



Tourism Marketing Support Program Authorization

Supporting Tourism Partnerships

Requesting Commission authorization for the Executive Director to execute contract agreements and implement the 2024-25 Tourism Marketing Support Program in an amount not to exceed \$600,000.

Background

The Port's Tourism Marketing Grant program was established in 2016 to

1. Drive out-of-state visitor-spending to the region
 2. Increase the economic impact of Port facilities such as SEA Airport and cruise terminals
- Over the past eight years the Port's Tourism Marketing Support Program (TMSP) has helped fund \$2,315,428 of marketing efforts through 178 grants statewide.
 - Initially the Port invested \$100,000 per year into these partnership grants. We increased Port funding to \$200,000 in 2018
 - The evaluation criteria were first modified in 2018 to put emphasis on eco and cultural tourism.

RCW 53.08.255

Tourism promotion and tourism-related facilities authorized

Any port district in this state, acting through its commission, **has power to expend moneys and conduct promotion of resources and facilities in the district or general area** by advertising, publicizing, or otherwise distributing information **to attract visitors and encourage tourist expansion.**

Grant Details

2016-2023

178 grants awarded

Maximum \$10k (2:1 match)

\$1,276,114 in actual funds paid

\$1,039,315 in actual match funds

Funded Projects

Each applicant provides a detailed description that outlines the project's objectives, how it delivers on Port goals, and the key metrics which will be submitted as part of the final report. Projects have included:

- Digital Campaigns/Advertising
- Media and Travel Trade Familiarization Tours
- Event Promotion
- Content Creation
- Visitor Transportation Enhancement
- Industry Events

Regional Breakdown

- Seattle/King County – 41%
- Western WA – 37%
- Central WA – 20%
- Eastern WA – 12%

Project Focus

Emphasis on Port priorities has been increased over the years and the proposed changes for 2024 will provide even greater clarity.

Focus	All-Time	2023
DEI	30%	55%
Eco-tourism	20%	27%
Shoulder Season	12%	9%
Cultural Organizations	10%	18%

Note: Does not total 100%. Some projects encompassed more than one of the themes, others none.

Program Evaluation

- Over the past eight months the Tourism Department has engaged with current, former and potential TMSP grant recipients to gather feedback about their experience with the program.
- In general, TMSP is a very well-received program, but some challenges were identified, especially from smaller organizations. These obstacles included:
 - **Inflation** and increased costs have lessened the impact of received funds
 - **Short window** to execute marketing plans eliminated shoulder seasons and limited scope of projects
 - Evaluation scorecard did not clearly reflect Port's DEI and sustainability priorities
 - Focus on "new" programs created more work and lessened impact of current programs in need of enhancement
 - Low match contribution levels allowed for admin of projects impacted smaller organizations' ability to participate
 - Notification of the program and the application window

Moving Forward – Key Refinements to 2024/25 Program

1. Converting to a two-year grant program
2. Increase the maximum award for grants to \$20k and creating a second tier of grants at \$10k
 - Second tier grant to provide greater access for smaller, cultural organizations that may not have the capacity to apply for the first tier grant.
 - Provides additional time and help with applications and project scoping
3. Moving and expanding the window of time to execute projects to encourage visitation during shoulder seasons and other need periods
4. Modifying the evaluation process to further emphasize diversity, equity and inclusion and other Port priorities
5. Increasing outreach to encourage applications, cultivate inclusion and provide support throughout

The main goal of the program remains unchanged: To drive visitor-related spending to the region through the use of Port facilities.

Two-Tiers of Grants

Tier One – Up to \$20k

- For larger organizations (DMOs, major attractions, chambers of commerce, etc.)
- 2:1 match, Port funds to actual funds
- Open to all applicants

Tier Two – Up to \$10k

- Designed for smaller, arts, and culturally-focused organizations whose missions specifically address diversity, equity and inclusion and that may not have the capacity or resources to participate in the Tier 1 program.
- 2:1 match, Port funds to actual funds
- Admin/staff time can account for up to 50% of actual match funds.

MAXIMUM TOTAL FOR ALL GRANTS - \$600k over 2 years, Increased from \$200k per year to provide greater impact and help overcome increased costs.

Benefits of a Two-Year Program

- Provides more time to execute projects and measure their impact
- Allows greater emphasis on shoulder season and other need periods, a key responsible tourism goal
- Allows Port staff more time to provide guidance through informational webinars and Q&A sessions.
- Increases program accessibility by creating longer application window
- Expands range of projects which can be executed

Updated Evaluation Process

The updated evaluation scorecard used by the evaluation panel clarifies Port priorities and provides increased emphasis on responsible tourism.

Current Evaluation Scoring

Criteria	Max. Value
Project Scope	50
Responsible Tourism/DEI	25
Clear Metrics	10
Community Collaboration	5
Project Sustainability	5
Shoulder Season Impact	5
Total	100

Updated Evaluation Scoring

Criteria	Max. Value
Overall Impact	40
Shoulder Season Impact	20
DEI Impact	20
Environmental	20
Total	100

Focus on Responsible Travel

The Port's Responsible Travel Handbook will be linked to the TMSP application process to provide guidance and inspiration for applicants as they design their marketing plans.

In an effort to advance conversations around tourism's impact on the environment, destination stewardship, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), the Port led a collaborative effort with statewide partners to develop this resource in 2023.

The contents provide practical guidance on how organizations can help usher in a better version of the tourism industry that works for all Washingtonians.



New Timeline

February 13, 2024 – Program Authorized by Commission

February 14, 2024 – Application Window Opens

Feb-March 2024 – Three Informational Sessions Held

End of March – Applications Due

April 2024 – Evaluation Panel Meets/Recipients Selected

April-June 2024 – Contracts Executed and Projects Begin

June 2024-Sep. 2025 – Check-ins, Support and Progress Reports

Dec 2025 – Final Deadline for Reports and Payments