



2026 Marketing Grant Initiative - Key Information

Overview

Calloway County Tourism Commission is offering marketing grants to support tourism-related businesses and nonprofits within Calloway County, KY. These funds must be used exclusively for marketing and communications efforts aimed at attracting visitors from at least 50 miles outside of Calloway County. This grant is designed to help local organizations increase visitors to their business/organization and Calloway County as a whole and elevate brand awareness, thereby growing the tourism economy throughout Calloway County. For the purposes of this grant, a “tourism-related business” is defined as:

A business or nonprofit organization that directly contributes to the tourism industry by providing services or experiences for visitors. These include, but are not limited to, hotels, resorts, restaurants, event venues, attractions, museums, galleries, and performing arts venues. The key factor is that these entities attract, serve, or host visitors from outside Calloway County, Kentucky.

Grant Amount

Calloway County Tourism Commission is making a one-time commitment to this grant program and will fund the program from its marketing budget. For 2026, \$25,000 is available for distribution, and applicants may request up to \$5,000. Applicants may apply once per application period, January 1 – 30, 2026. The grant review committee may decide to award partial funding to an applicant. *This grant commitment is for 2026, and the Calloway County Tourism Commission will review its ability to and need for continuing this initiative in 2027 and beyond.*

Eligibility Requirements & Grant Guidelines

All applicants must meet the following criteria to be eligible to receive grant funding:

- Must be a business or nonprofit operating in the tourism industry within Calloway County, KY.
- Must be registered with the Kentucky Secretary of State.
- Must be current on all city, county, and state business licenses and taxes.
- Individuals are **not** eligible to apply.
- City or county governments, as well as their subunits and departments, are **not** eligible to apply.

Eligible Expenses (including but not limited to):

- Advertising (social media, print, TV, streaming, radio, digital campaigns, etc.)
- Rebranding (logo redesign, brand messaging updates, etc.)
- Website development (new site creation, user experience improvements, SEO, e-commerce enhancements, etc.)
- Photography and videography for marketing (lifestyle/staged photoshoots allowed, excluding generic staff headshots and product photography)
- Public relations agency retainers and influencer contracts (influencers should be based in or have an audience primarily in a target market outside of the 50-mile radius of Calloway County, KY)
- Print marketing collateral (brochures, rack cards, etc., excluding non-marketing materials like business cards or menus)
- Billboards and out-of-home advertising. Festival / event advertising (but not sponsorship or event hosting)
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Ineligible Expenses include:

- Capital expenses (e.g., building improvements, equipment, repairs, etc.)
- Salaries or wages
- Postage or freight
- Websites which contain third-party paid ads
- Travel or entertainment
- Resale items (e.g., merchandise)
- Office supplies, letterhead, business cards, etc.
- Bank, finance, or interest charges
- Signage with only the business name or parking directions
- Expenses for events located within Calloway County other than promotional / marketing costs intended to attract visitors from outside Calloway County
- Feasibility studies or capital project research
- Business directories or city maps
- Programs, playbills, table tents, flyers, or posters
- Prizes, trophies, painting supplies, decorations
- Any expense violating federal/state/local laws
- Funds may not be used for political campaigns, ballot initiatives, or lobbying

Marketing Requirements & Deadlines

- Advertising must be targeted at markets at least 50 miles outside Calloway County, KY.
- Target markets include (but are not limited to): Louisville, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Nashville, Chicago, St. Louis, Memphis.
- All marketing efforts must be completed, published or deployed by September 30, 2026.
- A marketing plan is required with the application.

Reporting Deadline

Final documentation is due by **October 31, 2026**, including:

- Receipts and invoices for all expenses
- Reimbursement of any unused funds.
- Ad tear sheets (print)
- Screenshots of digital ads
- Final report summarizing campaign performance (reach, traffic, KPIs)
- ***Failure to submit the required documentation and reimbursement of funds (if applicable) by the stated deadline may result in administrative action. This may include legal action or other corrective measures deemed necessary by the Calloway County Tourism Commission. By proceeding, you acknowledge that you understand these requirements and the potential consequences of non-compliance.***

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Grant Program Timeline

- Application deadline: January 30, 2026 (4:00 PM)
- Award notifications: February 18, 2026
- Funds postmarked by: February 27, 2026
- Project completion deadline: September 30, 2026
- Documentation deadline: October 31, 2026

NOTE: Funds, if granted, are awarded “up front”. Receipts must be retained as part of the documentation.

