Region 1: 2017 Idaho Regional Travel and Convention Grant Program

Applicant	Sharon Matthews
Applicant ID	APP-002486
Company Name	North Idaho Tourism Alliance (NITA)
Recipient Address	North Idaho Tourism Alliance (NITA) 6373 Bonner St Bonners Ferry, ID NA
Phone	(208) 255-5815
Email	visitnorthidaho@gmail.com
Amount Requested	$125,000.00
Award Amount	$106,000.00
Status	Contract Signed
Funded	✓

Application Title: 2017-18 NITA ITC GRANT APPLICATION

Description:
The North Idaho Tourism Alliance (NITA) was created to cooperatively market the five North Idaho counties as a premier travel destination, with a primary focus of promoting overnight visitations in the region. This application is a request for funds to support these efforts.

File Attachments

Attachment Name	Upload Date
1 NITA_2016-17 NITA ITC Grant Budget by County.pdf	Tue Aug 15 14:42:29 GMT 2017
1 NITA.pdf	Tue Aug 15 14:42:25 GMT 2017

2017

Verification of Eligibility

Applicants enter their organizational information and upload eligibility documents.

Question: Applicant Organization Legal Name

North Idaho Tourism Alliance

Question: Chief Official Name and Title

Stephanie Sims, NITA Board Chair

Question: Chief Official Email

selkirkloop@frontier.com

Question: Grant Manager Name and Title

Sharon Matthews, NITA Grant Manager

Question: Grant Manager Email

visitnorthidaho@gmail.com

Question: Grant Manager Phone

509-255-5818

Question: Employer Identification Number (EIN)

84-1404579

Question: Eligible applicants are non-profit, incorporated organizations. Upload State of Idaho Certificate and Articles of Incorporation here.

State of Idaho articles of incorporation-nonprofit.pdf (5/10/2017 11:35 AM)

Question: Upload the organization's "Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax" (Form 990) here. Only the first page with submission dates and signatures is needed.

NITA 990.PDF (5/10/2017 11:35 AM)

Question: Conflict of Interest Statement. An affiliation with a profit-making organization may imply a conflict of interest that could render this application ineligible. Detail any potential conflict of interest below or enter N/A for not applicable.

N/A

Question: I have read and understood question 10.

☑ *Yes*

☐ *No*

Question: Describe your organization and give a brief description of how your organization's mission meets the goals of the Idaho Travel Council Grant Program and the needs of your region.

The North Idaho Tourism Alliance (NITA) was created to cooperatively market all five North Idaho counties as a travel destination, with a primary focus on promoting overnight visitations in the region. In alignment with the ITC's marketing

priorities, NITA consolidated smaller destination marketing organizations into one regional organization to increase efficiencies in the grant application and administration processes, while enhancing cooperation and collaboration among members.

NITA membership consists of 17 organizations representing all five counties in North Idaho. As illustrated below, our membership is composed of small, rural community chambers and visitor centers as well as chambers and CVB's from the largest communities in North Idaho, and representatives from non-profit organizations such as the International Selkirk Loop, the North Idaho Centennial Trail, the Friends of the Coeur d'Alene Trail, and the N. Idaho B & B Association. Grant funds, coupled with co-op marketing opportunities, help us stretch available marketing dollars to effectively promote North Idaho recreation, communities and events.

2017 NITA Membership Roster:
Bonners Ferry Visitors Center-Boundary County
Coeur d'Alene CVB - Kootenai County*
Friends of the Coeur d'Alene Trail- Benewah, Kootenai & Shoshone Counties
Harrison Chamber - Kootenai County
Hayden Chamber – Kootenai County
International Selkirk Loop - Bonner, Boundary & Kootenai Counties
North Idaho Bed & Breakfast Association
North Idaho Centennial Trail Foundation - Kootenai County
Post Falls Chamber – Kootenai County*
Priest Lake Chamber- Bonner County
Priest River Chamber – Bonner County
Rathdrum Chamber- Kootenai County
Sandpoint Chamber of Commerce – Bonner County
Silver Valley Chamber-Shoshone County
Spirit Lake Chamber-Kootenai County
St. Maries Chamber- Benewah County
Wallace Chamber – Shoshone County

*(While the Post Falls, Sandpoint and Coeur d'Alene Chambers receive ITC grant funds directly, they are members of NITA to leverage partnership opportunities.)

