



Illinois Commission on Equity and Inclusion

Nina Harris, Chairperson
Alexandria Wilson, Executive Director
115 S. LaSalle Street, Suite 4N
Chicago, IL 60603

APPROVED NOV 18 2025

NOTICE

State of Illinois Commission on Equity and Inclusion CEI MONTHLY MEETING OF THE COMMISSION

Wednesday, October 15, 2025

1:30 PM

Location: Jesse White State Building, 115 S. LaSalle St., 4th Fl., Lincoln Park Conference Room, Chicago, IL 60603

Location: Lincoln Tower Plaza, 524 S. Second St., Ste. 502, Springfield, IL 62701

WebEx

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

- Chair Harris called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m.
- In accordance with the Illinois Open Meetings Act, 5 ILCS 120/1 et seq., the Commission provided telephonic and video access to the meeting so that members of the public can monitor the meeting and has updated its website to keep the public fully apprised of the Commission activities relating to virtual participation.
- Chair Harris conducted roll call of the Commissioners.
 - i. Commissioners attending in person at a State facility:
 - 1. Chair Nina Harris
 - 2. Commissioner Richard Costes
 - 3. Commissioner Ennedy Rivera
 - 4. Commissioner Van Austin
 - 5. Commissioner Ovelia Smith-Barton
 - ii. Commissioner attending virtually:
 - 1. Commissioner Benjamin Salentine
 - 2. Commissioner Bruce Montgomery
 - iii. Commissioner Austin moved to approve the remote participation of Commissioners Salentine and Montgomery. Seconded by Commissioner Rivera. Motion carried by vote.
 - iv. A quorum of the public body was present.

2. Minutes: September 17, 2025 (Action)

- Commissioner Montgomery moved to approve the minutes. Seconded by Commissioner Smith-Barton. Motion carried by vote.



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3. Operations Reports

A. Legislative Updates and Outreach Report – Nikita Richards, Internal/External Communications & Legislative Affairs Officer

- The Outreach Unit continues to strengthen support for the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) and Veterans Business Program (VBP) through proactive engagement with diverse businesses and collaboration with stakeholders statewide.
- Outreach is currently developing the Illinois APEX BEP Certification Training
 - A new initiative designed exclusively for APEX centers statewide.
 - Training ensures that APEX partners are thoroughly educated on BEP certification procedures, documentation standards, and best practices to reduce submission errors—creating a more efficient and consistent certification process for vendors.
- CEI's participation in the 3rd Annual Chicago Minority Supplier Development Council Young Entrepreneurs Pitch Competition marks a significant outreach milestone.
 - Representing CEI as a judge, the Outreach Unit will also provide BEP certification resources to participants.
 - This initiative directly aligns with CEI's mission to support emerging diverse entrepreneurs (ages 18–35) by connecting them to mentorship, funding, training, and certification opportunities through partnerships with Aetna Better Health of Illinois and the Cook County Small Business Source.
- CEI continues to expand its legislative engagement by working directly with State legislators in the promotion of equitable access to State certification and procurement resources for their constituents.
- On September 30, leaders at CEI met with the Governor's Office to present its FY26 spring legislative proposals.
 - These proposals reflect a collaborative internal effort informed by valuable input from CEI staff and Commissioners who participated in the legislative proposal poll.
 - This coordinated approach enables CEI to deliver a comprehensive and forward-looking legislative agenda, reinforcing its commitment to transparency, inclusion, and effective policy development across the State.
- Officer Richards shared past and upcoming outreach events.

B. Administrative Report – Robin Streets, Chief of Staff

- The Fiscal Year 2025 BEP Annual Expenditure and Service Category Report memo, instructions, and reporting template have been distributed to BEP Liaisons and made available on the CEI website.
 - Completed reports are due from purchasing agencies, public institutions of higher education and community colleges by November 7th, 2025.
- CEI hosted its first Special Committee for Minority, Female, Persons with Disabilities, and Veterans Contracting (30 ILCS 575/8j) meeting on October 7th, 2025.



