2025 CHICAGO SMALL BUSINESS ECOSYSTEM REPORT

Strengthening Chicago's Neighborhood Business Ecosystem Through Data, Insight, and Action



BACP
Business Affairs and Consumer Protection

CHICAGO



This report brings together insights from over 6,600 business consultations, 8 regional roundtables, and 65 Neighborhood Development Center partners to better understand Chicago's small business ecosystem and help inform policies and strategies that strengthen neighborhood business growth.

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Overview

NBDC IN 2025

Each year, the Neighborhood Business Development Center (NBDC) program supports thousands of entrepreneurs and small business owners as they navigate the challenges of starting, sustaining, and growing businesses across Chicago's neighborhoods. This report reflects the impact of that work through insights gathered from business consultations, regional roundtables, and community partnerships, highlighting how neighborhood-based support strengthens commercial corridors, expands access to resources, and helps businesses navigate City processes.

Small businesses play a critical role in driving local economic activity, creating jobs, activating commercial corridors, and shaping the cultural identity of neighborhoods across the city. Yet for many business owners, accessing capital, scaling operations, navigating city processes remains complex, time-consuming, and resource-intensive, particularly for businesses operating with limited staff, thin margins, and language barriers.

The NBDC program exists to help reduce those barriers. The NBDCs are a citywide network of trusted community-based business service organizations, that provide no-cost one-on-one coaching, technical assistance, business education, and connections to City resources directly within the neighborhoods they serve. By embedding support at the local level, the program helps businesses navigate complexity more effectively, improve long-term sustainability, and advance inclusive economic growth across Chicago.

2025 IMPACT BY NUMBERS

Support provided to small businesses through the NBDC Program

65
NBDC Partners

100%
Free Business Support Services

6,659
Business Consultations

11,995
Business Consulation Hours

1,958
Business Referrals

2,259
Partner Collaborations

1,941,071
Outreach Touchpoints with Businesses

13,328
Outreach Touchpoints with new Businesses

248
Business Education Workshops Hosted

4,245
brick & mortar businesses

1,910
home-based businesses

49%
of Businesses Supported were in Growth Phase

37%
of Businesses Supported were 1-5 years in business

53%
of Businesses Supported had 2-10 employees

NBDC PROGRAM DETAILS

The Neighborhood Business Development Centers, administered by the Chicago Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection, are a network of 65 local business service organizations providing no-cost, hyper-local business development assistance to entrepreneurs and small business owners across Chicago.

The program plays a critical role in fostering equitable small business environments, supporting neighborhood economic vitality, and contributing to local job growth. NBDC partners serve as on-the-ground resources, helping businesses navigate City processes while delivering tailored support that reflects the unique needs of the communities they serve.

NBDCs provide core services including general business licensing and public way use for permitting guidance, as well as specialized support through different program types designed to meet businesses at every stage of their lifecycle.

NBDC PROGRAM TYPES

Place-Based Business Specialist

hyper-local business development assistance to small business owners and entrepreneurs in Chicago in their identified Focus Community Area(s) and/or Priority Corridors

City-Wide Capital Specialist

provide city-wide access to capital services to small business owners and entrepreneurs in Chicago

Peer-to-Peer Trainer

provide training, professional development and/or technical assistance to fellow NBDCs. Provide a platform for connection and collaboration to share best practices with the entire NBDC grantee ecosystem

Across these program types, services include:

- Confidential, one-on-one business advertising
- Technical assistance
- Professional development workshops & training
- Access to capital and financial resources
- Business-to-business networking opportunities
- Troubleshooting City-related issues
- Employment and workforce development assistance
- Consumer marketing support
- Connections to local communities and neighborhood insights
- Assistance with starting, growing, or sustaining a business

Through strong neighborhood networks, NBDCs coordinate with local alders, City departments, and community partners to ensure businesses have the support they need to succeed. The program also strengthens the broader ecosystem by building the capacity of participating business service organizations.

Together, the NBDC network advances a thriving, inclusive small business landscape across Chicago.

CONSULTATIONS

Total consults across all NBDC Capitalist and Place-Based Generalist Organizations

6,629 reported consultations

1.1 hours per individual consultation

Across the Northwest, Northeast, and Southeast regions, marketing was reported as the greatest support *need among consulted businesses. The Southwest region was an outlier, with business planning identified as the largest need.

*please note multiple topics can be reported for each consultation

BUSINESS PHASES

Seed/Idea

This is the concept stage. The business is not yet operating or generating revenue. The focus is on refining the idea, researching the market, testing feasibility, and building a basic plan.

Start Up

The business has launched or is about to launch. There may be early sales, but operations are still being built. The focus is on getting customers, proving the model, and stabilizing day-to-day operations.

Growth*

The business is established and generates consistent revenue. It is no longer a start up, but not yet at scale. The focus is on increasing sales, expanding customer base, hiring staff, and improving systems to support growth.

Expansion

The business is scaling beyond its initial footprint. This may include opening new locations, entering new markets, adding product lines, or significantly increasing capacity. The focus is on strategic growth and managing complexity.

Maturity/Exit

The business is stable with predictable revenue and operations. Growth may level off. The focus shifts to long-term sustainability, succession planning, or preparing for an exit such as a sale, merger or transition of ownership.

*The growth phase was the most commonly reported stage for consultations among NBDC organizations

Small business owners represent the diversity and resilience of the city's neighborhood economies.





