



LEGACY

— FORWARD —

GRANT FUND PILOT

Program Guidelines | 2026

\$100,000 PILOT FUND | 10 LEGACY BUSINESSES | \$10,000 GRANT EACH

Applications: September 8 - October 2, 2026

Six-week Legacy Business Fundamentals Course + Required milestones + One lump-sum grant upon successful completion

*Administered by the City of Birmingham Department of Innovation and Economic Opportunity's
Office of Business Diversity & Opportunity*



I. Grant Fund Overview

Legacy Forward is the City of Birmingham's pilot grant and capacity-building program created to help eligible legacy businesses strengthen operations, build organizational capacity, plan for succession, modernize, and prepare for long-term sustainability.

Ten selected legacy businesses will participate in a structured six-week Legacy Business Fundamentals Course, complete the Optimization Business Health Assessment (TM), and develop an informed plan for the use of grant funds. Participants who successfully complete all required program milestones will become eligible to receive a \$10,000 Legacy Forward grant.

The \$100,000 pilot fund will provide ten \$10,000 grants. Grant funds will be disbursed as a single lump sum following successful completion of required program milestones, with disbursement anticipated during the week of January 25, 2027.

Legacy Forward is an initiative of the City of Birmingham Department of Innovation and Economic Opportunity and the Office of Business Diversity & Opportunity. The program pairs capital with capacity building through the Legacy Business Fundamentals Course.

Program Goals

1. Enhance business sustainability through targeted financial support.
2. Build capacity through a structured six-week Legacy Business Fundamentals Course paired with the Optimization Business Health Assessment (TM), which is designed to identify organizational health and areas for improvement and enhancement.
- 3.

Application and Program Snapshot

Milestone	Date / Detail
Applications Open	September 8, 2026
Applications Close	October 2, 2026
Applications Review	October 5 - 16, 2026
Notifications	Week of October 19, 2026
Pre-Program Activities	Week of November 2, 2026
Cohort Sessions	November 2026 through January 2027, with holiday breaks
Grant Disbursement	\$10,000 lump sum during the week of January 25, 2027, following completion of required milestones
Graduation	Week of February 1, 2027

II. Eligibility Criteria

Businesses must meet all applicable eligibility requirements:

- Hold a current City of Birmingham business license.
- Be compliant with all applicable local, state, and federal regulations, including taxes, permitting, and, where applicable, health department requirements.
- Have operated continuously for 25 years or more within Birmingham city limits.
- Employ 20 or fewer employees.
- Be independently owned and not part of a national chain or corporate-owned franchise.
- Demonstrate financial need or operational challenges that can be mitigated through this fund.
- Be physically located within the City of Birmingham. Geographic priority areas may receive additional consideration in scoring.
- Operate in a commercial space. Home-based businesses are ineligible.
- No matching funds are required.

Program Ineligibility

- Businesses engaged in illegal activity under federal, state, or local law.
- Corporate-owned franchises and national credit tenants.
- Businesses located outside the United States.
- Government-owned entities.
- Businesses owned or operated by officials or employees of the City of Birmingham, Urban Impact, or People Optimum Consulting, or their family members, subject to applicable ethics and conflict of interest requirements.
- Pyramid sale distribution plans.
- Passive businesses owned by developers or landlords with no active ties to for-profit business activity at the location.
- Businesses primarily engaged in political or lobbying activities.
- Businesses principally engaged in teaching, instructing, counseling, or indoctrinating religion or religious beliefs, whether in a religious or secular setting.
- Businesses owned or controlled by a person incarcerated in a correctional institution.
- Private clubs or businesses that limit membership for reasons other than capacity.
- Enterprises that constitute adult businesses as defined by the City of Birmingham Ordinance.

III. Selection Criteria

- Business longevity and demonstrated community impact.
- Financial need and business stability.
- Historical and cultural significance.
- Adaptability and modernization.
- Location within a geographic priority area.
- Previous grant funding history.
- Potential for long-term sustainability.

The Optimization Business Health Assessment (TM) is a program assessment completed as part of the cohort and is not used to score applicants before participant selection.

IV. Geographic Priority Areas

All applicants must be located within Birmingham city limits. The following areas receive priority consideration in the scoring process.

Priority Areas

Urban Renewal Districts

- Five Points West
- North Birmingham
- Smithfield
- North Titusville
- Tuscaloosa-Lomb Avenue

Commercial Revitalization Districts

- East Lake
- Woodlawn
- Ensley
- 4th Avenue Business District
- Downtown Northeast
- Downtown West

V. Application Process and Required Documentation

Applicants will apply online through the City of Birmingham IEO Legacy Business landing page at <https://ieo.birminghamal.gov/legacybhm/>. Paper applications will not be accepted. Incomplete applications will not be considered.

***Special Note:** For assistance completing an application, please call 205-254-7741. You can schedule a time between 8:30 am and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, with a LEGACY BHM team member to help you complete an application online.

Required Documents

- Current City of Birmingham Business License.
- Certificate of Incorporation or Certificate of Organization from the Alabama Secretary of State's Office, as applicable.
- Annual registration from the Alabama Secretary of State, as applicable.
- Certificate of Existence.
- Signed Operating Agreement or Bylaws, as applicable.
- Executed Lease Agreement or Property Deed.
- Completed most recent Form W-9.
- Government-issued identification.

