



Small Business Improvement Fund

City of Chicago Department of Planning and Development (DPD) Small Business Improvement Fund (SBIF) Program Rules – Effective January 2021

The City of Chicago's Small Business Improvement Fund is a TIF program which will reimburse building owners or tenants, as applicable, for eligible investments which preserve building stock, improve neighborhood appearance or economic value, and enable businesses to stay in the neighborhood, remain competitive, or even expand within the TIF District.

SomerCor 504, Inc. ("SomerCor"), a not-for-profit Certified Development Company, administers the SBIF Program in conjunction with the Chicago Department of Planning and Development ("DPD").

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Funding:

- Grants only, in the form of reimbursement, to the approved person or legal entity who incurred the costs of the eligible improvements.
- Each Property shall be eligible to receive the Maximum Program Assistance no more than every three years. "Property" shall mean: (1) a building regardless of whether it has multiple addresses or permanent index numbers ("PINS"); and/or (2) contiguous parcels under Common Ownership, regardless of whether they have multiple addresses or PINS. A building or multiple parcels under Common Ownership shall mean having an ownership interest by the same person or legal entity of 7.5% or more.
- Applicants whose eligibility is established by being Industrial businesses currently employing a maximum of two hundred (200) full-time equivalent employees under the Eligible Applicant requirements are entitled to funding up to 50% of eligible costs.
- Applicants whose eligibility is established by the Net Worth Requirements under the Eligible Applicant requirements are entitled to funding in the following manner:
 - up to ninety percent (90%) of eligible costs if the Applicant demonstrates a net worth less than \$3,000,000.
 - up to sixty percent (60%) of eligible costs if the Applicant demonstrates a net worth equal to or greater than \$3,000,000, but less than \$6,000,000.
 - up to thirty percent (30%) of eligible costs if the Applicant demonstrates a net worth equal to or greater than \$6,000,000, but less than \$9,000,000.
- Applicants whose eligibility is established by the Annual Sales Requirement under the Eligible Applicant requirements are entitled to funding in the following manner:
 - up to ninety percent (90%) of eligible costs if the Applicant demonstrates annual sales totaling less than \$3,000,000.
 - up to sixty percent (60%) of eligible costs if the Applicant demonstrates annual sales totaling equal to or greater than \$3,000,000, but less than \$6,000,000.
 - up to thirty (30%) of eligible costs if the Applicant demonstrates annual sales totaling equal to or greater than \$6,000,000, but less than \$9,000,000.
- The Maximum Program Assistance shall be (i) less than Two Hundred and Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$250,000) maximum assistance per industrial Property; (ii) less than Two Hundred and Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$250,000) maximum assistance per industrial Property occupied by multiple owners or tenants, provided that no individual Applicant shall receive assistance greater than One Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$100,000); (iii) less than One Hundred Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$150,000) maximum assistance per commercial Property occupied by a single owner or tenant; or (iv) less than Two Hundred and Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$250,000) maximum assistance per commercial Property occupied by multiple owners or tenants, provided that no individual Applicant

shall receive assistance greater than Seventy-Five Thousand Dollars (\$75,000). Applicants may receive one or more grants up to the Maximum Program Assistance. Once an Applicant has received the Maximum Program Assistance, the Applicant shall not be eligible to reapply for another Program grant for the same Property until three years from the date on which it receives final payment for the preceding Program grant(s), provided it has met DPD's guidelines and procedures regarding re-application. Applicants who have received a Program grant for one Property shall not be excluded from applying for Program grants for another Property.

- Applicants selected by lottery; a waiting-list will be created, if needed. Any waiting-list shall expire two (2) years after the date of its creation. Any applicants placed on the waiting-list shall remain on the list until the waiting-list expires, they receive a grant, withdraw from the waiting-list, or are otherwise determined to no longer be eligible under the Program to receive a grant. Applicants for a Property located in an "INVEST South/West Corridor" shall be given priority for funding and the lottery, unless the City's INVEST South/West program has been terminated. Applicants for a Property located in a "Target Corridor" shall be second in priority for funding and the lottery. The remaining Applicants shall be provided funding, if available, and placed on the waitlist, if applicable, after Applicants in the INVEST South/West Corridors and the Target Corridors.
- The maximum grant any Property would be eligible to receive under the Program shall be reduced dollar for dollar by (i) any Direct City Financial Assistance from any other program for the Property within (3) years before the date of the application, (ii) any Direct City Financial Assistance currently being received for such Property, or (iii) any Direct City Financial Assistance that the City has agreed to provide to such Property at any time in the future pursuant to a written contract (except for "gap" financing for the Project that is disclosed at the time the Application is first filed). "Direct City Financial Assistance" shall mean financial assistance directly provided by the City, but shall not include any funds received pursuant to a contract for goods and services, a Delegate Agency Grant Agreement, or the "TIF Works" Program.
- All applicants for commercial properties who are approved for a grant of \$25,000 or greater shall be required to make at least one exterior improvement using at least ten percent (10%) of the maximum amount of their approved grant, including but not limited to, façade repair, windows and doors, and other exterior improvements eligible under the Program subject to DPD approval; provided that, at DPD's sole discretion such requirement may be waived if the applicant can demonstrate to DPD's satisfaction that no exterior improvements are needed because improvements have been recently

