

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
INTEROFFICE COMMUNICATION

DATE: November 13, 2024

TO: Supervisor Marcelia Nicholson, Chair, County Board of Supervisors

FROM: Celia Benton, Economic Development Director, Department of Administrative Services

SUBJECT: From the Economic Development Director, Department of Administrative Services requesting authorization to apply for, accept, and implement a Grant for a maximum amount of \$250,000 from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation for the creation of a Bridge Building Small Business Grant to help local small businesses acquire a real estate footprint in their communities.

POLICY

Milwaukee County Board review and approval is required for the submission of grant funding applications, pursuant to MCGO 56.06.

BACKGROUND

The Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation ("WEDC") is the State of Wisconsin's lead economic development agency focused on sustainable business growth and job creation. The economic development resources WEDC provides to local governments and private parties include the Small Business Development Grant ("SBDG") Program. This program is meant to "encourage communities and economic development partners to invest in their small businesses" by providing grants to local municipalities for use to "develop innovative programs that directly support small businesses and small business creation."

DAS-Economic Development is seeking authorization to apply for a SBDG in an amount up to \$250,000 for the creation of a Bridge Building Small Business Grant to assist local small businesses in purchasing or leasing commercial real estate. In addition to helping small businesses secure and maintain brick-and-mortar businesses, this program would also help alleviate the concern of commercial real estate vacancies throughout the County. While all 19 Milwaukee County municipalities would like to encourage filling such vacancies, most are not equipped to provide incentives and to find capable entrepreneurs to fill them. However, local ethnic chambers of commerce, Community Development Finance Institutions (CDFIs), and economic development organizations often work with entrepreneurs who are ready to establish and grow but may not be aware of available spaces throughout the county. By creating this Bridge Building Small Business Grant program, Milwaukee County seeks to build bridges in the local ecosystem by providing access to grant capital for vetted entrepreneurs to fill high priority brick and mortar locations throughout the county.

Milwaukee County intends to partner with local chambers of commerce, CDFIs and technical assistance providers to identify and work with local entrepreneurs that might benefit from this grant program. Eligible businesses would be able to apply for grants of

up to \$10,000 each to help purchase or lease commercial real estate or expand operations in existing brick and mortar businesses. Eligibility would require a brick-and-mortar business, with owners that reside in and operate their business in Milwaukee County, supported by a letter of support from their local municipality, and with a commitment to complete at least 6 hours of technical assistance from a local Community Development Finance Institution (CDFI), Chamber of Commerce, economic development organization, or Business Improvement District.

Milwaukee County, working with local chambers of commerce, CDFIs, and technical assistance providers, would be in charge of ensuring entrepreneurs applying for these grants follow the program as required.

The WEDC grant programs have previously been utilized by Milwaukee County to support many projects in the community.

RECOMMENDATION

The Director of the Department of Administrative Services - Economic Development recommends authorization to apply for, accept, and implement a Small Business Development Grant in a maximum amount of \$250,000 from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation to create a Bridge Building Small Business Grant to assist local entrepreneurs in acquiring and expanding real estate for their brick-and-mortar businesses in Milwaukee County.

FISCAL NOTE

Acceptance of the grant will have a net zero impact on the division's budget. Milwaukee County's role in the process will be that of manager of the grant program. Any staff time to provide support for the program will be absorbed in the division's existing budget.

Prepared By: Heather Reindl

Approved By:

Celia Benton

Celia Benton
Economic Development Director, Department of Administrative Services

Attachment: Resolution
 Fiscal Note
 Project Overview

cc: David Crowley, County Executive
 Steven Shea, District 8 County Supervisor
 Liz Sumner, Comptroller
 Community, Environment and Economic Development Committee Members
 MaryJo Meyers, Chief of Staff, Office of the County Executive
 Aaron Hertzberg, Director, Department of Administrative Services
 Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, County Board of Supervisors

Allyson Smith, Committee Coordinator
Ken Smith, County Board Research Analyst