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Bryan Congratulates Winners of \$50,000 Innovative Grant, But Some Complain of Process Lacking Transparency

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Governor Albert Bryan on Friday offered congratulations to the winning recipients of the \$50,000 “Innovation” grants, which he funded through the V.I. Small Business Development Center (SBDC) to be awarded to local businesses with fewer than 100 employees, to help them grow their businesses and strengthen the territory’s economy.

But several small business owners have reached out to the Consortium complaining about a process they said lacked transparency. Elsewhere, a Facebook post from the SBDC [is filled with complaints](#) from applicants who contend the SBDC should also notify those whose applications were rejected.

"I agree rejection letters should be sent out. I received calls twice to verify my email, but no correspondence came.. Let's communicate better," said Tammy Gardiner-Roberts.

"This is the definition of unprofessionalism. You people virtually begged businesses to apply, even extended the deadline multiple times so more business can get their applications in. Y'all made it seem that if your application was complete you would get something even if you didn't get what was requested," said Thomas love. "I think businesses should know how much funds were available, how many applications were accepted..."

Applicants not selected as grant recipients were not directly informed of their application status, according to an email from the SBDC received by a grant applicant and gleaned by the Consortium. Instead, the SBDC told grant applicants to search their inbox and junk mail for an email confirming that they were among recipients. "If you/your business did not receive an email from sbig2022@visbdc.org, you/your business were not selected for the grant," reads the email.

"Please do not call the VISBDC to find out if you were selected or why you were not selected at this time," the email further reads. "The VISBDC will post an updated webinar about the grant in the coming weeks."

The email confirming an applicant's selection as a grant awardee, also gleaned by the Consortium, reads, "Congratulations, your business has been selected as a recipient of the Honorable Governor Albert Bryan Jr. Small Business Innovation Grant 2022." It then asks to the recipient to provide basic information such as the business's legal name, email, phone number and address. Once this information is furnished, the recipient's grant amount will be provided.

In May, Mr. Bryan created the \$1 million fund that was administered through the SBDC, and local business owners were invited to apply with plans of how they would use the money to upgrade their business, such as by purchasing new equipment, hiring more employees or other means, said a release issued by Gov't House Friday.

It revealed that about 1,000 businesses submitted applications for up to \$50,000 in grant money, and entries were judged by the SBDC based on the level of innovation, the impact the proposal would have the business, and the business' ability to implement their plan.

"I would like to congratulate the winners of these competitive grants, and I'm especially pleased to see the innovative spirit and resilience shown by the small business owners who applied," Mr. Bryan said. "To all the applicants, I want to say thank you for working to make the U.S. Virgin Islands better and stronger."

The SBDC is an accredited member of America's Small Business Development Centers and is funded in part through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration through the University of the Virgin Islands.

It is the primary resource for entrepreneurs and small businesses in the territory and the only nationally accredited program that provides business advising, according to the release. Through a network of locations on St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John, the VI SBDC provides one-on-one advising, training, and information resources to help businesses start, grow and succeed.

For more information on the services the VI SBDC offers, visit visbdc.org.

