

Montana Department of Commerce

Tribal Tourism Small Business Grant Program

**BUSINESS MT APPLICATION GUIDELINES**

**Section** [**90-1-122**](https://leg.mt.gov/bills/mca/title_0900/chapter_0010/part_0010/section_0220/0900-0010-0010-0220.html)**(1)(b), MCA**

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INTRODUCTION

The Montana Legislature has directed the Montana Department of Commerce (Commerce) to encourage “economic development” and “recreational development,” including in Montana’s Indian County. *See* §§ [90-1-105](https://leg.mt.gov/bills/mca/title_0900/chapter_0010/part_0010/section_0050/0900-0010-0010-0050.html) and -[104](https://leg.mt.gov/bills/mca/title_0900/chapter_0010/part_0010/section_0040/0900-0010-0010-0040.html), MCA. The 2023 Montana Legislature specifically directed Commerce to use a portion of the lodging facility use taxes it receives to support “tribal tourism” in Montana by enacting [SB 540](https://bills.legmt.gov/#/bill/20231/LC1822?open_tab=bill). *See also* § [90-1-122](https://leg.mt.gov/bills/mca/title_0900/chapter_0010/part_0010/section_0220/0900-0010-0010-0220.html)(1)(b).

Consistent with that statutory authority, Commerce’s Business MT Division (Business MT) has established the Tribal Tourism Small Business Grant Program (the Program). Commerce also has adopted these Tribal Tourism Small Business Grant Program Guidelines, which provide public guidance on how Commerce will administer the Program.

These Guidelines explain who can apply for Program funds, how to apply for Program funds, how Program funds may be used to facilitate or promote tribal tourism in Montana, and the process Commerce will follow to award Program funds.

If you have questions about the Program or these Guidelines, please contact DOCTribal@mt.gov or <https://commerce.mt.gov/Business/Indian-Country/Tribal-Tourism>.

PROGRAM CALENDAR

Activities and deadlines for the Program are listed below. Please note this schedule is subject to change.

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| **Open from October 15 until December 15, 2024, 11:59 pm.** | **ServiceNow Grant Application Portal accepting applications** [**APPLY HERE**](https://montana.servicenowservices.com/mtgl?id=sc_cat_item&sys_id=54b13e8e87ac9ad043200f28cebb35c7) |
| **January 1 through February 15, 2025** | **Commerce will conduct a rank and review of applications and make recommendations to Commerce’s Director and the Governor** |
| **February 15 through March 15, 2025** | **Commerce’s Director and Governor make final decisions on Program awards.** |
| **March 15 through April 30, 2025** | **Program award recipients receive award letters and draft Program contracts** |
| **May 1 through May 31, 2025** | **Award letters sent, awards announced in press release, and Program contracts must be executed by all parties before funds awarded** |

Tribal Tourism Small Business Grant Program

A. Summary

The purpose of the Program is to provide funding to Native American businesses (startups or existing businesses) that promote or facilitate tribal tourism in Montana. Program funds can be used for a variety of activities, as described below. Commerce anticipates awarding up to $240,000 in Program funding in fiscal year 2025 to eligible applicants, and may use these Guidelines in future grant cycles, based on available funding. Grantees will receive Program funds on a reimbursement basis after incurring eligible costs.

**Tourism** is the act or practice of traveling away from home to a destination for the purpose of a vacation from, or pause in, life’s obligations associated with being at home, such as employment and routine domestic activities. This act or practice typically involves a duration of time that may necessitate overnight accommodations and services, such as the purchase of gas or transportation, food, and lodging. Therefore, this act or practice typically contributes to the economy, tourism industry, and personal fulfillment, edification, or rest.  Motivations for engaging in tourism may involve culture, leisure, recreation, natural wonders, events, entertainment, patronizing local businesses, and exchanges with the residents who live and work along the route to, from, and in the destination.  **Tribal Tourism** is further defined as the unique experience of traveling away from home for visitation to tribal communities with the motivation to engage with the tribal citizens, support their businesses and local economy, and witness their cultural practices, traditions, celebrations, knowledge, history, and lands.

B. Eligible Applicants

Enrolled members of Montana’s federally recognized tribes residing in Montana, aged 18 years or older may apply for Program funds on behalf of their for-profit businesses.

C. Ineligible Applicants

The following are ineligible to apply for Program funds:

* Non-profits;
* For-profit businesses that are owned or controlled by individuals who are not enrolled members of Montana’s federally recognized tribes and residing in Montana;
* Governmental units;
* Any business that is debarred, suspended, proposed for debarment, or declared as ineligible to receive State of Montana funds; and
* Any business that is under a garnishment order from the Montana Department of Revenue for monies owed to the State of Montana. Examples of garnishment include taxes owed to the State, child support payments that are past due and funds owed to the university system.

D. Funding Availability

Applications will be accepted from October 15 until December 15, 2024, at 11:59 pm. Check the website for more specific deadline details.

