



MARYLAND HERITAGE AREAS AUTHORITY

BLOCK GRANT GUIDELINES

Fiscal Year 2026



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BLOCK GRANT GUIDELINES – FY 2026

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INTRODUCTION

The Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (“MHAA”) is an independent unit of government in the Executive Branch of government that operates in the Department of Planning. MHAA oversees the Maryland Heritage Areas Program which is administered by the Maryland Historical Trust (MHT). Funding for MHAA, which is currently \$6 million dollars annually, comes out of Program Open Space funds. Block grants are awarded to the management entities of the Certified Heritage Areas through the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority Financing Fund, a non-lapsing, revolving fund. The following is information and instructions for completing the Block Grant applications online.

DISCLAIMERS

Each applicant shall comply with all applicable federal, State, and local laws, and departmental policies and programs, in carrying out the grant-funded project, including laws about drug-, alcohol-, and smoke-free workplaces; access for people with disabilities; equal opportunity in employment, housing and credit practices; and prohibiting discrimination.

The application process depends on complete and accurate information, and the failure to provide the information requested on the application may jeopardize MHAA’s approval of your application. If your application contains personal information, e.g., information that identifies a person’s education, financial information, or employment history—you should be aware of the following:

1. Any personal information supplied by the applicant will be used principally for MHAA’s evaluation of the application, but it also may be shared with other State, local, or federal government agencies involved with the applied-for project;
2. MHAA will permit the person whose information is included in an application to inspect, amend, and correct that information;
3. Your application and its supporting materials are public records that are generally available for public inspection under the Maryland Public Information Act. There are, however, certain types of information that are protected from disclosure under the Act. If there are portions of your application materials that you believe are exempt from disclosure under the Act, please indicate as much on your application. The Attorney General’s website contains helpful information about the Public Information Act and the types of information that it exempts from disclosure:
<https://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/Pages/OpenGov/pia.aspx>.

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Eligible applicants include the following:

- **Nonprofit organizations, local jurisdictions, and state agencies** that have been identified as **management entities** of Certified Heritage Areas (“Heritage Areas”).
- **Nonprofit organizations, local jurisdictions, and state agencies** to which Certified Heritage Area management responsibilities have been delegated by a heritage area management entity.

Nonprofit organizations must be in good standing, qualified to do business in Maryland, and have the legal capacity and authority to incur obligations under the grant program.

ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES

The block grants provided to Heritage Areas from MHAA have a specific purpose: To fund smaller (compared with MHAA Project Grants), non-capital grants that will be awarded by the Heritage Area to organizations conducting projects within the Heritage Area’s boundaries. These smaller grants are often referred to as “mini-grants.”

The mini-grant projects should be consistent with the goals, objectives, strategies, and actions outlined in the approved Management Plan and/or Five-Year Action Plan for the applicant Certified Heritage Area.

Funds awarded as a block grant can only be utilized to provide mini-grants to projects within boundaries of the Certified Heritage Area. They cannot be used for any other purpose.

GRANT AMOUNTS AND MATCHING FUND REQUIREMENTS

Block grants can be requested for up to **\$25,000**. This amount is contingent upon sufficient funding being made available in the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority Financing Fund.

Note: If a Heritage Area elects to use the Block Grant to fund mini-grants in a given fiscal year, their MHAA Management Grant for the same fiscal year cannot include funding for mini-grants.

All grants must be matched in an amount at least equal to the grant (dollar-for-dollar match).

Ineligible Match:

- State of Maryland funds, except for staff time from State employees
- Expenditures made prior to the award of the grant or after the completion of the grant period

Match requirements for the block grant can be met in two ways: either the Heritage Area provides an equal amount of non-state funds for mini-grants; or, the Heritage Area requires their mini-grantees to provide matching funds.

MINI-GRANT GUIDELINES

Heritage Areas must ensure that their mini-grantees follow these guidelines.

Eligible Activities

Eligible activities **must** take place within the boundaries of a Certified Heritage Area, and be consistent with the goals, objectives, strategies, and actions outlined in the approved Certified Heritage Area Management Plan and/or Five-Year Action Plan for the Heritage Area where the mini-grant will take place.

Mini-grants can fund non-capital projects that support and create heritage tourism resources and experiences within the 13 Certified Heritage Areas. Non-capital projects often fall into the broad categories of planning, interpretation, programming, digital resources, and research. Mini-grant recipients can also use the funds for marketing activities.

