

State of Illinois Uniform Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)
Summary Information

Awarding Agency Name	Commerce And Econ Opp
Agency Contact	Greg Mihalich (greg.mihalich@illinois.gov)
Announcement Type	Initial
Type of Assistance Instrument	Grant
Funding Opportunity Number	FY26-2
Funding Opportunity Title	International Tourism Grant Program
CSFA Number	420-25-1607
CSFA Popular Name	International Tourism Grant Program
Anticipated Number of Awards	0
Estimated Total Program Funding	\$466,685
Award Range	\$10000 - \$155000
Source of Funding	State
Cost Sharing or Matching Requirements	Yes
Indirect Costs Allowed	No
Restrictions on Indirect Costs	No
Posted Date	01/26/2026
Application Date Range	General announcement open for a period of time with no specific due dates for applications.
Grant Application Link	Please select the entire address below and paste it into the browser... https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/3e1354ed0a52499bb3104fb5cafa579a
Technical Assistance Session	No

Agency-specific Content for the Notice of Funding Opportunity

International Tourism Grant Program

NOFO ID: 1607-4230

For information about grants please visit:

<https://dceo.illinois.gov/dceo-grants.html>

A. Program Description

Notice of Funding Opportunity Intent

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (the “Department” or “DCEO”) is issuing this Notice of Funding Opportunity (“NOFO”) to provide grants to certified convention and visitors bureaus outside the City of Chicago to assist with international marketing efforts.

Program Description

Section 605-707 of the Civil Administrative Code of Illinois (International Tourism Program) [20 ILCS 605/605-707] authorizes the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Office of Tourism, to award grants and work in cooperation with certified local tourism and convention bureaus outside the City of Chicago that demonstrate their international tourism appeal and request to develop or expand their international tourism marketing program. These grants are payable from the International Tourism Fund.

The International Tourism Grant Program is important to the State of Illinois' tourism industry to match/leverage local funds with State funds to promote destinations that are of interest to international travelers. The goal of the program is to increase international travel to Illinois by our identified target markets.

Priority funding will be given to those areas with an extensive international product including bookable product with both receptive tour operators and international tour operators. This would include product in tour operator brochures and promotional material. Priority will also be given to those areas with state and national parks, national forests, scenic byways and have sites of historic and cultural significance.

Program History

This is the second round of funding, the program was funded in FY 26. This grant program is a partnership between the DCEO Office of Tourism and the certified convention and visitors bureaus to maintain a coordinated Illinois effort in these international markets.

In 2024, Illinois hosted nearly 2.2 million international visitors. We are hopeful to see growth from our international markets and these grants will help us achieve those goals.

Performance Goals and Measures

Applicant must identify performance measurements they will use to identify successful marketing outcomes. Such as:

1. Number of international media and trade hosted on familiarization tours.
2. Number of international media placements as a result of public relations efforts including the number of impressions and media value.
3. Number of international advertisements placed and results.
4. Number of tour operators that carry your product and in what markets.
5. Number of bookings achieved with tour operators based on promotions.

Other Information

N/A

B. Funding Information

This grant program is utilizing state funds appropriated by Public Act 104-0003 Total amount of funding expected to be awarded through this NOFO is \$466,685. Awards will range from \$10,000 to \$155,000.

Applications for this opportunity will be accepted on a rolling bases until 1) funds are exhausted or 2) March 1, 2026 @ 5pm CST, whichever occurs first.

The period of performance is expected to be date of grant execution through June 30, 2026

Pre award, or prior incurred costs, are allowable if they are incurred on or after July 1, 2025.

Eligible Use of Funds:

Per 14 IL Admin. Code 555.40, expenditures and activities for which grant funds can be utilized by Grantees include, but are not limited to, the following that target international markets:

- Brochures;
- Advertising;
- Travel expenses;
- Familiarization tours for trade and media;
- Translation services;
- Trade Shows;
- Sales missions;
- International association fees for regional organizations such as Great Lakes USA and Mississippi River Country as well as US Travel Association;
- Promotional items, which should, to the greatest extent practicable, be manufactured or produced in the United States, consistent with 2 CFR 200.322.

