



INDIAN COUNTRY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (ICED) PROGRAM

APPLICATION GUIDELINES FOR:
INDIAN EQUITY FUND (IEF) SMALL BUSINESS GRANTS

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I. ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The Indian Country Economic Development (ICED) program, created by the 59th Montana State Legislature, is a State-funded program administered by the Montana Department of Commerce. Since October 2005, the State Legislature has made a restricted biennial appropriation of One-Time-Only (OTO) grant funds to be made available to Montana's tribal nations and tribal businesses for business development activities. In the 67th legislative session, \$1.75M in funding for the ICED program was approved as part of House Bill 2, state special revenue, and signed into law by Governor Gianforte in May 2021.

The family of programs funded under the ICED program (Tribal Business Development Grant, Tribal Tourism Grant, Indian Equity Fund (IEF) Small Business Grant, and Native American Business Advisors (NABA) allow the Office of Indian Country Economic Development of the Department of Commerce to continue to articulate measurable successes of the program to tribal communities, the administration, and to the elected leadership.

II. PROGRAM CALENDAR

Following is a chart of proposed activities and deadlines for Indian Equity Fund (IEF) funded program:

	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY
INDIAN EQUITY FUND (IEF) GRANT	Fiscal Year begins			Indian Equity Fund grant application periods: September-October		Local Review	State Review	Awards and contracting	Spending and business site visits, etc.			

III. INDIAN EQUITY FUND (IEF) SMALL BUSINESS GRANTS

A. SUMMARY

The Indian Equity Fund Small Business Grant is a grant to assist a start-up or expanding Native American business in Montana. This money can be used for a variety of activities such as the purchase of new equipment or the development of a new product line. A total of \$320,000 is available to fund Native American business applications in Montana.

B. ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

The funds are available to enrolled members of Montana's federally recognized tribes residing in Montana within the exterior boundaries of a Montana Indian Reservation will receive higher consideration over those outside these boundaries. All applicants must provide proof of residency, i.e., registered bill, previous month bill, unless the business is a majority tribal owned entity (51% tribal ownership). Grants will only be allocated to for profit businesses. If funds are allocated, a business bank account is required to receive the funds and must be tracked with a verifiable accounting system, (software or accounting firm). All applications must include documentation of tribal enrollment in the form of a Certified Indian Blood (CIB) Form or tribal ID. An application will be considered incomplete without this information.

C. INELGIBLE APPLICANTS

Any applicant or business in Montana that is debarred, suspended, proposed for debarment, or declared as ineligible to receive State of Montana funds is ineligible to receive these grant funds.

Additionally, any applicant under a garnishment order at the time of application from the Montana Department of Revenue for monies owed to the State of Montana is an ineligible recipient of funds. Examples of garnishment include taxes owed to the State, child support payments that are past due and funds owed to the university system. Meals, lodging, and mileage reimbursements are also ineligible expenses.

Also, non-profit organizations (entities).

D. FUNDING AVAILABILITY

Applications will be accepted on an open cycle basis from the beginning of September to the end of October. Check the website for more specific deadline details: [IEF Small Business Grant](#)

Applicants can request a maximum of \$14,000 and must demonstrate a reasonable justification for the use of funds. (Please round request to the nearest \$100 increment.) Award amounts are at the discretion of the Review Committee. Applicants are encouraged to only apply for what they need so that grant dollars can be distributed across as many businesses as possible.

E. ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES

Funds can be used for a variety of business activities, usually funded by a commercial lender. These activities may include but are not limited to:

- Purchase of land, building, property renovations, signage, lighting, security systems, fencing, displays, organizational systems, and lockable display cases.
- Purchase of assets including interior or exterior furnishings, equipment, and technology.
- Business branding, website (with some limitations), logo design, promotional materials, and some marketing.
- Business inventory, supplies, culinary supplies, tools, and essential materials to produce products or provide services.
- Selected use of working capital for business operations. A very strong case must be made to utilize funds for working capital.

Existing business owners must show how the funding will support growth in their business either through the development of a new product or service with the existing business strategy.

F. INELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES

Please contact the program manager for more information about potential uses of these funds to ensure they meet the eligible activities before making any purchases.

Examples of activities that will not be funded:

- Reimbursement for activities completed prior to receipt of application.
- Reimbursement for activities not related to business start-up or expansion.
- Duplicative reimbursement for activities receiving funding for the same services, equipment, or improvements through any other local, state, or federal grant or funding program, except as necessary to fully fund the project.
- Also, perishable food items, unenclosed flat bed trailers, livestock, and rent.

G. MATCH REQUIREMENT

The requested grant funds require a minimum of dollar-to-dollar cash or in-kind match (\$1:\$1) and be firmly committed and documented in the application. Documentation of match will be required prior to the release of funds. Cash match may include collateral such as cash or loan

proceeds from a tribal loan fund, a micro loan program, or a commercial lender. In-kind match may include inventory, supplies, equipment, tools, or vehicles that are part of the activity of the business.

H. HOW TO APPLY

Individuals can submit applications on their own or are highly encouraged to utilize a Native American Business Advisor (NABA) to assist them with their application. Applications must be completed online through the Submittable™ application platform located at <https://montanadeptofcommerce.submittable.com/submit>. First time applicants will be required to create a Submittable™ profile which requires a valid email account.

Applications considered incomplete or ineligible can be re-opened for editing and negotiated from the Program back to the applicant through Submittable™. Applicants are encouraged to apply early so that they can make any necessary adjustments or changes before the deadline to make their application competitive.

It is essential that business owners understand their business. Native American Business Advisors (NABAs) are available on each reservation and to Little Shell tribal members to provide business counseling and assistance with the various aspects of the application such as marketing and development of cash flows and financial information. NABAs may assist in application preparation and are trained in the Submittable™ online application submission process. A list of NABA organizations is located at [Montana NABAs](#). Additionally, the Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) Network is located throughout the state and can provide business counseling services. A map of SBDC host organizations is located at <https://sfdc.mt.gov/About/Our-Locations>

Receipt of an application does not imply a commitment for funding from the Montana Department of Commerce (MDOC). Applications will be reviewed for eligibility and suitability with state and program requirements. Applications will be reviewed by a Local Review Committee where possible and a State Review Committee.

I. APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS

1. **RECEIPT OF APPLICATION-** Once submitted each application is assessed for completeness and clarity by the Program. Applications that are incomplete or lack clarity can be opened for editing to the applicant if submitted prior to the deadline. As needed, the Program will provide the NABA contact information in the applicant's community as a resource. The Program coordinates the application review and ranking timeline at the local and state levels.
2. **REVIEW** – The Review Committee makes funding recommendations to the Montana Department of Commerce Director who makes the final funding decision.

J. APPLICATION REVIEW CRITERIA

The following criteria will be used to evaluate the proposals for potential funding:

1. **APPLICATION QUALITY-** Is the application complete, clear, and logical, proofread for spelling, and/or mathematical errors?
2. **APPLICATION PROJECT REQUIREMENTS-**It is critical that the reviewers have a clear understanding of how the grant funds will be used. Did the application include a listing of all the assets of the business? This will tell us about your current capacity. Did the application show in detail the use of the grant funds? This will tell the reviewers how these assets will help your business start or expand. When necessary was documentation of use of funds shown such as price quotes, equipment, or inventory to be purchased, photos of facilities to be upgraded or other documentation that will provide support for a quality application? Did the cash flow projections reflect the use of funds? This will show how your use of project funds will impact your sales, expenses and if you will have positive cash flow at the end of a year. Does the application have a written project narrative that reflects the use of the grant funds? The written narrative and the cash flow projections (narrative in dollars) should describe the same project development.
3. **APPLICANT BUSINESS EXPERIENCE-** Does the applicant have experience in the business that is proposed in the application? If the applicant doesn't have experience, has the applicant demonstrated in the application that they have the capacity to endure a business start-up and make sustainable business decisions?
4. **FINANCIAL PROJECTIONS-** Are the cash flow projections convincing and understandable? For established businesses, have the most current financials been provided and explained?
5. **OPERATIONS-** Are the operational aspects (partners, suppliers, production costs, key resources, and pricing structure) of the business identified in the application?
6. **MARKETING PLAN-** What are the products and services that the value proposition is built around? Who is the target market and customer segment? How do the target market and the value proposition match?
7. **MATCH QUALITY-** Is the match business or machinery, equipment, furniture, or fixtures? Is the match land/buildings, inventory, accounts receivable, or other assets dedicated to the business? What is the market value, unpaid balance, and depreciated cost of these items? If using a vehicle as match, equity must be documented. For example, if a business vehicle has a Kelly Blue Book value of \$18,000 and the applicant has an unpaid balance of \$12,000, then the in-kind match of the vehicle is \$6,000.
8. **FINANCIAL NEED-** The fund is designed to assist new business start-up and or the growing small business that demonstrates a financial need in their application.
9. **PREVIOUS RECIPIENTS-** An applicant that has previously received an Indian Equity Fund Small Business Grant will rank less competitively than other applicants who have not received a previous award. In addition, an applicant who was a

