

State Of Illinois To Celebrate Black Business Month In August

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SPRINGFIELD – To honor the contributions of Black-owned businesses across the state, today the State of Illinois, with the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) announced the celebration of Black Business Month by highlighting a series of events and initiatives taking place throughout the month of August. This monthlong celebration includes collaborations with community leaders, organizations, and business enterprises throughout the state, inviting Illinoisans to

“Shop Black-owned Business Saturdays,” as well as discussing opportunities for the community to access the upcoming “Back to Business” recovery assistance program through the ARPA.

“Supporting Black business owners and entrepreneurs is important for the health of our communities and for restoring the Illinois economy following the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “Since day one of my administration, we have committed to creating an inclusive business ecosystem, centered around equitable access to opportunities and resources. This guiding principle has been incredibly important given the profound impact the pandemic has had on minority and economically depressed communities and businesses. During Black Business Month, and throughout the year, I encourage all Illinoisans to join me in supporting Black-owned business and celebrating the immeasurable contributions and the critical role they play in our economy.”

While Illinois has over 132,000 Black-owned business, comprising 11 percent of all Illinois businesses, these business owners have historically experienced barriers in accessing capital and other key business resources. As part of a monthlong celebration, DCEO and several partner organizations will host a series of virtual events, exploring resources available to grow your business, and to navigate the impacts of the pandemic. All events are free to attend, and information and registration can be found on the [DCEO website](#).

• **August 11th: Advancing the Development of Minority Entrepreneurship? (ADME): Achieving Success with the Illinois SBDC Network**

Presented by DCEO and the Illinois SBDC Network, Advancing the Development of Minority Entrepreneurship (ADME) is a workshop for business owners to learn more about the State’s expansive business development center network – one of the largest in the nation with over 40 SBDCs, 9 PTACs, 9 ITCs. During this panel, business owners can learn how these community centers which are available on a year round basis can support new and existing businesses take their vision to the next level with planning, technical assistance, marketing, and more – all at no cost. To register, ([LINK HERE](#)).

• **August 18th: Navigating the Pandemic: Resources to Help Black Businesses Survive and Thrive**

DCEO-OMEE will host a group of business leaders to discuss how to leverage funding and grant opportunities to get on the road to recovery from the pandemic. Attendees will learn about technical support offered through community navigators who are on the ground listening and responding to your needs. To register, ([LINK HERE](#)).

• August 25th: Building Back Better: Charting Economic Recovery for the Black Business Community & Crafting the Roadmap for Access to Capital for Black Entrepreneurs

DCEO is teaming up with Groupon and community leaders to host a conversation with Acting DCEO Director Sylvia Garcia and leaders in business around access to capital and how they can foster an ecosystem of success. Also joining are Ron Busby, President, US Black Chamber of Commerce; Don Thompson, Founder and CEO, Cleveland Avenue; Eva Brown, Segment Leader, U.S Bank; Don Cravins, COO, National Urban League; Stephen Davis, Founder and Chairman, The Will Group. To register, ([LINK HERE](#)).

“Under Governor Pritzker’s leadership, the State of Illinois is committed to an inclusive business environment that helps businesses owned by people of color compete and thrive,” said Acting Director of DCEO, Sylvia Garcia. “We have teamed up with a broad range of organizations to celebrate the successes of Black-owned businesses throughout the month of August. This month long celebration will also provide an opportunity to highlight existing barriers and create a call to action for additional solutions, resources and supports needed to help Black businesses compete and succeed now, during the COVID-19 pandemic, and in the future as we build toward an equitable economic recovery.”

DCEO is leading the charge to encourage Illinoisans to “Shop Black-owned Business Saturdays.” Groupon is supporting this initiative, by featuring Black-owned businesses on their platform, providing shoppers an opportunity to support and learn more about businesses in their community and beyond. Groupon will also be providing a chance for business merchants to engage in all the resources available to expand their cliental reach through their business resource platform.

“At Groupon, we take our responsibility to champion the success of Black-owned businesses across Illinois and the nation very seriously, and we realize that this is a 365 day a year job that extends beyond Black Business Month,” said Aaron Cooper, Interim CEO, Groupon. “Even though progress has been made to bring the community together, there is still more work to be done to improve the success rates for Black-owned businesses, and implement solutions that address the ongoing systemic barriers and biases that exist for marginalized communities. On behalf of the Groupon team, and our merchants, I want to thank the Pritzker administration, as well as the business and industry organizations, community leaders, policymakers and countless participants that have come to the table to support the community as we continue on our path toward economic recovery.”

“Black Business Month is exciting because it gives us an opportunity to focus on a community that is far too often underrepresented when it comes to access to capital and opportunities to build wealth,” said Denise Moore, CEO of the Black Business Alliance in Peoria. “I want to thank Governor Pritzker for his steadfast commitment to addressing the equity gap in Illinois this month, and beyond. By celebrating the contributions of Black business owners and entrepreneurs in Illinois, we will not only pay homage to their legacy, but we will clearly acknowledge the important role that Black people in Illinois and across America play in our communities and our economy today.”

Over the past year and a half, the State of Illinois led a swift and equitable response to the pandemic – with DCEO making available over \$1 billion in economic assistance for businesses and communities so far. This includes over \$290 million and 9,000 business grants provided so far – including a record 40 percent of grants extended to minority owned businesses. To help address the sustained impacts of the pandemic on small and hard-hit business types, DCEO will again issue economic recovery dollars with the launch of the \$250 million Back 2 Business programs, set to launch in the coming weeks.

To boost outreach to minority and vulnerable communities, DCEO has expanded its community navigator program, putting resources and trusted community organizations in every region of the state to help local businesses apply. More than 130 organizations will join the department in leading these efforts, including the Greater Auburn Gresham Development Corporation.

“We are proud to serve in the State of Illinois Community Navigators program – where we are leading outreach efforts to ensure that Black owned businesses have a fair shot at upcoming ARPA economic recovery programs,” said Carlos Nelson, Chief Executive Officer of the Greater Auburn Gresham Development Corporation (GAGDC). “As an anchor organization in an area that saw adverse economic conditions even prior to the pandemic – we know firsthand the importance of information sharing for Black and minority owned businesses, who are often underrepresented. We thank the Pritzker administration for continuing to prioritize the needs of Black owned businesses during Black Business Month, throughout the pandemic, and beyond.”

The State’s Black Business Month activities are presented by the DCEO, Office of Minority Economic Empowerment (OMEE). OMEE plays a crucial role in providing support to minority owned businesses of all sizes and types, including connection with grants, technical assistance, and incentives to bolster minority entrepreneurs and minority-owned enterprises. For more information on National Black History Month events planned for businesses, contact Matthew J. Simpson, the African American Business Development Manager, at Matthew.Simpson@illinois.gov or to learn more

about ongoing resources and programs for businesses, follow DCEO on social media @IllinoisDCEO.