Salary/Wage for international program staff performing duties set forth in the Grant Agreement's scope of work.

Ineligible expenditures include, but not limited to, the following:

- Purchase of Equipment;
- Administrative Expenses;
- Salaries not associated with international activities and;
- Purchase of alcohol.

The release of this NOFO does not obligate the Department to make an award.

C. Eligibility Information

An entity must be registered in the Grant Accountability and Transparency Act (GATA) Grantee Portal, <https://grants.illinois.gov/portal/>, at the time of grant application. The portal will verify that the entity:

- Has a valid FEIN number (<https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/get-an-employer-identification-number>)
- Has a current SAM.gov registration (<https://sam.gov>). SAM.gov registrations must be marked as "public" to allow the GATA Grantee Portal to expedite the review of the federal information;
- Has a valid UEI number (<https://sam.gov>)
- Is not on the Federal Excluded Parties List (verified at <https://sam.gov>)
- Is in Good Standing with the Illinois Secretary of State, as applicable (https://www.ilsos.gov/departments/business_services/corp.html)

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- Is not on the Illinois Stop Payment list (verified once entity is registered in GATA Grantee Portal); and
- Is not on the Department of Healthcare and Family Services Provider Sanctions list (<https://www.illinois.gov/hfs/oig/Pages/SanctionsList.aspx>)

Entities on the Illinois Stop Payment List and/or the Federal Excluded Parties List at time of application submission will not be considered for an award.

An automated email notification to the entity alerts them of “qualified” status or informs how to remediate a negative verification (e.g., not in good standing with the Secretary of State). A federal Debarred and Suspended status cannot be remediated.

At this time, federal memo M-21-20 allows entities to apply for grant awards without a valid UEI number. The UEI number must be obtained prior to grant execution. The State of Illinois has adopted this guidance for the issuance of state awards also.

Pursuant to the policy of the Illinois Office of the Comptroller, to receive grant funds from the State of Illinois, a grantee must be considered a regarded entity by the IRS for federal income tax purposes. Disregarded entities will not be eligible to receive grant funds.

1. Eligible Applicants include:

Local Tourism and Convention Bureau certified by the Department to receive funds under 20 ILCS 605/705 and are located outside the City of Chicago

The Department complies with all applicable provisions of state and federal laws and regulations pertaining to nondiscrimination, sexual harassment and equal employment opportunity including, but not limited to: The Illinois Human Rights Act (775 ILCS 5/1-101 et seq.), The Public Works Employment Discrimination Act (775 ILCS 10/1 et seq.), The United States Civil Rights Act of 1964 (as amended) (42 USC 2000a-and 2000H-6), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 USC 794), The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 USC 12101 et seq.), and The Age Discrimination Act (42 USC 6101 et seq.).

2. Cost Sharing or Matching.

Each grantee shall provide matching funds equal to no less than 50% of the total project cost. If grantee fails to match any portion of the grant award in a given Fiscal Year, that portion of the grant shall be refunded to the Department in accordance with the terms of the Grant Agreement. In-kind contributions shall not exceed 25% of the matching funds (See Section 555.70 of Title 14 of the Administrative Rules for eligible types of matching funds).

Section 555.70 Matching Funds

a) The Grantee shall provide Matching Funds to be expended towards the Total Project Cost that are:

1) Under the control of the Grantee. For purposes of the Grant, control shall mean that the Grantee can successfully demonstrate the following control and accountability requirements:

A) The Grantee's chief executive officer maintains responsibility for establishing review and approval policies and procedures with respect to the Grantee's daily operations; and

B) The Grantee's chief executive officer has approval authority for expenses charged to the Grantee's operating budget and approval over the Grantee expenses attributable to the Grant. Within this requirement, the Grantee's chief executive officer

must be the person that reviews and approves the payment of invoices related to the grant and match expenditures.

