

# Connecting HER to Illinois Business Resources

## Social Capital Resources for HER Illinois Business as of March 2024

powered by the [Office of Minority Economic Empowerment \(OMEE\)](#) at the [Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity \(DCEO\)](#)

### What is Social Capital?

Social capital is the networks and relationships within and between individuals, groups, and organizations, which can lead to building trust, creating efficiencies, and future opportunities. As social capital is a very significant form of capital like financial capital, building and leveraging your social capital as a woman-owned business or future female founder can lead to:

- acquiring new skills and knowledge through accelerators/cohorts/mentoring programs
- meeting fellow founders in the same industry
- meeting potential new mentors and advisors
- being introduced to new clients or customers
- finding a co-founder to launch your business and/or team members to hire
- learning about other businesses you can collaborate and/or share resources with
- connecting with financial institutions
- being introduced to potential investors
- much more!

As many women-owned businesses, future women business owners, and aspiring female entrepreneurs lack strong networks and the right mentors, we developed a social capital resource guide to help Illinois women-owned businesses and future entrepreneurs from all backgrounds and experiences to increase their social capital and to expand HER opportunities here in Illinois.

# Accelerator/Cohort/Mentor Programs, Business Advising, and Networking Opportunities

The guide includes organizations listed in regions outside the city of Chicago, industry resources (childcare/food/healthcare/manufacturing/technology/etc.), resources for diverse communities (minority/veteran/persons with disabilities/youth/women of color/mompreneurs/rural entrepreneurs/LGBTIQA+/family-owned businesses/etc.), etc.

Below is not a complete list of all the social capital resources (*mentoring/networking opportunities/etc.*) available for Illinois women-owned businesses, future women entrepreneurs, and aspiring female founders. To learn more about resources and opportunities in your region in Illinois, contact chamber of commerce organizations and economic development organizations in your community, contact your local municipality, refer to the [U.S. Federal & Illinois Local Governments' Resource Guide for HER Illinois Business](#), or contact one of our DCEO team members who are listed at the bottom of this guide. The list below is also not an endorsement of the views, opinions, products, or services of any the below entities. Also, please note that the website' addresses/URLs in this guide may change due to organizations' website updates.

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

### *statewide business advising*

Offering at no cost one-on-one business advising, the Illinois Small Business Development Centers (IL SBDCs) are centers located across the state which help 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 IL SBDC events & webinars, [click here](#).

## ❖ [Women's Entrepreneurship Hub \(WE Hub\)](#)

### *mentoring women-owned businesses and future female founders*

The statewide hub platform which is powered by the Illinois-based national non-profit [Women Employed](#), lists mentoring opportunities for Illinois women entrepreneurs with a focus on women in low-wage roles who are thinking about starting a business along with women entrepreneurs managing and growing their businesses. In addition to mentoring resources, the Women's Entrepreneurship Hub, features a comprehensive list of statewide resources on topics such as loans & grants and accounting. Resources are curated by different business stages as well as Illinois regions.

## ❖ [Founders Resource Hub](#)

### *mentoring women-owned businesses and future female founders*

The regional hub platform which is powered by the Illinois-based [Techrise](#) by [P33](#), lists mentoring opportunities for underrepresented tech founders as well as for founders from different industries. In addition to mentoring resources, the [Founders Resource Hub](#) features a comprehensive list of regional resources on topics such as loans & grants and accounting. Resources are curated by different business stages as well as Illinois regions.

## Women-Owned Businesses & Future Entrepreneurs

### ❖ [1871](#)

#### *mentoring for women entrepreneurs and networking for women-owned businesses & future female founders*

As the Illinois-based innovation hub is an expansive community of founders, leaders, innovators, and supporters that is advancing the world forward and shaping a brighter future, 1871 offers [year-round events](#) at its Chicago hub which provide networking opportunities. As 1871 has been [ranked](#) in the past as the World's No. 1 Private Incubator and the Most Promising Incubator for Women Founders, their robust mentoring programs include [WMNtech Founders](#), [WMNtech Leaders](#), [WMNfintech](#), and [WMNtech Pitch Competition](#). 1871 also hosts pitch competitions for [women](#) founders to help them get the funding and support they need to drive their businesses forward through 1871's programs.

### ❖ [AllRaise](#)

#### *national educational & networking group supporting women venture capitalists and women tech founders*

The national movement with a [Chicago chapter](#), develops programming and community engagement that drives local impact for women and nonbinary individuals in the tech ecosystem such as through [events](#) and [classes](#).

### ❖ [AWARE \(Accelerating Women And underRepresented Entrepreneurs\)](#)

#### *Champaign & Urbana area-networking & mentoring for women technology entrepreneurs*

AWARE (Accelerating Women And underRepresented Entrepreneurs) which is programmed through the EnterpriseWorks incubator at the University of Illinois Research Park, provides targeted mentorship such as business consulting, strategy assistance, marketing and communication help, investor preparedness, or other startup consultation needed through the Research Park [Entrepreneur-in-Residence \(EIR\)](#) program. AWARE also offers networking opportunities through its [events](#) and trainings.

### ❖ [Centralia Business & Professional Women](#)

#### *Centralia area-networking for women-owned businesses and professionals*

The Centralia Business and Professional Women in southern Illinois is dedicated to improving the professional, personal, economic, and educational outlook of women.

### ❖ [Curated Coaching for Entrepreneurs](#)

#### *virtual coaching for women entrepreneurs*

With Curated Coaching for Entrepreneurs, you'll get small-group (up to three business owners) coaching and actionable insights to help accelerate your business's potential. During your 55-minute session, you'll be introduced to a small business consultant from [The Acceleration Project \(TAP\)](#), [Opens overlay](#), a women-founded and -led business advisory organization. You'll meet with a coach who understands the unique issues and challenges facing entrepreneurs. Curated Coaching for Entrepreneurs is powered by Chase.

### ❖ [Ellevate Network](#)

#### *networking for women+ at work*

As the largest community for women+ at work with a [Chicago chapter](#), the Ellevate Network helps women build meaningful local in-person and digital relationships that can offer insights and open doors to opportunities. Members show up for each other, helping each woman — no matter their background or aspirations — building careers that they love. In addition to [events](#), one of their signature programs is their [Ellevate Squads](#), which are small, diverse, and trusted groups of peers. Resources to advance women through the forms of [videos/podcasts/articles](#) can also be found on their website.

❖ [Federation of Women Contractors](#)

*networking for women contractors in the construction industry*

The Illinois-based Federation of Women Contractors (FWC) is a dedicated group of women contractors who work tirelessly to promote opportunities for one another. In addition to [networking opportunities](#) for FWC members, FWC has a [membership directory](#) featuring Illinois women contractors.

❖ [Founding Females](#)

*Peoria area-mentoring & networking for women-owned businesses and future female founders*

As a fellowship network for empowering and uplifting female entrepreneurs to launch businesses, Founding Females which is based in central Illinois, also offers resources and programs such as their [Founding Females Mastermind mentoring program](#), [Start Your Business Bootcamp](#), and more.

❖ [Google for Startups Accelerator: Women Founders](#)

Google for Startups Accelerator: Women Founders is a 10-week digital accelerator program for Seed to Series A technology startups based in the U.S.

❖ [Illinois Women in Cannabis](#)

*networking for women-owned businesses and future female founders in the cannabis industry*

The statewide membership organization empowers women of all ages and backgrounds to build strong relationships, networks, and careers in the cannabis industry. Resources include their [networking opportunities](#).

❖ [Let's Talk Womxn Chicago](#)

*networking for women restauraters*

The Chicago chapter of the national collaboration of women restauraters who build combined economic empower, started in Chicago. Throughout the year, they have opportunities to connect and uplift fellow women restauraters.

❖ [Locally Made](#)

*Chicago region early-stage BIPOC-owned and women-owned natural product entrepreneurs*

Naturally Chicago's groundbreaking initiative, Locally Made, is designed to connect Illinois retailers with the region's emerging and top-performing brands. Locally Made's mentoring program mission is to help natural product entrepreneurs increase sales, create jobs, and thrive in the competitive retail grocery segment. Companies must be headquartered or products must be grown, produced, or manufactured within 150 miles of Chicago to be part of the Locally Made program.

❖ [Mentor Protégé Program](#)

*mentoring program focused on becoming a certified firm, tailored for IL women, minority, and persons with disabilities-owned businesses*

The Mentor Protégé Program's, a program presented by the State of Illinois Commission on Equity & Inclusion's Business Enterprise Program (BEP), goals are to motivate and encourage established businesses to provide developmental assistance to BEP certified firms; to maximize access to the State's procurement programs; to foster long-term relationships; to enhance the core capabilities of minority, women, and persons with disabilities-owned businesses; and to increase subcontracting opportunities for those businesses. [Click here](#) to express your participation interest.

- ❖ [\*\*Morgan Stanley Small Business Academy\*\*](#)  
*procurement focus for certified diverse businesses*  
The Academy focuses on helping small businesses leverage their competitive advantage, differentiate themselves in the procurement process, strengthen their business knowledge, and build their professional network. The Academy consists of a 12-week virtual, instructor-facilitated learning experience, followed by a yearlong mentorship program. The Morgan Stanley Small Business Academy is for certified diverse business (owned by African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, Asian-Pacific Americans, Asian Sub-continent Americans, Women, Veterans, LGBTQ+, Disabled, Disadvantaged, and/or any other underrepresented groups) with an annual revenue (net profit) of at least \$100,000 USD and no more than \$1,000,000 USD who have been in business for 3-10 years.
- ❖ [\*\*National Association of Minority & Women Owned Law Firms \(NAMWOLF\)\*\*](#)  
*networking for women & minority-owned law firms*  
As a national nonprofit trade association comprised of minority and women owned law firms and stakeholders throughout the U.S., the National Association of Minority & Women Owned Law Firms (NAMWOLF) which is led by its Chicago CEO, promotes diversity in the legal profession by fostering relationships among distinguished minority and women owned law firms and private/public entities.
- ❖ [\*\*National Association of Women Business Owners \(NAWBO\)-Central Illinois\*\*](#)  
*Central Illinois-networking for women-owned businesses*  
The central Illinois chapter of the national non-profit is the only dues-based organization in the U.S. representing the interests of all women entrepreneurs across all industries. As the unified voice of over 11.6 million women-owned businesses in the United States representing the fastest growing segment of the economy, the National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO) provides networking opportunities. It also has a [Resource Center](#), [NAWBO Institute for Entrepreneurial Development](#), and much more.
- ❖ [\*\*National Association of Women Business Owners \(NAWBO\)-Chicago\*\*](#)  
*networking for women-owned businesses in Chicagoland*  
The Chicagoland chapter of the national non-profit is the only dues-based organization in the U.S. representing the interests of all women entrepreneurs across all industries. As the unified voice of over 11.6 million women-owned businesses in the United States representing the fastest growing segment of the economy, the National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO) provides networking opportunities. It also has a [Resource Center](#), [NAWBO Institute for Entrepreneurial Development](#), and much more.
- ❖ [\*\*NextUp\*\*](#)  
*mentoring & networking for women+ at work*  
As the Illinois-based national non-profit NextUp is the largest non-profit of its type, with over 15,000 members representing over 900 organizations, 21 regions, and over 300 national and regional corporate partners, NextUp's focus is advancing all women, growing businesses, and transforming our workplaces through the power of community. Through their [events/forums/summit](#), their [membership programs](#) such as leadership development & assessments, inspiring [Advancing All Women](#) and [rEvolution](#) podcasts, and other programs & initiatives, NextUp is contributing to the women's entrepreneurship ecosystem.
- ❖ [\*\*Quincy Area Chamber of Commerce's Women Empowered Group\*\*](#)  
*Quincy area-networking for women-owned businesses*  
The Women Empowered group provides women the opportunity to network, encourage, enrich, grow, and inspire other women to reach ones' greatest potential professionally and personally.

❖ [Rockford Women's Small Business Networking Group](#)

*Rockford area-networking for women small business owners*

The Rockford Women's Small Business Networking Group was created for women entrepreneurs who own small businesses in and around the Rockford, IL area to have a place to market their small business and build and expand their professional network.

❖ [Women's Business Enterprise National Council \(WBENC\)](#)

*mentoring & networking for women-owned businesses*

The national non-profit, Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC) is the largest third-party [certifier](#) of businesses owned, controlled, and operated by women in the U.S. and a leading advocate for women-owned businesses in corporate and government supply chains in addition to [programs](#) & [resources](#), they also have specialty [networking programs](#).

