



State of Illinois
Commission on Equity and Inclusion



FISCAL YEAR 2024

STRATEGIC PLAN

Commission on Equity and Inclusion
FY24 Strategic Plan and Impact Report





Commission on Equity and Inclusion Strategic Plan and Impact Report Fiscal Year 2024

Overview

The Illinois Commission on Equity and Inclusion (“CEI”) continues its focus on strategic prioritization to meet its statutory objectives and support its Business Enterprise Program (“BEP”) and Veteran Business Program (“VBP”) goals and objectives. This strategic plan serves as a roadmap for achieving CEI’s mission of maximizing supplier and workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion. It outlines CEI’s key objectives, initiatives, and priorities to ensure fair access to contracting and job opportunities while promoting inclusive and equitable procurement and hiring processes. With a well-defined strategic plan, CEI can align its efforts, resources, and actions to effectively drive positive change, foster a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment, and impact supplier and workforce diversity, equity, and inclusion within Illinois.

Mission Statement

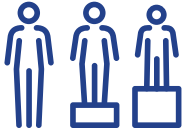
CEI’s mission is to maximize supplier and workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion, by ensuring access to contracting and job opportunities by developing procedures and initiatives that make the procurement and hiring processes inclusive, fair, and equitable while providing support, education, and mentorship.

Vision Statement

CEI’s vision is to be a trailblazing leader in fostering a diverse, equitable, and inclusive procurement and workforce environment, where supplier and workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion are celebrated, and opportunities are accessible to all, driving positive social impact and economic growth.

Core Values

Core values are the fundamental principles and beliefs that guide an agency's actions, decisions, and behavior. They serve as a compass, defining the agency's identity and shaping its culture. Having well-defined core values is essential for an agency as they provide a clear framework for establishing a shared vision and purpose. They create a common understanding among employees, stakeholders, and the community about what the agency stands for and the principles it upholds.



Equity

CEI is committed to promoting fair access and equal opportunities for all, ensuring that procurement and hiring processes are equitable and free from bias.



Inclusion

CEI embraces the richness of diverse identities, experiences, and perspectives, fostering an inclusive environment where everyone's voice is valued and respected. Innovation CEI continuously seeks innovative approaches and best practices, striving for excellence in all initiatives to achieve the highest standards of impact and effectiveness.



Empowerment

CEI is dedicated to empowering diverse businesses and individuals through education, mentorship, and supportive resources, enabling them to thrive and contribute to Illinois' economic growth.

Goals

Goals are vital to a successful strategic plan, providing clear direction and purpose for an entity's actions and initiatives. They serve as the foundation for decision-making, guiding the allocation of resources and efforts toward specific outcomes. A strategic plan becomes a roadmap for progress by setting measurable and attainable goals. It enables CEI to track its performance, measure success, and adapt strategies to achieve its mission and vision.



Collaboration

CEI believes in the power of collaboration, forging strong partnerships with stakeholders to collectively drive meaningful change in supplier and workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion.



Advocacy

CEI is committed to being a vocal champion for diverse businesses and individuals, advocating for equitable opportunities and policies that promote diversity and inclusion.



Results

CEI strives to achieve tangible and quantifiable outcomes that demonstrate the positive effects of its initiatives on supplier and workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion.



Experience

CEI prioritizes delivering exceptional service, ensuring all stakeholders receive the necessary support, education, and guidance to pursue diverse, equitable, and inclusive procurement and hiring practices.

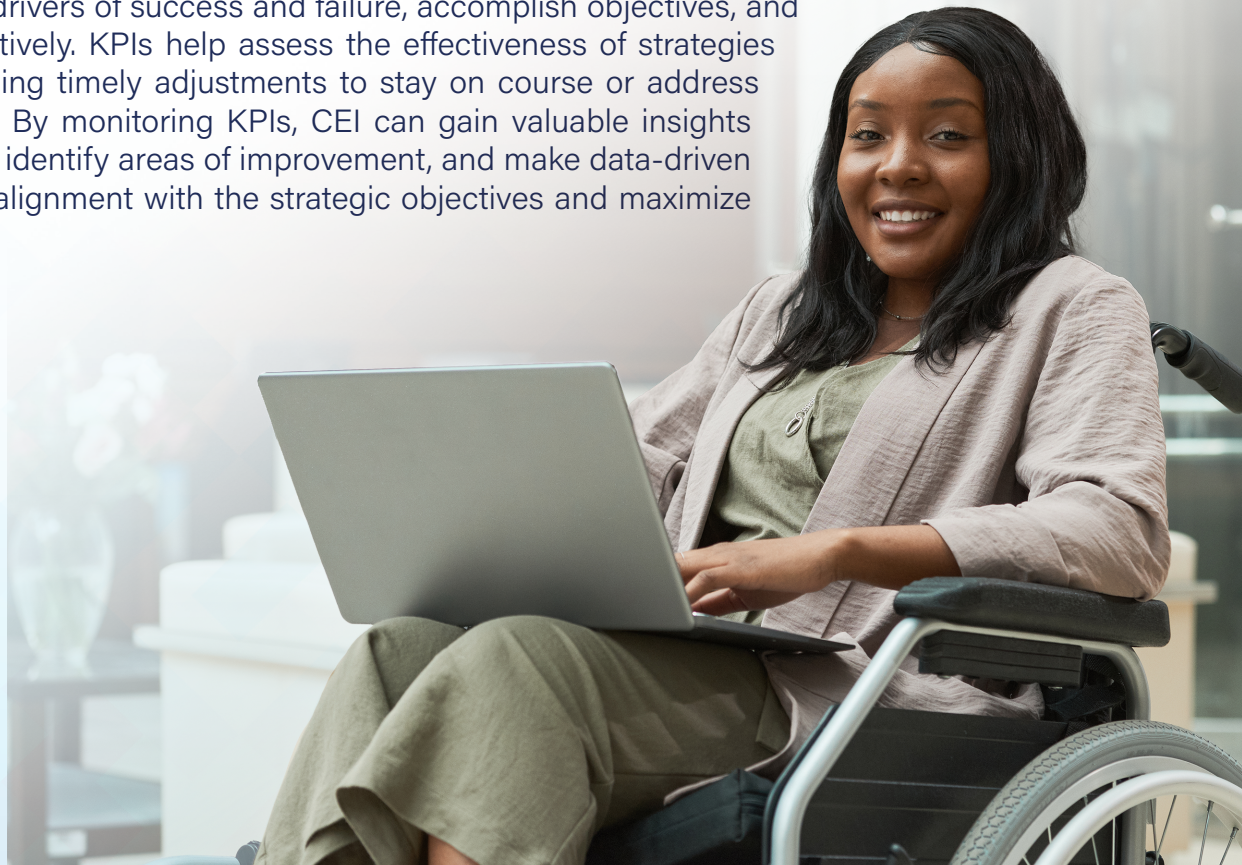
Growth Target Initiatives

This list of growth target initiatives outlines the specific objectives and initiatives to drive growth and progress within CEI. CEI carefully designed these initiatives to expand the reach and impact of CEI's mission, focusing on increasing supplier diversity, promoting workplace equity and inclusion, and fostering economic development among diverse businesses. By setting clear growth targets and strategic priorities, CEI aims to create a more inclusive and equitable procurement and workplace landscape, thereby contributing to advancing diversity and economic opportunities across the State. Through these initiatives, CEI endeavors to strengthen its role as a catalyst for positive change and a driver of meaningful progress in supplier diversity and workforce inclusion.

