

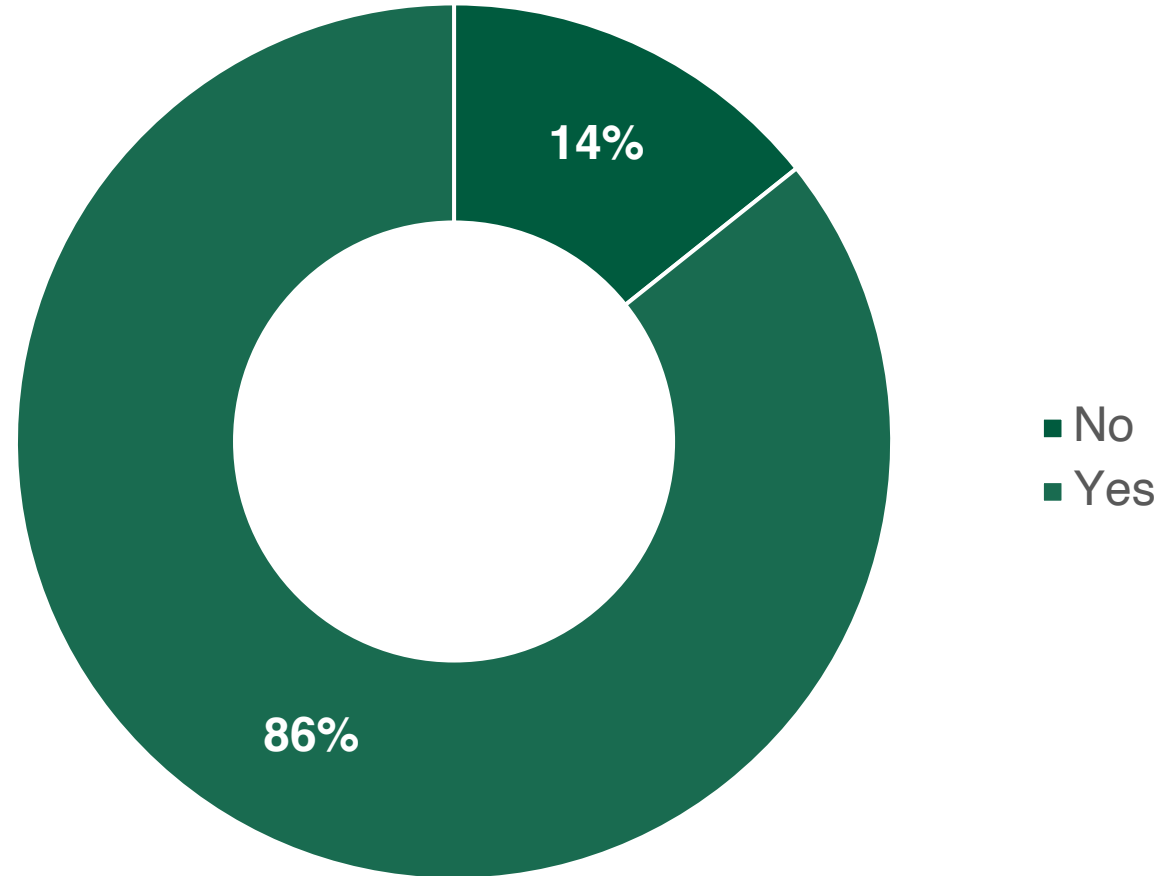
City of Vancouver

Lodging Tax Advisory Committee

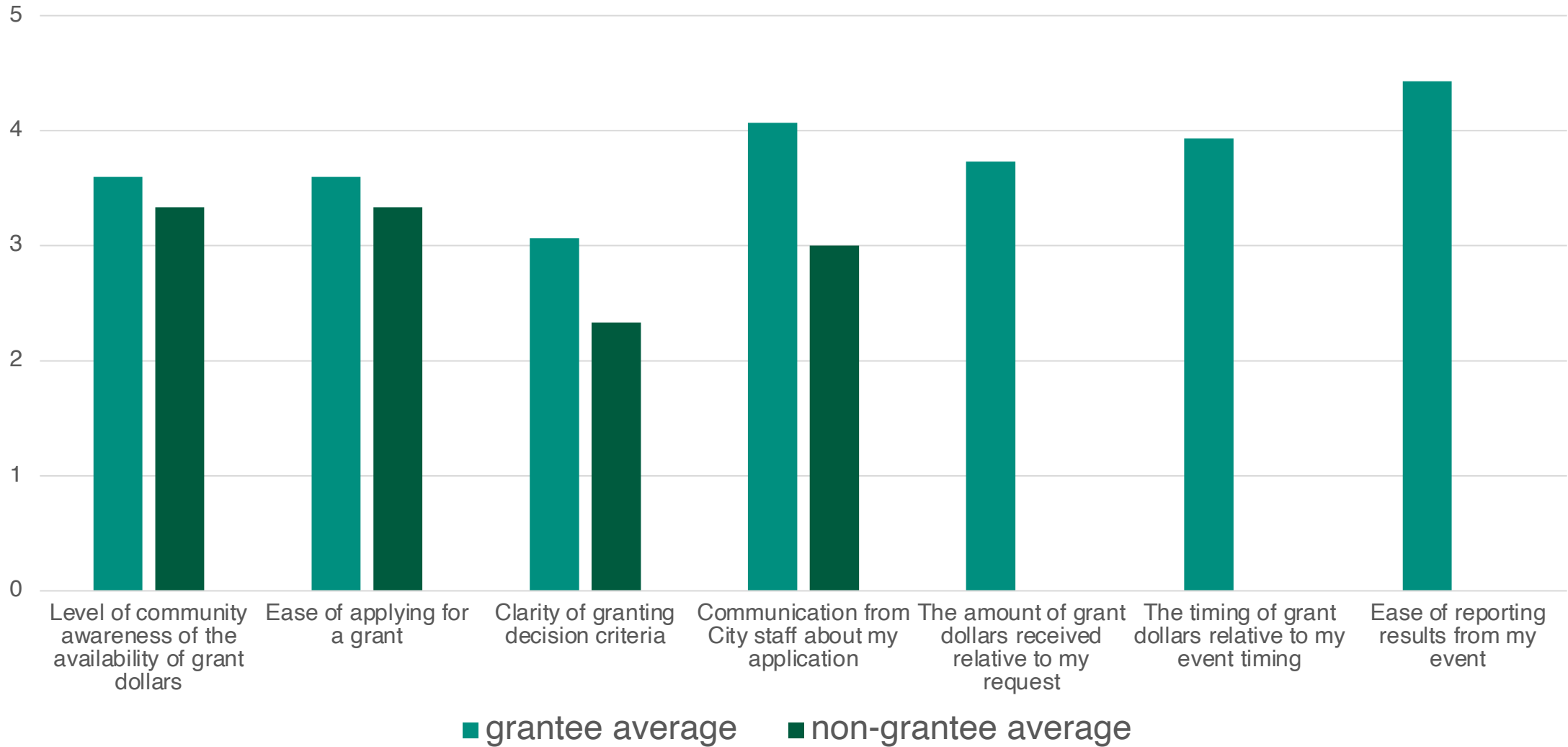
Grant Process Revision

Workshop 1—May 22, 2024

At any point, were you successful in receiving an LTAC grant?



Please rate your experience with the granting process in each of the following categories where 1=poor and 5=excellent



For the elements you scored 3 or below, please share a few comments about what needs to be improved:

Level of community awareness of the availability of grant dollars

- Even though I had applied and received LTAC grant dollars, I didn't get notified in time to be able to submit an application in subsequent years. It seemed like I heard about it at the last minute.
- I did not get a notice of the grant opening last year although I am a past recipient and the date of application changed.
- If you aren't on social media or read the newspaper it is difficult to learn about the grant. Many communities weren't even aware that this exists.
- Like most grant programs, you have to be "in-the-know" to receive information about these.
- More external communication about grant opportunities
- not a known process unless already in the loop
- Orgs who receive the grant annually to service their fee-based events, income yielding events are probably the most aware

Ease of applying for a grant

- a bit arduous
- For someone used to applying for state-level grants, this was about average, but if we want more community members to take advantage of this grant opportunity, it feels like a bit much.
- It is not possible to attach relevant supplemental documents such as spreadsheets with visitors demographics, brochures, posters, video clips. These are important in demonstrating the quality of an event, and the ability of an organization to successfully implement the grant.
- The application needs clarity on purpose, criteria, and minimum expectations
- There is a lot of estimation needed. It would be helpful to be directed to tools that would help with those estimates, such as most acceptable census data and most recent tourism stats.
- Workshops are good, but it would be nice to have more of them in locations where people can attend in person to learn more.
- We didn't end up applying for grant because we didn't feel we would meet the qualifications
- Online application was okay, but seems burdensome to list board member tenure at a beginning phase of the process. Is that necessary?

