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# NEIGHBORHOOD SMALL BUSINESS GROWTH STRATEGY

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CITY OF CHICAGO  
MAYOR RAHM EMANUEL





## LETTER FROM THE MAYOR

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From day one, I have worked to accelerate Chicago's economic growth so that all Chicagoans have a fair shot at achieving their dreams. Since taking office, my administration has created thousands of jobs by investing in our infrastructure, attracting new businesses to our city, and cutting unnecessary red tape. While our central business district is thriving, the backbone of our economic prosperity has always relied on our small businesses. Responsible for half of the city's workforce, small businesses are what drives success and opportunity in all parts of our city.

To ensure that small businesses in every neighborhood receive the resources and support they need, I am proud to launch the City's first Neighborhood Small Business Strategy. This strategy will make new resources and services available to small businesses, strengthen the City's partnership with local chambers, unveil new approaches to driving customers to commercial corridors, and enlist small businesses in making their communities safer.

This strategy builds off of my administration's successes in making City Hall more of a partner to the city's job creators. We've cut red tape by simplifying and streamlining the licensing process, cutting the number of license types by 60 percent. We've launched the Restaurant Start-up Program, which has slashed start-up times for new restaurants by half while making them safer and healthier.

And most importantly, we've launched the Small Business Center, which will provide a "one-stop-shop" for small business owners that acts as their City Hall concierge, helping them navigate every step of the start-up process so they can focus on their customers and not burdensome city requirements. Under the leadership of a new Chief Small Business Officer, Roxanne Nava, City Hall will be equipped to advocate for small business owners and entrepreneurs and ensure policies and procedures are implemented in a way that works for small business.

We have made great strides in creating a thriving environment for our small businesses, and with this plan I am confident that small business owners across Chicago will find that City Hall's doors are wide open to support them every step of the way.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rahm Emanuel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mayor Rahm Emanuel

Small businesses are the lifeblood of the Chicago economy, responsible for half of the city's workforce and serving as community anchors in neighborhoods across the city. To better support small businesses in all of Chicago's neighborhoods, Mayor Emanuel is launching a strategy to continue to cut red tape, build the capacity of neighborhood chambers of commerce, and expand neighborhood-based business support. The Emanuel Administration developed this strategy after holding roundtable discussions with over 200 small businesses and community leaders. Specifically, the strategy will:

1. Empower local chambers of commerce to deliver customized business counseling
2. Foster neighborhood engagement with the local business community
3. Drive neighborhood economic vitality by attracting businesses to targeted locations and corridors
4. Enlist small businesses in making their neighborhoods safer for business

### **STRATEGY 1: EMPOWER LOCAL CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE TO DELIVER CUSTOMIZED BUSINESS COUNSELING**

The City is committed to making it easier for small businesses to successfully open and grow. While the City continues to simplify requirements, many small businesses still require assistance meeting start-up requirements, completing an application, or troubleshooting issues. To address these challenges, the City will build the capacity of neighborhood chambers to:

#### **Assist with getting new small businesses started**

To help new businesses get off the ground, the City will train neighborhood chambers to ensure business owners are well-versed in City requirements—removing unnecessary roadblocks and reducing wait-times for permits, inspections, and licenses. Specifically, chambers will:

- Guide entrepreneurs through the key steps of opening a business so that they are poised for success
- Offer initial reviews to ensure business activity is allowed at the proposed site by checking zoning maps and building inspection history
- Facilitate online application for Limited Business Licenses at the chamber by walking businesses through the online process and helping those that may need language or technical assistance
- Provide pre-business counseling, including finding available financial resources, identifying potential business sites, registering with the State to obtain tax identification numbers, and deciding whether or not to incorporate their business

#### **To ensure chambers are well-equipped to assist new small businesses, the City will:**

- Develop and provide tailored training to neighborhood chambers on licensing, permitting, inspections, and zoning requirements
- Prepare resource guides and additional training around common business types (e.g., restaurants)
- Require each Chamber to attend a sponsored leadership program tailored to help them strengthen their chambers (e.g., Board development) and to better understand small business challenges
- Provide chambers with updates as new businesses start and complete the application process at City Hall so that the Chambers can reach out to them, introduce them to available programs, and promote them within the community

### Troubleshoot City-related issues for small businesses

Small businesses frequently approach neighborhood chambers when they run into roadblocks with the City. To formalize this relationship, the City will designate priority business concierges within small biz center to each neighborhood chamber. The role of the priority business concierge will be to serve as a point of contact for Chamber staff to:

- Advocate within City Hall to eliminate unnecessary roadblocks
- Expedite applications that are caught in backlogs
- Advise and assist with inter-agency inspections and permit processes

