



I. Background & Overview

Pinellas County collects a six-percent Tourist Development Tax ("Bed Tax") on all overnight tourism accommodations in the County. This tax is levied on customers of hotels, motels, condominiums, campgrounds, apartments and private homes that rent accommodations for less than six months in duration. The Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners ("BCC"), with input from the Tourist Development Council ("TDC"), has developed a Tourist Development Plan ("Plan") to guide how these proceeds are spent. Bed Taxes are spent, in large part, on marketing Pinellas County as a destination for leisure, business, conference, sports, film production, and other tourist travel. In support of these tourism marketing efforts, the Plan authorizes the expenditure of up to \$2,000,000 annually for: (i) marketing special events and programs; (ii) providing promotional or operating support for exhibits or programs provided by museums owned and operated by not-for-profit organizations and open to the public; (iii) providing promotional support for zoological parks that are owned and operated by not-for-profit organizations and open to the public; and (iv) event and program sponsorships.

One of the marketing programs administrated by Visit St. Petersburg/Clearwater ("VSPC") is the **Elite Event Funding Program** for events meeting the criteria to receive funding from TDT funds. The genesis of the Elite Event program was called "New Product" funding, which then became "Special Events" funding and is now operated under the current name. Prior to the New Products program, events were funded on an ad hoc basis. The New Product (now Elite Event) program was created with the intent to provide a more systematic means for funding applications, review and recommendations for funding. The goal moving forward is to continue the program to allow maximum 1) **consistency**; 2) **return on investment and sustainability of the individual events and the overall program**; and 3) **transparency**.

The County's fiscal year begins on October 1 and ends on September 30 of the following year. Therefore, applications for Elite Event funding are for annual events that are held within the next fiscal year after the application submittal date between October 1 and the following September 30. However, events that are annually held during either the last week of September or the first week of October are eligible to apply for funding for two annual events in those instances when both annual events fall within the same fiscal year.

II. Definitions

In the context of this tourism marketing/promotion program, the following definitions apply:

- A. "Elite Event" shall mean an organized sporting event, concert, exhibition, festival, fair, special event or celebration which is conducted according to a prearranged schedule that is generally less than seven (7) days in duration, and that: (i) is marketed to tourists that would consider visiting the destination and staying overnight to observe or participate in the Elite Event; and (ii) is conducted at a venue in Pinellas County, generating at least the minimum number of required room nights in Pinellas County and/or unique event attendees for funding eligibility as set out herein.
- B. "Marketing" shall mean advertising (print, electronic, digital, etc.), direct sales, public relations, promotions, or research, exclusive of professional fees and services, designed to increase tourist-related business activity from outside Pinellas County.
- C. "Sponsorship" shall mean a mutually beneficial business arrangement between VSPC, on behalf of the County, and an eligible applicant producing an Elite Event, wherein VSPC receives event assets and opportunities to promote VSPC brand and the Pinellas County destination not included in the Marketing Plan.
- D. "Tourist" shall mean a person who participates in trade or recreational activities outside the county of his/her residence and/or who rents or leases transient accommodations in Pinellas County as described in Section 125.0104(3)(a), Florida Statutes.
- E. "Unique Attendees" shall mean a single individual attending the event whether for a single day or multiple days. Examples of Unique Attendees:
- a worker issued a 2-day credential is considered one (1) Unique Attendee
 - an individual purchasing a 3-day package is considered one (1) Unique Attendee

III. Funding Categories & Eligibility

- A. Funding Categories are as follows:
- i. **Category I** – generates at least 50,000 “unique” paid, credentialed and/or otherwise documented attendees or over 15,000 room nights in Pinellas County with maximum funding eligibility up to \$200,000. Category 1 events must be broadcast on national television or other broadcast services such as cable, streaming services or other viewing platforms.
 - ii. **Category II** – generates at least 15,000 “unique” paid, credentialed and/or otherwise documented attendees or over 4,500 room nights in Pinellas County with maximum funding eligibility up to \$75,000.
 - iii. **Category III** - generates at least 10,000 “unique” paid, credentialed and/or otherwise documented attendees or over 3,000 room nights in Pinellas County with maximum funding eligibility up to \$25,000.
 - iv. **Category IV** - generates at least 7,500 “unique” paid, credentialed and/or otherwise documented attendees with maximum funding eligibility up to \$20,000.
 - v. **Category V**- a new event to Pinellas County with no local prior hotel room and/or attendance history which is required to meet Category I-IV consideration, with maximum funding eligibility up to \$15,000.00.
- B. To be considered eligible for funding, each applicant must:
- i. conduct, produce, manage, and/or operate an Elite Event at a location in Pinellas County;
 - ii. for Category I, II, and III events, generate the required room nights or unique attendees in Pinellas County as set forth herein,
 - iii. for Category IV events, generate the required attendees;
 - iv. For Category V submit completed application, including projected potential room nights/ expected “unique” attendees;
 - v. demonstrate it will attract Tourists to Pinellas County;
 - vi. provide Marketing and/or Sponsorship benefits that satisfies the Marketing rating criteria in Section V. C. and that has a media value equal to or greater than the funding awarded, as determined by VSPC and/or its advertising agency of record; and
 - vii. provide VSPC exclusivity as the only CVB and Destination Marketing Organization (“DMO”) recognized supporter of the Elite Event.

