

CRITERIA & GUIDELINES

- Any recipient with an outstanding grant from 2023 and prior that has not submitted the required documentation and has not been approved for an extension shall be ineligible to apply for a 2025 grant until such supporting documentation required herein is submitted and accepted by August 31, 2024.
- Must be an operating business within the county and have been an established business that has been operating for 12 months at the time of the application.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND ELIGIBILITY

GO Laurel Highlands (GO LH), in partnership with Somerset County, facilitates the Somerset County Tourism Grant Program (SCTGP). Forty percent of the Somerset County Lodging Tax is appropriated for a grant program specifically aimed to increase visitation to Somerset County and the Laurel Highlands resulting in positive economic impact and supporting jobs in the tourism sector. A visitor is defined as an individual traveling 50 miles or more and/or staying overnight.

GO LH administrates the program for the Somerset County Board of Commissioners and oversees the documentation process in compliance with the program guidelines. Awards are granted annually based on merit as determined by the Tourism Grant Review Committee (TGRC).

The SCTGP provides grants for tourism marketing, promotion, product development, special events, exhibits and festivals that drive overnight stays to Somerset County and the Laurel Highlands. The purpose is to strengthen the vitality of the tourism and hospitality community, resulting in increased economic activity. Eligible organizations are defined as nonprofit or for-profit businesses within the tourism and hospitality industry.

2025 PROGRAM PROCESS AND TIMELINE

- Grant applications will be available on August 26, 2024.
- **Applications will be accepted from August 26, 2024, at 9:00 am through October 4, 2024, at 4:00 pm.**
- Applications must be submitted via the online grant portal.
- Grants will be reviewed by the TGRC in November. The number of grants and amounts awarded will be based on the lodging tax collected over 12 months.
- All grant applications will receive a letter of approval or denial in November from the Grant Administrator.
- A formal grant ceremony will be held in December 2024. Grant recipients are encouraged to attend.
- Grant checks will be mailed by January 6, 2025. Grant funds must be utilized between January 1, 2025, and December 31, 2025. Grant dollars cannot be carried over to the following year.
- 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 an initial check of \$25,000. The remainder will be issued when the recipient provides the Grant Balance Reporting form and invoices.
- **Final reports for this grant cycle are due March 31, 2026, at 4:00pm.**

SOMERSET COUNTY TOURISM GRANT REVIEW COMMITTEE

- The TGRC 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 largest lodging property in Somerset County
 - Two (2) representatives of Somerset County appointed by the Somerset County Commissioners to serve annual terms
- If a member of the TGRC 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 TGRC will review, and a majority must approve, any Change of Use or Grant Extensions.
- The TGRC will review Criteria and Guidelines on an annual basis to enhance, amend, or modify as deemed necessary.

GENERAL INFORMATION AND GUIDELINES

- **ALL grant applicants are required by Pennsylvania law, Act 18, to provide a 25% match, cash or in-kind, of the requested grant amount.** A cash match can be derived from:
 - Applicant dollars
 - Sponsorships
 - Donated dollars
 - Leveraging another grant
- An In-kind match can include:
 - Donated professional services (classified as someone who routinely, as a career, provides that service. Examples: printing services, painting, IT development.) Documentation for in-kind professional services must be provided and include work performed, date/dates of the services, and hourly rate and hours donated. A DISCOUNT IS NOT CONSIDERED IN-KIND.
 - Donated physical items (Examples: printed collateral, rental venue)
 - Volunteer hours accepted **ONLY FOR EVENTS/FESTIVALS** and only for the time the volunteers work AT THE EVENT. Volunteer hours are calculated at \$12 per hour and must be documented, including dates, services provided, and hours of service.
 - Non-event volunteer hours or staff time will NOT be accepted as an in-kind match.

CASH MATCH EXPLANATION: When you are writing your grant, you need to be able to have your own funding in place to support a 25% match. For instance, if you are requesting \$10,000 – you need \$2,500 of your own money as a match. You are requesting \$7,000, you need \$1,750. When you are working on your Final Report you will need to show how that match was used. As an example:

- *I did not include radio in my grant request, but I purchased \$2,500 in radio spots from KDKA. This is my 25% match. I have included the invoice from KDKA. (You used YOUR money to purchase the advertising).*
- *Line 1 of my spreadsheet shows the total cost for website design was \$5,000. I only requested \$2,500 as part of my grant request. I personally paid \$2,500. That \$2,500 is my match. I have included the total invoice for website design.*

- 1.** All lodging establishments, including campgrounds with cabin rentals, cabins, hotels, resorts, hostels, vacation rentals (including Airbnb, VRBO, and any other third-party site), and bed & breakfasts, must be in good standing and current in their submission of obligated funds for the Somerset County Lodging Tax. If you have any questions on your status, please contact your County Treasurer 814-445-1482.
- 2.** Applicants must have a Federal Employer Identification Number (FEIN).
- 3.** For-profits must provide a list of owners, Articles of Incorporation/Articles of Organization, and current W9.
- 4.** Nonprofits must provide a list of officers (board members), a copy of your US Department of the Treasury IRS Tax-Exempt Status Determination Letter, and a current W9.
- 5.** Grants will not be awarded for operational expenses.
- 6.** An applicant may not file for more than one grant request for each grant type. Each grant request must be submitted on a separate application.
- 7.** ALL grant applications MUST be submitted by an authorized representative of the requesting entity. A key Grant Contact should be designated and will be responsible for submitting all required documentation and be the responsible party for answering questions from the Grant Administrator.
- 8.** 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.
- 9.** 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.
- 10.** 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 in utilizing grant funds.
- 11.** 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 TGRC, nor GO LH shall be responsible for monitoring such deadlines or informing any grant recipient of an impending or expired deadline.
- 12.** As a provision of accepting the grant, recipients agree to provide adequate proof that the funds received were used for their intended purpose. Any grant recipient who fails to provide the required documentation and invoices within the stated deadline will be disqualified from applying for any future Somerset County Tourism Grant. A final report is required at the end of your project to close out the grant.
- 13.** Grant recipients shall abide by all local, state, and federal laws and regulations. In addition, grant recipients understand that they are responsible for the proper expenditure of grant funds received which may be subject to audit and or further verification. Grant recipient must agree to cooperate with any such audit or verification process.

