



Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity

JB Pritzker, Governor

STATE SMALL BUSINESS CREDIT INITIATIVE (SSBCI) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE (TA) LOAN TA PROGRAM – REGION 4: NORTH NOFO FAQs

SSBCI LOAN TA GRANT ELIGIBILITY

Q: Who can apply for the SSBCI Technical Assistance - Loan TA Program?

A: Legal, Accounting, or Financial Advisory Non-Profit or For-Profit entities are eligible to apply. Applicants must administer the following three (3) TA services – legal, accounting, and financial advisory services – either directly or through a coalition of contractual partners.

The U.S. Treasury has provided guidance stating that entities must meet at least one of the following criteria in order to be defined as a “legal, accounting, or financial advisory firm” for the purposes of the TA Grant Program:

- A primary purpose of the entity or a central part of the entity’s mission is to provide legal, accounting, and/or financial advisory services,
- The entity regularly markets or publicizes itself as providing legal, accounting, and/or financial advisory services, or
- At least 25% of the entity’s revenues or staff are dedicated to providing legal, accounting, and/or financial advisory services.

Eligible applicants may not be suspended, debarred, or otherwise excluded from or ineligible for participation in federal assistance programs or activities.

Applicants should review U.S. Treasury’s [SSBCI TA program guidelines](#) and [FAQs](#) to verify eligibility requirements. Treasury’s definition of a “legal, accounting, or financial advisory firm” for the purposes of the TA grant program was updated on 9/21/2022 and is listed on page 25 of the FAQs.

Organizations previously awarded the SSBCI TA loan for another region are eligible to apply for the Region 4 NOFO, there is no restriction on managing two separate regions.

Q: Can multiple organizations apply as a collaborative group?

A: Yes, collaborative application submissions from eligible entities may include business support organizations, economic development organizations, for-profit or non-profit professional entities, or community development financial institutions. Applicants are strongly encouraged to partner with other federally funded technical assistance providers, such as the Illinois Small Business Development Centers, funded in part by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), for the provision of a portion of resources to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of services provided.

Q: Who are the eligible beneficiaries to be served by the SSBCI Technical Assistance - Loan TA Program?

A: Eligible beneficiaries of the SSBCI Technical Assistance - Loan TA Program are business owned by socially and economically disadvantaged individuals (SEDI) or very small businesses (VSBs) participating in or seeking assistance from the Illinois' State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI)-funded programs or participate in other federal or other jurisdiction programs that support small businesses.

Q: Are local government organizations, if partnered with a technical assistance provider, eligible for this opportunity?

A: The primary applicant for this opportunity must be a non-profit or for-profit entity that provides legal, accounting, and/or financial advisory services. Applicants may collaborate with business support organizations, economic development organizations, for-profit or non-profit professional entities, or community development financial institutions.

Q: Can we offer industry-specific TA services (i.e., Construction industry)?

A: The focus of this loan opportunity are businesses owned by socially and economically disadvantaged individuals (SEDI) or very small businesses (VSBs) participating in or seeking assistance from the Illinois' State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI)-funded programs and cannot be industry-specific.

Q: Are we in charge of recruiting businesses for this program, or are they 'assigned' to us through Statewide outreach efforts?

A: You are required to recruit business for this program. You will be asked to submit engagement and recruitment strategies in your program application.

Q: If I filed for bankruptcy will that disqualify my application?

A: Personal bankruptcy will not disqualify an applicant.

Q: Is my credit score checked for this grant?

A: Applying for the SSBCI Technical Assistance - Loan TA Program does not require a credit check.

Q: Will certain applications be given priority for the SSBCI Technical Assistance - Loan TA Program?

A: Yes, DCEO will prioritize applications submitted by SEDI-owned entities.

APPLYING FOR THE SSBCI LOAN TA GRANT

Q: What constitutes a Very Small Business (VSB)?

A: Very Small Business is defined as a business with fewer than 10 employees and may include independent contractors and sole proprietors.

Q: What constitutes a Socially Economically Disadvantaged Individual (SEDI) Business?

A: If **privately** owned, 51% is owned by one or more socially and economically disadvantaged individuals. If **publicly** owned, 51% of the stock is owned by one or more socially and economically disadvantaged individuals.

Q: Do Socially Economically Disadvantaged Individual (SEDI) Businesses need certification in order to be counted as SEDI?

A: Yes. If you choose to self-certify as a SEDI-owned business, you must complete the *SEDI-Certification* document found on the [NOFO webpage](#).

Q: Who is considered a socially and economically disadvantaged individual?

A: **Socially disadvantaged individuals** are those who have been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudice or cultural bias because of their identity as a member of a group without regard to their individual qualities. **Economically disadvantaged individuals** are those socially disadvantaged individuals whose ability to compete in the free enterprise system has been impaired due to diminished capital and credit opportunities as compared to others in the same business area who are not socially disadvantaged.

Q: What is a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) Investment Area?

