

# **CORNERSTONE ALLIANCE**



## **SMALL BUSINESS FAÇADE & ENERGY EFFICIENCY GRANT PROGRAM**


### **GRANT GUIDELINES**



**Cornerstone  
ALLIANCE**

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  BERRIEN COUNTY

80 W. Main Street  
Benton Harbor, MI 49022  
(269) 925-6100  
[www.cstonealliance.org](http://www.cstonealliance.org)



## About

The appearance of buildings plays a major role in the economic success of a community. Improving the physical appearance of buildings promotes business attraction and retention, deters property value deterioration, improves public perception, and can preserve historic resources. Making energy efficient upgrades to a building is easy, saves energy and can greatly improve a small business's bottom line.

The purpose of the Cornerstone Alliance Small Business Façade and Energy Efficiency Improvements Grant Program is to encourage small business owners located within the program areas to make both exterior building façade improvements and interior energy efficiency improvements that will attract customers, extend the life of the building and lower energy costs. This program is funded through Cornerstone Alliance and a generous donation from Indiana Michigan Power.

## Façade Grant Amounts and Participation

Façade grants will be given for projects with minimum eligible costs between \$500.00 and \$10,000.


This is a reimbursement-based program under which the applicant will be reimbursed \$.50 for each \$1.00 spent up to a maximum grant amount of \$10,000.00, except as noted below. The costs of all work and materials must be paid in full by the applicant before any grant funds will be paid to the applicant by Cornerstone Alliance. **The applicant will *may* be reimbursed for costs incurred for work completed prior to receiving final grant approval by Cornerstone Alliance where the application is approved by Cornerstone.**

In limited situations, the maximum grant amount may exceed the maximum grant amount of \$10,000 where the proposed façade improvements, in the sole opinion of Cornerstone Alliance, will result in a substantial and dramatic visual change and improvement to the exterior of the building involved.

## Eligibility Criteria

To be considered eligible for the program, the business must meet the following criteria:

1. Must be a small business as define herein. *Small Business* is defined as a for profit, privately-owned corporation, partnership, sole proprietorship, limited liability company, corporation, joint venture, association, trust or cooperative that has had 50 or fewer employees. The business must be independently owned and operated.
2. Must be located in the defined program areas, which include:
  - *Downtown Benton Harbor* defined as Main Street from Paw Paw Avenue west to the Bicentennial Bridge and a radius of two blocks on either side of Main Street (includes the Arts District).
  - *The Niles Road Business Corridor* defined as Niles Road between Napier Avenue and Hilltop Road. Includes Washington Avenue between Niles Road and Hilltop Road.
  - *The M-139 Corridor*, properties located on M-139 between Pipestone Road and I-94.
3. Primary location is the building which the improvements will take place.



## Who Can Apply?

- Building owners or tenants are eligible. If a tenant applies for assistance, he/she must provide written proof that the building owner has authorized proposed improvements.
- Only buildings with retail, commercial, or professional uses are eligible.
- Buildings with existing tenants will receive priority.

## Eligible Project Sites

Any front or side building façade abutting a public right of way or municipal parking lot are eligible projects. Rear or other facades not abutting a public right of way may be eligible on a case-by-case basis.

## Eligible Costs

Eligible Costs include, but are not necessarily limited to, labor and material for:

- Restoration, repair or replacement of windows, doors, exterior walls, chimneys or other architectural elements.
- Costs associated with work that is currently underway, where the work meets the program guidelines.
- Exterior painting if done in conjunction with other eligible work.
- Signage, awnings, marquees and related lighting and electrical fixtures.
- Masonry repair or cleaning.
- Exterior work necessary for conversion to a retail or entertainment storefront.
- Removal of after-installed façades.
- Restoration of vintage elements.
- Making energy efficient improvements recommended in the energy audit.


### The following costs are not eligible:

- Costs incurred before final grant approval by Cornerstone Alliance where the work does not meet the program guidelines.
- Work that does not meet the program guidelines.
- Costs paid by the applicant in merchandise or in-kind services.
- Labor paid to the applicant or a family member of the applicant or an employee of the applicant unless the applicant, family member or employee of the applicant is a recognized contractor for the particular labor being provided to the project.
- Costs incurred where the work fails to meet required municipal ordinances, building codes, and/or Americans with Disabilities Act guidelines.

