Events Support Fund was funded through advertising sales and reservations booked on ExploreAsheville.com.

# PROGRAM SPECIFICATIONS

## ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

### **Applicant Eligibility:**

- Must be a federally recognized non-profit organization based in Buncombe County

- If the applying organization is not a non-profit organization, the applicant may use a fiscal agent for their application. The fiscal agent must meet all applicant eligibility criteria.
- Organizational mission must be to conduct programs that benefit Buncombe County residents and visitors and have the potential to enhance the culture and vitality of Buncombe County

**Event Eligibility:**

- Event must take place within Buncombe County
- Event must occur between January 1, 2026, and December 31, 2026

## SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Applicants must provide the following required documents as attachments to their application:

- Sponsorship Deck (document outlining the benefits for all sponsorship levels of the event)
- List of applicant organization’s board of directors
- Event Budget (should include all anticipated expenses and revenues)
- Other Supporting Documentation (marketing Materials, media coverage of past events, photos/videos) – *Optional, but encouraged*

## EVALUATION CRITERIA

Applications will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Event & Audience Fit
  - Anticipated number of attendees (residents, regional, visitors)
  - Alignment with at least one BCTDA Strategic Pillar (See page 6)
  - Community interest
- Marketing Power
  - Details as to how event will be promoted (advertising, promotional partners, website, social media campaign, earned media potential)
- Event Viability & Community Support
  - Proven track record of successful event production and execution
  - Proof of other funding sources (tickets, sponsorships, grants, organizational)
  - Use of grant funds
  - Demonstrated support from the local community, local businesses, public-sector partners

## AWARD AMOUNT

Festivals & Cultural Events Support Fund awards will range from \$1,000 to \$5,000. The award amount will not exceed 50% of the total projected expenses.

## SPONSOR RECOGNITION

Grantee must display the designated Explore Asheville/BCTDA destination logo provided by Explore Asheville on materials, signage and online (including but not limited to social media posts) as appropriate and wherever sponsors are recognized for the Event. The use of the logo must be approved by Explore Asheville prior to public dissemination. Explore Asheville will provide logo files in print and web formats and the appropriate contact for seeking approval of its use.

## REPORTING

All grantees must submit a final report within 90 days of the event to receive disbursement of grant funds. The report includes information about attendance, financials, and execution of the event.

## DISBURSEMENT

Grant funds will be disbursed to the grantee only following the successful completion of the event and submission of a final report.

Each disbursement shall be:

- 1) a reimbursement based upon expenses actually expended
- 2) is limited to the grant amount as stated in the grant agreement; and
- 3) in no circumstances may the total amount disbursed exceed one half of the actual total event expenses.

## APPLICATION PROCESS

### APPLICATION TIMELINE

Date	Milestone
Monday, September 15, 2025	Application Opens
<b>Friday, October 17, 2025, 5:00PM</b>	<b>Application Closes</b>
<b>Wednesday, November 27, 2025</b>	<b>Funding Recommendations presented to BCTDA</b>

### SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

All applications must be submitted via the online application system. Handwritten applications will not be accepted.

All attachments must be submitted in the following formats: Adobe Acrobat (.pdf), Microsoft Excel (.xlsx). Images must be in (.jpg) or (.png) format. Any other formats will render the submission incomplete. All attachments should be named as directed in the application.

All applications will be recorded upon receipt and any applications received after the deadline will not be accepted.

Upon successful completion and submission of an application, a confirmation email will be sent to the email address provided in the application. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure the application was submitted.

## STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES

The Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority is charting a new course for tourism aligned with broader community priorities. This includes the adoption of strategic imperatives that are informing and guiding the direction of Explore Asheville's program of work and community investments going forward.

### 1. Delivering Balanced & Sustainable Growth

Balance resident and visitor needs, recognizing the necessary role that sustainable, long-term growth of travel has in achieving a healthy, collective economy. Focus on the quality of each visit to our community – balancing growth across the seasons, business and leisure travel, and throughout Asheville and Buncombe County.

Examples:

- Ability of event to attract out-of-town attendees for day trips and overnight visits
- Hosting event in needs period - off peak seasonally and midweek
- Ability to disburse visitors outside the core of downtown Asheville
- Providing employment opportunities for Buncombe County residents
- Sourcing from local Buncombe County-based vendors

### 2. Delivering Balanced & Sustainable Growth

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### 3. Encouraging Safe & Responsible Travel

Engage residents and visitors with shared values to care for and respect natural, cultural and human resources vital in delivering quality guest experiences. Collaborate with community organizations, local businesses, and environmentally focused partners to support the sustainability and growth of our outdoor economy.

Examples:

- Incorporation of sustainability principles in production of event
- Incentives provided to vendors and/or attendees to embrace environmental measures
- Strategic partnerships with local nonprofits whose mission is to serve the natural, cultural, or human resources in the region

#### **4. Engaging & Inviting More Diverse Audiences**

Extend a genuine invitation to Black travelers and other diverse audiences including LGBTQIA+ visitors – connecting them with local neighborhoods, businesses, and entrepreneurs – creating more opportunities for all to win. Support product development, place making and community connections, enabling new experiences and business opportunities throughout our community.

