



MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Reginald Goodson, City Manager

Date: March 4, 2026

Re: Consideration – Authorization to Submit Application to TDA – MACU Comprehensive Multi-Channel Marketing Initiative

BACKGROUND / ANALYSIS:

Mid-Atlantic Christian University (MACU) submitted an application to the Tourism Development Authority requesting \$150,000 in split funding (\$50,000 each between the TDA, City and County) for a comprehensive multi-channel marketing initiative aimed at "increasing awareness, visitation and overnight stays connected to the university's annual public events, waterfront access and campus amenities."

The TDA reviewed the application during their February 26, 2026 meeting and approved \$30,000 in total split funding. This is contingent on both the City and County agreeing to fund \$10,000 each, with the TDA funding \$10,000 as well. Note: This application is separate from a previous request for waterfront improvements.

The application and information forwarded from the TDA on behalf of MACU detailing a breakdown of anticipated costs and revenues is attached to this memorandum.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

By motion, authorize \$10,000 from the City's TDA funding to be used for MACU's comprehensive multi-channel marketing initiative.

Elizabeth City – Pasquotank County Expenditure Restricted Funds

Application Name: Mid-Atlantic Christian University

Contact & Title: Amy Alcocer, Vice President for Institutional Advancement

Email Address: amy.alcocer@macuniversity.edu

Phone Number: 252-334-2043

Project Name: MACU Annual Event/Marketing Support

Project Address: 715 North Poindexter Street, Elizabeth City, NC 27909

Website: www.macuniversity.edu

Funding Requested: \$150,000 (Request for \$50K each from City, County and Visit Elizabeth City)

1. Provide a detailed description of Project/Event. Include goals of the project and outline the intended results.

Project Description

Mid-Atlantic Christian University (MACU) is seeking funding to support a comprehensive, multi-channel marketing initiative aimed at increasing awareness, visitation, and overnight stays connected to the university's annual public events, waterfront access, and campus amenities. This project will involve strategic investments in

- Marketing events,
- ADA-compliant website improvements,
- Advertising our public amenities,
- Expanded marketing distribution,
- Enhanced digital and print media,
- Targeted mail campaigns,
- Installation of an information kiosk,
- Development of video marketing and streaming capabilities

MACU relies on tuition and contributions to sustain its operations while serving as a year-round destination for regional, national, and international visitors. The university provides free public access to its campus, including its waterfront dock with 14 permitted boat slips, cafeteria, library, athletic events, and signature public events. These assets generate measurable tourism and economic impact yet currently remain underpromoted due to limited resources and visibility.

On the water, MACU partners directly with the rose-buddy.com online visitor registration and record-keeping requested by Elizabeth City Police Department to aid in the towns legacy as being the Harbor of Hospitality. As a direct partner, the university allows the use of our property at no cost. Signage is posted along the waterway into Pasquotank County with a QR code encouraging boaters to complete their registration once they arrive. This system serves as the

primary information source for boaters used to highlight available amenities including free side-tie docking north of the bridge, free restrooms, gym showers, Maritime's loaner car, complimentary water, and their Cruiser's Guide to help Elizabeth City visitors to feel welcome and to become repeat guests. MACU and its partners serve as dockmasters. For boaters, the registration includes the Cruiser's Guide, lodging, dining, shopping, groceries, transportation, and helpful resources such as laundry services.

These offerings are designed to support and advertise services within the local community, not just our university. These are just a few of the categories on our website and registration forms for which we collect measurable data and can provide reporting. As a nonprofit institution with limited funding and fewer grant opportunities, external support is essential to elevate MACU's profile and fully leverage its unique assets for both the university and the community with the overall goal in broadening audiences and ultimately increasing overnight visitation and local spending.