Applicants can request up to $10,000 of the $240,000 in total available Program funds. The total number of awards per cycle is dependent upon each award amount and the total number of applications submitted. Commerce’s goal is to fund at least 24 awards, with at least three awards per Tribal Nation.

E. Eligible Uses of Program Funds

Program funds may be used for **one of five eligible tribal tourism business categories** listed below:

1. **Native American Made in Montana (NAMIM) retail sales products**
2. **Hosted Accommodations or Experiences such as vacation rentals or tours**
3. **Licensed outfitting or guiding in the hunting and fishing industry**
4. **Licensed food and/or beverage or grocery business such as food trucks**
5. **Other operational business associated with supplying or serving tribal tourism in Montana**

**Business activities may include:**

* Purchase of equipment;
* Working capital such as inventory and supplies;
* Building renovations or improvements such as installing plumbing and electrical systems;
* Signage, lighting, security systems, displays, organizational systems; and
* Business branding, website development, logo design, and promotional materials

F. Ineligible Uses of Program Funds

Grantees may not use Program funds include, but are not limited to, the following purposes:

* Any ongoing or monthly general operating expenses such as wages and taxes.
* Any reimbursement for travel expenses.
* Costs related to refinancing, servicing, or interest on any debt.
* Any undertaking prohibited by the contract signed by the Grantee and Department, or that is inconsistent with other Department directives.
* Any costs incurred prior to the date identified in the Program award letter the Grantee receives.
* Purchase of real property, such as land.
* Motorized vehicles not directly related to the tribal tourism business operations.
* Any undertaking prohibited by Montana or federal law.
* Any undertaking that violates federal law or does not meet all federal, state, and local building, food safety, and regulatory requirements.
* Any undertaking that would occur outside of Montana.

G. **Match** **Requirement**

There is no match requirement for this program.

**H. How to Apply**

Eligible applicants must submit their Program applications by using the ServiceNow portal on Commerce’s website. Eligible applicants are encouraged—but not required—to utilize a Native American Business Advisor (NABA) to assist them with their application. First time applicants will be required to create a ServiceNow profile (State OKTA account) which requires a valid email account. Click [**HERE**](https://montana.servicenowservices.com/mtgl?id=sc_cat_item&sys_id=54b13e8e87ac9ad043200f28cebb35c7) to set up your Okta account.

The grant cycle and application portal opens at 12:00 am on October, 15, 2024 and closes on December 15, 2024 at 11:59 pm.

Applicants must upload all required documentation, complete all required application fields, and follow application instructions for submission to be considered complete. NABAs are available on each reservation and to Little Shell tribal citizens to provide business counseling and assistance with the various aspects of the application such as marketing, development of cash flows and financial information, application preparation, and training in the ServiceNow online application submission process.

**I. Application Review Process**

Once submitted, Commerce assesses each for completeness and clarity. Business MT staff may contact the applicant to request additional information during the review process to aid in the evaluation process. As needed, the Program will provide the NABA contact information in the applicant’s community as a resource. Business MT coordinates the application review and ranking timeline as the Review Committee.

The Review Committee evaluates applications utilizing the review criteria established below and makes funding recommendations to Commerce’s Director, who makes the final funding decision that is then signed by the Governor.

J. Application Review Criteria

The following criteria will be used to evaluate the quality of proposals for potential funding:

1. Applicant business experience, education, and background
2. Overall professionalism, creativity, uniqueness, and need of business or services in the community
3. Why locals in the service area, the community, and tourists will support the business and become a customer
4. Business plan, marketing plan, and industry research or knowledge
5. Location(s), hours of operation to include days and seasons, and total employees
6. Financial projections, operating costs and potential profits
7. Timeline of business activities, from preparation to launch
8. List of anticipated purchases with specifics on: what, why, how much, where and when
9. Financial need

Additional Considerations for Eligible Projects:

* All applications must include documentation of tribal enrollment in the form of a Certified Indian Blood (CIB) Form or tribal ID. An application will be considered incomplete without this information.
* An application for Program funds must demonstrate a reasonable justification for the use of funds (please round request to the nearest $100 increment).
* With the exception of the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians enrolled citizens, businesses with a physical address located within a 50-mile radius of the exterior boundaries of an Indian Reservation located within Montana will receive higher consideration over those located outside a 50-mile radius of reservation boundary. All applicants must provide proof of residency.

K. Grant Notification and Contract

After the successful completion of the review process, Business MT staff will notify all successful applicants, i.e., Grantees of Program award, by sending a formal award letter.

Once award letters are sent, Grantees must sign the Contract required by the Department to receive Program funds. Contracts must be signed no later than May 31. Grantees have 24 (twenty-four) months from the date the contract is fully executed to completely spend down the Program funds, which will be issued on a reimbursement basis. For eligible applicants with new businesses, their bank account must be established prior to receiving any Program funding.

L. Program Contact

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