❖ [Women's Business Development Center \(WBDC\)](#)

*mentoring & networking for women-owned businesses, including childcare business owners*

As the Illinois-based Women's Business Development Center (WBDC) is a force in business development services, serving a 9-state region in the Midwest, the nationally recognized non-profit which is part of the SBA's national network of Women's Business Centers & led by Emilia DiMenco, provides many at no-cost and low-cost programs and services for women-owned businesses throughout Illinois. Mentoring is available through its cohort programs such as [Plan for Profit](#), [Digital Strategy & eCommerce](#), [Top Shelf Retail](#) for businesses doing business with Big Box retailers, and cohorts for childcare business owners such as [RiseUp and Elevate](#). The Women's Business Development Center's (WBDC) year-round [events](#) offer networking opportunities.

❖ [Women Entrepreneurs of Central Illinois \(WE-CI\)](#)

*networking for Central Illinois women business owners, co-owners, and entrepreneurs*

Women Entrepreneurs of Central Illinois' (WE-CI) offers business meetings with engaging speakers, they educate women on topics relevant in today's business climate, they connect through social events, and they provide resources to help women grow and lead their organizations.

❖ [Women Entrepreneurs Grow Global](#)

*cohort programs and networking opportunities for women growing their business outside the U.S.*

The Illinois-based global non-profit Women Entrepreneurs Grow Global's (WEGG) [Club wegg Cohort](#) is a 1-year, virtual program for women entrepreneurs and business owners who desire to take their business global. In addition to other offerings, they also have in-person [mentoring meet-ups](#) in Chicago through their wegg mentorship initiative.

❖ [Women's Mentoring Co-Op](#)

*mentoring for Chicagoland women founders*

Presented by Chicago Innovation, the mentoring program is where women founders can connect, innovate, and grow.

❖ [Women Tech Founders \(WTF\)](#)

*mentoring & networking for women tech founders & future female tech founders*

Women Tech Founders (WTF) is an Illinois-based grassroots organization that connects, inspires, and advances women in technology by providing them with the resources and support network to thrive, innovate, and ultimately change the world. In addition to providing mentoring & [networking](#) opportunities, WTF also offers inspirational capital through its [Stories That Inspire](#) feature.

- ❖ [Veteran Women Igniting the Spirit of Entrepreneurship \(V-WISE\)](#)  
V-WISE helps women veterans and female military spouses/partners find their passion and learn the business savvy skills necessary to turn an idea or start-up into a growing venture.
- ❖ [YWCA Evanston/North Shore](#)  
*Evanston/North Shore area- mentoring & networking for women-owned businesses and future female founders*  
Mentoring opportunities are available such as through their [YW Tech Lab](#) which provides education in digital skills to traditionally underrepresented or vulnerable populations, such as women of color, survivors of domestic violence, and low-wage workers and their [Basic Money Management program](#) which is designed to strengthen money management skills by providing tools to help with budgeting, credit and debt issue. YWCA Evanston/North Shore [events](#) offer networking opportunities.
- ❖ [YWCA Metropolitan Chicago](#)  
*Chicago- mentoring & networking for women-owned businesses & future female founders*  
Throughout the year, the YWCA Metropolitan Chicago is dedicated to empowering women and eliminating racism by providing support to all women along various stages of their journeys. Mentoring opportunities are available through their programs such as through their [Illinois Small Business Development Center at YWCA Metropolitan Chicago](#) which provides confidential at no-cost advising, [Breedlove Entrepreneurship Center](#) which ensures that women of color business owners realize success and prosperity, and through their [YWCA Innovation & Technology Institute \(ITI\)](#) which boasts state-of-the-art technology facilities designed to help you expand and strengthen your business and personal computer skills. As YWCA Metropolitan Chicago [events](#) offer networking opportunities, they provide a wealth of programs and services year-round.
- ❖ [YWCA Northwestern Illinois](#)  
*Rockford area- mentoring & networking for women-owned businesses & future female founders*  
Programs such as their [Diving Deeper: A Guided Business Plan](#) which is designed to help women of color overcome barriers to starting, growing and sustaining businesses while providing them with educational tools to increase their knowledge and confidence as entrepreneurs, offering mentoring to Rockford area women. The YWCA Northwestern Illinois provides year-round [events](#) offering networking opportunities.

## Minority Women-Owned Businesses and Future Entrepreneurs

- ❖ [1871](#)  
*mentoring & networking for Black/Brown women-owned founders*  
As the Illinois-based innovation hub is an expansive community of founders, leaders, innovators, and supporters that is advancing the world forward and shaping a brighter future, 1871 offers [year-round events](#) at its Chicago hub which provide networking opportunities. As 1871 has been [ranked](#) in the past as the World's No. 1 Private Incubator and the Most Promising Incubator for Women Founders, their robust mentoring programs include [BLKtech Founders](#), [LTNtech Founders](#), and [WMNtech Founders](#). 1871 also hosts pitch competitions to help Black and Latinx tech founders get the funding and support they need to drive their businesses forward.
- ❖ [Amazon's Black Business Accelerator](#)  
*mentoring for Black-owned e-commerce founders*  
a free accelerator program for Black-owned U.S. business owners who sell on Amazon.

- ❖ [Apple Entrepreneur Camp](#)  
*mentoring for underrepresented app founders*  
A one-on-one technology lab for underrepresented founders and developers with app-driven businesses.
- ❖ [Bank of America Breakthrough LabTM](#)  
*for Black, Hispanic-Latino, Native American and other underrepresented entrepreneurs whose businesses are focused on financial technology and/or tech-enabled solutions promoting inclusion*  
Bank of America Breakthrough LabTM is an impact accelerator program that provides economic opportunity and capital access to Black, Hispanic-Latino, Native American and other underrepresented entrepreneurs. Our part-time program provides hands-on mentorship to early-stage businesses by helping founders build growth models, establish industry contacts and position themselves for funding.
- ❖ [Black Girl Ventures Foundation \(BGV\)](#)  
*national resource-mentoring & networking for Black/Brown women-owned businesses*  
Through a variety of programs and initiatives such as the [BGV Pitch Program](#), the national non-profit Black Girl Ventures Foundation (BGV) addresses the unique challenges Black/Brown women face in accessing social and financial capital to grow their businesses. Their signature social capital program is the [BGV Connect Incubator](#), which they believe is the key to unlocking financial capital. Their website also features [blogs](#) which includes financial empowerment and additional topics for Black/Brown women-owned businesses.
- ❖ [BOSS Network \(“Bringing Out Successful Sisters”\)](#)  
*mentoring & networking for professional and entrepreneurial women of color*  
As an Illinois-based national online community of professional and entrepreneurial women who support each other through digital content, programs and event-based networking, the BOSS Network (“Bringing Out Successful Sisters”) also offers mentoring opportunities through its [BOSS Business University](#), which is a digital platform that provides mentorship programming through industry business experts, inspirational capital through [success stories and spotlights](#), and financial capital through its partnership with Sage which closed its [2<sup>nd</sup> annual BOSS Impact Fund](#). Sign-up for the BOSS Network e-news to be alerted when the [3<sup>rd</sup> annual BOSS Impact Fund](#) application opens. The BOSS Network is founded by Dr. Cameka Smith, who was listed in *Ebony Magazine* as a 40 under 40 Entrepreneur.
- ❖ [Chicago Urban League Center for Entrepreneurship & Innovation](#)  
*mentoring & networking for African American/Black professionals and business owners & entrepreneurs*  
They help African-Americans launch, grow, and sustain businesses through one-on-one advising, business training, workshops and more.
- ❖ [Emerging Young Entrepreneurs Program](#) (2024 cohort info TBA)  
Presented by the National Minority Supplier Development Council, the annual Emerging Young Entrepreneurs (EYE) program is a free, year-long program for minority entrepreneur participants ages 19-35.
- ❖ [FedEx E-Commerce Learning Lab](#) (next cohort info TBA)  
Presented by FedEx and powered by the nonprofit [Accion Opportunity Fund \(AOF\)](#) and Chicago-based e-commerce consultancy [37 Oaks](#), the FedEx E-Commerce Learning Lab is designed to help diverse small business owners who are looking to develop or expand their e-commerce operations as they continue to adapt their business models in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on women and entrepreneurs of color.



❖ [Google for Startups Accelerator: Black Founders](#)

*for Black-led technology startups*

This program is open to Black-led technology startups within the U.S. and is best suited for Seed to Series A revenue generating tech startups that are headquartered in the United States and Canada. Selected companies should have a minimum of 5+ employees and the founder and appropriate team members must be available to join all program elements of their cohort.

❖ [Hustle Mommies](#)

*networking for Black mompreneurs*

The Illinois-based non-profit led by Founder & CEO Ariel Rainey, is dedicated to supporting and uplifting Black moms including mompreneurs in the urban community. Throughout the year, they offer networking opportunities for Black mompreneurs.

❖ [IC U/Latinas](#)

*mentoring & networking for Latina professionals, business owners, & entrepreneurs*

Through the social enterprise program IC U/Latinas, the program offers small business cohorts which have disruptive proven modules of first-hand discussions & experiences for committed & driven Latinas to build their empires & dreams. IC U/Latinas is managed by [Velez Global Enterprises](#), which was founded and led by CEO Letty Velez, a Latina serial entrepreneur, multi-million-dollar annual producer & ultimate community navigator who's a passionate connector.

❖ [Illinois Minority Business Development Agency \(IL MBDA\) Business Center](#)

*mentoring for minority-owned businesses*

The Illinois Minority Business Development Agency (IL MBDA) Business Center which is operated by Strategic Exceptions Professional Consulting Inc., provides clients secure capital, access new markets, compete for contracts, and make strategic partners and business moves.

❖ [Latinas Executives and Entrepreneurs Network \("LEEN"\)](#)

*networking for Latina executives & entrepreneurs of all ages, industries, and professions*

As an Illinois-based networking group, the Latinas Executives and Entrepreneurs Network ("LEEN") was co-founded by two highly respected Latinas in Chicagoland, entrepreneurs Paola Meinzer and Martha Tovias. LEEN provides Latinas a place that helps them move up in their professional world and build their versions of success, while at the same time celebrating the customs, values, and traditions of Latina women. As members of the [Illinois Hispanic Chamber of Commerce \(IHCC\)](#), they provide a connection between member corporations and the group of women entrepreneurs. [Click here](#) for additional details and contact info.

❖ [The LTNtech Founders Incubator](#)

*for Latinx & underrepresented entrepreneurs*

Presented by the Illinois Hispanic Chamber of Commerce® and 1871, the mission of the incubator is to create pathways for Latinx and underrepresented entrepreneurs to break into and contribute to the tech and innovation economy while scaling their businesses.

❖ **[Mentor Protégé Program](#)**

*mentoring program on becoming an IL certified business, tailored for IL minority, women, and persons with disabilities-owned businesses*

The Mentor Protégé Program's, a program presented by the State of Illinois Commission on Equity & Inclusion's Business Enterprise Program (BEP), goals are to motivate and encourage established businesses to provide developmental assistance to BEP certified firms; to maximize access to the State's procurement programs; to foster long-term relationships; to enhance the core capabilities of minority, women, and persons with disabilities-owned businesses; and to increase subcontracting opportunities for those businesses. [Click here](#) to express your participation interest.

❖ **[Mercado on Fifth](#)**

*Quad Cities- mentoring & networking for English and Spanish-speaking entrepreneurs*

As a Moline-based non-profit organization that hosts vibrant outdoor markets every Friday during the summer on 5th Avenue in Moline, Mercado on Fifth is dedicated to serving as a resource and catalyst for minority entrepreneurs, inspiring Hispanic cultural pride and providing access to bilingual enrichment and educational opportunities for a more empowered and engaged community. Mercado on Fifth and its partners have helped [create and/or provide a platform](#) for new minority-owned businesses and much more.

❖ **[Minority Business Development Center](#)**

*Bloomington & Peoria- mentoring & networking for minority businesses*

The 501(c) 3 nonprofit, entrepreneurial organization focused on innovative ways to grow minority businesses and a skilled workforce. Programs include the [Entrepreneurship Training Program](#) which includes bootcamps, [Contractor Development Program](#) which is designed to increase the business acumen of small contractors, a [Youth STEAM Program](#) and much more.

❖ **[Morgan Stanley Small Business Academy](#)**

*procurement focus for certified diverse businesses*

The Academy focuses on helping small businesses leverage their competitive advantage, differentiate themselves in the procurement process, strengthen their business knowledge, and build their professional network. The Academy consists of a 12-week virtual, instructor-facilitated learning experience, followed by a yearlong mentorship program. The Morgan Stanley Small Business Academy is for certified diverse business (owned by African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, Asian-Pacific Americans, Asian Sub-continent Americans, Women, Veterans, LGBTQ+, Disabled, Disadvantaged, and/or any other underrepresented groups) with an annual revenue (net profit) of at least \$100,000 USD and no more than \$1,000,000 USD who have been in business for 3-10 years.

