



Official Program Guide & Application Overview

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Welcome from Clinton County THRIVE

Thank you for your interest in the THRIVE Emerging Businesses Award Program. Entrepreneurs are the backbone of Clinton County's economy. Through this program, Clinton County THRIVE seeks to recognize innovative emerging businesses, encourage continued investment, and provide financial assistance that helps businesses reach their next stage of growth.

This guide is designed to help you understand the program, prepare a competitive application, and avoid common mistakes. We encourage every applicant to read this guide before beginning the online application.

About the Program

The Emerging Businesses Award Program is intended to recognize businesses demonstrating innovation, growth potential, community impact, and a clear vision for the future. Awards are designed to accelerate business growth through strategic investments that improve operations, expand capacity, increase sales, create jobs, or strengthen long-term sustainability.

Award Overview

The **THRIVE Emerging Businesses Award Program** recognizes three outstanding businesses whose ideas, vision, and commitment demonstrate the greatest potential for success and community impact. Award recipients will receive the following cash prizes:

Award*	Amount
First Place	\$10,000
Second Place	\$5,000
Third Place	\$3,000

In addition to the cash award, each recipient will receive a one-year Cornerstone Membership with **Clinton County Catalyst**. This membership is designed to help emerging businesses continue their growth beyond the award itself by connecting them with valuable business resources, professional relationships, and opportunities throughout Clinton County.

As a Cornerstone Member, recipients will have access to networking events, workshops, Business RoundTables, legislative and community updates, marketing and promotional opportunities, referrals to business support organizations, grant and funding resources, and introductions to local business leaders and potential partners. Members also receive recognition through Catalyst communications and gain access to an organization dedicated to helping businesses connect, construct, and cultivate long-term success.

Together, the cash award and Cornerstone Membership provide recipients with both the financial resources and ongoing business support needed to accelerate growth and strengthen their impact within the Clinton County business community.

Eligibility Requirements

To apply, businesses MUST meet the following criteria:

- Business located in Clinton County, Michigan.
- Established and in business five years or less.
- Complete the required application.
- Applicant agrees to comply with all program requirements including use of its business name, logo, photos taken for award process, and any videos from event.

Program Timeline

- Program Announcement: July 1, 2026
- Application Period: July 15 through 5:00 pm August 14, 2026
- Application Review: August 17 through August 31, 2026
- Announcement/Notification to Top 10: September 4, 2026
- Top 10 “Shark Tank” Presentations: September 14 and 15 from 5:00 – 8:30 pm
- Award Announcements: September 24, 2026 (at the Clinton County Catalyst Annual Dinner)

Selection Process

Each eligible application is reviewed using established evaluation criteria. Reviewers consider the quality of responses, business need, growth potential, community impact, feasibility of the proposed use of funds, and the overall completeness of the application.

The Top 10 applicants will be selected to present their business to a committee (similar to what one may see in the television show *Shark Tank*) with the opportunity for them to further ask questions about your business.

The final three winners will be notified they will be awarded one of the 3 awards; however, will not find out which level until the evening of the Clinton County Catalyst Annual Dinner held in September/October of 2026.

Before You Apply

Set aside approximately 60–90 minutes to complete the application. Because the online application may not allow you to save your work and return later, prepare your responses in advance and copy them into the online form when you are ready to submit.

Application Preparation Checklist

- ☐ Read this guide completely.
- ☐ Review all eligibility requirements.
- ☐ Prepare written responses in a Word document.
- ☐ If you are selected as a Top 10 finalize, validate you can attend the “Shark Tank” presentation
- ☐ Submit before the deadline.

Reviewer Tips

- Be specific and provide measurable information whenever possible.
- Explain not only what you plan to do with the funding, but why it is important.
- Demonstrate how the award will create meaningful business growth.
- Connect your business success to benefits for the Clinton County community.

Application Overview

Below is a list of the information being requested on the application with additional context as needed. The application is broken down into four sections: Business Information, Contact Info, Business mission and plan, and certification.

Section 1: Business Info	▪ Business Name ▪ Business Address ▪ Owner(s) of the business – separate each name with a comma ▪ Your business website address (if you have one – if you don’t leave it blank) ▪ Business Social Media – provide a link to one of your social media accounts for your business ▪ Main Business Phone Number ▪ EIN # - Provide Employee Identification Number registered with the State of Michigan ▪ Year Established – This is the year you are recognized as a business with the State of Michigan (filing date) ▪ Number of Employees – Number of people you pay to work at your company (part-time, full-time, seasonal. If you are the only employee, list one (1). ▪ Is your business located in Clinton County? STOP! If you answer NO to this question, you are not eligible for this grant. If your business is located in Clinton County, select YES.
Section 2: Contact Info	▪ Provide contact name, phone number and email address of the person to contact regarding the application. ▪ Contact person is the one who THRIVE will reach out to with questions about the application.
Section 3: Mission and Plan	▪ Mission & Story – Provide a 500 character description of your mission and background about your company. ▪ 3-5 Year Plan – What is your business plan over the next 3 to 5 years.

	Where do you see yourself today versus where you plan to be in the future. ▪ Problem Solving - Describe an example of an idea or approach your business uses to solve problems. (Within your business) ▪ Business Challenges - What challenges have you faced or overcome so far in your business journey? Looking for business challenges and how you have handled to keep your business moving in the right direction or failures you have overcome. ▪ Award Funds – We want to hear how you will use the funds, if awarded. How will you use these funds to grow your business.
Section 4: Certification	▪ Your Name and Date of Your Application ▪ By entering your name and date, you agree, if awarded, Clinton County THRIVE and Clinton County Catalyst can use your business name, logo, photos and videos taken during the award process for promotions related to the program to promote future awards and the work THRIVE and Catalyst do within the community.

Post Award Follow-Up

Recipients of the THRIVE Emerging Businesses Award Program agree to participate in reasonable follow-up activities designed to highlight the impact of the award on their business and the community. Approximately three to four months after award funds have been distributed, THRIVE will contact recipients to learn how the funds were invested and the progress made toward the goals outlined in the application. Award recipients may be asked to provide photographs, project updates, testimonials, or other information demonstrating how the funding supported their business.

To celebrate the success of award recipients and promote entrepreneurship throughout Clinton County, THRIVE may feature recipients through marketing and promotional activities, which may include news releases, social media posts, website stories, photographs, video interviews, television or media interviews, and other public recognition opportunities. By submitting an application, applicants acknowledge and agree that, if selected to receive an award, they will reasonably participate in these follow-up and promotional activities and grant THRIVE permission to use their business name, logo, photographs, submitted materials, and related project information for educational, promotional, and reporting purposes associated with the Emerging Businesses Award Program.

Frequently Asked Questions

This section will be expanded in the next version to include detailed answers regarding eligibility, allowable expenses, documentation, deadlines, scoring, and recipient responsibilities.

Q: Who do I contact if I have questions about the application process?

A: You can email THRIVE at Thrive@ClintonCountyTHRIVE.org