- 2) Identified in the Applicant's grant application for the applicable Fiscal Year.
- 3) Expended during the applicable grant award period.
- 4) Supported by records of deposit and documentation of Eligible Expenditures.
- 5) Necessary and irrevocably obligated and used towards completion of the Project.

b) Each Grantee shall provide matching funds equal to no less than 50% of the Grant Amount. If Grantee fails to match any portion of the grant award in a given Fiscal Year, that portion of the grant shall be refunded to the Department in accordance with the terms of the Grant Agreement. In-kind contributions shall not exceed 25% of Matching Funds.

c) Allowable Matching Funds include:

- 1) Local hotel/motel taxes;
- 2) Membership dues;
- 3) Interest earned on local monies and Grant Funds;
- 4) Cash contributions;
- 5) Federal dollars deposited directly to the Grantee for tourism promotion purposes that do not require a match; and
- 6) In-kind Contributions necessary to complete the Project. In-kind Contributions shall not exceed 25% of the match requirement.

d) Ineligible Match: The following monies shall not be considered Matching Funds and may not be used as a match for Grant Funds:

- 1) Costs incurred or funds expended outside the grant term identified in the Grant Agreement unless those costs are approved by the Director as otherwise being compliant with this Part and consistent with the purposes of the Statute;
- 2) Funds from any other Department funded grant program, regardless of whether the other grant funds were awarded and expended to further the Project;
- 3) Funds used to match any other State and/or federal grants;
- 4) Penalties, fines, late payment fees or interest charges; and
- 5) Purchase of alcohol beverages.

3. Indirect Cost Rate.

Indirect costs are not allowed for this opportunity.

4. Freedom of Information Act/Confidential Information.

Applications and accompanying materials are subject to disclosure in response to requests received under provisions of the Freedom of Information Act (5 ILCS 140/1 et seq.). Information that could be proprietary, privileged, or confidential commercial or financial information should be clearly identified as such in the application materials. The Department will maintain the confidentiality of that information only to the extent permitted by law.

5. Other, if applicable.

Applicants may submit one (1) application for this opportunity.

D. Application and Submission Information

1. Address to Request Application Package.

Grant application forms are available at the web link provided in the “Grant Application Link” field of this announcement or by contacting the Program Manager:

Greg Mihalich
Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity
1011 S. 2nd Street
Springfield, IL 62704
Tele: 217-299-1323
Email: ceo.tourismgrants@illinois.gov

2. Content and Form of Application Submission.

A standard application package must be submitted to and reviewed by DCEO. Each package must contain the following items:

- ☐ Uniform Grant Application in fillable PDF format.
 - Signature page must be signed by the authorized signatory before submission
 - Can be printed, signed, and scanned
 - Can be signed digitally
- ☐ Uniform Budget utilizing the template provided by DCEO for this project.
 - The entire Excel document with all the tabs included, even if the tabs are not relevant to the grant opportunity, must be submitted.
 - Do not send a restricted version of the Uniform Budget.
 - Certification page must be signed by the authorized signatory before submission
 - Can be printed, signed, and scanned
 - Can be signed digitally
- ☐ Conflict of Interest Disclosure.
 - Conflict of Interest Disclosure must be signed by the authorized signatory before submission
 - Can be printed, signed, and scanned
 - Can be signed digitally
- ☐ Mandatory Disclosure.
 - Mandatory Disclosure must be signed by the authorized signatory before submission
 - Can be printed, signed, and scanned
 - Can be signed digitally

This Notice of Funding Opportunity also requires the submission of the following other programmatic specific items as part of the program application:

- ☐ Program Application

Please note there is a maximum upload of 10 documents in the web form that you submit the application, so combining files may be necessary.

3. Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and System for Award Management (SAM).