- Monitor the contract BEP and VBP goal commitments.
- Increase awareness of CEI's supplier and workplace diversity functions with purchasing agencies, public institutions of higher education ("PIHEs"), vendors, and other external stakeholders.
- Increase the accuracy and efficiency of CEI's supplier diversity tracking and reporting processes.
- Standardize supplier diversity processes and procedures.
- Increase purchasing entities' direct and indirect spend with BEP and VBP firms seeking procurement and contract opportunities.
- Create diverse business outreach initiatives that connect, inform, and increase engagement.

Key Performance Indicators

Collecting supplier diversity metrics and key performance indicators ("KPIs") will ensure continuous improvement and expansion. Measuring supplier diversity will help CEI understand the drivers of success and failure, accomplish objectives, and present results effectively. KPIs help assess the effectiveness of strategies and initiatives, enabling timely adjustments to stay on course or address potential challenges. By monitoring KPIs, CEI can gain valuable insights into its performance, identify areas of improvement, and make data-driven decisions to ensure alignment with the strategic objectives and maximize overall success.



CEI SWOT Analysis

CEI can identify its internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats by conducting a SWOT analysis. This analysis will help inform the strategic planning process, allowing CEI to leverage its strengths, address weaknesses, capitalize on opportunities, and mitigate potential threats in achieving its goals for the fiscal year 2024.

Strengths: CEI's strengths lie in its capable leadership, comprising experienced professionals with expertise in equity, inclusion, and procurement practices, facilitating its effectiveness. Additionally, CEI has established strong relationships and collaborations with state agencies, universities, and community organizations, enabling productive partnerships and information sharing. Furthermore, the growing societal awareness and support for equity and inclusion allow CEI to engage and leverage public backing.

Weaknesses: CEI acknowledges areas that require improvement, such as unreliable analytics and metrics, which could impact data-driven decision-making. A lack of standardized processes and procedures might hinder consistency and efficiency. Contract administration is another challenge, possibly leading to delays or complications. Staff vacancies create heavy workloads. CEI may face challenges when navigating complex procurement processes within purchasing entities. There may also be historical perceptions that hinder progress.

Opportunities: CEI recognizes various opportunities that can further its mission, including exploring sheltered market procurements, implementing internal and external training initiatives, and conducting outreach programs to reach diverse vendors. Leveraging pre-solicitation notices and post-solicitation surveys can enhance the procurement process's transparency and fairness. CEI can bolster supplier diversity by providing supplier diversity expertise during solicitation pre-bid conferences and promoting BEP firm registration in SBSA Program. Using inclusive language in solicitations can foster more diverse participation. Legislative initiatives and administrative rule updates can drive positive change. Collaborations with external stakeholders and technological advancements provide opportunities for growth and progress. Developing standardized processes and procedures can streamline CEI's operations.

Threats: CEI acknowledges potential challenges that impact CEI's efficiency and effectiveness. Addressing unreliable analytics and metrics and inconsistent practices is crucial for informed decision-making.

CEI can identify its internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats by conducting a SWOT analysis. This analysis will help inform the strategic planning process, allowing CEI to leverage its strengths, address weaknesses, capitalize on opportunities, and mitigate potential threats in achieving its goals for the fiscal year 2024.

CEI OAR Analysis and Impact Report

The purpose of an Objectives, Action Items, and Results (“OAR”) analysis is to provide a structured framework for evaluating and monitoring the progress and effectiveness of strategic initiatives. It involves clearly defining the objectives or goals an entity wants to achieve, developing a detailed action plan outlining the steps and activities required to reach those objectives, and assessing the results or outcomes of implementing the action plan. The CEI OAR analysis covers CEI’s objectives related to its statutory obligations under the CEI Act.

Additionally, this impact report provides stakeholders a clear understanding of the progress and outcomes achieved within a strategic plan. By presenting the status of initiatives, the information enables stakeholders to assess the strategic plan’s effectiveness and make informed decisions. Additionally, outlining the next steps in the report ensures a clear roadmap for continued progress and helps focus on achieving the desired objectives.

Objective 1: To enhance CEI’s role in procurement by establishing effective communication channels and streamlining interactions between the BEP Council, purchasing entities, Chief Procurement Officers, and other relevant stakeholders.

| Action Items | Results (KPIs) |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Develop and implement a comprehensive communication framework with regular meetings with external stakeholders, clear communication channels, and standardized documentation to facilitate information sharing and collaboration.2. Act as a central point of contact for inquiries, feedback, and clarification related to BEP Council decisions, procurement policies, and diverse vendor requirements, ensuring timely and accurate responses to stakeholders’ queries.3. Assess communication effectiveness, make improvements, and streamline information flow. | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Number of successful collaborations and partnerships facilitated by CEI between the BEP Council, purchasing entities, and CPOs, resulting in increased procurement opportunities for diverse vendors.2. Reduction in the time taken to resolve procurement-related inquiries or disputes due to improved communication and coordination facilitated by CEI.3. Percentage increase in the number of procurement-related information and updates to purchasing entities, CPOs, and other stakeholders.4. Percentage of favorable survey feedback. |

Objective 1 Status Update

Over the past year, CEI made significant progress in enhancing communication and stakeholder engagement. CEI developed a robust communication framework that includes regular stakeholder meetings, providing updates on BEP Council decisions, procurement policies, and diverse vendor requirements. Additionally, CEI identified and implemented clear channels to streamline communication, such as dedicated email addresses, enabling stakeholders to submit inquiries, feedback, and clarification requests easily.

CEI established an internal policy for managing and addressing stakeholder inquiries, recognizing the importance of prompt and accurate responses. This policy ensures that each query receives the necessary attention and that CEI promptly responds within specified timelines. Moreover, to monitor and track these inquiries efficiently, CEI implemented an internal system, enabling CEI to monitor each inquiry's status and ensure timely follow-ups.

Furthermore, CEI developed a shared inbox process to efficiently receive and monitor statutorily mandated procurement notifications, such as contract awards, potential conflicts of interest, sole source notices, emergency contract notices, and proposed leases. This streamlined process enhances CEI's ability to respond to critical notifications promptly and helps CEI stay proactive in fulfilling oversight responsibilities.

CEI has strengthened its communication channels through these efforts, enabling more effective and transparent communication with stakeholders. By fostering open dialogue and addressing inquiries promptly, CEI aims to build stronger relationships with stakeholders and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in procurement practices.

Objective 1 Next Steps

Moving forward, CEI is committed to advancing the objective of enhancing communication and engagement with stakeholders. To achieve this, CEI will focus on developing standardized documentation, including FAQs and guidelines, to address common queries and clearly explain BEP Council decisions, procurement policies, and diverse vendor requirements. This focus will streamline information accessibility and ensure stakeholders can access accurate and comprehensive information easily.

CEI will regularly assess the communication framework to improve communication efforts continuously. These assessments will help CEI evaluate the effectiveness of its current approach and identify enhancement areas. By gathering stakeholder feedback, CEI can ensure that communication strategies remain responsive to their needs.

Timely and efficient information dissemination fosters transparency and trust with stakeholders. To this end, CEI will promptly share relevant updates, changes, and clarifications with stakeholders. This effort will ensure they are well-informed about the latest developments and understand any modifications that may impact their engagement with the procurement process.

Recognizing the importance of skilled communication, CEI will provide training and support to CEI staff members involved in communication efforts. This training will enhance their abilities to handle stakeholder inquiries effectively, providing accurate and reliable responses. Empowering CEI staff with enhanced communication skills will further bolster CEI's commitment to open dialogue and promote a culture of responsive and accessible communication.

