



ROBERT G. CASSILLY

Harford County Executive

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For more information, contact:

Joe Cluster, Chief of Executive Staff

410-638-4118

jecluster@harfordcountymd.gov

New Harford County Tourism Funding Programs Created; Workshops to be held on April 13

BEL AIR, Md., (April 5, 2023) – Harford County Government is reorganizing how it distributes its tourism dollars – generated through the county’s hotel lodging fee – in an overall effort to increase the number of overnight stays in local hotels by creating more extended or weekend-long events.

Harford County will begin offering funds to entities that promote visits lasting longer than a day, rather than providing tourism grant money to individual tourism-related organizations, as it has in the past, without regard for the impact those grants have on hotel stays.

An overnight visitor to Harford County spends an average of \$1,200 per visit, whereas a day-tripper only spends about \$98 per visit, according to the Maryland Office of Tourism. The average stay in the county is 1.8 days. Increasing the number of overnight stays will increase the amount of tourism funding available to distribute to promote more events and in turn generate more overnight visits.

Through the Partnership Fund, Harford County is providing grants collectively, totaling \$550,000, to encourage multiple non-profit tourism groups to work together to plan large-scale joint or extended events that will draw visitors overnight, or even longer, and not just for the day.

“Increasing overnight stays in Harford County is a key component to leveraging tourism to support Harford’s economy and small businesses,” Harford County Executive Bob Cassilly said. “We want our many local tourism organizations to work together to create top-notch events that will bring people to our county from all over the region.”

To obtain Partnership Fund money, the lead organization of this new event or program must submit the application; partner tourism groups will provide supporting documentation to show their joint commitment to

the endeavor. The application should also include a joint budget to show how the event will encourage overnight visits.

In an effort to help tourism-related organizations make strides toward qualifying for Partnership Fund money, the county will provide temporary grants, through the Harford Strides Fund, for up to two consecutive years. Groups receiving these grants must show how they will sustain themselves with other outside funding within three years and how they attract visitors from beyond Harford's borders. The Strides fund has \$220,000 available.

Any group who applies for Strides funding is ineligible for Partnership Fund dollars.

The grants are only available to Harford tourism-related 501(c)3 and 501(c)6 organizations and will be awarded by the county executive after the applications are reviewed and recommended by the Tourism Activity Review Committee.

The deadline for applications is 5 p.m. on Friday, May 12. Two free hybrid workshops, to discuss program eligibility, will be held on Thursday, April 13 – one from 2-3 p.m. and the other from 6:30-7:30 p.m. – at 2021D Pulaski Highway in Havre de Grace. Advanced registration is required for the workshops; email Lisa Krysiak at lmkrysiak@harfordcountymd.gov. Applications will be found at <https://www.harfordcountymd.gov/2678/Tourism>.

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410.638.3350 | 410.879.2000 | 220 South Main Street, Bel Air, Maryland 21014 | www.harfordcountymd.gov

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