

2026 Clearwater Jazz Holiday Funding Request Memo

As part of its High Impact event funding request, Clearwater Jazz Holiday Foundation appreciates the opportunity to submit this memo outlining Clearwater Jazz Holiday's proven success record, longtime value, and community benefit. Clearwater Jazz Holiday is one of the longest running cultural events in Clearwater, making it a staple attraction in the community. As a signature, reoccurring event with a proven track record and special history and impact to downtown, we appreciate the consideration of the funding amounts requested with this application.

Background

At the 2025 Downtown Development Board meeting, council members expressed support for a multi-year Clearwater Jazz Holiday agreement as we looked ahead to the 47th through 50th Clearwater Jazz Holiday festivals (2026 through 2029), recognizing the many planning benefits such an arrangement would provide. During that discussion, we indicated Clearwater Jazz Holiday would work with City staff and prepare draft agreements for consideration. After the 2025 event concluded, Clearwater Jazz Holiday submitted draft concepts for multi-year agreements with the City of Clearwater (High Impact Event in-kind support) and the DDB (High Impact Event funding support). As part of the process, we reviewed the drafts internally with Parks and Recreation to gather overall feedback from the various City services, as well as input on operational considerations and other City recommendations - all in an effort to present a unified request to City Council and the DDB for approval.

The City has been an invaluable partner - both through its annual financial support and its in-kind services that make the event possible. That consistent commitment has helped sustain one of Clearwater's most cherished community traditions, even through unprecedented challenges from the pandemic, hurricanes, and temporary relocations during the Imagine Clearwater construction. Through it all, we have together kept the tradition going.

Now that we've reestablished the festival's Back to Our Roots format in Coachman Park, we have an opportunity to continue our momentum and audience engagement in a way that honors the City's investment and strengthens Clearwater's cultural identity as a live music destination.

The proposed DDB multi-year agreement also includes the companion request for support of our CJH Presents Music Series Holiday Experience at Station Square Park, which we've traditionally submitted alongside the Clearwater Jazz Holiday festival request each year, and which has also been incorporated as part of the DDB agreement annually.

Funding Request

As per the customary agreement between Clearwater Jazz Holiday Foundation (CJH) and the DDB, CJH requests grant payments to CJH on a reimbursement basis for event-related expenditures* incurred as authorized by the parties' agreement up to the following amounts:

| Clearwater Jazz Holiday | Amount | CJH Holiday Experience | Amount |
|--|---------------|-------------------------------|---------------|
| 47 th CJH October 15-18, 2026 | \$140,000 | December 5, 2026 | \$8,000 |
| 48 th CJH October 14-17, 2027 | \$140,000 | December 4, 2027 | \$8,000 |
| 49 th CJH October 19-22, 2028 | \$140,000 | December 9, 2028 | \$8,000 |
| 50 th CJH October 18-21, 2029 | \$150,000 | December 8, 2029 | \$8,000 |

*Consistent with DDB guidelines and similar to the 2025 request, event-related expenditures to be allocated at CJH discretion include entertainment (i.e. artists deposits and fees), event production and infrastructure costs (i.e. décor and design, audio-visual equipment, printing, other event materials, security, insurance, and city fees), and marketing and promotion expenses. Having this flexibility is very helpful to our planning.

Program Descriptions

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Program Description - Clearwater Jazz Holiday

For more than four decades, Clearwater Jazz Holiday has united the community through its signature Clearwater Jazz Holiday music festival - one of Clearwater's most enduring cultural traditions. Now entering its 47th year, the festival is a time-proven, community-centered event with a strong track record of artistic excellence, operational success, and meaningful economic and cultural impact for the City of Clearwater and the surrounding region.

The Clearwater Jazz Holiday is a multi-day, multi-genre music festival with a distinctive jazzfest spirit, featuring diverse, dynamic, and family-friendly programming. While rooted in jazz, the festival embraces a broad musical spectrum, attracting a wide cross-section of residents and visitors. Over the years, the event has evolved into a cornerstone community celebration that not only anchors Clearwater Jazz Holiday Foundation's year-round mission of inspiring and enriching lives through live music and music education, but also contributes to downtown vibrancy, tourism, and local business activity.

