

Business Elevate Program Guidelines 2025/26

- Small Business Applicants for Vouchers

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1.0 Introduction

Maribyrnong City Council supports our business community through the Business Improvement District (BID) grant program, which assists economic development and business viability across our City.

In the 2025/26 financial year we are proudly continuing a form of funding known as the **Business Elevate Program – a \$2,000* voucher based program for Small Business Owners** *(which is the focus of these guidelines)*.

Business Elevate Program Funding

This financial year Maribyrnong City Council will be continuing the Business Elevate Program (that was introduced as a new concept in 2021/22). The premise of this program is to encourage business to business (B2B) interaction, transactions and support within Maribyrnong City.

Council has allocated a total pool of \$100,000 to be available for the Business Elevate Program which will provide for 50 x \$2,000 vouchers.

The program has a selection of local businesses who are located (and registered) in Maribyrnong referred to as “Preferred Business Suppliers” to provide their services to other local businesses who need support in order to grow and “elevate” their businesses to the next level.

A list of “**Preferred Business Suppliers**” who have been approved to participate in the Business Elevate Program are listed on the Maribyrnong City Website
>>> <https://www.maribyrnong.vic.gov.au/elevate>

Local businesses within 13 defined categories have provided a description of the products/services which they are able to provide (valued at up to **\$2,000***).

How do you apply to be matched for a Voucher?

Small Business Owners located within Maribyrnong can now apply for a voucher to receive services from the nominated Business Elevate Program - Preferred Business Suppliers. A total of **50 local businesses** will receive a \$2,000 voucher and be

matched with their preferred supplier, once they nominate which business from the “preferred supplier list” that they would like to work with.

Small Business Owners will be awarded their vouchers on a **first in best dressed basis, per supplier category** (to ensure an equitable spread of vouchers across the various Preferred Business Suppliers). Therefore the speed of application will be very important. The first 50 eligible businesses that meet all the relevant assessment criteria, will be considered as final and the application process will close. No further businesses will be considered, as the number of \$2,000 vouchers is capped at 50 business recipients. Businesses that miss out will be placed on a waiting list in the event that voucher recipients don’t take up their opportunity.

NOTE: A 10% (i.e. \$200) “**Activation fee**” will be charged by the Preferred Business Supplier to the recipient/Small Business Owner at the commencement of any activity/work. This charge is in addition to the \$2,000 voucher amount and is designed to ensure recipients are proactive in utilising their voucher. Failure to pay the Activation Fee could mean forfeiture of the voucher, which will be allocated to another business on the waiting list.

It is advisable that business owners looking to apply for a voucher should carefully consider what their business needs are right now in order to grow or evolve, and select the preferred supplier they would like to work with accordingly.

Applications for Small Business Owners to receive a Business Elevate Program \$2,000 Voucher will be communicated via the Maribyrnong City Council Business Bulletin, website and social media, and will be processed via the Smarty Grants online applications platform.

All applicants are encouraged to read the guidelines and discuss any concerns with Council Officers before applying.

**Note: Vouchers will be for \$2,000+GST where the recipient is registered for GST*

1.1 Contact details

Economic Development Unit – Council Offices (03) 9688 0200 or
business.elevate@maribyrnong.vic.gov.au

