

Special Events Advisory Committee Orientation Package

April 2025



1. History

The Special Events Advisory Committee was created by Halifax Regional Council on March 27, 2007. The Committee was created to make grant recommendations to Regional Council based upon evaluation criteria provided in the Civic Events Policy Framework that was also approved by Regional Council on March 27, 2007.

November 10, 2015, Halifax Regional Council approved the Administrative Order 2014-020-GOV Respecting Marketing Levy Special Event Reserve Grants which replaced the 2007 Civic Events Policy Framework.

June 5, 2018, Administrative Order 2014-020-GOV was amended to reduce budget minimums, increase application intakes and reorganize annual and non-annual funding programs.

April 20, 2021, Administrative Order 2014-020-GOV was amended to increase the length of funding from three years to five years to New (Emerging) Events.

December 13, 2022, Administrative Order 2014-020-GOV was amended to include an interrupter clause, allowing the CAO ability to execute grant agreements or amendments, as well as a section on the communication process of a state of emergency.

On November 9, 2022 the former HRM Marketing Levy Act was repealed by the Province of Nova Scotia and the legislative provisions were moved into the HRM Charter, Section 29A. With the HRM Marketing Levy Act provisions now integrated in the HRM Charter, the provisions are read in conjunction with the other provisions of the HRM Charter, including subsection 71(2), which provides that the Municipality may not “grant a tax concession or other form of direct financial assistance to a business or industry.”

The November 9, 2022 amendments also raised the maximum rate at which municipalities may set the marketing levy from 2% to 3% of the purchase price and permits municipalities to apply the marketing levy to any accommodation that is required to be registered under the Tourist Accommodations Registration Act (including short-term rentals). By-law amendments are required to implement these changes.

June 6, 2023, Administrative Order 2014-020-GOV was amended to only deem non-profit organizations or registered Canadian charitable organizations eligible to receive marketing levy funds.

2. Funding Sources

Funding for the programs outlined in AO 2014-020-GOV comes from the MLSER (Q621).

The funding for the MLSER comes from the 35% portion of the 3.0% marketing levy imposed on the purchase price of accommodations within Halifax Regional Municipality. The remaining 65% of the marketing levy is provided to Discover Halifax to plan, coordinate and deliver sales and marketing strategies necessary to drive leisure and business tourism into the Municipality.

The total budget for MLSER is approximately \$3,000,000 annually. As directed by the Special Events Advisory Committee, \$400,000 of the annual funds is reserved within the MLSER to build capacity to bid on major events. Any remaining funds per fiscal remain in the Reserve and are carried over until the next year.

3. Business Case

Withdrawals are approved by Regional Council, in accordance with Administrative Order 2014-020-GOV Respecting Marketing Levy Special Event Reserve Grants (MLSER AO).

The total annual allocation for each program is as follows:

- New Events (Emerging) – \$250,000
- Distinguished Events – \$350,000
- Signature Events – \$800,000
- Major Hosting – no maximum

The maximum grant amounts for each program are as follows:

- New Events (Emerging) – \$30,000
- Distinguished Events – \$75,000
- Signature Events – \$135,000
- Major Hosting – no maximum

4. Administrative Order 2014-020-GOV

The purpose of AO 2014-020-GOV is to provide grants from the Municipality to direct financial support to large scale special events in Halifax Regional Municipality that support and promote tourism and business development. Included in the AO 2014-020-GOV are four funding programs:

- Signature Events – supports annual large, scale events, in existence for 5 years and with a minimum budget of \$100,000;
- Distinguished Events – supports one-time (non annual) large scale events with a minimum budget of \$50,000;
- New (Emerging) Events – supports organizations that bring or create a new or emerging event with a minimum budget of \$50,000;
- Major Hosting Events - supports organizations bidding on the rights to host major events that draw tourists, with a minimum budget of \$500,000 and in receipt of funding from other levels of government.

The AO 2014-020-GOV outlines the option for HRM to provide up to three years of funding to Signature and up to five years of funding for New / Emerging events. As well, AO 2014-020-GOV provides varying intakes per program:

- Signature Events – 1 intake;
- Distinguished Events – 2 intakes;
- New (Emerging) Events – 2 intakes;
- Major Hosting Events – open intake.

5. Evaluation

- Economic Impact
- Guaranteed Rooms – the confirmed hotel block for the event (eg: staff, athletes, etc.)
- Estimated Rooms – hotel rooms not used with the block booking (eg: visitors)
- Season (Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter)
- Event Location (Urban vs Suburban)
- Media / Marketing Exposure
- Accessibility, Culture & Diversity
- Financial Stewardship

Scoring is based on the event meeting a combination of the above-mentioned criteria. Staff have developed an internal scoring legend to determine an appropriate level of funding for the event subject to budget availability.

