

Gov. Pritzker Announces First \$24 Million In Back To Business Grants To Support Small Businesses

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State Urges Small Businesses to Apply for \$226 Million in Remaining Funds Before October 13 Deadline

CHICAGO – Governor JB Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) today announced the first grants have been awarded through the Back to Business (B2B) recovery program. To help businesses facing acute operational impacts due to COVID-19, 521 grants totaling more than \$24 million have been provided to small businesses in 146 cities across the state. The first wave of funds provided through this program support an array of diverse businesses representing industries and geographies hardest hit by the pandemic, and with more than half of the grants provided to minority-owned businesses across Illinois.

Overall, the B2B program allocates \$250 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars for small businesses experiencing COVID-19 losses, and grants will continue to be awarded on a rolling basis. Eligible businesses are encouraged to apply before the October 13 deadline by visiting the [DCEO website](#).

“I am excited to announce the first \$24 million in Back to Business grants – just the beginning of our efforts to distribute over \$250 million to small business owners across the state,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “This first wave of B2B funds will help over 500 of our state’s entrepreneurs rehire staff and cover operating costs – without owing a single cent back. And as Illinois rebuilds and recovers, we will continue to step up for our small businesses. They deserve to breathe easier and dream bigger – it’s our mission to deliver the funds and resources they need to do so.”

“These grants will be the bridge to economic stability for many of these wonderful businesses that are the backbone of our state’s economy and provide jobs and a positive presence in so many communities,” said Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton.

To help restore operational losses incurred during the pandemic, the B2B program will provide grants ranging in size from \$5,000 to \$150,000, commensurate with losses experienced. The administration will continue to accept applications for B2B grants through October 13, 2021.

“To help the most vulnerable small businesses in Illinois recover from the pandemic, our Back to Business (B2B) program provides grants to assist with operational costs like payroll, rent, and working capital,” said DCEO Acting Director Sylvia Garcia. “Under Governor Pritzker’s leadership – we are working to accelerate the recovery of small businesses that are the backbone of our economy and a pathway to economic opportunity for so many Illinoisans. For any businesses out there who have yet to receive or who are still in need of assistance –the State of Illinois and our partners stand ready to help you apply for these funds before the October 13 deadline – awards are being made on a rolling basis, so don’t wait, apply today.”

The first wave of funds announced today has reached businesses that are most in need of support due to the pandemic. The breakdown of the grants made thus far includes:

- 81 percent of funds provided for businesses that applied to the Business Interruption Grant (BIG) program, but did not receive funding
- 71 percent to businesses in disproportionately impacted areas (DIAs), or low-income zip codes that experienced high rates of COVID-19
- 66 percent to hard-hit industries, including restaurants and taverns, hotels, arts organizations, and salons
- Funds have primarily gone to the smallest businesses
- 54 percent going to businesses with revenue under \$500,000 in 2019
- 74 percent going to businesses with revenue under \$1 million

Building on efforts to shape an equitable recovery, of B2B funds deployed thus far, more than half have gone to minority-owned businesses. This includes 17 percent of grants made to Black-owned businesses, 12 percent to Latinx-owned businesses, 21 percent to Asian American or Pacific Islander (AAPI) owned businesses, and 1.2 percent to multiracial and/or Native American owned businesses. On average, recipients of B2B grants experienced revenue declines of 39 percent last year.

To make B2B grants more accessible to the most vulnerable businesses, DCEO has invested \$9 million in a comprehensive outreach model leveraging support from over 100 trusted, local organizations – “community navigators” performing outreach and technical assistance with applications. To date, DCEO and the community navigators have conducted direct outreach to more than 125,000 unique businesses and have hosted hundreds of virtual and in-person canvass events. To find a community navigator near you, please visit the [DCEO website](#).

“My thanks to the State of Illinois for the thoughtfulness that went into the Back to Business program,” said Chris Setti, CEO, Greater Peoria EDC, a community navigator. “The experiences learned from earlier programs helped shape an opportunity that was straightforward and clear in its goals, especially in helping those who had not been helped before. The addition of a statewide network of Community Navigators helped to ensure that every business had an opportunity for help.”

