

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

Awarding Agency Name	Commerce And Econ Opp
Agency Contact	Dana Huston (ceo.tourismgrants@illinois.gov)
Announcement Type	Initial
Type of Assistance Instrument	Grant
Funding Opportunity Number	FY27-2
Funding Opportunity Title	International Tourism Grant Program
CSFA Number	420-25-1607
CSFA Popular Name	International Tourism Grant Program
Anticipated Number of Awards	5
Estimated Total Program Funding	\$346,052
Award Range	\$10000 - \$200000
Source of Funding	State
Cost Sharing or Matching Requirements	Yes
Indirect Costs Allowed	No
Restrictions on Indirect Costs	No
Posted Date	09/18/2026
Application Date Range	09/18/2026 - 10/19/2026 : 5:00 PM
Grant Application Link	Please select the entire address below and paste it into the browser... https://dceo.illinois.gov/aboutdceo/grantopportunities/1607-4336.html
Technical Assistance Session	No

Agency-specific Content for the Notice of Funding Opportunity

International Tourism Grant Program

NOFO ID: 1607-4336

For information about grants please visit:

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

A. Program Description

1. 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.

2. Program History

This program was funded again in FY26 after being suspended during and after the Pandemic, and eleven (11) grants were awarded. 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 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.

3. 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.

4. Cost Sharing or Matching

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 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.

5. Allowable and Unallowable Activities

See Section A.6.

6. Allowable and Unallowable Costs

Expenditures and activities for which grant funds can be utilized by Grantees located outside Chicago include, but are not limited to, the following:

- a) Eligible Expenditures, including, but not limited to, brochures that target international markets, advertising, web site development and maintenance, in-country trade representations, familiarization tours, trade shows, sales missions, translation services, research, promotional items, technical assistance, training, association fees, travel expenses, and salaries for international program staff performing duties set forth in the Grant Agreement's scope of work.

b) Ineligible Expenditures include, but are not limited to, the purchase of equipment, administrative expenses, salaries not associated with international activities and the purchase of alcoholic beverages.

7. Prior Incurred Costs

Pre award, or prior incurred costs, are allowable if they are incurred on or after July 1, 2026.

8. Payment Methodology

Variable Advance/Remainder based on cash needs/reimbursement. Upon receiving the NOSA, grantees may request that an advance of up to two months' worth of expenditure be incorporated into the grant agreement. Whether to include such an advance in the grant agreement will be determined on a case-by-case basis and at the sole discretion of the Department.

9. Relevant Program-Specific Rules and Regulations

Illinois General Assembly – Administrative Code:

<https://www.ilga.gov/agencies/JCAR/Sections?PartID=01400555&TitleDescription=TITLE%2014:%20COMMERCE>

10. 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.

11. Other Information

N/A

B. Funding Information

This grant program is utilizing state funds appropriated by Public Act 104-0464. The total amount of funding expected to be awarded through this NOFO is \$346,052. Awards will range from \$10,000 to \$200,000. The Department expects to make 3-5 awards through this NOFO.

The period of performance is expected to be 7/1/2026 through June 30, 2027

Applications for this opportunity will be accepted on a first come first serve rolling bases until 1) funds are exhausted or 2) January 31, 2027 @ 5pm CST, whichever occurs first.

1. Indirect Cost Rate.

Indirect costs are not allowed for this opportunity.

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 (<https://sam.gov>)
- Is in Good Standing with the Illinois Secretary of State, as applicable (https://www.ilsos.gov/departments/business_services/corp.html)
- Is not on the Illinois Stop Payment list
- 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).

Currently, 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.

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.).

1. Eligible Applicants include:

- Corporation – Not For Profit
- Government Entity

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

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

Each applicant (unless the applicant is exempt from those requirements under 2 CFR 25.110 or has an exception approved by the State) must:

- Be registered in SAM.gov. SAM.gov registrations must be set to “public.”
- Provide a valid UEI number in the GATA Grantee Portal registration.
- Continue to maintain an active SAM.gov registration with current information at all times during which it has an active Federal, Federal pass-through or State award. DCEO 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 DCEO is ready to make a Federal pass-through or State award, the DCEO 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.

