

Governor Quinn Launches Women-Owned Business Initiative to Support Economic Growth

Written by Leslie Wertheimer
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Illinois' First Women Business Owners Symposium on March 29

CHICAGO – Governor Pat Quinn announced today that the state of Illinois is launching a new initiative to support the growth of women-owned businesses as a driving force in the Illinois economy. The Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity will host the state's first Women Business Owners Symposium (WBOS) at the UIC Pavilion in Chicago on March 29, coinciding with Women's History Month.

The event will bring together business leaders, lenders and technology experts to showcase the knowledge and opportunities available to help women-owned firms expand in Illinois.

"Women entrepreneurs are one of our state's key job creation engines," Governor Quinn said. "Our goal is to help women find the economic resources necessary to expand their companies and provide more employment for our state."

Three out of 10 firms in Illinois are owned by women generating a total of \$53.4 billion in sales, according to Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) based on U.S. Census data.

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The daylong event—which is free and open for women looking to start or expand a business—includes keynote speakers Ruth Ann Gillis, president, Exelon Business Services Co., and Judith A. Roussel, director, Illinois district of the U.S. Small Business Association.

Panel discussions at the event will focus on capital funding and financial growth, technology and infrastructure, new markets (private and public), and state agencies and programs. Attendees will also hear first-hand experiences of women who have built their own companies.

Topics of discussion will range from how to gain access to capital, how to get a foot in the door of large corporations, where to find free technology support, how to get certified for government contracts and how to use the U.S. Census Bureau web site for market research.

“We are committed to connecting experts and resources to firms owned and run by women as there is a great opportunity for these entrepreneurs to create jobs and keep Illinois competitive,” said DCEO Director Adam Pollet. “Women-owned firms are making a powerful impact on our economy.”

The list of panelists include Wendy Lewis, senior vice president, diversity and strategic alliances, Major League Baseball; Pat Harris, global chief diversity officer, McDonald’s Corp.; Marsha Serlin, CEO, United Scrap & Metal Co.; Katrina Markoff, CEO and founder, Vosges Haut-Chocolat; Joanne Tica-Steiger, director, Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses; Sona Wang, founder and managing director, Ceres Venture Fund LP; Maria A. Colangelo, vice president, Wintrust Bank; Poonam Gupta-Krishnan, CEO, Iyka Enterprises Inc.; Kristin Barrett, vice president, Chicagoland Entrepreneurial Center Project 1871, and Rita Haake, program manager, College of DuPage Center for Entrepreneurship.

Directors of four state agencies (DCEO, Transportation, Tollway, Veteran Affairs) and officials from three federal agencies (SBA, Census, Commerce) will discuss how to find business support and outline government projects that are fully funded and seeking contractors. Lt. Gov. Sheila Simon and Deputy Gov. Cristal Thomas will open the event.

There is also an exhibit hall, one-on-one counseling and free on-site daycare.

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“We want women business owners to know they aren’t alone,” said Carol E. Bell, deputy director of Women’s Business Development. “The state is a great resource. Providing these business leaders with support helps them evolve, develop and expand, which in turn leads to more jobs, stronger communities and a better state economy for everyone.”

WBOS will be held 8:30 p.m. to 3 p.m. on Friday March 29 at the UIC Forum, 725 W. Roosevelt Road, Chicago, IL 60608. To register or to find out more information, visit <http://www.ildceo.net/WBOS>

Registration is allowed on site the day of the event. Attendees who pre-register are invited to a free breakfast at 8

[a.m.in](http://www.ildceo.net/WBOS)
the Roosevelt Corridor sponsored by Verizon Wireless.

For more on why Illinois is the right place for business, visit <http://illinoisbiz.biz> .

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