Project Goals

- Drive increased overnight stays tied to events, boating, and athletic visitation
- Increase awareness of Elizabeth City as a visitor destination with the "north of the bridge" as part of the waterfront
- Improve visitor access and usability through an ADA-compliant website and digital tools
- Expand marketing distribution to new and underserved audiences, allowing Visit Elizabeth City and the city to reach expanded audiences
- Generate sustained economic impact for Elizabeth City and Pasquotank County

Intended Results

- Increased attendance at events from counties outside the local area
- Growth in overnight stays associated with multi-day events and boating visits
- Improved visitor navigation and access through information kiosk and digital platforms
- Expanded reach through billboards, mailers, video marketing, and streaming
- Measurable, year-over-year increases in visitor engagement and economic impact

2. What is the anticipated Project/Event timeline, including start and finish dates?

Upon approval of funding, MACU will immediately initiate an expanded marketing and visitor access strategy.

Timeline

- **Start Date:** Immediately upon funding approval
- **Duration:** Ongoing, year-round

- **Key Phases:**
 - Development of billboards, website and marketing materials to advertise free public use of dock, cafeteria, library and athletic games
 - Sign ADA-compliant contract to get website enhancements, digital accessibility upgrades and newly added external links to be made more accessible
 - Purchase of recording and video equipment
 - Expand on website page dedicated for tourism info to best provide additional data
 - Launch of expanded digital, print, and mailer campaigns targeting zip codes
 - Implementation of video marketing and live-streaming capabilities
 - Continuous promotion of annual and recurring events
 - Ongoing data collection and reporting
 - Secure a media day contract for athletics including a total of 8 teams

This is a request for initial support to cover one-time costs needed to put critical items in place, along with certain ongoing expenses that we propose to revisit and discuss in the following year, after we have had the opportunity to report back to the respective parties.

3. Provide an outline of the scope of work and anticipated costs, including an itemized budget.

Scope of Work

1. Public Awareness

- Local promotion of visibility and awareness of public amenities on campus and waterfront
- Event-specific with QR codes to guide visitors and promote amenities and local attractions
- Informational materials targeting boating and cruising communities with plastic trifold Kiosks stand

2. ADA-Compliant Website and Digital Presence

- Website redesign and updates for ADA compliance and improved accessibility
- Enhanced navigation and visitor-focused content (maps, dining guides, event calendars)
- Integration with local tourism partners and city websites
- Develop dedicated page for public access amenities

3. Expanded Marketing and Advertising

- Digital campaigns (Google Ads, social media, display ads) specific to events
- Print advertising, brochures, posters, direct mail, and editorial placements
- Billboard advertising targeting regional travel corridors

- Local television, newspaper placements, and ZIP-code-targeted outreach for events and for awareness of amenities on campus open to the public
- Host an annual media day for all MACU athletes to promote games and players with following audiences

4. Enhanced Media and Video Marketing

- Production of promotional videos highlighting events, waterfront access, and visitor experiences
- Live-streaming capabilities and video recording of events
- Updated brochures, flyers, visitor guides, and expanded distribution of publications
- Increased presence on tourism and travel platforms

5. Waterfront and Boater Engagement

- Promotion to boating and cruising associations
- Maritime-focused event promotion
- Coordination with local lodging, restaurants, and retailers for partner-led regional events

6. Data Collection and Reporting

- Tracking visitor and boater engagement, attendance, origin, and spending
- Measuring economic impact, including overnight stays and local tourism revenue
- Event registration and annual reporting for funding partners

*We are able to track this data through boater registrations. For campus events, we collect and monitor information using our Formstack platform, and all additional analytics are gathered from our online platforms.

Itemized Budget (Marketing-Focused)

Category	Cost
Outdoor Information Kiosks	\$10,000
ADA-Compliant Website Enhancements	\$28,000
Media Day - Athletics	\$6,000
Billboards & Regional Advertising	\$15,000
Digital Advertising & Online Media	\$30,000
Print Media & Targeted Mailers	\$30,000
Video Marketing & Streaming Equipment	\$13,000
Media Production & Content Creation	\$15,000
Data Collection & Reporting	\$3,000
Total Anticipated Project Cost	\$150,000

4. Provide information about the proposed firm or partnership contracted for the project, if any.

MACU partners with experienced marketing and creative firms specializing in tourism promotion, digital accessibility and media production.

Local and regional partners include:

- OBX Media
- Champagne Creative Design
- Eye Candy Digital Video
- JHL Digital Direct
- MMT Printers
- F&H Signs
- Lamar

These partners will support multi-channel marketing, including ADA-compliant website improvements, billboard and media placement, video production, and expanded marketing distribution. All efforts will be coordinated with MACU staff and aligned with tourism and economic development objectives to support data-driven reporting of results.

