



REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

2026-2027 Grant Opportunity: *WSMA Statewide Grant Program - Collaborative Projects*

PROGRAM GUIDELINES

Notification Date: September 16, 2026

Application Due: October 16, 2026 at 5:00 p.m. PST

Washington State Microenterprise Association

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Timeline

September 16, 2026	Notice of RFP
September 18, 2026	WSMA grant portal opens on or before this date
September 16 - October 16, 2026	Application technical assistance available (contact lisa@wamicrobiz.org and catherine@wamicrobiz.org)
September 22, 2026 at 1:00 p.m. PST	Information Session Webinar. Register HERE . WSMA will post the FAQs on the WSMA website after the Information Session. WSMA will also record this session and make it available on the WSMA YouTube Channel .
September 23, 2026 at 1:00 p.m. PST	Grant Portal Walk-through Webinar. Register HERE . WSMA will record this session and make it available on the WSMA YouTube Channel .
October 16, 2026	Proposals due by 5:00 p.m. PST via the WSMA grant portal
November 20, 2026	Applicants notified of funding decisions on or before this date from WSMA staff to the email address provided on the application
February - May 2027	Informal mid-grant check-ins
June 16, 2027	Project completed, funds expended, Grantee Final Report due

Applicants can find grant writing resources on either the [Puget Sound Grantwriters Association](#) or the [Funding for Good](#) websites. For language translation support and/or RFP questions, please contact lisa@wamicrobiz.org and catherine@wamicrobiz.org.

1. Purpose of Request and Program Overview

A. Overview

The Washington State Microenterprise Association (WSMA) is dedicated to strengthening business technical assistance providers, also known as **Entrepreneur Support Organizations (ESOs)**, as they engage with and assist the smallest businesses to grow sustainably, equitably, and financially throughout Washington state.

Thanks to support from the Washington State Department of Commerce, WSMA is opening this statewide grant opportunity to fund **collaborative projects** that engage 2 to 5 strategic partners to provide **business training series, training workshops/webinars, technical assistance, and/or access to financing** for small businesses, especially those with five or fewer employees in Washington. This grant opportunity strengthens small businesses in **rural and urban communities**, ensuring comprehensive business services are available to strengthen economic resilience statewide. By requiring collaboration, this initiative encourages partners to share ideas and work across sectors and communities to expand access to business services and opportunities.

WSMA, along with the entire microenterprise development ecosystem, has faced significant funding reductions over the past two years. WSMA endured a significant 70% funding reduction in the two most recent legislative sessions. As a result, WSMA will award **15 grants of \$10,000 each** in this fiscal year's grant cycle **for collaborative projects across the state, with an approximate six-month grant period**. This is a small grant program this year. If your organization wants to build your professional network, expand the reach of your services, and/or develop a pilot that could lead to future grant opportunities from other grantors, this grant may be worth exploring.

To extend the power and impact of these funds, WSMA is accepting applications from organizations seeking to engage partners on a collaborative project that expands business services and reach through collective action that no single ESO could achieve on its own. Eligible applicants (as defined in Section 1.B. and Section 2) selected for awards under this announcement will define an initiative with 2 to 5 strategic partners capable of innovating, reaching new entrepreneurs, leveraging expertise, and adapting existing resources to deliver comprehensive business services to microbusinesses in Washington.

The Lead Organization and all Collaborating Partners (as defined in Section 1.B.) must meet WSMA program eligibility criteria (as outlined in Section 2). WSMA will evaluate a collaborative project's plan for coordinating proposed activities with partner entities as a whole, as it meets the needs of microenterprises, expands the partners' reach, and/or supports the ongoing work and impact of the collaboration moving forward.

WSMA funding has helped ESOs support small businesses in ways that stimulate innovation, create social inclusion through an equity lens, advance sustainability principles, and/or support businesses in key sectors of our economy. Funding for this program intends to achieve these same priorities and serve all businesses and industry sectors. However, this round will prioritize collaborative projects that provide comprehensive business services to those running **small-scale manufacturing, creative economy, agriculture/food-based, circular economy, climate resilience, clean technology, energy, childcare, homebuilding/construction, life sciences,**

maritime trades, and tourism-based microenterprises. Priority will also be given to those collaborative projects supporting microenterprises owned by rural entrepreneurs, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), veterans, women, people with disabilities, returning citizens, LGBTQ+, and immigrants and refugees, and other historically marginalized communities.

The application period ends on **Friday, October 16, 2026, at 5:00 p.m.**, so please review these Program Guidelines as soon as possible. Please refer to the separate **2026-2027 WSMA Statewide Grant Application Instructions** for the complete list of application questions, required attachments, and portal instructions.

