

**State of Illinois Uniform Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)
Summary Information**

Awarding Agency Name	Commerce And Econ Opp
Agency Contact	Jael Olivares (CEO.EECProgram@illinois.gov)
Announcement Type	Initial
Type of Assistance Instrument	Grant
Funding Opportunity Number	FY26-1
Funding Opportunity Title	Illinois Economic Empowerment Centers (EEC) Program
CSFA Number	420-45-3226
CSFA Popular Name	Economic Empowerment Centers (EEC)
Anticipated Number of Awards	10
Estimated Total Program Funding	\$2,500,000
Award Range	\$250000 - \$500000
Source of Funding	State
Cost Sharing or Matching Requirements	Yes
Indirect Costs Allowed	No
Restrictions on Indirect Costs	No
Posted Date	05/11/2026
Application Date Range	General announcement open for a period of time with no specific due dates for applications.
Grant Application Link	Please select the entire address below and paste it into the browser... https://dceo.illinois.gov/aboutdceo/grantopportunities/3226-4281.html
Technical Assistance Session	Offered : Yes Mandatory : No Date : 05/20/2026 : 11:00 AM Registration link : https://illinois.webex.com/weblink/register/r4531ca7f3c0ff0fe80680e9d6ecc81d6

Agency-specific Content for the Notice of Funding Opportunity

Office of Economic Equity and Empowerment

Illinois Economic Empowerment Centers (EEC) Program NOFO ID: 3226-4281

For information about grants please visit:

<https://dceo.illinois.gov/dceo-grants.html>

A. Program Description

Notice of Funding Opportunity Intent

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (the “Department” or “DCEO”) is issuing this Notice of Funding Opportunity (“NOFO”) to establish and/or support Illinois Economic Empowerment Centers (EECs) throughout the State of Illinois. The Illinois Economic Empowerment Centers Program (EEC Program) provides training in the principles and practice of entrepreneurship to prepare individuals, including minorities, women, veterans, individuals with a disability, dislocated workers, and youth entrepreneurs to pursue self-employment and/or a business enterprise opportunity. The EECs provide training in all aspects of business development and small business management.

Program Description

Pursuant to 20 ILCS 605/605-503¹, the purpose of the EEC Program is to provide grants to eligible career education agencies and not-for-profit corporations, including, but not limited to, local development corporations, chambers of commerce, community-based business outreach centers and other community based organizations that offer technical assistance, training, and access to resources necessary to start-ups or existing businesses including, but not limited to, Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Individual (SEDI) business owners and/or Very Small Businesses (VSBs)², entrepreneurs, and/or dislocated workers. By allocating funds to EECs, the Office of Economic Equity and Empowerment (OE3) aims to create an inclusive and welcoming business ecosystem for communities that have traditionally faced systemic barriers to entry and growth, including, without limitations, communities that have historically been marginalized, discriminated against, underrepresented and those who have been justice-involved. Program funding will allow EECs in economically distressed areas and Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI)³ investment areas to substantially impact these communities by expanding on existing partnerships, providing targeted outreach and support, and developing culturally competent training programs and initiatives to support the Targeted Program Participants (defined below).

Through the Department’s business outreach team’s experience, it is evident that many businesses comprised from the Targeted Program Participants often require tailored support that resonates at a local, community, and cultural level. The EEC Program was developed in direct response to this need and will focus on establishing and supporting current centers to assist the Targeted Program Participants directly.

EEC Targeted Program Participants

Selected applicants must have the capacity to provide services in accordance with the EEC Program objectives to SEDI-owned businesses, VSBs, or entrepreneurs from one or more members of the following groups: minority groups members, women, veterans, individuals with a disability, dislocated workers, and youth entrepreneurs (collectively referred to as the “Targeted Program Participants”).

¹ Public Act 102-0821; <https://www.ilga.gov/legislation/publicacts/fulltext.asp?Name=102-0821&GA=102>

² Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Individuals (SEDI business) and Very Small Businesses (VSBs) as defined by the U.S. Treasury Department; <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/SSBCI-Capital-Program-Policy-Guidelines.pdf>

³ More information about the CDFI can be found at the SEDI link provided in Footnote 2

EEC Program Outline

A two-pronged approach is necessary to provide the Targeted Program Participants with access to resources and training.

