



## Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity

JB Pritzker, Governor

### Southwest Region Weekly Update January 16, 2026

#### STAR Bonds Expanded Statewide

Sales Tax and Revenue (STAR) bonds support economic growth by financing the development and revitalization of major tourism, entertainment, retail, and destination-based projects in STAR bond districts. The Statewide Innovation Development and Economy Act was recently expanded to extend the availability of STAR bonds to support municipalities in every region of the state by empowering them with additional financing options to meaningfully invest in capital projects that will attract visitors and spur additional revenues in local economies.

Governor Pritzker has signed **SB1911 (Public Act 104-0453)**, expanding Illinois' **Sales Tax and Revenue (STAR) Bonds** program so communities across the state can pursue major tourism, entertainment, retail, and other destination projects by leveraging a portion of **future sales tax growth** generated within a defined STAR bond district. ([Public Act 104-0453](#))

#### What's new and why it matters

- **Expanded local authority:** Counties and municipalities may establish STAR bond districts (including in eligible unincorporated areas).
- **Project scale:** District plans are evaluated against thresholds including **\$30M+ projected capital investment** and **\$60M+ annual gross sales** (with higher thresholds for NOVA districts).
- **State coordination & approvals:** District plans are submitted for joint consideration involving **DCEO, IDOR, and GOMB**, with final approval through the State process. ([Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity \(DCEO\)](#))
- **Key deadlines:** Local governments must **notify DCEO and IDOR of intent by June 1, 2026**, and proposed district plans must be submitted **by January 1, 2027**.

DCEO is providing a technical assistance webinar to explain this program expansion on Wednesday, **January 28, 2026** at 1:00 PM. To register, click [HERE](#).

To learn more or signal interest: Email [ceo.starbonds@illinois.gov](mailto:ceo.starbonds@illinois.gov) and visit: <https://dceo.illinois.gov/star-bonds>.

#### Manufacturing Training Academies Funding Opportunity

Governor JB Pritzker and DCEO announced \$24 million is now available in grant funding to establish six new Manufacturing Training Academies (MTAs) at community colleges in the state's downstate regions to expand

training for high-demand manufacturing jobs in Illinois. Grantees will be selected through a competitive Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) process.

Eligible applicants include community colleges outside of Cook and the collar counties, excluding previous MTA awardees. Through this competitive NOFO, qualified entities can apply for grants from \$3 million to \$6 million. Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis until April 30, 2026, at 5:00 p.m. or until funds are exhausted. To view the NOFO and apply for the grant, please visit the [DCEO website](#). Interested parties are encouraged to reach out to [CEO.GrantHelp@illinois.gov](mailto:CEO.GrantHelp@illinois.gov) for application assistance. DCEO will be hosting a [technical assistance](#) session on **January 28, 2026**, at 2:00 p.m. to provide assistance, answer questions, and provide information on becoming GATA pre-qualified.

## **ICJIA Announces \$50 Million to Restore Communities Impacted by Systemic Racism and Disinvestment**

The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA) announced two funding opportunities for the Restore, Reinvest, and Renew (R3) Program, totaling \$50 million in grants to historically underserved communities. ICJIA will allocate \$35 million to support community reentry from the criminal legal system, economic development, and civil legal aid programs, with another \$15 million allocated to support youth development and violence prevention initiatives.

R3 grant eligibility is evaluated every four years using mapped Census data and community-level data on gun injury, child poverty, unemployment, and state prison commitments and returns. Areas identified by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity as disproportionately impacted areas are also eligible. The current eligibility map identifies more than 900 eligible R3 areas.

Newer organizations often face challenges in managing grant administration, financial compliance, data tracking, and strategic leadership, diverting critical resources and time away from direct intervention work. ICJIA's Institute to Innovate (i2i) program offers tailored grant readiness and administration, organizational development, and performance and data management training designed to set R3 grantees up for success. Since its inception in 2021, ICJIA has awarded more than \$330 million in R3 grant funding to community organizations across Illinois.

