



February 27, 2009

TO THE GOVERNOR AND MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY:

In accordance with the provisions of the Public Act 88-0404, the Business Assistance and Regulatory Reform Act (Act), the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) respectfully submits this calendar year 2008 annual report on the Illinois Entrepreneurship Network Business Information Center (Center). As directed by the Act, DCEO's Entrepreneurship and Small Business Bureau oversees the Center, a statewide resource for new and existing business owners, the goal of which is to enhance the state's business climate by making it easier for entities to comply with government requirements and gain access to information they need to be competitive

This annual report reflects the 2008 achievements of the Center, one of Illinois' finest assets for improving the small business climate by effectively and successfully working with entrepreneurs, small businesses and prospective business owners. With a staff dedicated to providing comprehensive information on topics ranging from business start-up, financing, legislative and regulatory mandates to local demographics, marketing and international trade, this year builds on the history of the Center's success.

The Center is an essential part of the Illinois Entrepreneurship Network (www.ienconnect.com) and is the point-of-contact for entrepreneurs and small business owners interested in the services provided by the Entrepreneurship Centers, the Illinois Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs), Illinois Procurement Technical Assistance Centers (PTACs), the SBDC International Trade Centers (ITC), NAFTA Opportunity Centers (NOC), the Small Business Environmental Assistance Program (SBEAP), and the Illinois Manufacturing Extension Partnership of Illinois (MEP-I).

Herein is the 2008 report and please contact my office if you have any questions or need further information.

Sincerely,

Jack Lavin, Director
Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic
Opportunity

Internet Address <http://www.commerce.state.il.us>

IEN BUSINESS INFORMATION CENTER SERVICES

The cornerstone to the success of IEN Business Information Center is its personnel and their commitment to providing professional, comprehensive customer service. Listed below are the Center's primary services.

- **Business Specialists:** The core of the Center's services is the professionals that handle the thousands of inquiries that come in via the toll-free business help line, e-mail, standard mail and walk-ins. When a business encounters difficulty with the state regulatory process, the Business Specialists serve as advocates for small businesses, working to find a solution that both the business and state agency find mutually acceptable. The Center staff provides expert guidance in linking pre-business ventures and existing business owners to federal, state and local government resources. The Specialists help dispel the common perception that government is inaccessible to small businesses.
- **Toll-Free Call Center:** Calls into the Center via the toll-free number are received by highly trained customer service representatives. The call center handles the high percentage of requests for basic information as well as mail fulfillment regarding the business startup kits. A large number of these calls are referred to the Illinois Entrepreneurship Network (IEN) where clients can arrange an appointment to meet for professional one-on-one business counseling, assistance in developing business plans, exporting assistance and government contracting opportunities. Requests for in-depth assistance, advocacy and research are seamlessly forwarded to the Business Specialists who have the expertise to thoroughly assist the client.
- **Hispanic Outreach:** As an outreach effort to educate prospective entrepreneurs in Illinois' growing Hispanic population, the Center has converted its most popular publications, such as the Starting Your Business in Illinois handbook to Spanish. Since 2000 the Center has had a bilingual customer service representative to serve its Spanish-speaking clients.
- **Knowledge Base Technology:** The IEN Knowledgebase (KBS) uses state of the market technology to allow entrepreneurs and small businesses access the same comprehensive permitting information, financing and technical assistance tools, as our Call Center but on a self-serve basis and in real-time via www.ienconnect.com. This multi-functional system replaced three archaic databases and provides the Center with greater capability in assisting clients.
- **IEN Locator:** The KBS provides this function which will connect inquirers who enter an address, city/town/village, and/or zip code to their nearest IEN member. This network is comprised of the Entrepreneurship Centers, the Illinois Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs), Procurement Technical Assistance Centers (PTACs), the International Trade Centers (ITCs), NAFTA Opportunity Centers (NOCs), the Small Business Environmental Assistance Program (SBEAP), and the Illinois Manufacturing Extension Partnership of Illinois (MEP-I).

- Regulatory Flexibility Program: The “Reg Flex” staff examines proposed rules and regulations affecting the small business community and through impact analyses recommends ways of making the rules more flexible, cost effective or less restrictive for small business. The Regulatory Flexibility Program’s 2008 activities are included in this report.
- Electronic Monthly Newsletter: "The IEN Connection" to help businesses keep up-to-date on the latest happenings with regard to rules and regulations, business requirements, upcoming events and training. Solicits input on rule during the first notice period and works with state agencies to minimize impact on small businesses.

IEN BUSINESS INFORMATION CENTER PUBLICATIONS

The Business Information Center's publications are an integral part of the services provided to customers. The number and variety of publications has grown through the years reflecting customer demands for information.

