

Virginia Tourism Corporation

Summer 2025 Special Events & Festivals Sponsorship Program (SEF) Terms & Conditions

Applicants must attest to these terms and conditions at the time of application. For information on how to apply for this program, please refer to the Summer 2025 Special Events & Festivals Program Instructions, Sample Application, and Webinar recording.

Program Overview & Eligibility

Application Window: **July 22, 2025, 9AM – September 11th, 2025, 5PM (No Extensions)**

***This round of the VTC Special Events & Festivals Program is only for events that occur between January 1st, 2026 – December 31st, 2026.**

Funding Available: **\$800,000**

of Proposals to be funded this round: **70**

Three Award Tiers:

- Tier 1 - \$5,000: For special events and festivals with 500 - 4,999 attendees
- Tier 2 - \$10,000: For special events and festivals with 5,000 – 19,999 attendees
- Tier 3 - \$20,000: For special events and festivals with 20,000 or more attendees

Matching Grant Program

To receive the award amount you request, you must list cash or in-kind matching expenses that are at least 50% (half) of the amount you request in the application.

- Example: *In the application, if you are requesting an award of \$10,000 from VTC to use on your eligible marketing expenses, you must list a minimum of \$5,000 in matching eligible expenses. Applications that list more than the minimum match may score higher.*

Only items listed in the Eligible Expenses section of this document can be used as cash or in-kind match. However, Earned or Owned media may be counted as in-kind match. Please refer to the application instructions to learn how to value your Earned or Owned media.

Reimbursement-Based Grant

Funds are not awarded up-front. Your award is held in a grant account with VTC, and you may spend your funds by submitting your invoices, proofs of advertising, and proofs of payment for review. Once reimbursement is approved, your funds will be paid to you. VTC does allow for intermittent reimbursement so you may draw down funds as needed until the full award balance has been disbursed. Reimbursement forms can be found at <https://www.vatc.org/grants/grant-reimbursements/>

Only Established Businesses/Organizations are eligible to apply.

Your business/organization must be open to the public and operational at the time of application and have an officially registered Federal Employer Identification Number (FEIN).

If you are a sole proprietor, you may use the sole proprietor's Social Security Number (SSN)

Your business/organization must have a brick-and-mortar location that is open, operating, has appropriate local licensing, and appeals to tourists and visitors. Online storefronts and organizations are not eligible for this program. However, food trucks that are licensed to operate within a locality are eligible.

If your organization is one that promotes tourism-oriented brick and mortar businesses and events, such as a Chamber of Commerce, craft beverage trail, event management company, etc., you ARE eligible, but the organization's AND/OR event's address must be in Virginia.

****Only online applications entered through our website will be accepted. The application for this program can be found at this link ONLY when the grant officially opens: <https://vatc.org/grants/>. ****

Applicant & Partner/Spoke Eligibility

Applicants to the Special Events & Festivals Sponsorship Program...

- *Must* be a tourism-oriented business/organization applying for an event or festival occurring in 2 or more years since 2017. The event or festival must be a MINIMUM of TWO consecutive days. The goal of this program is to increase overnight event visitation and visitor spending. Events must show a significant and positive economic impact on the surrounding community.
- *Must* be an operational business/organization and have a FEIN or SSN (if sole proprietor)

- *Cannot* be a personal health and wellness business, such as nail salons, gyms, massage parlors, and yoga studios. The aforementioned businesses located in a lodging resort, as a tourism attraction, ARE ELIGIBLE to apply.
- *Cannot* be a federal or state agency.
- *Cannot* be a vendor of services, such as an advertising agency, PR firm, printing agency, television channel, web developer, influencer, marketing consultant, etc.
- *Cannot* apply for a start-up event.
- *Cannot* apply for an event/concert series that occurs weekly or monthly such as First Friday events. Event series can apply for the Microbusiness Marketing Leverage Program or the Marketing Leverage Program.
- *Cannot* apply for an event with fewer than 500 attendees. Events with fewer than 500 attendees can apply for the Microbusiness Marketing Leverage Program or Marketing Leverage Program.

Partners/Spokes...

