

Nearly \$500,000 Here: Gov. Pritzker Awards \$6.6 Million in Route 66 and Local Tourism Marketing Grants

by Submitted by Great Rivers & Routes
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SPRINGFIELD – Governor JB Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) today announced 58 awards totaling \$6.6 million

through the Route 66 (\$3.7 million) and Tourism Marketing Grant Programs (\$2.9 million) to boost local tourism efforts and attract visitors to drive along the historic Route 66 and Enjoy Illinois.

“Illinois truly is the middle of everything, as perfectly demonstrated by the hundreds of miles of America’s highway—Route 66 that travels through our state,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “These grants will stimulate local economies across Illinois and highlight our growing EV sector, honoring the history of Route 66 and looking to the future.”

The Route 66 Grant Program is awarding \$3.7 million in funding to seven recipients for the development of tourism, education, preservation, and promotion leading up to the 100th Anniversary of Route 66 in 2026. 300 miles of Route 66 weave through Illinois, and Route 66’s economic and historical impact is felt firsthand in communities across Illinois. The grantees will help develop and enhance sites along Route 66, with a focus on future transportation and tourism trends such as electric vehicles.

“Illinoisans know our state is not only the best place to live, work and do business, but also the best place to invite friends and family from near and far for a visit,” said DCEO Director Kristin A. Richards. “The millions of dollars the State is investing in local tourism promotion and enhancing the historic Route 66 will do wonders for Illinois’ tourism industry while boosting local economies and promoting the future of travel.”

This funding supports a variety of projects across the state, including the installation of iconic Route 66 signage, pylons, monuments, as well as investments in museums, exhibits, service areas and rest stops. As Illinois’ transportation sector evolves to include more electric vehicles (EVs), the projects also focus on building out EV infrastructure and promoting the state's tourism areas as EV destinations.

Grantee	Award Amount	Project Description
Bloomington-Normal Area Convention and Visitors Bureau	\$263,319	Development, site preparation, and installation of monument gateway signage in five communities along Route 66 in McLean County, as well as one Level 3 charger including Route 66 design and installation and statewide Route 66 promotion.
		Installation of architectural pylons on the north & south side of Jackson Boulevard where it meets Michigan Avenue. The

Choose Chicago	\$210,756	Pylons will incorporate the iconic Route 66 road sign language attesting to the historical significance of Route 66 and its starting point in Chicago. The Pylons will also include a QR code with information on EV charging stations along the route. The funding will also install interpretive signage in four diverse neighborhoods in Tri-Taylor, Douglass Park, North Lawndale and Little Village.
Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau	\$493,032	Funding for multiple projects, including expansion of the mural trail, creating interpretative panels for Green Book sites, Route 66 event signage for promotional use across the state, funding for Route 66 promotion at festivals and events, parking upgrades, exhibitions and more.
Heritage Corridor Convention and Visitors Bureau	\$1,609,400	Funding for a variety of statewide Route 66 promotional programs, including statewide marketing/advertising and promotional costs. Additionally, funding will support EV charging station and landscaping projects in Lockport, Bolingbrook and Joliet, several Route 66 monuments, murals, and Route 66-themed enhancements to welcome centers and local museums.
Logan County Tourism Bureau	\$29,320.00	Installation of two Level 2 EV chargers and Route 66 insignia embedded on the road to support with wayfinding.
City of Springfield	\$623,000	Creation of 12 murals connecting Williamsville, Sherman, Springfield, Chatham and Auburn to the murals in Heritage Corridor and Great Rivers & Routes service area, as well as upgrades to Shea's Gas Station and 12 site specific wayside exhibits.
	\$475,000	Various projects to add or upgrade iconic stops along Route 66 in Oak Park, including an illuminated Route 66 Gateway

Visit Oak Park

structure on Ogden Avenue, new Route 66 signage, wayfinding signage to iconic Route 66 locations, and new signage to promote new car chargers.