Each applicant (unless the applicant is an individual or Federal or State awarding agency that is exempt from those requirements under 2 CFR 25.110(b) or (c), or has an exception approved by the Federal or State awarding agency under 2 CFR 25.110(d)) is required to:

- (i) Be registered in SAM. To establish a SAM registration, go to <https://sam.gov> and/or utilize this instructional link: How to Register in SAM from the gata.illinois.gov Resource Library tab. SAM.gov registrations must be “public.”
- (ii) Provide a valid UEI number in the GATA Grantee Portal registration.
- (iii) Continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active Federal, Federal pass-through or State award or an application or plan under consideration by a Federal or State awarding agency. The State awarding agency may not make a Federal pass-through or State award to an applicant until the applicant has complied with all applicable UEI and SAM requirements and, if an applicant has not fully complied with the requirements by the time the State awarding agency is ready to make a Federal pass-through or State award, the State awarding agency may determine that the applicant is not qualified to receive a Federal pass-through or State award and use that determination as a basis for making a Federal pass-through or State award to another applicant.

4. Submission Dates and Times.

Applications for this opportunity will be accepted on a rolling bases until 1) funds are exhausted or 2) March 1, 2026 @ 5PM CST whichever occurs first.

Application materials must be submitted to the Department via electronic form at <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/3e1354ed0a52499bb3104fb5cafa579a>.

The Department is under no obligation to review applications that do not comply with the above requirements. Failure to meet the application deadline may result in the Department returning application without review or may preclude the Department from making the award.

5. Intergovernmental Review, if applicable.

N/A

6. Funding Restrictions.

This opportunity does allow reimbursement of pre-award costs. Other restrictions can be found in Sections A., B., and C.

7. Other Submission Requirements.

Documents stored in Google Docs or other cloud-based servers are not allowed.

The applicant can receive a copy of their submitted application by checking the “Send me a copy of my responses” box at the bottom of the application submission form.

Applicants may confirm receipt of the application and documents by contacting the program contact listed in this NOFO.

E. Application Review Information

1. Criteria.

Grant proposals will be reviewed on a competitive basis. Each proposal will be scored on a 100-point scale (or on a percentage scale). The Department shall consider the following criteria when evaluating the application submittal: Need, Capacity, and Quality

Need- Identification of stakeholders, facts, and evidence that demonstrate the proposal supports the grant program purpose	
Proposal clearly addresses how the project will increase international visitation and is part of an overall marketing plan based on research to identify opportunities. Application provided information describing the attractions they have such as state and national parks, national forest, scenic byways or historical or culturally significant attractions of interest to international visitors.	10 points
Proposal identified previous marketing efforts that were successful to justify funding. Proposal detailed information on products that are currently carried by receptive and international tour operators.	10 points
Capacity- The ability of the applicant to execute the project according to requirements of the grant program	
Applicant demonstrated experience and ability to provide the services outlined in the NOFO and successfully complete the project tasks within the proposed grant period	10 Points
Applicant demonstrated the ability and quality of systems/methodologies to track and measure the performance of the project and identified past results of those international efforts	10 Points
Quality- The totality of features and characteristics of the project that indicate its ability to satisfy the requirements of the grant program	
Proposal supported and augmented the international tourism efforts of our department by planning to work within the opportunities presented.	10 Points
The proposal demonstrated the potential interest or proven interest for the international markets selected by showing past results or providing information as to attractions that would be of interest to these markets	10 Points
The projects identified in the application will have an impact on the area's overall tourism recovery	10 Points
Applicant demonstrated that they are visitor ready for international guests from the identified markets	10 Points
Applicant demonstrated that the estimated outcomes reflect the intent of this funding opportunity by identifying the estimated performance measures and outcomes	10 Points
Applicant provided details that reflect attainable and viable outcomes as a result to their overall efforts	10 Points

2. Review and Selection Process.

Applications will be graded using the Merit Review Process and scored on the criteria specified in Section E.1. The Department will designate an Evaluation Committee to grade each application received for this funding opportunity. The final score of each Committee member will be calculated and an average of all scores will be the final applicant score. Applications will be reviewed on a first come, first serve basis. Applications that score 60 or higher will be recommended for funding.. .

