Destination Enhancement Grants

Mission

The mission of Visit Canton, the Stark County Convention & Visitors' Bureau, is to attract and engage visitors, serve and educate regional tourism partners, and ***generate economic growth for the community through travel and tourism development and enhancement projects.***

Goals

The goals of the Destination Enhancement Grant Program include:

- **Developing and enhancing destination-based assets that are in concert with the Visit Canton mission that help attract visitors, talent, and increased visitor spending to the region.**
- **Foster strategic vision as well as industry and community collaboration.**
- **Maximize the economic return on public and private investments for travel and tourism destinations in Stark County.**
- **Enhance the quality of life for residents as a result of the elevated destination assets.**

Eligibility

Applicant Eligibility

Applications must be signed by an official authorized to legally bind the applicant to perform the project. The lead applicant is responsible for meeting all grant requirements. Eligible organizations include, but are not limited to, local governments, for-profit enterprises, and non-profit organizations.

*****If a for-profit enterprise is a lead or a partner applicant, the project must reflect an economic benefit for the city, township, or county at large.***

Project Eligibility

Projects should target the development of quality-of-place amenities, attractions, and facilities that enhance the visitor experience and foster connectivity within the specific destination or geographic area. They should align with Visit Canton's mission and increase the likelihood of visitation from outside the area.

Partnerships that bring together local and regional organizations, economic development and/or government organizations and tourism-related businesses will be looked upon favorably.

The grant program seeks big, transformative ideas. Preference will be given to large-scale projects that enhance communities with visitor attraction efforts. Proposals are expected to detail transformational projects that strengthen the applicant's destination profile.

A cost match is required to be eligible for grant dollars (see Awards and Timeline section for more information).

Project proposals are not limited to, but may focus on one of the following categories:

- **Spectator sports, participation sports, and outdoor recreation**
- **Culinary and agricultural activities**
- **Heritage and historical experiences**
- **Arts and culture**

Project examples within the categories include:

- **Community wayfinding signage or placemaking**
- **Business sign and façade improvements, art installations, etc.**
- **Projects that elevate the visitor/guest experience within the destination.**
- **Accessibility additions to attractions, playgrounds, or parking**
- **Enhancement to the interior building to create more event or multi-purpose space**

The following expenses are **ineligible** for grant funding:

- Marketing materials or campaigns
- Replacement office furniture, fixtures, and equipment
- Annual service fees
- Staff salaries, mileage, or other fees that are already budgeted to carry out daily work
- Food, alcohol, or other hospitality items
- Projects that do not have a regional impact, either directly or indirectly

Awards and Timeline

- **Grant requests up to $50,000 will be considered through this competitive application process.**
    - **If you have a project that is looking for more than $50,000 in support, please reach out to Promotions and Grants Manager, Allison Gromofsky, allisong@visitcanton.com.**
- **Visit Canton grant dollars may not represent more than 50% of the total project cost.**
- **Projects must be started in the 2023 calendar year.**
- **Projects must be completed within two years of the award.**

Grant Application Requirements

For consideration, grant applications must provide the following within their online grant application proposal:

1. A detailed line-item budget showing the overall project scope and sources and uses for all funding associated with the project, and identifying the status of funding (e.g., secured, contingent, applied for, etc.)
2. Letter of support from the applicant's Board Chair and Executive Director/CEO approving all matching funds are on hand and documentation of commitment from all organizations supplying matching funds
3. A project timeline
4. Project photograph(s) and/or rendering(s)
5. Vendor/Supplier quotes (if applicable)
6. If a project application contains multiple destinations or community partners, letters of support from each partner's commitment to the project.
    - The inclusion of endorsement letters with the application is strongly encouraged. Endorsement letters may be from, are but not limited to, community leaders, industry partners or peers, and other organizations involved in or affected by the project.
7. A demonstration that the project complements and is consistent with existing local tourism development, talent attraction efforts, and marketing initiatives.
8. Quantitative demonstration of benefits from the project, which may include economic impact projections or other data demonstrating a benefit to the local economy
9. Qualitative demonstration of benefits from the project. For example, an explanation of how this project will enhance the visitor experience as well as the quality of life for residents
10. Marketing and sustainability plans that explain how the asset will be promoted and maintained into the future.

Applications that do not submit all the requirements will not be scored.

Scoring Considerations

Applications that have addressed all requirements above will be scored. Applications that reflect collaboration and financial commitment by two or more partners on the project are highly desired.

Did the applicant provide all of the materials as requested in the grant application?
Does the project fulfill the mission of the grant by enhancing the destination or creating greater connectivity in the community?

Does the project clearly identify how this investment would provide qualitative or quantitative value for the guest?
Does the project demonstrate that it is sustainable?
Does/Will this project enhance Stark County's public perception as a travel and tourism destination?
Will this project significantly enhance or connect multiple businesses and/or a community within Stark County?
Does this project's application present a complete & well-planned operational plan and future marketing plan to accomplish the presented goals?

Application Proposal Timeline

- **August 2022 |** Announcement of 2023 Destination Enhancement Project Grants
- **September 12, 2022 |** Online Applications for Destination Enhancement Grants Open
- **October 31, 2022 |** Online Applications for Destination Enhancement Grants must be submitted by 5:00PM

If your project is selected as a finalist, Visit Canton will notify you to schedule a Zoom or in-person interview to discuss your proposal in greater detail and to ask any final questions or request additional information.

- **November 16, 2022 |** Interviews with Finalists from 2:00PM-4:30PM
- **November 17, 2022 |** Interviews with Finalists from 9:00AM-11:30PM
- **November 21, 2022 |** Announcement of Awarded Projects

Recognition and Acknowledgement Requirements

Visit Canton will notify grant award recipients following approval by the Visit Canton Grant Committee. Applicants receiving grant funds will be issued a Memorandum of Understanding that must be signed and returned to receive funding. Visit Canton will be identified as a grantor in any press releases, media outreach or any other recognition of project funders. Destination Enhancement Grants will receive 100% of funding upon award acknowledgment and return of MOU, if matching funding is secured and properly represented in the grant proposal. Projects that have tentative matching funding will be withheld funding until secured. Payment

for the project will be released at a percentage based on matching funding and then once funding is secured, the additional percentage will be released.

Reporting

If a grant project is awarded funding, the lead organization must complete the following reporting:

- **Quarterly Project Status Report**
  A Quarterly project status report must be submitted to Visit Canton in the requested format.

- **Project Completion Report**
  At the conclusion of the project, a report summarizing the deliverables and accomplishments must be submitted to Visit Canton along with proof of completion (e.g., pictures, marketing materials, copies of invoices for related expenses.