

**REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)
TO PRODUCE A NEW SIGNATURE EVENT
FOR THE CITY OF BELLINGHAM**

All proposals must be received no later than **NOON SEPTEMBER 6**. Late submissions will not be accepted. Proposals are to be submitted in a single PDF format via email only to:

City of Bellingham Tourism Commission
Signature Event Proposal / Event 2026 / Taylor Webb
Email Taylor Webb: tkwebb@cob.org

INTRODUCTION:

The City of Bellingham, WA, seeks proposals from parties interested in and capable of producing a special event or a unique public experience, "Signature Event". This request seeks to identify a qualified producer or operator with the experience, industry contacts and innovative vision for launching an annual Spring event that will encourage commerce, maximize national and regional exposure, enhance the existing quality of life for residents and become self-sustaining. Responders to this RFP are encouraged to offer big, bold, creative ideas.

The Spring season has been selected by the Tourism Commission because the Commission is looking for shoulder season events (summer is peak visitor season). Proposals for projects or events held during the off-peak months of January through May is required with a preference for events held March, April and May and prior to Memorial Day weekend.

This RFP does not constitute a commitment implied or otherwise, that the City of Bellingham (City) will initiate a contractual action on this matter. Further, the City will not be responsible for any cost incurred by responders in furnishing any information. After receipt of responses to this RFP, meetings may be scheduled by the City to review/discuss the information received.

FUNDING and ELIGIBLE EXPENSES:

Up to \$100,000 is available for the first year and approximately \$70,000 is available for the two following years for one or more Signature Events. The award(s) will be announced in November/December of 2024. Recognizing the time it takes to prepare a large event, the Tourism Commission's expectation is the inaugural event will take place in Spring 2026

The source of funding is lodging tax dollars paid for by hotel/motel visitors and collected within the City of Bellingham. The anticipated commitment for the Signature Event is up to three years for purposes of providing seed money necessary to launch a new event. Following year three, the expectation is the operators will be eligible to compete for our annual tourism destination marketing grants (\$10-\$25k average).

Marketing and operational expenses are eligible. Marketing expenses include activities designed to increase tourism, including but not limited to advertising, publicizing, or otherwise distributing information for the purpose of attracting and welcoming tourists; developing strategies to expand tourism and funding marketing of special events and festivals designed to attract tourists.

Operation includes, but is not limited to, typical expenses associated with managing and operating an event such as supplies, equipment rentals, venue costs etc.

Events do not necessarily need to be held in Bellingham but need to demonstrate a direct impact to Bellingham's economy (i.e. hotel stays).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Bellingham is known for its natural beauty, a commitment to environmental awareness and a general healthy, creative and free-spirited nature (see www.bellingham.org/top-facts for more information on our region). Proposals should highlight and enhance Bellingham's unique history, cultural attributes, and vibrant downtown. Proposals should consider opportunities for event goers, through partners/others, to connect to Bellingham's culinary proficiency, and/or great outdoor experiences which includes access to the mountains, foothills, and Salish Sea. The City intends to use Signature Events to highlight what Bellingham has to offer.

The City is interested in pursuing an event unique to our area that reinforces Bellingham appeal outside of the summer months. Bellingham is well known for outdoor and recreational opportunities. The purpose of this offering is to highlight indoor events and activities such as an authentic restaurant and live music experience. The purpose is to build events/activities that locals are connected to and can participate in which also draws a significant number of visitor participants of all ages to Bellingham and Whatcom County. The goal is for the event to become synonymous with the community. The community currently has an annual outdoor relay event "Ski to Sea" held each May over Memorial Day weekend, and selected Bellingham SeaFeast as its first Signature Event several years ago. In 2024, our Signature Events – Northwest Tune-Up, a biking and outdoor music event, and Bellingham Exit, a multi-venue downtown music and arts event – will have their third and second annual events, respectively. The City is interested in an event that fills out the calendar with a Springtime event.

