

**HOUSTON FIRST CORPORATION
MARKETING MATCHING GRANT PROGRAM
GRANT GUIDELINES AND APPLICATION INFORMATION**

GRANT PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Houston First Corporation (HFC) and its tourism marketing arm, Visit Houston, announce the second annual **Marketing Matching Grant Program**. The 2017 program will foster and encourage partnerships in the leisure tourism industry in Greater Houston and the surrounding counties. By providing a funding opportunity previously unavailable in our region, grants will assist partnering organizations in launching new and innovative marketing campaigns.

HFC's strategic tourism plan includes a focus on leisure tourism, regionalism, and marketing partnerships. The strategic plan recommends cooperative marketing programs, increased horizontal partnerships across tourism industry stakeholders, a commitment to actively market the region's assets to the leisure tourist, themed promotions, and advertising and public relations aimed at niche audiences.

The Marketing Matching Grant Program is designed to:

- Increase tourism revenues and economic benefit through unique and effective marketing opportunities
- Increase out-of-market visitation by strengthening the region's image as a competitive, attractive, culturally-rich and diverse destination
- Leverage limited marketing dollars, resulting in increased visitor attendance, spending, revenue, and jobs
- Combine HFC resources (financial and technical) with those of tourism partners to extend and amplify the region's collective marketing efforts
- Encourage the development of innovative and active tourism marketing programs by attractions, the hospitality industry, and the corporate community
- Promote collaborations within and across sectors of the tourism industry
- Encourage creativity and the creation of projects beyond those normally offered
- Support projects that reach targeted niche markets
- Contribute to the development and improvement of local communities through enhancement, expansion, and promotion of the leisure tourism industry

The Marketing Matching Grant Program provides applicants with a unique opportunity to:

- Access significant grant dollars to be used for leisure tourism marketing
- Develop beneficial marketing partnerships
- Extend marketing plans to additional audiences and to wider geographic areas beyond what might be possible with a single organization's marketing budget
- Enhance your organization's ability to attract leisure visitors with expanded offerings
- Create packages that are attractive to your tourism audience
- Play a significant role in the region's commitment to leisure tourism

SUMMARY OF GRANT APPLICATION PROCESS

Organizations should read the guidelines carefully to determine eligibility and responsibilities of grant applicants. HFC encourages organizations to be creative in conceiving new marketing initiatives and identifying entities in the tourism industry to serve as partners, including hotels, restaurants, DMOs, historical sites, museums, recreational facilities, etc. Each marketing program submitted should have one “Lead Organization” partner that will administer the grant and interface with HFC staff.

Applicants must complete an initial Letter of Intent (LOI) using HFC’s online grant portal, accessed at www.visithouston.com/matchinggrant. LOIs will be accepted between July 11, 2016 and September 2, 2016. HFC staff will review LOIs on a rolling basis and issue invitations to organizations to submit a grant application. Grant applications are due **September 30, 2016**.

FUNDING AND SUPPORT PROVIDED

HFC is investing \$275,000 in the 2017 Marketing Matching Grant Program. Grant requests should be between \$10,000 and \$25,000. HFC reserves the right to award less than the requested amount. Organizations and programs that received a Marketing Matching Grant for 2016 are eligible to apply for the 2017 program.

MATCHING FUNDS REQUIREMENTS

- Applicants must match the grant award dollar-for-dollar
- Up to 25 percent of the applicant’s match may be in-kind, subject to the exclusions listed below. For example, a total marketing budget of \$50,000 with a \$25,000 HFC grant may have no more than \$6,250 of in-kind team support. The remaining \$18,750 must be a cash match
- Special consideration will be given to applications requesting less than a 1:1 match

DISBURSEMENT OF FUNDS

The Marketing Matching Grant Program is intended to reimburse grant recipients for documented marketing costs incurred to implement their program. To recognize the financial commitment of partners, HFC will provide an amount equal to ten percent of the total grant award to the Lead Organization at the time of the public award event. Thereafter, grant recipients will be required to submit a request for reimbursement via the online reimbursement form, supported by invoices detailing all marketing expenses incurred. The first invoices submitted will be applied against the ten percent initial payment.

Interim reimbursements should be submitted no more than once per month. Interim requests will be funded at 50 percent of documented value to prevent over-funding a project that does not fulfill its commitments. Reimbursements will be made by check to Lead Organizations, not

to program partners. Reimbursement requests made after project completion accompanied by documented expenditures will be funded up to the full value of the grant award.

