

City of Rockford
Business Advancement Program

The City of Rockford's Business Advancement Program offers 5-year forgivable loans to for-profit businesses with a commercial or industrial-zoned brick and mortar location for the advancement of business operations.

Program Description

The City of Rockford's Business Advancement Program (Program) offers up to \$25,000 in gap funding to business growth projects. The Program is to encourage business development and advancement with the creation of at least one new full-time equivalent job. Census tracts identified on the Program Map have met qualifications and businesses located within those areas are eligible to apply (see page 6).

The application opens on December 1, 2025 at 8:00 AM and closes January 31, 2026 at 11:59 PM.

A live webinar explaining the program and allowing questions from attendees will be held on Wednesday, November 26, 2025 at 10:00 AM. A link to access the live webinar (and recording thereafter) is available on the City of Rockford Business Advancement Program website (www.rockfordil.gov/businessadvancementprogram). Recipients will be required to submit performance data to the City of Rockford. Performance reporting requirements will be included in an agreement with the City of Rockford and may include but will not be necessarily limited to:

- Project Completion within identified timeframe
- FTE (Full-Time Equivalent) hired within one year of Project Completion

Funding Information

Program funding is provided by the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to support development activities to build stronger and more viable urban communities by expanding economic opportunities. A total of \$125,000 is allocated to this Program. Applicants can apply for up to \$25,000. The City expects to award around five forgivable loans (all allocated funds may not be used).

Eligibility Information

Eligible Applicants Include:

- For-profit businesses legally established and operating within the City of Rockford's municipal boundaries.
- Business is located in a property zoned Commercial or Industrial
- Business was established by November 1, 2025 documented through registration by the State or County
- Business is registered with the Official U.S. Government System for Award Management (SAM.gov), and will have an Active status at the time of assistance.

Ineligible Applicants Include:

- Home-based businesses.
- Business established after November 1, 2025.
- Businesses without a current active lease or ownership of property

Eligible Projects Include:

- Purchase of equipment (so long that installation or use of that equipment does not require construction)
- Operating expenses associated with business expansion (inventory, employee salaries, rent, operating expenses and advertising/marketing expenses).

Eligible projects should be located within an eligible program area. Job creation must be included within the project and will be verified during the performance period through submission of W-2 tax forms.

When applying, all information associated with the project must be provided. For example, if you are applying for assistance with a piece of equipment, please also include in the project description all other components of the project associated with the equipment purchase.

Ineligible Projects Include:

- Projects that require any type of construction/remodeling/reconfiguration of current space
- Purchase of property or a new lease agreement.
- Assistance for professional sports teams.
- Assistance for privately-owned recreational facilities that serve predominately higher income clientele, where the recreational benefit to users or members clearly outweigh employment or other benefits to low-to-moderate income individuals (eg: country clubs, exclusive membership organizations, or firms that require specific certification to enter)

Matching Funds

Matching funds are required for this Program. Applicants are required to provide a 1:1 match of funds. The total project cost can be higher than \$50,000, but the City's portion will be a maximum of \$25,000. This program awards additional points for higher private investment.

Source of the matching funds will need to be documented at the time of application.

Projects & Locations

The project and available funds are limited to the project site (address provided). A business that has multiple locations may apply only apply for one location. A business owner who has multiple businesses can apply for each business with each application being evaluated and scored independently. Submission of an application does not guarantee funding.

Application & Submission Information

Application Assistance

- Applicants who need technical assistance with the application can contact Francisca French (contact information below). Requests for technical assistance must be made by December 19, 2025.

Francisca French
Economic Development Diversity and Procurement Coordinator City of Rockford
425 E State St Rockford, IL 61104
Francisca.French@RockfordIL.gov
779.348.7419 (o)
779.207.2178 (c)

Application Submission

- All applications must be submitted through the online platform Neighborly. Applications are accepted December 1, 2025 at 8:00 AM through January 31, 2026 at 11:59 PM CST.
- All documents requested must be included with the application and uploaded onto the Neighborly platform. Only applications that include all of the requested information will be reviewed.
- Applications include:
 - Applicant Contact Information Business Information and history
 - Property Information
 - Verification current in property taxes
 - Verification current on lease or mortgage (if applicable)
 - Lease (if applicable)
 - Documentation of property owner's consent (if tenant)
 - Project Summary

