

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

Awarding Agency Name	Commerce And Econ Opp
Agency Contact	Ericka A. White (Ericka.White@illinois.gov)
Announcement Type	Initial
Type of Assistance Instrument	Grant
Funding Opportunity Number	FY26-1
Funding Opportunity Title	Small Business Development Centers
CSFA Number	420-35-0083
CSFA Popular Name	SBDC
Anticipated Number of Awards	57
Estimated Total Program Funding	\$5,585,000
Award Range	\$80000 - \$525000
Source of Funding	Federal and State
Cost Sharing or Matching Requirements	Yes
Indirect Costs Allowed	Yes
Restrictions on Indirect Costs	Yes : 13 CFR 130.460(C)
Posted Date	11/03/2025
Application Date Range	11/03/2025 - 12/03/2025 : 5:00 PM
Grant Application Link	Please select the entire address below and paste it into the browser... https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/2e2ff9e69bc64acdb64eb5894c672f01
Technical Assistance Session	Offered : Yes Mandatory : No Date : 11/14/2025 : 1:00 PM Registration link : https://illinois.webex.com/weblink/register/rbdc2f9187fcd6107f4e970c3717af2b7

Agency-specific Content for the Notice of Funding Opportunity Small Business Development Centers

NOFO ID: 0083-3201

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 seek qualified host organizations to operate Illinois Small Business Development Centers and provide program services.

Program Description

Overview

The Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, which, through a shared cooperative agreement with the United States Small Business Administration (SBA), serves as host to the Illinois Small Business Development Center (SBDC) Program Lead Center.

Consistent with the U.S. Small Business Administration’s national program purpose, Illinois SBDCs deliver professional, high-quality, individualized, confidential one-on-one advising and technical assistance to existing small businesses and pre-venture entrepreneurs. Centers provide professional assistance to help small businesses access capital, develop and exchange new technologies, and improve business planning, strategy, operations, financial management, personnel administration, marketing, export assistance, sales, and other areas required for small business growth and expansion, management improvement, increased productivity, and innovation.

SBDC Service Center

The Illinois SBDC Network provides services across Illinois through a direct-report model, in which each funded Service Center operates under a cooperative agreement directly with DCEO. Service Centers may establish satellite locations to extend service reach and accessibility within their defined service areas.

Each Service Center is responsible for fiscal management, compliance, program service delivery, reporting, and local partnerships. Satellites may not receive direct funding from DCEO but may operate under approved budgets within a Service Center’s grant agreement.

Specialty Focus

To align with SBA’s strategic focus and strengthen statewide expertise, applicants may also propose a specialty focus operating an International Trade Center (ITC) and/or offering statewide programming in Manufacturing.

Eligibility

- Service center applicants that have operated an Illinois SBDC Service Center for a minimum of three (3) years may submit a consolidated application to include one or more specialty designations.

Available Specialty Focus/Designations

- **International Trade Center (ITC):** provides training, technical assistance, advising, and other SBDC services, provided in person or virtually to small businesses on a wide variety of exporting and international trade issues and topics.

- **Manufacturing Specialty:** provides technical assistance to businesses in the manufacturing industry sector or any small business involved in onshoring activities.

All specialty-designated centers are required to operate in coordination with one another on a statewide basis, ensuring the delivery of targeted training and technical assistance while preventing unnecessary duplication of services.

Funding Priorities and Program Objectives

Illinois SBDC funding priorities are shaped by both SBA's national requirements and state economic development strategies. The responsibilities of the Illinois SBDC Lead Center, carried out through the activities of the service centers, include but are not limited to:

- (a) Expanding access to entrepreneurship services across the state, including rural communities.
- (b) Leveraging specialty designations (ITC, Manufacturing) to provide targeted expertise and deliver coordinated statewide trainings.
- (c) Improving outcomes for Illinois small businesses by supporting access to capital, fostering innovation, increasing exports, and strengthening management and operational capacity.

For a full list of criteria and program requirements, please see the supplemental Illinois SBDC Program Requirements and Definitions Guide.

