**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 underserved communities. 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://1drv.ms/b/s%21AlUdBPV5NCN-qX6H0qviNliLlnXb?e=849BBH) and [webinar recording](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EtrAoQ-fADI) of the information session on March 20, 2023. Please review the entire application, including the FAQ section, to understand the requirements for regional destinations and tourism stakeholders.

**INSTRUCTIONS**

The application period for the RTS program is April 3–May 1. Tourism stakeholders interested in applying for the RTS program are strongly encouraged to submit a letter of intent. SWT would like to schedule one-one meetings with potential applicants before the submittal of their RTS application. Tourism stakeholders can submit letters of intent and other application materials electronically to matthew@stateofwatourism.com. Please include “**RTS Letter of Intent**” and “**RTS 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.

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

Destination Development Manager
State of Washington Tourism

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

[**www.stateofwatourism.com**](http://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 on behalf of tourism stakeholders in their regional destination. Applicants will assume a leadership role in destination development for their region throughout 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 will comprise several members with backgrounds in hospitality management, economic development, government, land management, and destination promotion. Committee members will evaluate RTS applications according to the following criteria.

* **Regional Benefit**
*Is there a clear need for destination development, stewardship or management in the applicant’s region? What economic benefits is the destination missing from 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 in the latter phases of the RTS program? Is the convener a trusted community partner?*
* **Project Readiness**
*Is there a diverse range of tourism stakeholders with time and influence to serve on a Steering Committee and support the early phases of the RTS program, including the development of priority projects? Are resources available for the RTS matching grant to support the priority projects identified in the early phases of the program?*
* **Community Engagement**
*Are community members willing to engage with other tourism stakeholders in this program and provide feedback on program operations and strategies?*

**FAQ**

**How does the RTS Program Application work?**

The application period for the RTS program will open once a year in March/April. The RTS program is awarded annually to a regional destination following a rigorous application review. An ad hoc committee of industry experts from around the state will convene to review applications for the RTS program. The committee will comprise several members with backgrounds in hospitality management, economic development, government, land management, and destination promotion. Committee members will evaluate RTS applications according to the criteria in this application.

**When will the RTS program take place in the regional destination and how long will it take?**

Planning for the RTS program in the regional destination will start in May. The initial phases of the program will take 8-9 months and include tourism research, pre-workshop coordination, on-site instruction, and assistance with the priority projects. SWT may provide light coordination for an additional 24 months involving financial and technical assistance. Community workshops serve as an integral part of the RTS program. These workshops will occur in **November, December, and January** closest to the date of applicationsubmission.

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

**Applications are due to SWT on May 1, 2023**. Tourism stakeholders interested in applying for the RTS program are strongly encouraged to submit a letter of intent. SWT would like to schedule one-one meetings with potential applicants before the submittal of their RTS application. Tourism stakeholders can submit letters of intent and other application materials electronically to matthew@stateofwatourism.com. Please include “**RTS Letter of Intent**” and “**RTS Application**” in the subject line.

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

The dollar amount for communities to participate in the RTS program is relatively low; however, ample amounts of staff and volunteer time is necessary. The size of the destination and scope of the development projects will affect the 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 convener must provide the facilities. In-person meetings with the Steering Committee follow a similar guideline. Communities may consider subsidized research elements associated with the RTS program for an additional cost. SWT will subsidize the cost of those services by 50%.

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

Upon successful completion of the RTS program, tourism stakeholders are encouraged to apply for financial assistance from SWT and other sources of funding to support the priority project(s) identified in community workshops. The priority projects should align with a shared vision for regional tourism among stakeholders in several communities. Priority projects are eligible for SWT matching grants up to $30,000.