NITA members meet on a regular basis to discuss cooperative advertising opportunities, review website and social media results, share reviews of tradeshow activities and partnership options, and budget and RFF status reports. In addition, we often use this forum to conduct training on new technologies and tourism-related strategies.

The majority of NITA's funding comes from the Idaho Travel Council Grant Program. Additional funding is generated by dues and administrative fees paid for by member organizations to cover the costs of accounting and grant administration expenses. (Membership ranges from $75-$175/year).

As an organization, we are continually reviewing, re-evaluating and striving to enhance our tourism promotion strategies – while also being committed to increasing our efforts to provide measurable results with a focus of maximizing the return on investment.

Question: Describe your organization's ability to administer grants.

NITA contracts with a part-time grant administrator to manage the organization's grant writing, grant administration, financial management, and board coordination activities. NITA has utilized the same grant administrator for the last seven years, which has provided stability and consistency to our members and the organization. NITA has spent 100% of the awarded grant funds in an efficient and timely manner, while exceeding the 12.5% cash match requirement by 300-400% each year. In the last grant cycle, our cash match requirement was $11,750 and we provided $36,804 in matching funds/projects.

Question: Describe your organization's financial management processes and financial management systems.

NITA's Grant Administrator manages the financial activities of the organization including RFF submission and disbursement of funds to members, payment of bills, deposits, budget development and management with oversight from the board of directors. All banking activity is recorded in Quick Books.

Checks and balances in place include:
•Grant budgets which include itemized spending and balances are reviewed and discussed in detail at monthly board meetings
•NITA Board Chair must approve all payment activity prior to disbursement of funds
•NITA Board Chair and Treasurer review bank statements and Quick Books records prior to board meetings
•NITA Board Chair has online access to accounts so that reviews can be done on a random basis

Each year, the organization's 990 is completed by a certified public accountant from a local accounting firm.

Question: Type your Title and Full Name to indicate signature

Sharon Matthews, NITA Grant Manager

Marketing Plan

Applicants enter their marketing plans and justification for funding.

Question: Describe your marketing plan and the goals and objectives you have for this grant cycle.

2017-18 Marketing Plan, Goals & Objectives
The diverse geography of NITA's five county area includes an abundance of lakes, ski areas, snowmobile trails, bike and hiking trails, scenic drives, museums, and much more – providing a rich market for recreational, historical, culinary and cultural travel opportunities.

NITA's primary goal in 2017-18 will focus on increasing overnight visitations and lodging tax revenues generated from leisure travelers through the following objectives and activities:

1. Expand Regional Partnerships & Cooperative Marketing Efforts to Promote the North Idaho Region – Facilitate a strategic cooperative marketing program in partnership with the state, NITA members, other Region 1 grantees and private businesses to maximize the resources committed to promoting the entire region.

-Utilize various resources -including the North Idaho Research project results – to implement a collaborative marketing with other Region 1 grantees and private businesses. (NITA allocates 75-80% of the ITC grant award to members, while utilizing the remaining 20-25% to promote the North Idaho region. NITA needs to garner support from other Region 1 grantees to participate financially in the regional promotion efforts.)
-Leverage the co-op advertising funding offered through the state by providing a coordinated and timely co-op funding request.

2. Broaden "Explore Rural Idaho" Campaign - Build on our current campaign by developing new resources and marketing strategies designed to encourage visitors to extend their stays by promoting intra region travel – especially to our smaller communities and rural areas

-Continue the important role of supporting the 14 NITA members who represent the small communities and DMOs in North Idaho by assisting them with their tourism funding, planning and implementation –reinforcing the value of co-op marketing, consistent messaging, and partnerships while providing administrative efficiencies.

