

Best Practices for Applying to the Big Sky Film Grant

Part 1: Business Basics for BSFG



COMMERCE

Montana Department of Commerce Film Office

Mission and Purpose

Our mission is to market Montana as a business destination for film production and to ensure the state is film-friendly.

Our purpose is to build and support partnerships with filmmakers by promoting the creation and expansion of Montana film industry jobs and serving as a resource to film industry professionals.



Montana Department of Commerce Film Office

We strive to enhance Montana's economy by:

- Expanding film production in the state
- Advertising Montana as open for business
- Increasing job opportunities
- Promoting the growth of small businesses
- Promoting tourism

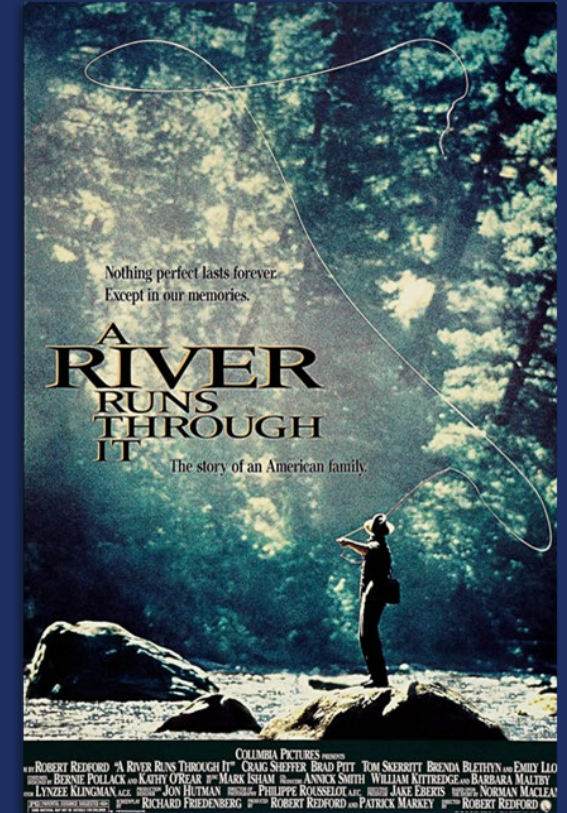


Economic Impact of Montana's Filmmaking Industry

Production Data 2022-2024 Highlights:

- Number of productions: **167**
- Total jobs: **1,320 FTE**
- Employee compensation: **\$95.8 million**
- Local economic impact: **\$312.2 million**
- Tax revenue for State: **\$22.2 million**

commerce.mt.gov/business/programs-and-services/montana-film-office/economic-reports



Best Business Practices

Choose your business structure.

- ✓ Business is formally organized and structured to operate in the State of Montana.
 - Sole proprietorship (individual business owner/operator)
 - General partnership
 - Limited liability partnership
 - Limited liability company
 - Corporation (C corporation, S corporation or nonprofit)



Best Business Practices

Choose your business structure.

- Choose carefully.
- Business structure affects the owner's/owners' taxes, employee considerations, ability to raise money/fund projects, required filing and registration, personal liability and more.



Best Business Practices

Register with the IRS.

- ✓ Apply for and receive a federal taxpayer identification number.
 - The IRS issues a unique number.
 - Social Security Number: Used only by individuals and sole proprietors.
 - Employer Identification Number: Used by entities and some individuals.



Best Business Practices

Complete IRS form W-9 with information that matches the IRS letter.

- ✓ Apply for and receive a federal taxpayer identification number.
 - Read the instructions and consult with your tax professional.
 - Lines 1 and 2 must be correct.
 - Use only one federal taxpayer identification number, not both.
 - The form must be signed and dated within the last 12 months.



Best Business Practices

Register with the Montana Secretary of State's Office.

- ✓ A registered agent may be needed.
 - A registered agent receives official papers and legal documents on behalf of your company.
 - Many business owners prefer to use a registered agent service rather than taking on this role themselves.



Best Business Practices

Register with the Montana Secretary of State's Office.

- ✓ Complete a new registration or update an existing registration.
 - Complete a name search to ensure availability.
 - Individuals must have an Assumed Business Name, or Doing Business As.
 - Information should match the IRS registration: name, address, etc.
 - Keep your registration updated.



Best Business Practices

Register with the Montana Secretary of State's Office at
biz.sosmt.gov/forms/business.



