Restricted Transient Occupancy Tax (RTOT) Fund
Tourism Grant Program
Process and Application Guidelines
Fiscal Year 2024

Issue Date:	Monday, May 1, 2023
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:	4:00 PM EST, Wednesday, May 31, 2023
Period of Funding:	July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024

Information and Grant Application can be found here

Contents

Summary

Loudoun County's FY 2024 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.

Tourism activities have been significantly impacted by the pandemic, and as such, the maximum award for RTOT Program grantees was increased in FY2023 from $10,000 to $25,000 and the 1:1 match has been waived.

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.

Application Considerations

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

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 unallowable expenses but is not an exhaustive list:
- Corporate debts
- Contingencies
- Contributions and donations
- Entertainment costs (except as otherwise provided)
- Fines and penalties
- Interest and other financial costs
- Legislative expenses
- Bricks and mortar

If your event or program 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 county staff for completeness and eligibility under Section 58.1-3819 of the Code of Virginia and the Board of Supervisors' RTOT Funding Policy upon receipt. 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 Board of Supervisors' policy that nonprofit entities receiving public funds for their proposed project through other means - such as Visit Loudoun Grants, Community Development Block Grants, Loudoun County Regional Organization Funding, Human Service Nonprofit Grants, or other such programs - will not be eligible for Restricted TOT grants.

FY 2024 Process and Timeline

Applicants for the FY 2024 RTOT Tourism Grant will be required to submit an application using the online form located at: RTOT Grant Program . Applicants may only submit one application for FY 2024. Questions may be submitted via email at grants@loudoun.gov or through the online

contact form: [Contact Form](). **The deadline to submit questions is May 30th.**

All applications will be reviewed by representatives from Visit Loudoun, the Department of Economic Development, County Administration, and the Department of Finance and Procurement.

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 11, 2023. Following approval by the Board of Supervisors at their July 18, 2023, Business Meeting, organizations will be informed of their application status.

RTOT Tourism Grant Timeline	
Grant Application Opens	May 1
Deadline for Applicant Questions	May 30
Grant Application Closes	**May 31 at 4:00pm**
Award Recommendations presented at FGOEDC meeting	July 11
Approval by the Board of Supervisors	July 18
Notice of award sent to applicants	July 20
MOUs due to Department of Finance and Procurement	August 1

Application Instructions

For the FY 2024 Nonprofit Grant process, applicants can access the online application form at the following link: [RTOT Grant Program Application](). The application form includes the following sections:

- Part I – General Organization Information
- Part II – Proposal Information

Applicants are required to provide a response for questions with an asterisk "*". If the required questions do not apply to your organization, please enter "not applicable" or "N/A". There is no character limit attached to the text boxes in the application.

Part I – General Organization Information

This section requests basic organizational information, including contact information, Federal Tax ID number, size, year of founding, organizational mission and milestones, and years that the organization has served Loudoun residents. Applicants must also indicate whether they are a first-time applicant.

Part II – Proposal Information

This section asks applicants to provide information on the specific initiative, program, or event which the requested funds would support. Please describe that program, in the context of your larger organization and provide the financial statements for the entire organization, not just the program requesting funds. If you are a chapter of a larger regional or national organization, please provide the information for your chapter only.

The maximum award for FY2024 is $25,000. The amount of funding requested should be clearly presented and explained and should be consistently tied to the anticipated tourism increases throughout the application.

Uploading Documents

In addition to the complete online application, supplemental information is also required. Documents up to 250MB must be uploaded to the application in PDF, Microsoft Word, or Microsoft Excel formats.

You must upload a document for all fields marked as required. If you are unable to provide one of the documents, please create and upload a document explaining why you cannot.
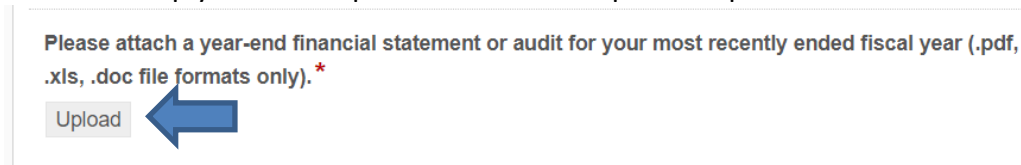
To upload these forms, click on the buttons titled "Upload".
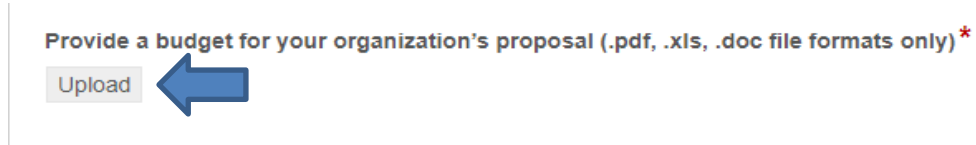
Once clicked, this button will open a window that will allow you to find the file or document that you want to add.
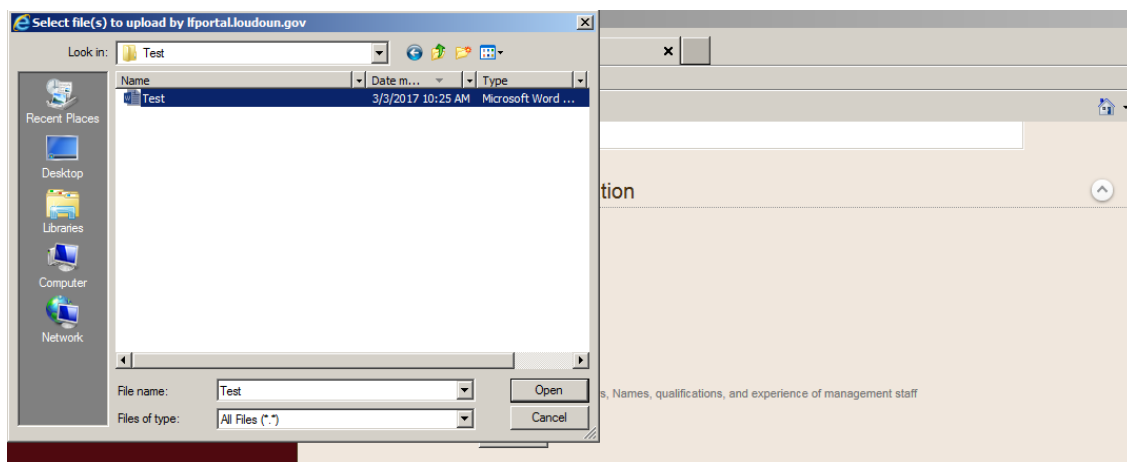

