Background & Purpose:

COVID-19 is a disease caused by a respiratory virus first identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China in December 2019. COVID-19 is a new virus that hasn’t caused illness in humans before. Worldwide, COVID-19 has resulted in thousands of infections, causing widespread illness.

The COVID-19 pandemic is creating unprecedented responses by federal, state, and local governments that impact the lives of all Marylanders, including people with developmental disabilities and their families. Specifically, the pandemic has resulted in statewide requirements to engage in social distancing, self-isolation, and quarantine. As a result, many providers closed day programs, instituted shelter in place rules, and took other actions necessary to protect the health and safety of the people with developmental disabilities. As a result, more people will be isolated, away from friends and family, and many interactions people normally engage in have or will cease.

These changes are very difficult for many people to understand. Having a change in a long-standing routine, limits on preferred activities, social isolation from friends and loved ones, and increased restrictions of movement are major sources of anxiety for many and particularly for people who have difficulty understanding the rationale behind the changes. Certain activities can promote socialization, lessen feelings of isolation, and help pass the time. Relaxation aids such as aroma-therapy, tactile and proprioceptive aids such as vibrating items and weighted blankets, visual items such as books, movies and video games, auditory items such as musical instruments; all help to maintain and promote socialization and alleviate stress and anxiety.

The Arc Maryland is now accepting applications for a Small Grant Opportunity: Engagement and Comfort during the COVID-19 Pandemic. This opportunity is possible with funds provided by the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council and is open to community-based organizations that provide supports to people with developmental disabilities who have been affected by the statewide Coronavirus response.

Ultimately, this initiative seeks to identify effective strategies that people with developmental disabilities, families, and provider agencies can institute to ensure people continue to engage with peers during this period of social distancing and isolation. Funds are available to meet the needs of people with developmental disabilities and their families during this pandemic.

In the capacity of a grant reviewer/small grant administrator of this Small Grant Opportunity, The Arc Maryland is tasked with soliciting, reviewing, and awarding applications to community-based organizations interested in purchasing items, such as those listed above, to be used by people with disabilities during the Coronavirus pandemic.

Items considered for funding through the Small Grant Opportunity include but are not limited to:
• Activities to remain engaged during social distancing, such as, but not limited to, board games, game consoles, word-search books, art supplies, and puzzles;
• Items that alleviate anxiety due to social distancing, such as vibrating items, bean bag chairs, weighted blankets, aroma-therapy items, tactile stimulation, and other sensory-need items; and,
• Other items needed for people experiencing social isolation

Items may be purchased for single recipients or for use by more than one individual and are intended to promote increased socialization, anxiety-reduction, and increase positive shared experiences. Grants shall be awarded for proposals of $500 to $2,500 as approved for funding by The Arc Maryland’s Grant Committee, in consultation with the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council.

The Arc Maryland, through its solicitation attempts, shall endeavor to secure state-wide impact of the fund, and shall make awards throughout the state (Eastern, Southern, Central and Western regions).

FAQs
What is the average Grant Award Amount?
The average grant award amount is expected to be between $500 and $2,500 depending on proposal and demonstrated need. No grant requests over $2,500 will be considered.

When is the Request for Funding Proposals open and when is the deadline for proposals?
The RFP opens directly after the information session on March 18th. The deadline for proposals is 5 PM on March 23rd.

Any proposals received after 5 PM on March 23rd will be put on a wait list, and may be considered if any funding is available after the first round of proposal evaluations and decisions are made.

When will decisions be made and awardees notified?
Applicants will be notified via email within 24 hours of receipt of a completed application. Decisions are made by The Arc Maryland’s Small Grant review committee and are final.

If The Arc Maryland finds it has received an insufficient number of viable requests in the first round of the RFP, it is possible that proposals received after March 23rd may be evaluated and selected for funding on a rolling basis until the provider small grant is expended.

How will decisions be made about proposals?
All complete proposals received will be properly considered and evaluated for adherence to guidelines.

Are there any restrictions on use of funds?
Incomplete proposals will not be considered. All required attachments must be submitted with proposals for them to be considered complete. Grant funds may not be used for personnel expenses.
Who is eligible to apply?
DDA Licensed, Community-Based Organizations that are supporting people with developmental disabilities as they shelter in place.

How do you submit the Small Grant proposal?
Small Grant applications and all attachments including the Small Grant budget form must be submitted to grants@thearcmd.org no later than 5 PM on March 23rd for first round consideration. If there are any grant funds remaining after the first round of awards is made, proposals received after 5 PM on March 23rd may be considered.

What is the time period for the grant project, activity, training or event proposed?
As this is an emergency grant fund, it is expected that items will be purchased with grant funds within 10 days of funding receipt. This is a non-recurring, OTO grant with no current opportunity for renewal from The Arc Maryland.

What agreements are required for funding and what are the reporting requirements?
Grant recipients will be required to complete standard affidavits and commitment documents for the use of the grant funding, as well as a contract for the use of the funding. The contract requires one final report however interim reports may be submitted for amounts of funding less than the full award which may be drawn down/requested for reimbursement with the submission of the completed reports.

How are grant funds distributed?
Grant funds shall be paid within 72 hours of a complete report and reimbursement request.

FAQs from Our Information Call on 3/18/20
What is the total amount of money being distributed through the grant?
The maximum amount of collective funding available for distribution to selected proposal awardees is $45,000. The amount awarded may be less depending on the quality of proposals received, and may not, in total, exceed the amount of $45,000.