A: The population in CDFI Investment Areas serves as a proxy for the needs of SEDI-owned businesses because these areas are generally low-income, high-poverty geographies that receive neither sufficient access to capital nor support for the needs of small businesses, including minority-owned businesses. A CDFI must have a primary mission of promoting community development. In determining whether an entity has such a primary mission, the CDFI Fund will consider whether the activities of the entity are purposefully directed toward improving the social and/or economic conditions of underserved people (which may include Low-Income persons or persons who lack adequate access to capital and/or Financial Services) and/or residents of economically distressed communities (which may include Investment Areas).

Q: How do I apply for the SSBCI Technical Assistance - Loan TA Program?

A: Visit the Grant Application Link [here](#) or contact us via email at CEO.SSBCI.TA@illinois.gov for application materials.

Q: What do I need to include in my application package?

A: As part of the application, the following documents must be submitted **within the [Smartsheet Application Form](#)**:

- Uniform Grant Application in fillable PDF format. Signature page must be printed, signed, scanned, and submitted with application.
- Uniform Budget utilizing the template provided by DCEO for this project. The entire budget with all worksheets included even if the worksheets are not relevant to the grant opportunity must be submitted with the application materials. Signature page must be printed, signed, scanned, and submitted with application.
- Conflict of Interest Disclosure
- Mandatory Disclosures
- NOFO Smartsheet Program Application
- If external partners are used, Proof of Partnership Cover Sheet(s) and required supporting documentation
- If applicable, SSBCI Loan TA Program SEDI-Certification
- Any other supplemental documentation

***NOTE:** Be sure to refer to the online NOFO to ensure all required parts of the application package are submitted electronically, otherwise your application will not be considered.

Q: Should the Uniform Budget reflect 1 or both years of the grant term?

A: The Uniform Budget submitted should be reflective of the anticipated 2-yr grant period.

Q: Can I submit more than 1 application (for multiple services regions)?

A: Applicants may apply to serve multiple service regions however you must submit separate applications for each region.

Q: Do both the primary applicant and all external partners have to be registered in GATA?

A: No. Only the primary applicant needs to be registered in GATA.

Q: Do the Mandatory Disclosure and Conflict of Interest Disclosure need to be completed by external partner(s) or just the primary applicant?

A: The Mandatory Disclosure and Conflict of Interest Disclosure need to be completed by the primary applicant only. External partner(s) do not need to complete the Disclosures.

Q: Which documents and certifications must external partners complete?

A: External Partners must complete the Proof of Partnership Cover Letter found on the [NOFO webpage](#) and provide any additional supporting documentation required.

Q: How do you decide who will be awarded SSBCI Technical Assistance - Loan TA Program dollars?

A: DCEO will designate an evaluation committee to review the SSBCI Technical Assistance - Loan TA Program applications. Applications will be reviewed on a competitive basis and graded on a 100-point scale based on need, capacity, and quality. The final score of each Committee member will be calculated and the average of all scores will be the applicant's final score. Grants will be awarded from highest score to lowest scores until funding is exhausted.

SSBCI LOAN TA GRANT DOLLAR SPECIFICS

Q: How much money is available? How many Grants do you plan to award?

A: Total amount of funding is \$700,000. One (1) award will be issued in for Region 4: North as outlined in the NOFO.

Q: Is the award range of up to \$700,000 for 1 year or both years?

A: The grant amount awarded will be reflective of the 2-yr grant period.

Q: What can SSBCI Technical Assistance - Loan TA Program dollars be used for?

A: SSBCI Technical Assistance - Loan TA Program dollars may only be used for cost of providing legal, accounting, and financial advisory services, including any wraparound services, to eligible beneficiaries. Costs required for the establishment or reorganization of a recipient, subrecipient, or contractor under an award are generally *not eligible*.

Q: Is program income considered an eligible line item for the uniform budget as it relates to the SSBCI Loan TA Program?

A: No. Under the SSBCI TA Program, program income is not an eligible line item under the Uniform SSBCI TA Budget. The intent of this program is not to charge eligible beneficiaries for technical assistance services.

Q: What is the role of program income in the SSBCI TA Program budget, and how can organizations generate income without charging participants for services?

A: Program income under the SSBCI TA Program includes any revenue generated directly by supported activities but should not involve fees charged to participants for services. Instead, organizations can explore alternative income sources to support their operations and enhance their offerings. These alternatives include:

- **Grants and Donations:** Apply for additional grants and seek donations from community stakeholders.
- **Sponsorships:** Secure corporate and event sponsorships.
- **Service Contracts:** Offer specialized services or manage projects for other organizations for a fee.
- **Indirect Cost Recovery:** Use a negotiated indirect cost rate to recover administrative costs.
- **Investment Income:** Earn interest from managed reserves or other compliant investments.
- **Intellectual Property:** License proprietary tools or sell educational materials.
- **In-kind Contributions:** Leverage volunteer time, donated equipment, or free facilities use.
- **Subleasing Space:** Rent out excess office space or property.

Program income generated through these methods must be detailed in the budget narrative, added to the grant funds, and used in accordance with the grant's terms.

Q: Are indirect costs allowed under this program?

A: Yes, indirect costs are allowable expenses under this program, but all expenditures must remain in the awarded grant amount of \$700,000.

Q: Is this a reimbursable or non-reimbursable grant?

A: This is a reimbursable grant.

