

Affordable Housing Grant Program

The St. Johns County Affordable Housing Grant Program provides grants to eligible organizations to fund a wide range of activities to create affordable housing for very low, low, and moderate income residents of St. Johns County, as defined in Chapter 420, Florida Statutes. Grant applications shall be evaluated quarterly. For projects of a time-sensitive nature, applications may be considered outside the quarterly application period on a case-by-case basis at the sole discretion of the Director of Health and Human Services.

I. Eligibility

In order to be eligible for grant funding, proposed projects must have a direct connection to the creation of affordable housing within St. Johns County. Eligible projects shall promote the development and preservation of affordable housing within the County as provided in the County's 2016-2020 Consolidated Plan. Examples of eligible projects include, but are not limited to, the following activities:

- Property acquisition;
- Rehabilitation of existing housing;
- Construction of new housing; and
- Provision of infrastructure to support affordable housing.

For grants funded through state or federal funds, there may be additional requirements for eligible projects. These requirements shall be set forth in the announcement of availability of grant funds. All projects receiving grant funding must be located entirely within St. Johns County.

II. Application Process

Based on funding availability, the County shall post an announcement of availability of grant funds each quarter on the County website and in the St. Augustine Record. The announcement shall identify the types of projects that will be considered during that quarterly grant cycle. If there are additional restrictions or requirements associated with the use of grant funds, these shall be identified in the announcement.

The deadline for submission of applications for a particular grant cycle shall be identified in the announcement of availability of grant funds. Applications received after the application deadline shall be retained and evaluated in the following grant cycle. If an applicant is applying for grant funds for a project of a time-sensitive nature, the applicant shall submit a written request for the application to be evaluated outside of the quarterly grant cycle. Such requests shall be approved or denied at the sole discretion of the Director of Health and Human Services. In deciding whether to approve or deny a request, the Director shall consider the nature of the project and the factors contributing to the time-sensitivity of the project. Requests shall not be approved if the time-sensitive nature of the project is a result of delay on the part of the applicant. The Director's denial of a request may be appealed to the County Administrator.

III. Evaluation Process

Grant applications shall be reviewed by the Affordable Housing Grant Review Committee. The Committee shall review all applications and provide recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners. The Committee shall be composed of five members of County staff designated by the Director of Health and Human Services. In selecting the Committee members, the Director shall select members whose expertise qualifies them to provide recommendations with respect to the grant applications. If the Director determines that the expertise of a non-County employee is required for the purposes of evaluating grant applications, the Director may include a non-County employee on the Committee for such purposes, provided that the non-employee is fully informed that all work and evaluation performed on behalf of the County is subject to all applicable Florida laws, including the Florida Public Records law. The Committee shall be subject to Government in the Sunshine, and its meetings shall be open to the public.

Application for a grant shall not guarantee an award of funding. Applications shall be evaluated based on the extent to which they provide effective use of grant funding to promote or preserve affordable housing for the benefit of very low, low, and moderate income County residents. Factors the Committee may consider in evaluating applications include, but are not limited to, the number of affordable housing units to be created or supported, the applicant's ability to leverage grant funds, the applicant's ability to complete the proposed project, and the extent to which the project fits within the County's overall affordable housing strategies.

The Committee's recommendations shall be submitted to the Board of County Commissioners for final approval. Upon receiving the Committee's recommendations, the Board shall take action to accept, deny, or modify the recommendations. If the Board approves funding for a particular application, the Board shall instruct staff to prepare a grant agreement between the County and the applicant for the Board's future consideration. The completed grant agreement shall accurately reflect any instructions or guidance provided by the Board at the time the Board approved funding. An award of grant funding shall not be final until a grant agreement is executed by both the County and the applicant. The County may withdraw an award if the grant agreement is not executed by the applicant within 30 days of the applicant's receipt of the agreement approved by the Board.

The County is not obligated to award all funds available during a particular grant cycle. The County reserves the right to reject any and all applications submitted for consideration.

IV. Lobbying

A grant applicant, or any person acting on behalf of a grant applicant, is prohibited from lobbying the County with respect to a grant application. If an applicant has any questions regarding the announcement of availability of grant funds, the applicant shall contact the person identified in the announcement as the contact person for the County. Applicants who fail to comply with this prohibition are subject to automatic rejection of their application, without further recourse, and disqualification from consideration for further grant funding for up to 12 months.

V. Requests for Reconsideration

An applicant that is denied funding by the Affordable Housing Grant Review Committee may submit a written Request for Reconsideration to the Director of Health and Human Services within 10 business days of the denial of the funding recommendation by the Committee. The Request for Reconsideration shall state the reason the applicant believes the grant application should be considered. The Director has the sole discretion to decide whether to grant or deny a Request for Reconsideration. If the Director grants a Request for Reconsideration, the grant application, along with any information contained in the Request for Reconsideration, shall be presented to the Affordable Housing Grant Review Committee at its next regularly scheduled meeting.

An applicant that is denied funding by the Board of County Commissioners may be reconsidered by majority vote of the Board.

Reconsideration of a grant application shall proceed according to the evaluation process provided in Section III above and shall be evaluated using the same criteria as the initial grant application.