

# Illinois Small Business Development Center at Harper College

ANNUAL REPORT **2024**



U.S. Small Business Administration



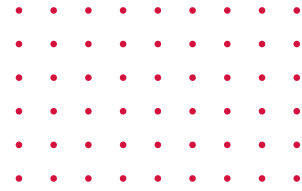
**Illinois**  
Department of Commerce  
& Economic Opportunity  
JB Pritzker, Governor

Providing professional guidance for business growth

[harpercollege.biz](http://harpercollege.biz)

# Welcome to

The Illinois Small Business Development Center  
at Harper College



## Let's Succeed Together

Growing a small business is no small task. Need help to expand or improve your existing business? Contemplating launching a new business? We can help!

Our talented team of seasoned business advisors will help you identify, understand and overcome the challenges of running a successful business. From someone who has an idea for a home-based business to an established company in need of capital to finance their next stage of growth, we work closely with our clients to find solutions that work best for them.

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# Organization Introduction

## Our Humble Beginnings

### Organization History

Small Business Development Centers provide advising and training to small businesses including working with the [SBA](#) to develop and provide informational tools to support business start-ups and existing business expansion.

#### 1953

The Small Business Administration (SBA) was created by an act of Congress. SBA helps Americans start, grow, and build resilient businesses.

#### 1980

The Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) network was established.

#### 1984

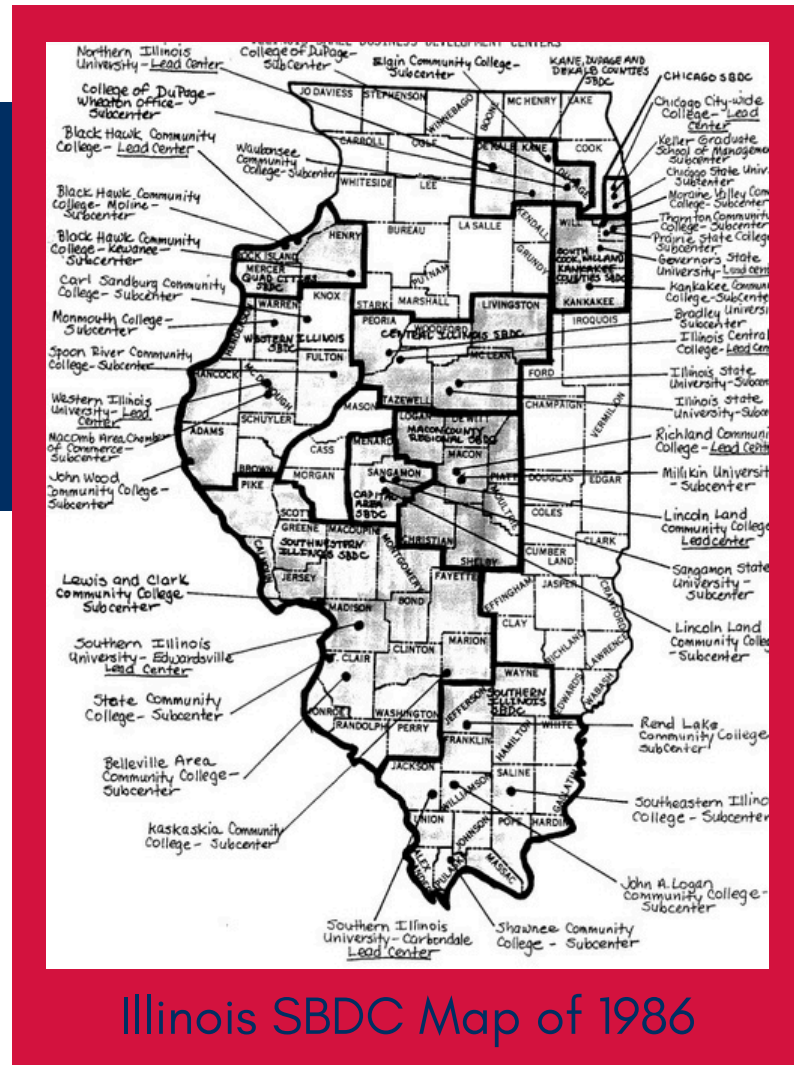
Illinois SBDC was added to the America's SBDC network

#### 1984

The Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) is the lead state agency for economic development in Illinois.

