



## Illinois' Small-Medium Business & Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

### State of Illinois Government Resources

*powered by the Office of Minority Economic Empowerment (OMEE) at the Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity (DCEO)  
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The [Office of Minority Economic Empowerment \(OMEE\)](#) at the [Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity \(DCEO\)](#), is committed to providing minority-, women-, persons with disabilities and veteran-owned small businesses and entrepreneurs, overall marginalized owned businesses, across the state with equitable access to opportunities and resources. Through dynamic partnerships, targeted outreach, and tailored programs and initiatives, OMEE aims to create an inclusive business ecosystem for communities that have traditionally faced systemic barriers to entry and growth. This investment spurs local economic development in underserved areas resulting in a revitalized and thriving Illinois economy. Click [here](#) to get connected with Team OMEE.

Sign-up for e-updates from the Office of Minority Economic Empowerment (OMEE) at DCEO by visiting <https://bit.ly/3Iphbpi> to receive updates for your business. Contact Women's Business Development Manager Michelle Lura White at [Michelle.White@illinois.gov](mailto:Michelle.White@illinois.gov) with any questions.

The [Office of Regional Economic Development \(Team RED\)](#) at the [Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity \(DCEO\)](#), lives and works in the communities they serve and are charged with facilitating economic development efforts in their regions, in addition to providing communities with front-line access to state programs and services. Team RED serves as an Economic Development Concierge for the State of Illinois. To help provide localized assistance, the State of Illinois is divided into 10 economic development regions. Download a copy of the Illinois Economic Development Regional [map](#) and [contacts](#).

Sign up for a e-newsletter from the Office of Regional Economic Development (RED) at DCEO by visiting <https://bit.ly/41s1erV> or contact Office of Regional Economic Development team member Kala Lambert at [Kala.Lambert@illinois.gov](mailto:Kala.Lambert@illinois.gov) with any questions.

### OMEE supports Illinois businesses through:

- Individualized technical assistance support by Team OMEE [Business Development Managers](#)
- Connecting business owners & entrepreneurs, future founders, and advocates to business resources and growth opportunities
- [Online with OMEE](#) is a monthly webinar series focused on financial capital resources. Team OMEE shares the latest financial resources across the sectors, federal and state programs, and other opportunities for business owners & entrepreneurs while taking attendees' questions in English & Spanish during the webinar.
- [Advancing the Development of Minority Entrepreneurship \(ADME\)](#) is a monthly workshop series in partnership with the Illinois Small Business Development Center (SBDC) network that shares best practices for Illinois entrepreneurs to help them be successful.
- [Business Basics](#) is a video series focused on basic business concepts that business owners need to know to be successful.
- [Recursos Financieros para Empresas \(RFE\) \(Financial Resources for Businesses\)](#) is a monthly, live streamed, Spanish webinar hosted by OMEE and the Office of Regional Economic Development (RED); to address the gaps of information in the Spanish speaking business community in which a different funding topic is discussed every month.
- Presenting tailored business resources together with our partners during monthlong celebrations

## Additional DCEO & State of Illinois Government Resources Are Available For Businesses, Including:

### Certifications

#### ❖ [Business Enterprise Program \(BEP\)](#)

The Business Enterprise Program (BEP) which is administered by the State of Illinois Commission on Equity & Inclusion, assists businesses owned by minorities, women and people with disabilities gain access to the State of Illinois procurement process. The BEP certification with the State of Illinois can also open the door to opportunities with other public and private entities which are looking for diverse suppliers. The FastTrack certification process allows reciprocity with City of Chicago and Cook County to provide a pathway to BEP certification in 7 days or less.

#### ❖ [Disadvantaged Business Enterprise \(DBE\)](#)

The Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) program which is administered by the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), provides minorities, women, and other eligible small businesses an opportunity to participate in transportation contracts that utilize federal funds.

#### ❖ [Veteran Business Program \(VBP\)](#)

The Veteran Business Program (VBP) which is administered by the State of Illinois Commission on Equity & Inclusion, assists businesses owned by qualified service disabled and veteran-owned business gain access to State of Illinois contracting opportunities and participation in the competitive procurement process.

#### ❖ [Smart Business Illinois-Overview of the State of Illinois Certification Process](#)

presented by the Office of the Illinois State Comptroller Susana A. Mendoza

## Business Advising & Consulting (*at no-cost*)

### ❖ [The Illinois Small Business Development Centers \(SBDC\)](#)

Offering at no cost one-on-one business advising, the Illinois Small Business Development Centers (IL SBDCs) are centers located across the state which offer assistance with business, management, and marketing plans; financial assessment and guidance; in-depth business training and more. The IL SBDCs also provides specialized services in technology, innovation, and entrepreneurial development. Business consultation is available to businesses of all stages/sizes/industries/etc. as well as for future owners & founders. Click [here](#) to find the nearest IL SBDC by address or zip code. For upcoming events & webinars, click [here](#).

