

Best Practices for Applying to the Big Sky Film Grant

Part 2: Elevating the BSFG Application

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

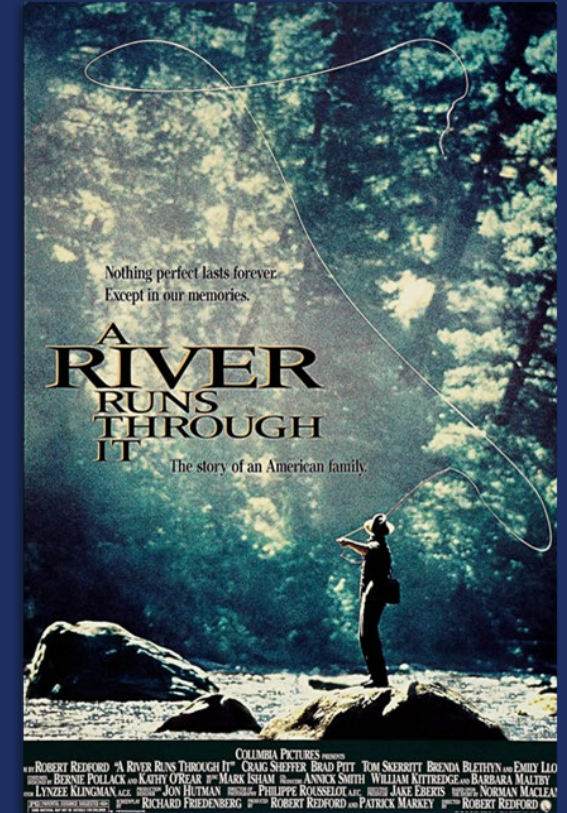


Economic Impact of Montana's Filmmaking Industry

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



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.