B. Definitions

- *Microenterprise/Microbusiness/Small Business*: Companies with five or fewer employees (including gig workers, cooperatives, or sole proprietors/solopreneurs) that require less than \$50,000 in financing.
- *Unduplicated Businesses*: Unduplicated counts a small business one time, no matter how many services (a workshop, a webinar, a technical assistance session, etc.) are attended or received, with at least one hour of in-depth business support provided to a unique business.
- *Entrepreneur Support Organizations (ESOs)*: Business technical assistance providers that predominantly offer business training (cohort training series or standalone training workshops/webinars), technical assistance, and/or financing opportunities for companies with five or fewer employees, including entrepreneurs, gig workers, cooperatives, business owners with limited incomes, rural businesses, people with disabilities, those from historically marginalized communities, and others. Examples of ESOs include:
 - *Regional Business Resource Partners*: Quasi-governmental entities such as associate development organizations (ADOs)/economic development councils (EDCs), economic development districts (EDDs), and port authorities;
 - *Financing Resource Partners*: Lending institutions such as Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) and Local Investment Network partners (LINs);
 - *State-Level Resource Partners*: Organizations that offer broad technical assistance and support to geographic, industry-specific, demographic or other sectors of Washington state. This could include Small Business Resiliency Network partners (SBRNs), WA Economic Development Association (WEDA), APEX Accelerators, WA Office for Regulatory Innovation & Assistance (ORIA), and the Small Business Administration's resource partners Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs), SCORE, and Women's Business Centers;
 - *Nonprofit, Non-Governmental Resource Partners*: Chambers of commerce, downtown associations/Main Street partners, trade, industry, and other networks;
 - *Tribal Resource Partners*: Tribal government agencies, Native CDFIs, or nonprofits that support Native-owned microenterprises;
 - *Institutional Resource Partners*: Nonprofit arms of ineligible parent organization types, such as foundations of libraries or academic institutions.
- *Embedded ESO*: ESO that provides business support services as outlined above, but as a division or department within a larger organization.

- *Emerging ESO*: An organization that offers some business programming to entrepreneurs on a limited basis but has no dedicated staff providing services and seeks to grow the organization into an ESO.
- *Collaborative Projects*: For this funding cycle, WSMA is accepting applications from organizations seeking to engage partners in **new ways on a collaborative project** that expands business services and reach through collective action that no single ESO could achieve on its own. Successful collaborative projects will define an initiative with 2 to 5 partners capable of innovating, reaching new entrepreneurs, leveraging expertise, and adapting existing resources to deliver comprehensive business services to microbusinesses in Washington. A collaboration could be a blend of ESOs – Regional Business, Financing, State-Level, Tribal, Nonprofit, or Institutional Resource Partners, as defined above, or others – that provide comprehensive business services such as training, technical assistance, and/or access to financing.
- *Lead Organization*: The Lead Organization submitting the proposal in the grant portal will identify partners, outline roles, and work out the details of the collaborative project, programs, and deliverables. The Lead Organization will receive the grant disbursements and distribute funds to its partners and subcontractors as allocated in the approved project budget. The Lead Organization will submit its IRS determination letter and organizational financial documents with the application. It will also attest that its Collaborating Partners have formal roles in the delivery of the programming, that they meet the eligibility requirements of the grant, and will participate in the development of the final report. The Lead Organization will submit the final report via the grant portal.
- *Collaborating Partner*: All Collaborating Partners for the project must meet the eligibility requirements outlined in Section 2. Their role can bridge services to new communities, provide unique business training to existing communities, be paid or not paid with WSMA funds (connecting businesses to existing programming), and/or enhance existing support through relevant technical assistance.
- *Urban* communities include businesses in incorporated communities within/immediately adjacent to the metropolitan core of the following urban counties or in these urban counties and having a population of more than 20,000 people: Benton, Clark, King, Kitsap, Pierce, Snohomish, Spokane, Thurston, and Whatcom.
- *Rural* communities include those non-metro projects (basically defined as areas around the state not defined as urban).
- *Statewide* projects include programs that have a demonstrated history of being accessed by businesses from all parts of the state.

2. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants include those that demonstrate their commitment to collaborate by bringing together 2 to 5 strategic partners and demonstrating their capacity to innovate, reach new entrepreneurs, leverage expertise, and adapt existing resources to deliver WSMA-funded programming to support microbusinesses in Washington.