3. Other

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 and reviewed by the Department. Each package should contain the following items:

- ☐ Uniform Grant Application in fillable PDF format
 - Signature page must be signed by the authorized signatory before submission
 - o Can be printed, signed, and scanned
 - o 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
 - o Can be printed, signed, and scanned
 - o Can be signed digitally
- ☐ Conflict of Interest Disclosure
 - Conflict of Interest Disclosure must be signed by the authorized signatory before submission
 - o Can be printed, signed, and scanned
 - o Can be signed digitally
- ☐ Mandatory Disclosure
 - Mandatory Disclosure must be signed by the authorized signatory before submission
 - o Can be printed, signed, and scanned
 - o Can be signed digitally

This Notice of Funding Opportunity also requires the submission of the following other programmatic specific items as part of a 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.

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

3. Submission Dates and Times

Applications for this opportunity will be accepted on a first come first serve rolling bases until 1) funds are exhausted or 2) January 31, 2027 @ 5pm CST, whichever occurs first.

Application materials must be submitted to the Department via electronic form at <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/60eaa584a01e4572a00f1fb9c9562389>.

The Department has 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.

4. Other Submission Requirements

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.

5. 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.

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. 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’s 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 or based upon research to increase international visitors to the area.	10 Points

Capacity- The ability of the applicant to execute the project according to requirements of the grant program	
Applicant demonstrated that they are visitor ready for international guests from the identified markets.	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 the Illinois Office of Tourism 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 project identified in the application will have an impact on the area's overall tourism efforts.	10 Points
The project identified in the application will have an impact on the State's overall tourism efforts.	10 Points
Application identified the performance measures that will be used to evaluate the projects effectiveness and return on investment	10 Points
Applicant provided extensive detail that demonstrated project outcomes that are attainable and viable.	10 Points

2. Feedback

Applicants are responsible for ensuring that all required documents and information are complete and accurate at the time of submission. DCEO will not request or accept corrections, updates, or additional materials after the submission deadline. All applications will be evaluated based solely on the materials received by the deadline.

3. 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. Applications will be graded on a rolling basis in order of receipt using the Merit Review Process and scored on the criteria specified in Section E.1 of the NOFO. The Department will designate an Evaluation Committee to grade applications 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. Grants will be awarded on a first come first serve rolling bases until 1) funds are exhausted or 2) January 31, 2027 @ 5pm CST, whichever occurs first. An Application's final score must be at least 50 of 100 possible points to be considered eligible for funding. The internal review committee shall forward eligible Application(s), together with its recommendations, to the Director for final review and determination. During the final review process, the Director will determine whether an eligible Application is awarded a grant. The Department may also consider geographical dispersion when making recommendations for grant awards to ensure adequate statewide representation.

The Merit Based Review process is subject to appeal per

<https://dceo.illinois.gov/aboutdceo/grantopportunities/meritappeal.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.

4. Anticipated Announcement and State Award Dates

After the application period is closed, the Department will conduct a merit 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 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).

Business Enterprise Program: For grant awards of \$250,000 or more, grantees will be required to comply with the Business Enterprise Program for Minorities, Females, and Persons with Disabilities Act (30 ILCS 575/0.01 *et seq.*), which establishes a goal for contracting with businesses that have been certified as owned and controlled by persons who are minority, female or who have disabilities. The Department will work with the grantees to ensure compliance prior to the establishment of the grant agreement as well as through the life of the grant.

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).

4. State Awarding Agency Contact

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

G. Other Information

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

Please visit the following website for instructional videos that guide applicants through each step of applying for and administering a grant:

<https://dceo.illinois.gov/aboutdceo/grantopportunities/learning-library.html>