With the continued partnership and support of the City of Clearwater, the Clearwater Jazz Holiday will celebrate its 47th year October 15-18, 2026, in the beautifully renovated Coachman Park. Building on the successful return to its "Back to Our Roots" format in 2025, the 2026 festival will again feature four days of live music programming centered on the large green adjacent to The Sound amphitheater.

The established festival footprint includes evening headliner performances on the main stage, complemented by late-afternoon concerts on two smaller stages located in the Lower Plaza and on Promenade Pier. This multi-stage layout creates a dynamic, walkable experience that creatively activates Coachman Park.

The 2026 festival format offers multiple access points designed to balance accessibility, comfort, and community tradition. Concertgoers may purchase reserved seats and general admission access (blankets and lawn chairs) on the green. The 2026 experience will also feature late afternoon, smaller concerts in the Lower Plaza and Promenade Pier prior to the headlining artists taking the main stage in the evenings on the green. Unlike the 2025 format, pursuant to recent strategy discussions with the City, these side stage areas, as well as the bluff overlooking the green, will be free and open to the public at no cost.

To further support families and accessibility, children under the age of 12 are admitted free on the green when accompanied by a paid GA adult attendee.

Through this proven and successful format, Clearwater Jazz Holiday continues to celebrate Clearwater's identity as a welcoming cultural destination, foster community connection, and deliver meaningful benefits to local partners, businesses, artists, educators, and audiences.

Impact to Downtown

The longstanding festival tradition helps generate substantial economic impact, drives tourism, provides great exposure for downtown, and increases foot traffic to downtown businesses.

- **Marketing Value!** Clearwater Jazz Holiday comprehensive year-round, marketing campaigns will highlight the downtown district by showcasing the Clearwater Jazz Holiday celebration.
- **Visitors!** Clearwater Jazz Holiday has a proven record of attracting visitors to downtown Clearwater with its family friendly, dynamic lineups and diverse audiences. Programming the side stages earlier in the afternoon, free and open to the public in 2026, will also draw visitors to downtown earlier in the day. We also plan to position young musicians along Cleveland Street through our Give Them a Stage Program to extend the music into the downtown corridor.
- **Benefit to Downtown Merchants!** Increased visitors downtown and earlier in the day means increased traffic and more exposure for downtown merchants plus the opportunity to participate onsite (food sales) at the festival.
- **Diversity and Accessibility!** Clearwater Jazz Holiday's diverse festival programming has historically translated to a diverse, multicultural audience of all ages and backgrounds. Affordable pricing also keeps the festival accessible. Our Bill Horne Community Day Fund also provides special access to the festival including attendees from economically underserved populations and other communities we serve throughout the year.

Event Dates and Times

Setup: Monday October 12, 2026

Breakdown: Monday October 19, 2026

Event Start Date: Thursday October 15, 2026

Event End Date: Sunday October 18, 2026

Event Start/End Times: Thursday 4:00PM-9:30PM; Friday 4:00PM-10:30PM; Saturday 3:00PM-10:30PM; Sunday 3:00PM-9:30PM

Outside Support

Clearwater Jazz Holiday Foundation is currently developing its 2026 operational, sales, and marketing strategies for the 47th Clearwater Jazz Holiday and is in the process of renewing corporate partnerships, High Note Society memberships, and cultivating new sponsors. The organization also maintains a robust annual grant-writing program that supports both the festival and its year-round Education & Outreach initiatives.

Sustaining Clearwater Jazz Holiday requires a broad network of public, private, and philanthropic partners. CJH operates in an increasingly competitive environment, with rising artist costs, a crowded festival marketplace, and ongoing uncertainty in grant funding, all while continuing to deliver a high-quality festival experience and robust year-round community programming.

In addition to City of Clearwater support, CJH seeks funding each year from Visit St. Pete-Clearwater, state arts grants, and corporate partners. While the 2026 sponsor roster is still being finalized, CJH anticipates continued participation from Duke Energy, Suncoast Tampa Association of Realtors, Blue Water Wealth Management, Raymond James, Creative Contractors, Crown Automotive, Flagship Bank, Freeman Sound, Florida Smooth Jazz Foundation, and Johnson Pope, among others. Single Source Insurance has also recently committed as a new sponsor. CJH is eligible for funding through the Florida Division of Cultural Affairs based on its 2025 application scoring, though final award levels, if any, will not be known until later in 2026 and depend on state legislative and gubernatorial decisions.