completed or the exterior features of the building have been well-maintained and are consistent with DPD's Design Guidelines.

- Funding for vacant properties will require one hundred percent (100%) lease-up of ground floor, the portion of the property subject to the SBIF grant with a qualified tenant, and a minimum sixty percent (60%) by square footage lease-up of the portion of the property subject to the SBIF grant, prior to funding.

Eligible Applicants:

- Property owners that have an ownership interest in a commercial business, located on the property to be improved, with a maximum average annual sales of Nine Million Dollars (\$9,000,000) for the past three (3) years, or a business plan for a new business showing the same level of projected maximum average annual sales for three (3) years (the "Annual Sales Requirement"). Property owners that would otherwise be evaluated for eligibility under the Annual Sales Requirement, but lease any part of the property to one or more entities in which they do not have an ownership interest are to be evaluated for eligibility under the Net Worth Requirement (defined herein).
- Industrial businesses currently employing a maximum of two hundred (200) full-time equivalent employees. Property owners of industrial businesses currently employing a maximum of two hundred (200) full-time employees. Property owners that would otherwise be evaluated for eligibility under this paragraph, but lease more than 50% of the property to one or more entities in which they do not have an ownership interest are to be evaluated for eligibility under the Net Worth Requirement (defined herein).
- Property owners who conform to maximum net worth and liquidity requirements (total net worth no more than Nine Million Dollars (\$9,000,000), and total liquidity of no more than Five Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$500,000) per individual owner, and who lease space to eligible commercial or industrial tenants.
- Tenants that meet the Annual Sales Requirement, have a leasehold interest in the property they would like to improve pursuant to a lease agreement with the property owner and have express prior property owner approval to make specific improvements. The property owner's eligibility will not be a requirement for the Tenant's eligibility.
- Qualified building owners who seek to attract eligible new commercial or industrial tenants to vacant space.

- Businesses which are Not eligible include, but may not be limited to: not-for-profit social clubs or for not-for-profit organizations that have a national affiliation, chain and franchise businesses (as defined by DPD); branch banks; day labor employment agencies; currency exchanges; pay day or title secured loan stores; pawn shops; fortune telling services; liquor stores, bars, night clubs; adult uses; hotels or motels; private clubs; track wagering facilities; K-12 schools; gas stations; firearms dealers; places of worship; smoke shops/cigar lounges; tobacco dealers, including sales of tobacco, nicotine, or similar products and accessories; residential storage warehouses; trailer-storage yards; and junk yards, or any uses similar to those listed.
- Religious organizations that operate an industrial or commercial business may be eligible for a Program grant provided that an authorized officer signs an affidavit stating that (a) the room or space that the SBIF funds will be used to acquire, improve or rehabilitate is not its primary place of worship; (b) SBIF funds will be used only for those portions of the acquisition, improvement or rehabilitation of the premises that are attributable to business activities described in its application; and (c) If in the future it uses the premise for inherently religious activities it will reimburse the City for the present value of the improvements, in an amount not to exceed the grant of SBIF funds.
- DPD, in its sole discretion, may deny new applications on the basis of past experience with the Applicant or Property involving misrepresentation, non-compliance with the requirements of the Program, or similar issues. Additionally, in the event of a major change to a project, such as a change in construction plans, unforeseen damage to the building, or, for start-up businesses, a change in the business plan, DPD may remove the project from the Program in its sole discretion.

Eligible Costs:

Any TIF-eligible improvement which permits a building owner to attract new commercial or industrial tenants, allows an eligible business owner to maintain or expand operations, or contributes to the improved appearance and viability of a property may be funded by the Program. This includes, at DPD's discretion, funding for the rehabilitation, remodeling or renovation of improvements including, but not limited to, the following:

- roof and facade;
- components of signs or awnings which are permanently affixed to the building;
- alterations or structures needed for ADA compliance (e.g., railings or ramps);
- HVAC and other mechanical systems;
- plumbing and electrical work;

- certain project-related architectural and construction management fees related to the project;
- certain environmental remediation measures;
- permanent interior renovations, including fixtures;
- the purchase of adjacent land parcels for purposes of expansion or parking; and
- solar panels.