ELIGIBILITY

Eligible Applicants:

- Location: Organizations located in Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land MSA including the city of Houston, the city of Galveston, and fourteen counties including Harris, Austin, Brazoria, Chambers, Fayette, Fort Bend, Galveston, Jefferson, Liberty, Matagorda, Montgomery, Walker, Waller, and Washington
- Partnerships: A partnership of two or more organizations with significant interest in the promotion of a tourist destination, attraction, or event in a defined region. Projects involving three or more partners demonstrating strong collaboration will be looked upon favorably
- Type: Businesses and non-profits; at least one non-profit partner, DMO or governmental tourism partner is required in each proposed project. The non-profit partner should be an organization supporting tourism; e.g., museum, arts group, or cultural center. It is not intended for the non-profit to be a net recipient of funds
- Please note: Applicants are required to include a hotel property as a project partner
- Participants may be large or small organizations and partnerships may be based upon geographic similarities, traveler behaviors, cultural identities, program themes, infrastructure links, etc. The concept of “region” is not necessarily confined to a single county. Applicants are encouraged to demonstrate strong alliances through collaboration with other partners and communities

Eligible Project Characteristics:

- Itinerary-based projects linking existing destinations/attractions based on a common theme
- Events generating large, out-of-market visitation
- Niche offerings aimed at important markets
- Programming during traditionally slow tourism periods
- Projects showcasing the region’s image and providing significant exposure of its assets
- Preferably targeted to visitors traveling more than 150 miles to attend an event or activity and including discounts or other value pricing

Potential Uses for Matching Grants

Marketing Matching Grant Funds may be used for a single marketing project or in combination with other efforts in a full marketing campaign. Examples of eligible uses of grant funds include:

- Public relations
- Paid advertising production and placement (for recognized and audited out-of-region media)
- Social media campaign

- Web site development /enhancement and/or search engine optimization targeted to leisure tourists
- Web-based marketing
- Video/CD /DVD production
- Printing and mailing costs for collateral materials including guides, directories and direct mail campaigns
- Promotional activities
- International marketing opportunities
- Special marketing opportunities (Familiarization [“FAM”] tours)

Applicants are encouraged to use good faith efforts to award marketing contracts equal to 30 percent of the HFC matching grant amount to certified diverse suppliers of goods and services in accordance with the Contractor Diversity Program established by HFC. Grantees shall disclose to HFC the manner and extent to which it has made good faith efforts to achieve such goal.

Grant Funds May Not Be Used For:

- Capital investments
- Asset development/ product enhancement
- Salary support, personnel costs
- Strategic plan development
- Lobbying
- Funding of existing marketing programs
- Tradeshow registration fees, booth rentals/educational conferences, membership dues
- Travel costs (food, lodging, entertainment)
- Database development
- Market research to identify target markets
- Outdoor advertising and other unaudited media
- Facility rental/insurance
- Purchase or rental of equipment or supplies
- Food or alcoholic beverages
- Items for resale
- Operating costs (including web hosting and domain registration)
- Wayfinding (signage, maps, trails)

Grant Program Implementation

The marketing project must be completed within twelve months of the award announcement.

MARKETING MATCHING GRANT PROGRAM TIMETABLE

July 11, 2016	Online Letter of Intent application available. Inquiries answered by phone/email
July 19, 2016	Grant writing seminar sponsored by HFC
August 11, 2016	Grant writing seminar sponsored by HFC
September 2, 2016	Deadline for submission of Letter of Intent
SEPTEMBER 30, 2016	DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS
October 7, 2016	HFC Working Group reviews applications and advises those that need more information
October 24, 2016	Final applications reviewed by Working Group and finalists selected
October 27, 2016	Finalists reviewed by HFC Board Tourism Committee
First-Half November, 2016	Decision date followed by notification to successful applicants
November 2016	Letters of Agreement issued to awardees
December 12, 2016	Fully executed Letters of Agreement from awardees due to HFC
Early January	Award event to announce grant recipients publicly
January 2017 -- December 31, 2017	Time period for implementation of awarded project
March 1, 2018	Final reports due to HFC for full year 2017 projects

HFC will offer an optional grant writing seminar on July 19 and August 11 to answer questions, provide grant writing best practices and a thorough overview of the grant application. The seminar will follow the same agenda on both days. Please see www.visithouston.com/matchinggrant for details and registration.