Objective 2: Develop a comprehensive scoring evaluation for State agency directors, public university presidents and chancellors, and public community college presidents, which will be founded on three principles: (i) enhancing capacity, (ii) fostering revenue growth, and (iii) advancing credentials to drive diversity and inclusion in procurement practices

| Action Items | Results (KPIs) |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a comprehensive scoring evaluation framework that aligns with the three principles. 2. Define clear criteria and metrics for each principle to ensure objective and standardized performance evaluation. 3. Provide feedback and recommendations to State agency directors, public university presidents and chancellors, and public community college presidents to support continuous improvement and strategic decision-making. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Average overall score achieved by State agency directors, public university presidents and chancellors, and public community college presidents based on the scoring evaluation framework, measured annually. 2. Level of stakeholder satisfaction with the scoring evaluation process and its alignment with the three principles, as measured through feedback surveys or feedback received from State agencies, public universities, public community colleges, and other relevant stakeholders. |

Objective 2 Status Update

In pursuit of its objective to develop a comprehensive scoring evaluation system, CEI has achieved significant milestones. CEI conducted an exhaustive review of existing performance evaluation systems, successfully identifying vital metrics and indicators to assess the three principles: increasing capacity, growing revenue, and enhancing credentials. CEI meticulously defined specific criteria and benchmarks to ensure objectivity and consistency.

CEI prioritized stakeholder collaboration, engaging relevant parties to provide input and feedback on the proposed scoring evaluation framework. Their valuable perspectives have significantly contributed to the development process, making CEI's approach more inclusive and well-rounded.

CEI distributed a survey to purchasing entity procurement and supplier diversity personnel statewide to gather comprehensive data for the evaluation system. CEI received 83 responses, although some were duplicates. These responses have provided CEI with invaluable insights into the principles' application and potential areas for improvement.

CEI scored 62 responses using the rubric, and responses include a description of the three survey principles and improvement recommendations. The scoring process has enabled CEI to evaluate the efficacy of CEI initiatives and identify supplier diversity opportunities.

Overall, the progress toward CEI's completion of this statutory responsibility has been substantial. CEI remains dedicated to refining the scoring evaluation system to maximize its impact on supplier diversity, equity, and inclusion within the procurement process.

Objective 2 Next Steps

As CEI moves forward to implement the scoring evaluation system, CEI has outlined several crucial next steps to ensure its success. CEI will promptly send the scored responses to the respective purchasing entities, providing them with valuable insights into their performance and adherence to the scorecard principles.

To foster an open dialogue and improvement, CEI will develop a process for feedback discussions, allowing purchasing entities to share their perspectives and provide input on the evaluation process.

In line with CEI's commitment to continuous improvement, CEI will establish a regular review and feedback mechanism to monitor the scoring evaluation's implementation. This effort will enable CEI to make necessary refinements or improvements as CEI gathers data and insights from various stakeholders.

Additionally, CEI will actively evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the scoring evaluation framework by analyzing performance outcomes, identifying areas of success, and addressing any challenges or areas for improvement. This ongoing evaluation will ensure that CEI's scoring system remains relevant, robust, and aligned with CEI's mission to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion within the procurement landscape. CEI aims to continuously enhance the supplier diversity ecosystem through these strategic next steps and drive meaningful change for all stakeholders involved.



Objective 3:

Enhance CEI's role and effectiveness by exercising specific powers and duties in alignment with the Procurement Policy Board, which includes reviewing and recommending procurement rules, offering training to chief procurement officers, conducting contract reviews, issuing recommendations, and holding hearings to address equity and inclusion violations, ensuring timely responses and decisions.

| Action Items | Results (KPIs) |
|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conduct a comprehensive review of existing procurement rules and practices to identify areas for improvement and recommend necessary changes to ensure equity and inclusion. 2. Develop and deliver training programs and professional development opportunities for chief procurement officers to enhance their understanding of equity and inclusion in procurement. 3. Establish a systematic process for reviewing contracts to identify potential equity and inclusion violations and recommend corrective actions. 4. Conduct thorough investigations and hold hearings when equity and inclusion violations are alleged, providing all parties with a fair and transparent opportunity to present their case. 5. Implement a time-bound response and decision-making framework to ensure the timely resolution of equity and inclusion violations and communicate clearly to all parties involved. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Number of recommended changes to procurement rules and practices implemented by chief procurement officers. 2. Percentage of chief procurement offices participating in training and professional development programs on equity and inclusion. 3. Number of contracts reviewed for equity and inclusion compliance and subsequent recommendations provided. |

Objective 3 Status Update

CEI has made significant progress in achieving the objective of promoting equity and inclusion within the procurement landscape. CEI has undertaken a thorough analysis and assessment of the current procurement practices to identify areas where CEI can improve to foster more significant equity and inclusion.

To ensure that CEI’s efforts align with stakeholders’ needs, CEI has consulted with chief procurement officers and other relevant parties. CEI has gathered valuable insights and feedback on the existing procurement rules and practices and their impact on equity and inclusion through these collaborations.

These critical steps have laid the foundation for CEI’s strategic initiatives to enhance equity, diversity, and inclusion in procurement processes. CEI will continue to work collaboratively with stakeholders, develop targeted interventions, and implement evidence-based practices to create a more equitable and inclusive procurement environment that benefits all businesses and communities across the State.

Objective 3 Next Steps

CEI will embark on a comprehensive and collaborative approach to further advance the objective of promoting equity and inclusion in procurement. CEI will assemble a cross-functional team comprising subject matter experts and stakeholders to conduct continuous reviews of existing procurement rules and practices. The purpose of this review will be to identify areas of improvement to enhance equity and inclusion.

Based on the findings, the team will develop recommendations and proposed changes to the procurement rules and practices, aligning them with equity and inclusion principles. CEI will then deliver tailored training programs and professional development opportunities for purchasing entities and the vendor community, equipping them with the knowledge and skills to integrate diversity, equity, and inclusion considerations into their procurement processes effectively.

CEI will establish a systematic process for reviewing contracts, identifying potential equity and inclusion violations, and promoting fairness and transparency to ensure ongoing compliance. CEI will institute regular evaluations and stakeholder feedback mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness of the implemented changes and initiatives, enabling CEI to make any necessary adjustments.

Through these concerted efforts, CEI aims to foster a procurement landscape that reflects the diversity of Illinois communities and empowers businesses of all backgrounds to thrive in an equitable and inclusive marketplace.

Objective 4: Collaborate with State agencies to establish and implement comprehensive support systems to promote diversity in State hiring practices.

| Action Items | Results (KPIs) |
|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assess current hiring practices and policies within State agencies to identify areas for improvement and opportunities to enhance diversity. 2. Establish partnerships with educational institutions, community organizations, and professional networks to create pipelines (like the Illinois Equity Office and IDHR) for diverse talent and increase the pool of qualified candidates for State agency positions. 3. Regularly assess and evaluate the effectiveness of diversity support initiatives and programs in State hiring, using stakeholder feedback, data analysis, and benchmarking against industry best practices. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Percentage increase in the representation of underrepresented groups in the State workforce, measured annually. 2. Average rating of State agencies' inclusive hiring practices as assessed through internal audits or external evaluations. 3. Level of employee satisfaction with diversity support initiatives in State hiring, measured through employee surveys or feedback mechanisms. |

Objective 4 Next Steps

CEI will take a proactive and collaborative approach to advance its objective of promoting diversity in State hiring. CEI will establish a joint working group comprising CEI representatives, purchasing entities, and relevant stakeholders to ensure effective coordination and partnership in supporting diversity initiatives.

