

San Juan County

Lodging Tax Advisory Committee (LTAC) Master Plan for the Lodging Tax Facilities Grant Program

Mission:

To invest in activities and facilities that increase tourism related revenue through a sustainable visitor experience.

Goals:

1. Fully utilize existing facilities
2. Promote creative uses of existing facilities
3. Promote partnerships through coordination and cooperation
4. Improve visitor experience
5. Improve visitor/resident relationship
6. Focus on unique San Juan experience
7. Emphasize County wide benefits
8. Cooperate with Town of Friday Harbor's LTAC
9. All recipients follow state and local laws in collecting and remitting taxes and fees when applicable

Funding Philosophy

- LTAC will annually evaluate the institutions it has traditionally supported and pledges that – barring extraordinary circumstance – it will not dramatically decrease its support for these institutions without at least a year's warning.

Those institutions include:

- County Parks
- Community Theaters
- Historical Museums
- County Fairgrounds

LTAC will consider recommending multi-year awards to these institutions, on a percentage basis, in order to facilitate their long-range planning and for time efficiency for the institutions and LTAC alike. In the event the funding for year(s) beyond the current year sees a dramatic decline, LTAC reserves the right to adjust the award for future years accordingly.

- Recognizing its limited ability to provide ongoing operating funds to organizations, LTAC will emphasize grants for fixed-term projects, such as:

- Start-up funds for promising organizations or events. The Lodging Tax Advisory Committee has the discretion to fund projects. The Committee’s operating philosophy is to fund projects for up to three years, with the right to extend on a year-by-year basis.
- Onetime grant funds for facilities improvement projects for County owned or operated facilities only.
- Seed money to conduct research and develop concepts and grant applications that dovetail with LTACs priority areas.
- Lend support to a diverse range of sustainable activities to encourage visitors to enjoy longer stays and return often.
- Help establish a visitor friendly infrastructure including such things as signage, restrooms, transportation, and information on attractions and facilities.
- The committee may elect to convene for the purpose of considering off-cycle requests for LTAC funds which meet the legal requirements for lodging tax funding, provided funds are available, for projects that meet the priorities for tourism as provided herein. Any off-cycle request(s) shall be considered using the same application process and procedure as the annual process, beginning with advertising for RFP.
- Endeavor to use or reserve 10% of its available grant funds annually to fund new or innovative proposals. No more than 2 projects will be funded from these reserved funds.

Areas of Emphasis

LTAC has historically given priority to funding proposals that encourage and enhance tourism beyond the peak months of July and August

- Promoting tourism that typifies the “best of the San Juan Islands” – its natural beauty, geology, outdoor activities, anthropology, agricultural attractions, lifelong learning opportunities, history, culture and the arts.
 - Strategies include:
 - Development of key community assets that function as point destinations, or venues for multipurpose events, and serve on a year round basis;
 - Special Events or festivals that exemplify the natural resources, cultural offerings or history of the San Juan Islands;
 - Meetings or retreats that focus on the “Best of the San Juan Islands” as identified above;
 - Creating partnerships and synergies with existing organizations to develop and promote attractions and events for visitors.

- Developing innovative opportunities
 - Use of capacity in existing community facilities is encouraged;
 - Improving the tourist/islander relationship/enhancing the tourism experience*
 - Visitor education events (i.e. ecotourism, agri-tourism)
 - Community involvement strategies
 - Improved effectiveness of coordinated transportation and trail linkages including streetscapes and signage
- Supporting projects that promote coordination and cooperation in tourism activities
- Supporting projects that demonstrate countywide benefit

*(Note: The category of enhancing the tourism experience is based on the increasing recognition that the tourist is purchasing “experience(s)”. The concept is to encourage facilities, events and tourism facility operations that heighten, expand, improve, or lengthen the tourism experience with the idea of encouraging longer stays or more frequent returns.)

2020 LTAC PRIORITIES FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

(Listed in alphabetical order)

- Arts
 - Assist arts festivals and events to get underway with funding, and encouraging partnerships with existing facilities.
- Fairgrounds
 - Support efforts to enhance and use the fairgrounds and its facilities for visitor related activities beyond the fair itself.
- Parks
 - LTAC considers County Parks critical and necessary to the tourist industry and to the County’s economy.
 - It will actively support efforts to provide an alternative, sustainable funding system for the County’s parks.
- Place-based Food
 - Support food related markets, festivals and events

- Support facilities and programs to expose visitors to locally grown and/or prepared food, wine and other beverages.
- Restrooms
 - Assisting in the development of a “comfort station” plan with standards, identification of existing restrooms available to the public, indications of where more restrooms are needed and a strategy for financing them.
- Museums & Theatres
 - Encouraging partnerships with sponsors of other local activities and events to provide income and help communities take full advantage of their facilities.
- Seasonal Tourism Industry Employee Housing
- Signage
 - Encourage the creation and installation of “welcome” and directional signs identifying communities and attractions. Signs should reflect the County’s unique culture and draw on the talent of its community of artists. (Proposals must comply with San Juan County Code).
- Transportation
 - Encourage development of transportation options for visitors
- Wildlife & Environment
 - LTAC will support projects to provide visitors with nonintrusive opportunities to enjoying the County’s abundant land, air and marine wildlife and environment – including such things as birding, nature hikes and marine activities.

ACTION ITEMS FOR LODGING TAX ADVISORY COMMITTEE

- Establish priority areas of concern and encourage applicants to come up with creative approaches
- Designate a percentage of LTAC funds to devote to an area of interest or project (e.g., funding artists to do visitor-oriented signage)
- Conduct a bidders' conference after issuing an RFP for a project
- Stay in communication with other committee members
- Establish a rolling five year funding plan to be updated annually
- Participate in the creation of a tourism master plan for the San Juan Islands