

2025 REQUIREMENTS

Aiken County Local Tourism Development Grant Guidelines (Bricks and Mortar)

(July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025) June 14, 2024 Application Due Date
July 9, 2024 Meeting Date, Applicant Present

Aiken County Local Accommodations Tax Grants are funded through Local Accommodations Tax revenues collected in the **unincorporated** Aiken County. These funds may be used for tourism related projects in Aiken County, with a priority of funding projects in the areas where Aiken County Accommodations Taxes are collected. Please pay close attention to grant requirements as they explain organization and program eligibility as well as funding priorities.

The proceeds from this tax are to be used for the dedicated purpose of promoting tourism in Aiken County. Overnight accommodations resulting from your project or attraction in the **unincorporated** areas of Aiken County are the ultimate goal. This is a competitive grants program that provides Accommodations Tax funds to eligible non-profit organizations. **Please do not contact anyone from the advisory committee regarding the status of the grant applications.**

AIKEN COUNTY LOCAL ACCOMMODATION TAX ORDINANCE

SEC. 22-78

1. As allowed by Section 6-1-530 of South Carolina state law authorizing the local accommodations tax, the county-collected accommodations tax may be used for:
 - (1) Tourism-related buildings including, but not limited to, civic centers, coliseums, and aquariums;
 - (2) Tourism-related cultural, recreational, or historic facilities;
 - (3) Tourism-related land and water access;
 - (4) Highways, roads, streets, and bridges providing access to tourist destinations;
 - (5) Water and sewer infrastructure to serve tourism-related demands.
2. All requests should be in the form of a one-time grant proposal submitted to the Aiken County Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee on a timetable determined by them. **June 14, 2024**
3. The County Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee will make its recommendations to the administrative committee at the end of the fiscal year. The recommendations will recommend allocation of the dollars collected for the current fiscal year in time for inclusion in the annual budget. Final approval shall be by Aiken County Council. *Funds from the prior fiscal year (FY24) will be awarded for the upcoming fiscal year (FY25). The amount recommended by the Advisory Committee will be the collections as of July 2024.*
4. Projects should be spread as much as possible around all areas of Aiken County and should impact the greatest geographic area possible. Multi-year commitments should be avoided.
5. No single entity will be allowed to receive more than forty (40) percent of the accommodations tax dollars raised in a single year. **In general, funds raised outside the limits of a city collecting its own local accommodations tax should be allocated for projects outside that city's limits.**

In other words: *If your project attracts tourist to the **unincorporated areas** of Aiken County, visitors are likely to use overnight accommodations in the unincorporated areas, replenishing and/or increasing the tax base.*

However, if your project attracts tourists to the incorporated areas (Cities of Aiken and North Augusta) collecting their own local accommodations tax, it is probable that your visitors will use overnight accommodations there. This will not replenish the Aiken County Local Accommodation Tax funds from which this grant derives. Please seek funding from the incorporated municipality in which your project is located.

6. All requests for funding should be submitted as grant requests on forms designed by the County Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee. Forms are available from the Aiken County Visitors Center; 133 Laurens St. NW, Aiken SC 29801.
7. *The county requires the provision of "matching dollars", with fifty (50) percent (dollar for dollar match) as the recommended guideline. **Preference in allocation of funding shall be to organizations with matching funds.***
8. All agencies receiving funds from the local accommodations tax fund shall make a written annual report to the Aiken County Visitors Center on the use of the funds **prior to receiving any further funds from this source by the designated deadlines.** See Local Accommodation Tax Timeline below.

DISTRIBUTION OF LOCAL ACCOMMODATION TAX

Distribution and Matching Funds

- a) Local Accommodations Tax funds will be distributed ***after project is complete and accountability report is reviewed for accuracy.*** You will not receive the funds in advance, so please do not ask for them from Aiken County employees, council members or advisory committee members.
- b) Expenditures must be used to attract **tourists to the unincorporated areas of Aiken County.**

Organizations are Responsible for Spending Aiken County Tax Funds – Your organization is responsible for spending the awarded funds as approved by county council. Any variance must be approved by the Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee and the Aiken County Council. A statement of assurance is included in the application and it must be signed.

