

AGENCY-SPECIFIC CONTENT FOR THE NOTICE OF DESIGNATION OPPORTUNITY
OFFICE OF ECONOMIC EQUITY & EMPOWERMENT*
STATE-DESIGNATED CULTURAL DISTRICTS PROGRAM
(*Formerly OMEE)

A. Program Description

Notice of Designation Opportunity Intent

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (the “Department” or “DCEO”) is releasing this Notice of Designation Opportunity (“NODO”) to designate an additional **five (5)** State-Designated Cultural Districts. The goal of this Designation Opportunity is to establish Districts throughout the State that build on existing strong cultural identities and promote economic development. The intent of issuing these designations is that the Districts will increase cultural programming, economic development, tourism, and growth without displacement of current residents.

Program Description

DCEO is issuing this NODO under 20 ILCS 605/605-1057 State-Designated Cultural Districts. Administrative Rules can be found at the Illinois Administrative Code tit. 14, §1.615 (2023). Through this NODO, the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) will competitively select no more than **five (5)** geographical areas as State-Designated Cultural Districts to receive a designation in early 2025. Those interested in applying for 2025 designations should submit their application via the guidelines outlined within this NODO.

State-Designated Cultural Districts are geographic areas with a distinct, historic, and cultural identity. The Department will issue Designations to municipalities and local governments that apply on behalf of a geographic area. Designees shall seek to:

- Promote a distinct historic and cultural community.
- Encourage economic development and support entrepreneurship in the geographic area and community.
- Encourage the preservation and development of historic and culturally significant structures, traditions, and languages.
- Foster local cultural development and education.
- Provide a focal point for celebrating and strengthening the unique cultural identity of the community.
- Promote growth and opportunity without generating displacement or expanding inequality.

In selecting the Districts, the Department will consider the following criteria:

- The application indicates the overall characteristics of a distinct, historic, and cultural identity.
- The applicant’s demonstration of need through the impact of gentrification, displacement, and the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The level of risk of loss of cultural identity because of gentrification, displacement, and the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Demonstration of historical economic disinvestment.
- The level of community support for the designation including whether that community support is formalized with a Community Council (see section **H. Other Information**, page 9, for the definition of Community Council).
- The likelihood that a designation will result in promoting growth, opportunity and economic development without generating displacement or expanding inequality.

- The level of organizational capacity and expertise to carry out plans, apply for and manage grant opportunities, and provide dedicated personnel to the Cultural District.
- Any additional information to demonstrate or support the information submitted by the applicant for the designation.

Priority will be given to proposed Cultural Districts that:

- Are in a region that does not already have a State-Designated Cultural District (see section **F.2. Review and Selection Process**, page 7, for further details).
- Are in underserved areas with documented economic disinvestment.
- Have development plans that include and prioritize the preservation of local businesses and retention of existing residents and businesses.
- Possess an education framework in place informed with a vision of food justice, social justice, community sustainability, and social equity.

Applicants must demonstrate collaboration with local diverse stakeholders, such as Community Council members, city or town staff, cultural organizations, community organizations, chambers of commerce, educational institutions, etc. to develop plans and projects that meet the objectives of the program.

Program History

The State-Designated Cultural Districts program is an initiative that was launched in 2023 and is administered by DCEO’s Office of Economic Equity & Empowerment (“OE3”), formerly the Office of Minority Economic Empowerment (“OMEE”). To date, OE3 has designated ten (10) Cultural Districts, five in 2023 and five in 2024 to foster cultural growth, economic vitality, and community pride across the State.

B. Designation Information

It is anticipated the Department will issue five (5) designations in Quarter 1 of 2025.

Designations shall be for an initial period of **ten (10)** years, after which the District may submit an application for renewal every **five (5)** years. The Department maintains discretion not to renew a District’s designation based on evaluation of their renewal application, or other factors including but not limited to failure to use the original designation, failure to execute plans, and failure to submit timely reports.