The working group will comprehensively assess current hiring practices and policies within State agencies to identify areas that require improvement. Based on the findings, CEI will develop comprehensive guidelines and best practices for State agencies and public institutions of higher education to promote diversity throughout the hiring process.

To support agencies and public institutions of higher education in implementing these practices, CEI will create a centralized repository of resources, providing toolkits, templates, and diversity recruitment strategies. Additionally, CEI will establish partnerships with external organizations to expand outreach efforts and attract a diverse pool of candidates for State positions.

CEI will implement mechanisms for monitoring and tracking diversity metrics in State hiring processes to measure progress, collecting and analyzing demographic data. CEI will also foster an inclusive work environment by promoting diversity and cultural competence training for existing State agency employees and implementing policies that support diverse perspectives.

CEI will conduct regular evaluations to measure the effectiveness of the initiatives and programs, seeking feedback from State agencies, public institutions of higher education, and other stakeholders. CEI will continually make necessary adjustments to improve support for diversity in State hiring and create a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable workforce within Illinois.

Objective 5: Monitor and supervise the implementation of diversity training within the State workforce.

| Action Items | Results (KPIs) |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Develop a comprehensive scoring evaluation framework that aligns with the defined objectives, ensuring it covers critical areas such as awareness, knowledge, application, and impact of diversity training.2. Develop criteria and metrics for diversity training, including participation, completion, knowledge retention, behavior change, and impact on workplace diversity.3. Establish mechanisms to collect data and feedback from employees who undergo diversity training, such as surveys, assessments, and performance evaluations. | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Employee feedback on the relevance and effectiveness of the diversity training, as measured by satisfaction surveys and feedback mechanisms.2. Percentage of State workforce employees who complete a diversity training program, measured annually.3. Number of State workforce employees who complete the survey. |

Objective 5 Status Update

CEI has made significant progress in assessing the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of diversity training programs. CEI defined measurable criteria and indicators within the scoring evaluation framework, enabling CEI to evaluate the relevance and impact of these programs. The requirements include content relevance, delivery methods, participant engagement, evaluation mechanisms, and alignment with equity and inclusion goals.

Additionally, CEI established a streamlined process for collecting relevant data and information from agencies and public institutions of higher education to populate the scoring evaluation. This data includes program materials, training records, participant feedback, and performance metrics, ensuring a comprehensive and data-driven assessment.

CEI developed a standardized evaluation process and tool to maintain consistency and objectivity in scoring. This tool will be used across all evaluations, ensuring uniformity in assessing the diversity training initiatives.

CEI is well-equipped to evaluate the impact of diversity training programs in Illinois by implementing these steps. These evaluations will help CEI identify areas for improvement and support agencies and public institutions of higher education in their efforts to create more diverse, inclusive, and equitable training initiatives. The data-driven approach will enable CEI to drive meaningful and measurable change.

Objective 5 Next Steps

In pursuit of CEI's objective to enhance diversity training initiatives, CEI has outlined the following steps to ensure progress and improvement. First, CEI will send diversity training surveys to agencies and public institutions of higher education to gather valuable feedback and insights. CEI will carefully analyze the results of these evaluations to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement in procurement and workplace diversity training.

Based on the evaluation findings, CEI will provide actionable feedback and recommendations to agencies and public institutions of higher education. These recommendations will focus on enhancing the effectiveness and impact of diversity training initiatives and fostering more inclusive and equitable procurement and workplace environments.

To ensure continuous improvement, CEI will monitor the implementation of recommended improvements and track progress over time. Additionally, CEI will periodically reassess the effectiveness of diversity training programs using the scoring evaluation framework, aligning with CEI's statutory obligations.

CEI will enhance diversity training initiatives by taking these steps, promoting a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive procurement and workforce landscape in Illinois. CEI is committed to positively impacting supplier diversity and equity in procurement practices through collaborative efforts and a data-driven approach.

Objective 6: Annually propose and present legislative initiatives, in addition to addressing timely opportunities, to the Governor and the General Assembly to advance and enhance inclusion and diversity within State government.

| Action Items | Results (KPIs) |
|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conduct a thorough review and analysis of existing laws and policies on inclusion and diversity in State government. 2. Identify areas where legislative changes are necessary to enhance inclusion and diversity within State government. 3. Collaborate with relevant stakeholders, such as government agencies, advocacy groups, and community organizations, to gather input and insights on potential legislative changes. 4. Develop comprehensive proposals for legislative changes, ensuring they align with CEI's mission and goals for increasing inclusion and diversity in State government. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Number of proposed legislative changes submitted by CEI. 2. Number of proposed legislative changes that are approved, enacted, or incorporated into State laws or policies, indicating the successful implementation of measures to increase inclusion and diversity in State government. 3. Impact and effectiveness of the legislative changes in enhancing inclusion and diversity within State government, as measured by indicators such as improved representation of underrepresented groups, increased equity in employment practices, and the implementation of diversity initiatives and programs. |

Objective 6 Status Update

CEI's goal to promote equity, inclusivity, and diversity within State government has led to notable progress in the analysis and preparation of legislative initiatives. CEI comprehensively analyzed existing laws, regulations, and policies on equity, inclusion, and diversity in State government. This analysis allowed CEI to identify specific areas for improvement and potential legislative changes.

Furthermore, CEI engaged commissioners and senior staff in a thorough survey to gather insights and prioritize legislative initiatives. Their valuable input has played a crucial role in shaping CEI's legislative agenda, ensuring CEI's focus on the most impactful and meaningful initiatives to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout Illinois.



With this foundational work complete, CEI is poised to move forward with its legislative initiatives, advocating for changes that will strengthen and promote equity, inclusion, and diversity in all aspects of State government. By working collaboratively and strategically, CEI will effectuate positive change and make a lasting impact on diversity, equity, and inclusion in Illinois.

Objective 6 Next Steps

To advance its objective of enhancing inclusion and diversity in State government, CEI is taking proactive steps to drive legislative changes. CEI's priority is conducting a comprehensive analysis of existing laws, regulations, and policies related to equity, inclusion, and diversity in State government. This analysis will help CEI identify areas for improvement and potential legislative changes that align with statutory objectives, powers, and duties.

Next, CEI will draft proposed legislation, incorporating feedback from stakeholders and leveraging legal expertise to ensure its effectiveness and compatibility with existing laws. CEI understands the importance of collaboration, so CEI will work closely with legal experts and legislative sponsors to refine the proposed legislation before promptly submitting it to the necessary parties.

Throughout the legislative process, CEI will monitor the progress of the proposed changes and advocate for their passage. This effort includes advocating, providing supporting documents, answering inquiries, and participating in hearings. By diligently pursuing these steps, CEI aims to bring about meaningful legislative changes that foster inclusion, diversity, and equity in every aspect of State government.



Objective 7: Exercise comprehensive oversight and coordination with designated entities, including the Illinois African-American Family Commission, Illinois African-American Fair Contracting Commission, Asian American Family Commission, Business Enterprise Council for Minorities, Women, and Persons with Disabilities, Illinois Latino Family Commission, and Illinois Muslim American Advisory Council, to foster collaboration and promote initiatives that advance equity and inclusion for diverse communities.

| Action Items | Results (KPIs) |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish regular communication channels and meetings with each entity to foster collaboration, share updates, and gather insights on relevant issues. 2. Monitor and evaluate the performance and impact of each entity, utilizing key performance indicators and metrics to measure progress and identify areas for improvement. 3. Collaborate with the entities to identify and address any challenges or barriers hindering their effectiveness in advancing equity and inclusion. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Number of collaborative initiatives and partnerships between the entities and relevant stakeholders to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. 2. Progress made in achieving the stated goals and objectives of the entities, tracked through performance indicators and milestones set by each entity and reported to CEI. 3. Level of engagement and satisfaction of the respective communities the entities serve, as measured through surveys or feedback mechanisms. |

Objective 7 Status Update

CEI has made significant progress in enhancing the oversight structure and responsibilities over the BEP Council. Through a comprehensive review, CEI identified areas for improvement, establishing clear lines of communication and collaboration between CEI and the BEP Council. This improved coordination ensures effective oversight and fosters a culture of open dialogue and cooperation.

