



STEP Financial Assistance Award Guidelines for 2025

Effective: October 1, 2024

The U.S. Small Business Administration's State Trade Expansion Program (STEP) grant initiative provides funding to states and U.S. territories to increase the number of businesses that export. Administered by Maine International Trade Center (MITC), the objective of the STEP Financial Assistance Award is to encourage Maine companies to seek new international sales through financial support for costs associated with such export growth activities.

Eligibility

To apply, companies or firms must:

- Be a Maine-based, for-profit company and pay taxes in Maine (*nonprofits, educational institutions, and cannabis businesses are not eligible*)
- Manufacture or perform at least 51% of the covered good or service in Maine.
- Be an export-ready company seeking to export goods or services that are of U.S. origin, which is defined as containing 51% or more U.S. content (For additional guidance, see page 5.)
- Have been in business for at least 1 year
- Have access to sufficient resources to bear the costs associated with trade
- Meet the U.S. Small Business Administration's definition of small business
Use the following [sba.gov](https://www.sba.gov/federal-contracting/contracting-guide/size-standards) link for information on size standards for your business:
<https://www.sba.gov/federal-contracting/contracting-guide/size-standards>
- Not be applying for/receiving public financial assistance from any other federal or state funded source for the same project

Overview

First Application Window: November 18 – December 13, 2024

Activity Period for Projects: February 1 – June 30, 2025

Award Notifications: January 15, 2025

Award Amounts: \$5,000 minimum to \$10,000 maximum

Before submitting an application, we recommend that you meet with a MITC Trade Specialist.

STEP Financial Assistance Awards are reimbursements, which means that you must cover 100% of activity costs up front. There is a 25% match required from your company, and the reimbursement payment covers 75% of eligible activity costs. For example, in order to receive a \$5,000 reimbursement payment, you would need to submit at least \$6,700 in paid invoices or similar required documentation for eligible expenses on the project.

Companies must apply for the STEP Financial Assistance Award in advance. Funds may not be used to pay for costs incurred prior to October 1, 2024 or projects completed prior to the award notification date. After a company receives notification of a STEP Financial Assistance Award, the company must complete the project activity within the timeframe stated in the application window.

STEP Financial Assistance Award Process Timeline



Application Process

Before submitting an award application, we recommend that you meet with a MITC Trade Specialist to review eligibility and discuss your project as part of your export growth plan.

The online application process usually takes between 15 to 20 minutes to complete. In addition to basic information about your company, you will need to provide a detailed description of the proposed project, targeted countries, total estimated cost, and explain how you plan to build export capacity from the activity.

Businesses must also complete and submit a self-representation as an “Eligible Small Business Concern” form, a W-9, a U.S. Content form, and a Scope of Work (if applicable) as part of the application process.

Applications for a STEP Financial Assistance Award will not be considered by the review committee until all supporting documentation is submitted. A company may not have more than 1 active application within an application window.

Please note that you have not been awarded any funds until you receive an award notification email from MITC staff.

Funding Categories & Eligible Expenses

International Business Development (International Market Entry)

International business development services awards will reimburse eligible costs associated with business matchmaking services or international trade show participation, plus associated expenses such as shipping.

Expenses relating to domestic trade shows are eligible only if the company engages in international matchmaking services such as the US Commercial Service international buyer's program or equivalent. A receipt for this service and a copy of the meeting schedule will be required for reimbursement. Eligible companies may receive support for one domestic trade show per grant year.

Eligible expenses are determined on a case-by-case basis based on SBA guidelines. Examples of eligible expenses in this category:

- Booth costs, interpreters, and costs for shipping to support the activity
- Digital marketing in foreign market and lead generation services to support the activity
- Consultants to schedule international B2B matchmaking

Export Skills Development (Capacity Building)

Export skills development awards will reimburse eligible costs associated with private or public training and export compliance and consulting services.

