Loudoun County

VIRGINIA

Restricted Transient Occupancy Tax (RTOT) Fund
Tourism Grant Program
Process and Application Guidelines Fiscal Year 2025

Issue Date:	April 8, 2024
Issuing Agency:	Loudoun County Government Department of Finance and Procurement 1 Harrison Street, SE Leesburg, VA 20175
Contact Information:	Darrell Simpson grants@loudoun.gov
Application Due Date:	May 3, 2024
Period of Funding:	July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025

Application Information Webinar: April 16, 2024, 1:00 PM – 2:00 PM Join the meeting here or dial-in by phone +1 757-600-4923,,824337410# Join the meeting +1 757-600-4923,,824337410# Phone Conference ID: Phone Conference ID: 824 337 410#

Webinar will be made available by recording and will be posted on the website.

Information and the grant application can be found at:
www.loudoun.gov/grantopportunities

Contents

Summary

Loudoun County's FY 2025 budget includes funds that can be allocated to organizations for proposals that provide tourism services or activities consistent with the county's Restricted Transient Occupancy Tax (RTOT) Funding Policy and the Code of Virginia. This program is designed to support local tourism initiatives and events that drive tourism to Loudoun County. The Board's RTOT grant program was established to fund events or programs which further the Board's funding policy:

- To provide the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors with the opportunity to strategically and proactively impact tourism in Loudoun County through the sustained investment in the provision of core tourism services;
- To enable targeted investment in high priority tourism projects that advance Loudoun's strategic tourism objectives; and
- To maximize tax relief to the general fund by increasing Restricted Transient Occupancy Tax revenues.

All funding proposals must comply with eligibility requirements for Restricted TOT Funds outlined in Section 58.1-3819 of the Code of Virginia: *"Transient occupancy tax… shall be designated and spent solely for tourism and travel, marketing of tourism or initiatives that… attract travelers to the locality, increase occupancy at lodging properties, and generate tourism revenues in the locality."*

Eligibility Criteria

Loudoun County's competitive RTOT grant funds can be designated and spent for any of the following tourism activities:

1. Marketing of events and programs to attract visitors;
2. Initiatives that attract visitors to the locality;
3. Initiatives that drive demand for and increase occupancy at lodging properties; or
4. Initiatives that drive spending and generate revenue in the locality through tourism.

Definitions

- **Events:** Events are defined as single – or multiple - day gatherings of the public planned for the purpose of education, celebration, marketing, or other special purpose.

    Examples:
    Event Example 1 – a two-day indoor event held at a conference center in the county
    Event Example 2– an annual event showcasing town businesses, residents, heritage, and tradition

- **Initiatives:** Initiatives are broader, long-term efforts designed to achieve a specific goal or vision.

Examples:
Initiative Example 1 – expansive efforts to broaden digital marketing for a school
Initiative Example 2– creation of a map highlighting local bed & breakfast and short-term vacation locations attracting visitors to the County

- **Overnight Stays:** For purposes of the RTOT Tourism Grant Program, overnight stays are defined as a booking at a Loudoun County lodging establishment where the visitor(s)' permanent place of residence is greater than 40 miles from County borders.

Application Considerations

To promote overnight stays, activities funded by RTOT Tourism Program grants must be shown to be part of a well-thought-out marketing plan to attract visitors from outside of Loudoun County.

Data collection is especially important to the success of the RTOT Tourism Grant Program. Describing data collection methods is part of the application process, and detailed reports on results are required prior to the conclusion of the grant performance period. To aid in data collection to assess the efficacy of these grants, a portion of grant funds may be used by grantees to fund data collection. For example, funds could be used for a software program, or for staff time to conduct surveys.

The following are specific examples of **ALLOWABLE** expenses but is not an exhaustive list:
- Creation and distribution of promotional materials
- Development and execution of data collection methods
- Marketing and advertising expenses
- Print, digital and social media campaigns
- Community engagement and development of local partnerships
- Public relations

The following are specific examples of **UNALLOWABLE** expenses but is not an exhaustive list:
- Corporate debts
- Contingencies
- Contributions and donations
- Entertainment costs
- Fines and penalties
- Interest and other financial costs
- Legislative expenses
- Brick and mortar expenses

If your event or initiative includes overnight accommodations, organizers must work with Visit Loudoun to secure accommodations rather than book directly. This is to ensure that Visit Loudoun can assist in providing economic impact data. Visit Loudoun will also help connect applicants with tourism and hospitality-related resources for packaged offerings (e.g., transportation, restaurants,

agritourism sites, etc.) if needed. Applicants are encouraged to take advantage of these resources, as well as linking to additional tourism information at www.visitloudoun.org.

Review Process

Applications will be reviewed by a panel of County staff from the Department of Finance and Procurement, Program Evaluation & Research Division, the Office of Management and Budget, the Department of Economic Development, and Visit Loudoun. Applications will be evaluated based on the following: meeting all eligibility requirements, having a clearly defined marketing plan with specific budget line items for approved expenses, having the ability to attract overnight visitors to events in the area, and having defined methodology for collecting and reporting visitor data such as place of origin and spending patterns. Incomplete or ineligible applications will not be considered.

