

CRITERIA & GUIDELINES

- Any recipient with an outstanding grant from 2022 and prior that has not submitted the required documentation and has not been approved for an extension shall be ineligible to apply for a 2024 grant until such supporting documentation required herein are submitted and accepted by August 31, 2023.
 - Must be an operating business within the county and have been an established business that's been operating for 12 months at the time of the application.
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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Forty percent of the Somerset County Lodging Tax is appropriated for a grant program specifically established to support the county's tourism assets. The purpose of this grant program is to enhance the tourism experience, increase tourism visitation, and to generate overnight stays within Somerset County. Awards are granted annually on the basis of merit as determined by the Somerset County Tourism Grant Review Committee and administered by the Somerset County Commissioners and GO Laurel Highlands (GO LH) (Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau). Thus, grant funding must be primarily used for marketing and advertising expenses that target potential visitors who reside outside of the Laurel Highlands counties and whose visit is likely to result in an overnight stay.

CRITERIA AND GUIDELINES

Please read the following items very closely. Failure to adhere to any of the following guidelines will result in the disqualification of your application.

1. **Both nonprofit and for-profit organizations** are required by Act 18 to have a 25% cash match or a 12.5% cash match and 12.5% in-kind match.
 - Documentation for in-kind donated professional services and/or donated materials must be provided and must include work performed, date/dates of the services, and hourly rate and hours donated. (A discount is not considered as in-kind).
 - In-kind volunteer work is only acceptable for events/festivals and only for the time the volunteer works at the event. The volunteer's time is valued at \$12 per hour and must be documented, including dates, services they provided, and hours of service.
2. All lodging establishments, including campgrounds with cabin rentals, cabins, hotels, resorts, hostels, vacation rentals (including Airbnb, VRBO), bed & breakfast, and other overnight rental organizations must be in good standing and current in its submission of obligated funds for the Somerset County Lodging Tax. (If you have any questions on your status, please contact your County Treasury Department).
3. If you receive a grant, you can incur expenses eligible for assistance immediately after you receive a grant notification letter. Expenses cannot be incurred before the notification date.
4. Grants may be awarded to any nonprofit or for-profit tourism-related business or organization located within Somerset County that submits a request for such funds utilizing the official grant application furnished for this purpose and whose mission and operation are directly related to tourism and tourism development.
5. Grants are awarded on an annual basis.

6. Applicants should not assume that they will be awarded a grant on an annual basis, nor should they consider these tourism grants a permanent addition to their budget.
7. Applicants must use only the official forms and required documents for submission.
8. An applicant may not file for more than one grant request for each type of grant. Each grant request must be submitted on a separate application.
9. ALL grant applications MUST be submitted by an authorized representative of the requesting entity and MAY NOT be submitted by a third party or agency on behalf of the entity.
10. Award amounts must be utilized before December 31, 2024. Grant dollars cannot be carried over to the next year.
11. If the funds cannot be utilized within the designated period, applicants must inform the GO LH Grant Administrator in writing and either request an extension or return unused funds. If an extension is not approved you must submit a final report, the portion of unused funds, and any accrued interest payable to: GO Laurel Highlands, Attn: Grant Administrator, 113 East Main Street, Ligonier, PA 15658.
12. Grant extension requests will be forwarded to the grant committee for approval. The grant committee reserves the right to approve or reject an extension request and the decision of the committee or its designated representative(s) shall be final and binding upon all parties. The grant recipient will be notified by email on the committee's decision.
13. Recipients approved for an extension shall be eligible to apply for a subsequent grant during the extension period.
14. A written request and an updated Tourism Grant Expenditure Form is needed for all project budget changes NOT approved on the original application. Budget changes need to be in the scope of the original project categories. Send all requests to grobinsky@golaurelhighlands.com.
15. A for-profit business that receives a grant may be required to treat the grant as income and is responsible for paying any necessary applicable taxes.
16. Awardees shall publicly acknowledge the Somerset County Tourism Grant Program through all reasonable vehicles as a stipulation of accepting such awards. This includes recognition of funding on printed media, social media pages, websites and any other media that might be engaged utilizing grant funds. Recipients are required to incorporate the Somerset County Tourism Program Logo in all marketing projects funded by a Somerset Tourism Grant, in whole or in part, whether utilizing print or any other media. Failure to do so will be taken into consideration when future grant applications are submitted by the applicant. An electronic version of the logo is available from GO Laurel Highlands by contacting Jennifer Benford at jbenford@golaurelhighlands.com.
17. All nonprofit applicants must provide a copy of their IRS Determination 501(c)(3) letter and a list of their Board of Directors. Failure to do so will render the application ineligible.
18. Based on the dollar amount, grants equal to or less than \$25,000.00 will be issued in the full amount. Anything above \$25,000.00 will be issued in two (2) equal checks. If the grant awardee receives a partial distribution of the grant, the remaining one-half of the grant will be issued when the project is 50% complete and has met the second-half reporting requirements.

