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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**MAYOR LIGHTFOOT AND BACP ANNOUNCE \$500,000 RFP FOR REGIONAL BUSINESS CENTERS**

*Five neighborhood organizations will be chosen to serve as licensing and resource hubs for small business owners*

**CHICAGO** – Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot and the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (BACP) today announced a Request for Proposals (RFP) for five community organizations to further support local small businesses, particularly entrepreneurs of color. These Regional Business Centers (RBCs) will each receive funding to serve as resource hubs in the neighborhoods, providing critical licensing information and services typically only available at City Hall. Additionally, these centers will offer business counseling and technical expertise to small business owners. This entrepreneurial assistance is especially important for recovery from the economic toll of the COVID-19 pandemic. Of the five RBCs, four will be located in neighborhoods that are part of the city's INVEST South/West initiative that is marshaling the resources of multiple city departments, community organizations, and corporate partners toward ten communities on Chicago's South and West Sides.

"For far too long, communities on our city's South and West sides have been denied access to the sustainable jobs and resources they need to escape the cycle of poverty," said Mayor Lightfoot. "This exciting new Regional Business Centers initiative will fulfill this need by uplifting and nurturing the ambitions of our local small businesses and entrepreneurs of color. These resource hubs will jumpstart the economies of these underserved communities by giving residents the business training, technology, and employment opportunities they need to succeed during these uncertain times."

Serving as an extension of BACP's Small Business Center in City Hall, each RBC will be expected to commit to assisting small businesses in their communities to navigate and understand licensing, financial options, technology, recruitment and other vital topics for small businesses. Each RBC will provide local business resources where there are currently gaps, in particular for Black and Latinx entrepreneurs, women entrepreneurs, and entrepreneurs with limited English proficiency who tend to be at a disadvantage due to lack of initial funding compared



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to White counterparts. The City is also in the process of partnering with the private sector and academic partners to provide much-needed professional services including legal support and digital support through these RBCs.

“Small businesses are the beating heart of our communities,” said BACP Commissioner Rosa Escareno. “As we work to recover from COVID-19, it is critical that business owners receive direct support to help them navigate licensing and receive guidance that will lead to resiliency.

The Regional Business Centers will be an integral component of neighborhood recovery from the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and will help drive small business growth that is a key component of INVEST South/West. Announced in October of last year, INVEST South/West is working to re-activate neighborhood cores that have historically served as focal points for pedestrian activity, shopping, services, transportation, public spaces, and quality-of-life amenities for local residents. To do this, INVEST South/West facilitates infrastructure improvements and development, supportive programming including business support, and policy improvements to ensure the ten initial target communities can thrive.

The RBCs will offer:

- Assistance with business licensing questions and applications
- Technology training to drive and grow business through digital platforms
- Professional and specialized services, including sector-specific guidance and partnerships to strengthen the network of resources available to entrepreneurs in neighborhoods
- Assistance with recruitment methods, managing personnel budgets, and connecting businesses to employer resources
- Support for the growth of new and emerging economies including worker cooperatives and home-based businesses

Announced in November of last year, the Regional Business Centers are part of Mayor Lightfoot’s commitment to better supporting Chicago’s small business owners by eliminating unnecessary red tape and placing resources in the communities where they serve. The RBCs will add to BACP’s ongoing support of 70 delegate agencies that provide general business resources throughout the city. BACP has also extended the expiration for all business licenses that expire from March 15 to September 30, 2020, allowing those licensees to renew without late fees by October 30, 2020. BACP continues to process license issuance and renewal via [chicagobusinessdirect.org](http://chicagobusinessdirect.org) while our offices remain closed to the public.

The RFP period is now open and information can be found by visiting [chicago.gov/nbdc](http://chicago.gov/nbdc). Applications will be accepted from eligible organizations through



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August 31, 2020, and the five selected RBCs will be identified by early September. The RBCs will undergo a training period and will be expected to open by October 1, 2020. Each RBC will be supported for one year with an option to extend for a second year.

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