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NATIONAL REPORT HIGHLIGHTS CHICAGO AS A LEADER IN IMPROVING SERVICE FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

National League of Cities publishes Big Ideas for Small Business Report to Promote Best Practices Across US Cities

Mayor Emanuel announced that several Chicago small business initiatives have been recognized in *Big Ideas for Small Business*, a Small Business Week report published today by the National League of Cities (NLC). The NLC report features best practices for supporting small business in cities across the country and highlights Chicago initiatives more than any other city surveyed. NLC highlights the Small Business Center, Chicago Microlending Institute, and the Small Business Neighborhood Strategy in the report.

"Small businesses are the backbone of our economy and the lifeblood of our neighborhoods. Cities can and should do more to serve as partners for small businesses," said Mayor Rahm Emanuel. "I know that by working together and sharing ideas, we can make all of our cities better homes for entrepreneurs and their businesses."

The report follows the inaugural Big Ideas for Small Business Summit in September 2013, when Mayor Emanuel welcomed small business officials from 19 cities around the United States to Chicago for a forum focused on fostering innovation to support small business. The two day event showcased small business programs from around the country and featured several Chicago programs.

"This new report on 'Big Ideas for Small Business' shows that local leaders are in a unique position to create a small business ecosystem that connects entrepreneurs with city resources, including funding opportunities, streamlined regulations and technical assistance," said National League of Cities President Chris Coleman, Mayor of Saint Paul, Minn. "Cities across the country understand that for small businesses to be successful in the long-term, it is critical that they have the support of communities and local leaders."

One section of the report focuses on the importance of viewing City services through the eyes of a small business owner, and cites Chicago's one-stop Small Business Center and Restaurant Start-Up Program as examples. The Small Business Center provides business owners with one place to go

for City services and has successfully reduced overall wait times by 50%, and the Restaurant Start-Up Program has reduced the time for new restaurants to open their doors by 33%.

Two more Chicago programs are showcased as models for how cities can connect entrepreneurs with the tools they need to succeed. Financially, the Chicago Microlending Institute and Seed Chicago provide small businesses with access to capital through alternative lending. CMI – a partnership with Accion Chicago – increases both the number of microlenders in the city and the capital available for microloans. To date, 126 businesses have received \$1.1M in loans, creating over 500 jobs. Seed Chicago, an initiative developed with World Business Chicago, provides a platform and best practices for entrepreneurs to crowdfund for their new business.

In terms of technical assistance and education for small businesses, Mayor Emanuel’s commitment to the organizations that provide these services is clear. The Neighborhood Small Business Strategy demonstrates how cities can invest in strong neighborhood business support organizations that provide valuable assistance to small businesses every day. The report also profiles 1871, the hub of Chicago’s digital technology ecosystem, which provides small businesses with a physical space to work, learn, and develop relationships.

Mayor Emanuel’s Innovation Delivery Team and the National League of Cities (NLC) formed The Big Ideas for Small Business Network as a grassroots effort in 2012 to share best practices and drive better services and programs for small businesses. The network convenes on monthly calls to discuss common challenges facing small businesses. Today, there are more than 20 cities that participate on a regular basis, sharing innovations to support and grow small business.

The report from the September Chicago Summit is available at <http://www.nlc.org/big-ideas-for-small-business> and the video is available [here](#).

Chicago is one of five cities to receive an Innovation Delivery Team grant from Bloomberg Philanthropies. Since launching in November 2011, the Mayor’s Innovation Delivery Team has spearheaded a business license reform ordinance that reduced the number of license categories by 60 percent, launched the Retrofit Chicago Residential Partnership to help home and apartment building owners save thousands of dollars on their energy bills, and helped design the Small Business Center to serve as a one-stop-shop for small businesses. Part of Bloomberg Philanthropies’ Mayors Project, Innovation Delivery Team grants were also awarded to Atlanta, Louisville, Memphis, and New Orleans.

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