WSMA is committed to ensuring that equal opportunity is provided to all business owners including BIPOC, veterans, woman-owned enterprises, entrepreneurs with disabilities, justice-involved entrepreneurs, and others historically shut out from training programs, financing, and other opportunities. Eligible applicants will be required to describe how their current and intended programs ensure diversity, equity and inclusion in delivery of services and their sensitivity to the issues of race and gender. When considering funding, WSMA will prioritize

eligible collaborative projects that focus on and have demonstrated experience with serving one or more of these communities.

Eligibility Requirements:

1. Applicants must have IRS 501(c)(3) nonprofit status documented.
2. Nonprofit or quasi-governmental applicants with different formal IRS designations will also be considered. For example: chambers of commerce, CDFIs, SBRNs, 501(c)(6) organizations, Main Street partners, trade associations, EDDs, or similar entities that provide comprehensive business services to Washington-based small businesses are eligible to apply.
3. Eligible applicants can contract with consultants to provide business services on this grant.
4. Applicants can bring in partners to provide services that are not funded with this grant to reach different/more businesses through the collaboration.
5. Unfortunately, academic institutions are not eligible for funding at this time (but could be brought on as a collaborating entity funded with either outside funds or as a consultant).
6. Must have at least two years of experience providing comprehensive business training, technical assistance, or financing support services to small businesses.
7. Track record of collaboration with relevant and diverse community stakeholders in planning, implementation, and evaluation of the work.
8. Lead Organization and all Collaborating Partners must be a Resource Partner on [Evergreen BizLink](#) or have a [profile submitted](#).
9. The collaborative project must be able to **serve at least 35 Washington-based unduplicated businesses** during the grant period.

3. Eligible and Required Use of Funds

This year's grant window allows for more time than previous cycles to develop programming and do outreach. Funds must be expended by June 16, 2027. Activities can begin on the date of contract signing by both parties. Initial grant funds (80 percent of grant award) will be available to grantees within 20 business days of contract signature with final disbursement of funds (20 percent of grant award) upon the approval of the grantee's final report.

WSMA will award collaborative projects that establish new relationships or build on existing partnerships on a project that engages at least two entities to accomplish what might be difficult for one partner alone. Funding is intended to serve all communities and industry sectors with the comprehensive business services outlined below. In this cycle, WSMA will prioritize collaborative projects that focus on and have demonstrated experience with serving one or more of the following communities: microenterprises owned by rural entrepreneurs, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), veterans, women, people with disabilities, returning citizens, LGBTQ+, and immigrants and refugees, and other historically marginalized communities. Priority will also be given to collaborative projects that provide support to Washington-based **small-scale manufacturing, climate resilience, creative economy, agriculture/food-based, circular economy, clean technology, energy, childcare, homebuilding/construction, life sciences, maritime trades, and tourism** small businesses in the following areas:

- **Training programs** that build the capacity of small businesses to formalize their operations, attract new customers, manage their finances, comply with regulations, and/or apply for financing, etc. Proposals can offer either or both of the following:
 - **Business Training Series** that provides participants with a connected, multi-session or cohort training experience where one session is connected to the next and attendance is expected at all sessions, typically with a culmination event or certificate.
 - **Business Training Workshops/Webinars** that are one-time or stand-alone events that provide vital training programs but as individual or separate, unconnected events where attendance at all workshop/webinar sessions is optional.
- **Business Technical Assistance:** One-on-one and/or small-group assistance for small businesses, including, but not limited to, support with accessing federal and state loans/grants, business coaching, help implementing business plans, troubleshooting, improving marketing strategies, or preparing for financing.
- **Microlending or Financing Support:** Assistance to small businesses that provide support for accessing microloans and other financing resources for microenterprises. Funding is available to provide technical assistance, loan processing, outreach, business counseling, and other services. **However, the loan amount itself and/or any fees associated with it that are normally paid by the borrower cannot be covered with these funds; this funding prohibition applies as well to any type of other lending or financial instrument.**

Eligible Use of Funds: Grants approved under this contract can pay project-related expenses, including, but not limited to, operational costs for personnel including their time spent for indirect costs (**staff wages only**); consultants providing technical assistance, training, translation, and interpretive services; rent and utilities; staff travel, outreach and education materials; and efforts to help keep businesses in operation.

Ineligible Use of Funds: Applicants **cannot use funds to pay for equipment**, such as copiers, vehicles, furniture, software, or technology infrastructure. **Nor can funds be delivered directly to entrepreneurs or businesses they serve under this grant**, including, but not limited to, stipends, loans, grants, transportation support, or any other funds provided to businesses and/or business owners. Regarding personnel costs, **no overtime is allowed**, and all payments accrued on account of payroll taxes, unemployment contributions, any other taxes, insurance, or fringe benefits shall be the sole responsibility of the grantee. **WSMA does not intend funding to cover the costs of event food or refreshments.** The contract for services will highlight further restrictions for awarded grants.