PROGRAM GOALS

The Tourism Commission has the following goals for the program yet recognizes each proposal may not satisfy every goal.

- Creates a meaningful artistic and cultural impact on our local community and the visitors that attend. Celebrates the indoor food, restaurant, arts and culture scene that Bellingham has to offer.

- Prioritizes diversity, equity and inclusivity and supports BIPOC, LGBTQIA+ and other historically marginalized communities.
- Integrates new and up & coming talent into the line-up.
- Provides a unique distinctive Pacific Northwest experience. For example, the event should not re-create what's happening in Seattle.
- Attracts a significant number of tourists, with an emphasis on the Canadian visitor and yields a strong likelihood of overnight stays. For example, a person is more likely to stay overnight if the event is over a period of days or weeks. A weekend event that begins on Thursday adds more benefit to the already popular weekend stays.
- Generates numerous secondary economic benefits. Promotes walkability, the food and restaurant scene, and highlights or incorporates, where appropriate, businesses, history, area attractions, other events and environmental stewardship.
- Creates a long-lasting positive impression of the event and of Bellingham/Whatcom County.
- Becomes self-sustaining after a few years – specifically, significant City funding is not required for longer than three years.

REQUIRED SUBMITTALS:

Submissions must be received no later than NOON! Late submissions will not be accepted. Event dates must be held in the months of January through May to be considered.

1. **Cover Letter (REQUIRED).** 1 page Maximum. Name of primary contact person – his/her/they, address, the fiscal agent (whether government, non-profit or for-profit), phone number and email address.
2. **Narrative (70 Points).** 10 Pages Maximum.
 - a. Description of Signature Event (15 Points). Describe the concept, dates, how the event builds upon Bellingham's food, arts & culture scene, how the event is unique to the Pacific Northwest and other information to fully describe the proposed unique event. Is this event new or does it build upon an existing but very small and relatively new event – be specific in order for the reviewers to have enough information to qualify your application as an eligible event.
 - b. Project Plan/Scope of Work (10 Points). Annual schedule showing key deliverables and milestones. When will funding be required, sponsors secured, venue secured, talent secured, advertising launched, event be held, etc. Note: Contract negotiation will likely begin early 2025. Details of funding availability and timing of release of funds will be negotiated between the selected party(ies).

- c. Management/Project Team (15 Points). Identify names of key personnel and describe their role and experience. Differentiate between paid and volunteer staff. Resumes of key personnel must be attached but will not be included in the 10 Page limit.
- d. Partnerships and Vendors (10 Points). Describe partnerships such as leveraging other events, resources of Bellingham/Whatcom County Tourism and Downtown Bellingham Partnership, or coordinate with other scheduled community events, facilities, organizations, community promotion and marketing efforts in order to leverage local resources and minimize duplication. Partnerships with hotels are strongly encouraged. Letters of support or letters of commitment from partners are strongly encouraged.
- e. Community & Economic Impact (15 Points). Please describe the expected economic benefit to the tourism sector and to the general community by explaining your target market and how and where you will reach your market, total estimated number of attendees/beneficiaries, estimated number of tourist attendees, and estimated number of room night stays generated at commercial hotel/motel lodging establishments. Describe secondary economic benefits such as the utilization of local restaurants, venues, businesses and potential employment opportunities for residents.
- f. "Wow" Us (5 Points). Applicants are encouraged to convince the reviewers that your proposal helps the Tourism Commission build Bellingham as a tourist destination. Describe how your project impacts the community's standing in terms of advancing Bellingham's goal to have a thriving food, arts and culture scene.