INCORPORATED AREA REQUIREMENTS

1. Organizations that are physically located in the areas where the county collects Accommodations Tax revenues provided the organization also sponsors projects or events within those areas.
2. Organizations that are not physically located in the areas where the county collects Accommodations Tax revenues; however, the project or event in which you are applying for is within the unincorporated areas. If you are not sure if your program or organization is located in incorporated or unincorporated Aiken County, please call the Aiken County Visitors Center for assistance at 803.642.7557. Each application/proposed project will be reviewed individually to determine the potential impact it will have for tourism in unincorporated Aiken County.

GRANT PROCESS

To be considered for funding, an application must be received by the published deadline June 14, 2024. Once all applications for Local Accommodations Tax Grant funds are received by the Aiken County Visitors Center and eligibility is verified, they will be forwarded to the Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee for review.

Eligible applicants will be required to attend a meeting of the Committee on **JULY 9, 2024** at 3:00pm at the Aiken County Government Center in order to answer possible questions.

The Committee will review and score each application based on the evaluation measures described below. Applications will be ranked based on the scores and the Committee will determine funding recommendations. The Committee will submit its funding recommendations to the county for review by County Council. County Council makes all funding decisions; however, the Council relies heavily on the recommendations of the Committee. Funding of all projects is entirely dependent upon Accommodations Tax funds being received by Aiken County.

LOCAL ACCOMMODATIONS TAX GRANT TIMELINE

FY25 Grant Period:	July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025
Request for applications:	May 9, 2024 – June 14, 2024
Application due date:	June 14, 2024 5:00 PM
*FY24 Accountability or Update Report (if applicable)	March 22, 2024 5:00 PM
Accommodations Tax Committee meeting (applicant present):	July 9, 2024 3:00 PM
Aiken County Budget & Grant Award Notifications:	By September 2024
*FY24 Accountability Report (End of FY24 projects only):	July 19, 2024

*These dates *do not apply unless* you received funding from the previous year. Projects from the previous grant cycle which continue through the current grant application due date, will submit two reports; One “Update Report” on March 22, 2024 and the “Accountability Report” by July 19, 2024.

Keep this in mind if your proposed project will extend past MARCH 22, 2024, you will also be required to submit 2 reports. (March 22, 2024 and July 19, 2024)

ORGANIZATION ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- Applicant organizations must have been in existence for at least one (1) year prior to requesting funds and provide their federal employer identification number as registered with the IRS.
- Applicants must provide proof of their non-profit status **and whose primary goal is to attract additional visitors through tourism promotion**. The letter of exemption from the IRS and/or the SC Secretary of State’s proof of good standing must accompany your proposal.
- Aiken County will not award Accommodations Tax funds to **individuals, fraternal organizations, religious organizations, or organizations that support and/or endorse political campaigns**.

CRITERIA FOR PROJECT ELIGIBILITY

As required by State Statute and by the requirements established herein, organizations and/or projects to be funded by A-Tax Funds **must have as their primary mission the attraction of tourists to Aiken County**. Each funding proposal will be reviewed individually to determine the potential impact it will have on the County’s tourism efforts.

Priority will be given to organizations and/or projects that have the following characteristics:

- will generate overnight stay(s) in lodging facilities in the unincorporated areas of Aiken County;
- will promote and highlight unincorporated Aiken County’s historic and cultural venues; recreational facilities and events; natural resources, and the uniqueness and flavor of the local community.
- will provide 50% matching funds.

OVERNIGHT JUSTIFICATION

In this section of the application, Aiken County wants the applicant to estimate the number of overnight stays in the **unincorporated** areas of the County. Take the following items into consideration when making your estimations and provide a justification explaining how you came up with this number.

- How many people visit your attraction?
- How many tourists visit your attraction? How many hotel rooms are booked annually in the unincorporated areas of Aiken County due to your attraction?
- Estimate hotel room nights that will be booked due to your attraction in the unincorporated areas of Aiken County. How will you track this number? # rooms x # nights = estimated room nights booked

BUDGET

The budget should reflect in financial terms the actual costs of achieving the objectives of the project(s) you propose in your application. A budget form is provided for you as part of the application.