previous recipient must provide a status update of the business and meet one of the below criteria in their application:

- New technology.
- A new product or line of products; or
- A new service or services.

K. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. **TOURISM-RELATED APPLICATIONS-** Applications from grantees who are considering a tourism business or growing their tourism business are welcome and encouraged. Applicants are encouraged to:
 - a) **Review helpful information on [National Guidelines: Indigenous Cultural Experiences](#)** (produced by the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada). These guidelines can be accessed in the hyperlinked name above or at <https://indigenoustourism.ca/corporate/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ITAC-Indigenous-Cultural-Experiences-Guide-web.pdf>.
 - b) Submit a business listing for inclusion on the **visitmt.com** website: <https://www.visitmt.com/places-to-go/indian-country.html>. Contact the Tribal Tourism Officer at DOCTribal@MT.GOV or at (406) 841-2734 for assistance.
 - c) **[Review Linking Communities, Tourism & Conservation: A Tourism Assessment Process](#)** (George Washington University)
 - d) **Access additional tourism tools and business development resources** for cultural heritage tourism, assessment and development, destination management, community-based tourism, customer relations for the hospitality industry, and best practices in event management can be accessed by contacting the Tribal Tourism Officer at DOCTribal@MT.GOV or at (406) 841-2734.
2. **NATIVE AMERICAN MADE IN MONTANA-** Applicants who are ‘producers’ (creating or adding value to a product that is made, grown, or enhanced in the state of Montana with the end product being worth 50% or more in added value) are eligible to register with the [Made in Montana Program](#). Those producers that are enrolled members of tribes in Montana are eligible to register products as Native American Made in Montana. There is no cost to this registration and can be done online at <https://app.mt.gov/madeinmontana/BusinessType/Create?ReturnUrl=%2fmadeinmontana%2fbusinesstype%2fcreate>. Additional information can be obtained by contacting the program at (406) 841-2757 or by email at madeinmontana@mt.gov.

L. GRANT NOTIFICATION AND CONTRACT

Applications will be reviewed during the months of November and December.

Recommendations are forwarded to the Director for final funding approval. This process can take anywhere from 30 to 60 days. The Program is aiming to notify applicants of funding decisions by the end of December. Once applicants have been notified of funding

decisions, those applications awarded funding will begin the contracting process initiated by the Department.

M. DISBURSEMENT OF FUNDS

Grant funds are paid on a reimbursement basis. No funds are paid directly, up-front to Indian Equity Fund grantees. Grant funds are intended to be expended within one year of the award. Grant funds can be dispersed for the grantees use once all listed items are received:

1. Grant funds are reimbursed to the grantee with the submission of:
 - a) a W-9,
 - b) banking information, and
 - c) receipts for reimbursement,

In the rare case of an award for working capital, the program will determine with the applicant how to proceed with establishing access to this working capital.

N. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

FINAL REPORT AND SURVEY - The Grantee will be requested to complete a Final Report at the end of the contract prior to the closing of the contract. In addition, the Grantee may be surveyed after the contract period to obtain follow-up information regarding the impact of the grant on their business.

O. PROGRAM CONTACT

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