# San Marcos Sights & Sounds of Christmas

2026 Signature Grant

# Sights & Sounds of Christmas

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# **Application Form**

# Internal Staff Review

### Internal checklist (admin only)\*

Grant request does not exceed 50 percent of budget Event is in 78666 zip code Organization in good standing with State Comptroller's Office

### Staff notes

NOTE TO EVALUATORS - budget numbers will be sent as a spreadsheet attachment in a separate email.

# Overview and instructions

This is the application for Signature Event Grants. If you want to apply for Arts and Cultural Grants, please click on the Apply button in the menu at the top of this page. Look for "Arts and Cultural Grant" or "Spark Grant" and click on the appropriate link.

The City of San Marcos awards grants annually for events that that bring people together to celebrate and enjoy different forms of artistic expression, music, food, sports and/or traditions in San Marcos. Funding is dependent upon eligibility and the availability of funds.

Events receiving Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT) allocations must also directly enhance and promote tourism and the hotel and convention industry in San Marcos to be eligible for Hotel Occupancy Tax funding.

General funds are also available for events that benefit the local community but do not attract visitors.

Grant expenses are restricted to event related costs and may not be used for venue operations, administrative salaries, or parts of an event that are not directly related to arts, culture and events.

Awardees receive **85 percent** of their grant after the official notification and execution of contract. The final **15 percent** will be released upon completion of the event, final report submission, review and acceptance of the report by City of San Marcos art grant staff.

### Maximum request

Signature Event Grant requests for an event can be up to **50%** of total expenditure budget. Award may only pay for eligible event expenses. All budgeted expenses must be real cost. **In-kind donation value of goods and services are not eligible to be included in the expense budget.** 

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### Mandatory Applicant Workshop

In coordination with the Arts and Cultural Grant program staff, several workshops will be held during the grant cycle that detail eligibility, requirements, restrictions, and application instructions. **Attendance to at least one workshop is mandatory to be eligible for grants.** Dates, times, location, and online signup portal are posted <u>here.</u>

### Review and Evaluation criteria

Applications are reviewed by Arts grants staff to verify eligibility and application completeness.

### Step one - Application Review

All required documents and application fields must be completed to be considered for funding. Any applications with missing or incorrect documentation will be notified for rectification via email. Missing or incorrect documentation must be rectified within four business days from the date of notification.

### Step two - Funding source evaluation

Must have a minimum score of 60% or better to qualify.

### SIGNATURE EVENT GRANT:

- TOURISM IMPACT: 10
- HOTEL AND CONVENTION INDUSTRY IMPACT: 10
- ARTISTIC/CULTURAL QUALITY: 10
- DEMAND FOR EVENT: 10
- ABILITY TO ACCOMPLISH: 10

### **DIVERSITY IMPACT POINTS: 10**

Additional points that can be assigned to applications.

### Step three – event evaluation

Public Events Grant Panel enter a suggested award for each project based on evaluation scores. The average of these amounts will guide the final award amount, if any.

# Full Signature Event Grant policy guide can be found XX LINK TO POLICY XX

# **Grant Eligibility**

# Eligibility Requirements\*

### Who is eligible?

### SIGNATURE EVENT GRANT:

 Organization must be in good standing with the Texas Comptroller's Office as verified by the Texas Comptroller Search

- Must bring people together to celebrate and enjoy different forms of artistic expression, music, food, sports and/or traditions in San Marcos
- Must occur within the San Marcos 78666 zip code
- Exclusive annual San Marcos event
- Minimum attendance of 5,000 people
- 50% of attendance must be out of town guests
- Proven record of a successful event for three consecutive years; excluding pandemic years
- Must be open to public participation or attendance
- Accessible and inclusive event
- Respectful of the environment
  - o 'Zero waste status' 90% landfill diversion
  - o Collaborate with Resource Recovery or like organization
- Must be held in-person and advertised to visitors and San Marcos residents
- Must be completed within the time period set in contracted award year
- Applicants must have fulfilled contractual requirements of previously funded events, including final reports
- Applicants may not receive funding or donations from any other City board, commission or department

### Who is NOT eligible?

- Schools/universities
- Religious institutions and/or programs to support a religion
- Government institutions and departments
- Students work intended for undergraduate or graduate academic credit or as part of an academically supported project, program, or residency

I have read and understand, and I know this event is eligible.

