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BACKGROUND: ROAD AHEAD BLACK EXPERIENCES GRANT PROGRAM

The Route 66 Road Ahead Partnership is proud to announce the Route 66 Black Experiences Grant Program [BE Grant Program]. Businesses are struggling in these Covid-challenged times. As we emerge from the pandemic, attention to local economic recovery is crucial. Route 66 is at the crossroads of Americana, family travel, iconic brands, and is an amazing example of economic development over the decades. It also has untold stories of hardship and racism. Recent national unrest and widespread economic challenges highlight the need for positive action to support African-American business along Route 66, both through financial support and through individual historical documentation, cultural awareness, education, and amplification of individual oral and pictorial histories.

Based on these factors, the Route 66 BE Grant Program is designed to achieve specific impacts:

- Improvement of local economies via projects designed to retain and sustain African American owned/operated businesses along Route 66, helping them to maintain existing and create new jobs.
- Strengthen healthy race relations via nationwide educational projects focused on research, interpretation and analysis of African-American and Black history on Route 66.

Stories of African American experiences along Route 66 have not been fully told. The BE Grant Program intends to better inform the larger national population by helping people more fully understand and appreciate African-Americans' experiences along Route 66 as specifically told in their own words. People of color do not typically share the nostalgia of Route 66 or its widely accepted narrative of U.S. history. The BE Grant Program seeks to balance the historical record with a fuller history that authentically represents African-American experiences along Route 66. It is a way to honor and learn from this icon of "living history", with the intent of positively impacting the current racial climate in our country. The aim of the program's initial steps is to produce potential, quantifiable impacts related to improved race relations including expansion and establishment of "Not In Our Town" organizations across Route 66, as well as increased numbers of African Americans choosing to travel and live along Route 66.

The BE Grant Program will also support projects focused on the location and identity of Green Book sites. The Green Book was a travel guide published from 1936-67 during the Jim Crow era when African-Americans faced severe discrimination and danger on Route 66. The Green Book identified businesses, such as cafes, gas stations, motels, hotels, and rooming houses that would accommodate and provide safe shelter to African-American travelers. Work is needed to definitively document the locations and stories of the Green Book. Because so many Green Book sites along Route 66 have been demolished or ceased to exist, there is also a great need for oral histories, focused research, and data collection that presents as full a picture as possible of the role these places played in the history of Route 66. Awards could also

be made to Green Book sites that physically remain, to help preserve, develop, and interpret them. In terms of impacts, the number of Green Book site markers installed can be documented, with over 400 potential sites along Route 66 possible. Other quantifiable data can be gathered on the number of Green Book stories preserved and oral histories related to Route 66 Green Book sites collected.

There is a critical need to support small business owners, especially those hit hardest by the pandemic. African American-owned businesses play an important role in improving local economies and uplifting communities along Route 66. The BE Grant Program is designed to help them survive and grow, focusing on both retaining *and* sustaining these struggling businesses. This is especially important as Covid-19 persists and businesses are trying to build back as quickly as possible.

Business and attractions located directly on or near an alignment of Route 66, that are African American-owned or operated by a may apply for a Black Experiences Grants. Both non-profit and for-profit organizations are eligible. Mobile operations that serve the Mother Road, such as tour operators, food trucks, and suppliers with Route 66 as their sales territory are also eligible. The initial round of BE Grant projects will be reviewed based on their economic impacts. Projects that help keep African-American owned and/or operated businesses or attractions in operation, or help them reopen, as well as projects that support the opening of new Black-owned or operated businesses/attractions will also be considered. Other considerations include projects that provide matching funds, how well the project reflects the spirit of Route 66, a project's impact on its community, and listing on, or qualification for, the National Register of Historic Places.

The Route 66 Black Experiences Grant Program is part of the Road Ahead's five-year "Party with a Purpose" to celebrate the Route 66 Centennial in 2026. The BE Grant Program is one of the first in a series of "birthday gifts" to be given to Route 66 over the next five years. Information on African-American experiences in the context of Route 66's 100th birthday offers a unique opportunity to publicize them to new audiences. The Road Ahead hopes to celebrate the Centennial by helping the millions of people who live, work, and travel along Route 66 through projects focused on preservation, promotion, research/education, and economic development.

New rounds of the Route 66 Black Experiences Grant Program will continue annually through 2026. Grant applications must be received by midnight [CST] on Friday, March 4, 2022. Awards will be announced by Friday, March 25, 2022 and grants distributed no later than April 15, 2022. Interested parties can access BE Program Guidelines and submit a grant application at: <http://route66roadahead.com/black-experiences-grant-program/>.

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