



Business Development Fund Grant Program Guidelines

Adopted: April 16, 2024

Last Revised: October 21, 2025

Program Objectives

The Business Development Fund Grant Program was established by the Cook County/Grand Marais Joint Economic Development Authority (EDA) to support small businesses and entrepreneurs, encourage public/private investment, and strengthen the Cook County economy.

The grant program funds projects that help stabilize and grow existing businesses, support business start-ups, and promote investments that diversify the local economy and contribute to long-term community vitality. The EDA administers all aspects of the program, including outreach, application intake, review, grant agreement execution, disbursement, and compliance.

Applications will be accepted according to the schedule published in these Guidelines and remain open until all program funds are fully allocated for the year.

Eligible Applicants

To apply for this program, applicants must meet all the following criteria:

1. The business must be physically located in or provide services within Cook County, Minnesota.
2. The business must be actively registered and in good standing with the Minnesota Secretary of State.
 - a. Sole proprietors may submit proof of an active Minnesota State Tax ID number in lieu of registration.
3. All properties owned by the applicant or business must be current on Cook County property taxes.
4. Applicants located within the City of Grand Marais must be current on city utility accounts.
5. The business must comply with all applicable zoning, permitting, and code requirements.
6. Only one active grant per business entity is permitted at a time.

Nonprofit organizations, for-profit entities, and entrepreneurs meeting these criteria are eligible to apply. Cities, towns, and other units of government are **not** eligible applicants.

Eligible Projects

Eligible project types include, but are not limited to:

- Equipment or software purchases, upgrades, or repairs
- Construction of new buildings, or repair, expansion, or renovation of existing buildings. *(Projects located on leased property may be considered ineligible)*
- Qualifying purchase of property for business development
- Training, certification or licensure promoting continued education or workforce development opportunities
- Furniture, materials, or supplies for new business or expansion
- Redevelopment (blight removal, environmental clean-up, site remediation)
- Marketing (consultation, web-site development, signage)
- Affordable Housing and Childcare Projects

Ineligible Expenses include, but are not limited to the following:

- Management fees, staff/management payroll
- Operating overhead such as rent, utilities, or insurance
- Financing costs or franchise fees
- Debt consolidation
- Costs incurred prior to EDA grant agreement and award
- Land or property acquisition for investment purposes or resale
- Attorney or accountant fees
- Any personal debt or items not solely used for the business
- Product inventory, ingredients, or materials for re-sale or promotion

If applicants are uncertain whether a project qualifies, they should consult with the EDA prior to submitting an application.

Projects must be completed within one year from the date of grant agreement execution.

Grant Awards

The Business Development Fund is established annually based on the EDA's approved levy. Grants are awarded on a competitive basis, subject to funding availability and approval by the EDA Board of Commissioners.

- There is no minimum amount.
- The maximum award is \$25,000.
- Grants are reimbursements only – costs incurred prior to the EDA's award approval and grant agreement date are not eligible.
- Grantees must provide documentation (receipts and proof of payment) for all reimbursements.
- Grants are considered taxable income; A W-9 form is required prior to reimbursement.

Match Requirements

Grant requests are subject to the following tiered match formula, which applies different match percentages to each portion of the grant amount:

Portion of Grant Request	Match Requirement
Request or first \$0-\$5,000	0% (no match required)
Request or portion between \$5,001 - \$10,000	20%
Portion between \$10,001 - \$25,000	35%

The total required match is calculated by applying these percentages to each portion of the requested grant amount. Applicants must demonstrate access to matching funds for the full required amount. Applicants may include additional project costs to show total investment, but only the required match and approved grant amount will be verified for reimbursement.

Example Calculations

Grant Request	Match Calculation	Total Required Match	Minimum Total Project Cost
\$4,000	First \$5,000 @ 0%	\$0	\$4,000
\$8,000	First \$5,000 @ 0% + next \$3,000 @ 20% = \$600	\$600	\$8,600
\$15,000	First \$5,000 @ 0% + next \$5,000 @ 20% (\$1,000) + remaining \$5,000 @ 35% (\$1,750)	\$2,750	\$17,750
\$25,000	First \$5,000 @ 0% + next \$5,000 @ 20% (\$1,000) + remaining \$15,000 @ 35% (\$6,250)	\$6,250	\$31,250

Documentation and Compliance

Applicants must provide a total project budget at the time of application to help the EDA evaluate overall project scope and feasibility. Only the grant amount and required match will be subject to documentation and reimbursement.

- Grantees are required to document all expenditures associated with the **approved grant amount and required match**.
- All match expenditure must be verifiable and spent on eligible costs prior to or concurrent with reimbursement requests.
- The EDA reserves the right to reduce or rescind grant payments if the grantee does not complete the grant-funded scope of work or provide adequate documentation for reimbursable expenses.

