Special Events, Group Meetings or Conferences Grant Program

Special events, group meetings, or conferences are defined as organized, non-sporting events such as festivals, conventions, trade shows, corporate meetings, association gatherings, and similar activities held in Stafford County for business, educational, cultural, or community purposes. Special Events, Group Meetings or Conferences Grant funds are provided to organizations to assist in covering various costs directly related to promoting and administering special events, meetings, or conferences, and boosting tourism in Stafford County.

The purpose of the Special Events, Group Meetings or Conferences Grant is to support high-quality special events, meetings, or conferences 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

- Minimum room verifications: at least 50 verified room nights
- Maximum funding: $10,000 based on $20/verified room night
- Submission deadline: applications must be submitted six (6) months before the event
- Excluded events: not applicable for exclusive events such as weddings, family reunions, class reunions, etc.

Full Program Details

Funding Request

There is a maximum funding level of $10,000. Funding will be calculated at $20 per verified room night. The number of room nights stated by the applicant in the initial application does not guarantee the actual funding level.

The final funding recommendation will be based on verified room nights and Stafford County Tourism’s sole discretion. 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 includes digital (geofencing, social media, retargeting, SEO/SEM, display ads, email campaigns, digital content), print, radio, and/or TV
- Public relations/media events
- Targeted audience outreach, such as trade show booth rentals and displays, or participation fees associated with targeting sporting events in Stafford
- 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, and/or entertainment for public events
- Necessary operational expenses, including event staff/volunteer shirts, security, fire and EMS services, post-event clean up, and waste disposal fees
- Pre-approved trophies, plaques, and non-monetary awards with the Stafford County Tourism logo included in the design
- Field or facility-related expenses
- Development of visitor-facing website pages and content

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 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 or design

- Any activities encouraging or supporting illegal or illicit activities
- Receptions or social events not intended for pre-event promotional purposes

Eligibility

Eligible businesses and organizations operating within and outside 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 six (6) months before the event. Clarifying questions from Stafford County Tourism regarding the submitted application will be sent via email to the applicant. 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 50 verified room nights and are defined as non-sporting, organized gatherings held within Stafford County for business, educational, cultural, or similar purposes, including but not limited to conventions, festivals, trade shows, corporate meetings, and association assemblies. This grant does not apply to exclusive events such as weddings, family reunions, class reunions, or similar private gatherings.

Funding consideration is based on the number of room nights the event will generate within Stafford County. Only hotels/accommodations located within Stafford County will be eligible for reimbursement. Only rooms subject to the Virginia Transient Occupancy Tax are included;

complimentary rooms are excluded. Verifications must come from an outside source beyond the grant recipient's records, such as third-party booking agents or booking platforms, or directly from hoteliers. Stafford County Tourism may audit listed accommodations to confirm accuracy.

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.

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.

The applicant must designate a single point of contact for the duration of the Sports Event 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.

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:

- Applications must be submitted no less than six (6) months before the event start date.
- Events must be held within Stafford County.
- There is a minimum of 50 verified room nights located in Stafford County.
- 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.

Special Events, Group Meetings or Conferences 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

- Attendance & Tourism Impact Projections
    - Projected attendance: overnight in-state attendees (50+ miles out), day-trip attendees (within 50 miles), and paid room nights
        - Verification method for each projection
- Event History & Past Funding
    - 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 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.

<u>Post Event Report</u>

- IRS W-9 Form and Stafford County Vendor Form
- Room night verification reporting all room nights generated by the event 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, as applicable, including the number of attendees, participants, spectators, staff, officials, 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

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.