Yes, I am eligible to apply

# Applicant Information

# **Applicant Type\***

### I am applying as an:

Nonprofit Organization

### **Event Contact Name and Position\***

Rick Doria / President

# **Event Manager Resume\***

Upload file here Rick-Doria.pdf

# **Contact Email for Event\***

This may be different than the main organization's email listed in the account information. This is the one point person that is in charge of this event.

exec@sights-n-sounds.org

# **Board Members & Staff Race & Ethnicity (#)**

	Board Members	Staff	Senior Staff
Asian American/Pacific Islanders/Asian			
Black/African American/African			
Hispanic/Latino/Latina/Latinx	6		
Native American/American Indian/Indigenous			
White/Caucasian/European	9		
Multi-Racial/Multi-Ethnic (2+ races/ethnicities)			
Decline to state			
Unknown			

# Grant history questionnaire

### **Previous Funding\***

Have you received funds from the City of San Marcos before?

Yes

# Previous grant history

# **Previous Funding Year\***

What is the year of the most recent grant received?

2024

### **Previous Grant Amount Received\***

Enter amount received from most recent previous grant.

\$50,000.00

# **Event information**

### **Event Name\***

San Marcos Sights & Sounds of Christmas

### Brief event description\*

Please enter a brief, one or two sentence description of your event.

Sights & Sounds of Christmas brings the community together to kick off the holiday season with music, lights, food, and fun. Celebrating 38 years, this beloved San Marcos tradition features over 1M lights and entertainment for the whole family.

### Event start date\*

First date your event is open to the public.

12/04/2025

### Event end date\*

Last date your event is open to the public.

For example if your event is monthly, the last date of the year it will be open.

12/13/2025

### **Multiple Event Dates**

If your event has multiple dates between the start and end dates, enter them in the space below.

12-4, 12-5, 12-6, 12-11,12-12,12-13

### **Event Website or Social Media**

Enter dedicated website address or direct social media page address that is used to promote your event. For example, "facebook.com/visitsmtx" is the direct address to our social media page.

sights-n-sounds.org

### Location(s)\*

Please list name and full address of venue(s) where the event will take place.

If it is at different locations on different dates, please indicate those along with the venue information.

City & Plaza Park (Both sides of the river)

# Changes to event\*

I understand that **any changes** to dates, locations and/or scope of the event after a grant has been awarded **must be sent to the Public Events staff in writing** for review and must be approved.

Yes, I agree to the above statement

# Participants\*

Number of people participating in event. For example, the number of vendors, stage hands, musicians, tech support, etc.

1200

# **Attendance Projections\***

Number in people attending in audience - total for all dates.

60000

### **Detailed Event Description\***

Describe your proposed event in detail. Describe what the event is, when and where it is happening, and who is involved in the event. Things to consider:

- How will arts or culture be infused into the chosen funding area?
- What are the goals of your event? What do you hope to learn, explore, or create?
- What does success look like for this event? What are your indicators for success?
- Share relevant history executing arts and cultural events and/or activities!

The Sights & Sounds of Christmas Festival is a cherished San Marcos tradition, now entering its 38th year. What began in 1987 as a small downtown gathering has grown into a six-day holiday celebration spanning the first two weekends of December at San Marcos Plaza Park and surrounding areas. Each year, families, visitors, and holiday enthusiasts from across Central Texas come together to celebrate the season through a vibrant mix of arts, culture, food, and festive activities.

The festival transforms the park into a winter wonderland with over one million lights and immersive displays. This year, a revitalized 85-foot Christmas tree will take center stage as a must-see attraction, creating a picture-perfect backdrop and new memories for guests.

Arts and Culture: More than 45 diverse performances showcase local talent, from elementary school choirs and high school bands to professional dance groups, theater performers, and musicians. Every CISD school is offered the chance to perform, making the event deeply rooted in community engagement and family pride.

Culinary Delights and Shopping: The festival features 28+ food vendors, including local non-profits and small businesses, offering everything from classic festival treats to culturally diverse holiday dishes. Santa's Gift Shop provides unique shopping experiences that support local artisans and small businesses.

Active Engagement: The Jingle Bell Run, featuring a 5K and a Kid's 1K, is the largest holiday-themed race in the region. Runners of all ages join together to race through illuminated streets, blending fitness with holiday spirit.

