

INTERNATIONAL MARKET ACCESS GRANT

A WORLD OF OPPORTUNITY FOR WISCONSIN EXPORTS

Companies that want to grow know they need to export—but navigating the global marketplace can mean taking risks and exploring new strategies. The Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) stands ready to help you dive into new international markets. Our **International Market Access Grant (IMAG)** helps companies lay the foundation for a new export strategy or advance an existing strategy through new projects.

WHY APPLY

Wisconsin companies can be reimbursed for short-term or one-time expenses associated with a targeted export project that will help to grow their sales in an international market. This grant supports activities that are new to the applicant and that would not be possible without grant funding. Applicants must identify specific target countries and describe export-related activities that will boost their ability to export to those markets. Applicants must also demonstrate a cohesive export strategy across all specified target countries and explain how the planned activities will increase their export sales.

ELIGIBILITY

Applicants for this grant may be new to exporting or be experienced exporters looking to expand further into new markets. An international market is defined as a country outside the geographical borders of the United States and its territories.

Under the program, companies that have not completed ExporTech can only receive IMAG funding up to three (3) times with a maximum of \$10,000 per grant, while ExporTech graduate companies can receive IMAG funding up to six (6) times at no more than \$30,000 per grant. No company can be funded more than six (6) times through the International Market Access Grant.

All applicants for an IMAG must:

- Be an established business, registered and operational in Wisconsin for at least one year.
- Have substantial export-related operations located within the state that provide economic benefit to Wisconsin.

APPLICATION INFORMATION

For more information about Global Business Development Grants, please contact:

SHEILA POSTLER
Global Trade and Investment
Grant and Fund Manager
Tel: 608.210.6763
Email:
sheila.postler@wedc.org

Or visit our website:
wedc.org/programs/international-market-access-grant/

- Manufacture, process, assemble and/or distribute a product or perform a service with the potential to be exported.
- Self-certify that at least 35% of the value of the product or service is composed of Wisconsin cost inputs. An Excel spreadsheet can be provided upon request to assist you with these calculations.
- Have gross revenue of less than \$100 million for the most recent complete fiscal year.

Funds are awarded based on the strength of the individual application. Not all applications will receive funding.

APPLICATION PROCESS

1. Contact WEDC and request access to the Network Wisconsin portal to complete the application. The application must be completed within the portal. WEDC will not accept documents submitted by any other means.
2. To allow sufficient time for project vetting and the financial underwriting process, please submit your application at least six weeks prior to the date you need to begin spending grant funds. Any application submitted with less than six weeks lead time may be denied.
3. WEDC grants staff will conduct a thorough review of your application. A WEDC market development director may contact you for additional information on your project.
4. After approximately 4-6 weeks, WEDC staff will notify you of the initial decision on your application. If your application is successful, you can begin incurring expenses on this date. However, expenses incurred between the acceptance date and execution of the contract are incurred at the applicant's own risk. You may not submit a request for reimbursement until an executed contract is in place. If your application does not pass the credit and risk checks and receive an executed contract, WEDC will not reimburse you for any expenses.
5. Once the project has been vetted, it proceeds to underwriting for background checks and a credit and risk check. Any individual that owns 20% or more of the company must undergo a background check. Without this information, the award process cannot proceed.
6. If there are no issues identified in the credit and risk check, WEDC's in-house legal staff will provide a draft of your contract for review.
7. WEDC grants staff will contact you to discuss the details of your project and WEDC's fund disbursement process. WEDC staff will provide you with a Reporting Guide detailing the reimbursement and evaluation process. This guide can be provided earlier by request.
8. Your application will be presented to a review committee. This is the final stage of review. If your application receives committee approval, WEDC's legal staff will send you a final contract to sign. You will have two weeks to sign and return the contract.
9. Once we receive your signed contract, it will be countersigned by WEDC's executive team and emailed back to you. The executed contract will include an Exhibit A, which you must submit with any requests for reimbursement.
10. After a contract is executed, you can proceed with your project through the end of 2026. You may submit reimbursement documents during or at the conclusion of the project.