The Merit Based Review process is subject to appeal per <https://dceo.illinois.gov/aboutdceo/grantopportunities/meritappreview.html>. However, competitive grant appeals are limited to the evaluation process. Evaluation scores may not be protested. Only the evaluation process is subject to appeal. The appeal must be submitted through the merit review appeal request form (<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/6444bed39ef140c589f002f53b9bc092>) within 14 calendar days after the date that the grant award notice has been published.

3. Anticipated Announcement and State Award Dates, if applicable.

After the application period is closed, the Department will conduct a meritbased review of eligible applications. Successful applicants will receive a Notice of State Award (NOSA) to initiate the grant agreement phase. During this phase, you will be contacted by a grant manager to develop a grant agreement, which can be a months long process depending on complexity, cooperation, and conformity with all applicable federal and state laws.

The Department reserves the right to issue a reduced award, or not to issue any award.

F. Award Administration Information

1. State Award Notices.

The Notice of State Award (NOSA) will specify the funding terms and specific conditions resulting from the pre-award risk assessments and the merit-based review process. The NOSA must be accepted in the GATA Portal by an authorized representative of the grantee organization. The NOSA is not an authorization to begin performance or incur costs.

2. Administrative and National Policy Requirements.

Subrecipients and Subcontractors: Agreement(s) and budget(s) with subrecipients and subcontractors must be pre-approved by and on file with DCEO. Agreements can be submitted to DCEO when available. Subcontractors and subrecipients are subject to all applicable provisions of the Agreement(s) executed between DCEO and the grantee. The successful applicant shall retain sole responsibility for the performance of its subrecipient(s) and/or subcontractor(s).

Grant Uniform Requirements: The Grant Accountability and Transparency Act (30 ILCS 708/1 *et seq.*) (and its related administrative rules, 44 Ill. Admin. Code Part 7000), was enacted to increase the accountability and transparency in the use of grant funds from whatever source and to reduce administrative burdens on both State agencies and grantees by adopting federal guidance and regulations applicable to those grant funds; specifically, the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (2 CFR 200).

Procurement: Grantees will be required to adhere to methods of procurement per the Procurement Standards (2 CFR 200.317 – 2 CFR 200.327).

3. Reporting.

Periodic Performance Report (PPR) and Periodic Financial Report (PFR)

Grantees funded through this NOFO are required to submit in the format required by the Grantor, at least on a quarterly basis, the PPR and PFR electronically to their assigned grant manager. The first of such reports shall cover the first three months after the award begins. Pursuant to 2 CFR 200.328, Periodic Financial Reports shall be submitted no later than 30 calendar days following the period covered by the report. Pursuant to 2 CFR 200.329, Periodic Performance Reports shall be submitted no later than 30 calendar days following the period covered by the report. Any additional reporting requirements will be disclosed in the NOSA. Grantees are required within 45 calendar days following the end of the period of performance to submit a final closeout report in the format required by the Grantor (See 2 CFR 200.344).

Monitoring

Grantees funded through this NOFO are subject to fiscal and programmatic monitoring visits by the Department in accordance with 2 CFR 200.337. They must have an open-door policy allowing periodic visits by Department monitors to evaluate the progress of the project and provide documentation upon request of the monitor. Program staff will also maintain contact with participants and monitor progress and performance of the contracts. The Department may modify grants based on performance.

Audit

Grantees shall be subject to Illinois' statewide Audit Report Review requirements. Terms of the Single Audit Act Amendments of 1996 (31 USC 7501-7507), Subpart F of 2 CFR Part 200, and the audit rules set forth under the Grant Accountability and Transparency Act Admin Rules shall apply (See 44 IL Admin Code 7000.90).

G. State Awarding Agency Contact(s)

Grant Help Desk
Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity
Email: CEO.GrantHelp@illinois.gov

H. Other Information, if applicable

N/A