New Events Marketing Grant Program

The New Events Marketing Grant supports multi-day events in their first three years in Stafford County that aim to become annual or recurring attractions. Eligible events must demonstrate a commitment to growth and attracting visitors from outside the county. The New Events Marketing Grant provides marketing support to events that promote visitation, increase overnight stays and local spending, enhance Stafford County's image, and enrich the visitor experience.

Basic Application Criteria

- Event duration: minimum two-day event, including an evening or next-day component
- Maximum funding:
    - Year 1- $20,000; no room night verifications required
        - Opportunity for an additional $20/room night reimbursement based on verified rooms.
    - Year 2 and 3- $10,000; no room night verifications required
        - Opportunity for an additional $20/room night reimbursement based on verified rooms.
- 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 is structured based on the age of the event, with a two-tiered approach to support new and developing events. There is a maximum funding level of $20,000 for year one (1) and $10,000 for years two (2) and three (3). In addition to base funding, events may qualify for the overnight incentive program, which provides $20 per verified room night based on documentation submitted from Stafford County lodging partners.

Final funding recommendations will be based on the age of the event and Stafford County Tourism's sole discretion. Verified room nights will only be considered for applicants who opt into the overnight incentive program. Stafford County Tourism has the right to lower the funding level, upon providing justification for its decision.

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.

Eligible Use of Funds

- Out-of-county advertising: 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 rescue 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 not directly related to the event
- Event insurance
- Legal, accounting, engineering, consulting, or planning 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
- 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 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, 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

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

Funding is available for new events in their first three years that have not previously occurred in Stafford County and are intended to become recurring events. Eligible events must be held within Stafford County, span at least two days, and include either an evening component or programming the following morning or day to encourage overnight stays.

In addition to the base grant funding, events may qualify for the overnight incentive program, which reimburses $20 per verified hotel room night in Stafford County. This bonus funding is designed to reward events that generate overnight visitation and economic impact for the county and is calculated strictly based on verified documentation submitted.

Applicants seeking to participate in the overnight incentive program must verify all room nights in Stafford County. To be eligible for reimbursement, accommodations must be subject to the Virginia Transient Occupancy Tax; 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.

Applicants must designate a single contact for the duration of the funding process. This individual is responsible for submitting all application materials, executing the funding expectations, providing required forms, attending a pre-application meeting (virtually or in-person), and following up on post-event reporting. Written notice must be provided to Stafford County Tourism if the primary contact changes.

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, a letter must be sent 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 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.
- 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.

New Events Marketing Grant Application Snapshot

- Applicant Information
    - Contact info and organization details
- Funding Request
    - Amount requested and how it will be used
    - Any other funding sources already secured
- 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 an overnight vs. day-trip breakdown) and how they'll be tracked/verified
    - Overnight Incentive Program (optional): projected room nights and verification method
- Event History & Past Funding
    - Whether the event has been held in Stafford County before or whether it's been held elsewhere previously (with details: dates, location, room nights, funding, economic impact, and how that was measured)
    - 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. Incomplete reports will not be considered.

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
- 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
- Verified attendee numbers, as applicable, including the number of attendees, staff, and media
- Itemized receipts or invoices for reimbursable expenses (front/back copies of cleared checks, credit card receipts, or online payment confirmations)
- Marketing outcomes, including ad reach and performance by placements inside and outside the county
- 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

Additional Overnight Incentive Program Report Documents

- Room night verification reporting all room nights generated by the event in Stafford County
    - 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

Stafford County Tourism reserves the right to audit reports and verify attendance and room nights, as applicable. 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.