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- The Special Committee reviews laws regarding contracting with minority owned businesses, women owned businesses, veteran owned businesses and businesses owned by persons with disabilities to determine what changes are necessary to increase participation of these groups in state procurement.
 - Leadership is working with the Certification unit to build a Certification Training Academy for BEP Council members.
 - The intent behind this program is to ensure all council members are working from the same baseline of knowledge and following consistent best practices when reviewing certification appeals.
 - The goal is that this leads to a greater understanding of the work performed by staff amongst council membership and provide a more efficient review process.
 - Operations continues to partner with the Illinois Office of Communication and Information in the building of fillable and expandable forms for our compliance unit.
 - Certification Virtual Office Hours for October through June have been added to the CEI website.
 - CEI Notice 2026.1 has been published to the Reference & Resource Library page on the Commission site. It has also been distributed via email to BEP Liaisons and all four Chief Procurement Officers.
 - The BEP Class Contract Exemption Request and Review Form was added to the BEP and VBP Goal Compliance webpage.
 - This form was also distributed via email with Notice 2026.1
- C. Financial and Human Capital Report – Tracey Kenney, Chief of Finance and Human Capital Officer**
- CEI's current headcount stands at 38 people, including the 7 Commissioners.
 - CEI's maximum appropriation is 52 FTEs for the fiscal year.
 - The next round of hiring includes positions for a legislative liaison, office associate and an administrative assistant/coordinator.
 - FY2027 budget season discussions with GOMB have started.
 - Appropriation requests are due in mid-October.
- D. Business Enterprise Program (BEP) Compliance Unit and Veterans Business Program (VBP) Reports – Harry Reinhard, Compliance Manager**
- The Veterans Business program has begun to receive SDVOSB and VOSB Veterans reports from the chief procurement officers. Reports are due from CPOs by November 1st.



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- The Compliance Subcommittee convened on September 16 to continue its review of FY26 Compliance Plans, FY25 Class Exemptions, and Administrative Code 30 Exemptions.
 - The subcommittee will resume these evaluations during the next scheduled meeting on November 18.
- CEI is actively collecting all FY25 and FY26 expenditure data, including lapse period payments through August, to maintain fiscal accountability and reporting integrity.
- CEI has completed key updates to strengthen program administration and compliance efficiency.
 - These include revisions to the Veterans Business Program (VBP) forms—specifically, the Individual Contract Exemption Request Form, Version 26.1 Goal Setting Form, Quarterly Report Form, and the Utilization Plan.
- The Business Enterprise Program (BEP) Version 26.1 Goal Setting Form has been finalized, accompanied by a revised Compliance FAQ Sheet designed to provide clearer guidance to agencies and vendors.
- These updates reflect CEI's commitment to maintaining accuracy, transparency, and consistency across all certification and compliance documentation.

E. Business Enterprise Program (BEP) Certification Unit and Mentor Protégé Program (MPP) Reports – LaTasha Binder, CEI Deputy Director

- Certification Unit
 - In collaboration with the outreach program, the certification unit will begin training APEX Accelerators. We are currently working to establish the appropriate training topics and material. The training session is expected to launch by end of October.
 - Certification has compiled a list of entities that accept the State's certification to meet their diversity objectives.
 - a. This is an important benefit that should be highlighted when promoting Certification with the State. The unit is currently working with Outreach on finalizing and displaying the list, including it in the CEI's outreach presentation and adding it to the Outreach page of CEI's website.
 - Certification is continuing to connect with partner agencies to continue to strengthen relationships and stay abreast on any changes concerning our respective programs.
 - The Certification unit continues to collaborate with outreach to assist vendors with questions around applications in the supplier Diversity Management Portal (SDMP).
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- As of October 3, 2025:
 - a. 2,869 active certified vendors in the SDMP:
 - i. 870 African American owned firms
 - ii. 16 American Indian or Alaskan Native owned firms
 - iii. 430 Asian American owned firms
 - iv. 1,028 Caucasian American owned firms
 - v. 518 Hispanic American owned firms
 - vi. 7 Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander owned firms
- Mentor Protégé Program:
 - MPP unit is moving forward in testing unit operations. This includes application intake, external document uploads, and scoring.
 - MPP continues to focus on capacity building, technical knowledge, and competitive edge of minority and women-owned businesses through mentorship and developmental assistance.
 - The unit continues the implementation of the program's project plan. The plan is currently in Phase 1 of the program-Outreach Efforts: Non-Certified BEP Vendor Outreach and Development of Marketing Material.
 - Program management will continue to track interest in the program through the MPP interest form as we begin to reach out those interested entities.
 - Interest in the MPP program is as follows (as of 9/29/25):
 - a. 120 interested entities:
 - i. 20 self-identified as mentors
 - ii. 97 self-identified as proteges
 - iii. 5 who are unsure which category they fall in

