

# Visitor Information Center Grant Program Guidelines

VISIT  
*Southwest*  
MONTANA



## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

### PURPOSE OF THE PROGRAM

Southwest Montana has long-supported community-based visitor information centers (VICs) with training and financial assistance.

Research shows that visitors who engage with staffed visitor center information centers:

- Stay longer in the community
- Spend more money locally
- Explore more attractions and businesses
- Adjust travel plans based on local recommendations
- Report on higher satisfaction with their experience

Successful VIC programs support the local visitor economy by providing a welcoming first impression and reliable, up-to-date information about attractions, accommodations, responsible recreation, and the history and culture of Montana and the community.

## TOTAL PROGRAM FUNDING



Southwest Montana has committed a total of \$40,000 to staffing assistance to this program, on a first come first serve basis. Staffing assistance for up to \$10,000 is available, depending on the number of hours open per week. The minimum number of hours to be open per week is 30. For VICs open between 30 and 39 hours, the grant amount is up to \$6,000. For 40 to 49 hours per week, the grant is up to \$8,000. For 50 or more hours per week, the grant is up to \$10,000. The center must be open from

Memorial Day to Labor Day.

**Use of funds:** Awards support staffing expenses needed to maintain or increases VIC hours of operation during peak visitation season – Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day weekend.

**Funding Structure:** one-time payment at the beginning of the grant term

**Award Range:** \$6,000-\$10,000 per eligible VIC based on hours of operation.

Awards may be adjusted based on funding availability.

# GRANT TERM

**Operating Dates** – May 22-September 8, 2026

**Final reporting Deadline:** September 30, 2026

All funded hours must fall within the official grant term.

## Staffing Assistance Levels

Minimum requirements: VIC must be open at least 30 hours per week, Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day Weekend.

Peak Season Hours (Memorial Day- Labor Day)	Maximum Award
30-39 hour/week-----	\$6,000
40-49 hours/week-----	\$8,000
50+ hours/week-----	\$10,000

# ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

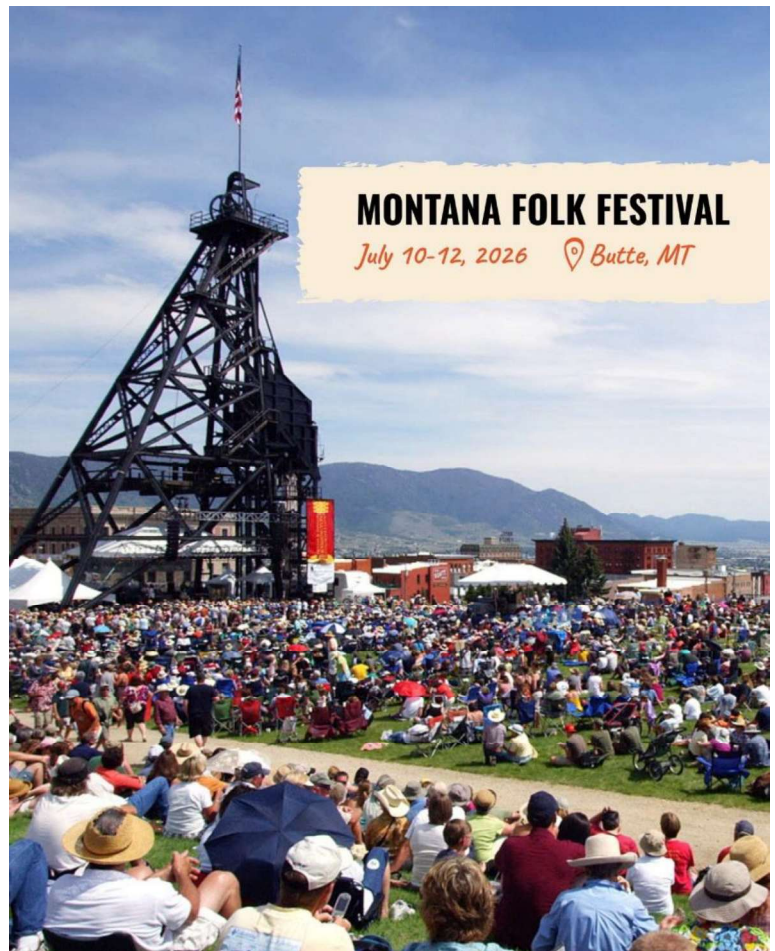
## Eligible Applicants

Applicants must be based within Southwest Montana Country’s eight-county region, which includes Beaverhead, Broadwater, Deer Lodge, Granite, Jefferson, Madison, Lewis & Clark, Powell, and Silver Bow counties.