Under project income, list known and anticipated funding sources, including any that are pending. Be sure to include the Aiken County requests in this list. Also include the value of any in-kind contributions and mark as in-kind.

Budget Narrative/Justification - Please include a detailed description for each budget item. The following are examples that would be sufficient in this area.

- Flooring: Pine: \$6.00 per Sq. Ft. (1000 Sq. Ft.) = \$6,000 / Justification: Our historic building had original pine floors that were damaged over neglect. In order to maintain the original appearance and architecture of the building, we wish to use comparable materials.
- Lighting: Spotlights (Qty. 10 x \$8.00=\$800.00), recessed (Qty. 20 x \$9.00=\$1800.00) Total: \$2600.00 / Justification: Spotlights are best when projecting light on the large pieces of sculpture we've recently acquired. Recessed lighting will provide lighting for our visitor reception area.
- Paving of road frontage: (\$6,000) We must pave the road in order to gain access to the parking area of our nature trail.
- Dredging of waterway: (\$10,000) The waterway will need to be dredged in order for our passenger boats to load and unload visitors.

Budget tips:

- Budgets MUST be entered on the budget form provided and MUST include a justification for Accommodations Tax expenditures. This tells Aiken County how you plan to spend grant funds.
- Be as detailed as possible in your budget justification. This information will be compared to your update and/or accountability report(s). Items in your reports must appear in your application's budget.

STATEMENT OF ASSURANCES

By signing and submitting the Local Accommodations Tax application, your organization is agreeing to the following Statement of Assurances:

- Upon grant application acceptance and funding award, applicant agrees that financial records, support documents, statistical records and all other records pertinent to Accommodations Tax funding shall be retained for a period of three years.
- All procurement transactions, regardless of whether negotiated or advertised and without regard to dollar value, shall be conducted in a manner so as to provide maximum open free competition.
- The funding recipient shall establish safeguards to prohibit employees from using their positions for a purpose that has the appearance of being motivated by a desire for private gain for themselves and others.
- All expenditures must have adequate documentation.
- All accounting records and supporting documentation shall be available for inspection by Aiken County upon request including complete copies of the grantee's annual audit.
- No person, on the basis of race, color, or national origin, should be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefit of or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under the program or activity funding in whole or in part by Accommodations Tax funds.
- Employment resulting from Accommodations Tax funding shall not discriminate against any employee or applicant on the basis of handicap, age, race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.
- None of the funds, materials, property, or services provided directly or indirectly under Accommodations Tax funding shall be used for any partisan political activity, or to further the election or defeat of any candidate for public office.
- The applicant hereby certifies that the information submitted as part of this application is accurate and reliable.
- Any change and/or variation must be reported immediately, otherwise, funding may be withheld.

APPLICATION EVALUATION

The Committee will use the following evaluation criteria to evaluate applications and proposed projects. The individual factors are important in project evaluation, as they are an indication of the degree to which the proposed project will contribute to the tourism in Aiken County. Please ensure that you review these factors and include the elements in your application. These factors, with their corresponding point values, are:

Project Design and Benefit to Community:

55 points maximum

Benefit to Tourism (20) - Does the project promote tourism in the areas of the County in which Aiken County Accommodations Taxes are collected? Will it promote a positive image for the County? Will it attract visitors, build new audiences and encourage tourism expansion in the areas of the County in which Aiken County Accommodations Taxes are collected? Will it increase awareness of the County's amenities, history, facilities, and natural environment in the areas of the County in which Aiken County Accommodations Taxes are collected?

Reliable Tracking Mechanism and Marketing Plan (15) – How will visitors and tourists would be tracked? (surveys, wristbands, ticketing, and etc.) Are these methods viable? Does the marketing plan describe how the organization will reach tourists? Are the ads or other marketing expenses targeted outside the Augusta/Aiken County area? Is the expected number of tourists in line with the organization's marketing plan?

