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# City of Cambridge Community Development Department Small Business Challenge GUIDELINES & APPLICATION

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The City of Cambridge Community Development Department (CDD) Small Business Challenge (“Challenge”) is designed to foster neighborhood engagement with the local business community and to support small business associations and groups of neighborhood businesses.

The Challenge provides one-time grant matching funds between \$1,000 and \$5,000 for well-designed projects that bring together neighborhood and business interests around shared goals of improved design, promotion, and business resiliency in a commercial area. Proposals must demonstrate a positive benefit to a given community in which businesses, residents, and visitors alike will benefit from the proposed project.

The Challenge encourages applicants to develop innovative ways to invigorate their commercial areas and business districts. This could include, but is not limited to, the following:

- **Neighborhood Tourism/Events Planning** – Work with Economic Development Division (EDD) of CDD, Cambridge Office of Tourism, Cambridge Arts Council, or other city departments to create one-time promotional marketing materials or events around a shared common vision for the district.
- **Technology & Skill Training** – Partner with a local technology expert and/or skill trainer to build the skills of businesses, and/or local business associations, to help increase sales, increase efficiencies, and develop online marketing and social media strategies.
- **Research & Planning** – Prepare for future district- or neighborhood-wide efforts (e.g. cooperative buying agreements, Business Improvement District formation, subsidized employee transit programs) by gathering information, conducting formal research, or enlisting the services of an expert.

## **FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

Funding offered is a reimbursement grant in which the City would reimburse the applicant for a portion of qualifying projects, up to \$5,000. Applicants may be awarded less than \$5,000 depending on funding availability.

The Program will only reimburse applicants after the applicant has fully paid for any work covered by the grant and after the project is determined to have been completed in accordance with the contract between the City and applicant. Any work paid for or conducted prior to a signed contract or “Notice to Proceed with Improvements” will not be considered as eligible for reimbursement.

Grant awards are determined by the Small Business Challenge review committee who exercises the following considerations: 1) total project cost 2) potential impact in community or given area 3) lasting impact and sustainability of project 4) feasibility of project and soundness of proposal 5) ability of project to be replicated.

Please contact Christina DiLisio at (617) 349-4601 or [cdilisio@cambridgema.gov](mailto:cdilisio@cambridgema.gov) for information on available funds and reimbursement grant procedures.

### **EXAMPLES OF APPLICABLE SMALL BUSINESS CHALLENGE GRANT PROJECTS**

The following past examples meet grant guidelines:

1. Large, reusable banners for marketing or branding purposes.
2. Decorative and whimsical elements (e.g. streetscape planters) that help act as gateway identifiers to a unique business district.
3. Decorative flags installed along a busy, business corridor.
4. Hanging flower baskets installed in a business district to unify area with adjacent business district.

The following examples would also meet grant guidelines:

5. Social media workshops or financial management trainings for business groups.
6. One-time marketing and promotional materials to boost a commercial area or new event (e.g. "swag bags" or branded items like T-shirts and hats).
7. Adding a one-time pop-up retail component or additional innovation to an existing, or established, event (e.g. a craft market at a movie night).
8. Launching a business-to-business network or business-to-resident network with targeted goals and an annual plan.
9. Studies to learn about business needs, customer shopping habits, or transportation needs.

### **ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA**

The following criteria must be met for applications to be considered:

1. Applicants must be a Cambridge business association or group of neighborhood business owners.
2. The area of focus must be a Cambridge business district or cluster of street-facing Cambridge businesses. Applications for projects focused on residential areas will not be considered.
3. Preference will be given to projects that help newly-formed, or struggling-to-form, business groups or commercial districts/commercial nodes.
4. Preference will be given to areas of need in which design, promotion, or business resiliency has not been as active as some other parts of the City.
5. Tenants must have written approval from property owners to participate in proposals that entail building renovations or changes.
6. Applicants must comply with all State and local laws and regulations pertaining to licensing, permits, building code and zoning requirements.

## 7. Additional Requirements:

- A small group of 2-3 businesses may apply together if they operate on the same block or street corner.
- Costs not covered by the Small Business Challenge Grant include City fees for permits or licenses. A portion of printing costs may be covered but they must account for no more than 30% of total proposed costs, be part of a broader re-branding or marketing effort, and have a direct connection to the grant pilot goals of commercial area betterment.
- Projects already in progress will not be funded, though new elements of an existing project will be considered.