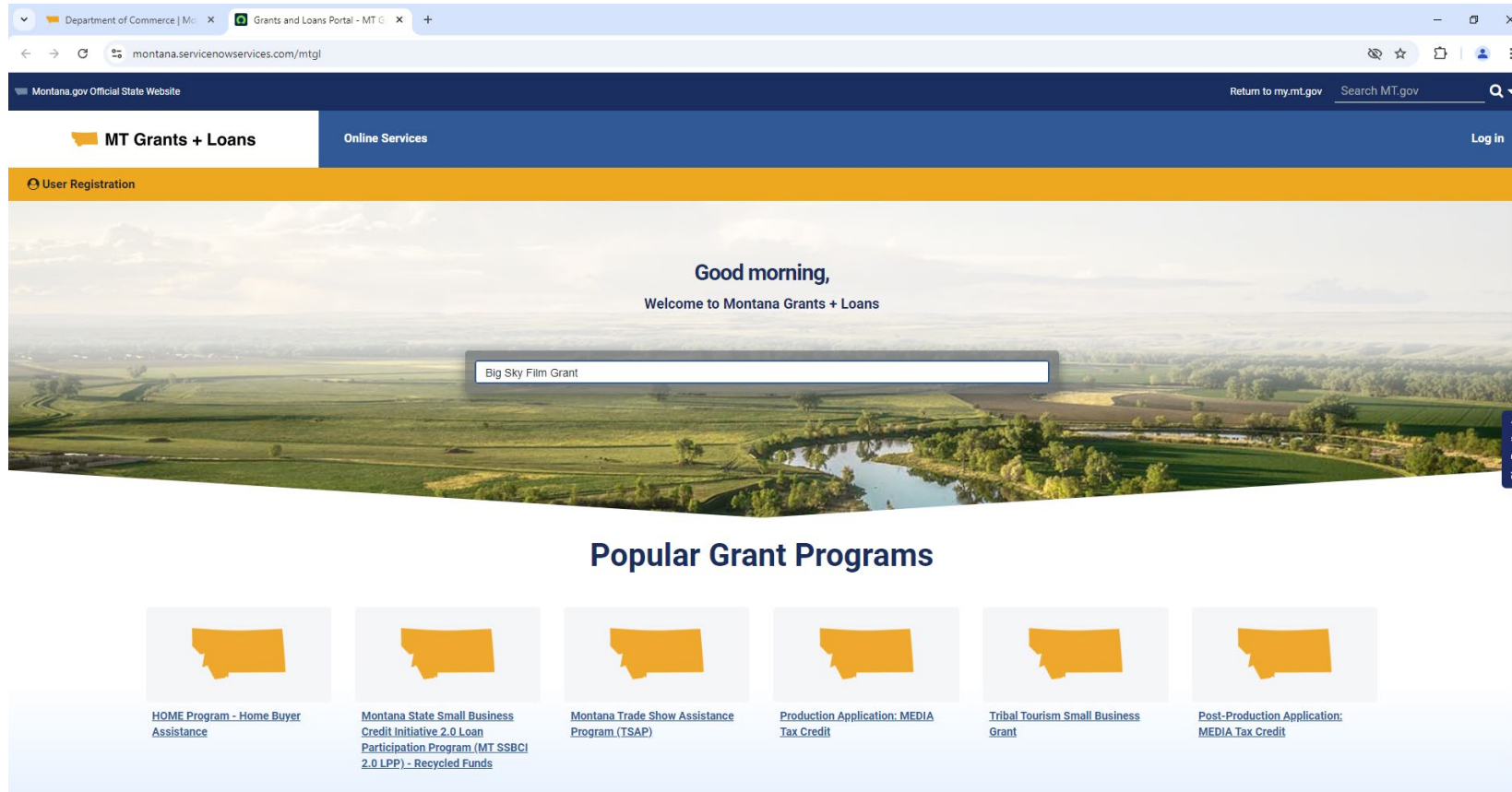


Applying for the Big Sky Film Grant

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



Elevating the BSFG application

Edit and complete the application. Submit by Feb. 15, 2026.

- Think like a member of the review committee.
- Apply in one category only.
- Complete **all** fields unless marked optional.
- Attach required supporting materials in the appropriate place and file format.



Elevating the BSFG application

Edit and complete the application. Submit by Feb. 15, 2026.

- Do not input “see attached” when an answer is required.
- Do not attach a combined “pitch packet.” Separate elements and attach what is called for.
- Provide explanation or attachment to support non-conformity.
- Allocate time to adapt to the technology and refine the answers. Do not wait until the last days or minutes to start.



Elevating the BSFG application

Project Details:

- Logline: Be concise and impactful to communicate the project in one or two sentences.
- Script: Include the complete, final version appropriately formatted.
- Outline: Documentary projects may attach an outline in lieu of a script.
- Synopsis or Project Description: One page.



Elevating the BSFG application

Project Details:

- Treatment
- Lookbook
- Project Need: from the perspective of the applicant





\$55 Private Room in a Safe Quiet Neighborhood

John left by 9am, and I told
him supper is at 6.



I picked my husband up from the airport at 3:30.



My mind raced as I
saw the pair of men
together.

I couldn't recall
where my husband
kept the ammunition
for his pistol.



Elevating the BSFG application

Project Details:

- Filming Locations: Include details on any scouting, permitting or unique attributes and why they were chosen.
- Provide examples of previous work, trailer, reels, etc. This is not required but can be a big lift for application.



Elevating the BSFG application

Budget:

- Budget should be detailed and align with the script.
- Explain or demonstrate budget challenges and the solution to overcome.
- Be mindful of sourcing of supplies, crew and Montana expenses; you may be able to incorporate rural locations and receive special considerations.





Elevating the BSFG application

Budget:

- Budget document format and presentation is important; a specific template is available for BSFG.
- Understand “Montana-spend” and how that translates to compliance with the grant.
- Include line-item descriptions for all costs in the total budget, not just Montana-spend.



Elevating the BSFG application

Funding Plan:

- List all sources of funding; funding should add up to at least 100% of total project costs.
- Attach letters of commitment, letters of in-kind donations, letters of intent or agreements.
- Secured funding (money in the bank) demonstrates higher level of readiness.



Elevating the BSFG application

Funding Plan:

- A competitive application includes contingency funding plans if less than the requested amount is received or if funding sources or budgets change.
- A minimum of 1% of budgets over \$100,000 and up to 5% of budgets under \$100,000 must be readily available. Submit proof.



Elevating the BSFG application

Production Dates and Schedule:

- Details matter, and a complete production schedule demonstrates readiness and professionalism.
- Those projects ready to proceed within 12 months or which have completed principal photography will be more competitive.
- Projects completing post-production in Montana receive special consideration.



Elevating the BSFG application

Employment and Compensation:

- Be sure to include all Montana residents working on the project from pre-production through post-production.
- Montana compensation includes hourly wages for employees (W-2 earners) and contracted services (W-9 earners).
- Include any rural aspects of the crew when claiming special consideration given for hiring Montana residents.



Elevating the BSFG application

Marketing and Distribution Plans:

- A complete and cohesive plan is required. Examples are available.
- Leverage any presales, commitments or contacts for distribution.
- Explain non-traditional channels or uses such as educational platforms.
- Attach supporting documents that are directly tied to the project.



Elevating the BSFG application

Marketing and Distribution Plans:

- List all intended festivals and screenings and any past festival acceptance, participation or accolades.
- Describe any collaborative efforts or partnerships.
- Failure to provide an adequate plan will negatively impact your application.