❖ **[mPOWER Program](#)**

*mentoring for women and people of color innovators/founders of physical products*

Presented by the Illinois-based non-profit [mHUB](#) which is based in Chicago and is the nation's leading hardtech innovation and manufacturing entrepreneurial center, the mPOWER cohort programs are designed to rebalance opportunity and access for startups building physical products that are founded by women and people of color.

❖ **[Mujeres de HACE for Entrepreneurs](#)** (2024 cohort info TBA)

*mentoring Latina business owners*

Presented by the national non-profit based in Chicago, the Hispanic Alliance for Career Enhancement (HACE) offers a Mujeres de HACE Women's Leadership program dedicated to Latina business owners who have been in business for 3-5 years, with over \$250K in revenue.

❖ [Sephora Accelerate](#) (2024 cohort TBA)

*mentoring for women and people of color innovators/founders of physical products*

With a focus on founders who are people of color, in line with Sephora's commitment to the 15 Percent Pledge, their goal is to ensure there are brands in the beauty industry representative of the colors, races, and ethnicities that make up the Americas. Founders will embark on a six-month journey where they'll gain the necessary skills to build and sustain a successful business through consistent, cohesive, and ongoing support backed by digital and in-person resources with content and curriculum directly correlated to helping founders succeed at Sephora.

❖ [The Ladder Mentoring Program](#)

*mentoring for Chicagoland Black & Latino founders*

Mentorship cohort program for Black & Latine founders, presented by Chicago Innovation

❖ [YWCA Metropolitan Chicago](#)

*Chicago-mentoring & networking for women of color business owners and future entrepreneurs*

Throughout the year, the YWCA Metropolitan Chicago is dedicated to empowering women and eliminating racism by providing support to all women along various stages of their journeys. Mentoring opportunities are available through their programs such as through their [Illinois Small Business Development Center at YWCA Metropolitan Chicago](#) which provides confidential at no-cost advising, [Breedlove Entrepreneurship Center](#) which ensures that women of color business owners realize success and prosperity, and through their [YWCA Innovation & Technology Institute \(ITI\)](#) which boasts state-of-the-art technology facilities designed to help you expand and strengthen your business and personal computer skills. As YWCA Metropolitan Chicago [events](#) offer networking opportunities, they provide a wealth of programs and services year-round.

## Veteran-owned Businesses & Their Partners and Future Veteran Entrepreneurs

❖ [Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs](#)

*mentoring & networking for veteran-owned businesses*

Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs in partnership with the Illinois Department of Central Management Services provides training and outreach to aspiring, emerging and established entrepreneurs by connecting them to government agencies, educational institutions, trade associations and business sector experts to educate them on resources and opportunities available to veteran-owned and service-disabled veteran-owned business.

❖ [Bunker Labs](#)

*mentoring & networking for veteran-owned businesses & their spouses*

As an Illinois-based national non-profit, Bunker Labs provides community, programs, and courses to help military veterans and military spouses start and grow successful businesses and startups. With a few signature entrepreneurial programs such as their [Veterans in Residence](#) mentoring program for early-stage startups and growth-oriented small businesses, Bunker Labs also features [Chicago Ambassadors](#) for veteran-owned businesses and future founders to network with, in addition to events.

❖ [DAV Patriot Boot Camp](#)

*mentoring & networking for veteran-owned businesses & their spouses*

DAV Patriot Boot Camp is a transformative program that empowers founders in the veteran and military community, including spouses, with comprehensive entrepreneurship start-up education, mentorship, access to resources, and a vital community committed to their success. The free bootcamp takes place in Cincinnati, Ohio.

❖ [Office of Veterans Business Development \(OVBD\) at the U.S. Small Business Administration \(SBA\)](#)

*mentoring for veteran-owned businesses & their families*

Devoted exclusively to promoting veteran entrepreneurship, the OVBD facilitates the use of all U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) programs by veterans, service-disabled veterans, reservists, active-duty service members, transitioning service members, and their dependents or survivors.

The SBA also offers a [Boots to Business](#) entrepreneurial education and training program for service members and military spouses at no-charge.

❖ [Veteran Women Igniting the Spirit of Entrepreneurship \(V-WISE\)](#)

V-WISE helps women veterans and female military spouses/partners find their passion and learn the business savvy skills necessary to turn an idea or start-up into a growing venture.

## Persons with Disabilities-Owned Businesses & Future Entrepreneurs

❖ [36Squared Business Incubator](#)

*mentoring & networking for Chicago businesses owned by persons with disabilities*

The Chicago based incubator provides free business development assistance to business owners & entrepreneurs of all abilities.

## LGBTQ+ owned Businesses & Future Entrepreneurs

❖ [The LGBT Chamber of Commerce of Illinois](#)

*networking for LGBT-owned businesses*

The statewide chamber of commerce serves the needs of the LGBTQ+ business community which includes close to 400 members. Networking events include a supplier diversity roundtable.

❖ [StartOut](#)

*mentoring & networking for LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs*

The national membership organization with [Chicago StartOut Programming Board members](#), provides mentoring and networking opportunities in addition to resources such as their Founders Program.

## Returning Citizens and/or Women Who Experience Homelessness & Poverty Who Are Future Microentrepreneurs and Business Owners

❖ [Pathway to Enterprise for Returning Citizens \(PERC\)](#)

*mentoring & networking for returning citizens who are interested in becoming future business owners & entrepreneurs*

As a first of its kind program in Illinois developed by Greenwood Archer Capital, Pathway to Enterprise for Returning Citizens (PERC) is a multi-collaborative of community partners committed to addressing recidivism through entrepreneurship. The Pathway to Enterprise for Returning Citizens (PERC) track is designed for those entrepreneurially minded individuals that have already transitioned back to their communities yet continue to be plagued with economic barriers that impede on the ability to live a meaningful life.

❖ [Streetwise](#)

*Chicago-based non-profit providing opportunities for individuals to earn an income with dignity as microentrepreneurs*

Selling StreetWise Magazines provide a flexible employment opportunity. It is a job. They buy the magazine for

\$1.15 and sell it for \$3.00 plus tips. [Streetwise vendors](#) are self-employed microentrepreneurs who build relationships and create connections between and across communities that change perceptions about homeless and low-income individuals. The vendors earn money to pay for transportation, phones, housing, utilities, clothing and medicine.

## Family-owned Businesses & Future Entrepreneurs

### ❖ [Family Business Center at Loyola University Chicago](#)

*mentoring & networking for family-owned businesses including the next generation*

The Loyola Family Business Center offers a "life stage curriculum" that provides best processes and applied practices for the whole family business. [Services](#) include different cohort programs, one-on-one business advising, connecting with peer groups, and more.

### ❖ [Entrepreneur and Family Business Council \(EFBC\) at DePaul University Driehaus College of Business](#)

*mentoring & networking for family-owned businesses*

The Entrepreneur and Family Business Council exists to educate and empower the people of family and entrepreneurial businesses through impactful programs and a unique community of peer support. With programs such as the [Forum](#) offering mentoring and networking opportunities, EFBC also offers [events](#), and much more.

### ❖ [John L. Ward Center for Family Enterprises at Northwestern University Kellogg School of Management](#)

*networking for family-owned businesses*

With the Ward Center's mission being a leader in family enterprise education and research, they offer networking opportunities through [events](#).

## Industry-based Businesses/Startups

### *Artificial Intelligence (AI)*

#### ❖ [The Techstars Chicago Powered by J.P. Morgan](#)

*promising, early-stage companies that are using Artificial Intelligence to address global problems, scale businesses, and design new business models*

The Chicago-based accelerator which is partnered with [J.P. Morgan](#), is focused on promising, early-stage companies that are using Artificial Intelligence to address global problems, scale businesses, and design new business models.

#### ❖ [Transform](#)

*Chicago-based accelerator for AI and data science ventures*

This unique 16-week program focuses on solving complex and provides unparalleled support to early-stage data science ventures. Through the accelerator, startups will gain access to business training and technical advisement, industry mentors, venture capital connections, as well as various funding opportunities. Transform, a data science and AI accelerator, is powered by Deep Tech Ventures at the University of Chicago's Polsky Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation in partnership with UChicago's Data Science Institute.

## Beauty

### ❖ [Black Beauty Collective](#)

Founded by Chicago woman entrepreneur Leslie Roberson, The Black Beauty Collective is a first of its kind marketplace and entrepreneurial collective for Black-owned beauty brands.

### ❖ [MUSE Accelerator](#) (2024 applications will open late spring/early summer)

*mentoring program for underrepresented founders of color through in-depth training, tools and brand-building expertise*

The MUSE Accelerator presented by Ulta Beauty, offers eight BIPOC beauty brands within their early stages the opportunity to continue their growth towards retail readiness and success.

### ❖ [Sephora Accelerate](#) (2025 applications TBA)

*mentoring for women and people of color innovators/founders of physical products*

With a focus on founders who are people of color, in line with Sephora's commitment to the 15 Percent Pledge, their goal is to ensure there are brands in the beauty industry representative of the colors, races, and ethnicities that make up the Americas. Founders will embark on a six-month journey where they'll gain the necessary skills to build and sustain a successful business through consistent, cohesive, and ongoing support backed by digital and in-person resources with content and curriculum directly correlated to helping founders succeed at Sephora.

### ❖ [Walmart Start](#) (2024 applications info TBA)

An accelerator program for small business beauty brands that offer cosmetics, hair, skin, nails and fragrance products, with the goal of getting the brands on Walmart's store shelves and e-commerce platform.

## Cannabis

### ❖ [Illinois Women in Cannabis](#)

*networking for women-owned businesses and future female founders in the cannabis industry*

The statewide membership organization empowers women of all ages and backgrounds to build strong relationships, networks, and careers in the cannabis industry. Resources include their [networking opportunities](#).

## Childcare

### ❖ [WBDC's Childcare Business Cohorts: RiseUp and Elevate!](#)

*mentoring programs and networking for childcare business owners and future owners*

The RiseUp cohort is explicitly designed for startup childcare businesses. Weekly topics range from SWOT analysis to operational efficiencies and recovery methods. In addition to this group learning, clients attend one-on-one advising sessions to discuss their business plans and financials. Strategic one-on-one advising helps owners manage their businesses and become more efficient, so repeat advising sessions are vital.

The Elevate! cohort is available to established licensed home providers and childcare center providers. It guides participants through a step-by-step process to develop a business and marketing plan, learn operational policies and procedures, and implement sound methods for managing their childcare business financials. While owners are in the cohort, they also receive one-on-one advising assistance on operations, financials, and opportunities to increase revenue.

## **Cleantech**

- ❖ [Apple's Impact Accelerator](#) (2024 cohort applications may open March 2024)  
*mentoring for clean energy & green technology entrepreneurs*

The Impact Accelerator is a virtual 12-week capacity-building program for entrepreneurs that are developing next-generation innovations in clean energy and green technologies. This unique program is designed to expand opportunities within Apple's supply chain and beyond. The at no-cost accelerator runs once/year.

- ❖ [Resurgence](#)

*Chicago-based accelerator for cleantech companies*

Startups will gain access to business training and technical advisement, premier facilities, industry mentors, student talent, and venture capital, as well as additional funding opportunities. This 9-month hybrid program is designed to support ventures that are focused on four specific areas. The Resurgence cleantech accelerator is powered by Deep Tech Ventures at the University of Chicago's Polsky Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation.

## **Construction & Trades**

- ❖ [Community Business Academy's \(CBA\) Construction Contractors Program](#)  
*for Chicago area founders*

Presented by Sunshine Enterprises, they invite any self-performing tradespeople, general contractors, project managers and all construction industry entrepreneurs ready to launch or grow their business to apply.

- ❖ [Chicago Women in Trades](#)

Chicago Women In Trades' FREE Training Programs provide a clear pathway to high-wage careers in the Union Construction trades and welding/manufacturing industries which often provide a foundation for future entrepreneurship.

- ❖ [Federation of Women Contractors](#)

*networking for women contractors in the construction industry*

The Illinois-based Federation of Women Contractors (FWC) is a dedicated group of women contractors who work tirelessly to promote opportunities for one another. In addition to [networking opportunities](#) for FWC members, FWC has a [membership directory](#) featuring Illinois women contractors.

## **Consumer Product Goods (CPGs)** (see above Beauty section too for additional CPG program opportunities)

- ❖ [RangeMe](#)

*for CPG founders*

RangeMe is the leading product discovery, sourcing, and purchasing platform where retailers and suppliers discover, connect, and grow their business.

- ❖ [Target Forward Founders](#)

*for early-stage CPG founders*

Designed for early-stage consumer packaged goods (CPGs) companies looking to learn and understand how to prepare for retail shelves. Get curated education, build community with like-minded founders and connect with industry leaders with this 10-week virtual accelerator program.

❖ [Target Takeoff](#)

*for mature CPG businesses*

Designed for more mature consumer packaged goods companies that want to learn how to scale into mass retail. Get ready for long-term success on mass retail shelves with curated education, a community of like-minded founders and the guidance of industry leaders in this six-week virtual accelerator program.

