

Somerset County Tourism Grant Program
Criteria and Guidelines
2016

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Forty percent of the Somerset County Room 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 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 the Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau.

CRITERIA AND GUIDELINES

1. Grants may be awarded to any tourism-related business or organization (nonprofit or for-profit) 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. Grants may be awarded in the following three project categories:

A. Marketing Programs: Marketing and advertising programs must be targeted to media that primarily reach out to non-Somerset County residents. 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.

B. Capital Projects: Capital improvements that benefit tourism and augment the visitor's experience by developing new or enhancing existing Somerset County tourism attractions or amenities will be given consideration.

(1) A property/attraction whose capital grant application has been approved by the Somerset Tourism Grant Committee may be required to sign a refunding agreement that would require all or a portion of the grant to be repaid in the event the property/attraction is sold within three years of receiving the grant based on the following schedule: If sold within one year of the grant, a 100% payback will be required; if sold between one and two years of the grant, a 66% payback will be required; and if sold between two and three years of the grant a 33% payback will be required. If the property/attraction is sold anytime after three years of receiving the grant, no payback will be required.

(2) For purposes of this refunding provision, the date of sale will be the date a valid agreement to sale the property/attraction is executed between the seller and a buyer. The date of the grant will be the date on which the receipt for the grant check is signed by the grant recipient or the grant recipient's representative.

(3) No capital grants will be made for more than one-half the value of the actual cost of the project. At least one half of the cost of the project must be provided by the applicant. Volunteer labor or “sweat equity” will not be considered in the cost of the project or in the share to be provided by the applicant. All capital grants will be contingent upon the recipient providing sufficient evidence of the availability of cash, a line of credit or other such funding equal to the amount of the grant. No check will be issued for a capital grant until sufficient evidence of available funds is provided and deemed acceptable.

C. Visitor Center: Operation of a visitor center in an Allegheny Trail Alliance officially recognized “Great Allegheny Passage Trail Town” in Somerset County, including expenses related to staffing the center (payroll, payroll taxes, payroll fees).

D. Grants will not be awarded for:

- Standard operational expenses (such as rent, utilities, insurance, payroll, etc., with the exception of the approved expenses directly related to the operation of a seasonal visitor center)
- Travel expenses such as gas, mileage, air fare or other transportation, lodging, etc.
- Sectarian religious purposes

2. Grants are awarded on an annual basis. The schedule for the 2015 Somerset County Tourism Grant Program is as follows:

- A grant coffee chat will be held: **Wednesday, November 19, 2015**
- Applications will be available **Monday, November 23, 2015**
- Deadline for applications to be submitted: **Friday, January 29, 2016 4:30 PM**
- Awards will be announced: **Mid- March 2016**

3. Award amounts must be appropriately utilized within 10 months (**before January 31, 2017**). Based on the dollar amount, grants will be distributed with a minimum of one-half of the grant awarded at the time of the announcement. In the event a partial distribution of the grant is made, the remaining one-half of the grant will be distributed when the project is 50% completed. Prior to distribution of the remainder of a grant, the grant recipient must submit a written request for the balance of the grant, copies of invoices verifying the expenditure of the first portion of the grant, a brief project update and a “certification letter” to:

**Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau
ATTN: Somerset Tourism Grant
120 East Main Street
Ligonier, PA 15658.**

- A. 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 the Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau.

B. For the Somerset County Tourism Program Logo, please contact:
Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau
Vice President Marketing
724.238.5661, Ext. 104
or kecker@laurelhighlands.org.

4. If the funds are not appropriately utilized within the 10 month period (**ending January 31, 2017**), applicants must inform the grant committee in writing and either request an extension or return, to the Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau, administrator of the Somerset Tourism Grant Program, the entire amount that has not been appropriately utilized along with any interest accrued accompanied by an explanation of why the funds were not used.

5. As a provision of accepting the grant, awardees agree to provide adequate proof that the funds received were used for their intended purpose. **A final project report** is required not later than **April 30, 2017** and **must** include:

- A. Copy of approved Budget Expenditure form from grant application.
- B. Completed Grant Expenditure form with copies of invoices and proof of payment.
- C. A summary report of the completed project including any traceable results and pictures of capital improvements (if applicable).
- D. Final Grant Expenditure Certification form executed by a principal of the entity that received the grant attesting to the fact that the grant funds were used for the purpose(s) awarded.
- E. If a grant was for a capital project, photos (before & after) of the project **must** be included in the final report.
- F. If the grant was for a marketing project, copies of any advertisements, press releases, or samples of media placements/media logs are to be included in the final report.
- G. Grant recipients shall abide by all local, state, and federal laws and regulations and agree to furnish all receipts and a certification letter to verify the expenditure of any grant funds received. 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.

6. Grant applications must be typewritten. Handwritten applications will not be considered by the grant committee.

7. An applicant may submit an application for both a marketing and a capital grant. However, an applicant may not file more than one grant request for a marketing project

or for a capital project. Each type of request must be submitted on a separate application.

8. If, at the deadline for submission of the current year's applications, any recipient of a prior grant that has not submitted the required receipts and supporting documentation within the prescribed deadline explaining and evidencing the use of the grant and an extension has not been requested and approved, said recipient shall be "ineligible" to apply for a future grant until such receipts and supporting documentation required herein are submitted and accepted.

Based on extenuating circumstances that might have precluded a grant from being appropriately utilized, a deadline extension may be requested by a grant recipient and, if approved, said recipient shall be eligible to apply for a subsequent grant during the extension period.

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.

9. 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 the Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau 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.

10. 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.

11. A for-profit business that receives a grant may be required to treat the grant as *income and is responsible for paying any necessary taxes applicable thereto.*

12. 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.

13. Applicants should use only the official forms and required documents for submission. Photographs may also be included. Individual applications should be secured with a paperclip. DO NOT staple set together and DO NOT place applications in folders or binders.

PLEASE NOTE THAT FIVE COPIES OF EACH APPLICATION MUST BE SUBMITTED WITHIN THE PRESCRIBED DEADLINE IN ORDER TO BE CONSIDERED, AND AS NOTED IN § 7 ABOVE, HANDWRITTEN APPLICATIONS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.

SOMERSET COUNTY TOURISM GRANT REVIEW COMMITTEE

- A. The Tourism Grant Review Committee shall be comprised of five (5) members:
 - a. One Somerset County Commissioner or the Commissioners' designee
 - b. The President & CEO of the Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau (LHVB) or the President & CEO's designee
 - c. A senior management representative of the Somerset County lodging facility with the highest volume of hotel tax collected for the prior year who is preferably also a member of the LHVB.
 - d. Two (2) representatives from Somerset County appointed annually by the Somerset County Commissioners to serve one (1) year terms.

- B. In the event that a member of the Tourism Grant Review Committee serves on the board of an applicant organization or event, or is affiliated in another manner with an applicant, it is mandatory that said member recuse himself/herself from the review and/or decision-making process of that specific application.

- C. The committee will review all grant applications and announce the awards in mid to late March 2016.

- D. Grant awards shall be presented to each recipient jointly by representatives of the Somerset County Tourism Grant Committee and the Somerset County Commissioners.

- E. 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.

- F. The Somerset County Tourism Grant Review Committee will review the criteria and guidelines on an annual basis to enhance, amend, or modify said guidelines.

*Re: Section 1, Paragraph C – The Allegheny Trail Alliance determination of the designation "Trail Town" shall be used as the official designation for this section.