Additional Considerations

Recent Historical Context

As a long-standing signature event for the City of Clearwater, Clearwater Jazz Holiday has historically relied on a combination of City in-kind services and financial sponsorship support to successfully present and sustain the annual festival. In 2025, the City transitioned large events to the High Impact Event Co-Sponsorship Program, which provides in-kind support only, with cash sponsorship requests directed through the Downtown Development Board (DDB). For the 46th Clearwater Jazz Holiday in 2025, CJH received \$125,000 in DDB cash sponsorship support, in addition to continued City in-kind services. This structure has provided a strong and collaborative framework for supporting major community events while aligning resources across the City and DDB.

Evolving Festival Model and Financial Considerations

As part of recent multi-year agreement discussions, the City outlined several updates to the festival model that will shape Clearwater Jazz Holiday operations in the coming years. Beginning with the upcoming multi-year agreement term, CJH is anticipated to contribute toward a portion of City-provided in-kind services. The timing of the initial contribution remains under discussion; however, the framework contemplates a phased approach with planned annual increases of approximately 5% of the estimated service value once implemented. In addition, certain festival areas, including side stage areas and the bluff overlooking the green, will be designated as free and open to the public.

These enhancements meaningfully expand public access and community benefit, aligning with the City’s vision for inclusivity and activation of public spaces. At the same time, they introduce new financial considerations for CJH. Specifically, the required contribution toward in-kind services represents a new expense category, while expanded free-access areas reduce a portion of traditional earned ticket revenue (estimated conservatively at approximately \$15,000 annually).

Together, these changes reflect an evolving festival model that increases accessibility and public benefit while also shifting the financial structure required to support the event. These evolving factors were not fully known at the time of CJH’s initial draft request.

Alignment with Revised Funding Request

As these elements were further clarified, CJH revisited its original multi-year funding request to ensure it accurately reflects the updated operating environment.

The initial request contemplated \$135,000 annually, increasing to \$150,000 in the final year in recognition of the 50th Anniversary celebration. In light of the additional cost-sharing requirements and changes to revenue-generating areas, CJH has adjusted its request to \$140,000 annually for Years 1–3, and \$150,000 in Year 4.

This revised request is intended to help offset the combined impact of these changes, while ensuring the continued quality, safety, and accessibility of the festival experience.

Sustaining a Community Asset

City in-kind services, together with DDB financial sponsorship, remain essential to delivering a safe, high-quality, and accessible Clearwater Jazz Holiday. These combined resources ensure the festival continues to serve residents, attract visitors, support downtown businesses, and generate meaningful cultural and economic impact.

As a mission-driven nonprofit, Clearwater Jazz Holiday Foundation relies on the annual festival as its primary source of earned revenue - supporting not only the event itself, but also its year-round education, outreach, and community programming. Sustaining this balance is critical to preserving both the festival tradition and the broader impact it delivers throughout the community.

Program Description - CJH Presents Holiday Experience

Clearwater Jazz Holiday Foundation is additionally requesting \$8,000 during each year of the proposed multi-year agreement to support and enhance the Station Square Park Holiday Experience in December as part of our continuing CJH Presents Music Series.

Similar to our past partnering plans, the concert is a ticketed event with tickets pre-sold by Clearwater Jazz Holiday and proceeds benefiting Clearwater Jazz Holiday Foundation. We keep ticket pricing very affordable for these events, and we also provide comp tickets to CJH Education & Outreach Partners such as the neighborhood family centers and other organizations we serve with our outreach programs.

The funds will support artist fees and services, sound & lighting, restrooms, equipment, tables, setup, marketing, city fees, insurance, and security.