- **EEC Business Advice/Technical Assistance.** The EEC, utilizing its current business support ecosystem, will be required to develop a referral system for existing and potential small business owners. The referral system must include business advisory services and provide referrals to financial resources, existing educational programs, and business incubator facilities. Targeted Program Participants served must be reflective of the demographic in the geographical area served by the center.
- **EEC Education and Cohort Training.** Each EEC will be required to administer an agency-approved cohort training plan utilizing an evidence-based curriculum for start-ups, existing businesses, and/or dislocated workers. The training plan must integrate the understanding of various cultural beliefs and values with the specific target populations to ensure compliance with standardized diversity, equity, and inclusion principles and guidelines, while also incorporating language access. Services must be targeted and delivered to:
 1. Start-ups – This type of training should offer startups and early-stage entrepreneurs assistance on how to launch their businesses, products, or services. Services may include early-stage development, business advisory, peer support, subject matter expertise, workforce development and focusing on early-stage businesses.
 2. Existing Business – This type of training should be designed for existing businesses that have moved beyond the earliest stages of getting established and need advanced guidance and peer support to scale up the business. Services may include advisory guidance around growth and expansion, vendors and peer support, workforce development and preparation of businesses for a pitch competition regionally and state-wide.Dislocated Workers – This type of training should be designed for individuals who have lost their jobs due to economic downturns or company closures and may face challenges when it comes to finding new employment. These offerings should provide support and training to help dislocated workers develop new skills and connect with resources to help them grow and successfully secure employment.

The training cohort must also include plans for providing ongoing technical assistance to the Program Participants who successfully complete the program (graduates), including linkages with providers of other entrepreneurial assistance programs and with providers of small business technical assistance and services (20 ILCS 605/605-503(e)). The EEC must also include proof of partnership and/or backing from local post-secondary education institutions, businesses, and government entities indicating their support of the proposed programs & services and the ability to provide them.

EEC Mandatory Client Services

Each EEC shall also provide needed services to eligible Program Participants including, but not limited to:

1. Orientation and screening of prospective entrepreneurs: This serves as an initial step to identifying and assessing the readiness and eligibility of prospective entrepreneurs for the EEC Program.
2. Analysis of business concepts and technical feasibility: This involves assessing the viability and potential of business ideas from both a conceptual and technical perspective.
3. Market analysis: This is very important in the follow up of business activities. It involves studying and understanding the market dynamics, trends, opportunities and challenges to inform business decision-making.

4. Management analysis and counseling: This involves providing guidance, support, and tools to help Entrepreneurs effectively manage their businesses. It can prove to be a very valuable and relevant training activity.
5. Business planning and financial planning assistance: This can turn out to be highly beneficial to entrepreneurs because it may cover a range of business areas such as business planning, financial planning, assistance with funding options, financial literacy, risk management, and business monitoring.
6. Referrals to financial resources: This is important to provide guidance on access to financial resources, education on financial options, building relationships with financial institutions, assistance with financial applications and financial literacy.
7. Referrals to existing educational programs for training in such areas as marketing, accounting and other training programs as may be necessary and available; and
8. Referrals to business incubator facilities, when appropriate, to enter into agreements to access shared support services.

Additional services that may be offered to Program Participants include, but are not limited to:

- Business Planning: Entrepreneurs may face unique challenges when it comes to accessing funding and building a business network. Therefore, training in business planning can help entrepreneurs to develop a solid business plan that is realistic, scalable and has a solid path to profitability.
- Financial Management: Financial literacy is important for any entrepreneur, including minority business owners, who may have less access to funding and financial resources. With the inclusion of training in financial management, accounting and bookkeeping, entrepreneurs can learn how to manage their finances more effectively and create a roadmap to financial success.
- Marketing and Branding: Effective marketing and branding is key to building a successful business. With the inclusion of training on market research, branding and marketing strategies, entrepreneurs can learn to build their brands, and increase their visibility in the marketplace.
- Legal and Regulatory Compliance: Entrepreneurs may face unique legal and regulatory challenges when starting and running a business. With training on compliance with relevant laws and regulations, entrepreneurs can navigate the legal landscape and avoid potential pitfalls.
- Networking and Mentoring: It is expected that the EEC Program should provide opportunities for entrepreneurs to network and connect with other business owners and mentors in their industry and/or communities. This can help entrepreneurs to build relationships, share knowledge and gain valuable insights from experienced professionals.