WSMA funds **cannot pay for programming that another source has already funded**. However, applicants can extend their existing programming and use WSMA funds to offer expanded services and/or reach new communities. Applicants can also combine the WSMA grant to cover eligible business services expenses with funding from other revenue sources to cover ineligible costs (such as providing stipends or incentives to businesses). Applicants may also charge attendees a small registration fee to cover expenses not eligible for grant funds (including event food).

4. Budget Request

Because of this small-scale statewide grant funding, WSMA will award 15 grants of \$10,000 each, based on the applicant's proposed deliverables and other selection criteria noted in Section 5. All grants that are awarded will receive the full amount of funding. The total fund request of \$10,000 must be **no more than 20 percent** of the **Lead Organization's** total prior calendar or last 12-month **actual** budget. If this is an embedded ESO, the 20 percent would apply to the budget dedicated to the organization's business services.

Application requests must total **\$10,000**. Applicants will use the 2026-2027 WSMA Fund Request Form (Excel), available for download from the [WSMA website](#) or the [grant portal](#). If you are unable to download a copy, please reach out to catherine@wamicrobiz.org. Once you fill in your **REQUIRED Fund Request Form** with written budget justifications AND line-item amounts in the Excel form, you will upload the completed Excel spreadsheet to the grant portal (third tab of the application portal) using the upload graphic (file with an up arrow). The Fund Request Form **MUST** upload in Excel, NOT PDF or Numbers.

5. Selection Criteria

Funding will be awarded based on the quality of the strategic partnerships, their capacity to accomplish the goals outlined in the proposal within the grant timeline, and the demonstrated relevance to the needs of the businesses served.

WSMA encourages applications that inspire innovation, ensure social inclusion, and use circular economy principles with the businesses they serve in every sector of our economy. For this grant, key sectors include, but are not limited to, **small-scale manufacturing, creative economy, agriculture/food-based, circular economy, climate resilience, clean technology, energy, childcare, homebuilding/construction, life sciences, maritime trades, and tourism**.

Priority will be given to collaborative projects with the capacity to work effectively with very small businesses owned by rural entrepreneurs, BIPOC, immigrants and refugees, women, veterans, people with disabilities, returning citizens, LGBTQ+ people, and others historically shut out from training programs and financing opportunities outlined in Section 2.

WSMA is seeking and will prioritize collaborative projects that:

- Meet eligibility requirements outlined in Section 2;
- Establish new relationships or build with existing partnerships on a project that engages at least two entities to accomplish what might be difficult for only one partner to achieve;
 - Work closely with local and Regional Business Resource Partners (quasi-governmental) such as ADOs/EDCs, EDDs, and port authorities;
 - Have existing connections with Financing Resource Partners such as CDFIs, local lenders, grant programs, etc., to support the financing needs of the businesses they serve;

- **Must serve at least 35 Washington-based unduplicated businesses** during the grant period. In previous cycles, ESO partners were able to outreach to multiple networks and serve more businesses through similar collaborative projects than they could have alone. Being able to reach greater numbers, support businesses in innovative ways, and/or engage underserved microenterprises will rate higher in the scoring;
- Have trusted relationships within the communities they are serving;
- Are experienced in providing comprehensive business services, especially to those in the priority industry sectors, communities, and/or regions in Washington;
- Have experience tracking and documenting grant activities, impacts, and outcomes using internal reporting processes.

Each proposal will be independently evaluated. WSMA is dedicated to ensuring that funds are distributed throughout the state to achieve geographic and demographic equity.

In the past, WSMA has received requests in excess of our available grant funds and we may not be able to fund all applicants. While we hope to continue to support this work, funding is not guaranteed to continue in future years. Although the legislature cut primary funding dedicated for grantmaking during this biennium, WSMA has taken internal steps to streamline and reduce agency programming so that limited funding available could be prioritized for ESOs with this RFP.