### Eligible entities include:

- Nonprofit organizations in good standing with the Montana Secretary of State
- Economic development organizations
- Local governments (city, county, consolidated governments)
- Tribal governments and organizations

Examples include chambers of commerce, tourism improvement districts, economic development authorities and established visitor information centers.



**Applicants cannot be destination organizations that receive the Montana Lodging Facility Use Tax.**

# OPERATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

To qualify for funding the VIC must:

- Be open  $\geq$  30 hours/week from May 22- September 8, 2026
- Maintain exterior wayfinding signage
- Maintain general liability and workers compensation insurance including volunteer coverage if applicable
- Process payroll using recognized accounting software (manual spreadsheet not accepted)



## REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION

(Application Stage)

Applicants must provide:

- IRS nonprofit status certification (if applicable)
- Signed and dated current year IRS W-9
- Employer Identification number (EIN)
- Certificate of Liability Insurance naming Gold West Country Inc. dba Southwest Montana
- Photo of exterior wayfinding signage
- Name of recognized payroll accounting software

# FACILITY + SERVICE EXPECTATIONS

## Funded VICs must:

- Maintain a clean and welcoming interior and exterior (including adjacent sidewalks)
- Serve as travel counselors for their community, region and the state of Montana
- Prominently display Southwest Montana Travel Guide at no cost
- Distribute additional materials, such as highway maps, regional guides, museum brochures, activity flyers, lodging information and local points of interest

Submission of an application constitutes agreement to comply with all program requirements.

## ALLOWABLE USE OF FUNDS

Program funds may be used only for expenses directly related to VIC staff providing travel counseling services

### Eligible Expenses

- Hourly wages for VIC assigned staff
- Payroll taxes
- Workers Compensation insurance
- VIC staff hours accrued completing customer Service Essentials training

### Ineligible expenses

- ☒ Wages or expenses for VIC operations
- ☒ Paid vacation, sick leave or PTO
- ☒ Administration or organized overhead
- ☒ Staff not assigned to travel counseling roles
- ☒ Only hours worked between May 22 and September 8, 2026, are eligible.
- ☒ All PTO vacation or sick leave must be excluded and clearly identified in reporting



[southwestmt.com](http://southwestmt.com)  
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[info@southwestmt.com](mailto:info@southwestmt.com)  
406-846-1943

# PAYROLL + STAFFING REQUIREMENTS

For fiscal transparency purposes:

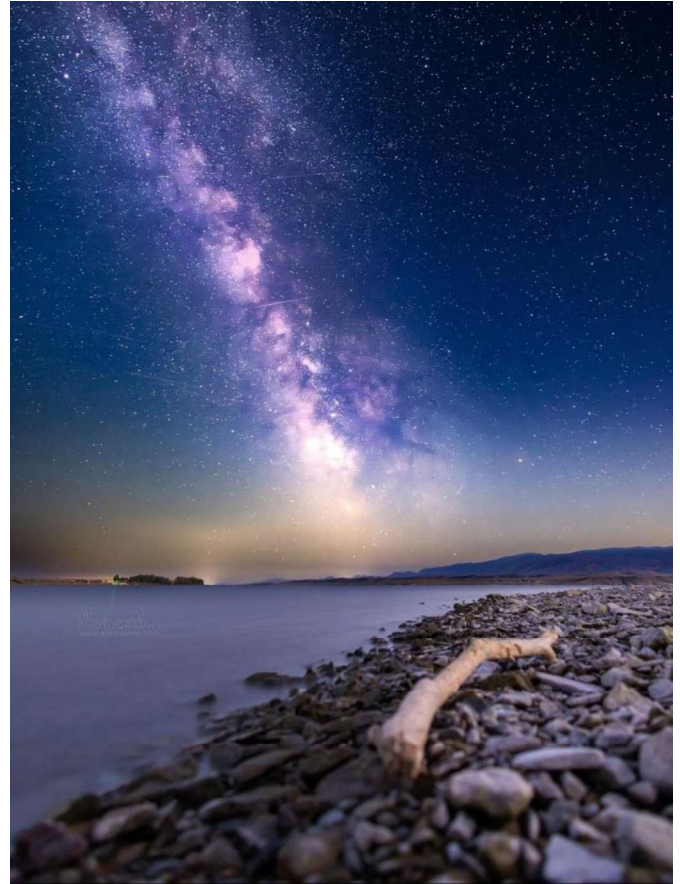
- Payroll must be processed using recognized accounting software (e.g. QuickBooks, BambooHR, Paychex, Gusto, etc.)
- Third party payroll processors allowed
- Manual spreadsheets are not accepted

Final payroll reporting must include:

- Employee name
- Hours worked
- Hourly wage rate
- Payroll period

The organization remains responsible for:

- Federal and state tax filings
- Maintaining worker's compensation insurance
- General liability coverage
- Employee benefits outside the scope of this program



## Training requirements

Each staff member and/or volunteer whose hours are recorded and reimbursed during the grant term must:

- Complete Southwest Montana Hospitality
- Submit a valid certificate of completion

Additional training:

- Fire Messaging Toolkit (this training does not replace the required Hospitality Training)

Training is offered at no cost through Southwest Montana.

