

Form Name:	Lodging Tax Application 2022
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ORGANIZATION / PROJECT INFORMATION

Organization name	East Lewis County Chamber of Commerce
Project name	Full-Time, Year-Round Staffing for Chamber, Visitor Center, Museum & Train Depot
Project coordinator	Cynthia Swift, as appointed for the Board
Amount requested from Lewis County	57000
Total project amount	57000

APPLICANT CONTACT INFORMATION

Name	Cynthia Swift
Street address	PO Box 10 Morton, WA 98356
Mailing address (if different from street address)	PO Box 203 107 Grant St. Mineral, WA 98355
Current home phone	(253) 797-4300
Current work phone	(360) 496-6086
Current cell phone	(253) 797-4300
Current email address	chamber@lewsicounty.com
Agency Tax ID Number	910730233
Organization Unified Business Identifier (UBI)	601395047
UBI expiration date	June 30, 2022
Type of organization:	501(c)6
Organization's mission statement or purpose (one or two sentences):	"Improve the Vitality and Livability of East Lewis County"
Year the organization was founded:	2001
Has your organization received Lewis County lodging tax funding in the past?	Yes

When did your organization receive Lewis County lodging tax funding?	2020
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How much did your organization / project receive?	\$11000
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REQUIRED INFORMATION

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Project name	Staffing for the Chamber and Visitor Center full-time, year-round.
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1. Describe how the project promotes tourism in all of Lewis County's unincorporated areas.

Our goal is to have a paid member available at the Cowlitz River Valley Historical Society Visitor Center/Museum located at 194 Main in Morton, year-round. The Chamber operates out of the Visitor Center as well. The hours worked by these individuals would include promotion of East Lewis County activities on social media, a strong web presence, local marketing publications, and events and civic meetings. It would keep the Visitor Center/Museum open through the winter months while allowing the staff to handle the day-to-day operations of the Chamber by reaching out and contacting local businesses on a regular basis. By keeping the Visitor Center open and fully staffed, we would be available to offer lodging and tour information to all visitors.

2. Describe how the project will enhance tourism and result in "heads in beds."

While an up-to-date website and social media presence will enhance tourism, face-to-face assistance and guidance are very important to many visitors. The requested funding for staffing hours will ensure visitor assistance is available to them for ALL seasons and every day of the week. It will allow the staff to properly promote East Lewis County events and activities that will increase the likelihood of more visitors and longer stays. Being open through the winter will allow us to collect more lodging dollars due to increased visibility and the ability to better promote more off-season activities.

3. List the responsible party / parties.

East Lewis County Chamber of Commerce and the Cowlitz River Valley Historical Society, located at 194 Main Ave, Morton, WA. 98356.

4. Describe the area the project will serve, as well as the project's expected impact.

This project will primarily focus on activities in East Lewis County, from the I-5 corridor to White Pass. The goal will be to bring tourists to communities in ELC communities. Many of these tourists will be traveling through the I-5 corridor, US Highway 12, and Highway 7 to reach their destinations. Therefore, the far-reaching impact will be to benefit all East Lewis County businesses. By keeping the Visitor Center open more hours our staff members will be available to assist them by suggesting lodging, campgrounds, food options, and other seasonal and year-round activities of the common traveler.

5. Describe how the project will specifically promote tourism.

The consistency of full-time staff members employed year-round will allow the ELC Chamber and the Historical Society to collaborate on various avenues of promotion and cross-promotion. Having time allocated to place advertisements of events in multiple directories will increase the capability of reaching far beyond the Pacific Northwest. Consistent and increased staff hours will allow for a stronger, more up-to-date web and social media presence, and put our team to work out in the communities as representatives.

