

A PROGRAM BY



BROWNSVILLE COMMUNITY
IMPROVEMENT CORPORATION
AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

2024 PROGRAM GUIDELINES

RENTAL REINVESTMENT

BIG GRANTS

DOWNTOWN BROWNSVILLE
BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT & GROWTH
PROGRAM

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Introduction

Since 2019, BCIC has invested over \$2.9 million in the award-winning Business Improvement & Growth (BIG) Program, which has prompted over \$24.8 million in private investment and economic activity that has contributed to the dynamic period we are currently experiencing in Historic Downtown Brownsville. We are at the cusp of an economic and cultural shift, propelled to critical mass by BCIC's BIG Program. As such, Historic Downtown Brownsville is once again becoming the hub and heart of our city.

BCIC has revamped the program to continue partnering with property and business owners investing in our city to further our efforts and leverage BIG's preservation-based economic development. Through BIG, BCIC is creating viable, risk-averse areas of investment that foster a diverse community of entrepreneurs that is making it happen together, sharing successes, and creating unmatched experiences that honor our colorful culture and history.

About BIG

The BIG Program offers reimbursable matching grants to downtown property owners and tenants investing in rehabilitating commercial buildings within the BIG Program Boundaries (refer to [map link](#)). The program aims to strengthen Downtown's economic activity by offering incentives to preserve existing buildings and prevent further deterioration, prep vacant spaces for occupancy and reduce vacancies, and promote mixed-use development by activating multi-story buildings.

Eligible activities include:

1. Façade Improvements*
2. Interior MEP Improvements*
3. Rent Subsidy

Eligible applicants may stack the various grants listed above.

* Façade improvement and rehabilitation grant [guidelines are available through this link](#).

The BIG Program is funded through BCIC's 2025 Operating Budget. Program funding is limited, and the BCIC Board of Directors' consideration of grant applications is subject to the availability of funds.

Rental Reinvestment Program

The BIG Rental Reinvestment Program offers rent reimbursements to new-to-market businesses expanding or relocating to Historic Downtown Brownsville. The program aims to strengthen downtown's economic activity, diversify the existing business mix, improve downtown's curb appeal, and increase occupancy.

Eligibility

New, expanding, or existing businesses choosing to relocate to Historic Downtown Brownsville and contribute to the existing business mix. Existing downtown businesses wanting to expand their gross rentable space are also eligible.

Eligible applicants must:

1. Be located within the [BIG Program Boundaries](#).
2. Hire or employ at least two (2) employees, not including the business owner.
3. Be in operation for at least three (3) months but no more than six (6) months and submit a profit and loss statement and cash flow statement with their application.
4. Existing downtown businesses older than six (6) months are eligible if they have expanded their gross rentable space.

Although any business may apply, businesses that diversify the existing business mix will be given greater consideration:

- Artisan shops.
- Restaurants, coffee shops, specialty food, and entertainment venues with live music.
- Winery, microbrewery, beer gardens.
- Visual and performing art galleries
- Upscale apparel accessories and footwear.
- Electronics – computers, phones, digital equipment.
- Specialty retail: toys, sporting goods.
- Home furnishings and appliances.
- Businesses that have completed the Blueprint Business Program or any Kauffman-related program.

Grant Award Amount

Program Participants may be reimbursed up to twelve (12) months of rent, with a maximum rent subsidy of fifteen thousand dollars (\$15,000) for the year for any business. The rent reimbursement works as follows:

- Program participants may receive up to 50% of their monthly rent, not to exceed \$1,250. The rent reimbursement amount will be determined by the monthly rent as stipulated in the Certified Lease Agreement.
- Rent reimbursements must be requested monthly by submitting an invoice from the business to BCIC, showing proof of rent payment, and submitting a profit and loss statement from the previous month.

Minimum Applicant Standards

At a minimum, the applicant must:

- ☐ Be in operation for a minimum of three (3) months, but no more than six (6) months before applying.
- ☐ Submit a complete BIG Rent Reinvestment Program application, including all required documents.
- ☐ Sign a two-year lease agreement.
- ☐ Obtain a Certificate of Occupancy from the City's Planning and Redevelopment Department and be open to the public before submitting a rent subsidy application.
- ☐ Submit profit and loss and cash flow statements for the months it has been operating. Additionally, the business must submit a profit and loss statement with each reimbursement request.
- ☐ Provide a Business Plan Executive Summary, Marketing Plan, and One-Year Business Pro Forma.
- ☐ Applicants are encouraged to meet with a business advisor with UTRGV's Small Business Development Center (SBDC) or Entrepreneurship and Commercialization Center to compile new or review existing business plan documents.
- ☐ Applicants who have graduated from the eBridge Center's Kauffman Program will be given greater consideration.
- ☐ Ensure the proposed business will open at least six (6) days a week, a minimum of eight (8) hours a day, and stay open past 6:00 p.m.
- ☐ Create a free Google Business Profile with the business name, address, contact information, and hours of operation, and establish a social media presence if the BCIC Board approves the application.
- ☐ Contribute to downtown's business mix, as determined by the BCIC Board.
- ☐ Attend trainings and workshops to help the business succeed and ensure longevity.
- ☐ Be in good standing and shall not be involved in any litigation, owe taxes, or have liens filed against any prior business or the property listed in the application.