#### 2008

Illinois SBDC at Harper College was established



#### Vision:

To be recognized as the leading resource for business growth advancing the Illinois economy.

#### Mission:

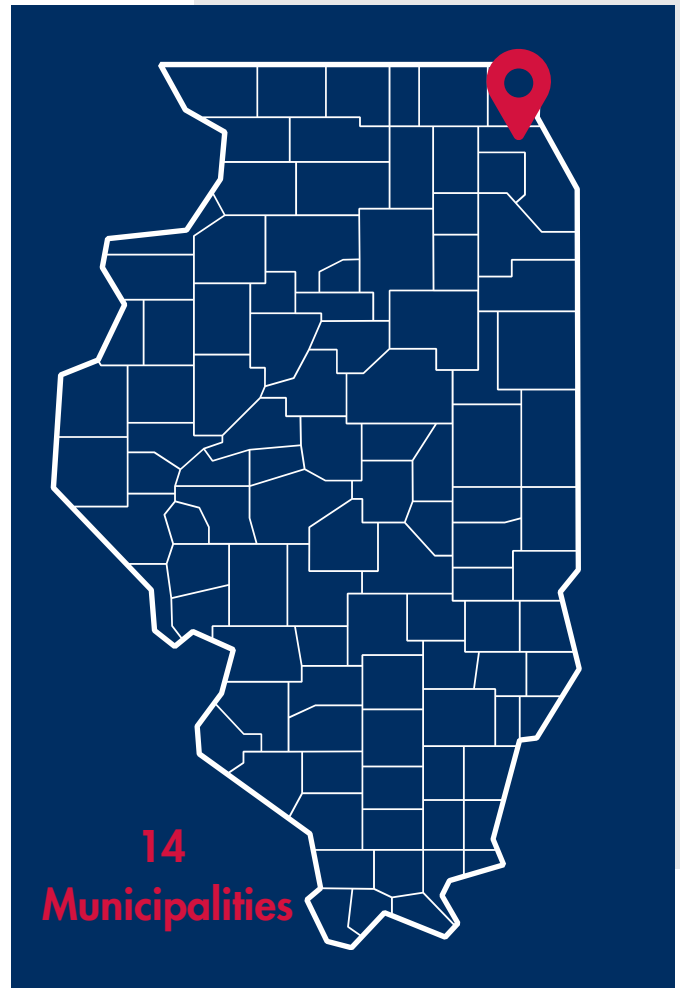
Providing professional guidance for business growth.

# Illinois SBDC at Harper College

## Areas we serve:

Arlington Heights  
Barrington  
Elk Grove Village  
Hoffman Estates  
Inverness  
Lake Barrington  
Lake Zurich  
Mount Prospect  
Palatine  
Prospect Heights  
Rolling Meadows  
Schaumburg  
Tower Lakes  
Wheeling

\*We also serve any small business within the State of Illinois at the client's request



## Our neighboring centers

Illinois SBDC at Harper College has neighboring centers at:

- College of DuPage
- College of Lake County
- Elgin Community College
- McHenry County College
- Oakton Community College
- Waubensee Community College

# Illinois SBDC at Harper College

## Our Services

At the Illinois SBDC at Harper College, we work with all individuals who wish to start a business or grow an existing business in Illinois.

The services we provide are always **no cost**, **professional**, and **confidential**.

The Illinois SBDC at Harper College provides financial, management, marketing, and operational guidance.

