



Maryland

**DEPARTMENT OF
VETERANS AFFAIRS**

FY 2023 Maryland Veterans Service Animal Grant Program

Notice of Funding Availability Application Guidance Kit

Online Submission Deadline: February 13, 2023 by 3 PM

Funded through:

Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs

16 Francis Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
veterans.maryland.gov
(410) 260-3838

Larry Hogan, Jr., Governor
Boyd K. Rutherford, Lt. Governor
George W. Owings III, Secretary

ELIGIBILITY

Funding through this solicitation is available to eligible service/support animal and equine therapy organizations to develop, implement, and support programs for eligible veterans in Maryland.

IMPORTANT LINKS

[Application](#)

See [MDVA website](#) for the Budget and Budget Justification Template PDF

Purpose

Thank you for applying for the **FY23 Maryland Veterans Service Animal Grant Program** from the **Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA)**. The primary purpose of this program is to develop, implement, and support suicide prevention strategies in Maryland through the training and placement of service and support animals with veterans and equine therapy for veterans.

If you need application assistance, please contact

Toni Gianforti

Grant Specialist, Maryland Veterans Service Animal Grant Program

Toni.gianforti@maryland.gov

The Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) was created by the State Legislature in 1999 as an executive agency with the *mission of assisting veterans, active duty service members, their families and dependents, in securing benefits earned through military service.* The Department's origin follows the history of the Maryland Veterans Commission back to 1924, when the Soldiers' Relief Fund Commission was formed to administer a State relief fund for disabled veterans of World War I.

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I. Eligibility Criteria

Organizations may submit an application under the FY 2023 Maryland Veterans Service Animal Grant Program if they meet the following criteria:

- Maryland based
- Tax exempt by the IRS (501(c)(3))
- Train service or support dogs for use by eligible veterans OR,
- Provide equine therapy and is a professional accredited or certified program (PATH Premier Member Center Accreditation or EAGALA Certified)

Each organization may **only submit one application.**

Applicants are required to use a data-driven, evidence-based approach and clearly describe how the funds will be used. Applicants must include strategies to address veteran mental health and well-being and explain how outcomes data and follow-up activities will be used to measure success.

II. Program Description

A. Requiring Agency

Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA)

B. Opportunity Title

FY 2023 Maryland Veterans Service Animal Grant Program

C. Submission Date

February 13, 2023 by 3:00 PM

D. Award Date

March 20, 2023

E. Anticipated Period of Performance

April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024

F. Funding Opportunity Description

The Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs anticipates the availability of \$220,000 for the FY 2023 Maryland Veterans Service Animal Grant Program. MDVA anticipates awarding up to 10 grants not to exceed the total of \$220,000. The minimum amount an applicant should request is \$10,000 and the maximum amount is \$25,000. The grant award period will be for one year.

Please note: Applications that do not meet the minimum range or those that exceed the maximum award allocation noted above are subject to removal from consideration during the initial technical review.

The Maryland Veteran Service Animal Program refers eligible veterans who inquire about service or support animals or equine therapy to nonprofit organizations who provide these services. The program provides additional funding mechanisms to assist organizations who train service or support animals for veterans and who provide equine therapy to veterans. The overriding program purpose of this funding opportunity is to assist in the reduction of the Maryland veteran suicide rate. See: [2021 Regular Session - Senate Bill 284 Chapter \(maryland.gov\)](#)

At the discretion of the Governor of the State of Maryland, funding is provided to the Maryland Veteran Service Animal Program and Fund to award discretionary grants to organizations who train service and support animals for veterans and who provide equine therapy to veterans. Successful applicants must detail within their application how the grant will increase opportunities for veterans to receive professionally trained service or support animals or receive equine therapy, as well as improve mental health, overall well-being and reduce risk of suicide in veterans.

Interested 501(c)(3) organizations should address the following NOFA priorities in their application for funding:

- Provide service and support animals and/or equine therapy to veterans with disabilities in geographic regions where limited opportunities are available for this population;

- Provide in-person or web-based training for service and support animals and/or equine therapy providers on (1) military cultural competency, (2) suicide prevention, and (3) veteran mental health and well-being;
- Include veteran suicide prevention and mental health subject matter experts in program planning; and
- Establish staff certification opportunities to increase qualified personnel in their organization to train service and support animals or provide equine therapy opportunities for veterans.