❖ [WBDC's Top Shelf Retail Cohort](#)

*For CPG businesses, with average annual revenues of \$50,000 or greater*

Each week the program will include components necessary for a consumer product company to become ready to sell into large retailers. Applicants should be two or more years in business and sells to retailers.

### **Creative Arts/Film/Makers/Music**

❖ [2112](#)

*for music, film/video, & creative arts entrepreneurs and future founders*

Chicago's first business incubator focused on the development of entrepreneurs in music, film/video and creative industry-focused technologies.

❖ [Community Business Academy's \(CBA\) Artists & Makers Program](#)

*for Chicago area entrepreneurs*

Presented by Sunshine Enterprises, this hub is for rising entrepreneurs in the "Art" industry which we define as including but not limited to the following—artisans, fine artists, singers, performers, fitness experts, fashionistas foodies, and creatives.

### **E-Commerce**

❖ [37 Oaks](#)

*mentoring & networking for ecommerce entrepreneurs*

A commerce development & learning laboratory that educates & prepares product-based businesses for growth. The national platform was developed and founded by Illinois-based, Black woman entrepreneur Terrand Smith.

❖ [Amazon's Black Business Accelerator](#)

*mentoring for Black-owned e-commerce founders*

a free accelerator program for Black-owned U.S. business owners who sell on Amazon.

❖ [FedEx E-Commerce Learning Lab](#) (next cohort TBA)

Presented by FedEx and powered by the nonprofit Accion Opportunity Fund (AOF) and Chicago-based e-commerce consultancy 37 Oaks, the FedEx E-Commerce Learning Lab is designed to help diverse small business owners who are looking to develop or expand their e-commerce operations as they continue to adapt their business models in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on women and entrepreneurs of color.

❖ [Techstars Future of Ecommerce powered by eBay](#)

*companies shaping the future of Ecommerce, including AI, Web3, privacy, security, and infrastructure*

This San Francisco-based accelerator which is partnered with eBay, is focused on startups with innovative technologies that are shaping the future of Ecommerce, including AI, Web3, privacy, security, and infrastructure. Participants will receive the support needed to succeed in the rapidly evolving Ecommerce market through access to mentors, thought leaders, and investors from both Techstars and eBay.



❖ [WBDC's E-Commerce Cohort](#)

In today's business environment, it is necessary to have a good digital strategy and the necessary online skills to grow your business. Whether you are a business owner or a startup, participate in this virtual workshop to increase your knowledge of e-commerce strategies to help you grow by optimizing your accessibility, capturing new clients, and improving your brand. This is a 5-week, free cohort.

***Exporting & International Trade***

❖ [Women Entrepreneurs Grow Global](#)

*cohort programs and networking opportunities for women growing their business outside the U.S.*

The Illinois-based global non-profit Women Entrepreneurs Grow Global's (WEGG) [Club wegg Cohort](#) is a 1-year, virtual program for women entrepreneurs and business owners who desire to take their business global. In addition to other offerings, they also have in-person [mentoring meet-ups](#) in Chicago through their wegg mentorship initiative.

❖ [National Association of Foreign-Trade Associations](#)

❖ [The International Trade Association of Chicago](#)

***Fashion and Apparel***

❖ [Chicago Fashion Incubator](#)

*mentoring for Chicago-based designers & future fashion founders*

The Chicago Fashion Incubator at Macy's on State Street, provides emerging Chicago-based designers in residence with the resources, business acumen, and mentoring to launch their careers in fashion.

❖ [Community Business Academy's \(CBA\) Artists & Makers Program](#)

*for Chicago area entrepreneurs*

Presented by Sunshine Enterprises, this hub is for rising entrepreneurs in the "Art" industry which we define as including but not limited to the following—fashionistas and creatives.

❖ [Make City Incubator](#)

*includes networking opportunities*

Operated by the ICNC - Industrial Council of Nearwest Chicago, the Make City Incubator houses over 110 new and growing companies across a diverse set of industries including food/beverage, light manufacturing, professional services, and apparel. They also offer year-round [events](#).

***Food (includes consumer product goods "CPG" beverages, and restaurants)***

❖ [Brewing the American Dream](#)

*speed coaching for food & beverage entrepreneurs*

Speed coaching is among business resources for food & beverage entrepreneurs through the Brewing the American Dream program presented by [Accion Opportunity Fund](#) and [Samuel Adams Brewing](#).

❖ [Chicagoland Food & Beverage Network \(CFBN\)](#)

*networking opportunities & more*

CFBN is the premier platform for food and beverage professionals to connect, contribute, and transform the industry.

❖ [Community Business Academy's \(CBA\) Artists & Makers Program](#)

*for Chicago area entrepreneurs*

Presented by Sunshine Enterprises, this hub is for rising entrepreneurs in the "Art" industry which we define as including but not limited to the following—foodies and creatives.

❖ [Good Food Accelerator](#)

*food entrepreneurs*

Chicago-based accelerator which supports entrepreneurs who create, produce and distribute good food products to consumers in the local, regional and national markets.

❖ [Food Foundry](#)

*for Chicagoland food entrepreneurs*

Food Foundry is a Chicago-based accelerator program by [Relish Works](#), built in partnership with [Gordon Food Service](#). Food Foundry supports, connects, and propels innovative startups who are reimagining the food and foodservice industry.

❖ [Hatchery](#)

*Chicago area mentoring & networking for food entrepreneurs*

The Hatchery is an Illinois-based non-profit food and beverage incubator dedicated to helping local entrepreneurs build & grow successful businesses. As it provides mentoring opportunities through its [Sprouts Incubation Program](#), it also provides year-round [networking opportunities](#), [discounted consulting](#) for members, and more.

❖ [Illinois Restaurant Association \(IRA\)](#)

*training & networking*

The statewide Illinois Restaurant Association (IRA) provides training classes and offers networking events throughout the year.

❖ [Institute of Food Technologists \(IFT\)](#)

*training & networking*

As a global institute based in Illinois, they bring together food professionals and technologists.

❖ [Let's Talk Womxn Chicago](#)

*networking for women restaurateurs*

The Chicago chapter of the national collaboration of women restaurateurs who build combined economic empower, started in Chicago. Throughout the year, they have opportunities to connect and uplift fellow women restaurateurs.

❖ [Mondelēz SnackFutures' CoLab](#)

*for food CPG founders*

As one of the world's largest snack companies, the Chicago-based company's CoLab supports mission driven start-up snack brands who have built their business on the promise of positive impact on social, environmental and human well-being. Selected businesses with over \$500K in revenue, will participate in a 12-week program and will receive a \$20K grant through the Mondelēz SnackFutures' CoLab.

❖ [Naturally Chicago](#)

*mentoring and networking for natural product entrepreneurs*

Naturally Chicago, a community-based program championing the natural products industry, hosts regular [networking events](#) that provide an opportunity to exchange ideas and explore new business opportunities. These events connect

entrepreneurs with investors, startups with industry experts, retailers and other industry professionals. Naturally Chicago's [Locally Made Program](#) is a groundbreaking initiative designed to connect Illinois retailers with the region's emerging and top-performing brands.

❖ [Pilot Project Brewing](#)

*Chicagoland- mentoring & networking for brewery owners*

Co-based in Illinois, the brewery incubator, Pilot Project Brewing, serves as a launch pad for start-up breweries, offering assistance with fine-tuning recipes, production scaling, business development, marketing, distribution and more. In addition to mentoring opportunities, Pilot Project Brewing [events](#) provide networking opportunities.

## Franchising

❖ [Entrepreneur's 2024 Franchise 500 Ranking](#)

❖ [Dunkin Franchising](#)

❖ [7-Eleven Franchise Owners Association of Chicagoland](#)

❖ [International Franchise Association \(IFA\)](#)

❖ [International Franchise Association- IFA Women's Franchise Network Chicago Chapter](#)

❖ [The Northern Illinois Franchise Association \(NIFA\)](#)

❖ [McDonald's Franchise Program](#)

❖ [The Black McDonald's Operators Association of Chicago and Northwest Indiana](#)

❖ [Wetzel's Pretzels Franchising](#)

- *opportunities include their Access to Equity Program, whose alumni include Illinoisan Daintry McFadden as the first female franchisee*

## Healthcare and Home Health

❖ [51 Labs](#) (2025 accelerator TBA)

The women's health accelerator is focused on startups who are preventing maternal mortality in the U.S. before, during and after birth. The virtual, 12-week accelerator features one-on-one mentoring with industry experts, workshops, interactive roundtable discussions, forums and more. The accelerator 51 Labs is presented by the premier healthcare incubator and innovation hub [MATTER](#) which is based in Illinois, alongside Health Care Service Corporation, Laerdal Million Lives Fund, BayCare, Parkview Health, University of Chicago Medicine, Organon and Stryker.

❖ [MATTER](#)

*mentoring programs and networking opportunities*

The Illinois-based non-profit MATTER supports healthcare startups at all stages of growth by creating access to learning and development opportunities, capital and customers and a dynamic community.

❖ [NAHC Mentoring Program](#)

*mentoring programs and networking opportunities for the home care and hospice industry*

The National Association for Home Care and Hospice (NAHC) supports emerging leaders in the home health, hospice, and community-based service sectors by connecting them with experienced industry leaders through their NAHC Mentoring Program.

❖ [Home Care Association of America-Illinois Chapter](#)

❖ [Illinois Association of Community Care Homecare Providers](#)

❖ [Illinois Homecare & Hospice Council](#)

## Legal

### ❖ [National Association of Minority & Women Owned Law Firms \(NAMWOLF\)](#)

#### *networking for women & minority-owned law firms*

As a national nonprofit trade association comprised of minority and women owned law firms and stakeholders throughout the U.S., the National Association of Minority & Women Owned Law Firms (NAMWOLF) which is led by its Chicago CEO, promotes diversity in the legal profession by fostering relationships among distinguished minority and women owned law firms and private/public entities.

### ❖ [Association of Women Attorneys of Lake County \(AWALC\)](#)

### ❖ [Black Women Lawyers' Association of Greater Chicago, Inc.](#)

### ❖ [Central Illinois Women's Bar Association](#)

### ❖ [DuPage Association of Women Lawyers](#)

### ❖ [North Shore LAW \(Lawyers, Advisors, Women\)](#)

### ❖ [Women's Bar Association of Illinois](#)

## Manufacturing

### ❖ [Illinois Manufacturing Association \(IMA\)](#)

#### *networking opportunities*

The professional statewide association addresses the industry's challenges while shaping the future.

### ❖ [Illinois Manufacturing Excellence Center \(IMEC\)](#)

The Illinois non-profit offers local advising and strategizing and networking opportunities through their [events](#).

### ❖ [Make City Incubator](#)

#### *includes networking opportunities*

Operated by the ICNC - Industrial Council of Nearwest Chicago, the Make City Incubator houses over 110 new and growing companies across a diverse set of industries including food/beverage, light manufacturing, professional services, and apparel. They also offer year-round [events](#).

### ❖ [mHUB](#)

#### *Chicago-mentoring & networking for hardtech & manufacturing entrepreneurs*

As the Illinois-based non-profit is the nation's largest hardtech and manufacturing innovation center, it offers mentoring opportunities through its [accelerators](#) such as the [mHUB POWER](#) program which is designed to rebalance opportunity and access for startups building physical products that are founded by women and people of color.

Throughout the year, mHUB's [events](#) offer networking opportunities.

### ❖ [mPOWER Program](#)

#### *mentoring for women and people of color innovators/founders of physical products*

Presented by the Illinois-based non-profit [mHUB](#) which is based in Chicago and is the nation's leading hardtech innovation and manufacturing entrepreneurial center, the mPOWER cohort programs are designed to rebalance opportunity and access for startups building physical products that are founded by women and people of color.

### ❖ [MxD \(Manufacturing x Digital\)](#)

#### *networking opportunities*

Based in Illinois, MxD is where innovative manufacturers go to forge their futures. entrepreneurial center, the mPOWER cohort programs are designed to rebalance opportunity and access for startups building physical products

❖ [Women in Manufacturing Association \(WiM\)- Illinois chapter](#)

*networking & professional development opportunities*

As the only national and global trade association is dedicated to providing year-round support to women who have chosen a career in the manufacturing industry.

## **Real Estate**

❖ [Community Business Academy's \(CBA\) Real Estate and Property Managers Program](#)

*for Chicago area entrepreneurs*

Presented by Sunshine Enterprises, This hub is for property managers and real estate entrepreneurs alike looking to take an idea for passive income, property based revenue streams or already existing property rental business to the next level.