The cost of an energy audit that recommends measures to improve the energy efficiency of a building may be included as a rehabilitation cost to the extent that:

- the building renovations undertaken pursuant to such recommendation promote energy efficiency and resource conservation (e.g., the installation of lowflow plumbing fixtures or energy-efficient HVAC systems, the use of building materials made with a high degree of recycled content or renewable or non-toxic substances, installation of energy efficient lighting systems); and
- the cost of the energy audit does not exceed 10% of the project budget.

The following items are not eligible for reimbursement, and therefore will not be counted toward total project cost (this is not an exhaustive list):

- new construction;
- minor repairs or improvements such as painting or cleaning;
- equipment-related expenses;
- planters surrounding or affixed to buildings;
- fencing;
- parking lot construction or repair;
- landscaping;
- work on the interior of residential units; and
- work, in DPD's sole determination, that is not consistent with the goals of this Program or the redevelopment priorities of the relevant TIF area, including, projects that do not conform with the uses and goals defined in the governing Redevelopment Plan for the relevant TIF area.

Energy Efficiency Requirement:

All industrial applicants shall be required to purchase products that earn the ENERGY STAR and meet the ENERGY STAR specifications for energy efficiency. The applicant is encouraged to visit energystar.gov for complete product specifications and updated lists of qualifying products.

Design Requirements:

In order to receive funding, projects must conform to design requirements including meeting [DPD's Design Guidelines](#), when applicable. Projects shall also comply with design guidelines and additional neighborhood requirements as described in guidelines, style guides, community plans and other planning documents associated with the TIF area and neighborhood in which the Property is located. Applicants are strongly advised to consult with SomerCor and design professionals on design requirements and guidelines before drawing up plans for work. Work which is potentially damaging to the building, such as use of incorrect tuckpointing materials, will not be reimbursed. Plans must be submitted to SomerCor for design approval prior to beginning construction, or the project will be automatically disqualified. At its sole discretion, DPD reserves the right to require design changes and to deny costs and projects inconsistent with DPD's Design Guidelines.

Compliance:

- Checks will be performed on all applicants prior to funding to ensure that they are not indebted to the City and that they are in compliance with child support laws.
- Each applicant will sign an Economic Disclosure Affidavit.
- Grantees will be required to sign an affidavit certifying that they will not relocate out of the TIF district or sell the business within a three (3) year period following disbursement of funds under the Program. This will be monitored.
- In cases of SBIF reimbursement for land purchase, proof of land ownership will be required before reimbursement may be made.

Project Phase Requirements & Time Limits:

Each stage of the program has a time limit by which Applicants must complete the requirement. Unless DPD has granted an extension of time, Applicants who do not complete each stage within that limit will be disqualified:

- Stage 1 - Applicant supplies any missing information to complete their application: twenty (20) days.

- Stage 2 - Plans, bids, and specs, are obtained, debts are cured: one hundred twenty (120) days.
- Stage 3 – Proof of Financing (concurrent with 10-month construction phase) Applicant provides evidence to the satisfaction of DPD within one hundred and twenty (120) days following the date of the commitment letter that it has sufficient funds to complete the approved project. Such evidence may include, but is not limited to, commitment from a financial institution for a loan or line of credit or financial statements that demonstrate that the applicant currently has sufficient equity to complete the project.
- Stage 3 - Construction is completed or land is purchased: ten (10) months.

A maximum of two (2) extensions may be granted with DPD approval in the case of unavoidable delay due to extraordinary circumstances. DPD (not SomerCor) also may on a case-by-case basis grant a Grant-Eligible Application an additional amount of time to complete any Program requirement. In such case, DPD shall have discretion to determine the appropriate length of the extension.

Once construction is complete, all conditions of the conditional commitment letter are satisfied, all construction project costs are paid, all payment documentation for these costs is submitted to SomerCor, City of Chicago debt is cleared, and a closing site visit is complete, it generally takes four-to-six weeks to receive the grant reimbursement.

Technical Assistance:

Grantees will have access to technical assistance to aid them in selecting contractors, obtaining bids, and drawing up proper work contracts.

Project Financing Escrow Option:

Grantees may choose to receive their grant funds through an escrow account, if offered by the City. Any fees associated with the use of an escrow account will be taken out of the grant award. DPD, in its sole discretion, may authorize up to three draws of funding from the escrow account to reimburse an Applicant as work is completed on a project.