REIMBURSEMENT AND REPORTING PROCESS

The International Market Access Grant is a reimbursement grant. This means that your company will pay for all expenses out of its own budget, then gather and submit documentation to support those expenses. WEDC will analyze those documents to determine how much funding can be disbursed to you, up to your maximum approved amount.

WEDC is required by statute to obtain certain financial and performance data on all grants. Doing so helps us remain transparent to taxpayers, as well as conduct program evaluations and work to better understand the most effective ways to assist Wisconsin businesses.

Performance Reports: WEDC requires Performance Reports from all grants to track not only how well businesses are using funds, but also the success of WEDC programs. Performance Reports include a variety of metrics depending on the grant and must be submitted in accordance with the schedule in the contract. The Network Wisconsin Portal lists any required data that must be included in the Performance Report.

Requests for Reimbursement: In order to receive your grant funds, you must request reimbursement from WEDC. WEDC will reimburse only after the product or service has been fully received or rendered and your company has fully paid the expense. WEDC requires a specific format for all documents in a request for reimbursement.

Proper documentation must be supplied for all expenses related to the grant, including matching funds expenditures. WEDC requires dated, itemized invoices on the vendor's letterhead for all grant expenses and match expenses. You must save all documentation throughout the project. For more details on these requirements, you can request a Reporting Guide from WEDC grants staff. You will also receive the Reporting Guide when your application passes all credit and risk checks.

You must submit the reimbursement request and Performance Report to WEDC no later than 90 days after the project end date. You may submit multiple requests for reimbursement throughout the project. If you submit multiple requests, you must include the Performance Report with the final request. WEDC will contact you for a follow-up evaluation within a year.

Eligible Expense Categories

Trade Shows/Missions

- **Trade Activity Registration:** Signup fees for a trade show or other authorized event. Does not include WEDC trade missions.
- **Booth Space/Booth Construction:** Fees to reserve a booth space at a trade show or other authorized event; purchase or rental of furnishings for the booth, such as display tables.
- **Interpreters:** Services rendered by a professional interpreter who is not a full-time employee of your company.
- **Shipping:** Shipping costs for items which are not for sale, including shipping a demo unit to an authorized event, shipping a test unit for certification, or shipping samples. Does not include the cost of shipping any item which is for sale.
- **Transportation:** Flights, trains, or car rental for full-time employees of your company on an authorized trip for export-related business purposes. These costs cannot be reimbursement with grant funds, but they can be used toward the 30% match requirement. Does not include gas or mileage reimbursement.
- **Lodging:** Hotel accommodations for full-time employees of your company on an authorized trip for export-related business purposes. These costs cannot be reimbursement with grant funds, but they can be used toward the 30% match requirement.

Marketing/Promotion

- Website: Fees to create or upgrade a website that is viewable and usable by international customers or partners.
- Graphic Design/Photography/Videography: Design costs, including packaging redesign, label redesign, website redesign, photo shoots for advertising purposes, or video shoots for advertising purposes.
- Digital or Print Translation: Translation of labels, marketing or advertising materials, website pages, or instructional materials. Translations of software copy for companies that sell software may be permitted as a product modification expense subject to preapproval.
- Advertising/Marketing: Fees for advertising or marketing, such as Google Ads fees. May also include purchase of promotional items (other than clothing) distributed for free at an authorized event, such as branded magnets or pens. Does not include promotional giveaways or other prizes.
- Printing: Printing costs for marketing or advertising materials, including posters, flyers, banners, and pamphlets. Does not include printing costs for labels, packaging, logo wear or other clothing, or business cards.
- Product Certification: Fees to obtain a certification or registration necessary to sell your product in a foreign country, such as CE marks or UL listing.
- IP Protection: Fees to register a patent, trademark, or copyright in a foreign country.

Export Education

- Export Development Training: An authorized training course, attended by your full-time employee(s), covering topics related to export strategy or export development, including customs policies or other export-specific topics. Does not include ExporTech.
- Cultural Competency Training: An authorized training course, attended by your full-time employee(s), covering topics related to cultural competency or best business practices in foreign markets.
- Foreign Language Training: An authorized training course, attended by your full-time employee(s), teaching a language commonly spoken in one or more of your identified target markets.

