

STEP Grant year 11

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Introduction:

The Nebraska Department of Economic Development (DED) has received a State Trade Expansion Program (STEP) grant from the US Small Business Administration (SBA) to: 1) increase the number of small businesses in Nebraska that are exporting; and 2) increase the value of exports for those small businesses that are currently exporting.

This program will reimburse participant companies for approved activities associated with international marketing initiatives for Eligible Small Business Concerns (ESBCs) across Nebraska.

Nebraska STEP funds will not be used to support activities sponsored or co-sponsored with NDED when registration or participation fees are required that are outside the approved program guidelines for STEP Year 11.

All participating organizations are required to contribute matching funds of 25%. Example: \$10,000 grant would require a \$2,500 contribution from the participant.

Program Details:

1. Domestic or International Trade Shows:

Eligible activities must be executed by direct employees of the applicant company; ALL travel must be confirmed on US airlines (coach or economy class only); we request 30 days advance notice of travel.

Category 1: STEP will provide up to \$4,000 for an eligible small business concern (ESBC) to attend a qualified export focused activity in the United States; eligible expenses include expenses incurred by up to 2 direct employees from the Nebraska facility;

Category 2: STEP will provide up to \$10,000 for an eligible small business concern (ESBC) to attend a qualified export focused activity outside the United States; eligible expenses include expenses incurred for up to 2 direct employees from the Nebraska facility;

In addition to these categories, we may cover translation services and other “booth add-ons.”

A 25% company “match” of the maximum reimbursement amount allowed for these activities is required. Approval is limited to two (2) travel activities per company.

2. Participation in US Department of Commerce Business Matchmaking Programs:

STEP will reimburse application fees related to the following US Department of Commerce programs: Gold Key, International Partner Search, International Company Profile, Business Facilitation Services, or other approved USDOC programs. ***Pre-approval by the US Commercial Service in Omaha is required.***

A 25% company “match” of the maximum reimbursement amount allowed for this activity is required;

Approval for USDOC Business Matchmaking Programs is limited to two (2) programs/per company.

3. Export Training and Associations:

STEP will provide reimbursement for an eligible business to cover up to \$300 per registration fee to attend training sessions provided by local partners covering the basics of export documentation, pricing, shipping, market entry methods, export finance, methods of payment, and other topics relative to exporting.

Approval is limited to one (1) awards per company/grant period; a 25% company “match” of the maximum reimbursement amount allowed is required to qualify.

PROGRAM GUIDELINES

1. Submit an application at <https://opportunity.nebraska.gov/step/> .
2. All participants must complete grant software training.
3. All participants that have not yet exported to a foreign country must complete:
 - a. New to Export training conducted by approved vendors. *i.e. USDOC, MITA, NBDC, etc.*
 - b. Enrollment in international trade organization.
4. Submit an Itemized Budget Request (IBR) with a demonstration or confidence in a positive ROI for each event/activity for which funding is requested, to be submitted **at least 30 days prior** to the proposed event/activity;
 - a. Eligible activities must be executed by direct employees of the Nebraska applicant; costs incurred by company representatives, consultants, agents, or distributors within or outside of Nebraska are not eligible for reimbursement or company match.
5. Upon completion of the approved event/activity, submit a request for reimbursement **within 30 days of completion of the activity** for eligible expenses based on Reimbursement Guidelines and Checklist (see below);
 - a. Submit a Post-Activity Report, through DED grant software, prior to the request for reimbursement.
 - b. Continue to produce a Post-Activity Report for each quarter until the close of the grant.
6. Funds will be awarded to eligible companies on a first-come, first-serve basis to the extent funds are available; **Maximum reimbursement per company over the life of this grant is limited to \$19,999/year; All events/activities must be COMPLETED and PAID for PRIOR to September 29, 2025.**

Company Eligibility Requirements:

Companies applying for STEP Grant funding must be a US owned, operated, and headquartered in Nebraska to process, manufacture, and/or distribute a product or provide an exportable service at the time of application. They must also meet the following criteria:

1. Be in business at least one year, US owned and operating in the United States;
2. Produce exportable products that contain at least 51% U.S. content;
3. Qualify as a small business entity according to the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS). All employees of affiliates, such as parent companies, subsidiaries, etc., must be included in employee and annual receipt totals;
4. Submit a “Self-Representation as an Eligible Small Business Concern” form;

5. Submit a “Debarment Certification” Form to certify that the applicant is not on the U.S. Excluded Parties List.

Guidelines for Reimbursement:

In order for DED to comply with federally mandated STEP grant terms and conditions award recipients must provide the following documentation for each event/activity participated in to be reimbursed for eligible expenses from STEP Grant funding.

1. Reimbursement requests must be received **within 30 days of completion** of the event/activity to be eligible for reimbursement;
2. Submit a request for reimbursement outlining the event/activity completed;
3. Provide a Summary of Expenses in U.S. dollars to include all expenses incurred through DED grant software
4. Provide invoices, receipts, and proof of payment in US dollars for all expenses for which you are requesting reimbursement or using for company match
5. Photo of booth display if available; and
6. Post-Activity Report to accompany request for reimbursement.

Eligible Expenses: *(Receipts are required for all expenses to be reimbursed or used as company match)*

- Airfare: coach/economy class only (Note: **All flights must be on a U.S. Flag Carrier**, such as American, United, Delta, etc., pursuant to the Fly America Act unless a FAA Waiver is submitted and approved in advance of travel; **all** travel must be approved by NDED prior to departure;
- Baggage fees (with receipt);
- Ground transportation: taxi, bus, train, subway, car rental, parking (with receipts);
- Mileage to/from events and airports within the US;
- Hotel: lodging will be reimbursed up to the maximum published GSA/US Department of State per diem rates by city/country plus applicable hotel tax and fees;
- Interpreter services;
- Program registration fees for USDOC and other matchmaking programs;
- Trade show/booth related expenses (registration fee, electricity, furniture, etc.);

Ineligible Expenses for Reimbursement:

Under Nebraska and Federal law, the following expense categories are ineligible for public funding (others may also apply):

- Printing, or manufacturing of anything
- Compensation, wages or salary of any individual;
- Meals, beverages and tips; *(GSA/US Department of State M&IE per diems may be used as match)*



- Capital goods, product samples, office supplies, business cards, and promotional supplies;
- New product research and development costs; or alteration of existing products to meet foreign standards;
- Alcoholic beverages;
- Passport or Visa fees; *(may be used as match; with receipts)*
- Immunizations; *(may be used as match; with receipts)*
- Cell phone and cell phone charges;
- Expenses related to entertaining current or prospective clients, partners or government officials;
- Any expenses incurred by company representatives, consultants, agents or distributors located within or outside the United States who are not full-time employees of the applicant;
- Any travel expenses without **prior** travel approval from NDED;
- Any airfare booked other than coach or economy class;
- Any expenses NOT included on the Itemized Budget Request (IBR) as submitted and approved;
- Any expenses incurred AFTER September 29, 2024.
- Federal regulations may prohibit funding of activities/exports in countries subject to either comprehensive embargoes or targeted sanctions, subject to changing world events.
- **If airfare is booked on a foreign airline without previous Waiver Approval, ALL expenses related to that trip will be ineligible for reimbursement.**
- **Those requests not conforming to these guidelines and/or checklist will be returned to the company to correct and resubmit.**

Failure to comply with these guidelines could result in decrease of approved funds and/or denial to future applications.

For additional information contact:

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