For the elements you scored 3 or below, please share a few comments about what needs to be improved:

Clarity of granting decision criteria

- For some of the organizations that were granted funds, it didn't seem that their event impacted tourism. More funds should be directed to those events that can clearly demonstrate that a high % of their attendees were coming from out of the region.
- The criteria needs specific clarity; too general currently
- The criteria seem clear. However, some reviewers seem willing to change the criteria during the public evaluation and voting meeting. It is unfair to all applicants to change the criteria when applications are already submitted. Better practice would be to announce ahead of time that criteria will be changed in the next funding round so that everyone has an equal opportunity.
- The criteria used to be that the event had a requirement to generate out-of-town visitors. There does not seem to be ANY emphasis on this. In point of fact, most of the funding seems to be 'pre-allocated' to City of Vancouver governmental agencies, and we know that groups are discouraged from even applying as this seems to be the primary focus.
- The low score is mostly due to lack of rubric outside of application questions. Assumptions were made about funding uses given priority however grants received for events did not line up with those assumptions.
- We had an application in which we had a number of conversations about the criteria, but still ran into issues in the end.
- This seems pretty arbitrary, with decision-making criteria unclear.

Communication from City staff about my application

- City staff are excellent.
- We didn't receive important information about our approved application until it was very late in the process.
- Staff reached out to solicit a presentation, and notify of non-award
- I didn't get enough feedback about why my application was rejected.

For the elements you scored 3 or below, please share a few comments about what needs to be improved:

The amount of grant dollars received relative to my request

- It is understandable that there are a finite number of grant dollars. However, the reductions in the requested amounts do not appear to be made equally among applications that appear to be equally valuable.
- It seems that funds are not distributed proportionately based on ability to bring people from out of the region to the area.
- There does not seem to be any understanding among the committee as to how events are created or produced; what the value is to the community; or what the purpose of this funding is. We have been in the room during discussions where committee several committee members have suggested "dividing up the money" among all grant requests, regardless of merit, history of success, etc.

The timing of grant dollars relative to my event timing

- City process and budgets determines the timing, doesn't it? A rolling application process with awards throughout the year would be better for grant applicants, but not great for City process.
- This last round came out earlier than normal and I hadn't even spent my 2023 funds yet so I didn't feel that I could apply.
- Timing of grant funding gave only 6 weeks to utilize funding in a proposed program expected to be utilized over a year however funding was cut (not attributable) which lessened burden.)

Ease of reporting results from my event

- The JLARC database is a mess. I appreciate knowing the required reporting information in advance, but wish there were standards developed to help grant applicants provide uniform answers (many of the reporting categories leave much to interpretation)
- The reporting doesn't always fit all types of approved projects.

Do you have any ideas about how we might better promote the availability of grants to increase the number of qualified applicants?

- Availability is known -- it is coming up with defensible numbers of heads in beds, etc., that is difficult.
- Be clearer about the objective of the grants and the outputs anticipated: More tourism? Ability to yield tourism dollars spent? More exposure to markets outside of the PNW? Amount of other income leveraged by the org to support an event/initiative? Seems very short-term focused for impacts of a given event. . . is there any strategy about long-term event thinking and how this opportunity ties to the Tourism Master Plan?
- Columbian newspaper, VBJ, Chamber of Commerce, VDA, Press Release, Social media
- Emailing the nonprofits who may qualify is the best approach in my opinion. General notices through social and standard media forms are rarely viewed within our organization.
- Look at the demographic that you are currently serving to determine what is missing. LTAC grants are unique as they need to go to events that bring in tourists from 50 miles out and put heads in beds. Although there is some confusion as to what else the funds can support. Who are the communities that might have some opportunity to provide events or programming that you aren't seeing apply? Work with existing organizations on educating them about the grant program and ask if they can help determine the best way to promote. collateral in multiple languages. Application translation opportunities. Provide workshops in communities that you would like to reach as opposed to expecting people to come to you.
- Send notice to all local nonprofits and ask them to share.
- Social Media
- Use partners to help get the word out about the grant.
- Use partners who have wide reach to nonprofits/event managers to help spread the word and educate all year long about opportunities, not just at time of application opening.
- Work with Chamber of Commerce to distribute grant program information through their non-profit networks. Require economic development agencies (Visit Vancouver, VDA, CREDC, Chamber, etc) to promote the grant opportunities through their channels and platforms.