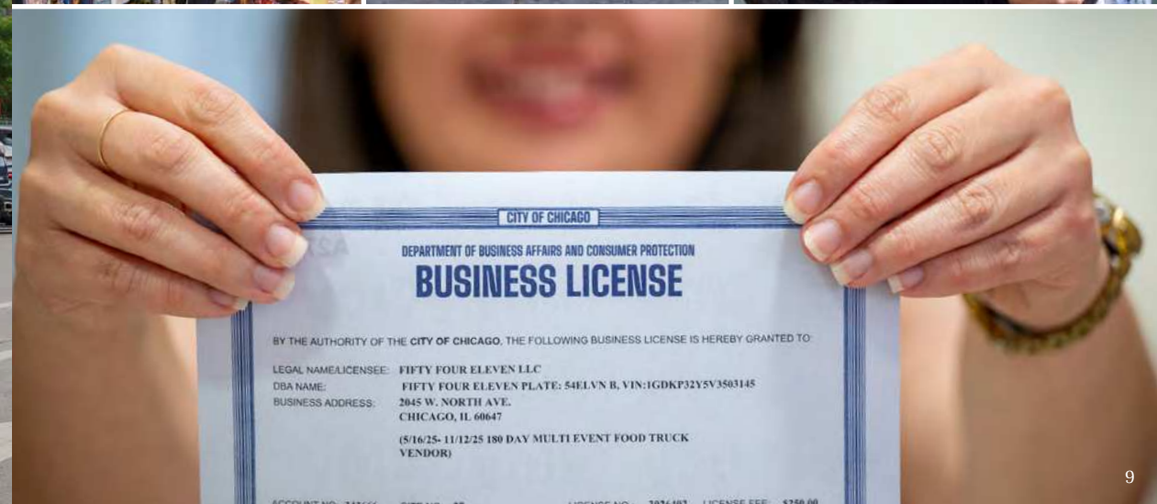




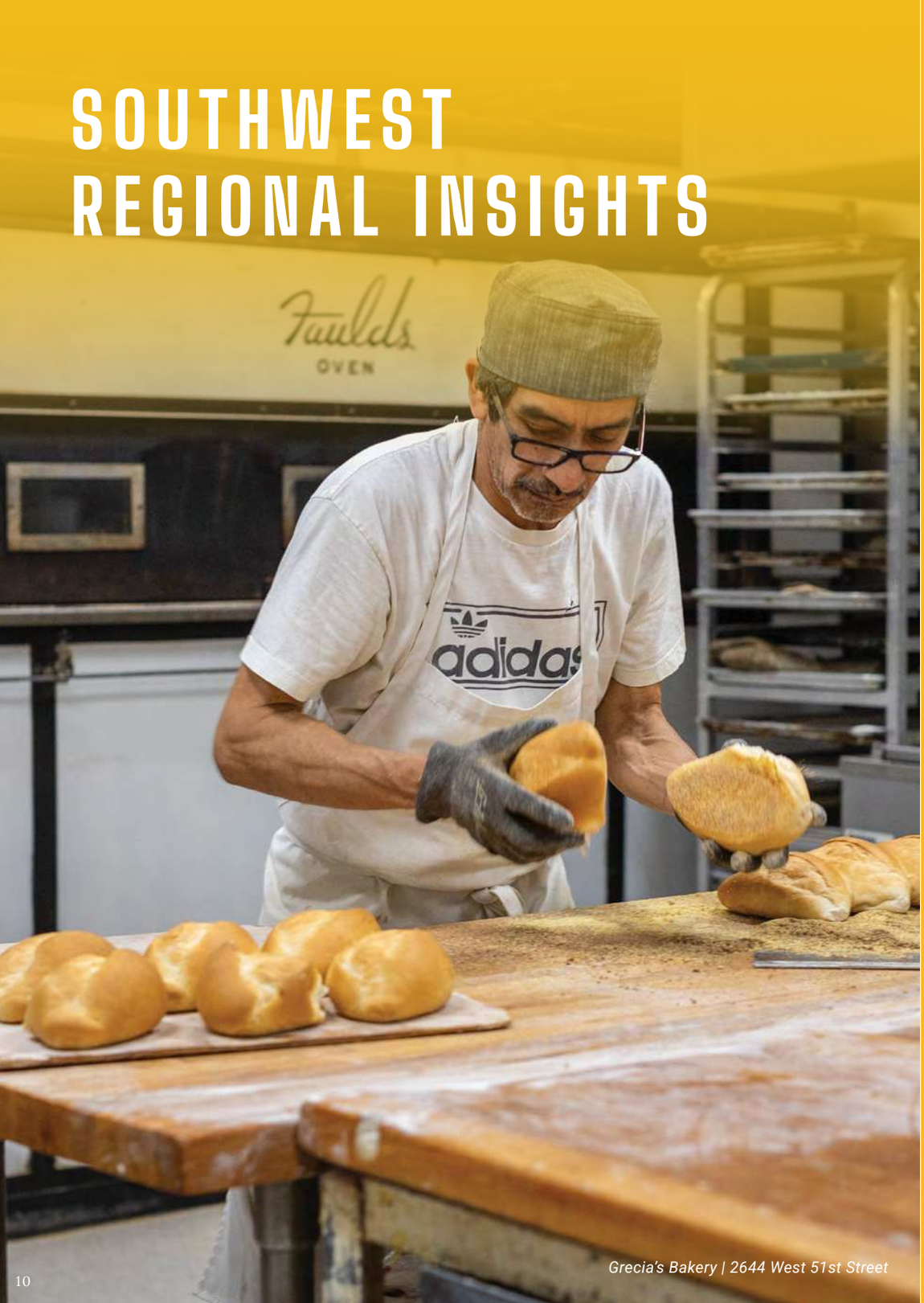








SOUTHWEST REGIONAL INSIGHTS



Grecia's Bakery | 2644 West 51st Street

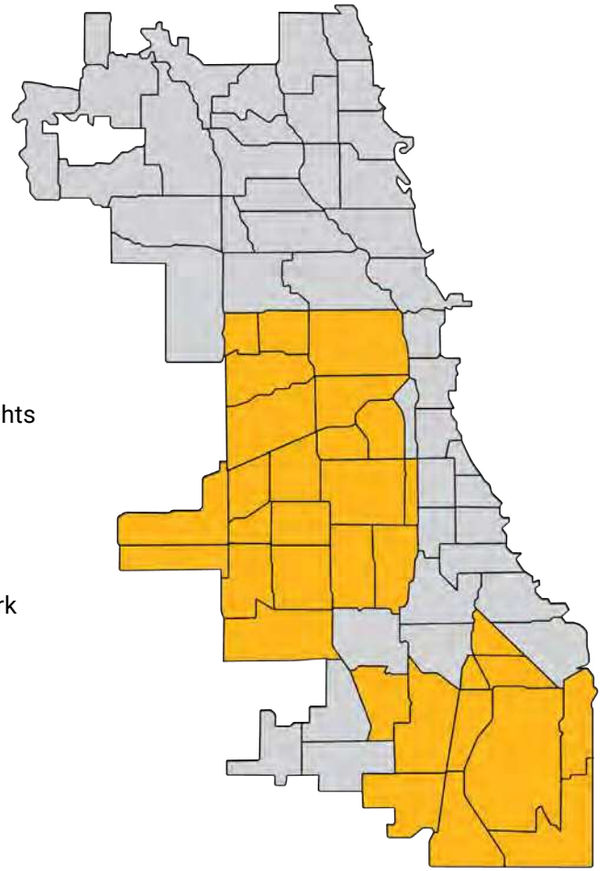
The Southwest Region encompasses some of Chicago's most culturally rich and economically diverse commercial corridors, shaped by longstanding immigrant communities, legacy businesses, and strong neighborhood identity.

Its business landscape spans retail, food, manufacturing, and service industries, serving as both economic anchors and cultural centers for the communities they support.

Resilient Corridors

31 COMMUNITY AREAS SERVED

Archer Heights
Ashburn
Avalon Park
Bridgeport
Brighton Park
Burnside
Calumet Heights
Chicago Lawn
Clearing
East Garfield Park
East Side
Englewood
Fuller Park
Gage Park
Garfield Ridge
Hegewisch
McKinley Park
Near West Side
New City
North Lawndale
Pullman
Riverdale
Roseland
South Deering
South Lawndale
Washington Heights
West Elsdon
West Englewood
West Garfield Park
West Lawn
West Pullman



15 NBDC PARTNERS

1. 36 Squared Business Incubator
3636 South Iron Street
Chicago, Illinois 60609
312.772.0104
36business.org
squaredbusinessincubator

2. Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council (BYNC)
4555 South Ashland Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60609
872.281.7832
bync.org
@byncorg

3. Center for Changing Lives (CCL)
1955 North St. Louis Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60647
773.342.6210
cclconnect.org
@cclchicago

4. Chicago's Chinatown Chamber of Commerce
2169B South China Place
Chicago, Illinois 60616
312.326.5320
chicagochinatown.org
@chinatownchamber

5. Entrepreneurs Academy
4950 West Thomas Street
Chicago, Illinois 60651
773.295.5365
entrepreneursacademy.net
@entrepreneursacademynet

6. Far South Community Development Corporation (FSCDC)
853 West 115th Street
Chicago, Illinois 60643
773.831.7107
farsouthcdc.org
@farsouthcdc

7. Greater Roseland Chamber of Commerce (GRCC)
1000 East 111th Street
Chicago, Illinois 60628
773.785.4000
greaterroselandchamber.org
@greaterroseland

8. Greater Southwest Development Corporation (GSDC)
2601 West 63rd Street
Chicago, Illinois 60629
773.436.1000
greatersouthwest.org
@greatersouthwest

9. Lawndale Business Renaissance Association (LBRA)
906 South Homan Avenue,
Suite 400
Chicago, Illinois 60624
312.925.3186
lawndalebusiness.org

10. Little Village - 26th Street Area Chamber of Commerce
3610 West 26th Street
Chicago, Illinois 60623
773.521.5387
littlevillagechamber.org
@littlevillagechamber

11. New Covenant Community Development Corporation (NCCDC)
2653 West Ogden Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60608
773.826.1356
new-covenantcdc.org

12. Pilsen Chamber of Commerce
1419 West 18th Street
Chicago, Illinois 60608
312.316.0311
pilsenchamberofcommerce.org
@thepilsenchamber

13. Southwest Collective (SWC)
4444 South Pulaski Road
Chicago, Illinois 60632
708.740.8914
swcollective.org
@swcollectivechi

14. West Side Forward
4100 West Ferdinand Street
Chicago, Illinois 60624
773.321.9268
westsideforward.org
@westsideforwardchicago

15. West Town Chicago Chamber of Commerce
1819 West Chicago Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60622
312.850.9390
westtownchamber.org
@westtownchicago

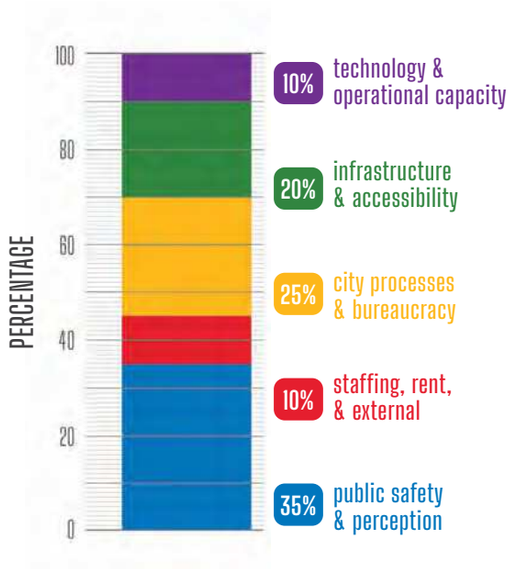
Businesses Served

NBDCs serve as trusted local connectors, helping businesses start, scale, and grow by navigating City systems, accessing resources, and building the capacity for long-term successes. Without this support, many businesses would struggle to remain open.