- Starting Your Business in Illinois handbook: This 42-page booklet is the core of the business startup kit IENBIC sends out and is heralded by the business community as one of the most useful publications of its kind. It features answers to the basic questions and issues facing new business ventures, including a business feasibility checklist; a business plan outline; listings of essential state, federal and local agencies; and, much other useful information. It is the most downloaded document offered on the IEN web site: www.ienconnect.com/handbook and more than 25,000 hard-copies are distributed annually. It is also available in Spanish.
- Directory of Business Profiles, Requirements and Assistance Programs: This comprehensive database of more than 450 profiles of state business permits, licenses, certifications and assistance programs have been enhanced to include profiles of the top 100 most popular business startups. It is available on IEN's website in an easy-to-search application, or by calling the Business Information Center through its toll-free business help line.
- Financing Matrix: This comprehensive and popular document lists in an easy to understand format the variety of state and federal small business financing programs that are available. The Financing Matrix is available on DCEO's web site and in hardcopy.
- Illinois Child Care Resource Guide: As a part of the DCEO Entrepreneurship and Small Business Office's highly successful Day Care Initiative, the Center collaborated with other state and federal agencies, the Illinois State Treasurer's Office, the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, and the Illinois Network on Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies to create this valuable resource guide, which was completely updated in 2005. The guide is a four-part publication:
 - **A Guide for Family Providers** outlines the steps necessary for family providers to start a home child care program
 - **Developing Center-Based Programs** outlines the steps necessary for starting a center-based child program
 - **Options for Employers** outlines available options for companies assisting employees with child care
 - **Developing Community Programs** outlines the steps necessary for developing community child care programs
- Child Care Start-up Profile: This 29-page booklet, written and produced by the Center, is a straight-forward guide for starting a day care. It is separated into two sections, one geared toward those hoping to establish a home child care business and the other for those establishing a larger scale child care center. It is also available in Spanish
- Proposal Writing Guide: To meet the demand from individuals interested in starting a nonprofit organization but having no resources to turn to, the Center offers this 52-page

booklet to help nonprofit community program developers and planners with the basic elements and concepts in planning and preparing winning proposals for project funding.

- eCommerce Business Start-up Profile: This booklet, a combined effort by Braddock Communications, Inc., the College of Business and Technology at Western Illinois University and the Center, gives prospective and existing business owners guidance when starting or expanding their business into the e-commerce arena.
- Restaurant Start-up Profile: This 46-page booklet is a combined effort by the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs at Western Illinois University and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. It is a resource to facilitate startup or help existing restaurant owners operate more profitably. This was made available in Spanish.
- Grocery/Convenience Store Profile: This 38-page booklet is a combined effort by the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs at Western Illinois University and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. It is a resource to facilitate startup or help existing store owners operate more profitably.
- The Business Start-up Expert: This business card sized compact disk is the Center's effort to create innovative, cost effective ways to make information readily available to its customers. This business card disk literally replaces hundreds of pages of small business information and links users to in-depth web resources. The Expert is a virtual business start-up library.
- Business Management Guides: Through a partnership with New Ground Publications, the Center and the Illinois Small Business Development Center have made 7 management guides available via DCEO's web site. These management guides are:
 - A Simple Guide to Your Company's Financial Statements
 - The Small Business Owner's Guide To Financial Control
 - Understanding Commercial Lending: The Question and Answer Guide
 - A Simple Guide To Your Small Business Marketing Plan
 - The Small Business Report Card: Is Your Business Making The Grade?
 - Buying & Selling A Small Business
 - The Plan: A Step-By-Step Business Plan Workbook
- Winery Profile: This 67-page booklet is a combined effort by Illinois Small Business Development Center at Southern Illinois University, Illinois Grape and Wine Resources Council and the IEN Business Information Center. This profile complements the State's current efforts to increase a growing industry in Illinois and to boost tourism.

**IEN BUSINESS INFORMATION CENTER
CLIENT ASSISTANCE PERFORMANCE**

What has the IEN Business Information Center accomplished in 2008? Below are numerical measures of the Center's performance.

Type of Cases Handled: CY2008

• General Business Inquiries and Other Cases	3,241
• Licensing and Registration Cases	2,148
• Sources of Financing Cases	1,442
• Business Startup Inquiries	1,109
• Business Planning, Counseling and Training	1,017
• Government Contracting Cases	137
• Not-For-Profits Organization	111
• International Trade Cases	37

Where Clients Were Referred to:

• Small Business Development Centers	2,321
• International Trade Centers/ NAFTA Opportunity Centers	37
• Procurement Technical Assistance Centers	136

How Clients Reached the IEN BIC:

• Toll Free IEN Help Line Calls	4,757
• Internet and Business Portal Inquiries	3,880
• DCEO Business Development Line Calls	386
• US Mail / Written Inquiries	169
• Walk-ins	50
• Total IENBIC Client Activity	9,242

IEN BUSINESS INFORMATION CENTER CUSTOMER SERVICE

As in the private sector, the leading edge goes to the organizations that strive for and provide superior customer service. Instituted early in its beginning, the Center surveys its clients to determine their satisfaction on key areas including: professionalism, promptness, knowledge, courtesy, value, and saving time and money. Business specialists follow up with any respondent who is less than satisfied with the service they receive. Results for FY 2008 are consistent with past years.