Best Business Practices

Business Bank Account

- ✓ A dedicated bank account in the name of the business
 - Application requires proof of funds in an account owned by the business: 1% for large budgets and up to 5% for small budgets.
 - Commerce will distribute grant funds via Electronic Funds Transfer.



Best Business Practices

Expense Tracking and Receipts

- ✓ Track all costs.
- ✓ The Big Sky Film Grant requires proof of expense tracking of Montana-spend and corresponding receipts.
- ✓ Obtain and save all receipts related to pre-production and production.



Best Business Practices

Business Liability Insurance

- ✓ General liability: commercial policy
- ✓ Annual production insurance: coverage for entire year



Best Business Practices

Business Liability Insurance

- ✓ Standard production insurance
 - Inland marine policy: covers damage to any property and is required by equipment rental houses
 - Other policies: excess liability, auto liability, equipment coverage, errors and omissions and more



Best Business Practices

Workers' Compensation Act: How does each business comply?

- ✓ Businesses with employees are required to have adequate coverage for them.
- ✓ Sole proprietors may obtain individual coverage or apply for and receive an Independent Contractors Exemption Certificate from the Montana Department of Labor and Industry.
- ✓ The officer or member owner of a corporation is typically exempt.



Are You Ready To Apply?

Readiness Checklist:

- ✓ Identified appropriate category (resident or non-resident; short or feature)
- ✓ The applicant has established its business entity with the IRS and the Montana Secretary of State's Office.
- ✓ The applicant has established its business bank account.



Are You Ready To Apply?

Readiness checklist:

- ✓ Of the total budget, 1-5% is readily available should an award be made.
- ✓ The applicant has received quotes or purchased policies for required liability insurance and workers' compensation.
- ✓ The project's budget and finance plan are complete with secured funding.



Are You Ready To Apply?

Readiness checklist:

- ✓ An alternative budget or funding plan is in place.
- ✓ Agreements or arrangements are in place to proceed with specialty locations, permitting and any required film industry unions (SAG, DGA, IATSE).
- ✓ Talent and crew have been secured for pre-production and principal photography.



Applying for the Big Sky Film Grant

Prepare materials to apply; reach out to the Montana Film Office in advance.

1. Review the application guidelines and the administration manual posted [online](#).

For assistance, contact the Montana Film Office in advance of submitting an application.
Individual appointments are available until Feb. 15, 2026.



Applying for the Big Sky Film Grant

2. Gather and organize required information:

- Label documents appropriately, e.g., “budget – name of production.”
- File format matters; see list of acceptable formats.
- Save in an easily accessible folder on your desktop.



Applying for the Big Sky Film Grant

Start now. The application portal opens Dec. 1, 2025.

3. Sign into the Montana Grants and Loans Portal located on Commerce's home page.
4. Login or create a unique OKTA account for the business. This should be associated with the business email address and separate from an individual's personal OKTA account.
5. Select the appropriate grant application. There are four Big Sky Film Grant categories; select only one.



Applying for the Big Sky Film Grant

6. Start your application and complete all fields marked with a red asterisk (*).
7. Save your draft and edit as needed.
8. Submit your final application by the deadline.



montana.servicenowservices.com/mtgl

This screenshot shows the 'Register New User' form on the Montana.gov website. The form is titled 'Register New User' and includes a sub-header 'Register for a new account'. Below this, a message states: 'You will receive an email from donotreply@mtgov on how to complete your account setup after you submit this registration. Use the login button at the top of the portal once you complete your account setup.' The form contains several input fields: 'Email' (with the placeholder 'email@example.com'), 'First Name' (with the placeholder 'John'), 'Last Name' (with the placeholder 'Doe'), and 'Primary phone' (with the placeholder '+14061234567'). There is also a dropdown menu for 'Please select an option that describes your purpose here' with the selected option 'I am representing a business'. At the bottom, there is a checkbox for 'Has anyone else in your business signed up before?' with the selected option 'No'. A 'Submit' button is located to the right of the form. The page header includes 'Montana.gov Official State Website', 'MT Grants + Loans', 'Online Services', and a 'Log in' link. The breadcrumb trail shows 'Home > Register New User'.

Register New User

Register for a new account

You will receive an email from donotreply@mtgov on how to complete your account setup after you submit this registration. Use the login button at the top of the portal once you complete your account setup.