AMERICA'S SBDC ILLINOIS		Illinois SBDC at Harper College Areas of Expertise					
AREA OF ASSISTANCE/ BUSINESS ADVISOR	SARAH CERVANTES	JENNIE JOHNS	MARGE JOHNSON	CHERI KRETSINGER	DENNIS LAPORTA	KEVIN MCVEARRY	
ACCESS TO CAPITAL			✓			✓	
ACCOUNTING			✓				
BRANDING	✓		✓	✓			
BUSINESS GROWTH AND BUSINESS STRATEGY			✓	✓	✓	✓	
BUSINESS PLAN REVIEW	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
CHOOSING A BUSINESS ENTITY			✓			✓	
DIGITAL MARKETING	✓	✓	✓	✓			
ECOMMERCE PLATFORMS & TECHNOLOGY ASSISTANCE		✓					
EMPLOYEE RETENTION, RECRUITMENT, & CULTURE						✓	
FINANCIAL PROJECTIONS			✓			✓	
GENERAL BUSINESS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
HOSPITALITY/RESTAURANT, MENU DEVELOPMENT & FOOD PRODUCTION						✓	
INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT & COMMERCIALIZATION			✓	✓			
MARKETING & ADVERTISING	✓		✓	✓			
NEW VENUES: DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION						✓	
NEW VENUES: BUDGETING AND FINANCIAL PLANNING			✓			✓	
POSITIONING STRATEGY & PROSPECTING			✓	✓	✓		
SALES: PROPOSALS & PITCHES	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
SALES GROWTH, MARKET SHARE, & INCREASE REVENUE			✓	✓	✓	✓	
SEO AUDIT, RECOMMENDATIONS, & SEO MARKETING		✓		✓			
SOCIAL MEDIA	✓	✓	✓	✓			
START-UP FRIENDLY	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
TRADESHOW PREPARATION AND STRATEGY			✓		✓		

ISBDC@HARPERCOLLEGE.ACQUITYSCHEDULING.COM | 847.925.6570 | 1200 WEST ALGONQUIN ROAD, PALATINE, IL 60067

## Our Services

Illinois Small Business Development Centers are located throughout the state and provide information, confidential business guidance, training, and other resources for start-ups and existing small businesses.



One-on-one business advice and management assistance



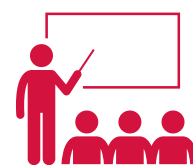
Assistance with the development of business plans



Help with accessing market information and the development of marketing plans



Assistance with accessing business financing programs and with financial analysis & planning



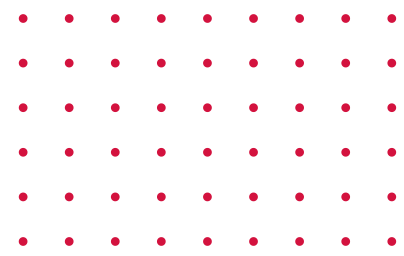
Access to business education and training opportunities



Specialized services in technology, innovation, and entrepreneurial development

# Illinois SBDC at Harper College

## Meet our Team



Combined,  
we have

**147**  
**years**

of  
business  
experience

It's an incredible privilege to work with such a dynamic and talented team. Our SBDC advisors collectively bring decades of experience, combining exceptional expertise with genuine dedication and vibrant personalities in every advising session. Many of our advisors are current or former business owners, while others are experts in their respective industries, making their knowledge an invaluable asset to clients.

Additionally, we are fortunate to partner with Lavelle Law's Attorney, Frank Portera, who provides 30-minute legal consultations to Illinois SBDC at Harper College clients at no-cost. Having his expertise available to our clients is an incredible resource. Last year, Frank assisted **19** of our clients!

Whether you're just starting out or looking to expand your business, we encourage you to explore our services and discover how we can support your journey to business success!

# 38+

Combined years at  
the Illinois SBDC at  
Harper College

## More about our Team

- Sarah Cervantes, Illinois Small Business Development Center Manager, **9 months**
- Kaye Medina, Business Development Support Assistant, **7 years**
- Jennie Johns, Ecommerce, Technology, & Website Business Advisor, **7 years**
- Marge Johnsson, Growth Strategy Business Advisor, **3 years**
- Cheri Kretsinger, Marketing, Branding, and P&L Management Business Advisor, **6 years**
- Dennis LaPorta, Sales Strategy Business Advisor, **10 years**
- Kevin McVeary, Restaurant/Bar, Hospitality Business Advisor, **5 years**

For the past **4 semesters**, we had the privilege of working with **two outstanding** Harper College student aides who assisted in managing our client calendar, performing vital reporting duties, and assisting the SBDC with daily functions. Their contributions greatly helped with our center's operations. We're eager to see what fantastic things they accomplish post-graduation!