Program History

The \$5M Illinois Economic Empowerment Centers Program was launched in 2024 as a pilot initiative and awarded 10 agencies across the state a total of \$2.5M. This NOFO seeks to distribute the remaining \$2.5M in available funds to new and/or existing EECs statewide.

Performance Goals and Measures

The EEC must design and implement data collection systems to collect and report on the following required programmatic data points:

1. The EEC must monitor and provide a summary of the extent to which the centers serve the Program
2. Participants and the method by which this information will be verified.
3. Data concerning the Program Participants should be collected at intake (which could be gathered at a pre-registration for a training or advising session), plus follow-up data should be collected on participants that have participated in an EECs training program or one-on-one advising.
4. EEC Business Advice/Technical Assistance:
 - a. Number of Program Participants (new/existing) from the Program Participants who were referred to financial resources, existing educational programs, and business incubator facilities.
 - b. Number of businesses the EEC provided with one-on-one advising.
 - c. Total hours of one-on-one advising the EEC provided.

NOFO ID: 3226-4281

- d. Number of business plans the EEC helped businesses to create.
Number of formal client pitches/presentations to potential investors the EEC helped businesses develop.
- e. Number of marketing plans the EEC helped businesses to develop.
5. EEC Education and Cohort Training:
 - a. Number of seminars/workshops/cohorts sponsored/cosponsored conducted.
 - b. Number of attendees who attended each seminars/workshops/cohorts sponsored/cosponsored grouped by the Targeted Program Participants.
 - c. Number of seminars/workshops/cohorts sponsored/cosponsored which were conducted in additional languages. Additional Language Type(s) Offered.
 - d. Number of training certifications issued to businesses that complete the program.
 - e. Upon the completion of each cohort, the EEC must host a pop-up market event for successful graduates. This event should include aspects of networking and will offer business owners an opportunity to demonstrate the skills and training they have received.
 - f. The EEC must provide a summary report detailing the extent to which the training program is coordinated with other assistance programs targeted to small and new businesses.
7. EEC Education and Cohort Training:
 - a. Description of EEC collaborates with any other career education agencies and not-for-profit corporations, including details the other assistance program services utilized/provided.
 - b. The EEC must detail the ability of the program to leverage other sources of funding and support.
8. EEC Business Advice/Technical Assistance and EEC Education and Cohort Training:
 - a. Description of amount and source of leveraged funding utilized each quarter.
 - b. Description of how supplemental funding was utilized to support/implement business advice, technical assistance, and education and cohort training by the EEC to the targeted program participants.
 - c. The EEC must provide an overview that details the success of the program in aiding entrepreneurs to start up new businesses, including the number of new business start-ups resulting from the program.
9. EEC Business Advice/Technical Assistance and EEC Education and Cohort Training:
 - a. Number of new jobs created as a result of a business working with an EEC.
 - b. Number of jobs retained as a result of a business working with an EEC.
 - c. Number of new business launches as a result of a business working with an EEC.
 - d. Number of businesses retained as a result of a business working with an EEC.
 - e. Number of businesses with first recognized revenue as a result of a business working with an EEC.
 - f. Number of businesses with first acquired customer as a result of a business working with an EEC.
 - g. Number of businesses with first retained customer as a result of a business working with an EEC.
 - h. Number of businesses that received their certification as minority-, woman-, persons with disabilities- and veteran owned through the Business Enterprise Program as a result of a business working with an EEC.

Other Information

Each EEC must also:

1. Establish an advisory group of community business experts within the first three (3) months of grant execution, at least one-half of whom shall be representative of the clientele (Program Participants) to be served by the center, which shall constitute a support network to provide counseling and mentoring services to minority group members, women, individuals with a disability, dislocated workers, and veterans from the concept stage of development of the EEC through the first one (1) to two (2) years of existence of the EEC on a regular basis and as needed thereafter.

2. The local center advisory groups must meet at least twice per year. Notice of the center's advisory group meetings and member listing should be submitted within 30 days advance to OE3.
3. Establish a referral system and linkages to existing area small business assistance programs and financing resources within the first three (3) months of grant execution; and
4. Develop a system within the first three (3) month of grant execution for tracking business training and assistance provided to the targeted program participants which must be reported to the Department through established Periodic Performance Reporting.