### Goals and Measures of Success:

Sights & Sounds creates a safe, inclusive, magical space for the community and its guests while showcasing San Marcos. Success is measured by increased attendance, strong volunteer and school participation, tourism growth, and lasting holiday memories. By supporting local vendors and non-profits, the festival drives revenue for restaurants, hotels, and shops, boosting the local economy.

### Accessibility and Affordability:

Children 12 and under have always received free entry, making this event an accessible holiday tradition for families. The venue offers ADA-compliant pathways and facilities, ensuring all community members can fully participate and enjoy the experience.

With nearly four decades of experience, a 100% volunteer board, and strong city partnerships, Sights & Sounds continues to grow as a premier holiday destination, bringing people together and shining a spotlight on San Marcos as a hub for holiday tourism and cultural celebration.

### Demand for Event\*

Describe how your event will meet a tourism-related demand you've identified in the community. Things to consider:

What unique niche is this event addressing?

- How is this event different from any others that may be similar?
- Who will this event appeal to?
- Will they travel to San Marcos to experience it?

Sights & Sounds of Christmas fills a unique niche as the only holiday festival in the region that combines dazzling light displays, live performances, culinary experiences, and a family-friendly race into one cohesive event. For 38 years, it has provided a gathering place where the community and visitors can celebrate the season while enjoying entertainment that reflects the rich cultural diversity of San Marcos and Central Texas.

No other local event offers this blend of experiences. While there are light displays or performances in other cities, none match the scale and variety of Sights & Sounds. Every CISD school is invited to perform, giving students a rare opportunity to showcase their talents. Parents, grandparents, and extended families travel to San Marcos to support their children while also enjoying the festival's festive atmosphere.

The festival's revitalized 85-foot Christmas tree will create a new centerpiece and photo destination, attracting visitors eager to capture the magic and share it with friends and followers. Combined with over one million lights and immersive holiday décor, Sights & Sounds offers a level of visual impact and tradition not found elsewhere in the region.

The annual Jingle Bell Run sets Sights & Sounds apart further as the largest holiday-themed 5K and Kid's 1K in the area. This event draws competitive runners, families, and fitness enthusiasts seeking an active, festive experience.

Sights & Sounds appeals to a wide audience: families seeking memorable holiday traditions, young adults and couples looking for Instagram-worthy moments, and holiday enthusiasts searching for authentic seasonal events. Its diverse attractions make it a destination for visitors from across Central Texas and beyond.

Attendees often plan overnight stays, boosting hotel bookings and driving business to local restaurants and shops. This broad appeal ensures Sights & Sounds remains a premier holiday attraction and major tourism driver for San Marcos.

# Ability to Accomplish\*

Describe how you or your organization plan to execute this event. Things to consider:

- What experience do you have in planning this type of event?
- Have you investigated what is needed to accomplish the event (i.e. venues, permits needed, costs, volunteer support, timing, etc.)

The Sights & Sounds of Christmas Festival is organized and executed by a 100% volunteer board dedicated to producing a safe, high-quality event. Many board members have been involved for decades, bringing nearly 40 years of combined experience in planning, logistics, and community engagement. This long-standing commitment has allowed the festival to grow steadily while maintaining its reputation as one of Central Texas's premier holiday events.

Our team manages every aspect of the festival, including entertainment coordination, vendor selection, security, permits, budgeting, and marketing. With over 45 performance acts, 28+ food vendors, and thousands of nightly visitors, careful planning is essential. The board has established strong working relationships with the City of San Marcos, law enforcement, fire and EMS, and local organizations to ensure seamless operations.

Planning begins months in advance, starting with securing San Marcos Plaza Park as the primary venue and obtaining all required permits and safety approvals. Budgets are meticulously prepared and reviewed, with

funds raised through sponsorships, donations, and partnerships to cover infrastructure, marketing, entertainment, and security needs.

The festival relies on hundreds of volunteers who staff admissions, crowd management, setup, and teardown. Local schools, businesses, and civic groups provide additional support, making this a true community effort.

Our proven track record includes safely hosting tens of thousands of attendees each year. Detailed operational plans cover traffic flow, parking, vendor management, emergency procedures, and guest experience. From setup to closing night, every element is executed with precision and care.

