



Think **BIG** 

Build. Invest. Grow.

HANDBOOK

WELCOME TO THINKBIG

Welcome to the ThinkBIG Program, an initiative of the Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce created to support entrepreneurs and small business owners as they Build, Invest, and Grow.

Through ThinkBIG, the Chamber sponsors eligible small business's first year of Chamber membership, connecting participants to the local business community through membership, professional development, networking, resources, and other opportunities that support business growth.

The program is designed to help small businesses build stronger connections, access valuable resources, increase visibility, and become more engaged in the local business community.

Program availability is limited. Applications are reviewed based on eligibility, completeness, program requirements, and available sponsorship opportunities.

PROGRAM PURPOSE

The purpose of ThinkBIG is to:

- Support eligible small businesses and entrepreneurs.
- Increase access to Chamber resources and business connections.
- Encourage participation in the local business community.
- Provide opportunities for professional and business development.
- Increase visibility for participating businesses.
- Connect small businesses with other business owners, professionals, and community resources.
- Encourage meaningful engagement with the Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce.

ThinkBIG gives businesses that meet the program criteria an opportunity to establish or strengthen their connection with the Chamber and the Sarasota/Manatee business community.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

To be considered for ThinkBIG, an applicant must meet the eligibility requirements below.

3.1 Business Status

The business must:

- Be a legally registered business.
- Operate as an LLC, corporation, sole proprietorship, or partnership.
- Be currently operating at the time of application.
- Be in good standing with applicable state and local regulatory agencies.

Applicants must provide documentation verifying business registration and good standing.

3.2 Business Size

The business must qualify as a small business under the program's established size requirements. Size is determined primarily by annual gross revenue, with a qualifying threshold generally falling between \$50,000 and \$100,000. The Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce sets the specific revenue threshold for each application cycle.

Applicants may be asked to provide financial documentation to verify eligibility.

3.3 Location

The business must be:

- Physically located in Sarasota or Manatee County; or
- Primarily operating within Sarasota or Manatee County.

Home-based businesses may qualify when legally permitted.

3.4 Time in Operation

Businesses must generally have been operating for a minimum of **one year** at the time of application.

INDUSTRY ELIGIBILITY

ThinkBIG is open to most industries. Businesses are not eligible when their primary business activity involves:

- Gambling.
- Adult entertainment.
- Illegal Activities
- Passive real estate holding companies
- Nonprofit organizations, unless specifically identified as eligible for a particular program cycle.

The Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce reserves the right to determine whether a business or industry is eligible for the program.

FINANCIAL STANDING

Applicants must demonstrate either:

- Financial need; or
- A clear and appropriate use of sponsorship and associated Chamber membership.

In addition, businesses must:

- Not be in active bankruptcy.
- Not having unresolved liens or judgments that affect eligibility.
- Be current on federal, state, and local taxes, or have an approved payment plan.

Applicants may be required to provide financial documentation to verify eligibility and demonstrate the intended use of sponsorship.

THINKBIG CHAMBER MEMBERSHIP

A central component of ThinkBIG is connecting participating businesses with the Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce. Chamber membership provides participating businesses with opportunities including:

Networking

Connect with local business owners, professionals, community leaders, and potential customers through Chamber events and programs.

Professional Development

Access workshops, educational programs, and business development opportunities.

Visibility

Utilize Chamber resources and opportunities designed to increase awareness of your business.

Member Directory

Receive visibility through the Chamber's member directory.

Business Resources

Access business tools, information, legislative updates, economic development insights, and other resources.

Member Savings

Access discount rates and exclusive opportunities for eligible Chamber programs and events.

THINKBIG ONBOARDING PROCESS

All ThinkBIG participants must complete an onboarding process designed to help them understand the program, connect with Chamber resources, and establish a relationship with the Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce. Onboarding includes the following required components.

7.1 One-on-One Meeting with the ThinkBIG Program Manager

Each participant must complete a one-on-one meeting with the ThinkBIG Program Manager. The meeting provides an opportunity to:

- Welcome the participants to the ThinkBIG Program.
- Review program expectations and participation requirements.
- Discuss the participant's business and goals.
- Identify Chamber programs, events, and resources that may benefit the business.
- Answer questions about Chamber membership.
- Develop a plan for meaningful engagement during the program year.

Participants are responsible for scheduling and attending their one-on-one onboarding meeting.

7.2 Connect 1st Event

As part of onboarding, each participant is required to attend a Connect 1st event hosted by the Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce. Connect 1st provides an opportunity for participants to:

- Meet other Chamber members.
- Introduce themselves and their business.
- Begin building their professional network.
- Learn how to engage with the Chamber community.
- Develop relationships with other local businesses and professionals.

Attendance at a Connect 1st event is a required component of the ThinkBIG onboarding process.

