High Impact Signature Event Grant Program

High Impact Signature Events Grants are provided to assist with expenses that support the promotion and continued growth of recurring, large-scale events in Stafford County, including sporting events, festivals, and other major cultural or entertainment gatherings that generate visitation from outside the local area. The purpose of the High Impact Signature Event Grant is to provide support for high-quality events in Stafford County that, in turn, promote visitation to the county, attract overnight visitors, increase local spending, enhance Stafford County's positive image, boost the experience economy, and enrich the visitor experience.

Basic Application Criteria

- Event duration: minimum two-day event, including an evening or next-day component
- Minimum room verifications and/or attendees: at least 500 verified room nights and/or at least 5,000 verified attendees, with at least 30% verified from outside the county
- Minimum funding: $2,500 based on $0.50 per verified attendee or $20 per verified room night, with no funding ceiling.
    - Applicants must state in the application whether funding will be based on verified attendees or room nights.
- Submission deadline: applications must be submitted at least six (6) 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

Funding levels are based on verified room nights and/or verified attendees, with a minimum grant of $2,500. Awards up to $10,000 require approval from Stafford County Tourism staff; awards up to $50,000 require approval from Stafford County Administration; and awards exceeding $50,000 require approval from the Stafford County Board of Supervisors, which may extend the timeline for approvals.

Funding is calculated at $20 per verified room night or $0.50 per verified attendee, provided at least 30% of attendees are from outside Stafford County. Applicants must state their preferred funding option in the application. Consideration is based on verified room nights, verified attendees, and the overall economic impact of the event.

Final funding is determined by verified room nights and/or attendees and Stafford County Tourism’s discretion. Stafford County Tourism may lower the funding level with justification.

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.

Stafford County Tourism will reimburse only for room nights verified by a third-party source, not based on projected room nights stated in the application. Acceptable verification methods include confirmation from a booking agent or booking platform, or direct verification from hoteliers. Only hotels or accommodations secured for the event located within Stafford County and subject to the Transient Occupancy Tax are eligible for reimbursement.

The projected number of room nights or attendees stated in the initial application does not guarantee the final funding amount. If an event does not meet the minimum requirement of 500 verified room nights, the reimbursement rate will be reduced from $20 to $15 per verified room night.

Eligible Use of Funds

- Out-of-county advertising, including digital (geofencing, social media, retargeting, SEO/SEM, display ads, email campaigns, digital content), print, radio, or TV
- Development of visitor-facing website pages and content
- Public relations/media events
- Targeted audience outreach, such as trade show booth rentals
- Promotional items tied to an experience or activation at the event (pre-approved by Stafford County Tourism, with logo included)
- Event fees, including A/V equipment rental, in-county transportation/tours, entertainment for public events, and facility fees at Stafford County venues or Stafford County Tourism partners
- Necessary operational expenses, including event staff/ volunteer shirts, security, fire and EMS services, post-event clean up, and waste disposal fees

Ineligible Use of Funds

- Prize money, scholarships, or monetary awards
- Unapproved shirts or merchandise without the Stafford County Tourism logo
- 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
- 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 and/or design
- Any activities encouraging or supporting illegal or illicit activities

Eligibility

Eligible businesses and organizations operating within or outside of 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

Before submitting an application, applicants must meet with the Tourism Program Manager. Applications must then be submitted at least six (6) months prior to the event. Clarifying questions from Stafford County Tourism regarding the submitted application will be sent via email. Applicants have 30 days to respond; otherwise, the application will be denied, and a re-application is required.

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

Eligible events must generate at least 500 verified room nights and/or 5,000 verified attendees and are defined as recurring, large-scale events held within Stafford County that attract significant visitation from outside the county. Examples include major festivals, sporting events, concert tours, cultural events, and business events.