CEI's senior staff conducts meetings with the BEP Council leadership to enhance communication further. These meetings are a platform to discuss goals, challenges, and progress, facilitating a shared understanding of priorities and initiatives.

In addition to communication improvements, CEI standardized vital processes, such as agenda distribution, meeting minute preparation, and parliamentary procedures. By streamlining these processes, CEI promotes efficiency and ensures that all aspects of the oversight function run smoothly.

The progress made so far demonstrates CEI's commitment to effective oversight and collaboration with the BEP Council, maximizing the impact of supplier diversity efforts throughout Illinois.

Objective 7 Next Steps

Moving forward, CEI will conduct a comprehensive review of its existing oversight structure and responsibilities over the other entities once staffed to identify any gaps or areas for improvement. To ensure effective oversight and coordination, CEI will establish clear lines of communication and collaboration between CEI and each entity.

A critical step will involve developing a memorandum of understanding outlining the roles, responsibilities, and reporting mechanisms between CEI and each entity. This transparent and collaborative working relationship will facilitate shared objectives and improved coordination.

CEI will conduct regular meetings with each entity's leadership to discuss goals, challenges, and progress, fostering a culture of open dialogue and collaboration. Additionally, CEI will implement a standardized reporting framework to collect and analyze data and information from each entity, enabling CEI to assess their performance and compliance with equity and inclusion goals.

CEI will develop a performance evaluation process to measure the effectiveness and impact of each entity's initiatives. CEI will provide technical assistance and guidance to support each entity's efforts in achieving equity and inclusion objectives, including sharing best practices, resources, and training opportunities.

Furthermore, CEI will conduct periodic reviews and audits to ensure compliance with relevant laws, regulations, and policies while identifying improvement areas or corrective actions.

CEI aims to foster transparency and accountability by regularly communicating the progress and outcomes of the oversight activities to the relevant stakeholders.

Finally, CEI will create tailored training for each entity related to CEI and their specific functions, strengthening collaboration and expertise.

Objective 8: Develop and implement a comprehensive set of rules and guidelines to effectively administer and enforce the provisions outlined in the CEI Act, ensuring equitable and inclusive practices are upheld throughout all CEI operations.

| Action Items | Results (KPIs) |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify any potential administrative rule changes. 2. Collaborate with legal counsel and subject matter experts to draft and finalize the administrative rules per JCAR’s formatting and submission guidelines. 3. Prepare a comprehensive rulemaking package, including all necessary documents, supporting materials, and required forms. 4. To ensure compliance and transparency, keep a detailed record of all actions taken during the rulemaking process, including communications, submissions, and revisions. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Percentage increase in clarity and understanding of BEP processes and procedures among CEI staff and stakeholders, as measured through pre- and post-implementation surveys or assessments. 2. Number of successfully updated administrative rules and procedures reviewed, approved, and implemented within the defined timeframe. 3. Reduction in errors, inconsistencies, or ambiguities identified in the BEP/ VBP processes and procedures, as reported through internal audits or quality control assessments. 4. Measure stakeholder satisfaction with BEP/VBP processes through surveys and feedback from vendors and agencies. |

Objective 8 Status Update

CEI has made significant progress in advancing the objective of improving inclusion and diversity in State government through administrative rule changes. CEI conducted a comprehensive analysis of existing laws, regulations, and policies to identify areas for enhancement. CEI engaged with commissioners and senior staff to prioritize potential administrative rule updates.

Based on the insights gained, CEI successfully identified critical areas for administrative rule changes that align with its equity and inclusion goals. Collaboration with legal counsel and subject matter experts allowed for developing well-crafted and comprehensive administrative rules.

CEI has finalized the draft administrative rules for BEP and VBP, adhering to Joint Committee on Administrative Rules (“JCAR”) formatting and submission guidelines, ensuring compliance with the regulatory process. This thorough approach will help facilitate the implementation of the desired changes, promoting a more inclusive and diverse State government.

Objective 8 Next Steps

To move forward to implement administrative rule changes, CEI will focus first on preparing and submitting a comprehensive rulemaking package. CEI will assemble all the necessary documents, supporting materials, and required forms for the proposed administrative rule changes. This effort includes CEI

drafting clear and concise language for the rules, providing detailed explanations and justifications for the changes, and ensuring all legal and procedural requirements are met.

CEI will then submit the rulemaking package to the appropriate regulatory bodies. This step involves a thorough review process, where the proposed rules will be scrutinized for compliance, clarity, and alignment with statutory obligations.

CEI hopes to adopt the changes once the rules are reviewed and approved.

CEI will communicate transparently with stakeholders, including other government agencies, legal experts, and advocacy groups throughout this process. CEI will provide timely updates to ensure all involved parties are informed and engaged in the rulemaking process. By following these steps diligently, CEI can successfully implement the administrative rule changes to advance its mission of promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in the State government.

Objective 9: Foster and actively promote the sustainable economic growth of small businesses owned and operated by qualified veterans and qualified service-disabled veterans per the Illinois Procurement Code.

| Action Items | Results (KPIs) |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and implement outreach programs to raise awareness among qualified VOSB and SDVOSB about procurement opportunities and resources available to support their economic development. Establish partnerships with key stakeholders, such as chambers of commerce and industry associations, to create networking and mentorship opportunities for VOSB and SDVOSB. Track and adjust programs for VOSB and SDVOSB economic development. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Number of qualified VOSB and SDVOSB that receive support and assistance through CEI programs and initiatives. Percentage increase in the number of contracts awarded to qualified VOSB and SDVOSB under the Illinois Procurement Code. Growth in the revenue and business activities of qualified VOSB and SDVOSB. |

Objective 9 Status Update

CEI has accomplished several key milestones in alignment to support veteran-owned businesses.

CEI has a robust certification procedure to ensure that businesses are legitimately classified as qualified Veteran-Owned Small Businesses (VOSBs) and Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Businesses (SDVOSBs). This procedure involves a detailed assessment of eligibility criteria, ensuring that only veteran-owned businesses receive the appropriate certifications.

CEI diligently compiles and maintains a comprehensive list of certified VOSBs and SDVOSBs. This list is valuable for purchasing entities when conducting goal-setting for contracting opportunities with qualified veteran-owned businesses.

CEI is committed to supporting VOSBs and SDVOSBs throughout the procurement process. By providing guidance and assistance, CEI helps these businesses effectively navigate the procedures

involved in bidding on State contracts.

CEI has an electronic portal on its website designed to streamline and simplify the VOSB and SDVOSB certification process. This user-friendly platform allows businesses to complete and submit their certification applications conveniently.

CEI has demonstrated its dedication to empowering veteran-owned businesses and promoting their active participation in State procurement opportunities by achieving these milestones.

Objective 9 Next Steps

To achieve the objective of supporting VBP and ensuring opportunities for VOSBs and SDVOSBs, CEI has outlined the following strategic next steps:

CEI will prioritize filling the VBP staff vacancy to ensure dedicated support and efficient management of VOSB and SDVOSB initiatives. By having a specialized team member, CEI can enhance its expertise in veteran-related matters and better cater to the needs of VOSBs and SDVOSBs.