❖ [Crew Chicago](#)

*networking for commercial real estate women in Chicago*

❖ [IWIRE, Industrial Women in Real Estate](#)

*networking for women in Chicago's industrial real estate industry*

❖ [Women In Real Estate™ \(W.I.R.E.\)- Chicago chapter](#)

*networking for women in real estate*

❖ [REACH](#)

*accelerator for real estate tech entrepreneurs*

Based in Chicago, REACH is the number one accelerator in the real estate industry. They launch & accelerate the most promising technology companies in the real estate & adjacent industries through an intensive event- based program through [REACH](#).

## **Technology**

❖ [1871](#)

*mentoring & networking for Chicago area Black/Brown tech founders and women tech founders*

As the Illinois-based innovation hub is an expansive community of founders, leaders, innovators, and supporters that is advancing the world forward and shaping a brighter future, 1871 offers [year-round events](#) at its Chicago hub which provide networking opportunities. As 1871 has been [ranked](#) in the past as the World's No. 1 Private Incubator and the Most Promising Incubator for Women Founders, their robust mentoring programs include [BLKtech Founders](#), [LTNtech Founders](#), and [WMNtech Founders](#). 1871 also hosts pitch competitions to help Black and Latinx tech founders get the funding and support they need to drive their businesses forward.

❖ [Apple Entrepreneur Camp](#)

*mentoring for underrepresented app founders*

A one-on-one technology lab for underrepresented founders and developers with app-driven businesses.

❖ [Bank of America Breakthrough Lab™](#)

*for Black, Hispanic-Latino, Native American and other underrepresented entrepreneurs whose businesses are focused on financial technology and/or tech-enabled solutions promoting inclusion*

Bank of America Breakthrough Lab™ is an impact accelerator program that provides economic opportunity and

capital access to Black, Hispanic-Latino, Native American and other underrepresented entrepreneurs. The Bank of American Breakthrough LabTM's part-time program provides hands-on mentorship to early-stage businesses by helping founders build growth models, establish industry contacts and position themselves for funding.

❖ **Community Business Academy's (CBA) Tech & Digital Program**

*for Chicago area entrepreneurs*

Presented by Sunshine Enterprises, this hub is for our tech-centric entrepreneurs looking to grow their tech deliverables into passive and supplemental income.

❖ **Google for Startups Accelerator: Black Founders**

*for Black-led technology startups*

This program is open to Black-led technology startups within the U.S. and is best suited for Seed to Series A revenue generating tech startups that are headquartered in the United States and Canada. Selected companies should have a minimum of 5+ employees and the founder and appropriate team members must be available to join all program elements of their cohort.

❖ **Google for Startups Accelerator: Women Founders**

Google for Startups Accelerator: Women Founders is a 10-week digital accelerator program for Seed to Series A technology startups based in the U.S.

❖ **The LTNtech Founders Incubator**

*for Latinx & underrepresented entrepreneurs*

Presented by the Illinois Hispanic Chamber of Commerce® and 1871, the mission of the incubator is to create pathways for Latinx and underrepresented entrepreneurs to break into and contribute to the tech and innovation economy while scaling their businesses.

❖ **Natives Rising**

*mentoring for indigenous founders and indigenous in tech*

Natives Rising is a holistic career accelerator for indigenous founders and indigenous in tech.

❖ **REACH**

*for real estate tech entrepreneurs*

Based in Chicago, REACH is the number one accelerator in the real estate industry. REACH launches and accelerates the most promising technology companies in the real estate and adjacent industries through an intensive event-based program.

❖ **Women Tech Founders (WTF)**

*mentoring & networking for women tech founders & future female tech founders*

Women Tech Founders (WTF) is an Illinois-based grassroots organization that connects, inspires, and advances women in technology by providing them with the resources and support network to thrive, innovate, and ultimately change the world. In addition to providing mentoring & **networking** opportunities, WTF also offers inspirational capital through its **Stories That Inspire** feature.

## Quantum

### ❖ [Duality](#)

#### *Quantum startups*

Duality is the first accelerator program in the US exclusively focused on supporting innovative quantum startups. The 12-month program is based in Chicago, the world's leading hub for quantum innovation. Startups from around the world are welcome to apply.

## Additional Industry, Professional, and Trade Organizations

### ❖ [American Marketing Association Chicago](#)

### ❖ [Chicago Society of Human Resource Management \(SHRM\)](#)

### ❖ [Illinois CPA Society](#)

### ❖ [Illinois Hotel and Lodging Association](#)

### ❖ [Illinois Insurance Association](#)

### ❖ [Illinois Retail Merchants Association](#)

### ❖ [Illinois Trucking Association](#)

### ❖ [Independent Accountants Association of Illinois](#)

### ❖ [Public Relations Society of American-Chicago chapter](#)

### ❖ [Illinois State Council SHRM](#)

## Regional Mentoring Programs

### ❖ [U.S. Federal & Illinois Local Governments' Resource Guide](#)

#### *statewide*

The guide lists the largest counties and cities in Illinois with links to local business resources which may include mentoring programs and networking opportunities.

### ❖ [AWARE \(Accelerating Women And underRepresented Entrepreneurs\)](#)

#### *Champaign & Urbana area-networking & mentoring for women technology entrepreneurs*

AWARE (Accelerating Women And underRepresented Entrepreneurs) which is programmed through the EnterpriseWorks incubator at the University of Illinois Research Park, provides targeted mentorship such as business consulting, strategy assistance, marketing and communication help, investor preparedness, or other startup consultation needed through the Research Park [Entrepreneur-in-Residence \(EIR\)](#) program. AWARE also offers networking opportunities through its [events](#) and trainings.

### ❖ [Centralia Business & Professional Women](#)

#### *Centralia area-networking for women-owned businesses and professionals*

The Centralia Business and Professional Women in southern Illinois is dedicated to improving the professional, personal, economic, and educational outlook of women.

❖ [City of Evanston's Small Business Mentoring](#) \_

***mentoring program for Evanston small business businesses***

Northwestern University and its Kellogg School of Management have partnered with the City of Evanston to provide strategic consulting support to Evanston business owners. To help Evanston's small businesses, local Kellogg alumni and students will provide pro bono consulting to Evanston business owners in high-demand areas, including digital marketing and social media, public relations, financial planning and analysis, and human resources management.

❖ [Elevate CCIC, Inc.](#)

***Mattoon area- mentoring & networking for business owners & future founders***

As a Mattoon-based non-profit, Elevate is a business incubation center that provides mentoring for its [Elevate's Six-Step Program members](#) in the southern region. It also provides a regional [economic toolbox](#) of organizations supporting business owners & entrepreneurs and more.

❖ [EnRich Minority Mentor Protégé Program](#)

***Decatur and Macon County- mentoring & networking for low-income and minority adults who are interested in entrepreneurship/future founders***

Presented by Richland Community College, the EnRich Minority Mentor Protégé Entrepreneurship Program is a curriculum-driven program that builds a cohort and a supportive network for low-income or minority community residents, often first generation, entrepreneurs in this community. The program builds soft and hard-skills, addresses the importance of financial literacy and attaches mentors to each business concept.

❖ [Founding Females](#)

***Peoria area-mentoring & networking for women-owned businesses and future female founders***

As a fellowship network for empowering and uplifting female entrepreneurs to launch businesses, Founding Females which is based in central Illinois, also offers resources and programs such as their [Founding Females Mastermind mentoring program](#), [Start Your Business Bootcamp](#), and more.

❖ [Illinois University Incubator Network](#)

***mentoring & networking for business owners & entrepreneurs and future founders, with a primary focus on serving communities south of Chicagoland***

The Illinois University Incubator Network (IUIIN) supports advancement of entrepreneurship through linking university incubators to resource sharing, technical assistance, and the collection of best practices. In addition to IUIIN's [programs and initiatives](#), IUIIN partners with the Illinois FAST Center to support technology-based entrepreneurs (TBE) and startups seeking SBIR/STTR funding for small business innovation research. Additional resources include networking opportunities through [events](#) and a wealth of [resources](#).

❖ [Innovate Springfield](#)

***Springfield area- mentoring & networking for business owners & entrepreneurs and future founders***

As Springfield's university-led incubator, Innovate Springfield is a catalyst for creating a collaborative community where ideas ignite, businesses incubate, and creators and social changemakers innovate. Innovate Springfield offers mentoring opportunities are through its [CO.STARTERS program](#), networking opportunities through its events, and much more.

❖ [Mercado on Fifth](#)

***Quad Cities- mentoring & networking for English and Spanish-speaking entrepreneurs***

As a Moline-based non-profit organization that hosts vibrant outdoor markets every Friday during the summer on 5th Avenue in Moline, Mercado on Fifth is dedicated to serving as a resource and catalyst for minority entrepreneurs, inspiring Hispanic cultural pride and providing access to bilingual enrichment and educational



opportunities for a more empowered and engaged community. Mercado on Fifth and its partners have helped [create and/or provide a platform](#) for new minority-owned businesses and much more.

❖ [Minority Business Development Center](#)

*Bloomington & Peoria- mentoring & networking for minority businesses*

The 501(c) 3 nonprofit, entrepreneurial organization focused on innovative ways to grow minority businesses and a skilled workforce. Programs include the [Entrepreneurship Training Program](#) which includes bootcamps, [Contractor Development Program](#) which is designed to increase the business acumen of small contractors, a [Youth STEAM Program](#) and much more.

❖ [National Association of Women Business Owners \(NAWBO\)-Central Illinois](#)

*Central Illinois-networking for women-owned businesses*

The central Illinois chapter of the national non-profit is the only dues-based organization in the U.S. representing the interests of all women entrepreneurs across all industries. As the unified voice of over 11.6 million women-owned businesses in the United States representing the fastest growing segment of the economy, the National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO) provides networking opportunities. It also has a [Resource Center](#), [NAWBO Institute for Entrepreneurial Development](#), and much more.

❖ [Quincy Area Chamber of Commerce's Women Empowered Group](#)

*Quincy area-networking for women-owned businesses*

The Women Empowered group provides women the opportunity to network, encourage, enrich, grow, and inspire other women to reach ones' greatest potential professionally and personally.

❖ [Rockford Women's Small Business Networking Group](#)

*Rockford area-networking for women small business owners*

The Rockford Women's Small Business Networking Group was created for women entrepreneurs who own small businesses in and around the Rockford, IL area to have a place to market their small business and build and expand their professional network.

❖ [The Incubator at SIU](#)

*Carbondale-mentoring & networking for business owners & future founders*

The Incubator at SIU provides start-up coaching, business planning, peer-to-peer connections, and expert advisors to flexible co-working memberships.

❖ [The Quincy Business & Technology Center \(QBTC\)](#)

*Quincy area- mentoring & networking for business owners & future founders*

The Quincy Business & Technology Center (QBTC) enhances economic development by combining the entrepreneurial drive of emerging businesses with the services and resources needed for success and sustained growth. [Mentoring and networking opportunities](#) and additional services & features are offered by the QBTC.

❖ [The TREP School](#)

*for Danville area founders*

Led by its Danville-based founder Tricia Teague, a minority and woman founder, The TREP School provides entrepreneurship training to aspiring business owners through its [Trep OnTrack Business Bootcamp](#). It also offers a law and business clinic improving access to Illinois cannabis business licensing through its law and business clinic which improves access to Illinois cannabis business licensing.

❖ **Union County Women in Business**

***Union County (Southern Illinois which is also known as Little Egypt)-networking opportunities***

Union County Women in Business assists and supports women owned businesses in Union County. They support & empower women from all backgrounds and walks of life to grow, thrive and succeed in business.

❖ **Women Entrepreneurs of Central Illinois (WE-CI)**

***networking for Central Illinois women business owners, co-owners, and entrepreneurs***

Women Entrepreneurs of Central Illinois' (WE-CI) offers business meetings with engaging speakers, they educate women on topics relevant in today's business climate, they connect through social events, and they provide resources to help women grow and lead their organizations.

❖ **YWCA Evanston/North Shore**

***Evanston/North Shore area- mentoring & networking for women-owned businesses and future female founders***

Mentoring opportunities are available such as through their [YW Tech Lab](#) which provides education in digital skills to traditionally underrepresented or vulnerable populations, such as women of color, survivors of domestic violence, and low-wage workers and their [Basic Money Management program](#) which is designed to strengthen money management skills by providing tools to help with budgeting, credit and debt issue. YWCA Evanston/North Shore [events](#) offer networking opportunities.

**Chicago area**

❖ **Ageless Innovators**

***mentoring for Chicago area entrepreneurs***

Through the intergenerational co-mentoring program, Chicago Innovation bridges generations through reciprocal mentoring to share experience & perspectives.

❖ **Allies for Community Business's (A4CB) 1:1 Coaching**

***Coaching for Chicago area businesses***

Offering free business coaching to Chicago area businesses, A4CB coaches early-stage businesses, emerging businesses, and established businesses.

