

2017 Criteria and Guidelines Somerset County Tourism Grant Program

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Forty percent of the Somerset County Lodging Tax is appropriated for a grant program specifically established to support the county's tourism assets. **The purpose of this grant program is to enhance the tourism experience, increase tourism visitation, and overnight stays within Somerset County.** Awards are granted annually on the basis of merit as determined by the Somerset County Tourism Grant Review Committee and administered by the Somerset County Commissioners and the Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau. Funds distributed in the form of grants are a portion of the hotel room occupancy tax collections. Thus, grant funding should be primarily used for marketing and advertising expenses that target potential visitors who reside outside of the Laurel Highlands counties and whose visit is likely to result in an overnight stay.

CRITERIA AND GUIDELINES

1. Recipients are required to have a cash or in-kind match of at least 25%. Half of the match can be in-kind services and/or donated materials and documentation must be provided for any in-kind match. In-kind services documentation must include work performed, date/dates of the services and hourly rate and hours donated. In-kind volunteer work is only acceptable for events (such as festivals) and only for the time the volunteer works at the event. The volunteer's time is valued at \$10 per hour and must be documented, including dates, services they provided, and hours of service.
2. If you receive a grant, you can incur expenses eligible for assistance immediately after grant notification. Expenses cannot be incurred before notification date.
3. Grants may be awarded to any non-profit or for-profit tourism-related business or organization located within Somerset County that submits a request for such funds utilizing the official grant application furnished for this purpose and whose mission and operation are directly related to tourism and tourism development.
4. Grants are awarded on an annual basis.
5. Applicants should not assume that they will be awarded a grant on an annual basis, nor should they consider these tourism grants a permanent addition to their budget.
6. If, at the deadline for submission of the current year's applications, any recipient of a prior grant that has not submitted the required supporting documentation within the prescribed deadline explaining and evidencing the use of the grant and an extension has not been requested and approved, the applicant shall be ineligible to apply for a future grant until such supporting documentation required herein are submitted and accepted.
7. Applicants must use only the official forms and required documents for submission.
8. Grant applications must be typed. Handwritten applications will not be considered by the grant committee.
9. An applicant may not file for more than one grant request for each type of grant.

10. Each type of grant request must be submitted on a separate application.
11. Individual applications should be secured with a paperclip. DO NOT staple together and DO NOT place applications in folders or binders.
12. Award amounts must be appropriately utilized **before December 31, 2017.**
13. If the funds cannot be appropriately utilized within the designated period applicants must inform the grant committee in writing and either request an extension or return, to the Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau, administrator of the Somerset Tourism Grant Program, the unused portion of the grant that has not been appropriately utilized along with any interest accrued accompanied by an explanation of why the funds were not used.
14. Recipients approved for an extension shall be eligible to apply for a subsequent grant during the extension period.
15. The grant committee reserves the right to approve or reject an extension request and the decision of the committee or its designated representative(s) shall be final and binding upon all parties.
16. As a provision of accepting the grant, awardees agree to provide adequate proof that the funds received were used for their intended purpose.
17. **It shall be the sole responsibility of any grant recipient to adhere to the prescribed deadlines** relative to the appropriate utilization of any such grant. Neither the Somerset County Commissioners, the grant committee, nor the Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau shall be responsible for monitoring such deadlines or informing any grant recipient of an impending or expired deadline. Failure of a grant recipient to comply with the deadline relative to a grant will subject said recipient to the covenants and provisions contained in these Criteria and Guidelines.
18. **A for-profit business that receives a grant may be required to treat the grant as income and is responsible for paying any necessary taxes applicable thereto.**
19. Awardees shall publicly **acknowledge** the Somerset County Tourism Grant Program through all reasonable vehicles as a stipulation of accepting such awards. This includes recognition of funding on printed media, social media pages, websites and any other media that might be engaged utilizing grant funds. Recipients are required to **incorporate** the Somerset County Tourism Program Logo in all marketing projects funded by a Somerset Tourism Grant, in whole or in part, whether utilizing print or any other media. Failure to do so will be taken into consideration when future grant applications are submitted by the applicant. An electronic version of the logo is available from the Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau.
20. Photographs may be included.
21. All non-profit applicants **must provide a copy of their IRS Determination 501(c)(3) Letter and a list of their Board of Directors. Failure to do so will render an application ineligible.**
22. A written request is needed for all project budget changes. Send all requests to rseifert@laurelhighlands.org.
23. Based on the dollar amount, grants will be distributed with a minimum of one-half of the grant awarded at the time of the announcement. In the event a partial distribution of the grant is made, the remaining one-half of the grant will be distributed when the project is 50% complete.

Grants are awarded in the following two (2) project categories:

Marketing Grant: Marketing and advertising programs must be targeted to media that primarily reach non-Somerset County residents. Cooperative programs, which include tourism partners in the three-county Laurel Highlands region, are eligible. The Grant Program will not fund advertisements in local event programs, (i.e., high school sports programs, local dance troupe programs, etc.)