1,367
Business Consultations in 2025

1,274
Business Consultation Hours in 2025

CONSULTATION TOPIC



PRIMARY ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY BUSINESSES



Southwest Businesses Served Reflect a Diverse Local Economy

737
Brick & Mortar Businesses

569
Home Based Businesses

51
E-Commerce Businesses

Businesses served in the Southwest Region were primarily small, locally rooted enterprises, with brick-and-mortar storefronts continuing to serve as important commercial anchors. Home-based businesses represent a significant share of entrepreneurship, highlighting the importance of accessible technical assistance for emerging and microbusiness owners.

2025 SWOT ANALYSIS SUMMARY: SOUTHWEST REGION

The Southwest Region's strengths are deeply rooted in community and culture, while its greatest barriers are systemic and process-driven, reinforcing the need for coordinated, predictable, and transparent City support.

S — STRENGTHS

Internal advantages within the business & community ecosystem

- Strong collaboration between businesses, chambers, and local leadership
- Deep cultural identity anchoring neighborhood commercial corridors
- Informal networks supporting shared staffing, promotions, and mentorship
- Flexible business models, including pop-ups, co-ops, and hybrid spaces

W — WEAKNESSES

Internal limitations hindering growth, visibility, or efficiency

- Limited capacity for long-term planning and digital adoption
- Inconsistent organizational continuity and succession planning
- Underutilization of institutional partnerships
- Fragmented collaboration across business groups

O — OPPORTUNITIES

External factors that can be leveraged for growth & impact

- Corridor beautification and vacancy activation to improve perception
- Coordinated marketing to position neighborhoods as destinations
- Expanded youth workforce development and engagement pipelines
- Stronger partnerships with schools, nonprofits, and civic institutions

T — THREATS

External barriers jeopardizing stability or progress

- Administrative delays and inconsistent City Processes
- Rising rents and displacement of legacy businesses
- Public safety perceptions and corridor infrastructure conditions
- Limited trust in systems and engagement fatigue from business owners

How NBDC Support Strengthens the Southwest Region

The Southwest Region demonstrates that neighborhood businesses remain strong economic anchors when paired with coordinated local support, trusted partnerships, and systems that reduce barriers to growth.

Direct Support
↓
Capacity Building
↓
Community Outcomes







La Casa Playroom
4371 South Archer Avenue



Grecia's Bakery
2644 West 51st Street





Small Business Success Story

Tawney Coffee
3055 West Pope John Paul II Drive
Brighton Park
Chicago, Illinois 60632
tawneycoffee.square.site
@tawneycoffee

Supporting Agency: Greater Southwest Development Corp



Tawney Coffee approached the Greater Southwest Development Corp seeking guidance to transition from operating under a cottage food license to opening a brick-and-mortar location. While the owner had identified a potential site, they needed support with business planning, financial literacy, and capital readiness to make expansion viable. Through one-on-one advising, the business strengthened its business plan, developed three-year financial projections, and improved overall financial preparedness. Advisors also connected the owner to current grant and pitch competition opportunities.

As a result, the business advanced as a finalist in the South Side Pitch Contest and moved closer to securing the capital needed for expansion. This story illustrates how early planning support and financial coaching can reduce risk, unlock growth opportunities, and help small businesses take the next step toward long-term sustainability.



Roscoe Company Uniform Services
3535 West Harrison Street
Lawndale
Chicago, Illinois 60624

Supporting Agency: Lawndale Business Renaissance Association

Learn more about Roscoe Company Uniform Services and the story of their small business.

Tawny Coffee — Brighton Park

Tawny Coffee approached the Greater Southwest Development Corporation seeking support to transition from operating under a cottage food license to establishing a brick-and-mortar location.

Challenge:

The business required guidance in business planning, financial literacy, and capital readiness to make an expansion viable.

NBDC Support:

Through one-on-one advising, the business:

- Strengthened its business plan
- Developed three-year financial projections
- Improved financial readiness
- Connected to grant and pitch competition opportunities

Outcomes:

- Advanced as a finalist in the South Side Pitch Contest
- Positioned to secure capital for expansion
- Significantly reduced financial and operational risk associated with scaling

Why this matters:

This demonstrates how early-stage planning and financial coaching by NBDC partners can accelerate business growth, unlock access to capital, and increase long-term sustainability.

SOUTHEAST REGIONAL INSIGHTS



Bailey Acupuncture & Wellness | 2737 West 111th Street

The Southeast Region of Chicago is rooted in deep community connections and rising entrepreneurial adaptability. The businesses are closely tied to its residents, neighborhood institutions, and organizations. The business landscape is experiencing expansion and growth and continues to provide their communities with services and offerings that contribute to longstanding loyalty within diverse corridors.

Resilient Corridors

17 COMMUNITY AREAS SERVED

Armour Square

Auburn Gresham

Beverly

Douglas

Grand Boulevard

Greater Grand Crossing

Hyde Park

Kenwood

Morgan Park

Mount Greenwood

Near South Side*

Oakland

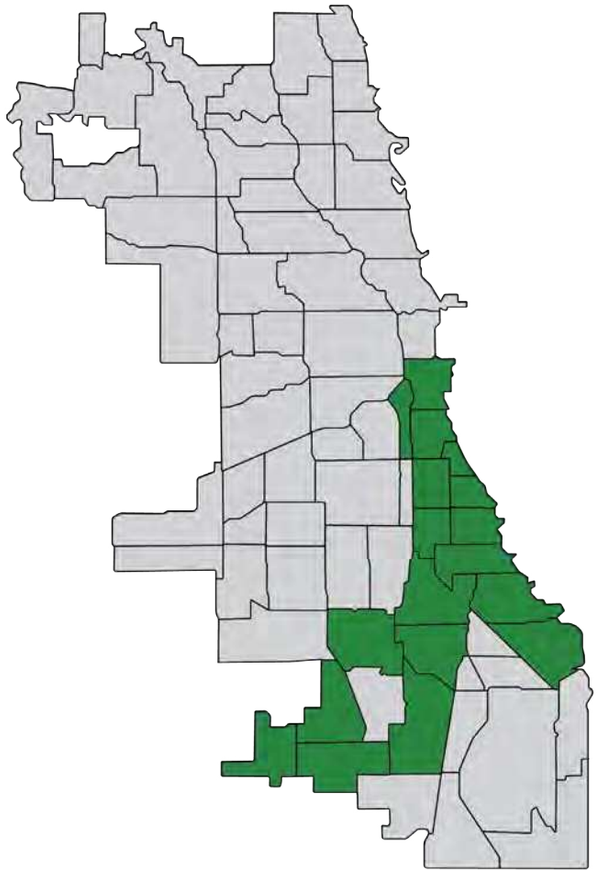
Roseland

South Chicago

South Shore

Washington Park

Woodlawn



14 NBDC PARTNERS

1. 51st Street Business Association
220 East 51st Street
Chicago, Illinois 60615
773.285.3401
51streetchicago.org
@51stba_chicago

2. 95th Street Beverly Hills Business Association
2100 West 95th Street
Chicago, Illinois 60643
773.415.8778
95thstreetba.org
@95thstreetba

3. Beverly Area Planning Association (BAPA)
1744 West 99th Street
Chicago, Illinois 60643
773.405.2120
bapa.org
@bapa_org

4. Calumet Area Industrial Commission (CAIC) SE
1000 East 111th Street,
Suite #608
Chicago, Illinois 60628
773.928.6000
calumetareaindustrial.com

5. Chicago Urban League
4510 South Michigan Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60653
312.285.5800
chiul.org
@thechiurbanleague

6. Greater Auburn Gresham Development Corporation (GAGDC)
1159 West 79th Street
Chicago, Illinois 60620
773.483.3696
gagdc.org

7. Hyde Park Chamber of Commerce (HPCC)
1525 East 53rd Street
Chicago, Illinois 60615
773.288.0124
hydeparkchamberchicago.org
@hydeparkchamber

8. Morgan Park - Beverly Hills Business Association (MPBHBA)
10827 South Western Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60643
773.779.2530
mpbhba.org
@mpbhba

9. Mount Greenwood Community & Business Association (MGCBA)
3400 West 111th Street #496
Chicago, Illinois 60655
773.881.0622
mgcba.org

10. Near South Planning Board (NSPB)
2600 South Michigan Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60616
312.987.1980
thenspb.org
@thenspb

11. Quad Communities Development Corporation (QCDC)
4210 South Berkeley Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60616
773.268.7232
qcdc.org

12. South East Chicago Commission (SECC)
1511 East 53rd Street
Chicago, Illinois 60615
773.324.6926
secc-chicago.org

13. South Shore Chamber Community Development Corporation (SSCC)
1750 East 71st Street
Chicago, Illinois 60649
773.955.9508
southshorechamberinc.org
@southshorechamberinc

14. Woodlawn Chamber of Commerce
6429 South Martin Luther King Drive
Chicago, Illinois 60637
773.234.7207
woodlawnchamberchicago.org

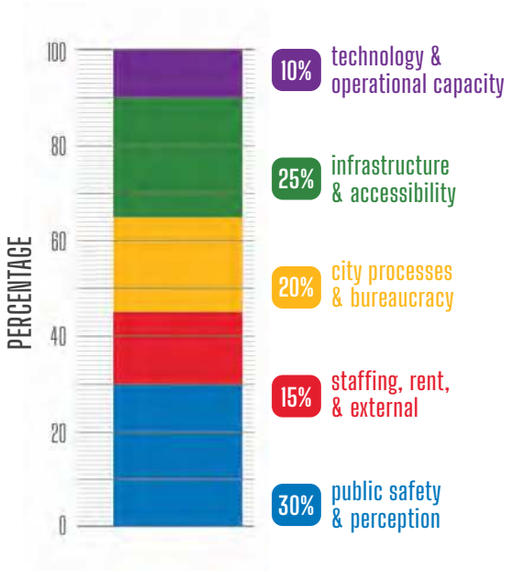
Businesses Served

NBDCs serve as trusted local connectors, helping businesses start, scale, and grow by navigating City systems, accessing resources, and building the capacity for long-term successes. Without this support, many businesses would struggle to remain open.

