



MUNCIE-DELAWARE COUNTY  
**CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

*Serving the community since 1894*

Dear Awards Committee,

It is with great enthusiasm that we nominate the Muncie-Delaware County Chamber of Commerce for the Excellence in Innovation Award. Our chamber has been at the forefront of bringing innovation and equality to our community by offering a minority business certification series.

We created a workshop series to help certify women, veteran, and minority-owned businesses with the State of Indiana so those minority-owned businesses could bid on jobs from entities that are required to award a percentage of their work to certified minority-owned businesses. By offering hands-on support for these businesses to qualify for MBE/WBE/IVOSBs subcontracting opportunities on state contracts in Indiana, we have helped businesses in our community expand their businesses by expanding their opportunities to compete.

Our workshop series presenting partners included INDOT (Indiana Department of Transportation) for the DBE (The Disadvantaged Business Enterprise) Certification, IDOA (Indiana Department of Administration) M/W/VBE (Minority, Women, and Veteran-Owned Business Enterprise) Certification, and The City of Indianapolis for the M/W/V DOBE (Minority, Women, Veteran, and Disabled-Owned Business Enterprise) Certification.

The innovation of bringing all three of these certification organizations under one roof allowed our members to quickly understand the process associated with certification. This process was/is considered a pilot program by the State of Indiana to maximize opportunities for our businesses to become certified. Never before have all three certifying organizations participated in a workshop series such as this.

We also included community partners in the process to promote the workshop series and made information tables available at each of the workshops for those community partners that included: the Indiana Small Business Development Center, the Innovation Connector (our community's entrepreneurial incubator), Ivy Tech, and local banks. We chose to include these community partners knowing they each had expertise in areas that might also be beneficial to our business attendees.

The series included (5) two-hour workshops over the course of February and March 2023 to explain the state certification process to our attendees. The first workshop included representatives from all three State certifying organizations. The State representatives explained to attendees the criteria for certifications. Attendees departed with "homework" (completing an online application and/or gathering necessary paperwork for future workshops). The second workshop was designed for those businesses interested in certification for INDOT projects only. INDOT representatives answered in-depth questions regarding the certification process specific to INDOT and helped attendees work through the INDOT application. The next two workshops were structured to provide hands-on assistance with completing the application process as they related to the IDOA and the City of Indianapolis, again with representatives from those entities on hand to answer questions in their respective areas of expertise. The final workshop was a virtual workshop designed to (1) allow for follow-up questions from business participants regarding the application process; (2) provide information regarding where to look for bid opportunities once businesses receive their certifications; (3) briefly discuss State reporting requirements once securing a bid and completing a project; and (4) ensuring businesses have contact information for each of the certifying entities.

The workshops were deliberately scheduled only two weeks apart to allow time for "homework" completion, yet not any longer than two weeks so as not to lose momentum for the certification process.

We had nearly fifty businesses attend at least one of the workshops with several commenting, "I have heard about the advantages of being a certified business but had no idea how to start the process".

Because we recognized the importance of having as many certified businesses as possible in our community, we chose to open the workshop series not just to our Chamber membership, but to every business in our county (and actually cheerfully welcomed a business in Indianapolis who had heard about the workshops from a friend). Additionally, we provided the workshops at no cost to the attending businesses. We, of course, offered the series to be a value to our membership, but were pleased the workshops generated eight new Chamber members who agreed that our Chamber provides immense value to its membership.

Through these partnerships, we were able to provide equal access to compete for City and State projects and other contract opportunities. It is heartening to know that the certification process for our series attendees will be instrumental in not only their own business' success, but also to our community's success. At this writing we do not yet know how many of our workshop attendees have received their certifications, but we are eager to track them as well as quantify the role we played in their future expansions.

Our State Certification partners have mentioned that they already have plans to expand this program to other counties in Indiana due to the success of our Chamber's series. We are thrilled to have been the Leader for this innovative programming, and we believe that it is worthy of recognition with the Excellence in Innovation Award.

Thank you for considering our nomination.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Rowray