



Gov. Pritzker Announces \$250 Million Back To Business Grant Program To Accelerate Small Business Recovery Across Illinois

August 11 2021 10:24 AM

*Application Opens August 18th, Nation-Leading Community Navigator Program Ready
to Assist Businesses in Applying*



SPRINGFIELD - Governor JB Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) today announced the \$250 million [Back to Business \(B2B\) grant program](#) to support the continued recovery of small businesses across Illinois.

The first in a series of economic recovery programs set to launch by the administration, B2B will offer small businesses access to funds that can help offset losses due to COVID-19, bring back workers, and take continued steps to rebuild amid the fallout from the pandemic. The program builds on last year's Business Interruption Grant program, which provided \$580 million to small businesses and childcare providers across the state.

The state is also providing a \$9 million investment to grow the proven community navigator program, providing a robust network of community organizations to conduct outreach and provide technical assistance in the hardest hit communities. DCEO and community navigators will immediately begin working to provide businesses with information on required steps to apply, allowing them time to prepare before the application formally opens on August 18, 2021 – one week from today.

“Today, in partnership with the General Assembly, I’m taking another step to stimulate economic growth, jobs, and new opportunity for the people of Illinois,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “Further accelerating our economic recovery, we are announcing \$250 million in Back to Business grants to help small businesses all across Illinois hire back staff and cover operating costs. Small businesses are the backbone of Illinois’ economy, collectively representing the largest number of jobs in Illinois and the largest job creators. And here in Illinois, they’re also the cornerstone of our recovery.”

DCEO is making \$250 million available for small businesses across the state experiencing significant losses due to COVID-19. To reach the businesses most in need with these funds, DCEO will work alongside over 100 community navigators, 42 Small Business Development Center (SBDCs) and other outreach partners who have relationships with their local business community.

“Through the new Back to Business grant program, our administration is mobilizing our share of federal recovery dollars to provide grants that will help Illinois businesses continue with reopening, bring back their staff and rebuild stronger,” said DCEO Acting Director Sylvia Garcia. “At DCEO, we have already begun to join community navigators, chambers of commerce, economic development organizations, legislators and many other partners from around the state in getting the word out about the availability of critical resources for businesses still in need.”

While many business types and industries may apply, businesses in the following industries will be given priority status for grants: restaurants and taverns; hotels; arts businesses and organizations; and more. Additionally, businesses located within Disproportionately Impacted Areas (DIAs), as defined in statute, will be prioritized.

To reach the most vulnerable businesses, the State of Illinois has invested in an expansive outreach support infrastructure – grounded by a \$9 million investment to grow the proven community navigator program. DCEO and partners will conduct outreach and mobilize resources to remove any barriers that they may face to applying – including language support, gathering documents, and completing the application – these partners will deliver the technical assistance needed to help small, under resourced businesses claim available ARPA funds.

The community navigator approach has been recognized by the Biden-Harris administration as a national model, and it follows on investments made by State during the pandemic through the Small Business Development Centers and other community partners providing no-cost technical assistance to businesses in need. To find a community navigator near you, please visit <https://www2.illinois.gov/dceo/AboutDCEO/GrantOpportunities/Pages/CommunityNavigator.aspx>.

DCEO and its grant administrator partner, Allies for Community Business (A4CB) will make awards on a rolling basis, according to priority criteria mentioned above. Additionally, businesses with revenues of \$5 million or less as well as those who did not receive an award during the Business Interruption Grant program will receive preference during the review period, with \$25 million set aside for businesses which applied but did not receive funding through that program. To help businesses with ease of applying, A4CB has launched a new and easy-to-use customer portal, allowing applicants to track and learn updates on their application status in real-time.

“Community businesses across Illinois continue to be impacted by the pandemic, and grant programs like B2B will give thousands of entrepreneurs much needed support,” said Brad McConnell, CEO of Allies for Community Business. “We are honored to continue working with the State to provide funds to the small businesses who need them most.”

B2B seeks to restore operational losses incurred during the COVID-19 pandemic and will provide grants ranging in size from \$5,000-\$150,000, commensurate with the amount of losses experienced. To be considered for a grant, applicants must demonstrate a reduction in revenue in 2020 as compared with 2019, and annual revenues of no more than \$20 million in 2019. Businesses must also provide two bank statements, a business owner ID, and federal tax returns for 2019 and 2020.

"We're grateful for the launch of the Back 2 Business Grant program, a crucial investment by the state of Illinois to support small businesses and accelerate business recovery to rebuild our economy post-pandemic," said Carly McCrory-McKay, Executive Director of the Champaign County Economic Development Corporation. "As one of thirteen Community Navigator hubs across the state of Illinois, we look forward to working with regional partners to assist with outreach and technical assistance to ensure programming and financial assistance is accessible amongst small businesses, hard-hit industries, and disproportionately impacted businesses."

“We are grateful to have been selected to participate in the Small Business Community Navigator Program,” said Cary Minnis, Executive Director of the Greater Egypt Regional Planning and Development, “Working with our partners, we look forward to ensuring equitable access to small business resources in the southernmost part of Illinois.”