CEI aims to organize a minimum of two outreach events per year, specifically tailored to inform and engage VOSBs and SDVOSBs about the procurement opportunities and certification requirements available within the State. These events will serve as valuable platforms for networking, information dissemination, and addressing any queries or concerns veteran-owned businesses raise.

CEI recognizes the significance of State purchasing entities in achieving VOSB and SDVOSB goals. To facilitate compliance with these goals, CEI will provide specialized training to purchasing entities on the goal-setting process and effective strategies for promoting contracting opportunities for veteran-owned businesses. This training will empower these entities to play a vital role in supporting VOSBs and SDVOSBs throughout the procurement process.

By implementing these strategic next steps, CEI will bolster its efforts to create a thriving environment for VOSBs and SDVOSBs, promoting their meaningful participation in State contracting and furthering the goals of VBP.

BEP and VBP OAR Analysis and Impact Report

The purpose of an Objectives, Action Items, and Results (“OAR”) analysis is to provide a structured framework for evaluating and monitoring the progress and effectiveness of strategic initiatives. It involves clearly defining the objectives or goals an entity wants to achieve, developing a detailed action plan outlining the steps and activities required to reach those objectives, and assessing the results or outcomes of implementing the action plan. The BEP and VBP OAR analysis covers CEI’s objectives related to its statutory obligations under the BEP Act and Illinois Procurement Code.

Additionally, this impact report provides stakeholders a clear understanding of the progress and outcomes achieved within a strategic plan. By presenting the status of initiatives, the information enables stakeholders to assess the strategic plan’s effectiveness and make informed decisions. Additionally, outlining the next steps in the report ensures a clear roadmap for continued progress and helps focus on achieving the desired objectives.



BEP Council

The BEP Council was developed to help implement, monitor, and enforce the goals of the Business Enterprise for Minorities, Women, and Persons with Disabilities Act.

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| Objectives | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Conduct a thorough review of the rules and regulations governing the program's implementation for businesses owned by minorities, women, and persons with disabilities.2. Serve as a central clearinghouse for information on State contracts, including maintaining a list of all pending State contracts eligible for bidding by businesses owned by minorities, women, and persons with disabilities.3. Create the statutorily mandated Special Committee on Minority, Female, Persons with Disabilities, and Veterans Contracting.4. Increase the number of sheltered market categories and subsequent procurements.5. Increase agency and PIHE direct and indirect spending with BEP firms seeking procurement and contract opportunities. |
| Action Items | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Identify areas for improvement and recommend necessary changes to enhance the program's effectiveness.2. Explore options for developing and implementing a centralized contract information management system.3. Define the Special Committee's structure, meeting frequency, milestones, and deliverables.4. Identify potential sheltered market categories. |
| Results (KPIs) | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Increase/decrease in the number of exemption and waiver requests.2. Number of meetings in FY24 versus previous periods.3. Meeting attendance in FY24 versus previous periods.4. Number of achieved milestones and timely deliverable delivery in FY24 versus previous periods.5. Increase/decrease in the number of sheltered market categories and subsequent procurements.6. Number of BEP firms that respond to solicitations and do win/don't win.7. Total prime monthly/fiscal year/ to-date spend.8. Increase/decrease in direct and indirect monthly/fiscal year/to-date spending with BEP firms.9. Increase/decrease in the achieved goal percentage for agencies and PIHEs. |

BEP Council Status Update

The BEP Council has actively participated in several key initiatives to enhance diversity and inclusion within State contracting. Through BEP, they have established a streamlined registration procedure to recognize certified businesses owned by minorities, women, or persons with disabilities, working with approved entities like the City of Chicago and Cook County. Additionally, through the BEP Compliance unit, the Council has diligently granted exemptions from State contracting goals and waivers to contractors who demonstrate genuine efforts to meet participation goals. Their commitment to regular meetings underscores their dedication to fulfilling their responsibilities under the BEP Act. Moreover, the Council's efforts extend to maintaining an up-to-date and comprehensive list of businesses legitimately classified as diverse enterprises through BEP. Their crucial role also includes reviewing compliance plans submitted by State agencies and public institutions of higher education and certification appeals submitted by vendors, ensuring a holistic approach to promoting diversity and equity in State procurement practices.

BEP Council Next Steps

Moving forward, the BEP Council is committed to fulfilling its statutory obligations. The BEP Council will strengthen and optimize the program's impact by identifying areas for improvement and proposing necessary changes to enhance its effectiveness. A key initiative will involve exploring options to develop and implement a centralized contract information management system. This initiative will streamline processes and ensure better accessibility to essential contract details. Furthermore, the BEP Council will diligently assess potential sheltered market categories, identifying opportunities to foster growth and inclusivity for qualified businesses. These next steps signify the BEP Council's continued dedication to driving meaningful progress in supplier diversity and promoting equitable opportunities across the State's procurement landscape.

Certification

The BEP certification unit demonstrates the State’s continued commitment to opportunity and inclusion of minority-owned, women-owned, persons with disabilities-owned, and veteran-owned businesses by offering certification opportunities to qualifying firms.

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| Objectives | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase the percentage of certified BEP/VBP vendors. 2. Streamline processes, reduce red tape, and enhance the overall efficiency of BEP/VBP certification operations. 3. Decrease the time it takes to complete the certification process. 4. Adopt a procedure to grant automatic certification to businesses holding certifications from approved entities. 5. Provide prompt and helpful assistance to vendors seeking clarification or guidance. |
| Action Items | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Execute the proposed administrative rule updates to align with current policies, removing unnecessary bureaucracy and incorporating industry best practices. 2. Develop process and procedure guides for internal distribution. 3. Launch a certification training course for internal staff and external stakeholders. 4. Establish a centralized repository of FAQs, resources, and guidance materials to address common inquiries and provide vendors with easy access to relevant information. 5. Request appropriations to conduct target marketing to increase the BEP/VBP vendor pool. |
| Results (KPIs) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase/decrease in the number of certified BEP/VBP vendors in FY24 versus previous periods. 2. Number of internal staff who received training. Percentage of favorable feedback. 3. Number of external stakeholders who receive training. Percentage of favorable feedback. 4. Amount of time it takes to complete the certification process. 5. Increase/decrease in the amount of time it takes to complete the certification process in FY24 versus previous periods. 6. Number of certification denials overturned by the BEP Council and CEI in FY24 versus previous periods. |

Certification Status Update

The BEP certification unit has made significant progress during FY23, receiving 5,274 BEP certifications. Of these, 4,026 certifications were successfully approved, underscoring the unit’s commitment to supporting diverse businesses. The availability of four recognition certification programs, including BE BEP, FastTrack Certification, TRC, and the Veteran Affairs Recognition Certification, showcases the unit’s dedication to providing various pathways for businesses to obtain certifications tailored to their specific

needs. In line with ensuring excellent service, the certification staff conducts weekly virtual office hours, offering vendors an accessible platform to seek guidance and clarity on the certification process. The unit's proactive approach to promptly and helpfully assisting vendors has contributed to streamlining the certification journey, fostering an environment that encourages and supports the growth of diverse enterprises within the State.

Certification Next Steps

The BEP certification unit has an exciting roadmap of initiatives to enhance its operations further and better serve the vendor community. The first step involves executing proposed administrative rule updates, ensuring alignment with current policies, and eliminating unnecessary bureaucracy while incorporating industry best practices. CEI aims to develop comprehensive process and procedure guides for internal distribution, streamlining certification workflows to improve efficiency.