Eligible expenses are determined on a case-by-case basis based on SBA guidelines. Examples of eligible expenses in this category:

- Export skills training registration fees for employees
- Consultant fees for compliance testing or certifications for export market entry (e.g., ITAR registration, CE Marking, ISO 9000)
- Export compliance plan development and/or export compliance audit
- Fees for legal, marketing, and tax experts to enhance market-entry strategy

Ineligible Expenses

- Travel expenses such as airfare, lodging, meals, baggage fees, passports, and vaccinations
- Ground transportation: mileage, tolls, or gas expenses
- Printing costs of marketing collateral (brochures, handouts, business cards, etc.)
- Cost of product to sell at a trade show
- Expenses for new product development
- Capital or equipment purchases
- Expenses paid to employees or contractors representing a conflict of interest (e.g., family member)
- Invoices paid in cash, with rewards points, or by any organization other than the awardee
- Projects in countries on the Office of Foreign Asset Control Sanction List

Application Review & Scoring

After the application window closes, all completed applications will be sent to the review committee. Awards will be determined through a competitive review process. Applications will be scored on several criteria including:

- **Strength and Detail of Project Plan:** The highest points will go to organizations whose proposal outlines a detailed project plan that aligns with the budget.
- **Potential to Increase International Sales:** The highest points will go to organizations whose proposal provides strong evidence that the project will increase international sales and by how much.
- **Implementation Capacity:** The highest points will go to organizations whose proposal provides complete information on the applicant's capacity to ensure the proposed project's success.
- **Location:** Extra points will be given to applicants from economically distressed counties and those that have historically under-utilized STEP funds including Aroostook, Franklin, Piscataquis, Somerset, Waldo, and Washington County.
- **STEP Funding History:** Extra points will be given to businesses that are new to STEP funding and have not received prior awards.

Reimbursement Requirements & Timeline

MITC will conduct confidential surveys on completion of the supported project activity and at 6 and 12 months following the activity.

When the project activity is complete, you must submit your post-activity survey, paid invoices, copies of meeting schedules, and any other required information to MITC within 30 days in order to process your reimbursement payment. *After 30 days, award funds may not be provided to reimburse costs for the project.*

MITC has to meet strict federal grant guidelines and auditing requirements, so please carefully note the following receipt requirements. Documentation must be *official evidence of payment* which shows the amount paid, to whom, and what the payment was for. Bank statements or credit card statements are not acceptable proof of payment alone without an invoice to support the payment amount shown.

Acceptable proofs of payment include:

- Invoice showing a zero-balance
- Credit card receipt showing all charges
- Wire transfer receipt
- Copy of BOTH sides of a check along with a copy of the invoice that was paid

STEP Financial Assistance Awards are reimbursed on a quarterly schedule established by SBA. You will receive the reimbursement payment within 90 days of the end of the quarter during which you submitted all required documentation.

Questions? For more information or clarification, please contact us via email: STEP@mitc.com

Additional Information

Guidance on U.S. Content for Manufactured Goods and Services

Eligible Small Business Concerns (ESBCs) engaged in STEP activities must be an export-ready U.S. company seeking to export goods or services that are of U.S. origin, which is defined as containing 51% or more U.S. content. Please refer to the formulas below to determine your U.S. content.

U.S. content of manufactured goods = (*Ex-factory price of a good*) minus (*Aggregate value contributed by non-U.S. or foreign sources*)

Helpful Definitions:

Ex-factory price of a good: The retail cost of the good minus shipping and the profit margin

Aggregate value contributed by non-U.S. or foreign sources: Costs or payments to foreign suppliers/providers/employees not resident in the United States

EXAMPLE:

Ex-factory price of good		\$100	
Aggregate value contributed by non-U.S. or foreign sources	Manufacturing costs (payment to foreign contract manufacturer)	-\$25	
	Value of all foreign-supplied parts/inputs/materials	-\$20	
	Foreign administrative costs	-\$2	
	Foreign transportation and logistics costs (up to factory door)	-\$2	
	Licenses, royalties, and fees paid for foreign intellectual property	-\$0	
= U.S. content		\$51	

U.S. content for services = (*Contract value of the service*) minus (*Aggregate value contributed by non-U.S. or foreign sources*)

Helpful Definitions:

Contract value of the service: whether delivered in the U.S. or overseas

Aggregate value contributed by non-U.S. or foreign sources: Costs or payments to foreign suppliers/providers/employees not resident in the United States

EXAMPLE:

Contract value of the service		\$100	
Aggregate value contributed by non-U.S. or foreign sources	Staffing costs of foreign subcontractor	-\$25	
	Value of foreign inputs/materials used to execute contract	-\$15	
	Foreign based legal and administrative costs	-\$9	
= U.S. content		\$51	

Scope of Work Sample



Square Pop Consulting
555 Commercial Street, Suite F
Portland, ME 04101
207-555-1444

Scope of Work Prepared on 12/15/23 for: GreenPlate

Executive Summary

GreenPlate, a health and wellness startup, focuses on nutritious, on-the-go meals catering to busy individuals with specific dietary requirements. This project seeks to create and guide the first stage of a tailored Go-To-Market (GTM) strategy to ensure the effective launch and growth of the new product line, with tangible, measurable results.