Application materials, including instructions for applying, are available at <https://r3.illinois.gov/>. Applications must be submitted by March 6, 2026.

## **National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI) Program Round 3 Funding Update**

The third application period for Illinois's NEVI grant program is open! This round of funding will provide up to \$65 million for the construction and operation of light-duty and medium-/heavy-duty charging stations along Illinois's public roadways, including Scenic Byways, U.S. Routes, and Interstates.

The Round 3 NOFO and all application materials can be found on the IDOT [NEVI webpage here](#). The application period will be open until February 13, 2026.

## Introducing the CEJA Capacity Grant

The Workforce Policy Lab, in collaboration with the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), is excited to introduce the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA) Capacity Grant Program—a bold new initiative to strengthen a more inclusive and resilient clean energy future for Illinois.

Launching in 2026, this program will provide current and prospective DCEO CEJA grantees and sub-grantees with robust capacity-building support, along with grant awards starting at \$100,000. This direct investment will empower 501(c)(3) organizations across the state to scale clean energy workforce development, expand contractor opportunities, and drive equitable economic growth in communities statewide.

Ways to get involved include:

1. Join the Amplifier Session on **January 28, 2026**, from 10:00–11:30 AM, where you'll learn about the CEJA Capacity Grant Program model and help identify potential applicants who can make a lasting impact in their communities. Register [here](#) for the CEJA Capacity Grant Program Amplifier Session
2. Visit the program [website](#) to explore program details and stay informed about opportunities and updates.
3. Share the interest form found on the program website with your network so they can be the first to hear about the CEJA Capacity Grant when the opportunity goes live in February.

## Illinois DCEO Regional Site Readiness Program – Round 2

Governor JB Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) have announced \$31.5 million in funding as part of the Regional Site Readiness Program – Round 2 – an infrastructure grant program designed to help communities attract businesses, create jobs, and support community renewal. Through the program, entities can apply for funding to begin planning and prepare unused or unsuitable sites – such as abandoned factories or brown fields – for business or community development.

The program contains two separate categories: Planning and Capital Ready. Qualified entities can apply for Planning grants up to \$150,000 and Capital Ready grants up to \$5 million. Eligible applicants include local governments, economic development organizations, nonprofit organizations, and private landowners. Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis until March 31, 2026, or until funds are exhausted.

A Technical Assistance webinar session recording can be accessed at this [link](#). Below are links to the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for each grant:

[Regional Site Readiness Program Round 2 - PLANNING](#)

[Regional Site Readiness Program Round 2 – CAPITAL READY](#)

The Regional Site Readiness Program will build upon the State's efforts to support communities and landowners in their site readiness planning, assessments, and infrastructure improvements. This includes addressing the financial barriers faced when gathering information and making infrastructure improvements. The program will increase the number of sites with completed due diligence and expand the pipeline for future industrial site development. DCEO is investing in planning activities such as environmental due diligence and preliminary

engineering costs, as well as capital ready activities including capital improvements to road or water infrastructure to increase the number of sites ready for industrial development.

## Federal Grant Support Program – Round 2

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity's (DCEO)'s Federal Grant Support Program-Round 2 is open and will make \$16.9 million available to Illinois-based proposals seeking competitive federal grants. This match program will encourage more applicants to apply for federal grant opportunities, provide critical assistance to meet the minimum match eligibility requirements, increase the competitiveness of applications, and provide the State of Illinois with an opportunity to make a firm commitment and demonstration of support for projects that are well aligned with the State's economic development goals and priorities. For more information about the program, including links to the NOFO and application, visit this [link](#).

## Office of Accountability

Curious about the grant lifecycle or wanting to learn more about the different facets of grants? Do you have a grant-related question that you would like answered in real time? DCEO is pleased to offer three training options for current and potential grantees. Learn more and sign up to register at this [link](#).

