

Vermont State Trade Expansion Program (STEP)
Financial Assistance for International Export Activities

Program eligibility and application guidelines

Program Purpose

The **State Trade Expansion Program (STEP)** is funded in part through a grant from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) and is administered by the Vermont Department of Economic Development. Funding assistance is available to eligible Vermont businesses to support entry into foreign markets or expand international export activity through trade shows, trade missions, market research, and export education.

The objective of the grant is to spur job creation, increase the overall number of small business exporters, and increase their export sales with a focus on relationship development and export planning—helping businesses diversify by entering international markets.

Eligible Expenses

Eligible Vermont businesses may apply to receive **reimbursements for up to 75 percent** of pre-approved, allowable, export-related expenses, up to a **maximum of \$15,000 per federal award cycle for up to three (3) of the following activities** (separate applications must be submitted for each activity):

- Registration fees, booth space, and booth build-out at export trade shows (Up to \$5,000 per application);
- Development of export trade show exhibits (Up to \$5,000 per application);
- Design of export market-specific marketing materials or campaigns including design and translation of brochures and targeted advertising in industry-appropriate media, does not include printing (Up to \$5,000 per application);
- Fees for shipping sample product (Up to \$2,000 per award cycle);
- Participation in ExporTech or export trade training (Up to \$6,000 per award cycle);
- Participation in foreign market sales trip (Up to \$5,000 per application);
- Participation in foreign trade mission (Up to \$5,000 per application);
- Cost of compliance testing an existing product for entry into an export market (Up to \$2,000 per award cycle);
- Export market research tool subscription (Up to \$1,000 per award cycle);
- Localization of websites for target export markets including website translation, technical localization and search engine optimization (SEO) for export markets (Up to \$3,000 per award cycle)

Reimbursements require a 25 percent cash match from the business. Reimbursements are distributed as grants from the State of Vermont and will be available upon pre-approval of application [PART A: Reimbursement Grant Application](#) and availability of funds. Allowable expenses for cash match may include travel expenses for **one company representative**:

- Airfare (consistent with [Fly America Act guidelines](#));
- Meals and lodging (based on [GSA per diem rates](#));
- Ground transportation fees;
- Parking;
- Baggage fees;
- Currency exchange fees

Funded in part through a grant from the U.S. Small Business Administration

Eligible Companies

To be eligible for STEP funding, Vermont businesses must meet criteria set forth by the SBA:

1. Must be registered with the Vermont Secretary of State and have a physical operation and employees in VT;
2. Product must be made in the USA – there is a 51% U.S. content requirement;
3. Companies must meet SBA size standards for eligibility, which vary by NAICS code and type of business. **Please verify before completing the application:** www.sba.gov/federal-contracting/contracting-guide/size-standards
4. Companies must be in business for no less than one year;
5. Company must demonstrate understanding of the costs associated with exporting and doing business with foreign producers, including costs of freight forwarding, customs brokers, packing and shipping;
6. Company must have a strategic export plan in effect.

Application and Reimbursement Process

Eligible businesses may apply to receive reimbursements for eligible expenditures by completing a two-part application. Prior to starting the activity, please complete PART A: REIMBURSEMENT GRANT APPLICATION and submit all supporting documents:

- SBA Self-Representation as an Eligible Small Business Concern form;
- Current W-9 signed within the last six (6) months;
- Certificate of Insurance (COI) certifying a minimum of \$1,000,000 in commercial general liability, \$500,000 in automobile liability, workers compensation in compliance with Vermont state laws, and indicating State of Vermont as the certificate holder.

Upon receipt of your application, the STEP manager for the State of Vermont will review your materials for eligibility and contact you at the phone number or email provided with any questions or to notify you of your award amount. Limited funds are available, and applications are accepted on a rolling basis until all funds are allocated.

Upon completion of the trade activity, a second form is required, PART B: Data Collection Instrument, along with scanned copies of paid invoices/receipts and an itemized worksheet indicating costs in U.S. Dollars at the time expenses were incurred.

Evaluation and Reporting

Companies will be contacted by the State of Vermont to document the successes achieved with the help of this grant. Companies receiving grants agree to provide the State with confidential information in follow up to the activity such as: number of leads received, business under negotiation and/or sales achieved and Vermont jobs created or retained as a result of the trade activities for which funding was granted.

The State of Vermont is required by the SBA, as a condition of its funding for this program, to provide feedback on all activity in the form of progress reports collected quarterly from all STEP awardees through the end of the grant cycle period. Recipients of SBA grants acknowledge that their cooperation in this regard is a contingency of such funding. The State of Vermont appreciates your cooperation, and it is essential to our ongoing success in winning and administering SBA grants on behalf of Vermont businesses.

Additional information and links to the application forms can be found at www.accd.vermont.gov/STEP

Please direct questions to: Hilary DelRoss, State Trade Expansion Program Manager
Vermont Department of Economic Development
hilary.delross@vermont.gov, 802-622-4337

We look forward to reviewing your application!