

2026 Visit Canton Event Support Opportunities

Overview

Event support investments aim to increase regional visitation and economic impact through visitor spending by supporting sporting events & tournaments, conferences, professional meetings, expos and complementary experiences to qualifying events.

Goals/Metrics

Visit Canton Event Support investments must accomplish one or more of the following:

- Attract and/or retain events that generate significant visitor spending in Stark County
- Increase attendance at recurring events that generate significant visitor spending in Stark County
- Maximize visitor spending for an established event by executing additional programs, initiatives, etc.

Eligibility

Eligible organizations for consideration include:

- Sports events rights holders, associations, host organizations, local organizing committees
- Event or meeting planners
- Associations, and other professional or fraternal groups

**If a for-profit enterprise is an applicant, the project must reflect a partnership and/or economic benefit for the community or county at large.*

Event Support Grant Eligibility

- Events hosted in Stark County that cannot be found within 90 miles and/or 90 days of the event date(s)*
**Due to the limited availability of hotel rooms on peak travel dates, a blackout period for Event Support Grants may be established. The specific blackout dates will be communicated to prospective applicants annually. Events planned within this timeframe will be ineligible for support.*
- Events must have a minimum commitment of 125 Stark County hotel room nights and/or 400-day visitors from outside of Stark County.
- Event Support Grant funding for for-profit organizations is only available for the first three years of hosting in Stark County. If a for-profit organization demonstrates significant growth compared to the previous year, a grant may be considered for future sustainability funding. If growth or expansion is not achieved, event grant support funding will not be awarded in year four or beyond.
- Grant Project must not solely be dependent on the Event Support Grant funding and must have 50% of matching funds invested in the project (in-kind or other grant funding is acceptable)

Event Support Grant Eligible Expenses- Up to \$10,000

- Venue Rental
- Transportation
- Hospitality
- Marketing initiatives to attract event participants and spectators
- Addition of a Stark County experience that elevates the visitor/guest experience within the itinerary.

Ineligible Grant Expenses:

- Staffing/standard operating costs
- Alcohol expenses

Awards and Timeline

- Grant requests **up to \$10,000** per event will be considered in a competitive application process throughout the

calendar year, pending available funds.

- Event Support Grant applications must be submitted at least 90 days before the scheduled event.
- Events must be hosted within the 2026 calendar year.
- The Grants Committee will not judge incomplete applications.

Please reach out to Zita Blile at zitab@visitcanton.com to discuss event support opportunities and to receive an online application for qualifying events.

Grant Application Requirements

Applicants must provide the following to be considered:

- Applicant organization's name and contact info
- Detailed event description
- Event operational budget with revenue & expenses
- Event marketing plan with targeted audiences
- Requested vendor/marketing quotes and/or contracts
- Estimated attendance for the project with tracking methods to calculate visitor spending
- Repeat events must present attendance and visitor spending data from past events
- Statement on partial funding: If this project is not awarded at 100% of the request, how will the project proceed?

Recognition and Acknowledgement Requirements

- Initiatives using Event Support Grant Funds must acknowledge Visit Canton by including representation and links to Visit Canton on the grantee's website and other requested marketing materials.
- Awarded grantees must complete a Memorandum of Understanding to receive funding. Grant funds will be distributed as follows: **70% disbursed upon receipt of a signed MOU and 30 days prior to the event, and the remaining 30% will be disbursed following review of the final evaluation report submitted by the recipient organization.**

Final Evaluation Reporting

- A detailed summary of all expenditures from grant funding, including but not limited to invoices and receipts.
 - Return on investment data, including visitor numbers and locations, the economic impact on the recipient organization, and the estimated effect on the Stark County community.
- Approved data include:
- Event ticket/registration report that shows the location of attendees
 - Hotel report that shows out-of-town visitor rooms contracted
 - Participating team rosters that show the number of team members and their cities of origin
- **The final evaluation form must be submitted within 30 days of project completion.** Should the Committee require any additional information, the grantee will have 10 business days to submit the requested data.
 - If the grantee does not submit a completed report, the remaining 30% of the grant will be forfeited. This forfeiture will also be considered when evaluating future Event Support Grant applications from the grantees.

In addition to the Event Support Grant eligibility requirements outlined above, other event support opportunities include the following:

- **Sustainability Grants-** Recurring events with long-term commitments to Stark County, that drive significant visitor spending and attendance
- **Sponsorships** – Events that offer significant media value and out-of-market exposure, with the opportunity to include Visit Canton branding, and can elevate the destination

- **Competitive Bids** –Rotating events that are subject to RFP processes