Please briefly describe how you calculate room night impacts for your event.

- # of Rooms multiplied by # of Nights
- Any room nights attributed directly to the event, assuming double occupancy (for room impact we use actual)
- Estimate the number of attendees, vendors, and performers likely to travel from more than 50 miles away, and divide that in half. Half may be staying with friends.
- For the grant we are speaking of, we used the number of contracted and occupied guest rooms for the groups we served (event related transportation services).
- Strictly by past similar events and registration for those events, as required.
- This is difficult to do because each event and activity is different.
- This is hard for the project that I did.
- We are unable to calculate overnight stays.
- We asked for an average from I believe Visit Vancouver and then calculated how many families we expected to come into town and stay from past events.
- We can see where the tickets are bought, and we get calls from customers when the local hotels run out of rooms.
- We did an estimate of how many out of town guests would be staying over night for the event - and estimated 20% of those out of town attendees would be in hotels
- We didn't calculate room nights for our event.
- We know exactly how many people attend our event and where they are coming from. Then we can extrapolate how many people are attending from far enough away that they will need to stay somewhere. The difficult part is that we find attendees don't often use the hotel room blocks/discounts we provide because they tell us they can get the rooms cheaper through hotel.com, expedia or other online options. Some people also use Air B&B or VRBO which is difficult to track. Or some people stay at friends/family but are still spending money in the area for food, restaurants, gas, shopping, entertainment etc. We also survey attendees to ask them where they stayed during their visit.
- We look at our actual visitor attendance. We have all their demographic information (address, city, state, zip, etc.) so we know that if someone is attending from out of state they are an overnight visitor. We also know the number of people who are traveling greater than 50 miles.
- We put on the Rotary Community Tree Lighting, and we know that rooms are rented for the night near the event in the park and the waterfront. But we have no way to know how many rooms. The event also brings a lot of people downtown and we know that many come over from Portland. While we feel that these are real benefits to Vancouver, unless we have actual room nights, we feel we cannot obtain a grant.
- we receive a report from Visit Vancouver

Please briefly describe other ways—besides room nights—that you use to evaluate impact for your event.

- # of registered teams
- Broader support, programs, and tools that support the tourist economy. The availability of activities for tourists is a way we measure the benefit.
- Evaluate overall attendance numbers as it is also important for community members to have events available. Informal conversations with attendees to determine what they liked and didn't like.
- Expected attendance at an event.
- Food/Fuel/Entertainment. We promoted partnered restaurants.
- It should be based on attendee demographics. If they do not live in the area, they will be spending money when they are here which positively impacts our community. It is also helpful to complete an informal economic impact calculation based on the type of event, how long the event/festival is, and how likely people will attend multiple days.
- Money spent while in town in restaurants, breakfast, fuel, after hours, downtown shopping.
- New exposure to the region for prospective community members/investors.
- Our event and marketing highlight Vancouver as a place to live, work, and visit. It is a tour that encourages people to explore and discover new places they may have never been.
- This grant provided a pilot program to allow micro transportation services for event attendees in Vancouver hotels. We tracked ridership to determine impact.
- We consider sales from participating vendors and exhibitors
- We evaluate event impact by attendance and feedback from attendees. Repeat attendees is also a significant factor.
- We had 30,000 attendees over the course of 3 days. We calculated the average amount spent per individual was \$35. having an economic impact of 1,050,000. This is for an unfenced, non-ticketed event.
- WE knew a significant portion of the event attendees stay in downtown Vancouver after the event to enjoy restaurants and other amenities so that was included
- We look at the number of people who come to the event, particularly families and children. We try to keep things free for most all events, with donations only, so that this really benefits the community at large. This event has become very popular and we know from talking to people at the event that many are coming from Portland, but we don't have a way to count it.
- We use an impact figure for the average spend by tourists per day based on actual room night occupancy (food, bev, entertainment) for economic impact to the community.