Requests for recurring funding commitments will not be considered as part of this application process; funding in one year does not guarantee funding in future years. It is the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors' policy that nonprofit entities receiving public funds for their proposed project through other means - such as Visit Loudoun Grants, Loudoun County Regional Organization Funding, Human Service Nonprofit Grants, or other such programs - will not be eligible for Tourism Program Grant funding.

FY 2025 Process and Timeline

Applicants for the FY 2025 RTOT Tourism Grant Program will be required to submit an application through the County's grants management system, AmpliFund. Applicants may only submit one application for FY 2025. Questions may be submitted via email. **The deadline to submit questions is April 22, 2024.**

Once reviewers' scores are available, applicants will be ranked, and the funding amount will be determined. Recommendations will then be made to the Finance/Government Operations and Economic Development Committee (FGOEDC) for consideration on July 9, 2024. Following approval by the Board of Supervisors at their July 16, 2024, Business Meeting, organizations will be informed of the final disposition of their application.

RTOT Tourism Grant Program Timeline	
Grant Application Opens	April 8
Technical Assistance Training for Applicants	April 16
Deadline for Applicant Questions	April 22
Grant Application Closes	**May 3 at 4:00pm**
Award Recommendations presented at FGOEDC meeting	July 9
Presentation to the Board of Supervisors	July 16
Notice of award sent to applicants	July 18
MOUs due to Department of Finance and Procurement	July 26
Grant Performance Period	July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025

Application Instructions

The maximum award for FY2025 is $25,000. The amount of funding requested should be clearly presented and explained and should consistently be tied to the anticipated tourism increases throughout the application.

For the FY 2025 RTOT Tourism Grant Program process, applicants can access the online application at www.loudoun.gov/grantopportunities .The application includes the following sections:
- Section I – Opportunity Details
- Section II – Project Information
- Section III – Application Forms
- Section IV – Budget

Applicants are required to provide a response for all questions of the application to be considered for funding. There is no character limit attached to the text boxes in the application.

Please be advised that reviewers are looking for applications that provide clear and comprehensive details on all questions.

Section I – Opportunity Details

Overall information regarding the funding opportunity is displayed here, including the award information, how and where to ask questions, and relevant due dates and performance period. In this section, the applicants provides basic organizational information, including contact information, Federal Tax ID number, authorizing point of contact, and a brief overview of the funding request. Applicants must also indicate whether they are a first-time applicant for tourism funding in Loudoun County.

Section II – Project Information

This section requires the applicant to outline the requested award amount and primary point of contact for the application package.

Section III – Application Forms

In this section, the applicant provides all information to be evaluated by reviewers. This section is made up of four parts, described in detail below.

- **Part I: Organization Information** – The applicant provides basic organizational information, including contact information, Federal Tax ID number, authorizing point of contact, and a brief overview of the funding request. Applicants must also indicate whether they are a

first-time applicant for tourism funding in Loudoun County.

- **Part II: Proposal Information** - In this section, applicants will provide information on the specific event or initiative which the requested funds would support. The answers provided in this twelve-question section are the basis of evaluation for the review team. Applicants will also provide details on how the proposed event or initiative will attract overnight visitors to Loudoun County and the metrics by which that data will be collected and reported. Finally, the application asks about the success and stability of the applying organization, along with additional funding procured to support the event or initiative.

- **Part III: Required Attachment** - Applicants also provide a clear, cohesive marketing plan/strategy to promote the event or initiative.

- **Part IV: Budget Narrative** - Applicants must provide a detailed budget narrative for their proposed event or initiative.

Section IV – Budget

Complete the budget for the amount of RTOT Tourism Grant Program dollars you are requesting. For example, if your total project is $350,000 and you're requesting $25,000 from the County, your budget should be $25,000. Your budget should be specific and detailed. This section includes the primary funding categories that are approved under the program, including:

- Marketing and Advertising (Print, Video, and Digital) - includes social media campaigns, television, radio, and print advertising
- Creation and Execution of Data Collection Methods – includes the creation and distribution of surveys, online collection software, expenses related to event volunteers who collect data from attendees, etc.
- Community Engagement and Public Partnerships – any expenses related to cultivating partnerships, sponsorships, or other community engagement
- Event-Centric Expenses – includes signage and other promotional expenditures

Uploading Documents

As part of a complete online application, supplemental supporting information is required that outlines your event/initiative marketing plan. Documents up to 250MB must be uploaded to the application in PDF, Microsoft Word, or Microsoft Excel formats.

Uploading your marketing plan is a required field.
To upload these forms, click on the buttons titled "Choose File".

Part III. Required Attachments

Event/Initiative Marketing Plan *

Choose File

RTOT Manual FY25.docx 🗑

Once clicked, this button will open a window that will allow you to find the file or document that you want to add. Select the correct file that corresponds to the Marketing Plan, and it will populate into the application. If you select the wrong file or attach it to the wrong location, delete that file and repeat the upload process.

As you complete each section of the application, you should select "Mark As Complete" prior to saving. This will prompt the software to check for input errors before moving forward.

