



Maryland

**DEPARTMENT OF
VETERANS AFFAIRS**

FY 2024 Maryland Veterans Service Animal Grant Program

Notice of Funding Availability Application Guidance Kit

Online Submission Deadline: November 3, 2023 by 3 PM

Funded through:

Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs

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

Wes Moore, Governor
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor
Anthony C. Woods, 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[FY24 Grant Application](#)[FY24 Grant Application Budget](#)

(Also see [MDVA Website](#) for links)

Purpose

Thank you for applying for the **FY24 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 2024 Maryland Veterans Service Animal Grant Program if they:

- Are Maryland-based;
- Hold tax exempt status by the IRS as a (501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable organization;
- Are a program that trains service or support dogs for use by eligible veterans; OR,
- Are a stable licensed in Maryland that (1) is also a Member Center of the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH, Intl.) **OR** (2) has Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA) certified professionals who provide services to veterans..

Each organization may submit only **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 2024 Maryland Veterans Service Animal Grant Program

C. Submission Date

November 3, 2023 by 3:00 PM

D. Award Date

November 17, 2023

E. Anticipated Period of Performance

January 1, 2024 - December 31, 2024

F. Funding Opportunity Description

The Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs anticipates the availability of \$170,000 for the FY 2024 Maryland Veterans Service Animal Grant Program. The minimum amount an applicant should request is \$5,000 and the maximum amount is \$15,000. 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: <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2023RS/bills/sb/sb0910T.pdf>

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 at least one of the four following NOFA priorities in their application for funding:

- Provide service and support animals or equine therapy to veterans with disabilities in geographic regions where limited opportunities are available for this population;
- Provide in-person training to staff, volunteers, and community partners 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). A successful application should also include evidence of one or more current or proposed working partnerships with one or more of the following:
 - Local community organizations. 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.
 - Government/Nonprofit/Local Community Leaders. Local, state, federal and/or neighborhood leaders, health care providers, etc.
 - Research entities. Either from within the US Department of Veterans Affairs, the healthcare industry or through an academic institution, will help applicants identify trends, develop targeted strategies, and measure the effectiveness of their program.

Note: Applicants will be asked to provide with their application evidence of established partnerships or, if not yet established, evidence of intent to do so under the priorities/objectives of this NOFA. Signed letters on partners' letterhead, clearly stating the nature of their relationship to the applicant, will satisfy this requirement.

2. Statement of Need/Purpose of Request

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 in consultation with one or more of your partnerships - to support your Statement of Need.

3. Objectives/Activities

Applicants should identify objectives and activities that address at least one of the bulleted priorities noted in Section II. Program Description, F. Funding Opportunity Description. Using the bullets below as examples, applicants' objectives could state how they would::

- 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.
- Establish a research/evaluation component 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 the applicant's program, as well as to reduce risk of suicide and improve mental health and overall well-being for veterans,

After identifying objectives, briefly describe the activities to be performed to achieve the objectives and who will perform them. If an applicant's submitted budget requests funding for a portion of staff salary/fringe, the applicant must identify the specific activities - linked to an objective - that are to be performed by such staff member(s).

NOTE: If an applicant is requesting funding for a new component of their program, please include a brief timeline for full implementation of the new program.

4. Anticipated Metrics

In order to ensure accountability for an award issued under this NOFA, the MDVA requires that grantees report on outputs or metrics (numbers). Those metrics are noted below. In the application, applicants should state the number they 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 Member Center, 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: [Governor's Challenge Training Portal \(psycharmor.org\)](https://psycharmor.org). The following seven (7) training modules (and the time it takes to complete each) are on the Portal and must be completed by June 31, 2024 (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. Outcomes

The MDVA wants to know if an applicant's objectives and activities demonstrably improve the quality of life for veterans served through a grant award by improving their health/mental health, overall well-being, and reducing their risk of suicide. 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.

5. Deliverables

- Online grant submission: November 3, 2023 By 3:00 PM.
- Interim Grant Report: July 15, 2024 By 3:00 PM.
- Final Report: January 31, 2025 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 (metrics) and program outcomes (how participation in your program has resulted in client betterment), 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 July 15, 2024), which should include metrics from January 1, 2024 - June 30, 2024 (six months); and
- At the time of the final grant report (January 31, 2025)*

*The final report must include program metrics achieved throughout the **full** grant period and must be submitted to DMVA by January 31, 2025..

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 and budget preparation assistance and to answer questions. The FY 2024 Maryland Veteran Service Animal Grant Program NOFA technical assistance call will be held Friday, October 13, 2023.

