

§ 143B-135.227. North Carolina Science Museums Grant Program.

(a) Grant Program. – The North Carolina State Museum of Natural Sciences (hereinafter "Museum of Natural Sciences") shall administer the North Carolina Science Museums Grant Program as a competitive grant program. Any museum in the State may apply for a grant under the Program, but grant funds shall be awarded only if the museum meets the criteria established in subsection (d) of this section. No museum shall be guaranteed a grant under the Program.

(b) Transition Requirements. – For the 2016-2017 fiscal year, the Museum of Natural Sciences shall award grants for a one-year period as set forth in this subsection. Any museum may submit an application for funding. If the museum received funding during the 2015-2016 fiscal year under the Grassroots Science Program, and the Museum of Natural Sciences determines those museums meet the criteria for funding established in subsection (d) of this section, it shall be funded at a level determined as set forth in subsection (b1) of this section. Funds remaining after funding of eligible 2015-2016 fiscal year Grassroots Science Program recipients may be awarded to other museums under the criteria set forth in subsections (b1), (d), and (e) of this section.

(b1) Tier-Based Funding Preferences. – The Museum of Natural Sciences shall reserve seven hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$750,000) for the purpose of awarding grants to museums located in development tier one counties and six hundred thousand dollars (\$600,000) for museums located in development tier two counties. The development tier designation of a county shall be determined as provided in G.S. 143B-437.08. If, after the initial awarding of grants to all museum applicants who meet the eligibility criteria provided for in subsection (d) of this section, there are funds remaining in any development tier category, the Museum of Natural Sciences may reallocate those funds to another development tier category. The maximum amount of each grant awarded in any fiscal year shall be (i) seventy-five thousand dollars (\$75,000) for a museum in a development tier one county; (ii) sixty thousand dollars (\$60,000) for a museum in a development tier two county; and (iii) fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000) for a museum in a development tier three county. For purposes of this subsection, a museum located in a rural census tract, as defined in G.S. 143B-472.127(a)(2), in a development tier two or development tier three county shall be subject to the maximum grant amount for a development tier one county.

(c) Beginning July 1, 2017, it is the intent of the General Assembly that the Museum of Natural Sciences shall award grants under this program for a two-year period. For each two-year grant cycle, the Museum of Natural Sciences shall reserve the amounts for development tier one and tier two counties and shall award the maximum grant amounts for each year of the grant cycle as provided in subsection (b1) of this section. The tier-based funding preferences in subsection (b1) of this section and the requirements of subsections (d) and (e) of this section shall apply to the two-year grants. If there are funds remaining after the awarding of grants to all museum applicants meeting the eligibility criteria set forth in subsection (d) of this section in any grant cycle, the remaining balance of funds shall be distributed equally to all museum applicants awarded funds during that grant cycle without regard to the maximum grant amounts established in subsection (b1) of this section.

(d) To be eligible to receive a grant under the competitive grant program, a museum shall demonstrate:

- (1) That it is a science center or museum or a children's museum that is physically located in the State.
- (2) That it has been open, operating, and exhibiting science or science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education objects to the general public at least 120 days of each year for the past two or more years.
- (3) That it is either (i) a nonprofit organization that is exempt from federal income taxes pursuant to section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code or (ii) an

organization that received funding in fiscal year 2015-2016 from the Grassroots Science Program.

- (4) That it has on its staff at least one full-time professional person.
- (5) That its governing body has adopted a mission statement that includes language that shows the museum has a concentration on science or STEM education.
- (6) In its application, in a format to be determined by the Museum of Natural Sciences, a detailed plan for (i) the proposed use of the funds and (ii) measurements to demonstrate at the end of the grant cycle that the use of the funds has had the projected results.

(e) The Museum of Natural Sciences shall, in awarding grants under this section, give priority to museums that:

- (1) When compared to other museum applicants:
 - a. Are located in counties that are more economically distressed according to the annual rankings prepared by the Department of Commerce pursuant to G.S. 143B-437.08(c).
 - b. Generate a larger portion of their operating funds from non-State revenue.
 - c. Have a higher attendance-to-population ratio.
- (2) Partner with other museums in the State to share exhibits, programs, or other activities.
- (3) Are not located in close proximity to other science or STEM education museums.

(f) Of the funds appropriated to the North Carolina Science Museums Grant Program each year, the Department may use no more than the greater of one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) or four percent (4%) as its operating expenses for the Program. In addition to administering the Grant Program, positions created with these funds shall also (i) serve as liaisons between grant applicants or recipients and the Museum to answer questions and assist with grant applications; (ii) foster collaboration between the Museum and grant recipients with respect to education program development and the loaning of exhibits from the Museum or between grantee institutions; and (iii) undertake other duties in support of the Grant Program at the discretion of the Director of the Museum. (2015-241, s. 15.18A(b); 2016-94, s. 16.5; 2017-57, s. 14.11; 2022-74, s. 14.3.)