

STEP 2023-2024 Guidelines

Effective: October 1, 2023 – December 31, 2024

The U.S. Small Business Administration's State Trade Expansion Program (STEP) grant initiative provides funding to states and U.S. territories to increase the number of businesses that export. Administered by Maine International Trade Center (MITC), the objective of the **STEP Financial Assistance Award** is to encourage Maine companies to seek new international sales through financial support for costs associated with such activities.



Eligibility

To apply, companies or firms must:

- Not be applying for/receiving public financial assistance for this project from any other source, such as but not limited to FoodExport USA
- Manufacture or perform at least 51% of the covered good or service in Maine
- Have been in business for at least 1 year
- Have access to sufficient resources to bear the costs associated with trade
- Meet the U.S. Small Business Administration's definition of small business

Use the following [sba.gov](https://www.sba.gov/federal-contracting/contracting-guide/size-standards) link for information on size standards for your business:

<https://www.sba.gov/federal-contracting/contracting-guide/size-standards>

Eligible businesses may receive a maximum of five **STEP Financial Assistance Awards** for up to \$20,000 per year. A company may not have more than 2 active applications at any given time. Applications will be reviewed and awarded in the order submitted.

MITC will reimburse 75% of eligible costs associated with activities in the following categories:

International Business Development: up to \$8,000 per activity

International business development services awards will reimburse up to \$8,000 in costs associated with business matching services or international trade show participation, plus associated expenses such as shipping, interpretation, or ground transportation. *International travel expenses such as airfare and lodging are not eligible for reimbursement under this program.*

Expenses relating to domestic trade shows* are eligible *only* if the company engages *international* matchmaking services such as the US Commercial Service international buyer's program or equivalent. A receipt for this service and a copy of the meeting schedule will be required for reimbursement. Eligible companies may receive support for one domestic trade show per grant year.

*Your business may be eligible for financial support for domestic trade shows and other activities to diversify and grow markets within the US through the [Maine Domestic Trade Expansion Program \(DTEP\)](#).



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Export Skills Development: up to \$6,000 per activity

Export skills development awards will reimburse up to \$6,000 in costs associated with private or public training and export compliance and consulting services.

Export Marketing Assistance: up to \$8,000 per activity

Export marketing assistance awards will reimburse up to \$8,000 in costs associated with developing international marketing material. This includes costs associated with hiring consultants and marketing agencies to improve international marketing strategies.

E-commerce and Digital Marketing: up to \$8,000 per year

E-commerce and digital marketing awards will reimburse up to \$8,000 in costs associated with E-commerce platform hosting and website development fees. This includes costs for search engine optimization targeting foreign markets, online market listings, and online international payment solutions.

Required for Application

Companies must apply for the **STEP Financial Assistance Award** in advance. Funds may not be used to pay for activities or costs incurred prior to the approval of the activity.

For more
information, please
contact us via email:
STEP@mitc.com

Applications for a **STEP Financial Assistance Award** will not be considered until all supporting documentation is submitted. Incomplete applications will be terminated after 30 days, which means that applicants will need to reapply.

Businesses must complete and submit a Self-Representation as an “Eligible Small Business Concern” form as part of the application process.

Please note that you have not been awarded any funds until you receive an award notification email from MITC staff. Costs incurred before receiving award notification will not be reimbursed.

Timeline for Reimbursement

The typical processing time for applications is two weeks from date of submission to notification. Once a company is approved for a **STEP Financial Assistance Award**, the company must conduct the activity within the timeframe stated in the grant. After the activity is complete, the company will submit paid invoices, copies of meeting schedules, post-activity surveys, and any other required information to MITC. Once MITC has received all required documentation, reimbursement payments are made to the company within 60 days of the end of the quarter. MITC will conduct confidential surveys on completion of the supported activity and at 6 and 12 months following the activity.