Illinois Solar for All
A STATE PROGRAM

Securing and Leveraging State of Illinois Small Business and Diversity Certifications: Webinar

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Topics We Will Cover

- Introductions
- Value of Certifications
- Relevant Business Certifications
- Certification Details by Jurisdiction
- Tips and Resources
- Small Business Interview
- Questions and Answers

The Value of Small Business Certification in Illinois



Why Get a Business Certification in Illinois?

- **Certification can create access and support business growth.**
  - Access additional education on contracting and subcontracting processes
  - Become more visible to primes and procurement teams
  - Qualify for contracts with small business set asides
  - Participate in targeted outreach and matchmaking
  - Demonstrate verified ownership or status to prospective partners
  - Build relationships with larger firms seeking certified partners
  - Enter new markets and customer networks
  - **Note**: *Certification does not guarantee an award of any contracts or awards*

Why Certifications Can Feel Overwhelming

- **The certification landscape can be difficult to navigate.**
  - Multiple certification programs and certifying entities
  - Different eligibility and documentation requirements
  - Administrative time investment
  - Uncertainty about certifications customers recognize
  - Certification does not automatically equal contracts
- **The goal: Be strategic, not certified for certification's sake.**



Start With the Opportunity, Not the Certification

Before investing your time and resources, ask: What are you trying to access? Certification should align with your growth strategy.

- **Who do you want to work with?**
  → State agencies? Municipalities? Utilities? Corporations? Prime contractors?
- **Where do you want to secure contracts and build relationships?**
  → National, Illinois state-wide? County or City?
- **What opportunities are you pursuing?**
  → Government prime contracts? Enterprise prime contracts? Subcontracts? Supplier diversity opportunities? Partnerships?
- **Which certifications do those customers recognize?**

Relevant Business Certifications

STATE OF ILLINOIS, COOK COUNTY AND CITY OF CHICAGO PROGRAMS

Certifications Small and Emerging Businesses Should Know

Not every certification is equally relevant to every business.

Certification	Certifier	Think About It If Your Business…
State of IL Business Enterprise Program	*Commission on Equity and Inclusion*	Will provide services and products to State of Illinois or agencies like CTA, IDOT, METRA, PACE. *No fees ($0)*
State of IL Veterans Business Program	*Commission on Equity and Inclusion*	At least 51 percent owned by veterans living in Illinois and seeking to compete for procurements. *No fees ($0)*
State of IL Small Business Set Aside	*State of IL Chief Procurement Office*	Seeking to compete for contracts exclusively set aside for small businesses by State of IL Chief Procurement Officer
County or City Level Minority / Women's / Veterans – Business Enterprise	*Local City / County*	You plan to pursue local city or county contracting. Fees are variable.

Certifications Small and Emerging Businesses Should Know

Not every certification is equally relevant to every business.

Certification	Certifier	Think About It If Your Business…
Women Business Enterprise Certification (WBE)	*Women's Business Development Center*	Controlled by and at least 51% owned and operated by one or more women and are seeking to do business with private companies. *Starts at $350 in cost*
Minority Business Enterprise Certification (MBE)	*National Minority Supplier Development Council*	Controlled by and at least 51% owned and operated by individuals of a recognized minority group and seeking to do business with private companies. *Starts at $270 in cost*

Your Certification Roadmap For Illinois

- **1. State of Illinois Business Enterprise Program (BEP) or Veterans Business Program (VBP)**
  - Start here if State agencies, universities, or State prime contractors are priority customers. (**There is a "fast-track option if you already have a Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) or Women's Business Enterprise (WBE) certification)
- **2. State of Illinois Small Business Set Aside Program**
  - Pursue this program when you meet its eligibility rules and the opportunity matches your growth plan.
- **3. County or City Level (ex. Cook County or City of Chicago)**
  - Choose the local certifier tied to your target contracts. MBE/WBE reciprocity may reduce duplicate applications.
- **4. Match each certification to your trade**
  - Use accurate specialty descriptions, licenses, commodity codes, and project examples for roofing, construction, solar, or electrical work.