B. Funding Information

This grant program is utilizing state funds appropriated by Public Act 104-0003. Total amount of funding expected to be awarded through this NOFO is \$2,500,000. Awards will range from \$250,000 to \$500,000. The Department expects to make no more than 10 awards through this NOFO.

The period of performance is expected to be July 1, 2026 through June 30, 2028.

This opportunity will be a reimbursable grant. Grantees must meet quarterly programmatic objectives and matching funds requirements prior to reimbursement.

Eligible expenses under this opportunity are limited to:

- the cost of services and expenses of the EEC Program Director;
- the cost of services and expenses for instructors of the participating career education agency or not-for-profit corporation;
- the cost of services and expenses of the faculty and support personnel thereof; and
- the cost of services and expenses for any other person in the service of providing instruction and counseling in furtherance of the program.

With Department approval, pre-award costs are allowable under this opportunity dating back to the date of the NOSA.

The release of this NOFO does not obligate the Department to make an award.

C. Eligibility Information

An entity must be registered in the Grant Accountability and Transparency Act (GATA) Grantee Portal, <https://grants.illinois.gov/portal/>, at the time of grant application. The portal will verify that the entity:

- Has a valid FEIN number (<https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/get-an-employer-identification-number>)
- Has a current SAM.gov registration (<https://sam.gov>). SAM.gov registrations must be marked as "public" to allow the GATA Grantee Portal to expedite the review of the federal information;
- Has a valid UEI number (<https://sam.gov>)
- Is not on the Federal Excluded Parties List (verified at <https://sam.gov>)
- Is in Good Standing with the Illinois Secretary of State, as applicable (https://www.ilsos.gov/departments/business_services/corp.html)
- Is not on the Illinois Stop Payment list (verified once entity is registered in GATA Grantee Portal); and
- Is not on the Department of Healthcare and Family Services Provider Sanctions list (<https://www.illinois.gov/hfs/oig/Pages/SanctionsList.aspx>)

Entities on the Illinois Stop Payment List and/or the Federal Excluded Parties List at time of application submission will not be considered for an award.

An automated email notification to the entity alerts them of "qualified" status or informs how to remediate

a negative verification (e.g., not in good standing with the Secretary of State). A federal Debarred and Suspended status cannot be remediated.

At this time, federal memo M-21-20 allows entities to apply for grant awards without a valid UEI number. The UEI number must be obtained prior to grant execution. The State of Illinois has adopted this guidance for the issuance of state awards also.

Pursuant to the policy of the Illinois Office of the Comptroller, to receive grant funds from the State of Illinois, a grantee must be considered a regarded entity by the IRS for federal income tax purposes. Disregarded entities will not be eligible to receive grant funds.

1. Eligible Applicants include:

- Career education agencies; and
- Non-profit organizations, including but not limited to: local development corporations, chambers of commerce, community based outreach centers, and community based organizations that provide services to underserved businesses and entrepreneurs.

Each center must:

- Have a designated EEC Program Director;
- Be operated by a Board of Directors representing community leaders in business, education, finance, and government;
- Be incorporated as a not-for-profit corporation; and
- Be located in an area accessible to eligible Program Participants.

The Department complies with all applicable provisions of state and federal laws and regulations pertaining to nondiscrimination, sexual harassment and equal employment opportunity including, but not limited to: The Illinois Human Rights Act (775 ILCS 5/1-101 et seq.), The Public Works Employment Discrimination Act (775 ILCS 10/1 et seq.), The United States Civil Rights Act of 1964 (as amended) (42 USC 2000a-and 2000H-6), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 USC 794), The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 USC 12101 et seq.), and The Age Discrimination Act (42 USC 6101 et seq.).

2. Cost Sharing or Matching.

A minimum overall matching contribution of 100% of the grant amount is required. This must include a minimum cash match of 50% of the grant amount. The remaining 50% of the grant amount may be provided as in-kind (non-cash) to meet the total required of 100% match.

Cash Match: must be documented and may include host institution funds, state or local government contributions, or private investment. At least 50% of the total award amount must be committed as cash each program year.

In-Kind Match: may include allowable, documented costs such as staff salaries, facilities, or supplies used directly for Illinois Economic Empowerment Center program operations. In-kind match must comply with state cost principles and be verifiable.

