

**Board of County Commissioners
Tourist Development Council
Gadsden County, Florida**

**MINUTES
(HAPPY NEW YEAR)
Marketing Meeting
January 27, 2014
3:00 p.m.**

Present:

Matt Thro, Vice – Chair TDC

Keith Dowdell (absent)

Jeff DuBree

David Knight (absent)

Brenda Holt

Terry Kelly

Mary Kelly

Allara Gutcher, Planning Director

Call to Order:

Matt Thro called the Marketing Meeting to order.

He said they had discussed previously opening the grant cycle to twice a year.

Mr. DuBree said he did research on what other counties are doing in the area on the grant cycle. Most counties in state did once a year, but there were some doing twice a year. He listed local counties such as Leon does it once year, Wakulla once a year, Jackson you can submit anytime during the year, Putnam County twice a year, Sumpter County once a year and Madison County four cycles a year. Most operated from a scoring system, which we use to have in place but we eliminated the last time out. Most require bed night criteria to qualify before it even makes it to the TDC to weed some out, a policy of some sort in place. He said one county that was interesting was Sumpter County that held their grant cycle once a year, they had a scoring system and you qualified for a higher amount of money if you had certified bed nights you qualified more. They made an allowance on events that didn't produce bed nights, they had a \$1,000 cap on it and we could emulate by putting whatever cap we like. Most of the counties had 50% matching fund, scoring system, bed nights, consistency and reduced by 50% each year and if the event became profitable it wouldn't be eligible at all. He said the scoring system would be the only way to have even shot at funding. He said the application process

was anywhere from a 120-180 days in front of the event. Does this require Strategic Plan change?

Mr. Thro commented they hadn't spent much of those funds over the last two years and thought the ideas presented were great in moving forward. He said by having the infrastructure they have in place with the marketing committee and the contractors, Legacy Marketing and providing time for them both to review is important before it comes to the Board and it might be a better way to grade them internally through those discussions.

Mr. DuBree agreed and said it would probably take a 120 days or longer to complete the process. He asked did the changes require a Strategic Plan change.

Mrs. Gutcher said she thinks it reads in the Strategic Plan they are accepted twice per year.

Mr. DuBree recalled a conversation with Sonya and stated he thought she said it had been switched to once a year.

He pointed out some things that needed clarifying, such as how do you get funds from the TDC. "Do you feel out an application, you have the option to apply for marketing or grant funds." He disclosed he felt when the Strategic Plan was written it wasn't written to receive marketing funds be given to an event. It was suppose to be the County spending money for an event and that was the intention when it was written. He said that's not how it went, because TDC didn't have anyone in place to get events going and keep them in place. He discussed grant funding versus marketing funds. If strategic plan needs to be changed, eliminate marketing money as an option for event planners to get monies from. "Everything would be funneled through the grant process and currently we only have 5% budgeted for grants, but if we went in and changed the categories and reduced the marketing down to 45-55 increase the grants to 20-25 and changed the infrastructure to a capital improvement fund, which would match the county's from 15-25%, then administration. Then you can emulate Sumpter County they have lei way for the events that don't meet the bed night require to still get some funding."

Mr. Thro responded that was reason he suggested doing workshops prior to each session that would start off with the 120 day period.

Mrs. Gutcher stated it looked like grant funds are given to non competitive if they go through process such as the 100th Year Celebration for the Courthouse and marketing funds are competitive you fill out application to receive.

Mr. Thro said they haven't had an application for marketing, they were writing letters to give a proposal of what they were wanting. He said the last revision they did; they accepted applications for grants as well as marketing.

Mrs. Gutcher pointed out in the budget it only showed \$5,000 for grant funding.

Mr. Thro said that was the one historically grants had been held to the 3 year rule and marketing was not.

Mr. DuBree recalled you have to have bed nights to qualify for any money. That's why the number was only 5% of our budget, because so few people would apply or qualify for that money under grants.

Mrs. Gutcher said she liked the idea of certified bed nights, because on the application it's asking how many are staying in the hotels.

Mr. Thro stated they really need to get the ball rolling on this and think going back we have already set the budget for the year. He said he was fine with amended it, if that's what they want to do, but it would be easier to look at regimented educated applications. Clarify application itself; put timeline in place and as next agenda at next meeting start working on budget that would fit the mold next year of what we are trying to do. He felt they shouldn't waste time trying to amend budget and not be able to use dollars. Funds need to benefit hotel industry, to help tourism.

Mr. DuBree agreed with the workshops to educate people.

Mr. Price said he thought the process was you feel out for either grants or marketing funds.

Mr. DuBree said they spent most of the funds budgeted for events. He pointed out if they are already on twice a year there is nothing for us to do if we are going to leave it the way it is.

Mr. Thro said he was not advocating for increasing the events budgets. They should set up workshops, schedule dates and put procedures in place. He stated he did like the idea of changing budgets, but didn't think it was feasible this year.

Mr. DuBree said if they had to go before the BOCC to get Strategic Plan approval, even if it was only to put cycle in place I thought it might be worth considering making a few of these changes at that time. He said if that's not the case, he would agree let's just put calendar in place.

