

2026 Destination Development Grant – Additional Funding Round

February 2026

SECTION I GRANT INFORMATION

Applications are only accepted through the portal. The grant portal and link will be available **February 10, 2026, by 9:00 a.m. CDT and will close on March 10, 2026, at 5 p.m. CDT**. No late submissions will be accepted. Applications sent via USPS mail or email will not be accepted. The Department of Commerce is not responsible for untimely submissions.

Application Window: February 10 – March 10, 2026

Review Period: March 11 – April 29, 2026

Award Announcement: April 30, 2026

A. BACKGROUND

The 69th Legislative Assembly appropriated \$15 million to the Department of Commerce for the Tourism Destination Development Grant Program for the 2025–2027 biennium. Funding in the amount of \$4 million is now available for applications. As such, we are reopening the application process to the public.

Grant applications will be evaluated based on how the proposed project will provide new experiences, how it aligns with North Dakota's identity and values, and the long-term impact and timeline for completion. We encourage eligible applicants to take advantage of this opportunity to help shape North Dakota's tourism future through innovative and meaningful destination development initiatives.

B. PURPOSE

The Destination Development Grant Program provides financial support for **the development or expansion of tourism experiences and attractions** that contribute to North Dakota's economic growth and diversification. The program is designed to:

- Increase the number of unique visitor experiences.
- Encourage extended stays and overnight visits from travelers originating more than 50 miles away.
- Support workforce recruitment and retention.
- Enhance the quality of life for North Dakota residents.

This grant is intended to fund infrastructure construction or the expansion of attractions and services

that serve as anchor tourism destinations. These projects have the potential to stimulate and support additional tourism-related activities and businesses in the area.

Funding is meant to advance projects toward completion, not to support early-stage planning or development.

Eligible uses of funds may include (but are not limited to):

- a. Purchase or construction of new or existing tourism, recreation, entertainment, historic, or cultural attractions.
- b. Infrastructure investments that directly support tourism expansion.
- c. Purchase of equipment that is essential to the operation of a specific tourism project.

TO QUALIFY, PROJECTS MUST FALL UNDER AT LEAST ONE OF THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES:

1. Accommodations

Projects that provide lodging experiences distinct from traditional hotels, motels, or short-term homestays. These accommodations should offer memorable, immersive experiences that reflect the culture, landscape, or history of the area. Examples include:

- a. Rehabilitation of historically significant structures unique to the area (e.g., a downtown boutique hotel).
- b. Lodging reflective of regional identity (e.g., ski lodge, glamping site, hunting or fishing lodge).
- c. Lodging built alongside a tourism attraction, where the attraction is the primary draw and exceeds the value of the lodging facility.
- d. Construction, restoration, or renovation of full-service lodging that is or will be integrated with major tourism assets such as an attraction, convention center, or sports facility.

2. Culinary Experiences

Food and beverage related attractions that enhance the visitor experience and celebrate local flavor.

- a. Breweries or wineries that include tours, tastings or event spaces.
- b. Themed destination restaurants developed as part of a larger tourism project.
- c. Cultural or regional cuisine experiences that highlight local heritage (e.g., Native American, Scandinavian, German Russian cuisine) and locally grown foods.

3. Themed Education and Entertainment Attractions

- a. Culinary, Art, and Wellness Experiences
 - i. Culinary tourism and food-based experiences.
 - ii. Art-focused attractions or installations.

- iii. Fitness and wellness retreats.
- b. Themed Attractions
 - i. Artist, author, or animal inspired attractions.
 - ii. Interactive or narrative-driven experiences.
- c. Outdoor and Recreational Venues
 - i. Parks and themed recreational spaces.
 - ii. Additional recreational activities that enhance tourism offerings.
- d. Value-Added Services
 - i. Equipment rentals (e.g., bikes, kayaks, snowshoes).
 - ii. Guide and outfitter services.
 - iii. Curated or complete experience packages for visitors.

4. Agritourism Attractions

Experiences rooted in agriculture, rural culture or working farms that welcome visitors.

- a. Farm stays with educational tours, seasonal activities, or community events.
- b. Full-service guest ranches offering accommodation and programming.
- c. Ranches with event venues for conferences, weddings, or festivals.