6. Describe how you have collaborated with other entities throughout Lewis County to promote tourism.

The Chamber and some Board members from the Historical Society are active participants in a variety of promotional threads, such as Facebook and Instagram, Visit Lewis County webpage, ELC group emails, and distribution of materials, Cowlitz River Valley Historical Society, White Pass Scenic Byway, Discover Lewis County, Packwood Improvement Club, Cities of Morton and Mossyrock, Loggers Jubilee, FMAC-Roxy Theater, Blueberry Festival, SW Washington Fair, Apple Harvest Festival, Arbor Health Hospital Foundation, Centralia College, Christmas in the Mountains, Rainier Music Festival, and other local entities and organizations.

7. Describe why your project should receive funding.

) The ELC Chamber of Commerce is now serving more than 120 members. We have a goal to become financially self-sufficient. The Chamber and the Historical Society are actively collaborating with other entities and events to create annual income streams toward this goal, but currently, we need outside funding for personnel to properly manage our website, social media, and other advertising outlets, and to keep both the Chamber and Visitor Center operational. The bonus would be to partner with the CRVHS Visitor Center/Museum to partner in community events geared to attract tourists and day-trippers during all seasons to promote the region.

8. Describe how your organization would respond to potential cancellations or closures, such as those caused by COVID-19 in 2020 and 2021.

The ELC Chamber and Visitor Center located at 194 Main Ave., Morton, WA. 98356 would be available to help residents and businesses in the area by gathering and distributing important up-to-date information online and in-person and by helping pass out and deliver PPE to those in need. The Chamber and Visitor Center staff would be point persons for contact with other Chambers, city and government officials, and all persons tasked with the gathering of information in the event of a crisis or continued state restrictions so we can all work together and continue to handle our day-to-day business in an orderly, well-prepared manner. During threats of fire, we have a social network of volunteers to help relocate families and animals, and in the event of extreme heat, we will have the staffing to offer a cooling zone, fresh water, and resources for those that may need them.

USE OF HOTEL / MOTEL TAX

Please indicate below the types of activities for which the lodging tax monies would be used:

TOURISM PROMOTION
OPERATION OF TOURISM-RELATED FACILITY
FESTIVAL OR EVENT DESIGNED TO ATTRACT TOURISTS

Describe the expected results (measurable outcomes) of your project, with the dollar amount for each outcome.

) Motion for the LTAC application between the Chamber and the Historical Society, located at 194 Main, Morton, WA. 98356, with the Chamber taking the lead. We will request \$15K for Museum staffing in addition to \$35K for Chamber staffing. MSPassed. Addendum: Should the County cut back the requested amounts, the percentages will be proportionately distributed between the Chamber and the Historical Society. MSPassed. This funding would supply personnel to help run the ELC Chamber and Historical Society Museum, Visitor Center, and Train Depot efficiently and effectively on a daily, year-round basis helping the Museum and Depot become a regular tourist destination. This would result in the improved promotion of all the ELC businesses and Chamber members plus promotion of events and activities throughout East Lewis County and the surrounding areas. Measuring the dollar amount of the result is difficult because this past year was only the second year the Visitor Center, Museum, Depot and Mt. View TLR Pop-Up Library in Morton has operated cooperatively to draw visitors to the area. Due to Covid-19 mandates and high fire danger, we were forced to have restrictions for several months, which kept many visitors out of the Visitor Center and out of the county. Consequently, there was less tourism than expected as the closures were county-wide. This left us little information on how to proceed for this year. It is our hope and our goal that increasing promotional efforts will lead to increased visits and increased traffic and lodging to all lodging opportunities in East Lewis County.

Total number of attendees predicted to attend:

Over 2,000

Describe how receiving lodging tax dollars would increase that number

This prediction of 2,000 is based on the number of visitors that signed the Visitor Center guestbook between the months of March through September this year. The Visitor Center reopened in January of this year. The number of visitors in 2021 are not an accurate reflection of what we could expect in a normal year, due to continuing Covid-19 fears, mandates, and restrictions.