- *Must* be tourism-oriented businesses/attractions that are open, operating, and have appropriate locality licensing.
- *Cannot* be a personal health and wellness business, such as nail salons, gyms, massage parlors, and yoga studios unless they are in a lodging resort which is a tourist attraction.
- *Are* allowed to be state or federal entity, such as a state or national park.
- *Cannot* be a vendor of services, such as an advertising agency, PR firm, printing agency, television channel, web developer, influencer, marketing consultant, etc.
- *Cannot be events sponsors that are not tourism-oriented brick and mortar businesses or food trucks. While we encourage you to have corporate and local sponsors, they partners/spokes for this application must be tourism oriented.*

****If you or your listed partners/spokes do not meet the above criteria, your program may not be awarded. ****

Partner/Spoke Involvement Requirements

Using VTC's Hub & Spoke model, the partners/spokes you list in your application must contribute to your program initiative, either through a financial commitment to the marketing initiative or through marketing collaboration. Please refer to the application instructions for more details on the Hub & Spoke model. These contributions and/or collaborations must be documented in the application narrative and will be evaluated

Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) Letter of Support

To apply for this program, you must have a letter of support from your local or regional DMO that clearly states their support for your program. You can find a list of DMOs on www.vatc.org/dmolist.

If you do not have a local or regional DMO serving your area, you must obtain a letter of support from your locality leader (such as your town manager, city manager, or county manager.)

****If you do not have a letter of support from your local or regional DMO, your program may not be awarded. ****

Lodging Partner Requirement & Letter of Support

To apply for this program, you must list a lodging business as a partner in your application. This can be a hotel, bed & breakfast, resort, campground, or state park.

You DO need a letter of support from this lodging partner and will be required to upload this letter of support as an attachment at the time of application.

Proposal Guidelines

Applicants can only submit one application proposal per FEIN.

Your event must have been established and have occurred at least two years since 2017. It must be at least two consecutive days for it to be eligible for funding.

You will need to upload proof of your prior event attendance with the application. If your event/festival's second year occurs between July 16th, 2025, and December 31st, 2025, you must include a reasonable estimate of your 2025 event attendance.

Events & festivals that apply to this program must have a minimum attendance of 500. If your event/festival has less than 500 attendees, it is not eligible for this program. You will be eligible to apply in the VTC Microbusiness Marketing Leverage Program or VTC Marketing Leverage Program.

Ineligible Proposals Include:

- Non-tourism related applicants/events
- Cannabis-related applicants/events
- Applicants/events related to political activities
- Private events (i.e., family reunions, weddings, birthday parties, and “members-only” events)

Scoring & Award Notification Protocol

This is a competitive grant program, with programs awarded by the strength and score of their applications. Applicants must develop new marketing initiatives for their event or expand upon previously generated initiatives. Applications must explain and justify how the proposal's target markets, demographics, and marketing channels will drive overnight and out of region visitation to their locality. Proposals which lack adequate justification of the choices outlined in the application may be subject to a reduced grant award or denial of funding.

There are limited funds available for this program. Since awards are determined based on application scores, your application must be complete and thorough. **Final awards may or may not equal the amount you originally requested and are based on funds available at the time of the award.** Awards may also be reduced if the event has received an award from prior VTC grant programs in 2025.

Do not assume that the review team is familiar with your area, destination, business, event, or festival. You should include all requested information and be as detailed as possible.

When determining the award total for an application, Virginia Tourism Corporation may consider a variety of factors. These include the type and scope of the organization, the proposal's audience and message, the number of applications received, the regional distribution of funds, and MOST IMPORTANTLY, the economic impact of the program and its ability to drive visitation/visitor revenue in the program coverage area.

Please see the score breakdown for each application section below:

GOALS & PARTNERSHIPS – 25 POINTS

RESEARCH/DATA – 25 POINTS

MARKETING & PRODUCTION PLANS – 50 POINTS

BONUS SECTION – 5 POINTS

Award Notification

If you receive an award in this program, you will receive an email from the VTC Grants team to the email address listed on your application. This email will include your Grant ID Number, general information regarding your grant account, and supporting documents that will assist you in completing your grant proposal successfully.

If you are not awarded in this program, you will also receive an email from the VTC Grants team to the email address listed on your application. You will be able to schedule a 1:1 meeting with a member of the VTC Grants team to discuss your application and how it can be improved in future rounds.

Award Notifications for this program are anticipated to be sent in **November 2025**.

Please Note – Successful applicant who receive an award through the Special Events & Festivals Sponsorship Program may receive a reduced grant award if they have been awarded in a different VTC grant program.

Please Note – This program has strict statewide regional funding distribution requirements based on Go Virginia regions. Awards may be reduced based on regional allocation limits.