✓ Mark as Complete   Save & Continue

When each section is completed and correct, that section should show a check mark. When all four sections and all required fields are completed, there should be four check marks. Then you are ready to submit!

FY25 RTOT Tourism Grant Program *TEST APPLICATION*

✓ Opportunity Details   ✓ Project Information   ✓ Application Forms   ✓ Budget*   ⦿ Submit
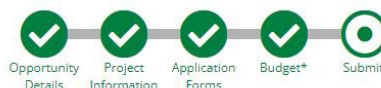
Application Scoring

Applications will be reviewed by a panel of County staff from the Department of Finance and Procurement, Program Evaluation & Research Division, the Department of Management and Budget, the Department of Economic Development, and Visit Loudoun. The application is built on a Likert scale, with twelve questions containing five possible scoring options (0-4), and one question with three scoring options (0-2). There is a maximum score of 50 for each application. Applications that receive 38 or more points are considered strong candidates. Applications that receive a score between 32 and 37 are considered acceptable for funding. Applications scoring below 32 points are considered weak applications and are not recommended for funding. All efforts will be made to fund as many viable projects as possible, however funding is limited, and a

strong application is no guarantee of funding in part or as a whole.

Preference is given to applications including:
- Initiatives that attract visitors from outside of Loudoun County who are inclined to stay overnight.
- Partnerships between multiple organizations or tourism and hospitality-related businesses.
- Data collection efforts that provide information on event attendance, spending patterns, attendee place of origin, and overnight stays at Loudoun lodgings.

Tips for Application Development

- Assume that the reviewers are not familiar with your organization; scores are based on application content only.
- Identify attributes of the attraction or event that would motivate residents of areas outside of Loudoun County to visit/ attend.

- Emphasize results achieved by the program, including metrics used to measure results.

- Ensure that budgeted costs are reasonable, well- explained, and within industry standards (if applicable).

- Be sure that responses to questions:
    - Directly answer the question
    - Are concise, specific, and thorough
    - Are specific to Loudoun County

- Loudoun County defines overnight visitors as a booking at a Loudoun County lodging establishment where the party or parties' permanent place of residence is greater than 40 miles from County borders (See Definitions above). Consider the following ideas for measuring reach or visitors outside of your town or service area:
    - Use website analytics to track engagement by geographic region. You can also use analytics to track the reach of digital and social media campaigns.
    - If you have online ticket sales, use digital analytics to report zip codes of attendees.
    - Ask for zip codes of attendees as they enter attraction/event or count out-of- state license plates at event.
    - Partner with merchants or other hospitality-related businesses to provide special discounts to help measure the economic impact of the event.
    - Have a raffle where participants must fill out a survey capturing demographics to enter.

- Additional resources are available through Visit Loudoun and the Small Business Development Center, both located in downtown Leesburg.

The Loudoun County Visitor Information Center
Market Station - Lower Deck
Corner of Loudoun St. and Harrison St.
112-G South Street, SE
Leesburg, VA 20175
800-752-6118
703-771-2170
VCHost@visitloudoun.org

Mason Enterprise Center – Leesburg
202 Church St. SE
Leesburg, VA 20175
703-466-0466
mec20175@gmu.edu

Requirements for Grant Recipients

Once awards have been announced, grant recipients will be required to sign an agreement with the County to receive the grant funds. This agreement will outline the requirements for receiving the grant award and will include important terms relative to the grant award as follows:

- The term of the funding will begin on July 1, 2024, and, unless sooner terminated, will expire on June 30, 2025.

- County funding will be remitted to the Organization within thirty (30) days after the execution of the agreement and an invoice is submitted.

- Each organization must account for all expenditures made from the awarded funding, and it must be provided to the County within thirty (30) days upon event completion if a specific event is involved. Failure to comply with expenditure reports may result in decreased funding for future Tourism Grants. The Organization will also need to complete and submit a programmatic report detailing activities and outcomes associated with grant funding within sixty (60) days of the event. Organizations will be required to collect and report on data that measure successes tied to the funding, as well as information about visitors (e.g. number of visitors, number of out-of-state visitors, number of overnight stays in County lodgings, etc.).

- At the end of the period of performance, you should be able to measure successes tied to the funding and information about visitors. For example:
  - Compared to last year, sales during the event increased XX%
  - XX% of attendees were from outside of County
  - XX% of survey respondents spent over $50 at the event

- Detail how you will promote increased visitation to Loudoun County. Examples include print media, websites, social media, online ads as well as partnering with other events with same event timeframe, cross-promotion using materials available from Visit Loudoun, etc.

- If the event is canceled, or if the Organization otherwise desires to use any portion of the County funding for a purpose other than stated in their application, the Organization must seek approval from RTOT Tourism Grant Program administrative staff.

- As a condition of receiving the County funding, the Organization shall agree to repay County funds if the event described in the application is canceled for any reason. To that end, it is recommended that the Organization obtain Event Cancellation Insurance in an amount sufficient to maintain yearly operations if the event is canceled.

Contact Information

Questions about the application form or process may be directed to Darrell Simpson, Grants Analyst within the Department of Finance and Procurement.

Email: grants@loudoun.gov
Phone: (571) 258-3482