



Sound Check – Live Entertainment Grants Policy & Guidelines

Sound Check – Live Entertainment Grants

AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

About the Program

The City of Champaign is launching *Sound Check*, a Live Entertainment Grant Program that reimburses downtown businesses for hosting live entertainment events. This year-round program reimburses businesses \$250 per qualifying event, with an additional \$500 Community Connections bonus that is available for events that demonstrably attract and serve diverse audiences.

The program operates on a trimester schedule with \$30,000 available per period:

- Summer Period: July 8 – October 31, 2025
- Winter Period: November 1, 2025 – February 28, 2026
- Spring Period: March 1 – June 30, 2026

Businesses may apply for multiple events but are limited to eight events per period (~two per month).

Program Goal

Sound Check helps downtown businesses host live entertainment to increase entertainment options, attract diverse audiences, encourage community partnerships and boost foot traffic and sales.

Program success shall be measured through increased revenue for businesses, event attendance and audience diversity, the number of participating businesses, the number of community organization partnerships formed, accessibility improvements implemented, and geographic distribution of events.

Eligibility

Event Requirements

- Maximum \$10 cover charge (\$20 for artists traveling 50+ miles)
- Must be held at a business within designated downtown boundaries (see Attachment A)
- Maximum three events reimbursed through this program per day and events cannot overlap with other City and 40North downtown programming including but not limited to Friday Night Live (Fridays, 6pm – 9pm during the summer), The Beat on Market Street (first and last Saturdays, 8pm – 12am during the summer), and summer concerts series on the Downtown Plaza.
- Must include online promotion of the event and reference to City of Champaign event support
- Trivia and karaoke events do not qualify for reimbursement under this program

Business Requirements

- Maximum eight events per business per program period (~2 per month)

- Maximum \$7,500 reimbursement per business per year
- Own or operate a business within program boundaries
- Current with all city taxes, fees and licenses
- Registered as a City vendor (W-9 on file)

Eligible Expenses, with Documentation

- Artist/performer fees
- Sound equipment rental
- Marketing and advertising costs
- Temporary seating or staging
- Accessibility equipment or services
- Other event-related expenses as approved by City staff

Reimbursement Structure

Participating businesses may receive a \$250 reimbursement per event, plus a \$500 Community Connections bonus for events that intentionally include populations identified in the City's [Equal Opportunity in Purchasing Ordinance](#) (Socially-disadvantaged business, Minority Business Enterprise and Women Business Enterprise). To qualify for the bonus, events must meet one or more of the criteria listed below or receive approval from the Department of Equity and Engagement.

- 1. Community Partnerships.** Partner with local nonprofits or community organizations through co-branded marketing, donation of a portion of event proceeds, or collaborative programming. Examples of qualifying events include:
 - A coffee shop partners with Community Choices for sensory-friendly music sessions
 - A restaurant donates a portion of proceeds to a local veterans group
 - A bookstore collaborates with a literacy nonprofit for an author or poetry reading
- 2. Cross-Promotion.** Partner with minority-, women-, or other socially disadvantaged-owned businesses through joint marketing efforts, special discounts or promotions, or co-hosted events. Examples of qualifying events include:
 - A restaurant/bar offers discounts at a minority-owned retail shop for attendees
 - A coffee shop features products from a women-owned bakery during a book club
 - A bookstore cross-promotes with a minority-owned art gallery
- 3. Inclusive Programming.** Event demonstrates a commitment to diversity through hiring minority, women, or socially disadvantaged artists, multilingual marketing materials, offering accessibility accommodations (ASL interpreters, wheelchair access improvements, etc.), or programming aligned with broader cultural celebrations. Examples of qualifying events include:
 - A restaurant hosts Hispanic musicians and/or uses multilingual marketing materials for an event during Hispanic Heritage Month
 - A restaurant/bar provides a sign-language interpreter during a comedy performance

Application Process

1. Applicant will register with the City of Champaign as a vendor by submitting a [W-9 form](#).
2. **Pre-Event Application** (due at least 15 days before event). Submit an online application ([Form 1 – Before Event](#)) and include event details, expected expenses and Community Connections bonus qualification plans. City staff will review for approval and reserve funding for eligible events.
3. **Event Promotion.** Business advertises event with link to VisitDowntownChampaign.com or City Facebook page. City provides sandwich board outside business two days before event to advertise.
4. **Post-Event Submission.** Submit a reimbursement request ([Form 2 – After Event](#)) with the following: photograph(s) of event, evidence of event marketing, approximate attendance and hour of peak attendance, artist signature verifying payment, receipts for any other eligible event costs.
5. **Reimbursement.** A reimbursement check will be sent to the address listed on the participating business's W-9 form within three weeks of complete submission. Participants may also retrieve reimbursement checks from the City Building at 102 N Neil Street when ready.

Administration and Compliance

The City Manager or their designee shall have the authority to adjust application timelines and procedures, modify documentation requirements, clarify eligibility criteria, and make minor program adjustments between program periods. This ensures the program can adapt based on participant feedback and operational needs throughout the year.

Failure to comply with the provisions set within this document may result in denial of reimbursement, ineligibility of future events, and/or recovery of improperly disbursed funds. The City may audit event documentation and attend events to verify program compliance. The City may request Point-of-Sale data to verify typical revenues against event revenues.

Contact Information

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Live Entertainment Grants Eligible Area Map

