

# GUIDELINES FOR AIKEN COUNTY STATE MARKETING ATAX GRANT

**FY 2025 (July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025) Due Date: March 28, 2024**

County Marketing Grants are funded through Accommodations Tax revenues collected in **unincorporated** Aiken County. These funds may be used for tourism related events and programs in Aiken County, with a priority of funding projects in those areas where A-Tax funds are collected. Please pay close attention to grant guidelines as they explain organization and program eligibility as well as funding priorities.

The proceeds from this tax are to be used for the dedicated purpose of promoting tourism in Aiken County. The County Marketing program is a competitive grants program that provides A-Tax funds to eligible organizations.

1. **Maximize the Amount of County Marketing Funds**
  - a) A-Tax funds will be distributed *after* your program or event. The Marketing Grant is a reimbursement.
  - b) Applicants should provide 50% match in cash for their project.
  - c) Eligible expenditures are restricted to Advertising/Marketing/Promotions. These expenditures must be used in manner to attract tourists to your event, program or tourist attraction.
2. **Strengthen Measures to ensure that Organizations are Held Responsible for Spending County A-Tax Funds –**  
Statement of assurances is included within these guidelines.

## ALLOCATION REQUIREMENTS

Organizations that are physically located in the areas where the county collects Accommodations Tax revenues provided the organization also sponsors projects or events within those areas.

Organizations that are not physically located in the areas where the county collects Accommodations Tax Revenues; however, the organization sponsors projects or events within those areas.

## COUNTY MARKETING GRANT PROCESS

**To be considered for funding, an application must be received by the published funding deadline (March 28, 2024).** Once all applications for A-Tax County Marketing Grant funds are received by Aiken County and eligibility is verified, they will be forwarded to the Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee for review.

Eligible applicants will be required to attend a meeting of the Committee on April 16, 2024 in order to answer possible questions. The Committee will review and score each application based on the evaluation measures described below. Applications will be ranked based on the scores and the Committee will determine funding recommendations. The Committee will submit its funding recommendations to County Council. County Council makes all final funding decisions; however, the Council relies heavily on the recommendations of the Committee. Funding of all projects is entirely dependent upon A-Tax funds being received by Aiken County.

## COUNTY MARKETING GRANT TIMELINE

<b>Request for Applications:</b>	January 19, 2024- March 28, 2024
<b>Application Due Date:</b>	March 28, 2024, 5:00 PM
<b>A-Tax Committee Meeting (applicant present)</b>	April 16, 2024, 3:00 PM at the Aiken County Government Center
<b>Grant Award Notifications:</b>	by August 2024
<b>Grant Period:</b>	July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025
<b>Final Reports:</b>	May 16, 2025 and / or July 18, 2025 (see below)

Note: (Project/Events taking place after May 17, 2025 must have final report to Aiken County Visitors Center by July 18, 2025.)

## ORGANIZATION ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- Applicant organizations must have been in existence for at least one (1) year prior to requesting fund.
- Applicants must provide proof of their non-profit status. The letter of exemption, including the Federal ID # from the IRS must accompany your proposal or written proof of non-profit status as registered with the SC Secretary of State.

- Aiken County will not award A-Tax funds to individuals, fraternal organizations, religious organizations, or organizations that support and/or endorse political campaigns.

### CRITERIA FOR PROJECT ELIGIBILITY

As required by the Accommodations Tax Ordinance, projects to be funded by Accommodations Tax funds must result in **the attraction of tourists to Aiken County.**

Priority will be given to projects that demonstrate a benefit to **unincorporated** Aiken County. Marketing efforts that draw tourists to the area, especially those areas where Aiken County collects Accommodations Tax, which are the unincorporated Aiken County areas.

If you are not sure if your program or organization is located in incorporated or unincorporated Aiken County, please call the Tourism Office for assistance at 803.642.7557. Each application/proposed project will be reviewed individually to determine the potential impact it will have for tourism in unincorporated Aiken County.

### FUNDING PRIORITIES/ELIGIBLE EXPENDITURES

#### MARKETING & ADVERTISING ONLY

Priority will be given to projects that:

- Generate overnight stay in **unincorporated** Aiken County’s lodging facilities; and
- Promote and highlight **unincorporated** Aiken County’s historic and cultural venues, tourist related venues, recreational facilities and events, and the uniqueness and flavor of the local community.