III. Program Requirements

The following core elements must be addressed within the Program application narrative:

1. **Partnerships** – All participants will work in partnership with the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA). In addition to this partnership, a successful application should also include:
 - Evidence of any current/established partnerships or the status of proposed partnerships with your local community organizations. MDVA views these partnerships as vital to achieve successfully the priorities noted above. An example of a local community partnership could be programmatic planning/events/activities with a local library, church or community center, veteran service centers, etc.
 - Evidence of any partnership with federal, state, and local government leaders, neighborhood leaders, and health care providers is also essential.
 - Because of the importance and effectiveness of implementing evidence-based practices, the MDVA also highly encourages a partnership with a research entity—either from within the US Department of Veterans Affairs, the healthcare industry or through an academic institution—to help identify trends, develop targeted strategies, and measure the effectiveness of your program.

Note: If you apply for funding, you will be asked to provide with your application evidence of your established partnerships/stakeholders or, if not yet established, evidence of intent to do so under the priorities/objectives of this NOFA. Evidence could include, as an example, signed letters from your partners on their letterhead, clearly stating the nature of your relationship in service to the aforementioned NOFA priorities.

2. **Purpose of Request/Targeted Objectives**

Statement of Need: Describe the extent of the problem in your community with regard to veteran mental health issues and well-being (e.g., incidence/prevalence of post-traumatic stress, combat-related trauma, traumatic brain injury, and physical

disability). Address current gaps in service that exist and how your program will help narrow or close that gap with NOFA funds. Provide back-up data - perhaps through one or more of your partnerships - to support your Statement of Need.

Targeted Objectives: Applicants are asked to address the four bulleted priorities noted in Section II. Program Description, F. Funding Opportunity Description to meet the objectives below. You must identify specific activities/tasks that will result in attaining the following objectives:

- Establish and implement effective program objectives that enable veterans to receive professionally trained service animals or receive equine therapy to effectively and sustainably reduce risk of suicide, improve mental health and overall well-being. Identify specific activities/tasks that target each objective. Briefly describe the tasks to be performed, who will do them, and how they link to the identified priorities. If your submitted budget requests funding for a portion of staff salary/benefits, please provide a description that links identified tasks to the staff member performing the task;
- Establish a productive research/evaluation plan to be integrated into program operations, if one does not already exist;
- Foster effective and consistent collaborations with the MDVA, external organizations, and the communities they serve, in order to increase awareness of your program, as well as to reduce risk of suicide and improve mental health and overall well-being for veterans;

3. Anticipated Metrics

In order to ensure accountability for an award issued under this NOFA, the MDVA requires that grantees report on outputs or metrics throughout the grant period. Those metrics are noted below. In the application, please indicate the number you hope to achieve in each category.

- Number of veterans served;
- Number of animals placed with veterans during the reporting period OR
- Number of equine therapy sessions held with veterans;
- Number of outreach and education activities targeted at local government, other nonprofit organizations, civic groups, etc. to increase community knowledge regarding suicide prevention and military cultural competency;
- Number of trainings held for the purpose of increasing PATH-certified staff at an already accredited PATH Premier Member Center facility, or number of trainings held for the purpose of increasing EAGALA certified staff.
- For staff providing direct service to veterans, registration on and completion of training modules within the Governor's Challenge Portal <https://veterans.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/09/Governors-Challenge-Communications-Toolkit.pdf>. The following seven (7) training modules

(and the time it takes to complete each) are on the Portal and must be completed by the end of September, 2023 (mid-way through the grant period). Evidence of completion of the training modules are reported through the Portal.