Examples:

- Ability of event to appeal to diverse audiences
- Percentage of opportunities afforded to minority-owned businesses
- Strategic partnerships with local nonprofits whose mission is to support underserved and underrepresented segments of the community

#### **5. Promoting & Supporting Asheville's Creative Spirit**

Share stories of creators and makers who help differentiate our destination through food and drink, visual and performing arts, experiences and more. Support product development, place making and community connections, enabling new experiences and business opportunities throughout our community.

Examples:

- Demonstration of what makes the event stand out from other events in Buncombe County or in the region
- Ways in which the event will contribute to the cultural identity and vibrancy of Buncombe County
- The extent to which the festival or cultural event is anticipated to enhance the local community and/or economy
- Percentage of opportunities afforded to local creative individuals or businesses

## **GRANT AGREEMENT REQUIREMENTS**

Grant agreements will be developed for each awarded event in the weeks following award announcements. A standard agreement will be made available for reference by request during the application process.

Applicants will be asked to acknowledge and certify the following statements as part of the application process and within their grant agreement:

### **SPONSOR RECOGNITION**

All festivals and cultural events receiving grant support must display the designated Asheville

destination logo provided by Explore Asheville on materials and signage as appropriate and wherever sponsors are recognized. The use of the logo must be approved by Explore Asheville prior to public dissemination.

### **DISCLOSURE FOR PUBLIC RECORD**

As a governmental agency, Explore Asheville is subject to Chapter 132 of the North Carolina General Assembly Statutes. Therefore, any and all aspects of this application, except qualified trade secrets as described in Section V(c) below, must be made available by Explore Asheville to any party, public or private, upon request without exception. If you are concerned that the distribution of any of your application materials may do irreparable damage to you, your organization, or associated parties, Explore Asheville highly recommends that you seek alternative funding.

### **PROJECT MONITORING**

I hereby acknowledge that if I am awarded Festivals and Cultural Events Support Funds, I will be required to submit a final report within two months of the event's last scheduled date. This report will include attendance numbers, final actual-to-budget figures and a narrative of the event's success. The report is provided with grant award notification.

### **BUNCOMBE COUNTY TDA MARKETING**

I hereby acknowledge that certain information from my application, such as the Event's Description and Partners & Leadership, may be used by Explore Asheville at its sole discretion for the promotion and marketing of the Festivals and Cultural Events Support Fund program and the region as a tourism destination.

### **INDEMNITY**

Grantee agrees, to the fullest extent permitted by law, to defend, indemnify, and hold harmless BCTDA and Explore Asheville, its officers, directors, affiliates, employees, and agents, from and against any and all claims, liabilities, losses and expenses (including reasonable attorney's fees) directly, indirectly, wholly or partially arising from or in connection with any act or omission of Grantee, its employees or agents, in applying for or accepting the grant, in expending or applying Grant funds or in carrying out the festival or event as set forth in the proposal.

## **ABOUT US**

Established by legislation in 1983, the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority is a public authority charged with marketing Buncombe County as a tourism destination and administering its tourism product development fund.

### **BCTDA Board Members**

The Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority is a board of eleven volunteers appointed to oversee the use of occupancy tax revenues as directed by North Carolina law. Four members are

appointed by Asheville City Council, four by the Buncombe County Commission, and one by the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce. Six members represent accommodations who collect the tax and three are from non-lodging, tourism-related businesses. A Buncombe County Commissioner and an Asheville City Council Member serve as non-voting, ex-officio board members. The current members of the BCTDA are:

**Matthew Lehman, *Chair***

The Grand Bohemian Asheville  
City Appointed

**HP Patel, *Vice Chair***

BCA Hotels  
County Appointed

**Lucious Wilson, *Treasurer of the Nonprofit***

Wedge Brewery  
City Appointed

**Tim Rosebrock**

Biltmore  
Chamber Appointed

**Brenda Durden**

Asheville Hotel Group  
County Appointed

**Elizabeth Putnam**

Mosaic Community Lifestyle Realty  
County Appointed

**Michael Lusick**

FIRC Group, Inc.  
City Appointed

**Amy Kelly**

Hatteras Sky  
City Appointed

**Himanshu Karvir**

Virtelle Hospitality  
County Appointed

**Vice Mayor Antanette Mosley**

Asheville City Council  
Ex-Officio Member

**Commissioner Terri Wells**

Buncombe County Commission  
Ex-Officio Member

## STAFF

Explore Asheville provides support for the Festivals & Cultural Events Support Fund process on behalf of the BCTDA. If you have any questions, please contact Allison Bashford, Grants Manager ([abashford@exploreasheville.com](mailto:abashford@exploreasheville.com)).