



# U.S. GOVERNMENT EXPORT ASSISTANCE FUNDS AVAILABLE

»» By Linda Spencer

This is another in a series of articles identifying government funds for U.S. SEMA-member companies to defray the costs of developing export business. A previous *SEMA News* article entitled “Grow Your Bottom Line: Export to the Underserved Global Market” in May 2022 focused on the Department of Commerce International Trade Administration’s Market Development Cooperator Program. This month’s article will focus on a partnership between the Small Business Administration (SBA) and the states called the State Trade Expansion Program (STEP), in which the states provide grants to help qualified companies export.

STEP funds can be used towards defraying the cost for participation in trade missions and foreign-market sales trips, export trade shows, international marketing efforts and export training. It provides federal (SBA) funding to states through a competitive application process, with nearly all states receiving funds.

SEMA has been actively connecting participants with grant opportunities to defray the cost of association international programs. With its recent trade missions

to the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia and the upcoming Nordic Business Development Program to Sweden, as well as the new SEMA International Promotion Program (SIPP), which included a listing and ad in an export directory distributed in *SEMA News* and as an insert in *SEMA News*, SEMA has developed a state-by-state list of STEP contacts available at [www.sema.org/international](http://www.sema.org/international).

In all, more than 40 companies participating in SEMA programs have received

»» The STEP program is helping to fund programs such as the SEMA Australia program pictured above and the August 24–28 2022 SEMA Nordic program in Stockholm Sweden. More information is available at [www.sema.org/nordic](http://www.sema.org/nordic).

STEP grant funds since September 2021. *SEMA News* reached out to a dozen of these recipients based in various states to ask about their experiences and the benefits of the STEP grant program.

## CALIFORNIA

“The trip was planned and executed extremely well by SEMA International. Additionally, [SEMA] helped coordinate engagement with the state of California to receive reimbursement grants toward the cost. This made the decision to join the trip easy, enabling us to further benefit from visiting key international markets.”

—Adam Weisner, President, SuperSprings International

## INTERNATIONAL

“The performance and racing markets benefit from exposure to global markets. Thank you to SEMA for organizing and promoting these international events. In addition to the SEMA organization, we thank the state of California and appreciate its support. The total effort is impressive and beneficial to all involved, including new potential customers.”

—**Mark Cornwell,**  
**Vice President New Business**  
**Development and Specialty Markets,**  
**Wilwood**

“The SEMA international business trips are already one of the most cost-effective and productive ways to reach international markets. By using state grants that are available, the minimal cost can be further reduced. At McLeod, we have been awarded multiple California STEP grants that have been easy to obtain and require minimal effort to apply for.”

—**Bob Scheid,**  
**Vice President,**  
**Wharton Automotive Group**

“The California STEP program has been such a helpful tool and monetary resource in expanding our business internationally! [SEMA] is an indispensable asset as a liaison to making the smooth transition of all the pieces fitting into place, and the California STEP program has made it more inviting to help defray some of the costs involved to get into exporting. Everyone was very helpful in wanting to make it a success for me and our business, Baja Forged.”

—**Theresa Contreras,**  
**Lead Designer and Co-Owner,**  
**Baja Forged**

## CONNECTICUT

“Getting assistance from Laura’s team and the Connecticut STEP program has been crucial in enabling our company to attend international events and continue to grow our export efforts. Meeting international customers face to face has created long-lasting relationships with buyers in many countries that continue purchasing our products.”

—**Yury Lyalko,**  
**CEO, Wiring Specialties LLC**

## MICHIGAN

“As a startup, Blacklake Research and Development has been able to participate in several SEMA-sponsored events that were dedicated to expanding business internationally. The Michigan Economic Development Corporation [MEDC, the Michigan STEP/export-assistance program] has been very supportive of our efforts to pursue export markets and expand business opportunities into other parts of the world. We received a Michigan STEP grant for the most recent Middle East Business Development trip, which was sponsored by SEMA. Through the work with MEDC, we have been able to access grant funding for participation in foreign trade missions and have also been connected to other SBA resources.”

—**Joe Valentich, Co-Owner,**  
**Blacklake Research and Development**

“The staff at SEMA were great to work with in regards to the SIPP program. Not only did they introduce us to Government programs we were unfamiliar with, they offered their guidance, reminders, and knowledge whenever it was needed. It was invaluable to have their assistance, otherwise we would have missed out on potentially thousands of dollars of aid and grants.”

—**Andy Ricketts,**  
**Vehicle Operations Manager,**  
**Livernois Motorsports & Engineering**

## NORTH CAROLINA

“STEP funding through the North Carolina EDPNC (Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina) makes our travel to international trade events possible. Participation in the tradeshows, in our customers’ regions, helps to build the relationships we need to grow our export business.”

—**Mark Whitney,**  
**CEO, Performance Analysis**

## OHIO

“The international grant money available from the state of Ohio has helped fund several projects for the Malco international sales team. From trade shows and travel for customer visits to advertising campaigns and content creation, Malco has been able to put these funds to great

use, increasing our international brand presence in the automotive industry.”

—**Jennifer Bowman**  
**Director of Marketing**  
**Malco Products Inc.**

## SOUTH CAROLINA

“I worked with Anita and the South Carolina STEP office last year, and it has worked out very well. By having them help defray some of the cost, we were able to make the most out of our SEMA Show budget, and the connections we made during the Show due to the SIPP program allowed us to connect with an even larger audience than we were originally intending to connect with. We truly feel that our involvement in the SIPP helped us win our three international media awards, which generated positive exposure overseas for a market that we were not targeting to service. I had not worked with them before but plan to try to partner with them every opportunity I get going forward.”

—**Christopher Owens, CEO,**  
**Last Drop Wrench**

“The South Carolina STEP program is a great help with our overseas expansion. South Carolina STEP provided us with funding for exhibiting overseas, help with travel expenses, and B2B matchmaking.

—**Barry Adler, President**  
**Quick Time Performance**

## UTAH

“The state official in Utah who assisted us in obtaining STEP funds is an incredibly helpful individual. She helped us qualify for reimbursements that will cover nearly the entire expense for two travelers to attend not one, but two SEMA events overseas. We are off to the SEMA Nordic event in August largely due to their help. I would recommend contacting their office if your business is looking at expanding overseas.”

—**Shaun Hill,**  
**Chief Revenue Officer, Hypercraft**

For more information on SEMA’s international programs or the STEP program, contact Linda Spencer at [lindas@sema.org](mailto:lindas@sema.org) or Kristin Atwan at [kristina@sema.org](mailto:kristina@sema.org). ■