Benefit to Community (10) - How will this project benefit the citizens of Aiken County? Will the project benefit unincorporated Aiken County? Who will attend the attraction? How many visitors will the attraction serve? A visitor is defined by someone who travels at least 50 miles to the attraction.

Community Support and Partnerships (10) - Does the project have broad-based community appeal or support? What is the evidence of need for this project in the County? What kind and degree of partnership does the project exhibit? Does it exhibit volunteer involvement or inter-jurisdictional, corporate, business, and/or civic support?

Economic Impact and Accountability

45 points maximum

Budget (5) – Are all expenses that are to be paid with Accommodations Tax funds eligible expenses? Did the budget and justification provide enough detail to show how funds will be spent? Does the applicant provide 50% in cash or in-kind match?

Expected Accommodations Tax Revenue Generated (15) - What are the projected direct and indirect dollar expenditures by visitors/tourists? Are any overnight stays anticipated? Will this program drive business to those businesses that collect and remit Aiken County Accommodations Tax in the unincorporated areas of the County?

Reasonable Cost/Benefit Ratio (15) - Does the benefit of the project (i.e. number of tourists estimated; expected revenue generated) exceed the cost of the project? Is this project "worth" its cost?

Management Capability (10) - Does the applicant organization demonstrate an ability to successfully complete the project through effective business practices in the areas of finance, administration, marketing, and production? If this organization has received County Accommodations Tax funding previously, was the project successful?

REPORTING AND GRANT ACKNOWLEDGEMENT REQUIREMENTS

At the completion of the grant funded project, Aiken County requires grantees to complete an accountability report. Grantees must acknowledge the receipt of Aiken County Accommodations Tax funds by adding the statement "Funding Assistance provided by Aiken County Through Accommodations Tax Funds" on all program/project advertising, marketing and promotional materials. A sign (provided by Aiken County) must be posted at the project location for all award recipients. The Aiken County Visitors Center website, www.DiscoverAikenCounty.com must be linked to your website. Examples of this must be included in your final report.

Accountability Report must include:

1. A written summary of the project.
2. A budget, noting the expenses that were outlined on your application.
 - a. A written account of income associated with this project.
 - b. A written account of expenditures associated with the project.
3. Copies of your cancelled checks and/or receipts and invoices pertaining to the funds we award you and matching funds.
 - a. Receipts and invoices must be within the dates of the grant cycle.
(July 1, 2024 and June 30, 2025)
4. A marketing plan of how you will promote the project.
5. Any advertisements or promotional material
6. Photographs (5 or more) of the project and one additional photo showing your acknowledgment of "Funding Assistance Provided by Aiken County Through Accommodations Tax Funds" posted at the project location. (Sign provided by Aiken County)
7. Survey results from event/attraction associated with this project.
 - a. Total number of attendees.
 - b. Number of attendees from out of town.
 - c. Accommodations out of town guests plan to use or did use.

These guidelines may be changed or revised by Aiken County at any time.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT NOTICE

Please be advised that all materials submitted for Local Accommodations Tax funding are subject to disclosure based on the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

CONTACT

Ashley Blalock, Aiken County Tourism Manager, 133 Laurens St. NW, Aiken, SC 29801,
803.642.7557, ablalock@aikencountysc.gov



**AIKEN COUNTY LOCAL ACCOMMODATIONS TAX
TOURISM DEVELOPMENT GRANT APPLICATION (Bricks and Mortar)
Funding for FY2025 (July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025)**

Do not alter this application form.
Incomplete applications will not be evaluated.
Application Deadline June 14, 2024.