The City of Cambridge reserves the right to apply additional criteria before accepting proposals if program demand exceeds budgeted resources. Past recipients of a Small Business Challenge award are welcome to apply again. First-time applicants, or applicants not awarded in previous years, will be given special consideration.

## **DEADLINES & REVIEW PROCESS**

A completed application, that includes a signed application along with a full grant proposal narrative and supporting documentation (e.g. letters of support) as detailed on the last page of these guidelines, is due **December 22 2017 at 5:00 PM (EST)**. Incomplete applications will not be reviewed.

Completed applications will be evaluated by a grant committee and awardees will be announced by **January 15 2018**. Awardees will have until January 19 2018 to confirm, in writing, acceptance of their award. Failure to confirm will result in a forfeiture.

Awardees should be prepared to implement plans **no later than May 2018**. Projects must be fully paid for **by June 1<sup>st</sup> 2018** to qualify for reimbursement before the end of the Fiscal Year (June 30 2018). CDD staff will work with awardees one-on-one to establish bench marks to ensure grant projects are realized and on track for completion. Grant funds will be awarded upon project completion.



**City of Cambridge  
Community Development Department  
Small Business Challenge Pilot  
APPLICATION FORM**

**APPLICANT INFORMATION**

1. Applicant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Applicant's Business or Organization Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Applicant's Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Business or Organization's Address: \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. Telephone Number(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Fax Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ Web Site: \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Relationship of Applicant to area of focus **and supporting documents required:**
  - Business Owner (applying on behalf of group of businesses):
    - a) Copy of Cambridge Business Certificate.
    - b) Three signed letters of support from businesses abutting proposed project
    - c) Written permission from building owner(s) of any proposed properties (if making building improvements).
  - Business Association:
    - a) Organizing charter or Mission statement
    - b) Copy of 501c3 status (if applicable)
    - c) Three signed letters of support from businesses abutting proposed project.
    - d) Written permission from building owner(s) of any proposed properties (if making building improvements).
  
4. Is the applicant or co-applicant one or more of following:
  - Involved in a political campaign
  - A candidate or public official
  - An immediate family member of a political official
  
5. Street Address of proposed project (include street range for area of focus, e.g. "Broadway from Harvard Square to Inman Street intersection") \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. Which category does your project fall in: (Neighborhood Tourism/Events Planning) (Technology & Skill Training) (Research & Planning)

7. In 50 words or less, briefly describe what your project is (can attach a separate page):

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8. What challenges does your project seek to address and why are they pressing now?

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9. What obstacles have prevented you from launching a project like this in the past?

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10. In addition to funding, what resources are available to ensure project success?

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11. What would you need to either replicate your project in year two or scale it up? Please be specific and if funding is needed please note an estimated amount.

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12. How do you plan to measure the success of your project? Please list some metrics (e.g. number of tickets sold, number of enrolled businesses, number of Facebook "likes").

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13. What other qualitative measures do you plan to use to measure success?

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14. Attach a proposed budget showing itemized costs and any anticipated revenue \_\_\_\_\_

### **CERTIFICATION**

The undersigned hereby represents and certifies to the best of his/her knowledge and belief that the information contained on this statement and any exhibits or attachments hereto are true and complete and accurately describe the proposed project, and the undersigned agrees to promptly inform the City of Cambridge Community Development Department of any changes in the proposed project which may occur.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Tax ID #

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

### **RETURN COMPLETED APPLICATION**

Deliver, Mail, E-mail or Fax Completed Application to:

Economic Development Division                      Cambridge Community Development Department

Attention: **Christina DiLisio, Associate Economic Development Specialist**

City Hall Annex, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor

344 Broadway, Cambridge, MA 02139

Telephone: (617) 349-4601

FAX: (617) 349-4638

E-mail: [cdilisio@cambridgema.gov](mailto:cdilisio@cambridgema.gov)

[www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/econdev/resourcesforbusinesses/smallbusinesschallenge](http://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/econdev/resourcesforbusinesses/smallbusinesschallenge)