*"My time at the SBDC was really invaluable. It taught me how to be more efficient with my time and how to communicate my ideas better. I am grateful for the mentorship and camaraderie that was provided to me while I was there!"*

- Vera Valenti, Student Aide at the Illinois SBDC at Harper College



## Advisory Board

# Illinois Small Business Development Center

### Advisory Board Overview

The Illinois SBDC at Harper College Advisory Board Members meet quarterly and play a critical role in shaping the future of small business support in our community.

Below are some of the key responsibilities and expectations for board members:

- Ambassadors for the SBDC Program
- Strategic Guidance
- Advisory Expertise
- Provide insight on industry trends, market conditions, and small business challenges to guide center activities.
- Support for Clients
- Innovation and Growth

### Our Advisory Board Members are Passionate about the Illinois SBDC at Harper College

- **Shirmeen Ahmad**- I'm wanting to grow as a professional in the nonprofit sector, specifically in the development and grants world and want to *help the community and economy*.
- **Bridget Bond**- I have a strong focus in the relationship aspect of my work and building a community hub through connecting people and resources together for *clients and community members to thrive*.
- **Noeli Serna**- As a corporate attorney, I work closely with the small business community and am always seeking opportunities to share my knowledge and resources with them. The IL SBDC at Harper College Advisory Board's role is another avenue to *share my resources with deserving entrepreneurs*, and I'm thrilled to support the cause!
- **Adrian Serrano**- I'm still new to my current role and want to solve problems by helping to remove barriers for people and allowing access, sharing skills and information with people to *better serve the community*.



Bridget Bond,  
Colab Community Manager at  
Bellworks, Inspired by Somerset  
Development



Adrian Serrano, Innovation  
Space Manager, Schaumburg  
Township District Library



Shirmeen Ahmad, Resource  
Development Coordinator,  
YWCA Metropolitan Chicago



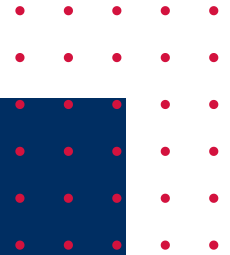
Noeli Serna, Serna Legal  
Services, Founding Attorney,  
Spanish-speaking Corporate  
Attorney

# Community Oriented



# 2024 Economic Impact

## Illinois SBDC at Harper College



### Achieving Together

*"We're really proud of the work that we do and we are excited to continue contributing to the small business success in our community."* - Manager of Illinois SBDC at Harper College, Sarah Cervantes

## 2024 Economic Impact



### Educational Workshops

**18** Training Sessions Provided  
**300** Workshop Registrants



### Continuing Education

**104** Professional development hours completed by our team



### Team Meetings

**24 hours** of advisor strategic team meetings and planning



### Networking Events

**20+** networking events attended



### Client Contact Points

Our center had **1,411** client contact points in 2024



### Jobs Created

We helped create and retain **74** jobs within our territory this year



### Capital Infusion

We helped clients secure **\$1,954,650** in funding to start and expand their businesses



### Total Clients Advised

**309** unique clients served this year



### Total Advising Hours

**971.92** client advising hours in 2024



### Total Number of Clients

Our center has a total of **651** clients

# 2024 Economic Impact Community Outreach

This year, we attended America's SBDC National Conference to stay at the forefront of small business innovation, hosted representatives at key events to foster collaboration, and welcomed the SBA to campus to support and empower our community. By building these connections, we strengthen the resources available to local businesses and entrepreneurs, ensuring they have the tools to thrive.

**2024 Illinois Lender Forums**

SBA's Illinois District Office, SCORE and Illinois SBDC Network are holding a series of free forums to update essential leaders on agency programs and services. Topics will include SBA 509 to 510 changes, Updated Lender Match, and upcoming SBA training opportunities. SBA staff, SBA representatives, SBDC representatives, and SBA micro lenders will present at the event.