### Facilitate customized small business educational programs

The City currently offers an array of educational workshops in high demand by small business owners at City Hall, ranging from a how-to session on bidding for City contracts to a skills workshop on digital marketing. To expand the reach and impact of these programs, the City will:

- Extend these sessions into the neighborhoods through scheduled regional workshops
- Recruit subject matter experts to provide additional training in the neighborhoods on a pro-bono basis
- Task neighborhood chambers to actively work to identify the content local business owners are seeking

To ensure success, the City will provide neighborhood chambers with the most effective tools and training to support small business owners. Through training sessions chambers will learn how to refer the appropriate businesses to priority city concierges and complete the necessary pre-work with business owners to ensure permitting and licensing issues are quickly resolved. After these training sessions, chambers will take post-training assessments to ensure critical information has been fully conveyed to them. The City will adopt a rigorous approach to performance management and work closely with the chamber leadership to ensure small businesses' needs are being met.



**SITE SELECTOR** is an online real estate mapping tool that helps businesses find and advertise available industrial, R&D, and retail properties in Chicago. Locations are mapped geographically with the ability to add informational layers, such as "L" and Metra lines and incentive programs like TIF and federal New Markets Tax Credits. Individual listings provide detailed property information, including square footage and sale or rental price. Delegate agencies will be a key driver in using this tool to market neighborhood vacancies and to help entrepreneurs identify suitable sites for their new small businesses

## STRATEGY 2: FOSTER NEIGHBORHOOD ENGAGEMENT WITH THE LOCAL BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Community engagement is a critical ingredient for small business success. Often the most vibrant commercial corridors occur where neighborhood groups have deep roots in the community and where they foster strong networks between business owners and local residents. The City will tap into these networks to learn how to best serve business owners and their communities. In partnership with these networks, the City will be able to extend the reach of its most successful and popular services.

### Creating networking opportunities

Small businesses often benefit when they meet with each other to discuss ideas, share leads on services, and simply by getting to know each other better. Neighborhood chambers have the ability to bring small businesses together in informal settings. To create stronger, more vibrant small business communities, the City will:

- Provide a guide for chambers on holding networking events for their members and representatives of larger businesses.
- Identify big businesses eager to learn more about partnering with the small business community.
- Work with chambers to identify and host local networking events and opportunities focused on collaboration and business growth.
- Foster stronger ties between neighborhood chambers and industry groups and trade associations.

### Marketing small business programs to the neighborhoods

The City will develop new and identify existing programs that support small businesses and will introduce these through neighborhood chambers. These initiatives are most successful when the City partners with local chambers to champion them by recruiting business owners and tailoring the workshops to meet local interests. The City will work with neighborhood chambers to market a suite of programs that best line up with the interests and needs of local business owners. Current examples include:

- Holding quarterly small business expos to connect businesses with resources and training programs and to help entrepreneurs identify new business opportunities.
- Marketing mentorship and business counseling programs including SCORE and Small Business Development Centers that are valuable resources for small businesses.
- Promoting small business educational programs like 10,000 Small Businesses.
- Developing and promoting financial assistance and financial counseling programs.

### Building a City Hall responsive to the needs of small businesses

A neighborhood small business strategy relies on frequent input from the local business community to ensure the City cuts red tape and provides the services that small businesses need. Collecting a diverse set of perspectives from neighborhood business owners will lead to tailored solutions for local challenges. The City will work with neighborhood chambers to:

- Host annual roundtables with local business owners to garner a first-hand view of City services and programs. This will not only give small businesses an opportunity to share their successes and challenges, but will also inform the City's future services—to ensure that ineffective programs are reformed and the most successful programs are expanded.

- Develop a toolkit to help chambers effectively conduct business roundtables so they produce actionable results.
- Launch regular small business surveys to collect input from the broader business community and better identify unique challenges represented across the cultural and demographic mix of Chicago.

**THE NEW AMERICANS SMALL BUSINESS SERIES** is a series of quarterly events that foster small business growth and expansion in immigrant communities throughout Chicago by creating temporary one-stop-shops in community settings. Immigrants in Chicago are 50% more likely to open a small business and these one-stop-shops will ease the process by providing technical advice on how to start a small business, navigate the licensing process, comply with tax laws, interact with chambers of commerce, and access capital. The expos are held in community settings throughout the city and provide translated materials as well as onsite interpreters so immigrant entrepreneurs from any background can receive the guidance they need.