### OVERNIGHT JUSTIFICATION

In this section of the application, Aiken County wants the applicant to estimate the number of meals that will be consumed in restaurants and overnight stays in the **unincorporated** areas of the County. Take the following items into consideration when making your estimations and provide a justification explaining how you came up with this number.

- How many people will attend your event?
- How many tourists are attending your event? How many hotel rooms are booked for your event?
- Estimate the number of hotel room nights that will be booked due to your event. Are these rooms located in the unincorporated areas of the County? How will you track this number? # rooms x # nights = estimated room nights booked

### BUDGET

The budget should reflect in financial terms the actual costs of achieving the objectives of the project(s) you propose in your application. A budget form is provided for you as part of the application.

The project expenses section may or may not contain all of the listed “Budget Categories,” depending on the size and type of project you propose. Under project income, list known and anticipated funding sources, including any that are pending. Be sure to include the Aiken County requests in this list. Also include the value of any in-kind contributions and mark as in-kind.

**Budget Narrative/Justification** - Please include a detailed description for each category included in the budget. A brief example is below:

- Marketing/Advertising – \$5,000 for 6 billboards located in Charleston, Greenville, Myrtle Beach and Rock Hill. \$1,000 for TV ads on WAAB \$2,500 radio ads on Clear Channel Boston (Example)
- Security/Emergency Services: \$100 fire marshal, \$300 RC Sheriff’s Deputies (not eligible for grant funds, but please include in your budget details)
- Entertainment: \$9,000 for 3 bands (not eligible for grant funds, but please include in your budget details)

#### Budget tips:

- Budgets **MUST** be entered on the budget form provided and **MUST** include a justification for A-Tax expenditures. This tells Aiken County how you plan to spend grant funds.

- **Grant funds must be used for tourism marketing. See the FUNDING PRIORITIES/ELIGIBLE EXPENDITURES section above for more information.**
- Be as detailed as possible in your budget justification. This information will be compared to your payment requests. Items in your payment requests must appear in your application budget.
- Signage and banners used at your event, directional signage, programs, volunteer t-shirts, and other items handed out at your event are not covered through Accommodations Taxes.

## STATEMENT OF ASSURANCES

By signing and submitting the A-Tax County Marketing application, your organization is agreeing to the following Statement of Assurances:

- Upon grant application acceptance and funding award, applicant agrees that financial records, support documents, statistical records and all other records pertinent to Accommodations Tax funding shall be retained for a period of three years.
- All procurement transactions, regardless of whether negotiated or advertised and without regard to dollar value, shall be conducted in a manner so as to provide maximum open free competition.
- The funding recipient shall establish safeguards to prohibit employees from using their positions for a purpose that has the appearance of being motivated by a desire for private gain for themselves and others.
- All expenditures must have adequate documentation.
- All accounting records and supporting documentation shall be available for inspection by Aiken County upon request.
- No person, on the basis of race, color, or national origin, should be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefit of or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under the program or activity funding in whole or in part by Accommodations Tax funds.
- Employment made by or resulting from Accommodations Tax funding shall not discriminate against any employee or applicant on the basis of handicap, age, race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.
- None of the funds, materials, property, or services provided directly or indirectly under Accommodations Tax funding shall be used for any partisan political activity, or to further the election or defeat of any candidate for public office.
- The applicant hereby certifies that the information submitted as part of this application is accurate and reliable.
- Any change and/or variation must be reported immediately, otherwise, funding may be withheld.

## APPLICATION EVALUATION

The Committee will use the following evaluation criteria to evaluate applications and proposed projects. The individual factors are important in project evaluation, as they are an indication of the degree to which the proposed project will contribute to the tourism in Aiken County. Please ensure that you review these factors and include the elements in your application. These factors, with their corresponding point values, are:

### **Project Design and Benefit to Community:**

55 points maximum

Benefit to Tourism (20) - Does the project promote tourism in the areas of the County in which Aiken County A-Taxes are collected? Will it promote a positive image for the County? Will it attract visitors, build new audiences and encourage tourism expansion in the areas of the County in which Aiken County A-Taxes are collected? Will it increase awareness of the County's amenities, history, facilities, and natural environment in the areas of the County in which Aiken County A-Taxes are collected?

