



# Request for Proposals:

## Bellingham 2026 Fan Zone - Celebrate the World's Game!

|                    |                       |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| RFP Issued:        | October 22, 2025      |
| Proposals Due:     | December 10, 2025     |
| Soccer Tournament: | June 11-July 19, 2026 |

### Overview

The City of Bellingham and partners seek projects to enliven celebrations in Bellingham leading up to and during the [worldwide soccer tournament](#) coming to North America in 2026.

Individuals, businesses and organizations are invited to submit proposals for activations, improvements, events, and watch parties to enhance our community and celebrate the summer of soccer! Our goal is to celebrate in a way that is **inclusive, hyper-local, and empowering** to the many passionate organizations and businesses that make Bellingham special.

Previously, the City and partners planned to host six watch parties to celebrate Seattle-based matches at a centralized location. New budget realities make that vision financially unfeasible. Instead, the City and partners developed this grant-based model to support community and business-driven activations that align with the original goals of the fan zone: create memorable experiences for watching the games, engage visitors and residents around the unifying aspect of sports, and showcase Bellingham's vibrant and welcoming community.

A range of funding, from various sources, will be distributed through this Request for Proposals (RFP). Funding will be focused on projects occurring between **June 11-July 19, 2026**, aligned with the soccer tournament dates and peak tourism season. Funders will be focused on creating memorable experiences for visitors and residents by creating a concentrated series of opportunities to celebrate soccer.



**Projects are being solicited under four tracks:**

**TRACK 1:** Community Watch Parties

**TRACK 2:** Designated Bellingham Fan Zone Venues

**TRACK 3:** Downtown Business Improvements and Readiness Grants

**TRACK 4:** Soccer-Related Activities

**We especially welcome proposals that are family-friendly, free or low-cost to attend, showcase local identity, diverse voices, and creative expression, and foster inclusive experiences for visitors and residents.**

## **TRACK 1: Community Watch Parties**

This category is to support one or more outdoor community watch parties on **June 19, 2026**, when the U.S. Men's National Soccer Team is scheduled to play in Seattle. The team draw on December 5, 2025 will determine who will play against the U.S. men's team in this match. Up to **\$25,000** will be contracted for each watch party to reimburse expenses related to hosting a small or mid-sized (250-1,500 attendee) event. Applicants may propose alternative or additional dates.

Applicants must demonstrate proficiency in executing all aspects of their proposal. Under **Project Team Experience**, the applicant must submit materials demonstrating their ability to:

- Procure and manage all aspects of hosting the event, including but not limited to:
  - Liquor licenses and WA State Liquor and Cannabis Board compliance requirements
  - Audio/visual equipment
  - Site logistics (e.g. traffic control plan, crowd flow and safety, seating, restrooms, trash management, accessibility, etc.)
- Secure partnerships with local businesses or organizations to enhance the event (e.g., food vendors, music, family-friendly activities). This could include local schools, arts organizations, and/or community groups such as youth soccer clubs, marching bands, performers, etc.
- Promote the watch party in partnership with Bellingham/Whatcom County Tourism and other organizations.
- Align with the **Bellingham Fan Zone Objectives** (see Appendix).



Funding may be used for:

- Enhancements to the visitor experience (swag, decorations, etc.)
- Viewing support (audio/visual equipment, additional seating, etc.)
- Pre- or post-game activities (live music, trivia, family zones and activities, etc.)
- Restrooms, traffic control, or other logistical support
- Permit fees, insurance and related fees and services

**Funds for staffing, project management, or payroll are not eligible under this track.**

Successful proponents will enter into a services agreement or similar contract with the City of Bellingham and will be paid on a reimbursement basis.

## **TRACK 2: Designated Bellingham Fan Zone Venue**

This category is designed to maximize community participation and ensure that Bellingham is alive with soccer spirit and celebration throughout the tournament. Instead of hosting a single watch party location, multiple venues will be designated as Bellingham fan zone venues. These designated venues will serve as community hubs where locals and visitors can gather to watch matches and enjoy interactive, engaging fan experiences. Between **\$2,500 to \$10,000** will be contracted to successful applicants, depending on the scope of the proposed community benefits and infrastructure needs.

When responding to the **Project Team Experience** criteria, applicants must demonstrate their ability to meet the following objectives to be considered a designated Bellingham fan zone venue:

- Show as many matches as feasible throughout the tournament (preference for venues showing all or most games).
- Provide a safe, fun, inclusive, and welcoming experience for locals and visitors from around the world.
- Demonstrate commitment to customer service excellence.
- Showcase local food, beverages or culture.
- Procure and manage all aspects of programming, staffing, and management.
- Comply with all regulatory requirements, including providing clean and adequate restrooms, maintaining occupancy limitations and all requirements of the WA State Liquor and Cannabis Board, Whatcom County Health Dept. and other agencies.

**We strongly encourage applications from venues with existing:**

- Indoor and/or outdoor gathering spaces



- Screens or projection capability
- Staff to manage operations during matches
- Seating areas or flexible event layouts
- Permits in place and in good standing.