### STRATEGY 3: DRIVE NEIGHBORHOOD ECONOMIC VITALITY BY ATTRACTING BUSINESSES TO TARGETED LOCATIONS AND CORRIDORS

Local chambers are uniquely positioned to act as catalysts for neighborhood economic vitality. Through existing relationships with landlords, brokers, small businesses, and Special Service Areas, neighborhood chambers of commerce are poised to understand the needs and potential of their local business community. The City will partner with its neighborhood chambers and local economic development agencies to identify strategic opportunities to spur business growth in local commercial corridors. Specifically, the City will work with chambers to:

#### **Promote and fill vacant storefronts and workspaces that have a potential for high growth**

Storefront vacancies and empty workspaces continue to be a challenge for many communities. There are several options available, both passive and active, to help chambers fill vacancies:

- The City will provide an online site selection tool that neighborhood chambers can use to share neighborhood vacancies with aspiring small business owners. The City will also incorporate this tool as one of the resources available through its business consultants.
- The City will develop a playbook for local economic development agencies on filling vacancies through temporary or permanent small businesses.
- Neighborhood chambers will be encouraged to foster relationships with brokers to conduct neighborhood tours and work with them to help “market” sites.
- The City will work with local chambers to support creative solutions for empty storefronts and workspaces, recognizing that business needs are evolving.

### Promote neighborhood retail corridors through dynamic branding and market research

To drive the creation of new business and drive customers to up and coming retail corridors, the City will work with neighborhood chambers to:

- Develop market profile templates to highlight community needs and opportunities for new small businesses. These profiles will also help small businesses better plan their offering and support franchisees in identifying new markets
- Promote neighborhoods through conferences such as the International Council of Shopping Centers events as well as through tourism programs like Choose Chicago
- Create unique neighborhood brands that are instantly recognizable and reflect the unique assets of the local business community
- Engage chambers in City planning for placemaking, streetscapes, and other neighborhood development branding efforts

### Create high-profile neighborhood business events that drive customer traffic

High-profile business promotion events can have a huge benefit in driving local and new customer traffic to local retail corridors. Working with neighborhood chambers, the City will:

- Follow local and national best practices to develop and promote local events that will attract new customers and create revenue for businesses (e.g., cash flash, sidewalk sales)
- Encourage chambers to develop local fairs that feature their local business community
- Work with the agencies to facilitate any necessary special event permits
- Incorporate social media and technology to develop 21st-century means of promoting local events and driving customer traffic
- Share best practices from chambers who currently host successful events and initiatives in their local communities

**CASH FLASH** is a program developed by the City in partnership with a neighborhood Chamber where residents vote on a small business to support and show up at a given time to spend \$10-\$20. The first "Cash Flash" took place in February 2013 at a Spanish language book store in Little Village and had great results: the book store saw profits increase by almost \$500, the chamber was able to sign up new business owners, and the commercial corridor saw unprecedented customer traffic. The event was such a success that the chamber is already planning its next "Cash Flash."

## STRATEGY 4: ENLIST SMALL BUSINESSES IN MAKING THEIR NEIGHBORHOODS SAFER FOR BUSINESS

A successful neighborhood small business strategy requires a supportive ecosystem for small business. One of the challenges that some small businesses identify is the threat of crime in the community. Fortunately, chambers and small businesses can play a role in making their neighborhoods safer. In addition to providing additional tools and training to the Chicago Police Department (CPD), the City will offer new programs and services for small businesses.

### Strengthen the connection between small businesses and CAPS

The Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy, known as CAPS, is a community policing effort to identify and solve neighborhood crime problems. The goal is to address the real issues by having police, the community, and city agencies partner in a proactive manner. Ongoing success requires participation from the small business community and chambers can build a relationship with this community to reinforce the importance of CAPS and the small business role in making our neighborhoods safer.

### Building formal relationships with CPD

Building relationships and nurturing trust between small businesses and CPD is critical in our efforts to make neighborhoods safer. In neighborhoods with ongoing challenges with crime, the City will create new opportunities for CPD to meet with business owners – at the time of licensing, when problems begin to arise, and following court actions. In addition to those interactions, neighborhood chambers will work more proactively with CPD so that chambers can facilitate additional interactions between small businesses and CPD.

### Crime prevention education

Neighborhood chambers will work with the CAPS program to formalize a training program run by CPD Districts on tactics to prevent crime. This includes training on how to protect employees, optimizing business layout to prevent crime, how to protect your cash registers, and using lighting and cameras to prevent crime in addition to other proactive safety measures.

### SHUTTING DOWN PROBLEM BUSINESSES THAT ATTRACT CRIME AND GANG ACTIVITY

To strengthen communities and neighborhood businesses, the City launched a new task force to crack down on problem businesses that attract crime and blight in commercial corridors. This interagency task force comprised of public safety agencies and city business inspectors works to identify problem businesses, and coordinate police and city inspections to reduce criminal activity and violations that negatively impact the quality of life of residents. Since its launch, the City has seen wide success. Numerous businesses harboring drug and gang activity have been shuttered, including Nickel Liquors—which was found to violate numerous building and city regulations in addition to hoarding illegal guns and drugs.

