

SIGNS

SUPPORTING INNOVATIVE GROWTH THROUGH NEW SIGNAGE



The SIGNS grant is designed to improve the attractiveness of downtown retail and commercial business storefront signs. The purpose of this program is to encourage property owners or business tenants to design and install high-quality, creative, and interesting signs that add to the vitality, livability, and overall welcoming atmosphere of a rural downtown commercial district, while following standard sign guidelines that will support the long-term aesthetics and historical character of Kansas downtowns.

If you are considering an application and have questions, please contact us.

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PURPOSE

Recognizing that downtown buildings are key community assets that are essential to growing economic development in rural communities, Commerce has created the SIGNS Grant to improve the attractiveness of downtown retail and commercial business storefront signs. The purpose of this program is to encourage property owners or business tenants to design and install high-quality, creative, and interesting signs that add to the vitality, livability, and overall welcoming atmosphere of a rural downtown commercial district, while following standard sign guidelines that will support the long-term aesthetics and historical character of Kansas downtowns. The goal of this program is to provide matching funding and design support that will enhance sign character and visual appeal for locally owned retail and commercial businesses that are symbolic and unique to the business while maintaining the historical character of the building and the commercial district.

AVAILABLE FUNDING

The total funds available will be \$250,000. Applicants may request funding for eligible one-time project expenses in the range of \$1,000 to \$50,000. Applicants are required to demonstrate investment in the projects by providing a minimum cash match of 50% if the population is less than 50,000 but more than 2,500 population, or 25% cash match if a community has less than 2,500 population. In-kind contributions are eligible but will only increase the match contribution above the minimum match cash contribution requirement.

Minimum \$1,000 – Maximum \$50,000 – The program is intended to support multiple buildings and/or businesses in a downtown or multiple downtowns in a region. Applicants must complete at least 3 or more signs on 3 or more businesses.

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

This grant may be used by a business, building owner, or community entity, such as a municipality, foundation, Chamber of Commerce, Main Street organization, economic development group, or other non-profit community-based organization.

Only independently owned businesses located in communities with populations under 50,000 are eligible; chain businesses do not qualify.

ELIGIBLE EXPENSES

The Sign Program can be used toward the design, purchase, lighting, and installation of a commercial sign in the downtown of a rural community. Eligible costs include design, purchase, lighting and electrical, and installation of the sign (including mortar work where sign will be adhered).

Grant administration costs up to 10% of the grant award are eligible.

INELIGIBLE EXPENSES

- Façade improvements, window replacements, window signs interior improvements, temporary signage, sign maintenance, billboards/marketing signs, etc.
- Sign grants will NOT be given to internally lit panel signs, standard corporate franchise signs, signs that are not completed by a sign professional, or signs that simply replace existing signs with no change in the design or materials.
- Government offices, residences, and home businesses are not eligible under this grant.

WHAT QUALIFIES AS A SIGN?

*All sign types should follow the **Quality Places Signage Guide** found at kansascommerce.gov/signs.

- **Building/Facade Signs:** Signs attached to the exterior of the building, either flat on the storefront or the facade.
- **Blade Signs:** Projecting signs installed perpendicular to the building.
- **Pole Signs:** Signs installed on poles are eligible if they are historic, being restored, or not backlit plastic. Existing pole signs are also eligible if they are in poor condition or display outdated business information.
- **Awning Signs:** Graphics or text permanently affixed to or incorporated into a storefront awning. The awning itself is also an eligible expense.
- **Painted Wall Signs:** Signage where the business name, logo, or advertisement is painted directly onto the building's exterior surface. The painted wall sign must upgrade previous signage and include a lighting element.
- **Exterior Lighting:** Lighting specifically installed to illuminate a new sign under this grant can be included as an eligible expense as part of the total package.

TIMELINE

This is a rolling deadline grant, meaning Kansas Commerce will review submitted grants every month until all funds have been awarded. The review team will review grant applications on the 15th of each month. Grant funds are limited and are distributed on a first-come, first-served basis.

Applications are open February 17 through December 5, 2025, or until funds are depleted.

The sign must be completed and installed within six months of receiving approval of the grant.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

- Applicants who lease their space must provide a letter providing permission from the building owner to apply for the grant. The letter must indicate awareness of the rules and requirements of the program.
- Applicants and intended sign recipients must have all property taxes to the City and State paid in full to date.
- Under the SIGNS grant, preference will be given to signs that are three-dimensional, as well as made and installed by a Kansas business.
- Sign and awning designs should follow the Quality Places Signage Guide.
- The Design Committee may deny a sign incentive to any applicant that does not make recommended changes to their sign after a first review.
- Nonconforming signage on the property, if applicable, must be permanently removed as part of the improvement.
- Applicants must comply with all state and local laws and regulations pertaining to licensing, permits, building codes, and zoning requirements. Permitting must be obtained before grant funds are disbursed (if applicable).

APPLICATION CRITERIA

All applications must include:

1. Need: 300 word limit
2. Current Sign Condition: 300 word limit
3. New Sign Description: 300 word limit
4. Timeline: 300 word limit
5. Photos
6. Budgets
7. Letters from Building Owners
8. Letters of Support (optional)
9. Proof of Matching Funds
10. Project Estimates

The Department of Commerce may request any additional information it determines necessary to evaluate an application.

REVIEW CRITERIA

The Kansas Department of Commerce will evaluate all applications based on the following criteria:

PROJECT NEED (30 Points)

- Does the application clearly demonstrate a significant need for new signage? (e.g., current signage is outdated, missing, or does not meet visibility needs)
- Does the proposal align with revitalization efforts or community goals?
- Is a new sign critical?
- Is the existing signage already effective?

PROJECT IMPACT (20 Points)

- Will the proposed signage significantly enhance visibility, attract foot traffic, or contribute to economic growth and district vibrancy?
- Will the proposed sign benefit the broader community?
- Is the proposed sign in an easily accessible, visible public space that will maximize community interaction and appreciation?

TIMELINE & READINESS (20 Points)

- Is the project well-planned, with a clear timeline demonstrating completion within six months or less?
- Are necessary approvals (permits, design, contractor, etc.) in place or easily obtainable?
- Are details clear or uncertain?

DESIGN & AESTHETIC QUALITY (20 Points)

- Is the design high-quality?
- Does the design align with the historic/commercial district's character?
- Does the design include appropriate materials and lighting?

FEASIBILITY & BUDGET (10 Points)

- Is the budget clear, well-documented, and reasonable for the scope of work?

SUBMITTAL PROCEDURES

- Applications must be submitted via the online portal.
- Supporting documentation such as signed letters must be uploaded and submitted with the application.
- Incomplete applications will not be accepted.

KANSAS

COMMERCE

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