

VisitMercerCountyPA

Fiscal Year (FY) 2025/2026 Tourism Attraction Development Grant (MCTAG)

The Mercer County Tourism Attraction Development Grant (MCTAG) is designed to assist with the development, expansion, renovation, and improvement of tourism attractions within Mercer County, PA. This grant seeks to support projects that will increase overnight stays and travel into and throughout Mercer County. Funding available for FY 2025/2026 is \$200,000.00. Grant requests may be made for \$5,000.00 to \$25,000.00. Applicants must provide at least a \$0.50 match for every dollar given.

Eligible projects must: Directly impact tourism in Mercer County, PA and/or complement or enhance existing tourism destination assets and be sustainable and financially viable.

The goal of the Mercer County Tourism Attraction Development Grant is to:

1. Increase visitors experiences and services that will draw overnight visitors to Mercer County, PA
2. Increase the number of visitors, length of stay and spending by visitors in Mercer County, PA
3. Assist Mercer County tourism assets to become competitive with other destinations

Grant funds will be awarded on a reimbursement basis.

The maximum grant amount to tourism attractions for FY 2025/2026 is **\$25,000.00** and must be leveraged with at least 50% of the eligible project expenditures from other sources. Funds from other sources must be made available for the project at the time of application submittal. The amount available for matching purposes must be expended during the grant period, which is one year following the award unless an extension has been granted. Requests for budget modifications or extensions must be received by VisitMercerCountyPA no later than 45 days prior to the expiration of the contract.

MCTAG GUIDELINES & APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

I. Purpose

VisitMercerCountyPA (hereafter referred to as VisitMCPA) will make grants to not-for-profit organizations/government and for-profit businesses to increase tourism visitation or enhance the visitor experience in a measurable way. This primary mission is shown by the marketing and advertising efforts of the attraction to regions outside of Mercer County. **Projects that are not tourism related and whose primary markets are the local community are not appropriate for this grant.**

II. Intent

The intent of the Mercer County Tourism Attraction Development Grant (MCTAG) is to provide matching grants to assist projects that will increase the economic impact of tourism.

III. MCTAG Funding (FY 2025/2026)

- **For profit and Non-profit/Government organizations** submitting applications for tourism attractions are eligible to receive a maximum of \$25,000.00 per fiscal year per Federal Tax ID Number. No more than one (1) grant in 2 years or four (4) grants shall be awarded in a ten-year period beginning with the date of first grant approval, regardless of the combined total award amount.

IV. Eligible Applicants

Must be:

- a. A not-for-profit organization/government or for-profit corporation or business applying for tourism attraction in Mercer County, PA.
- b. A grantee must be a member of VisitMCPA prior to disbursement of funds.
- c. The applicant must be the owner of the business/location the project is taking place or a tenant with a lease of three years or more. Home-based businesses are not eligible.
- d. The business must be in good standing with the state in which it does business, and all federal, state, and local taxes must be current.
- e. The business must have an active business license, if required by the state or local government.
- f. An applicant cannot have any outstanding Grants with VisitMCPA.

V. Application Procedures

A. VisitMCPA shall supply interested entities with Application Guidelines upon request.

Applications will be accepted twice during the fiscal year. The deadline for the first round of applications is October 31, 2025, with awards granted in November 2025. \$100,000 will be available in the first round. The deadline for the second round of applications is Feb. 28, 2026, with awards granted in March of 2026. \$100,000 will be available in the second round. Any application not funded in the first round will be considered for the second grant cycle.

An application will be considered delivered on the date it is postmarked or delivered to: VisitMCPA, 50 North Water Ave. Sharon, PA 16146.

B. Pre-Application Screening – Potential applicants are strongly encouraged to submit a brief pre-application discussing their proposed project. A response to the pre-application encouraging or discouraging a formal application will be communicated to the applicant within 30 days. This screening is to provide guidance. The decision on whether to proceed or not proceed with a formal application rest totally with the applicant.

VI. Review of Applications

Within 15 business days after VisitMCPA receives the application, the President/CEO shall notify the Applicant whether, after a brief review, the application and attachments, if any, are complete. This notice is not in any way an acknowledgement by VisitMCPA as to the adequacy of the substance of the application. If the application and attachments are incomplete, the applicant will be notified of the deficiencies and will have 15 business days to remedy any deficiencies. In the event the applicant fails to remedy all deficiencies within 15 business days the application shall be considered null and void.

Accepted applications will be sent to a review committee which will rate each submission and make recommendations to the Board of Directors, which will discuss and vote on the grant request.