If you need to make any substantial changes to your proposal after the time you are awarded, you must submit a **VTC Plan Revision** form to the VTC Grants Team and have it approved.

If you need an extension to complete your proposal, you must submit a **VTC Grant Extension** form to the VTC Grants Team and have it approved.

Grant Reimbursement Process

This is a reimbursement-based grant program. Awarded funds will not be paid up-front.

Once you receive an award notification email from the VTC Grants team, we will place your award in a grant account that you can spend on your own basis up to **60 days after the completion of your event**. **Failure to utilize your awarded funds by this date will result in VTC releasing your award back to the VTC grants pool.**

How to Submit a VTC Grant Reimbursement Request

You must submit a reimbursement request package to our main office, via postal service, addressed: **VTC Grants Team; 901 East Cary Street, Suite 900, Richmond, Virginia, 23219**. Any reimbursement requests that are not submitted via postal service may not be reviewed if they do not reach the correct department. Reimbursement forms and instructions can be found at: <https://www.vatc.org/grants/grant-reimbursements/>

Within the reimbursement request package, you must include:

- The VTC Reimbursement Request Form
- Completed W-9 (business name and address must match your application's information)
- ACH Direct Deposit Form (optional)
- Invoices & Proofs of Payment for expenses listed on the Reimbursement Request Form

- Proof of Ad Placement for any marketing expenses listed on the Reimbursement Request Form
- Scope of Work for any web development or Influencer Marketing listed on the Reimbursement Request Form
- Photography Release (if grant funds were used for content acquisition, like photography/videography)
- A completed Final Report Template for your program (Your final report must be completed using the correct VTC template)
- A copy of your event liability insurance

After the VTC Grants Team receives your reimbursement request package, it will be reviewed. Afterwards, you will be notified, via email, regarding the status of your reimbursement request and whether we need additional information.

Please Note – Only the primary contact on your application/grant account can submit grant reimbursement requests to VTC. Reimbursement requests cannot be submitted by partners/spokes or any other parties; requests submitted by those parties will not be reviewed or processed.

VTC grant reimbursement payments will only be sent to the applicant business/organizations. No other party will receive payment from VTC.

Eligible Expenses

The expenses in this section are eligible to be used as cash match or for which you may receive reimbursement.

All marketing/advertising submitted to VTC for match or reimbursement must use the “Virginia is for Lovers” logo, link, and/or hashtag (#LoveVA).

Please Note – Only 50% of your total grant award can be spent on eligible production expenses. Expenses that exceed this 50% allowance will not be approved and may result in a reduced award or a reduced grant reimbursement payment.

Eligible Expense Period: July 1, 2025 – 60 Days After the End of Your Event

Below are the only expenses that can be used as cash match for this grant award and that can be submitted to VTC for reimbursement. *In-kind match can be paid, owned, or earned media. Instructions on how to value earned and owned media are in the Program Application Instructions and discussed in the program webinar.* Please reference the logo usage section for more information on how to incorporate the Virginia is for Lover’s brand and logo into your marketing:

List of Eligible Marketing Expenses:

Social Media advertising

Digital Media advertising

Radio advertising

Newspaper advertising

Magazine Advertising

Brochures & Rack Cards

Contracting a Photographer/Videographer

- All photography and video marketing materials created using this VTC grant should include usage rights for VTC in perpetuity. You can secure those rights for Virginia Tourism corporation in one of two ways:
- When creating your for-hire contract, include language that allows you to transfer usage rights to partners (like VTC). Not only is it a great way to maximize your marketing dollars, but it is a practice VTC has been implementing for years. This agreement allows us to share photo assets with VTC partners. For an example of the language we use in our contracts, see section 3 in our licensing terms & conditions. Please feel free to copy and adapt this language for your own contracts.
- You can have the copyright owner complete our photo & video release form. This MUST be completed by the copyright owner, not by the licensing entity.
- For information on planning your photo shoot, please see our How to Plan a Photo Shoot document. Here, we break down our planning process while giving recommendations and tips on maximizing your budget, staying organized, and considering the details. ☒ Note: The cost of purchasing equipment for photographic and video production is not an eligible expense.
- Note: The costs of food and other props during a photo shoot are not eligible expenses.
- *High resolution photography and b-roll may be delivered to Sarah Atkins. Please contact her at satkins@virginia.org with assets and any questions.*

Contracting a Marketing Consultant

Contracting a Creative Agency

Contracting an Influencer

- Influencer fees must be invoiced under one document when submitted for VTC reimbursement. VTC will not reimburse individual receipted expenses for influencers, like lodging receipts, meal, receipts, transportation receipts, etc...