Recognizing the importance of education, CEI is committed to launching a certification training course. This course will benefit both internal staff and external stakeholders, ensuring a consistent and knowledgeable approach to the certification process.

In pursuit of transparency and accessibility, CEI will establish a centralized repository of frequently asked questions, resources, and guidance materials. This repository will be a valuable resource, addressing common inquiries and providing vendors with easy access to relevant information.

To support businesses already holding certifications from approved entities, the unit is working to adopt a procedure for automatic certification. This initiative will simplify the certification process for qualified vendors and demonstrate the unit's dedication to fostering a business-friendly environment.

By taking these strategic steps, CEI aims to fortify its role as a catalyst for diverse business growth and economic empowerment, fostering an inclusive procurement landscape for the benefit of all stakeholders.

Compliance

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| Objectives | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Monitor the contract goal commitments of the agency and PIHE contracts with BEP subcontractor goals.2. Increase the accuracy and efficiency of tracking and reporting processes.3. Increase U-Plan responsiveness.4. Standardize compliance processes and procedures.5. Provide prompt and helpful assistance to vendors seeking clarification or guidance. |
| Action Items | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Conduct prime BEP goal review annually, six months before a renewal option and three months before a renewal option.2. Obtain reporting access in all CPO bulletins.3. Reconcile the data in the CPO bulletins and the BEP DCMS.4. Run reports consistently.5. Update the U-Plan and goal-setting forms.6. Develop process and procedure guides for internal distribution.7. Launch a compliance training course for internal staff and external stakeholders.8. Establish a centralized repository of FAQs, resources, and guidance materials to address common inquiries and provide vendors with easy access to relevant information. |
| Results (KPIs) | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Percentage of primes meeting/not meeting their BEP goal commitment annually, six months before renewal, and three months before renewal.2. Number of FY24 internal reports with accurate data and metrics versus previous periods.3. Number of FY24 external reports with accurate data and metrics versus previous periods.4. Frequency of internal/external reports received/provided to internal/external stakeholders in FY24 versus previous periods.5. Number of internal staff who received training. Percentage of favorable feedback.6. Number of external stakeholders who receive training. Percentage of favorable feedback.7. The number of solicitations, including a supplier diversity expert on pre-bid calls in FY24. |

Compliance Status Update

The BEP compliance unit has made significant progress in ensuring equitable and inclusive procurement practices across State agencies and public institutions of higher education. In FY23, the compliance unit received 104 compliance plans, indicating a growing commitment from agencies and public institutions of higher education to meet diversity goals. Additionally, 318 Utilization Plan responsiveness reviews were conducted, with 246 Utilization Plans meeting the responsiveness criteria, demonstrating the dedication

of agencies and public institutions of higher education to comply with BEP and VBP requirements.

The compliance unit conducted 573 goal-setting form reviews in FY24. To facilitate goal-setting and adherence. Those reviews foster accountability in achieving supplier diversity objectives. Moreover, the team received 104 annual reports, providing valuable insights into the progress of contracts with BEP and VBP subcontractor goals.

As part of its oversight role, the compliance unit actively monitors the contract goal commitments of purchasing entities, ensuring transparency and adherence to diversity commitments. The team continues to provide responsive assistance to vendors, offering guidance and clarity on BEP and VBP compliance matters. The unit consistently runs reports to maintain data accuracy and up-to-date insights, enabling informed decision-making and progress evaluations.

Compliance Next Steps

CEI has identified several strategic initiatives for implementation to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the BEP compliance unit. First, CEI will establish a centralized repository of FAQs, resources, and guidance materials, providing vendors easy access to relevant information and proactively addressing common inquiries.

Standardizing compliance processes and procedures will streamline operations and promote consistency in evaluating purchasing entities' BEP and VBP goal commitments. The unit will aim to conduct prime BEP goal reviews annually, six months before a renewal option and three months before a renewal option, to ensure timely reviews.

Obtaining reporting access in all Chief Procurement Office bulletins will be pursued to strengthen data access and reporting capabilities. Additionally, reconciling data in the CPO bulletins and the CEI compliance monitoring system will enhance data accuracy and integrity, facilitating informed decision-making.

As legislative and policy changes arise, CEI will update the Utilization Plan and goal-setting forms to align them with current policies and industry best practices. CEI will continue developing internal process and procedure guides to ensure seamless operations and consistent execution.

A compliance training course will be launched for both internal staff and external stakeholders to bolster knowledge and expertise, empowering them with the necessary tools to drive compliance excellence.

By implementing these strategic initiatives, the BEP compliance unit will continue to elevate supplier diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts across State agencies and public institutions of higher education, fostering a more equitable and inclusive procurement landscape.

Mentor Protégé Program

The Mentor Protégé Program fosters the development and mentoring of minority, women, and persons with disabilities-owned businesses. It enables experienced firms to provide various types of support to create more equitable access for economic growth while meeting the State's BEP contracting goals. The Mentor Protégé Program's goals are to motivate and encourage established businesses to provide developmental assistance to BEP-certified firms, to maximize access to the State's procurement programs, to foster long-term relationships, to enhance the core capabilities of minority-owned, women-owned, and persons with disabilities-owned businesses, and to increase contracting opportunities for those businesses.

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| Objectives | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Increase the participation of minority and women-owned businesses in the MPP by actively promoting and recruiting eligible businesses to join the program.2. Facilitate meaningful and productive mentoring relationships between BEP vendors and experienced businesses to enhance the protégé businesses' skills, knowledge, and capacity.3. Measure and track the progress and success of protégé businesses in terms of business growth, revenue generation, and increased market opportunities. |
| Action Items | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Fill staff vacancies.2. Conduct targeted outreach and awareness campaigns to BEP vendors through various channels such as industry events, trade associations, and social media platforms.3. Develop a mentor-matching process that considers the specific needs and goals of protégé businesses, ensuring compatibility and alignment with experienced mentors.4. Establish a feedback mechanism to gather insights and evaluate the effectiveness of mentor-protégé relationships, making necessary adjustments and improvements as needed. |
| Results (KPIs) | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Number of mentor-protégé partnerships.2. Business growth of protégé business.3. Number of mentorship hours (measures mentors' level of engagement and commitment in providing valuable guidance, advice, and knowledge transfer to proteges).4. Percentage of favorable survey feedback (the survey should assess overall satisfaction with the program, including the quality of mentoring relationships, the support received, and the perceived value of the program's outcomes).5. Number and value of contract awards or business opportunities secured by protégé businesses due to their participation in the MPP. |

Mentor Protégé Program Next Steps

CEI has outlined several strategic actions to advance the BEP Mentor-Protégé Program and strengthen its impact.

First, filling staff vacancies is a priority to ensure the program is adequately resourced and supported.

CEI will conduct targeted outreach and awareness campaigns to expand the program's reach and engagement, leveraging channels such as industry events and social media platforms to connect with BEP vendors and promote mentorship opportunities.

CEI will develop a structured approach to optimize the mentor-protégé matching process, taking into account the unique needs and aspirations of protégé businesses. This personalized matching process will foster productive relationships with experienced mentors who can provide valuable guidance and support.

CEI will establish a feedback mechanism to continuously improve the program's effectiveness and gather insights from mentors and protégés. CEI will also conduct regular evaluations to assess the success of mentor-protégé relationships and identify areas for enhancement, ensuring the program remains responsive and impactful.

By pursuing these strategic steps, the BEP Mentor-Protégé Program will further nurture the growth and development of diverse businesses, fostering mutually beneficial partnerships that promote economic empowerment and increased competitiveness within the State's procurement landscape.