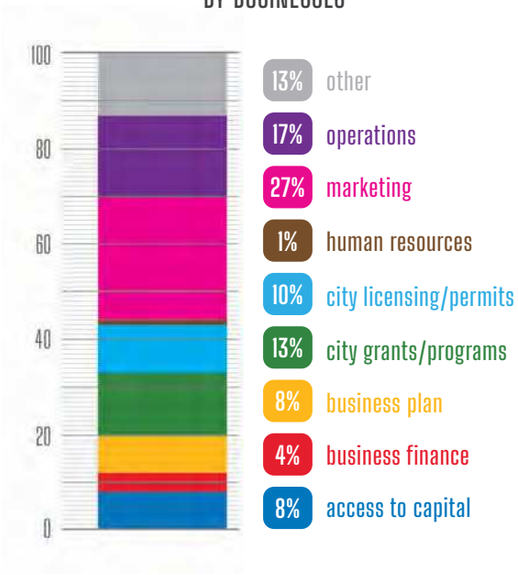
1,182
Business Consultations in 2025

1,452
Business Consultation Hours in 2025

CONSULTATION TOPIC



PRIMARY ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY BUSINESSES



Southeast Businesses Served Reflect a Diverse Local Economy

777
Brick & Mortar Businesses

246
Home Based Businesses

136
E-Commerce Businesses

Businesses served in the Southeast Region include a diverse mix of commercial corridors shaped by deep community roots, anchor institutions, and long-standing neighborhood businesses.

2025 SWOT ANALYSIS SUMMARY: SOUTHEAST REGION

Businesses in the Southeast Region continue to adapt despite operational challenges. Strategic investments in infrastructure, public safety, streamlines government processes, and access to capital present opportunities to strengthen commercial corridors.

S — STRENGTHS

Internal advantages within the business & community ecosystem

- Strong community partnerships and trusted local leadership
- Customer-centered businesses with deep neighborhood connections
- Effective use of digital marketing and community storytelling
- Active business support networks and corridor investments strengthen neighborhood identity

W — WEAKNESSES

Internal limitations hindering growth, visibility, or efficiency

- Limited operational capacity and succession planning constrain business growth
- Gaps in financial readiness, grant navigation, and digital capacities
- Administrative and navigation complexities create challenges in accessing government programs
- Small business owners often balance multiple operational responsibilities with limited staff

O — OPPORTUNITIES

External factors that can be leveraged for growth & impact

- Expand access to capital, technical assistance, and financial education
- Strengthen partnerships among businesses, schools, community organizations, and City agencies
- Increase investment in commercial corridor marketing, placemaking, and tourism
- Streamline government processes to improve access to programs and resources

T — THREATS

External barriers jeopardizing stability or progress

- Rising operating costs and economic uncertainty limit reinvestment
- Public safety perceptions and aging infrastructure affect customer activity
- Redevelopment pressures may challenge the sustainability of legacy businesses
- Unregulated businesses and inconsistent engagement with City officials can create barriers to equitable growth

How NBDC Support Strengthens the Southeast Region

The Southeast Region demonstrates that strong partnerships and community ties serve as primary drivers to increase business sustainability and reduce barriers in navigating processes and programs that aid in business support.

Direct Support
↓
Capacity Building
↓
Community Outcomes







Honey & Hue Bookstore
1804 West 103rd Street



Bailey Acupuncture & Wellness
2737 West 111th Street





Small Business Success Story

Norman's Bistro
3111 East 79th Street
South Shore
Chicago, Illinois 60632
normansbistro.com

Supporting Agency: South Shore Chamber Community Development Center



Norman's Bistro on the Lake, a Blackowned restaurant located at 3111 East 79th Street, opened along the shoreline of Rainbow Beach as a new dining destination and community gathering place in South Shore. To support the business's grand opening and strengthen neighborhood awareness, Norman's Bistro partnered with the South Shore Chamber Community Development Corporation (SSCC) for technical assistance, promotional support, and local stakeholder connections.

SSCC participated in the restaurant's soft reveal and helped coordinate its official ribbon-cutting in June 2025, promoting the launch through Chamber communication channels and inviting community members, local officials, and business leaders to attend. The event drew more than 100 guests and helped position Norman's Bistro on the Lake as a celebrated addition to the neighborhood's arts, food, and hospitality scene. In doing so, the opening contributed to local economic activity, supported job opportunities, and helped activate a key lakefront area as part of broader commercial revitalization efforts.



Ware Ranch Steakhouse
11147 South Michigan Avenue
West Roseland
Chicago, Illinois 60628

Supporting Agency: The Greater Roseland Chamber

Learn more about Ware Ranch Steakhouse and the story of their small business.

Norman's Bistro — South Shore

Norman's Bistro reached out to the South Shore Chamber Community Development Center for support in marketing their new business opening along the shoreline of Rainbow Beach.

Challenge:

The business needed assistance in spreading the word to the community and forming partnerships with local organizations and officials.

NBDC Support:

Through one-on-one advising, the business:

- Promoted on multiple channels
- Drew over 100 guests to opening celebration
- Met with local officials and neighboring businesses

Outcomes:

- Contribution to local economic activity
- Supported job opportunities
- Activated a key lakefront destination

Why this matters:

This demonstrates the important role of an NBDC partner facilitating strong relationships at the start of a business launch to increase engagement with the community and foster building trusted business support networks.

NORTHEAST REGIONAL INSIGHTS



Rivers & Roads Cafe | 1259 West Devon Avenue

The Northeast Region comprises many long standing destinations for Chicago's tourism industries. It includes communities uniquely shaped by neighborhood identity and its business landscape caters to retail, dining, and features many active entertainment corridors. Legacy businesses are high contributors to the feel of each commercial district and provide visibility that anchor the communities.

Resilient Corridors

11 COMMUNITY AREAS SERVED

Edgewater

Lake View

Lincoln Park

Lincoln Square

Loop

Near North Side

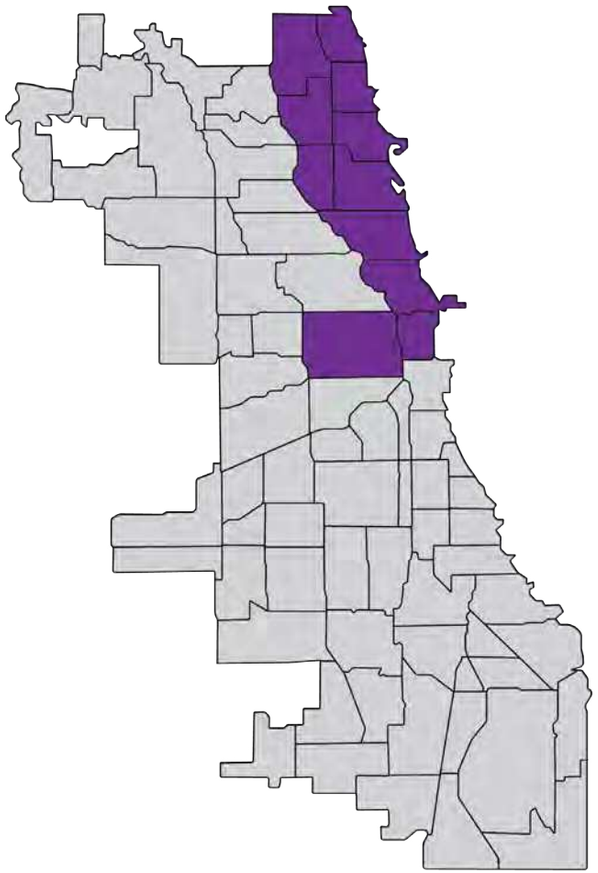
Near West Side

North Center

Rogers Park

Uptown

West Ridge



16 NBDC PARTNERS

1. Andersonville Chamber of Commerce
1554 West Hollywood Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60660
773.728.2995
andersonville.org
@avillechamber