“Both Brookfield Zoo and the start of Route 66 are fan favorites among children and parents alike, and the State’s tourism marketing dollars will help them both continue to be a landmark for the next generation,” said Sen. Javier Cervantes (D-Chicago). “Every dollar spent while visiting Brookfield Zoo or traversing Route 66 bolsters our local economy and keeps our businesses humming.”

Through the Illinois Travel and Tourism Grant Program, \$2.9 million is being awarded to 51 grantees to support local tourism promotional efforts. This program provides funding for promotional efforts by local governments, municipalities, non-profits and local promotional groups such as Illinois' Certified Convention and Visitor Bureaus (CVBs), with the goal of attracting visitors to destinations, attractions, and events throughout Illinois. This program is funded by a federal Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant.

“The Village of Rosemont will soon be able to launch advertising campaigns to draw in out-of-state visitors thanks to the latest round of local tourism marketing grants,” said Sen. Robert Martwick (D-Chicago). “Illinois’ tourism industry is thriving, and Rosemont will continue to be a top destination for visitors as word spreads about the variety of amenities available in the area.”

Through the grant opportunity, the State is matching local funds used to promote destinations, attractions and events through marketing such as promotional materials, media production costs, billboards, and promotional materials at trade shows. The ultimate goal of the program is to support promotional projects that increase visitation and overnight stays, thereby fueling the local economies across the state.

“I’m pleased to see the State of Illinois partner with Kane County to promote the beauty and adventures of the Fox River we all know and love with creative, consistent branding,” said Sen. Karina Villa (D-West Chicago). “Families in Kane County have been lucky enough to enjoy the Fox River for years, and these tourism marketing grants will ensure the local landmark continues to not only be enjoyed by its neighbors, but also by visitors from near and far for years to come.”

Grant awards will help increase marketing efforts outside of Chicago to promote The Joffrey Ballet and further promote Visit Champaign County's destinations through print, digital and video advertising to drive economic impact, among many other projects.

“Thanks to Illinois’ unmatched tourism marketing campaigns, locals aren’t the only ones who know about the sought-after destinations and hidden gems in every corner of the state,” said Rep. Lance Yednock (D-Ottawa). “The dollars awarded to DeKalb, LaSalle County and Ottawa in the latest round of tourism funding are essential to encouraging trips to Illinois while ensuring local economies benefit from the uptick in visitors.”

Grants were awarded to entities in every economic region in the state, with awards ranging from \$9,640 to \$100,000, with an average award of \$57,502 for a total of \$2.9 million. A link to the full list of the recipients can be [found here](#).

“The iconic Route 66 attracts visitors from around the world to drive on the historic highway and enjoy everything Illinois has to offer – from the biggest cities to the smallest towns and every place in between,” said Rep. Larry Walsh, Jr. (D-Joliet). “As we come upon Route 66’s 100th-anniversary celebration, I’m thrilled that Joliet and Will County will be getting the opportunity to shine.”

The State of Illinois continues to prioritize our tourism industry as millions of visitors spend billions of dollars annually across Illinois, boosting economic development and supporting jobs in the industry. The State recently awarded \$22.5 million in grant funding for [89 projects](#) across Illinois to support local festivals and attractions and drive tourism across the state. In FY23 to date, hotel tax collections have surpassed all of FY22 collections and are on-track to surpass the highest fiscal year collections on record in FY19. Per the latest data available, in 2021 Illinois welcomed more than 97 million visitors who spent more than \$32 billion in the state.

The success of Illinois' tourism sector is due to commitment to supporting the industry as well as the Illinois Office of Tourism's award-winning ‘Middle of Everything’ campaign. New data from Longwoods International shows that the campaign had an enormous positive economic impact – leading to an additional 2 million trips which equated to an additional \$1 billion spent in Illinois hotels, restaurants, small businesses, and attractions. Additionally, every \$1 spent on the campaign equated to \$91 in visitor spending while generating \$10 in state and local tax revenue for every dollar spent – an enormous return on investment.