

# Discover Manitowoc Grant Application

900 Quay St, Manitowoc, WI 54220 - (920) 686-3508



Please email completed applications to [chansen@manitowoc.org](mailto:chansen@manitowoc.org) by February 15, 2026.

Name of event: Ghost Ships Festival 2027
Date and time of event: March 5th and 6th, 2027
Name of organization: Wisconsin Underwater Archeology Association
Federal ID number: EIN: 39-178513 Tax status: 501c3
\$ Amount request:
If you received funding from the Discover Manitowoc Grant in the past, how many years, which years, and how much each year? 2025: \$2500 2026: \$5000

## Event Coordinator Information

Name: Brendon Baillod
Address: 311 N. Stevenson St., DeForest, WI 53532
Phone: 608.438.7246
Email: baillod@gmail.com

Estimate the expected attendance of participants and visitors. Include attendance from Manitowoc County as well as outside of Manitowoc County. Provide specifics on total estimated daily attendance, historical attendance data, and how you came to these estimations.

The Ghost Ships Festival was held annually in Milwaukee from 2000 to 2017 and received 800 - 1000 attendees from around the Great Lakes region. The event was essentially priced out of the Milwaukee market due to facility changes.

Last year's second year of the Ghost Ships Festival in Manitowoc was a resounding success as was the initial "reboot" at Manitowoc in 2025. We had planned for about 200 attendees, but received around 400 in all. Ghost Ships consists of a Friday evening show that is free to the public as well as a full day Saturday for which registration is required and an entry fee of \$25. For this year's show (2026), around 425 people were paid or volunteer registrants for the full two day event. Our Friday +

Priority will be given to events that generate overnight stays. How many room nights will your event generate and at which lodging establishments? Include how you measure room nights and came to this estimation.

We sold 75 rooms each night at the Inn on Maritime Bay, generating \$20,250 in pre-tax hotel revenue according to Pat Reilly. We know that people also stayed at the Holiday Inn Express, the Lighthouse Inn and some VRBO/B&B establishments, per their report. Because we have seen increases in attendance for each of the last two years, we expect to see a continued rise in room occupancy as our event grows in Manitowoc. Our projects to locate lost ships have been generating national media attention and we have used these opportunities to highlight the Ghost Ships Festival and Manitowoc.

I have attached our preliminary financial report for Ghost Ships 2026, which was just held this past weekend. Some figures are estimates as we are still tabulating expenses and income. We had +

## **Project Summary**

Attach a detailed description of the event including goals, target demographics, how this event will bring overnight visitors to Manitowoc, and the plans and timeline for marketing. List the roles of key team members and their experience. Include how you will measure the success of this event (surveys, room night tracking).

## **Budget Information**

Attach the event's budget showing the use of anticipated funds and sources of those funds. The budget must show all resources required for the event and indicate who is responsible. The budget must also demonstrate the need for financial assistance. If total funding is not awarded, be prepared to prioritize financial needs.

Sign below certifying that all information in this application has been provided truthfully and in acknowledgement of Discover Manitowoc Grant policies.

Event Coordinator: Brendon Baillod
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Date: 3/8/2026
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**Expected Attendance:** The Ghost Ships Festival was held annually in Milwaukee from 2000 to 2017 and received 800 - 1000 attendees from around the Great Lakes region. The event was essentially priced out of the Milwaukee market due to facility changes.

Last year's second year of the Ghost Ships Festival in Manitowoc was a resounding success as was the initial "reboot" at Manitowoc in 2025. We had planned for about 200 attendees, but received around 400 in all. Ghost Ships consists of a Friday evening show that is free to the public as well as a full day Saturday for which registration is required and an entry fee of \$25. For this year's show (2026), around 425 people were paid or volunteer registrants for the full two day event. Our Friday night shows are free and sponsored by the Wisconsin Shipwreck Coast National Marine Sanctuary. We ask people to sign in for the Friday show, but this is voluntary, so we don't have hard numbers for Friday attendees, but we estimate it to be around 100 people.

