



Queen Anne's County

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Queen Anne's County Outside Agency Grant Program Policies and Procedures

Introduction

The Queen Anne's County Outside Agency Grant Program is a vital resource for supporting local organizations that contribute to the community's welfare, address critical needs, and enhance the quality of life for residents. Recognizing the importance of fairness, transparency, and accountability in managing public funds, this document outlines a structured approach to administering the grant program. These policies and procedures are designed to professionalize the grant process, ensure equitable access, and maximize the community impact of allocated funds.

Grant Application Process

The grant process begins with a proactive and inclusive application phase designed to engage diverse organizations and ensure equitable access. In early January of each year, Queen Anne's County will officially announce the availability of the Outside Agency Grant. This announcement will be disseminated through multiple channels, including the County's official website, social media platforms, and targeted email campaigns. Outreach efforts aim to ensure that all eligible organizations, including those from historically underrepresented communities, are aware of the opportunity to apply.

Eligible applicants must be nonprofit organizations registered in good standing with the IRS and the State Department of Assessments and Taxation (SDAT). Organizations must either operate within Queen Anne's County or provide services directly benefiting its constituents. To maintain neutrality, organizations with overt religious or political affiliations are not eligible for funding.

Applications will be distributed in early January, with a submission deadline in mid-February. This timeline provides organizations ample time to prepare thorough and competitive proposals. Each application must include detailed information about the organization's mission, the proposed project, and a justification for the requested funds. Required supporting documents include a line-item budget, a Certificate of Good Standing from SDAT issued within the last year, an IRS Determination Letter for nonprofit organizations, and the most recent financial records, such as a balance sheet, financial statement or IRS Form 990. All applications must be submitted electronically to ensure efficient processing.

Evaluation and Award Process

Once applications are received, a structured evaluation process ensures that funding decisions are guided by transparency and alignment with County priorities. The initial screening phase verifies that each application is complete and complies with eligibility criteria. Incomplete applications will not advance to the evaluation stage but will receive a notice allowing applicants to address deficiencies if time permits.

Applications are then assessed based on a comprehensive set of criteria, including the proposed project's feasibility, alignment with community needs, and anticipated impact. A scoring system assigns favorability ratings to each application:

- **Green:** Strongly recommended for funding, indicating confidence in the project's feasibility and alignment with Commissioner objectives.
- **Yellow:** Conditionally recommended, contingent on the resolution of specific concerns.
- **Red:** Not recommended for funding, often due to misalignment with priorities or significant application deficiencies.

To maintain the integrity of the process, a mandatory Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form must be completed by all participating Commissioners. This form ensures that individuals disclose any financial or personal connections to applicant organizations, preventing undue influence in decision-making. Commissioners with disclosed conflicts will abstain from discussions and decisions related to the affected applications.

Funding decisions will be guided by evaluation outcomes, available funding, and alignment with the County's goals. Awards will not exceed the amounts requested in the applications, ensuring that funds are allocated responsibly and equitably.

Fund Disbursement and Management

Following the award decisions, successful applicants must sign a formal Grant Agreement outlining the terms and conditions of funding. This agreement ensures that funds are used exclusively for the purposes stated in the application and includes provisions for reporting, monitoring, and compliance. Upon acceptance of the Grant Agreement, funds allotted will be disbursed by October of the next fiscal year (i.e., for applicants applying in February 2025, funds will be disbursed by October 2025).

To address the possibility of unspent funds or project delays, grantees may submit a Budget Extension Request. This process allows organizations to propose reasonable adjustments to their budgets or timelines, provided these changes align with the original project scope. However, any funds unspent by June 1 of the following year, and in excess of \$50, must be returned to the County, ensuring that public resources are used efficiently and transparently.

If applicable, the County's approved grant oversight vendor will provide weekly updates to Queen Anne's County during the grant cycle to ensure transparency and address any issues promptly.

Reporting Requirements

Accountability is a cornerstone of the grant program, and grantees are required to submit regular reports detailing their use of funds and the progress of their projects. A mid-year report, due by December 31, provides an update on activities undertaken, expenditures to date, and any challenges encountered. A final report, due by June 1 of the following calendar year, offers a comprehensive summary of project outcomes, including financial documentation, community impact, and public acknowledgment of County support.