Tourism-related marketing expenses eligible for funding, including but not limited to:

- Internet website development or enhancement.
- Image marketing (creating photo or film libraries, logo development, new artwork, etc.).
- Tourism awareness programs and customer service programs.
- Brochure design and printing
- Advertising (TV stations, radio stations, newspapers, magazines, billboards, etc. – local media may be included if the majority of their audience is out of the county).

Visitor Center Grant: Operation of a visitor center in an Allegheny Trail Alliance recognized “Great Allegheny Passage Trail Town” in Somerset County, including expenses related to staffing the center (payroll, payroll taxes and payroll fees, etc.).

Expenses not eligible for grant funding:

- Food, lodging, mileage and transportation costs
- Purchase or rental computers, software, projectors and other equipment
- Telephone expenses
- Postage and handling expenses
- Purchase of brochure racks
- Envelopes, letterhead, business cards, and miscellaneous office supplies
- Membership dues, sponsorships and talent/dignitary honorariums
- Office space rental
- Physical construction of billboards
- Gift cards, t-shirts, and items for resale
- Standard operational expenses such as rent, utilities, insurance, payroll, postage, etc., with the exception of the approved expenses directly related to the operation of a seasonal visitor center
- Sectarian religious purposes

REPORTING GUIDELINES

Request for balance of a grant the grant recipient must submit the following:

Applicants must provide:

- A. LHVB Tourism Grant Second Half Reporting Form
- B. Completed Grant Expenditure Form
- C. Copy of approved Budget Expenditure Form
- D. Copies of all invoices and proof of payment
- E. Marketing grants must provide copies of all printed advertisements, press releases, or samples of media placements/media
- F. Capital grant projects must provide before and after photos of the project.
- G. Grant recipients shall abide by all local, state, and federal laws and regulations and agree to furnish all the documentation listed above. In addition, grant recipients understand that the expenditure of grant funds received might be subject to audit and or further verification and agree to cooperate with any such audit or verification process.

To close out a grant, the LHVB Tourism Grant Final Report Form and the required documentation must be submitted no later than **March 31, 2018**.

Applicants must provide:

- A. LHVB Tourism Grant Final Reporting Form
- B. Completed Grant Expenditure Form
- C. Copy of approved Budget Expenditure Form from grant application
- D. Copies of all invoices and proof of payment
- E. Marketing grants must provide copies of all printed advertisements, press releases, or samples of media placements/media
- F. Capital grant projects must provide before and after photos of the project.
- G. Grant recipients shall abide by all local, state, and federal laws and regulations and agree to furnish all the documentation listed above. In addition, grant recipients understand that the expenditure of grant funds received might be subject to audit and or further verification and agree to cooperate with any such audit or verification process.

YOU WILL BE REQUIRED TO SUBMIT FIVE (5) COPIES OF GRANT APPLICATIONS ALONG WITH TWO (2) COPIES OF THE BUDGET EXPENDITURE FORM FOR EACH APPLICATION AND EACH MUST BE SUBMITTED WITHIN THE PRESCRIBED DEADLINE IN ORDER TO BE CONSIDERED.

MAILING ADDRESS FOR ALL GRANT CORRESPONDENCES

Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau
ATTN: Grant Administrator
120 East Main Street
Ligonier, PA 15658

For the Somerset County Tourism Program Logo, please contact:

**Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau
Vice President of Marketing Kristin Ecker
724.238.5661
or kecker@laurelhighlands.org**

SOMERSET COUNTY TOURISM GRANT REVIEW COMMITTEE

- A. The Tourism Grant Review Committee shall be comprised of five (5) members:
 - a. One (1) Somerset County Commissioner or the Commissioners' designee
 - b. The President and CEO of the Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau (LHVB) or the President and CEO's designee
 - c. A senior management representative of the Somerset County lodging facility with the highest volume of hotel tax collected for the prior year who is preferably also a member of the LHVB.
 - d. Two (2) representatives from Somerset County appointed annually by the Somerset County Commissioners to serve one (1) year terms

- B. In the event that a member of the Tourism Grant Review Committee serves on the board of an applicant organization or event, or is affiliated in another manner with an applicant, it is mandatory that said member recuse himself/herself from the review and/or decision-making process of that specific application.

- C. The committee will review all grant applications and announce the awards in January or February 2017.

- D. Grant awards shall be presented to each recipient jointly by representatives of the Somerset County Tourism Grant Committee and the Somerset County Commissioners.

- E. Nothing shall prevent the Somerset County Tourism Grant Review Committee from withholding part or all of the grant funds available for annual awards should the committee believe that insufficient requests have been made justifying the full distribution of those funds. Should funds be remaining at the end of any fiscal year, those funds may be rolled forward to be utilized in the subsequent year's grant program.

- F. The Somerset County Tourism Grant Review Committee will review the criteria and guidelines on an annual basis to enhance, amend, or modify said guidelines.