In writing: PO Box 50, West Footscray 3012

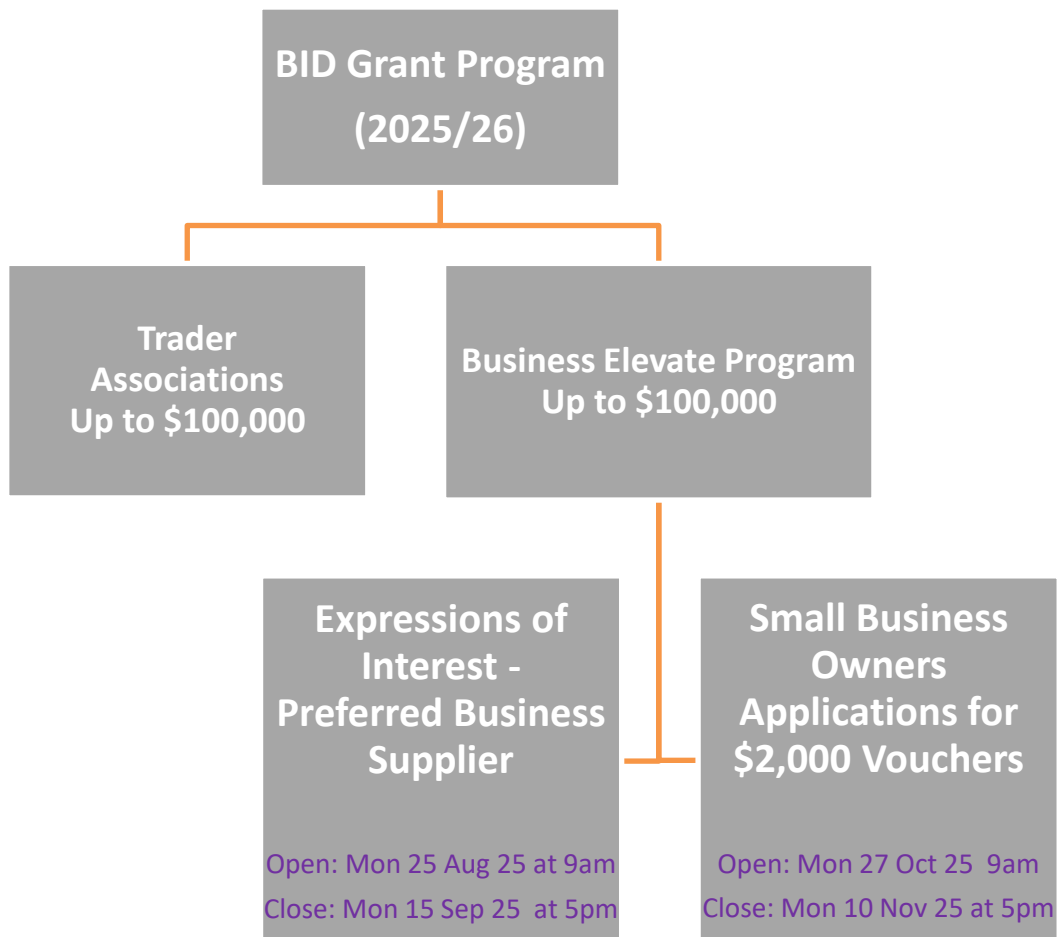
1.2 More information

Information about the Business Elevate Program is available on Council's website at
>>> <https://www.maribyrnong.vic.gov.au/elevate>

1.3 Important dates

Applications for \$2,000 Vouchers – Small Business Owners
• Opens for application – Monday 27th October 2025 at 9am • Closes for application – Monday 11th November 2025 at 5pm
Implementation Period: • Preferred Business Suppliers work with successful Small Business Owners to deliver their nominated projects/initiatives, monitoring milestones and project/initiative status – Dec 2025 to Apr 2026
Acquittals Reports: • Acquittals Reports Due – Monday 4th May 2026 at 5pm

Figure 1: Summary of key dates



2.0 Business Improvement District (BID) Grant Program – Business Elevate Program

Overview

Businesses within the City of Maribyrnong are encouraged to participate in the Business Elevate Program. This program has 2 phases. The first phase involved the establishment of a panel of local businesses that can offer services that support other businesses. The second phase opens up applications to the broader business community for \$2,000 vouchers that can be used at the businesses on panel.

The idea is to support local businesses to thrive, by sharing the skills and talents that already exist within the Maribyrnong business community. This not only promotes business awareness, it also helps foster networking and business development, and possible future collaborations. Instead of just being a standard grants program, the Business Elevate Program is really designed to support multiple small businesses and create a ripple effect of personal, professional and economic benefits for all involved.

2.1 Business Elevate Program objectives

The objectives of the Business Elevate Program are:

- To increase opportunities for small businesses within Maribyrnong through a voucher based, business-to-business (B2B) grants program
- To showcase the business talent in our community that are experienced and well equipped to help and support other local businesses with their services
- To strengthen connections, future networking and collaborative opportunities for small business owners
- To create a positive “ripple effect” by adding to the collective economic benefits for small businesses in Maribyrnong

2.2 Fictitious example of how it works

Website Wizard is a business based in the City of Maribyrnong, and has a passion for helping small businesses with their website needs. The owner, William, received an email promoting the Business Elevate Program, through the Business Bulletin newsletter, and was excited to see that they could help other local businesses through the program.

Website Wizard met all the necessary eligibility criteria and applied to be a Preferred Business Supplier as part of the Business Elevate program. They had a special offer

“My First Website” valued at \$2,000 which they proposed as part of their application. Fortunately they were selected as a Preferred Business Supplier.

Their offer was advertised on the Maribyrnong City Council website for Small Business Owners in Maribyrnong who were interested in applying for a \$2,000 voucher to consider and review their “My First Website” offer.