All listed cash and in-kind match must be **committed up front** and identified by **source and amount/value** in the grantee budget. Contributors, requirements, specifications, and/or deliverables must be clearly identified in the application. Verification documents must be submitted with the application and may include, but are not limited to:

- Signed leases,
- Signed agreements,
- Signed letters of support,
- Signed MOUs, or

- Contracts.

3. Indirect Cost Rate.

Indirect costs are not eligible for this program.

4. Freedom of Information Act/Confidential Information.

Applications and accompanying materials are subject to disclosure in response to requests received under provisions of the Freedom of Information Act (5 ILCS 140/1 et seq.). Information that could be proprietary, privileged, or confidential commercial or financial information should be clearly identified as such in the application materials. The Department will maintain the confidentiality of that information only to the extent permitted by law.

5. Other, if applicable.

Applicants may submit multiple application for this opportunity.

D. Application and Submission Information

1. Address to Request Application Package.

Grant application forms are available at the web link provided in the “Grant Application Link” field of this announcement or by contacting the Program Manager:

Jael Olivares
Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity
555 W. Monroe, 12th Floor
Chicago, IL 60661
Email: CEO.EECProgram@illinois.gov

2. Content and Form of Application Submission.

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

- Uniform Grant Application in fillable PDF format.
 - Signature page must be signed by the authorized signatory before submission
 - Can be printed, signed, and scanned
 - Can be signed digitally
- Uniform Budget utilizing the template provided by DCEO for this project.
 - The entire Excel document with all the tabs included, even if the tabs are not relevant to the grant opportunity, must be submitted.
 - Do not send a restricted version of the Uniform Budget.
 - Certification page must be signed by the authorized signatory before submission
 - Can be printed, signed, and scanned
 - Can be signed digitally
- Conflict of Interest Disclosure.
 - Conflict of Interest Disclosure must be signed by the authorized signatory before submission
 - Can be printed, signed, and scanned
 - Can be signed digitally
- Mandatory Disclosure.

NOFO ID: 3226-4281

- Mandatory Disclosure must be signed by the authorized signatory before submission
 - Can be printed, signed, and scanned
 - Can be signed digitally

This Notice of Funding Opportunity also requires the submission of the following other programmatic specific items as part of the program application:

- Economic Empowerment Center Program Application.
- Supporting documents below. Follow the naming conventions provided in the Program Application and listed below.
 - File Name: Section 1.Organization Information
 - An electronic/digital photo of the project location
 - Copy of the CDFI Map Area, if applicable
 - IRS 501C Determination Letter
 - Mission Statement
 - Articles of Incorporation
 - File Name: Section 2A/2B
 - Optional supplemental documentation
 - Proof of Partnership/Backing Documents
 - File Name: Section 2C
 - Optional supplemental documentation
 - File Name: Section 2E
 - Copies of Organizational Chart
 - Staff/Board of Directors/Partner Resumes
 - Referral Letters/ Programmatic Letters of Support
 - Letters of Support for Match Requirement (both for Cash & In-Kind Funding, see C.2. for more information on these requirements)

Please note there is a maximum upload of 10 documents in the web form that you submit the application, so combining files may be necessary.

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

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

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

4. Submission Dates and Times.

Applications for this opportunity will be reviewed on a rolling basis.

Application materials must be submitted to the Department via electronic form at <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/2ba62593649141b284a59825d3cb957e>.

The Department is under no obligation to review applications that do not comply with the above requirements. Failure to meet the application deadline may result in the Department returning application without review or may preclude the Department from making the award.

5. Intergovernmental Review, if applicable.

N/A

6. Funding Restrictions.

This opportunity does allow reimbursement of pre-award costs. Other restrictions can be found in Sections A., B., and C.

7. Other Submission Requirements.

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

The applicant can receive a copy of their submitted application by checking the “Send me a copy of my responses” box at the bottom of the application submission form.

Applicants may confirm receipt of the application and documents by contacting the program contact listed in this NOFO.