IV. Conditions of Funding

- A. Funds may only be used in accordance with Chapter 125, Florida Statutes for the Marketing and/or Sponsorship benefits as agreed upon with VSPC. Funds may not be used for event operating expenses, except and only to the extent any funds received by applicant are allocated by VSPC for sponsorship benefits.
- B. Applicants receiving Elite Event funding will be required to enter into and sign a Tourism Promotions Agreement prepared by the Pinellas County Attorney’s Office. This Agreement will include Marketing and/or Sponsorship benefits to be negotiated and received by VSPC.
- C. Applicant’s Marketing and/or Sponsorship proposal must have a direct correlation with VSPC’s targeted markets and should specifically indicate how that correlation exists.
- D. For Elite Events held between October 1 and December 31, expenditures incurred prior to the beginning of the fiscal year may be reimbursed in the fiscal year the Elite Event is held if expressly allowed in the Funding Agreement.
- E. By accepting Elite Event funding, the applicant agrees to allow the VSPC's staff and/or research firm of record access to the venue to conduct on site intercepts with attendees to determine the value of the event, festival, program, or project to tourism and its potential for future growth.
- F. Funding will be paid in a lump sum on a post-event basis or as otherwise provided in the Tourism Promotions Agreement, subject to submittal of a fully completed and signed **Post-Event Report Form and any other documentation** acceptable to VSPC.
- G. Elite Events utilizing Pinellas County property during their event must adhere to and abide by the County’s Special Events & Facilities Use Guide available at <http://www.pinellascounty.org/Events/pdf/Special-Events-Users-Guide.pdf>.

V. Application Process & Review

- A. Application Submittal.
- i. Each applicant must submit a fully completed **Funding Application** (“Application”) per the **Application Requirements & Instructions**.
 - ii. All Applications must be submitted by the deadline established in the **Program Process Flow Chart & Timeline**.
 - iii. Incomplete or late Applications may disqualify the applicant.
- B. Review & Evaluation Process.
- i. Staff review and evaluation .
 - a. Each application will be reviewed by VSPC staff and the County Attorney's office, as may be needed, to ensure compliance with state statutes, county ordinances and these Guidelines regarding proper usage of Bed Tax funds.
 - b. Select VSPC staff along with VSPC's advertising agency of record will evaluate each application using the criteria in these guidelines and determine the tourism and marketing value of the event.
 - ii. VSPC staff will then make its funding recommendations to the entire TDC who will then review and finalize their funding recommendations for BCC review and approval.
 - iii. BCC Review.
 - a. The BCC will review the funding recommendations of both VSPC staff and the TDC.
 - b. Funding recommendations and negotiations of funding agreement terms will not begin until BCC review and approval of those recommendations.
- C. Rating Criteria.
- i. Unique Attendees & Room Nights – Ability of the Elite Event to generate unique attendees (Category I, II, III, and IV) OR room nights in excess of the threshold established to be eligible for funding (Category I, II, and III).
 - ii. Marketing Plan – The value of the applicant’s proposed Marketing Plan in promoting Pinellas County as a tourist destination and the extent the value of the plan exceeds the funding request.
 - iii. Sponsorship Benefits – The value of the applicant’s proposed Sponsorship Benefits in promoting Pinellas County as a tourist destination and the extent the value of the benefits exceeds the funding request (includes onsite benefits).
 - iv. Economic impact - The financial effect an event will have on the local economy resulting from tourists.
 - v. Timing of Event: Peak vs. Offseason & Non-Conflicting – Timing of the Elite Event to coincide with non-peak or shoulder seasons in Pinellas County tourism. Preference will be given to Elite Events which occur during “off season” periods, including January 1 through February 15, May 1 through June 30, and September 1 through December 31. In addition, timing of the Elite Event should not conflict with other Elite Events or other special events taking place in Pinellas County.
 - vi. Event History & Community Support – Demonstration of widespread community support and charitable contributions by the Elite Event applicant that benefit the Pinellas County community. Ability of the Elite Event to fulfill any previous contractual obligations with Pinellas County. Ability of the Elite Event to attract high caliber and high profile artists, athletes and/or participants to perform and/or attend in Pinellas County. Ability of the Elite Event to enhance the overall image of Pinellas County.
- D. Program Timeline
- i. VSPC staff, with TDC approval, will annually establish a schedule for consideration and award of funding, which will generally comply with the following timeline:

March	Commence application process
April	Deadline for receipt of applications
May	Staff and advertising agency of record evaluation of applications
May/June	TDC reviews and considers proposed funding recommendations
June/July	BCC reviews and considers recommendations
July	VSPC staff negotiates terms of the funding agreements
 - ii. Each year’s timeline will be published and available online at <https://partners.visitstpeteclearwater.com/resource/funding-opportunities/elite-event-funding-program>.

VI. Key Documents

In addition to the Funding Guidelines, the Elite Event Funding Program is supported by other key documents, including:

- A. Program Overview
- B. Application Requirements & Instructions
- C. Funding Application
- D. Program Process Flow Chart & Timeline
- E. Post-Event Report Form
- F. Elite Event Funding Agreement