Reliable Tracking Mechanism and Marketing Plan (15) – How will visitors and tourists would be tracked? (surveys, wristbands, ticketing, and etc.) Are these methods viable? Does the marketing plan describe how the organization will reach tourists? Are at least 70% of the ads or other marketing expenses targeted outside the Columbia/Aiken County area? Is the expected number of tourists in line with the organization's marketing plan?

Benefit to Community (10) - How will this project benefit the citizens of Aiken County? Will the project benefit unincorporated Aiken County? Who will attend the event? How many visitors will the event serve? A visitor is defined by someone who travels at least 50 miles to attend the event.

Community Support and Partnerships (10) - Does the project have broad-based community appeal or support? What is the evidence of need for this project in the County? What kind and degree of partnership does the project exhibit? Does it exhibit volunteer involvement or inter-jurisdictional, corporate, business, and/or civic support?

**Economic Impact and Accountability**

45 points maximum

Budget (5) – Are all expenses that are to be paid with A-Tax funds eligible expenses? Did the budget and justification provide enough detail to show how funds will be spent? Does the applicant provide 50% in cash or in-kind match?

Expected A-Tax Revenue Generated (15) - What are the projected direct and indirect dollar expenditures by visitors/tourists? What is the estimated number of meals consumed? Are any overnight stays anticipated? Will this program drive business to those businesses that collect and remit Aiken County A-Tax in the unincorporated areas?

Reasonable Cost/Benefit Ratio (15) - Does the benefit of the project (i.e. number of tourists estimated; expected revenue generated) exceed the cost of the project? Is this project “worth” its cost?

Management Capability (10) - Does the applicant organization demonstrate an ability to successfully complete the project through effective business practices in the areas of finance, administration, marketing, and production? If this organization has received County Accommodations Tax funding previously, was the project successful?

**APPLICATION PACKAGE**

In order to be considered for funding, applicants must submit a **complete** application package for the A-Tax Marketing grant program. Incomplete applications will not be considered. Complete applications include:

- Completed and signed application form. Answer all questions and complete each section. N/A and See Attached are not valid responses.
- If your organization does not have an Executive Director, please note this in the signature area.
- Required Attachments:
  - Letter from IRS confirming tax exempt status and/or proof of registration and good standing with the SC Secretary of State’s Office
  - List of the organization’s current Board Members/Directors
  - Additional one (1) page project description (**OPTIONAL**)
  - Additional one (1) page budget justification (**OPTIONAL**)

**Attachments MUST be submitted along with the proposal. Incomplete applications will not be evaluated.** Applicants must provide 9 copies of the complete application package plus one (1) original (**10 packages total**). Please submit only the required elements secured with a binder clip. Folders, report covers and binders will be discarded.

**Applications are due by 5:00 p.m. on March 28, 2024.** Emailed or faxed applications will not be accepted. Due dates are not post mark dates. For us to proof your application, in order to advise the organization of errors or missing information, you must turn it in by March 21, 2024. **Applications delivered after 3-28-24 will not be considered for funding. Mail or hand deliver application to:**

Aiken County Visitors Center  
Attn: Ashley Blalock, Tourism Manager  
133 Laurens St. NW  
Aiken, SC 29801

#### **AWARD NOTIFICATION**

Applicant organizations will be notified of the funding outcome in **writing by August 2024**. Awards will be available for reimbursement. Final reports for the previous fiscal year, if applicable, as well as the current year, must be received before payments are released.

#### **REPORTING AND GRANT ACKNOWLEDGEMENT REQUIREMENTS**

Grantees must acknowledge the receipt of A-Tax County Marketing funding by including the Aiken County logo, or by stating funding assistance provided through “Aiken County Accommodations Tax” on all program/project advertising, marketing and promotional materials. Examples must be included in your final report.