- Project Budget *Only Project Budget information using of the Project Budget Template sheet included in this application will be accepted)
- Financial Documents (Proving availability of matching funds either by most current bank statement or letter from lends indicating approval)
- Insurance
- Documents showing exact costs of each expenditure (eg: listings of equipment, job listing showing pay rate for similar position)
- Sam.Gov Active Registration confirmation (www.sam.gov)
 - The registration process can take several weeks. It is suggested to start immediately. If your registration is not “Active” at time of application, submit documentation of the current status. Sam.gov registration must be “Active” at time of assistance.
- Verification business owner and business is compliant with all local, state, and federal taxes.
- Verification business owner and business (and associated businesses) do not have outstanding liens and judgments.
- Verification project location does not have any outstanding fines and/or code violations.
- Verification business owner, business applying, and all associated businesses are currently compliant and have been compliant with any City funding programs.
- Verification that neither the business nor the business owner is currently under any agreement with the City of Rockford that contains the use of CDBG funds.

Application Review Information

The City of Rockford will review completed submissions that contain all requested information. The City may deny incomplete applications or applications that do not contain the applicable supporting documentation.

Incomplete applications are applications that do not contain all applicable supporting documentation requested through the City’s online application portal.

Additionally, City staff may contact the Applicant to answer questions or request additional information to document eligibility. Supporting documentation is used to demonstrate that the for-profit business has the capacity to expend funds in a way that aligns with the Program and federal CDBG requirements. An application is considered complete once it has been submitted through the Neighborly platform.

Applications will be reviewed on a competitive basis using the criteria and scoring chart below. The City may deviate in order to provide balance in funding throughout the City.

CRITERIA - 135 Total Potential Points

1. Organizational Capacity	Applicant describes their experience in successfully implementing projects of similar scope and comparable complexity.	5
	Applicant demonstrates that their ability to manage proposed project.	5
	Business' finances are stable and organization is financially secure.	5
	Business owner lives in Rockford	5
	Business has not received previous funding through City of Rockford.	5
	TOTAL POINTS FOR SECTION	30

2. Project Characteristics	Project Summary is detailed and explains the activities and services associated with it.	10
	Project Summary includes an explanation of goals/outcomes that will be associated with the Project and how they will be met.	10
	New Jobs created through project – two points per job created. (Program requires the creation of at least one new job)	10
	Project timeline is reasonable and achievable.	5
	TOTAL POINTS FOR SECTION	30

3. Budget	Provided Budget is clear, detailed, and comprehensive for the entire project.	10
	Budget is reasonable and has supporting documents such as estimates, equipment details with price, etc.	10
	Budget identifies all sources of funding for the total project costs.	10
	Amount of requested funds is _____% of project:	
	25% or more - 5 point	15
	10%-25% - 10 points	
	TOTAL POINTS FOR SECTION	45

4. Project Eligibility & Program Alignment	The Scope of Project and Budget, in its entirety, demonstrates compliance with CDBG eligibility requirements.	5
	Project demonstrates a true growth of business operations.	15
	Applicant explains how the growth will continue after the usage of funds.	15
	TOTAL POINTS FOR SECTION	35

AWARDEE NOTIFICATION

Application status will be provided by email and letter to the Applicant following the review of their application. An Applicant who was denied can submit a written appeal within 14-calendar days from the date of the denial letter.

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

If receiving funding, the Applicant will enter into a Development Agreement with the City of Rockford. During this process additional questions and information may be requested. The City may adjust the potential award amount based on the information. The Agreement will provide award information, program requirements, and reporting requirements. Funding is provided as a five-year forgivable loan (a percentage of the loan is forgiven on an annual basis).

No expenditures prior to the of the Development Agreement are allowed.

FUNDS DISBURSEMENT

Funds will be disbursed once the entire project is completed. Paid invoices (invoice & confirmation that it has been paid) will be submitted to the City of Rockford are required before funding will be released to Recipient.

FIVE YEAR FORGIVABLE LOAN

Funding is provided as a Five-Year Forgivable Loan. Annually a portion of the loan is forgiven. During this period, when requested, the business provides an updated employment profile and information to document alignment with national objective compliance, public benefit standard compliance, and other documentation as required by the development agreement as necessary.

PROGRAM MAP

The census tracts marked in red below have met requirements and businesses located within the areas are eligible to apply.

