
BARRY GLASSMAN
HARFORD COUNTY EXECUTIVE



BILLY BONIFACE
DIRECTOR OF ADMINISTRATION

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For more information, contact:

Cindy Mumby

Phone: 410-340-5376

Email: camumby@harfordcountymd.gov

Glassman Administration Awards More than \$1.3M in Grants to Grow Tourism in Harford County

BEL AIR, Md., (June 9, 2015) - County Executive Barry Glassman is pleased to announce that 23 local nonprofits will receive more than \$1.3 million in grants to plan and implement a variety of tourism-related activities including sporting events and historical, cultural, agricultural, heritage, and eco-tourism operations in the fiscal year 2016. The one-year grants are being awarded following a competitive grant process, with funding generated through a hotel lodging fee implemented in March.

“I am pleased to reinvest revenue from our hotel lodging fee to advance Harford County as a tourism destination,” said County Executive Barry Glassman. “Our competitive grant process provides accountability for how funds are used; at the same time we assist nonprofits in developing attractive tourism-related programs and activities for citizens and guests to enjoy. Indirectly, this funding will also help local shops, restaurants and other businesses that thrive when visitors come to town.”

Funding for the grants is being generated through a 6% hotel lodging fee initiated by the Glassman administration and approved by the Harford County Council in January. Application of the fee began on March 25, 2015. The last jurisdiction in the state to implement such a fee, Harford County will use the funds explicitly for tourism-related operations and events.

An eight-week competitive grant application process was launched on March 2 through the Office of Economic Development, offering 501c3 and 501c6 organizations the opportunity to

apply for funding. Two informational workshops were offered in March and April to provide assistance in completing the application, and to answer questions from interested organizations.

The Economic Development Advisory Board (EDAB) was tasked with review and recommendation of tourism-related funding applications. A Tourism Activity Review Committee (TARC) was designated under EDAB for this purpose. EDAB endorsed the committee's process and forwarded the recommendations to County Executive Glassman for his consideration.

Any remaining dollars not allocated by TARC will remain designated for tourism-related activities not yet identified in FY 16. Should the funds not be used in this fiscal year, they will roll over into FY17 for tourism-related activities and operations.

Tourism for Harford County was recently privatized under the Glassman administration, which eliminated the tourism office in the Office of Economic Development and transitioned it to Visit Harford! Inc., a 501c6 that now serves as the county's Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) in the eyes of the state. Visit Harford! Inc. was the largest recipient of tourism related grants for FY16 at \$500,000, which will assist in augmenting a comprehensive, mass media marketing program, launch a regional reservation system for sports tourism, and increase operational support for the volunteer-board organization.

"The program and process that the Glassman administration has put in place legitimizes the idea that tourism is not only about vacations. It's a business that generates business. It is a sound investment," said Eric McLauchlin, EDAB's chair. "Through the wise distribution of these dedicated revenues, Harford County is supporting organizations and venues that substantially impact the local economy, and is at the same time holding them accountable."

Grant recipients have received a notification letter from County Executive Glassman announcing their award amount. A package from the Office of Economic Development will follow with guidelines for executing a Memorandum of Agreement, quarterly performance report template and procedures for receiving funding. Once packet materials are fully executed, funds will be made available after July 1st.

"As with any new process, we will be seeking feedback from applicants on how to improve on this process," said Karen Holt, director of Economic Development, noting that an earlier start in the fall will allow for a longer application window. "These funds are a great investment in our county. They help to build Harford as a premier tourism destination and many businesses across our county benefit from both day trippers and overnight bed stays."

Organizations receiving competitive grant funding are listed below:

- Bel Air Downtown Alliance, \$58,130, operations for Maryland BBQ Bash and Town of Bel Air Market study;
- Boys & Girls Club of Harford County, \$50,000, marketing and operations for seasonal, temporary, “haunted” event development at Camp Hidden Valley;
- Center for the Arts, \$50,000, support staff position to assist with revised business plan and marketing;
- Chesapeake Heritage Conservancy Inc., \$25,000, staffing support and basic operating expenses for Skipjack Martha Lewis, 60th year on Chesapeake Bay;
- Concord Point Lighthouse, \$17,250, fund half of a staff position and support essential website upgrades;
- Darlington Apple Festival, \$35,000, expanded marketing materials, support toward trash and traffic management, addition of a cornhole tournament;
- HCC Foundation, \$40,000, expansion of regional marketing campaign to promote APGFCU Arena, expand multi-day events, and attract out-of-county event patrons;
- Harford County Agricultural Research & Exposition Foundation Inc., \$5,000, site preparation, administrative operational support to develop Ag Research and Exposition Center;
- Harford County Farm Fair, \$50,000, shuttle bus and electrical services;
- Harford County Historical Society, \$30,000, support overall operating costs;
- Harford Land Trust, \$12,500, improved signage and PR materials;
- Havre de Grace Decoy Museum, \$90,000, support for an executive director, marketing with Canvasback magazine and social media outreach;
- Havre de Grace Main Street, \$100,000, staffing, marketing analysis and branding for downtown district in a collaborative citywide process;
- Havre de Grace Maritime Museum, \$24,000, partial support for two part-time employees and general operating expenses;
- Highland Community Association, \$50,000, promote cultural aspects of Northern Harford with tourism information dissemination, Highland Museum and Archives;
- Hosanna Community House Inc. (Hosanna School Museum), \$25,253, support a bus tour series that showcases Harford County’s social and cultural heritage from the lens of African Americans
- Ladew Gardens, \$30,000, support for general operating expenses
- Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway, \$50,000, support for staff position, marketing and operations;
- Rockfield Manor, \$63,395, marketing, catering and tech items to support and sustain Harford County Wine Festival;
- Steppingstone Museum, \$20,000, FY 16 operating funds to sustain and expand living museum through preservation of historic trades and folk arts;

- Susquehanna Museum of Havre de Grace Inc. at the Lock House, \$25,000, for approximately 26% of general operating expenses;
- Susquehanna Symphony,\$25,900, for rental, marketing of regional musical performance, support to commemorate 40th season;
- Visit Harford! Inc., \$500,000, support for operations, advertising and promotions.

In addition to the above competitive grants, \$170,000 for marketing agriculture and ag-tourism, which had been funded in prior years by General Fund revenue, is funded in fiscal year 2016 by revenue from the hotel lodging fee.

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