Mrs. Gutcher said she would verify by checking the Strategic Plan.

Mr. DuBree said he was unsure whether it was twice or once a year, but was pretty sure the dates already in were from previous years.

Mr. Thro clarified the decisions that they needed to make where the dates, how they wanted to divide up the budget as far as 1st period and 2nd period and procedural how they want applications handled.

Mrs. Gutcher said she was unsure of what kind of review Sonya makes before she sends to TDC in an agenda item, but I would definitely want to make sure application is properly reviewed.

Mr. DuBree discussed dates that he felt might work for the TDC, for events taking place on October 1 – March 30, would advertise the grant cycle on June 1 with a July 1 deadline, then there would be a coordinating committee review in July in would come before the TDC and if needed the BOCC in August then funds would be available in September. Events taking place from April 1 – September 30, would advertise on December 1 with a deadline of January 2, coordinator committee review in January, February TDC meeting and BOCC if needed and funds would be available in March.

Mr. Thro asked about workshops.

Mr. DuBree said he hadn't put them in place, but assumed it needed to be sometime before the deadline so they would know the proper way to feel out application and how the process works. He stated maybe when you advertise June 1 you have a meeting half way through the month are within a week of that advertisement .

Mr. Thro said you have to give people time to plan to come to a meeting. If you do the workshop before you meet you would have to advertise twice.

Mr. DuBree said he felt a month gives enough time to advertise in a workshop and have time to feel out the form. He said you could bump up to give 45 days in front of the deadline.

Mr. Thro concurred that was a good idea, you advertise from the 1st one, May 15, June 1 you would have the workshop and they would have until July 1 to get the application in.

Mr. DuBree said most of them he looked at were about a month, if they advertise the 1st of the month (Monday) then the deadline was the 1st Monday of the next month.

Mrs. Holt asked where the TDC applications online and stated they need to be.

Mrs. Gutcher replied it might be with the new website.

Mr. DuBree said that was one of the cool things I saw with Jackson County, you can submit an application anytime, you did have to submit application 5 months prior to your event, but there was not dates you had to feel in the application. The application was on their website. He also

suggested they do video on line, such as a webinar on how to apply in addition to the workshop to educate.

Mr. Thro drew a consensus of dates and to check to see what dates fall on. June/July advertise 15 days before June 1 application deadline. May 15 advertise, June 1 workshop.

Mrs. Gutchner said she would prefer that they have more than 15 days in case someone needs help with an application.

Mr. Thro said it was 15 days until the workshop then they have 30 days to get the application in. He said deadline on the referenced one would be July 1st and then we have the committee meetings in the month of July.

Mr. DuBree read events that need monies by October 1 - March 30, would advertise May 15, have a workshop June 1 and deadline to get in application would be July 1st. We would review with committee or coordinator staff and then make recommendations to the TDC Board for their August Meeting, whatever the scheduled meeting date is. The amount of money approved then it would be available in September. The following cycle after that would be the events on April 1 – September 30, you would advertise November 15. You have a workshop December 1, application deadline January 2, review in January and vote in February on applicants.

Mr. Thro added with the disbursement of funds, it would be loosely a 60/40 split, 60% in 1st cycle and 40% in 2nd cycle that is because we have more events in this timeframe and legally could care over anything that was not spent.

Discussion occurred among the members.

Mr. Thro inquired about the 50/50 match. He asked how they would do this cycle since they have an abbreviated one, should we create as a separate segment for money now through the next fiscal year, so we only do it one time until October 30.

Consensus there were no changes needing to be made, it is in the Strategic Plan.

Mr. DuBree asked how soon this could be implemented, which cycle. He asked would they be able to make March 15.

Mrs. Gutchner said they need to have some procedural language developed with deadlines that we could bring back before the council to adopt.

Mr. Thro asked did they need to amend the Strategic Plan.

Mrs. Burns said the application is a part of the Strategic Plan.

Mrs. Gutcher said the TDC Council needs to create or amend whatever you want to call it rather than it is an issue the Marketing Committee tackles. She stated they needed to create some procedural language and draft something up.

Mrs. DuBree conveyed it should be some kind of procedure in the application for dates and deadlines.

Mrs. Burns commented he was correct it was in the Strategic Plan.

Mrs. Gutcher read it states January and July as two application dates, so we would have to amend it.

Mr. DuBree said with the dates given one would be July 1st.

Mr. Thro stated this was procedural how they wanted to educate people and get them involved in what they do.

Mrs. Gutcher said they would find and also look into an abbreviated schedule. She pointed issues where applicants can't make meetings and second when the Council can't meet because they don't have a quorum.

Mr. Thro clarified they are talking about this starting the next fiscal year and procedurally we will take them as they come in until or do we have a special session.

Mrs. Gutcher replied procedurally right now you are suppose only take them in January and July, but understand you have been taking them as they come.

Mr. DuBree asked what they would need to do, just to stick to that. He inquired could the dates be added since the form has a place for dates.

Mrs. Gutcher said the application would only be on the website when it is available to apply.