We estimate based on the fact that we filled all of the hotel's 360 seats for the main hall and still have many people in the exhibit areas, that we had around 400 people in the building at peak with around 450 people total in attendance over both days. This represents a 12% increase in attendance over last year, which we attribute to the extra advertising we were able to purchase with the Visit Manitowoc grant we received.

The Ghost Ships Festival taps into an existing community of maritime history enthusiasts, shipwreck divers and "boat nerds" who attend what is essentially a circuit of similar events, including Duluth's Gales of November, Detroit's Great Lakes Shipwreck Festival and Cleveland's Shipwrecks and Scuba show. People travel from states around the Great Lakes to see talks about new shipwreck discoveries, to connect with old friends and to learn about new technology. This event draws primarily from outside Manitowoc County, although Friday night free show probably drew a lot of local attendance. Estimates are as follows:

Friday (Non-Manitowoc): 250  
Friday (Manitowoc): 100  
Friday (Out of State): 100  
Saturday (Non-Manitowoc): 300  
Saturday (Manitowoc): 50  
Saturday (Out of State): 100

This year's show saw an estimated increase of 12% over last year's show. We estimate this based on wrist band usage, hotel rooms booked and seats occupied during the main shows.

**Overnight attendance:** We sold 75 rooms each night at the Inn on Maritime Bay, generating \$20,250 in pre-tax hotel revenue according to Pat Reilly. We know that people also stayed at the Holiday Inn Express, the Lighthouse Inn and some VRBO/B&B establishments, per their report. Because we have seen increases in attendance for each of the last two years, we expect to see a continued rise in room occupancy as our event grows in Manitowoc. Our projects to locate lost ships have been generating national media attention and we have used these opportunities to highlight the Ghost Ships Festival and Manitowoc.

I have attached our preliminary financial report for Ghost Ships 2026, which was just held this past weekend. Some figures are estimates, as we are still tabulating expenses and income. We had approximately \$11,000 in total expenses as well as \$13,000 in event income. That coupled with the \$5000 Visit Manitowoc grant last year enabled us to show an estimated net profit of around \$7,000, which will be used to fund our mission to provide opportunities for the public to participate in underwater archeology and to tell the stories of the lost ships that we search for, discover and publicize nationally.

Attach a detailed description of the event including goals, target demographics, how this event will bring overnight visitors to Manitowoc, and the plans and timeline for marketing. List the roles of key team members and their experience. Include how you will measure the success of this event (surveys, room night tracking).

2026 saw the third year of the revived Ghost Ships Festival, held in Manitowoc at the Inn on Maritime Bay. The two-day event welcomed over 450 attendees from across the Great Lakes and Canada. The festival is organized by the Wisconsin Underwater Archaeological Association (WUAA) that works with local, state and federal partners to bring the latest shipwreck discoveries on the Great Lakes to a wide audience.

**We noted a 12% increase in attendance over last year, which we attribute to increased publicity that we were able to do thanks to last year's Visit Manitowoc Grant.**

Founded in 2000, the Ghost Ships Festival attracts explorers of all ages who wish to learn more about the nautical time-capsules preserved in the cold, fresh water of the Great Lakes. The Lakes have preserved the remains of thousands of lost ships, including everything from working tugboats to giant four masted sailing schooners and lavish passenger steamships. Today, their remains lie in the clear depths of the Lakes, often undiscovered for centuries.

The Ghost Ships Festival treats attendees to a wide range of technologies, exhibits, artists, musicians, scuba divers and explorers whose work focuses on Great Lakes shipwrecks.

- Take a virtual walk down the deck of newly discovered lost ships through the magic of 3D virtual reality headsets.
- Pilot an ROV (Remove Operated Vehicle) in the hotel swimming pool.
- Visit exhibits and attend performances by Great Lakes maritime artists and musicians.
- See hands-on exhibits of the technologies used to locate, document and tell the stories of lost Great Lakes ships. Exhibits feature side scanning sonar, remote operated vehicles and 3D photogrammetry.
- Attend presentations from professional underwater archaeologists whose job it is to record, preserve and tell the stories of historic shipwreck sites.
- Hear talks by the explorers and wreck hunters who spend their summers on the water searching for and finding historic lost ships on the Great Lakes.

