



Experience Mt. Hood and the Gorge Strategic Investment Fund 2026 Grant Guidelines and Application Instructions

Who We Are

Experience Mt. Hood and the Gorge is the Regional Destination Management Organization (RDMO) for the Mt. Hood and Columbia River Gorge Region. Managed through Clackamas County Office of Tourism, our regional leadership also includes Explore The Dalles, Visit Hood River, Visit Cascade Locks, and Explore Troutdale.

Together, we seek to use responsible visitor management to build awareness for the region as a multi-day and year-round travel destination that benefits all communities. Ours is a mature destination surrounded by small communities and neighboring Oregon's largest metro area. Challenges include congested roadways, over-visited sites, imbalance of visitation throughout all of our communities, and workforce development and training needs. We work in collaboration with community and industry representatives to develop marketing, PR, destination development and global sales tactics in order to address these complex challenges and convert them to opportunities.



About the Strategic Investment Fund

The Experience Mt. Hood and the Gorge Strategic Investment Fund (SIF) grant program invests directly into our tourism assets, businesses, and community to fund one-time investments into regionally impactful tourism projects within the boundaries of the Mt. Hood and Columbia Gorge Region. Projects should address one or more of our Regional Key Priorities:

KEY PRIORITIES

EXPERIENCE MT. HOOD AND THE GORGE

The infographic consists of five vertical panels, each with a circular icon at the top, a title, and a description. The panels are: 1. 'CARE FOR Community' with an icon of a building and people, describing support for community engagement. 2. 'DESTINATION AND VISITOR Management' with an icon of a tree and a path, describing support for high-use/low-use areas. 3. 'IMPROVE Visitor Experiences' with an icon of a person and a path, describing support for improving visitor experiences. 4. 'LEVERAGE RESOURCES THROUGH Partnership' with an icon of two wine glasses, describing expansion of work through partnerships. 5. 'REGIONAL Alignment' with an icon of a mountain and a path, describing support for alignment between Mt. Hood and the Columbia River Gorge.

Priority	Description
CARE FOR Community	Create and/or support ways in which our communities can engage with, advocate for, and understand the benefits from the tourism economy.
DESTINATION AND VISITOR Management	Leverage and support tools and programs that address high-use/low-use, seasonality, and economic impact needs in the region.
IMPROVE Visitor Experiences	Access funding and partnerships to support partners with improving existing visitor experiences in the region.
LEVERAGE RESOURCES THROUGH Partnership	Expand the work the RDMO can accomplish to meet our goals through partnerships with Travel Oregon, RDMOs, DMOs, associations, and other partners.
REGIONAL Alignment	Maintain and support a strong sense of alignment between Mt. Hood and the Columbia River Gorge in visitor communications.

In addition to addressing key priorities, preference will be given to projects that:

- **Address tourism-related public infrastructure needs**
- **Enhance the visitor experience**

The 2026 SIF cycle will give preference to projects that address tourism-related public infrastructure in the form of increasing capacity or improving access to/experience at facilities such as restrooms, parking areas, and transportation. In Travel Oregon's most recent survey of tourism industry partners, public infrastructure was identified as the top area to focus on to improve the resident and visitor experience, with a significantly higher response than the statewide average. By prioritizing infrastructure needs in the Strategic Investment Fund program, Experience Mt. Hood and the Gorge aims to respond to the need identified by our industry and our region to benefit both visitors and residents. If you are

interested in seeing more regional results, you can access the full Travel Oregon Tourism Industry Partners Survey here: <https://industry.traveloregon.com/research/2024-oregon-tourism-industry-partner-survey/>

Additionally, preference will be given to projects that create lasting enhancements to visitor experiences, including improvement to existing experiences/sites, adding new components to an experience/site, or reaching a new audience, including accessibility and inclusion considerations.

Projects not related to public infrastructure or experience enhancements may apply and be eligible for funding through Experience Mt. Hood and the Gorge's 2026 Strategic Investment Fund, but will be less competitive than those demonstrating a clear connection to preferred projects. All projects will be strengthened if the application can clearly demonstrate: positive impact to more than one community; include involvement/collaboration of multiple partners; and/or provide cash/in-kind matching funds.

The total funds available in the 2026 SIF cycle are \$120,000. SIF requirements include:

- Project requests must be a minimum of \$3,000 and maximum of \$120,000.
- Any printed materials and/or physical projects created with SIF funding must clearly acknowledge Experience Mt. Hood and the Gorge and Travel Oregon with inclusion of both organization's logos and addition wording: "Funded in part by Travel Oregon and Experience Mt. Hood and the Gorge." Acknowledgement must be submitted for review prior to finalizing a print piece or physical project.
- All projects must be completed by June 1, 2027 with final invoices received by June 15, 2027.

Timeline

- Applications open Monday February 23.
- Applications close Tuesday, April 7 at 5pm PST.
- Award notifications delivered by Monday, May 4.
- Public awards notice is released Tuesday, May 5.
- First invoicing date is July 1, 2026
- Projects must be completed and final invoices received by June 15, 2027.
- Final project reports due by July 15, 2027.