E. Application Review Information

1. Criteria.

Grant proposals will be reviewed on a competitive basis. Each proposal will be scored on a 100-point scale. The Department shall consider the following criteria when evaluating the application submittal: Need, Capacity, and Quality:

Need- Identification of stakeholders, facts, and evidence that demonstrate the proposal supports the grant purpose	
Assessment of Local Economic Distress: Evaluates the applicant’s description of local economic distress and the need for and anticipated impact of the proposed EEC.	6
Alignment with Targeted Program Participants & Accessibility: Evaluates the applicant’s cultural competency and Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) integration, accessibility of their location, organizational experience, history of service to Targeted Program Participants, and demonstrated success in helping businesses launch and grow.	10
Mission Alignment: Evaluates clarity of the mission statement, its alignment with the EEC purpose, and confirmation of required document submission.	6
Location-Based Priority in CDFI Investment Area: Applicant’s EEC location is located in a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) Investment area.	3

NOFO ID: 3226-4281

Capacity- The ability of the applicant to execute the project according to requirements of the grant program	
Organizational Capacity & Past Performance: Evaluates the organization's recent experience delivering business advising and technical assistance to Targeted Program Participants.	5
Nonprofit Status, Staffing, Leadership, & Governance Capacity: Evaluates nonprofit status and documentation, Program Director qualifications, Board structure and representation, board member information, and staff/partner qualifications.	10
Partnerships & Support Network: Evaluates the organization's existing business support ecosystem, the strength of partnerships and backing from external institutions, and the quality of letters of support submitted.	10
Financial Capacity, Matching Funds, & Past Grant Fund Management: Evaluates whether the organization has secured the required matching contributions, clarity of funding sources, documentation provided, transparency regarding additional funding needs, and history of managing grant funds.	10
Advisory Council: Evaluates the clarity, feasibility, and completeness of the plan to establish an advisory group within the first three months of grant implementation.	5
Quality- The totality of features and characteristics of the project that indicate its ability to satisfy the requirements of the grant program	
Quality of Business Advice & Technical Assistance Plan: Evaluates the organization's business support ecosystem, referral system plan, tracking system plan, history of technical assistance to Targeted Program Participants, and track record of helping businesses launch and grow.	10
Quality of Education & Cohort Training Plan: Evaluates current training program impact, experience with evidence-based cohort training, the tailored Education and Cohort Training Plan, plans for ongoing technical assistance, DEIA and language-access integration, training timeline, and proof of partnerships.	10
Quality of Mandatory Client Services Delivery Plan: Evaluates the completeness, clarity, and feasibility of the organization's Mandatory Client Services Plan and outreach strategy, covering all required service components.	10
Quality of Work Plan: Evaluates clarity, completeness, and feasibility of the organization's work plan for implementing training and services during the grant period.	5

2. Review and Selection Process.

Applications will be graded using the Merit Review Process and scored on the criteria specified in Section E.1. Grants will be awarded utilizing a multi-phase review process. The process consist of a three-phase approach to fully evaluate applicants' applications:

1. Initial Review: OE3 staff will perform an initial cursory review as applications are received to ensure proposals are in compliance with basic form, content requirements, and verified for GATA pre-qualification. Applications that do not meet the compliance requirements will be denied. However, applicants may submit a new application for further review.
2. Merit Review: Applications will undergo an in-depth review on a first come first serve basis by a minimum of three (3) department staff persons. Reviewers utilize a Merit Review Scoring Rubric to evaluate the strength and completeness of the application. Following the in-depth review, the application scores are compiled. Applications that meet a score of 70% or above the total points available may be recommended for award. OE3 may consider geographic

coverage alongside grantee scores when making funding recommendations and may prioritize EEC projects located in Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) investment areas.

3. Following the Merit Review, OE3 staff develops funding recommendations, taking into account the available state appropriation levels for the EEC program. These recommendations are submitted for review, approval, and processing through the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.

The Merit Based Review process is subject to appeal per <https://dceo.illinois.gov/aboutdceo/grantopportunities/meritappreview.html>. However, competitive grant appeals are limited to the evaluation process. Evaluation scores may not be protested. Only the evaluation process is subject to appeal. The appeal must be submitted through the merit review appeal request form (<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/6444bed39ef140c589f002f53b9bc092>) within 14 calendar days after the date that the grant award notice has been published.

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

Successful applicants will receive a Notice of State Award (NOSA) to initiate the grant agreement phase. During this phase, you will be contacted by a grant manager to develop a grant agreement, which can be a months long process depending on complexity, cooperation, and conformity with all applicable federal and state laws.

The Department reserves the right to issue a reduced award, or not to issue any award.