Funding consideration is based on the number of room nights or attendees generated by the event for Stafford County. The applicant must specify in the application which funding option they are requesting. Only rooms subject to the Virginia Transient Occupancy Tax are eligible for reimbursement; complimentary rooms are not eligible. Room night verifications must be provided by third-party sources, such as booking agents, online platforms, or directly from participating hoteliers. Stafford County Tourism reserves the right to audit accommodations and may request additional documentation related to vendor participation, ticket sales, or other economic contributions.

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.

Grant funds are intended to supplement expenses directly associated with hosting the event, including marketing and promotion, venue or site rentals, and other operational costs. These funds may not be used to cover administrative expenses and are not intended to serve as the event's sole source of funding.

The applicant must designate a single point of contact for the duration of the High Impact Signature Event Funding process. This individual is responsible for submitting all application materials and following up on post-event reporting. Should the point of 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 and reproduce 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, and any materials showing 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, a letter must be sent to the Stafford County Tourism office 90 days before the originally approved date or the new date (whichever is first). Failure to notify the Stafford County Tourism office will result in application denial.

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

Criteria:

- The primary contact must attend a pre-application meeting with the Stafford County Tourism Program Manager, either in person or virtually, to discuss event plans and promotional efforts.
- Applications must be submitted no less than six (6) months before the event start date.
- Events must be held within Stafford County.
- Events must take place over two or more days and feature programming in the evening or the following morning/day to promote overnight stays.
- The event must generate at least 500 verified overnight stays in Stafford County hotels and/or at least 5,000 verified attendees, with a minimum of 30% coming from outside of Stafford County.
- Applicants must include projected economic impact information in their application and report actual, updated economic impact in the post-event report.
    - Applicants may also be asked to provide additional information, such as vendor participation, ticket sales, or other contributions to Stafford County's economy.
- 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.
- 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.

High Impact Signature Event Grant Application Snapshot

- Applicant Information
  - Contact info and organization details
  - Business plan
- Funding Request
  - Amount requested
  - Whether funding should be considered based on verified room nights OR verified attendee number
- Event Details
  - General information: event name, dates, location, type, description
  - Website and social media handles
  - Event schedule
  - Event budget
- Projected Economic Impact
  - Projected attendee numbers (including overnight vs. day-trip breakdown) and how they'll be tracked/verified
  - Projected total room nights and verification method
- Event History & Past Funding
  - Whether the event has been held previously
    - If yes: prior event info (dates, location, room nights, funding, economic impact, method used, contact)
  - Any prior Stafford County Tourism funding received (years/amounts)

Reimbursement and Accountability

Funding will be provided as reimbursement for approved actual 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 and room night verification are complete. 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.

Post Event Report

- IRS W-9 Form and Stafford County Vendor Form
- Detailed business plan demonstrating how the event will increase out-of-county visitation and overnight tourism to Stafford County
- Room night verification reporting all room nights generated in Stafford County (staff, competitors, volunteers, spectators, officials, etc.)
    - All reported room nights must be verified by a third-party before reimbursement.
        - Acceptable verification methods include confirmation from a booking agent or booking platform, or direct verification from hoteliers
- Verified attendee numbers, including the percentage of verified out-of-county attendees, total number of attendees, participants, spectators, staff, officials, and media
    - All reported attendee numbers must be verified by an official source
        - Acceptable verification methods include ticket sales, geofencing, and official check-ins
- Actual economic impact information updating previously submitted projected estimates
    - Figures to include, as applicable, are total attendance and out-of-town visitors, revenue generated, hotel rooms booked, on-site food, merchandise, etc., or other measurable financial impacts
- Itemized receipts or invoices for reimbursable expenses (front/back copies of cleared checks, credit card receipts, or online payment confirmations)
- All advertising and/or promotional materials with the official Stafford County Tourism logo
- Marketing outcomes, including ad reach and performance by placements inside and outside the county
- 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 and verify attendance and room nights. Incomplete reports or missing documentation will void approved funds. Stafford 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.