

Downtown Improvements Matching Funds Grant Program

Strategic Plan & Pilot Program Overview | FY 2027



Introduction

The City of Bowling Green is committed to strengthening the vibrancy, identity, and competitiveness of Downtown. The Downtown Improvements Matching Funds Grant Program provides financial support to businesses, developers, tenants, and property owners who wish to invest in projects that enhance infrastructure, aesthetics, amenities, and the overall sense of place in Downtown. By offering matching funds to supplement costs, the program shall stimulate private investment, attract talent and residents, and position Downtown Bowling Green as the cultural and economic heart of the City.

Goals:

- Increase vibrancy and visual appeal of Downtown.
- Support and encourage private investment in Downtown properties.
- Attract and retain businesses, residents, and talent to the area.
- Strengthen Downtown's role as a hub of economic, cultural, and community activity.
- Foster projects that create visible, long-term impact and encourage additional investment.

Program Structure: These guidelines are subject to change.

Funding:

- Allocation: \$40,000 per fiscal year.
- Match: 50/50 reimbursement model.
- Award Range: \$2,500 minimum – \$7,500 maximum (based on available funds).

Eligible Projects/Criteria:

- Façade and signage improvements.
- Restoring/Preserving/Repairing/Rebuilding elements of a Downtown historic property or structure
- Property or storefront enhancements visible to the public (planters, accessibility features, bike racks, benches/seating, café space, deck/patio, sidewalk space, etc.)
- Marketing and placemaking initiatives (murals).
- Infrastructure improvements that improve safety or accessibility.

Ineligible Projects/Criteria:

- Wages, salaries, fringe benefits, etc. of Downtown businesses

- Subscription fees
- Regular maintenance or recurring maintenance projects
- Activities or projects promoting political stances/statements
- Private residences

Who Can Apply:

- Business owners, developers, and property owners within Downtown Bowling Green. Downtown location based on address in the area from Chestnut Street to Louisville Road intersection, and from E 13th Ave to Riverfront Park, along with participation in community/neighborhood activities.
- Applicants must demonstrate proof of matching funds (cash investment, not in-kind).
- Each applicant (business owner, property owner, or ownership group) is limited to one application submission per funding cycle. Applications submitted under multiple LLCs or related entities controlled by the same ownership group will be considered duplicate and disqualified.
- Successful applicants are eligible for once-a-year funding. Applicants who receive funding for one project may not receive funding for another project within the same fiscal year.

Application Process:

Timeline:

- Pilot Program Launch: August 15, 2026.

Application Windows:

- o Summer: Opens August 15, 2026, closes September 15, 2026. (1 month)
- o Spring: Opens February 15, 2027, closes March 15, 2027. (1 month)

Application Process, Evaluation, & Awarding:

Applications will be made available in 3 ways for easy access and submission options via a landing page on the Downtown section of the City website:

1 - an online fillable form

2 - a fillable PDF that can be saved and submitted via email.

3 - the same downloadable PDF that can be printed and dropped off in person at Neighborhood & Community Services building at 707 E Main Ave, Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm.

Applications will include the following requirements:

- 1 - Project Name
- 2 - Contact Name, Email, and Phone Number
- 3 - Physical Address of Project (to verify in Downtown)
- 4 - Social Media/Website for Project Business if available

5 - \$\$ Amount of funding requested

6 - Description of the project (i.e. How will this project align with the goals of this program, in enhancing infrastructure, aesthetics, amenities, and the overall sense of place in Downtown, positioning Downtown Bowling Green as the cultural and economic heart of the City?)

7 - Demonstrating the need for funding support (i.e. Explain why matching grant funds are needed to complete the project and why the project is important to Downtown.)

8 - Budget and scope of work, including an expected timeline and any visual aids/renderings that can be uploaded (i.e. Provide as realistic of an itemized budget break down of the costs associated with this project - include lines similar to Advertising, Supplies, and Labor.)

9- Provide an expected impact on the Downtown area location where the work will be completed - businesses, neighbors, etc. This includes the required permits from Building/Electric, potential road or public parking temporary closures, etc.

Applications will be reviewed within 1 month of window close date, and awards announced at upcoming Board of Commission meeting.

Applications will be reviewed based on 3 key points:

- Impact – project’s contribution to Downtown vibrancy, safety, or appeal.
- Visibility – project’s location and ability to enhance Downtown’s image.
- Feasibility – applicant’s readiness/preparedness, financial commitment, and ability to complete within 12 months.

Evaluation Committee:

Applications will be reviewed by a 5-member committee, organized by NCS staff, within 2 weeks after application close date:

- (1) City of BG Downtown Development division head.
- (1) City of BG Grant Coordinator.
- (3) Additional City of BG staff members from other departments/divisions, based on availability.

Project Completion: Recipients have up to 12 months from award date to complete projects. Funds not spent may be returned to fund other matching funds grant projects.

Recognition & Accountability:

- Recipients recognized via press release, Downtown/City social media announcements, and City website News/Announcement section, spotlight features may be coordinated for high-visibility projects.
- Projects monitored through site visits and documentation of expenses; submitted to quarterly check-ins from grant administrative staff.

Marketing & Outreach:

To ensure broad awareness and strong participation, the program will be promoted through:

- Direct communication: sent via Downtown stakeholder direct email list, Downtown BG Planning GroupMe chat, and shared with the Community Engagement Division to share it via any of their email subscriber lists
- Digital outreach: Downtown and City social media accounts (and any other related City accounts that wish to share depending on the project), Downtown landing page on City site, press announcements on City site, blog post on Downtown standalone website
- Media coverage: Distributed press release to local news outlets and scheduled appearances on tv and radio if needed.