

Village of Oak Park ARPA Community Request Application

1. Project name: Oak Park Tourism Recovery Initiative (OPTRI)

2. Contact Person, Email:

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AGENCY OVERVIEW

3. Please describe your agency and your organization's mission and/or operations

Oak Park Tourism Recovery Initiative (OPTRI) is a consortium consisting of the following non-profit organizations. **Visit Oak Park** is the tourism bureau serving the Village of Oak Park whose mission is to promote the village's attractions and small businesses to attract visitors and increase revenue for the economic benefit of residents. Since 1974, **Oak Park Area Arts Council** has been the focal point for artistic activity in our community to celebrate, support, and promote local artists and arts organizations that strengthen and connect us. **Unity Temple Restoration Foundation** is a secular, non-profit organization founded in 1973 that is privately funded and responsible for the preservation of Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Temple serving as a tourist attraction while providing artistic and educational public programming. **Ernest Hemingway Foundation of Oak Park** is a literary arts and educational organization, serving as a tourist attraction as well as a community cornerstone for the arts and other arts organizations. **Frank Lloyd Wright Trust** mission is to engage, educate and inspire the public through interpretation of Frank Lloyd Wright's design legacy and preservation of his original sites for future generations through the operations of the FLW Home & Studio.

4. For your most recently ended fiscal year, provide the following:

Organization	Revenue	Expenses	Salaries/ Benefits	End Cash
Visit Oak Park *	\$860,464	\$864,883	\$170,141	N/A
OP Area Arts Council	\$216,900	\$109,200	\$85,211	\$188,600
Unity Temple Restoration Foundation **	Gen Op \$200,642 Cap Res \$321,727	Gen Op \$169,285 Cap Res \$267,560	\$96,437	Gen Op \$31,357 Cap Res \$54,167
Ernest Hemingway Foundation of OP	\$158,055	\$118,119	\$62,220	\$39,936
FLW Trust	\$3,411,709	\$3,468,655	\$1,444,043	(56,946)

* Visit Oak Park is an extremely lean organization with two employees and 63% of the bureau's total budget going towards advertising and marketing—the bureau's key mission; Per the bureau's grant agreements, Visit Oak Park is required to spend the total amount of its state and local funding each year.

** UTRF has two functioning budgets, one for General Operations and one for a Capital Reserve which is maintained solely for ongoing maintenance and long-term preservation of the building. Remaining net balance in general operations is diverted to the reserve at the end of the fiscal year.

5. Are there similar non-profit or private organizations that perform essentially the same services as your agency? If so, please list them.

There are no similar organizations. **Visit Oak Park** plays a vital role as the village's tourism bureau, helping to support all the village's attractions, business districts, small businesses and other stakeholders. Each of the **OPTRI** partners are all non-profit entities that have unique missions and programming. All of the partners share the same objective of strengthening our community and attracting visitors to spend their tourist dollars within our area.

Collaboration & Community Partnerships

6. Do you have partners that you are collaborating with to support this program financially or in other ways? Name them and the support you will receive from them.

The **Oak Park Tourism Recovery Initiative (OPTRI)** is a joint funding proposal and collaborative effort that includes Visit Oak Park, Frank Lloyd Wright Trust, Ernest Hemingway Foundation of Oak Park, Unity Temple Restoration Foundation, and Oak Park Area Arts Council. The funding is best realized as a means to strengthen each organization both individually and collectively so that we can better respond to the damaging effects of the pandemic, create opportunities for future collaborations, and together compete locally, regionally and nationally for tourist dollars. **OPTRI** partners, encouraged by the Village board, are currently working together to develop impactful synergies for marketing and advertising to support the village's economic recovery.

At least **\$100,000** of the funds granted to the individual organizations will be **reallocated** toward a collaborative approach to tourism outreach programs including an Oak Park Attractions Digital Tour Pass, and shared resources for digital advertising and public relations. No other outside support is being offered at this time for the outlined initiatives.

PROJECT NARRATIVE

7. Please describe or attach to this form a description of your proposed program.

OPTRI has attached an addendum with specifics for each partner as to their use of funds to assist each in their recovery from the pandemic in our efforts to wholly strengthen us both individually and collectively.

