

Businesses Reducing Impact on the Environment (BRITE) Program Frequently Asked Questions

Pre-Assessment Questions

What is the BRITE Program?

- Businesses Reducing Impact on the Environment, or “BRITE,” is a grant program created by the Cook County Department of Environment and Sustainability (DES) to assist small businesses that were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. With funding from the American Rescue Plan Act, DES helps qualified businesses reduce their environmental impact while creating a healthier environment for their employees, customers and community.

Does my business need to undergo an assessment prior to receiving a BRITE grant award?

- Yes. DES and its partners will conduct an on-site assessment to identify opportunities to reduce pollution and other environmental impacts, including toxic chemical use reduction, renewable energy use, energy and water efficiency and waste reduction practices. The department will conduct a follow-up meeting to discuss these options with the business owner.

How much does the assessment cost?

- The assessment is completely free to participants.

Who will conduct my assessment?

- A representative from DES will coordinate the assessment and may bring in additional expertise to assess certain business categories. In these cases, DES will use a specialized environmental consultant to assist with the assessment. Free energy assessments from your local utility may also be conducted.

How do I prove that my business experienced a negative economic impact due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Examples of negative economic impacts include decreased revenue or gross receipts, financial insecurity, increased costs and inability to afford materials, lost capacity to manage financial hardship, challenges covering payroll, rent or mortgage and other operating costs. This information will be requested after the assessment during the grant application process.

How do I sign up for an assessment?

- Complete the [online interest survey](#). You will then be contacted to schedule an assessment.

Does my site need to be in compliance?

- Yes. In accordance with Section 30-186 of the Cook County Municipal Code, a site may not participate if it has any current or unresolved environmental violations, financial, or other obligations to the County.

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Post-Assessment Questions

What happens after an assessment?

- DES and its partners will prepare an assessment report that lists all project recommendations. Businesses will receive the report within 30-60 days post-assessment and DES will then schedule a meeting with the business to discuss project recommendations and next steps. Businesses will be notified if their assessment reports will be received later than the typical 30–60-day timeframe.
- Following the assessment report delivery, businesses that wish to apply for grant funding for their projects may do so by filling out the [BRITE Grant Application](#).
- Businesses selected for a grant will receive a grant offer letter, listing specific project options that have been approved for funding. To accept the award, businesses then select the projects for which they would like to apply the grant funding and return the project selection page. This may require a prioritization of projects if the expected costs will go over the \$400,000 cap.
- All BRITE grant awardees must attend one BRITE grant orientation training hosted by the Chicago Urban League (CUL) and two sustainability trainings cohosted by CUL and DES.

What are some examples of projects, specific products and equipment upgrades the BRITE Grant may cover?

- Replacement of dry-cleaning equipment that uses perchloroethylene with a newer model that uses a safer alternative cleaning agent such as those in wet cleaning machines
- More efficient spray booths
- Safer solvents used in the metal finisher process
- Purchase and installation of process equipment to conserve energy and water
- Purchase of cleaning products that are EPA Safer Choice verified

Do I have to implement project recommendations on the assessment report?

- No, the business owner decides whether to implement the projects identified by the assessment and whether to proceed with the grant application.

What are eligible uses of the BRITE Grant funds?

- Once the Beneficiary Agreement is signed, grant dollars awarded from the BRITE Grant must be used to improve business operations and practices to reduce environmental impacts as recommended on the assessment report. The applicant will be given an opportunity to choose from the projects recommended on assessment reports up to the funding cap of \$400,000 per business.
- The BRITE Grant will cover up to 100% of the top pollution prevention project identified by the specialist in the report and up to 100% for all other projects until the \$400,000 cap is met.
- A business may not resell equipment purchased from the BRITE Grant within one year. If a site plans to sell their business, the business needs to communicate with the BRITE

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program and new owner to meet the requirements of the Beneficiary Agreement as they are outlined.

Does the County offer any additional support to small businesses?

- Cook County offers the following additional services to support small businesses:
 - [Cook County Small Business Source](#) directly connects small business owners with expert guidance and support to take businesses to the next level.
 - [Cook County's C-PACE Program](#) helps property owners secure low-cost, long-term financing for energy efficient upgrades.