7.3 Completion of Onboarding

Participants are expected to complete onboarding within the timeframe established by the ThinkBIG Program Manager.

Required onboarding checklist

THINKBIG ONBOARDING PROCESS

- ☐ Complete one-on-one meeting with the ThinkBIG Program Manager.
- ☐ Attend one Connect 1st event.
- ☐ Review the ThinkBIG Program Handbook and participation requirements.
- ☐ Identify Chamber events and resources relevant to the business.

Failure to complete the required onboarding process may affect a participant's continued participation in the ThinkBIG Program.

THINKBIG PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENT

ThinkBIG participants are expected to actively engage with the Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce. As part of participation, applicants agree to attend a minimum of three Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce events during the program year.

Examples of Chamber opportunities may include:

- Chamber Connect
- Good Morning Sarasota
- Shumaker Chamber University
- Hustle Bar
- Power Hour Luncheons
- Signature events
- Networking events
- Educational programs
- Other Chamber programs designated by the Chamber

Participation should be meaningful and demonstrate the business's engagement with the Chamber and local business community. Acknowledging this participation requirement is part of the application process.

ONE BUSINESS PER PROGRAM YEAR POLICY

One Business Funding Limitation

To ensure ThinkBIG opportunities are distributed equitably among eligible small businesses:

ONE BUSINESS PER PROGRAM YEAR POLICY

One Business Funding Limitation

To ensure ThinkBIG opportunities are distributed equitably among eligible small businesses:

An applicant may only have ONE business funded through the ThinkBIG Program during any given program year.

This means:

- An individual who owns or operates multiple businesses may not receive ThinkBIG funding for more than one business during the same program year.
- A business owner may not submit multiple applications for different businesses with the intent of receiving multiple ThinkBIG sponsorships during the same program year.
- If an applicant owns multiple eligible businesses, the applicant must select one business to be considered for funding for that program year.
- Receiving funding for one business does not guarantee funding for another business owned by the same applicant in a future year.
- The Chamber reserves the right to verify ownership and business relationships as part of the application and review process.
- A business previously awarded ThinkBIG funding may reapply in a future program year, provided it has fulfilled all program eligibility requirements and completed a minimum of three Chamber event participations during its prior program year.

Example

If an applicant owns Business A, Business B, and Business C, the applicant may apply for ThinkBIG for one of those businesses during the program year. If Business A is selected for ThinkBIG funding, Businesses B and C are not eligible to receive ThinkBIG funding during that same program year.

This policy applies regardless of the legal structure of the businesses.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Applicants must submit a complete application and require supporting documentation. Required materials may include:

- ☐ Completed ThinkBIG application.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

- ☐ Proof of business registration.
- ☐ Most recent tax return or financial statements (if needed).
- ☐ Brief statement describing the intended use of sponsorship.
- ☐ Acknowledgement of the minimum three-event Chamber participation requirement.
- ☐ Any additional documentation requested by the Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce.

Incomplete applications may not be considered until all required information has been received.

USE OF SPONSORSHIP

ThinkBIG sponsorship funds one year of Chamber membership for eligible small businesses, providing participation in the Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce and access to associated resources and opportunities.

APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS

Applications are reviewed by the Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce. The review process may include:

1. Application submission.
2. Verification of eligibility.
3. Review of supporting documentation.
4. Review of business needs.
5. Confirmation of Chamber participation requirements.
6. Review of program availability.
7. Final selection and notification.

Meeting the minimum eligibility requirements does not automatically guarantee selection. ThinkBIG sponsorship opportunities are limited, and the Chamber reserves the right to determine final selections.

APPLICANT RESPONSIBILITIES

ThinkBIG participants agree to:

- Provide accurate and complete information.
- Submit requested documentation.
- Maintain eligibility throughout the program year.
- Participate in the required Chamber activities.
- Maintain good standing with applicable governmental agencies.
- Use the sponsorship for approved purposes.
- Participate in follow-up reporting or impact surveys.
- Acknowledge the ThinkBIG Program when requested in public materials.
- Notify the Chamber of significant changes to business status or ownership.

REPORTING & FOLLOW-UP

ThinkBIG participants may be asked to take part in follow-up reporting, surveys, interviews, or other activities designed to measure the program's impact. Participants may be asked to provide information such as:

- Business growth.
- New customers or clients.
- New partnerships or connections.
- Participation in Chamber events.
- Business milestones.
- How Chamber membership or resources benefited the business.
- Other outcomes related to the ThinkBIG experience.

Participation in required reporting is a condition of the program.

MAINTAINING ELIGIBILITY

Participants are expected to remain in compliance with program requirements throughout their participation. A participant may become ineligible if:

- Business ceases operations.
- The business no longer meets program eligibility requirements.
- Information provided in the application is determined to be inaccurate or misleading.
- Required documentation is not provided.
- The business fails to meet required participation obligations.

