Marketing Leverage Grant Program

Stafford County Tourism's Marketing Leverage Grant Program is designed to support high-impact marketing efforts that promote Stafford as a destination, attract new visitors, and drive visitor spending, prioritizing campaigns, projects, and initiatives with strong potential for tourism-related return on investment.

Basic Application Criteria

- Minimum requirement for reimbursement: Marketing must target audiences 50+ miles from Stafford County and aim to attract out-of-county and out-of-state visitors
- Marketing messaging is for attendance at a Stafford County event or visitation to a Stafford County Tourism asset.
- Maximum funding: $10,000 per fiscal year
- Submission deadline: applications must be submitted three (3) months before the date of the start of the campaign, project, or initiative

Full Program Details

Funding Request

The maximum allowable reimbursement funding per organization per fiscal year (July 1 – June 30) is $10,000. The maximum allowable reimbursement funding for print items such as rack cards, brochures, and flyers is $1,000 per fiscal year, per project.

Funding awards are not guaranteed and are based on eligibility, available funds, and how well each proposed campaign, project, or initiative meets grant criteria, including campaign success. Particular emphasis is placed on marketing efforts that target audiences 50 miles or more outside the area. Final funding recommendations will be based on the applicant's compliance with the required targeted marketing criteria and Stafford County Tourism's sole discretion. Stafford County Tourism has the right to lower the funding level, upon providing justification for its decision.

Applicants must clearly document all out-of-county marketing efforts and associated costs in their funding reimbursement request. Funding is reimbursable only after the campaign, project, or initiative is complete, expenses are verified as eligible, and the required post-campaign report is submitted.

Eligible Expenses

- Digital or online marketing, targeting audiences outside of Stafford County, including geofencing, re-targeting, SEM/SEO, social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), targeted email blasts, Connected TV, website creation or updates, etc.
- Printed materials distributed outside the county to attract visitors (e.g., brochures, rack cards, flyers)
- Original photo or video production promoting visitation to Stafford County.
- Creative design for marketing or promotional materials.
- Marketing materials developed to drive attendance for familiarization tours or site visits (eligibility depends on target audience)
- Fulfillment costs for marketing programs aimed at out-of-county audiences

Ineligible Use of Funds

- Advertising or promotions targeting audiences within Stafford County
- 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)
- Annual operating costs not directly related to the campaign, project, or initiative
- 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
- Sales tax
- Ongoing website maintenance
- Costs of giveaway or promotional items
- Any activities encouraging or supporting illegal or illicit activities

Eligibility

Eligible businesses and 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 are in compliance with all applicable County regulations.

Stafford County employees, elected officials, and members of their immediate families may not apply in an official County capacity, but 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 start of the campaign, project, or initiative. 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 campaign, project, or initiative's completion.

Application Guidelines

The Marketing Leverage Grant provides reimbursement-based funding to support marketing campaigns, projects, or initiatives designed to draw visitors located 50 miles or more from Stafford County. Each eligible organization may receive a maximum of $10,000 per fiscal year, which runs from July 1 through June 30.

Organizations may apply for funding for multiple campaigns, projects, or initiatives throughout the fiscal year, provided that each campaign, project, or initiative is submitted only once. Applicants must clearly detail the funding amount requested for each campaign, project, or initiative in the application. Collaborative efforts that leverage multiple partners to reach out-of-market audiences are encouraged.

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

Funds cannot be used for general marketing or day-to-day promotion; they must support specific campaigns aimed at drawing visitors to the county. Organizations are required to submit a post-

campaign report, and failure to do so may impact current and future funding and may void reimbursement for the related campaign, project, or initiative.

The applicant must designate a single primary contact for the duration of the Marketing Leverage Grant process. This individual is responsible for submitting all application materials, executing funding expectations, providing required forms, and following up on post-campaign reporting. If the primary contact changes at any point during the process, written notification must be provided to Stafford County Tourism. Failure to provide timely notification may result in application denial or impact funding.

By applying, the applicant grants Stafford County permission to use and reproduce photographs, digital images, videos, or other content created in connection with the funded marketing campaign. 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 change before the campaign, project, or initiative is carried out, a letter must be sent to Stafford County Tourism at least 90 days before the originally approved date or the new date, whichever comes first. Changes that require notification may include, but are not limited to, start or end dates, marketing tactics, or the scope of the campaign, project, or initiative. Failure to notify Stafford County Tourism of such changes may result in application denial.

Criteria:

- Applications must be submitted no less than three (3) months before the campaign, project, or initiative start date.
- Marketing efforts must target audiences 50+ miles from Stafford County and aim to attract out-of-county and out-of-state visitors.
- All advertising (print or digital) must prominently feature the Stafford County Tourism logo and refer to Stafford County Tourism. 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 consent from any individuals featured in photographs, videos, or other media created for the funded campaign, project, or initiative, granting permission for Stafford County to use the content for marketing, promotional, or reporting purposes. Applicants may use official consent forms provided by Stafford County Tourism or alternative methods, such as written acknowledgment or electronic consent. Proof of the consent method must be provided in the post-campaign, project, or initiative 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-campaign report within 90 days of campaign, project, or initiative completion.

Marketing Leverage Grant Application Snapshot

- Applicant Information
  - Contact info and organization details
- Funding Request
  - Amount requested for the campaign/project/initiative
  - Detailed list of expenses the funds will cover (for example, advertising, social media, print materials, design
- Campaign/Project Details
  - Campaign/project/initiative details and budget
  - Metrics that will be tracked (impressions, engagement, conversions)
  - Campaign/project/initiative budget
- Marketing Plan
  - Full marketing plan with implementation timeline
- Projected Tourism Impact
  - How the campaign/project/initiative will drive tourism/visitation and visitor spending in Stafford County
  - How the campaign/project/initiative plans to target markets 50+ miles outside of Stafford County
  - How success will be tracked and measured (out-of-county spending, overnight stays)

Reimbursement and Accountability

Funding will be provided as reimbursement for approved out-of-county marketing and advertising expenses upon submission of the post-campaign, project, or initiative 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.

Funds will be released only to the primary contact once all post-campaign, program, or initiative documentation has been submitted. Incomplete reports or missing documentation may result in reimbursement denial.

Acceptable methods of verification for marketing targeting audiences 50+ miles from Stafford County may include, but are not limited to:

- Advertising platform targeting and delivery reports, including geofence maps, radius settings, or lists of targeted ZIP codes or cities.
- Campaign performance reporting from advertising or social media platforms showing impressions, engagement, conversions, or other measurable outcomes tied to geographic targeting.
- Website analytics or campaign referral reports demonstrating that users accessed the website through paid social or digital advertising.
- Exported reports or screenshots from advertising platforms verifying out-of-market campaign delivery and performance.
- Other location-based analytics or third-party reporting that clearly and verifiably demonstrate out-of-county targeting and reach.

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

<u>Post-Campaign, Project, or Initiative Report</u>

- IRS W-9 Form and Stafford County Vendor Form
- Documentation of out-of-county marketing efforts and post-campaign results using the methods mentioned above
- All advertising and/or promotional materials with the official Stafford County Tourism logo
- Itemized receipts or invoices for reimbursable expenses (front/back copies of cleared checks, credit card receipts, or online payment confirmations)

- Verification of a photo and media release consent method from any individuals featured in photographs, videos, or other media created for the funded campaign, project, or initiative

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.