5. Does this Project/Event have the potential to attract new overnight visitors? Explain.

Yes. This project has strong potential to attract new overnight visitors through enhanced marketing of the northern downtown waterfront, campus amenities, and multi-day events. MACU regularly hosts events that draw visitors from outside the region, including lectureships, athletic competitions, maritime gatherings, graduation, recruitment events, community events and faith-based events. We have a baseline for our numbers now and will be able to show the growth year after year with the impact this funding will have.

MACU's Impact on Local Economy through Events and Visitors: MACU plays an important role in bringing visitors to the region. The university has over 76 years of graduates, many of whom have families and friends that are from outside of Elizabeth City.

- Events such as Homecoming, the Jack Cottrell Memorial Lectureship, and Seniors by the Sea attract attendees from several states, directly boosting local tourism revenue through shopping, dining, and lodging.
- Last year, two new events were added:
 - Grace in Every Cup, a tea and culinary event
 - Advent Choir, a Christmas event featuring students from MACU, COA, and ECSU

- This year, a new event called Amplified Faith will invite the public to campus to celebrate the 4th of July with family-friendly games, live entertainment, and picnics.

Local businesses are utilized to help host these events, further supporting the local economy. With additional support, marketing efforts could expand significantly to attract even larger and more diverse audiences. For example, analytics from last October's Homecoming event show that 27 guests clicked the lodging link prior to attending, demonstrating a direct impact on local accommodations.

Furthermore, MACU's public-facing amenities, such as the library and Mustang Café, encourage repeat visits and deeper engagement within the region. At last year's Kings Fleet Conference, we welcomed visitors from as far away as Russia, many of whom are repeat guests. The university's community-focused events continue to support local businesses and attract visitors, driving both short-term and long-term tourism. From this one event, we had 56 registered attendees and by Sunday morning it had grown to at least 65, with participants arriving both by land and water. After a survey was conducted, a total of twelve families stayed in local hotels while others stated they stayed in various lodging options in which occupancy tax would be collected.

Additional boating annual events that create hotel stays include:

- Seven Seas Cruising Association - 150,000 have been invited by email
- Elizabeth City Rendezvous – 3,000 active looper vessels have been invited
- Christian Loopers Gaggle – 15,000 America Great Loop participants have been invited

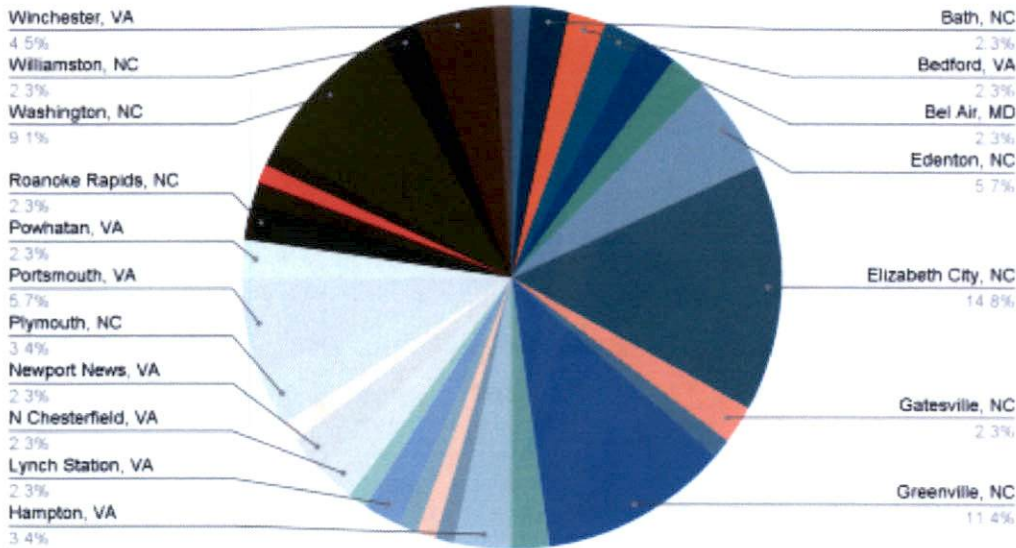
The MACU dock has the highest most consistent year over year rating on Garmin's Active Captain app of any free dock on the East or Gulf coast and the following of these annual events do bring both water and land guest who do stay in local hotels.