How will the grants be disbursed to businesses?

- Grantees will work with DES' subrecipient, the Chicago Urban League (CUL), on selecting vendors for projects. Once vendors have been selected, grant funds will be used to pay vendor invoices up to the amount of the grant award, as detailed in the grant beneficiary agreement. Grantees will be responsible to pay for any remaining balances not covered by grants.
- Reimbursement for goods and services will be considered on a case-by-case basis. For example, grantees may be reimbursed for replacing older equipment essential to operations that malfunctioned prior to receiving grant funds, if the equipment was identified in the grantee's BRITE assessment report and was part of grantee's BRITE Grant application. To apply for reimbursement, grantees must hold onto their receipts and send a request to BRITE@cookcountyil.gov to begin the process.

When do I need to spend all of the Grant money by?

- Businesses receiving the BRITE Grant are expected to use the awarded funds within 100 days of signing the Beneficiary Agreement or before September 30th, 2026, whichever is sooner.
- **Funds do not need to be spent all at once. However, funds must be spent before the 100 days deadline or before the end of September 30th, 2026, whichever is sooner.**

How much money can I receive?

- The maximum award is \$400,000 per applicant for approved projects and equipment.
- DES will fund up to 100% of the pollution reducing project with the most environmental impact as determined by the BRITE assessment report **(up to a maximum cap of \$400,000)**.
- For all subsequent recommendations, DES will fund up to 100% of purchase value with the applicant covering the remainder of costs **(up to a maximum cap of \$400,000)**.

What is a beneficiary agreement?

- A beneficiary agreement is an agreement between a business and DES outlining the terms for use of the grant funding.
- The business owner and staff from DES's subrecipient, Chicago Urban League, will sit down and go through the beneficiary agreement. The business owner can ask any questions about the agreement at that time.

How do I prove economic loss?

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- To be fully eligible for the BRITE Grant, the business must demonstrate economic loss caused by the pandemic. Applying sites will be asked to submit the following documents from both 2019 and 2020: Balance Sheet, Income Statement, and Tax Returns.

Do I need to register the new equipment through the Cook County Air Division?

- Yes. A business will be required to register all eligible equipment on [Cook County's online portal](#). Fees for this registration are not covered by the BRITE grant. More information on equipment registration can be found here: [Equipment Registration Permitting](#)

Can I request additional projects not included in the report?

- A business may request projects not found in the assessment and include the projects in their grant application as this may require a follow-up assessment. Once a Beneficiary Agreement is issued, additional projects will not be added.

Grant Award Recipient Questions

If I use less money for one project, can I use those saved grant funds for another?

- No. Funds for any project cannot exceed the awarded grant limit in the Beneficiary Agreement.

Will I receive funding for all of the projects in the Beneficiary Agreement?

- Not necessarily. If projects of a lower priority would require funds exceeding the \$400k cap for the business, these projects will not receive funding even if approved in the Beneficiary Agreement. However, if a business is able to save money from other projects that bring the total below \$400,000, projects that were not initially going to be covered may be.

If I don't want to have full funding for one project, can I request full funding for another?

- No. The highest item is decided on Cook County's BRITE Hierarchy of Needs to reduce pollution and cannot change. If a site cannot complete the top project due to feasibility issues, the top item can be re-reviewed.

If the cost for my project exceeds the estimate from Beneficiary Agreement, can I receive more funds?

- Possibly. Provided proof can be used to revise the Beneficiary Agreement and cost limits for a project if the BRITE team did not provide an industry-appropriate estimate. The site owner and DES leadership may need to resign a Beneficiary Agreement or provide addendums to a prior Beneficiary Agreement that acknowledges the pricing has been changed to meet industry standards.

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If I receive 50% for a project but find a vendor that has a lower cost than the estimate, do I receive the grant award limit amount or 50% of the lower project cost?

- A site will only receive 50% (or any other listed percentage for a project) of the final cost for a project, not the award limit listed in the Grant Award Letter and Beneficiary Agreement.

What projects am I obligated to complete?

- A business is expected to complete any project signed for in the Beneficiary Agreement. However, a business can provide proof of obstacles or other challenges to not be held accountable to install the projects.

Further questions? Please email BRITE@cookcountyil.gov.