MAINTAINING ELIGIBILITY

- Sponsorship is used for an unauthorized purpose.
- The business enters active bankruptcy or otherwise becomes subject to circumstances that affect eligibility.

The Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce reserves the right to review eligibility throughout the program year.

PROGRAM AVAILABILITY

ThinkBIG sponsorship opportunities are limited. Applying does not guarantee:

- Selection.
- Sponsorship.
- Chamber membership.
- Continued eligibility.
- Funding for future program years.

The Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce may establish application deadlines, selection dates, program cycles, and available sponsorship amounts for each program year.

PARTICIPANT CODE OF CONDUCT

ThinkBIG participants represent both their businesses and the Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce when participating in Chamber programs and events. Participants are expected to:

- Conduct themselves professionally.
- Treat Chamber staff, members, speakers, and other participants respectfully.
- Follow events and facility policies.
- Engage in professional and ethical business practices.
- Represent their business accurately.
- Contribute positively to the Chamber community.

Failure to maintain appropriate conduct may result in removal from the program.

PARTICIPANT CHECKLIST

Before applying, applicants should confirm the following.

Business Eligibility

- ☐ Business is legally registered.
- ☐ Business is currently operating.
- ☐ Business is in good standing.
- ☐ Business meets the applicable small business size requirements.
- ☐ Business is in or primarily operates within Sarasota/Manatee County.
- ☐ Business has operated for at least one year, unless an exception applies.
- ☐ Business operates in an eligible industry.
- ☐ Business is not engaged in prohibited activities.

Financial Eligibility

- ☐ Business demonstrates financial need or a clear use of sponsorship.
- ☐ Business is current on federal, state, and local taxes or has an approved payment plan.
- ☐ Business is not actively bankruptcy.
- ☐ Business does not have unresolved liens or judgments that affect eligibility.

ThinkBIG Requirements

- ☐ Applicant intends to participate in the required Chamber activities.
- ☐ Applicant agrees to participate in a minimum of three Chamber events during the program year.
- ☐ Applicant understands the one-business-per-year funding limitation.
- ☐ Applicant understands that program availability is limited.

Documentation

- ☐ Completed application.
- ☐ Proof of business registration.
- ☐ Most recent tax return or financial statements.
- ☐ Intended use of sponsorship.
- ☐ Any additional documentation requested by the Chamber.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Can I apply if I own more than one business?

Yes. However, only one business owned or operated by an applicant may receive ThinkBIG funding during a given program year.

Can I receive ThinkBIG funding for two different businesses?

No. An applicant may only have one business funded through ThinkBIG in a given program year.

Can I apply again in the future?

Applicants may apply in a future program year if they meet the eligibility requirements for that application cycle. Businesses previously awarded ThinkBIG funding are eligible to reapply, provided they have fulfilled all program eligibility requirements and completed a minimum of three Chamber event participations during their prior program year. Prior participation does not guarantee future funding.

Do I have to be a Chamber member to participate?

ThinkBIG is designed to connect eligible businesses with Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce membership. Applicants should review the current program requirements regarding membership and sponsorship.

How many Chamber events must I attend?

Participants commit to attending a minimum of three Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce events during the program year.

Does meeting all eligibility requirements guarantee selection?

No. Program availability is limited, and meeting eligibility requirements does not guarantee selection.

What documentation will I need?

Applicants should be prepared to provide proof of business registration, recent tax returns or financial statements, an intended-use statement, and any additional documentation requested by the Chamber.

Can home-based businesses apply?

Yes. Home-based businesses may be eligible if they are legally permitted and meet all other program requirements.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT & AGREEMENT

By submitting a ThinkBIG application, the applicant acknowledges that they:

- Have reviewed the ThinkBIG Program Handbook.
- Understand the program eligibility requirements.
- Have provided accurate information.
- Agree to provide requested documentation.
- Agree to participate in the required Chamber activities.
- Agree to participate in follow-up reporting or impact surveys when requested.
- Understand that program availability is limited.
- Understand that meeting eligibility requirements does not guarantee selection.
- Understand that only one business owned or operated by the applicant may receive ThinkBIG funding during a given program year.
- Agree to comply with the terms and requirements established by the Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce.

Please acknowledge that you have read and understand the guidelines of the ThinkBIG Program Handbook by [CLICKING HERE](#).

Important Notice

The Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce reserves the right to establish, modify, interpret, and enforce ThinkBIG Program requirements, deadlines, eligibility criteria, participation requirements, and available sponsorship opportunities.

Program requirements may be updated from one program year to the next. Applicants should refer to the current application and program materials for the requirements applicable to the current program year.