## Indiana Michigan Power On-Site Energy Efficiency Evaluation

Prior to the completion of the façade improvements, all program participants who are Indiana Michigan electric customers are required to have an on-site energy efficiency evaluation completed by Indiana Michigan Power. An Indiana Michigan Power representative will conduct a Level I audit at your business location. The Level 1 audit is free of charge and will identify energy efficiency opportunities for your business and available rebates and incentives for energy saving projects.

While the program participant is not required to make any of the recommended energy efficiency improvements, they are highly encouraged to do so. **Additional grant funds up to \$2,000 may be available toward making the recommended energy efficiency improvement projects.** These additional funds do NOT require a match.



Program participants who have had an energy audit completed by Indiana Michigan Power within the last **5 years** must provide proof of audit completion to be considered exempt from the audit requirement. These participants may still be eligible for additional grant funds to complete energy efficiency improvement projects recommended by their audit.

## Application Process

Cornerstone Alliance will consider and award Façade Improvement Grants between February 1 and August 1 of each year or, as funding becomes available.

**Only complete applications will be considered.** Incomplete applications will not be processed.

Applications will be made available online at [www.cstonealliance.org](http://www.cstonealliance.org) or in person at Cornerstone's office at the address below.

Applicants must complete a Cornerstone Alliance Façade and Energy Efficiency Grant application and return it and all required attachments in person or by mail to:

Cornerstone Alliance Small Business Services  
Façade and Energy Efficiency Grant Program  
80 W. Main Street  
Benton Harbor, MI 49022

## Application Requirements

A completed application will consist of the following required documentation:

1. A completed application form.
2. Proof that the business is a "Small Business" as defined herein.
3. Renderings of the proposed work.
  - **Building Façade Work:** A rendering of the proposed work must be submitted. The rendering must be neat, detailed and scaled, including window locations, door locations, any existing and/or proposed signs or awnings.
  - **Building Signs:** Where a new building sign is proposed, a scaled rendering/elevation accurately depicting all existing and proposed wall signs must be submitted.
  - **Freestanding Signs:** Where a new freestanding sign is proposed, a formal site plan must be submitted. The plan must be drawn with a straight edge and to a standard engineering scale. The site plan must include the following information:
    - Lot lines
    - North arrow
    - Streets labeled
    - Driveway location(s)
    - Existing structures
    - All known easements
    - Natural features (lakes, creeks, floodplain, or wetlands)
    - Proposed location of freestanding sign(s), with setbacks from property lines



- If the project cost exceeds \$10,000.00, renderings and site plans must be completed by an architect licensed in the state of Michigan.
4. A written description of the project plans must be submitted including any information that will assist in understanding the scope of the project, including:
    - Building materials
    - Colors (paint chips, brick/stone color, etc.)
    - Exterior lighting
    - Window and door types
    - Architectural detailing
    - Sign specifications
    - Awnings
    - General renovation details
  5. For projects up to \$1,500, provide one (1) recent price quote (“recent”=dated within past 45 days). For projects over \$1,500, provide two (2) recent price quotes or bids for the proposed project. Cornerstone Alliance is not responsible for any costs incurred in obtaining the quote.
  6. Proof that Property Taxes are current.
  7. Proof of business ownership or tenancy (lease agreement).

## Cost Estimates and Contractors

For projects up to \$1,500, the applicant must submit one (1) cost estimate for the work to be completed as an attachment to their application. For projects over \$1,500, the applicant must submit two (2) bids or cost estimates for the work to be completed as an attachment to their application.

All contractors must be licensed in the state of Michigan (as applicable), bonded, and insured.

Upon signing the Façade Grant Agreement, the applicant will identify the contractor or contractors who will perform the work and disclose if any such contractor is a family member or employee of the applicant.

Where the applicant received multiple bids and the applicant chooses the highest bid, Cornerstone will reimburse for costs to not exceed the lowest bid. The applicant will be responsible for the difference between the highest bid and the lowest bid.