The Department issued **five (5)** State-Designated Cultural Districts in 2023 and **five (5)** State-Designated Cultural Districts in 2024. The Department will issue **no more than five (5)** State-Designated Cultural Districts in 2025, thereby reaching the maximum of **fifteen (15)** State-Designated Cultural Districts.

Applicants must submit a project narrative that describes in detail how the designation will be utilized. The project narrative should include enough information for DCEO to understand the capacity of the organizations that are applying on behalf of the area, where future funding will come from, and how the organizations intend to execute their plans to increase cultural programming, economic development, tourism, and growth without displacement of current residents among other previously stated goals.

Applicants are expected to have resources and/or funding that include items other than budgetary line items appropriated for the State-Designated Cultural Districts program.

The release of this NODO does not obligate the Department to issue any designations.

C. Funding Information

No funding is associated with this Designation opportunity. The Department anticipates future opportunities for State-Designated Cultural Districts to apply for grant funding. The applicants issued a designation will be able to represent their District using the titled designation as well as receive technical assistance from the Department. Applicants are encouraged to demonstrate capacity for applying for and managing a grant from private, local, state, and federal sources.

D. Eligibility Information

While there is no funding tied to a State-Designated Cultural District Designation, to be eligible for certification, an applicant must have an active GATA registration and be qualified on the GATA Grantee Portal (<https://grants.illinois.gov/portal/>) at the time the application is submitted. The portal will verify that the entity:

- Has a valid FEIN number (<https://www.irs.gov/individuals/international-taxpayers/taxpayer-identification-numbers-tin#:~:text=You%20can%20use%20the%20IRS%27s,for%20Individual%20Taxpayer%20Identification%20Number>);
- Has a current SAM.gov registration (<https://sam.gov>), SAM.gov registrations must be marked as “public” to allow the GATA Grantee Portal to expedite the review of the federal information;
- Has a valid UEI number (<https://sam.gov>);
- Is not on the Federal Excluded Parties List (verified at <https://sam.gov>);
- Is in Good Standing with the Illinois Secretary of State, as applicable (https://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/business_services/corp.html);
- Is not on the Illinois Stop Payment list (verified once entity is registered in GATA Grantee Portal); and
- Is not on the Department of Healthcare and Family Services Provider Sanctions list (<https://www.illinois.gov/hfs/oig/Pages/SanctionsList.aspx>).

1. Eligible Applicants include:

Municipalities or 501(c)(3) organizations located in Illinois are eligible to apply to be a State-Designated Cultural District if the applicant:

- Demonstrates the community seeking certification has been historically impacted and is currently at risk of losing their cultural identity because of gentrification displacement, or the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Demonstrates a history of economic disinvestment.
- Demonstrates strong community support for the Cultural District designation through active and formal participation by community organizations and municipal and regional government agencies or officials.

Multiple municipalities, 501(c)(3) organizations, and other units of local government (counties, townships, special districts, school districts) may partner to apply but only one eligible entity may be listed as the primary applicant.

An eligible entity may apply for multiple Cultural District Designations, but each requires a separate application. Multiple Designations cannot be applied for via one application submission.

The Department complies with all applicable provisions of state and federal laws and regulations pertaining to nondiscrimination, sexual harassment and equal employment opportunity including,

but not limited to: The Illinois Human Rights Act (775 ILCS 5/1-101 et seq.), The Public Works Employment Discrimination Act (775 ILCS 10/1 et seq.), The United States Civil Rights Act of 1964 (as amended) (42 USC 2000a-and 2000H-6), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 USC 794), The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 USC 12101 et seq.), and The Age Discrimination Act (42 USC 6101 et seq.).

2. Cost Sharing or Matching.

N/A.

3. Indirect Cost Rate.

There is no funding associated with this opportunity, so indirect costs are not applicable.

4. Other, if applicable.

Applicants may submit multiple applications for this opportunity.