3. Budget (30 Points). No Page Limit.

- a. Budget Spreadsheet. Please be specific about *sources of revenue* (i.e. "City", "Sponsorships", "Ticket Sales", "T-shirt sales", "Foundation Grant", etc.) Be specific about *expenses* (i.e. "Payroll", "Insurance", "Website Design", "Graphic Design", "T-shirts/Collateral", "Radio Advertising", etc.) Note: If applicant seeks reimbursement for payroll, documentation will need to meet auditing standards. It must be clear what line items the applicant is seeking City funding for. Applicants can seek City funding for up to three years.
- b. Budget Narrative. A narrative may accompany the spreadsheet to outline details such as the types of advertising and promotional materials, the vendors utilized, the locations/venues where the advertising will be displayed. Describe (or show via spreadsheet) how the event will continue without City funding – i.e. what does the budget look like in 2029?

ALL MATERIALS ARE DUE NO LATER THAN NOON on SEPTEMBER 6, 2024.

Email all required materials in a single PDF format to:

City of Bellingham Tourism Commission
Signature Event Proposal / Taylor Webb
Email Taylor Webb: tkwebb@cob.org

Email Taylor Webb with questions at tkwebb@cob.org

For any addendums or updates check

[Signature Event - City of Bellingham \(cob.org\)](#)

between now and submittal date.

IMPORTANT NOTICE: A PRE-CONTRACT AND POST-EVENT MARKETING MEETING WITH BELLINGHAM WHATCOM COUNTY TOURISM WILL BE REQUIRED FOR ANY SUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS.

1. If the Lodging Tax Advisory Committee recommends funding your application, you will be required to meet with Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism (BWCT) before the City of Bellingham enters into a contract with your agency. If you do not complete this required step, funding will be withdrawn – no exceptions. A sample of the pre-contract Marketing Meeting template is attached as Exhibit A.
2. You will be required to conduct a post-event marketing meeting with BWCT to review your draft final report. The purpose of this meeting is to support your event/program and to ensure your marketing strategy is effective at bringing visitors to Bellingham. The post-event final report will include BWCT's signature that you completed this required step. Failure to do so will be reported to LTAC. This post-event marketing meeting is in addition to other required elements in a final report – this template will be included in the contract.
3. Prior to contracting you will also be required to provide one of the following depending upon your status:
 - Non-profits: A copy of 501(c) (3), (4) or (6) letter
 - For-profits: A copy of current/valid Bellingham Business License and IRS Employee Tax I.D. number

EXHIBIT A

Marketing Meeting with Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism (BWCT)

Please answer the following questions:

Marketing Strategy	
Who is your audience? (Add: What region are you planning to market to?)	
What marketing channels do you plan on using?	
What is your budget for these channels?	
How do you plan to measure success with your marketing efforts?	
<p>What is your anticipated Return On Investment (ROI) of your marketing efforts?</p> <p>How are you going to Measure that?</p> <p>If not, what do you hope to learn and how would you use that knowledge in future applications?</p>	
What is your knowledge and comfort level with marketing?	
Do you use a digital marketing agency/firm or resources? Identify them.	
<p>Do you feel comfortable tracking and providing on your marketing efforts and analyzing the success of your efforts?</p> <p>If no, does your application allow for a budget for hiring of additional resources or a third party to assist you with this?</p>	
<p><i>In order to qualify for the application, a key stipulation is a final year report (post event) including measurable metrics for your marketing efforts as outlined above.</i></p>	

What to Expect from Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism Meetings

Roles & Responsibilities for Initial Meeting with BWCT

- **Grantee (Provides to BWCT)**
 - Logo
 - Content and Photos for Social Media
 - Event submitted to Events Page at Bellingham.org
 - Press Release related to event.
 - Any additional materials
 - Report on room blocks secured with lodging properties (Initial Meeting) and final report on number of room nights generated from room blocks (Final Meeting).

- **BWCT (Provides to Grantee)**
 - BWCT Logo for Cross Linking
 - Metrics on Social Post(s) related to grantee's event
 - Metrics on grantee's event page at Bellingham.org
 - Metrics on sample of event area traffic/spend during a specific timeframe.