**RURAL TOURISM SUPPORT PROGRAM
APPLICATION**

State of Washington Tourism (SWT) is seeking applicants for the Rural Tourism Support (RTS) program. This program will guide the development of an actionable vision for regional tourism among stakeholders in several communities.

Launched in 2021, the RTS program is a key pillar of SWT’s destination development plan and serves as a vital resource for underrepresented and disadvantaged communities. It will serve as a model for communities across the state to strive for more sustainable tourism growth.

The RTS program incorporates best practices from the Oregon Tourism Studios (OTS), a program within Travel Oregon. Some tools and materials for the RTS program have been adapted from OTS with permission from Travel Oregon.

For details about the RTS program, review the [slide deck](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NYYswi2vyNG0JR8J5PCcclhPYAXPYggP/view) used during the [informational webinar](https://youtu.be/YLRpjK_p4Ik) in August 2021. Please review the entire application, including the FAQ section, to understand the requirements for participating communities.

**INSTRUCTIONS**

Submit completed application materials electronically to matthew@stateofwatourism.com by **5 p.m. on April 20**.Please include “**Destination Development Application**” in the subject line.

Along with the completed application form, please submit the following attachments:

* **Letters of support** from each of the possible Steering Committee/Action Team members listed in the application. Letters of support should follow a specific naming format: LOS + the name of the organization that submitted the letter (e.g., “LOS Bellingham/Whatcom County Tourism.pdf”).
* **Community plans** identifying tourism development as a strategic priority. Please name planning documents in the application by number (e.g., “Plan 1.pdf,” “Plan 2.doc,” etc.).

SWT will send email confirmations to individuals within two business days of receiving their applications. For questions regarding the RTS program, contact Matthew Ozuna, SWT destination development manager:

**Matthew Ozuna** *(he, him, his)*

Destination Development Manager
State of Washington Tourism

(509) 945-3026 | **matthew@stateofwatourism.com**

**www.stateofwatourism.com**

**APPLICATION DETAILS**

Destination organizations, businesses, community organizations, local governments, tribal governments and enterprises, or a combination thereof may apply for the RTS program. Applicants must identify tourism as an economic development strategy and intend to work collaboratively with regional partners as a visitor destination. An ad hoc committee of industry experts from around the state will convene to review applications for the RTS program. The committee is comprised of several members with backgrounds in hospitality management, economic development, government, land management and destination promotion. SWT will appoint members to this committee to evaluate applications according to the following criteria.

* **Benefit Potential***Is there a clear need for destination development, stewardship or management in the applicant’s region? What economic benefits is the destination missing due to untapped tourism potential?*
* **Convening Capacity***Is there a local convener (a person backed by an organization) who has the capacity to plan and facilitate monthly Steering Committee meetings during and after the implementation of the RTS program? Is the convener a trusted community partner?*
* **Readiness***Are there enough tourism stakeholders willing and able to serve on a Steering Committee to support the implementation of the RTS program, including the priority projects? Are there resources available to support each priority project from the community workshops?*
* **Community Engagement and Feedback***Is the community willing to engage in the RTS program and provide SWT with feedback to improve program offerings, instruction and general management?*

**FAQ**

**How many times will the RTS program be offered each year?**

SWT anticipates implementing the program in two regional destinations per year. For destinations that prefer to undertake the program in the fall, please consider applying now. If enough destinations qualify in this application cycle, SWT may keep the application process closed until those destinations complete the program.

**How long will the RTS program take?**

SWT anticipates 6-8 months for the duration of the program, which includes pre-workshop coordination, on-site instruction and assistance with priority projects. SWT will provide light coordination for an additional 12 months involving financial assistance and oversight.

**When are applications for the RTS program due?**

**Applications are due to SWT by 5 p.m. on April 20, 2022**. Submissions must be emailed to Matthew Ozuna, SWT destination development manager, at matthew@stateofwatourism.com.Please include “Destination Development Application” in the subject line.

**What is the cost of the RTS program for communities?**

The cost for communities to participate in the program is scalable. The size of the destination and scope of the development project(s) will affect cost as well as program add-ons. Communities are encouraged to pool their resources to support program requirements and may seek additional services at a discounted rate. For example, SWT will provide instruction and catering for community workshops, but the applicant must provide the workspace and facilities. Communities may also consider subsidized research elements associated with the RTS program for an additional cost.

**What financial assistance is available from SWT to support priority projects identified in the community workshops?**

Upon successful completion of the program, tourism stakeholders are encouraged to apply for financial assistance from SWT and other benefactors to support priority projects identified in the community workshops. Tourism stakeholders and priority projects are eligible for SWT matching grants up to $30,000. Additional financial assistance from SWT may be available.