Funding may be used for:

- Enhancements to the visitor experience (swag, decorations, etc.)
- Viewing support (audio/visual equipment, additional seating, etc.)
- Pre- or post-game activities (live music, trivia, family zones and activities)
- Other equipment or supplies to host watch parties

**Funds for staffing, project management, or payroll are not eligible under this track.**

Successful proponents will enter into a services agreement or similar contract with the City of Bellingham and will be paid on a reimbursement basis.

## **TRACK 3: Downtown Business Improvement and Readiness Grants**

This category is to support **downtown** businesses to prepare for the influx of visitors anticipated during the tournament and capitalize on the excitement of worldwide sports competition. The Downtown Bellingham Partnership (DBP) received funding from the Seattle Foundation via the WA State Dept of Commerce to support local businesses with planning and expenses related to World Cup preparation. Award amounts of up to **\$5,000** will be allocated to businesses and venues depending on the scope of the project and community benefits.

Projects may include, but not be limited to:

- Window decals or displays
- Signage and printing
- Planters or landscaping
- Decorative lighting
- Sidewalk programming (busking), sales or events
- Storefront improvements



Funding will not be allocated towards larger improvement projects already underway. Funding will be provided directly to the selected businesses by the Downtown Bellingham Partnership.

## TRACK 4: Soccer-Related Activities

This category will support experiences, activities and events that promote and/or amplify the festive soccer tournament atmosphere. Activities may be standalone or partnered with a venue (“Designated Fan Zone Venue”) or watch party (“Community Watch Party”) in other funding tracks. Applicants must demonstrate the ability to coordinate and deliver all aspects of their proposed activity, including staffing, permits, and insurance (if required). Award amounts between **\$2,500 to \$5,000** will be allocated to selected projects, depending on the scope of the project, community benefits, and funding needs.

Projects may include, but are not limited to:

- Outdoor games or soccer-related activities, such as futsal or soccer tournaments
- Pop-up youth soccer clinics
- Soccer-related documentary film screenings
- Performances or live music
- Cultural celebrations, storytelling, or dance

Funding is limited to:

- 1) Projects on public streets, sidewalks, plazas, parks or other public properties.
- 2) Projects on the exterior of private buildings, provided they create public benefit. Permanent improvements to private property are not permitted.
- 3) Activities or events in private buildings or on private properties that are open to the public.

Funding may be used for project development and design, materials/supplies, fabrication/production, marketing/promotion, installation, service or artist fees and/or insurance and other fees. Successful proponents will enter into a services agreement or similar contract with the City of Bellingham and will be paid on a reimbursement basis.



## Application Requirements

To receive full consideration, submissions must include each of the following elements.

**Total pages of the combined PDF should not exceed five (5) pages. The cover sheet, budget, and references/letters of support are not included in this page limit.**

- ☐ **Cover Sheet**, attached.
- ☐ **Project Description**. A detailed description of your proposal and how it responds to the Bellingham fan zone objectives (attached) and any specific requirements and/or criteria listed under the intended funding track.
- ☐ **Project Team Experience**. List the names of the people responsible for implementing the project or program, with a summary of their qualifications and experience and their primary duties/role with this project.
- ☐ **Project Approach and Timeline**. List the steps necessary to implement the project or program, with timelines and responsible person.
- ☐ **Detailed Budget**. Provide a list of all expenses required to implement the project. Include anticipated vendor(s) or service provider(s). Indicate which items are proposed to be paid with grant funds or other funding sources or in-kind contributions, if provided. (Matching funds are not required). List the total program cost and the total amount of grant funding being requested. See Sample Budget Form, attached.
- ☐ **Visuals or sketches**, to illustrate the project concept, if available and needed.
- ☐ **References** and/or letters of support (optional).

## How to Apply

Proposals for all tracks must be received on or before **noon, 12:00 PM PST on Wednesday, December 10, 2025**. Submissions received past this deadline will not be considered.

Proposals must be emailed as a **single combined pdf attachment** addressed to:

Darby Galligan, Senior Planner (she/her)  
[dgalligan@cob.org](mailto:dgalligan@cob.org)



All proposals are public records and all submissions become the property of the City of Bellingham.

## Scoring and Evaluation Process

Proposals will be evaluated for completeness and feasibility, then scored by a review committee of local tourism and organizational representatives based on the following criteria:

| CRITERIA                                      | DESCRIPTION  | MAX POINTS |
|---|--|------------|
| Overall activation value                      | Activates the targeted areas, creates interest and a draw for visitors. Reflects local identity and culture. Achieves the goals and objectives of the RFP and the Bellingham fan zone objectives.                | 20         |
| Quality and appropriateness                   | Represents a high-quality experience or project and appropriateness to the proposed location and program goals. Reflects support from surrounding and affected parties.  | 20         |
| Feasibility and Experience                    | Demonstrates project team experience and expertise implementing projects. Presents a realistic plan, manageable scale, reasonable and clear budget, feasible timeline and rational logistics for implementation. | 20         |
| Inclusivity, accessibility and sustainability | Welcomes a broad audience, considers equal access and environmental sustainability.  | 20         |
| Positive community and economic Impact        | Supports local businesses and organizations, generates overnight hotel stays and/or creates a positive community impact during or beyond the soccer tournament.  | 20         |

A follow-up interview and or in-person meeting with the applicant may be requested by the City prior to finalizing its decision and prior to contracting.