### Virtual Office Hour Q & A - Tuesdays at 2pm:

Join for a virtual question and answer session via Webex in which potential and current Grantees may attend to ask questions and seek assistance. Technical Support Managers will be online to field questions, demonstrate steps, or provide instructions as needed to assist entities and individuals with the grant process.

### Pre-Qualification Training – 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday of the month 9AM:

This slide presentation will cover Pre-Qualification requirements. Pre-qualification is required of all grantees with the State of Illinois and must be maintained throughout a grant program. To be in pre-qualified status means that all required registrations have been met and an entity is in good standing and able to conduct business with the State of Illinois. Join DCEO's Technical Support Team as we explain each step in the pre-qualification process and how to get started.

### Various topics Training – 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of the month 9AM:

This slide presentation will discuss important grant-related topics pertaining to grant management. Each month we will discuss a different component, process, or emerging practice that can benefit potential and existing grantees. Register or view recording of past grant trainings at this [link](#).

- **January 21, 2026** - Help Desk Overview: (CSFA, GATA) This training will provide insight on the resources available to potential and current Grantees as they navigate the Grant process. Learn where to find grant opportunities, how to search the CSFA, and how to contact DCEO for assistance.
- **February 18, 2026** - Registering in SAM: This training will explain the steps required to apply for a Unique Entity Identifier, how to complete your SAM.gov registration and steps for registration renewal.
- **March 18, 2026** - Creating a GATA Registration: This training will show applicants how to create a GATA Grantee Portal Page and the different components of the GATA Portal.
- **April 15, 2026** - Notice of Funding Opportunities: This training will explain what a Notice of Funding Opportunity is and give a breakdown of the template and where to find information.

- **May 20, 2026** - Writing a Grant Application: This training will explain how to complete application documents, how to read a Notice of Funding Opportunity, and how to submit the application package for review.
- **June 17, 2026** - Overview of DCEO Programs: This training will give an overview of the Grant Program Offices at DCEO as well as our mission and background of the Agency
- **July 15, 2026** - Risk Assessments: This training will cover the required Risk Assessments for Grantees including the Internal Control Questionnaire and Programmatic Risk Assessment.
- **August 19, 2026** - Completing A Budget Application: This training will introduce the budget application and instructions on how to best complete the budget for application submission.
- **September 16, 2026** - Reporting and Supporting Documentation: This training will explain the Periodic Performance Report and Periodic Financial Report, as well as appropriate supporting documents required for submission.
- **October 21, 2026** - Indirect Cost Rates: This training will introduce potential and current Grantees to the Indirect Cost Rate system, the different types of elections and requirements, and the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders through the review process.
- **November 18, 2026** - Capital Grants: This training will explain what a capital grant is, requirements and eligibility for capital grants, application documents, and an overview of the grant lifecycle
- **December 16, 2026** – Audits: This training will introduce grantees to the different Audit types, requirements, and the submission process.

Need assistance with a grant-related question? Please email inquiries to [ceo.GrantHelp@illinois.gov](mailto:ceo.GrantHelp@illinois.gov) or use this [Help Desk Inquiry Form](#). All inquiries submitted outside of business hours will be addressed the following business day.

**For a complete list of current DCEO grant opportunities, upcoming grant trainings, video resource library and Grant Help Desk assistance, visit [DCEO Grants \(illinois.gov\)](https://illinois.gov)**

- [Regional Site Readiness Program Round 2 - PLANNING](#) -Rolling but final deadline is March 31, 2026.
- [Regional Site Readiness Program Round 2 – CAPITAL READY](#) Rolling but final deadline is March 31, 2026.
- [Manufacturing Training Academies](#): Applications due April 30, 2026.
- [SBIR/STTR Match Program](#): Application due June 30, 2026
- [Community Development Block Grant Economic Development Program](#): Applications are rolling
- [CDBG Disaster Response Program](#): Applications are rolling
- [Illinois Returning Residents Clean Jobs Program \(CEJA\)](#): Applications are rolling