E. Application and Submission Information

5. Address to Request Designation Package.

Designation application materials are available [here](#) or may be shared by contacting the Program Manager:

Tiffany Hawkins
Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity
555 W. Monroe Street, 12th Floor
Chicago, IL 60661
Email: CEO.Cultural.Districts@illinois.gov

6. Content and Form of Designation Submission.

A standard Designation Package must be submitted to and reviewed by DCEO. Each package must contain the following items:

- Completed Smartsheet Cultural Districts Designation Submission Form
- Designation Program Application
- Letters of Support from Members of the Community
- Map outlining geographic boundaries of the District
- Conflict of Interest Disclosure
- Mandatory Disclosure
- Any other supplemental documents requested may be submitted via the File Upload Option found on the Smartsheet Form

***NOTE:** If you or any of your co-applicants are a current DCEO grant recipient or awardee, you must disclose it in your application submission.

The applicant is responsible for the accuracy of all data, information and documentation. Once submitted, applications shall become the property of the Department.

7. Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and System for Award Management (SAM).

Each applicant (unless the applicant is an individual or Federal or State awarding agency that is exempt from those requirements under 2 CFR 25.110(b) or (c), or has an exception approved by the Federal or State awarding agency under 2 CFR 25.110(d)) is required to:

- Be registered in SAM. To establish a SAM registration, go to www.SAM.gov and/or utilize this instructional link: How to Register in SAM from the www.grants.illinois.gov. Resource Links tab. SAM.gov registrations must be “public.”
- Provide a valid UEI number in the GATA Grantee Portal registration.
- Continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active Federal, Federal pass-through or State award or an application or plan under consideration by a Federal or State awarding agency. The Department will not make a Federal pass-through or State award to an applicant until the applicant has complied with all applicable UEI and SAM requirements and, if an applicant has not fully complied with the requirements by the time the Department is ready to make a Federal pass-through or State award, the Department may determine that the applicant is not qualified to receive a Federal pass-through or State award and use that determination as a basis for making a Federal pass-through or State award to another applicant.

8. Submission Dates and Times.

Applications for this opportunity must be submitted by **5:00P on Monday, December 16, 2024**. All required documents shall be submitted electronically.

Application materials must be submitted to the Department via electronic form at <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/fb49ceb92af9474292ec42fcffbd8c6d>.

The Department is under no obligation to review applications that do not comply with the above requirements. **Failure to meet the application deadline will result in the Department not proceeding with review of the designation submission and will preclude the Department from moving forward with consideration of the designation submission.**

9. Intergovernmental Review, if applicable.

N/A

10. Funding Restrictions.

N/A

11. Other Submission Requirements.

Documents stored in Google Docs or other cloud-based servers are not allowed.

Applicants may confirm receipt of the Designation Package by contacting the program contact listed in this NODO or by checking the box to request a copy of the form submission when submitting their Smartsheet application.

F. Application Review Information

1. Criteria.

Proposals will be reviewed on a competitive basis and will be scored on a 100-point scale. The threshold for not recommending designation is set by the Department. The Department shall consider the following criteria when evaluating the application submittal: Need, Capacity, and Quality.

NEED - Applicant demonstrates the need for a Designated Cultural District. (40 points)	
○ Applicant demonstrates that the proposed District has a distinct, historical, and cultural identity and has plans to increase cultural programming,	10