*Email
email@example.com

*First Name
John

*Last Name
Doe

Primary phone
+14061234567

*Please select an option that describes your purpose here
I am representing a business

Has anyone else in your business signed up before?
No

Submit

Required Information
Email First Name Last Name
Business Name

This screenshot shows the 'User Registration' page on the Montana.gov website. The page features a large background image of a Montana landscape. In the center, there is a blue box with a white login icon and the text 'login mt gov ****'. Below this, there are two buttons: 'Citizen Login' and 'State Login'. A link for 'Have questions?' is also present. The page header includes 'Montana.gov Official State Website', 'MT Grants + Loans', and a 'Log in' link. The footer contains the text 'Site Maintained By State Information Technology Services Division: PO Box 200113 Helena, MT 59620-0113' and links for 'Contact Us' and 'Cookies and Google Analytics'.

Montana.gov Official State Website

MT Grants + Loans

User Registration

login mt gov ****

Citizen Login

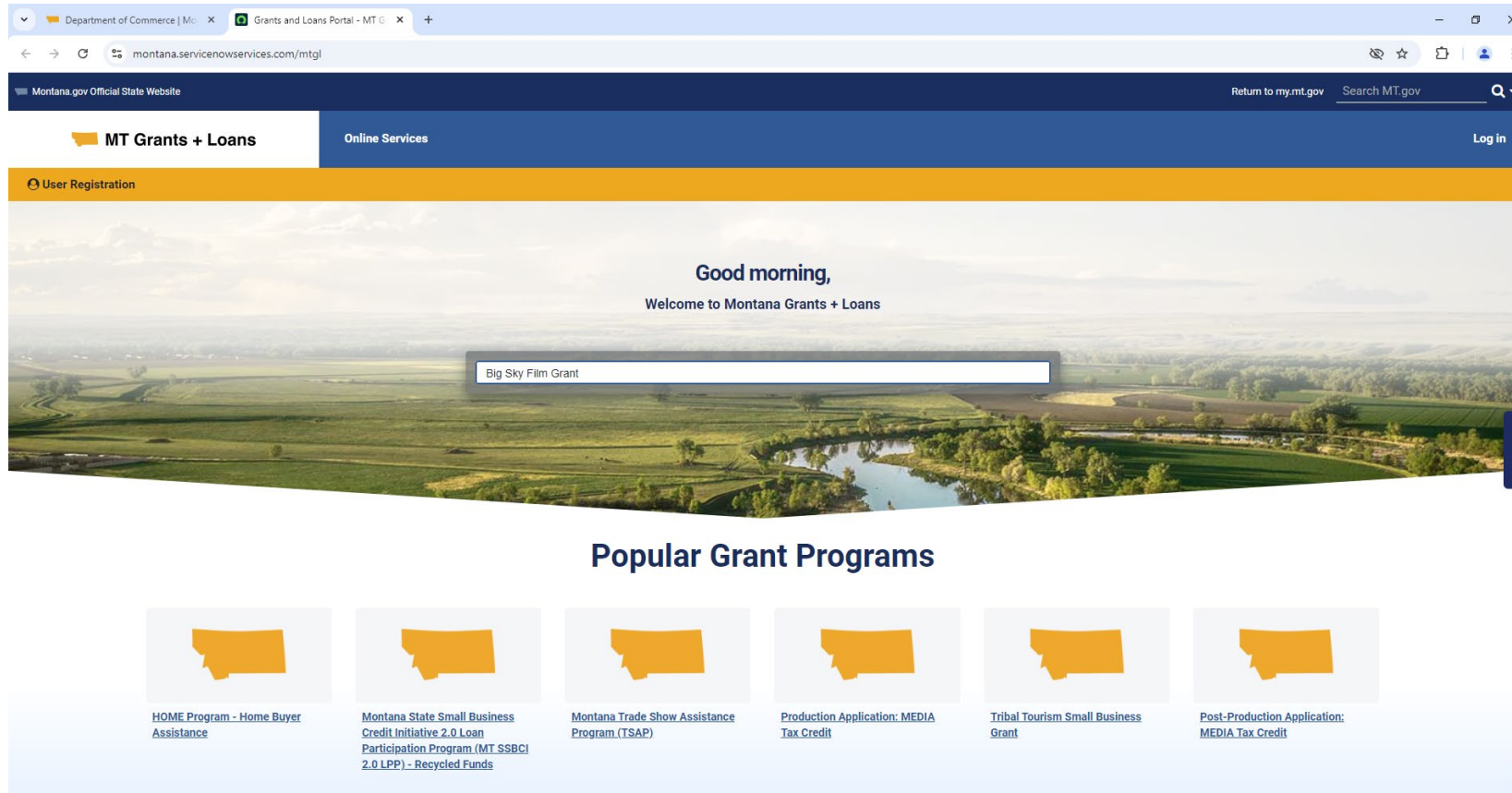
State Login

Have questions?

