

SIGNS

SUPPORTING INNOVATIVE GROWTH THROUGH NEW SIGNAGE



The SIGNS Grant strengthens commercial districts by helping businesses upgrade storefront signage that improves visibility, attracts customers, and drives revenue. By supporting high-quality, strategically designed signage, the program enhances brand presence and strengthens the overall marketability of Kansas' commercial corridors. Effective signage does more than identify a business. It is a proven tool for increasing foot traffic, boosting sales, and positioning commercial areas as viable, high-value destinations for residents, visitors, and investors.

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

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KANSAS
C O M M E R C E

Updated December 2025

PURPOSE

Recognizing that downtown buildings are critical economic assets in rural communities, the SIGNS Grant is designed to strengthen local economies by improving the visibility and marketability of retail and commercial businesses through high-quality storefront signage. By supporting multiple signage projects within each community, the program helps create a cohesive, attractive commercial environment that draws customers, supports small-business revenue growth, and reinforces the long-term economic vitality of rural downtowns.

The grant encourages property owners and business tenants to collaborate with skilled designers and local artists to develop creative, distinctive signs that enhance business identity while respecting standard guidelines and the historic character of Kansas downtowns. Through matching funding and design support, the program elevates the visual appeal and competitiveness of locally owned businesses, contributing to stronger commercial districts and more vibrant, economically resilient communities.

AVAILABLE FUNDING

The total amount of available funding is \$125,000.

Each community may request up to \$25,000 and is required to complete a minimum of three signage projects for three separate businesses. Communities are required to work with approved artists from the Kansas Arts Commission's *Signs Roster of Artists*. Rates for artists will be between \$20-\$50 per hour. A typical sign design takes on average 10-30 hours. Artist fees are an eligible expense of the program.

Applicants may request funding for eligible one-time project expenses. All applicants must demonstrate local investment through a required cash match of 50% for communities with populations between 2,500 and 50,000, or a 25% cash match for communities with populations below 2,500. In-kind contributions are permitted but apply only toward increasing the match above the required cash minimum.

This program is structured to support improvements across multiple buildings and businesses within a downtown district or across multiple downtowns within a region, ensuring that communities undertake three or more signage installations as part of their grant-funded projects.

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Applicants need to be an a municipal, foundation, Chamber, Main Street, Economic Development or other non-profit community-based entity. Applicants need to identify a minimum of three, maximum of 5, businesses needing new signage in the application. The need for new signage needs to be shown in the application.

Businesses must serve walk-in customers who purchase goods or services on-site, in a qualifying commercial district. Only retail and restaurant, consumer-facing establishments that generate in-person commerce are eligible.

Each applicant must provide a letter of support from the city acknowledging the new signage and agreeing to help with codes and installation where applicable.

Each applicant must provide letters from each participating business acknowledging their desire for new signage and their commitment to cover matching funds.

Qualifying Commercial Districts:

- Traditional Main Street districts with mostly intact commercial buildings
- Urban commercial corridors with street-oriented businesses
- Historic downtown areas, even with significant vacancy
- Mixed-use districts where ground floors are designed for commercial use

Non-Qualifying Commercial Districts:

- Strip centers with front parking lots
- Highway commercial with scattered businesses
- Areas where most buildings are residential or office
- Districts fragmented by major parking lots or non-commercial development

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.

APPLICATION TIMELINE

- **Grant Announcement:** December 2025
- **Application Period:** January 1 to February 28, 2026
- **Submission Deadline:** February 28, 2026
- **Award Notification:** April 2026
- **Informational/Grant Application Webinar:**
 - Date: January 6, 2026
 - Time: 1:30 P.M.
 - Link: <https://shorturl.at/kgGpQ>

PROGRAM TIMELINE

The SIGNS Grant follows a structured nine-month timeline designed to guide communities from training and design through installation and evaluation. This phased approach ensures that participants build the skills needed to develop effective signage, collaborate successfully with designers and fabricators, complete high-quality installations, and measure both the economic and community impact of their work. The timeline below outlines the progression of activities and expectations for each stage of the program.

April 2026

- Two virtual trainings
 - What makes an effective sign?
 - What do sign companies need to install a sign?