* After successful completion of the program, one matching grant application for no more than three priority projects may be submitted by an active member of the Steering Committee.
* Tourism stakeholders must submit a complete and thorough application with details on project objectives, longevity, and budget. If awarded grant funding, the grantee must submit all contracts/contractors involved with the priority project(s) to SWT for review and approval.
* 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.
* Up to three priority projects are eligible for a total of $30,000 in grant funding with a maximum of $15,000 per project. The budget for each priority project may exceed the SWT grant and its match.
* Grant funds from SWT should not pay for staff salaries, debt or interest payments associated with the priority projects.
* A one-to-one match is necessary to receive this grant. 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.
* SWT may release half of the matching funds for the priority projects upon approval of the grant application/agreement; the other half will be disbursed after the completion of the projects.
* The evaluation of each priority project should occur no later than six months after its completion and include a final budget, proof of spending, photos, and a written account of how grant funds were used and their impact on travel and tourism.
* Once approved and finalized with a signed contract, the grantee has 24 months to complete the priority projects with grant funds.
* The grantee must acknowledge the RTS program and include the SWT logo in material associated with the priority projects. SWT must also review and approve this material.

**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 of 10-15 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 the priority projects in terms of capacity planning and project funding
5. Provide the facilities for meetings and workshops to take place in the region.

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

The program requires the formation of a Steering Committee for the regional destination. A diverse and robust committee comprised of 10-15 key stakeholders from the region is necessary to help with program planning, design, and outreach prior to the community workshops. This committee will also support tourism collaboration across the region and the implementation of a development road map, which will include the priority projects. **The Steering Committee does not need to be fully formed by the application submission date.**

Members of the Steering Committee may include and 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 – community-minded, big-picture thinkers
* Local and regional economic development organizations
* Land managers/owners involved with 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 if my application is accepted for the RTS program?**

The application period will close on May 1. The convener of the RTS program will be announced in mid-May. A representative from SWT will contact the convener before the public announcement to confirm program details 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 across the state and consists of a one-day workshop pertaining to situation analysis. It will help foster a community tourism approach to destination development involving vision planning, asset mapping, and relationship building among stakeholders. 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.

**RURAL TOURISM SUPPORT PROGRAM
APPLICATION**

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| **Regional Destination:**  |
| **Date:** |
| Planning for the RTS program in the regional destination will start in May. The initial phases of the RTS program will take 8-9 months and include tourism research, pre-workshop coordination, on-site instruction, and assistance with priority projects. SWT may provide light coordination for an additional 24 months involving financial and technical assistance. Community workshops serve as an integral part of the RTS program. These workshops will occur in **November, December, and January** closest to the date of applicationsubmission. |

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| **A. APPLICANT DETAILS.** The applicant should be the convener of the Steering Committee. The convener will also liaise with SWT and program contractors.   |
| 1. Name:  |  |
| 2. Organization:  |  |
| 3. Title: |  |
| 4. Phone:  | Office: | Cell: |
| 5. Email:  |  |
| 6. Mailing Address: |  |
| 7. Role: | c Staff (paid) c Contractor (paid) c Volunteer (unpaid)c Other: |

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| **B1. Please list the individuals and organizations planning to serve on the Steering Committee**. A diverse and robust committee comprised of 10-15 key stakeholders from the region is necessary to help with program planning, design, and outreach prior to the community workshops. This committee will also support tourism collaboration across the region and the implementation of a development road map, which will include the priority projects. The Steering Committee does not need to be fully formed by the application submission date.Please include letters of support from each organization on the Steering Committee. Members of the Steering Committee may represent and are not limited to:* **Travel and Tourism**
* **Economic Development Organizations**
* **Public/Private Land Managers**
* **Public Agencies and Civil Servants**
* **Tribal Government and Enterprises**
* **Educational Institutions**
* **Nonprofit Organizations**
* **Residents/Influencers**
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| **NAME** | **ORGANIZATION(S)** or **AFFILIATION(S)** | **TITLE** | **EMAIL** | **PHONE** (cell/office) |
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| **B2. Are there key stakeholders not able to serve on the Steering Committee?** If so, please list these individuals/organizations and provide a reason for their absence. |

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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 region.** (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 resources are available to match the RTS grant and support the priority projects identified in the community workshops?** (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 your 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 other strategic plans in the region that include travel and tourism. Please reference the page number(s) where travel/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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*\* When emailing this application, please have the planning document files correspond to numbers listed above: “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 industry education for tourism stakeholders? If so, please describe them.** (120 words or less) |