19. As a provision of accepting the grant, awardees must provide adequate proof that the funds received were used for their intended purpose. (see Reporting Guidelines)
20. It shall be the sole responsibility of any grant recipient to adhere to the prescribed deadlines relative to the appropriate utilization of any such grant. Neither the Somerset County Commissioners, the grant committee, nor GO LH shall be responsible for monitoring such deadlines or informing any grant recipient of an impending or expired deadline. Failure of a grant recipient to comply with the deadline relative to a grant will subject said recipient to the covenants and provisions contained in these Criteria and Guidelines.

2024 | Somerset County Tourism Grant Program

GRANT CATEGORIES

1. MARKETING GRANTS

Marketing and advertising programs must be targeted to media that primarily reach visitors outside Somerset County. Cooperative programs, which include tourism partners in the three-county Laurel Highlands region, are eligible. The Grant Program will not fund advertisements in local event programs (i.e. high school sports programs, local dance troupe programs, etc.) **Tourism-related marketing expenses are eligible for funding as long as the contractor is with a 3rd party organization and not affiliated with the requesting organization in any way.**

Eligible expenses including but not limited to:

- Internet website development or enhancement if contracted with an entity not affiliated with the applicant.
- Creative services (creating photo or film libraries, logo development, new artwork, etc.) if contracted with an entity not affiliated with the applicant.
- Brochure design and printing
- Advertising (TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, billboards, search engine marketing, digital ad campaigns, etc. – local media may be included if the majority of their audience is out of county.)
- Directional signage.
- Exhibiting fees to participate in industry travel shows/trade shows.
- Trade show displays that include the GO Laurel Highlands logo.

2. VISITOR CENTER GRANTS

- Operation of a visitor center in a Great Allegheny Passage Conservancy recognized “Great Allegheny Passage Trail Town” in Somerset County.
- Expenses related to staffing the center such as: payroll, payroll taxes, and payroll fees and standard operational expenses such as rent, utilities, insurance, postage, etc., as directly related to the operation of a seasonal visitor center.

EXPENSES NOT ELIGIBLE FOR GRANT FUNDING:

- Food, lodging, mileage, and transportation costs
- Purchase or rental computers, software, projectors, and other equipment, food trucks and business vehicles
- Payments for a grant writer to write the grant
- Payments to staff for managing advertising campaigns related to grant
- Personnel costs and/or salaries except for the Visitor Center Grants
- Telephone expenses
- Postage and handling expenses
- Purchase of brochure racks
- Envelopes, letterhead, business cards, and miscellaneous office supplies

- Membership dues, sponsorships, and talent/dignitary honorariums
- Office space rental
- Physical construction of billboards
- Gift cards, t-shirts, mugs, and items for resale including items for giveaways
- Sectarian religious purposes
- Signage for onsite property that promotes your individual entity

2024 | Somerset County Tourism Grant Program

APPLICATION, REVIEW & REPORTING INFORMATION

2024 GRANT APPLICATIONS

Applications can be found online at golaurelhighlands.com/grants. You will be required to complete and submit the following online:

- Grant application
- 2024 tourism grant budget worksheet
- W9 (a check will not be processed if you fail to submit a W9)
- Board of Directors list if applicable
- IRS Determination 501(c)(3) letter

ALL grant applications and documentation must be received no later than 4:00 p.m., Friday, October 6, 2023, to be considered and will not be accepted thereafter.