**The City of Bellingham promotes equal opportunity and shall not discriminate against any person or proposal based upon race, color, religion, creed, sex, sexual orientation, nationality or disability.**



## Selected Projects

### **Selected projects will receive:**

**Funding.** Funding amounts are detailed in each eligible track. Selected Community Watch Parties may also receive in-kind support from the City for traffic control and/or public safety.

**Coordination assistance with the [SeattleFWC26 local organizing committee on broadcasting](#).** Staff will work with Community Watch Party applicants to secure required licensing.

**Permitting coordination support.** Projects within the public right-of-way may require a [temporary right-of-way use permit](#), [special event permit](#), engineering or structural review or other reviews or permits. Grantees are responsible for all costs associated with obtaining required permits and approvals. Staff will provide oversight and permitting support.

**Promotion through City and partner marketing channels.** Selected proposals will be promoted through the city-wide fan zone campaign, including premium marketing channels and visitor itineraries, as applicable. Selected venues may also receive branded swag and associated giveaways. A pre-contract discussion with relevant communication staff will be required. A communications request form will be sent in advance. Recipients may also be required to provide a post-installation or event report on the impact of the project.

## Questions?

### **Darby Galligan, Senior Planner | Special Projects**

Community & Economic Development

City of Bellingham

[dgalligan@cob.org](mailto:dgalligan@cob.org)





# Cover Sheet:

## Bellingham 2026 Fan Zone

### PROPOSAL SUMMARY

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Project/Program Title:

Contact Name/Title:

Organization Name (if applicable):

Street Address:

City:

State:

Zip:

Phone:

Email:

Organization Status (if applicable):

☐ For-profit

☐ Non-profit

☐ Agency

Requested Funding Track:

☐ Track 1:  
Community Watch  
Party

☐ Track 2:  
Fan Zone Venue

☐ Track 3:  
Downtown Business  
Grant

☐ Track 4:  
Soccer Activation

Grant Amount Requested: \$.

Total Project/Program Budget: \$

Installation/Event Dates (if applicable)

Is the event open to the public and free of charge (if applicable) ☐ Yes ☐ No

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

By signing you acknowledge all required documents and information has been provided and required qualifications to be considered for funding have been met.



## SAMPLE BUDGET

### BUDGET SHEET

Project Name: \_\_\_\_\_

| BUDGET ITEMS | TOTAL EST.<br>COST | GRANT<br>PORTION |
|--------------|--------------------|------------------|
| 1.           | \$                 | \$               |
| 2.           | \$                 | \$               |
| 3.           | \$                 | \$               |
| 4.           | \$                 | \$               |
| 5.           | \$                 | \$               |
| 6.           | \$                 | \$               |
| 7.           | \$                 | \$               |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>\$</b>          | <b>\$</b>        |

Eligible operational expenses are limited to venue rentals (i.e., conference rooms), equipment rentals (i.e., cones, traffic signs, etc.), contracted services, and/or the purchase of goods/supplies with prior approval by the City. For example, payroll, travel, alcohol, any expense that may trigger prevailing wage and permanent equipment expenses are NOT allowed. Final decisions by the City on allowed operational expenses will be identified in the contract and pre-approved. All expenses must be incurred up front and paid via reimbursement during the contractual period with appropriate back-up documentation available, including proof of payment.



## Bellingham Fan Zone Objectives

These objectives will help guide the planning and execution of Bellingham fan zone events.

1. **Create Memorable Experiences:** Deliver a unique and enjoyable experience that people will remember and talk about, generating excitement for locals and bringing visitors back to Bellingham!
2. **Showcase Local Culture and Values:** Showcase the unique aspects of the community, such as local traditions, art, and history, helping to preserve and share its culture.
3. **Foster Community Engagement:** Encourage active participation and interaction among community members and businesses building a sense of belonging and connection.
4. **Provide Entertainment and Recreation:** Offer fun and enjoyable activities that cater to a wide range of interests, not just soccer, ensuring attendees of all ages and backgrounds have a good time.
5. **Support Local Businesses:** Highlight and promote local vendors, artisans, and service providers, contributing to the economic development of the community. The benefits should reach further than at the watch party locations.
6. **Communicate Clearly and Consistently:** Provide clear messages about fan zone events, activities and the Bellingham experience consistently across Party communications.
7. **Create a Safe and Welcoming Atmosphere:** Ensure the events and activities are accessible, safe, and welcoming for all participants, including those from foreign countries, with disabilities, or from historically marginalized groups.
8. **Ensure Sustainability:** Plan the event with an emphasis on environmental responsibility, reducing waste, using eco-friendly materials, and promoting sustainable practices. See minimum requirements of FIFA Seattle.
9. **Ensure a High-Quality Experience for Operators, Attendees, and Visitors:** Focus on creating an organized and efficient event(s) where both event operators and attendees have a smooth, enjoyable experience.