



Tourism Entity Overview

Two separate significant changes relating to Tourism Entities in the Wisconsin Room Tax Statute 66.0615 took place in the 2015/16 state legislative sessions. Both changes are incorporated into this Overview in order to provide current guidance on the updated law.

First, in July 2015 with the adoption of WI. Act 55, a municipality imposing a room tax will, as of January 1, 2017, have exactly two choices relating to the oversight of the portion of Room Tax revenue that must be allocated to “tourism promotion and tourism development” (TP&TD). This portion must be given to either a tourism “commission” or a “tourism entity”. There are specific requirements relating to each of these. WH&LA’s “*Tourism Commission Overview*” is covered separately in the *Wisconsin Room Tax Series* resources, and this composition provides an overview for the Tourism Entity.

Second, on March 30, 2016, WI. Act 301 was signed into law providing revisions to the statutory definition of “Tourism Entity” and the composition of its governing body, all of which went into effect immediately.

New Statutory Definition of “Tourism Entity”

(f) “Tourism entity” means a nonprofit organization that came into existence before January 1, 2015, spends at least 51 percent of its revenues on tourism promotion and tourism development, and provides destination marketing staff and services for the tourism industry in a municipality, except that if no such organization exists, a municipality may contract with one of the following entities:

- 1. A nonprofit organization that spends at least 51 percent of its revenues on tourism promotion and tourism development, and provides destination marketing staff and services for the tourism industry in a municipality.*
- 2. A nonprofit organization that was incorporated before January 1, 2015, spends 100 percent of the room tax revenue it receives from a municipality on tourism promotion and tourism development, and provides destination marketing staff and services for the tourism industry in a municipality.*

To provide clarity to this definition, we will address 3 types of organizations that could be eligible to provide tourism promotion and tourism development services for a municipality or Tourism Commission, per 66.0615.

“Tourism Entity”

An existing entity that fits the definition of “Tourism Entity” must have achieved all of the following:

- Official classification by the IRS as a non-profit organization by January 1, 2015 (*Note: governmental agencies have a different classification*)
- Spends a minimum of 51% of the entity’s revenue on tourism promotion and tourism development (as per the statutory definition)
- Provides destination marketing staff and services for the tourism industry in a municipality. (*Note: with this definition, a Tourism Entity may service more than one municipality, and does not need to be located in each municipality it services*).

A Tourism Entity may receive room tax revenue either directly from a municipality or from an appointed Tourism Commission that contracts with them. Regardless of which way they receive their room tax revenue, all of it must be spent on “tourism promotion and tourism development “ as defined in the statute.

If there is no “Tourism Entity” fitting the definition outlined above, a municipality or a tourism commission may contract with one of the following alternate organizations to expend the room tax revenue allocated for tourism promotion and development (TP&TD), as outlined in the statute:

Alternate Nonprofit Organization Option #1 *(Generally a post-January 1, 2015 CVB or Chamber of Commerce)*

This organization would typically be a more recently created convention and visitors bureau (CVB), also sometimes known as a destination marketing organization (DMO), or a chamber of commerce in a dominantly tourist area. The difference between this organization and a “tourism entity” is purely the creation date. The requirements are:

- Official classification by the IRS as a non profit organization (with no date requirement)
- Spends a minimum of 51% of the entity’s revenue on tourism promotion and tourism development (as per the statutory definition)
- Provides destination marketing staff and services for the tourism industry in the municipality.

Alternate Nonprofit Organization Option #2 *(Generally an established Chamber of Commerce focusing and spending most of their revenue on the development of multiple industries, but using the room tax revenue received only for TP&TD)*

The difference between this organization, usually a chamber of commerce, and a “tourism entity” is that the majority of their budget is not spent on TP&TD, but all of their room tax revenue is. The requirements are:

- Official classification by the IRS as a nonprofit organization prior to January 1, 2015.
- Spends 100 percent of the room tax revenue it receives on tourism promotion and tourism development (TP&TD) as outlined in the statute.
- Provides destination marketing staff and services for the tourism industry in the municipality

What Requirements Must a Tourism Entity Follow?

Under the state statutes, a Tourism Entity must:

- Expend all of the room tax revenue received on tourism promotion and tourism development (as defined in statute)
- Include in their governing body at least one owner or operator of a lodging facility collecting room tax that is located in the municipality for which the room tax is collected. For a Tourism Entity servicing a “zone” with multiple municipalities, a minimum of four (4) owners or operators of lodging facilities in the zone must be included in the governing body.
- Provide an annual report on the purposes for which the room tax revenues were spent, to each municipality it receives room tax revenue from.

Definition of “tourism promotion and tourism development” (TP&TD):

(fm) "Tourism promotion and tourism development" means any of the following that are significantly used by transient tourists and reasonably likely to generate paid overnight stays at more than one establishment on which a tax under sub. (1m)(a) may be imposed, that are owned by different persons and located within a municipality in which a tax under this section is in effect; or, if the municipality has only one such establishment, reasonably likely to generate paid overnight stays in that establishment:

1. Marketing projects, including advertising media buys, creation and distribution of printed or electronic promotional tourist materials, or efforts to recruit conventions, sporting events, or motorcoach groups.
2. Transient tourist informational services.
3. Tangible municipal development, including a convention center.



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