#### **FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT NOTICE**

Please be advised that all materials submitted for A-Tax County Marketing grant funding are subject to disclosure based on the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

#### **CONTACT**

Ashley Blalock, Aiken County Visitors Center, 133 Laurens St. NW, Aiken SC 29801, [ablalock@aikencountysc.gov](mailto:ablalock@aikencountysc.gov)



# AIKEN COUNTY ACCOMMODATIONS TAX STATE MARKETING GRANT APPLICATION

Funding for FY2025 (July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025)  
Do not alter this application form. DEADLINE: March 28, 2024  
COURTESY CORRECTION EARLY DEADLINE: March 21, 2024

*We will notify you of errors or missing information if you turn your application in by March 21, 2024.*

**After March 28, 2024 incomplete applications will not be evaluated.**

A representative of the organization must be available for a Question/Answer session on Tuesday, April 16, 2024 at the

Aiken County Government Building, 1930 University Parkway, Aiken, SC at 3:00pm. You may have only one other person present during the Q & A session. The amount of available grant funds will not be known until August 2024. The approximate amount of available funds is \$10,000. All attachments for your project must be included with this application. *We will not accept handouts during the meeting.*

INCORPORATION DATE:

FEDERAL ID:

ORGANIZATION:

ORGANIZATION ADDRESS:

CONTACT:

TITLE:

PHONE:

EMAIL:

MISSION STATEMENT:

PROJECT TITLE:

TOTAL AMOUNT REQUESTED: \$

TOTAL PROJECT COST: \$

PROJECT START DATE:

PROJECT END DATE:

ESTIMATED TOTAL ATTENDANCE:

ESTIMATED TOURISTS:

ESTIMATED ROOM NIGHTS:

ESTIMATED MEALS:

DESCRIBE HOW YOUR ORGANIZATION DETERMINED THE NUMBERS ABOVE (Please indicate the numbers of meals and room nights estimated in the **unincorporated areas of Aiken County**):

PROGRAM/PROJECT LOCATION(s):

DOES YOUR PROJECT REQUIRE PERMITS? \_\_\_\_\_ LIST THOSE REQUIRED:

PROJECT DESCRIPTION (Add up to one additional sheet, if needed):

BENEFIT TO TOURISM:

**BENEFIT TO COMMUNITY:**

**MANAGEMENT CAPABILITY TO MAKE THIS PROJECT SUCCESSFUL:**

**OUTLINE PROJECT MARKETING PLAN (Include how you plan to reach tourists. What tracking mechanism do you use to determine tourist attendance?):**



**ACCOMMODATIONS TAX GRANT BUDGET**

List the expenses for your project. If needed, add additional expense categories in the blank lines provided. **NOTE: Advertising & Marketing are the only expenses allowed through this marketing grant. A minimum of three official quotes must be provided for advertising/marketing services.**

Expense Category	County A-Tax Request	Other Sources	Total
<b>Advertising/Marketing</b>			
Municipal Services/Security			
Entertainment/Speakers/Guest Artists/Instructors			
Other Event Expenses			
Supplies			
Consultants/Contractors			
Venue/Equipment Rental			
<b>Total</b>			

List the income sources for your program or project below. Include the amount requested in this application.

Income Source	Amount	Write "Pending" or "Received"
FY25 Aiken County A-Tax Marketing Grant Request		

If applicable, you must list prior year information here on the PRIOR YEAR DETAIL FORM. **Also include a brief summary of the project from the previous year.**

EVENT NAME(S) Some organizations have more than one event	Total Budget PREVIOUS YEAR	# of Visitors outside a 50 mile radius PREVIOUS YEAR

**Brief summary of project from previous year if applicable.**

**Budget Narrative/Justification: Add one additional sheet, if needed. Provide details on how you will spend Aiken County Atax Marketing Grant funds if awarded. See guideline for instructions.**