To Apply

Required application documents include

1. Application form including project timeline (fillable PDF form)
2. Project budget (template)

Additionally, applicants may choose to include additional supporting documents such as

- Letters of support (Optional)
- Plans, feasibility studies, etc. (Optional)
- Any other materials relevant to your application (Optional)

All application materials must be sent to ithaca@hood-gorge.com, with receipt no later than 5pm on Tuesday, April 7. Please ensure all required and any optional documents are included as attachments in one email, with subject line “Strategic Investment Fund Application.”

FAQs

To ensure you are equipped to submit an application we have compiled a list of frequently asked questions.

Q: Who can apply?

A: Nonprofits, government agencies, and Tribal entities who work extensively in the Mt. Hood and Columbia River Gorge Region, as designated by Travel Oregon’s boundaries (found on page 1 of these guidelines). Additionally, for-profit entities can apply for the SIF, but the project **must benefit multiple entities** and show support and buy-in from those organizations. If for-profit entities choose to apply, letters of support **must** be included to demonstrate engagement and support from identified partners. *(Example: a downtown shopping shuttle that services multiple businesses but is operated by a private entity. LOS would be provided by the serviced businesses as well as the local downtown association/chamber).* Funds may not be used towards any project with the primary goal of private profitability.

Organizations may be based outside of the region, but the SIF application project must take place within and clearly benefit the region.

Note that SIF funds **cannot** be used towards:

- The cost of doing business
- General administrative and operational costs (including salary, monthly business expenses like internet service, phone bills, etc.)
- Projects that promote tourism outside of Oregon's Mt. Hood and Columbia River Gorge Region

If you are unsure if your project idea is allowable under the SIF guidelines, please reach out and ask ithaca@hood-gorge.com. Any organization may only submit one project application during this grant cycle.

Q: Who is ineligible to apply?

A: The local Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) in the region cannot apply for SIF funding. Those organizations are:

- Clackamas County Office of Tourism (Oregon's Mt. Hood Territory)
- City of Troutdale Tourism & Economic Development Division (Explore Troutdale)
- Hood River Chamber of Commerce (Visit Hood River)
- The Dalles Area Chamber of Commerce (Explore The Dalles)
- Cascade Locks Tourism Committee (Visit Cascade Locks)

Applicants are encouraged to work closely with your local DMO on your project proposal as they may have resources or feedback to strengthen your application. In the case where DMOs are managed by a local government agency, other departments/divisions of that agency are eligible to apply.

Q: I am having trouble with the fillable PDF application. What can I do?

A: Reach out to ithaca@hood-gorge.com. We can provide other application formats and accommodation assistance. Please note that we cannot accept hand-written application forms.

Q: Is a cash or in-kind match required?

A: No, there is no match required for this fund, however they are **highly** encouraged. The more partner support, both in-kind and financial, that you can show for your project, the better. This should be detailed in your application responses as well as your budget.

Q: Is there a limit to how much we can ask for a project?

A: The maximum request is \$120,000, the full amount of the 2026 Strategic Investment Fund. The minimum request is \$3,000.

Partial funding for projects may be awarded. If your project could benefit from partial funding, please include a brief explanation of segments or phases of a project in your application as well as the project budget to help inform decisions for partial funding.

Q: How many projects will you be funding this year?

A: There is no set number of projects that will be funded, and it depends on the applications received. Additionally, Experience Mt. Hood and the Gorge may determine not to award the full \$120,000 in funding if we do not determine there are enough eligible and competitive projects.

Q: What if my project will take more than one year?

A: Eligible projects should be able to be completed by June 1, 2027. If your project will take longer, consider applying only for components or phases of the project that can be completed by the project deadline. We recognize that infrastructure investments in particular may be longer-term projects. If you would like to discuss a project idea, please reach out to ithaca@hood-gorge.com.

Q: Can the Strategic Investment Fund monies be leveraged as a match for Travel Oregon grants?

A: No. Experience Mt. Hood and the Gorge is funded through the state Transient Lodging Tax designated by Travel Oregon. SIF monies can, however, be used as a match for other grant programs.

Q: Once awarded, how will funds be distributed?

A: 50% of the award amount shall be invoiced for up front, with invoices received by July 1, 2026. The remaining project balance can be invoiced for with proof of expenditures upon completion of the project, and invoices should be received no later than June 15, 2027.

Do you have further questions about the Experience Mt. Hood and the Gorge Strategic Investment Fund and application process? Reach out to:

Ithaca Janzen, Regional Lead

ithaca@hood-gorge.com

971-235-1730

The Strategic Investment Fund is funded by the Regional Cooperative Tourism Program created by Travel Oregon due to HB4146 requiring Travel Oregon to invest 20% of the statewide lodging tax in Oregon's seven designated tourism regions. Experience Mt. Hood and the Gorge serves as the designated management organization for the Mt. Hood and Columbia River Gorge Region.

Free language assistance is available for this document. Contact (ithaca@hood-gorge.com).

Hay asistencia de idiomas disponible para este documento. Contacto (ithaca@hood-gorge.com).

Для ознакомления с этим документом доступны бесплатные услуги перевода. Свяжитесь с нами: (ithaca@hood-gorge.com).

Для ознайомлення із цим документом доступні безплатні послуги перекладача. Зв'яжіться з нами: (ithaca@hood-gorge.com).

本文件可提供免费的语言协助服务。如需帮助，请联系 (ithaca@hood-gorge.com)。

Chúng tôi cung cấp hỗ trợ ngôn ngữ miễn phí cho tài liệu này. Liên hệ (ithaca@hood-gorge.com)