F. Award Administration Information

1. State Award Notices.

The Notice of State Award (NOSA) will specify the funding terms and specific conditions resulting from the pre-award risk assessments and the merit-based review process. The NOSA must be accepted in the GATA Portal by an authorized representative of the grantee organization. The NOSA is not an authorization to begin performance or incur costs.

2. Administrative and National Policy Requirements.

Subrecipients and Subcontractors: Agreement(s) and budget(s) with subrecipients and subcontractors must be pre-approved by and on file with DCEO. Agreements can be submitted to DCEO when available. Subcontractors and subrecipients are subject to all applicable provisions of the Agreement(s) executed between DCEO and the grantee. The successful applicant shall retain sole responsibility for the performance of its subrecipient(s) and/or subcontractor(s).

Grant Uniform Requirements: The Grant Accountability and Transparency Act (30 ILCS 708/1 *et seq.*) (and its related administrative rules, 44 Ill. Admin. Code Part 7000), was enacted to increase the accountability and transparency in the use of grant funds from whatever source and to reduce administrative burdens on both State agencies and grantees by adopting federal guidance and regulations applicable to those grant funds; specifically, the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (2 CFR 200).

Procurement: Grantees will be required to adhere to methods of procurement per the Procurement Standards (2 CFR 200.317 – 2 CFR 200.327).

3. Reporting.

Periodic Performance Report (PPR) and Periodic Financial Report (PFR)

Grantees funded through this NOFO are required to submit in the format required by the Grantor, at least on a quarterly basis, the PPR and PFR electronically to their assigned grant manager. The first of such reports shall cover the first three months after the award begins. Pursuant to 2 CFR 200.328, Periodic Financial Reports shall be submitted no later than 30 calendar days following the period covered by the report. Pursuant to 2 CFR 200.329, Periodic Performance Reports shall be submitted no later than 30 calendar days following the period covered by the report. Any additional reporting requirements will be disclosed in the NOSA. Grantees are required within 45 calendar days following the end of the period of performance to submit a final closeout report in the format required by the Grantor (See 2 CFR 200.344).

The Department shall monitor the performance of each entrepreneurial assistance center and require quarterly reports from each center at such time and in such a manner as prescribed by Uniform Grant Agreement Reporting Schedule.

Monitoring

Grantees funded through this NOFO are subject to fiscal and programmatic monitoring visits by the Department in accordance with 2 CFR 200.337. They must have an open-door policy allowing periodic visits by Department monitors to evaluate the progress of the project and provide documentation upon request of the monitor. Program staff will also maintain contact with participants and monitor progress and performance of the contracts. The Department may modify grants based on performance.

Audit

Grantees shall be subject to Illinois' statewide Audit Report Review requirements. Terms of the Single Audit Act Amendments of 1996 (31 USC 7501-7507), Subpart F of 2 CFR Part 200, and the audit rules set forth under the Grant Accountability and Transparency Act Admin Rules shall apply (See 44 IL Admin Code 7000.90).

Additional Financial Reporting

Cash requests are to be submitted quarterly, at a minimum, however monthly is preferred.

Reports must include:

- Cash reimbursement request workbook.
- All time and effort forms (must be completed monthly).
- Expenditure backup documentation.
- Proof of matchings funds equal to or greater than the value of the voucher reimbursement request.

G. State Awarding Agency Contact(s)

Grant Help Desk
Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity
Email: CEO.GrantHelp@illinois.gov

H. Other Information, if applicable

Program Definitions:

- **“Career Education Agencies”** also known as career development agencies are organizations or government entities that focus on providing services and support related to career education and development. These agencies typically work to enhance and promote career-related skills, knowledge and opportunities for individuals.