**MAKE SURE YOU KEEP A COPY OF YOUR GRANT- ESPECIALLY THIS SHEET.**

**IF AWARDED YOU MUST AGREE TO THE FOLLOWING REQUIREMENTS:**

1. Unspent funding must be returned to Aiken County Accommodations Tax Funds. If your organization is found to have spent funding in any other way than as described and approved per your application, funding must be returned to Aiken County Accommodation Tax Funds.
2. Any revenue generated by the event or attraction **must be to benefit a community or organization within the limits of Aiken County.** (Profits cannot go to other division of the organization, if that division is outside of Aiken County, SC.)
3. The sponsoring agency shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age or handicapped status in employment or provision of services.
4. Promotional material such as brochures, rack cards, etc., a statement must be added that states "Funding assistance provided by Aiken County through Accommodations Tax Funds". At least fifty (50) copies of any brochures must be submitted to the Aiken County Visitors Center for distribution.
5. Projects that continue past May 16, 2025 must provide two reports. The first will be an "Update Report" on May 16, 2025, on the status of your progress. Include all expenses thus far, cancelled checks, all pertinent information concerning your project. The second, a final "Accountability Report" (see #5 for details) must be delivered by July 18, 2025. Both reports must be delivered to Aiken County Visitors Center, C/O Ashley Blalock, 133 Laurens St. NW, Aiken SC 29801.
6. Projects that are finished by May 16, 2025 will deliver one report, a final "Accountability Report" on or before May 16, 2025 to Aiken County Visitors Center, C/O Ashley Blalock, 133 Laurens St. NW, Aiken SC 29801.

**Accountability Report must include:**

1. A written summary of the project.
2. A budget, noting the expenses that were outlined on your application.
  - a. A written account of income associated with this project.
  - b. A written account of expenditures associated with the project.
3. Copies of your cancelled checks and invoices pertaining to the funds we award you.
  - a. Receipts and invoices **must lie within the dates of the grant cycle**, which are July 1, 2024 and June 30, 2025.
4. A marketing plan of how you will promote the project.
5. Any advertisements or promotional material
6. Photographs (5 or more) of the project and one additional photo exhibiting your acknowledgment of Aiken County through receipt of Aiken County Accommodations Taxes. (i.e. plaques, signs, etc.)
7. Survey results from event/attraction associated with this project.
  - a. Total number of attendees.
  - b. Number of attendees from out of town.
  - c. Accommodations out of town guests plan to use or did use.
7. Agree to allow a representative of the County and/or its appointed representative to examine the financial records of my organization insofar as they pertain to this project.
8. I hereby declare that this organization carries liability insurance in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ and agree to include Aiken County as a named insured for purposes of this project. This organization assumes full legal responsibility for any suit or action at law or equity, and any or all claims arising from this project/activity, and do hereby indemnify and hold harmless the County of Aiken and its Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee from any liability in any action at law or equity associated with its support for this project/activity.
9. I have received a copy of the 2025 Aiken County Marketing Grant Requirements and agree to abide by those and the above stated requirements.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIGNATURE/DATE:

BOARD CHAIRMAN SIGNATURE/DATE:

## APPLICATION CHECKLIST

**This sheet is not part of the application, but a tool to assist you in preparing your application.**

### Required Elements:

- Completed each section of the Marketing Grant Application. Incomplete applications will not be evaluated. Answers such as N/A or See Attached are not appropriate. Please do not use font sizes lower than 10 point.
- Answer each question and make sure each point in the guidelines is addressed.
- Board Chair signed and dated the application
- Executive Director signed and dated the application – please note in the signature line if your organization does not have an executive director (all volunteer organization).
- Fill out the budget form and make sure your budget narrative/justification has enough detail for each item that will be purchased with A-Tax grant funds.

### Required Attachments

- Letter from IRS confirming tax exempt status **AND/OR**
- Proof of registration and good standing with the SC Secretary of State's Office as a nonprofit
- Attach list of current Board of Directors or Governing Board
- Three official quotes

### Optional Elements:

- One additional page for the project description
- One additional page for the budget justification (grant expenditures only).

### Application Packet

- Made a copy to keep for your files (applicant organization)
- Prepared 10 copies of the application, including the original to send to Aiken County Visitors Center (**total of 10**)
- Secured each application with a staple, paper clip or binder clip. No report folders, please.

### REMINDERS

**The Application deadline is 5:00 pm Friday, March 28, 2024. If you turn your application in early, by March 21, 2024 we will notify you of any corrections or additional information needed. After March 28, 2024, we will not be able to provide this courtesy. LATE applications will NOT be accepted. Aiken County does NOT accept applications sent via fax or email.**

### **Mail or Hand Deliver Application to:**

Aiken County Visitors Center  
Attn: Ashley Blalock, Tourism Manager  
133 Laurens St. NW  
Aiken, SC 29801

### QUESTIONS

Call 803.642.7557 or email [ablalock@aikencountysc.gov](mailto:ablalock@aikencountysc.gov) if you have any questions concerning the application process or the Aiken County Accommodations Tax Marketing Grant Program.