

COVID relief grant for hospitality businesses opens March 15

A new COVID relief grant for eligible hospitality industry businesses opens for applications March 15, 2021.

The Columbia County Commissioners are urging businesses to apply as soon as possible for the COVID-19 Hospitality Industry Recovery Program (CHIRP) grants since funds may be quickly exhausted.

Businesses can apply at the Community Giving Foundation's website at www.cs giving.org from March 15, 2021 until the funds are exhausted or June 15, 2021.

Grants will range from \$5,000 to \$50,000 and the funds will alleviate revenue losses and pay eligible operating expenses due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Columbia County Commissioner Chris Young said that the new grant program is a much-needed lifeline to businesses during this time.

"This grant program offers a lifeline to businesses in the hospitality industry in our county. These funds are limited, so we urge businesses to apply quickly," Young said.

The county has contracted with SEDA-Council of Governments (SEDA-COG) to manage their \$735,806 grant program on their behalf. SEDA-COG will receive the applications and determine eligibility and grant amounts in partnership with Harry Mathias, a contractor with SEDA-COG who also served as a former math teacher and Central Columbia Schools superintendent. SEDA-COG also will disburse the funds to awarded businesses.

Mike Fisher, SEDA-COG assistant executive director, said SEDA-COG is honored to partner with its counties on this effort to help the local hospitality industry.

"We are honored to be able to further assist our counties in this way. We know that the economic effects of the pandemic have crippled our local hospitality industry, so we trust this will alleviate some of that pain. This pandemic has left gaping holes of need and we are here to help our communities and businesses meet those needs," Fisher said.

Eligible hospitality industry businesses include hotels, restaurants, bars, and taverns. These businesses must fall within eligible industry codes which include the Accommodations subsector (721) or Food Services and Drinking Places subsector (722).

Eligibility includes, but is not limited to, having fewer than 300 full-time employees; a net worth that does not exceed \$15 million; a 25% reduction in gross receipts in 2020 compared to 2019; and be located within Centre, Clinton, Columbia, Juniata, Lycoming, Mifflin, Montour, Northumberland, Snyder, or Union counties.

Priority will be given to businesses that did not already receive COVID relief funds; that were subject to closure following the disaster emergency declared by Gov. Tom Wolf on March 6, 2020; and had more than a 50% reduction in gross receipts from March 31, 2020 to Dec. 31, 2020 compared to the same time period in 2019. For a full listing of eligibility requirements and prioritization guidelines, visit www.cs giving.org.

The grant program was created from Act 1 of 2021, which was passed Feb. 5. Statewide, it provides \$145 million in funding assistance to the hospitality industry businesses adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic through the state Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED).

For more information, contact SEDA-COG Grants Manager Betsy Lockwood at 570-522-7265 or elockwood@seda-cog.org.

As a community and economic development agency, SEDA-COG enhances the quality of life and economic advantage for residents and businesses in 11 central Pennsylvania counties through its vital partnerships and initiatives. SEDA-COG also is an advocate for the interests of its communities at the state and federal levels. For more information, visit www.seda-cog.org.