Mr. Thro inquired could it be on there all the time and specifically says that this is the window, so people can be preparing. He stated it helps with the educational process at anytime they can access that information.

Mrs. Gutcher added it would be an application that you would be able to feel out online when the website is up. She suggested it be an insert during the time you are accepting applications otherwise it would be a pdf download.

Mrs. Holt said her thoughts were to have applications on the web at all times, but specific times when they are accepted.

Mr. Thro asked do they take applications now or do they hold to what is in the strategic plan.

Discussion occurred among the Council. The meeting carried on past the 30 minute window due to not having a quorum, so they continued the Marketing Meeting.

Mr. Thro said he felt they should do a shorter schedule to help get funds out this year before the next fiscal year starts and workshop mid – February start the timeline for what would have ended in January and backup with a more abbreviated schedule. It would be a little bit more work with meeting and getting it done for everyone. He voiced they should still try to have this cycle.

Mr. DuBree pointed out looking at the Strategic Plan that was emailed it states once a year in January, but the application has been changed to twice a year so there is some inconsistency. The dates on the plan are to advertise in January and February, so we could advertise right now it's in the plan, the applications would become available to the public on February 6. The grant workshop is February 6 and then deadline for having your applications in is March 3, review by staff March 3 – 9 and reviewed by the TDC at the March meeting.

Mrs. Gutcher said they might have to push the meeting back because they had already missed the deadline for the ad.

Mr. DuBree commented the way the plan is written it knows the days would change each calendar year.

Mrs. Gutcher suggested fixing.

Mrs. Holt said she would like for the Council to consider allowing the 6 municipalities to apply for x number of dollars and it could encourage them to come up with events.

Mr. DuBree responded he didn't know if he believed in splitting the funds up between the municipalities because some are more tourists ready.

Mrs. Holt stated that would help the others become more tourists ready.

Mr. Thro mentioned that's what happened to the grants part of it, but it got to the point where no one was applying. He said as long as he has served on the TDC they have never had an issue with funding and event, it's that we haven't had the people to apply. The idea behind placing the 3 year cap was actually what you have mentioned, but also no one touched the grant dollars either. He said they are finding a hardship in justifying the bed nights.

Mrs. Holt suggested you tell them that they have to put people in the beds overnight to get the dollars and she felt they would do it; that would push the people to stay overnight.

Mr. DuBree said that's why he concurred with what Sumpter County was doing; they based theirs on bed nights. If you didn't have them you still qualified for grant dollars. Although, it was a much lower level. He said their cap for an event if it didn't produce 25 bed nights was \$1,000. If you produced 100 bed nights you were eligible for \$10,000 in funding.

Mrs. Gutcher said if I have an applicant that's only going to project \$480.00 in bed taxes, does that mean we can't give him the money because he is not generating enough funding.

Mr. Thro replied under grants they could not but, under marketing they could.

Mrs. Holt said it should be pointed out on the web, the difference between marketing and grant funding, so the public would understand.

Mr. Thro stated that grant applications are mostly for first time, but could receive up to 3 years at the same level.

Mr. DuBree said after 3 years if they still applied, it would reduce each year.

More discussion occurred among the Council.

Mrs. Gutcher said it's important to reach out to the different municipalities to encourage them to come to the meetings.

Mr. Thro commented it should be the responsibility of everyone on the board to get the people in their community help.

He asked could they do abbreviated schedule of events, so we can check off the event part.

Mrs. Gutcher said they could advertise Friday, January 31 to be in next week's paper.

Mr. Thro said the workshop would be 2 weeks after that date. We could start accepting applications then. He asked where that put them date wise.

Mrs. Burns reminded them it had to run in all 3 newspapers.

Mrs. Gutcher said if they put an ad in the paper on February 6, another ad on February 13 and February 27 to schedule workshop. She commented that would give 30 days after the workshop to receive applications by the March 13.

Mrs. Burns asked did they want to put the suggested application dates in the ad for the newspaper to attract more people.

Mr. Thro concurred. He said they would need to abbreviate their review process to get it out.

Mrs. Gutcher said they needed to have a special meeting since there was no meeting scheduled for April.

Mr. Thro said he would like for the April meeting to occur the first part of the month. He said the marketing committee can meet sometime in March and meet with the Marketing Coordinators and review the events in March, review and vote first week in April.

Mrs. Gutcher paused and said she had concerns they were making decisions that they couldn't make. She asked could they change the calendar, because they have adopted a calendar.

Mr. Thro said probably not.

Mr. DuBree voiced that it could be changed it was adopted with the intention that it would fluctuate each year based on the calendar, but as long as you are consistent. He said the one problem they have is the Strategic Plan saying once a year and the application saying twice a year that was approved by the BOCC.

Mrs. Gutcher said she doesn't disagree, but is concerned if the Council has adopted a calendar. She said have the regular meeting in March and a special meeting in April.

ADJOURNMENT

THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THE MARKETING COMMITTEE, THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED AT 4:26 P.M.

GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA

MATT THRO, CHAIR OF MARKETING COMMITTEE

ATTEST:

BERYL H. WOOD, DEPUTY CLERK