Grantees are also required to publicly acknowledge the County's contribution through press releases, social media posts, and other promotional materials. Proof of these acknowledgments must be included in the final report to demonstrate compliance with the Grant Agreement.

Compliance and Monitoring

To ensure that funds are used responsibly, the County reserves the right to conduct site visits to monitor project progress and verify compliance with grant terms. Grantees failing to submit required reports or adhere to the Grant Agreement may be deemed ineligible for future funding and may be required to return funds to the County. This approach reinforces accountability and maintains the community's trust in the program.

Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form

The Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form is a critical tool for maintaining impartiality in the grant review process. Commissioners and reviewers are required to disclose any financial, professional, or personal relationships with applicant organizations. The form includes questions such as:

1. Do you or your immediate family have a financial interest in any applicant organization?
2. Are you affiliated with any applicant organization in a capacity that could influence decisions?
3. Have you received any gifts or compensation from any applicant organization?

Individuals must certify that their disclosures are accurate and agree to recuse themselves from discussions or decisions where a conflict is identified. This policy ensures that the grant process remains transparent and equitable.

Best Practices for Funding External Organizations

To ensure that all funds allocated through the Queen Anne's County Outside Agency Grant Program directly benefit the residents and businesses of Queen Anne's County, the following policies will apply to organizations located outside the County but operating within its boundaries:

1. **Restricted Use of Funds:**
 - All grant funds awarded to external organizations must be used exclusively for programs, projects, or services that directly benefit Queen Anne's County residents or businesses.
 - No portion of the funding may be allocated to administrative or operational expenses outside Queen Anne's County.

2. **Detailed Budget and Justification:**
 - Applicants must submit a detailed, project-specific budget that clearly outlines how the requested funds will be spent exclusively within Queen Anne’s County.
 - The budget must include line items tied directly to services, materials, or activities benefiting Queen Anne’s County residents.
3. **Proof of Local Impact:**
 - Grantees must provide documentation of the local impact of the funded project or program. This includes:
 - Invoices or receipts for expenditures within Queen Anne’s County.
 - Logs or reports demonstrating the direct provision of services to County residents.
4. **Enhanced Reporting Requirements:**
 - Reports must include narratives, photographs, or other evidence showing how the project benefited Queen Anne’s County.
5. **Monitoring and Compliance:**
 - The County reserves the right to conduct periodic audits and site visits to verify compliance with the grant’s terms.
 - Any organization found to have used funds for benefit to entities outside Queen Anne’s County will be required to return the misallocated amount and may be deemed ineligible for future funding.

Enhancements to the Grant Program

1. **Streamlined Application Timeline:** Launch the application process earlier in the year to allow organizations adequate time for planning and submission.
2. **Broader Outreach:** Expand outreach efforts to include underrepresented organizations and communities, ensuring equitable access to the program.
3. **Strict Funding Alignment:** Ensure that awards do not exceed the amounts requested in applications, maintaining consistency and fiscal responsibility.
4. **Unspent Funds Policy:** Require grantees to return unspent funds exceeding \$50 or submit a Budget Extension Request for approval.
5. **Neutrality in Funding:** Exclude organizations with overt religious or political affiliations to maintain fairness and neutrality in the allocation of taxpayer funds.

Implementation Timeline

To further improve the grant program’s efficiency and effectiveness, the following timeline is proposed for the typical annual budget cycle:

- **January:** Official announcement of the grant opportunity.
- **January:** Conduct community outreach.
- **February:** Application deadline.
- **February-June:** Evaluation and review.
- **June-July:** Award decisions.

- **August-October:** Disbursements
- **December:** Submission of mid-year reports by grantees.
- **June:** Submission of final reports by grantees.

Conclusion

The Queen Anne's County Outside Agency Grant Program is a cornerstone of community development, providing vital support to organizations that enhance the quality of life for residents. By implementing these comprehensive policies and procedures, the County ensures that the program operates with the highest standards of fairness, transparency, and accountability. These reforms, combined with a commitment to continuous improvement, position the program to achieve even greater impact in the years ahead.