* After successful completion of the program, one matching grant application for no more than three priority projects may be submitted by a participating member of the Steering Committee.
* Tourism stakeholders must submit a complete and thorough application with details on project objectives, impacts, budget, timeline and sustainability.
* A local nonprofit organization or public agency will need to serve as a fiscal sponsor for the grant.
* The matching grant application is due no later than six months after the completion of the last community workshop in the program.
* In the application, tourism stakeholders may request up to $10,000 per priority project identified in each of the three community workshops for a maximum total request of $30,000.
* Neither matched nor requested funds should pay for salaries, debt or interest payments associated with the priority project(s).
* A one-to-one match is necessary to receive this grant request. In-kind contributions can comprise no more than half of the matched funds by the applicant. For example, if tourism stakeholders request $10,000 in matching grant funds, they can provide $5,000 in cash and $5,000 worth of in-kind contributions.
* Unless otherwise stated, SWT will release half of the matching funds for the priority project(s) upon approval of the grant application. The remainder of matching funds will be disbursed after SWT receives documentation of the completion and evaluation of said project(s).
* Once approved and finalized with a signed contract, communities have one year to complete the priority project(s) with matching funds.

**What level of commitment must communities demonstrate in the RTS program?**

Communities working collaboratively on tourism development strategies for a regional destination must consider the following requirements to host the program:

1. Identify a convener – person backed by a local organization – to manage local stakeholders, program elements and ongoing destination development work.
2. Create a diverse, multi-sector Steering Committee – seven to 12 members (described in detail below).
3. Confirm monthly meetings with the Steering Committee through the duration of the program. The Steering Committee must also consider the formation of a long-term Destination Leadership Team to guide ongoing destination development work.
4. Ensure the Steering Committee will:
	* Aid the development process in the region and serve as an ambassador for SWT
	* Conduct community outreach to maximize participation in the program
	* Collect data and research to support the evaluation of the program and priority projects
	* Identifying conveners for Action Teams
	* Identify and secure resources to support the implementation of priority projects in terms of capacity planning and project funding
5. Provide the facilities for meetings and workshops to take place in the destination.

**What role does the Steering Committee play in the RTS program?**

The program requires the identification of a Steering Committee for the regional destination. A robust committee comprised of seven to 12 key stakeholders from the region is necessary to help with program planning, design and outreach prior to the on-site workshops. This committee will also support tourism collaboration across the region and the implementation of a development road map, which will include priority projects for the destination.

Members of the Steering Committee may include but are not limited to:

* Staff from destination organizations (ex: chamber of commerce, convention and visitors’ bureau, destination marketing organization)
* Tribal community leader
* Academics who study business, hospitality, tourism, outdoor recreation, etc.
* Elected officials and other civil servants
* Individuals who can represent underrepresented segments of the community
* Business leaders in the tourism sector (two to three) – community-minded, big-picture thinkers
* Local and regional economic development organizations
* Land managers/owners of lands used for outdoor recreation (local, state, federal, tribal and private)
* Nonprofit environmental, outdoor recreational or cultural heritage organizations
* Transportation agencies responsible for infrastructure
* Transportation service providers
* Philanthropic foundations and private donors
* Armed Forces (ex: U.S. Coast Guard)

**What happens once my application is accepted into the RTS program?**

The application period will close on April 20, and the inductee for fall 2022 will be announced on May 11. A representative from SWT will contact tourism stakeholders from the regional destination before May 11 to arrange the public announcement, scheduling for the program and alterations to the application (if needed). Once activated, the Steering Committee for the regional destination will choose the topics for three out of four community workshops. These workshops include one Core Course and three Elective Courses. The Core Course is applicable in all tourism regions cross the state and consists of a one-day workshop that will help stakeholders develop and define the stories of their specific region. The Core Course will help stakeholders with community tourism visioning and planning, tourism marketing and communications as well as Action Team development. Elective Courses are tailored to a specific tourism region and the Steering Committee will select three themed, one-day workshops from several industry segments and practices. Examples of themed workshops include agritourism, visitor readiness and social media marketing. The Elective Courses will help stakeholders identify short-term and long-term objectives in each category.

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| **Name of regional destination applying to the program:**  |
| **Date of application submission:** |
| This destination development program should not take place during peak season. When is the best season for this program to take place in local communities?**\_\_\_October-January** or **\_\_\_ February-May** or **\_\_ Other:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |

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| **A. LEAD APPLICANT DETAILS.** The lead applicant should also be the lead convener of the Steering Committee, and the project liaison to SWT and its contractors.   |
| 1. Name:  |  |
| 2. Organization:  |  |
| 3. Title: |  |
| 4. Daytime phone:  | Office: | Cell: |
| 5. Email:  |  |
| 6. Mailing address: |  |
| 7. Your role: | ⬜ Staff (paid) ⬜ Contractor (paid) ⬜ Volunteer (unpaid)⬜ Other; describe: |