- 15 Things Veterans Want You to Know (17 minutes)
- Women Who Serve (8 minutes)
- Suicide in Military Members and Veterans (50 minutes)
- Communications Skills with Veterans (18 minutes)
- Myths and Facts About Wounded Warriors (13 minutes)
- VA S.A.V.E. (18 minutes)
- [MDVA 101 - YouTube \(6 minutes\)](#)

4. Anticipated Outcomes and Learning

The MDVA wants to know if funds awarded under this NOFA have demonstrably improved the quality of life for veterans served through a grant award. MDVA wants to know if the targeted objectives and tasks stated in your application have resulted in improved health and mental health, overall well-being, and reduced risk of suicide in veterans. In this section, identify tools you will use to evaluate your program (e.g., records, surveys, interviews, pre- and post-tests, follow-up contacts, community feedback, etc.). If you are partnering with another organization to gather and assess outcomes for the grant, please provide the entity conducting the evaluation and their scope of work. Please consider the following to inform your responses to this section of the application:

- Provide a brief description of your organization's past performance relative to this NOFA's priorities;
- Explain briefly how you plan to incorporate learning from your evaluation to improve your past performance and inform the work of others.

5. Deliverables

- Online grant submission: February 13, 2023 By 3:00 PM.
- Interim Grant Report: October 15, 2023 By 3:00 PM.
- Final Report: April 15, 2024 By 3:00 PM

IV. Reporting Requirements

Grantees must develop a plan for training service and support animals or providing equine therapy in a manner consistent with evidence-based best practices. This plan must articulate how the applicant plans to meet the requirements above. The MDVA requires programs and projects to focus on delivering services that show their effectiveness via program outputs and outcomes, that directly support the goal of

reducing the veteran suicide rate and improving their mental health and overall well-being.

All grants awarded under this funding opportunity will be required to report on the mandatory performance measures noted in **III. Program Requirements, 3. Anticipated Metrics.**

Post-award recipients must submit the above metrics and a brief narrative report:

- In the Interim Grant Report (due October 15, 2023), which should include metrics from April 1, 2023 through September 31, 2023 (six months); and
- At the time of the final grant report (April 15, 2024)*

*The final report must include program metrics achieved throughout the **full** grant period and must be submitted to DMVA by April 15, 2024.

V. Application Process

Applicants are required to apply for grant funding through the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs Service Animal Grant Program Fund Google Form Application.

If you need assistance with completing the program-specific information required in the online application, please contact:

Toni Gianforti
Grant Specialist
Toni.gianforti@maryland.gov

V. Training/Technical Assistance (TA)

To help applicants prepare and submit applications that reflect the MDVA's established guidelines and procedures, application instructions are provided. Applicants are encouraged to review these [instructions](#) prior to completing the online application.

The MDVA will conduct a technical assistance conference call to provide further application assistance and to answer questions. The FY 2023 Maryland Veteran Service Animal Grant Program NOFA technical assistance call will be held Friday, January 6, 2023 from 10:00am-11:00am.

Call in number: 585-495-2245

PIN: 798 712 344#

Meeting Link: <https://meet.google.com/ukg-nurg-moh?authuser=0&hs=122>

Important Dates

- Application Technical Assistance Conference Call: January 6, 2023
- Online Application Deadline: February 13, 2023

- Award Notices//Denial Notices e-mailed: March 15, 2023
- Award Documents Due: March 22, 2023
- Program Start Date: April 1, 2023
- Interim Grant Report Due: October 15, 2023
- Program End Date: March 31, 2024
- Final Report Due: April 15, 2024

VI. Application Evaluation

The MDVA will assess the merits of each application based on applicants' responses in each of the following areas. **Responses in the categories below that will be more heavily weighted in terms of a positive evaluation are noted with an asterisk (*).**

- Statement of Need
- Purpose of Request/Targeted Objectives (identification and implementation of program/project strategies/objectives)*
- Performance Measurement (outputs, outcomes, impacts)*
- Estimated Expenses and Budget Narrative (justification per line item)*
- Anticipated Results and Learning (activities aimed at sharing program results in the community to build the field)*
- Timeline

The FY23 Maryland Veteran Service Animal Grant Program is a competitive application process. The MDVA will conduct an internal staff and external review of each application submitted in accordance with this NOFA.