5. Focused Niche Activities

Tourism offerings with a targeted theme or value-added service, often tied to place-based identity.

- a. Attractions with historical or cultural themes.
- b. Experiences catering to national or state park visitors.
- c. Destinations that emphasize scenic beauty or natural features.
- d. Unique community-based amenities that enhance local tourism appeal.

Projects should be multi-use and multi-seasonal, serving multiple purposes and events within a community rather than being limited to a single use.

In addition to new projects, existing attractions may qualify for this grant under operational enhancements; however, grant funds cannot supplant an existing budget. These enhancements should extend the length of the visitor season or keep the attraction competitive with other out-of-state offerings, resulting in additional revenue and visitors.

C. ELIGIBLE ENTITIES

Eligible applicants include for-profit businesses, non-profit organizations, and tourism-related entities. This includes those operating within state government-owned buildings or on public property. However, grant funds must be used only for improvements to assets that are owned by the applying business or non-profit — not for upgrades or enhancements to the public building or property itself.

D. INELIGIBILITY

INELIGIBLE ENTITIES

- State and federal government entities are not eligible.
- Applicants who received funding during the 2023-2025 and 2025–2027 Destination Development Grant application process. Any applications submitted by previously awarded grantees will be denied.

INELIGIBLE PROJECTS

Projects that are state or government owned facilities are not eligible for funding.

INELIGIBLE GRANT FUND EXPENSES

- a. Travel and lodging.
- b. To supplant an existing budget.
- c. Fees incurred preparing and submitting an application (i.e., time, research, grant writing fees, etc.).
- d. Administrative, personnel and programmatic funding for existing operations.
- e. Taxes, except sales taxes on eligible expenses.
- f. Funding advocacy or lobbying efforts.
- g. Direct payment to individuals; the funds must be paid to a registered organization (In extreme circumstances where contractors or work
- h. Staffing.
- i. Marketing.
- j. Strategic Planning.
- k. Ongoing operational expenses.

E. MATCHING REQUIREMENTS

A total of \$4 million in funding is available for Destination Development Grant projects. A 1:1 match is required, which may include cash or in-kind support. Applicants must clearly outline the sources of their match to demonstrate both commitment and project viability. This is a competitive grant program, and the strength of the match relative to the project's size and location will be evaluated.

Match Information

- \$4 million for single or multiple projects.
- 1:1 match required (cash or in-kind support).
- Reimbursement of 50% of invoices for cash match.

Cash Match. The applicant should be able to cover costs up front, then submit invoices for reimbursement, and once verified as eligible under the grant agreement, will receive reimbursement for 50% of the approved expenses.

In-Kind Contributions. These may include the value of donated land or facilities (documented value), materials, equipment, in-house labor (excluding administrative staff and programmatic costs), and sales tax on eligible purchases.

F. WHAT MAKES FOR A STRONG APPLICATION?

Competitive applications will demonstrate a clear vision, strategic alignment with tourism goals, and long-term value. Strong proposals typically include the following elements:

- 1. New Experiences.** Projects that introduce fresh, original, and distinctive experiences to North Dakota's tourism landscape.
- 2. Major Expansions.** Proposals that detail significant growth or enhancements to existing attractions or facilities, supported by a clear funding strategy.
- 3. Defining North Dakota.** Initiatives that embody and promote the state's unique identity, highlighting its natural beauty, cultural heritage, or historical significance.
- 4. Long-Term Impact.** Projects that have a lasting positive impact on the community and the state's tourism industry. Grant recipients are required to provide monthly visitor attendance numbers for ten years.
- 5. Timely Completion.** Projects with realistic, achievable timelines that can be completed within the 2025–2027 biennium.
- 6. Operational Enhancements.** Capital improvements to existing attractions that elevate the visitor experience or increase operational efficiency.
- 7. Additional Strengths Include:**
 - a. A clear demonstration of how the project will attract new visitors to North Dakota, supported by data or projections of increased visitation, with an emphasis on encouraging overnight trips from visitors traveling more than 50 miles. Evidence of the project's role as a key tourism and recreation attraction within its community, region, and the State of North Dakota
 - b. The demand for the tourism-related project is clearly demonstrated through research and analysis.
 - c. The experience offered is distinctive and meaningfully tied to North Dakota's history, culture, or natural resources.
 - d. Projects that leverage funding from various sources.
 - e. Projects that demonstrate responsible management of tourism activities and enhance the natural, cultural, or social resources that make a destination attractive to visitors. (*Ex: promoting cultural understanding and respect by providing information about local culture and customs, supporting local cultural initiatives, supporting the local economy by using local suppliers, reducing environmental impacts through sustainable practices,*

(protecting public safety by conducting activities in a safe and responsible manner.)

G. APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

If you have already created and submitted an application through the online portal in the first round in August of 2025, you are required to refine your existing application to meet the new streamlined application. Please create a new application in the online Portal following the instructions below.

New and Returning Applicants:

1. Whether you are a new or returning applicant, you must complete the following steps:
 - a. Complete the initial form with basic project information to be admitted to the full DDG application located on this webpage: <https://www.commerce.nd.gov/services-assistance/grant-programs/destination-development-grant>
 - b. **Important: You must be accepted into the portal before completing the full application. Portal acceptance may take 1–3 business days. You will be notified via email if you have been accepted into the online portal. The Department of Commerce is not responsible for untimely submissions.**
 - c. Once accepted into the portal, you may create a new account or log in using an existing account.
 - d. Log in and find the tile that says 2025-2027 Destination Development Grant – Additional Funding Round. This is where you complete and submit the full online application.

Returning Applicant Notes:

2. If you previously applied through the online portal: <https://commerceportal.nd.gov/>
 - a. The returning applicants will navigate to their supporting documentation on the existing application and download the "Grant Review.pdf" file. This is a copy of the original application. You may use this to make any necessary edits to your original application. Use your updated responses when completing the new application questions.
 - b. **PLEASE NOTE: SOME QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN UPDATED AND NEW QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ADDED FOR THIS APPLICATION ROUND. BE SURE TO REVIEW THE APPLICATION CAREFULLY AND RESPOND TO ALL REQUIRED FIELDS.**

The online application portal automatically times out after 25 minutes of inactivity. To avoid losing any progress, we strongly recommend saving all application materials in a Word document before entering them into the portal. This will ensure you have backup and can easily re-enter your information if needed.

SECTION II GRANT APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS & SCORING GUIDE

All application materials must be submitted online in the grant portal. The items listed below will need to be completed and/or uploaded as part of the applicant's submission. Complete proposals need to demonstrate clear and concise explanation of the project, cost, and overall impact on North Dakota tourism.

Please avoid repeating the same information in multiple sections. Each section of the application is designed to evaluate a specific aspect of your project, so use the opportunity to provide new and relevant details throughout your application.

I. Project Description (100 Points) 100 words max)

a. Overview (25 Points)

- i. Physical location of the project.
- ii. Project type.
- iii. New Experiences. (12 pts)
- iv. Major Expansions. (5 pts)
- v. Operational Enhancements. (3 pts)
- vi. Please elaborate on the project category: accommodations, culinary, agritourism, entertainment, niche activities, etc.
- vii. Please describe the facility and land ownership details (owned, leased, shared).
- viii. Are you required to report an approval status from a governing board or oversight body? Please describe.
- ix. Please describe how your project is multi-use/multi-season.
- x. Please describe the alignment with grant objectives: innovation, impact, completion timeline.

3. Unique Experiences (25 Points)

- i. Please describe the originality and creativity of the project.
- ii. How does the project enhance or introduce new tourism experiences in North Dakota and attract visitors from more than 50 miles away?
- iii. How does the project increase overnight stays in North Dakota from out-of-state travelers?

4. Cultural & Historical Significance (20 Points)

- i. Describe the connection to North Dakota's culture and history.
- ii. Describe the appeal to heritage-focused visitors.

5. Tourism & Hospitality Experience (15 Points)

- i. Please describe the experience of individuals or organizations in tourism/hospitality operations.

