

# Cincinnati Tenant Improvement Program

## Program Overview

Grants up to \$20,000 for tenant improvements to small businesses (1) relocating to Cincinnati, (2) opening a new business in Cincinnati, or (3) expanding within Cincinnati. The program goal is to encourage economic development by reducing barriers that small businesses face when securing commercial space. The funds can be used for tenant improvements to commercial properties. Up to 10% of the total grant award can be used for soft costs, such as architectural and/or engineering costs.

## Eligibility Requirements

- Applicant must be a for-profit business engaged in the restaurant/dining, retail, service, or office sector.
- Business must have 50 or fewer employees.
- The business must be one of the following:
  - A business that is new to the City of Cincinnati;
  - A business that is expanding ; or
  - A business that is a first-time storefront operator.
- The Leased Premises to which improvements will be made ("Leased Premises") must be located within the geographical boundaries of the City of Cincinnati.
- The Leased Premises may not be used as a residence.
- The business must have a written lease agreement for the Leased Premises with a minimum of 2 years remaining or an existing renewal option (if 1 year remains on the lease) under the lease term.
- The business must have at least 1 year of continuous operations.
- The business must be in good standing with the Ohio Secretary of State, the City of Cincinnati, and the IRS.
- Neither the business nor its owners may be included on any debarred vendor list of or otherwise be restricted from doing business with the City, the state of Ohio and any of its agencies ("Ohio"), or the federal government and any of its agencies.
- The business must demonstrate a commitment to the Program Guidelines set forth below.

# Ineligible Businesses

Businesses that do not meet the eligibility criteria include, but are not limited to:

- Religious institutions;
- Non-profit service providers;
- Private clubs with membership restrictions;
- Businesses proposing any use prohibited by the City, Ohio, or federal regulation or law;
- Predatory lending entities; and
- Stores that primarily sell alcohol / liquor.

# Eligible Improvement Examples

This program is intended to fund repairs, upgrades, and improvements that will, in general, stay with the property. Generally accepted improvements include, but are not necessary limited to the following:

- Lighting fixtures;
- Mechanical, electrical, plumbing, and HVAC;
- Carpeting and/or flooring;
- Painting and/or drywall;
- Windows and/or doors;
- Green initiatives;
- Permanent fixtures;
- Interior demolition and renovation;
- Remediation of environmental contamination on the interior of the building, including lead paint, mold, and/or asbestos;
- Acquisition and installation of a security system;
- Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act;
- Furniture, fixtures, and equipment with a useful life of at least five years; and
- Architectural or engineering costs for interior work (not to exceed 10% of the total grant award).

# Ineligible Improvement Examples

- Work performed without a permit where permits are required;
- Work performed by an unlicensed contractor where licenses are required;
- Work performed prior to the effective date of a grant agreement between applicant and the City, and
- Routine maintenance.

# Program Guidelines

- Applicant must provide with its application a letter of consent for the improvements to the Leased Premises ("Consent Letter") from the property owner.
- The lease or the Consent Letter must allow for tenant improvements with no requirement to return the Leased Premises to the original condition.
- The business must continue to operate from the Leased Premises for two years after the improvements are made or, if the duration of the lease is longer, for the full lease term.
- Applicant must be willing to participate in City-approved technical assistance (TA) programs and must also allow the City access to its financial statements for two years subsequent to the grant award.
- All improvements must comply with City building codes and architectural standards.

## Disbursement of Grant Funds

Grant funds will be dispersed on a Reimbursement Basis or through Controlled Disbursements, defined as follows and as determined in the City's sole discretion:

Reimbursement Basis	The City inspects and approves completed improvements AND, after reviewing all invoices and copies of cancelled checks evidencing payments to contractors for eligible expenses, issues a reimbursement payment to the awarded applicant.
Controlled Disbursement	The City remits payments directly to the contractor(s) who performed the improvements following the City's inspection and approval of the work and the City's review and approval of invoices for eligible improvement expenses submitted by the contractor(s) to the awarded applicant.