If you could improve one thing about the LTAC grants process, what would that be?

- 1) put a REQUIRED 2-to-1 CASH match for all recipients to be able to qualify for funding. If an applicant is requesting \$10,000, they must demonstrate PROOF of \$20,000 in additional funding sources. The matching should be a guaranteed match, not a proposed match.
- A consistent calendar for when applications will open every year.
- Consider impact on the community, and not just lodging. By getting more people over to Vancouver and seeing what we have to offer, the room nights come. We realize there is no good way to measure our event because it is free to the community.
- Culturally, we felt like only because our nonprofit has headquarters was outside of Vancouver, even though we serve the Vancouver community, was not approved.
- Either the opportunity to ask for larger sums of money due to the extensive application information, and/or requiring a much simpler, streamlined application for requests of \$7500 or less.
- Focus more on the social impact, which isn't measurable but, in turn, results in economic prosperity.
- Give the LTAC commission members some better parameters for judging applications (seems very subjective); originate a new category supporting applications other than the ones who benefit every year (who charge and gain income from their events otherwise) can also access. Think of both long- and short-term strategic deployment of the funds.
- Have a rubric and stick to it to make objective decisions. Don't try to be everything for everyone.
- I'd like LTAC to be an event incubator, and to find a way to clearly de-prioritize repeat events. Over time, these grants are designed to introduce new events into the community instead of providing an additional funding stream to established repeat events.
- It would be a lot easier to get the money upfront and then provide receipts rather than expending the amounts and then getting refunded. Really appreciate this program.
- Less guesswork required on the numbers. I understand these are state requirements but it is ridiculous to expect small organizations to have statistical experts available to help. Where can applicants access data on hotel stays during previous similar events and programs?
- Making sure that funds are distributed to events that can demonstrate direct impact to tourism and significant economic impact to the community.
- Provide the funds to Visit Vancouver to support existing tourist infrastructure that provides long-term tourist benefits and discontinue grants for one off projects or events.
- That it would be easier for community groups who want to hold events to take advantage of.

Overview of Strategic Perspectives

1. Streamline the grant application process
2. Clarify and refine decision criteria
3. Build awareness of grant opportunities
4. Strive for equity and fairness in event funding
5. Focus on tourism impact, but play the long game

1. Streamline the grant application process

“For someone used to applying for state-level grants, this was about average, but if we want more community members to take advantage of this grant opportunity, it feels like a bit much.”

“It is not possible to attach relevant supplemental documents such as spreadsheets with visitors demographics, brochures, posters, video clips. These are important in demonstrating the quality of an event, and the ability of an organization to successfully implement the grant.”

“There is a lot of estimation needed. It would be helpful to be directed to tools that would help with those estimates, such as most acceptable census data and most recent tourism stats.”

“Workshops are good, but it would be nice to have more of them in locations where people can attend in person to learn more.”

“Online application was okay, but seems burdensome to list board member tenure at a beginning phase of the process. Is that necessary?”

“A consistent calendar for when applications will open every year.”

“Either the opportunity to ask for larger sums of money due to the extensive application information, and/or requiring a much simpler, streamlined application for requests of \$7500 or less.”

“Originate a new category supporting applications other than the ones who benefit every year (who charge and gain income from their events otherwise) can also access.”

“Timing of grant funding gave only 6 weeks to utilize funding in a proposed program expected to be utilized over a year however funding was cut (not attributable) which lessened burden.”

“The JLARC database is a mess. I appreciate knowing the required reporting information in advance, but wish there were standards developed to help grant applicants provide uniform answers (many of the reporting categories leave much to interpretation)”

“The reporting doesn't always fit all types of approved projects.”

“Less guesswork required on the numbers. I understand these are state requirements but it is ridiculous to expect small organizations to have statistical experts available to help. Where can applicants access data on hotel stays during previous similar events and programs?”

2. Clarify and refine decision criteria

“Have a rubric and stick to it to make objective decisions. Don't try to be everything for everyone.”

“Give the LTAC commission members some better parameters for judging applications (seems very subjective).”

“We had a application in which we had a number of conversations about the criteria, but still ran into issue in the end.”

“This seems pretty arbitrary, with decision-making criteria unclear.”