2. Arab American Business and Professional Association (ABPA)
4131 South State Street
Chicago, Illinois 60609
708.738.7957
abpaillinois.com
@abpa_illinois

3. Chinese Mutual Aid Association (CMAA)
1016 West Argyle Street
Chicago, Illinois 60640
773.784.2900
chinesemutualaid.org
@cmaachicago

4. East Edgewater Chamber of Commerce
1210 West Rosedale Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60660
773.561.6000
edgewater.org
@edgewaterchamber

5. Greater Ravenswood Chamber of Commerce (GRCC)
1770 West Berteau Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60613
773.975.2088
ravenswoodchicago.org
@ravenswood_chi

6. Lake View East Chamber of Commerce
3138 North Broadway
Chicago, Illinois 60657
773.348.8608
lakevieweast.com
@lakevieweast

7. Lake View Roscoe Village Chamber of Commerce (LRVCC)
1409 West Addison Street
Chicago, Illinois 60613
773.472.7171 ext. 101
lakeviewroscoevillage.org
@lakeviewroscoevillage

8. Lincoln Park Chamber of Commerce
2468 North Lincoln Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60614
773.880.5200
lincolnparkchamber.com
@lincolnparkchamber

9. Lincoln Square Ravenswood Chamber of Commerce
4505 North Lincoln Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60625
872.806.0685
lincolnsquare.org
@lsrcc_chicago

10. Magnificent Mile Association
625 North Michigan Avenue,
Suite 401
Chicago, Illinois 60611
773.744.1669
themagnificentmile.com
@themagmile

11. North Branch Works
2545 West Diversey Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60647
773.929.5552
northbranchworks.org
@northbranchworks

12. Old Town Merchants & Residents Association (OTMRA)
1453 North Wells Street
Chicago, Illinois 60611
312.951.6106
oldtownchicago.org
@oldtownchi

13. Rogers Park Business Alliance (RPBA)
1448 West Morse Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60626
773.508.5885 ext. 7
rpba.org
@rogersparkba

14. Uptown Chamber of Commerce
4619 North Broadway
Chicago, Illinois 60640
773.878.1064
exploreuptown.org
@exploreuptownchi

15. West Central Association (WCA)
917 West Washington Boulevard
Chicago, Illinois 60607
312.902.4922
wcachicago.org
@wcachicagochamber

16. Wicker Park & Bucktown Chamber of Commerce (WPBCC)
1414 North Ashland Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60622
773.384.2672
wickerparkbucktown.com
@wickerpark_bucktown

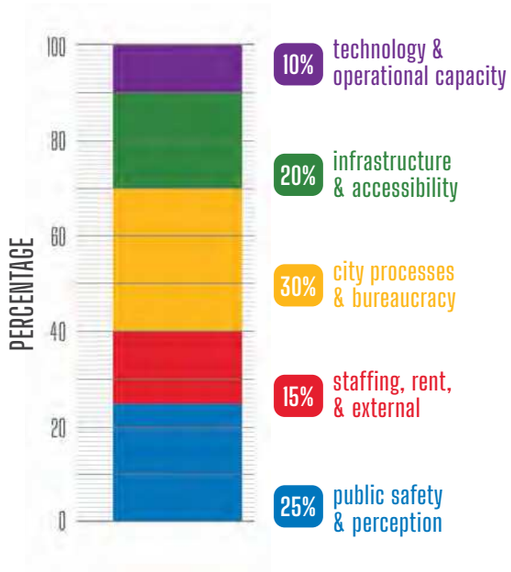
Businesses Served

NBDCs serve as trusted local connectors, helping businesses start, scale, and grow by navigating City systems, accessing resources, and building the capacity for long-term successes. Without this support, many businesses would struggle to remain open.

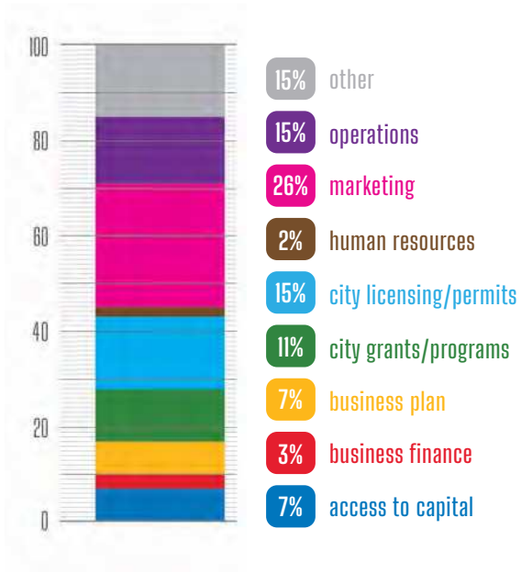
1,713
Business Consultations in 2025

1,670
Business Consultation Hours in 2025

CONSULTATION TOPIC



PRIMARY ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY BUSINESSES



Northeast Businesses Served Reflect a Diverse Local Economy

1,293
Brick & Mortar Businesses

324
Home Based Businesses

42
E-Commerce Businesses

Businesses served in the Northeast Region were primarily small and seeking assistance in growth and expansion, indicating an increasing need for support and one-on-one guidance to sustain presence in a changing economic climate.

2025 SWOT ANALYSIS SUMMARY: NORTHEAST REGION

The Northeast Region benefits from diverse and established commercial corridors, strong entrepreneurial innovation, and growing embrace of technology and cultural entrepreneurship. Continued improvements in digital access, multilingual support, government navigation, and workforce development can help businesses capitalize on their new market opportunities.

S — STRENGTHS

Internal advantages within the business & community ecosystem

- Entrepreneurial businesses embrace technology, innovation, and digital marketing
- Strong cultural identity supports vibrant neighborhood commercial districts
- Diverse business sectors contribute to a resilient local economy
- Collaborative business networks foster knowledge sharing and community investment

W — WEAKNESSES

Internal limitations hindering growth, visibility, or efficiency

- Digital capacity and online business presence vary significantly across businesses
- Workforce recruitment and retention remain ongoing challenges
- Language access and translation barriers can limit participation in programs and services
- Infrastructure limitations constrain business expansion and modernization

O — OPPORTUNITIES

External factors that can be leveraged for growth & impact

- Expand multilingual resources and culturally responsive business services
- Increase access to flexible financing and growth capital and support for employee ownership models
- Promote neighborhood tourism and collaborative marketing initiatives
- Strengthen partnerships among businesses, chambers, alderpeople, and community organizations

T — THREATS

External barriers jeopardizing stability or progress

- Rising operating costs and competition from larger businesses in terms of benefits and flexibility
- Public safety perceptions on streets and public transit affecting tourism and customer activity
- Limited awareness of available business resources and City programs
- Regulatory complexity disproportionately impacts small businesses

How NBDC Support Strengthens the Northwest Region

The Northeast Region demonstrates that by leveraging digital tools and maintaining strong relationships with community partners, businesses are able to resolve factors that create barriers to sustain and grow their businesses.

Direct Support

↓

Capacity Building

↓

Community Outcomes





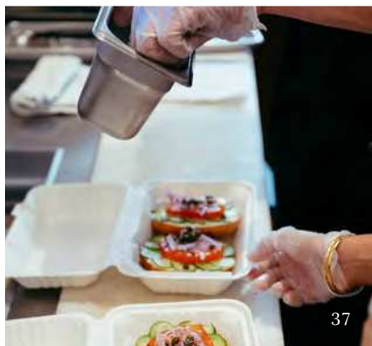


Athena Board Game Cafe
1412 West Lunt Avenue



Rivers & Roads Cafe
1259 West Devon Avenue





Small Business Success Story

Dulcería La Fiesta Inc.
7053 North Clark Street
Rogers Park
Chicago, Illinois 60626
dulcerialafiesta.com
@dulcerialafiestainch

Supporting Agency: Rogers Park Business Alliance



Dulcería La Fiesta Inc., owned by Reyna González, is built around truly handcrafted piñatas, each made with care and customized to match a customer's theme or vision, setting them apart from mass-produced alternatives. Reyna sought support to strengthen her business model, improve digital marketing, expand sales channels, and refocus operations on her core product. Through targeted advising and the Business Accessibility Toolkit (BAT) Program, the team helped audit and strengthen her online presence, guided website upgrades, and prepared her e-commerce catalog to meet Walmart's requirements for online store integration.