With decades of expertise, strong city partnerships, and a passionate volunteer base, Sights & Sounds is fully prepared to deliver a magical, well-organized event that continues to grow and benefit the San Marcos community year after year.

### **Diversity**

**OPTIONAL**: Additional points that can be assigned to applications. Explain how your event supports and/or promotes diversity:

- What impact does your organization have on culturally specific populations in our community?
- How does your event address accessibility?
- Does your event address and enhance cultural equity?

Sights & Sounds of Christmas is committed to creating a festival that reflects and celebrates the diverse community of San Marcos and surrounding areas. Our mission is to provide a welcoming, family-friendly environment where people of all ages, backgrounds, races, religions, and orientations can come together to experience the magic of the holiday season.

### **Cultural Representation:**

The festival showcases a wide variety of performances from local schools, dance groups, musicians, and theater performers, representing the cultural fabric of our region. By offering every CISD school a chance to perform, we give young artists a platform to share their talents while celebrating their heritage.

Our vendor selection also reflects this commitment. Food and gift vendors from diverse backgrounds share their traditions, cuisines, and crafts, giving attendees the chance to experience global flavors and artistry. This supports small businesses and non-profits while fostering meaningful cross-cultural connections.

### Accessibility:

Sights & Sounds prioritizes accessibility so everyone can participate. Children 12 and under always receive free admission, making the festival affordable for families. The event site features ADA-compliant pathways, seating, and facilities so guests with disabilities can fully enjoy the festival.

### **Promoting Cultural Equity:**

By showcasing underrepresented performers, supporting minority-owned vendors, and maintaining a welcoming environment, Sights & Sounds actively promotes cultural equity. Every voice and tradition is celebrated, and our programming and partnerships reflect that value.

Through these efforts, Sights & Sounds unites the community, celebrates diversity, and provides a holiday tradition that truly belongs to everyone.

# Signature Grant Questions

### Marketing plan\*

Describe plans for promoting your event to out-of-town visitors. Include a general timeline for implementation. Things to consider:

- How will you promote San Marcos as an event and tourist destination to encourage overnight stays?
- Describe *paid advertising* and target audience that will be used. Provide links to websites and/or social media pages.
- How far in advance will you start promotions?
- What is your event's target audience? (i.e. family with young children, multi-generational group, young adults, couples, specific interests, what ages, demographics, etc.)

Sights & Sounds of Christmas will implement a robust marketing strategy designed to promote the festival as a premier holiday destination and drive tourism to San Marcos. Our plan focuses on attracting out-of-town visitors, encouraging overnight stays, and showcasing the city's vibrant dining, shopping, and entertainment opportunities.

### Promoting San Marcos as a Destination

We position the festival as more than an event—it's a reason to visit San Marcos. By highlighting attractions such as the San Marcos River, outlet shopping, wineries, and downtown dining, we encourage visitors to plan a full weekend experience. We also work with local hotels to offer special packages and partner with restaurants and retailers on promotions like "show your festival ticket for a discount." This drives overnight stays and local spending, benefiting the community and economy.

### Paid Advertising Strategy

Our campaign uses a mix of digital, print, and traditional media to maximize reach across Central Texas and beyond.

Digital Ads: Paid campaigns on Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok target families, holiday travelers, and event seekers in Austin, San Antonio, Houston, and Dallas.

Google Ads & SEO: Optimizing our website and search ads ensures visibility when people search for Texas holiday events or family activities.

Media Buys: Regional print, radio, and TV ads highlight the festival's unique offerings.

Outdoor Signage: If feasible, billboards or other displays may be placed along major routes to raise awareness and encourage last-minute attendance.

Websites & Social Media:

Website: www.sights-n-sounds.org

Facebook: facebook.com/SightsAndSoundsTexas

Instagram: instagram.com/smtxsightsandsounds

TikTok: tiktok.com/@SightsAndSoundsSMTX

Timeline for Marketing Rollout

April: Announce event dates and format.

Aug – Sept: Launch teaser campaigns and engage with past attendees on social media.

October: Focus on organic promotion and low-cost outreach to build awareness.

November – December: Launch major paid advertising, peak marketing efforts, influencer partnerships, and countdown campaigns leading up to opening night.