"As a community navigator hub organization for DCEO, our organization has leveraged partners in the area to engage hundreds/thousands of small businesses around B2B recovery grants," said Courtney Yockey, President, and CEO of the Effingham Regional Growth Alliance. "We are working on behalf of our region to ensure that the most

vulnerable businesses are aware of this grant opportunity, to provide them the support needed to get a grant, and to further Governor Pritzker's efforts to help businesses get back on track as part of our statewide recovery."

"Thanks to support by the State of Illinois, we will use our Back 2 Business grant to help pay our staff and cover the cost of inventory and produce that's increased significantly as a result of the pandemic," said Ezequiel Fuente, owner of Mi Tierra Restaurant in Little Village. "Like many family-owned businesses in Little Village, Mi Tierra faced hard times last year, but we have been creative in finding safe ways to continue serving our popular Mexican cuisine for the community. This grant is a lifeline and will support us as we continue to fully reopen, bring back our staff, and provide excellent service to both our regular and new customers."

The B2B program includes set-asides for hard-hit sectors, DIAs, as well as for businesses that have yet to receive small business relief - as required in statute set forth by the Illinois General Assembly. While many business types and industries may apply for B2B, businesses in the following sectors will be prioritized: restaurants and taverns, hotels, arts businesses and organizations, and more.

"These latest grants prioritize the business sectors and communities hardest hit by the pandemic so our economic recovery can be faster and more equitable," said House Majority Leader Greg Harris (D-Chicago). "I'm glad these grants are being distributed as expeditiously as possible to save jobs and revitalize the community businesses we all treasure."

"It has remained a top priority of mine to help all small businesses build back better," said State Senator Elgie Sims (D-Chicago), Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee. "And I'm especially eager to ensure dollars reach the communities hardest hit by the pandemic. This program serves as a support system for those who've struggled in receiving funding assistance in the past. I hope many of you take advantage of these additional resources and I look forward to the opportunity of making our small business owners' voices heard."

"The pandemic has further highlighted the financial fragility of many small businesses in communities of color," said State Senator Celina Villanueva (D-Chicago). "And I'm extremely proud of the work done by the General Assembly to restore dollars in our most vulnerable communities. The Back 2 Business Program will act as a stimulus to give our businesses the resources to come back stronger and more resilient. I encourage those in need of additional assistance to take advantage of this opportunity. Please do not wait until it's too late."

“In the past months, I’ve had the pleasure to meet hardworking and innovative small business owners in my district that have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic,” said State Representative Edgar Gonzalez (D-Chicago). “It’s imperative that we continue to push for businesses in communities of color to apply for the B2B grant and provide technical assistance along the way. To my Latino community, I urge you to apply, this will help ensure our communities continue to thrive.”

Businesses with revenues of \$5 million or less as well as those who did not receive an award during the BIG program also receive preference during the review period, with \$25 million set aside for businesses that applied but did not receive funding through that program. Additionally, businesses located within DIAs, are being prioritized, with more than \$100 million in funds set aside for these zip codes.

DCEO and its grant administrator partner, Allies for Community Business (A4CB) will make awards on a rolling basis, according to priority criteria mentioned above. To help businesses apply, 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.

“We are thankful for all of the hard work that the Governor and his team have invested thus far in designing and executing a huge, fast, and thoughtful grant program,” said Brad McConnell, CEO of Allies for Community Business. “We have much more work to do, and we look forward to serving thousands of additional small businesses throughout Illinois in the coming weeks.”

To be considered for a grant, applicants must demonstrate a reduction in revenue in 2020, compared to 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.

Since the onset of the pandemic, the Pritzker administration has efficiently granted relief for businesses and communities hit hardest during the pandemic. B2B builds on the success of the Business Interruption Grant (BIG) small business emergency relief program from earlier this year, which provided \$290 million to more than 9,000 businesses in 98 counties statewide. The largest of its kind economic support program at the time, the BIG program also provided more than 4,000 childcare business provider grants. In total, the state’s childcare and other small business relief grants will provide more than \$1.5 billion to childcare providers, bars and restaurants, entertainment venues, hotels, and other hard-hit small businesses across the state.

For more information on the B2B program, or for assistance with the application, please visit [DCEO’s website](#).