6. RFP Process

- This RFP provides a practical online application to reduce waste, improve accessibility and provide a simple platform that supports communication, documentation and reporting.
- Language translation services and support are available. Guidelines can be translated on WSMA's website. Contact lisa@wamicrobiz.org and catherine@wamicrobiz.org for more information.
- Refer to the separate 2026-2027 Statewide Grant Application Instructions for the complete list of application questions, required attachments, and portal instructions located on the [WSMA website](#).
- All proposals will be electronically submitted utilizing the [WSMA grant portal](#). The WSMA grant portal allows applicants to save their work as a draft to come back to before submitting the final version. **We strongly advise applicants to click "Save Draft" frequently while completing their draft application on the grant portal to avoid losing their work.**
- In line with WSMA's commitment to an equitable and accessible application process, technical assistance will be offered between September 16 and October 16, 2026, to help organizations determine their eligibility and complete their application. Contact lisa@wamicrobiz.org and catherine@wamicrobiz.org with questions.
- Submittal is required by **Friday, October 16, 2026, by 5:00 p.m. PST** to facilitate the review and selection process. Upon submission, you will receive a confirmation email to the address you provided from noreply@smartsimple.com, which will also include a PDF

of your application for your records. You can continue to access your submitted application on your grant portal dashboard. Unfortunately, once an applicant submits their application, you can NOT make changes. However, if you accidentally submit before completion of the application, please contact catherine@wamicrobiz.org. You will also receive email communications as your application moves through the review process, and if our reviewers require additional information. ***Due to the short review window, please ensure the project's responsible person (or a designated person) is available from October 16 through November 20, 2026, to respond promptly if requested to provide further information.***

- Submitted proposals require an electronic signature in the WSMA grant portal. The person ultimately responsible for this project should certify the application. This could be an executive director, board president, chief financial officer, etc.
- In extenuating circumstances, an official signed hard copy original with proper attachments will be accepted by mail through the close of business on October 16, 2026, at Washington State Microenterprise Association P.O. Box 1914, Olympia, WA 98507, providing notification is sent to WSMA at catherine@wamicrobiz.org before the deadline. WSMA assumes no responsibility for delays caused by any delivery method.

7. Expectations

WSMA Grantees (Lead Organization) will:

- Execute a contract with WSMA to carry out proposed activities of the collaborative project within the timeline established.
- Accomplish work with Collaborating Partners outlined in the approved Scope of Work.
- Submit a completed W-9 with a 2026-dated signature.
- Meet with WSMA staff (if the Lead Organization is a new grantee) to review payment processing and reporting requirements, and agree to securely upload forms for the electronic distribution of funds to the grant portal.
- Attend a required, informal mid-grant check-in with all Collaborating Partners and WSMA staff virtually or in-person.
- [Enroll](#), along with all Collaborating Partners, on [Evergreen BizLink](#). This robust online business search engine connects entrepreneurs with trusted referrals that provide technical assistance, business training and funding in Washington state. This hub links networks to entrepreneurs and to each other building a cohesive community to support new and existing business growth. In addition, grantees will document and provide details of how they are using and promoting Evergreen BizLink through their newsletters, website links, social media, workshops, and technical assistance programs in their final report.
- Submit a final report with contributions by Collaborating Partners addressing the questions from the Final Report Guidelines.
- Provide evidence of liability, auto, and other existing insurance coverage upon request.
- Contact WSMA staff if problems occur that will inhibit work.

8. Reporting Requirements

The Lead Organization, with input from its Collaborating Partners, must submit a final report highlighting the impacts of their collaborative projects via the grant portal **on or before Friday, June 16, 2027**. WSMA will provide the Final Report Guidelines, requesting a summary of successes, insights, strategies, challenges, business testimonials, consultants used, any changes to the approved budget, economic impact outcomes, and evidence of the use of Evergreen BizLink, such as examples of promoting through newsletters, website links, social media, workshops, and technical assistance programs.

WSMA is interested in the evaluation insights from your collaborative project, particularly regarding innovation that goes beyond traditional measures of impact. Impact can vary significantly across different communities. For example, it may be reflected in improved quality of life, increased confidence, greater stability, or heightened hopefulness among the businesses being served. Additionally, projects that foster collaboration and promote a more cohesive local economy can help bridge geographic and cultural divides. This ensures equitable and sustainable support for underserved communities while positioning the region for future economic growth. Such projects should be deeply rooted in relationships, local knowledge, and a listening approach to build trust and provide responsive advising.

For reporting economic impact outcomes, please refer to the separate Application Instructions, Economic Impact Outcomes, for a complete list of specific outcome metrics to track your project's impact, including technical assistance provided, unduplicated businesses served, businesses started, jobs created, access to capital, etc. Grantees will effectively describe the needs of the businesses they reached, show the impact of collaborations, and demonstrate the impact of their delivered services on the businesses they served. Please contact Lisa at lisa@wamicrobiz.org and Catherine at catherine@wamicrobiz.org for additional details.