Consulting Services

- Trade Rep Services: Fees to retain the services of an authorized trade representative, including fees for WEDC trade representatives.
- USCS Gold Key: Fees to participate in the Gold Key program offered by the U.S. Commercial Service.
- Marketing Consultant: Fees to retain a person other than an employee or owner of your company to provide marketing or advertising services, including website design, graphic design, and copy writing.
- Export Consultant: Fees to retain a person other than an employee or owner of your company to provide export-specific consulting services, such as customs advisors, sales strategy developers, or export gap analysis programs.
- Overseas Legal Assistance: Fees to retain a person other than an employee or owner of your company to provide legal assistance for obtaining a foreign patent, trademark, copyright, or certification. Does not include fees to establish a foreign legal entity.
- Market Research: Fees to retain a person other than an employee or owner of your company to provide market research, or fees to purchase and analyze a relevant data set. Does not include access to market research software.
- Product Modification: Fees to retain a person other than an employee or owner of your company to provide advice and specifications for modifying your product to meet the requirements of your target market(s), subject to preapproval.

A limited number of product modification projects will be accepted this year. If you are requesting funds for product modification, please schedule a meeting with WEDC's grants manager prior to

submitting your application. You will be required to provide an attachment detailing the product, how it will be modified, and how the modification will make the product more salable in the target market.

Ineligible Expense Examples

Note: This is not an exhaustive list.

- Business-related expenses that are considered “costs of doing business,” including but not limited to salaries, rent, office supplies, materials, inventory, or other costs essential for your operations
- Production costs, including production or purchase of samples or packaging
- Capital expenditures
- Any activities currently subsidized by a state or federal government (e.g., Food Export Association, ExporTech, WEDC trade missions) or which will be reimbursed or counted as a cost match for any other funding program
- Salaries, stipends, living expenses, office costs, allowances, commission, or bonuses
- Passport or visa costs
- Subscription services extending beyond the project end date
- Travel and lodging expenses for non-employees, including consultants, customers, interpreters, independent representatives, distributors, and dealers
- Deposits, prepayments, or advances paid before the grant approval date
- Shipping of items that are for sale
- Rental, lease, or purchase of warehouse space
- Purchase, construction, or lease of space for permanent displays (i.e., displays lasting beyond a one-year activity plan)
- Meals, reception refreshments, entertainment, decorations, or gifts
- Business cards, seasonal greeting cards or subscriptions to publications
- Costs associated with U.S. patents, trademarks, copyrights, or product certifications
- Membership fees for any group or association
- Software, digital devices, or other communications technologies, either as rental, purchase, or subscription
- Medical expenses, clothing, or other non-business expenses such as hotel internet fees or gym use fees
- Any activity exclusive to the domestic market

PROJECT WINDOW AND BUDGET

Timeline

Previous grant projects must be completed, along with their reimbursements and performance reports, before a new application will be provided to any applicant. No company may receive more than one IMAG at a time or more than one IMAG in any fiscal year. Past grant utilization and lapse history will be considered when reviewing a new application.

The International Market Access Grant application period opens annually on July 1. Grant applications are accepted until the budget is exhausted or until October 31, whichever occurs first. If grant funds remain after October 31, a second round may open from February 1 to March 15. The second round may not be available every year. Applicants should plan to submit their applications between July 1 and October 31.

The project window is the time between your application acceptance date (up to 6 weeks after you submit your application) and your project end date. For example, successful applicants who submit their application on July 1 can expect to begin their project in August. All grant projects must end on or before December 31, 2026. All expenses must be incurred and invoiced within this window. All activities must also occur within the project period, meaning you cannot use a 2025 grant to prepay for 2026 activities. Any expense that falls outside this window or was documented or paid outside this window will be rejected.

Budget

IMAG assistance is up to \$10,000 (with a lifetime limit of three (3) grants). ExporTech graduates may apply for up to \$30,000 (with a lifetime limit of six (6) grants).

Applicants must also contribute matching funds to the project equal to 30% of the grant amount. For example, applicants who are approved for up to \$10,000 in grant funds must spend an additional \$3,000 out of their own budget, which WEDC will not reimburse. The total project spend will be no less than \$13,000.

All grant projects must end on or before December 31, 2026.