Program History

Statutory Authority

The Illinois SBDC Network is authorized under the **Small Business Act, Section 21 (15 U.S.C. § 648), 20 ILCS 605/605-500(2), and Admin Code Title 14 Part 570.**

Background

The Illinois SBDC Network, launched in 1984, has grown into one of the most comprehensive and impactful networks in the country. Operated in partnership between the the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), and local host organizations, it provides a statewide system of advising and training centers that support entrepreneurs and small businesses at every stage of growth.

Purpose

The purpose of the Illinois SBDC Network aligns with SBA's national mission: to deliver high-quality, professional, and individualized advising and technical assistance to existing small businesses and pre-venture entrepreneurs. Illinois SBDCs help businesses access capital, strengthen management capacity, adopt innovation, expand into international markets, improve financial and operational practices, and increase productivity and competitiveness.

Leveraging of Resources

A hallmark of the program is the leveraging of resources. Federal funding is matched with state, local, and private contributions, ensuring accountability, cost-efficiency, and sustainability. This utilization of resources also expands the reach and depth of services, allowing Illinois SBDCs to provide impactful assistance to thousands of entrepreneurs each year.

SBDC Services

Through training and confidential one-on-one advising, the Illinois SBDC Network offers services in areas such as:

- Business planning, strategic planning, and financial analysis.
- Access to capital and investment readiness.
- Marketing analysis, market expansion, and e-commerce strategies.
- International trade readiness and export assistance.

- Government contracting and regulatory compliance.
- Disaster preparedness, cybersecurity, and workplace safety.
- Manufacturing/onshoring, AI/technology adoption, and innovation support.

Applicants should note that the Illinois SBDC Program is not a social service or workforce development program. Workforce training of employees is not an eligible activity; however, SBDCs are expected to collaborate with workforce development partners as part of a broader economic development ecosystem.

Benefits of Serving as a Host Organization

For host organizations, operating a service center provides significant benefits, including:

- Direct connection to and measurable impact on the small business community.
- Recognition for contributing to economic growth through job creation and capital investment.
- Enhanced understanding of community business needs.
- Collaboration with a statewide network of economic development stakeholders.
- Opportunity to leverage federal and state resources to advance the host's own economic development mission and expand impact.

Partnership Model

The Illinois SBDC Network operates under a partnership model, which emphasizes equal participation of federal, state, and local stakeholders in the strategic direction, operation, and service delivery of the network. Shared financial support is a defining characteristic, with local host partners expected to contribute and actively seek funding to meet and exceed the match requirement to support SBDC services and create lasting positive economic impact.

Importantly, the term “partnership” does not signify the creation of a legal entity. Instead, it reflects a relationship of mutual cooperation and shared responsibility to achieve common goals. This partnership model is central to the Illinois SBDC Network's long-term success and statewide impact.

Performance Goals and Measures

Illinois Small Business Development Center Goals

The Illinois Small Business Development Center (SBDC) Network Lead Center, in partnership with its federal and state funding partners, has set forth the following major program goal areas. The assignment and tracking of these goals correlate to the overall strategic plan of the state, positively impact the economy, and are utilized in the overall valuation of the SBDC program.

Performance measurement is intended not only for accountability but also to improve program outcomes. Results will be used to:

- Identify and replicate promising practices across the statewide network.
- Strengthen collaboration within the Illinois SBDC Network.
- Inform state-level policy and resource allocation to better support Illinois' small business community.

The following goals and indicators are required to be monitored by SBDC staff on an ongoing basis.

Economic Impact Results from SBDC Assistance

The area of economic impact is where the return on investment and the value added by the program are tracked. Impact data must be collected on an ongoing basis so that all service center performance can be regularly reviewed by the Lead Center. All economic impact information must be verifiable with approved client attribution documented.

Performance Indicators:

- Number of new jobs created
- Number of jobs retained

- Number of new business starts
- Number of debt financing transactions
- Number of non-debt financing transactions
- Dollar value of debt financing
- Dollar value of non-debt financing

Business Advice

The service center must provide business advising and analysis to existing and potential small business owners.

