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Washington County opens next round of COVID-19 relief funding

Washington County will begin taking applications Jan. 7 from small businesses and non-profits for COVID-19 relief funding.

Applications will be accepted starting at 8 a.m. Thursday, Jan. 7, and accepted through 4:30 p.m. Feb. 4. Eligibility requirements are on the Washington County website and the county's Community Development Agency website. Businesses must be in Washington County, have no tax lien, and be able to show how they have been impacted, directly or indirectly, by an executive order related to the COVID-19 pandemic. They must have been in operation on or before Nov. 1, 2020.

The county received \$5 million in county relief grants for local businesses, approved by the Legislature in mid-December, based on a per-capita allocation.

The Washington County Board determined that priority for grant funding shall go to those businesses most directly impacted by the governor's most recent executive order. If funding remains available, eligible applicants will be businesses that have been directly or indirectly impacted by any executive orders issued to address the on-going COVID-19 pandemic, and certain non-profit businesses impacted by the pandemic.

Washington County will first provide grants to impacted businesses holding a food, pools, or lodging license from Washington County for 2021, with grants equal to the 2021 license fee. Licensed businesses receiving a grant under this portion of the program are also eligible to apply for an additional grant.

The Metropolitan Consortium of Community Developers' (MCCD) Open to Business Program, a local non-profit business, will collect and review applications, and award grants.

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All applications will be processed by MCCD through its web-based application. A link to the application is on the Washington County Community Development Agency website. MCCD will review and approve/decline based on eligibility. MCCD will review all applications, but fund only the priority businesses until Feb. 4. At that time, funding will open up to the next priorities, including businesses not affected directly by the governor's most recent executive order, non-profits, and home-based businesses.

Eligible businesses are those with 75 or fewer employees and \$5 million or less in annual revenue. First priority will be given to restaurants, bars, gyms, and similar businesses that have been partially or fully closed as a result of an executive order.

Businesses that received Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act assistance, including county small business grants, or state business grants, are eligible for the program, but must apply again to receive funds. Home-based businesses or self-employed entrepreneurs who have no employees and have a physical business in Washington County other than their personal residence are eligible for grants.

Non-profit organizations, such as arts organizations, museums, and fitness centers that earn revenue similar to businesses are eligible. Non-profit organizations that provide social and community services, such as mental health services, housing, services for individuals with disabilities, food support, and other human services or safety net services closely related to those provided by counties, and those that provide direct services to veterans are eligible.

Grants must be awarded and checks mailed by March 15. Once a business meets the eligibility criteria, its grant award amount will be based on the following tiers:

- up to \$15,000 for for-profit and non-profit restaurants and bars impacted by the executive order.
- up to \$15,000 for other for-profit businesses impacted, either directly or indirectly, by an executive order related to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- up to \$10,000 for eligible non-profit businesses impacted by an executive order related to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- up to \$7,500 for home-based or non-employer small businesses/sole proprietors.

Funds must be used for business operating expenses incurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. Those expenses may include payroll, rent payments, mortgage payments, payments to suppliers, insurance, utility expenses or other critical business expenses, including expenses related to closing and/or reopening. Washington County funds may not be used for the same expenses or activities that were paid with other sources of grants or COVID relief funds.

If the application requests received as of the end of the day Feb. 4 does not equal or exceed the total grant funds available, the application process will remain open until application requests exceed the amount of funds available.

If funding remains, and eligible applications are received after Feb. 5, those applications can be reviewed and processed on a rolling basis to ensure grant dollars are awarded prior to the March 15 deadline. If grant applications received prior to Feb. 5 exceed the amount of funding available for grants, Washington County reserves the right to pro-rate grant amounts to provide assistance to as many applicants as possible. No applications will be accepted after March 1 at 4:30 p.m.