In February 2022 a local entrepreneur Sandra started a home based business located in City of Maribyrnong called She Makes Cakes. Her business has grown quickly and organically. Most of her marketing has predominately been based on Instagram advertising – using posts, stories and reels to promote her baking talents. She has a strong desire to grow her business, and ultimately move into a commercial kitchen, but she really needs a professional website.

Sandra applies for the Business Elevate Program to be matched with a website designer. She had five web companies (preferred business suppliers) to choose from (they were listed on the Maribyrnong City Council website), and she did her research and liked what Website Wizard had to offer for \$2,000. She met all the relevant selection criteria, and promptly filled in the application form online. Sandra was successful in receiving her \$2,000 voucher to use with Website Wizard.

When Sandra’s application for a voucher was approved by Council and successfully matched with Website Wizard, both organisations were notified. After the initial discussions took place, Website Wizard directly invoiced a Sandra a \$200 (+GST) Activation Fee, in order for the work to get started.

Then Website Wizard received the first \$1,000 instalment payment and got started immediately on the new website scope and development process for ‘She Makes Cakes’ website. Sandra had five months to work with the web designer, to design and develop a basic website for her brand and she was thrilled with the experience and outcome.

After five months the website was finished and Website Wizard provided an acquittals report to Council to prove the successful completion and delivery of services provided to Sandra. William then received the final \$1,000 payment. Two happy businesses in Maribyrnong.

NOTE: This is just a fictitious example to demonstrate how the process will work, and how two businesses can benefit from being involved in the Business Elevate Program.

2.3 13 Key Categories of “Preferred Business Suppliers”

The following categories will be the primary focus areas to source “Preferred Business Suppliers” for local businesses to be a part of the Business Elevate Program for 2025/26:

1. Accounting/Bookkeeping
 2. Business Coaching/Business Consulting
 3. Business Sustainability
 4. Copywriting/Public Relations
 5. Digital Marketing/SEO
 6. Graphic Design/Visual Merchandising
 7. Legal/Intellectual Property
 8. Marketing Consulting/Advertising
 9. Photography
 10. Printing/Signage
 11. Videography
 12. Web Design/Mobile App Development
 13. Other Business Services
- A “Small Business Owner” can only apply for ONE \$2,000 voucher to use to be matched with ONE “Preferred Business Supplier”
 - There is a cap of a maximum of 5 businesses that a Preferred Business Supplier can agree to work with as part of the Business Elevate Program – to ensure fairness and distribution of work across a variety of suppliers.
 - While it is unlikely, a Preferred Business Supplier has the right to reject an application to work with/be matched with a Small Business Owner (e.g. If they have become too busy to help you in this financial year). If this happens Council officers will contact you to ask you for your next preference.
 - It is the responsibility of the Preferred Business Supplier to ensure all adequate due diligence (including checking on any necessary insurances) is carried out prior to commencing work with a Voucher Recipient.
 - Once you have been successfully matched with a supplier you cannot change your mind and switch suppliers, unless unforeseen circumstances occur, and a change is approved by Council staff.
 - To ensure an even spread across the Preferred Business Suppliers there is a limit of 5 voucher redemptions per supplier on a first-come, best-dressed

basis, per supplier category. In the event that your first choice has been over prescribed Council officers may contact you to ask for your next preference.

- **IMPORTANT:** If an applicant has received a \$2,000 voucher **at least 2 times in previous years of the program**, preference will be given to those who have never successfully received a voucher/match.

2.4 Timeline

27 October 2025	Applications for Small Business Owners to apply for \$2,000 Vouchers open
10 November 2025	Applications for Small Business Owners to apply for \$2,000 Vouchers close
2 December 2024	Announce successful Small Business Owners/Preferred Business Suppliers matched for \$2,000 services
24 November 2025	50% Payment of \$1,000 made to all recipients (<i>paid to Preferred Business Supplier</i>) – <i>upon confirmation that the Activation Payment of \$200+gst has been paid by the voucher recipient to the Preferred Business Supplier</i>
Dec 2025 – Apr 2026	Preferred Business Suppliers work with successful Small Business Owners to deliver their nominated projects/initiatives, monitoring milestones and project/initiative status
4 May 2026	Preferred Business Suppliers - Acquittals reports due
18 May 2026	50% Final Payment of \$1,000 made to all recipients (<i>paid to Preferred Business Supplier</i>)

3.0 Business Elevate Program – Small Business Owners

3.1 Eligibility

Who is eligible?