economic development, tourism, and growth without displacement of current residents among other previously stated goals.	
○ Applicant demonstrates economic distress, disinvestment, and inequality using relevant economic metrics for the community or region covered by the plan. Examples of such metrics include unemployment rates, household income, poverty rates relative to state and national averages, and the concentration of Qualified Census Tracts ¹ and Opportunity Zones ² . Priority will be given to applications from underserved areas with documented economic disinvestment.	10
○ Applicant demonstrates the local/regional economy has been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 health and economic crisis due to the nature of local industry (e.g. reliance on tourism) and/or high spread of COVID-19.	10
○ Applicant demonstrates the loss of cultural identity because of gentrification displacement, and/or the COVID-19 pandemic.	10
CAPACITY - Applicant demonstrates the ability to successfully compose a local or regional Economic Recovery Plan. (30 points)	
○ Applicant has staff with experience successfully applying for and managing state, local, private or federal grants.	10
○ Applicant has sufficient staff and/or contractors that can support in data collection, analytical, and administrative tasks to successfully complete the Cultural District plan.	10
○ Applicant has a realistic and detailed timeline for all activities needed to be developed in the proposed District within one year of being issued a designation.	10
QUALITY - Applicant addresses the relevant economic development needs in the proposed District and describes how this District will facilitate growth without displacement. (30 points)	
○ Applicant submits a complete application package that contains information for the reviewer to understand the goals, activities and projects of the proposed District.	5
○ Applicant submission includes strategies and development plans that: (1) foster growth opportunity and economic development without generating displacement or expanding inequality and (2) include and prioritize the preservation of local businesses and retention of existing residents and businesses.	5
○ Applicant includes an education framework in place informed with a vision of food justice, social justice, community sustainability, and social equity.	5
○ Applicant includes a future timeline of all activities needed to develop the Cultural District and report back with the required plans.	5
○ Applicant includes a detailed description of plans to secure resources (including financial) required to execute on the goals, activities and projects of the proposed District, and how those resources will be obtained.	5
○ Applicant identifies a Community Council, meaning a representative working group of local/regional stakeholders that collectively offer the expertise to ensure proper and effective governance of the District. The Council may be made up of local council members, employees of local	5

¹ See U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development web site at <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/qct.html>.

² See DCEO website at <https://www2.illinois.gov/dceo/Pages/OppZn.aspx>

governments, cultural organizations, community organizations, chambers of commerce, education institutions, etc. Additional points will be allocated if applicant documents commitment from identified stakeholders to participate in proposed projects. Additional points will be allocated for letters of support from organizations, elected officials, and other stakeholders.	
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2. Review and Selection Process.

Prior to substantive evaluation of applications, DCEO will screen all applications submitted to ensure that all requirements of the application package have been met. Applicants will be notified of any deficiencies in their application package via a Smartsheet update request sent to the primary applicant’s email address provided with the submission. Applicants will have 30 days from the notice date to submit additional documentation to address the identified deficiencies.

After the deficiency period closes, the Department will conduct a merit-based review of eligible applications. Failure to respond to the deficiency request within the allotted timeframe will result in the application being removed from the merit review queue and deemed ineligible for further consideration.

Applications will be graded using the Merit Review Process and scored on the criteria specified in Section F.1. The Department will designate an Evaluation Committee to grade each application received for this designation opportunity. The final score of each Committee member will be calculated and an average of all scores will be the final applicant score. Designations will be awarded according to the following process: All applications will be sorted based on the State of Illinois Economic Development region. Applications from regions that do not already have a State-Designated Cultural District will be prioritized; this includes North Central, Northern Stateline, Northwest, Southeast, Southern, Southwest, and West Central Regions (refer to the Regional Map on page 10 of this NODO).

Throughout the process, the Department will ensure that designations are distributed fairly across regions, first focusing on regions that do not have a State Designated Cultural District and proposals that include underserved areas. In cases where multiple applications cover the same or overlapping areas, the Department will award the Designation to the highest-scoring application.

The Department reserves the right to request additional information from applicants for evaluation purposes. At its sole discretion, the Department reserves the right to depart from the merit review rankings to ensure balance and diversity across the state.

3. Anticipated Announcement and State Designation Dates, if applicable.

Successful applicants will receive a Notice of State Cultural District Designation to initiate the agreement phase.

The Department reserves the right to not to issue any designation.