Certification Details for Illinois Trade Contractors

STATE OF ILLINOIS, COOK COUNTY AND CITY OF CHICAGO PROGRAMS

State of Illinois Business Enterprise Program (BEP) Certification

- **Your business qualifies with (all must be met):**
  - At least 51% owned and controlled by one or more minorities, women, or persons with disabilities
  - Qualifying owner is a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident
  - Annual gross sales under $150 million
- **Why it matters**
  - Free certification and a public directory listing
  - State buyers and prime contractors can identify eligible trade firms for BEP participation
  - Full certification lasts seven years; file an annual No Change Affidavit
- **Process**
  - Apply through State of IL Commission on Equity and Inclusion Portal; turnaround time is stated as 60 days after application submission (average).

State of Illinois Veterans Business Program (VBP) Certification

- **Your business qualifies with (all must be met):**
  - At least 51% owned by qualified veterans or service-disabled veterans living in Illinois
  - An Illinois home office
  - Valid military records (ex. DD214)
  - Annual gross sales under $150 million
- **Why it matters**
  - Free certification and a public directory listing
  - State buyers and prime contractors can identify eligible trade firms for VBP participation
  - Full certification lasts seven years; file an annual No Change Affidavit
- **Process**
  - Apply through CEI's portal; CEI typically decides within 60 days of a complete application

State of Illinois Small Business Set Aside Program (SBSA)

- **Your business qualifies with:**
  - An Illinois business with annual gross sales:
    - Retail/Service less than $8 million
    - Wholesale less than $13 million
    - Construction less than $14 million
    - Manufacturing less than 250 employees
- **Why It Matters:**
  - Over 600 supply/service classifications set-aside
  - All awards under $100,000 set-aside for qualified small businesses
  - All State procurements considered for set-aside program
- **Process**
  - Register through the State of Illnois website. *Contact the Small Business Set-Aside Program at (217) 720-2206 or email CPOGS.SmallBusiness@Illinois.gov.*

County Level Example: *Cook County Business Enterprise Certification*

- At least 51% owned, operated, and controlled by qualifying owners
- Independent business with technical expertise in the certified trade
- Headquarters and most full-time employees in Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, or Will County
- Certifications: MBE, WBE, VBE, SDVBE, and PDBE
- $250 for MBE/WBE; no fee for VBE, SDVBE, or PDBE



City level Example: *City of Chicago Certification Program*

- Programs covered: MBE, WBE, VBE, and BEPD
- Qualify toward contract-specific participation goals or incentives
- Appear in the City's searchable certification directory
- Market approved specialty areas to prime contractors before bids are released
- Chicago and Cook County have reciprocal MBE/WBE programs..



Certification Resources: Where Do I Start?

- ILSFA SEB Resource Team
- State of Illinois CEI (Manages BEP Program): https://cei.illinois.gov/
- Illinois Chief Procurement Officer Team https://cpo-general.illinois.gov/vendor.html
- Cook County Business Enterprise Development https://www.cookcountyil.gov/agency/business-enterprise-development
- ComEd and Ameren Illinois Utility MDI Programs
- City of Chicago Department of Procurement Services

Tips and Resources

Easing Your Administrative Effort For Applications

- **To minimize the administrative burden, create a reusable folder of files containing:**
  - Articles of incorporation / organizational documents
  - Ownership documentation
  - Operating agreement or bylaws
  - Business licenses
  - Tax filing from past three years
  - Most recent financial statements
  - Résumés of owners/key personnel
  - Contracts or evidence of business activity
  - Proof of ownership and control
  - Required affidavits or supporting documentation
- **Most certification processes take 60-90 days from applying to becoming certified**

Avoid These Common Certification Mistakes

- **Applying without a business reason**
  → Know what opportunity the certification supports.
- **Underestimating documentation requirements**
  → Gather records before beginning the application.
- **Submitting inconsistent business information**
  → Make sure ownership, titles, addresses, and corporate records align.
- **Getting certified…and doing nothing afterward**
  → Register for procurement events, introduce yourself to primes, and monitor opportunities.
- **Forgetting renewals**
  → Track expiration dates and renewal requirements. Set an annual calendar reminder
- **Trying to do everything at once**
  → Prioritize certifications based on your business development strategy.

From Certification to Opportunity

CONVERSATION WITH A CERTIFIED ILLINOIS SMALL BUSINESS



Thank You and Questions

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Securing & Leveraging State of Illinois Small Business and Diversity Certifications webinar

- Please take a moment to complete the Exit Survey and help us improve our offerings

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