Performance Indicators:

- Number of advising clients
- Total hours of one-on-one advising (minimum 1,100 per \$80,000)
- Number of formal client pitches/presentations

Education and Training for Business

An annual training plan that meets the requirements of the program and the community will be submitted in January of each calendar year. This training plan will outline preliminary arrangements for sponsored and co-sponsored workshops, seminars, and events. Plans shall include any available information such as dates, times, speakers, locations, modality, and if the event is new or has been held in previous years.

Performance Indicator:

- Number of SBDC sponsored/co-sponsored seminars/workshops/events

Professional Development and Training

The continued professional development of all staff is required to maintain quality service for SBDC clients.

Performance Indicators:

- Number of hours of professional development training (40 per permanent full-time equivalent [PFTE])
- Number of hours of service in support of the Illinois SBDC Network (5 per PFTE)

Public Relations and Marketing Efforts

The development of an overall public relations and marketing plan to promote the services provided by the center, in accordance with Illinois SBDC branding requirements.

Performance Indicators:

- Number of client-approved success stories submitted during the program year (minimum 8)
- Number of events hosted in which local, state, and/or federal legislators and other key stakeholders are invited to visit the center (minimum 2, with 1 event associated with SBDC Day)

Specialty Focus Goals and Performance Measures

In addition to the statewide SBDC goals, centers with a **specialty focus** designation (International Trade Centers, Manufacturing) will be held to additional performance expectations aligned with their specialized role.

International Trade Centers (ITCs):

The Illinois International Trade Center (ITC) program has developed the following set of major program goal areas. These goals serve as a means by which the many important services and activities of the SBDC ITCs are tracked. The following goals and indicators are the minimum standards by which activities must be recorded. Additional goals and indicators may be added by an individual center after consulting with and receiving approval from the SBDC Lead Center.

Performance Indicators:

- Number of clients that receive advising on exporting and international trade.
- Number of clients that receive training on exporting and international trade.
- Dollar value of export sales
- Number of businesses participating in trade missions, shows, or international partnerships.
- Number of export market expansion plans developed.

Manufacturing Specialty:

Provides technical assistance to businesses in the manufacturing industry sector or any small business involved in onshoring activities.

Performance Indicators:

- Number of manufacturing clients that receive advising.
- Number of manufacturers assisted with adoption of advanced technologies (automation, AI, cybersecurity, lean practices).
- Number of onshoring and manufacturing industry-specific training sessions or workshops conducted.

Reporting and Accountability

Service centers are responsible for ensuring timely and accurate submission of all required programmatic and financial reporting, including data from specialty focus areas and satellites. Reports must be submitted in accordance with the schedules and formats outlined below in section F.3.

Other Information

The Lead Center reserves the right to assess proposed coverage to ensure balanced distribution of services and avoidance of duplication.

Governing Authority/Order of Precedence

This application is subject to the following requirements and representation, whether stated explicitly or incorporated by reference:

- Any Federal and State of Illinois statutes, regulations, and policy documentsThe SBDC Program Announcement 2026 issued by the Office of Small Business Development Centers of the U. S. Small Business Administration (SBA)
- Any terms and conditions cited in the formal application and grant agreement issued by the Department of Commerce/Illinois SBDC

B. Funding Information

This grant program is utilizing federal pass-through funds appropriated by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) and state matching funds appropriated by the Illinois General Assembly for grants to Small Business Development Centers. Total amount of funding expected to be awarded through this NOFO is \$5,585,000, contingent on receiving federal funds. Awards will range from \$80,000 to \$525,000. The Department expects to make up to 57 awards through this NOFO.

The anticipated start date for awards is January 1, 2026. The initial period of performance is January 1, 2026, through December 31, 2026. This NOFO covers a three-year period (January 1, 2026 – December 31, 2028). Applications should include a project plan that reflects this timeframe. Executed grant agreements will be issued for one year at a time, with the option for up to two (2) additional one-year awards.

