

GUIDELINES FOR ACCOMMODATIONS TAX GRANT PROGRAM

FY 2021 (JULY 1, 2020 THROUGH JUNE 30, 2021)

Grant Applications Due: Friday, March 27, 2020 5:00pm

Accommodations Tax Grants (ATax) are funded through the collection of State Accommodations Taxes. By act of the SC General Assembly, a two percent (2%) tax is levied on the rental of all transient accommodations. The proceeds from this tax are utilized by municipalities and counties in the State to promote tourism and tourism-related activities.

ALLOCATION REQUIREMENTS

The funds received by a municipality or county must be allocated as follows:

- The first \$25,000 to the General Operating Fund.
- The balance remaining, after deduction of the \$25,000, must be allocated as follows:
 1. 5% of balance to General Operating Fund
 2. 30% of balance to special fund for advertising and promotion of tourism
 3. 65% of balance, plus interest, to a fund for tourism-related expenditures.

ATAX GRANTS PROCESS

To be considered for funding, an application must be submitted by **5pm on March 27, 2020**. Once all applications for ATax Grant funds are received by Lancaster County and eligibility is verified, they will be forwarded to the ATax Committee for review. Applicants will be required to deliver a five (5) minute presentation on their program to the Committee. **Applicants will be contacted with the date for presentations.** The Committee will determine funding recommendations to the County Council. County Council will decide whether to approve those recommendations.

GRANT TIMELINE

Request for applications:	February 12- March 27, 2020
Application due date:	Friday, March 27, 2020
ATax Committee meeting & applicant presentations:	TBD
County budget process:	April – June 2020
Budget Public Hearing	May 25, 2020 (date subject to change)
Grant award notifications:	June 15- June 19, 2020

Grant Period:
Mid-Year Reports:
Final Reports:

July 1, 2020– June 30, 2021
Due by January 15, 2021
Due by July 15, 2021

APPLICANT REQUIREMENTS

- 1) Applicant organizations must have been in existence for at least one (1) year prior to requesting funds.
- 2) Accommodations tax funds are for the use of nonprofit organizations only. Proof of nonprofit status must accompany all requests for funding.
- 3) Lancaster County will not award ATax Funds to individuals, fraternal organizations or organizations that support and/or endorse political campaigns.
- 4) Grantee organizations may not re-grant County funds to other organizations. All funds must be spent on direct program expenditures by organization that is granted the allocation.

CRITERIA FOR PROJECT ELIGIBILITY

As required by State Statute and by the guidelines established herein, organizations and/or projects to be funded by ATax Funds must have as their primary mission the attraction of tourists to Lancaster County. Each funding proposal will be reviewed individually to determine the potential impact it will have on the County's tourism efforts. Priority will be given to organizations and/or projects that have the following characteristics:

- will generate overnight stay(s) in Lancaster County's lodging facilities;
- will promote and highlight Lancaster County's historic and cultural venues; recreational facilities and events; and the uniqueness and flavor of the local community.

The ATax Review Committee considers the definitions of "travel" and "tourism" to mean the action and activities of people taking trips outside their home communities for any purpose, except daily commuting to and from work. ATax funds must be used to attract and provide for tourists, and must be spent on tourism-related expenditures.

The Committee encourages projects which "leverage" ATax funds as "matching" or "challenge" grants and/or which stimulate or add to the financial support contributed to the project by private and commercial/industry purses. All grant funds must be expended by the recipient organization. Re-granting or sub-granting of ATax funds is NOT allowed.

APPLICATION COMPONENTS

Ensure all fields are completed as incomplete applications will not be reviewed by the Committee. All answers should be concise and to the point. No item should be left blank.

Answers such as “See Attached” and “N/A” are not acceptable. Incomplete applications will not be reviewed by the ATax Committee.

The application must be signed by the organization’s Executive Director and Board Chair. If your organization is volunteer driven and does not have an Executive Director, please note this in the application.

General Description - Describe the project (a) in its totality, or at completion of the presently known ultimate stage, and/or (b) the portion, phase or section of the total project for which funding is now being requested.

- Include a thorough, but concise description (who, what, when, where and why).
- Include information about innovative ideas, community support and partnerships.
- Describe coordination that has been completed or will be needed with other organizations: if they are engaged in similar activities, or, if they will be expected to be the beneficiary of this project.

Benefit to Tourism – How does your event promote and highlight Lancaster County’s historic and cultural venues, recreational facilities and events, and the uniqueness and flavor of the local community. Describe how your project will impact tourism in Lancaster. Include support with data and other records or history. How are you working with local hotels and other hospitality businesses?

Benefit to Community – Describe how your project will benefit the community and Lancaster County. Include support with data and other records or history.

Previous Success/Organization Capability – Describe how your organization has successfully managed this program or similar programs in the past. Describe your organization’s capacity for managing the program described.

Project Marketing Plan – Outline your marketing, advertising and promotional plans for your program. How will you track visitors and overnight stays? What methods are you using to track all visitors and count the number of tourists and residents that attend your event or participate in your program?

BUDGET AND ELIGIBLE EXPENDITURES

The budget should reflect in financial terms the actual costs of achieving the objectives of the project(s) you propose in your application.