G. Designation Administration Information

1. Administrative and National Policy Requirements.

N/A

2. Performance Goals and Measures

Within 12 months of receiving a designation, the District must report back with its current accomplishments and goals for the next four years of its designation. These goals must include:

- Detailed development plans that include and prioritize the preservation of local businesses and retention of existing residents and businesses.
- A description of an education framework in place, informed with a vision of food justice, social justice, community sustainability, and social equity.
- A description of existing infrastructure needs in order to expand economic opportunity for businesses and residents.
- A description and data regarding affordable housing needs for existing residents and plans for how those needs can be met.
- Development plans for transportation improvements that will help residents reach employment and make the community accessible to visitors.
- Detailed plans to address gaps in ability for families to easily access affordable fruits, vegetables, and produce.
- List of opportunities for cultural celebration, both for residents and visitors.
- Plans to promote the District and its events to visitors in traditional and digital media.

Each year after the initial reporting period that the District remains a State-designated Cultural District, it shall submit a detailed report on the status of the program and future developments of the District. Any State-designated Cultural District that fails to file a report for 2 consecutive years shall have their status as a Cultural District terminated.

H. Other Information

1. Program Definitions

"Advisory Committee" means an appointed body of members that will advise the Department on program rules and the certification process. The advisory committee shall reflect the diversity of the State of Illinois, including geographic, racial, and ethnic diversity. The advisory committee must include representatives as follows:

- A representative of the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity appointed by the Director
- A representative of the Department of Agriculture appointed by the Director of Agriculture
- A representative of the Illinois Housing Development Authority appointed by the Executive Director of the Illinois Housing Development Authority
- Two members of the House of Representatives appointed one each by the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the Minority Leader of the House of Representatives
- Two members of the Senate appointed one each by the President of the Senate and the Minority Leader of the Senate
- Four community representatives appointed by the Governor representing diverse racial, ethnic, and geographic groups not captured in the membership of the other designees, with the input of community and stakeholder groups

"Applicant" means the municipalities or 501(c)(3) organizations applying on behalf of a certified geographical area seeking Cultural District designation. Multiple municipalities, 501(c)(3) organizations, and units of local government may partner to apply but only one eligible entity may be listed as the primary applicant.

"Application" means the competitive application system by which a municipality or 501(c)(3) organization may apply for certification as a State-designated Cultural District.

"Certification" means a geographical area within the State is certified for a period of 10 years, after which the District may renew certification every 5 years, as a State-designated Cultural District after a successful application to the Department. The applying entity is responsible for complying with reporting requirements under Section 605-1057(f) of the Statute.

"Community" means the geographical area that has a distinct historic, and cultural identity seeking State-designated Cultural District certification.

"Community Council" means a group of local stakeholders brought together by the Applicant to demonstrate support of the cultural designation. The Council may be made up of local council members, employees of local governments, cultural organizations, community organizations, chambers of commerce, education institutions, etc.

"DCEO" or "Department" means the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.

"Designee" means any applicant whose proposal is selected for a designation under this program.

"GATA" means the Grant Accountability and Transparency Act [30 ILCS 708].

"State-designated Cultural District" means a geographical area certified under this Section that has a distinct, historic, and cultural identity as defined by Section 605-1057(a) of the Statute.

"Technical Assistance" means the support provided to State-Designated Cultural Districts to help them identify and achieve their goals for cultural preservation, including, but not limited to, promotional support of State-Designated Cultural Districts and support for small businesses looking to access resources.

"Underserved Areas" means regions or communities that experience limited access to critical resources and services, such as economic development opportunities, infrastructure, health care, education, or financial services, compared to more affluent or urban areas. These areas often include, but are not limited to, populations that are socially, economically, or geographically disadvantaged, such as rural communities, areas with high unemployment rates, or areas with significant populations of racial or ethnic minorities. Underserved areas may also be characterized by a lack of sufficient business development, investment, and access to technical assistance.

2. Regional Map

