

Accessible Businesses Lead Everywhere (ABLE) Grant Program

Frequently Asked Questions

The Accessible Businesses Lead Everywhere (ABLE) Grant Program is administered by the Office on the Disabled for the City of St. Louis under a grant from the St. Louis Community Development Agency. This FAQ is intended to address questions that typically come up.

What does the ABLE Grant Program offer?

A small business or commercial property owner may be awarded half the cost of making its entrance and/or restroom(s) accessible up to a maximum of \$2,500.

Where can I obtain an application and statement of the technical requirements for an ABLE Grant?

Contact the Office on the Disabled, City Hall, Room 30, St. Louis, Missouri 63103
Telephone: (314) 622-3686 TTY: (314) 622-3686 Fax: (314) 622-4019 Email Office on the Disabled <http://stlcin.missouri.org/index/contactelect.cfm?ID=52>

What is the purpose of the ABLE Grant Program?

The ABLE Program is designed to create one more financial incentive for small businesses to make their facilities fully accessible for people with disabilities. It provides funding assistance to businesses that remodel their entrances and/or restrooms to make them accessible.

What do you mean by “one more” financial incentive for small businesses to make their facilities accessible?

Small businesses can obtain tax credits from Federal and State income taxes for making their facilities accessible, subject to certain conditions. See Internal Revenue Code Section 44 <http://frwebgate6.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/TEXTgate.cgi?WAISdocID=146457206516+0+1+0&WAISaction=retrieve> and Missouri Disabled Access Tax Credit, summarized at <http://dor.mo.gov/tax/taxcredit/dac.htm>

Who is eligible for an ABLE Grant?

A business property tenant who makes retail sales or provides retail services, such as, for example, a laundry, travel agency, or insurance, medical, law, or accounting office, and who chooses to remodel its entrance and/or restrooms to make them accessible is eligible.

Also a commercial property owner who leases property to tenants who provide sales or services to the public is eligible.

Who is not eligible?

Non-profit organizations and public agencies are not eligible, although a commercial landlord who leases to such an agency and who does the remodeling to make its property accessible is eligible.

How is it decided whether an applicant will be approved to receive an ABLE Grant?

Applicants must complete the application for the Grant. They must also provide one set of construction documents, prepared, sealed and signed by a licensed design professional, showing the proposed accessible ramp and/or restroom(s).

If the conditions for the grant are met, and assuming there is sufficient money left in the program, the applicant will be approved for the grant.

Does the applicant then get the grant money automatically?

No. The applicant must make the agreed-to improvements to the property, spending a reasonable amount of money on the project. And they must demonstrate to the Office on the Disabled that the work was actually contracted for, done, and paid for. That is accomplished by meeting the requirements specified in the memorandum entitled, "Accessible Businesses Lead Everywhere (ABLE) Grant Requirements," which is sent to the applicant along with the application.

What happens if an applicant is slow in getting the work done that is approved for a grant?

The applicant has up to six months from the date of the grant approval to finish the work and submit final paperwork to receive the grant payment. If the applicant cannot show good cause for an extension (including showing it is likely the applicant can complete the work and documentation within the calendar year), the award will be terminated at the end of the six months.

Why does the Office on the Disabled impose a six-month time limit?

In past years, applicants have not completed work on their grant. As a result, they did not receive the funding promised, and the grant program was not fully utilized. The six-month deadline gives the Office on the Disabled the opportunity to find other applicants who will be able to complete the work and paperwork by the end of the calendar year.

How much money is in the ABLE Grant Program?

For 2009, there is enough money for ten \$2,500 grants. The grant program runs on a calendar year basis.

Since there are a limited number of grants, how does the Office on the Disabled decide who gets one and who does not?

Grants are approved on a first-come, first-serve basis among applicants who have completed all the conditions for approval. In short, those conditions are that the applicant has filed the application, has submitted satisfactory signed and sealed construction drawings, and the Office on the Disabled has proof the applicant has a business license and is current on City taxes.

Is there any benefit for an applicant to get on the Office on the Disabled waiting list in a year when all the grants have been approved?

Experience shows that some applicants will not be able to complete their projects. Therefore, the Office maintains a waiting list of those who have indicated a desire to apply for an ABLE Grant. When the opportunity arises, the Office calls upon applicants, in the order they went on the waiting list, to submit an application for the current year if they are still interested.

What design standards for accessible entrances and restrooms are eligible for an ABLE Grant?

If the design complies with the International Building Code as adopted by the City of St. Louis, it meets the design standards applied for ABLE Grants. The City has adopted some “typical” design standards for ramps and restrooms that are available from the Office on the Disabled and/or the Building Division. They are found in a memorandum entitled “People Interested in Designing Accessible Restrooms and Ramps.” While these design standards are acceptable under the ABLE Grant program, other designs that comply with ICC/ANSI A117.1-1998 will also be acceptable.

Does an applicant necessarily have to build a ramp to make an entrance accessible for ABLE Grant purposes?

No. Raising sidewalks, sloping sidewalks, installing automatic door openers, and other strategies (alone or in combination) may be the best indicated solution for making an entrance accessible in a given situation and would therefore be eligible for an ABLE Grant.

Suppose an applicant has a main entrance that is difficult to make accessible and a secondary entrance that is less difficult to make accessible. Is the applicant eligible for an ABLE Grant to make that secondary entrance accessible?

The Americans with Disabilities Act encourages architectural solutions that allow people with disabilities to interact with the rest of the population on as integrated a basis as possible. Secondary entrances can be contrary to that goal. Also, common practice is to

lock such secondary entrances, because the business does not face that direction, to put furniture in front of such entrances, and to otherwise discourage use of such entrances.

Therefore, the Office on the Disabled will strongly discourage solutions that involve secondary entrances. But, given the vast variation of built conditions in the real world, it never says, "never."

Does the ABLE Grant program allow a business to install one accessible restroom or two?

At the end of the grant for restrooms, restrooms should be accessible for both men and women. Often, the least expensive way to do the work for an applicant that has two inaccessible restrooms is to make one accessible and label it unisex/accessible. Commonly, grantees in that case would label the other restroom unisex, but not accessible. Alternatively, the applicant may choose to make both restrooms accessible. The ABLE Grant will fund doing the work either way, so long as the grant only funds half of the cost up to \$5,000, for the maximum grant of \$2,500.

Suppose an ABLE Grant applicant discovers that the cost of making the entrance and the restroom accessible exceeds \$5,000. May the applicant obtain two grants, one for the entrance work and one for the restroom work?

No. The ABLE Grant is available to one business at one location.

Suppose an ABLE Grant applicant wants to make both an entrance and restroom accessible and the cost of doing either is less than \$5,000 but the combined cost is greater than \$5,000. May the applicant apply for doing both projects at once and secure the maximum \$2,500 grant?

Yes.

Suppose there are two storefronts next to one another containing businesses owned by separate people, but the building is owned by the same landlord. Is each business eligible for a separate ABLE Grant?

Yes.

Suppose as a group the two storefront businesses raise the whole sidewalk in front of their stores (and their neighbors' stores) instead of installing a ramp at each store. Is each business still eligible for a separate ABLE Grant?

Yes,

Suppose an applicant has further questions. Whom should he or she call?

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Other information about the Office on the Disabled is on our website
<http://stlouis.missouri.org/citygov/dhs/index.html#ootd>

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