As a result, the business transitioned from struggling to cover rent to operating profitably and expanded from a local customer base to a national audience through Walmart's online platform. Ongoing support is focused on pricing, production planning, and workspace efficiency, with access to capital identified as a key next step to scale output while preserving the artisanal quality that makes Reyna's piñatas unique.



Downstate Donuts
1132 West Wilson Avenue
Uptown
Chicago, Illinois 60640

Supporting Agency: The Uptown Chamber of Commerce

Learn more about Downstate Donuts and the story of their small business.

Dulcería La Fiesta Inc — Rogers Park

Dulcería La Fiesta requested assistance from Rogers Park Business Alliance in revising their business model to expand into a broader market.

Challenge:

The business required assistance to drive increased visibility and demand for their offerings in order to sell through major retailers.

NBDC Support:

Through one-on-one advising, the business:

- Strengthened business model
- Improved digital marketing
- Expanded sales channels

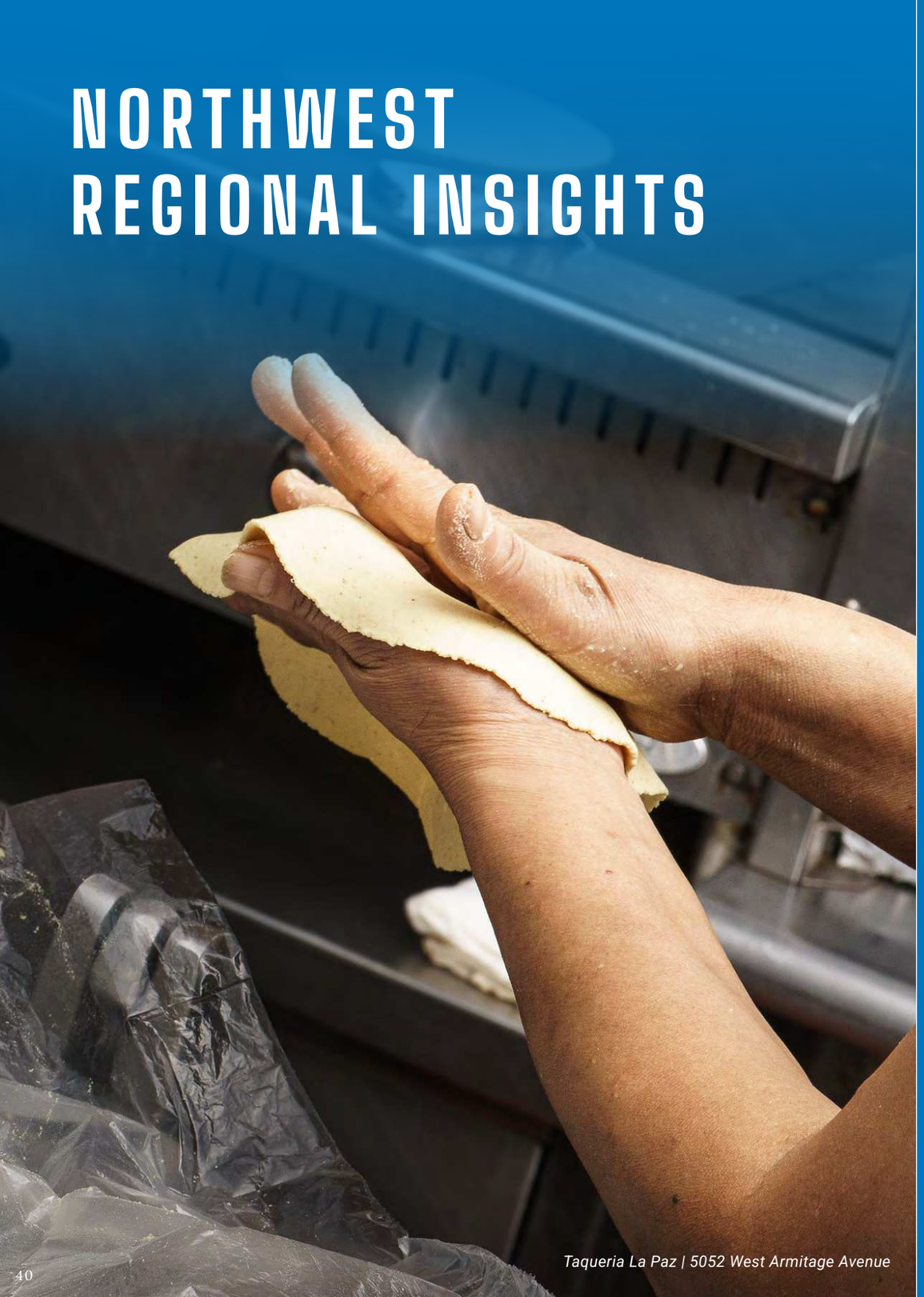
Outcomes:

- Acquired national audience
- Increased profitability
- Successful e-commerce integration

Why this matters:

This demonstrates the importance of ongoing guidance from an NBDC partner. Providing regular support to small businesses creates a measurable impact on the success and livelihood of those within our communities.

NORTHWEST REGIONAL INSIGHTS



Taqueria La Paz | 5052 West Armitage Avenue

The Northwest Region features a strong commercial identity with a growing small business presence. The region is seeing an increase in community events and a focus on beautification. Active neighborhood partners drive engagement from residents and visitors alike in the region with a resurgence of locally owned and operated businesses that historically gave shape to the many entertainment and manufacturing corridors that coexist side by side.

Resilient Corridors

17 COMMUNITY AREAS SERVED

Albany Park

Austin

Avondale

Belmont Cragin

Dunning

Edison Park

Forest Glen

Hermosa

Humboldt Park

Irving Park

Jefferson Park

Logan Square

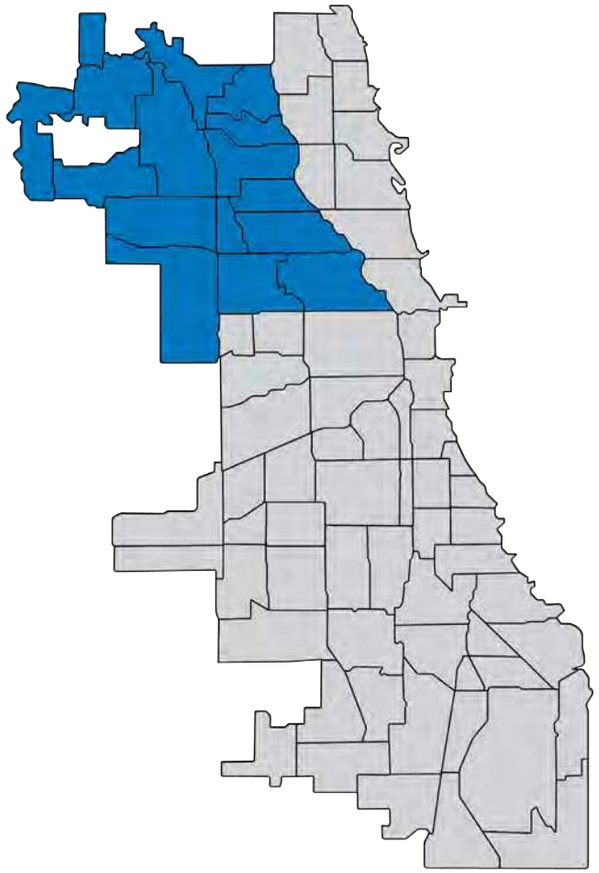
Montclare

North Park

Norwood Park

Portage Park

West Town



16 NBDC PARTNERS

1. Austin African American Business Networking Association (AAABNA)
5820 West Chicago Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60651
773.626.4497
aaabna.org
@aaabnachicago

2. Belmont Central Chamber of Commerce
5534 West Belmont Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60641
773.647.1644
belmontcentral.org
@belmontcentralchamber

3. Edgebrook Sauganash Chamber of Commerce
4740 West Peterson Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60646
773.545.9300
escc60646.com
@escc60646

4. Edison Park Chamber of Commerce
6730 North Olmsted Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60631
773.631.0063
edisonpark.org
@edisonparkchicago

5. Gladstone Park Chamber of Commerce (GPCC)
6348 North Milwaukee Avenue
PMB 318
Chicago, Illinois 60643
773.756.6206
gladstoneparkchamber.com
@gladstoneparkthrowback

6. Jefferson Park Chamber of Commerce
5214 West Lawrence Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60630
773.736.6697
jeffersonparkchamber.com
@jeffersonparkchamber
ofcommerce

7. Logan Square Chamber of Commerce
2808 North Milwaukee Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60618
773.489.3222
loganchamber.org
@logansquarechamber

8. North River Commission(NRC)
3403 West Lawrence Avenue
Suite 301
Chicago, Illinois 60625
773.478.0202
northrivercommission.org
@northrivercommission

9. Northwest Connection Chamber of Commerce (NWCC)
3924 West North Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60647
773.558.8743
nwconnection.org