-Connect NITA members with state co-op funding to maximize their tourism promotion funding

3. Continue Enhancing the Marketing Toolbox - Continue to improve and promote the VisitNorthIdaho.com website, Visit North Idaho APP, social media platforms, and visual assets - to maximize their effectiveness as planning resources for potential and existing visitors to North Idaho.

Target Markets:
The primary target markets for NITA and NITA members include-

1. Active Families-North Idaho is a very family friendly affordable destination with many attractions – such as lakes, water parks and theme parks- geared to families of all ages and interests.
2. Outdoor Enthusiasts-The type of adventures that this demographic is seeking can be found in North Idaho at a very cost effective price. Certain promotional efforts around activities such as skiing, snowboarding, white water rafting, hiking, biking, and endurance events help draw this specific type of traveler to the region.
3. Empty Nesters and Affluent Boomers-This group is the wealthiest, most educated and most well traveled generation in U.S. history. Activities such as snowmobiling cross country skiing, biking, hiking, fishing, historical tours, scenic byways, and community festivals appeal to this important niche.
4. NITA and NITA members primarily target visitors from surrounding western states and nearby Canadian provinces.

Marketing Strategies:
Tourism promotion strategies, as detailed further in the grant application, will include the following-

1. Advertising – With a primary focus on digital advertising (NITA spends 100% of advertising funds on digital advertising; NITA members are increasing their digital percentage each year – 80% digital/20% traditional)

2. Collateral Materials –Primarily in support of member needs for projects such as bike/trail maps, walking tours, event flyers, distribution costs. (Collateral materials represent 6% of NITA's budget).

3. Website enhancements/Social Media Integration/APP promotion

4. Tradeshows, Conferences and other travel with an emphasis on partnerships to maximize resources

Measurement Tools:
• Digital advertising provides timely and in-depth data – such as impressions, click-through-rates, etc.- allowing for timely adjustments to campaigns
• Website, APP & social media analytics are extremely valuable in understaning the volume of users/follwers/sessions, as well as length of sessions, geographic breakdown, areas of interest, etc.
• Analyzing calling patterns, website hits, visitor guide orders and downloads, event attendance, attendee demographic data, etc. help determine the effectiveness of traditional advertising efforts
• Analysis of lodging tax reports by county is important and would be even more helpful if it were available by zip code
• Monitoring visitor traffic statistics at visitor centers is extremely important

Question: If you are a prior grantee detail your accomplishments and how your objectives were met in previous grant cycles (if you are not a prior grantee indicate N/A)

Accomplishments & Measurements:
During the 2016-17 grant cycle, our accomplishments, goals met, and best practices included:

1. Regional Partnerships & Collaboration Collaboration and partnerships are at an all time high in Region 1
- In partnership with the state, Region 1 grantees recently partnered on a joint research project to better define our target markets and how best to reach them. In addition, NITA is currently partnering with the Post Falls Chamber on a Facebook ad campaign to promote spring activities in the region. NITA is in the first phase of developing a North Idaho video with support of the state and other Region 1 grantees.
- NITA worked with members on the development of a co-op advertising plan with the state and aggressively pursued the plan once the funds became available. As a result, NITA – as well as our individual members – received approval for more co-op dollars than ever before.
- NITA members meet on a regular basis to discuss collaborative projects, share new ideas and tools, and compare notes on what works and what doesn't. Over the last five years. NITA membership has doubled and participation has improved dramatically – with members partnering on advertising, tradeshows and other activities to leverage resources more than ever before.