A representative of the organization must be available for a Question/Answer session on Tuesday, July 9, 2024 in the Sandlapper room at the Aiken County Government Building, 1930 University Parkway, Aiken, SC at 3:00pm. You may have only one other person present during the Q & A Session. The amount of available grant funds will not be known until September 2024. The approximate amount of available funds is \$25,000. All attachments for your project must be included with this application. *We will not accept handouts during the meeting.*

INCORPORATION DATE:	FEDERAL ID:
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Full Legal Name of ORGANIZATION:

ORGANIZATION ADDRESS:

CONTACT:	TITLE:
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PHONE:	EMAIL:
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MISSION STATEMENT:

PROJECT TITLE:

TOTAL AMOUNT REQUESTED: \$	TOTAL PROJECT COST: \$
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PROJECT START DATE:	PROJECT END DATE:
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ESTIMATED TOTAL ATTENDANCE:	ESTIMATED TOURISTS:
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ESTIMATED ROOM NIGHTS:	PROJECT LOCATION:
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<p>PRIORITY IS GIVEN TO ORGANIZATIONS WITH PROJECTS THAT RESULT IN OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATIONS IN THE UNINCORPORATED AREAS OF AIKEN COUNTY. DESCRIBE HOW YOUR PROJECT WILL ENCOURAGE OVERNIGHT STAYS IN THE UNINCORPORATED AREAS. (OUTSIDE THE CITY LIMITS OF AIKEN AND NORTH AUGUSTA.)</p>

DOES YOUR PROJECT REQUIRE PERMITS? _____ LIST THOSE REQUIRED:

PROJECT DESCRIPTION (Add up to one additional sheet, if needed):

BENEFIT TO TOURISM:

BENEFIT TO COMMUNITY:

MANAGEMENT CAPABILITY TO MAKE THIS PROJECT SUCCESSFUL:

OUTLINE PROJECT TOURISM DEVELOPMENT PLAN (Include how you plan to reach tourists. What tracking mechanism do you use to determine tourist attendance and overnight lodging stays?):

Attach the following REQUIRED documents to your application. Incomplete applications will not be evaluated.

1. Budget and grant expense justification – See budget form below, see budget narrative/justification section below. One additional sheet may be attached for this section.
2. Letter from IRS confirming tax exempt status and/or proof of registration and good standing with the SC Secretary of State's Office.
3. List of current organization board of directors or governing board.
4. Proof of the organizations most recent filing with the IRS and/or certification of the organizations most recent filing with the State of SC. This may be in the form of a letter, email correspondence, or other legal documentation.

LOCAL ACCOMMODATIONS TAX TOURISM DEVELOPMENT GRANT BUDGET

List the expenses for your project. Add one additional sheet, if needed. **Three official quotes for any work done must be provided.**

Expense Category	County A-Tax Request	Other Sources	Total
Total			

List the income sources for your program or project below. Include the amount requested in this application.

Income Source	Amount	Write "Pending" or "Received"
<i>FY25 Aiken County A-Tax Tourism Development Grant Request</i>		

If applicable, you must list prior year information here on the PRIOR YEAR DETAIL FORM. **Also include a brief summary of the project from the previous year.**

EVENT NAME(S) Some organizations have more than one event	Total Budget PREVIOUS YEAR	# of Visitors outside a 50 mile radius PREVIOUS YEAR

Brief summary of project from previous year if applicable.

Budget Narrative/Justification. Provide details on how you will spend Aiken County Atax Tourism Development Grant funds if awarded. See guideline for instructions.

IF AWARDED YOU MUST AGREE TO THE FOLLOWING REQUIREMENTS:

1. Unspent funding must be returned to Aiken County Local Accommodations Tax Funds. If your organization is found to have spent funding in any other way than as described and approved per your application, funding must be returned to Aiken County Local Accommodation Tax Funds.
2. Any revenue generated by the event or attraction **must be to benefit a community or organization within the limits of Aiken County.** (Profits cannot go to other division of the organization, if that division is outside of Aiken County, SC.)
3. The sponsoring agency shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age or handicapped status in employment or provision of services.
4. On promotional material such as brochures, rack cards, etc., a statement must be added that states "Funding Assistance Provided by Aiken County Through Accommodations Tax Funds". At least fifty (50) copies of any brochures must be submitted to the Aiken County Visitors Center for distribution. A sign (provided by Aiken County) must be posted at the project location for all award recipients.
5. Projects that continue past March 21, 2025 must provide two reports. The first will be an "Update Report" on March 21, 2025 on the status of your progress. Include all expenses thus far, cancelled checks, all pertinent information concerning your project. The second, a final "Accountability Report" (see #6 for details) must be delivered by July 18, 2025. Both reports must be delivered to Aiken County Visitors Center, C/O Ashley Blalock, **133 Laurens St. NW**, Aiken SC 29801.
6. Projects that are finished by March 21, 2025 will deliver one report, a final "Accountability Report" on or before March 21, 2025 to Aiken County Visitors Center, C/O Ashley Blalock, 133 Laurens St. NW, Aiken SC 29801.