If the wrong file was chosen, you can click the X. This will remove the file. To replace the file or add another file simply click the Upload button and repeat the process that is detailed above.


When the form is completed and all files have been attached using the Upload button, you will electronically "sign" the application and agree to the conditions listed by entering the email address of your organization's designated authorizing official. You can then click on the Submit

button to send the application for review and consideration.
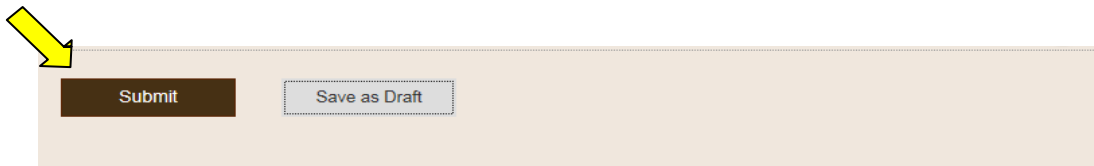
Applicants may also save their application form and return to the form to make changes or add more information later. To save, click on "Save as Draft."
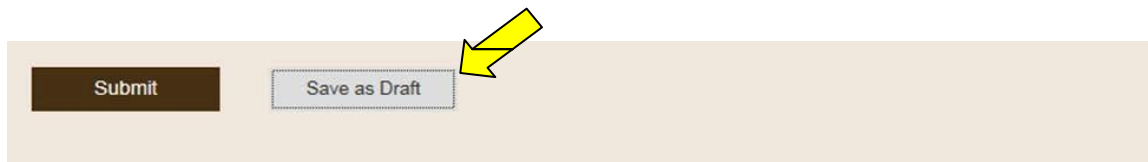
After clicking the button, "Save as Draft", a window will appear. Applicants should input an email address and create a password. **Be sure to write down the password you create!** Once this has been completed click the Save button in the bottom right-hand corner of the window. After clicking the Save button a link or internet address will be emailed to you.
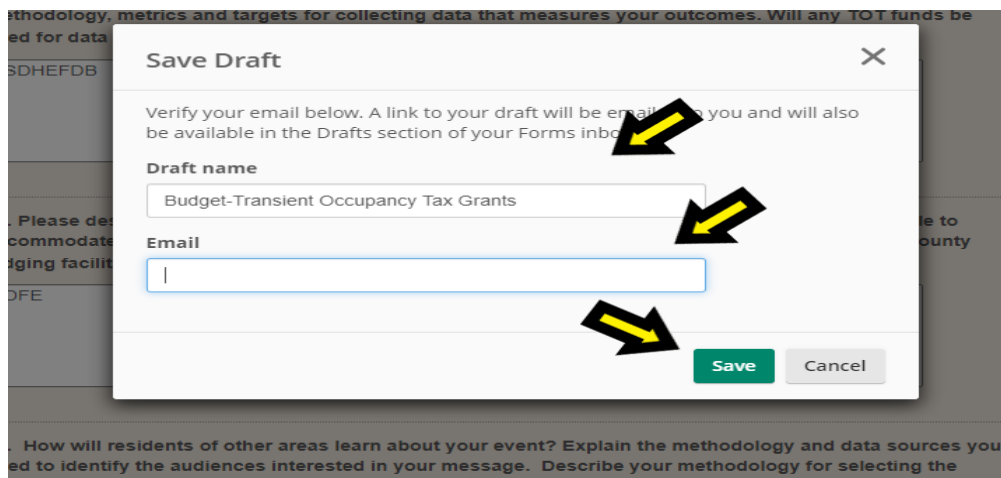
Application Scoring

Applications are scored by a multi-agency review team from County Administration, Finance and Procurement, Economic Development, and Visit Loudoun. The application is built on a Likert scale, with four points as the maximum score for each question. The summed score achieved by an applicant across all panel reviewers is then averaged by the number of questions and the number of reviewers. Applicants with an average score of 3.0 or higher are considered strong applicants; those with an average score of 2.5 to 2.9 are viable applicants with a reasonable alignment with the County's mission and stated goals. Applicants scoring below an average of 2.5 are considered weak applicants. 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 likely to attract visitors from outside of Loudoun County who are inclined to stay overnight.
- Partnerships between multiple organizations or tourism and hospitality-related businesses.
- Solid data collection efforts.

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

- Ensure that costs in requested budget 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

- Be sure that all required documents have been uploaded, or explain why you cannot provide them.

- Loudoun County defines overnight visitors as anyone staying in the County from a distance of

more than 40 miles from their home address. 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 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, 2023, and, unless sooner terminated, will expire on June 30, 2024.

- 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 after the event is completed. The Organization will also need to complete and submit a programmatic report detailing activities and outcomes associated with grant funding.

- At the end of the grant, 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, website, 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 the Board through the Department of Finance and Procurement.

- As a condition of receiving the County funding, the Organization shall agree to repay County funds if the event 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