Advance tickets for the full, two-day event are available at [www.ghostshipsfestival.com](http://www.ghostshipsfestival.com) for \$25 or can be purchased at the door for \$30. **People under 18 will be admitted for free.**

All events will be held at the Inn on Maritime Bay, 101 Maritime Dr., Manitowoc, WI.

The Ghost Ships Festival taps into an existing community of people who attend an established circuit of Great Lakes maritime history and scuba diving events around the Great Lakes region. These shows include the Great Lakes Shipwreck Festival in Detroit, Shipwrecks & Scuba in Sandusky, Ohio, The Gales of November conference in Duluth and the Evening Beneath the Inland Seas show in Holland, Michigan. This demographic is mostly over 60 retirees and former shipwreck divers. A secondary demographic that is growing are younger underwater archeology professionals and students as well as social media influencers in the underwater exploration space.

Because this market is established, we have an extensive mailing / contact list from the previous incarnation of the Ghost Ships Festival, which was held in Milwaukee from 2000 to 2017. The Ghost Ships Festival is held by the Wisconsin Underwater Archeology Association, a 501c3 with over 200 members, so we also get substantial support from our own membership.

We generally begin planning the next year's Festival in November of the previous year by holding monthly Zoom meetings of the Festival Committee, which is a formal sub-committee of the WUAA. The first two months are spent planning the program and speakers. Our first media blast on Social Media and through our bulk emailing program goes out in November as well. We generally announce the speakers and put out the provisional event flyer in January with a second media blast. This also goes out to statewide media outlets and we frequently get news coverage of the event. This year, we had several reporters in attendance **and received a tremendous boost from our national press release of the discovery of the steamer Lac La Belle and its unveiling at our event.**

We do our final blast in February, two weeks before the event and we distribute vendor booth assignments and finalize the volunteer roster.

Our social media community includes the 6000 member Great Lakes Shipwreck Research Group of Facebook and YouTube, which also give us strong support.

**In should be noted that all our marketing materials this year prominently featured the Visit Manitowoc logo. This was included on our program flyers, social media posts, program brochure and website. We also provided Visit Manitowoc with a booth at our event at no cost.**

Our event team includes the following members:

- Brendon Baillod: I have been coordinating volunteers, managing the ROV station, the VR/Tech booth, getting speakers, coordinating the program, coordinating booths/sponsors and generally managing the entire event at a project level. I will

continue to do this, but I will be delegating more tasks next year. This past year, I shed responsibility for creating the program brochure, which was a big help. I also handle most of our marketing, media, social media and publicity, although Kevin Cullen and Alyssa Saldivar also help significantly with local Manitowoc outlets. I am a professional project manager and the founder of the original Ghost Ships Festival as well as the president of the WUAA.

- Alyssa Saldivar: Alyssa is the WMM's former operations manager and a WUAA board member. She is our main liason with the hotel and with the museum and is one of our key planners. She is now an Educator with the Wisconsin Shipwreck Coast National Marine Sanctuary.
- Gene Nisler: Gene is our treasurer and was responsible for tracking our financials, payment of our vendors and organizing our Point-of-Sale system. Gene is a retired professional Engineer.
- Kevin Cullen: Kevin is the Executive Director of the Wisconsin Maritime Museum. He was responsible for coordinating our TV and Radio purchases this year.
- Caitlin Zant: Caitlin is our main liason with the WSCNMS and is also in charge of our Ghost Ships merchandise planning. She works closely with Bob Lijewski, our online merchandise manager. Caitlin is a program coordinator with the NOAA WSCNMS.
- Bob Jaeck: Bob is the WUAA VP and coordinates the front of the house (e.g. ticketing, will-call, registration). He works closely with our Treasurer, Russ Leitz and his assistant, Gene Nisler, to do budgeting and strategic planning. Both are retired professionals.
- Rich Laiacona: Rich is our webmaster and does our graphic design for the event. Rich is a software engineer, graphical designer and WUAA board member.
- Scott Riemer: Scott is our A/V guy and coordinates the sound and video. He is an IT professional
- Brian Bangert: Brian is a licensed contractor and he coordinates day-of facility setups such as signage, electrical, booth layouts and general troubleshooting.
- Lisa Gibson: Lisa was our Volunteer Coordinator this year.
- Emily Roth: Emily helped plan food and beverages this year.
- Derek Haager: Derek was responsible for Vendors and Sponsors this year.