❖ **Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce**

***mentoring & networking for Chicago business owners & entrepreneurs and future founders***

As a private, non-profit business assistance and economic development organization dedicated to helping area businesses grow as well as promoting the economic development of the region, mentoring and networking opportunities are available through programs such as the [Emerging Leaders](#) which engages and develops the next generation of Chicagoland business leader and through the [Illinois SBDC at the Chicagoland Chamber](#) which has already helped over 600 small business owners and entrepreneurs with their confidential, at no-cost 1:1 business advising through the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce's programs.

❖ **Coleman Mentorship Program**

***mentoring for Chicago entrepreneurs in DePaul University's community***

Presented by Illinois-based Coleman Entrepreneurship Center at [DePaul University's Driehaus College of Business](#), the Coleman Mentorship Program offers more than 50 mentors who can help take your business to the next level.

❖ **Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses (10KSB)** (2024 cohort info TBA)

***accepted business owners outside the Chicago area can join virtually***

The cohort program provides greater access to education, capital and business support services for growth-oriented entrepreneurs. Participants gain practical skills to take their business to the next level, with topics like financial statements, negotiations, and marketing.

❖ [Polsky Center for Entrepreneurship & Innovation at the University of Chicago](#)

*Chicago South & West side neighborhoods- mentoring for business owners & entrepreneurs*

The Polsky Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation at the University of Chicago has 100+ mentors who are ready to meet with community members on the South and West sides of Chicago virtually or in person and assist businesses in navigating their business challenges and to plan for growth and scale. [Click here](#) for additional information and to book your mentor appointment.

❖ [Polsky Small Business Growth Program](#)

*for Chicago's South & West Sides business owners*

The Polsky Small Business Growth Program helps South and West side businesses grow and scale to the next level of success. With funding from JPMorgan Chase, and in partnership with the Office of Civic Engagement at the University of Chicago, teams of highly-skilled University of Chicago students provide hands-on consulting experience to these companies, helping them address key business challenges and determine new strategies for business growth. For more information, [click here](#).

❖ [SBAC Empower's Mentoring Program](#)

*mentoring for Chicago small businesses*

Presented by the Illinois-based [Small Business Advocacy Council \(SBAC\)](#), a full-service advocacy organization which empowers their members, their SBAC Empower's Mentoring Program provides an opportunity for mentors to discuss business strategies, help generate ideas for growth, and to provide advice with any issues or problems that have arisen for Chicago small business owners.

❖ [Sunshine Enterprises](#)

*mentoring programs for Chicago entrepreneurs (northside, southside, and westside Chicago areas)*

The Chicago non-profit Sunshine Enterprises operates strategically-placed, geographic business hubs and three sector-specific hubs which offers mentoring opportunities through their programs. Their signature, intensive 12-week [Community Business Academy \(CBA\)](#) teaches effective business management. The CBA is offered at their 6-hubs which include: geographic hubs—Southside, Westside, and Northside in Chicago and 3 industry specific hubs focused on construction trades; arts and makers; technology & digital; and property developers. Through Sunshine Enterprises' [Business Acceleration Services program](#), programs include individual coaching, workshops, events, and access to their signature mentor program, [Next Level Exchange \(NLE\)](#).

❖ [UIC Entrepreneurial Support Program](#)

The University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) Entrepreneurial Support Program helps new and established business owners in Chicagoland start, scale and succeed in business.

❖ [YWCA Evanston/North Shore](#)

*Evanston/North Shore area- mentoring & networking for women-owned businesses and future female founders*

Mentoring opportunities are available such as through their [YW Tech Lab](#) which provides education in digital skills to traditionally underrepresented or vulnerable populations, such as women of color, survivors of domestic violence, and low-wage workers and their [Basic Money Management program](#) which is designed to strengthen money management skills by providing tools to help with budgeting, credit and debt issue. YWCA Evanston/North Shore [events](#) offer networking opportunities.

## Rural business owners & entrepreneurs

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

#### *mentoring for rural business owners and future entrepreneurs*

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](#).

### ❖ [Illinois AgTech Accelerator](#)

#### *mentoring for IL AgTech entrepreneurs*

Powered by [Serra Ventures](#), the accelerator programs are for high-growth or early-stage AgTech and Agriculture startups.

### ❖ [Annie's Project](#)

#### *knowledge-based network empowering women farmers, ranchers, growers, landowner and agriculturalist*

The Illinois-based national non-profit provides [classes](#), [resources](#), networking opportunities, and much more. Annie's Project in Illinois collaborates with [University of Illinois Extension](#) to offer educational opportunities to advance women's roles in the modern farm enterprise.

### ❖ [Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs](#)

#### *mentoring & networking for rural business owners and future entrepreneurs*

The Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs offers mentoring through its programs such as the [Illinois Value Added Sustainable Development Center \(IVASDC\)](#) which provides guidance for new community-owned stores, networking opportunities through its [conferences & trainings](#), and much more.

### ❖ [SCORE for Rural Entrepreneurs](#)

#### *mentoring for rural business owners & future entrepreneurs*

SCORE business mentors can help you start, grow, or transition your business.

### ❖ [University of Illinois Extension](#)

#### *empowers rural business owners & future entrepreneurs*

Communities throughout Illinois are directly served by Extension staff in 27 units located throughout Illinois. Extension educators in local offices and specialists located on the U of I campus develop and deliver in-depth programming locally, in regional venues, and through distance-learning technologies. With offering classes and resources, resources include being a [home-based food seller](#) in the cottage food industry and [trainings](#) as a cottage food seller as presented by the University of Illinois Extension.

## Future Youth & Young Adult Innovators & Entrepreneurs

### ❖ [Belleville CEO](#)

#### *Belleville area mentoring program for youth students*

The CEO (Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities) program for youth students, provides real life learning experiences with the opportunity to take risks, manage the results, and learn from the outcomes. Presented by [Midland Institute for Entrepreneurship](#), their mission to develop the next generation of thought leaders and innovators.

### ❖ [Central Illinois CEO](#)

#### *Central Illinois area mentoring program for youth students*

The CEO (Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities) program for youth students, provides real life learning experiences with the opportunity to take risks, manage the results, and learn from the outcomes. Presented by [Midland Institute for Entrepreneurship](#), their mission to develop the next generation of thought leaders and innovators.

### ❖ [Effingham CEO](#)

#### *Effingham area mentoring program for youth students*

The CEO (Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities) program for youth students, provides real life learning experiences with the opportunity to take risks, manage the results, and learn from the outcomes. Presented by [Midland Institute for Entrepreneurship](#), their mission to develop the next generation of thought leaders and innovators.

### ❖ [Chicago Student Invention Convention](#)

#### *mentoring for Chicago's future innovators & entrepreneurs*

Presented by Chicago Innovation, Chicago's future innovators and entrepreneurs are provided mentoring opportunities through the Chicago Student Invention Convention.

### ❖ [Emerging Young Entrepreneurs Program](#) (2024 cohort info TBA)

Presented by the National Minority Supplier Development Council, the annual Emerging Young Entrepreneurs (EYE) program is a free, year-long program for minority entrepreneur participants ages 19-35.

### ❖ [Female Strong](#)

#### *mentoring for future Chicagoland middle and high school girl entrepreneurs*

Presented by the Illinois-based non-profit, Female Strong, their [Entrepreneurial Girls Program](#) 6-month cohort covers idea generation to pitching their businesses for startup investment funds and everything in between. Financial assistance is available for selected students with proven financial need.

### ❖ [Future Founders](#)

#### *mentoring for future youth & young adult innovators & entrepreneurs*

As the nation's largest inclusive community of intentional young entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial-minded leaders through its programs and initiatives, the Illinois-based non-profit Future Founders offers programs for middle and high school students such as bootcamps, workshops, [Be Your Own Boss Internship](#), fellowships, and much more.

### ❖ [Gray Matter Experience](#)

#### *mentoring for Chicago Black youth & future young Black innovators & entrepreneurs*

The Chicago non-profit connects young Black people to entrepreneurial education and experiences that ignite their unrealized possibilities. Their tuition-free programs use a nationally-recognized curriculum designed by Black leaders that cultivates an entrepreneurial mindset, embracing innovation, authentic leadership, and proactive problem-solving across all career paths. The Gray Matter Experience provides a unique pathway for Black youth ages 14 to 24 to build a future in business and innovation.

### ❖ [LIFT \(Leaders Innovating For Tomorrow\)](#)

#### *Mattoon-area mentoring program for high school students who are inspiring business owners*

High school students who are interested in pursuing a career pathway of being a child care center owner, can apply for their [childcare co-hort program](#) which also includes school credit. Cohort program for students interested in opening their own coffeeshops is also available.

❖ [Little Egypt CEO](#)

*Southern Illinois region mentoring program for youth students*

The CEO (Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities) program for youth students, provides real life learning experiences with the opportunity to take risks, manage the results, and learn from the outcomes. Presented by [Midland Institute for Entrepreneurship](#), their mission to develop the next generation of thought leaders and innovators.

❖ [McDonough County CEO](#)

*McDonough County (includes Macomb) area mentoring program for youth students*

The CEO (Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities) program for youth students, provides real life learning experiences with the opportunity to take risks, manage the results, and learn from the outcomes. Presented by [Midland Institute for Entrepreneurship](#), their mission to develop the next generation of thought leaders and innovators.

❖ [Minority Business Development Center](#)

*Bloomington & Peoria- mentoring & networking for minority businesses*

The 501(c) 3 nonprofit, entrepreneurial organization focused on innovative ways to grow minority businesses and a skilled workforce. Programs include the [Youth STEAM Program](#) which focuses on students in grades 5-12 who are interested in learning about coding, gaming, robotics, and app building.

## Additional Mentoring & Networking Opportunities

❖ [Founders Boost](#)

*preparing entrepreneurs for accelerator programs*

As a global tech startup pre-accelerator with a Chicago team, they aim at working with great early stage entrepreneurs to prepare them for accelerator programs, seed investment, and revenue through a six week part-time program.

❖ [Founders First](#)

Since 2015, Founders First CDC has helped accelerate the success of hundreds of small, service-based, B2B companies through their programs across the country including Chicago. Programs includes [Founders First Bootcamp](#) for entrepreneurs with established businesses, earning a minimum of \$250K in annual revenue who want to achieve rapid growth. 90-day, weekly online 12 group sessions, the [Founders First Challenge](#) which is a program is for entrepreneurs with established businesses, earning between \$50,000 and \$250,000 in annual revenue, who want to achieve growth, and the [Founders First FastPath](#), which is a 4-week FastPath Executive Program in Financing & Managing Growth is designed for companies generating \$1 million to \$5 million in annual revenues. The program is best suited for successful Founder/CEOs, needing up to \$1 million in growth capital as well as professional development, including leadership skills, confidence, and vision to overcome challenges and realize opportunities in accelerating revenue growth through the programs presented by Founders First.

❖ [Founders Institute](#)

As the world's most proven network to turn ideas into fundable startups, and startups into global businesses, there's a Chicago chapter. They help pre-seed entrepreneurs and teams build get to traction and funding by establishing a critical support network of local startup experts that are invested in their success, and by providing a structured and challenging business-building process that has helped their alumni raise over \$1.75BN.

❖ [Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses \(10KSB\)](#) (2024 cohort info TBA)

***accepted business owners outside Chicagoland can join virtually***

The cohort program provides greater access to education, capital and business support services for growth-oriented entrepreneurs. Participants gain practical skills to take their business to the next level, with topics like financial statements, negotiations, and marketing.

❖ [Illinois Chamber of Commerce](#)

***networking for business owners & entrepreneurs and future founders***

As the state's leading business advocacy organization, the Illinois Chamber of Commerce offers year-round networking events and a [Business Resource Center](#) which provides information and tools you need to keep your business in compliance with the many federal and state regulations and laws.

❖ [Neighborhood Entrepreneurship Lab \(NEL\)](#)

***for Chicago area businesses***

Powered by Allies for Community Business and Chicago Community Trust, NEL pairs community business owners with project advisors, project strategists, community partners, and corporate partners who provide intensive support to help execute a growth initiative for each business.

❖ [SCORE](#)

***statewide-mentoring for small businesses***

As a national non-profit with mentors throughout Illinois, SCORE is the nation's largest network of small business mentors helping small businesses plan, launch, manage and grow. SCORE mentors offer area-specific advice at no cost (financing, human resources, business planning) via email, telephone, and video. SCORE is powered by the [U.S. Small Business Administration \(SBA\)](#).

❖ [T.H.R.I.V.E. \(Train.Hope.Rise.Innovate.Venture.Elevate\)](#)

***for high-potential small businesses***

Presented by the [U.S. Small Business Administration \(SBA\)](#), T.H.R.I.V.E. is an executive-level training series designed to accelerate the growth of high-potential small businesses across the U.S. As the program allows participants to work with a network of experienced subject matter experts in core business topics, accepted applicants pay no program fee.