We also partner with and assist with other events to bring events to the area, for example, the Coast Guard Marathon, we helped host visiting families by providing a venue large enough to accommodate the luncheon. In addition, we supported Cycle NC when local hotels and Airbnb properties reached capacity and we committed to overflow accommodations, which helped secure the event's commitment to come to our community. Without partnership with MACU, Elizabeth City would not have been able to host the Cycle NC event.

The Jack Cottrell Memorial Lectureship's Regional Reach: One of the most prominent events hosted by MACU is the Jack Cottrell Memorial Lectureship, which draws an audience from across the region. As highlighted in the accompanying data, this event attracts visitors from various states, creating substantial local spending on accommodations, dining, and transportation services. The lectureship not only generates a one-time influx of economic activity but also helps to establish Elizabeth City as a

destination for cultural and educational tourism. By showcasing the region's offerings, the event encourages repeat visits, longer stays, and an overall increase in tourism. This year we have over 150 guests who will be attending the event on February 26. The chart below shows the locations of guests that attended the 2025 lectureship.

Location of Guests for Jack Cottrell Lectureship



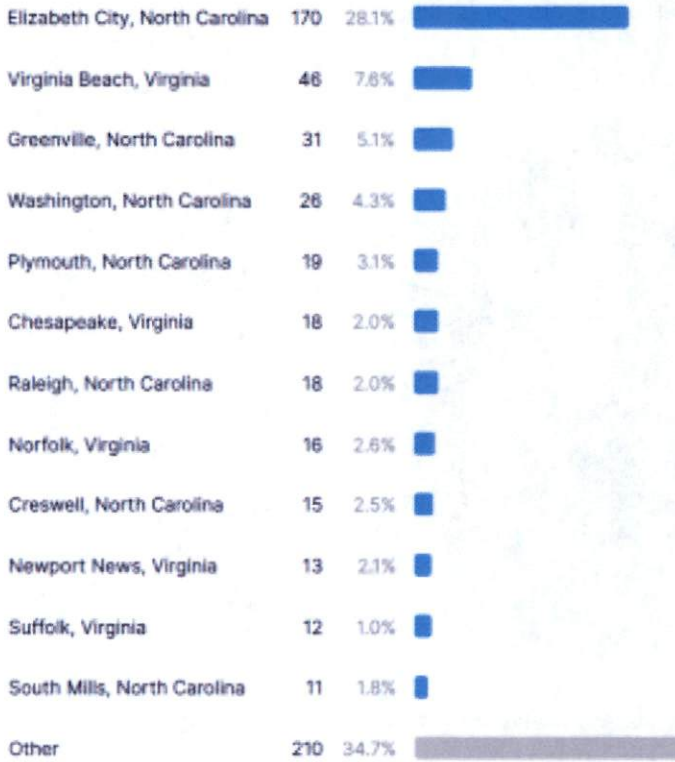
*Other than Elizabeth City and Edenton, the locations are over 2 hours away, where they would likely stay overnight in a local hotel.

Expanding MACU's Reach through Digital Marketing: In addition to physical events, MACU's digital presence is expanding the university's reach, attracting visitors from both in-state and out-of-state. The university's social media efforts, which target a broad demographic, help increase awareness of the campus and Elizabeth City as a destination. Social analytics have shown that MACU's online activity is attracting an increasing number of visitors to Pasquotank County. The data, compiled over just one month, indicates that people from across various locations are engaging with MACU's events and programs, further increasing interest in the region.

Below are the social analytics after one month of activity to show the geography of audiences that had an impression through social media. This data is broken down by location and by age group.