May & June 2026

- Creating goals for a new sign
- Finding and working with a designer/artist AND a sign fabricator
- Final sign design and budget Approval

July through September 2026

- Fabrication and Installation

October through December 2026

- Qualitative and quantitative assessments

APPLICATION TIMELINE

The application period runs from January 1 to February 28, 2026. All submitted applications will be reviewed in March, with award notifications issued in April 2026.

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.
- Communities are required to work with approved artists from the Kansas Arts Commission's *Signs Roster of Artists*.
- 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 PROCEDURES

- Online application link can be found here: www.kansascommerce.gov/signs
- Questions and submission of additional documentation should be directed to Sara Bloom at SIGNS.Grant@ks.gov.
- Applications that are incomplete or missing documentation will not be reviewed for rating or considered for funding.

Estimated Time to Complete Application: 1-2 hours

RELEASE OF INFORMATION:

Information submitted to the Kansas Department of Commerce relating to the application may be subject to the Open Records Law (K.S.A. 45-215 et seq.).

REQUIRED ATTACHMENTS

Attachments and support materials must be uploaded into the application through Salesforce. Attachments and support materials will not be accepted by any other method. Required attachments are required for eligibility. The required attachments are:

1. A signed copy of the State Policy Regarding Sexual Harassment Acknowledgment Form.
[Blank form here.](#)
2. Photos of the proposed businesses.
3. Proof of matching funds sufficient to cover at least the minimum estimated cost of \$5,000 per sign.
4. Screenshot Submission of Kansas Secretary of State Good Standing Status.
5. Department of Revenue Tax Clearance Certificate.

LATE APPLICATIONS

To maintain a fair application process, the Kansas Department of Commerce will not accept late grant applications.

For emergency circumstances please contact Sara.Bloom@ks.gov to discuss any extenuating circumstances that led to late submission.

APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

Kansas Commerce strives to review grants through an objective and unbiased process. Grants will be reviewed based on rubric criteria by a panel.

VALUE	DESCRIPTION	SCORE
EXEMPLARY	Clearly explains the project and its significant public value, justifying the allocation of financial support from the State of Kansas.	92-100
EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS	Satisfactorily explains the project and its public value, justifying the allocation of financial support from the State of Kansas.	80-91
MEETS EXPECTATIONS	Sufficiently explains the project and its public value, and may justify the allocation of financial support from the State of Kansas.	68-79
NEEDS IMPROVEMENT	Does not sufficiently explain the project or its public value; does not warrant the allocation of financial support from the State of Kansas.	56-67
INSUFFICIENT EVIDENCE	Provides an incomplete and/or inadequate explanation of the project or its public value. The information is confusing, not very clear, and/or doesn't give enough details. Does not warrant funding from the State of Kansas.	0-55

RUBRIC

Grants will be reviewed and scored based on the provided rubric available in the application package.

SCORING

The maximum number of points an application can earn is 100. Reviewers will individually score each application or each section that is assigned to them. A scoring rubric will be published with the grant opportunity and on the grant webpage. Funding priority criteria may be allocated a higher percentage of the total score or weighted more.

Applications must earn enough points for their application to fall under “Meets Expectations”, “Exceeds Expectations”, or “Exemplary” to be recommended for funding. Meeting one of these values does not guarantee funding for a project.

AWARD NOTIFICATION

Kansas Commerce strives to notify applicants of awards in a timely manner. Applicants will be notified via email if they have been selected.

GRANT PROVISIONS

The SIGNS grant can be used toward the design, purchase, lighting, and installation of a commercial sign in the downtown of a rural community. Eligible costs include the artist fee(s), 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 include but are not limited to:

- Fundraising
- Taxes, except sales tax on goods and services and payroll taxes
- Lobbyists, political contributions
- Bad debts, late payment fees, finance charges, or contingency funds
- Parking or traffic violations
- Out of state transportation and travel expenses. Kansas will be considered the home state for determining whether travel is out of state.
- 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.