Call in number: (US) +1 904-323-4746

PIN: 541 266 756#

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

Important Dates

- Application and Budget Technical Assistance Conference Call: Friday, October 12, 2023, 10:00am - 11:30 am
- Online Application Deadline: November 3, 2023
- Award Notices//Denial Notices e-mailed: November 14, 2023
- Award Documents Due: November 30, 2023
- Program Start Date: January 1, 2024
- Interim Grant Report Due: July 15, 2024
- Program End Date: December 31, 2024

- Final Report Due: January 31, 2025

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
- Objectives and Activities*
- Performance Measurement (outputs and outcomes)*
- Tools used to measure outcomes/collaboration of research entity*
- Estimated Expenses and Budget Narrative (justification per line item)*
- Timeline (if funding for a new program is requested)

The FY24 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 not later than December 15, 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 July 15, 2024.

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

B. Allowable Costs

NOTE: A minimum of 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, e.g., salary for staff who conduct therapeutic riding sessions with veterans.

- Salary and Fringe Costs: Staff salary and fringe can be included in an applicant's budget only if (1) those staff positions engage in community outreach/education/referral activities that 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; and/or (2) those staff positions provide direct service to veterans (as noted immediately above).
- Staff Development/Training Costs: Cost of classes for staff to attend PATH or EAGALA certification training (including travel/hotel costs); costs related to retaining subject matter experts to train staff in military and cultural competency; costs to obtain software licenses and monthly software fees.
- Equipment Related to Development/Training: Projectors, pop-up displays, etc.
- Supplies Related to Development/Training: Binders, file folders, printer paper, toner, etc.
- Equipment Related to Equine/Canine Services: leashes, bridles, saddles, driving carts, canine crates, etc.
- Supplies Related to Equine/Canine Care: Hay, feed, farrier services, grooming supplies, kennel costs, veterinary services, etc.

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

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: FY24 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 \$17,000.
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 be a Member Center of the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH, Intl.) 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 and Contact Title
6. Organization Contact Phone Number
7. Organization Contact Email Address.

Section 4: Grant Program 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. Provide a title for your grant (if a grant is awarded to your organization, this will assist MDVA in publicizing your award).

3. Specify the amount of your grant request (must be a minimum of \$5,000 and a maximum of \$15,000).
4. Provide the **start date** and **end date** of your program/project.
5. Compliance with Maryland's Commercial NonDiscrimination Policy.
6. Additional Recipients of Service under the Grant

Section 5: Program Narrative

1. Statement of Need/Purpose of Request
2. Program Objectives and Program Activities
3. Program TimeLine (**only if this is a new program for your organization**)
4. Anticipated Metrics (Outputs) as noted below:
 - 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 Member Center, or number of trainings held for the purpose of increasing EAGALA certified staff.
5. How often program participants will take part in grant activities (daily, weekly, monthly, or other).

Section 6: Partnerships (Refer to III. Program Requirements, 1. to address this section).

Section 7: Anticipated Outcomes (Grant Results)

- Outcome measurement tool(s)
- Describe what outcomes (changed conditions for veterans) will be achieved
- State any additional information not already requested in the application

Section 8: Organization Budget and Budget Justification (Refer to VII. Funding Specifications, B, Allowable Costs). Do not include unallowable costs (Refer to VII. Funding Specification, C. Unallowable Costs). Please fill out and upload the Google Budget Sheet.

The following activities/expenses are allowable costs that can be included in the grant budget::

NOTE: A minimum of 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. e.g., salary for staff who conduct therapeutic riding sessions with veterans.

- Salary and Fringe Costs: Staff salary and fringe can be included in an applicant's budget only if (1) those staff positions engage in community outreach/education/referral activities that 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; and/or (2) those staff positions provide direct service to veterans (as noted immediately above).
- Staff Development/Training Costs: Cost of classes for staff to attend PATH or EAGALA certification training (including travel/hotel costs); costs related to retaining subject matter experts to train staff in military and cultural competency; costs to obtain software licenses and monthly software fees.
- Equipment Related to Development/Training: Projectors, pop-up displays, etc.
- Supplies Related to Development/Training: Binders, file folders, printer paper, toner, etc.
- Equipment Related to Equine/Canine Services: leashes, bridles, saddles, driving carts, canine crates, etc.
- Supplies Related to Equine/Canine Care: Hay, feed, farrier services, grooming supplies, kennel costs, veterinary services 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 training for service and support animals and/or equine therapy providers on suicide prevention and mental health for veterans.

Section 9: Supporting Documentation - Upload all documentation.

- Two professional letters from organizations who are partners specific to the grant application, on the reference organization letterhead with contact information for the reference, including their name, title, phone number and email address.
- A copy of the applicant's current IRS determination letter - **dated within the past 5 years** - indicating 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status.
- A copy of the organization's most recent IRS form 990 or 990-EZ.
- The applicant's current organizational operating budget
- Proof of professional accreditation as a PATH Member Center or EAGALA certification..

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