Application

Applicants are strongly encouraged to contact the EDA or Small Business Development Center (SBDC) before submitting an application.

Application Schedule and Funding Availability

Deadline	Time	Available Funding	Eligible for Board Review
First Wednesday of February	11:59 p.m. CST (midnight)	\$100,000	March Meeting
First Wednesday of May	11:59 p.m. CST (midnight)	\$50,000	June Meeting
First Wednesday of September	11:59 p.m. CST (midnight)	\$50,000	October Meeting

Applications must be submitted electronically to the EDA at director@cookcountymneda.org by 11:59 p.m. CST (midnight) on the first Wednesday of February, May, and September.

Applications received after this time will be reviewed in the next cycle.

The program will close when all Business Development Fund (BDF) dollars have been fully allocated.

All required materials must be submitted by the deadline. **Incomplete or ineligible applications will not be reviewed.**

Required Application Materials

Applicants must submit the following items:

1. Completed Business Development Fund Grant Application form, available on EDA website: <https://www.cookcountymneda.org/business-development-fund>
2. Certificate of Good Standing from the Minnesota Secretary of State.
 - a. Sole proprietors may provide their most recent Minnesota State Sales Tax Report or other proof of active Minnesota State Tax ID number as approved by the Grant Review Committee in lieu of a certificate
3. For real estate projects (acquisition, renovation, or construction), a current Cook County Property Tax Statement and most recent City of Grand Marais Utility bill (if applicable) for the project property. All applicants – including those whose projects do not involve real estate – must self-certify on the application form that all properties owned by the applicant or business are current on Cook County property taxes, and if located within the City of Grand Marais, all utility accounts are current.
4. A project budget that includes:
 - a. All itemized project costs and the sources of funding (total project budget). The total project budget is for review and evaluation, but only the approved grant amount and required match will be subject to documentation and reimbursement.
 - b. Identification of costs proposed for grant reimbursement and matching funds.
 - c. Supporting estimates or quotes from contractors, suppliers, or retailers.
 - i. If working with a contractor or service provider, a formal estimate is required
 - ii. Documentation for product, equipment, and material purchases can be in the form of estimates or self-made documents with pricing, description and vendor links.

Incomplete or ineligible applications will not advance to Grant Review Committee review. Applicants may be invited to resubmit during the next cycle.

Supplemental Materials

Optional but strongly encouraged materials include:

- Business plan or financial projections
- Photos, renderings, or other visuals
- Proof of funding for required match
- Community letters of support

If supplemental information is requested by the Grant Review Committee, **applicants will have seven (7) calendar days** from the date of request to submit these items. Failure to provide requested materials within this period may delay or disqualify the applicant.

Evaluation Process

1. **Staff Review:** EDA staff will review all applications for completeness and eligibility.
 - a. Incomplete or ineligible applications will not be reviewed or accepted, and applicants will be notified to re-submit a complete application by current or future deadline.
2. **Committee Review:** The EDA Grant Review Committee evaluates eligible applications and makes recommendations to the EDA Board.
 - a. If supplemental materials are requested, applicants will have seven (7) calendar days from the date of request to submit these items.
3. **Board Approval:** Final awards and grant agreements are approved by the EDA Board of Commissioners
 - a. Applicants will be notified of the Board meeting date at which their application will be considered and are encouraged to attend to answer any questions from the Board.
4. **Notification:** The EDA will make its best effort to notify applicants of funding decisions within approximately forty-five (45) days of the grant deadline for which they are applying (e.g. the first Wednesday in February, May, or September).
5. **Late Applications:** Applications submitted after a deadline will be considered in the next cycle.

Evaluation criteria include:

- Business creation, expansion and retention
- Job creation and workforce development
- Compliance with local regulations and tax base growth
- Property redevelopment and blight removal
- Community impact; provides needed services to Cook County
- Feasibility of project timeline and budget; overall need for the grant
- Collaboration and leveraging other funding sources
- Contributes to workforce housing
- Local tax base impact

Reporting Requirements

All grantees must:

1. Complete the project within one year of the grant agreement date.
2. Submit a Final Report to the EDA within 30 days of project completion or grant deadline, whichever occurs first
3. Provide documentation of project expenditures (grant and required match portion) and photos of completed work.

4. Display an EDA Business Development Fund recipient sticker/decal where practicable (for example, on storefront window) for at least one year following the completion date.
5. Participate in follow-up survey at one (1) year and five (5) years after project completion to share information about grant impacts and project outcomes.

The EDA may also highlight select funded projects through local media, community presentations, or educational partnerships to demonstrate the program's public benefit and promote future participation. Grantees are expected to cooperate with reasonable EDA promotional efforts, including media features, testimonials, or community presentations, as requested.

Contact Information

Cook County/Grand Marais Joint Economic Development Authority
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