

Orange CARES COVID-19 Assistance Program Opens for Individuals and Small Businesses

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As of June 8, Orange County has officially opened (and partially closed) its application portals for the Orange CARES initiative. The program will allow approximately 6,500 qualifying small businesses access to a grant of \$10,000 to cover normal business expenses (including employee wages, vendor bills, and rent), and will provide a one-time payment of \$1,000 per household to certain Orange County residents affected by COVID-19.

The funds are being made available following receipt by the Orange County Government of \$243 million as part of the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act passed on March 27, 2020.

The county has stated that it plans to allocate the \$243 million as follows:

Source: ORANGE CARES

Unfortunately, due to an overwhelming number of applicants, the application portal for individuals closed less than 20 minutes after opening at 8:00 AM on June 8, 2020. The individual application portal was initially scheduled to reopen at 8:00 AM on Wednesday, June 10, 2020; however, the portal was reopened and closed again this morning (Tuesday, June 9, 2020).

The portal for individual applicants now advises residents to check the website tomorrow (Wednesday, June 10, 2020) for updated information. The county has previously stated that the application portal will subsequently reopen every other Wednesday and Saturday until December 19, 2020 or until all funds have been depleted. As of the time this post was drafted, the application portal for small businesses remained open.

Eligibility criteria for individuals are as follows:

- The applicant must reside in Orange County, Florida.

- The applicant must pay rent or own a home in Orange County, Florida.
- The applicant or another adult in the same household has lost a job or experienced a reduction in hours at work due to COVID-19.
- The applicant is a U.S. Citizen or permanent legal resident, and all adults in the applicant's household are U.S. Citizens or permanent legal residents.

Eligibility criteria for small businesses are as follows:

- There are two eligibility classifications:
 - Commercial Businesses: Businesses that have a physical commercial location and employ 25 employees or less.
 - Home Businesses: Businesses with 2-25 employees, not including the owner, that are legally allowed to operate within their jurisdiction and have employees that are not residents of the home pursuant to their jurisdiction's zoning regulations.
- Other business criteria regardless of eligibility classification:
 - Must be a for-profit business
 - Can NOT be a publicly traded company
 - Must have experienced a business interruption or closure due to COVID-19
 - Have not received funds covered by insurance or reimbursement from the Federal Payroll Protection Program
 - Must have operated since at least January 1, 2020
 - Must prove ongoing business operations as of February 29, 2020
 - Must expect to operate after applicable local and state emergency guidelines are removed
 - Must commit to following all recommended COVID-19 safety guidelines, including:
 - Practice social distancing
 - Stay home when feeling sick
 - Wear protective face covering
 - Conduct health screenings
 - Sanitize and wash hands frequently
 - High-risk individuals should shelter and work from home, when possible
 - Temperature checks should be conducted for all staff. If there is a temperature of 100 degrees or higher, said employee must go home.
 - No current unpaid code enforcement liens or violations of any state, federal or local laws.
 - No owner, officer, partner or principal actor of the business may be involved in financial mismanagement. This includes: "Business Owner(s) with any conviction(s) for financial crimes within the last 3 years, with Business Owner(s) defined as: Managing Members and/or Officers."

Additional information, as well as links to the application portals for both individuals and small business, can be found on the Orange County website.