Application Submission

Eligible applicants applying for the Rental Reinvestment Program must submit their application via [BCIC's website](#). The application must be completed in its entirety, and all required documents must be included for the application to be considered complete and submitted.

Required documents include:

- ☐ Certificate of Occupancy issued by the City of Brownsville's Planning and Redevelopment Department
- ☐ Certified Lease Agreement
- ☐ Profit and Loss Statements for the months the business has been in operation.
- ☐ Cash Flow Statements for the months the business has been in operation.
- ☐ Business Plan Executive Summary and Marketing Plan
- ☐ One-Year Operating Pro Forma
- ☐ Form 503 Assumed Name Certificate issued by the Cameron County Clerk's Office, if applicable.
- ☐ Texas Sales and Use Tax Permit issued by the Texas Comptroller's Office.
- ☐ Previous Two Years of Tax Returns for each applicant listed.
- ☐ Floor Plan(s) submitted to the City of Brownsville's Permitting
- ☐ Digital photos of the building façade and storefront and interior of the business
- ☐ Applicants with an existing business relocating to downtown or an existing downtown business expanding their gross rentable space must submit a completed application and a profit and loss statement.

Application Deadline & Review

Applications are accepted continuously, with a strict deadline of the second Friday of each month to allow for a 30-day application review. No exceptions will be granted regarding this deadline. The Board of Directors will consider submitted applications in the subsequent month.

BCIC Staff will review all applications and work with the applicant to collect any pending information. All applications must be presented and approved for funding by the BCIC Board of Directors. Applicants will be notified in writing whether their application was approved or denied. The applicant must be available to answer questions about the application or project.

Appeals Process

Applicants denied program participation by the BCIC Board may appeal the decision in writing within thirty (30) days of denial and must submit the appeal to the BCIC Office. Appeals are reviewed by assigned BCIC staff and one of the Board's subcommittees. The reviewers will compile a recommendation of whether to reverse the denial. They will be taken to the BCIC Board at the next meeting. All appeal decisions are final.

Participation Agreement

Applicants whose applications have been approved by the BCIC Board will be required to sign a Participation Agreement. The agreement will be prepared by BCIC staff and reviewed with the Program Participant. The agreement shall state specific terms, such as the effective agreement date and obligations required by the Program Participant and BCIC. At a minimum, the Program Participant agrees to:

1. Rent the premises listed above for a minimum of twenty-four (24) months. The Lease may not expire before the Agreement Term.
2. Operate its business at the premises at least six (6) days a week, for a minimum of eight (8) hours a day and be opened past 6:00 p.m.
3. Meet with a business advisor to establish or review and revise its business plan executive summary and a one-year business pro forma; and attend training and workshops dealing with topics that will help the business succeed.
4. Promptly submit written monthly reimbursement requests in accordance with the Reimbursement Schedule and follow the Reimbursement Guide included in the Guidelines. Reimbursement requests must be submitted no later than the 10th of every month.
5. Provide satisfactory evidence that one hundred percent (100%) of the monthly rent has been paid. In-kind contributions by the Participant or others or waived rent by the lessor will not be considered for reimbursement or count as rent payments.
6. Notify BCIC in writing and email of any changes to the Lease; or adverse, material changes to the Premises.
7. Allow BCIC to promote the participant and project using photographs in printed promotional materials, press releases, websites, and social media outlets.
8. Place a sign provided by BCIC on the building throughout the duration of the project to create awareness for the BIG Program.
9. BCIC will request a repayment of funds if, within twelve (12) months of signing the Program Agreement, the property or business is sold or transferred, or the business closes.

REIMBURSEMENT REQUESTS

Reimbursement requests must be submitted on a monthly basis and require documentation, which will be detailed in the participation agreement but, at a minimum, includes:

- An invoice from the Program Participant to BCIC.
- Bank statement showing cashed check.
- If paid with a credit card, the credit card receipt must be included along with the credit card statement showing payment.
- If paid with mobile or peer-to-peer payment apps such as Google Pay, Apple Pay, Venmo or Cash App, then the receipt from the app must be submitted along with the bank or credit card statement showing the processed transaction.
- A receipt from your landlord may be submitted along with documentation showing the cleared transaction from a business account. No receipts from a manual receipt book are allowed.
- No CASH payments are allowed.

If proper documentation has been submitted, reimbursement requests may be disbursed within fifteen (15) business days of receipt of the request. To ensure a thorough review of the submitted documentation. Requests to expedite the reimbursement request are not an option.

Business Resources

Eric Quintero

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Community Development Manager

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Free resources are available for entrepreneurs through the University of Texas at Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV). Contact UTRGV to find out what resources are available and schedule an appointment with a Business Advisor to discuss your business plan and operating pro forma required as part of the Downtown Rent Subsidy application.

UTRGV Small Business Development Center

Website: <https://www.utrgv.edu/sbdc> | Phone: (956) 665-7535

UTRGV Entrepreneurship and Commercialization Center

Website: <https://www.utrgv.edu/ecc> | Phone: (956) 882-4119