As part of the collaborative efforts, the Oak Park Tourism Recovery Initiative (OPTRI), proposes the following:

- **Oak Park Attractions Digital Pass:** The **OPTRI** partners will create a new digital pass that links ticketing to each of the village's attractions and offers cross-promotion/discount opportunities for small businesses. Visit Oak Park and the Oak Park Area Arts Council will collaborate to create a free, self-guided public art tour that will also be included as part of the digital pass;
- **Digital Advertising:** The **OPTRI** partners will execute digital advertising campaigns, both specific and broad in scope, in support of tourism attractions, cross promotion with area outlets, and the new digital pass in spring/summer/fall advertising campaigns;

- **Media & Public Relations:** In collaboration with all the **OPTRI** partners, we will pursue shared resources to support media relations activities to support attractions, cultural programs, and events;
- **Oak Park Tourism Committee:** Collectively, the **OPTRI** partners will continue to meet throughout the year to facilitate additional efforts for collaboration and to share resources, where available. We will also look to create an atmosphere of collaboration for future tourism and arts organizations' participation and strive to make these plug & play build-outs to maximize their impact.

Approach/Impact/Goals

8. How does the proposed initiative address immediate or delayed public health, economic or other community harms resulting from or exacerbated by the Covid-19 public health emergency?

The collaborative efforts of this initiative directly as well as indirectly addresses the negative economic impact of the pandemic on the village's tourism and arts sector. It is important to note, on average, our organizations saw an approximate decrease of 75%-100% in admissions and programmatic revenues over the previous two years. For **Visit Oak Park**, the loss of hotel/motel tax revenue has greatly impacted the bureau's ability to meet its local funding from the village in order to receive the full amount of state funds available to support the village's economic recovery. The **OPTRI partners** each help to support, through tourist patronage, the restaurants and outlets we enjoy within our area. Likewise, each **OPTRI** partner fosters community and engagement through a variety of programming and partnerships with area small businesses.

9. Describe overall program goals

The overall program goals for this initiative are to support the recovery of the village's tourism and arts sector for increased tourist visitation and investment in our community. This includes helping each partner with their individual recovery from the devastating effects of the previous two years in strengthening their marketing/operations capabilities and making needed capital improvements. **OPTRI** will collectively work together to meet new challenges in competing for those dollars by:

- Increase in tourism attendance with goals to attain 2019 levels
- Creation of new marketing and public relations efforts to build awareness outside of Oak Park by engaging a PR firm to identify media outlets, print and digital advertising options, potential partnership with group tour companies, etc.
- Production of a new Oak Park Attractions Digital Tour Pass
- Cross-marketing with local businesses to encourage spending within Oak Park
- Establishment of a tourism committee including representatives from all local tourist attractions and arts organizations to build new partnerships, cross-market, and direct visitors to more time and dollars spent in Oak Park

PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

Strategic Goals

10. Can you describe a link with this proposed program and the Village Board's goals?

Oak Park's cultural attractions and arts sector make the village a unique place to visit, work and live. The ability for tourism and the arts to continue to thrive is in direct alignment with the village board's goals, particularly neighborhood support. In turn, vibrant neighborhoods touch each of the board's goals in one way or another.

Tourism is now a major and substantial part of the global economy. Data indicates that travel and tourism contributed 8.81 trillion US dollars to the economy in 2018 (WTTC 2019). Tourism, both domestically and internationally, can encourage the preservation of culture, history, and culturally significant sites. The income of tourism assists in the preservation and restoration of nationally recognized historic sites. Oak Park is unique in that it is internationally recognized as the birth home of Ernest Hemingway (as well as other historic and contemporary figures) and the epicenter of Frank Lloyd Wright architecture and his well-regarded contemporaries. Oak Park has four National Historic Landmarks, three of which are open to the public, and one property that is part of a UNESCO World Heritage site. International tourists regard World Heritage sites as must-see places, and with only 24 sites in the whole country, Oak Park is poised to benefit greatly from Unity Temple's designation. Tourism traditionally has served as an economic benefit for the Oak Park community as a whole; in particular, small local businesses, restaurants, and lodging are positively impacted by the thousands of tourists Oak Park welcomes every year. Tourism organizations provide an outlet for volunteerism, cultural exchanges, and opportunities for employment. The availability of several public sites as rental facilities also provides economic opportunities for local restaurants, caterers, and employees.

Community Benefit

11. Describe the residents impacted (#, age) and over what duration; Is this program for low moderate income recipients ?