“I didn't get enough feedback about why my application was rejected.”

“There does not seem to be any understanding among the committee as to how events are created or produced; what the value is to the community; or what the purpose of this funding is. We have been in the room during discussions where committee several committee members have suggested "dividing up the money" among all grant requests, regardless of merit, history of success, etc.”

“I'd like LTAC to be an event incubator, and to find a way to clearly de-prioritize repeat events. Over time, these grants are designed to introduce new events into the community instead of providing an additional funding stream to established repeat events.”

“I think the idea for this is something to get somebody kick started, get it up, get the event going and then become self sustainable. So you don't have to keep coming back to the pot so to speak and include that as basically part of their operating income when they're when they're doing this.”

“I wish it was more clear on how they're judging and awarding... Maybe I'm not the only one feeling this way, but it's like... why did they get 50 grand and I got 11 grand, you know, or what was the process?”

“I'm fine with getting denied, but when we saw programs get funded that the presentation was, ‘Well, we're having an event next weekend and we really need 25,000.’ It was like, great, you got 25,000 and it was like six days away.”

3. Build awareness of grant opportunities

“Even though I had applied and received LTAC grant dollars, I didn't get notified in time to be able to submit an application in subsequent years. It seemed like I heard about it at the last minute.”

“If you aren't on social media or read the newspaper it is difficult to learn about the grant. Many communities weren't even aware that this exists.”

“Like most grant programs, you have to be "in-the-know" to receive information about these.”

“Orgs who receive the grant annually to service their fee-based events, income yielding events are probably the most aware.”

“[I think] that organizations that are eligible for funding don't know that they're eligible for funding because there's not great communication saying this can be used as a way to expose your organization to a group of people who are other than Vancouver residents.”

“I think communication within the various committees that the City has would probably be beneficial. Even though the Lodging Tax is not associated with the Culture, Arts & Heritage Committee, [they] are going to be already in communication with a lot of the arts organizations and performing arts organizations or fine arts presenters in the city that would... probably be able to make use of these dollars.”

“[For raising awareness] I would say maybe start with like Visit Vancouver and the Chamber of Commerce—and maybe they're doing this already.”

“I think... communicate directly to the Chamber of Commerce Nonprofit Pod, would be a way for us to reach a couple hundred nonprofits here locally in a way that I don't think that that we currently touch them.”

4. Strive for equity and fairness in event funding

“Focus more on the social impact, which isn't measurable but, in turn, results in economic prosperity.”

“The criteria seem clear. However, some reviewers seem willing to change the criteria during the public evaluation and voting meeting. It is unfair to all applicants to change the criteria when applications are already submitted. Better practice would be to announce ahead of time that criteria will be changed in the next funding round so that everyone has an equal opportunity.”

“The low score is mostly due to lack of rubric outside of application questions. Assumptions were made about funding uses given priority however grants received for events did not line up with those assumptions.”

“It is understandable that there are a finite number of grant dollars. However, the reductions in the requested amounts do not appear to be made equally among applications that appear to be equally valuable.”

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“A lot of the events that are funded—some of them they get more money than us. There's not people that are flying in. They're not people that are driving it from other states... to me, it's just not fair.”

“I'm fine with getting denied, but when we saw programs get funded that the presentation was, ‘Well, we're having an event next weekend and we really need 25,000.’ It was like, great, you got 25,000 and it was like six days away.”

5. Focus on tourism impact, but play the long game

“For some of the organizations that were granted funds, it didn't seem that their event impacted tourism. More funds should be directed to those events that can clearly demonstrate that a high % of their attendees were coming from out of the region.”

“The criteria used to be that the event had a requirement to generate out-of-town visitors. There does not seem to be ANY emphasis on this. In point of fact, most of the funding seems to be 'pre-allocated' to City of Vancouver governmental agencies, and we know that groups are discouraged from even applying as this seems to be the primary focus.”

“It seems that funds are not distributed proportionately based on ability to bring people from out of the region to the area.”

“Making sure that funds are distributed to events that can demonstrate direct impact to tourism and significant economic impact to the community.”

“I do think room nights are important... the whole purpose of this is to generate more room nights to keep sustaining the lodging revenue, right? So tax dollars are coming from overnight stays and I do believe that that's a big part.”

