

DORAL SEEDS BUSINESS GRANT PROGRAM

Program Policy and Implementation Framework

Originating Department: Economic Development

Program Status: Draft for Approval

City Award Allocation: Twenty Thousand Dollars (\$20,000)

Grant Funding Source: City Award Allocation, supplemented by Private Sector Sponsorship Contributions

Responsible Administrator: Economic Development

Program Cycle: Annual, subject to renewal and available funding

I. PURPOSE AND POLICY STATEMENT

The Doral Seeds Business Grant Program (“Doral Seeds”) is established to support qualified small businesses located within the City of Doral through a competitive grant program intended to accelerate measurable growth, promote job creation, and support long-term economic activity within the City of Doral.

The City provides a grant award allocation of up to twenty thousand dollars (\$20,000) per program cycle. Private sector sponsorship contributions may supplement the City award allocation in accordance with this policy.

The City’s role is limited to program administration, compliance oversight, records retention, and certification that the procedures established in this policy have been followed.

For purposes of this policy, “City” refers to the City of Doral.

This policy establishes eligibility criteria, orientation requirements, qualification screening procedures, evaluation standards, award structure, reporting requirements, and safeguards necessary to administer the program in a fair, documented, and transparent manner.

2. DEFINITIONS

Applicant: A business that submits a completed application under this program.

Awardee: The business selected to receive a grant under this program.

Grant: A non-repayable cash award funded by the City award allocation and, where applicable, supplemented by private sector sponsorship contributions, and administered pursuant to this policy and an executed Grant Agreement.

Independent Review Committee (“IRC”): A panel of qualified reviewers responsible for evaluating qualified applications and scoring finalists in accordance with this policy.

Milestone: A measurable business result tied to grant disbursement and verification.

In-Kind Support: Non-cash contributions provided by sponsors or partners, including mentorship, education, technical assistance, professional services, software access, or similar support.

Small Business: For purposes of this program, a for-profit business operating within the City of Doral that meets the eligibility requirements and qualification thresholds established by this policy and the application materials.

Qualification Gate: The administrative, documentation-based, pass/fail screening process conducted by City staff prior to any scoring.

Demo Day: The public finalist presentation event at which the top finalists present before the Independent Review Committee and are evaluated using the final-round scoring sheet.

Application Materials: The official application form, checklist, templates, instructions, deadlines, published thresholds, and related documents issued by the City for a given program cycle.

3. PROGRAM STRUCTURE

3.1 City Award Funding

- A. Total City award funding per program cycle shall not exceed twenty thousand dollars (\$20,000).
- B. The City award allocation serves as the base grant funding for the program.
- C. Private sponsorship contributions may supplement the City award allocation in accordance with this policy.

3.2 Grant Award Structure

- A. The program shall select one (1) awardee per cycle.
- B. The base grant amount shall consist of the City award allocation for that cycle, not to exceed \$20,000.
- C. Cash sponsorship contributions designated for that cycle’s prize pool may supplement and increase the total cash grant amount.

D. In-kind sponsorship contributions may supplement the award package but shall not be included in the cash grant calculation.

E. The City reserves the right to make no award if no applicant meets program requirements, qualification standards, or evaluation thresholds.

3.3 Disbursement

A. Seventy percent (70%) of the grant shall be disbursed upon execution of the Grant Agreement and satisfaction of any pre-disbursement requirements established by the City.

B. Thirty percent (30%) shall be disbursed upon verification of agreed-upon milestones within six (6) months, or such other timeline as may be established in the Grant Agreement.

C. Failure to meet milestones or comply with grant conditions may result in withholding or recovery of funds pursuant to the Grant Agreement.

D. Disbursement procedures shall comply with Finance Department requirements, legal requirements, and any other applicable internal controls adopted by the City.

4. PRIVATE SECTOR SPONSORSHIP

A. The City may solicit voluntary private sponsorship contributions to supplement the grant prize pool or provide in-kind support for the program.

B. Sponsorship contributions do not constitute matching funds and do not create financial obligations for the City beyond the adopted City award allocation.

C. Sponsorship participation may include cash or in-kind support.

D. Sponsorship participation does not confer weighted influence, preferential treatment, decision-making control, or outcome guarantees.

E. Sponsorship agreements shall be reviewed and approved by the City Attorney and coordinated with the Finance Department.

