



Illinois Department of Transportation

Office of the Secretary
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January 13, 2026

To Our Valued Transportation Partners,

As we start the new year, we want to offer our continued support for firms in our Disadvantaged Business Enterprise program and remind those impacted by the recent changes on the federal level that we are here to help.

Guidelines issued Oct. 3 in the form of an Interim Final Rule (IFR) from the U.S. Department of Transportation have changed how businesses are certified as DBEs.

According to the IFR, race and gender alone are no longer presumptive qualifiers of social and economic disadvantage. Firms previously certified as DBEs must be reevaluated for eligibility using new criteria focused on personal narratives and net worth statements.

In response, IDOT and the other agencies in the Unified Certification Program – the City of Chicago, Chicago Transit Authority, Pace and Metra – have been engaging DBE firms via email, phone calls, letters and personal visits to offer resources to meet a Jan. 31 submission date for the required materials.

To date, efforts have included:

- Thirteen workshops for DBE firms (10 district events, two town halls, one virtual). More than 200 DBEs were reached during the district events and streaming views exceeded 1,000.
- Supportive service consultants are providing one-on-one assistance to DBEs to help develop their personal narratives and net worth statements.
- A personal narrative guidance tool has been made available for all DBEs.
- An [IDOT supportive services events](#) webpage has been established and will be updated as more in-person and virtual events are scheduled.
- A comprehensive Q&A document is available online.

Please know these steps are not a retreat from equity, but rather a regulatory reset. We remain deeply committed to inclusive economic growth, opportunity and the ongoing development of a wide and multifaceted pool of vendors and contractors to work on our projects.

Since the IFR was issued, IDOT and its UCP partners have not been allowed to set DBE goals on new contracts. We will not be able to do so until the reevaluation process is complete.

Timely submission will allow us to notify the U.S. DOT that the reevaluation is complete, which is a precondition to resume setting DBE goals on contracts. It also will help ensure that there are enough certified DBE firms available to set appropriate goals on upcoming projects.

This is a critical moment in our ongoing, longstanding efforts to achieve equity in transportation contracting.

All prime contractors and stakeholders are urged to continue engaging DBE firms, even while there are no DBE goals on projects. Firms that were in the DBE program are encouraged to keep bidding as prime contractors or subcontractors for work on projects and contracts as well. Their participation is valuable.

We realize we are in a period of great uncertainty that is undoubtedly creating stress for you and your business.

We ask for partnership and leadership from all in the transportation industry to ensure that DBE firms continue to be supported during this time.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Gia Biagi
Illinois Transportation Secretary