Grant Review Committee & Scoring Rubric

Review Committee & Award Procedure

The applications will be scored by a committee composed of the Calloway County Tourism Commission Executive Director and two (2) neutral third-party marketing, public relations, or tourism professionals.

The committee will evaluate applications in two stages. First, each committee member will review and score the applications independently. Each member’s scores will be averaged for each application. To be considered for approval, applications must receive an average score of at least 65 out of 100 available points.

The committee will identify applications it believes best demonstrate the need for the grant and then forward its recommendations to the Calloway County Tourism Commission board, which will vote in February 2026 to award grants based on the committee’s recommendations. A representative of the committee will notify all applicants of the committee and board decision after grant awards are determined no later than February 18, 2026.

Scoring Rubric

Category	Criteria	Points Available
Eligibility Review	Meets eligibility requirements as outlined in the application and grant information packet	Pass / Fail
Strength of Marketing Plan	Does the submitted marketing plan show consideration of grant requirements?	45 points available
<i>Clear Goals and Objectives</i>	<i>Are the goals and objectives of the project/plan/campaign clearly defined and outlined?</i>	<i>15 points</i>
<i>Target Audience & Market Strategy</i>	<i>Are the target markets and the strategy used to define the target markets clearly explained?</i>	<i>15 points</i>

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<i>Vendors</i>	<i>Has the applicant selected its preferred vendor for the project? Will the applicant use vendors based in Kentucky? *Kentucky-based vendors are recommended but not required.</i>	<i>7 points</i>
<i>Media Placement Plan</i>	<i>Is the media placement plan clearly defined? Does it meet the 50-mile distance requirement?</i>	<i>5 points</i>
<i>Creativity, Innovation, and Originality</i>	<i>Does the project/campaign plan show creativity, innovation, and originality?</i>	<i>3 points</i>
Campaign Budget	Does the applicant clearly define the project/campaign budget and justify the financial need for assistance?	20 points available
<i>Detailed Budget Breakdown</i>	<i>Does the supplied budget clearly define the cost associated with the project, including production, placement, and other associated costs?</i>	<i>10 points</i>
<i>Cost Effectiveness</i>	<i>Does the supplied budget show cost-effectiveness on behalf of the applicant?</i>	<i>10 points</i>
Impact and Measurable KPIs	Does the project/plan/campaign have a plan to track its impact? Are measurable KPIs identified? Will the project/plan/campaign have a positive impact on tourism?	15 points available
<i>Projected Impact on Tourism</i>	<i>Will the project/campaign/plan have a positive impact on tourism in Calloway County? Will it drive visitation to both the business/organization receiving the grant and Calloway County at large?</i>	<i>10 points</i>
<i>Measurable KPIs and Tracking</i>	<i>Does the applicant have the means to track the impact of the campaign? What is the applicant's plan to track key performance indicators, and which KPIs will the applicant track?</i>	<i>5 points</i>

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Applicant's Past Marketing Performance	Does the applicant have sufficient understanding or capability to undertake a marketing project/plan?	10 points available
<i>Past Success</i>	<i>Has the applicant run successful marketing campaigns in the past?</i>	<i>5 points</i>
<i>Organizational Readiness</i>	<i>Does the applicant have a marketing professional on staff or available to assist with this project?</i>	<i>5 points</i>
Financial Need & Organizational Budget	Does the applicant demonstrate sufficient financial need for the grant funds?	10 points available
<i>Annual Marketing Budget</i>	<i>Priority is given to organizations with smaller previous marketing budgets: \$0-\$10,000 = 10 points \$10,001-\$25,000 = 7 points \$25,001-\$50,000 = 5 points \$50,001+ = 3 points</i>	<i>10 points</i>
Total		100 points

Other Important Information

- **Re-Application:** Applicants who are denied funding may reapply in future grant cycles.
- **Matching Funds:** This grant cannot be used to match funds for another grant.
- **Acknowledgment Requirement:** All marketing materials funded by this grant must include the statement: "Funded in part by Calloway County Tourism Commission" and/or the Calloway County Tourism Commission logo.

How to Apply

To apply, visit <https://www.experiencekylake.com/marketing-grant/> For more information, contact Calloway County Tourism Commission at (270) 713-0110 or email jeremy@experiencekylake.com.