4. Ongoing Business

- A. Illinois Hiring Practices (30 ILCS 574/40-10(4) – Commissioner Ennedy Rivera
 - Commissioner Rivera extend thanks to the Illinois Association of Hispanic State Employees for hosting their Director's Roundtable Discussion at their 37th Annual Hispanic State Employees Conference and Job Fair.
 - Agencies highlighted their hiring initiatives.

5. New Business

- A. Upcoming CEI Form and Process Information – Alexandria Wilson, CEI Executive Director
 - BEP Participation Closeout Report Form
 - Purchasing entities will use this form to comply with Section 8.3 of the BEP ACT by evaluating a prime vendor's fulfillment of BEP contract goals



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before contract expiration or termination, ensuring a standardized process for reporting compliance and triggering potential remedies or sanctions if goals are not met without a demonstrated good faith effort.

a. This is key to enforcement of contracts.

- Form is currently ready for publication.
- Anticipated publication date: October 24, 2025
- Anticipated effective date: January 1, 2026
- **BEP Utilization Plan**
 - This form standardizes how prime vendors demonstrate compliance with their BEP participation goals, requires them to document their commitment to meeting the contract specific goal, identifies certified subs, includes participation agreements, information about requesting a waiver and ensures transparency, accountability, and consistent reporting under the act.
 - This form is currently being designed with CMS IOCI.
 - Anticipated publication date: November 7, 2025
 - Anticipated effective date: February 1, 2026
- **BEP Waiver Request and Review Form**
 - The purpose of this form is to standardize the process for primes to document and demonstrate their good faith efforts to engage BEP vendors before requesting a waiver. It ensures consistent evaluation by the purchasing entity in the final determination by CEI in compliance with Section 7.3 of the BEP Act.
 - Form is currently ready for publication.
 - Anticipated publication date: November 7, 2025
 - Anticipated effective date: February 1, 2026
- **VBP Utilization Plan**
 - The purpose is to mirror the BEP forms for U-plans, except it is now separate.
 - The current utilization plan asks for information for both BEP and VBP however, the Veterans' Business Program is authorized in the Illinois Procurement Code, not the BEP Act.
 - Some but not all requirements apply to VBP in the current U-plan.
 - Separating this allows for higher focus on VBP.
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 - The current form asks for information for both BEP and VBP however, the Veterans' Business Program is authorized in the Illinois Procurement Code, not the BEP Act.
 - Separating this allows for higher focus on VBP.

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- Chair Harris expressed thanks to all of those who participated in this project stating:
 - “Thank you, Executive Director Wilson, our Operations team, and the commissioners assigned to this work on standardizing critical forms and processes. Your diligence and collaboration on this labor-intensive effort reflect a deep commitment to clarity and operational excellence in support of aspirational goals. These updates will not only streamline procedures for intra-state purchasing entities but also foster greater benefits for the stakeholders served.”

6. Public Comment

- Mr. Larry Ivory of the ILBCC thanked the Commission and Director Wilson for the work being done. He also expressed concern about the certification process and the glitches in systems communications with certifying partners, as well as the drop in certified vendors. He also expressed concern over continued discrimination in sheltered markets.
- Ms. LaDonna Raeh of WVON Radio expressed concern of the new system (VIVA) issues. She shared that listeners of the station are curious about low BEP participation numbers. She also asked if there was a test of the system prior to migration of data.
- Director Wilson shared that BEP expenditures did increase from FY23 to FY24. The year-over-year trend for spend has been positive and CEI expects to receive spending data from purchasing entities for FY25 by the November 7 deadline. Over \$1.3 billion was spent with BEP firms in FY24.

7. Adjournment (Action)

- Commissioner Montgomery moved to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Commissioner Austin. Motion carried by vote.
- Chair Harris adjourned the meeting at 3:01 p.m.