Hello Former, Current, and Future Virginia Tourism Partners ,

In this webinar I am going to go over the Marketing Leverage Program and how to maximize your scoring potential. This program is open to officially recognized DMOs, organizations that do tourism marketing like Main Street Organizations and Chambers of Commerce, tourism-oriented private businesses like hotels, B&Bs, campgrounds, restaurants, food trucks, outfitters, breweries, wineries, distilleries, tour guiding companies, and some types of retail stores.

If you are questioning your eligibility, you can email the Grants Team with any questions about eligibility. The grants team email for this program is VTCMLPGrant@virginia.org

This is a very competitive program and receives the most applications out of all of our programs. Be sure to take your time with the application and please remember there are some new questions and a new application format this year.

You’ll start your application process on this page [www.vatc.org/grants](http://www.vatc.org/grants). You’ll click on the Marketing Leverage Program and it will bring you to a new page.

It will not be password protected when you access it. To start you application, you will simply scroll down and start filling it out. But wait---don’t just dive right in!!

Mouse over right side bar

On the right hand side bar are three documents that you’ll want to print out and read.

The first is a Guidance document. This has detailed instructions for filling out the application and it has an application template. You can type your answers into this word document then copy and paste them over to the online portal when you are ready to apply. The second is the program Terms and Conditions and the third is the FAQs document. FAQs will be updated every Tuesday during the grant round as we get questions into our email boxes.

There are some changes compared to the 2022 round.

First off, this is a 1:1 cash match program. In-kind match is no longer permitted in this program. We are well on our way through tourism recovery and we are back requiring cash match in this program like we were before the pandemic.

Only eligible marketing expenses that have been invoiced and have documented proof of payment along with images, recordings or other evidence of placement will be eligible for reimbursement. This program does not allow for staff costs, equipment purchases, or most types of signage among other ineligible items. Be sure to thoroughly read the list of eligible and ineligible expenses in the Terms and Conditions document.

This is a reimbursement program so we encourage businesses to only apply for an award for which they can handle the cashflow with regards to spending and waiting for reimbursements. No funds will be available up-front.

The maximum award is $20,000. You don’t have to request the maximum.

Scroll through application

Information Section

**The very first question we ask is if you are listed on the state tourism website** [**www.virginia.org**](http://www.virginia.org)**. Listings are free.**

There is a link in the instructions document that will take you to the site with a webinar on how to set up an account and get your listing set up with photos. Try to do this before you apply. You must have a listing on Virginia.org to be eligible for reimbursement.

In the first part of the application we ask for some general information. Our programs are tracked by EIN or Social Security number if it is a sole proprietorship. Only ONE application per business/per EIN/per SSN is allowed.

We are asking for secondary contact for your application. As you know we are seeing some turnover in hospitality staff and so to ensure continuity of the program please give us a second contact. If you are very small DMO managed by a locality, use your County Manager or Finance Officer as the second contact.

We request that insurance information if you are doing events outside the scope of your normal operations. VTC needs to be added as a “interested party’ to your event liability insurance if events are not covered by your regular liability insurance. You can use up to 10% of you award for insurance policy fees.

We are asking for social media account info which we will provide to VTC’s content and marketing teams.

Program Marketing Goals Section

In the Program Marketing Goals section we need you to pick the focus category that best fits your business type and/or marketing campaign. This is so we can easily find program types when we are looking for content opportunities. We’ve expanded these selections. Please do your best to select the one best category.

In the next section, you will name your program. Please select a creative name. Our computer system is aging and it gets easily confused if you use your name as a contact and your name as the name of the marketing program. We are working on modernizing our software and we hope to have that in place by 2024. More on that this summer.

The Marketing Leverage Program allows from program dates no earlier than August 1, 2022 and not later than October, 2024. That means that if you get an award and had some expenses prior to mid-April when we make award announcements you can use those expenses in either your match plan or your reimbursement plan.

No program can go beyond October 15, 2024. All expenses should be submitted for reimbursement by then and a final report is due no later than December 15, 2024.

Tell us how these funds will enhance your normal marketing budget. Our funds are designed not to replace your marketing budget but to help you stretch your dollars to target new markets and new audiences.

There is a new question about diversity and accessibility. It isn’t required to market to those constituent groups, but we do encourage you to think about it in your marketing plans.

Driving overnight visitation is critical for this program. It is actually backed by legislation that requires significant overnight economic impact.

Then we get to the DMO question. If you are new to the tourism industry, I’ll explain what a DMO is. A DMO is a destination marketing organization that is designated by a locality or several localities and VTC to manage tourism marketing and tourism development in a locality or region. Becoming a DMO requires legislation at the local level and extensive review by VTC at the state level.

You’ll need to get a letter of support from your local ore regional DMO and upload it with your application. Most DMOs are familiar with this program and will understand why you are asking for a letter of support. We are asking you to take this step so your DMO knows that you are planning to apply and can work with you on some marketing ideas, getting listed on their tourism website, and connecting with them and their more local or more regional resources. A letter of support IS required. Applications without a letter of support will be disqualified.

