**Request for Public Comment: Small Business Grants**

**Announcement**

The Washington Department of Commerce’s Office of Economic Development and Competitiveness (OEDC) is seeking public comments and recommendations to inform the agency’s work on the development of the next round of COVID-19 small business recovery grants, Working Washington Grants: Round 5. The purpose of this effort is to:

1. Gather stakeholder input on a draft definition for the arts and heritage sectors;
2. Determine desirable methods of grant administratio and distribution;
3. Identify potential challenges of eligibility requirements and ideas for how to circumvent those hurdles;

Feedback obtained through this *Request for Public Comment* process will help inform coordinated agency action in designing and implementing programs that support equitable access for small business recovery grants across the state.

**Supplementary Information (Background)**

Over the last year, Washington state has provided small businesses in all 39 counties with more than $500 million in grants through various programs to address the economic fallout of COVID-19. Most recently, $50M was approved by the state legislature to provide grants to small businesses through the Working Washington grant program. Another $20 million was added in the Governor’s proposed budget for FY2022 for this same program. This next grant round, Working Washington Grants: Round 5, is anticipated to launch in Spri ng 2022 after the legislature adjourns. The final amount authorized by the legislature is not yet known at the time that this *Request for Public Comment* has been released.

To be eligible for this next grant round, the business must meet certain requirements as set forth by the legislature. However, because Commerce still does not know of the final requirements, it is relying on the [current legislation](https://ofm.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/budget/statebudget/22supp/GOv2022SuppOperatingZ-0437.1.pdf) outlined in the Governor’s proposed budget for the purpose of this effort.

The new program will be designed in concert with the legislative requirements and supported by Commerce’s analysis of prior grant round data, current economic needs, and stakeholder outreach. The main goal of the Working Washington grant program is to offer short-term relief funds to small businesses, especially those that were adversely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Commerce has continually sought to refine the eligibility requirements and administration processes of each emergency relief grant round as the economic environment has changed and the concerns afflicting our small businesses have evolved. Further, Commerce must be mindful of certain eligibility constraints while also administering a program that ensures equitable access and distribution to grant funds across the state for small businesses that continue to be adversely impacted at this state of recovery.

In an effort to explore further refinements for the next round of grants and gather targeted input from stakeholders who represent the state’s diverse business communities, Commerce is soliciting feedback from the public to help inform program development to best support our small businesses

**Estimated Key Action Dates**

The dates in the following table are only estimates and are provided to illustrate the current expectations for timing of actions related to this *Request for Comment*.

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| **Key Actions** | **Estimated Dates** |
| Public Comments, must be received by | March 4, 2022 |
| Request for Proposal to select vendor\* | On or about March 1, 2022 |
| Grants portal launch | On or about June 2022 |
| Grants awarded | On or about July 2022 |

\*It is required by state law to issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) to select a technology vendor to create and manage the grant portal, a competitive process open to the public that takes an average of 90 days.

**How to Participate**

We welcome stakeholders representing the state’s small business communities across the state to participate in the public comment process.

Interested organizations are invited to:

* **Provide comments via our feedback form.** Participation is completely voluntary. We encourage you to invite key partners to participate. **Electronically submit via email to** [**bizgrants@commerce.wa.gov**](mailto:bizgrants@commerce.wa.gov) **by March 4, 2022.**

The feedback forms can be accessed here: [Contracting with Commerce - Washington Department of Commerce](https://www.commerce.wa.gov/serving-communities/current-opportunities/).

* **Attend a webinar.** Hosted by the Washington Small Business Development Center and Washington Department of Commerce. Webinar will include an overview on the Request for Public Comment and allow the opportunity for feedback**. Register for a session here:**

Thursday, February 17th, 11AM – 12PM PT

Register at: <https://wsu.zoom.us/j/91774443102> Meeting ID: 917 7444 3102

Thursday, February 24th, 3PM – 4PM PT

Register at: <https://wsu.zoom.us/j/98198853693> Meeting ID: 981 9885 3693

Webinars will be recorded and posted to: [Contracting with Commerce - Washington Department of Commerce](https://www.commerce.wa.gov/serving-communities/current-opportunities/)

Questions concerning this opportunity may be directed to:

Working Washington Grants Team

Office of Economic Development and Competitiveness (OEDC)

Washington State Department of Commerce

Email: [bizgrants@commerce.wa.gov](mailto:bizgrants@commerce.wa.gov)

Participation is completely voluntary and will not result in any preference or selection for any state or federally funded contract or grant through Washington State Department of Commerce.

**5. Summary**

OEDC appreciates your thoughts and participation as we work together to increase our positive

economic impact within Washington state communities.