*For Example:*

Applicant receives two bids for a project: Bid #1 is \$5,000 and Bid #2 is \$7,000. The applicant chooses to use the contractor who submitted Bid #2. Cornerstone would reimburse the applicant 50% of the lowest bid amount (in this case, \$2,500) for the work and the applicant would pay the remaining \$4,500 out of pocket.

## Application Review

### Initial Application Review

Within 7 days of receipt, a Cornerstone Alliance Small Business staff member will perform an initial application review to determine whether the application is complete. Applications will be reviewed in the order that they were received by Cornerstone Alliance. Staff will notify the applicant whether the application is complete and will be accepted for



consideration. **Only fully completed applications (including all required attachments) will be reviewed for consideration.**

## **Application Review Committee/Final Review**

An application review committee consisting of Cornerstone staff members and a representative from Indiana Michigan Power will review completed applications. The review committee will review applications on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month.

A Cornerstone Alliance Small Business Services staff member will notify the applicant in writing as to whether their application was approved, approved with modifications, or denied.

## **Application Evaluation Criteria**

### **Design Guidelines**

The following represents Cornerstone Alliance's general design guidelines and will be used in reviewing projects. However, some communities may have their own design guidelines as found in the municipality's code of ordinances. Check with your municipal building or code enforcement department to determine whether design guidelines apply to your building **BEFORE** designing your project. Where these design guidelines deviate from the required municipal design guidelines, the municipal design guidelines will take precedence.

Painting. The use of color should be harmonious with the neighboring properties and the surrounding neighborhood. Separate paint colors for building walls and architectural details are encouraged. The goal is to enhance the architectural details of the building and not suppress them.

New walls and siding, and repair of same. Use suitable materials which are compatible in texture, scale, and color with those already found in the surrounding area and on the structure.

New awnings. Awnings should have coordinating colors to match building façades and details. Canvas/cloth awnings are strongly recommended over vinyl.

Exterior storefront and/or storefront display lighting. All exterior building or storefront display lighting must be in compliance with local lighting ordinances. Fixtures should be compatible with the existing structure in scale and design. Lighting must not throw off more light than is necessary to show a sign or storefront. To reduce excess light pollution, downcast directional lighting is preferred. Lights must face the façade and bulbs should not be visible from the street.

Cleaning of building façade. Appropriate cleaning techniques should be used which will not mar building façades or contribute to building decay.

New signage. Signage must comply with local sign ordinances and may require a municipal sign permit. Sign design should be compatible with the building façade. Use coordinating colors to match building façades and details, as well as, using an appropriately sized sign to fit the scale of the building. New signage should not cover any significant architectural details. Exterior box-type backlit, moving, flashing or neon signs and awnings are discouraged except when part of a structure's original architectural design.

Window and window treatments. Replacement windows and window treatments must be consistent with scale and design of the structure. Replacement windows should be historically accurate in design in relationship to the structure.



## Application Scoring

Applications will be reviewed by the Application Review Committee using the scoring system below. A maximum of 30 points is available. Applications receiving a score of 21 or higher will be eligible for funding.

Category	Maximum Points
Applicant has never received a grant of any type from Cornerstone Alliance.	5
The applicant is the owner of the property (and is not a building tenant).	1
The existing building condition visually appears to be structurally sound with roof intact.	4
The façade project is part of a larger planned building renovation project.	2
The proposal meets Cornerstone's Design Guidelines and/or the municipal design guidelines.	5
The extent to which the proposed work will compliment or enhance the appearance of the surrounding area.	5
The extent to which the proposed work will improve the appearance of the property.	5
Whether the grant will leverage additional funding for the project.	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30</b>

## Discretion of Cornerstone Alliance

Cornerstone Alliance may, in its sole and absolute discretion, approve or reject any application or request modifications of the proposed project and may require that façade improvements meet specific descriptions, concepts, and utilize specific materials. Cornerstone Alliance reserves the right to change these guidelines at any time.