Performance Measurements:
• An increase in the number of co-op projects with other grantees
• Over $16,000 in state co-op funding provided to NITA and it's members
• Over 130 co-op projects between NITA, NITA members, and private businesses in the region
• Each year, NITA spends all ITC funds efficiently and exceeds the 12.5% required cash match by 300-400%

2. Digital Advertising Campaigns:
As part of a state co-op with Madden Media, NITA launched a six month digital prospecting and re-targeting campaign to promote hiking/biking this fall, snow sports this winter, and a variety of recreational activities this spring. Results to date have been impressive with October-March results coming in at twice the national average for this type of campaign.

Performance Measurements:
• Average click through rates for prospecting and retargeting campaigns is 11%- our results have been 20% and 25% respectively with over 3 million impressions during the first 4 months
• Google Analytics showed a 150% increase in website traffic from the previous period.

3. Facebook ad campaign – In October, NITA launched a Facebook ad campaign to promote the region and the new Visit North Idaho APP - targeting people already visiting North Idaho.

Performance Measurements:
• 66,649 people reached over the four month campaign at a cost of $70/month
• 1000 click-throughs to APP landing page
• Increased traffic to our social media sites and to VisitNorthIdaho.com
• Resulted in 50 APP downloads/month

Due to the positive impact that Facebook advertising has had on increasing our social media followers and visits to our website, we have decided to expand this campaign to target all surrounding states.

4. VisitNorthIdaho.com - NITA continues to prioritize the importance of growing the content and quality of the VisitNorthIdaho.com website, while also growing our social media presence.

- Regional Asset Mapping – NITA is committed to maximizing the effectiveness of the VisitNorthIdaho.com website and social media platforms to assure that they serve as content-rich resources to visitors. We have just completed the initial phase of our asset mapping project – which focused on identifying all of the regions historical sites, hiking and biking trails, and wineries and breweries - and then adding this information and related photos to our website and promoting the content on our social media platforms. We are measuring our results by monitoring analytics on a monthly basis.

- Itinerary Builder – our idea is to provide a "shopping cart" style functionality so that a visitor to the website will be able to browse through the things to do and, when they see one they like, be able to click a button to "Add to my itinerary." When they are done selecting the items they want to do, they'll be able to go to an Itinerary page they can print out or email to themselves or to friends.

Performance Measurements:
• Traffic to VisitNorthIdaho.com has increased by 150% over the same period last year
• The Seattle area remains the largest geographic segment visiting the site – increasing by 180% over the previous year.
• Social media platforms continue to grow with people reached and post engagements improving by 1000-2000% (Facebook ad campaign influenced this greatly)

5. Visit North Idaho APP
We launched the Visit North Idaho APP in May of 2016 and initially utilized window clings and table tents placed in vistor centers and chamber offices (and a few hotels) to promote the APP. We then launched a Facebook ad campaign promoting the APP to people visiting North Idaho – which proved to be much more effective. Currently, we are averaging 50 downloads/month and want to expand our approach by placing our table tents in more hotel rooms in the region while also continuing our Facebook campaign. We have been working with our developer to provide more detailed analytics, which has just been completed!

Performance Measurements:

• Averaging 50 downloads/month
• Expanced analytics just became available from developer – can now see what areas of the APP are utilized the most

Regional Impact & Support

Applicants enter their expected regional impact and partnership plan.

Question: How does the proposed project increase local/regional awareness and encourage visitors to stay longer or promote intra-region travel?

All of the strategies detailed in this application are geared towards increasing the awareness of the North Idaho region- as well as local communities. Our "Explore Rural Idaho" campaign was designed to capitalize on travelers already visiting the larger cities in the region- and persuading them to stay longer and experience some of the unique sights and activities in rural North Idaho. The additions and enhancements we are making to our VisitNorthIdaho.com website, APP, and social media platforms are all designed to increase the region's and local community awareness – and encourage intra-region travel.

Question: Who are the contributing partners participating in the project?

NITA is well-positioned to promote North Idaho as a premier tourist destination in partnership with the State, NITA members, other ITC grantees, and private businesses. In addition, partnerships often involve and benefit government entities such as the local government, US Forest Service, etc. as well as local community associations.