10. Northwest Side Community Development Corporation (NWSCDC)
5233 West Diversey Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60639
773.283.3888
northwestsidecdc.org

11. Polish American Chamber of Commerce (PACC)
5214 West Lawrence Avenue
Suite #1
Chicago, Illinois 60630
773.205.1998
polishamericanchamber.org
@pacc_chicago

12. Puerto Rican Cultural Center (PRCC)
3151 West Diversey Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60647
773.904.7996
prcc-chgo.org

13. Pulaski Elston Business Association (PEBA)
4204 West Lawrence Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60630
331.248.7127
pebachamber.org
@pulaskelstonbiz

14. Six Corners Association
4041 North Milwaukee Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60641
773.685.9300
sixcorners.com
@sixcornerschicago

15. West Humboldt Park Family & Community Development Council (WHPDC)
3620 West Chicago Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60651
773.342.0036
whpdevelopmentcouncil.net
@whpdc1

16. West Ridge Chamber of Commerce
6445 North Western Avenue,
Suite 304
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773.743.6022
westridgechamber.org
@west_ridge_chamber

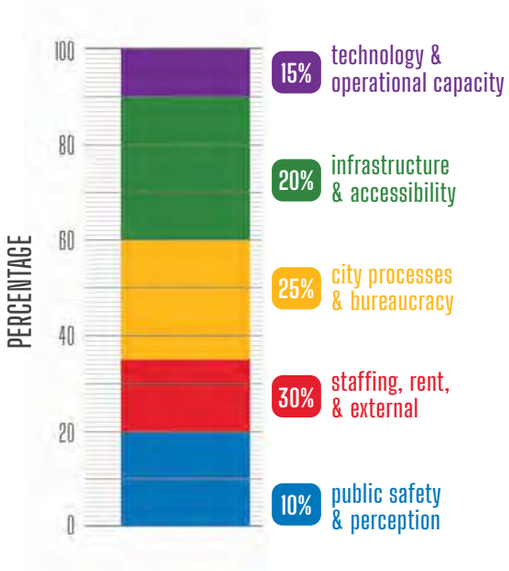
Businesses Served

NBDCs serve as trusted local connectors, helping businesses start, scale, and grow by navigating City systems, accessing resources, and building the capacity for long-term successes. Without this support, many businesses would struggle to remain open.

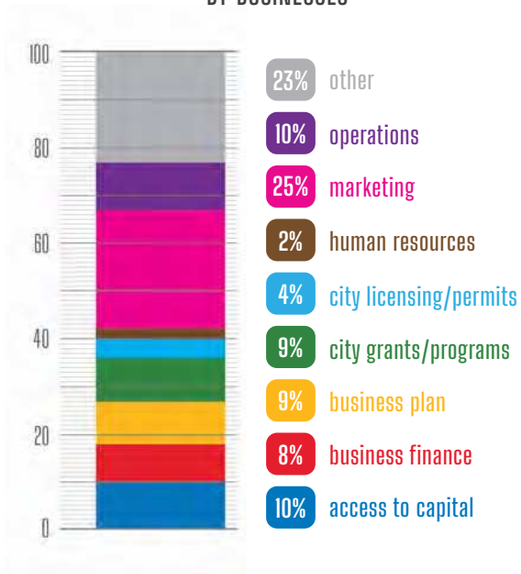
1,876
Business Consultations in 2025

2,311
Business Consultation Hours in 2025

CONSULTATION TOPIC



PRIMARY ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY BUSINESSES



Northwest Businesses Served Reflect a Diverse Local Economy

1,220
Brick & Mortar Businesses

641
Home Based Businesses

15
E-Commerce Businesses

Businesses served in the Northwest Region were primarily small brick and mortar establishments, with a majority in the growth or start up business phase, demonstrating the need and importance of support in the growing small business presence throughout the corridors.

2025 SWOT ANALYSIS SUMMARY: NORTHWEST REGION

The Northwest Region's strengths include strong corridor identity, adaptive use of space, and active support organizations. The greatest barriers for the region are navigating City processes and experiencing delays, which highlights the importance of technical assistance to support and reduce hindrances in processes.

S — STRENGTHS

Internal advantages within the business & community ecosystem

- Established commercial corridors supported by active neighborhood organizations
- Strong culture of entrepreneurship, innovation, and business collaboration
- Growing adoption of technology to improve operations and customer engagement
- Trusted business support organizations provide navigation, mentorship, and multilingual assistance

W — WEAKNESSES

Internal limitations hindering growth, visibility, or efficiency

- Limited staffing capacity constrains growth and long-term planning
- Hiring, workforce development, and succession planning remain persistent challenges
- Complex government processes create administrative burdens for small businesses
- Limited time and resources reduce opportunities for marketing and business development

O — OPPORTUNITIES

External factors that can be leveraged for growth & impact

- Simplify and coordinate City processes to improve the business experience
- Expand multilingual business services and trusted navigation support
- Invest in shared marketing, placemaking, and corridor activation initiatives
- Increase access to affordable commercial space and business stabilization resources

T — THREATS

External barriers jeopardizing stability or progress

- Rising costs and regulatory complexity limiting business investment
- Declining infrastructure maintenance reduces customer activity
- Redevelopment and gentrification pressures threaten displacement of local and legacy businesses
- Public safety concerns, ICE activity, and inconsistent public official coordination impacting corridor vitality

How NBDC Support Strengthens the Northwest Region

The Northwest Region demonstrates that businesses are flexible in adapting business structures and quick to adopt and embrace new marketing tools to boost visibility and awareness. By providing the support to interact with City programs and processes, it relieves strain on small staff and gives time back to the businesses to engage their community.

Direct Support

↓

Capacity Building

↓

Community Outcomes







Taqueria La Paz
5052 West Armitage Avenue



El Capitan Snacks and Cafe
3150 North Central Avenue





Small Business Success Story

Arts Alive Chicago
4041 North Milwaukee Street
Jefferson Park
Chicago, Illinois 60641
artsalivechicago.org
@artsalivechicago

Supporting Agency: Jefferson Park Chamber of Commerce



Arts Alive Chicago, a women-owned nonprofit located at 4041 N Milwaukee Ave, partnered with the Jefferson Park Chamber of Commerce and Senator Rob Martwick to launch the Northwest Art Trail, a public sculpture walk that activates Milwaukee Avenue and connects Jefferson Park with surrounding commercial districts.

The Chamber served as a key local partner by helping plan and promote the project, recruiting local businesses to participate through specials and visibility on the Trail map, and amplifying the launch through newsletters, social media, event listings, and corridor signage reaching more than 300 member businesses. The launch boosted foot traffic for participating merchants, increased exposure for more than ten local businesses, and helped establish Jefferson Park as a model for arts driven placemaking that strengthens neighborhood pride and supports commercial vitality.



JC Moon Co
4250 North Pulaski Road
Albany Park
Chicago, Illinois 60641

Supporting Agency: Pulaski-Elston Business Association

Learn more about JC Moon Co and the story of their small business.

Arts Alive Chicago — Jefferson Park

Arts Alive Chicago connected with the Jefferson Park Chamber of Commerce to help launch a public sculpture walk with Senator Rob Martwick aimed at activating and connecting Jefferson Park with neighboring communities.

Challenge:

The non-profit required assistance to engage the local business community in promoting the new corridor attraction along Milwaukee Avenue.

NBDC Support:

Through one-on-one advising, the business:

- Formed a project and promotion plan
- Recruited local businesses to participate
- Produced marketing through multiple channels

Outcomes:

- Boost in foot traffic for the district
- Created new placemaking identity driven by art
- Engaged with over 300 surrounding businesses

Why this matters:

This demonstrates how activating a corridor with the support from an NBDC partner can bring exposure to the local businesses, creating increased traffic throughout the district.

Data Sources

Data reflected in this report is drawn from a combination of stakeholder engagement, survey responses, direct consultations, and publicly available datasets. Together, these sources provide a comprehensive view of small business needs, trends, and service delivery across Chicago.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT & ROUNDTABLES

Feedback was gathered through a series of in-person regional roundtable events with Business Service Organizations and community stakeholders. These sessions provided qualitative insights into emerging challenges, service gaps, and neighborhood-specific trends.

ROUNDTABLE SCHEDULE

SOUTHWEST REGION
April 14 & September 8, 2025

SOUTHEAST REGION
June 2 & November 10, 2025

NORTHEAST REGION
April 28 & October 20, 2025

NORTHWEST REGION
May 12 & September 29, 2025

CITYWIDE CHIBIZCHAT *July 21, 2025*

SURVEY AND CONSULTATION DATA

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected through direct engagement with NBDC Partners:

40
NBDC Survey Submissions
collected between March 10 and June 3, 2025

32
One-on-One Consultations
conducted between April 2 and August 4, 2025

PUBLIC DATA SOURCES

Citywide business activity and licensing data were sourced from the Chicago Data Portal, specifically Business License Data for active licenses between January 1 and December 31, 2025. *data.cityofchicago.org*

Together, these sources ensure that the findings in this report are grounded in both on-the-ground experiences and citywide data, reflecting a balanced and data-informed perspective on Chicago's small business ecosystem.