Having a vibrant tourism and arts sector attracts visitors, which, in turn, generates revenue and jobs that supports the entire community, including low- and moderate-income residents. Many of the tourist attractions either have internal employment opportunities (catering, maintenance, customer service) and/or hire external companies for these services creating opportunities for jobs and referrals for jobs. Arts organizations regularly host exhibits that provide artists outlets to showcase their work and generate revenue. Tourism also provides outlets for fixed income seniors to contribute their time and talents as volunteer docents, administrative assistants, and educators. There is no end date for these employment and volunteer opportunities; tourism attractions will continue to rely on human services for their daily operations.

Race Equity Impact

12. What racial/ethnic groups are currently most advantaged and most disadvantaged by the issues this proposal seeks to address?

Having a vibrant economy supported by tourism makes Oak Park desirable for everyone. While it's difficult to quantify the distribution of benefits by race, gender, age, income, etc. it is important to note that tourism benefits affect everyone in the community and those wishing to make Oak Park home in the future regardless of socio-economic background. This proposal seeks to assist **OPTRI** partners to recover and help maintain a vibrant tourism and arts sector that all residents can continue to enjoy.

13. What positive impacts on equality and inclusion, if any, could result from this proposal? What racial/ethnic groups could benefit? Will it reduce disparities or discrimination?

For the **OPTRI partners**, the funding in this proposal will enable them to support the village's minority and women-owned businesses, as well as provide outlets for new and diverse voices through a variety of event programming. Some of the partners are actively reaching out to performance groups in Oak Park and Chicago's west and south sides that represent a diverse range of talents, racial/ethnic groups, and traditions, which also brings their core audience base

to Oak Park. Some partners are able to collaborate with school groups from all over northeast Illinois, inspiring children to learn about design, architecture, and history within a tactile environment.

Measures & Reporting

14. Do you have program success indicators and progress benchmarks (list them)

The following indicators/data metrics will be used to evaluate the success of the **OPTRI's** program initiatives that will be developed and executed using this funding:

- **Media Coverage:** Increase local, regional, and national awareness for Oak Park through new advertising efforts appealing to visitors beyond the typical tourist demographic. With many free or reduced-rate events including the outdoor Art Walk and artistic programming in attractions, more people inside and outside Oak Park will be encouraged to attend and experience other Oak Park businesses.
- **Website traffic and social media impressions:** Each organization has methods in place to track web and social media interactions, success would be indicated by an increase in website clicks, amount of time spent on a page, number of followers, post interactions, e-newsletter open and click rates, etc.
- **Oak Park Attractions Digital Tour Pass:** benchmark to have this pass produced and in use within two months of receipt of funding. Future success will be indicated by a steady increase in use of the pass resulting in more ticket sales for attractions.
- **Hotel/motel tax growth:** With more tourists coming to Oak Park, there will be an increased need for lodging. With a new hotel being developed in Oak Park there is more opportunity for cross-marketing to encourage stays and visitation.
- **Attraction attendance growth:** steady increase in attendance for tours and events at each attraction, with a goal to reach at least 2019 levels by 2024.
- **Greater local engagement:** Increase volunteerism, attendance, and employment with nearby residents and communities.

15. How would you describe the impact to the community? How will these impacts be documented and evaluated that you are meeting the intended goals and community benefits? Please provide examples.

Tourism and the arts are vital to making Oak Park a unique place to visit, work and live. Without our attractions and arts, Oak Park would be a very different place. The impact and results of this program will be documented and evaluated per the indicators (data/metrics) noted in point #14 above. Quarterly reports will be provided to the village to document outcomes.

Project Cost

16. Total Project cost: Total ARPA request: \$877,000

17. Provide timetable when funds will be spent:

For Visit Oak Park, the disbursement would include \$96,000 before June 30, 2022 and \$96,000 before June 30, 2023 to meet state of Illinois matching requirements. With village board approval, the other OPTRI partners can work towards a timeline for targeted expenditures, knowing that all funds must be spent two years from the date of receipt to each of the OPTRI organizations.

18. Do you need all the grant funds in one distribution

For Visit Oak Park, see above. The preference for the other OPTRI partners is to each receive their allocated funding in one distribution so we can confidently budget for and secure the

needed resources, outlined in the proposals:

- FLW Trust: \$195,000
- Hemingway Foundation: \$155,000
- Unity Temple Restoration Foundation: \$110,000
- OPAAC: \$225,000

Project Sustainability

19. Do you have a plan to keep this initiative in place once the one-time ARPA funds are used? Please describe.

The tourism committee will stay in place following this initiative. The capital and operating expenditures will have long-term positive effects, marketing and audience development will build awareness-we can continue to use the models created during the funding period long-term. The impactful experiences from this funding will allow other tourism and arts organizations to benefit from increased awareness of Oak Park attractions and joint programming and advertising efforts.

