Mini-Business Improvement Grants (Mini-BIGs) Program Guidelines

Overview

Mini-Business Improvement Grants (Mini-BIGs) are a way to help San Pablo small business owners set, hit, and celebrate milestones critical to small business growth. The Mini-BIGs program will help small businesses grow and create jobs by providing them with greater access to education, capital, and business support services.

Through our expertise and community partners network, we will work with a small cohort of entrepreneurs over a 12-week period to define critical business goals and accelerate their path to achieving it. Participants will attend the DreamBuilder online courses that teach them the skills and knowledge to grow their business. Courses are interactive, convenient for their schedule, and available in both Spanish and English. Best of all, they're free, will offer guidance and feedback, and will take a personal interest in helping San Pablo businesses grow.

The program is virtual and aims to help small businesses in San Pablo solve some of their principal business needs. The program will help entrepreneurs define critical business goals and help accelerate their path to achieving them.

Through the program, entrepreneurs will gain practical skills across topics, such as financial statements, marketing, and employee management, and gain the tools to develop a customized business plan for growth. There is an opportunity to earn milestone achievement grants up to $2,500, and a matched grant component for those who complete the milestones and are looking to invest in their business.

Qualifying Businesses

Currently licensed small businesses located in the City of San Pablo incorporated boundaries with at least one (1) employee that do not yet have all of the standard documentation required to apply for grant relief and affordable nano capital programs are eligible. Provided a sole proprietor business is meeting the qualifications of one employee, it may enroll. Business must have experienced temporary or ongoing negative operations and/or revenue impacts due to the pandemic and post-pandemic economic conditions.

Mini-BIGs Program Overview

Mini-BIGs is a two-part program designed for qualifying businesses with at least one (1) employee that do not yet have all of the standard documentation required to apply for grant relief and affordable nano capital programs. Businesses may elect to do one or both phases.

- **Phase I**: Businesses that apply are enrolled in a DreamBuilder cohort, receive technical assistance (TA) from EDC and partners as needed, and earn up to $2,500 as they complete milestones of business fundamentals.

- **Phase II**: Provides up to $2,000 per business as a matched improvement grant (e.g.,
technology, safety, equipment, etc.)

**Phase I**

Businesses are enrolled in a DreamBuilder cohort (they may elect Spanish or English). There are five (5) milestones to achieve under this phase, each equating to a $500 value. These are documents are universally required to apply for any grant relief and nano-capital program. Businesses must complete all milestones to receive the grant payout of $2,500.

1. Business Plan
2. Monthly financial statements (e.g., balance sheet, P&L)
3. Business taxes filed
4. Business bank account
5. Business credit established separate from personal credit

What is DreamBuilder? DreamBuilder is:

- A 12-week program (25-30 hours at business owner pace) of practical business education focused on business growth via 13 courses (plus a bonus course)
- A network of community partner professionals & business advisors
- A way to build credit worthiness, access to capital and a supportive business network

Multiple cohorts of the Mini-BiGs DreamBuilder will be offered annually. Courses offer business education, support services and pathways to capital for growth-oriented entrepreneurs. Participants gain practical skills to take their business to the next level, with topics like financial statements, business plans, and marketing. Participants develop an actionable growth plan for their business with the help of community partner advisors, such as SCORE and SBDC and a network of like-minded entrepreneurs. The program is free for participants and delivered in partnership with community professionals.

Courses are designed to be easy to understand and done at the pace that works for the entrepreneur, allowing for acceleration or slowing at any time. They feature animations, exercises, and games designed to help small business owners learn the most important business concepts.

DreamBuilder is designed for business owners who have a business poised for growth or in need of the stability that comes from having business fundamentals in place and a network of fellow businesses. The ideal Mini-BiGs applicants are passionate about growing their business, creating jobs and are willing to engage, as follows, to get tangible, long-term benefit from the program.

- Attend the program orientation
- Complete the 13 convenient learning modules over the course of 12 weeks
- Complete the bonus 14th module “Financing Your Dream”
- Participate in out-of-webinar activities, including completing assignments, attending
networking events and business support clinics (25-30 hours total)

**Phase II**

Once an entrepreneur has completed Phase I, they may apply for a matched grant up to $2,000 to invest in an identified business improvement. These may include, but are not limited to, a new piece of equipment, improved software systems, upgraded technology, safety equipment, new sign or permitted mural, façade or landscape improvements, etc. The matched grant requires a purchase order (PO), invoice or receipt to receive the payment.

To review, to be eligible for Phase II, an enrolled business must have:

- Completed the Dream Builder training program and achieved the $2,500 grant
- Provided its newly completed or updated Business Plan
- Submitted a plan for how the business owner will use the matched grant and how the grant will improve business operations along with the purchase order (PO), invoice or receipt; quotes, estimates or other documentation that does not represent a purchase commitment will not be accepted

**Program Timeline**

The Program will open in January 2023. San Pablo EDC will notify applicants within 15 business days of their eligibility. The program will remain open until funds run out.