VII. Funding Specifications

A. Distribution of Awards

- The initial grant award payments will be half of each individual total grant award. The Initial grant payments will be made March 23, 2023. The second disbursement for all grant awards will be the balance remaining on each grant award. The second and final payment will be disbursed after submission of the Interim Grant Report, due by October 15, 2023.

B. Allowable Costs

- 40% of the total budget request must be used to support direct service to veterans needing support to improve mental health and overall well-being. Salary requests must be directly related to program delivery to veterans.

- If a portion of staff salary and fringe benefits are included for positions that engage in outreach and referral activities, the positions must increase awareness of veteran issues in the community, refer eligible veterans to the program, and raise the bar on a community's military cultural competency. E.g., general outreach events, training events, partnership research activities, etc.
- Equipment related to development and training, e.g., projector, pop-up displays, etc.
- Supplies related to development and training, e.g., binders, file folders, printer paper, toner, etc.
- Supplies related to equine/canine care, e.g., hay, feed, grooming supplies, kennels, etc.
- If your organization is an equine therapy program, a portion of staff salary and benefits for positions that provide training for additional PATH-certified staff at an already accredited PATH Premier Member Center facility, or for staff to achieve EAGALA professional certification.
- In-person or web-based training for service and support animals and/or equine therapy providers on suicide prevention and mental health for veterans.

C. Unallowable Costs

The following services, activities, and costs are not be eligible for funding and should not be included in the application budget:

- Rent
- Printing costs
- Utilities
- Food/beverage
- Trinkets
- Fundraising
- Lobbying
- Research
- Audit or consulting costs

The Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs reserves the right to make additional budget reductions and adjustments at its discretion.

VIII. Other Reporting Requirements

Prospective grantees will be required to provide, and update as necessary, their financial/fiscal status with the General Accounting Division(GAD)/Comptroller of Maryland. See: <https://www.marylandtaxes.gov/divisions/gad.php>

A. Match

There is no match required for this funding source. **DO NOT ENTER A MATCH INTO YOUR BUDGET.** If you wish to show other financial or in-kind contributions to your program, it may be written into your narrative.

B. Transparency and Accountability

A strong emphasis is being placed on accountability and transparency. Grantees must be prepared to track, report on, and document specific outcomes, benefits, and expenditures attributable to the use of grant funds. Misuse of grant funds may result in a range of penalties to include suspension of current and future funds and civil/criminal penalties.

C. Payments

Grantees will receive payments from the Maryland Comptroller's Office (with confirmation by paper check).

IX. Application Instructions

Section 1: FY23 Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program Grant

At the discretion of the Governor of the State of Maryland, funding is provided to the Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program and Fund to organizations who train service and/or support animals for veterans and who provide equine therapy to veterans. Applicants must detail within their application how the grant will increase opportunities for veterans to receive professionally trained service or support animals or receive equine therapy, we well as improve mental health, overall well-being and reduce suicide risk in veterans.

Section 2: Eligibility Criteria

1. In order to apply, your organization must be 501(c)(3) tax-exempt and meet the minimum standards as described in Title 35, Subtitle 6 of the Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program
2. The minimum grant request is \$10,00; the maximum request is \$25,000.
3. Indicate in which of the following geographic region(s) your organization will serve veterans through this grant:
 - Central: Baltimore City and Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Howard and Harford counties
 - Western: Alleghany, Carroll, Frederick, Garrett, and Washington counties
 - Southern: Calvert, Charles, Montgomery, Prince George's and St. Mary' counties
 - Eastern: Caroline, Cecil, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne's, Somerset, Talbot, Wicomico and Worcester counties.
4. Your organization must provide training for service or support dogs, or provide equine therapy for veterans.
5. If your organization provides equine therapy, your organization must have PATH Premier Member Center Accreditation or be EAGALA Certified.

Section 3: Organization Information

1. Full organization name
2. Organizational Mission
3. Organization's IRS EIN (Employer Identification Number)
4. Full organization address
5. Organization Contact Name
6. Contact Title, Phone Number and Email Address.