- **Percent of customers surveyed indicating the IENBIC saved them time and/or money** **90%**
(73 out of 81 total responses)

- **Percent of customers surveyed indicating a high degree of satisfaction with products and services** **95%**
(593 out of 624 total responses)

Here are some of the Center’s customer comments from 2008 surveys (For privacy respondents names are withheld)

- “(Staff) was very courteous and professional. Very happy with your services” - Braidwood
- “Thank you for your prompt service.” - Champaign
- “I spoke with (staff) she was very helpful and courteous.” - Kankakee
- “Thank you for your speedy response. I hope that you will continue to assist others just like you assisted me.” -Danville
- “The staff were exceptionally helpful and pleasant, seemed like they really wanted to help me.” -Fieldon
- “The agent who took my call was extremely helpful and informative. She followed thru sending all the information we discussed” - McHenry
- “The woman was so kind and helpful. She is the nicest person I ever dealt with a business matter via a government call...” -Chicago

**IEN BUSINESS INFORMATION CENTER
REGULATORY RELIEF AND BUSINESS RESOURCES ACTIVITIES**

In addition to clients assisted with various regulatory assistance requests, IENBIC also proactively reached out to small businesses through the Regulatory Flexibility Program. Better known as Reg Flex, this program calls for DCEO to serve as a regulatory watchdog for small businesses. Its web address is: www.ienconnect.com/regflex.

Helping Illinois' small businesses bring their concerns to the rulemaking process and requiring agencies to consider the prospective impact of proposed regulation on small entities is the role of the IEN's Office of Regulatory Flexibility. The Office of Regulatory Flexibility continues to advocate against the disproportionate burden of regulations on small businesses.

In 2008, the Office reviewed proposed rulemakings and submitted comments to the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules in an effort to reduce the financial burden and compliance requirements on small business. Through these efforts, as well as implementing a new online form to register regulatory complaints, the Office works to save small businesses money in regulatory and compliance costs.

Additionally, the office publishes the *IEN Connection* monthly newsletter. This newsletter contains the latest on state and federal regulations; news from the resource partners that make up the IEN, as well as the Small Business Administration and the Internal Revenue Service; information on upcoming conferences, seminars or training; and other news and changes to help Illinois' small businesses compete. Utilizing well-known Constant Contact, the newsletter is sent to over 700 businesses, chambers of commerce, trade groups and associations.

In 2008, the Office of Regulatory Flexibility:

- **429** Proposed State Regulations were reviewed.
- **102** Small Business Impact Analyses for consideration by JCAR were conducted.
- A new vehicle was established to allow businesses to file a formal complaint regarding an onerous rule or regulation, such as the continued need for the rule, the complexity of the rule, the extent to which the rule duplicates or conflicts with federal regulations. Businesses are able to file the complaint online, and the Regulatory Flexibility staff will determine what can be done to offer relief to the businesses with regard to the regulation. A copy of this online complaint form can be found at www.ienconnect.com.
- In November 2008, the Office of Regulatory Flexibility began a monthly newsletter entitled "*The IEN Connection*" to help businesses keep up-to-date on the latest happenings with regard to rules and regulations, business requirements, upcoming events and training.

STRATEGIC FUTURE

The Illinois Entrepreneurship Network Business Information Center is committed to being the foremost resource for information, compliance assistance and advocacy for businesses dealing with government red tape and bureaucracy.

The mission of the IEN Business Information Center is to focus on the removal of impediments to business growth by making the government regulatory process less burdensome and easier to negotiate. The Center continues to develop stronger advocacy ties to the State's regulating agencies in order to develop a comprehensive approach to decreasing negative enforcement action while increasing regulatory compliance.

In addition, the Office of Regulatory Flexibility will be taking a more "pro-active" approach to the rulemaking process, by meeting with agencies during the earliest stages of a rulemaking process and allowing for more industry input.

2009 will see a dramatic upgrade on our client's ability to access regulatory and business assistance information in a user friend manner via our new Knowledgebase System. Staff will be working extensively buildup and enhance the content of the KBS.

The Center's marketing strategy will intensify outreach to business groups to ensure that more small business owners become aware and take advantage of the services not only offered by the IEN but by the entire State of Illinois.

For questions or comments regarding this report or the Center's programs and services, contact Darryl Thomas, Interim Manager, 217-785-6190.