GRANT CHANGE OF USE AND EXTENSIONS

1. Grant recipients may request a change to the scope of work or allocation of approved budgeted expenses due to extenuating circumstances or an extension for the organization to complete the project. Applicants must submit a Grant Change of Use/Extension Request Form. Form available at golaurelhighlands.com/grants. Grant extensions must be received BEFORE the end of the current grant cycle.
2. Grant Change of Use/Extension Form must be submitted to Georgia Robinsky at grobinsky@golaurelhighlands.com She will send to the TRGC for review. The committee reserves the right to approve or reject a change or extension. The grant recipient will be notified by email of the committee's decision.
3. Extensions do not prohibit grant applicants from submitting in the next grant cycle.

GRANT CATEGORIES / 2 TYPES OF GRANTS IN SOMERSET COUNTY

1. MARKETING GRANTS

Marketing and advertising programs must be targeted to media that primarily reach visitors who live outside Somerset County (50 mile radius beyond the county). Campaigns should be designed to increase visitation to an attraction, lodging property, or event/festival. Collaborative partnerships in the three-county region are eligible and encouraged.

Multi-day established annual events are encouraged to apply. New or one-day events may be less likely to be funded.

The goal of marketing grants should be to increase/extend/or enhance overnight stays.

The Grant Program will not fund advertisements in local event programs (i.e. high school sports programs, local dance troupe programs, etc.)

Eligible expenses include but are not limited to:

- Website development or enhancement.
- Creative services (design, photography, videography, media production, logo development)
- Printing of brochure and other collateral.
- Brochure distribution.
- Advertising (TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, billboards, search engine marketing, digital ad campaigns, and social media. The reach of advertising buys should primarily be outside of the county.
- Off site directional signage (not on your property).
- Exhibiting fees to participate in industry travel shows/trade shows.
- Trade show displays.

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 may include payroll, payroll taxes, payroll fees, and standard operational expenses such as rent, supplies, utilities, insurance, postage, etc., as directly related to the operation of the visitor center.

EXPENSES NOT ELIGIBLE FOR GRANT FUNDING:

- Expenses not directly related to the approved grant.
- Expenses that take place outside of the Grant Activity Period.
- Studies, surveys, research, feasibility studies.
- General operating, staff or administrative expenses (salaries/wages/benefits)
- Volunteer time or compensation to volunteers.
- Building repairs, renovations or remodeling of office/business facilities.
- Rent of office space.
- Office supplies and promotional giveaways (swag/giveaways)
- Resale items i.e. gift cards, t-shirts, mugs.
- Computer hardware, software platforms, and subscription services (Ex: Microsoft Suite, QuikBooks, Canva, MailChimp, Adobe)
- Professional development, including workshops and training for staff.
- Subscriptions or membership costs.
- Scholarships or endowments.
- Interest or the reduction of debt/loans.
- Cash awards of any kind.
- Tournament bid fees.
- Application and permit fees.
- Food, lodging, mileage, and transportation costs.
- Payments to a grant writer.
- Payments for Agency fees.
- Telephone/cell/cable/internet expenses.
- Envelopes, letterhead, business cards, and miscellaneous office supplies.
- Physical construction of billboards.
- Sectarian religious purposes.
- Onsite signage that promotes your individual property.

APPLICATION AND REPORTING INFORMATION

2025 GRANT APPLICATIONS

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

- Grant application
- Tourism grant budget worksheet
- For-profits must provide List of Owners, Articles of Incorporation/Articles of Organization, and W9
- Nonprofits must provide a list of officers (board members), Copy of your US Department of the Treasury IRS Tax-Exempt Status Determination Letter, current W9.

Grant applications and documentation must be received no later than 4:00 p.m. EST, Friday, October 4, 2024. Applications received after that date/time will not be eligible.

REPORTING GUIDELINES

GRANT BALANCE | To request the balance of a grant, the recipient must submit all required documentation through the grant portal. This applies ONLY to those who did not receive their full amount in January.

- Grant Balance Report
- Balance Request Spreadsheet
- Copies of all invoices for grant expenses and match

FINAL REPORT | To close out a grant, the recipient must submit all required documentation through the grant portal **no later than March 31, 2026. ALL grant recipients must complete a final report.**

- Final Report
- Final Spreadsheet
- Copies of all invoices for grant expenses and match

The following only applies to those who have done a Grant Balance Report:

You will need to provide a Final Spreadsheet that includes ONLY the Project Activity / Vendor/ Cost/Invoices incurred after your Balance Request Spreadsheet was submitted (new invoices you have not submitted yet).