“Cook County is honored to be a recipient of DCEO’s Community Navigator Grant as a part of the State’s Back to Business initiative. It will add to the County’s ongoing efforts to address the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 and the inequities amplified by the pandemic in our most vulnerable communities,” said Cook County Board of Commissioners President Preckwinkle. “Strategic, community-informed outreach

represents a critical piece in connecting business owners and residents with information, and this grant will allow us to continue to meet small business owners where they are in this moment. This is equity in action.”

“This program will offer small minority owned businesses a real opportunity to apply for funds that are essential to their long-term well-being, and to the state’s strong economic resurgence after the pandemic,” said Jaime di Paulo, President and CEO of the Illinois Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. “As a community navigator, I’m glad we will be able to assist businesses with submitting complete applications to ensure they receive a fair shot at a grant.”

“The DCEO Community Navigator program works for two reasons. First, it recognizes that the Covid-19 pandemic continues to challenge small businesses. Second, the program works because it relies on trusted community partners to help underserved and underrepresented businesses secure the financial support they need to recover and thrive into the future,” said Christopher Merritt, Executive Director, Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs.

B2B builds on the success of the Business Interruption Grants (BIG) program, first launched by the Pritzker administration last year to provide emergency assistance for businesses facing acute operational impacts due to COVID-19. The largest economic support program of its kind at the time – BIG delivered on its intended goals of serving the hardest hit industries in the hardest hit places. The program deployed \$580 million to small businesses and childcare providers across the state – including over 9,000 small business grants awarded through DCEO. Moreover, a record 40 percent of grants were awarded to minority-owned businesses – a testament to the work of the community navigators program piloted to help reach more underserved businesses in minority and rural communities across the state.

“Small businesses are vital to our economy, and they were some of the hardest hit by the pandemic,” said Senate President Don Harmon. “I am hopeful that this investment will help them recover and thrive in the years to come.”

"This new program has expanded on previous grant programs for business," said Majority Leader Greg Harris. "Not only are there more resources, we have targeted funds for disproportionately impacted communities and also specific types of small businesses, like hospitality, tourism, arts and culture, which have been particularly hard hit by COVID."

“This is the shot in the arm that our small businesses need to continue to grow and once again thrive in this COVID-era economy. And when our small businesses thrive, so do our communities,” said Assistant Majority Leader Elizabeth Hernandez.

“Small businesses create jobs, attract tourism and underpin our communities—they’re fueling our state’s economic recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic,” said State Senator Laura Murphy (D-Des Plaines). “But our main streets need support to bounce back. The Back 2 Business program has enormous positive potential not just for businesses, but for our communities as a whole, as we revive and expand our local economies.”

“Throughout the pandemic, providing support to our small businesses has been a priority, starting with the BIG program last year and continuing on with the Back to Business program now,” said State Senator Cristina Castro (D-Elgin). “I commend Gov. JB Pritzker and the hardworking folks at DCEO for helping ensure that our most vulnerable businesses bounce back and thrive as we work to recover from the last year and a half.”

“It has remained a top priority of mine to help all small businesses build back better,” said State Senator Elgie Sims (D-Chicago). “Like all of us, small business owners suffered unimaginable stress over the past year, but the losses our small businesses experienced have put a tremendous strain on growing local economies. I am proud to lead Democratic efforts in the Senate to ensure needed dollars reach the communities hardest hit by the pandemic as we work to ensure every small business owner’s voice is heard.”

"Many small businesses and non-profits impacted by COVID-19 have not received any or little financial support. This situation is unacceptable and is about to change with this new program that focuses on helping businesses in industries severely affected by the pandemic. Our communities will appreciate this funding that allows rebuilding the state's economy from the bottom up," said State Senator Omar Aquino (D-Chicago).

“The Back to Business grant program is exactly the boost our most vulnerable businesses need in order to rebound from the challenging times we've recently experienced,” said State Representative Sonya Harper (D-Chicago). “I applaud Governor for listening to our concerns and coming up with a program that truly works for disproportionately impacted businesses and communities.”

“The Back to Business grant will be a lifeline for the small businesses in the communities we serve,” said State Representative Theresa Mah (D-Chicago). “Some of these businesses were so small or so challenged by previous grant opportunities that they were not equipped to take advantage of them, or they were so severely impacted that they did not receive enough assistance. For them this program is coming just in time.”

“As we continue our economic recovery from this pandemic, it is imperative for our state to continue its support of the small businesses that line our bustling communities,” said State Representative Aaron Ortiz (D–Chicago). “As I walk our business districts and hear from our merchants, many immigrants who rely on the income generated to support their families, I understand how vital these programs are in maintaining the spirit of our communities. I am proud to support the Back to Business Grant Program that continues to prioritize the small businesses that serve as an important engine in our neighborhoods.”

For more information on B2B, how to apply and where to access small business assistance, please visit dceo.illinois.gov. DCEO and partner organizations will hold webinars over the next several weeks to provide virtual technical assistance on demand. To receive regular updates on economic recovery programs, capital assistance and other economic development programs, [subscribe to the DCEO newsletter](#), or follow us on social @IllinoisDCEO.