## Municipal Approvals

Approved applications **must** be reviewed by the appropriate municipal building department for design/appropriateness/building permit approval prior to the start of any work. Depending on the project scope of work, other municipal approvals may be required, i.e. sign permit, planning commission or city council review, etc.

*The applicant is responsible for ensuring that all required municipal approvals are obtained.*

Cornerstone Alliance Small Business Services will assist the applicant in facilitating the process wherever possible, as time allows.

The applicant will be responsible for providing Cornerstone with proof of municipal approval, as applicable.

## Façade Grant Agreement

At a convenient date and time, the applicant (and the building owner, where the applicant is a tenant) will be required to sign the Façade Grant Agreement. .

The applicant will also sign a consent form that gives permission to Cornerstone Alliance to use any pictures, renderings or descriptions of the work for promotional purposes.

## Changes in Scope of Work

Both Cornerstone Alliance and the applicable municipality must approve any changes in the scope of work in writing before construction or installation.

## Project Completion and Reimbursement

The approved work must start within thirty (30) days and be completed within six (6) months from the date the Façade Grant Agreement was signed by the applicant, building owner, and Cornerstone.

Upon completion of the work and **prior** to the release of grant funds, the applicant must:

1. **Have an on-site energy evaluation conducted by Indiana Michigan Power** (applies to Indiana Michigan electric customers only).
2. **Notify Cornerstone Alliance Small Business Services staff once the work has been completed.** An authorized Cornerstone Alliance representative must inspect and approve the completed project.
3. **Submit to Cornerstone Alliance a written request for reimbursement.** The Request for Reimbursement will be on a form provided by Cornerstone, certifying that the work has been completed in accordance with the approvals and certifying that all project expenses have been paid in full. The costs of all work and materials must be paid in full by the applicant before any grant funds will be paid to the applicant by Cornerstone Alliance.
4. **Submit to Cornerstone Alliance evidence that any required municipal building inspections have occurred and that all required approvals have been obtained.** The municipal building inspector(s) shall

### Local Municipal Contacts


City of Benton Harbor Code Compliance – (269) 927-8418 or (269) 927-8434; <https://bhcity.us/code-enforcement-inspection/>

City of St. Joseph – (269) 983-1212; <https://sjcity.com/government/departments/building-inspector>

St. Joseph Charter Township – (269) 429-7703; <http://sjct.org/departments/building-dept>

Benton Charter Township – (269) 925-0616; [www.bentonchartertp.org/departments/building](http://www.bentonchartertp.org/departments/building)





make a final on-site inspection of such completed project *prior* to the release of any grant funds for the project.

5. **Submit to Cornerstone Alliance lien waivers and a project completion report, including copies of all bills, receipts, and cancelled checks associated with the project.** In addition, the report shall include evidence that the façade improvement project is 100% complete.

## **Improvements Shall Become Permanent Fixtures**

Any improvements completed under the Cornerstone Alliance Façade and Energy Efficiency Grant program shall become permanent fixtures of the building. They may not be removed by the business owner or the building owner in the event of the closing or sale of the business or the sale of the building without the express written consent of the Cornerstone Alliance. This provision shall not apply if a future change is made to the building for further renovation that will enhance the redevelopment of the surrounding area.

## **Promoting the Program**

Cornerstone Alliance Small Business Services will prepare communications announcing the grant program and the availability of funding. This notification will take place at least once each calendar year. Communications will also be found on Cornerstone's social media outlets:

- Cornerstone Alliance website, [www.cstonealliance.org](http://www.cstonealliance.org),
- Cornerstone Alliance Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/CornerstoneAlliance](http://www.facebook.com/CornerstoneAlliance),
- Cornerstone Alliance Twitter page at @CStoneAlliance
- Cornerstone Alliance Women's Business Center webpage at [www.cornerstonewbc.com](http://www.cornerstonewbc.com); and
- Cornerstone Alliance Women's Business Center Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/WBCatCornerstoneAlliance](http://www.facebook.com/WBCatCornerstoneAlliance).

Additionally, all program participants will be required to display a Cornerstone Alliance decal in a prominent place in their storefront window signifying their business was assisted by Cornerstone Alliance.