Am I eligible to apply if I am not a DDA-Licensed Provider?
You would not be eligible if you are not a DDA Licensed Provider. If you are still interested in grant funds to support people with Developmental Disabilities, we suggest partnering with a DDA Licensed Provider for this opportunity.

What role should DDA Licensed Providers have in the application process?
As DDA Licensed Providers are the eligible applicants, they may be the lead in the process with non-DDA licensed partners taking on a support role. Only the DDA licensed organization may receive funding and are fiscally responsible for all funds received and reporting requirements. Nothing in this advice is intended to be interpreted as mandated partnership. DDA providers may submit grant requests with or without the inclusion of other community partners in their proposals.
How do I find a DDA Licensed Provider to partner with to apply?
You can talk to the CCS organizations for assistance linking with a DDA provider in your surrounding area or find listings of DDA Licensed Providers on the DDA Website for each region of Maryland. Click each link here for your regional listings:
- Central
- Eastern
- Southern
- Western

Do we need matching funds for a project that DD Council typically requires?
No, you do not need to match funds for the project, but you are encouraged to provide a match of either financial or in-kind support to the project and keep track of your contribution to include in your final report. The DD Council has guidance on calculating the in-kind contributions of staff time to research, actively purchase, provide the items or activities, and complete required billing and final reports.

Are there priorities you are looking for in the grant specifications?
We are looking for applications that would help the council meet their goal of state-wide impact and support of underserved populations. Beyond that, there are no other priorities. Grant proposals should show how they will impact current systems of support, for applicability to future positive systems change. Priorities include increasing opportunities for people to be engaged with friends and loved ones and reduce anxiety and stress related to social isolation during this time.

Can I restrict use of funds to a particular group we support (Residential Program, Self-Directed, etc.)?
We suggest using funds for whatever group you support that you believe is in need of funding the most. If you are a DDA licensed provider who has a partnership with an FMS Services provider, you may submit a separate grant request to serve that group of Self-Directed participants and that grant will be evaluated separately from the organization’s original and separate grant proposal.

How would you like Question 1 on the application formatted?
The first question in the application can be formatted in whatever way you prefer, such as in paragraphs, a bulleted list, or any other way you feel you can best make the case for support of your proposal.

How recent must my organization’s Certificate of Good Standing be?
Your Certificate of Good Standing must be current within the past 30 days.

Is the application available in Spanish?
The application is available in Spanish on The Arc Maryland website. Due to the quick turn-around in this time of crisis, we apologize for any inaccuracies. If you require assistance in order to have equal access to the application, please contact Kathy Swanson at kswanson@thearcmd.org as soon as possible and we will do our best to accommodate your translation needs.

Where can I find application materials online?
Application materials are available through the links in the constant contact announcement of the grant and on The Arc Maryland’s website at www.TheArcMD.org.
Are the funding amounts of $500 to $2500 per person or per agency? The funding amounts are the total amounts awarded per DDA licensed agency.

Can grant funds be used to pay staff? Grant funds cannot be used to pay existing or new contractual or regular staff (funds cannot be used for personnel).

Can grant funds be used to pay for items I have already purchased? No, only item and activity costs incurred after notification of grant award, AND after acceptance of grant terms and conditions may be reimbursed.

Can grant funds be used for improvements to places of residence (Ramps, fencing, etc.)? Grant funds cannot be used for housing accommodations that would already be a need outside of our current public health crisis.

Can funds be used to purchase apps or items for an existing piece of equipment? Yes, enhancements to currently owned equipment will be considered with justification in the application showing how the enhancements, add-ons, or additional equipment would be used to meet the goals and purpose of the grant.

Can I provide virtual support to supported individuals using grant funds? Grant funds can be used for apps or equipment for virtual enhancements, but cannot be used to be for the staff time of accessing and providing virtual supports.

Can electronic items such as iPads and digital cameras be purchased with grant funds? As long as a reasonable justification is given for this type of item, it will be considered.

Can outdoor recreation items such as balls, bats, etc. be purchased with grant funds? As long as a reasonable justification is given for this type of item, it will be considered.

If I list sources for purchases on my budget form and end up changing the source of a purchase (switching from a store to Amazon, etc.) with a differing price, are you flexible? As long as the sources switched are noted in your final report, and it is not considered a “material” change, they will be accepted. If you do have a substantial change, such as the types of items you are purchasing, you should contact Kathy Swanson immediately and prior to making the purchase.

If selected, when is the earliest I can expect funds to arrive? Funds would be available by check at the earliest after the 23rd of March. If there is an immediate need noted in your application, we will work to accommodate you so you could access the funds sooner. In all cases, The Arc would first need to receive required grant receipt documents, AND receipts prior to payment as this is a reimbursement grant. You could pick up the check from The Arc Maryland’s office if necessary and only with prior arrangements made. Contact Kathy Swanson. Otherwise all checks will be mailed to the address on the application and grant award documents.

If I have been approved for funding, can I make purchases at that time and before receiving the funding with the intention of being reimbursed? After you have received notice of award AND you have signed and returned required documents, you may make reimbursable purchases.
Who do I contact if I have questions about this opportunity or the grant process?
Please contact Kathy Swanson, Director of Education and Advocacy for The Arc Maryland. Kathy may be reached via email at kswanson@thearcmd.org. If you are unable to reach Kathy Swanson, please email akolp@thearcmd.org or (for emergencies only) call 443-851-9351.

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