Timetable:

20. Provide a comprehensive timeline to implement your proposed program and what is the duration of the program.

Timelines will differ based on each individual organization’s capacity. With an eye towards ways that allow OPTRI to capitalize on the upcoming (hopefully) high season, we will do our best to expeditiously develop a timeline where applicable. With the assumption that funds will be distributed in Q2 of 2022, the following timeline is an estimate of both the collaborative initiatives outlined in question #9 and individual organizations’ initiatives:

ORG	Year one	Year two
OPTRI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Begin production of digital pass ● Implement digital pass ● Create new marketing strategies with PR firm ● Invest in group tour Initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Creation of tourism committee ● Establish cross-marketing partnerships within tourism committee
VOP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● \$96K gap funding to assist in Visit OP achieve its mission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● \$96K gap funding to assist in Visit OP achieve its mission
OPAAC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Designate routes for Village ArtWalk ● Prep, setup of all photos ● Interviews of artists for the Otocast App ● Tech upgrades ● Begin marketing and advertising efforts w/OPTRI ● Hire project manager 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Determine what additions are desired for the app ● Analyze usage and customer satisfaction

UTRF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Technology upgrades ● Hire Audience Development Specialist ● Establish new advertising and marketing strategies ● Implement new local marketing campaigns for program attendance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● End of fiscal year analysis of attendance and online engagement ● Build new local and national partnerships for cross-marketing ● Hire additional staff for engagement and operations (not part of ARPA funds) ● Implement new statewide, national and international campaigns
EHFOP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Technology upgrades, integrations and new platforms as needed ● Digital integration w/partners ● Capital improvements, bid process and project completion by Q4 ● New strategic marketing initiatives via collaborations (<i>OPTRI and others</i>) ● Hire program operation staff person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Analysis of data/metrics, and adjust strategies as needed ● Capital improvements continued, ADA upgrades, etc. ● Build new local and national partnerships for cross-marketing ● Build out new training platform
FLWT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Website service provider overhaul/ data migration (current system becomes obsolete in 2023) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Revamp security structures ○ Improve current web pages/structure ○ Streamline online programming/tourist experience ● Design/implement strategic digital marketing campaigns to drive tourism numbers back up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Continue research and active digital marketing data collection. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Adjusting campaign variables as necessary to output optimum messaging

The program duration will be long-lasting. With the funding we will be able to develop the strategy and tools as outlined resulting in a significant growth in tourist traffic. Several of the initiatives we develop will remain and assist in paying for themselves in future years. All of the attractions will continue to provide tourism and programming for the long-term.

Other:

21. If you don't receive the funds, what are the impacts and will the program not occur in the future? What would be your plan to get this program running without ARPA assistance?

For Visit Oak Park, the loss of this funding would result in the forfeit of valuable state funding for the bureau. The loss of funds would result in the reduction of marketing and advertising initiatives to support the village's economic recovery. For the other **OPTRI** partners, due to the devastating impact of the last two years, none of the organizations would currently have the resources to move forward with the outlined initiatives, so the proposed plans would not and could not be implemented, so the plan would effectively end.

Without these funds, there would be a noticeable impact on the community. As we have observed during COVID, with fewer overnight travelers and day visitors, local businesses have

felt the effect of a significant decrease in hotel stays, restaurant patronage, and shoppings. It is with the support of tourism in Oak Park that all of the business will thrive, leaving more room for employment and volunteerism for the residents.

22. Can your program or a portion of your project wait until January 2023 to coincide with the anticipated next phase of community ARPA requests? What would be lost if this program waited until 2023? Do you have a plan to make up this loss?

For Visit Oak Park, the bureau could wait to receive the second \$96,000 payment until January 2023. For the other **OPTRI** partners, as noted, due to the devastating impact of the last two years, none of the organizations would currently have the resources to move forward with the outlined initiatives. The delay in collaborative marketing would severely impact our ability to take advantage of the summer tourism season. Lack of funding would hinder most of us from hiring needed staff/contractors to further our operations. Further, the program initiatives have varying ROI timeframes. Some investments will have a more immediate impact while others have a longer term horizon which takes time to build momentum.

23. Are you requesting ARPA funding from other agencies for this program? Are you requesting ARPA funding from other agencies for other programs?

None of the **OPTRI** partners are requesting ARPA funding from other agencies.