- Applications for vouchers will be accepted from businesses physically located within the municipal boundaries of the City of Maribyrnong (see **Figure 2** at the end of this document)
- Projects/initiatives must be delivered within the boundaries of the City of Maribyrnong
- Businesses who are interested in using the products/services/initiatives in ONE of the 13 Key Categories shown in **Section 2.3** above.

Who is not eligible to apply?

Applications will not be accepted from:

- Businesses not located in the City of Maribyrnong
- Businesses not legally registered
- Businesses that are not financially stable
- Businesses that have outstanding reports or debts with Maribyrnong City Council
- Businesses that have outstanding compliance issues with Maribyrnong City Council

General Exclusions

- "Small Business Owners" applying for a voucher cannot have an existing business contract/agreement/outstanding invoice with a Preferred Business Supplier, as the program is designed to encourage NEW business connections/transactions.

3.2 Application Checklist

Before starting an application we suggest business owners gather the following information to make the application process a smooth and easy experience:

- The business ABN
- Website/Social media links (if available)
- A clear idea of what services/offers the business needs up to \$2,000 (+GST)
- Reading these guidelines in full BEFORE applying

TIP: Businesses should consider reading through the questions EARLY in the application period and allow some extra time for gathering any extra information that may be needed to complete the application.

3.3 Key Application Components

Applications must consider formulating answers to address the following:

- What is your primary business?
- Why are you applying for a Business Elevate Voucher?
 - What help does your business need right now?
 - What anticipated positive benefits will the voucher provide your business?
- Which Preferred Business Supplier would you like to work with?
- Why have you selected to be matched with this particular Preferred Business Supplier from the panel?
- Your capacity to work with a Preferred Business Supplier during Dec 2025 – April 2026?

3.4 Application

All applications are subject to review against the eligibility and assessment criteria. Applicants are encouraged to carefully consider their capacity to meet program requirements and the assessment criteria before committing resources to developing an application.

Applications must include:

- A completed **application form** via Smarty Grants online platform, that is well thought through and well-developed, addressing all criteria and questions to be considered to be matched for a voucher to work with a Preferred Business Supplier.

3.5 Assessment Criteria

Applications will be assessed against the following criteria:

- Registered business within the City of Maribyrnong
- The reason/rationale for applying, including the anticipated positive benefits that the voucher will provide the business
- Appropriate match for products/services required to elevate their business

3.6 Activation Fee

The Preferred Business Supplier will charge the recipient/Small Business Owner an Activation Fee – as follows:

1. The activation fee to be invoiced is 10% of the voucher value – ie \$200 (+gst *where appropriate if the business is registered for gst*). This is over and above the \$2,000+GST voucher that will be paid by Council to the Preferred Business Supplier through this program.
2. The activation fee should be paid **before** any work commences.
3. The activation fee is non-refundable unless for unforeseen reasons the Preferred Business Supplier is unable to fulfil the commitment.
4. If the activation fee is not paid, the Preferred Business Supplier reserves the right to stop working with the Small Business Owner as part of the Business Elevate Program, and may seek to be matched with an alternative Small Business Owner from the waiting list if viable.

NOTE: The activation fee is a small financial contribution from the recipient, designed to encourage participants to engage in commencing the work in a timely manner to complete all the initiatives/programs within the designated 5 month timeframe. It has been introduced based on feedback from participants in the 2021-22 Business Elevate Program.

3.7 Payment

The payment schedule will be as follows (Note: payments will be made directly to the businesses on the supplier panel. Businesses receiving the voucher will not receive any funds directly):

- Council will release funding in two instalments
- The first instalment will be 50% (i.e. \$1,000 + GST) when the Preferred Business Supplier is successfully matched with a Small Business Owner

- The final instalment of 50% (i.e. \$1,000 + GST) is withheld until Council has received the project/initiative acquittal report, and is satisfied with the execution of activities.

3.8 Reporting

The following reports are required to be submitted by the Preferred Business Suppliers:

- Acquittals report due at the end of the project/initiative to be submitted to Council demonstrating the successful implementation/execution of the program.

If the Preferred Business Supplier is experiencing any difficulty meeting their obligations, they should contact the Economic Development Unit for advice.

Voucher recipients will be sent a survey at the completion of the program for feedback that will help with future development of this program.

3.9 Notification Process

- Applicants for a Business Elevate Program voucher will be formally advised of the outcome of their application via email
- Once the successful “matching” of Small Business Owners and their Preferred Business Supplier is made, both parties will be contacted via email and advised the next steps

Maribyrnong City Council – Business Improvement District Grant Program 2025/2026