There were approximately 350 groups consisting of 665 people who came to get information, visit the Museum/Depot, or both. Of those visitors, 434 were from Washington, 43 from Oregon, 18 from California, and 14 from Florida. All others were from various parts of the country or international travelers. New residents in the area and people looking to purchase homes came to speak with the Chamber staff for a realtor and home repair referrals. Many stayed overnight and requested referrals for lodging. LTAC funding would allow further promotion of local merchants and businesses, and enough staffing to keep the Visitor Center open through the winter season. Consistent and reliable hours of operation are important to tourist activities. We would be increasing the operating hours from 15 hours per week to 40 hours per week leading to a higher number of attendees than we have seen in previous years.

a. Projected number of attendees who will travel fifty (50) miles or more one way from their home or business to attend:

Over 1,200 in a typical year

b. Describe how receiving lodging tax dollars would increase that number

From January to September 2021, our visitor profile looked like this; approximately 1/3 of the visitor groups at the Visitor Center in Morton came from over 50 miles or more. This year we saw international travelers as well as many folks traveling cross-country on road trips lasting several weeks. The estimated projection is based on this data. Consistent year-round staffing and increased hours of operation would allow for proactive planning and promotion of prior season events and activities to significantly increase tourist activity. Chamber and Museum staffing at the Visitor Center could help with data collection and documentation to help with grant funding from other sources as well. More data will help us all determine where best to put future funding helping to keep the Visitor Center open year-round, which should be a priority.

a. Projected number of participants who will travel from another country or state to attend:

Over 800

b. Describe how receiving lodging tax dollars would increase that number	Over 35% of the groups who came to the Visitor Center/Museum since it opened in March 2019 were from out of state or a different country. Even though much information can be found online, it is still important to have a human presence available to answer questions, to help visitors feel welcome to our communities, and to guide them in having the best experience possible during their visit. LTAC funding would allow East Lewis County to have both: a great promotional online presence AND friendly, helpful people to assist them in the Visitor Center no matter when they travel here.
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a. Projected number of participants who will stay overnight in paid accommodations:	500
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b. Describe how receiving lodging tax dollars would increase that number	Based on answers from the Visitor Center/Museum guest book in this same time period of January to September 2021, over 25% of the people visiting planned to stay overnight in Lewis County. There are so many activities available in East Lewis County in addition to the variety of community events, that it would take weeks to try to do them all. We believe that additional staffing hours could be used to raise the awareness of these activities, sponsor some of the local activities in-house as a joint venture, and offer lodging options for people who are online planning their trips, resulting in more travelers selecting our area as a destination of choice rather than just passing through.
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a. Projected number of participants who will stay overnight in unpaid accommodations:	Possibly up to 500 or more
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b. Describe how receiving lodging tax dollars would increase that number	East Lewis County has many outdoor activities and free places for people to camp or to park an RV. While we really have no way to track the number of visitors who stay in unpaid lodging, we feel it is safe to assume that increased promotion will increase the number of visitors to our area resulting in increased revenue for the businesses in our communities. Web and social media promotion are quite effective at getting people's attention, but it takes time to do this properly. Having full-time, year-round paid staff hours dedicated to building and maintaining a strong, informative, exciting internet presence is essential. With funding, much of the behind-the-scenes preparation could be done in the off-season while also keeping the doors open at the Visitor Center/Museum and Train Depot located at 194 Main Ave, Morton, WA. 98356.
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10. Describe how the project provides short-term or long-term economic benefit for Lewis County

By being able to assist visitors on a daily basis, we increase our overall footprint, can incorporate and promote good reviews and other articles and photos to be shared on our social media platforms. The more people that see what we have to offer, and the more desirable we make visiting this area, the more people will choose to come here again and again. We hope to establish a tradition for the generations to come.

11. Explain what plans exist to allow this project to become self-sustaining. Include any plans for ticket sales, event sponsors, and other cost-recovery models.