## Review Criteria

The following factors will be considered in the review of applications:

- The impact, if any, of the Leased Premises improvements on the business's jobs and payroll;
- The availability and amount of any leveraged funding and/or private investment for the improvements;
- The completeness and clarity of the application;
- Project readiness; and
- The location of the Leased Premises.

Evaluation Criteria	Max Score
<p><b>Economic Impact</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Impact of the project on the applicant’s jobs and payroll</li> <li>● Impact of the project on the City’s jobs</li> <li>● Leveraged funding / private investment for the project</li> <li>● City-certified business(es) (SBE/MBE/WBE)</li> <li>● Utilizing City-certified business(es) (SBE/MBE/WBE) to complete the project</li> <li>● Demonstrates a financial need (Will the project happen without the assistance?)</li> </ul>	<b>35</b>
<p><b>Project Readiness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Completeness and clarity of application</li> <li>● Provided quote(s)/cost estimate(s) for project</li> <li>● Can begin the project within 3 months of approval</li> <li>● Can complete the project within 1 year of approval</li> </ul>	<b>25</b>
<p><b>Project Location</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Area lacking investment - be a catalyst</li> <li>● Low- or moderate-income area</li> <li>● Located in an NBD (or node)</li> <li>● Other developments currently occurring and/or planned for the immediate area (continue momentum)</li> <li>● Will the project increase foot traffic for the area?</li> </ul>	<b>20</b>
<p><b>Types of Improvements</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Do improvements help eliminate blight?</li> <li>● Converting vacant space to utilized space</li> <li>● Do the improvements make space healthier and/or more energy efficient (HVAC, LEED, lighting...)?</li> <li>● Do the improvements make the building safer (lighting, security, ADA....)?</li> </ul>	<b>20</b>

# Program Procedures

1. **Apply:** Applicant submits a complete application packet to DCED/SBT **by 5:00 PM EST on Monday, September 18, 2023.**
2. **Initial Review:** Application packet is initially reviewed by DCED/SBT for minimum eligibility requirements and completeness.
3. **Interview:** DCED/SBT interviews applicants for which an initial determination of minimum eligibility and completeness has been made, and that interview may be followed by or be conducted in conjunction with a visit to the Leased Premises.
4. **Competitive Review:** Selection committee, consisting of at least 4 members from the Department of Community and Economic Development, completes its review of the application packets and makes a determination of award or non-award.
5. **Determine Award:** In the case of a determination of award, the grant award for each awarded applicant shall be determined by the selection committee.
6. **Contract:** Tenant improvement grant contracts are prepared by the City and executed by awarded applicants and the City.
7. **Meet and Confer:** City and awarded applicants conduct meetings with minority, female, and locally owned small business contractors and trade unions.
8. **Project Work:** Work begins (within 3 months of approval) and is completed (within 1 year of approval).
9. **Inspections:** City inspects improvements for approval.
10. **Funds Awarded:** Following inspection approval, DCED reviews invoices and other submitted documentation verifying costs and, upon a determination by DCED that satisfactory proof of eligible expenses for the improvements (and, where applicable, satisfactory proof of payment of those expenses by the awarded applicant) has been provided, the City shall disburse awarded funds on a Reimbursement Basis or as a Controlled Disbursement.

# Program Timeline

The deadline for submission of applications is **by 5:00 PM EST on Monday, September 18, 2023.**

To apply:

- Email a complete application to DCED at [communitydevelopment@cincinnati-oh.gov](mailto:communitydevelopment@cincinnati-oh.gov)

**OR**

- Drop off your application in person to the Department of Community and Economic Development:

Two Centennial Plaza  
805 Central Avenue, Suite 700  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202

## Contact Information

For more information, please contact the Department of Community and Economic Development.

**Email:** [communitydevelopment@cincinnati-oh.gov](mailto:communitydevelopment@cincinnati-oh.gov)

**Phone Number:** 513-352-6146