



## Opportunity Attraction Fund Program

Program Guidelines for Fiscal Year 2026			
<b>Lead Division:</b> Marketing and Brand Strategy			
<input type="checkbox"/> New	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Revised 7/1/2025		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Grant	<input type="checkbox"/> Loan	<input type="checkbox"/> Tax Credit	<input type="checkbox"/> Technical Assistance

### Introduction

**Background Information:** The Opportunity Attraction Fund was established by 2023 Wisconsin Act 169, to create a grant program designed to attract high-impact events and opportunities to the state. Recognizing the economic potential of hosting major conventions, sporting events, and cultural programs, the Wisconsin Legislature authorized an annual \$5 million allocation to help communities and organizations bid for and secure events that elevate Wisconsin's national profile. The fund was created in response to increasing competition from other states and aims to position Wisconsin as a premier destination for tourism, business, and talent attraction.

**Program's Purpose:** The purpose of the Opportunity Attraction Fund Program is to attract major opportunities and events to the State of Wisconsin, to improve perception and increase awareness of Wisconsin as a place to travel and live. The Program provides funds for eligible entities to attract to Wisconsin, or host in Wisconsin, opportunities and events that are secured through competitive bidding against other states or jurisdictions outside of Wisconsin. Events or major opportunities secured through this program should drive economic impact within Wisconsin. Additional benefits may include increased travel and tourism activity within the state, as well as out-of-state talent attraction.

### Eligibility Requirements

**Eligible Applicants:** Opportunity Attraction Fund applicants may be:

- A city, village, town, or county.
- An American Indian tribe or band in this state.
- An area visitor and convention bureau.
- A business improvement district.
- A private entity.<sup>1</sup>

**Eligible Use of Funds:** Applicants may use Opportunity Attraction grant funds on a project as specified in the application to attract to Wisconsin, or host in Wisconsin, or both, a major opportunity event that is open to the public, whether or not free of charge<sup>2</sup>. Specifically, grant funds may be used to undertake a project to do one or more of the following:

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<sup>1</sup> Wis. Stat. § 238.143(1)

<sup>2</sup> Wis. Stat. § 238.143(3)(b)



1. Bid: Bid against other states or jurisdictions outside of Wisconsin to attract an opportunity or event that will draw national exposure and drive economic development and visitors to Wisconsin.<sup>3</sup>
2. Such costs may include, among others, documented out-of-pocket expenses for materials and travel to present the bid, or the use of staff time or outside consultants to prepare a bid, or the bid fee itself.
3. Host: Host an opportunity or event that will attract national exposure and drive economic development and visitors to Wisconsin that the applicant has secured through a competitive bid against other states or jurisdictions outside of Wisconsin.<sup>4</sup>

Such costs may include, among others, sponsorship or other fees required for hosting the event in Wisconsin, costs related to event space and logistic expenses, lodging, catering, and capital investment for infrastructure related to the event, as well as expenses related to marketing the event.

**Matching:** A 1:1 cash match from non-state sources is required. In-kind contributions are not eligible.<sup>5</sup>

## Available Incentives

**FY26:** \$3,067,898

### Award sizes:

1. Bid: The maximum grant amount to a bid for an event or opportunity is \$2,000,000.
2. Host: The maximum grants for expenses related to hosting an event or opportunity is \$3,067,898

## Activities and Expected Outcomes

Assist 4 communities and achieve a leverage of 1:1 of other investment.

**Impact:** Direct and indirect economic impact through increased out-of-state visitor attraction to Wisconsin, national exposure via earned media, tourism and related spending by visitors, event-related spending, and possible capital investment related to an event.

**Metrics:** As an event attraction program, performance reporting metrics for OAF are focused on measuring bid completion or event preparation and hosting. OAF program metrics include the following list, and each project will include one or more of these metrics in its reporting requirements depending on the project's specified use of funds.

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<sup>3</sup> Wis. Stat. § 238.143(3)(b)1

<sup>4</sup> Wis. Stat. § 238.143(3)(b)2

<sup>5</sup> Wis. Stat. § 238.143(4)

1. Bid
  - Plans Completed
  - Performance Milestone
  - Leverage – Total
2. Host
  - Capital Investment
  - Individuals Served/Engaged
  - Marketing Impressions
  - Leverage – Total

## Application Guideline

**Timeline:** The Opportunity Attraction Fund program has a continuous application process.

**Review Considerations:** Applicants must include a detailed cost-benefit analysis demonstrating the projected direct and indirect economic benefits to Wisconsin. This analysis should include assumptions, methodology, and justification for projections, along with any third-party data or models used.<sup>6</sup> In addition, all applicants will be expected to provide the following:

- An estimate of the number of event attendees from outside the state.
- Estimates of total or out-of-state visitor spending, broken down by category, as well as the basis for those estimates.
- A breakdown of planned capital expenditures, including construction and equipment, that will be made to host the event.

WEDC may consult with the Wisconsin Department of Tourism<sup>7</sup> prior to making an award under this program and may take the following into account when evaluating applicants:

1. Bid
  - Whether or not the event or opportunity is appropriate and desirable for support by the State of Wisconsin.
  - Whether or not the applicant has demonstrated sufficient direct and indirect impact to justify WEDC's investment.
  - Whether or not the applicant's expected out-of-pocket costs for preparing and submitting its bid are reasonable.
  - Whether or not the bid fee is reasonable.
  - Whether or not the applicant is based in Wisconsin.
2. Host
  - Whether or not the event or opportunity is appropriate and desirable for support by the State of Wisconsin.
  - Whether or not the applicant has demonstrated sufficient direct and indirect impact to justify WEDC's investment.
  - Whether or not the applicant is based in Wisconsin.

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<sup>6</sup> Wis. Stat. § 238.143(3)(a)

<sup>7</sup> Wis. Stat. § 238.143(5)



- The extent to which Wisconsin vendors will be used in supporting the event or opportunity.

**How to Apply:** An interested applicant should contact a WEDC Account Manager to determine if their project is right for the program. Upon review of the project, and alignment with eligibility criteria, an applicant will be invited to submit their application through Network Wisconsin.

**Award Process:** The completed application will be assigned to a WEDC underwriter and go through WEDC's awards administration process.

**Performance Reporting:** Recipients must periodically submit a performance report documenting specific project activities and any other contract deliverables.

WEDC annually selects awards on a sample basis for an audit. All backup to the performance report and financial records are required to be maintained by the Recipient for a period of at least three (3) years after the last performance report is due.

WEDC may impose additional reporting requirements to evaluate project performance and to ensure compliance with contract deliverables.

Opportunity grants are not subject to Wis. Stat. § 238.03(3)(a).<sup>8</sup>

## Helpful Information

### Definitions:

"Direct economic benefits" – economic benefits from the event itself, including spending by the event host and organizer.

"Indirect economic Benefits" – economic benefits from attendees of the event, including spending on categories like food and beverages, lodging, transportation, retail, and recreation and entertainment.

## Revision History

### Program Inception – Fiscal Year 2025

- 7/1/2025: Removes criteria that are more restrictive than statute requires; increases bid fee limit to 2 million; removes in-kind match

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<sup>8</sup> Wis. Stat. § 238.143(3)(c)