All lender forums will be held from 9 a.m. - 12 p.m. CT. To register, click on the date you wish to attend.

DATE	CITY	LOCATION	HOST
April 24, 2024 Tuesday	CHICAGO	SBDC at Evanston Incubator 5805 S. Paulina Ave. Chicago, IL 60631	Illinois SBDC at Build Evanstonville (773) 891-4088 Email: <a href="mailto:ebv@sbdcillinois.com">ebv@sbdcillinois.com</a>
April 25, 2024 Wednesday	CHICAGO	SBDC at Priority Exchange 1412 E. 35th St. Chicago, IL 60617	Illinois SBDC at Priority Exchange (773) 795-5099 Email: <a href="mailto:pe@sbdcillinois.com">pe@sbdcillinois.com</a>
May 1, 2024 Wednesday	VERNON HILLS	College of Lake County, Southlake Campus 1120 S. Milwaukee Ave., RM V136 V140 Vernon Hills, IL 60061	Illinois SBDC at College of Lake County (847) 543-2790 Email: <a href="mailto:slc@sbdcillinois.com">slc@sbdcillinois.com</a>
May 3, 2024 Thursday	GLEN ELLEN	College of DuPage 150 Duane Street #123, Training Bldg 301 Glen Ellyn, IL 60137	Illinois SBDC at College of DuPage (630) 542-3535 Email: <a href="mailto:cd@sbdcillinois.com">cd@sbdcillinois.com</a>
May 21, 2024 Wednesday	DES PLAINES	Des Plaines, IL 60018-1220 3900 S. Rte. 54 Chicago, IL 60609	Illinois SBDC at Des Plaines College (847) 635-1845 Email: <a href="mailto:desplains@sbdcillinois.com">desplains@sbdcillinois.com</a>
May 22, 2024 Thursday	CHICAGO	SBDC at Regis Park Business Alliance 7034 N. Clark St. Chicago, IL 60630	Illinois SBDC at Regis Park Business Alliance (773) 508-5885 x 9 Email: <a href="mailto:regis@sbdcillinois.com">regis@sbdcillinois.com</a>
May 29, 2024 Tuesday	ROCKFORD	Rock Valley College Strommen Student Center 2340 North Railroad Road, Box 1118 (Rockton) Rockford, IL 61114	Illinois SBDC at Rock Valley College (815) 931-4076 Email: <a href="mailto:rbv@sbdcillinois.com">rbv@sbdcillinois.com</a>
June 5, 2024 Wednesday	AURORA	Madison Community College 18 S. Blue St., Room 380 Aurora, IL 60506	Illinois SBDC at Madison Community College (630) 596-4143 Email: <a href="mailto:mcc@sbdcillinois.com">mcc@sbdcillinois.com</a>
June 12, 2024 Wednesday	PHILADELPHIA	Wright Conference Center 2200 W. Algonquin Rd. #205 - Park in lot 14 Phila., IL 60559	Illinois SBDC at William Rainey Harper College (847) 925-4020 Email: <a href="mailto:whc@sbdcillinois.com">whc@sbdcillinois.com</a>

Registration is required to attend the forums, so that each lender attending can receive an information packet containing material from all presenters. Reasonable arrangements for persons with disabilities will be made if requested at least two weeks in advance. Contact the host Small Business Development Center to make arrangements. The forums have been developed in cooperation with the U.S. Small Business Administration, SCORE, and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity Small Business Development Center Network as a service to Illinois small businesses.

Illinois District Office: 312 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 608, Chicago, IL 60604 | Telephone: 312-353-4528  
All SBA programs and services are provided on a nondiscriminatory basis.

## SBA Lenders Forum

This event was co-hosted with the Small Business Administration (SBA) and provided updates on SBA loan guarantees, guidelines, and training opportunities



## Illinois SBDC represented at America's SBDC 45th Annual National Conference in Atlanta

Theme: Digital Transformation  
**1,200** Attendees  
**200** Workshops  
**30** Sponsors  
**4** Keynote Speakers



Schaumburg Business Association's Women in Business Event, "How to Overcome Adversity to Lead a Life of Victory"

We were a featured table and networked with over 60 women at this event.