Section 4: Grant Program/Project Information

1. Indicate if the grant award will address one or more of the indicated priorities as detailed (see **II. Program Description, F. Funding Opportunity Description**).
2. Specify the amount of your grant request (must be a minimum of \$10,000 and a maximum of \$25,000).
3. Provide a title for your grant (if a grant is awarded to your organization, this will assist MDVA in publicizing your award).

4. Provide the **start date** and **end date** of your program/project.
5. Executive Summary: Include a Statement of Need (problem statement), along with a brief summary of the purpose, objectives, activities/tasks, and expected outcomes of the grant.
6. Objectives: Provide a more detailed description of the issue and how your objectives will help you successfully address it.
7. Strategies/Tasks/Timelines: Specify strategies/tasks that you will use to help you achieve your objectives - and include an estimated timeline for each.
8. Provide a description of who will participate in and/or who will benefit from your program/project.
9. Check all relevant boxes that describe your service population.
10. Indicate how frequently your service population will take part in your program/project activities.

Section 5: Grant Program Requirements

Refer to **III. Program Requirements of the NOFA** for guidance in completing this section.

Anticipated Metrics (examples):

- Number of veterans served;
- Number of animals placed with veterans during the reporting period OR
- Number of equine therapy sessions held with veterans;
- For staff providing direct service to veterans, registration on and completion of training modules within the Governor's Challenge Portal;
- Number of outreach and education activities targeted at local government, other nonprofit organizations, civic groups, etc. to increase community knowledge regarding suicide prevention and military cultural competency;
- Number of trainings held for the purpose of increasing PATH-certified staff at an already accredited PATH facility, or number of trainings held for the purpose of increasing EAGALA certified staff.

Section 5: Anticipated Outcomes and Learning

Please describe what you hope to achieve in terms of reducing suicide and improving mental health and overall well-being among your service population, and what tools you will utilize to measure these outcomes, e.g., pre- and post- surveys, phone or in-person interviews, etc. Also describe how you will share what you've learned within your community to raise awareness of veterans' issues and military cultural competency.

Section 6: Budget

Provide all estimated grant activity expenses. Clearly indicate how a grant award will be spent during the life of the grant period. Grant awards can be used for a program or project, capacity building/operational support, or personnel/outreach educational workshops/training in line with

MDVA priorities. In addition to allowable costs noted in **VII. Funding Specifications, B. Allowable Costs**, the following activities/expenses also qualify for reimbursement:

- 40% of the total budget request must be used to support direct service to veterans needing support to improve mental health and overall well-being. Salary requests must be directly related to program delivery to veterans needing support to improve mental health and overall well-being.
- If a portion of staff salary and fringe benefits are included for positions that engage in outreach and referral activities, the positions must increase awareness of veteran issues in the community, refer eligible veterans to the program, and raise the bar on a community's military cultural competency. E.g., general outreach events, training events, partnership research activities, etc.
- Equipment related to development and training, e.g., projector, pop-up displays, etc.
- Supplies related to development and training, e.g., binders, file folders, printer paper, toner, etc.
- Supplies related to equine/canine care, e.g., hay, feed, grooming supplies, kennels, etc.
- If your organization is an equine therapy program, a portion of staff salary and benefits for positions that provide training for additional PATH-certified staff at an already accredited PATH facility, or for staff to achieve EAGALA professional certification.
- In-person or web-based training for service and support animals and/or equine therapy providers on suicide prevention and mental health for veterans.

Section 7: Supporting Documentation

- A copy of the organization's current IRS determination letter indicating 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status.
- A copy of the organization's most recent IRS form 990 or 990-EZ.
- Two professional letters from organizations (specific to the FY23 Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program Grant Application) who are partners specific to this grant application, on the reference organization's letterhead with contact information for the reference, their name, title, phone and email address. Reference letters may come from, but not limited to, USDVA medical centers, Department of Defense (DOD) medical treatment facilities, community partners involved in the delivery of service animal training and/or equine therapy, and other project/program partners)
- If applicable, proof of professional accreditation as a PATH Premier Member Center or EAGALA.

Applications that are incomplete or incorrect will result in the application not being considered for funding.