## **Other Federal and State Agency Grants & Programs**

### **Illinois EPA Driving A Cleaner Illinois**

Illinois EPA is accepting applications to fund a portion of the eligible costs associated with the replacement (not repower) of eligible existing and licensed on-road diesel Class 4-8 medium- and heavy-duty local freight trucks (at least 14,001 lbs. GVWR) and Class 8 port drayage trucks (at least 33,001 lbs. GVWR). Each new replacement truck must be of the same type and class as the retired truck and be a licensed on-road all-electric Class 4-8 medium- and

heavy-duty local freight truck or Class 8 port drayage truck (hereinafter “all-electric trucks” or “electric trucks”) located and operated in any of the three VW Priority Areas established in the Beneficial Mitigation Plan.

The types of trucks covered under this NOFO are those used to haul and deliver freight or cargo, including delivery/box trucks, waste haulers, Class 8 port drayage trucks, landscape trucks, dump trucks, and freight/transport trucks. If the existing diesel truck to be replaced and the proposed new electric truck is not routinely hauling any type of freight or cargo by design or actual use, it is ineligible for this NOFO. In addition to providing funding for new all-electric trucks, Illinois EPA will also fund a portion of necessary new Level 2 or DCFC charging equipment if charging infrastructure is needed.

Applicants may find the NOFO and all application materials on the [Driving a Cleaner Illinois](#) website and also at Illinois’ [GATA webpage](#). Applicants must pre-qualify prior to application submission. The application period will remain open until funds are depleted. Applications should be signed, scanned and submitted to [epa.vwgrants@illinois.gov](mailto:epa.vwgrants@illinois.gov).

The Illinois EPA will accept applications for eligible new all-electric trucks and any necessary charging infrastructure for the trucks requested in this application. From a business or government entity located in the following VW priority area and the eligible trucks will operate in the priority areas:

- Priority Area 1: Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, and Will counties, Oswego Township in Kendall County and Aux Sable and Goose Lake townships in Grundy County
- Priority Area 2: Madison, Monroe, and St. Clair counties
- Priority Area 3: Champaign, DeKalb, LaSalle, McLean, Peoria, Sangamon, and Winnebago counties.

For a complete list of current IEPA funding opportunities, visit this [link](#).

## Illinois EPA Unsewered Communities Planning Grants

Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Acting Director James Jennings announced a new funding opportunity to assist communities where there are currently no wastewater collection and/or treatment facilities. Illinois EPA is making \$1 million available for grants through the Unsewered Communities Planning Grant Program, which will assist small and disadvantaged communities in developing a project plan that identifies a solution to wastewater collection and treatment needs. A Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) has been posted to the [Illinois EPA website](#).

The Unsewered Communities [Planning Grant Program](#) (UCPGP) provides grant funding to develop a plan that will address problems associated with the collection and treatment of wastewater in an unsewered community. Ultimately, this information can be used in an application for a project that would be funded by the Illinois Unsewered Communities [Construction Grant Program](#). Funding for the UCPGP is made possible by utilizing a portion of Illinois EPA’s Water Pollution Control Loan Program Loan Support funds generated from loan repayments. Applicants that qualify can receive funding up to \$30,000, and Illinois EPA expects to fund up to 50 grants.

All required forms and information are available on the [Illinois EPA’s UCPGP webpage](#). **The application period will remain open until all funding has been expended.** Applications will be reviewed for eligibility and completeness and awarded on a first-come, first-serve basis. Applicants must be pre-qualified through the [Grant Accountability and Transparency Act \(GATA\) Grantee Portal](#).

## Illinois EPA Lead Service Line Inventory Grant

Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has announced \$6.57 million to assist communities across the state in meeting the inventory requirements of the Lead Service Line Replacement and Notification Act (LSLRNA). More information can be found at this [link](#). Please note this grant program is for lead service line inventorying purposes only, and lead service line replacement costs are ineligible for this grant program.