Grant Selection and Scoring

Category	Max Points	Scoring Criteria
Business Longevity	25	25 - 39 years = 15 points; 40 - 49 years = 20 points; 50+ years = 25 points
Community Impact & Local Contributions	20	Strong evidence = 20; Moderate = 10 - 15; Minimal = 5
Financial Need & Stability	20	Significant need with sustainability plan = 20; Moderate = 10 - 15; Minimal = 5
Historical & Cultural Significance	10	Strong documented significance = 10; Moderate = 5; None = 0
Adaptability & Modernization	10	Strong adaptation = 10; Moderate = 5; None = 0
Geographic Priority Area	10	Located in priority area = 10; partial/adjacent impact = 5; not applicable = 0
Previous Grant Funding	5	No prior funding = 5; Some = 3; Significant prior funding = 0

Applicants must score at least 60 points to be considered for selection and funding eligibility.

Evaluation Process and Funding Priority

1. Minimum Score Requirement: Applicants must score at least 60 points to be considered.
2. Priority Consideration: Historically disinvested geographic priority areas, businesses that experienced significant economic disruptions, and businesses that have received minimal or no previous grant funding.
3. Tiebreakers: Highest business longevity, highest community impact score, then level of financial need based on the applicant's impact statement.

Selection Process

1. Pre-Application Screening: Urban Impact staff will verify applicant eligibility.
2. Application Review: The Grant Selection Committee will evaluate and score eligible applications.
3. Notification: Selected businesses will receive written notification confirming selection into the Legacy Forward cohort.
4. Due Diligence: Selected businesses must submit or validate all required eligibility and due diligence documentation.
5. Program Agreement: Selected businesses must execute required program and grant agreements.
6. Grant Eligibility: Selection into the cohort does not constitute grant disbursement. Participants become eligible for the \$10,000 grant only after successfully completing required program milestones.
7. Post-Grant Reporting: Grantees must submit a follow-up report detailing the impact and use of funds within 90 days after receiving the grant.

VI. Program Timeline

	Date
Pre-Program + OBHA	November 2, 2026
Week 1: Founder Download Part 1	November 16, 2026
Week 2: Financial	November 30, 2026
Week 3: Digital	December 7, 2026
Week 4: Founder Download Part 2	December 14, 2026
Week 5: Workforce	January 5, 2027
Week 6: Succession + post-OBHA	January 11, 2027
Makeup Session	January 18, 2027
Grant Disbursement	Week of January 25, 2027
Graduation	February 1, 2027

VII. Program Requirements and Conditions

Successful completion of Legacy Forward requires participants to:

- Attend the mandatory pre-program orientation and complete the pre-program Optimization Business Health Assessment (TM).
- Attend all six required instructional sessions. The scheduled makeup week may be used to satisfy an approved missed session in accordance with program policy.
- Actively participate in cohort activities and submit required assignments, documentation, and evaluations.
- Complete the post-program Optimization Business Health Assessment (TM).
- Develop and submit an informed and allowable plan for the use of grant funds.
- Remain eligible and in good standing throughout the program.
- Execute all required grant documentation before disbursement.

Grant Disbursement

The \$10,000 Legacy Forward grant will be disbursed as one lump sum through the program's fiscal partner, Urban Impact, after successful completion of all required cohort activities and program milestones. Disbursement is anticipated during the week of January 25, 2027. Failure to satisfy program completion requirements may result in forfeiture of grant eligibility.

VIII. Eligible Use of Funds

Grant funds may be used for purposes that directly enhance the business's financial health, operations, modernization, and sustainability, including:

- Working capital and inventory purchases.
- Equipment purchases or upgrades.
- Technology and digital system improvements.
- Marketing and advertising, including website development, SEO, social media advertising, promotional materials, signage, and rebranding.
- Professional services, including accounting, human resources, legal, and other approved business services.

IX. Ineligible Uses of Funds

- Furniture, office supplies, or routine day-to-day operating expenses such as utilities, rent, or insurance.
- Cosmetic or aesthetic improvements such as painting, landscaping, lighting, or awnings.
- Structural repairs or HVAC, plumbing, or electrical work that is not part of a larger approved project.
- Debt refinancing, loan repayment, or personal expenses.
- Reimbursement for expenses incurred before grant approval and disbursement.
- Any use prohibited by applicable federal, state, or local law, City policy, or the executed grant agreement.

X. Frequently Asked Questions

1. What makes a business a legacy business?

For this pilot, an eligible legacy business is a Birmingham-based business that has operated continuously for 25 years or more within Birmingham city limits and employs 20 or fewer employees, subject to all other eligibility requirements.

2. Is this a loan or a grant?

This is a grant. Ten selected cohort participants may become eligible for a \$10,000 grant after successfully completing all required program milestones. The grant is not paid in installments.

3. Do I need to provide collateral or matching funds?

No. No collateral or matching funds are required.

4. How will funds be disbursed?

The program's fiscal partner, Urban Impact, is expected to disburse the full \$10,000 grant as one lump sum after successful completion of required program milestones.

5. What happens if I do not complete the program?

Failure to complete required program milestones may result in forfeiture of grant eligibility.

6. Will my business be featured or recognized?

Yes. Participants may be recognized through The Legacy Series, including Building Legacy, Talking Legacy, and Celebrating Legacy, and through the Legacy Forward graduation and related City communications.



XI. Program Contact Information

Legacy Forward Program

City of Birmingham Department of Innovation and Economic Opportunity

Office of Business Diversity & Opportunity

Program Contact: Dorothy George, Program Manager

Email: dorothy.george@birminghamal.gov

Phone: 205-254-2799

Website: <https://ieo.birminghamal.gov/legacybhm/>

Administrative Notice

These guidelines describe the intended structure of the 2026 Legacy Forward pilot. Final awards, eligibility determinations, disbursement, allowable uses, and program administration remain subject to executed agreements, available appropriations, applicable law, and final City legal, fiscal, procurement, ethics, and administrative review. The City reserves the right to clarify or amend program requirements when necessary.