Minority/Women-Owned Businesses (M/WBE):

A directory of City of Chicago certified M/WBE contractors will be provided to all eligible

applicants to encourage the hiring of such contractors under the program. [Online access to this directory can be found here.](#)

SBIF Program FAQ's:

Am I in a SBIF district?

Here are resources available to determine if you are in a SBIF district:

- You can consult the [Chicago Department of Planning and Development zoning map](#). If you are unfamiliar with this tool and how to use it, please see our [instructions page](#) for assistance.
- [Individual maps of TIF districts](#) are made available by the Chicago Department of Planning and Development.
- If you own the property, your Cook County property tax bill will indicate if you are in a TIF district.
- You can submit an inquiry to the SomerCor team at sbif@somercor.com

Who can apply for a SBIF grant?

Business and property owners can apply if they are in [SBIF districts](#) in the City of Chicago that are currently accepting new applications for the program. Business owners can own or lease their places of business. Landlords of commercial or industrial properties can also apply. To be eligible:

- **Commercial Business:** Annual sales must total less than \$9,000,000.
- **Industrial Business:** Must have two hundred (200) or fewer full-time equivalent employees.
- **Landlord:** Property owners must have a combined net worth that does not exceed \$9,000,000 and total liquid assets that do not exceed \$500,000. (Examples of liquid assets are: cash on hand, and non-retirement stocks and bonds.) This requirement shall also apply to Industrial Businesses that lease any portion of the property to one or more entities which do not share common ownership with the applicant business.
- **Tenant:** Annual sales of less than \$9,000,000, with express prior property owner approval.

Can I be a start-up or new business?

Yes, start-ups can apply. Start-up applicants will need to supply a detailed business plan and projections of the business's income and expenses for its first 36 months of operation as part of their application materials. Please note that the City of Chicago reserves the right to impose additional conditions for funding in connection with start-up business applications.

If you have only been in business for 1-2 years, SomerCor requires tax returns and a projection of gross sales to equal three years of data.

Am I eligible if I live outside of Chicago?

The important consideration is where you have your business/property. To participate in SBIF, your property has to be in the City of Chicago, as the funding source comes from City of Chicago property taxes. If you live in another area, please call your city's planning, economic development, or community development department to see what other programs may be available to assist small business.

What if my building has both business and residential spaces?

This program is primarily for business use. Business space projects may be eligible. Residential space interior and residential projects are ineligible. Mixed use exceptions: Chicago has many mixed use buildings, with both commercial and residential space. For these buildings, many envelope projects such as roofing, facade improvements, and tuck pointing can be eligible. No second-floor interior work to a mixed-use building shall be considered eligible if the property is classified as a "Class 2-12" type property ("Mixed use commercial/residential building with apartment and commercial area totaling six units or less with a square foot area less than 20,000 square feet") by the Cook County Assessor for property tax purposes.

What is the maximum grant amount allowed under (SBIF)?

- \$250,000 maximum assistance per industrial property
- \$150,000 maximum assistance per single owner/tenant commercial property or landlord
- \$250,000 maximum may be granted per multiple owner/tenant commercial property, with \$75,000 maximum assistance per tenant/landlord

Applicants may receive one or more grants up to their maximum program assistance. Once this maximum is reached, the applicants will need to wait three years to reapply.

How is the SBIF grant reimbursement percentage determined?

Your reimbursement percentage will be determined according to your *appropriate* application type (Landlord, Tenant, Owner-occupied, Industrial). Applicants cannot opt to apply under an application type that does not correspond to the actual nature of the applicant's control of the project property or the organization or operation of the business. Factors that determine reimbursement percentage and related financial eligibility criteria are **business gross sales/not-for-profit gross receipts, landlord net worth, landlord liquidity, and number of full-time equivalent employees**, depending upon application type.

- **Commercial Business (Tenant Applicant)** – based on gross sales/gross receipts for non-profit
 - \$0-\$3M = eligible for 90% reimbursement
 - \$3-\$6M = eligible for 60% reimbursement
 - \$6-\$9M = eligible for 30% reimbursement
- **Commercial Business (Landlord Applicant/no interest in the business leasing the space)** – is based on net worth with a liquid assets cap of \$500,000 per individual
 - \$0-\$3M = eligible for 90% reimbursement

- \$3-\$6M = eligible for 60% reimbursement
- \$6-\$9M = eligible for 30% reimbursement
- **Commercial Business (Owner-Occupied Property) –**
 - The above-mentioned schedules for both net worth AND sales AND all requirements for Landlord and Commercial Tenant types also apply. If the applicant should fall within different eligibility ranges for net worth and sales then the applicant will be eligible for the lesser of the two percentages.
- **Industrial Business (for both Building Owner or Tenant Business) –**
 - Eligible for 50% reimbursement with 200 or fewer full-time employees

What can I do through the SBIF, and what costs are eligible for reimbursement?