6. Supporting Materials (Optional, 15 Points)

- i. Please include these attachments in the support documentation tab of the application.
 - a. Economic impact analysis
 - b. Architectural drawings, photos, maps, design details

- c. Community surveys and planning documents
- d. Sustainability plans

II. Project Financials (100 Points) (750 words max)

a. Budget & Timeline (60 Points)

- i. Please indicate the full project budget and implementation timeline.
- ii. Phased development and grant fund allocation through June 30, 2027.
- iii. Please list the overall budget totals.
- iv. Matching funds: source, amount, timeline, and intended use.
- v. Past state funding (amount, source, year, purpose).

b. Operational Budget & Sustainability (40 Points)

- i. Estimated post-completion operating budget (profit/loss).
- ii. 10-year sustainability plan: financial self-sufficiency, community impact, adaptability to tourism trends.

III. Project Compatibility & Appeal (100 Points) (750 words max)

a. Market Demand (50 Points)

Please indicate the alignment with local, regional, and state tourism needs.

i. For New Businesses:

- 1. Three-year visitation projections.
- 2. Include the number of visitors traveling from more than 50 miles away.
- 3. Supporting data (e.g., market research, benchmarks, seasonal trends).

ii. For Existing Businesses:

- 1. Current visitor numbers.
- 2. Current attendee counts.
- 3. Three-year visitation projections.
- 4. Visitation reports for the previous three years.
- 5. Include the number of visitors traveling from more than 50 miles away.
- 6. Supporting data (e.g., market research, benchmarks, seasonal trends).

b. Visitor Demographics (25 Points)

- i. Please describe your target audiences.

c. Collaboration & Community Support (25 Points)

- i. Please describe partnerships with local/regional businesses and stakeholders.
- ii. Community compatibility and synergies.
- iii. If lacking support: explanation of concerns and engagement efforts.

IV. Demand for the Project (80 Points) (750 words max)

a. Economic Impact (30 Points)

- i. Visitor spending, job creation, tax revenue, and quality of life improvements.

b. Tourism Growth Potential (30 Points)

- i. Ability to attract new and repeat visitors.
- ii. Contribution to long-term tourism sustainability in North Dakota.

- iii. Projected increased visitor spending.

- c. **Community Benefit (20 Points)**

- i. Enhancements to resident quality of life.
 - ii. Potential to attract or retain workforce.

V. Operational Enhancement (No Additional Points) (500 words max)

- a. **Feasibility**

- i. Is the proposed enhancement realistic given your organization's resources and timelines? Include an implementation plan with milestones and a completion date.

- b. **Sustainability**

- i. Outline how the enhancement will be maintained beyond the grant period, including plans for evaluation and long-term success.

- c. **Financial Hardship**

- i. If your project is an operational enhancement necessary to keep the attraction viable, please explain why this is critical and what financial hardships have prevented implementation.

VI. Supporting Documentation

Please upload the supporting documentation referenced below as separate files, appropriately labeled as to what each document is. The support letters should be uploaded together as a single PDF document. Supporting documentation is required and plays a critical role in strengthening your application.

- a. **Three Letters of Support.** The lead applicant must upload a minimum of three letters as a single PDF.
- b. **Business Plan.** The business plan should be uploaded containing all the required information below (executive summary, company, and service) as one single document.
 - i. Executive Summary. This should concisely describe the key elements of the business plan including, but not limited to:
 1. Business location and plan description;
 2. Discussion of the tourism offering;
 3. Market, and competition;
 4. Summary of historical and financial projections;
 5. Amount of financial assistance requested;
 6. Form of and purpose for the financial assistance;
 7. Complete uses and sources of funds;
 8. Business goals and objectives.
- c. **The Company.** A general description of the business, including the service and tax identification number. Historic development of the business, including such items as: name,

date, and place (state) of formation, and legal structure.

d. **The Service.** Provide a general description of the project and the purpose for which it is undertaken, including, but not limited to:

- Demand for your offering.
- Comparison to competitors' product.
- Competitive advantages over other offerings.
- Description of industry and industry outlook.
- Number of jobs the project is expected to generate.
- Projections and their sources.

e. **Financial documents**

- i. A funding request detailing the desired financing, including complete description of uses and sources of funds for the timeline of **July** 1, 2025, through June 30, 2027. If phased financing, describe phases, projected timing and detailed uses and sources of funds.
- ii. Three years of company historical profit and loss statements.
- iii. Three years of projected profit and loss statements. Projections should include profit and loss, balance sheet and cashflow statements.
- iv. Document proof showing source of project match commitment, if applicable.
- v. Agree to complete vendor registration with Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to receive payment (if you have never received or not received payment from the state within the past 12 months): Supplier Registration. Note: The business applicant name must match your State Vendor Registration ID. *(This can be completed once the grant has been awarded).*

SECTION III PROPOSAL REVIEW AND APPROVAL

A. PROPOSAL REVIEW AND RATING

Review and rating of proposals will be conducted by the Department of Commerce and the designated review committee. Commerce may work with the applicant to clarify proposals to ensure completeness.