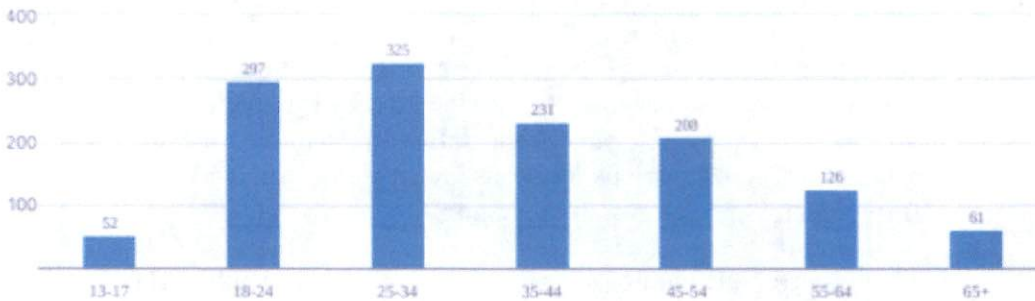
Social Analytics: Geography of audience

Mid-Atlantic Christian University | By: 02 Mar, 2025



Social Analytics: Audience by age

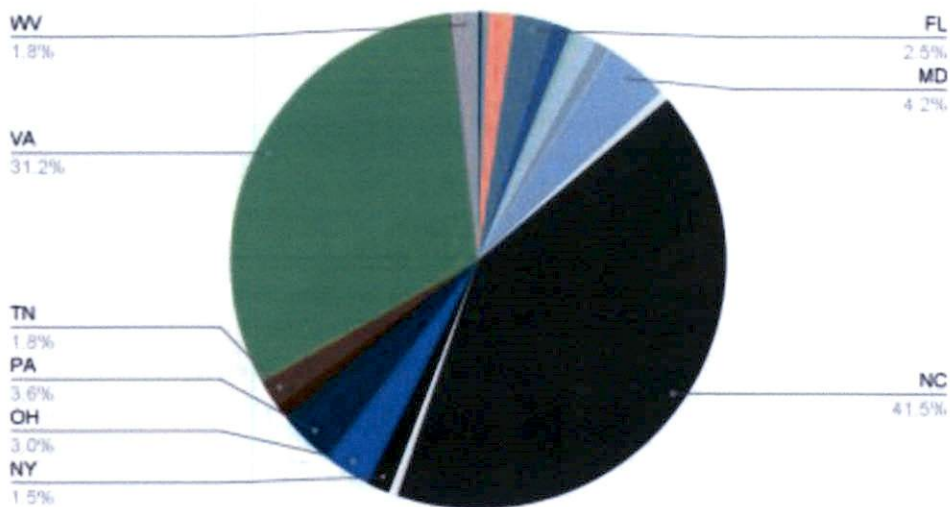
Mid-Atlantic Christian University | By: 02 Mar, 2025



Additionally, MACU's outreach efforts through email marketing, such as the Winter 2024 issue of *The Messenger* magazine, which reaches over 4,000 recipients, and its use of Constant Contact emails, which have a strong open rate, ensure that MACU's community and events continue to attract new visitors. The university's ability to promote its events and services to a wide audience plays a crucial role in boosting the region's tourism appeal, making Elizabeth City and Pasquotank County an attractive destination for travelers, students, and supporters. Through our outreach efforts via Constant Contact, Mid-Atlantic Christian University has made a significant impact by sending 7,876 emails in just the last month alone, achieving an impressive 33% open rate. These emails are strategically crafted to engage our audience with MACU's community-focused services, events, and programs. By tracking the links within these

emails, we gain valuable insight into how many of our recipients are engaging with content related to supporting the university, ultimately helping to grow MACU and its initiatives. This, in turn, contributes to bringing more revenue into the local economy, as visitors and donors are encouraged to invest in both the university and the surrounding region. By promoting MACU's events and services to a wide and diverse audience, we also help to enhance the region's tourism appeal, making Elizabeth City and Pasquotank County an attractive destination for travelers, students, and supporters alike.

Distribution List for Messenger Publication



*Distribution of 4,061 copies, with 41.5% in North Carolina; all others are out of state.

The proposed project at MACU will significantly enhance the economic landscape of Elizabeth City and Pasquotank County. Through improvements to the waterfront area, increased event visibility, and sustained marketing efforts, MACU will continue to drive local spending, increase tourism revenue, and support long-term economic growth in the region. By making the area more accessible and appealing to visitors, both in-state and out-of-state, the university will play a key role in positioning Elizabeth City as a thriving cultural and educational hub, benefiting local businesses and contributing to the region's overall economic development.