Each staff member/volunteer must register individually and obtain their own certificate.

For date verification and compliance, training certificates must be submitted with the final report annually for each staff member and volunteer who engages with visitors during the grant term.

# VISITOR TRACKING REQUIREMENTS

Each funded VIC must track all visitors served during the grant term. Southwest Montana will provide a visitor-tracking template for uploading with the final report.

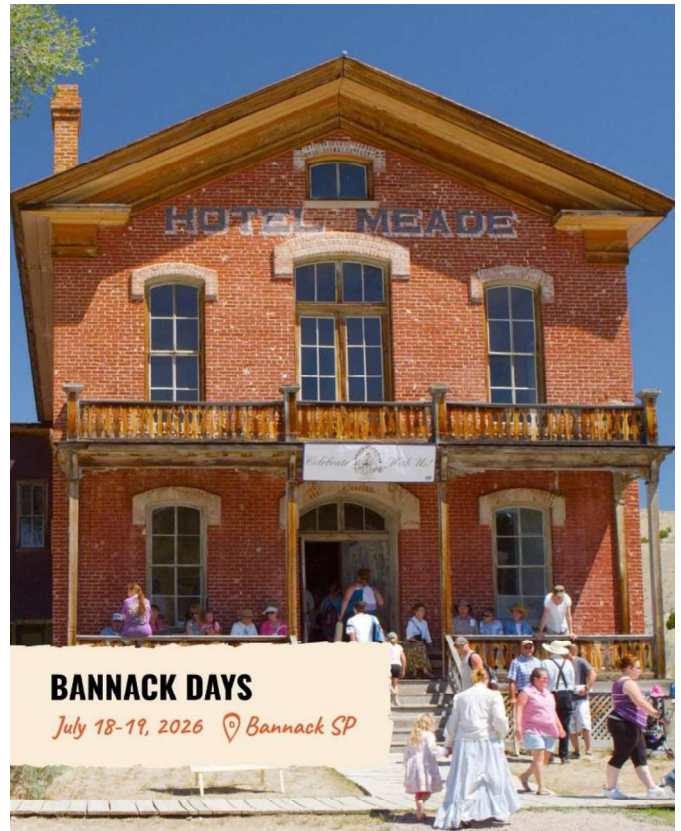
## Required Data Collection

For each visiting party:

- Date of visitation
- Number of people in the party
- Country of residence (if outside the U.S.)
- No personal identifying information is required.

## Tracking standards

- Only documented visitors may be counted (e.g. visitor logbook)
- Estimates are not permitted
- If visitors do not self-sign, staff must ask “Where are you visiting from?”
- Data must be entered into the Excel tracking form provided
- PDF’s alternate formats will not be accepted



Accurate visitor tracking strengthens program credibility and demonstrates community impact. Accurate reporting also enables Southwest Montana to continue advocating for the continuation of the VIC Grant Program.

## HOURS OF OPERATION + VIC CALENDAR



Each organization must maintain a VIC calendar documenting:

- Actual hours of operation for each day
- Staff and volunteer hours worked

Southwest Montana will provide an official Excel template to be uploaded with final reports.

# APPLICATION PROCESS

All applications must be emailed to [office@southwestmt.com](mailto:office@southwestmt.com)

Applicants will provide:

- Eligibility form
- Official tax designation or exemption letter to verify entity type
- Organizational information
- Authorized representative contact information
- EIN a copy of your organization's current signed and dated IRS Form W-9)
- Hours of operation
- Facility and accessibility details
- Photo of exterior wayfinding signage
- Certificate of Liability

# REVIEW & AWARD PROCESS

- Staff review applications for completeness
- Completed applications are evaluated by a grants committee
- Applicants are notified of funding decision
- Approved applications serve as the contractual agreement
- Grant terms may not be extended without prior approval



# REQUIRED CLOSEOUT DOCUMENTATION

Due by noon, September 30, 2026

Final report must include:

- Training certification for all VIC staff, paid and volunteer
- Payroll reports verifying eligible hours
- Completed VIC calendar (Excel template provided)
- Insurance verification, if policies have changed during the grant term
- Brief narrative summarizing highlights, challenges, and year-over-year comparisons (if applicable)
- Accurate data for visitor counts and locations (Excel Template provided)

Late or incomplete reports may affect future eligibility. Changes to VIC hours of operation during the grant term may require the applicant to return unused award funds.

## QUESTIONS?

Contact

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