## **Illinois-based Hubs & Organizations Supporting Women-Owned Businesses, Future Women Business Owners, and Aspiring Female Entrepreneurs**

Below is not a complete list of all the social capital resources (*mentoring/networking opportunities/etc.*) available for Illinois women-owned businesses/future women business owners/aspiring female entrepreneurs. To learn about chamber of commerce organizations and economic development organizations in your community, contact your local municipality, refer to the U.S. Federal & Illinois Local Governments' Resource Guide for Businesses at the very bottom of the [OMEE Business Resource Library webpage](#) or contact one of our DCEO team members who are listed at the bottom of this guide. The list below is also not an endorsement of the views, opinions, products, or services of any the below entities. Also, please note that the below website URLs are subject to change due to organizations' websites updates.

**BizHub** (powered by DCEO) | [link](#)  
year-round events | [link](#)

**ChiBizHub** (powered by A4CB) | [link](#)  
year-round events | [link](#)

**Founders Resource Hub** (powered by P33's Techrise) | [link](#)  
year-round events | [link](#)

**Women's Entrepreneurship Hub (WE Hub)** (powered by Women Employed) | [link](#)  
year-round events | [link](#)

- **American Business Immigration Coalition (ABIC)** (national, with Chicago HQs) | [link](#)
- **AWARE (Accelerating Women And underRepresented Entrepreneurs) at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign** (Champaign) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Bradley University's Turner School of Entrepreneurship and Innovation** (Peoria) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Bunker Labs** (nationwide & based in Chicago) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **C200 (Chicago)** | [link](#)
- **Chicago:Blend** | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Chicago Foundation for Women** | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Chicago Innovation** | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Chicago Minority Supplier Development Council, Inc. (ChicagoMSDC)** | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Chicago United** | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce** | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Coleman Entrepreneurship Center at DePaul University's Driehaus College of Business** (Chicago) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)



- **Dress for Success Chicago** | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Ed Kaplan Family Institute for Innovation and Tech Entrepreneurship at Illinois Technology (Chicago)** | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Elevate CCIC, Inc. (Mattoon)** | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Ellevate Chicago** (*national with Chicagoland chapter*) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Entrepreneur and Family Business Council (EFBC) at DePaul University's Driehaus College of Business (Chicago)** | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **EIGERlab (Rockford)** | [link](#)
- **Evanston Woman Magazine** | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Family Business Center at Loyola University Chicago** | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Federation of Women Contractors** (*statewide & Chicago-based*) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Female Strong (Chicago)** | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **First Women's Bank** (*national, Chicago-based*) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Founders First CDC Chicago** (*national, with Chicago office*) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Founding Females** (*central Illinois-Peoria area*) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Future Founders (Chicago)** | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Gender Equality in Tech (GET) Cities Chicago** (*national*) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Hustle Mommies (Chicagoland)** | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **IC U/Latinas (Chicagoland)** | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)

- **Illinois Chamber of Commerce** (*statewide with Chicago & Springfield offices*) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Illinois Institute of Rural Affairs** (*Macomb*) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Illinois Women in Cannabis** (*statewide*) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Innovate Springfield** | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Lake Forest College's Oppenheimer Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation (OC)** (*Chicago's northern suburbs*) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Latina Empowering Entrepreneurs Network (LEEN)** (*Chicagoland*) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Let's Talk Womxn Chicago** (*nationwide with Chicago as first hub*) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **LGBT Chamber of Commerce of Illinois** (*statewide with Chicago office*) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Lift Women's Foundation** (*Rock Island*) | [link](#)
- **Make City** (*Chicago's west side*) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **mHUB** (*Chicago*) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **National Association of Minority & Women Owned Law Firms (NAMWOLF)** (*national, with Chicago HQs*) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO)-Central Illinois** | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO)-Chicago** | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Naturally Chicago** | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Next Street** (*national, with Chicago office*) | [link](#)

- **NextUp** (*nationwide with Chicago HQs*) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Northeastern Illinois University's College of Business and Technology's Business Innovation & Growth (BIG) Center** (*Chicago*) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Northwestern University's Innovation & New Ventures Office** (*Chicagoland*) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Obama Foundation** (*global with Chicago HQs*) | [link](#)
- **Quincy Chamber of Commerce's Women Empowered** (*Quincy*) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **P33-Techrise** (*Chicago area*) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Polsky Exchange at the University of Chicago's Polsky Center for Entrepreneurship & Innovation** (*Chicago*) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Refine Collective (refinecltv)** (*national, Chicago-based*) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Revolution Institute** (*Chicago*) | [link](#)
- **Richland Community College's EnRich Minority Mentor Protégé Entrepreneurship Program** (*Decatur*) | [link](#)
- **Skokie Public Library** | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Small Business Advocacy Council (SBAC)** (*Chicago area*) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Southern Illinois University Research Park** (*Carbondale*) | [link](#)
- **The Aux** (*Evanston*) | [link](#)
- **The BOSS "Bringing Out Successful Sisters" Network** (*national, Chicago-based*) | [link](#)
- **The Hatchery** (*Chicago*) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **The Illinois Minority Business Development Agency (IL MBDA) Business Center** (*statewide & based in Chicago area*) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **The Incubator @ SIU** (*Carbondale*) | [link](#)
- **University of Illinois Chicago IC Entrepreneurial Support Program** (*Chicago*) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)

- **University of Illinois Extension (Urbana) | [link](#)**
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's Gies College of Business's Origin Ventures Academy for Entrepreneurial Leadership including Women in Entrepreneurship (WIE Connect) (Champaign-Urbana) | [link](#)**
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's Grainger College of Engineering's Technology Entrepreneur Center (Champaign-Urbana) | [link](#)**
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **University of Illinois System's Office of the Vice President for Economic Development & Innovation (statewide with Chicago & Urbana offices) | [link](#)**
  - [resources](#)
- **U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) – Illinois District office | [link](#)**
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **West Side Forward (Chicago) | [link](#)**
- **Women's Business Development Center (WBDC) (Midwest with Chicago HQs) | [link](#)**
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **WomenEmployed (WE) (national, with Chicago HQs) | [link](#)**
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Women in Entrepreneurship Institute (WEI) at DePaul University's Driehaus College of Business (Chicagoland) | [link](#)**
- **Women Entrepreneurs Grow Global (Chicago area) | [link](#)**
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **Women Tech Founders (WTF) (national with Chicago HQs) | [link](#)**
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **World Business Chicago | [link](#)**
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **WorldChicago | [link](#)**
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **YWCA Evanston/North Shore | [link](#)**
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **YWCA Metropolitan Chicago | [link](#)**
  - [upcoming events](#)

- **YWCA Northwestern Illinois** (*Rockford*) | [link](#)
- **YWCA Quincy** | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **YWCA of the University of Illinois** (*Champaign*) | [link](#)
- **1871** (*Chicago*) | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)
- **37 Oaks** | [link](#)
  - [upcoming events](#)

## **Additional Organizations Supporting Women-Owned Businesses, Future Women Business Owners, and Aspiring Female Entrepreneurs**

- 2112 (*music, film/video & creative industry-focused technologies incubator*) | [link](#)
- 36 Squared | [link](#)
- Adelante Center for Entrepreneurship | [link](#)
- African American Business Association (AABA) | [link](#)
- Alianza Hispanoamericana NFP, Inc. | [link](#)
- Allies for Community Business | [link](#)
- American Arab Chamber of Commerce of Illinois | [link](#)
- AMIGOS DE LENS | [link](#)
- Arab American Business & Professional Association | [link](#)
- Artfully Gifted Foundation | [link](#)
- Asian American Chamber of Commerce of Illinois (AACCL) | [link](#)
- Asian Real Estate Association of America (AREAA) (*Chicago*) | [link](#)
- Aurora Regional Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (ARHCC) | [link](#)
- Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council | [link](#)
- Belvidere Chamber of Commerce | [link](#)
- Berwyn Development Corporation | [link](#)
- Binational Institute of Human Development | [link](#)
- Black Business Alliance Peoria (BBAPeoria) Chapter | [link](#)
- Black Chamber of Commerce of Lake County (BCCLC) | [link](#)
- Black Chamber of Commerce of Southern Illinois | [link](#)
- Breakthrough | [link](#)
- Built In Chicago | [link](#)
- Center for Capacity Building on Minorities with Disabilities Research | [link](#)
- Center for Changing Lives (CCL) | [link](#)
- Center for Entrepreneurship and Social Impact at Northern Illinois University | [link](#)
- Centro de Trabajadores Unidos: United Workers' Center | [link](#)
- Champaign County Black Chamber of Commerce (CCBCC) | [link](#)
- Chicago Chinatown Chamber of Commerce | [link](#)

- Chicago Latina Moms | [link](#)
- Chicago Southland Business Incubator's 4343 Ascending House | [link](#)
- Chicago Urban League | [link](#)
- Chicago Veterans | [link](#)
- Chicagoland Black Chamber of Commerce | [link](#)
- Chicagoland Food & Beverage Network | [link](#)
- Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community's Small Business Development Program | [link](#)
- Cook County Black Chamber of Commerce | [link](#)
- Cook County Business Small Business Source | [link](#)
- Economic Strategies Development Corporation (ESDC) | [link](#)
- Elgin Area Chamber | [link](#)
- Elgin Hispanic Network (EHN) | [link](#)
- Evanston Latinx Business Alliance | [link](#)
- Foundation of Little Village (*formerly known as Little Village Foundation*) | [link](#)
- Fox Valley SCORE | [link](#)
- Greater Decatur Black Chamber of Commerce | [link](#)
- Greater Kankakee Black Chamber of Commerce (G.K.B.C.C.) | [link](#)
- Greater Peoria Hispanic Chamber of Commerce | [link](#)
- Greater Quad Cities Hispanic Chamber of Commerce | [link](#)
- Greater Southwest Development Corporation | [link](#)
- Growth Dimensions - Economic Development Belvidere & Boone County | [link](#)
- GWDC (*formerly known as Greater Waukegan Development Coalition*) | [link](#)
- High Road Restaurants | [link](#)
- Highwood Chamber of Commerce | [link](#)
- Hispanic American Construction Industry Association (HACIA) | [link](#)
- Hispanic Business Leaders Committee- Sauk Valley Area Chamber of Commerce | [link](#)
- Hispanic Business Network – Chicago | [link](#)
- Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan St. Louis | [link](#)
- Hispanic Chamber of Lake County | [link](#)
- Hispanic Connections Networking Group-Woodstock Chamber of Commerce & Industry | [link](#)
- Hispanic/Latino Resource Center at SIU | [link](#)
- Hispanic Leaders Group of Greater St. Louis | [link](#)
- Illinois Black Chamber of Commerce | [link](#)
- Illinois Hispanic Chamber of Commerce | [link](#)
- Illinois Migrant Council (IMC) | [link](#)
- Illinois Restaurant Association | [link](#)
- Illinois Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at Chinese Mutual Aid Association (CMAA) | [link](#)
- Illinois State Black Chamber of Commerce (ILBCC) | [link](#)
- Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Chicago | [link](#)
- Joliet City Center Partnership | [link](#)
- Joliet LEDA – Latino Economic Development Association | [link](#)

- Latino Business Group-DeKalb Chamber of Commerce | [link](#)
- Latino Round Table of Southwestern Illinois | [link](#)
- Latinos Progresando | [link](#)
- Little Village Chamber of Commerce | [link](#)
- Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) Chicago | [link](#)
- Melrose Park Chamber of Commerce and Community Development | [link](#)
- Mexico Americanos Saliendo Adelante (MASA) | [link](#)
- Midwest Hispanic Chamber of Commerce | [link](#)
- Minority Business Development Center-Peoria | [link](#)
- Mongolian Business Council of Chicago | [link](#)
- Mujeres Artesanas con Carrillo | [link](#)
- Mujeres Latinas en Acción | [link](#)
- Native American Chamber of Commerce of Illinois | [link](#)
- New American Welcome Center at the University YMCA-University of Illinois Champaign Urbana | [link](#)
- Next Street | [link](#)
- North River Commission | [link](#)
- Northern Kane County Chamber of Commerce (NKCCC) | [link](#)
- Northwest Hispanic Chamber of Commerce | [link](#)
- Northwest Side Community Development Corporation | [link](#)
- Peoria Black Chamber of Commerce | [link](#)
- Philippine American Chamber of Commerce of Greater Chicago | [link](#)
- Pilsen Chamber of Commerce | [link](#)
- PODER | [link](#)
- Polish Women in Business | [link](#)
- Puerto Rican Cultural Center | [link](#)
- Quad County African American Chamber of Commerce (QCAACC) | [link](#)
- Rockford Black Chamber of Commerce | [link](#)
- Rockford Regional Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (RRHCC) | [link](#)
- Rogers Park Business Alliance's GROW/PROGRESANDO | [link](#)
- Self-Help Federal Credit Union | [link](#)
- Six Corners Association | [link](#)
- South Asian American Chamber of Commerce of Illinois | [link](#)
- Southland Black Chamber of Commerce & Industry | [link](#)
- Southwest Collective | [link](#)
- Southwest Suburban Immigrant Project | [link](#)
- Springfield Black Chamber of Commerce (SBCC) | [link](#)
- Street Vendors Association of Chicago (SVAC) | [link](#)
- Sunshine Enterprises | [link](#)
- Supply Chain Innovation Center and Business Incubator (SCICBI) at Governors State University | [link](#)
- Taiwanese American Chamber of Commerce of Greater Chicago | [link](#)
- Telpochcalli Community Education Project (TCEP) | [link](#)
- The Bronzeville Incubator | [link](#)

- The Chicago Network | [link](#)
- The Resurrection Project | [link](#)
- The United States Pan Asian American Chamber of Commerce Education Foundation - Midwest Region | [link](#)
- The USDOT Small Business Transportation Resource Center (SBTRC) for the Great Lakes Region at the
- Universidad Popular | [link](#)

## Volunteer Mentoring Opportunities to Support Illinois Women-Owned Businesses, Future Women Business Owners, and Aspiring Female Entrepreneurs

### ❖ [BU Turner School Mentor program](#)

#### *Peoria area-mentoring Bradley University's Turner School of Entrepreneurship & Innovation students*

Every academic year, the Turner School of Entrepreneurship & Innovation invites successful entrepreneurs to connect with the Bradley University students through the BU Turner School Mentor program. The program enables students to learn through ongoing personal interaction with experienced entrepreneurs, investors, consultants, innovators, and executives.