Elevating the BSFG application

Special Considerations:

- Planning to film 50% or more of the principal photography days in a rural Montana location
- Minimum of \$10,000 in expenditures with a single Montana vendor
- Post-production expenditures of \$25,000 with one or more Montana vendors



Elevating the BSFG application

Special Considerations:

- At least 30% of the crew are Montana residents
- Officially accredited production company, director or director of photography is attached to the production
- Name talent attached to production



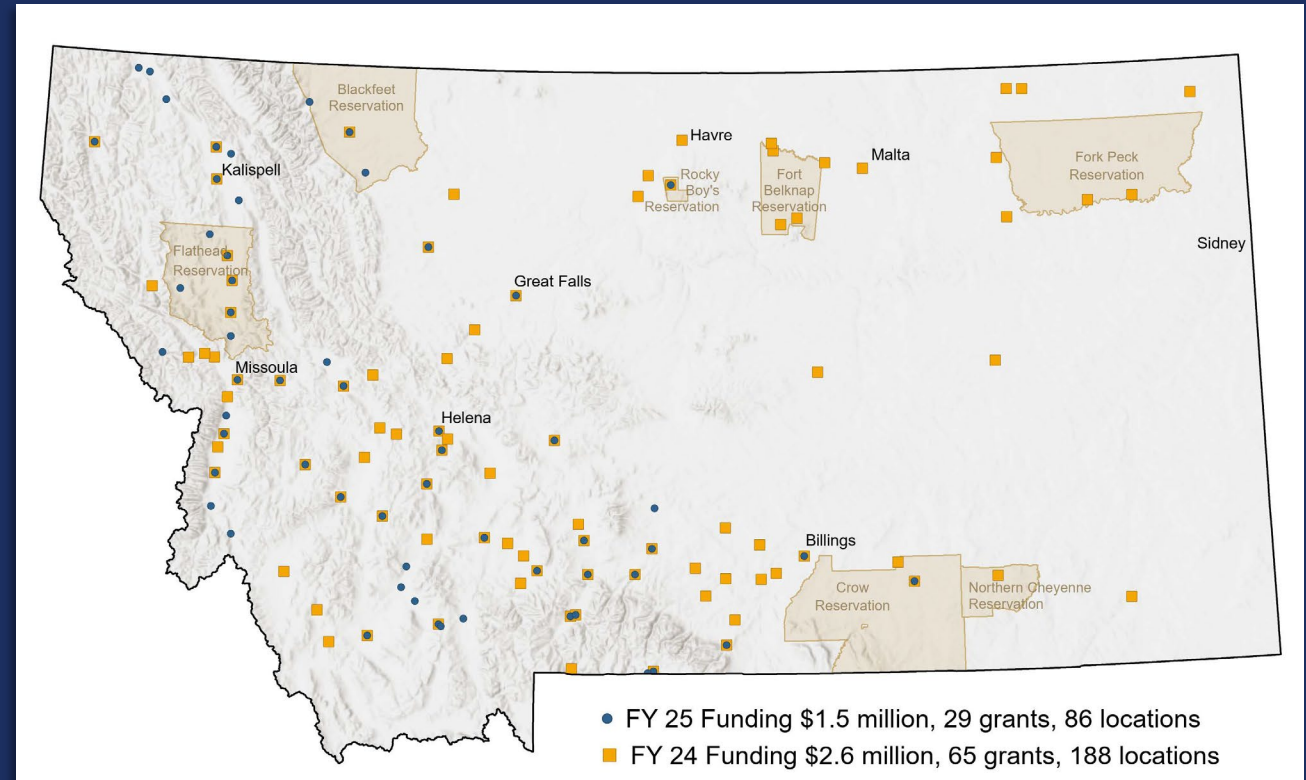
Big Sky Film Grant Proposed Locations

FY 25

- \$1.5 million
- 29 grants
- 86 locations

FY 24

- \$2.6 million
- 65 grants
- 188 locations



Elevating the BSFG application

Special Considerations:

- Montana-themed project; historical, topical or place-based significance; or a Montana writer associated with the project
- One hundred percent of planned principal photography days to be filmed in Montana



Elevating the BSFG application

Special Considerations:

- Filming at locations in Montana during shoulder seasons — after Labor Day weekend and before Memorial Day weekend
- Wide distribution contracts or agreements secured



How Much Can I Request and Receive?

The following amounts are subject to the total funding available:

- Up to \$50,000 for short form content: residents and nonresidents
- Up to \$100,000 for feature and TV series: residents
- No maximum for feature and TV series: nonresidents



How Much Can I Request and Receive?

- Request amount award based on proposed Montana-spend; do not ask for more.
- Budget and funding plan should demonstrate the project is fully funded and not solely dependent upon a BSFG award.



2026 BSFG Application Timeline

Now:

- Review Program guidelines and eligibility.
- Determine if your project fits and you are ready to apply.
- Establish/update your business entity.
- Gather and organize required materials.
- Create/update an OKTA account.
- Call the Montana Film Office for assistance if needed.

2026 BSFG Application Timeline

Dec. 1, 2025:

- Log in to the application portal.
- Select the appropriate category's application.
- Enter information or use placeholder information and attachments to start and save your draft.
- Work on your draft, refine, update attachments, etc.
- Call the Montana Film Office for assistance if needed.

2026 BSFG Application Timeline

Feb. 15, 2026:

- Submit final application no later than 11:59 p.m.
- Close out of application and return to application to confirm application is in “Submitted” status.

Completed applications received by the deadline will be reviewed.

The anticipated award date is April 30, 2026.

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

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