Our hope for continuing sustainability will come from careful planning, preparation, and roll-out of future, annual events and activities. Due to Covid-19 having ruled our state for the past 19 months, it is difficult to map out an exact plan at this time. The Chamber has purchased a cell phone for better communication when out of the office, as well as an item called The Box, where ticket monies can be deposited directly into our bank accounts. Our thoughts are these will make us much more mobile for off-site events as well as any events we sponsor on-site in collaboration with other entities.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Website address

www.https://elcchamber.org

Facebook user name

@EastLewisCountyChamberofCommerce

Instagram

@elcchamberofcommerce

Twitter account name

EastLewis

Any other social media platforms your organization uses to promote tourism

) Not at this time but we are currently exploring other avenues. Increased staff hours will help to finalize this research and set up these new platforms.

BUDGET

Amount

a. \$15,000

Source

a. City of Morton; the Cowlitz River Valley Historical Society has requested additional funds for increased staffing which would also be utilized by both the Chamber and the Cowlitz River Valley Historical Society located at 194 Main Ave, Morton, WA. 98356 for off-site meetings, events and additional marketing.

Confirmed

No

Date available

Unknown

Income 2

Amount	\$3,500
Source	Membership Dues from the Chamber renewals, and Historical Society membership dues
Confirmed	No
Date available	Ongoing

Income 3

Amount	\$2500
Source	Christmas in the Mountains
Confirmed	No
Date available	December 2021, January 2022

Income 4

Amount	0
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Income 5

Amount	0
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Income 6

Amount	0
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Expense - Personnel

County	\$37000 Chamber, \$15000 Historical Society
Other Funds	0
Total	\$52000

Expense - Administration

County	0
Other Funds	0
Total	0

Expense - Marketing/promotion

County	0
Other Funds	\$250
Total	\$250

Expense - Direct sales activities

County	0
Other Funds	0
Total	0

Expense - Minor equipment

County	0
Other Funds	0
Total	0

Expense - Travel

County	\$1000
Other Funds	0
Total	\$1000

Expense - Contract services

County	\$1000
Other Funds	0
Total	\$1000

Expense - Other activities

County	\$5000 Christmas in the Mountains
Other Funds	0
Total	\$5000

Total Cost

County	\$57000
Other Funds	0
Total	\$57000
Priority 1	\$57000
Full Funding Request	Funding for full-time year-round staff at the Chamber office and the Cowlitz River Valley Historical Society Visitor Center, Museum and Train Depot located at 194 Main Ave, Morton, WA. 98356.
Priority 2	\$47000
Minimum Funding Request	\$42000
Applicant will / can accept no less than this amount	\$40000
If partial funding is received, how will that affect the project / activity? Please describe:	The Chamber and Visitor Center will be forced to continue to offer reduced hours of operation, therefore, a reduced time allocated in the promotion of tourism.

PROJECT TIMELINE / TOURISM SEASON

What is your anticipated timeline for accomplishing this activity?	The fiscal year 2022
Year-round	Yes
Year-round Explanation	Continual and consistent staffing will help promote tourism in every day of the week in every season!
Is it a seasonal activity appropriate to its location? Explain	N/A

Financial Review

Balance sheet	https://lewiscounty.formstack.com/admin/download/file/11485632810
Income statement	https://lewiscounty.formstack.com/admin/download/file/11485632811
Operating budget for 2021	https://lewiscounty.formstack.com/admin/download/file/11485632813
Projected budget for 2022	https://lewiscounty.formstack.com/admin/download/file/11485632814

Financial review

Financial review	https://lewiscounty.formstack.com/admin/download/file/11485632817
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Nonprofit determination

Nonprofit determination

<https://lewiscounty.formstack.com/admin/download/file/11485632818>

Personnel list

Personnel list

<https://lewiscounty.formstack.com/admin/download/file/11485632819>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Signature



(Print or type applicant's name)

Cynthia K. Swift

Date

Oct 07, 2021