Accountability Report must include:

1. A written summary of the project.
 2. A budget, noting the expenses that were outlined on your application.
 - a. A written account of income associated with this project.
 - b. A written account of expenditures associated with the project.
 3. Copies of your cancelled checks and/or receipts and invoices pertaining to the funds we award you and matching funds.
 - a. Receipts and invoices must be within the dates of the grant cycle. (July 1, 2024 and June 30, 2025.)
 4. A marketing plan of how you will promote the project.
 5. Any advertisements or promotional material
 6. Photographs (5 or more) of the project and one additional photo showing your acknowledgment of "Funding Assistance Provided by Aiken County Through Accommodations Tax Funds" posted at the project location. (Sign provided by Aiken County)
 7. Survey results from event/attraction associated with this project.
 - a. Total number of attendees.
 - b. Number of attendees from out of town.
 - c. Accommodations out of town guests plan to use or did use.
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7. Agree to allow a representative of the County and/or its appointed representative to examine the financial records of my organization insofar as they pertain to this project.
 8. I hereby declare that this organization carries liability insurance in the amount of \$ _____ and agree to include Aiken County as a named insured for purposes of this project. This organization assumes full legal responsibility for any suit or action at law or equity, and any or all claims arising from this project/activity, and do hereby indemnify and hold harmless the County of Aiken and its Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee from any liability in any action at law or equity associated with its support for this project/activity.
 9. I have received a copy of the 2025 Aiken County Tourism Development Requirements and agree to abide by those and the above stated requirements.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIGNATURE/DATE:

BOARD CHAIRMAN SIGNATURE/DATE:

Application Checklist

Required Elements:

- Completed each section of the Tourism Development Grant Application. Incomplete applications will not be evaluated. Answers such as N/A or See Attached are not appropriate. Please do not use font sizes lower than 10 point.
- Answer each question and make sure each point in the guidelines is addressed.
- Board Chair signed and dated the application
- Executive Director signed and dated the application – please note in the signature line if your organization does not have an executive director (all volunteer organization).
- Fill out the budget form and make sure your budget narrative/justification has enough detail for each item that will be purchased with Local A-Tax grant funds.

Required Attachments

- Letter from IRS confirming tax exempt status **And/Or**
- Proof of registration and good standing with the SC Secretary of State's Office as a nonprofit
- Attach list of current Board of Directors or Governing Board
- Attach proof of the organizations most recent filing with the IRS and/or certification of the organizations most recent filing with the State of SC via letter, email correspondence, or other legal documentation.
- Three official quotes for any work done.

Optional Elements:

- One additional page for the project description
- One additional page for the budget justification (grant expenditures only).

Application Packet

- Made a copy to keep on file (applicant organization)
- Prepared 9 copies of the application, including the original to send to Aiken County Visitors Center (total of 10)
- Secured each application with a staple, paper clip or binder clip. No report folders, please.

REMINDERS

The Application deadline is 5:00 pm Friday, June 14, 2024. Late applications will NOT be accepted.

Aiken County does NOT accept applications sent via fax or email.

Please contact the Visitors Center if you need assistance filling out your application ablalock@aikencountysc.gov or 803-642-7557.

Please do not contact anyone from the advisory committee regarding the status of the grant applications.

This application may be changed or revised by Aiken County at any time.

Mail or Hand Deliver Application to:

Aiken County Visitors Center
Attn: Ashley Blalock, Tourism Manager
133 Laurens St. NW
Aiken, SC 29801

QUESTIONS

Call 803.642.7557 or email ablalock@aikencountysc.gov if you have any questions concerning the application process or the Aiken County Accommodations Tourism Development Grant Program.