Partners include the following:
- Idaho Tourism
- Private businesses in our region and communities
- NITA Members- Bonners Ferry Chamber, Coeur d'Alene CVB Friends of the Coeur d'Alene Trail, Harrison Chamber, Hayden Chamber, International Selkirk Loop, North Idaho B & B Association, North Idaho Centennial Trail Foundation, Post Falls Chamber, Priest Lake Chamber, Priest River Chamber Rathdrum Chamber, Sandpoint Chamber of Commerce, Silver Valley Chamber, Spirit Lake Chamber, St. Maries Chamber, Wallace Chamber
- Local, county, state and federal government staff and elected officials
- Various community associations in the region including economic development, downtown, arts, etc.

Budget

Applicants enter their proposed budgets. Match is required at 12.5%.

Question: Administration and Fulfillment is available to all applicants. An amount equal to 10% of the amount awarded, up to a maximum of $25,000 is allowable. Are you requesting administration and fulfillment funds?

☑ *YES*

☐ *NO*

Question: Describe your plan for Public Relations, Advertising and Collateral Materials (if not applicable, enter N/A). Include any cooperative advertising, whether it's with local businesses/organizations, other grantees, or Idaho Tourism.

Advertising and Collateral Materials are key marketing strategies for NITA and NITA members in our efforts to increase overnight stays throughout the region. Priorities for the 2017-18 tourism season include:

Advertising:
Digital Advertising –

- Prospecting & Re-targeting Campaign - Leverage the success that we have had by expanding our state co-op digital marketing campaign to promote North Idaho as a premier vacation destination during the fall, winter and spring seasons with a focus on driving traffic to the Visit North Idaho website
- Facebook Advertising – Implement a campaign to promote North Idaho shoulder season activities by placing boosted posts on a regular basis - which has proven very successful in driving traffic to our social media platforms and especially to the VisitNorthIdaho.com website, while also promoting our Visit North Idaho APP. Broaden our geographic target market to surrounding states.
- Traditional Advertising – Continue to support NITA members in their tourism promotion plans by connecting them with state cooperative advertising opportunities - with a special emphasis on shoulder season, special event and winter advertising. Targeted digital, print, broadcast, and radio advertising will also be used to encourage intra-region travel by promoting recreational, historical, culinary and cultural opportunities, as well as community events- while leveraging co-op funds from NITA, the state and local businesses.
- North Idaho Video Production/TV ads – Work with other Region 1 grantees in the region and leverage state resources to develop a video promoting North Idaho – portions of which can be used by all partners to support broadcast advertising opportunities.

The analytics available with digital advertising are invaluable in gauging the effectiveness of various campaigns and targeting efforts.

Collateral Materials:
- Small Community/DMO Support - Maps, rack cards, brochures and event flyers continue to be a key element in many of our member's marketing campaigns. NITA would like to co-op with regional partners on the costs associated with, but not limited to, printing, distribution, and/or photography for such publications.
- These maps and guides are utilized as handouts at tradeshows, and distributed to the region's visitor's centers, lodging properties, airports, chambers, and certified folder and display racks around the Northwest and parts of Canada. They have proven to be a very important tool in attracting travelers to the region – and getting them to visit some of our more rural sites and communities. Examples include detailed maps for hiking and biking the North Idaho Centennial Trail or the Trail of the Coeur d' Alenes, brochures detailing a historic walking tour in a community, and flyers distributed in border states to promote events. Most of these materials include co-op advertising with local business communities.

The best way to measure the effectiveness of collateral materials is by monitoring increases in demand, how quickly materials need to be replenished, etc.

Question: Describe your plan for Website Development/Maintenance or Social Media (if not applicable, enter N/A).

1. Website: The North Idaho Tourism Alliance recognizes the role that high quality, interactive websites and social media integration play in increasing awareness and interest in our region, resulting in increased inquiries, overnight stays and increased lodging revenues.