## Doing Business with the Government

### ❖ [Procurement Technical Assistance Centers \(PTAC\)](#)

Illinois Procurement Technical Assistance Centers are a portal for small businesses looking to enter the world of government contracting. The centers provide one-on-one counseling, technical information, marketing assistance and training to existing businesses interested in selling their goods and services to local, state, and/or federal government agencies. Click [here](#) to find the nearest IL PTAC by address or zip code. For upcoming events & webinars, click [here](#).

### ❖ [Smart Business Illinois-Overview of the State of Illinois Procurement Process](#)

presented by the Office of the Illinois State Comptroller Susana A. Mendoza

### ❖ [Doing Business with Illinois](#)

presented by the Illinois Department of Central Management Services

### ❖ [Doing Business with the Illinois Tollway](#)

presented by the Office of the Illinois Secretary of State Alexi Giannoulias

### ❖ [Illinois BidBuy](#)

BidBuy is designed to streamline service, increase efficiency, reduce cycle times and transaction costs, improve availability of information, and modernize the tools and resources available to incorporate best practices in Illinois procurement.

## Grants

### ❖ [Grantee Resource Site](#)

DCEO's Grantee Resource Site explains how to prepare to receive a grant and how to be successful once awarded.

### ❖ [Apply for Funding](#)

Browse DCEO's current grant programs that are accepting applications.

## Loans

### ❖ [Advantage Illinois – FAME: Fund for the Advancement of Minority Enterprises](#)

Advantage Illinois is a participating loan program which provides funding for loans where borrowers have difficulty accessing traditional funding sources. DCEO takes subordinate position thereby reducing the lender's risk. The rate for DCEO's portion of loan is 2% less than lender. An offspring of Advantage Illinois is the Fund for Advancement of Minority Enterprises (FAME) Program. The FAME program is for loans made to minority-, woman-, person with disabilities-, and veteran-owned business.

### ❖ [Business Invest](#)

The Office of the Illinois State Treasurer Michael W. Frerichs partners with approved financial institutions to provide business loans -- either lower rate loans, or loans to a business or non-profit that would not otherwise qualify -- to facilitate capital to underserved communities. This provides an opportunity for the Treasurer's Office to stimulate business growth and economic activity while earning a competitive return for the state.

### ❖ [Ag Invest](#)

Through a commitment to Ag Invest, the Office of the Illinois State Treasurer Michael W. Frerichs partners with approved financial institutions to provide qualified farmers, agri-business and agriculture professionals below-market rate loans to start, expand or add value to their farm operations. The loans provided by the financial institution can be used for the purchase of farm equipment, purchase of land, construction-related expenses, provide operating lines of credit or other costs related to conventional or sustainable farming.

### ❖ [Equity Agriculture Programs](#)

The Illinois Department of Agriculture has identified programs at both the state and federal level which either specifically support socially disadvantaged farmers, or which can be utilized by socially disadvantaged farmers. These programs offer options in commercial, large-scale agriculture as well as small-scale urban agriculture, agribusiness, and food programs.

## Incentives, Tax Assistance, and Funds

### ❖ [Incentives and Tax Assistance](#)

Illinois offers a competitive range of incentives for locating and expanding your business, including tax credits and exemptions that encourage business growth and job creation. Additional grant programs and access to loans can assist your business with working capital, machinery and equipment, land acquisition, building construction and public infrastructure improvements. And for those looking to invest in Illinois companies, early-stage investment incentives are also available.

### ❖ [Illinois Growth and Innovation Fund \(ILGIFT\)](#) *for technology-enabled businesses*

The Office of Illinois State Treasurer Michael W. Frerichs makes targeted investments with venture capital, growth equity, and private venture debt funds that invest in technology-enabled businesses and are either based in Illinois or possess a significant workforce in Illinois. Tech-enabled businesses can be situated in industries such as, but not

limited to: agricultural tech, bio tech, consumer tech, financial services tech, green tech, health care tech, logistics tech, manufacturing tech, and services tech.

## International Trade & Exporting

### ❖ [Office of Trade & Investment \(OTI\)](#)

The Office of Trade & Investment (OTI) at DCEO provides export assistance to companies interested in growing their global footprint. Through a network of trade specialist located in Chicago and 7 well established regional foreign offices, OTI provides businesses with lead generation support and connects companies to foreign governments, chambers of commerce and other strategic partners around the world. Our expert team also leads trade missions, curated overseas tradeshows, and outreach events and seminars.

The Office of Trade and Investment also administers the [Illinois State Trade & Export Program \(ISTEP\)](#), which is partially funded by the Small Business Administration (SBA) STEP grant, of which Illinois has been a top award recipient since 2011. The ISTEP program provides small businesses with both financial and technical assistance to increase their exports, including: Trade Missions (GTM), Individual Foreign Market Sales Missions (IFMSM), and Product Compliance (PC), Website Localization (WL) and Export Education Program (EEP). For upcoming events & webinars, click [here](#).