NOFO ID: 3226-4281

- **“Chamber of Commerce”** means an organization of business and professional persons dedicated to improving the economic climate and business development of the community, area, or region in which the organization is located and that: (1) operates as an approved not-for-profit corporation; (2) is tax-exempt under Section 501 (c)(3) or Section 501 (c)(6) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986.
- **“Disability”** means, with respect to an individual: (i) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of an individual; (ii) a record of such an impairment; or (iii) being regarded as having an impairment.
- **“Dislocated Worker”** means individuals that:
 - a) Have been laid off, or terminated, or have received notice of layoff or termination due to a plant closure or mass layoff,
 - b) Are unemployed through no fault of their own, are eligible for or have exhausted their unemployment compensation and are unlikely to return to their previous occupation or industry,
 - c) Were self-employed (including farmers, and ranchers) and are unemployed as a result of general economic conditions in their community, or
 - d) Are displaced homemakers or those who have been dependent on another’s salary but are now without.
- **“Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion” or “DEI”** is recognizing the value of diverse voices, beliefs and values that project and emphasize on inclusivity regardless of culture, gender or status.
- **“Entrepreneurship assistance center” or “center”** means the business development centers or programs which provide assistance to primarily minority group members, women, individuals with a disability, dislocated workers and veterans that will be awarded through this initiative.
- **“Justice Involved”** means residents whose lives have been impacted by the criminal justice system because they or a close family member have spent substantial time in jail or prison.
- **“Minority business enterprise”** has the same meaning as provided for "minority-owned business" under Section 2 of the Business Enterprise for Minorities, Women, and Persons with Disabilities Act.
- **“Minority group member”** has the same meaning as provided for "minority person" under Section 2 of the Business Enterprise for Minorities, Women, and Persons with Disabilities Act.
- **“Not-for-profit”** also known as a nonprofit organization is an organization that operates for purposes other than generating profit for its owners or shareholders. Instead, its primary goal is to pursue a specific mission or purpose that benefits the public or a particular group of individuals. Not-for-profit can take various forms, including charities, foundations, educational institutions, religious organizations and social service agencies and are often involved in activities such as providing humanitarian aid, advancing education, promoting arts, supporting research, advocating for social causes and addressing community needs.
- **“Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Individuals (SEDI)-owned business”** is:
 - A business enterprise that certifies that it is owned and controlled by individuals who have had their access to credit on reasonable terms diminished compared to others in comparable economic circumstances, due to:
 1. Membership of a group that has been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudice or cultural bias within American society,

2. Gender,
3. Veteran Status,
4. Limited English proficiency,
5. Disability,
6. Long-term residence in an environment isolated from the mainstream of American Society,
7. Membership of a Federally or state-recognized Indian Tribe,
8. Long-term residence in a rural community,
9. Residence in a U.S. territory,
10. Residence in a community undergoing economic transitions (including communities impacted by the shift towards a net-zero economy or deindustrialization), or
11. Membership of an underserved community. "Underserved communities": Underserved communities are populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life, as exemplified by the list in the definition of equity. "Equity": Equity is consistent and systematic, fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality;
 - A business enterprise that certifies that it is owned and controlled by individuals whose residences are in Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) Investment Areas, as defined in 12 C.F.R. § 1805.201(b)(3)(ii);
 - A business enterprise that certifies that it will build, open, or operate a location in a CDFI Investment Area, as defined in 12 C.F.R. § 1805.201(b)(3)(ii)2;
 - A business enterprise that certifies that it is located in a CDFI Investment Area, as defined in 12 C.F.R. § 1805.201(b)(3)(ii). The CDFI Fund evaluates Puerto Rico, but not other territories, in identifying CDFI Investment Areas. For purposes of the SSBCI, Treasury has also evaluated American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands and has determined that these territories in their entirety constitute CDFI Investment Areas, because each of these territories has a poverty rate of at least 20 percent. See 12 C.F.R. § 1805.201(b)(3)(ii)(D)(1) ARPA Act of 2021(Pg 71 No. 15-18) (<https://www.congress.gov/117/plaws/publ2/PLAW-117publ2.pdf>).

For purposes of the definition of "**SEDI-owned business**," a business is "owned and controlled" by applicable individuals:

- if privately owned, 51 percent or more is owned by such individuals;
- if publicly owned, 51 percent more or of the stock is owned by such individuals; and in the case of a mutual institution, if a majority of the board of directors, account holders, and the community which the institution services is predominantly comprised of such individuals.

- "**Very Small Business**" or "**VSB**" – means a business with fewer than 10 employees and includes independent contractors and sole proprietors.
- "**Veteran**" means a person who served in and who has received an honorable or general discharge from, the United States Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, or reserves thereof, or who served in the Army National Guard, Air National Guard, or Illinois National Guard.
- "**Women-owned business enterprise**" has the same meaning as provided for "women-owned business" under Section 2 of the Business Enterprise for Minorities, Women, and Persons with Disabilities Act.

NOFO ID: 3226-4281

- **“Youth Entrepreneur”** means a person who is between the ages of 16 and 29 years old that is seeking community support to start a business in Illinois.