Activities

1. Market Definition and Analysis:
 - a. Define and document primary and secondary markets, pinpointing specific segments and potential customers.
 - b. Execute a thorough market analysis, evaluating trends, consumer needs, and competitor offerings, using agreed-upon methodologies.
2. Brand Positioning and Messaging:
 - a. Organize two workshops, each of 3 hours, with internal teams to align the product with market demands and company ethos, culminating in an agreed-upon brand positioning statement.
 - b. Construct and finalize impactful communication strategies, emphasizing the product's unique value propositions.
3. Strategy Formulation and Implementation Guidance:
 - a. Design three actionable, measurable strategies for market penetration and growth, mutually agreed upon.
 - b. Offer guidance during strategy implementation through four bi-weekly 1-hour check-ins, ensuring alignment with overarching business goals and efficient resource distribution.

Deliverables

1. Comprehensive market analysis report in PDF (30-40 pages) containing detailed findings and insights, with set acceptance criteria and up to two revisions.
2. Finalized brand positioning statement and communication tactics in Word/PDF, subject to approval against set standards and up to two revisions.
3. GTM strategy document in PDF (20-25 pages) delineating actions, schedules, and roles, mutually accepted.

Timeline

The 10-week project includes the following milestones:

Project Estimated Dates: 2/5/2024 – 4/12/2024

- Weeks 1-2: Market Definition and Analysis
- Week 3: First Brand Workshop
- Week 4: Second Brand Workshop
- Weeks 5-6: Strategy Creation

Scope of Work Sample (cont.)

- Week 7: Initial Strategy Implementation Check-in
- Weeks 8-9: Continued Strategy Implementation
- Week 10: Final Presentation and Approval Session

Payment Terms

- \$10,000 upon project commencement.
- \$7,500 post approval of the market analysis and brand statement.
- \$7,500 following acceptance of the final GTM strategy document.

Communication & Contacts

- Communication platforms: Zoom (meetings), Google Drive (file sharing).
- Designated points of contact: [Name from GreenPlate] and [Consultant's Name].
- Expected response time: Maximum of two business days.

Approval Process

For each submitted deliverable, the client will:

1. Receive the deliverable and a request for feedback.
2. Have up to five business days to review and provide written comments or request revisions.
3. If feedback or revision requests are not received within this timeframe, the deliverable will be considered as accepted.
4. Each deliverable becomes finalized when it aligns with predefined criteria and gains written endorsement from an authorized GreenPlate representative.

Client Responsibilities

To ensure the timely progression and successful execution of the project, GreenPlate will:

1. Appoint a designated point of contact to coordinate with the consultant, provide timely feedback, and facilitate necessary internal communications.
2. Supply any requisite company data, insights, and documentation in a timely manner.
3. Provide prompt access to key personnel for workshops, interviews, and check-ins.
4. Ensure availability for scheduled meetings and adhere to the defined review and feedback cycles.
5. Confirm project objectives, deliverable acceptance criteria, and other essential specifics at the outset.
6. Report any concerns or changes in project direction immediately to ensure alignment and prevent wasted efforts.

Out-of-Scope for the Consultant

To prevent scope creep and ensure the focused execution of the project, the following activities are out of scope for the consultant:

- Any tasks not explicitly listed in the "Activities" or "Deliverables" sections.
- Execution or implementation of marketing campaigns.
- Direct sales or customer interactions.
- Training or onboarding of staff beyond the scope of the strategy.
- Continuous support or consultations post-project completion outside the defined timeframe.

Termination Terms

Parties can terminate this agreement by supplying written notice 15 days in advance. Should the client terminate before project completion, they must compensate for services rendered until the termination

Scope of Work Sample (cont.)

date and cover additional incurred costs. If the consultant terminates, they will refund payments for unrendered services.

SIGNATURE OF APPROVAL

The above statement of work is approved and agreed to by:

Client Signature

Title

Printed Name

Date

Consultant Signature

Title

Printed Name

Date