Grant funds requested in applications and budgets must reflect a single year of funding and include a 100% match contribution. Successful applicants must provide a minimum of 50% of the match in cash.

These funds are to be identified and available at the beginning of each award year. The Illinois SBDC is a reimbursement program, and costs must be accurately recorded and reported in order to receive grant funds. Each Illinois SBDC is required to provide a minimum of 1,100 reportable hours of one-on-one advising per \$80,000 in grant funds received annually.

The Illinois Department of Commerce's regional focus facilitates reduced administrative costs, maximized use of available resources, and stronger regional coordination of small business assistance services to better meet regional needs.

Applicants must clearly demonstrate:

- How small businesses and entrepreneurs in the service area have been identified.
- How their needs have been assessed.
- How program services will be provided to address those needs across the region.

The applicant's service area must be clearly defined by county lines. In Cook County service area may be defined by neighborhood and/or street intersections. In order to provide geographical coverage across the state, the Lead Center reserves the right to award funding to one or more applicants in a specific territory. Where territories overlap or counties are left unserved, the Lead Center reserves the right to allocate funding to best meet the needs of the small business community.

Special consideration will be given to applications that best demonstrate cost-sharing, cooperation, coordination, and consolidation within their respective regions.

Responses to application questions must clearly describe how the award will be executed and include sufficient detail for DCEO to evaluate the scope of work, budget, and costs associated with each budget line. It must also provide evidence of capacity, quality, and need as defined in Section E.1..

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:

1. Has a valid FEIN number (<https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/get-an-employer-identification-number>)
2. 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;
3. Has a valid UEI number (<https://sam.gov>)
4. Is not on the Federal Excluded Parties List (verified at <https://sam.gov>)
5. Is in Good Standing with the Illinois Secretary of State, as applicable (https://www.ilsos.gov/departments/business_services/corp.html)
6. Is not on the Illinois Stop Payment list (verified once entity is registered in GATA Grantee Portal); and
7. 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:

- Fully accredited institutions of higher education such as public and private universities, state, and community colleges.
- Private nonprofit organizations engaged in economic development activities.
- Local counties or municipalities with established community/economic development departments and/or programs.
- Public economic development institutions such as workforce investment boards and economic development corporations.

Only applicants seeking to serve as an Illinois SBDC service center are eligible to receive direct awards from the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO). Satellites may be included in service center applications but will not receive direct funding from DCEO; they must be supported through subawards or MOUs with their service center partner. Service centers may submit consolidated applications to host specialty designations, including International Trade Centers (ITCs) and manufacturing specialties.

Each applicant shall demonstrate the following attributes:

- A well-established host organization (at least 5 years in operation) with a mission aligned to the Illinois SBDC mission.
- Fiscal soundness, with the ability to cash flow SBDC operations at the start of the program year and provide documented proof of required cash match sources.
- Experience in receiving, expending, tracking, and reporting government funding.
- Capacity to attract and retain a well-rounded, educated, and experienced staff committed to serving small businesses.
- Ability to identify and access a wide range of small business-related resources to support client needs.
- Defined service area aligned with geographical coverage of the state.

For a full list of criteria and program requirements, please see the supplemental Illinois SBDC Program Requirements and Definitions Guide.

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) match to meet the total required 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 SBDC program operations. In-kind match must comply with state and federal 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 MOUs, or
- Contracts.

