[US] Curtains up for the Shuttered Venue Operators Grant

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The Shuttered Venue Operators Grant (SVOG) programme has commenced in the United States as of early April 2021. With funding of USD16.2 billion (EUR 13.5 billion) available, these grants are hoped to provide much-needed financial support to cinemas, theatres, and other performance venues hit by the coronavirus pandemic across the United States.

Organisations eligible for SVOGs will be those with “defined performance and audience spaces”, and include cinemas and theatres, live venue operators or promoters, performing arts organisations, talent representatives, and certain other cultural venues. The scheme will be administered by the U.S. Government’s Small Business Administration (SBA) and applications are to be made online through sba.gov.

Formerly known as the Save Our Stages Act 6, SVOG was passed into law in December 2020 as Section 324 of the Economic Aid to Hard-Hit Small Businesses, Nonprofits and Venues Act. In March 2021, the SVOG budget was bolstered by a further USD1.25 billion (EUR 1 billion) under President Biden’s new American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, also called the COVID-19 Stimulus Package.

Applicants will be able to seek grants of up to USD10 million (EUR 8.4 million), or 45% of 2019 gross revenue, whichever is the smaller amount. The grant may be used to cover payroll, payments to independent contractors, mortgages and rents, as well as alterations to facilities to meet health and safety protocols as performances begin to resume. The SVOGs will be awarded in several stages, with the first tranche expected to be given to entities that suffered a 90% or greater revenue loss between April 2020 through to December 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The SBA has committed to reserve at least USD 2 billion (EUR 1.7 billion) of funding for smaller entities with fewer than 50 employees.

As with all government grant schemes, certain conditions and restrictions do apply. For example, they will not be awarded to publicly traded corporations, or those which “present live performances of a prurient sexual nature”. Grant recipients must also have a connection to the United States, either physically or through payment of U.S taxes or use of American products, materials or labour. Each application will be considered on a case-by-case basis and requires

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submission of documentary evidence through a dedicated online portal.

Notwithstanding the above caveats, the availability of SVOGs will be welcome news for many creators, performers and other stakeholders in the sector. By way of example, new COVID-19 cases started to diminish in and around Hollywood in April 2021, and accordingly, more film and television projects have started (or indeed, restarted) production. Noting that on-location filming had been curtailed for months, in observance of strict health protocols, FilmLA (the partner film office for the City and County of Los Angeles) President Paul Audley recently said he was “optimistic that the local film economy will soon be back on track”.

Many state,local film and media boards, including FilmLA and the New York City Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment, are offering resources on how to apply. Official video tutorials have been published by the SBA on YouTube, and some government as well as not-for-profit organisations have established dedicated advice hotlines and helpdesks. Applications initially opened online at sba.gov on 8 April, but were almost immediately suspended due to technical problems (current as of 11 April).

COVID-19 Relief: Shuttered Venue Operators Grant official site

https://www.sba.gov/funding-programs/loans/covid-19-relief-options/shuttered-venue-operators-grant

FilmLA issues update on pandemic-era film permitting

https://www.filmla.com/filmla-issues-eighth-update-on-pandemic-era-permitting/

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