## Illinois Electric Vehicle Rebate Program

The Illinois EPA will open the next EV Rebate Program funding round is now open! The funding round will run until January 31, 2026. There have been numerous changes to the rebate program; review changes on our [EV Rebate website](#) to determine if you are eligible to apply for the rebate.

**The application and instructions are now available on the Illinois EPA Electric Vehicle Rebate website.**

Applications will be accepted until January 31, 2026. Funding for the round is limited and low-income applicants are given priority for rebates.

Illinois residents that purchase a new or used all-electric vehicle from an Illinois licensed dealer, meet all other eligibility requirements, and apply during a rebate cycle will be eligible for a rebate. Applicants that certify as low income are given an enhanced rebate and priority in disbursement. EV rebates are subject to the availability of funds for each cycle. The Illinois General Assembly has appropriated \$14 million to Illinois EPA for the current fiscal year, which ends on June 30, 2026. Actual funding amounts will be determined by the amount of money available in the Electric Vehicle Rebate Fund, not to exceed \$14 million.

Applicants must apply during the rebate cycle window and within 180 days of purchase of the vehicle. The application and instructions will be available shortly before the opening of the rebate cycle on the Illinois EPA's [Electric Vehicle Rebate Program](#) webpage.

Eligibility requirements for an EV rebate in Illinois include, but are not limited to:

- The vehicle must be a new or used all-electric vehicle and legally permitted to drive on all public roadways, including interstate highways.
- The selling price of the vehicle cannot exceed \$80,000, not including state and local taxes, license and registration fees, documentary service fees, and aftermarket products, if itemized separately on the bill of sale.
- The vehicle must be purchased from a dealership licensed by the Illinois Secretary of State and be the owner of the vehicle at the time the rebate is issued. Rented or leased vehicles, vehicles purchased from an out-of-state dealership, and vehicles delivered to or received by the purchaser out-of-state are not eligible for a rebate under the Act.
- A rebate cannot have been previously issued for the vehicle that is the subject of the application. The Illinois EPA uses the vehicle VIN number to track issued rebates. A searchable list of vehicle identification numbers for vehicles that have received a rebate under the Act is below.
- The applicant must reside in Illinois, both at the time the vehicle was purchased and at the time the rebate is issued.

- The applicant must not have received a rebate under the Act in the 10 years prior to the date an application is received by the Agency.
- The applicant’s family income cannot exceed 500% of the federal poverty line for the current State fiscal year.
- The applicant must apply for the rebate within 180 days of the vehicle purchase date and provide and certify to all of the information specified in the application. The application must be postmarked during an open rebate application cycle.
- The purchaser must retain ownership of the vehicle for a minimum of 12 consecutive months immediately after the vehicle purchase date. The purchaser must register the vehicle in Illinois during that time frame.
- Only individuals can receive a rebate. Businesses, government units, organizations, and other entities that are not individuals that submit an application will be denied.
- The rebate amount cannot exceed the purchase price of the vehicle.

Applicants will need to submit the following along with the information contained in the rebate application:

- Copy of the bill of sale, purchase invoice, or purchase agreement from an Illinois dealership;
- Documentation of proof of purchase, such as a copy of a canceled check, an invoice or bill showing that the applicable amount has been paid or that no remaining balance exists, or loan documents
- Copy of the Illinois vehicle registration or temporary permit provided by the dealership at the time of sale/delivery; and
- IRS W-9 or W-8 form

## Helpful Resources

### **Illinois Catalog of State Financial Assistance**

As part of the Grant Accountability and Transparency Act, the State of Illinois maintains a “Catalog of State Financial Assistance” (CSFA). It includes information on state agencies that have active grant programs, a list of active grant programs, and a list of current funding opportunities. It also includes a link to subscribe to a weekly mailing list of new opportunities. For more information, click this [link](#).