Impact to Downtown

- **Marketing Value!** Clearwater Jazz Holiday advertises its CJH Presents events year-round, so this Station Square Park concert will be promoted all year highlighting downtown as part of the popular series.
- **Visitors!** Clearwater Jazz Holiday has a proven record of attracting visitors to downtown Clearwater with its Holiday Experience concert. The concert is anticipated to attract 300 attendees.
- **Benefit to Downtown Merchants!** History has shown that many CJH Presents concert attendees grab dinner with downtown merchants prior to the shows or alternatively eat at the concerts. CJH has had good success working with downtown restaurants, providing them with opportunities to sell food to concert attendees at no cost to the merchants.
- **Performance Opportunities and Community Cultural Development!** Supporting CJH Presents is to support performing artists and community cultural development by creating opportunities for visitors to experience diverse, quality live music. Now a regular part of CJH programming, these events have provided stages to approximately 134 bands over 78 events at 11 different venues and attract diverse audiences.

A Note on Music, Community, Legacy, and Impact

Clearwater Jazz Holiday Foundation is a longstanding, Clearwater-based nonprofit organization rooted in the transformative power of live music and music education to inspire and enrich lives. For more than 47 years, the organization has brought the community together through Clearwater's signature music festival - a multi-day jazz celebration featuring diverse, world-class performances that generate significant cultural and economic impact while showcasing the vibrancy of the downtown district.

The impact of Clearwater Jazz Holiday extends far beyond the stage. Year-round, the Foundation advances its mission through innovative education and outreach initiatives, including music appreciation and instructional programs, student scholarships, jazz camps, online learning resources, and performance opportunities for emerging musicians. Programs such as *History of Jazz*, *My Journey with Jazz*, *Give Them a Stage*, and *Young Lions*, along with the *CJH Presents Music Series* and *High Note Society*, inspire the next generation of music lovers and artists, empower young musicians, and create meaningful pathways for engagement across schools, neighborhood family centers, and community organizations.

At the same time, Clearwater Jazz Holiday plays a vital role in positioning downtown Clearwater as a dynamic destination. As a City flagship event, the festival attracts visitors, supports downtown merchants, and keeps high-quality cultural experiences accessible to residents and guests alike. Through a comprehensive and far-reaching marketing campaign, the festival generates substantial exposure for the downtown district and aligns directly with the Downtown Development Board's goal of increasing awareness of downtown as a vibrant place to live, work, and visit.

Tourism and economic impact remain central to the Foundation's work. Rooted in its origins as a chamber-led initiative designed to attract visitors, Clearwater Jazz Holiday continues to deliver a one-of-a-kind destination experience through high-profile artist lineups, diverse programming, and the unparalleled backdrop of Clearwater's waterfront. By highlighting the region's natural beauty and cultural appeal, the festival drives visitor spending on lodging, dining, and local attractions - strengthening the local economy and reinforcing Clearwater's reputation as a premier destination for entertainment and cultural experiences. Additional initiatives, including the *CJH Presents Music Series* and the *Holiday Experience in Station Square Park*, further activate downtown spaces, attract new audiences, and create opportunities for local business engagement.

These efforts are grounded in the Foundation's core values:

Music

We value music as a transformative force that fosters unity, inspires creativity, enriches lives, and serves as a catalyst for education and cultural connection.

Education & Outreach

We believe that music appreciation, instruction, and performance opportunities ignite creativity, cultivate musicianship, inspire lifelong engagement in the arts, and build new and diverse audiences.

Community

Community is at the heart of everything we do. Through live events and outreach initiatives, we connect, inspire, and serve a broad and diverse audience. Our work is made possible through the collective efforts of volunteers, sponsors, partners, and supporters who help us deliver inclusive, impactful programming.

Together, these values align closely with the City of Clearwater's vision and priority areas of community well-being and economic opportunity - fostering community pride and belonging, enhancing education, inspiring volunteerism, and supporting a strong, inclusive, and engaged community.

In addition to enhancing Clearwater's cultural and entertainment landscape, Clearwater Jazz Holiday Foundation's initiatives promote personal and community development, expand access to the arts, cultivate creativity, and provide opportunities for learning, performance, collaboration, and business growth. These efforts contribute to a vibrant and economically diverse community that invests in its future and remains a wonderful place to live, learn, work, and play.

In these ways, Clearwater Jazz Holiday continues to serve as a key cultural and economic driver - enriching lives, uniting the community, supporting local businesses, and elevating Clearwater as a premier destination for music, culture, and tourism.

Thank you for your consideration of this request and for your continued support of the longstanding Clearwater Jazz Holiday tradition of Music, Education & Outreach, Community, and Impact.