

**HOUSTON FIRST CORPORATION
2018 TOURISM INCENTIVE PROGRAM
GUIDELINES AND APPLICATION INFORMATION**

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Houston First Corporation (HFC) and its tourism marketing arm, Visit Houston, are proud to announce the third annual **Tourism Incentive Program**. The initiative has been rebranded as “**TIP**” this year to more accurately reflect the nature of the program. HFC’s tourism business plan includes a focus on leisure tourism, regionalism and marketing partnerships. The TIP strives to encourage cooperative marketing programs, increased horizontal partnerships across tourism industry stakeholders, active marketing of the region’s assets to the leisure tourist, themed promotions, advertising, and public relations aimed at niche audiences. This year, HFC is investing \$275,000 to support the continued growth of this successful program.

The 2018 Tourism Incentive Program is designed to:

- Invest HFC technical and financial resources with tourism partners in the Greater Houston area to increase visitor attendance, spending, revenue, and jobs
- Provide matching marketing funds through a reimbursement of qualifying marketing paid expenses
- Encourage the development of innovative and collaborative tourism marketing programs by attractions, the hospitality industry and the corporate community
- Give special emphasis on increasing out-of-market (areas beyond 90 miles from Houston) visitation to Houston by strengthening the region’s image as a competitive, attractive, culturally-rich and diverse destination
- Encourage new program creativity and the creation of visitor experiences and tourist packages 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 2018 Tourism Incentive Program provides a unique opportunity to:

- Access significant matching funds to support new leisure tourism marketing
- Develop marketing partnerships within the hospitality industry to leverage each partner’s marketing efforts and tourism product
- Expand your marketing reach, reaching new geographic markets
- Expand your marketing scope, offering new leisure tourist experience packages
- Enhance your organization’s ability to attract leisure visitors
- Play a significant role in the region’s commitment to leisure tourism

Organizations must read the 2018 program and eligibility guidelines carefully to determine your eligibility and fully understand your responsibilities.

PROGRAM GUIDELINES

- Programs must market Greater Houston area experiences and/or packages to audiences living 90 miles or more outside of Houston
- HFC encourages organizations to be creative in conceiving new marketing initiatives and identifying entities in the tourism/ hospitality industry to serve as partners, including hotels, restaurants, DMOs, historical sites, museums and recreational facilities
- Each marketing program application must have one “Lead Organization” partner who will act as the administrator, submit the Letter of Intent (LOI), the full application, project results, reimbursement requests and interface with HFC staff in a timely manner.
- All applications (LOI & Full Applications), reimbursement requests and final report submissions must be made online at: www.visithouston.com/TIP
- TIP fund requests can be made for amounts between \$5,000 and \$25,000
- All applicants must be within 90 miles of the City of Houston
- Applicants must match their marketing award amounts 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 may have no more than \$6,250 of in-kind team support. The remaining \$18,750 must be a cash match.

ELIGIBILITY**Eligible Lead Organization Applicants and Partners:**

- Lead Organizations must accept administrative responsibility for their project
- Lead Organizations must secure two or more organizations with significant interest in the project and they must take an active role in its promotion. *Projects involving three or more partners demonstrating strong collaboration will receive bonus points.
- *Please note:* At least one partner must be a hotel. *Bonus evaluation points are given for hotel partners located in Houston
- Hotel partners must be able to accommodate tourists attending the program and actively market the program
- For profit businesses and non-profits can be included
- At least one non-profit partner, Destination Marketing Organization (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*
- Lead Organizations and partners may be large or small organizations. We suggest that in choosing partners you consider those 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 partners and communities.

Eligible Project Characteristics:

- Itinerary-based projects linking destinations/attractions based on a common theme
- Events generating large, out-of-market (beyond 90 miles) visitation to the Houston area
- Niche offerings aimed at important markets
- Projects showcasing the region's image and providing significant exposure of its assets
- Projects including discounts or other value pricing

Potential Uses for TIP Funds

TIP 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 matching 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 TIP funds award to certified diverse suppliers of goods and services in accordance with the Contractor Diversity Program established by HFC. Awardees shall disclose to HFC the manner and extent to which it has made good faith efforts to achieve diversity goals.

TIP 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)

2018 Tourism Incentive Program Implementation Requirement

The marketing project and tourism program must be completed by December 31st, 2018.

Disbursement of Award Funds

The Tourism Incentive Program reimburses awardees for documented paid 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 award to the Lead Organization at the time of the public award event. Thereafter, awardees will be required to submit a request for each reimbursement via the online reimbursement form, supported by paid invoices detailing all marketing expenses incurred. The first paid invoices submitted will be applied against the initial 10% payment.

- Reimbursement requests can be submitted only once per month.
- Reimbursements will be made by check and only issued to the Lead Organization.
- Reimbursements are calculated at 50% of the (submitted) paid qualifying marketing expense (i.e. lead organization submits \$10,000 of paid expenses, HFC reimburses \$5,000)
- The first qualifying marketing expenses will be applied against the initial 10% payment
- Final reimbursement requests must be received within 60 days of your program end date

Distribution of 2018 Tourism Incentive Program (TIP) Award Budget

- 70% of the TIP award budget will be awarded to programs administered and operated by participants in Houston, using a majority of attractions/ events/ activities located in Houston
- 20% of the TIP award budget will be awarded to programs administered and operated by "Visit Houston and Beyond" participants/ members
- 10% of the TIP award budget will be awarded to programs administered and operated by participants outside of Houston and not members of "Visit Houston and Beyond" but within 90 miles of the city

2018 TOURISM INCENTIVE PROGRAM TIMETABLE

July 14, 2017	Online Letter of Intent application available. Inquiries answered by phone/email
August 8, 2017	Application writing webinar sponsored by HFC
September 8, 2017	Deadline for submitting Letter of Intent
September 29, 2017	Deadline for submitting Full Applications
October 12, 2017	HFC Working Group reviews applications and advises those that need more information
October 17, 2017	Final applications reviewed by Working Group and finalists selected
October 19, 2017	Finalists reviewed by HFC Board Tourism Committee
First-Half November, 2017	Decision date followed by notification to successful applicants
November 2017	Letters of Agreement issued to awardees
December 8, 2017	Fully executed Letters of Agreement from awardees due to HFC
Early January	Award event to announce grant recipients publicly
January 2018 -- December 31, 2018	Time period for implementation of awarded project
60 Days following End of Project	Final project reports due to HFC

Application Form – Required 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, 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 Application Attachments

- Letters of Commitment from all partners signed by the CEO or assigned senior staff on official letterhead
- IRS determination letter for all 501(c) partners
- Current annual budget for the Lead Organization
- Board of Directors list for all partners
- Lead Organization's W-9

2018 Tourism Incentive Program Administrative Contact

The HFC contact for the Tourism Marketing Matching Funds Program is Ms. Gail Benyacine. She can be reached via email: TIP@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 (traveling from more than 90 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 three or more partners (not including the Lead)	5
• Projects with a Houston hotel partner	5
• Projects with at least one minority, woman, disabled business enterprise (MWDBE) owned & operated partner	5
• Projects with a MWDBE lead organization	5
• Projects that target a minority demographic in the USA	<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.

Awardee Obligations

- 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 & Houston First as co-sponsors on all printed and electronic materials. Visit Houston participation must be included on all promotional coverage, with Visit Houston & Houston First logos
- Participate in periodic reviews of program's progress
- Submit final report online to HFC within 60 days after the conclusion of the marketing project, including copies of all promotional materials created and distribute
- Assess/comment on the Tourism Incentive Program at the end of the project period