3. Indirect Cost Rate.

In order to charge indirect costs to a grant, the applicant organization must have an annually negotiated indirect cost rate agreement (NICRA). There are three types of NICRAs:

a) Federally Negotiated Rate. Organizations that receive direct federal funding, may have an indirect cost rate that was negotiated with the Federal Cognizant Agency. Illinois will accept the federally negotiated rate. The organization must provide a copy of the federally NICRA.

b) State Negotiated Rate. The organization may negotiate an indirect cost rate with the State of Illinois if they do not have a Federally Negotiated Rate. If an organization has not previously established an indirect cost rate, an indirect cost rate proposal must be submitted through State of Illinois' centralized indirect cost rate system no later than three months after receipt of a Notice of State Award (NOSA). If an organization previously established an indirect cost rate, the organization must annually submit a new indirect cost proposal through CARS within six to nine months after the close of the grantee's fiscal year, depending on the grantee's audit type requirements.

c) De Minimis Rate. An organization may elect a de minimis rate of 15% of modified total direct cost (MTDC). Once established, the De Minimis Rate may be used indefinitely. The State of Illinois must verify the calculation of the MTDC annually in order to accept the De Minimis Rate.

All grantees must complete an indirect cost rate negotiation or elect the De Minimis Rate to claim indirect costs. Indirect costs claimed without a negotiated rate or a De Minimis Rate election on record in the State of Illinois' centralized indirect cost rate system may be subject to disallowance.

Grantees have discretion and can elect to waive payment for indirect costs. Grantees that elect to waive payments for indirect costs cannot be reimbursed for indirect costs. The organization must record an election to "Waive Indirect Costs" into the State of Illinois' centralized indirect cost rate system.

The following State University Facilities & Administration Rate and Base will apply to all State issued awards that contain either Federal pass-through funding or State funding.

RATE:

- 20% Rate for awards or programs administered On-Campus*
- 10% Rate for awards or programs administered Off-Campus*

BASE:

Base approved in the State Universities' current Federally Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA)

*Criteria for utilization of the On/Off campus rate is located within the general terms and conditions of Federal NICRA for each State University. If not clearly defined, State awarding agencies and officers will make final determination based upon the purposes of the grant scope.

The Illinois SBDC rules override general NICRA guidance and does not allow grantees to recover indirect costs from the grant funding provided for this program. However, grantees may utilize waived indirect costs toward the in-kind (non-cash) matching requirement of this award.

In order for a grantee to apply waived indirect costs toward the in-kind match requirement, one of the following must apply:

- The grantee has an approved Indirect Cost Rate Agreement from a cognizant federal agency;
- The grantee utilizes the 24% indirect cost rate agreement approved by the U.S. Small Business Administration for the SBDC program (only available to organizations that do not have a federally negotiated rate);
- The grantee elects the 10% de minimis rate of Modified Total Direct Costs (MTDC); or
- The grantee negotiates a separate state rate through the Centralized Indirect Cost Rate System (CARS).

Requirements for Rate Establishment:

- Organizations without a previously established indirect cost rate must submit a proposal to CARS no later than three (3) months after the effective date of the award.
- Organizations with a previously established rate must annually submit a new proposal through CARS within six (6) months after the close of the grantee's fiscal year.
- Once elected, the de minimis rate of 10% of MTDC may be used indefinitely. The State of Illinois must verify the calculation of MTDC annually in order to accept the de minimis rate.

Election and Documentation:

- Grantees that elect not to claim indirect costs cannot be reimbursed for indirect costs. The organization must record an election of "No Indirect Costs" in CARS.
- If an indirect cost rate is listed in the application budget and used toward the match requirement of the grant, a copy of the current Indirect Cost Rate Agreement must be submitted with the application.

Limitations:

- Indirect costs cannot be charged directly to grant funds under this program.
- Waived indirect costs may only be applied toward the in-kind match requirement if properly documented and approved.
- Indirect costs claimed without a negotiated rate or de minimis election in CARS are subject to disallowance.

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.

Costs for developing proposals, or for any subsequent audits, are entirely the responsibility of the applicant and shall not be reimbursed by the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.

Applicants may submit one 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:

Ericka A. White
Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity
1011 S. Second Street
Springfield, IL 62701
Tele: 800-252-2923
Email: Ericka.White@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.
 - 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:**

- ☐ Program Application: Sections 1 through 4 of the SBDC Program Application must not exceed a total of fifteen (15) pages. Section 5: Specialty Designations and Section 6:

Submission Checklist are not included in this page limit. Any pages exceeding the 15-page limit for Sections 1 through 4 will not be reviewed or considered.