OTHER IMPORTANT DATES FOR THE 2024 GRANT CYCLE

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| • Application submission deadline | | 4:00 p.m., Friday, October 6, 2023 |
| • Date grant funds must be utilized by | | Tuesday, December 31, 2024 |
| • Due date for final reporting | | 4:00 p.m. Monday, March 31, 2025 |

SOMERSET COUNTY TOURISM GRANT REVIEW COMMITTEE

- The Tourism Grant Review Committee shall be comprised of five (5) members:
 - One (1) Somerset County Commissioner or the Commissioners' Designee
 - The Executive Director of GO LH or the Executive Director's designee
 - One (1) member of the GO LH Board of Directors who represents the Somerset County lodging community
 - Two (2) representatives of Somerset County appointed by the Somerset County Commissioners to serve annual terms
- In the event that a member of the Tourism Grant Review Committee serves on the board of the applicant organization or event, or is affiliated in any other manner, it is mandatory that said member recuse himself/herself physically from the venue during the review and/or decision-making process of that specific application and must not participate in the determination thereof.
- The committee will review all grant applications and announce the awards in December 2023.

- Grant awards shall be presented to each recipient jointly by representatives of the Somerset County Tourism Grant Committee and the Somerset County Commissioners.
- Nothing shall prevent the Somerset County Tourism Grant Review Committee from withholding part or all of the grant funds available for annual awards should the committee believe that insufficient requests have been made justifying the full distribution of those funds. Should funds be remaining at the end of any fiscal year, those funds may be rolled forward to be utilized in the subsequent year’s grant program.
- The Somerset County Tourism Grant Review Committee will review these Criteria and Guidelines on an annual basis to enhance, amend, or modify said guidelines.

REPORTING GUIDELINES

SECOND HALF | To request the balance of a grant, the recipient must submit all required documentation.

APPLICANTS MUST PROVIDE:

- Tourism Grant Second Half Reporting Form
- Completed Grant Expenditure Form
- Copy of approved Budget Expenditure Form
- Copies of all invoices and proof of payment for grant dollars and match.
- Marketing grants must provide copies of all printed advertisements, press releases, or samples of media placements/media
- Grant recipients shall abide by all local, state, and federal laws and regulations and agree to furnish all the documentation listed above. In addition, grant recipients understand that the expenditure of grant funds received might be subject to audit and or further verification and agree to cooperate with any such audit or verification process.
- **** When filing your final report, you do not have to send in the documentation that you submitted with the Second Half Report. You will need to enter the information on the Grant Expenditure Form and note they are from your second half filing.**

FINAL REPORT | To close out a grant, the Tourism Grant Final Report Form and the required documentation must be **submitted no later than March 31, 2025.**

APPLICANTS MUST PROVIDE:

- Tourism Grant Final Reporting Form
- Completed Grant Expenditure Form
- Copy of approved Budget Expenditure Form from grant application
- Copies of all invoices and proof of payment for grant dollars and match.
- Marketing grants must provide copies of all printed advertisements, press releases, or samples of media placements/media
- Grant recipients shall abide by all local, state, and federal laws and regulations and agree to furnish all the documentation listed above. In addition, grant recipients understand that the expenditure of grant funds received might be subject to audit and or further verification and agree to cooperate with any such audit or verification process.

MAIL REPORTS AND REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION TO: **E-MAILS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED**

GO Laurel Highlands
 ATTN: Grant Administrator
 113 East Main Street
 Ligonier, PA 15658