



COMMISSION
AGENDA MEMORANDUM

ACTION ITEM Item No. 10b

Date of Meeting January 27, 2026

DATE : January 15, 2026

TO: Stephen P. Metruck, Executive Director

FROM: Nick Leonti, Director, Tourism Development

SUBJECT: Tourism Development – Tourism Marketing Support Program Authorization

Amount of this request: \$600,000.00

Total estimated project cost: \$600,000.00

ACTION REQUESTED

Request Commission authorization of the 2026/27 Tourism Marketing Support grant program (TMSP) and authority for the Executive Director to approve execution for all related contract agreements for the 2026/27 selected Tourism Marketing Support Program recipients in an amount not to exceed \$600,000.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Port's Tourism Development department continues to adapt to ensure that the tourism industry is delivering benefit to the organization, the community, local businesses, and visitors. Part of this effort is continuing the long-running Tourism Marketing Support Program (TMSP) which provides grants to enable local partners to drive tourism in a responsible way.

Tourism is a powerful economic engine for Seattle and Washington State, one that supports small businesses, sustains jobs, and reinforces our region's identity as a welcoming, culturally rich, and environmentally responsible destination. The Port plays a unique and irreplaceable role in this ecosystem. Through our global marketing presence, destination stewardship initiatives, and strategic investments in community-centered tourism, the Port ensures that visitor spending translates into broad, equitable, and sustainable benefits for residents across the region.

As we prepare for the next round of the Tourism Marketing Support Program (TMSP) grants, we are requesting authorization of \$600,000 to continue delivering measurable, community-focused outcomes and advancing the Port's economic, environmental, and equity goals.

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JUSTIFICATION

The TMSP grant program is a key to including local partners in our larger scope of tourism development work focused on advancing Commissioner Hasegawa's goal of rewriting the map for equitable tourism. Through the Port's leadership, local partners can be involved in regular contact with travel producers, travel media outreach and hosting, destination trainings, responsible tourism efforts and more.

Tourism marketing is destination stewardship in action and the projects supported by the TMSP help drive visitors when and where they are needed most. This includes smaller, lesser-resourced communities, destinations and attractions that support the livelihood of the region's local residents.

Diversity in Contracting

The opportunity to apply will be directly shared with diverse non-profit organizations and all applications are evaluated for their impact on promoting equitable, inclusive tourism. The second tier of grants which allow for more staff time to be included in the match funds was specifically designed with smaller, culturally-based organizations in mind.

DETAILS***Scope of Work***

Work will include but not limited to:

- (1) Announcement of program guidelines, application window dates, application process and materials, and eligibility and scoring criteria.
- (2) Outreach and promotion of the grant program, including virtual information sessions and email communications.
- (3) Coordination of the application review and evaluation process, including convening an evaluation panel and scoring applications based on established criteria.
- (4) Execution and management of grant agreements with selected recipients, including contract compliance and payment processing.
- (5) Monitoring of funded projects through progress check-ins, review of final reports, and documentation of project outcomes.
- (6) Grant cycle closeout activities, including final report review, approval, and disbursement of funds.

Schedule

February 2026 – Application window opens

Feb/March 2026 – Informational sessions held

March 2026 – Application window closes

March 2026 – Port of Seattle Evaluation panel meets/Recipients selected

April 2026 – Contracts in place and projects begin

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October 2026 – February 2027 – Recipient check-ins, support and progress updates
December 2027 – Final Reports Due and funds disbursed (some may be due earlier)

ALTERNATIVES AND IMPLICATIONS CONSIDERED

Alternative 1 – Do not offer the Tourism Marketing Support Program for 2026/27.

Cost Implications: \$0.

Pros:

- (1) Reduces specific budget request by \$600,000 for 2026/27.

Cons:

- (1) Eliminating the program would impact small tourism organizations and industry partners that rely on this funding to support their projects due to limited resources for marketing to out-of-state visitors.
- (2) Eliminating the program would decrease positive impact of visitor-spending to lesser-known and lesser-visited neighborhoods, destinations and attractions throughout the region.

This is not the recommended alternative.

Alternative 2 – Offer and authorize funding for the Tourism Marketing Support Program for 2026/27.

Cost Implications: \$600,000 over two years

Pros:

- (1) The TMSP program assists and demonstrates the Port of Seattle's intention to work with a diverse range of organizations and industry partners.
- (2) Because the TMSP program requires a two-to-one matching contribution, the \$600,000 positively impacts tourism and visitor marketing throughout Washington State with a minimum of \$900,000 in total marketing promotional efforts. In previous years the actual match fund levels exceeded the two-to-one match requirement.
- (3) This program will advance the Port's destination stewardship efforts by prioritizing projects that embrace responsible tourism principles that drive visitor spending when and where it is needed most.

This is the recommended alternative.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

<i>Cost Estimate/Authorization Summary</i>	Capital	Expense	Total
COST ESTIMATE			
Original estimate	\$0	\$600,000	\$600,000

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AUTHORIZATION			
Previous authorizations	0	0	0
Current request for authorization	0	600,000	600,000
Total authorizations, including this request	0	600,000	600,000
Remaining amount to be authorized	\$0	\$0	\$0

Annual Budget Status and Source of Funds

Funding for the 2026/27 Tourism Marketing Support Program is included in the approved operating budget.

TMSP will be funded from the tax levy.

Financial Analysis and Summary

Project cost for analysis	\$600,000
Business Unit (BU)	Economic Development Division, Tourism Development
Effect on business performance (NOI after depreciation)	Supports increased tourism-related economic activity
IRR/NPV (if relevant)	
CPE Impact	

Future Revenues and Expenses (Total cost of ownership)

TMSP does not generate direct Port of Seattle revenues. However, the program leverages a required 2:1 match from grant recipients. This results in a minimum of \$900,000 in additional tourism marketing expenditures statewide. There are no ongoing capital costs or long-term operating expenses beyond the authorized 2026/27 grant cycle.

ATTACHMENTS TO THIS REQUEST

- (1) Attachment: List of TMSP- supported projects from previous grant cycle
- (2) Presentation slides

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTIONS OR BRIEFINGS

February 13, 2024 – Commission approved \$600,000 for 2024/25 Tourism Marketing Support Program

January 24, 2023 – Commission approved \$200,000 for all contract agreements for the 2023 Tourism Marketing Support Program

December 15, 2020 – Commissioners authorized the Executive Director to approve execution of all contract agreements for the 2021 Tourism Marketing Support Program

December 10, 2019 - Commissioners authorized the Executive Director to execute contract agreements for the 2020 Tourism Marketing Support Program in the not-to-exceed amount of \$200,000