Key Takeaways

Chicago's small business ecosystem is diverse, resilient, and deeply rooted in our neighborhoods. These findings underscore the importance of trusted local business support, safe and vibrant commercial corridors, strong public-private partnerships, and continued investment in neighborhood business districts to advance inclusive economic growth across Chicago.

NEIGHBORHOOD-BASED SUPPORT SYSTEMS MATTER

Trusted local business service organizations play a critical role in helping businesses navigate licensing, permitting, financing, compliance, and operational challenges. Embedded, community-based technical assistance continues to be one of the most effective ways to reduce barriers and improve long-term business sustainability.

ACCESS TO CAPITAL AND OPERATIONAL CAPACITY REMAIN CRITICAL NEEDS

While many businesses demonstrate strong market demand and community support, growth is often constrained by limited access to capital, staffing challenges, rising operating costs, and limited internal capacity. Continued investment in financial readiness, operational support, and growth-stage assistance, and exit planning remains essential.

PUBLIC SAFETY AND PERCEPTION INFLUENCE BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

Businesses consistently identified public safety and perceptions of safety as important factors shaping customer behavior, employee recruitment and retention, investment decisions, and overall corridor activity. While conditions vary across neighborhoods, business owners emphasized that clean, welcoming, and well-maintained commercial corridors help attract customers, encourage foot traffic, and build confidence among residents, visitors, and investors.

REDUCING GOVERNMENT FRICTION

Businesses highlighted opportunities to simplify and improve interactions with government. More streamlined, coordinated, and predictable government processes like licensing, permitting, inspections, grants, and compliance processes can reduce burdens on business owners, improve the customer experience, and strengthen business confidence.

Cut the Tape for Small Business

PRIORITY INITIATIVES

Cut The Tape for Small Business is comprised of nine Cut The Tape for Small Business Goals, inspired by input from eight small business roundtables over the course of 2025. The nine Goals are designed to streamline and simplify regulatory processes, enhance transparency, and increase access to small business education and resources.

1 Standardized Pre-Licensing Inspection Guidance

Develop clear, standardized, department-specific guides that help business owners understand required steps, documentation, and compliance criteria for City inspections.

2 Licensing and Permitting Modernization

Streamline and digitize licensing and permitting processes to reduce complexity, eliminate redundancies, and improve overall efficiency.

3 Neighborhood Tourism and Cross-Corridor Marketing

Leverage cultural storytelling and coordinated marketing to showcase neighborhood assets, promote local destinations, and strengthen corridor-based economic activity.

4 Interactive Business Zoning Platform

Develop an online zoning map showing allowable business uses by address, giving entrepreneurs quick, clear zoning information and reducing the need for manual inquiries.

5 Administrative Debt Check Process Streamlining

Improve the clarity and consistency of debt-check procedures to reduce delays and accelerate permit and license processing.

6 Emerging Industries Regulatory Framework

Assess and update regulations to accommodate new industry sectors, ensuring Chicago remains competitive, innovation-friendly, and aligned with evolving trends.

7 Interdepartmental Information Integration

Increase data-sharing and coordination across departments to reduce silos and deliver more seamless support to small businesses.

8 Community-Based Entrepreneurial Education Access

Expand in-community access to entrepreneurship through City Colleges of Chicago, providing residents with accessible pathways to develop business skills and pursue new ventures.

9 Digital Literacy Advancement for Entrepreneurs

Provide targeted digital literacy training for under-resourced business owners to close technology gaps and strengthen long-term business capacity.

Appendix

CITY SERVICES

Chicago City Hall | 121 North LaSalle Street | chicago.gov
For General Information, call 311

Animal Care & Control
312.747.1406

Buildings
312.744.3449

Business Affairs & Consumer Protection
312.744.6060

Business Licensing & Permits
312.74.GOBIZ (744.6249)

Emergency Services
911

Family & Support Services
312.743.0300

Finance (Revenue)
312 744 2204

Fire (Central Office)
312.745.3705

Planning & Development
312.744.4190

Human Resources
312.744.4976

Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities
312.744.7050

Park District
312.742.PLAY (7529)
chicagoparkdistrict.com

Police (Central Office)
for non-emergency calls
312.746.6000

Public Health
312.747.9884

Public Library
312.747.4300

Water Management
312.744.6653



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the1stward.com
@aldermanlaspata

2
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312.643.2299
aldermanhopkins.com

3
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ward03chicago.com

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@lamontjrobinson

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@6wardcentral

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gregmitchell7thward.org

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@aldbeale

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@aldermanpeterchico

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@votenicolelee11

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the12thward.org
@the12thward

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773.581.8000
chicago.gov/city/en/about/wards/13.html

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773.236.0117
chicago14.com
@jeylugutierrez

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Alderperson Raymond Lopez
2650 West 51st Street
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773.823.1539
the15thward.org

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@aldmosley21

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@25thwardoffice

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chicago.gov/city/en/about/wards/27.html

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@alderwomancruz

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Chicago, Illinois 60651
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chicago.gov/city/en/about/wards/37.html

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aldermansposato.com

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@aldknudsen43

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@alderwoman49

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@aldermansilverstein

Contributions

This report is the result of a collective effort across the Neighborhood Business Development Centers network, made possible through the time, insight, and collaboration of business service organizations, community partners, and small business owners across Chicago.

Special thanks to the Chicago Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection team, NBDC partners, roundtable hosts, and contributors who shared their expertise, data, and on-the-ground experiences to inform this work. We are also grateful to the many entrepreneurs who participated in surveys, consultations, and discussions, offering honest perspectives that shaped the findings of this report.

This work reflects a shared commitment to strengthening Chicago's small business ecosystem and supporting the continued growth and resilience of neighborhood commercial corridors.

FROM THE CITY | Chicago City Hall | 121 North LaSalle Street | chicago.gov

Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (BACP)
Chicago City Hall | 8th Floor | 312.744.6060 | @chicagobacp

Ivan Capifali | Commissioner
Lotika Pai | Managing Deputy Commissioner
James Harris | Assistant Commissioner, Small Business Advocacy Bureau
William Aguilar | Project Coordinator
Tracy Brown | Project Coordinator
Matthew Meade | Project Coordinator
Steve Niketopoulos | Project Coordinator

CHICAGO COMMUNITY MEMBERS

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Neighborhood Photography

Roundtable Host Sites

Arturo Velasquez Institute
Southwest Region
2800 South Western Avenue
773.838.1520
ccc.edu/daley/departments/arturo-velasquez-institute/

Malcolm X College
ChiBizChat
1900 West Jackson Boulevard
312.850.7000
ccc.edu/malcolm-x/home/

Catholic Theological Union
Southeast Region
5416 South Cornell Avenue
773.371.5400
ctu.edu

DuSable Black History Museum
Southeast Region
740 East 56th Place
773.947.0600
dusablemuseum.org

Truman College
Northeast Region
1145 West Wilson Avenue
773.907.4000
ccc.edu/truman/home

Copernicus Center
Northwest Region
5216 West Lawrence Avenue
773.777.8898
copernicuscenter.org

Caterers

Alonti Catering
3150 West 44th Street
alonti.com

Bartoli's Pizzeria
658 North Ashland Avenue
bartolispizzeria.com

The Chef and The Baker
135 North Kedzie Avenue
thechefandbaker.com

Chicago French Press
1021 South Delano Court
chicagofrenchpress.com

Dark Matter Coffee
2400 North Milwaukee Avenue
darkmattercoffee.com

The Dinner Belle
thedinnerbelle.com

Downstate Donuts
1132 West Wilson Avenue
downstatedonuts.com

Everybody's Coffee
935 West Wilson Avenue
everybodyscoffee.com

Gotham Bagels
521 South Dearborn Street
gothambagels.com

Happy Monday
1307 West Hollywood Avenue
happymondaychicago.com

Portage Grounds
5501 West Irving Park Road
portagegrounds.wixsite.com/portage-grounds-coff

Rivers & Roads Cafe
1259 West Devon Avenue
riversandroadscafe.com

Sip & Savor
5301 South Hyde Park Boulevard
sipandsavorchicago.com

Smack Dab
6730 North Clark Street
smackdabchicago.com

Sweet Cafe
6348 West Higgins Avenue
mysweetcafe.com

True North Cafe
1323 East 57th Street
truenorthchicago.com

Weston's Coffee & Tap Co.
4872 North Milwaukee Avenue
westonscoffee.com