VII. Grant Agreement

Upon approving a given application, VisitMCPA will notify the organization/business of the grant amount and execute a contract between that entity and the agency. The applicant is responsible for paying for the TAG legal agreement which typically costs about \$350.00.

VIII. Disbursement of Grant Funds

Grantee must **first** expend the full amount of their matching portion of the project from the approved application prior to any funds being disbursed by VisitMCPA. Proof of expenditure will need to be provided to VisitMCPA. The tourism attraction development grant will be disbursed with a proforma invoice or invoice for the remaining amount once the grantees matching funds have been spent. New developments must be completed and opened before reimbursement is made.

IX. Reports

The grantee will be responsible for submitting a close-out report. Copies of original vendor invoices showing the actual matching and grant costs incurred, the check number, and date of the check corresponding to the invoices shall be submitted to VisitMCPA with the closeout report. Completion of the project must be one year following the award unless an extension is requested and approved.

X. Recognition

The grantee must acknowledge VisitMCPA as a sponsor of the project. All construction related projects that are funded through this program must include a sign displayed at the project site stating:

“This project was partially funded by a Grant from VisitMercerCountyPA.” The grantee shall prominently acknowledge the participation of VisitMCPA in all press releases, publications and promotional materials presented to the media or otherwise disseminated or published concerning the project. Failure to comply with this request may affect the applicant’s future funding.

XI. Eligible Projects and Activities include:

Projects and activities eligible for funding include, but are not limited to,

- A. Major Expansions, and Significant Capital Improvements of existing tourism assets
- B. Interpretive Programs – creation and implementation of interpretive programs
- C. New projects that will generate overnight stays or increase tourism visitation

XII. Ineligible Projects and Activities

Projects and activities ineligible for funding include, but are not limited to, the following:

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------------|
| A. Debt refinancing | D. Operating expenses |
| B. Contingency funding | E. Administrative expenses |
| C. Staff | F. Feasibility studies |

XIII. Matching Funds

The grantee shall provide matching funds for the total project costs which are identified in the application budget. Matching funds must be cash.

XIV. Application Evaluation and Selection Process- Tourism Attractions Capital Projects

VisitMCPA’s internal review (TAG) committee shall conduct an evaluation of each application. The criteria used in determining whether an application will be considered for a grant award include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Will the Project be a viable tourism attraction drawing visitors from another state or from 50 miles or more? Or will the project complement/enhance existing tourism assets?
2. Is the tourism attraction currently marketed or going to be marketed to potential visitors from another state or at least 50 miles from Mercer County?
3. Does the project demonstrate how it will increase visitation, length of stay, and/or tourism expenditures?
4. Does the project include adequate tracking and evaluation measures?
5. Will the project generate a Return on Investment (ROI) for the county within three years?
6. Does the project demonstrate the potential for sustainable economic growth and job creation, or does it have a significant impact on the area’s overall tourism efforts?

Each of the above criteria will be rated with 100 points possible. An application must receive a minimum of **80** points to be considered eligible for funding. The review committee will forward all eligible applications together with its recommendations to the VisitMCPA Board of Directors for final determination.

Requests for exceptions to this policy need to be reviewed by the Board of Directors VisitMercerCountyPA

Tourism Attraction Development Grant Application

COVER PAGE (This sheet must be completed by all applicants)

1. Applicant Organization: _____

Authorized Official (Name and Title: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ **State:** _____ **Zip:** _____

Daytime Telephone: _____ **Fax:** _____

Email: _____

Location of Attraction (Street Address if applicable, otherwise a description of location):

2. Applicant's F.E.I.N.: _____

3. Applicant Organization Status: ___ Not-For-Profit ___ For-Profit

4. Project Contact Person: _____

Telephone: _____

5. Project Title: _____

6. Anticipated project initiation and completion dates:

From: _____ **to:** _____

7. Total Cost of Project: \$ _____ **Grant Request: \$** _____
(As Reflected on Itemized Budget)

8. Anticipated employment positions created by project if applicable: Full Time _____
Part Time _____

**To the best of my knowledge and belief, information in this application is true and correct,
and the governing body of the Applicant Organization has duly authorized this document.**

Signature of Authorized Official/Title/Date:

VisitMercerCountyPA
Tourism Attraction Development Grant Application
Tourism Attractions Capital Projects

The following 12 items must be addressed by tourism attractions seeking funding. Responses are scored so it is important that you answer each item completely. See the score sheet on page 8.

NOTE: Each of the following numbered Application sections (1-12) must be addressed on separate sheets of paper and attached to the Application Cover Page.

