



City of Cambridge Community Development Department **Boosting Business Blocks Grant - FY27**

Guidelines

Are you a local business owner or business association? Do you have an idea for how to improve your block or commercial district? Apply to receive a reimbursement grant for your project. Applications for both grants are accepted on a rolling basis while funds are available.

The **Boosting Business Blocks** (BBB) grant helps groups of businesses and business associations improve their commercial area and attract more shoppers. You can receive up to \$7,000 for your eligible project. BBB funds physical improvements that make your commercial area more vibrant, like signs, seating, and public art. It also funds large reusable items that make it easier for you to host public events with other businesses, like tents and tables.

We are accepting applications on a rolling basis as long as there is funding available or until Tuesday, April 13, 2027, at 5:00 PM. We do not accept applications for BBB in November and December to focus on the holiday season.

If you are interested in funding for programming in November and December, please learn more about our Holiday Season grant on our website:

<https://www.cambridgema.gov/cdd/economicopportunityanddevelopment/smallbusinessassistance/boostingbusinessblocks>.

Grant Process

What does the Boosting Business Blocks (BBB) grant process look like? It typically includes the following steps:

1. Application – Submit your BBB application. The Review Committee reviews it. You will receive a funding decision by email.
2. Contract – If your project is funded, you will get a contract to sign. After you sign it, the City signs it too.
3. Notice to Proceed – After you sign the contract and the City signs the contract, you will receive an email “Notice to Proceed.” **Do not spend any of the funds you plan to submit for reimbursement until you receive this email.**
4. Complete your project – After receiving your Notice to Proceed, you can make

- approved purchases and complete your project.
5. Measure impact – Measure the impact of your project and share results.
 6. Reimbursement – Submit a detailed invoice and include proof of payment.

Eligibility

How do I know if I'm eligible for the Boosting Business Blocks (BBB) grant? The following criteria must be met to be considered for the BBB grant:

1. Applicants must be a Cambridge business association or group of neighboring business owners. **Applications from an individual person or a single business will not be accepted.**
2. The area of focus must be small businesses in a commercial district or a group of street-facing small businesses. **Applications for projects focused on residential areas will not be accepted.**
3. Tenants must have written approval from property owners to participate in proposals that involve building renovations or altering the space in any way.
4. Applicants must comply with all State and local laws and regulations pertaining to licensing, permits, building code and zoning requirements.

The BBB will give priority to projects submitted by, or projects that serve, diverse businesses. The following criteria will apply:

1. For applicants applying as a group of businesses, preference will be given to the following:
 - a. An application team comprised entirely of businesses owned by historically excluded persons (women, people of color, veterans, individuals that are disabled, and members of the LGBTQ+ community).
 - b. Application teams comprised of a mix of businesses owned by historically excluded persons and historically included persons will be considered but given lower priority than teams in category "a."
2. For applicants applying as a business association that serves historically excluded business, preference will be given to the following:
 - a. Business associations with a mission statement that expressly states support, and offers services, for historically excluded businesses.
 - b. Business associations with a mission statement that more generally serves small, or local businesses, will be considered but given lower priority than business associations in category "a."
3. For projects that support historically excluded businesses, preference will be given to the following:
 - a. Projects with a stated and explicit benefit to businesses owned by historically excluded persons (women, people of color, veterans, individuals that are disabled, and members of the LGBTQ+ community).
 - b. Projects with a benefit to small, or local businesses in general, of which historically excluded businesses in Cambridge would represent a portion, will be considered but given lower priority than projects in category "a."

The following restrictions apply to all eligible projects, regardless of applicant:

1. City permit or license fees, as well as sales tax, are not eligible for reimbursement.
2. Maintenance costs (such as membership fees or digital platform subscription fees) are not eligible for reimbursement.
3. Staff time costs are eligible for reimbursement but cannot account for the total project cost (maximum allowed is 20% of total proposed costs or \$1,000.00, whichever is less).
4. Printing costs are not eligible for reimbursement.
5. Items already purchased for an existing event are not eligible for reimbursement but items not yet purchased, or upcoming phases of a project, will be considered.
6. Resubmission of past projects are not eligible for reimbursement, but new elements of a past project will be considered.
7. Resubmission of past projects for the exact same project type are not eligible for reimbursement unless the resubmission is three (3) years from first submission. So, an applicant that was awarded funding in 2026 for light pole banners can request funding for more light pole banners of the same style in 2029.

The City of Cambridge reserves the right to apply additional criteria and restrictions before accepting proposals if program demand exceeds budgeted resources.

Financial Assistance

Applicants may be awarded up to \$7,000 per fiscal year, meaning that between July 1 and June 30 an applicant can be awarded two grants but both grants combined cannot exceed \$7,000. If an applicant has unused funds from a previous award they will not be considered for additional grants. Reimbursement checks are mailed out and only after projects have been completed with financial documentation and impact measurements reviewed by the BBB Manager. An example budget template is attached.

Any work paid for or conducted prior to a signed contract or “Notice to Proceed” will not be considered as eligible for reimbursement.

Funding through BBB cannot be offered to those projects already funded through some other city funding source (such as ARPA funds) to ensure that there is no duplication of benefits.

Funding made available is intended for the purposes expressly stated in the applicant's grant application and may not be used, in any part, for personal or political purposes. Examples of inappropriate use of BBB funding includes but is not limited to:

- An applicant is awarded grant funding to string up holiday lighting at their business and at a cluster of businesses around them. The lights are taken down in the summer to help reduce unnecessary wear and tear. A business may not use the lighting for their own display purposes inside their store when the lights are not in use outside alongside their business neighbors.

- A business association is awarded funding to develop a new social media platform to help promote their business members and association work. The association agrees to host a regular video series by a campaigning member of Cambridge City Council who is particularly supportive of small businesses. Unless the association is willing to host promotional materials for all City Council candidates as part of a larger election awareness effort, the association may not use the social media platform to distribute political content for a singular candidate.

If an applicant is found to be in violation of grant contract funding terms, the applicant may be required to reimburse the City of Cambridge in full. Additionally, the applicant may be restricted from future grant funding opportunities.

Review Process

How will grant awards be determined? The Boosting Business Blocks (BBB) Manager and the BBB Review Committee will review eligible projects according to the following:

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.

Projects, regardless of when funding was awarded, need to be completed and paid for by June 1.

Boosting Business Blocks Grant Budget Template

Project Expenses

Consultant or Specialist

	kind of work	cost
1		
2		
3		
	Subtotal	

Equipment Purchase or Rental

	type/general category	cost
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
	Subtotal	

Space Purchase or Rental

	type of space or location	cost
1		
2		
3		
	Subtotal	

Marketing & Advertising (including printing costs)

	Type of marketing (e.g. ad, printing)	cost
1		
2		
3		
4		
	Subtotal	

Other Expense

	type	cost
1		
2		
3		
4		
	Subtotal	

Total Expenses

\$

Balance

Project Income

Budgeted Funds *if funds are anticipated, note date

	Source or type	cost
1		
2		
3		
4		
	Subtotal	

Donations or Contributions

	Source or type	cost
1		
2		
3		
4		
	Subtotal	

Other Grants or Sponsorships *if funds are anticipated, note date

	Name and type	cost
1		
2		
3		
4		
	Subtotal	

Total Income

\$

Total Expenses - Total Income

\$