Outreach

The CEI outreach unit enhances BEP and VBP by proactively engaging with diverse businesses. The team fosters awareness and participation in BEP and VBP through targeted outreach initiatives, ensuring a robust and inclusive supplier base. By cultivating meaningful connections, providing resources, and offering support, the CEI outreach unit drives more excellent representation and economic opportunity for minority-owned, women-owned, persons with disabilities-owned, and veteran-owned businesses in the State's procurement ecosystem.

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| Objectives | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create outreach initiatives for external stakeholders that connect, inform, and increase engagement. 2. Increase awareness of procurement opportunities for BEP vendors. 3. Identify, build a contact list, and meet regularly with external stakeholders to identify and address issues related to supplier diversity. 4. Create a communication plan that informs external stakeholders of supplier diversity initiatives and activities. |
| Action Items | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Collaborate with external stakeholders (i.e., agencies, CPOs, caucuses, and diverse business organizations) to host outreach events in FY24. 2. Launch a supplier diversity training course for BEP and VBP firms seeking procurement and contract opportunities. 3. Collect, update, and distribute supplier diversity metrics and KPIs. 4. Fill staff vacancies. 5. Target industries with low BEP vendor representation. |
| Results (KPIs) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Number of outreach event attendees. Frequency of outreach events. Percentage of favorable survey feedback. 2. The number of BEP and VBP firms that submit/win contracts after receiving training. Percentage of favorable survey feedback. 3. Increase in the number of BEP and VBP firms responding to opportunities versus the previous period. Increase in the number of BEP and VBP firms winning their first contract award (as a prime or a sub). 4. Meeting frequency with external stakeholders. The number of meetings with external stakeholders. 5. Number of external stakeholders who received communication. 6. Number of training course attendees. Frequency of training. Percentage of favorable survey feedback. |

Outreach Status Update

The CEI outreach unit has made significant progress in optimizing its structure and internal processes. CEI implemented a revised organization chart to enhance communication and reduce redundancy, streamlining the unit's operations under the Internal/External Communications Officer. Additionally, CEI developed a formal internal process for tracking the distribution of CEI's BEP and VBP outreach invitations, ensuring effective and targeted outreach efforts.

In FY23, the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) actively participated in six outreach events, engaging with diverse businesses and potential partners to promote inclusive procurement practices. These events were valuable platforms to raise awareness about BEP and VBP initiatives and foster meaningful connections within the diverse supplier community. The CEI outreach unit strives for greater effectiveness, cultivating partnerships and promoting equitable opportunities for underrepresented businesses.

Outreach Next Steps

The CEI outreach unit is committed to enhancing its outreach efforts and fostering meaningful engagement with external stakeholders. To achieve this, CEI will prioritize filling staff vacancies to ensure optimal capacity for executing outreach initiatives effectively. CEI will build on this to create targeted outreach programs that connect, inform, and increase engagement with diverse businesses, promoting supplier diversity and inclusion.

CEI will develop a comprehensive communication plan to keep external stakeholders informed about supplier diversity initiatives and activities, ensuring transparency and open channels of communication. CEI will continue cultivating collaborative partnerships with purchasing entities, Chief Procurement Officers, caucuses, and diverse business organizations to host impactful outreach events throughout FY24.

In alignment with CEI's commitment to continuous improvement, CEI will launch a dedicated supplier diversity training course to empower purchasing entities conducting procurements and vendors seeking procurement and contract opportunities. This training course will equip these purchasing entities and businesses with valuable insights and resources to thrive in procurement.

Additionally, CEI will collect, update, and distribute supplier diversity metrics and KPIs to track progress and inform data-driven decision-making. These next steps will fortify CEI's role in advancing supplier diversity and positively impacting the State's procurement practices.

Veteran Business Program

VBP assists businesses owned by qualified service-disabled and veteran-owned businesses to gain access to the State of Illinois contracting opportunities and participation in the competitive procurement process.

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| Objectives | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase the percentage of certified VBP vendors. 2. Streamline the certification process, reducing administrative burdens and promoting long-term stability for VBP vendors. 3. Create VBP outreach initiatives that connect, inform, and increase engagement. 4. Increase awareness of procurement opportunities. 5. Decrease the time it takes to complete the certification process. |
| Action Items | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Align the VBP certification process with BEP's certification process, ensuring consistency in timelines and requirements. 2. Establish consistent timelines and communication for VBP certification. 3. Develop process and procedure guides for internal and external distribution. 4. Launch a certification training course for internal staff and external stakeholders. 5. Collaborate with external stakeholders to host outreach events in FY24. 6. Fill staff vacancy. |
| Results (KPIs) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase/decrease in the number of certified VBP vendors in FY24 versus previous periods. 2. Number of internal staff who received training. Percentage of favorable feedback. 3. Number of external stakeholders who receive training. Percentage of favorable feedback. 4. The number of VBP firms that submit/win contracts after receiving training. Percentage of favorable survey feedback. 5. Amount of time it takes to complete the certification process. 6. Increase/decrease in the amount of time it takes to complete the certification process in FY24 versus previous periods. |

VBP Status Update

VBP made significant strides in supporting and empowering veteran-owned businesses during FY23. VBP received 198 VBP certifications, of which 173 were approved by the certification unit, reflecting a growing interest among veteran entrepreneurs to participate in state contracting opportunities. Currently, there are 180 total registered VBP certifications, indicating a robust and expanding network of certified veteran-owned businesses.

To further enhance accessibility for veteran-owned businesses, VBP introduced the Veteran Affairs Recognition Certification, streamlining the recognition process for veteran-owned small businesses (VOSB) and service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses (SDVOSB). This recognition certification allows these vendors to request their certification to be acknowledged by one of the State's trusted

partners, thereby facilitating their access to procurement opportunities.

CEI's commitment to excellent customer service remains unwavering. CEI continues to provide prompt and helpful assistance to vendors, addressing inquiries and offering guidance to ensure a smooth and seamless certification process. These accomplishments highlight VBP's dedication to supporting veteran entrepreneurs and fostering their success in the State's marketplace. As CEI progresses, CEI is eager to build on these achievements and create new opportunities for veteran-owned businesses to thrive in procurement.

VBP Next Steps

VBP is poised to take significant strides in FY24 toward enhancing support for veteran-owned businesses. To achieve this, CEI will first prioritize filling the staff vacancy within the VBP unit, ensuring that CEI has a dedicated and proficient team to drive CEI initiatives.

One of CEI's key objectives is to align the VBP certification process with the Business Enterprise Program's (BEP) certification process. This alignment will streamline procedures, creating consistency in timelines and requirements for both programs, ultimately providing a more efficient and seamless experience for veteran entrepreneurs seeking certification.

In addition to the alignment, CEI will establish consistent timelines and communication for VBP certification, clarifying the process for vendors and stakeholders. To ensure internal and external teams are well-informed, CEI will develop comprehensive strategy and procedure guides for distribution, promoting transparency and clarity in operations.

Recognizing the significance of training, CEI is committed to launching a certification training course for internal staff and external stakeholders. This training will further enhance CEI's expertise in serving veteran-owned businesses and keep the various stakeholders updated on the latest developments.

Finally, CEI aims to strengthen collaborative efforts with external stakeholders, including agencies, Chief Procurement Officers (CPOs), legislatures, and diverse business organizations, to host outreach events throughout FY24. These events will foster greater engagement with the veteran business community and promote awareness of supplier diversity initiatives and opportunities.

With these strategic steps, VBP is dedicated to empowering and expanding opportunities for veteran-owned businesses, creating a more inclusive and thriving procurement landscape for all.