6. Will this Project/Event attract overnight visitors on a continuing basis? Explain.

Yes. MACU hosts recurring annual events and year-round activities that drive consistent overnight visitation rather than single, one-time impacts. These include signature lectures, athletic home games, recruitment visits, maritime events, graduations, and community gatherings.

Enhanced marketing and increased visibility will support continued growth in visitation, encourage repeat attendance, and generate sustained tourism revenue for Elizabeth City and Pasquotank County.

Yes. This project is specifically designed to attract new overnight visitors by raising awareness and improving access to events and waterfront amenities. The expanded marketing strategy will include billboards, mailers, digital campaigns, and video promotion aimed at reaching new regional and national audiences likely to plan multi-day visits.

Yes. This initiative focuses on ongoing, annual marketing rather than a single campaign. MACU's recurring events, athletic competitions, and maritime gatherings throughout the year will benefit from an improved accessible website, broader distribution, and continuous video promotion, ensuring sustained visibility and repeat visitation. These efforts are expected to drive long-term growth in overnight tourism and provide a consistent source of occupancy tax revenue.

7. Describe how this Project will increase the economic impact on the region. The project will have several positive economic effects:

- **Local Spending:** Visitors to the waterfront area will spend money on accommodations, dining, and other local services, driving economic growth.
- **Increased Tourism:** The improvements to the waterfront will increase the region's appeal, particularly to out-of-town visitors attending MACU events, which already attract visitors from various states. This can result in higher tourism revenue, including overnight stays.
- **Sustainable Growth:** Over time, as more tourists visit the waterfront, the increased foot traffic will support local businesses, creating a ripple effect that boosts the region's economy.

MACU's Impact on the Local Economy:

● **Student Body and Visitors:**

MACU serves students, many from out of the area. We have three that are from Alaska, we have two that are from the Netherlands, and over 100 more students who are from all over the world. The university also attracts a variety of visitors through events, which draws attendees from multiple states. These events provide a direct boost to the local economy by increasing spending on local businesses like hotels, restaurants, and transportation services.

● **Events:**

MACU's events such as Homecoming, athletic competitions, and other university-hosted programs contribute to local economic activity. MACU hosts 88 home athletic competitions throughout the year which are often multi-day events (i.e. Baseball and Softball). These competitions not only bring MACU parents and fans, but also the opposing teams and fans requiring overnight lodging and food services. Public services like the library and Mustang Café encourage repeat visits, further enhancing the impact on Elizabeth City and Pasquotank County's economy. As MACU continues to host community-oriented events, both short-term and long-term tourism benefits will increase.

● **Regional Reach:**

MACU's outreach efforts, including a strong social media presence, attract a significant number of visitors annually from outside the region. The *Messenger* magazine, with a distribution of 4,061 copies, helps expand the university's visibility, drawing attention from across the state and beyond, enhancing the economic footprint of the institution.

- **Economic Data:**

Events such as lectureships and guest speakers with large followings that consistently bring local and out-of-state visitors, and further drive economic activity in Elizabeth City. These visitors contribute to local spending, benefiting businesses, restaurants, and lodging services.

- **The Messenger Magazine:**

The *Messenger*, MACU's official magazine, plays an important role in reaching audiences far and wide. With a distribution of 4,061 copies, the 16-page Winter 2024 issue connects readers to campus and the Elizabeth City community.

8. How will this Project/Event enhance Elizabeth City and Pasquotank County as an overnight travel destination?

This project will directly tie into the Elizabeth City Comprehensive Plan, showing the waterfront that is north of the bridge as a part of the downtown waterfront. This project enhances Elizabeth City and Pasquotank County as a more visible, accessible, and competitive travel destination by promoting a unique combination of waterfront access, cultural and educational events, athletics, and maritime tourism. MACU's publicly accessible campus, free dock, and signature events, just a block from downtown, serve as a welcoming gateway connecting visitors and students to local restaurants, shops, and attractions.