Site Maintained By
State Information Technology
Services Division:
PO Box 200113
Helena, MT 59620-0113
Contact Us
Cookies and Google Analytics



montana.servicenowservices.com/mtgl



montana.servicenowservices.com/mtgl

The screenshot displays the Montana Grants and Loans Portal. The browser address bar shows the URL `montana.servicenowservices.com/mtgl`. The website header includes the Montana.gov logo, navigation links for "MT Grants + Loans", "Online Services", and "Log in", and a search bar. A yellow banner at the top of the main content area reads "User Registration".

The "Find Services" sidebar on the left contains the following filters:

- Keyword Search:** A search box with the text "BSFG" and a magnifying glass icon.
- + Application Status:** A filter button.
- + Programs:** A filter button.
- + Funding Type:** A filter button.
- + Agencies:** A filter button.
- Sort by field:** A dropdown menu showing "--Select a Sort Fiel..." and a sort icon.
- Clear All Filters:** A button.
- Share Opportunities:** A button with a share icon.

The main content area displays four search results, each with a title, application status, funding type, max award, application open date, expiration date, and description. Each result includes a "Read more" link.

- BSFG - Resident Short Form Content**
Application Status: No Longer Accepting Applications
Funding type: Grant
Max Award: \$50,000.00
Application open date: 02-15-2024
Expiration date: 04-11-2024
Description: Awarded to a Montana-based production of a short-form content film project that is produced by a Mon...
Read more
- BSFG - Resident Filmmaker-Feature Film & TV**
Application Status: No Longer Accepting Applications
Funding type: Grant
Max Award: \$100,000.00
Application open date: 02-15-2024
Expiration date: 04-11-2024
Description: Awarded to a Montana-based production of a feature-length project that is produced by a Montana resi...
Read more
- BSFG - Short Form Content**
Application Status: No Longer Accepting Applications
Funding type: Grant
Max Award: \$50,000.00
Application open date: 02-15-2024
Expiration date: 04-11-2024
Description: Awarded to a Montana-based production of a short-form content film project. Examples include a short...
Read more
- BSFG - Feature Film & TV**
Application Status: No Longer Accepting Applications
Funding type: Grant
Max Award: \$1,500,000.00
Application open date: 02-15-2024
Expiration date: 04-11-2024
Description: Awarded to a Montana-based feature-length film or TV series that shoots at least 50% of the Principa...
Read more

At the bottom right of the results area, it says "Showing results 1 - 4 of 4".



Resources

- IRS Small Business and Self-Employed Tax Center:
irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed
- Montana Department of Commerce Film Office:
commerce.mt.gov/business/programs-and-services/montana-film-office
- Montana Small Business Development Center:
commerce.mt.gov/business/programs-and-services/small-business-development-center
- Montana Department of Labor and Industry:
erd.dli.mt.gov/work-comp-regulations

Resources

- Montana Grants and Loans Portal: montana.servicenowservices.com/mtgl
- Montana Secretary of State's Office Business Services: biz.sosmt.gov
- SBDC Business Startup Checklist: commerce.mt.gov/business/programs-and-services/small-business-development-center/services/business-start-up-checklist
- OKTA single sign-on portal for the State of Montana: okta.mt.gov

Montana Department of Commerce Film Office

Allison Whitmer, film commissioner

406-841-2881, allison.whitmer@mt.gov

Laura Benedict, operations coordinator

406-841-2764, laura.benedict@mt.gov

Emma Brandt, multimedia coordinator

406-841-2876, emma.brandt@mt.gov

Kev Campbell, media incentive and grant specialist

406-841-2883, k2campbell@mt.gov

Dan Molloy, projects and locations coordinator

406-841-2880, dan.molloy@mt.gov

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