In the 2017-18 grant cycle, NITA would like to continue to build on the progress we have made with our new website by:
- Promoting our new Itinerary Builder and Go Touring section to promote intra-region travel
- Expand the lodging section of the website by using the Visit North Idaho lodging section as a model (TripAdvisor feeds and and other custom applications)
- Continue our asset mapping project so that the site continues to be content-rich, up to date and relevant
- Support our small community members in their efforts to fund quality web site designs, updates, and hosting costs
We review our Google Analytics in-depth each month to monitor the growth of our visitors, sessions, session lengths, geo-data, etc.

2. Social Media: We have dedicated a lot of time and resources into updating and expanding our social media platforms, which now include Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, and YouTube. We have established overall social media objectives to include:
- Utilize social media to promote activities and events to key target markets
- Update social media platforms on a continual basis to increase the number of fans/followers
- Focus on driving traffic to the website to build website audience
- Review analytics in each platform to determine most effective messaging

Through the use of various analytic tools, we are able to track important information about where inquiries are coming from, what they are looking for, how effective other efforts are by tracking activity patterns, and analyzing trends, visitors, friends- to see if we are continuing to grow our marketing footprint effectively.

3. Visit North Idaho APP – In May, 2016 we launched the Visit North Idaho APP – available for free download from both Apple's and Google's APP stores. The APP provides a comprehensive overview of the North Idaho region, including extensive information about communities, things to do, and lodging options-with the majority of information embedded into the APP so that wireless and cellular service is not required to access the information. We have promoted the APP through various forms

of digital and social media advertising, as well as window decals and table tents in visitor centers, chamber offices and tourism partner locations. Our goal is to substantially increase the number of hotel rooms in the region that showcase our table tents - encouraging guests to download the Visit North Idaho APP.

We receive monthly reports identifying the number of downloads the APP is experiencing and have been working with our developer to broaden the analytics – which will now give us geographical and content specific information.

Question: Describe your plan for Trade Shows, Conferences & Other Travel (if not applicable, enter N/A).

Trade shows continue to be an excellent way for NITA members to reach niche markets. North Idaho offers a variety of outdoor activities and they are gaining popularity among visitors looking for fun and adventure. Biking enthusiasts in particular are making their way to North Idaho in greater numbers and we have identified several trade shows to highlight all we have to offer.

We have succeeded in our efforts to encourage NITA members to work together on tradeshow partnerships and leverage their funding. Members have begun to jointly fund tradeshow booths while expanding the North Idaho presence and in some instances, have identified one or two representatives from the group to attend the tradeshows on behalf of the entire region.

NITA members participate in such tradeshows as the WSSA Snowmobile Show, Spokane Winter Knights, Seattle Outdoor Show, Vancouver Outdoor Show, Calgary Adventure Show, Spokane Outdoor Show, Spokane Bike Swap, Spokane Golf Show, Spokane Boat Show, National Tour Association, Bloomsday Expo, and the ABA Marketplace.

NITA members would also like to continue to attend ICORT – many partner together to share expenses associated with attending.

NITA continues to evaluate the effectiveness of each tradeshow by asking all ITC funded tradeshow participants to share their evaluation of each show with the NITA board members. This provides a way for members to share and track the effectiveness and outcomes of each show. In addition, Google Analytics reports are monitored to detect an increase in traffic to attending members' sites during and after the tradeshows.

Question: Describe your plan for Capital Purchase. Allowable capital includes trade show booths and electronic equipment essential to administering the grant or marketing the area. Electronic equipment must be less than $500 (if not applicable enter N/A).

N/A

Question: Upload the budget and match detail form. This form can be downloaded from the grant home page.

SF_Grant-Application-Budget-Sheet-2017.xls (5/10/2017 12:14 PM)

Question: Upload letters of cash match pledges from partners OR your organization's declaration of available cash reserves. Letters of support, while not required, may be uploaded here as well.

Letters of support-5-10-17.pdf (5/10/2017 12:21 PM)