F. Sponsors and their affiliates are not eligible to apply for or receive grant awards under this program.

G. Nothing in this policy shall be interpreted to create a lending relationship, underwriting obligation, or credit approval role on the part of the City or any sponsor.

5. ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

To qualify for consideration, applicants must satisfy all eligibility requirements set forth below.

- A. The applicant must be a for-profit business.
- B. The applicant must be physically located and operating within the City of Doral.
- C. The applicant must maintain a verifiable physical business address within the City of Doral. Home-based businesses may apply, provided they meet all applicable zoning, licensing, and regulatory requirements.
- D. The applicant must hold an active City of Doral Business Tax Receipt.
- E. The applicant must have operated continuously for at least twelve (12) months prior to the application deadline.
- F. The applicant must maintain all required licenses, registrations, permits, and approvals at the City, County, State, and any other applicable regulatory levels.
- G. The applicant must be in good standing and in compliance with all applicable legal and regulatory requirements, with no unresolved violations, fines, liens, suspensions, or revocations.
- H. The applicant must operate as an independent business and must not be part of a national chain, regional chain, franchise system, or corporate network with centralized ownership or branding.
- I. The applicant must submit a complete and timely application with all required supporting documentation.
- J. The applicant must agree to comply with all reporting, verification, and Grant Agreement requirements.

5.1 Ineligible Applicants

The following are not eligible for funding under this program:

1. Nonprofit organizations
2. Passive investment vehicles
3. Real estate flipping or wholesaling businesses
4. Adult entertainment, gambling, or illegal activities
5. Businesses relocating outside the City of Doral during the program term
6. Pre-venture, concept-stage, or validation-stage applicants that are not yet operating businesses with documented activity
7. Sponsors, sponsor affiliates, or entities with a direct conflict of interest under this program
8. Applicants failing to complete the mandatory orientation requirement

9. Applicants lacking required supporting documentation

5.2 Required Supporting Documentation

Applicants must provide documentation sufficient to verify eligibility, compliance, and business activity, including but not limited to:

1. IRS Form W-9
2. City of Doral Business Tax Receipt
3. All applicable City, County, and State licenses, registrations, or permits
4. Proof of physical business address within the City of Doral
5. Basic financial documentation, such as a profit and loss statement, recent business tax return, or business bank statements, sufficient to demonstrate operating activity
6. Any additional documentation specified in the application materials

Failure to provide required documentation shall result in disqualification.

6. MANDATORY APPLICANT ORIENTATION

A. Applicants must attend and complete one (1) official Doral Seeds introductory orientation session prior to submitting an application.

B. The orientation may be offered in person, virtually, or through another documented format approved by the City and published in the application materials.

C. The orientation shall explain the program requirements, eligibility standards, application components, qualification thresholds, grant conditions, scoring structure, and reporting obligations.

D. Completion of the orientation requirement must be documented in accordance with procedures established by the City.

F. Failure to complete the orientation requirement shall result in automatic disqualification.

7. QUALIFICATION GATE (PASS/FAIL SCREEN)

7.1 Purpose and Administration

A. All applications shall undergo an administrative Qualification Gate prior to any scoring.

B. The purpose of the Qualification Gate is to ensure that only complete, documented, compliant, and operating businesses advance to evaluation by the Independent Review Committee.

C. The Qualification Gate shall be administered by designated City staff on a pass/fail basis using objective, documentation-based criteria only.

D. City staff shall not assign merit-based scores, rank applicants, or make qualitative business judgments during this stage.

E. All screening determinations shall be documented and retained in accordance with applicable records requirements.

F. Economic Development may, at its discretion, permit correction of minor clerical errors prior to disqualification, provided such correction does not alter the substance of the application or create unfair advantage.

7.2 Qualification Gate Requirements

All thresholds and documentation requirements shall be defined in the application materials prior to program launch and applied uniformly to all applicants.

To advance beyond the Qualification Gate, each applicant must satisfy all required gates below.

Gate A – Complete Application Package

The applicant must submit all required application components and supporting attachments listed in Section 8.1 and the application materials.

Gate B – Verified City Operations

The applicant must demonstrate active business operations within the City of Doral by submitting at least two (2) qualifying items dated within the prior ninety (90) days, as specified in the application materials. Qualifying items may include lease documentation, utility statements, proof of insurance, invoices, or equivalent documentation.