Hub & Spoke Section

We do want a full Hub & Spoke model for these applications. The Hub & Spoke graphic will not show up in the application portal, but I included the circle and spokes here so you can visualize how the model helps build an itinerary around your business or destination.

It really helps us see the marketing potential of your program when you list partners who you will cooperatively market with and list the spokes who might also join in your marketing program.. Do not use general categories in your spokes—name the names of businesses. You will lose points if one of your spokes is generic such as “restaurants” or “lodging.” Name the business names. Joe’s Café or Riverside B&B.

If your partners are not listed on Virginia.org yet---it can be done after you apply, but needs to be done before reimbursements will be processed.

Be sure to fully explain how you will cross-market your businesses, destination, or region.

Target Markets

We changed up the Target Markets section from the Fall 2022 Microbusiness application. There is a drop-down box with the same markets VTC is targeting out-of-state and all the major metro areas in the state. There is also an option to pick “Other” and list a target market that is not on the drop-down list.

We aren’t requiring that you spend at least 25% on out-of-state marketing, but we are encouraging it and applications that do will score higher.

Remember this program needs to drive overnight visitation. You need to pick at least two target markets, but you can select three. Try not to allocate funding to in-market visitation---your marketing should really be focused on visitors at least 50 miles away if not further away and out-of-state.

Marketing Plans

We updated this section to be more clear on what items are match and what items you will seek reimbursement for. These are still two separate tables, but we will be scoring the marketing plan section holistically.

You’ll create your match plan and then you’ll create a plan of the items for which you seek reimbursement from VTC. This is just a semantics change to help some of our new folks and new businesses understand match and reimbursement.

Use the plus button to add lines to your marketing plans.

I also included examples of how detailed we would like your marketing plans to be. Being detailed will help you score higher and will help us make comparisons if you need to request changes to your marketing plan.

We encourage you to look at the Virginia Tourism Industry Marketing Plan that offers discounts with some major advertising channels and we encourage to look at our PMAP Welcome Center marketing program where you can have your rack cards hosted at the Welcome Centers and safety rest areas across the state.

Remember certain categories of expenses like insurance, music licensing fees, promotional items, and AV rentals only have a 10% of requested award maximum allowance. Double check to make sure you aren’t going over that allowable amount. If you are only awarded a partial award, then your marketing plan allowance for those items would also be reduced.

Detailed information on allowable expenses and expenditure limits are listed in the Terms and Condition document. Information about the requirement to use the Virginia is for Lovers logo and links in your advertising is also included in the Terms and Conditions documents. Only marketing materials that have the logo and/or link are eligible for reimbursement.

Please double check your totals in the web portal. Sometimes you will need to tab back through your application to get the auto-sum features to update the total if you change any of your line items.

Performance Outcomes

For the Performance Outcomes section, we want to pick two performance measures from the drop-down boxes.

New in this round is we want you to list your baseline for that measurement and the date you took that measurement. Then we want you to set a goal and that date that will you will measure that again.

I included an example in the instructions that will help you understand this change. This will help us make some comparisons to your final report and to make sure we are meeting our economic impact goals.

Bonus Section

For the last section of the application, you will do the Bonus Section. There is a drop-down box of choices, and you can also select “other” if you want to get super creative. There are up to five bonus points available.

We made these a bit more comprehensive in terms of merchandising, activating the Virginia is for Lovers brand on site and in the destination, and offering opportunities for content teams to capture photography and videography. Considering our limited staffing and the schedules of contracted writers, we won’t always be able to come out to activate these opportunities, but you will still receive bonus points for listing them.

The ”behind the scenes” opportunity is a new option and what that means is that there is something unique going on at your destination---like grape picking or wine bottling—something that would make for some really compelling photography.

Or maybe you are having an event or celebrity come to your destination. Let us know if there would be a “behind the scenes” opportunity for an exclusive interview.

Recognition of VTC as a sponsor of an event could be as simple as an announcement from the stage or as high tech as spotlights with the Virginia is for Lovers logo being projected onto nearby buildings.

We really want to find new and unique ways to activate our brand with yours so get creative in this section.

Checkbox and Submit

Finally, in the web portal, you will need to attest to the match is true and correct and that you have read the Terms and Conditions of the program. Remember, this is a reimbursement program so manage that cash flow and reimbursement carefully.

If you need to stop and start your application, you can bookmark the url at the top of your application and click Save so you can come back and add more information later.

The deadline for this program is 5pm on Tuesday, February 28, 2023. There are no exceptions to this deadline.

There is a technical assistance request box in the sidebar and that will trigger an email to the grants team to reach out to you via email.

Please feel free to reach out the me (Staci Martin), Angela Wiggins, or Noah Salaah ad-Deen. We are your grants management team and we look forward to assisting you and reviewing your application. We are so excited about the 2023 travel season and value your partnership in tourism marketing and tourism development.

Thank you!