### **Grant Accountability and Transparency (GATA)**

- GATA Grantee Portal: <https://grants.illinois.gov/portal/>
- GATA Grantee Portal New User Guide: <https://www2.illinois.gov/sites/GATA/Documents/Resource>
- GATU Resource Site: <https://gata.illinois.gov/>
- Catalog of State Financial Assistance (CSFA): <https://gata.illinois.gov/grants/csfa.html>
- DCEO Current Grant Opportunities: <https://dceo.illinois.gov/aboutdceo/grantopportunities/grants.html>

Audit Report Review Process Manual:

<https://gata.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/gata/documents/audit/audit-manual-august-2018-revision.pdf>

## DCEO Office of Accountability

- Office Hours for Grantees – Office of Accountability is hosting a weekly office hour **every Tuesday from 2-3pm** for any questions grantees or potential grantees may have.
  - [Sign up for any of these sessions with this link](#)
  - **Email Us:** [ceo.granthelp@illinois.gov](mailto:ceo.granthelp@illinois.gov)
  - Or use our Inquiry Form:  
<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/df9d38efa4e241218ced486c54f3c109>
- **Visit Our Website:**
  - [DCEO Grants](#)
  - Video Training & Resources Library [Video Training & Resources \(illinois.gov\)](#)

## State of Illinois Commission on Equity & Inclusion

The Commission on Equity and Inclusion (CEI) was created to expand access to state contracts for minorities, women, persons with disabilities, and veterans and assist the state in enhancing equity and inclusion throughout its workforce. CEI's reach into state hiring and contracting is expansive and encompasses the involvement of several state agencies and commissions.

The Business Enterprise Program (BEP) for businesses owned by minorities, women, and persons with disabilities is committed to fostering an inclusive, equitable, and competitive business environment that will support underrepresented businesses in increasing their capacity, growing revenue, and enhancing credentials.

### **Business Enterprise Program (BEP) Certification** [BEP Certification](#)

The Veterans Business Program (VBP) assists businesses owned by qualified service-disabled and veteran-owned businesses in gaining access to State of Illinois contracting opportunities and participating in the competitive procurement process.

### **Veterans Business Program (VBP)** [VBP Certification](#)

## Workforce Development – Office of Employment & Training

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

Programs and services:

- [Illinois workNet®](#)
- [WIOA Works Illinois](#)
- [Apprenticeship Illinois](#)
- [Trade Adjustment Assistance Program \(TAA\)](#)
- [WIOA Success Stories](#)
- [More Programs and Resources](#)
- [Illinois Workforce Development System \(IWDS\)](#)
- [Climate and Equitable Jobs Act](#)

## DCEO Business Information Center (BIC)

The BIC serves as a comprehensive resource for entrepreneurs and small businesses. Our services include assistance with licensing and permitting, resource referrals, small business environmental assistance, and regulatory alerts for small businesses.

### [License & Permit Assistance and Resource Referrals](#)

Contact us at [BIC@Illinois.gov](mailto:BIC@Illinois.gov) or 800-252-2923

Explore: [Self-Serve Knowledge Base](#)

### [Regulatory Flexibility Program](#)

Contact us at [ceo.regflex@illinois.gov](mailto:ceo.regflex@illinois.gov) or 217-299-1263

View our weekly [Illinois Regulatory Alert](#)

### [Small Business Environmental Assistance](#)

Contact us at [dceo.sbeap@illinois.gov](mailto:dceo.sbeap@illinois.gov) or 800-252-3998

Explore: [Frequently Asked Questions](#)

## DCEO Website – <https://dceo.illinois.gov>

The Illinois DCEO website includes a page dedicated to current state and federal grant opportunities as well as Grantee resources. Click [here](#) to find valuable information!

## Join DCEO's Team

DCEO's Team is expanding around the state. To view and apply for these jobs, please click this [link](#).

## Following DCEO & Connecting with Team RED

If you have upcoming meetings or events and would like DCEO to participate, please reach out to us. Follow us on our social media channels for real-time updates.

Facebook: [@illinoisdceo](#)

LinkedIn: [Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity](#)