Ineligible Activities

Mini-grants and matching funds cannot be used for the following:

- **Capital expenditures** (including building repairs, painting, trail construction and other bricks and mortar or construction activities);
- **Overhead expenses** (rent, utilities, etc.,);
- **Salaries and/or benefits** of permanent or temporary staff of the grantee organization, although staff time working on the grant-funded project can be used as match; or
- **Alcohol**

If a Heritage Area has non-state funds that are in addition to their required mini-grant match that they wish to award for capital grant projects, they must establish a separate, stand-alone capital mini-grant program to ensure that there is no overlap between the allowable state-funded non-capital projects and the non-state-funded capital grant projects.

PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA

See **Appendix A** for the list of criteria that are considered when applications are reviewed.

APPLICATION SUBMISSION AND DEADLINE

Block Grant applications must be submitted online no later than 11:59 p.m. on May 19, 2025.

GRANT TERMS AND CONDITIONS

All successful grantees will be required to enter into a grant agreement with MHAA. It is important that you understand these terms and conditions prior to applying for grant funds because you will need to abide by them if a grant is awarded. See **Appendix B** for full terms and conditions.

GRANT SCHEDULE

Full Application –

- Due no later than **11:59 p.m. on May 19, 2025.**

Grant Review and Awards –

- MHAA Program staff will review all Block Grant applications and make recommendations to MHAA in **May and June**
- MHAA takes final action on grant awards on **July 10, 2025**
- Applicants are notified by email after **July 10, 2025**
- If awarded, the grant period begins **July 10, 2025** and all mini-grants can be awarded after that date

APPLICATION FORMAT

A link to the Block Grant application will be emailed to all Heritage Area directors. All applications must be submitted online. All other online grant materials are available [here](#). See the [Quick Start Guide](#) on the **MHT grants page** for full details on the online submission process.

In addition to answering the questions in the online application form, applicants will be required to upload samples of the Heritage Area's mini-grant application, grant agreement/award letter, guideline materials, and copies of their organizational documents. For most organizations, this will include the filed Articles of Incorporation or Articles of Organization, and Bylaws or an Operating Agreement. Government entities do not need to upload organizational documents.

APPENDIX A - PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA

The following criteria will be considered by MHAA Program staff when reviewing block grant proposals:

MINI-GRANT APPLICATION PROCESS

- Is the application process well thought out?
- How will the Heritage Area spread the word about their mini-grant opportunities?

MINI-GRANT REVIEW PROCESS

- Is the review process well thought out?
- Does the review process include consideration of how potential mini-grant projects support the goals, objectives, strategies, and actions outlined in the approved Management Plan and/or Five-Year Action Plan for the applicant Certified Heritage Area?

APPENDIX B - GRANT TERMS AND CONDITIONS

All grantees will be required to enter into a grant agreement with MHAA. The grant agreement is a binding contract with standard terms and conditions including the following:

Grant Term - All grant funds generally must be expended within no more than 24 months of the date the grant agreement is signed by all parties, unless MHAA Program staff agrees to a longer term or approves in writing an extension of the grant period. Written progress and final reports must be submitted to MHAA Program staff during the grant term, generally at the mid-point and end of the project (grant agreements will specify reporting requirements). The Heritage Area may also be required to submit supporting financial documentation with progress and final reports identifying project costs incurred to date.

Grant Disbursements – Grant funds shall be disbursed in a single lump sum payment upon submission of a disbursement request to MHAA Program staff via the online portal that can be submitted at any time after award notification. To close the grant project, grantees must provide a list of mini-grant recipients, copies of grant agreements that document the amount and purpose of the mini-grant funds, as well as the match requirements for the mini-grant (if applicable).

Workplace Restrictions – Each applicant shall comply with all applicable federal, State, and local laws, and departmental policies and programs, in carrying out the grant-funded project, including laws about drug-, alcohol-, and smoke-free workplaces; access for people with disabilities; equal opportunity in employment, housing and credit practices; and prohibiting discrimination.

Acknowledgment - Grant and mini-grant recipients are required to provide appropriate acknowledgment of MHAA assistance for all projects in accordance with requirements outlined in the grant agreement. Grant recipients may also be required to provide appropriate acknowledgment of the local Certified Heritage Area management entity.

Compliance with Applicable Laws – Recipients of funds are responsible for complying with all federal, State, and local laws applicable to the project. This responsibility includes, but is not limited to, compliance with local zoning, building and public safety codes, review by local historic preservation commissions, and federal and State licensing, permitting and environmental requirements.