Project costs that are eligible under the SBIF program include expenses related to: renovation and repair of commercial and industrial buildings (or the commercial portion of a mixed-use building); alterations needed for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act; facade repair and restoration of historic buildings; MEP improvements; and improvements necessary for environmental remediation. The program can reimburse for qualified permanent work expenses as well as some of the associated project “soft costs” such as project-specific expenses for architectural work. A more complete list of eligible and ineligible project types and costs can be found on the [SBIF Eligibility page](#). All external work listed on the application must comply with [City’s Design Guidelines](#).

Any work started before receipt of a conditional commitment letter from the City of Chicago’s Department of Planning and Development is not eligible for grant funds. Projects completed outside of the formal grant process are not eligible for grant funds; grants cannot be retroactively awarded for projects completed outside of the formal grant process. New construction is not eligible for grant funds.

How do I pay back the money?

The funds provided by the City of Chicago through the SBIF program are reimbursement grants. As such, the funds are not repaid to the City of Chicago by the applicant.

What will my responsibilities be to the city once I receive the money?

Once the applicant receives the grant, he or she must provide minimal information to SomerCor annually. If the applicant owns the property, they must continue to own the property for three years. If applicant leases the property, they must not relocate the business outside of the TIF district for three years. If the applicant is a tenant, the lease term must have more than three years remaining.

Will there be enough SBIF funds for all applicants?

Each Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district that has the SBIF program authorized in it has limited funds reserved for the program. If demand for the SBIF funds is greater than the available funding supply, then a lottery will be conducted to determine the order in which each grant

application may be accommodated. If any surplus funds become available, they will be allocated to waitlisted applicants.

What about Scofflaw (City Debt)?

Each individual who is applying for a grant and has an interest as an owner, tenant, partner, member, or board member (in the case of not-for-profit entities) in the business that operates at the project property or in the ownership of that property (for owner-occupied applicants) may not have any unpaid parking tickets, water bills, past due license fees, or other indebtedness owed to the City of Chicago. No conditional commitment for funding or reimbursement for completed work shall be made in connection with a property for which Cook County property taxes are past due. Additionally, all such individuals must be current on all child support payments (if applicable) and must submit a satisfactory Economic Disclosure Statement and Affidavit.

Is there SBIF funding in my area?

Every SBIF area has its own budget that the City refills if it has TIF funds available and if there is a demonstrated need for more grant money. Please check with SomerCor 504, Inc. to see if there are funds in your SBIF. We also maintain an interested party list for funds, which you can send an email to the SomerCor team at sbif@somercor.com. When more funding becomes available, or the City allocates more funds, we will let you know. The interested party list helps the City of Chicago gauge demand for additional funding in particular SBIF areas.

What if I am in a TIF and it is not a SBIF?

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is the mechanism that funds the Small Business Improvement Fund (SBIF). If you are in a TIF district and it does not have a SBIF, please contact your alderman. Your alderman's phone number can be found in the zoning map information ([click here](#)). You can also contact the project manager from the Department of Planning and Development.

Application Process – Getting Started:

- 1) [Confirm your business is in a SBIF District](#)
- 2) [Check which SBIF Districts are open](#)
- 3) [Review SBIF eligibility requirements](#)
- 4) Review SBIF program rules
- 5) [Click here to fill out application](#) and email to sbif@somercor.com

SomerCor 504, Inc. SBIF Contact and Mailing Information:

Applicants are encouraged to contact the SBIF Team with questions about the SBIF Program.

SBIF Team Member:	Phone:	E-mail:
Silvia Orozco (hablo español)	(312) 360-3334	sorozco@somercor.com
Savannah Allen	(312) 360-3327	sallen@somercor.com
Anastasia Williams	(312) 360-3336	awilliams@somercor.com
Shalonda Fisher	(312) 360-3331	sfisher@somercor.com

Applications should be submitted by email to: sbif@somercor.com

SomerCor Office and Mailing Address:

SomerCor 504, Inc.
Attn: SBIF Department
601 South LaSalle Street, Suite 510
Chicago, Illinois 60605

Fax: (312) 757-4371

Applications can be submitted via e-mail, fax, U.S. Mail or other courier service (FedEx, UPS, local courier, etc.), or hand delivery at SomerCor's office. Applicants are encouraged to contact SomerCor to confirm receipt of their application after submission. All applications must be received by SomerCor by 5:00 p.m. Central Time on the application acceptance period "close" deadline date in order to be considered for the SBIF Program.