Application Process:

1. **Verify Eligibility:** Ensure your business is a tourism-related business within Calloway County.
2. **Develop Your Marketing Plan:** Include goals, target audience, and media strategy.
3. **Submit Your Application:** Complete the online application and email any additional documentation to jeremy@experiencekylake.com by January 30, 2026.
4. **Wait for Notification:** All applicants will be notified of award decisions by the close of business on February 18, 2026.

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Application Assistance

Calloway County Tourism Commission will assist or answer any questions regarding the grant program or the application. Email jeremy@experiencekylake.com or call (270) 713-0110.

A One-Page Marketing Plan form is available for any applicant who needs assistance in developing / formatting their plan. Use of this specific form is not required just as long as a Marketing Plan is submitted in addition to the application.

Addendum 1: Definitions

This section provides definitions and explanations for terms used throughout the Calloway County Tourism Commission Marketing Grant Initiative materials, ensuring clarity for applicants who may not be familiar with marketing or tourism industry terminology.

- **Tourism-Related Businesses:** A business or nonprofit organization that directly contributes to the tourism industry by providing services or experiences for visitors. These include, but are not limited to, hotels, resorts, restaurants, event venues, attractions, museums, galleries and performing arts venues. The key factor is that these entities attract, serve, or host visitors from outside Calloway County, Kentucky.
- **Marketing & Communications Efforts:** Activities aimed at promoting and increasing awareness of a business or destination through various forms of media, including advertising, public relations, content creation, and digital marketing. These efforts must target potential visitors from at least 50 miles outside Calloway County.
- **Target Markets:** Geographical areas or specific groups of people that a marketing campaign aims to attract. For this grant, target markets are visitors from regions outside Calloway County, including cities such as Louisville, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Nashville, Chicago, St. Louis and Memphis.
- **Rebranding:** The process of changing or updating the visual and messaging elements of a brand. This can include redesigning a logo, updating brand messaging, or altering the overall aesthetic to better align with current market trends or to reflect new business goals.
- **Billboards & Out-of-Home Advertising:** Forms of advertising that reach potential visitors while they are outside of their homes, such as billboard displays, transit advertisements (e.g., buses or subway ads), and posters in high-traffic public spaces.
- **Public Relations (PR):** Strategic communication efforts designed to build and maintain a positive image of an organization or business. PR may involve media relations, community engagement, influencer partnerships, and other strategies to shape public perception.
- **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):** Specific, measurable metrics used to evaluate the success of a marketing campaign. KPIs may include metrics such as website traffic, social media engagement, leads generated, or actual visitation rates.
- **Creative, Innovation, and Originality:** The assessment of how unique and inventive a proposed marketing campaign is. This includes evaluating new, non-traditional, or out-of-the-box ideas that could set the campaign apart from others.

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- **Capital Expenses:** Costs related to purchasing or improving long-term assets such as buildings, equipment, or infrastructure. These expenses are not eligible for funding under this grant, as the focus is on marketing and promotional efforts.
- **Eligibility Requirements:** Conditions that an applicant must meet to be considered for funding. For this grant, these include being a registered business or nonprofit, operating within Calloway County in a tourism-related field, and having all necessary licenses and taxes in good standing.
- **Matching Funds:** Funds that must be provided by the applicant to match the grant amount. This grant does not require matching funds from applicants.
- **Vendor Selection:** The process by which applicants choose third-party companies or professionals to assist with the marketing campaign (e.g., public relations firms, advertising agencies, graphic designers, web developers). Kentucky-based vendors are encouraged but not required.
- **Project Completion Deadline:** The final date by which all marketing activities funded by the grant must be completed, in this case, September 30, 2026. This ensures that the funds are utilized within the specified timeframe.
- **Ad Clips & Tear Sheets:** Clippings or proof of placement from advertisements showing that the ad ran as planned. These are required as part of the reporting documentation for grant recipients. Whenever possible, a screenshot of the digital ad must be provided, not just the ad graphic itself.
- **Measurable Impact:** The demonstrable effect that the marketing campaign has had on tourism, such as increased visitation to the area, increased visitor spending, higher ticket sales, or greater engagement with the business or organization.

NOTE: This initiative is based on one created originally by *ShelbyKY Tourism* for Shelby County, KY that was announced in July 2025.