“I mean, I can't tell you how many times the Board is talking about in general: 'Well, this is a feel good thing.' That's great. I'm sure there's other mechanisms within the City funding for feel-good projects.”

“I look at it as broad-based community development. I do think if there are events where there is a possibility that people will drive here for them, then I think that is interesting, because I'm interested in day trip visitation even though the hotels [may not be].”

Example Tool

Event Name	West Coast				
	Kustoms	AirFest	Rodeo	Wine Festival	BBQ Fest
Count of projected incremental room nights	2,500	1,500	700	1,200	200
Three-year average ADR for the event month	\$ 175.00	\$ 124.00	\$ 132.00	\$ 111.00	\$ 118.00
Accommodations revenue on estimated overnight stays	\$437,500.00	\$186,000.00	\$92,400.00	\$133,200.00	\$23,600.00
Other benefit	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Total Benefit	\$437,500.00	\$ 186,000.00	\$ 92,400.00	\$ 133,200.00	\$ 23,600.00
In-Kind/Expenses	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 5,000.00	\$ -	\$ 5,000.00	\$ -
Cash contribution from Visit Santa Maria Valley	\$ 4,000.00	\$ 5,000.00	\$ 5,000.00	\$ 5,000.00	\$ 2,000.00
Other contributions	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Total Investment	\$ 6,000.00	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 5,000.00	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 2,000.00
Raw ROI	72.92	18.60	18.48	13.32	11.80
Projected Visibility: (1) low visibility (2) medium visibility (3) high visibility	3	3	1	2	1
Alignment to interests/demographics of identified visitor segments (0 no alignment, 1 partial alignment, 2 strong alignment, 3 complete alignment)	2	2	1	3	2
Alignment to natural and unique advantages of Santa Maria (0 no alignment, 1 partial alignment, 2 strong alignment, 3 complete alignment)	2	2	2	3	3
Alignment to existing venue/accommodations capability and capacity in Santa Maria (0 no alignment, 1 partial alignment, 2 strong alignment, 3 complete alignment)	3	3	3	1	1
Alignment to Need Periods: (-3) high season (1) shoulder season (3) off season	-3	1	-3	-3	-3
Overnight Stay Multiplier (0 0-150 room nights, 1 150-300 room nights, 2 300-450 room nights, 3 >450 room nights)	3	3	3	3	3
Total Impact	10	14	7	9	7
Total Score	729.17	260.40	129.36	119.88	82.60

ROI Criteria

- x

Impact Criteria (multipliers)

- x

Why this process; why now?

- Existing process isn't working
- Applicants aren't able to quantify good data—room nights, in particular
- Want to see more qualified applicants
- City is growing; needs more polish
- Methodical way to help applicants improve
- More uniform for Committee
- More accurate reporting
- Different levels or tiers of grantee?
- Incubator
- Remove barriers
- What funds are for
- Capacity building

What have been stumbling blocks?

- Reporting back from recipients
- Funding questions
- Mixed messaging re: what events are sought
- Application process
- Lack of diverse applications
- Get message out: encourage applicants
- Not knowing impact & intention
- Timeline for applicants
- Big City priorities: climate, equity
- Alignment to City Strategic Plan & Tourism Master Plan
- Event support timeline
- Rolling application window?
- Reimbursement
- 50 miles/out of state

What do we need to balance re: equity & inclusion?

- Accessibility (application)
- Capital/reimbursement
- Evaluation—an element
- Pre-communication: languages; to communities

What do we need to balance beyond heads in beds?

- Derrieres in chairs
- Careful to maintain heads in beds
- New events don't have the ability to predict
- Future potential
- Brand-building
- Spend info

What do we need to balance re: climate change?

- Recycling/waste zero
- Food waste/S.U.P.
- Inbound travel carbon
- Attendee distance?
- Transportation initiatives

What do we need to balance re: geography?

- A lot of focus on downtown; constraints
- Bonus for non-downtown?
- Utilize the water
- Main Street is separate from Downtown

What else do we need to balance?

- Seasonality/off-season
- Facilities—sports
- Overall alignment with City priorities: public and personal safety; carbon footprint; equity & inclusion; growth
- Future: bridge project and Main Street Promise

How do we need to align with the Tourism Master Plan?

- Link for applicants
- Grade applicants by support of the Plan
- Classes?