B. GRANT APPROVAL

Commerce will officially notify the grantee of the award by contacting the respective applicants. The notification will include:

- a. Amount awarded.
- b. Request that the applicant name an authorized agent as the contact with Commerce on the specific grant.
- c. Request that the grantee not publicize the award, pending a press release by the State.

SECTION IV GRANT AGREEMENT

Upon approval of a grant proposal, Commerce will develop a grant agreement. Commerce will work with the authorized agent to finalize grant agreement details.

SECTION V POST-AWARD COMPLIANCE AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

A. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

a. Reimbursement and Documentation Guidelines Once Awarded Funding.

- i. All documentation must be uploaded through the official grant portal. Submissions via email or otherwise will not be accepted for reimbursement or progress narrative updates.
- ii. Invoices must include a detailed description of the service provided. All work must be completed within the grant cycle and must align with the approved scope of work outlined in the grant agreement.
- iii. Summary invoices will not be accepted. Reimbursements will not cover any late fees or credit card fees.
- iv. Final approval of all reimbursements is at the discretion of the Director of Tourism.
- v. Grantees must complete an ACH form upon receiving the award to allow for electronic deposit of reimbursement of funds. Failure to complete this form may result in delays in payment.
- vi. All grant-related expenditures should be incurred by June 30, 2027, to be eligible for reimbursement as carryover authority is not guaranteed.

B. PROGRESS NARRATIVES

- a. Grantees are required to submit progress narratives at the end of each quarter throughout the grant period, beginning with the commencement of the grant agreement. These reports must be submitted through the online grant portal. Each progress narrative must include:
 - a. A brief summary of the project's current status.
 - b. Updates on milestones identified in the approved project proposal and implementation plan.
 - c. A final report to include a narrative and photos of the project is required upon completion.
 - d. Commerce reserves the right to request progress narratives at any time.
 - e. Ongoing communication with the Department of Commerce, Tourism Division is required after project completion. This includes keeping your business profile updated in the Partner Portal and submitting monthly visitor statistics reports.

FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH REPORTING REQUIREMENTS MAY RESULT IN A SUSPENSION OF

GRANT FUNDING.

C. GRANT AGREEMENT MODIFICATION

The grantee will contact Commerce to get prior approval of changes to match, authorized use of grant funds, grant agreement term, or funding. Approved requests may be denied if not appropriate to the grant or may require grant agreement modification prior to implementation.

Grant agreement modifications should be completed within the timeframe of the grant period.

D. GRANT AGREEMENT CLOSEOUT

Near the end of the grant agreement period, which runs from July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2027, Commerce will notify the grantee via letter and/or email that the grant period has been officially closed. This notification signifies the formal conclusion of the grant agreement and releases both the administrator and the grantee from any further obligations under the agreement.

If the grantee has not already completed this step, the new offering must be added to the Partner Portal for inclusion on NDtourism.com, as this listing is essential for promoting your destination and should be kept up to date to attract more visitors and encourage longer stays. Additionally, all grantees are required to report monthly visitor statistics to the North Dakota Department of Tourism.

While grantees may be granted carryover authority, this is not guaranteed and will be determined by the North Dakota Legislature during the 2027 legislative session.

E. MONITORING

Commerce will monitor all grants throughout the grant period to ensure compliance with program requirements and progress toward project goals. Monitoring may be conducted through desk reviews, provided that the documentation submitted by the grantee is sufficient to support a thorough evaluation. As part of this process, Commerce may request supporting materials such as financial statements, budgets, project timelines, design documents, and detailed project plans.

SECTION VI ADMINISTRATION

The Destination Development Grant is administered by the Tourism Division of the Department of Commerce. Questions may be directed to:

McKenzie Clayburgh
North Dakota Department of Commerce, Tourism Division

Phone: (701) 328-6484

Email: clayburghmckenzie@nd.gov