



DCEO Commemorates Black History Month

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CHICAGO – The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) today launched its annual Black History Month campaign, designed to honor and uplift the contributions of Black Illinoisans, business owners and leaders. As part of the month-long celebration, DCEO launched a [webpage](#) featuring events and resources, including resources to support Black-owned businesses, a social media toolkit, [proclamation](#) and more.

The 2024 theme, *Knowing the Past Opens Doors for the Future*, pays homage to Illinois' rich Black history and celebrates the economic contributions of Black Illinoisans.



“Black-owned businesses are vital to Illinois' economy and building generational wealth,” **said Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton.** “When you support Black businesses and entrepreneurs, you help local communities thrive.”

“Black-owned businesses are the backbone of so many Illinois communities, contributing both economically and culturally to our state’s rich and diverse past and present of entrepreneurship and innovation,” **said Governor JB Pritzker.** “This month, we not only celebrate their contributions but also look forward to a future where black-owned business continue to thrive in every corner of our state.”

Many businesses of color face unprecedented challenges when it comes to accessing essential business resources. DCEO is committed to creating an equitable business environment through targeted initiatives and resources designed for businesses owned by people of color.

“DCEO is proud to celebrate, uplift, and reflect on the achievements of Illinois’ Black businesses and entrepreneurs,” **said DCEO Director Kristin Richards.** “Black-owned businesses play a critical role in our state’s economy and DCEO is committed to supporting Black-owned businesses as they work to launch and expand. Knowing the history of these businesses is essential to understanding the importance of their impact on the state during Black History Month and beyond.”

“There are more than 148,000 Black owned businesses in Illinois,” **said Matthew J. Simpson, DCEO African American Business Development Manager.** “This Black History Month we celebrate the achievements and contributions of these businesses, while reflecting on the vast history of Black business owners and entrepreneurs across the state. We are committed to providing support and resources to help Black business continue to thrive across Illinois.”

DCEO's Black History Month campaign is led by the DCEO’s Office of Minority Economic Empowerment (OMEE). Throughout the year, OMEE works to create an inclusive business ecosystem for communities that have traditionally faced systemic challenges to growth, which includes Black business owners and entrepreneurs. Some key highlights from OMEE during the past year include:

- In 2023, OMEE participated in 61 engagements geared primarily toward Black Illinoisans population with over 3,100 estimated attendees present.
- OMEE, in partnership with grassroots organizations, local governments and economic development organizations, launched the first of its kind [Statewide Black Business Survey](#). OMEE participated in more than 11 events across the state to share pivotal findings from the survey.

- Secured \$11 million for Black-owned businesses through APEX Accelerator Assistance.

Black History Month Events

The events below are free to attend; interested parties are encouraged to register on the [DCEO website](#).

Online with OMEE – Overview of Financial Resources for Small Businesses

Wednesday, February 7 | 10–11 a.m. | Virtual

OMEE Business Development Managers host a monthly virtual conversation that is open to all minority-owned businesses. Team OMEE will provide attendees with updates about federal and financial resources available at the state and federal level and answer questions attendees have about their business. The OMEE team will provide answers to questions in both English and Spanish.

Knowing the Past Opens Doors for the Future: Black Business Panel Discussion in Partnership with Chicago Urban League

Wednesday, February 14 | 10-11:30 a.m. | Virtual

In partnership with Chicago Urban League Center for Entrepreneurship, OMEE will convene long standing business owners from across the state, representing industries where Black businesses have deep roots. These industries include food and restaurants, health and beauty, arts and entertainment and professional services. The panel discussion will cover each business's history of entrepreneurship in the state, lessons they have learned and insights they would like to share.