APPLICATIONS

Submission Guidelines

- Only online applications will be accepted. Detailed instructions for registering and using the online grant system should be reviewed prior to beginning your grant application. All support materials must be uploaded via the online portal. No hard copies of the application or support materials will be accepted.
- Each application must be submitted by a Lead Organization with letters of commitment from other project partners
- An organization may serve as a Lead Organization for one grant project per Marketing Matching Grant Program cycle. That same organization may be a participating partner in other projects sponsored by a different lead organization
- Definition of a visitor is someone traveling more than 150 miles to attend an event or activity
- Letters of support are strongly suggested from partners other than those named in the grant application and can be uploaded in the online portal
- Applicants may be awarded less funding than requested
- Project activities may not begin until the Letter of Agreement has been executed and signed by HFC
- Organizations awarded a Marketing Matching Grant by HFC in 2016 are eligible to apply again for the 2017 program.

Application Form

Applicants should be prepared with the following information:

- Lead Organization and Project Partner information including name, address, phone, email, website address
- Primary contact person and individual responsible for program implementation
- Lead Organization CEO, number of employees, number of volunteers, IRS tax ID number
- Name, type and role of all project partners
- Beginning and ending date of the event/project being marketed
- Project budget and project marketing budget
- Type and elements of the marketing plan, including timetable for implementation
- Primary target markets
- Marketing plan goals
- Marketing plan expected outcomes
- Planned media schedule
- Amount requested
- Summary of proposed project including a description of how the project will help increase visitation to and enhance the image of the applicant/region

Required Attachments

- Letters of Commitment from all partners signed by chief executive on official letterhead
- IRS determination letter for all 501(c) partners
- Current annual budget for all partners, other than hotels
- Board of Directors list for all partners, other than hotels

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATIVE CONTACT

The HFC contact for the Marketing Matching Grant is Gail Benyacine. She can be reached via email: matchinggrant@visithouston.com.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Award Criteria

Applications will be reviewed with consideration given toward those that show:

- Potential to attract a significant number of visitors from outside the region (i.e. preferably visitors traveling from more than 150 miles away)
- High level of innovation in programming and partnerships
- Strong marketing plan
- Track record in producing high quality and effective marketing materials
- Evidence of ongoing commitment to a professional marketing program
- Consistency with HFC’s leisure tourism marketing/advertising efforts
- Commitment to attracting a diverse audience

Point System: Maximum points available are **125**.

Points are awarded for:

- | | |
|---|------------|
| • Program description (completeness, creativity, innovation) | 25 |
| • Experience and financial ability of partners to carry out marketing plan | 25 |
| • Target audience(s) being served and specific call to action in marketing plan | 15 |
| • Marketing message, completeness of marketing plan and how well the program supports the HFC’s marketing initiatives | 25 |
| • Evidence of strong performance measures | <u>10</u> |
| | 100 |

Incentive points available:

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| • Projects with more than two partners | 5 |
| • Multiple sites included in project | 5 |
| • Applicant requesting less than 50% of the matching dollar amount | 5 |
| • Use of diverse suppliers | 5 |
| • One or more partners are members of GHCVB | <u>5</u> |
| | 25 |

Review of Application Process

Applications will be initially reviewed by HFC staff to determine if all required information has been submitted. An email message will be sent to the project contact when the application is received and complete. A Working Group of HFC staff and management will assess the applications using the established point system. Final award decisions are made by the HFC Board Tourism Committee.

GRANTEE OBLIGATIONS**Responsibilities**

- Sign Letter of Agreement binding the organization(s) to the terms and conditions set forth in the funding guidelines, project proposal and grant contract
- Hot link project on their web sites to Visit Houston.com web site
- Be available for press/award event to announce grant winners
- Obtain approval for media plan and advertising
- Provide materials (photos, descriptions, logos, etc.) for HFC to use in web listings
- Provide advertising and recognition opportunities for HFC's marketing efforts
- Provide tickets to events/exhibits (if appropriate) for VIPs who are designated by HFC
- List Visit Houston as a co-sponsor on all printed and electronic materials. Visit Houston participation must be included on all promotional coverage, with Visit Houston logo
- Participate in periodic reviews of program's progress
- Submit final report to HFC within 60 days after the conclusion of the marketing project, including copies of all promotional materials created and distribute. Report will be available through the online HFC portal.
- Assess/comment on the matching grants program at the end of the project period