- ☐ Illinois SBDC Personnel Detail Form and Organizational Charts
- ☐ Proposed Scope of Work
- ☐ Proposed Training Calendar
- ☐ Listing of Office Closures and Holidays for Program Year 2026
- ☐ Letters of Support (Optional)
- ☐ Any other required supplemental documentation noted in application

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 must be submitted by December 3, 2025 at 5:00 pm.

Application materials must be submitted to the Department via electronic form at <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/2e2ff9e69bc64acdb64eb5894c672f01>.

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 not allow reimbursement of pre-award costs. Other restrictions can be found in Sections A., B., and C, the Illinois SBDC Program Requirements document and the Definitions Guide.

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 300 point scale. The Department shall consider the following criteria when evaluating the application submittal: Need, Capacity, and Quality.

Applicants requesting designation as an International Trade Center or Manufacturing Specialty, will be evaluated with supplemental criteria worth up to 50 additional points per specialty function. These supplemental points are applied only to applicants requesting specialty designations.

Need- Identification of stakeholders, facts, and evidence that demonstrate the proposal supports the grant program purpose (100 Points)	
Assessment of geographical service area: Applicant provides clear definition of service area; includes geographical coverage	30
Market Sector Focus: Clearly defines market sector focus based on data-driven evidence and regional economic strengths	20
Client Needs: Demonstrates systematic, data-informed process to assess small business and community needs.	20
Screenings and Referrals: Explains proposed client screening and referral processes; process of compiling and maintaining an equitable listing of public and private resources for conflict-free referrals.	10
Education and training plan: Plan provided that shows how topics are selected (based on needs assessment) and aligned with client/community needs, includes proposed training schedule and collaboration with other service centers to avoid duplication.	20
Capacity- The ability of the applicant to execute the project according to requirements of the grant program (150 Points)	
Organizational experience and prior performance with government funding: Demonstrates history of managing government funds, organizational stability, and performance success.	10
Office Operations and Facilities: Describes facility layout, accessibility, storage/security of files and equipment, and continuity of operations during closures.	30
Fiscal Management and Cash Flow: Demonstrates ability to cash flow operations under reimbursement; identifies fiscal agent; describes internal fiscal controls.	30
Outside resources and partnerships: Evidence of partnerships/resources that align with SBDC partnership model and enhance advising, training, and client engagement.	10
Personnel and Staffing: Staffing adheres to SBDC staffing policies with organizational charts, personnel detail forms, resumes, and job descriptions; staff qualifications meet program requirements.	32

Performance indicators/measures: Proposed indicators are aligned with NOFO performance goals and are realistic.	8
Budget summary: Budget is accurate, reasonable, and aligned with program activities	30
Marketing and outreach: Applicant demonstrates compliance to Illinois SBDC branding requirements; includes targeted marketing campaigns individualized for the demographics served.	20
Hybrid and innovative service delivery: clear use of video, internet, and/or coalition partnerships to expand reach and efficiency.	10
Utilization of an advisory board specific to the SBDC Program: comprised of the appropriate member mix with listing included in the application package.	10
Completeness and quality of application package: application package is clear, complete, and professionally prepared.	10
Specialty Designations (50 Points)	
Client Advising Model: Describes specialized advising and readiness assessment for selected specialty (ITC, Manufacturing).	15
Partnerships: Describes partnerships that are relevant to the specialty focus and outlines collaboration mechanisms.	10
Training Strategies: Provides strategy for specialized training (exporting, manufacturing) with defined outreach, curriculum, and evaluation methods.	15
Budget Justification: States funding request for each specialty and provides a brief justification outlining how the funds will be used.	10

2. Review and Selection Process.

Applications will be graded using the Merit Review Process and scored on the criteria specified in Section E.1. The Department will designate an Evaluation Committee to grade each application received for this funding opportunity. The final score of each Committee member will be calculated and an average of all scores will be the final applicant score. Grants will be awarded utilizing a multi-phase review process. The process consists of a three-phase approach to fully evaluate applicants' applications:

Phase 1: INITIAL REVIEW

The Illinois SBDC Lead Center staff will perform an initial cursory review to ensure proposals are in compliance with basic form and content requirements. At this time the applications are logged in with the applicant's name, submission date, center type, and funds requested.

