CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY & SUSTAINABILITY

MAY 12, 2025

American Express to Provide $3.95M in Support for Restaurants Worldwide with 2025 “Backing Small” Grant Programs



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American Express’ signature grant programs for the dining industry: Backing Historic Small Restaurants and Backing International Small Restaurants. Together, the 2025 “Backing Small” program grants will provide $3.95 million in funding and other resources to help small and independent restaurants around the world preserve their history and legacy, while celebrating their cuisines and supporting local economies.

“American Express is proud to back local champions who strengthen their communities, and that includes many small and independent restaurants,” said Madge Thomas, Head of Corporate Sustainability and President, American Express Foundation. “Food brings people together and builds community. We aim to offer restaurants the support they need to expand, innovate, update their spaces, and improve operations, so they continue to grow and bring vitality to neighborhoods across the U.S and around the world.”

Celebrating the fifth anniversary of Backing Historic Small Restaurants this year, American Express is partnering with the National Trust for Historic Preservation to give $2.5 million in grants to 50 U.S. historic restaurants. The program has already provided over $5 million throughout the past four years to 130 restaurant owners in all 50 states who have been impacted by economic hardship or disasters.

“American Express is an invaluable partner to the National Trust as together we strengthen neighborhoods across the country by supporting these small businesses that bring people together,” said Carol Quillen, President and CEO of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

This year, Backing International Small Restaurants is bigger than ever and is open to applicants in new countries such as France and Spain, with 8 countries supported in total, including Canada, Japan, Mexico, Australia, New Zealand, and the U.K. In partnership with the International Downtown Association Foundation, the program is offering $1.45 million in funding to 100 restaurants so they can make critical improvements, such as enhancing their digital capabilities, refreshing dining spaces, and improving kitchen operations.

"The IDA Foundation is excited to partner once again with American Express to launch the fourth year of the Backing International Small Restaurants program," said David Downey, Executive Director, IDA Foundation. "To empower these vital community anchors to thrive, this initiative provides essential support to the independent restaurants that are the heart and soul of our downtowns.

Grantees from past years say the funding helped them make much needed infrastructure changes. Stephen Reeve, a 2024 Backing Historic Small

ago. The grant helped Stephen restore key elements of the building façade and better document the café’s history with historic signage. “We want to honor the families that created the New York Café and much more of the surrounding historic Stedman-Thomas neighborhood,” Reeve said.

The grants also help restaurant owners offer the best possible experience to customers, which can benefit the community as a whole. Just ask Heleana Genaus, co-founder of Rising Sun Workshop in Sydney, Australia, and a 2024 Backing International Small Restaurants grantee. The grant came at the perfect time, Genaus said: Rising Sun, a unique spot where motorcyclists can work on their bikes while enjoying a coffee or meal, had evolved into a growing communal space. By using the funding to update the kitchen and storage areas, Genaus was able to improve operations and be better equipped to meet community demand.

“Rising Sun Workshop is about breaking down the barriers of urban living, where people often don’t know their neighbors,” she said. “We created this space to give people a place to work on their bikes, and it has grown into something much bigger — a community where everyone feels welcome.”

Applications for both programs open today; they close on May 30 for “Backing Historic Small Restaurants” and on June 30 for “Backing International Small Restaurants.” For the U.S. program, community members can also nominate their favorite restaurant here.

American Express launched these Backing Small programs when many restaurants were forced to close their doors during the pandemic, expanding the grant support over the years to help small restaurant owners address their evolving needs. As the founder of Small Business Saturday in 2010, American Express has brought communities together by connecting small business owners with local customers when these businesses needed the foot traffic. Since 2020, our grants have supported nearly 5,000 small businesses across six countries and 50 U.S. states, Washington D.C., and Puerto Rico.

Learn more about American Express’ community impact here.

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