### **Target Audience**

The festival appeals to a wide audience, perfect for multi-generational groups and out-of-town visitors.

Families with Young Children: Free admission for kids 12 & under creates a budget-friendly holiday experience.

Multi-Generational Groups: Families attend together to support performers and build lasting traditions.

Holiday Enthusiasts: Guests seeking lights, festive foods, and immersive décor.

Young Adults & Couples: Drawn to vibrant holiday settings and photo-worthy moments like the 85-foot Christmas tree.

Runners & Fitness Fans: Drawn to the Jingle Bell Run 5K and Kid's 1K, blending fitness with holiday fun.

This strategy ensures Sights & Sounds draws tens of thousands of visitors, increases overnight stays, and positions San Marcos as a must-visit holiday destination.

# Tourism Impact\*

Describe why this event will draw visitors from outside San Marcos and how it will impact local businesses. Things to consider:

- What local businesses will feel the economic impact of your event?
- Is it on a day/time that encourages local dining, shopping or visitation to other attractions?
- How will this highlight San Marcos as an event and tourist destination?

Sights & Sounds of Christmas is one of the largest holiday events in Central Texas, drawing tens of thousands of visitors each year, many from outside San Marcos. The festival directly boosts the local economy through spending at hotels, restaurants, shops, and attractions. Families traveling from Austin, San Antonio, Houston, and beyond often plan overnight stays, booking rooms and exploring the area during their visit.

The event's timing over the first two weekends of December encourages guests to dine, shop, and enjoy San Marcos during a peak holiday season. Local restaurants and bars benefit from pre and post-event traffic, while downtown businesses and outlet malls experience strong holiday sales. Festival vendors also see significant revenue, with local non-profits and small businesses gaining direct community support.

Sights & Sounds promotes other San Marcos attractions such as the river, wineries, and entertainment venues, encouraging visitors to extend their stay. The festival's unique mix of over one million lights, live performances, food vendors, Santa's Gift Shop, and the only holiday-themed 5K and Kid's 1K in the region creates a powerful draw for families, runners, and holiday enthusiasts.

This broad appeal highlights San Marcos as a vibrant holiday destination and generates lasting tourism revenue, making Sights & Sounds one of the city's most impactful annual events.

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### Projected Hotel Room Nights Generated\*

Multiply the number of rooms by number of nights. For example, if 2 rooms are booked for 3 nights, that would be 6 room nights. Include total nights for projected visitors and participants.

1700

### Hotel Reservation\*

Did you contract with a host hotel?

Yes

### Room Night Tracking\*

How do you plan to track this information?

We will track hotel room nights through a combination of pre/post-event surveys, direct feedback from our blocked hotel, and participant registration data. Runners and festival attendees will be asked to indicate whether they stayed overnight.

# Budget Expenses - PROJECTED

# **Budget Expense Form Instructions\***

### **BUDGET CATEGORY EXPLANATIONS**

Category totals need to be entered in the table section below. It is suggested you keep a detailed budget for your event internally so you plan for a realistic budget. Grant awardees may be audited for their final report where the City requests copies of actual receipts. If you need a detailed expense spreadsheet for planning purposes, a sample template can be downloaded **here**.

### 1) Contracted Services:

This is not employees that receive a W2 from your organization. Actual monetary amount paid, not in-kind or sponsorship value. Examples include administrative, technical, consultant, CPA, lawyer, event coordinator, artist, photographer, videographer, set up/tear down labor, etc.

### 2) Venue Rental:

Actual monetary amount paid, not in-kind or sponsorship value

### 3) Equipment Rental:

Rental only-grant cannot be used to purchase equipment. Projectors, sound system, portable toilets, chairs, tables, linens, installation equipment, etc.

### 4) Supplies/Materials:

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Materials that are used for proposed event only and not for general daily use. Set up/tear down cleanup, paper goods, etc.

### 5) Advertising/Promotion:

Actual monetary amount paid, not in-kind or sponsorship value. Traditional, digital, and social media, collateral printing, influencer, etc. Hotel Occupancy Tax funded grant requires 15% of awarded funds be used for paid advertising.

### 6) Transportation/Shipping/Postage:

Travel for event's out of town featured artists, musicians, director, speaker, etc. that is not already included in their contracted fee. Shipping, postage, delivery fees for sending event related materials, etc.