6. Application Process / Timeline

The application and review process is as follows:

- Organizations submit an application.
- Staff reviews the applications for eligibility and whether the proposed event qualifies for a specific grant program as per AO 2014-020-GOV.
- Should the applicant be deemed ineligible for a program or redirected by staff to an alternative program, staff notifies the applicant immediately.
- Staff prepares a report for SEAC that recommends or declines a proposed grant award.
- SEAC reviews all material provided by staff. At this stage, the Committee may take one of the following four courses of action:
 - Approve the proposed grant award as recommended by staff;
 - Propose an increase to the recommended grant award;
 - Propose a decrease to the recommended grant award;
 - Ask for additional information.
- SEAC submits their final recommendations to Regional Council for final approval.
- Regional Council reviews report and makes final recommendations.
- Successful applicants are notified, contribution agreements are prepared and forwarded by staff.
- Applicants' review and submit signed contribution agreement which permits 80% of the grant award to be released.
- 20% of the grant award is withheld until a post report is received and approved.

7. Final Reporting

All events that receive MLSER funding are required to submit a final event report as part of the funding process within 120 days of the conclusion of the event. The final event reporting provides information on the success and challenges associated with the event. This is a key deliverable for Signature and New (Emerging) Events that receive multi-year sustainable funding to ensure criteria is met and no significant changes have occurred.

A final report template is provided by staff that will include a final description of event, detailed finalized budget, copies of promotion using HRM logo. As per the AO, HRM does reserve the right to require proof of payments made.

Failure to submit final reporting within 120 days of event conclusion: 1) Forfeiture of remaining grant (20%) and 2) Organization placed on delinquent list making organization ineligible to receive future grants from HRM. Once final reporting is received, organization is removed from the delinquent list.

8. Concerned Status

Included in the MLSER AO under the Conditions of Approval & Payment of Grants section as well as in Appendix 3 in all Agreements speaks Concerned Status; a mechanism to ensure the funds meet the requirements of the approved applications and grant agreements.

An organization is placed on Concerned Status if concerns have been identified within an organization or event. Concerned Status may occur if the organization:

- (i) has a major deficit (10% or more of the organization's annual budget);
- (ii) shows evidence of not being financially viable;
- (iii) has a significantly reduced audience or sales base that differs from stated intentions;
- (iv) does not demonstrate the ability to plan into the future;
- (v) does not address major artistic concerns, such as artistic or editorial direction, declining quality of activity, or failure to achieve activity plan;
- (vi) does not meet contractual obligations or minimum requirements outlined in the agreement; or
- (vii) demonstrates management or governance practices which do not conform with generally acceptable practices in the sector.

An organizer will be notified immediately upon the organization being placed under Concerned Status. Once the organization is placed on Concerned Status, the organization must communicate with Parks & Recreation staff and provide documentation upon request such as: a detailed finalized budget, organizations' financials, etc.

When an organization receiving a multi-year grant commitment has been placed under Concerned Status may result in:

- (i) a lower grant award;
- (ii) additional conditions placed on the current grant and any future grants; and
- (iii) discontinuation of the grant term if applicable where issues go unresolved.

An organizer will be notified immediately upon completion of the Concerned Status review and communicate the results.

9. Role of the Special Events Advisory Committee

The Special Events Advisory Committee (SEAC) shall review and evaluate staff recommendations and make recommendations to Regional Council in regard to the allocation of the Marketing Levy Special Event Reserve (MLSER) with support from Parks and Recreation.

Members of SEAC will review eligibility criteria, priorities, policy and procedures for assistance under the respective programs and services pursuant to AO 2014-020-GOV and advise Regional Council on all matters related to the allocation of the MLSER.

10. Presentations to SEAC

Under the new AO 2014-020-GOV process there are no requirements for presentations by applicants, however presentations may be arranged by request of SEAC.

11. Supporting Documentation

Administrative Order 2014-020-GOV Respecting Marketing Levy Special Event Reserve Grants (includes Special Events Advisory Committee Terms of Reference) -

<https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/legislation-by-laws/2014-020-gov.pdf>

Halifax Regional Municipality By-Law H-400 Respecting Marketing Levy –

<https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/legislation-by-laws/by-lawm-400.pdf>

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter -

<https://nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/legc/statutes/halifax%20regional%20municipality%20charter.pdf>