Expanded marketing strategies, including enhanced signage, ADA-compliant digital access, billboards, and video storytelling, will elevate the region's profile and make trip planning easier for visitors. By highlighting MACU as a hub for multi-day visits, repeat tourism, and signature regional events, this initiative strengthens the local tourism ecosystem, encourages longer stays, and reinforces Elizabeth City's reputation as a destination worth visiting and revisiting.

This marketing initiative will help establish Elizabeth City as a destination for education, outdoor recreation, and community engagement, boosting the area's visibility and attractiveness for future visitors. By enhancing the Elizabeth City waterfront, this project will position Elizabeth City as an emerging waterfront destination. Improved recreational facilities, waterfront access, and the visibility of the university's events will contribute to making Elizabeth City a more attractive place for both leisure and education-based travel. The local economy will directly benefit from the influx of tourists, students, and event attendees.

MACU's free public waterfront dock accommodates 65% of all vessels that visit EC and 82% stay two nights. They contribute to local spending on lodging, dining, fuel, groceries, and retail. Events such as the Seven Seas Cruising Association, Elizabeth City Rendezvous, King's Fleet, Christian Loopers Gaggle along with the campus event like

Homecoming, the Jack Cottrell Memorial Lectureship, Seniors by the Sea, graduations, family campus visits consistently generate overnight stays in local accommodations.

By expanding marketing reach and improving visitor access, this project will increase attendance at multi-day events, extend visitor stays, and encourage repeat visits. Overnight visitors contribute directly to occupancy tax revenue through hotel stays and generate additional spending at local restaurants, retailers, fuel providers, and service businesses.

MACU already tracks visitor spending and lodging utilization. In 2025, boater activity alone generated an estimated \$43,523 in local economic impact, even with reduced traffic due to extended canal closures. With expanded marketing and restored boating traffic, MACU anticipates significant growth in attendance, longer visitor stays, and higher lodging utilization. Continued data collection will allow MACU to report year-over-year increases in overnight stays and economic impact, directly supporting occupancy tax revenue for Elizabeth City and Pasquotank County.

Conclusion: Mid-Atlantic Christian University's Annual Event Marketing Support initiative represents a strategic investment in long-term tourism growth and economic development for Elizabeth City and Pasquotank County. By expanding visibility, improving accessibility, and promoting our waterfront amenities and recurring public events, this project will generate sustained increases in overnight visitation, local spending, and occupancy tax revenue. Funding support will enhance the region's tourism ecosystem, strengthen connections between visitors and local businesses, and position Elizabeth City as a vibrant, accessible, and repeat-worthy destination for cultural, educational, athletic, and maritime travelers.

Submitted by:

Amy Alcocer, Vice President for Institutional Advancement
Mid-Atlantic Christian University



April Onley <aonley@elizabethcitync.gov>

MACU Tourism Funding Request for Marketing 2-26-26

Angela Sutton <director@visitelizabethcity.com>
To: April Onley <aonley@elizabethcitync.gov>
Cc: Reginald Goodson <rgoodson@elizabethcitync.gov>

Tue, Mar 3, 2026 at 9:11 PM

Hi April,

The ECPC-TDA Board met on February 26, 2026 and reviewed a new \$150,000 funding request from Mid-Atlantic Christian University (MACU) located at [715 N. Poindexter St.](#) Elizabeth City, NC.

The new funding request was split between TDA, City, and County, each contributing \$50,000 to fund a **Comprehensive, Multi-channel Marketing Initiative** aimed at increasing awareness, visitation, and overnight stays connected to the university's annual public events, waterfront access, and campus amenities.

The TDA Board approved \$30,000 total in funding contingent on Pasquotank County approving \$10,000, Elizabeth City approving \$10,000, and the TDA would approve \$10,000. The TDA Board stated the **funds should be used to promote Annual Events** on the MACU campus that would draw overnight tourists to Elizabeth City-Pasquotank County.

Attached is MACU's Funding Application 2-26-26.

Please note, MACU's prior funding request for Waterfront Property Improvements is on hold while the TDA Board performs their due diligence.

Once I hear from you and the County, I will update Amy Alcocer, the Applicant.

Thank you,

Angela

Angela Sutton

Interim Director | Visit Elizabeth City

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