Gate C – Minimum Business Activity Threshold

The applicant must satisfy at least one (1) published documentation-based business activity threshold, such as minimum revenue, average monthly revenue, or documented contracts, purchase orders, or invoices.

Gate D – Compliance Verification

The applicant must demonstrate that all required licenses, registrations, and approvals are active and that the business is in compliance with applicable regulatory requirements.

Gate E – Milestone and Budget Documentation Compliance

The applicant must submit a Use-of-Grant plan with at least two (2) milestones that are measurable, time-bound, tied to activity within the City, and supported by a budget that maps to the proposed activities and totals correctly.

Gate F – Financial Documentation Readiness

The applicant must provide sufficient financial documentation to demonstrate that the business maintains basic financial organization consistent with an operating business.

Failure to satisfy any required gate shall result in automatic disqualification.

8. REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS

8.1 Required Application Components

Applications must include, at minimum:

- A. Verification of legal business status
- B. Ten-slide pitch deck in the format required by the City
- C. Ninety-second (90-second) founder or business representative video
- D. Financial summary and projections
- E. Evidence of traction or business activity, if applicable
- F. Use-of-Grant plan with at least two measurable milestones
- G. Description of technology use, including artificial intelligence where applicable
- H. Basic financial documentation consistent with Section 5.2 and Section 7.2
- I. Signed certifications and conflict-of-interest acknowledgment

Incomplete applications shall be disqualified.

8.2 Preliminary Evaluation

- A. Applications that pass the Qualification Gate shall be evaluated by the Independent Review Committee using Attachment A.
- B. The Preliminary Evaluation shall identify the top five (5) finalists.
- C. Each reviewer shall score independently.
- D. All reviewers' scores shall carry equal weight.
- E. Reviewers shall not deliberate collectively during preliminary scoring.
- F. The five (5) highest-ranked applicants based on aggregated preliminary scores shall advance, subject to final compliance confirmation by the City.

8.3 Demo Day Final Evaluation

- A. The top five (5) finalists shall participate in a public presentation event (“Demo Day”).
- B. Demo Day shall include a live pitch and question-and-answer session before the Independent Review Committee.

C. Finalists shall be evaluated using Attachment B.

D. Final Demo Day scores shall determine the ranking and selection of the awardee, subject to procedural confirmation by the City.

8.4 Tie Resolution

If two or more applicants are tied, preference shall be given to the applicant with the higher score in “Room for Growth,” followed by “Addresses a Real Need.” If still tied, the Independent Review Committee shall resolve the tie by majority vote.

8.5 Final Award Certification

Final certification of the award shall be made by the City Manager or designee solely to confirm that the procedures set forth in this policy were followed.

9. INDEPENDENT REVIEW COMMITTEE

A. The Independent Review Committee shall consist of qualified reviewers selected by the City, which may include independent subject-matter professionals, sponsor representatives, and no more than one (1) City representative.

B. Committee participation shall not be tied to sponsorship contribution size.

C. All reviewers shall execute conflict-of-interest disclosures prior to participation.

D. Any reviewer with a financial, advisory, employment, family, or other material relationship with an applicant shall disclose such relationship and recuse from scoring that applicant.

E. Reviewers may not solicit business, investment, or services from applicants during the evaluation period.

F. Scoring shall be performed independently and documented in writing.

10. SCORING PRINCIPLES

A. The program shall evaluate applicants based on clear, published criteria.

B. Scoring shall consider business strength, growth potential, execution readiness, financial readiness, and the extent to which the applicant addresses a real market need.

C. The program shall also evaluate the applicant’s use of technology, including artificial intelligence where applicable, as a factor contributing to efficiency, competitiveness, or scalability.

D. Artificial intelligence shall not be mandatory for eligibility, but effective use of technology or AI may be rewarded in scoring.

E. The evaluation process may consider the applicant's financial organization, documentation, and readiness to responsibly deploy capital as indicators of business maturity and scalability.

F. The program may align, where appropriate, with general small business lending readiness principles; however, the program does not constitute loan underwriting, pre-qualification, or credit approval.

