Community Event Marketing Grant Program

The Community Event Marketing Grants are provided to non-profit organizations to help cover the costs directly related to promoting and marketing public community-based recreation and entertainment for locals and visitors. The Community Event Marketing Grant is designed to support the launch of high-quality new or small events in Stafford County. These events are intended to drive local and visitor spending, enhance the County's positive image, strengthen the experience economy, enrich the overall visitor experience, and encourage increased visitation.

Basic Application Criteria

- Minimum verifiable attendees: at least 500 verified attendees
- Maximum funding: $2,500 based on the age of the event
- Submission deadline: applications must be submitted three (3) months before the date of the event
- Pre-application meeting: in-person or virtual meeting with Stafford County Tourism required

Full Program Details

Funding Request

The Community Event Marketing Grant provides financial support to help organizations promote new or small events in Stafford County. Funding is not intended to serve as a perpetual source of revenue for established events, but rather to provide seed or supplemental support for event marketing and promotion.

Maximum funding is determined by the age of the event in the year the event takes place:

- Years 1–3: Up to $2,500 per event
- Years 4–6: Up to $1,250 per event

The final funding amount will be based on the event's age at the time of the event, the applicant's proposed marketing plan, eligible matching funds, and Stafford County Tourism's sole discretion. Stafford County Tourism reserves the right to adjust award amounts, with justification, based on available funds, application quality, and the applicant's demonstrated ability to meet matching requirements.

All funding awarded through this program is on a reimbursable basis and will be released only after the event has taken place, verification of eligible marketing expenses, and submission of required documentation in the post-event report.

This grant requires a dollar-for-dollar (100%) match for eligible out-of-county marketing expenses. Applicants must demonstrate that they have invested an amount equal to the funds awarded, specifically toward marketing efforts that target audiences outside of Stafford County. If the applicant does not provide the full match required, Stafford County Tourism will reduce the reimbursement amount to reflect the actual eligible matching funds provided. Only documented, eligible out-of-county marketing expenses will be considered for reimbursement and matching purposes.

Eligible Use of Funds

- Grant funds can only be used for out-of-county marketing and advertising expenses, with 75% of those expenses allocated to be used for digital/online marketing.
- Digital or online marketing, targeting audiences outside of Stafford County (must be 75% of your funding request), including geofencing, re-targeting, SEM/SEO, social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), targeted email blasts, Connected TV, Website Creation or updates, etc.
- Other approved out-of-county advertising methods that are not considered digital, online advertising include: print ads, printed collateral materials (flyers, posters, banners), radio ads, television ads, digital or print billboards, etc.
- Event giveaway item for attendees (item and design to be approved by Stafford County Tourism)
- All advertising, print or digital, must prominently feature the Stafford County Tourism logo and comply with the official branding style guide to be eligible for funding

Ineligible Use of Funds

- Prize money, scholarships, or monetary awards
- Giveaway items that include additional sponsor logos
- Shirts or merchandise
- Travel expenses (airfare, lodging, meals, car rentals, mileage, baggage fees)
- Private entertainment, food, beverages, or concessions
- Annual operating costs that are not directly related to the event
- Event insurance
- Legal, medical, security, accounting, engineering, consulting, planning, or fire rescue services
- Employee salaries
- Real property or capital improvements to facilities
- Tangible personal property
- Interest, debt reduction, or loans
- Expenses outside the grant period

- Advertising/promotional materials distributed in Stafford County after the event
- Social events or receptions not directly tied to pre-event marketing
- Sales tax
- Ongoing website maintenance
- Any activities encouraging or supporting illegal or illicit activities

Eligibility

Eligible nonprofit organizations operating within Stafford County may apply individually or as part of a group. All applicants must be in good standing with Stafford County, meaning they are current on all required licenses, permits, taxes, and fees, and comply with all applicable County regulations.

Stafford County employees, elected officials, and members of their immediate families may not apply in an official County capacity. However, they may apply in their professional capacity as a member of an eligible non-profit or organization. For purposes of eligibility, the organization, not Stafford County, must be the applicant, and the individual must be acting within their role for that organization.

The Tourism Program Manager reserves the right to evaluate applications and, at their discretion, reassign an application to the most appropriate grant program or category to ensure alignment with program criteria and intent.

Application Timeline

Applications must be submitted at least three (3) months before the event. Clarifying questions from Stafford County Tourism regarding an application will be sent via email, and applicants have 14 days to respond; otherwise, the application will be denied, and a re-application is required.

A pre-application meeting with the Stafford County Tourism Program Manager is required to review marketing plans and coordinate promotional efforts before applying.

Any expenses incurred before or after the grant period are not eligible for reimbursement under any circumstances. The grant period begins upon approval of the application and ends immediately after the event's completion.

Application Guidelines

Funding is available for public events taking place in Stafford County. The organization must be in Stafford County and must qualify as a not-for-profit organization under Section 501 of the Internal Revenue Service Code.

Funding consideration is based on the age of the event. This tiered structure is designed to encourage the development and promotion of new events while gradually reducing dependency on grant funds as events become established and self-sustaining.

An applicant may not receive funding from more than one Stafford County Tourism grant program for the same event. Grant requests that do not receive a funding recommendation will not be eligible for reconsideration until the following fiscal year.

Funds must be used exclusively for advertising and promotion of special events. All funding awarded through this program is on a reimbursable basis and will be released only after verification of eligible expenses and submission of required documentation in the post-event report.

The applicant must designate a single point of contact for the duration of the Community Event Marketing funding process. This individual is responsible for submitting all application materials and following up on post-event reporting. Should the primary contact change at any point during the process, written notification to Stafford County Tourism is required. Failure to provide notification will result in application denial.

By applying, the applicant gives Stafford County and its employees, officers, contractors, subcontractors, volunteers, and agents permission to use, reproduce, and create any photographs, digital images, videos, or recordings taken at or related to the event. This includes images of the applicant's employees, volunteers, or invitees, as well as any materials that display the applicant's name, artwork, logo, or trademark. Stafford County may copyright, use, reuse, publish, or republish these materials.

The applicant confirms that they legally own any artwork, logo, or trademark they use and understands that Stafford County is relying on this representation. If any third party makes a claim against Stafford County related to these materials, the applicant will indemnify and hold Stafford County and its representatives harmless from any resulting damage. The applicant understands and agrees that these items will become the property of Stafford County. The applicant waives any right to inspect, approve, or receive payment (including royalties) for their use. The applicant also permits Stafford County to use photographs, digital images, videos, or recordings at any time in the future without notice. Stafford County may use them for trade, commercial, advertising, or promotional purposes, reporting on events in Stafford County, and on Stafford County websites.

If any details (date, time, event name, etc.) change before the event is carried out, written notice must be given to Stafford County Tourism 90 days before the originally approved date or the new date (whichever is first). Failure to notify Stafford County Tourism will result in application denial.

NOTE: Stafford County Tourism reserves the right to audit reports, verify attendance, adjust or cancel funding for cancelled or significantly altered events. Misleading or false information, or failure to track visitors, may negatively impact current and future funding and could void post-event reimbursement.

Criteria:

- The primary contact must have a pre-application meeting with the Stafford County Tourism Manager, either in-person or virtually, to discuss marketing plans and promotional efforts.
- Applications must be submitted no less than three (3) months before the event start date.
- The event must generate at least 500 verified attendees.
- All advertising and publicity (print or digital) for the event prominently features the Stafford County Tourism logo and refers to Stafford County Tourism in all public relations activities. The logo must comply with the official branding style guide and should be displayed either on the website or landing page linked to the ad, or the ad must include a direct link to the Stafford County Tourism website at tourstaffordva.com.
- At least 75% of awarded funds must be designated for out-of-county digital online advertising.
- Applicants are required to provide a dollar-for-dollar match, meaning the applicant must contribute an amount equal to the award. Proof of the applicant's contribution is required in the post-event report.
- Applicants must obtain photo and media release consent from event attendees, granting permission for photographs and/or video captured at the event to be used for marketing, promotional, and reporting purposes by Stafford County. Applicants may use the official photo and media release forms provided by Stafford County Tourism or collect consent through alternative methods such as day-of-event signage, customized consent forms, digital or electronic consent, or written acknowledgement included in the event registration or participation agreements. Proof of consent method is required in the post-event report.
- Applicants are required to permit Stafford County the use of photographs, digital images, video, or recordings in their entirety and/or edited versions as deemed necessary by Stafford County.
- The appointed primary contact must submit all application materials and required documents in a post-event report within 90 days of event completion.

Community Event Marketing Grant Application Snapshot

- Applicant Information
    - Contact info and organization details
- Funding Request

    - Amount requested
    - Amount applicant can match
- Event Details
    - General information: event name, dates, location, type, description
    - Website and social media handles
    - Event schedule
    - Event budget (including sponsorship plan, commitments, and levels, if applicable)
- Event Marketing Plan
    - Plan and budget for out-of-county marketing
    - Success metrics
- Projected Attendance
    - Projected total attendees, out-of-county attendees, and vendors
    - Method used for each projection
- Event History
    - Whether the event has run before
        - If so: prior contact, dates, location, past room nights and economic impact, and how that data was measured
    - Any prior Stafford County Tourism funding received (years/amounts)

Reimbursement and Accountability

Funding will be provided as reimbursement for approved out-of-county marketing and advertising expenses upon submission of the post-event report. Proof of payment must be provided in the form of vendor receipts and front-and-back copies of cleared checks or credit card receipts. Cash receipts will not be accepted for reimbursements.

Stafford County Tourism may use geofencing and other verification methods to confirm attendance and reported activity. Funds will be released only to the primary contact after all post-event documentation has been submitted. Incomplete reports or missing documentation will result in reimbursement denial.

Within 90 days of event completion, the primary contact must submit a completed post-event report to be eligible for reimbursement. Incomplete reports will not be considered.

<u>Post Event Report</u>

- IRS W-9 Form and Stafford County Vendor Form
- Verified attendee numbers, as applicable, including the number of attendees, participants, spectators, staff, officials, and media
- Verified attendee ZIP code data, documented through ticketing, registration, or other acceptable reporting methods

- Itemized receipts or invoices for reimbursable expenses (front/back copies of cleared checks, credit card receipts, or online payment confirmations)
- Demonstration of a dollar-for-dollar match of awarded funds used in marketing and promotional efforts
- All advertising and/or promotional materials with the official Stafford County Tourism logo
- Verification of a photo and media release consent method from event attendees, granting permission for photographs and/or video captured at the event to be used for marketing, promotional, and reporting purposes by Stafford County

Stafford County Tourism reserves the right to audit reports to verify accuracy. Incomplete reports or missing documentation will void approved funds. Stafford County Tourism reserves the right to adjust or cancel funding if the event is cancelled or significantly altered due to circumstances beyond the applicant's control.

Questions about the program, eligibility, or criteria?

Contact Stafford County Tourism at tourism@staffordcountyva.gov.