### ❖ [Illinois SBDC International Trade Center \(ITC\)](#)

Illinois SBDC International Trade Centers specialize in providing information, advising, and training to existing and new export companies interested in pursuing international trade opportunities. Click [here](#) to find the nearest ITC by address or zip code. For upcoming events & webinars, click [here](#).

## Environmental Advising

### ❖ [Small Business Environmental Assistance Program \(SBEAP\)](#)

The Small Business Environmental Assistance Program is a non-regulatory program which provides free, confidential assistance to Illinois small businesses to help them succeed. Services include a toll-free helpline 1-800-252-3998 for free and confidential regulatory questions, help in understanding how state and federal environmental regulations apply to your business, fact sheets summarizing various environmental rules, environmental recordkeeping tools, and resources for navigating environmental regulations.

## Regulatory & Permits

### ❖ [First Stop Business Information Center](#)

First Stop is a single statewide resource for entrepreneurs and businesses to obtain comprehensive regulatory and permitting information. Business specialists provide professional guidance to entrepreneurs by helping them identify and navigate regulatory requirements for their business and link them to state and local resources. Business specialists can be reached in English and Spanish at 1-800-252-2923 or [ceo.firststop@illinois.gov](mailto:ceo.firststop@illinois.gov).

## Workforce Employment & Training Advising for Businesses

### ❖ [Workforce Programs](#)

The Office of Employment and Training supports innovative workforce programs and career, training and employment services that connect employers to a highly skilled workforce. Providing assistance and resources for job seekers is central to Illinois' commitment to ensuring that businesses thrive.

## Promoting Small Businesses

### ❖ [Illinois Made](#)

Presented by the Illinois Office of Tourism, the Illinois Made program celebrates those makers, creators, and artisans who help craft Illinois by hand. Illinois Made also inspires visitors and fellow Illinoisans to discover more about the state by experiencing firsthand the passion that makes the makers, creators, and artisans thrive. Interested in becoming or nominating an Illinois Maker to be included in the [Illinois Made Guide](#) or featured [itineraries](#)? Click [here](#) for criteria and for the submission form.

### ❖ [Homegrown by Heroes](#)

Presented by the Illinois Department of Agriculture, the Homegrown by Heroes at no-cost program allows Illinois farmers, ranchers, fishermen and producers who have served or are still serving in any branch of the U.S. military to use a special logo on the agricultural products they sell to the public. This special designation sets these farmers apart in the market, allowing these heroes' products to be visible to consumers while giving them the chance to tell their story.

## Additional DCEO & State of Illinois Government Resource Links for Businesses:

*Below is not a complete list of all the state of Illinois agencies & offices supporting business owners and entrepreneurs.*

- Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity (DCEO) | [link](#) | [upcoming events](#)
  - Office of Minority Economic Empowerment (OMEE) at DCEO | [link](#) | [upcoming events](#)
  - Office of Regional Economic Development (RED) at DCEO | [link](#) | [upcoming events](#)
  - Office of Trade & Investment (OTI) at DCEO | [link](#) | [upcoming events](#)
  - Office of Entrepreneurship, Innovation & Technology (EIT) at DCEO | [link](#) | [upcoming events](#)
- Starting your business in Illinois handbook-Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity (DCEO) | [link](#)
- State agencies' resources for businesses- State of Illinois | [link](#)
- Office of Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker | [link](#)
- Office of Illinois Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton | [link](#)

- How to obtain a free credit report- Office of the Illinois Attorney General Kwame Raoul | [link](#)
- Business services-Office of the Illinois Secretary of State Alexi Giannoulias | [link](#)
- Smart Business Illinois-Overview of the State of Illinois Certification & Procurement Process- Office of the Illinois State Comptroller Susana A. Mendoza | [link](#)
- Support for veteran-owned businesses- Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs | [link](#)
- Resources for businesses licenses- Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation (IDFPR) | [link](#)
- Contact support for innovators and entrepreneurs regarding IDFPR regulations-Office of Innovation at IDRPR | [link](#)
- Business registration-Illinois Department of Revenue (IDOR) | [link](#)
- Small Business Resources-Illinois Department of Transportation's (IDOT) Bureau of Small Business Enterprises | [link](#)
- Utility procurement sites for doing business with utility companies- Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) | [link](#)
- Energy Workforce Equity Portal for connecting clean energy companies with Equity Eligible Persons looking to work in the clean energy sector in Illinois- Illinois Power Agency (IPA) | [link](#)
- How to obtain a license- Illinois Department of Agriculture | [link](#)
- Farmers' Markets- Illinois Department of Agriculture | [link](#)
- Illinois Product Events- Illinois Department of Agriculture | [link](#)
- Illinois 2022 Cottage Food Guide- Illinois Department of Public Health | [link](#)