TIMELINE FOR THE SSBCI LOAN TA GRANT

Q: When is the deadline to apply for the SSBCI Technical Assistance - Loan TA Program?

A: The deadline to apply for the SSBCI Technical Assistance - Loan TA Program is January 8, 2026, at 5:00pm. Late applications will not be accepted. Submit your applications early to avoid any submission issues.

Q: When will I be notified if I was selected for the SSBCI Technical Assistance - Loan TA Program?

A: DCEO anticipates sending Notice of State Awards (NOSAs) 8 weeks after the application closes. This time frame may be extended depending on the volume of applications received. The Department reserves the right to issue a reduced award or not to issue any award.

SSBCI LOAN TA GRANT DISBURSEMENT/POST-DISBURSEMENT

Q: What would be expected of me as an SSBCI Technical Assistance - Loan TA Program recipient?

A: Expectations of an SSBCI Technical Assistance - Loan TA Program recipient include:

- Provide – at minimum – the following three (3) services either directly or through a coalition of contractual partners: Legal, Accounting, and Financial Advisory Services and any wraparound services.
- Comply with the Illinois' Economic Benefit Ratio (EBR) of 2.28 to target 70% of program benefits at SEDI-owned businesses and 30% of program benefits at VSBs
- Submit quarterly narrative reports, Periodic Financial Reports (PFR), and Periodic Performance Reports (PPR) which will be submitted to DCEO for review and approval
- Fiscal and Programmatic Monitoring visits by the Department
- Grantees shall be subject to Illinois' statewide Audit Report Review requirements

***NOTE:** This is not the entire list of Grantee Expectations. For exact details on Grantee expectations, please refer to our online NOFO.

Q: What is the Illinois Economic Benefit Ratio (EBR) of 2.28?

A: Per the U.S. Department of the Treasury's guidelines, Illinois' Economic Benefit Ratio (EBR) for this program is 2.28. The EBR is a jurisdiction's SEDI capital allocation divided by their VSB capital allocation, which means that Illinois' TA program must have the capability to achieve economic benefits to SEDI-owned businesses at approximately 2.28 times greater than VSBs, or roughly 70% of program benefits should be targeted at SEDI-owned businesses and 30% of program benefits should be focused on VSBs. As a result, each funding recipient for this program must have the ability to conduct outreach to and engage with eligible beneficiaries, with an understanding that Illinois' EBR is 2.28, and that a greater portion of your efforts must be tailored towards SEDI-owned businesses in relation to VSBs.

Q: If I am an SSBCI Technical Assistance - Loan TA Program recipient, when can I expect to receive my grant dollars?

A: A cash request for a variable advance of 25% of the approved grant amount will be processed upon execution of the uniform grant agreement. The timeframe for when grant funds will be direct deposited, or a paper check issued, is determined by the Illinois Office of the Comptroller.

Q: What is the performance period for the SSBCI Technical Assistance - Loan TA Program?

A: The anticipated start date for awards 2/01/2026, and performance period is expected to be 2/01/2026 through 01/31/2028.

OTHER

Q: How do I submit the supplemental documentation?

A: Documents are submitted via the File Upload Option in the Smartsheet form. Please note that there is a 10-file max when submitting documentation. Make sure that your documents are clearly named. Refer to our [Preparing Your Application Documents for Smartsheet Upload](#) for detailed instructions on how to properly name and combine your documents. The guidance set forth in this document must be followed.

Q: How can I apply for nonprofit status?

A: You will need to contact the [IRS](#) for assistance with the application process. This designation is issued at a Federal level, not at the State level.

Q: Does the presence of an SBDC in my area impact the likelihood of my receiving SSBCI Technical Assistance - Loan TA Program dollars?

A: No, it does not. In fact, applicants are strongly encouraged to partner with other federally funded technical assistance providers, such as the Illinois Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs), funded in part by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), for the provision of a portion of resources to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of services provided.

Q: Can we charge eligible beneficiaries to participate in the SSBCI TA Program?

A: No. The goal of the SSBCI TA Program is to offer technical assistance that enhances the ability of small businesses to access capital through SSBCI-supported programs, without imposing additional costs on the participants.

If organizations plan to charge participants for SSBCI TA services, this would be inconsistent with the program's guidelines and objectives. SSBCI TA funding is meant to cover the costs of providing these services, ensuring that small businesses/eligible beneficiaries receive the support they need at no cost to them.

If an organization is planning to apply for SSBCI TA funds, they should be budgeting to use those funds to fully cover the costs of delivering services to program participants, rather than passing those costs along. It's crucial for organizations to understand that any fees charged to participants could undermine the purpose of the SSBCI TA Program and may lead to non-compliance with program requirements. Please remind these organizations that their budgets should reflect the total cost of providing free services to participants and that these costs are covered by the program's funding, not by the small businesses they're assisting.

Q: Will the SSBCI Technical Assistance - Loan TA Program NOFO be posted online in other languages?

A: No. It is only posted in English.

Q: Will rejection notices be sent at the same time as a Notice of State Award (NOSA)?

A: Applicants will be notified of their approval or denial via email. All applicants will be notified of their approval or denial during the same window.