



Illinois Commission on Equity and Inclusion  
Nina M. Harris, Chairperson  
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## **Illinois Commission on Equity and Inclusion Launches Mentor Protégé Program for Diverse Businesses**

**Chicago, IL, July 1, 2026** — The Illinois Commission on Equity and Inclusion (CEI) is proud to announce the launch of its new Mentor Protégé Program (MPP), a new initiative designed to empower vendors certified in the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) through structured coaching, mentorship, and growth opportunities. By pairing experienced prime vendors with emerging BEP firms, the program aims to build capacity, strengthen relationships, and create meaningful pathways into State contracting. This launch marks a major step toward advancing equity and ensuring that diverse suppliers have the tools and support they need to compete and thrive.

The MPP reflects CEI's commitment to advancing equity and ensuring that diverse businesses have the tools, relationships, and technical support needed to thrive in Illinois' procurement ecosystem. Through structured mentorship, targeted skill building, and hands-on project collaboration, the program will help protégés enhance operational readiness while enabling mentors to deepen their engagement in supplier diversity efforts.

"With the MPP, Illinois is raising the bar for supplier diversity. This initiative provides BEP-certified firms with the support, guidance, and industry insights they need to compete at the highest levels. We are proud to lead a program that not only strengthens individual businesses but also reinforces our statewide commitment to supplier diversity excellence," said CEI Chairperson Nina M. Harris.

The program will focus on:

- Capacity building for BEP-certified firms through guided mentorship.
- Knowledge transfer in areas such as project management, compliance, and procurement navigation.
- Increased access to contracting opportunities and industry networks.
- Strengthened collaboration between purchasing entities, prime vendors, and certified businesses.

Those interested in becoming an MPP protégé should complete the [MPP Protégé Application](#).

Additional program details and participation requirements are available on CEI's website at <https://cei.illinois.gov/>.

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