ATax County funds are to be used for tourism related expenses only in accordance with Chapter 4 Title 6 of the South Carolina Code of Laws:

- 1) advertising and promotion of tourism so as to develop and increase tourist attendance through the generation of publicity;
- 2) promotion of the arts and cultural events;

- 3) construction, maintenance, and operation of facilities for civic and cultural activities including construction and maintenance of access and other nearby roads and utilities for the facilities;
- 4) the criminal justice system, law enforcement, fire protection, solid waste collection, and health facilities when required to serve tourists and tourist facilities. This is based on the estimated percentage of costs directly attributed to tourists;
- 5) public facilities such as restrooms, dressing rooms, parks, and parking lots;
- 6) tourist shuttle transportation;
- 7) control and repair of waterfront erosion;
- 8) operating visitor information centers.

All grant funds must be expended by the recipient organization. Re-granting or sub-granting of funds is not allowed.

Expenditures must be consistent with the application budget. Only goods and services that comply with the ATax Guidelines and State Law are permitted. Project or event vendors will not be paid directly by Lancaster County.

The budget should reflect the actual costs of achieving the objectives of the project(s) you propose in your application. A budget section is provided for you as part of the application. Amounts listed in the County ATax Request column should total the amount of funds requested on the application. Please make sure that all expenses in County column fit the expense criteria mentioned above.

- Budgets **MUST** be entered on the budget form provided in the grant application and **MUST** include a narrative for ATax expenditures. This tells Lancaster County in detail how you plan to spend the grant funds.
- Grant funds should be used for tourism marketing first above any other expense. See the list of eligible expenditures above for more information.
- Be as detailed as possible in your budget narrative. If awarded, this information will be compared to your reporting and accounting backup information.
- Signage and banners used at your event, directional signage, gift cards, programs, volunteer t-shirts, and other items handed out at your event do not count as marketing expenses.

APPLICATION EVALUATION

The Committee will use the following evaluation criteria to evaluate applications and proposed projects. The individual factors are important in project evaluation, as they are an indication of the degree to which the proposed project will contribute to the tourism in Lancaster County. Please ensure that you review these factors and include the elements in your application.

Thoroughness of Proposal:

All required forms and application are complete and submitted on time. Responses are clear and complete. Budget is complete. Support Documents are provided.

Project Design:

- **Benefit to Tourism:** Does the project promote tourism in the areas of the County in which Lancaster County ATaxes are collected? Will it promote a positive image for the County? Will it attract visitors, build new audiences and encourage tourism expansion in the areas of the County in which Lancaster County Accommodation Taxes are collected? Will it increase awareness of the County’s amenities, history, facilities, and natural environment in the areas of the County in which Lancaster County ATaxes are collected?
- **Benefit to the Community:** How will this project benefit the citizens of Lancaster County? Will the project benefit unincorporated Lancaster County? Who will attend the event? How many visitors will the event serve? A visitor is defined by someone who travels at least 10 miles to attend the event.
- **Innovation:** Is this project unusual or unique? Does it move an existing program in a new direction?
- **Community Support:** Does the project have broad-based community appeal or support? What is the evidence of need for this project in the County?)
- **Evidence of Partnerships:** What kind and degree of partnership does the project exhibit? Does it exhibit volunteer involvement or inter-jurisdictional, corporate, business, and/or civic support? Projects which leverage ATax funds as matching grants or to stimulate financial contributions are encouraged.
- **Management Capability:** Does the applicant organization demonstrate an ability to successfully complete the project through effective business practices in the areas of finance, administration, marketing, and production? If this organization has received County ATax funding previously, was the project successful?

Economic Impact & Accountability:

- **Reliable Tracking Mechanism:** Surveys, ticket sale data, etc.
- **Expected Revenue Generated:** What are the projected direct and indirect dollar expenditures by visitors/tourists? What is the estimated number of meals consumed? Are any overnight stays anticipated?
- **Reasonable Cost / Benefit Ratio:** Does the benefit of the project (i.e. number of tourists estimated; expected revenue generated) exceed the cost of the project? Is this project “worth” its cost?

APPLICATION PACKAGE

1. Applications are available on the Accommodations Tax Grants page at www.mylancastersc.org – (go to Finance Department and click on State Accommodations Tax Info in upper right corner) and may be submitted using the following methods:

E-mail vtthompson@lancastersc.net

Mail Lancaster County Finance Department
 Attn: Veronica C Thompson, CFO
 PO Box 1809
 Lancaster, SC 29721

In Person Lancaster County Government Administration Building
101 North Main Street, Suite 121, Lancaster, SC

In order to be considered for funding, applicants must submit a complete application package for the ATax grant program. Incomplete applications will not be considered. Complete applications should include:

- 1) Completed and signed application form.
 - Answer all questions and complete each section.
 - Signature by board chair and the executive director - If your organization does not have an Executive Director, please note this in the grant application.
- 2) Project budget and narrative (form included with the application)
- 3) Required Attachments:
 - IRS determination letter indicating the organization's 501c charitable status
 - Annual Financial Statement Audit
 - Most recent 990 tax return. If you file a 990 post-card please also attach a financial report showing financial status. (nonprofit)

Incomplete applications will not be evaluated by the Committee.

Applications are due by 5:00 p.m. on Friday, March 27, 2020.

AWARD NOTIFICATION

The Chief Financial Officer will notify all applicant organizations of the funding outcome in writing by June 30, 2020. Awards will be available for disbursement beginning July 1, 2021.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Lancaster County requires grantees to complete a mid-year and/or a final report for ATax funds. Grantees are required to submit proof of grant expenditures (invoices and proof of payment).

Grantees are asked to report on attendance, room and meal numbers, event success or failure as well as the impact on Lancaster County, especially the unincorporated areas. Each grantee will receive a copy of or a link to the reporting documents with their award packet.

All reporting data is subject to Freedom of Information Act disclosure.