11. ALLOWABLE AND PROHIBITED USES

11.1 Allowable Uses

Grant funds may be used for legitimate business growth purposes, including but not limited to:

1. Product development
2. Equipment and tools
3. Professional services
4. Software, technology, and AI-related tools
5. Certifications and compliance costs
6. Targeted marketing tied to business growth

11.2 Prohibited Uses

Grant funds may not be used for:

1. Owner salary, compensation, or distributions
2. Debt repayment or rent arrears
3. Political activity or contributions
4. Relocation outside the City of Doral
5. Fraudulent, improper, or unlawful purposes
6. Any use inconsistent with the approved Grant Agreement

12. REPORTING AND COMPLIANCE

A. Awardees must submit a three-month status report, six-month milestone verification, and twelve-month closeout summary, or such other reports as may be required by the Grant Agreement.

B. Awardees are solely responsible for any tax obligations associated with the receipt of grant funds.

C. Participation in the program does not create a fiduciary, advisory, partnership, employment, or agency relationship with the City, sponsors, or reviewers.

D. The City may require receipts, documentation, and other proof of expenditures and outcomes.

13. PUBLIC RECORDS AND TRANSPARENCY

A. All applications, screening determinations, scoring sheets, conflict-of-interest forms, sponsorship agreements, grant agreements, and related records shall be maintained in accordance with Florida public records law.

B. Personally identifiable or confidential information may be redacted to the extent permitted by law.

C. The City shall retain sufficient records to demonstrate objective screening and consistent administration of the program.

14. RISK SAFEGUARDS

The program shall include the following safeguards:

1. Objective administrative Qualification Gate
2. Mandatory orientation requirement
3. Document-based eligibility verification
4. Independent scoring and equal reviewer weighting
5. Conflict-of-interest and recusal requirements
6. Sponsor ineligibility protections
7. Separation of City award funds and sponsor supplemental funds
8. Milestone-based disbursement
9. Discretionary award authority

15. DISCRETION AND FINALITY

A. Awards are discretionary.

B. There shall be no appeal or protest process.

C. The City reserves the right to cancel, pause, modify, or discontinue the program at any time prior to award issuance.

D. The City reserves the right to revise application materials, thresholds, schedules, and procedures from cycle to cycle, provided such revisions are published in advance of the applicable deadline.

ATTACHMENT A

Doral Seeds Preliminary Evaluation Score Sheet

Top Five Finalist Selection

Purpose: To evaluate applicants who passed the Qualification Gate and determine the five (5) finalists who advance to Demo Day.

Instructions:

- Score each application independently.
- Do not discuss scores during preliminary evaluation.
- Assign points up to the maximum in each category.
- Total score determines preliminary ranking.

Applicant Name: _____

Reviewer Name: _____

Criteria	Description	Max Points	Score
Creativity / Innovation	Is the business differentiated and does it show originality in its product, service, or approach?	15	_____
Room for Growth	Does the business show clear potential to scale revenue, customers, or operations?	25	_____
Addresses a Real Need	Does the business solve a clear problem or meet a real market demand?	15	_____
Traction / Proof of Activity	Does the business demonstrate real customers, revenue, contracts, or documented operating activity?	20	_____
Execution & Financial Readiness	Does the business demonstrate the ability to execute and maintain basic financial organization consistent with responsible use of capital?	15	_____
Use of Technology / AI Leverage	To what extent does the business effectively use technology, including artificial intelligence where applicable, to improve operations, customer experience, scalability, or efficiency?	10	_____

Total Score: _____ / 100

Reviewer Comments:

ATTACHMENT B

Doral Seeds Demo Day Final Evaluation Score Sheet

Final Round

Purpose: To evaluate the five (5) finalists during Demo Day and determine the final awardee.

Instructions:

- Score each finalist immediately after the live pitch and Q&A.
- Consider both the presentation and the applicant's ability to respond clearly and credibly.
- Assign points up to the maximum in each category.
- Total score determines final ranking.

Finalist Name: _____

Reviewer Name: _____

Criteria	Description	Max Points	Score
Pitch Clarity and Storytelling	Was the business clearly explained in a compelling, structured, and understandable way?	15	_____
Q&A Performance	Did the presenter answer questions clearly, confidently, and with strong command of the business?	20	_____
Execution & Financial Readiness	Does the team demonstrate the ability to execute and responsibly manage capital?	20	_____
Milestone Credibility	Are the proposed milestones realistic, measurable, and achievable?	15	_____
Overall Business Strength	Overall impression of the business and its potential to grow successfully in the City of Doral	20	_____
Use of Technology / AI Leverage	To what extent does the business effectively use technology, including artificial intelligence where applicable, to improve operations, competitiveness, or scalability?	10	_____

Total Score: _____ / 100

Reviewer Comments:
