STEP Grant Tennessee

Jack C. Massey College of Business
Belmont University

STEP Grant Program

The State Trade Expansion Program (STEP) is a national export initiative which makes matching-fund awards to state entities to assist small businesses in entering and expanding into international markets. In Tennessee, STEP is administered by the Tennessee Export Initiative (TEI) at Belmont University. Funded in part by the U.S. Small Business Administration, the main objectives of STEP are to increase the number of U.S. small businesses that export, increase the value of exports, and increase the number of U.S. small businesses exploring significant new trade opportunities.

Eligible Reimbursable Expenses Include

- Virtual or In-Person Matchmaking Services with Foreign Buyers, Distributors, and Representatives
- Website Translation and Localization
- Website Search Engine Optimization
- Marketing Media Design for International Audiences
- International Trade Show Exhibition

Is My Company Eligible?

To be considered eligible, a company must meet all of the requirements below:

- Export-ready
- Organized and incorporated in the United States
- Registered in Tennessee as a for-profit business
- Has operations in Tennessee
- Meets the SBA definition of a small business (see SBA Self-Representation Form)
- Has been in business not less than 1 year
- Has a written export plan with clear and achievable export objectives
- Has sufficient resources to bear the costs associated with trade, including the costs of packing, shipping, freight forwarding, and customs brokers
- Is engaged in, or wishes to be engaged in, the delivery abroad of goods and/or services
- produced in the United States
- Offers products or services that are of U.S. origin or have at least 51% U.S. content

For more information visit our website at https://belmont.edu/step-tn/
or contact Jeff Overby, Director, Tennessee Export Initiative, TEI@belmont.edu

DEC TENNESSEE DISTRICT EXPORT COUNCIL
Working for America's Exporters™

SBA U.S. Small Business Administration

U.S. COMMERCIAL SERVICE
United States of America Department of Commerce

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Funding Process

To receive STEP funding:

1. Complete Readiness Questionnaire
2. Complete Online Interview
3. If eligible, submit STEP Application
4. If approved, a Letter of Approval will be issued confirming the approved level of funding
5. Submit a Request for Reimbursement within 30 days of project completion and include all required documentation. Failure to submit within 30 days, without justification, could jeopardize reimbursement of approved funds
6. Complete Data Collection Instrument form when requested to provide updated information on actual export sales that occurred as a result of a STEP-supported activity



Tennessee Step Program Eligible Activities

The following is information that you will need to complete the application:

- Basic company contact details and key facts (e.g., Federal Tax Identification Number, employment data, revenue data, product/service information, etc.)
- Background information on the company's existing export activity (e.g., export sales information, key export markets, channels, international marketing activities, budget, etc.)
- Anticipated export goals and strategies over next three years (international marketing plan)
- Proposed export development activities under the STEP program, including sales projections, job growth projections and detailed budget information

All requests will be evaluated on the overall quality of the proposal, the company's ability to successfully execute the proposed project, and the projected export sales. Incomplete applications will be rejected.

The following activities are eligible for STEP reimbursement of up to 75% except as otherwise noted, with a maximum benefit per company of $7,000. Activities must be completed by September 29, 2027.

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Export Promotion Services Through the U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Commercial Service

Eligible for STEP reimbursement up to 75% - maximum reimbursement $4,000/project

Reimbursement for U.S. Commercial Service subscription services (e.g., Gold Key Service, International Partner Search, Single Company Promotion, etc.). A complete list of services and fees can be found at: https://www.trade.gov/services-current-exporters.

International Website Optimization

Eligible for STEP reimbursement up to 75% - maximum reimbursement $5,000/project

Eligible e-Commerce and website expenses include:

- Design and develop a website with an international focus (including website translation or localization)
- Oversight and maintenance/monitoring fee for SEO (SEO stands for Search Engine Optimization, which is the practice of increasing the quantity and quality of traffic to your website through organic search engine results)
- Online market listing fees (online sites such as Etsy, Amazon, and eBay charge nominal fees for listing items on their website)
- e-Commerce platform, including hosting and/or maintenance fees (e-Commerce software enables a business to sell products and services online)
- Expenses to set up websites to accept international payments

International Marketing Media Design

Eligible for STEP reimbursement up to 75% - maximum reimbursement $5,000/project

Eligible design expenses include:
Development of marketing media is the ability to promote a product or service to strengthen export sales using any of the following: brochures, social media, websites, billboards, newspapers, posters, international magazines and translation of marketing media, including audio and video. This activity must be carried out by a third-party organization.

International Trade Show Exhibition

Eligible for STEP reimbursement up to 75% - maximum reimbursement $7,000/trade show

Assistance with the cost of standard booth registration fees, booth furnishings, signage, design costs, electricity, etc. Companies may include in their total request, funding for activities in support of their participation in the trade show, including design of marketing materials, social media marketing, and shipping of samples to the show. Travel is not covered.

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