



Start-Scale-Sustain (S3) Grant Frequently Asked Questions for Business District Organizations

What is a Business District Organization in the context of this grant?

Business District Organizations (BDOs), also known as merchant/commercial/business associations, are non-profit entities serving a targeted commercial area. The primary objective of these organizations is to promote businesses and economic vitality in their district. Functions may include economic development, marketing and promotion, beautification, safety & security, advocacy and representation, and community engagement.

What is a Business District?

A business district, also known as a neighborhood commercial center, is a localized area within a community where a variety of businesses are clustered together. These centers are generally walkable and contain ten or more businesses, providing a range of goods and services that support the economic vitality of the neighborhood. Amenities in these areas often include retail shops, restaurants, offices, and services that cater to the daily needs of local residents and visitors, fostering a vibrant and accessible commercial environment.

What is capacity building in the context of this grant?

Capacity building for a business district organization (BDO) broadly involves enhancing an organization's ability to better serve its members and more effectively achieve its mission and goals. This process can include various components depending on the state of the organizations, such as:

- Organizational development (governance, bylaws, roles and responsibilities, decision-making)
- Strategic planning for sustainability and building partnerships in the community
- Leadership development and training (capacity of board members, staff, volunteers) in areas such as strategic planning, financial management, conflict resolution
- Financial management to improve budgeting, reporting, diversifying funding sources and other activities that build financial resiliency
- Marketing and engagement strategies to communicate more effectively and strengthen relationships with businesses, residents, and other stakeholders

Is the capacity building focus for the business district organization (BDO) or for the businesses in the district as well?

This grant will focus first on building capacity within the BDO to then enable the organization to provide support and services for members and businesses in the district, thus enhancing capacity of district businesses as well.

Is the grant a reimbursement and how will it be disbursed?

The grant will be disbursed in two payments per year. For the two-year grant term, there will be 4 disbursements at the rate of 25% of the total grant award. All funds must be expended by December 31, 2026.

How will grant amounts be determined?

Grant awards will be determined based on the applications and the needs of each organization applying. Applicants will be able to choose from the list of pre-selected services that are structured around building and enhancing organizational capacity (referred to as Category 1 in the Grant Guidelines). In addition to technical assistance, business district organizations may qualify for business development programming funds based on adequate capacity to carry out the proposed activities (referred to as Category 2 in the Grant Guidelines). Grant amounts for business development activities are based on Tier 1: Grants up to \$75,000 for organizations with one or more full time staff, and Tier 2: Grants up to \$25,000 for organizations with no full-time staff.

How are applications chosen for review and consideration?

Applicants must meet eligibility requirements to be considered for this grant.

What are the eligibility requirements?

Applicants must be a non-profit with an existing or pending 501(c)3, 501(c)6 designation; be located and serve a business district or commercial area in the Corridors of Opportunity geography; and represent at least 10 businesses from the business district they serve. Additionally, eligible applicants for review and selection will need to comply with federal guidelines and requirements for receiving funding (SAM Certificate and UEI, Certificate of Insurance).

If my organization does not have a SAM.gov registration and UEI, can we still apply?

We understand that a SAM.gov registration is dependent on your organization's nonprofit designation (which may take up to 6 months to receive). If you have a pending non-profit designation, you can still apply if you have a fiscal sponsor or fiduciary that has a Certificate of Insurance and an active SAM.gov registration.

How many employees does a business district organization need to have to apply?

Business District Organizations that operate on volunteer basis are eligible to apply. The only difference in eligibility for funding levels is regarding funding requests for business development activities and programming. Organizations with one or more full time staff are eligible for Tier 1 funding: Grants up to \$75,000. Organizations with no full-time staff are eligible for Tier 2: Grants up to \$25,000.

What are the City of Charlotte's reporting requirements?

Grantees will need to submit progress reports every six months, reporting on the current progress toward the performance measures (i.e. number of businesses participating in applicable activities, trainings provided, engagement events etc). These metrics should be proposed by Business District Organizations on how they would like to track progress and outcomes and measure success.

What are the federal requirements?

Organizations receiving federal funds must register with SAM.gov and provide a UEI number with expiration date, as well as a Certificate of Insurance. Organizations will be required to obtain a single audit if they expend \$750,000 or more in federal funds in one year from all federal sources combined.

Which are the Corridors of Opportunity in Charlotte?

There are six corridors of Opportunity in Charlotte. They are Albemarle/Central, Beatties Ford/Rozzelles Ferry, Freedom/Wilkinson, West Sugar Creek, North Graham/North Tryon, and West Boulevard. To check if the business district you serve falls in the eligible geography, visit <https://explore.charlottenc.gov/> and select on the Layer List: Corridors of Opportunity Areas of Influence.

Our business district needs infrastructure improvements, can we include this work in our proposal?

This grant is not intended to support design and infrastructure investments.

Can our BDO use funds to assist businesses with City Fees?

This grant cannot cover City Fees for businesses. However, the grant can support training for Business District Organizations (BDOs) to provide technical assistance on specific issues. This assistance can address a variety of topics, including legal concerns, zoning regulations, and code compliance, among others. The aim is to empower BDOs to offer valuable support to district businesses in identified critical areas.

Can our BDO assist businesses with bringing commercial properties up to code, façade paintings, activating vacant lots, streetscape improvements etc?

No. There are other programs in the city that can support these activities such as the Business Matching Grant Program, the Placemaking Grant, and the Neighborhood Matching Grants.

What is the term of this grant?

The grant term is 2 years. Funds must be expended by December 31, 2026.

Can this grant be used to pay staff?

This grant cannot be used to hire salaried staff or pay salaries of current staff. However, it can be used for hiring consultants, subcontractors, and interns whose work is intended to help grow capacity for the organization.

What are eligible expenses?

This grant will cover activities that target organizational capacity building of Business District organizations, as well as capacity building of businesses they serve and represent. There will be two categories of funding within the application for which the applicants may qualify. Category 1 includes activities that focus on capacity building and organizational growth. Category 2 includes programming and membership driven activities that target member businesses or the economic vitality of the district.

If we are an organization that is just starting out, how can we demonstrate support from the business community?

Business District Organizations that are in the early stages of formation can demonstrate this support and engagement by providing three letters of support from the business community. More established

organizations can demonstrate this support and engagement with at least 10 businesses through membership, meeting attendance rosters, and other forms of engagement.

The webpage of the S3 Grant references a Work Sheet template a BDO needs to complete to indicate which services the BDO would like to be considered for funding. Where is the Work Sheet?

The Work Sheet has been incorporated directly into the S3 Grant online application form to simplify the application process. Once you begin completing the application in the [Grant Interface](#), you will be able to select all the capacity-building areas and services your BDO would like to be considered for funding.