GRANT PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS

In addition to Applicant Eligibility, all grantees are expected to:

1. Complete all proposal activities within the grant period
2. Include only allowable expenses in the proposal budget
3. Comply with all grant administration requirements:
 - Provide the required information for grant award agreement
 - Sign and return the grant award agreement to Commerce within 30 calendar days of receipt.
 - Request approval for any changes to the grant award agreement.
 - Complete a final report no later than January 31, 2027
 - Maintain complete and accurate grant records, including all documentation, for a minimum of three years after the end of the grant period.
 - Comply with the requirements of the State of Kansas Policy Against Sexual Harassment, Discrimination, and Retaliation established by Executive Order 18-04.
 - Use the appropriate credit line or approved logo to acknowledge grant funding in all publications. See grant contract for credit requirements.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND REPORTING

All awardees must adhere to the full 9-month program timeline and fulfill all required activities, trainings, deliverables, and reporting obligations outlined in these guidelines. Failure to meet these requirements may result in the withholding of funds, termination of the grant agreement, or ineligibility for future funding.

Awardees must sign a formal contract stating they understand all responsibilities, deadlines, and consequences of noncompliance.

IN PROGRESS REQUIREMENTS

Once awardees have identified artists and sign fabricators additional documentation will be required, including:

- A detailed budget
- Immediate reporting of any budget changes exceeding 10%
- Proof of permits or approvals
- Contracts or agreements with designers/fabricators

FINAL REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

All awardees must submit a Final Report by January 31, 2027, including:

- Summary of activities completed
- Description of design and fabrication process
- Final installed sign photos
- Assessment results (qualitative and quantitative)
- Budget reconciliation and documentation of expenses
- Reflections on impact and lessons learned

GRANT PAYMENTS

Grant funds will be distributed only after the applicant has completed the required design and budget development process during the May–June program phase. No funds will be released prior to the approval of the final sign design, project budget, and all required documentation by the Kansas Department of Commerce.

Once the design and budget are formally approved, grant funds will be deposited within 30 days, provided all compliance requirements have been met.

APPLICATION CRITERIA

All applications must include:

4. Need: 300 word limit
5. Current Sign Condition: 5,000 characters
6. Commercial District Description: 5,000 characters
7. Project Approach: 5,000 characters
8. Project Team: 5,000 characters
9. Photos
10. Letters from Building Owners (if needed)
11. Letters of Support (optional)
12. Proof of Matching Funds

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 (40 Points)

- Does the application clearly demonstrate a significant need for new signage (e.g., outdated, missing, ineffective, or non-compliant signage)?
- To what extent do the current signs help establish a clear district identity and support its perception as a destination?
- Is the existing business signage effective at attracting customers to the businesses?
- Does the proposal include signage improvements for multiple businesses within a defined district?
- Will the combined improvements create visible, district-level economic or aesthetic impact?

TIMELINE & READINESS (30 Points)

- Has a team of business owners, building owners, and city representatives been identified and committed to participating?
- Has the applicant included team members who can support necessary approvals (permits, design, contractor coordination, etc.)?
- Is the applicant open to a collaborative design process involving an artist? Does the applicant demonstrate a clear plan for engaging an approved artist from the Kansas Arts Commission Signs Roster?
- Are there anticipated scheduling issues or conflicts with the proposed timeline?
- Does the proposed design appropriately reflect the historic character and architectural context of the district? Does the application demonstrate understanding and implementation of the Quality Places Signage Guide?

COMMUNITY CONTEXT (20 Points)

- Are the businesses located in a qualifying commercial district?
- How does the community show pride in the district?
- Does the proposal align with broader revitalization initiatives or community goals?
- How will the new signage support or strengthen current economic development efforts? Does the application clearly explain how new signage will increase customer visibility or accessibility?
- Is there a reasonable expectation that the project will contribute to increased sales, foot traffic, or business stability?

FEASIBILITY & BUDGET (10 Points)

- Is proof of matching funds complete, clear, and well-documented?
- Does the proposal include evidence of community support (business groups, chambers, Main Street organizations, etc.)?

SELECTION CRITERIA

Kansas Commerce will announce the amount of funds available for the SIGNS grant, subject to funding availability. All grant applications approved by the Department of Commerce will be funded according to the process set forth in the following:

All applications received by the deadline will be reviewed for eligibility and threshold criteria, as outlined in the guidelines. Eligible applications will then be reviewed and rated according to the established rubric and scoring matrix.

Kansas Department of Commerce may determine which grant applicants will receive state grant funds based on a number of factors, including:

- Grant reviewer scores
- Geographic distribution of grant applicants
- Services to specified populations
- History of grant applicant as a state grantee
- Applicant's capacity to perform the work
- Pre-award capacity assessment of applicant

All awards must be approved by the Secretary of Commerce.

CONTACT US



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