

# Welcome Center Funds

Austin has many premiere tourism attractions - including our City parks. While tourists may need to visit the city to conduct business, attend a convention, or visit family, our attractions are why visitors jump to make the trip and why they come back and bring their friends. They are also part of the “wow factor” that makes Austin such a coveted location for conventions, music festivals, and group travel. The Welcome Center fund would invest in centers to improve visitor experience at specific areas frequented by a large number of tourists by providing information and direction to visitors.

An example of such a center is the Visitor Education Center envisioned by the Barton Springs Conservancy to be located in Zilker Park near Barton Springs Pool. This center would educate visitors about the heritage, natural history, and eco-system of Barton Springs, as well as serve as a point of orientation for other City parks.

While Welcome Centers are authorized under the same portion of Chapter 351 as Austin’s existing Visitor Information Centers, they are conceptually distinct. While Visitor Information Centers provide information to visitors about the whole city, Welcome Centers guide visitors around specific tourist areas.

## Recommendations

- 1. Create a new fund called the Welcome Center Fund to construct, improve, expand, equip, repair, operate, and maintain Welcome Centers at tourist destination parks, such as Zilker Park, or other qualifying tourist destination areas that promote tourism and the convention and hotel industry.**
- 2. Solely fund the Welcome Center Fund out of the “waterfall” or “ending balance bucket” funds identified as part of Scenario 2B of the Convention Center Expansion.**
- 3. Set a maximum limit amount of the “ending balance bucket” to be allocated to the Welcome Center Fund in any given year.**
- 4. Assign administration and operation of the Welcome Center Fund to an appropriate body which would create a special committee composed of a broad set of stakeholders representing tourist destination parks and other tourist destination areas.**
- 5. Establish eligibility and grant administration guidelines while retaining consistency with state law and city code.**
- 6. Prior to construction funding for a Welcome Center, require funds be identified for operation and maintenance of the Welcome Center that will not be drawn from Tourism Promotion Fund or other Visit Austin funds.**