- 1. PROJECT DESCRIPTION:** Describe the proposed project clearly and concisely. State the goal, strategy, and the target audience. Describe how this project will increase visitation, length of stay, and/or tourism expenditures from visitors from other states or outside a 50-mile area.
- 2. BUDGET CATEGORY BREAKDOWN:** Describe the use of funds being requested on the budget sheet, explaining how the money will be spent. The budget must be submitted in a Budget Grid Format (see sample budget format). Each project category must provide an itemized budget that lists the requested eligible budget items pertaining to the project and documented with supporting vendor attachments.
- 3. MARKETING ATTRACTION:** Describe the current promotional efforts for the attraction as well as the anticipated efforts to advertise the attraction to another State or outside a 50-mile area.
- 4. EVALUATION MEASURES:** Describe the methods to be used to track the success of this project.
- 5. HOURS OF OPERATION:** Detail the attraction's current or proposed schedule of operation (days and hours) that it will be open to the public. Describe the source of funding for personnel to staff and operate the attraction.
- 6. RETURN ON INVESTMENT:** Describe how this project will increase expenditure from additional visitors generating a Return on Investment (ROI) for the county within three years.
- 7. SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH POTENTIAL:** Demonstrate the potential for sustainable economic growth and job creation or the significant impact on the area's overall tourism efforts that will occur because of this development. Provide the number of jobs this project is expected to create. How will the county benefit from the project? Preference will be given to projects that demonstrate the greatest potential for significantly increasing overnight stays and travel into and throughout Mercer County.
- 8. HISTORY OF THE APPLICANT'S TOURISM EFFORTS:** Provide a description of the Applicant's tourism efforts, including any public financial assistance received or private efforts utilized to generate increased tourism travel to the location.
- 9. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE:** Provide a list of the timelines for major project milestones and/or activities including the start and end date of each major activity (month and year).

10. NEW DEVELOPMENTS (if applicable): For building construction or renovations, copies of contractor's bids must be submitted on the bidder's letterhead. Contractors should be licensed and insured. Two quotes should be secured. Work that is completed by anyone with ownership in the project is not eligible for TAG reimbursement.

11. DESCRIPTION OF MACHINERY AND/OR EQUIPMENT (if applicable):

Identify major equipment to be acquired with grant and/or match funds and provide copies of bids on bidder's letterhead or selected vendor's quotes/estimates if bids are not required.

New Machinery and/or Equipment: Attach a copy of vendor's cost estimates or provide copies of bids on bidder's letterhead.

Used Machinery and/or Equipment: Attach an appraisal demonstrating that the fair market value is consistent with the purchase price.

Installation or Moving of Machinery and/or Equipment: Attach written cost estimates on vendor's letterhead or provide copies of bids on bidder's letterhead.

12. LETTERS OF FINANCIAL COMMITMENT: List the source(s) and amount(s) of local or private matching funds in the form of specific commitment letters. Loan commitment letters from financial institutions must have language indicating the loan amount, the specified term and interest, collateral, conditions pertaining to the loan, and the fact that the loan is approved. If the matching source is an individual, evidence of available assets such as balance sheets, financial banking statements, stock dividends must be provided, or it will not be considered as matching commitment.

Sample Budget Format

Item Description	Grant Request	Match	Total
(4) Exhibits for Underground Railroad Tour	\$10,000.00	\$10,000.00	\$20,000.00
Interpretative panels for three sites	\$7,000.00	\$7,000.00	\$14,000.00
Total Project Cost	Grant: \$17,000.00	Match: \$17,000.00	Total Project Cost: \$34,000.00

Evaluation Worksheet

			Points scored in each category	Total Points
1	Will the project be a viable tourism attraction drawing visitors from another state or from 50 miles or more? Or will project strongly complement/enhance existing tourism assets			30 points available
2	Is the tourism attraction currently marketed or going to be marketed to potential visitors from another state or at least 50 miles from Mercer County			20 points available
3	Does the project demonstrate how it will increase visitation, length of stay and /or tourism expenditures			10 points available
4	Does the project include adequate tracking and evaluation measures?			10 points available
5	What is the projected Return on Investment (ROI) for the county within three years?			10 points available
6	Does the project demonstrate the potential for sustainable economic growth and job creation, or a significant impact on the area's overall tourism efforts			20 points available

Each of the above criteria will be rated by the TAG Committee with 100 points possible. An application must receive a minimum of 80 points to be considered for funding. The review committee will forward all eligible applications together with their recommendations to the VisitMercerCountyPA Board of Directors for final determination.