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| **B1. Please list the organizations and individuals planning to serve on the Steering Committee**. It is recommended that seven to 12 members serve on this committee, coming from relevant and diverse organizations across the region. Members of the Steering Committee should consider pledging their ongoing support and leadership for the program by assisting with the promotion and implementation of workshops as well as helping with priority projects, which occur after the completion of the program. Please include letters of support from each organization represented on the Steering Committee. In prior destination development work, a Steering Committee comprised of diverse interests was highly effective. These interests may include but are not limited to: * **Tourism sector** (e.g., local and regional destination marketing organizations, chambers, tour operators, guides and outfitters, lodging or restaurant owners, etc.)
* **Economic development organizations** (e.g., local and regional economic development councils, renewal districts, etc.)
* **Public and private land managers responsible for recreation assets** (e.g., local staff from the U.S. Forest Service, BLM, State Parks, county and/or local parks, timber companies, etc.)
* **Public agencies and civil servants** (e.g., Fire/EMS, Community Development, Long-Range Planning, elected officials, department heads, etc.)
* **Tribal government and enterprises**

**Other private business** **in key industries/sectors** (e.g., agriculture, wine, transportation, etc.)* **Educational Institutions** (e.g., academics, staff and students in tourism-related fields from area colleges and universities)
* **Nonprofit organizations** (e.g., environmental, outdoor recreation, cultural heritage, etc.)
* **Residents/influencers** interested in local economic development via tourism
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| **NAME** | **ORGANIZATION(S)** or **AFFILIATION(S)** | **TITLE** | **EMAIL** | **DAY PHONE** (cell/office) |
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| **B2. Are there other key stakeholders or organizations that may not be able to serve on the Steering Committee?** If so, please list names/organizations with an explanation of why their involvement is important for this work. |

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| **C. WHY SHOULD SWT SELECT YOUR APPLICATION?** The following are a series of open-ended questions. Please respond in a succinct manner.  |
| **1. Please describe why you believe the Rural Tourism Support program is well-suited for your area.** (120 words or less) |
| **2. What does your region hope to achieve after participating in this program?** Outcomes can be broad or specific. For examples, these outcomes may include “improving the visitor experience,” “clear action steps for developing agritourism and culinary tourism” or “improved recreational assets for visitors.” Please consult with members of the Steering Committee to formulate this response. (200 words or less) |
| **3. Please describe a collaborative initiative in your region and the outcome(s) from that initiative.** (200 words or less) |
| **4. What funding and/or resources are available or could be obtained to support the implementation of priority projects, which occur after the completion of the program?** (200 words or less) |

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| **D. ABOUT YOUR COMMUNITIES.** Please share more information about the communities in your region. The Rural Tourism Support program should encompass several communities and/or a large, well-defined geographical area. Communities that share similar or complementary traits, located near one another are encouraged to apply together. |
| **1. Describe the region associated with this applicant. Please list the names of the communities and/or counties included in this region as well as the total population and other demographic information.** (200 words or less) |
| **2. What geographic characteristics define your region and how are they attributed to tourism?** The geographic character of a place includes the environment, history, culture, aesthetics and the well-being of residents. (200 words or less) |
| **3. What drives the regional economy and how significant is tourism to the regional economy?** Please include a list of the region’s top industries. (200 words or less) |
| **4. Please describe recent tourism and visitor trends in your region.** List visitor characteristics such as age, zip code, purpose of trip, tourism activities, etc. (120 words or less) |
| **5. What type(s) of visitors would you like to attract to the region?** (120 words or less) |
| **6. What lodging taxes or assessments are currently being collected in this region?** Please list any private, local, county or regional lodging taxes, as well as the entity that oversees said taxes. Please include the revenues collected during the prior calendar year. |
| 1. **Please list any economic development, transportation or strategic plans in the region that include tourism. Please reference the page number(s) where tourism appears in these plans.**

Include the website address (URL) or digital copies of each plan as attachments to this application. \* |
| **Plan title:** | **Page number(s) and URL if available** |
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| 2. |  |
| 3. |  |
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*\* When emailing this application, please name the planning document files to correspond with how they are numbered here in the application: “Plan 1.pdf,” “Plan 2.doc,” etc.*

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| **E. PROGRAM CUSTOMIZATION.** The Rural Tourism Support Program is tailored for specific communities and tourism assets. The following section will help SWT assess the level of customization needed for each applicant of the program. |
| **1. What development or management opportunities have the most potential to increase the positive impact of tourism in your region?** (120 words or less) |
| **2. What challenges do the communities in your region face in relation to tourism?** (120 words or less) |
| **3. If you could remove one of the challenges previously mentioned, which would it be? How would overcoming that challenge benefit the regional destination?** (60 words or less) |
| **4. Have you or members of the Steering Committee identified any specific expectations for this program, such as goals for the region or specific skills training for tourism stakeholders? If so, please describe them.** (120 words or less) |