Phase 2: IN-DEPTH APPLICATION REVIEW

All applications undergo an in-depth review by a minimum of three department staff persons. Reviewers utilize the Application Review Instrument to evaluate the strength and completeness of the application. At least one of the reviewers must be an Illinois SBDC Lead Center staff person. Reviewers may also be selected from other Bureaus/Divisions of the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. Following in-depth review and scoring by at least three staff persons, the application scores are compiled.

Phase 3: LEAD CENTER RECOMMENDATIONS/FINAL REVIEW:

Following the completion of the Phase 2 Review, the Illinois SBDC Lead Center staff develops funding recommendations, taking into account the available state and federal appropriation levels for the SBDC program. These recommendations are submitted for review, approval, and processing through the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and Small Business Administration for funding approval.

The Merit Based Review process is subject to appeal. 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 in writing to the Department within 14 calendar days after the date that the grant award notice has been published. The written appeal shall include the name and address of the appealing party, the identification of the grant and a statement of reasons for the appeal. To file an appeal, applicants must submit the appeal in writing and in accordance with the Merit-Based Application Review Appeals Process listed on the Grant Opportunities page of the DCEO website:
<https://dceo.illinois.gov/aboutdceo/grantopportunities/meritappealreview.html>.

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

After the application period is closed, the Department will conduct a merit based review of eligible applications. 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).

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 Programmatic Reporting

- Client Advising Notes are to be entered regularly. The notes must be clear, concise, and highlight the advice given to the client. Entries should be reviewed prior to close of system on the following month.
- Quarterly Narratives – provide a high-level summary and highlight what is happening at the center. The categories that should be entered each quarter are as follows: Accomplishments during quarter, challenges/concerns/praise, key personnel changes/updates, ongoing efforts, upcoming scheduled events next quarter.
- Training events are to be entered regularly. Notes need to include when the training was conducted, including attendance and participant evaluations.
- Economic Impact metrics are to be entered regularly. Signed client verification for all reported economic impact results (jobs created, jobs retained, capital infusion, etc.) must be secured and maintained in client record within Neoserra. All centers have access to the use of the economic impact survey feature to document client-reported results. and must include signed client attribution
- Success Stories: Must be developed as they occur and reported in Neoserra. A minimum of eight (8) client-approved success stories must be submitted annually, highlighting the impact of SBDC services.
- Professional Development: Documentation of staff professional development hours (minimum 40 hours per PFTE annually)
- Stakeholder Events: A minimum of 2 stakeholder events must be held within the calendar year, one including SBDC Day.

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

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 Context

Applicants should carefully review the requirements of this NOFO, which differ from prior years. International Trade Centers and specialty designations are statewide coordinated specialty programs that may be awarded as part of consolidated applications.

Related Programs and Funding Opportunities

- Applicants should note in their narrative if they currently host or plan to submit an application for complementary small business support opportunities administered by the Department, such as the Illinois APEX Accelerator program, economic empowerment centers, etc.
- Information about other DCEO funding opportunities is available at:
<https://grants.illinois.gov/portal/>

Confidential or Proprietary Information

- Applicants are responsible for clearly identifying proprietary, privileged, or confidential commercial or financial information in their submissions. The Department will maintain confidentiality to the extent permitted by the **Illinois Freedom of Information Act (5 ILCS 140/1 et seq.)**.

Routine Notices

- The release of this NOFO does not obligate the State of Illinois or the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity to make an award.
- Only authorized grant officers of the State of Illinois may bind the State to the expenditure of funds.
- The Department reserves the right to negotiate the final scope of services, budget, and performance measures with successful applicants.
- Awards are subject to the availability of state and federal appropriations.