Website/Apps Development/Updates

- Hosting fees are not eligible
- The Virginia is for Lovers logo is required to be used on the website/app
- Invoices for website/app development must include a scope of work

Expenses related to participating in the VTC PMAP Program

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- Participate Here: <https://welcomeva.com/>

Virginia is for Lovers Promotional Items

- Only 10% of your total grant award can be used for this expense
- These promotional items must be acquired using Creative Color, VTC's Contractor of Record for merchandise. It can be found here: <https://vatc.org/about/merchandise/>

Outdoor advertising through paid billboards that are 50 miles away from the location of business/organization.

- Billboards listed in the application must have the exact location stated as well

Tradeshow Booth Rentals

Cost of Event Liability Insurance

- Only 10% of your award can be used

Cost advertising via a mobile vehicle wrap that is managed by a third-party marketing agency where the vehicle is driven 50 miles away from the applicant's destination.

- **Please Note** -- Wrapping DMO-owned, business-owned, organization-owned, or locality-owned vehicles IS NOT eligible

List of Eligible Production Expenses:

Cost of temporary state rentals

Cost of the rental of event space or parking lots

Cost of temporary fence rentals

Cost of tent rentals

Cost of table/chair rentals

Cost of porta potty restroom rentals if they are contracted and invoiced

Audio/Video services, sound engineering, and lighting services that are contracted and invoiced

- A/V Equipment purchases, lighting purchases, and sound equipment purchases are not eligible.

Performer booking fees that are contracted and invoiced.

****Any other marketing or event production expenses are ineligible. Grant funds cannot be used to pay for staff, police, fire, emergency services, referees, timekeepers,***

vehicle rentals, temporary or permanent signage, fireworks/pyrotechnics, food, beverage, accommodations, or any other equipment rentals or event production costs. *

Virginia is for Lovers Logo Usage Guidelines

Below are the ways you must incorporate the “Virginia is for Lovers” brand into your marketing to receive VTC reimbursement:

- Any social media posts, digital media, or website/app creation must include the “Virginia is for Lovers” logo or a Virginia is for Lovers sub-brand logo, link to Virginia.org AND/OR Hashtag **#LoveVA** to be eligible as match or be approved for reimbursement. Sub-brand examples include but are not limited to “Virginia is for History Lovers” or “Virginia is for Wine Lovers”. Logos can be requested at <https://vatc.org/marketing/advertising/vifl-logo-request/>.
- Any print media, like brochures, flyers, magazines, newspapers, etc., must include the “Virginia is for Lovers” logo or a Virginia is for Lovers sub-brand logo, link to Virginia.org AND/OR Hashtag **#LoveVA** to be eligible as match or be approved for reimbursement. Sub-brand examples include but are not limited to “Virginia is for History Lovers” or “Virginia is for Wine Lovers”. Logos can be requested at <https://vatc.org/marketing/advertising/vifl-logo-request/>.
- Radio ads that **longer than 30 seconds** must include the “Virginia is for Lovers” phrase within the advertisement. This can be included as part of the advertisement narrative, such as *“Everyone knows Virginia is for Lovers, and you’re going to love this event...”*
- *Video ads (OF ANY LENGTH) must include the “Virginia is for Lovers” logo and/or phrase within the advertisement. An example of this can include a banner in the background or an actor/performer wearing Virginia is for Lovers apparel.*

Open Records Policy

As a political subdivision of the Commonwealth of Virginia, Virginia Tourism Authority (DBA Virginia Tourism Corporation) must comply with open records policies per Virginia Code §2.2-3700, and therefore must provide copies of awarded grant applications when requested. If your application is requested by an individual or organization, you will be notified, and any personal and banking information will be redacted

The grant program terms may be modified at any time. Applicants will be notified of any changes.

The VTC Grants Team disclaims liability for any costs or damages incurred in the execution of funded proposals. Applicants submitting their grant proposal and their participation in the grant program constitutes agreement to these terms.

VTC Grants Team Contact Information

For questions regarding any of the information in this document, please contact the VTC Grants Team:

VTC Special Events & Festivals Email – vtcsefprogram@virginia.org

Staci Martin, Grants Director – smartin@virginia.org

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