We have a post-mortem after each year's event and review what went well and where we have opportunities to improve. During the post-mortem, we evaluate our attendance and profitability by:

1. Determining how many wrist bands were distributed. This tells us how many paid attendees and volunteers we had. Although we may have had only 280 direct ticket

sales, we also give 2-3 tickets to each booth holder and we had 30 booths. We also admitted our 17 volunteers for free as well as 10 of our speakers and we admitted 8 volunteers for the WSCNMS for free. As such, we had around 380 people who were registered for the event in some way. We also had free Friday walk-ins, which we estimated at around 100 people. As such, the main hall usually had around 350 people with another 40 or so browsing the vendor booths or participating the exhibits.

2. We also use an electronic Point of Sale system (Zettle) to track our income from merchandise, admissions and memberships. This, as well as cash income is represented in our financials (attached.)

## **Ghost Ships 2027 Budget and Request**

For our 2027 event, we would like to request \$10,000 in grant funding from Visit Manitowoc.

- This would enable us to buy additional advertising on Wisconsin Public Radio and in local media outlets to raise awareness of our event.
- Last year's grant enabled us to purchase better external signage and we would like to potentially purchase a billboard spot for the weeks leading up to next year's event.
- We would also like to bring in a prominent speaker for our Friday night show in 2027, which will require a larger honorarium.

This year's (2026) show had expenses of about \$11,000. We anticipate that next year's expenses will be around \$15,000 if we are able to meet our new goals for advertising, signage and speakers.

We believe a grant of \$10,000 would help us achieve these goals.

Thanks

Brendon Baillod, WUAA President and Ghost Ships Chair

- 02/05/26 Amazon Mktpl\*nj5b47qo0 Amzn.com/bill Wa
- 02/05/26 Amazon Mktpl\*nj5b47qo0 Amzn.com/bill Wa
- 02/05/26 AWARD.COM 888-628-3298 CA
- 02/05/26 Stickerapp
- 02/05/26 AWARD.COM 888-628-3298 CA
- 02/19/26 Amazon Mktpl\*nj5b47qo0 Amzn.com/bill Wa
- 02/23/26 Amazon Mktpl\*nj5b47qo0 Amzn.com/bill Wa
- 03/02/26 Wisconsin Public Radio
- 03/03/26 Fedex Office #436
- 03/07/26 Lee Murdock
- 03/07/26 Carrie Sowden
- 03/07/26 Mark Gammage
- 03/08/26 Inn on Maritime Bay
- 03/07/26 Robert Lijewski
- 03/08/26 Gene Nisler
- 03/08/26 Estimated WMM Expenses

**TOTAL EXPENSES:**

- TOTAL FESTIVAL SALES
- MANITOWOC GRANT
- TOTAL INCOME:
- TOTAL EXPENSES:
- TOTAL PROFIT:

**EXPENSES**

Review of copies of Fathoms Deep	\$16.72
Ghost Ships Festival Wrist Bands	\$39.19
100 Engraved Cocktail Glasses 10.5 oz.	\$789.20
WUAA Die Cut Stickers, 300 pcs.	\$158.00
Boyd Award	\$110.40
Transfer tape, permanent vinyl for glasses.	\$18.71
Fathoms Deep Book Printing	\$990.00
Advertising	\$675.00
Ghost Ships Brochures	\$1,100.00
Musician	\$250.00
Speaker	\$250.00
Speaker	\$250.00
Hotel Festival Fees	\$5,249.16
Laminated Pictures for display	\$16.68
Volunteer's snacks, beverage, candy, note pads	\$153.73
Ghost Ships Reception	\$950.00
	<b>\$11,016.79</b>

Tickets, Booths, Sponsorships, Merchandise	\$13,054.33
	\$5,000.00
	<b>\$18,054.33</b>
	<b>\$11,016.79</b>
	<b>\$7,037.54</b>