### 7) Lodging:

This is part of your total budget but cannot be paid by grant funds. Other cash resources will need to pay this expense. List accommodation costs for event's out of town featured artists, musicians, director, speaker, etc. that isn't already included in their contracted fee.

### 8) Food/Beverage:

This is part of your total budget but cannot be paid by grant funds. Other cash resources will need to pay this expense. This does not include in-kind or sponsorship value for items.

### 9) Other:

Anything that does not fit in one of the above categories. Items like City Event permits, security, insurance, licensing and royalty fees to use musical scores or plays, costumes, etc.

I understand that I may only list expenses dedicated to this event.

AND I understand expense amounts may not include in-kind donations or value:

Yes, I agree to the above statement

# Admin only visibility

ACTUAL column below is admin only visibility so applicants can't see it.

However the table shares to the follow up for and applicant can see and complete that column only

### **Budget Expenses Overview**

Enter category totals from your detailed Budget Expense Template file uploaded.

If there are no expenses for a category, enter 0. Maximum grant request can be no more than 50% of the total budget.

Expense type	Projected Amount	Actual Amount
--------------	------------------	---------------

Contracted Services	\$0.00	
Venue Rental	\$0.00	
Equipment Rental	\$0.00	
Supplies/Materials	\$0.00	
Advertising/Promotion* MUST BE 15% of AWARD/REQUEST	\$0.00	
Transportation/Shipping/Postage	\$0.00	
Lodging	\$0.00	
Food/Beverage	\$0.00	
Other	\$0.00	
TOTAL: this will auto add entries	0	

# Budget Revenue and Grant Request - PROJECTED

Grant Amount Requested\* \$100,000.00

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# However the table shares to the follow up for and applicant can see and complete that column only

### **BUDGET REVENUE CATEGORY EXPLANATIONS**

Enter all revenue specific to THIS event

Category totals will need to be entered in the table section below. All amounts are for category income received/anticipated and not for in-kind services. If there is no income for a category enter 0.

### 1) Admission Charges:

Anticipated income earned from admission.

### 2) Registration Fees:

Anticipated income earned from vendor fees, competition fees, participation fees, etc.

### 3) Sponsorships/Donations:

Anticipated/received contributions from sponsorships, donations, fundraising.

### 4) San Marcos Public Event Grant Request:

Requested grant amount

### 5) Texas Commission on the Arts Grants:

Anticipated/received grant from Texas Commission on the Arts.

### 6) Other Grants:

Anticipated/received grant total from all other agencies.

### 7) Sales:

Anticipated income earned from concessions, merchandise sales, parking fees

### 8) Organizational Funds Available:

Amount of internal funds budgeted for this event.

### 9) Other:

Anything that does not fit in one of the above categories.

### **Revenue Overview**

All amounts are for category income received/anticipated and not for in-kind services.

If there is no expense for a category enter 0.

Revenue type	Projected Amount	Actual Amount
Admission Charges	\$0.00	

# **2025 EXPENDITURE BUDGET**

# The San Marcos Sights & Sounds of Christmas

Contract Vendor Food Vendor Payout	\$10,000 \$165,000
Banking Fees	\$1,600
Accounting/Bookkeeping	\$500
Dues & subscriptions	\$2,000
Insurance .	\$18,000
Legal & Professional Services	\$3,000
Meeting Meals	\$2,500
Rent or Lease of Buildings	\$7,300
Equipment Rental	\$10,000
Fencing	\$20,000
Sanitation	\$10,000
Waste Management	\$9,200
Tents	\$25,000
Transportation	\$12,000
Contract	\$20,000
Food Vouchers	\$2,000
Security	\$72,000
Admissions	\$20,000
Advertising & Marketing	\$40,000
Apparel	\$10,000
Christmas Light Set-Up	\$150,000
Capitol Improvements	\$25,000
Electrical Set-Up	\$60,000
Event Attractions	\$40,000
Meals & Entertainment	\$1,000
Signage	\$7,000
Sound Set-Up	\$23,000
Sponsor Expense	\$5,000
Supplies	\$25,000
Taxes & Licenses	\$16,700
Travel	\$500
Volunteer	\$5,500
Total Expenditures	\$818,800

# Meet the Team





























**Visit our website** www.sights-n-sounds.org