### ❖ [Belleville CEO](#)

#### *Belleville area volunteer mentoring opportunity to support youth students*

The CEO (Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities) program for youth students, provides real life learning experiences with the opportunity to take risks, manage the results, and learn from the outcomes. Presented by [Midland Institute for Entrepreneurship](#), their mission to develop the next generation of thought leaders and innovators. [Click here](#) to learn how you can volunteer to mentor Belleville students.

### ❖ [Central Illinois CEO](#)

#### *Central Illinois area volunteer mentoring opportunity to support youth students*

The CEO (Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities) program for youth students, provides real life learning experiences with the opportunity to take risks, manage the results, and learn from the outcomes. Presented by [Midland Institute for Entrepreneurship](#), their mission to develop the next generation of thought leaders and innovators. [Click here](#) to learn how you can volunteer to mentor Central Illinois students.

### ❖ [Chicago Innovation](#)

#### *mentoring multigenerational founders and future innovators*

Chicago Innovation welcomes both [mentors](#) and [volunteers](#) to join them in supporting women founders through their [Women's Mentoring Co-op](#), Black & Latine founders through [The Ladder Program](#), bridging generations through their [Ageless Innovators Mentoring Program](#), and the next generation of innovators and entrepreneurs through the [Illinois Student Invention Convention](#).

### ❖ [Duality](#)

#### *mentoring quantum startups*

Duality is the first accelerator program in the US exclusively focused on supporting innovative quantum startups. The 12-month program is based in Chicago, the world's leading hub for quantum innovation. [Click here](#) for contact information to learn more about becoming a mentor.

### ❖ [Ed Kaplan Family Institute for Innovation and Tech Entrepreneurship at Illinois Tech](#)

#### *coaching Chicago college students*

They're always interested in recruiting industry professionals to coach their student startup & innovation teams



each semester. [Click here](#) for additional info and contact info.

❖ [EnRich's Minority Mentor Protégé Program at Richland Community College](#)

*mentoring Decatur area low-income and minority adults who are aspiring entrepreneurs*

The program is designed to have a direct investment in people to start businesses in Decatur thereby transforming their lives, their family legacy and the community of Decatur. Mentors connect prospective participants to knowledge resources. [Click here](#) to sign up as a mentor helping aspiring Decatur entrepreneurs.

❖ [Effingham CEO](#)

*Effingham area volunteer mentoring opportunity to support youth students*

The CEO (Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities) program for youth students, provides real life learning experiences with the opportunity to take risks, manage the results, and learn from the outcomes. Presented by [Midland Institute for Entrepreneurship](#), their mission to develop the next generation of thought leaders and innovators. [Click here](#) to learn how you can volunteer to mentor Effingham CEO students.

❖ [Female Strong](#)

*mentoring future Chicagoland middle and high school girl entrepreneurs*

The Illinois-based non-profit Female Strong, welcomes Chicagoland professional women and in select cases men, who have a comfortable understanding of business functions and who have a passion for working with young women, exposing them to all the possibilities that lay ahead for them. [Click here](#) for additional volunteer information.

❖ [Future Founders](#)

*volunteer opportunities to help future youth & young adult innovators & entrepreneurs*

Volunteer opportunities are available to support the Illinois-based Future Founders in helping them build the nation's largest inclusive community of intentional young entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial-minded leaders through its programs and initiatives.

❖ [Good Food Accelerator](#)

*volunteer opportunities*

Mentor, advisor, and instructor volunteer opportunities are available to support the Chicago-based accelerator which supports local food businesses' success.

❖ [Gray Matter Experience](#)

*mentoring Chicago Black youth and future Black innovators and entrepreneurs*

Through this work, we're bridging the knowledge and wealth gap in the Black community and equipping the next generation of changemakers to excel in a global economy. Support the work by becoming a [volunteer mentor!](#)

❖ [Illinois Women in Cannabis](#)

*volunteer opportunities to support women-owned businesses and future female founders in the cannabis industry*

Volunteering at Illinois Women in Cannabis (IWC) events provides the opportunity to get involved and network with IWC members and fellow industry leaders.

❖ [Little Egypt CEO](#)

*Southern Illinois region mentoring program for youth students*

The CEO (Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities) program for youth students, provides real life learning experiences with the opportunity to take risks, manage the results, and learn from the outcomes. Presented by [Midland Institute for Entrepreneurship](#), their mission to develop the next generation of thought leaders and

innovators. [Click here](#) to learn how you can volunteer to mentor Little Egypt CEO students.

❖ [McDonough County CEO](#)

***McDonough County (includes Macomb) area volunteer mentoring opportunity to support youth students***

The CEO (Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities) program for youth students, provides real life learning experiences with the opportunity to take risks, manage the results, and learn from the outcomes. Presented by [Midland Institute](#)

[for Entrepreneurship](#), their mission to develop the next generation of thought leaders and innovators. [Click here](#) to learn how you can volunteer to mentor McDonough County CEO students.

❖ [Mentor Protégé Program](#)

***Volunteer mentoring opportunity to support IL minority, women, and persons with disabilities-owned businesses***

The Mentor Protégé Program's, a program presented by the State of Illinois Commission on Equity & Inclusion's Business Enterprise Program (BEP), goals are to motivate and encourage established businesses to provide developmental assistance to BEP certified firms; to maximize access to the State's procurement programs; to foster long-term relationships; to enhance the core capabilities of minority, women, and persons with disabilities-owned businesses; and to increase subcontracting opportunities for those businesses. [Click here](#) to express your volunteer mentoring interest State of Illinois Commission on Equity & Inclusion's Business Enterprise Program's (BEP) Mentor Protégé Program.

❖ [mHUB Mentors](#)

***mentoring hardtech & manufacturing entrepreneurs***

As an Illinois-based hardtech and manufacturing innovation center, [mHUB](#) is the nation's leader convening the entrepreneurial ecosystem around hardtech innovation to ensure the manufacturing industry continues to accelerate, grow, and thrive. With the non-profit offering year-round [events](#), a wealth of programs such as its [mHUB mPOWER](#) programs for women & people of color, and much more, [mHUB](#) offers industry leaders who volunteer

their time and expertise to offer guidance and leverage their networks in support of mHUB members.

❖ [Naturally Chicago](#)

***mentoring Chicago area women-owned and BIPOC-owned CPG companies***

Naturally Chicago's, a community-based program championing the natural products industry, Locally Made Mentorship Program provides one-on-one guidance from industry veterans to professionals in the natural product industry, including early-stage producers. [Click here](#) to become to mentor founders.

❖ [SBAC Empower's Mentoring Program](#)

***mentoring Chicago small business owners***

Presented by the Illinois-based [Small Business Advocacy Council \(SBAC\)](#), their SBAC Empower's Mentoring Program welcomes veterans of the Chicago business world.

❖ [Techstars](#)

***mentoring creative college students, toaspiring founders, toearly-stage startups in their accelerators***

❖ [Women Employed \(WE\)](#)

***mentoring women entrepreneurs***

As Women Employed is seeking volunteers with entrepreneurship experience and who want to mentor women as they start businesses, contact them to learn how you can support them.

Please contact us anytime if you're looking for a different business resource. We're here to support-connect-advance Illinois women-owned businesses, future women business owners, and aspiring female entrepreneurs throughout the state!

**Michelle Lura White**: Women's Business Development Manager

*(Illinois' liaison to women-owned businesses and future women entrepreneurs)*

Office of Minority Economic Empowerment (OMEE), Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO)

[Michelle.White@illinois.gov](mailto:Michelle.White@illinois.gov) | 872.272.0094



**Office of Minority Economic Empowerment (OMEE)**

*Serving marginalized communities including minority, women, persons with disabilities, and veteran owned businesses.*

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## **Team OMEE from the [Office of Minority Economic Empowerment \(OMEE\)](#) at the Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity (DCEO)**

The Office of Minority Economic Empowerment (OMEE) is committed to providing minority-, women-, persons with disabilities and veteran-owned small businesses and entrepreneurs 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 connect with Team OMEE.
- To view upcoming events hosted by Team OMEE, [click here](#).

## **Team RED from the [Regional Economic Development \(RED\)](#) at the Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity (DCEO)**

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.

- As Team RED is located throughout Illinois, [click here](#) to connect with Team RED.
- To view upcoming events hosted by Team RED, [click here](#).

## **Team EIT from the [Office of Entrepreneurship, Innovation & Technology \(EIT\)](#)**

The [Office of Entrepreneurship, Innovation & Technology \(EIT\)](#) supports entrepreneurs, innovators, and small businesses in Illinois by providing concierge services, information, and technical support. Programs and services provided through EIT include:

- [The Illinois Small Business Development Centers \(SBDC\)](#) offers at no cost one-on-one business advising. The 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 business owners & entrepreneurs and those who have an idea. [Click here](#) to find the nearest IL SBDC by address or zip code. For upcoming IL SBDC events & webinars, [click here](#).

- The [Illinois APEX Accelerator](#) (formerly known as the Illinois Procurement Technical Assistance Centers “PTAC”) 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. The primary mission of the Illinois APEX Accelerator is to serve as the axis for existing and new business to enter and strengthen the Government Industrial Base (GIB) and Defense Industrial Base (DIB), by accelerating innovation, fostering ingenuity, and establishing resilient and diverse supply chains. [Click here](#) to find the nearest IL APEX Accelerator by address or zip code. For upcoming IL APEX Accelerator events & webinars, [click here](#).
- [The First Stop Business Information Center](#) 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.
- [The Illinois International Trade Centers](#) provide assistance with international trade and exporting. The centers offer information, counseling and training to existing and new-to-export companies interested in pursuing international trade opportunities.
- The [Small Business Environmental Assistance Program \(SBEAP\)](#) provides free confidential information and services to help small businesses understand and comply with their environmental obligations.

### **Team OTI from the [Office of Trade & Investment \(OTI\)](#) at the Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity (DCEO)**

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 in 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.

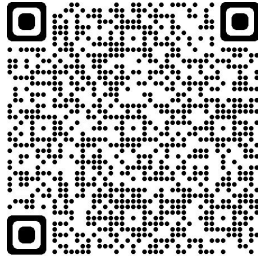
- As Team OTI is located both in Illinois and abroad, [click here](#) to connect with Team OTI.
- To attend upcoming OTI events, [click here](#).
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### **Community Navigators**

Community Navigators support small businesses in Illinois who are identified as underserved including minority, rural, veteran, and women-owned businesses.

- [Click here](#) to find a Community Navigator near you.

**Scan below** to access this Social Capital Resources Guide for HER Illinois Business (*accelerator/cohort/mentoring programs & networking opportunities*) on your phone, watch and/or tablet:



**Scan below** to access different resource guides for Illinois women-owned businesses on your phone, watch, and/or tablet, which can also be found at the very end of the OMEE Business Resource Library [webpage](#):

- Connecting HER to Illinois Business Resources Guide
- State of Illinois Government’s Resources Guide for HER Illinois Business
- U.S. Federal & Illinois Local Governments’ Resources Guide for HER Illinois Business (*includes contractor and vendor opportunities*)
- Financial Capital Resources Guide for HER Illinois Business (*includes grant opportunities, loan programs, crowdfunding platforms, etc.*)