## 2024 DCEO Business Development Roadshow

The Illinois SBDC at Harper College welcomed DCEO's Team Red, Representative Michelle Mussman, and State Senator Mark Walker to campus. This event brought together business leaders, local government officials, and community stakeholders to learn about the latest state programs, resources, and initiatives available to support economic development in our region.

This informative event brought in **24 attendees!**

At the heart of everything we do is our commitment to community and the relationships we build along the way. We take pride in showing up, supporting, and collaborating with those around us—fostering camaraderie, trust, and shared success. Together, we create a strong foundation where businesses and individuals can thrive.



### Beautification Commission of Palatine's 17th Annual Scarecrows on Parade Contest at the Rotary Club of Palatine's Oktoberfest

The Illinois SBDC at Harper College was awarded 3rd place!



### Schaumburg Business Association Annual Pack Day

The Illinois SBDC at Harper College volunteered helping pack meals on Giving Tuesday. The Schaumburg Business Association brought together 200+ members to volunteer and together we packed 60,696 meals for Feed My Starving Children!

### Lavelle Law Food Drive

The Illinois SBDC at Harper College participated in Lavelle Law's Annual Charities Food Drive benefitting the Schaumburg Township Food Pantry.

We filled our box with nonperishable food items, baby diapers, bibs, and essential household items.

### Northwest Hispanic Chamber of Commerce EmpowerHer Golf Classic: Swinging For Success

This year, we participated in an all women golf outing for a fantastic day of fun, networking, and friendly competition at Fox Run Links.



## Digital Outreach and Impact

# 4,896

## Email Subscribers



This year, we enhanced our bi-monthly e-newsletter with curated content and engaging features—and the numbers show its success!

- **31** Newsletters sent in 2024
- **153,275** Sends
- **1,093** Most Engaged Subscribers
- **1,939** Clicks
- Average Open Rate: **37%**
- **220** New Subscribers
- Average Click Rate: **4%**

# 55,199

## Opens

## Happenings at Harper College

Harper College was named as a semifinalist among the **Top 20** Community Colleges in the nation for the **2025 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence**, an improved recognition from Top 25 and highlighting our commitment to student success and equitable outcomes!



## Go Hawks!

## Workforce Development

Good Morning Schaumburg - Estate Tax Planning Opportunities Before the Sunset event hosted by Schaumburg Business Association

Harper College and the Illinois SBDC participated in this event as a sponsor and had a featured display table.

Pictured left to right, Sarah Cervantes, Manager of the Illinois SBDC at Harper College and Besa Sadiku, Manager of Workforce Initiatives at Harper College



## Harper Is Your Business Partner.

We are committed to serving as the preferred provider for our area businesses - focused on helping you find success. Harper College offers your organization a comprehensive and integrated approach to workforce development. Our team can help you grow with a flexible, proactive strategy adapted to meet your needs.

[harpercollege.biz](http://harpercollege.biz)

# HARPER COLLEGE WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS DIVISION



## Harper College Business & Industry Leadership Teams (BILT) Program

At Harper College, we believe in the power of collaboration to shape a stronger workforce and thriving community. As a forward-thinking institution, we are dedicated to establishing meaningful partnerships with employers and industry professionals. Together, we can bridge the gap between education and industry, ensuring our students graduate with the skills and knowledge that match your evolving needs.

Illinois SBDC at Harper College Business Advisors, Cheri Kretsinger and Dennis LaPorta served as 2024 BILT Members!

By collaborating closely with Harper, employers can help to create cutting-edge, industry-driven programs that produce job-ready graduates, bridge skills gaps, and contribute to the regional innovative ecosystem.

## Leading the Harper Way

Harper College's Workforce Solutions' Sarah Cervantes, Illinois SBDC Manager, Billie Diaz, Manager of Career and Customized Training, and Besa Sadiku, Manager of Workforce Initiatives were selected to participate in Harper College's *Leading the Harper Way* Leadership Cohort after a competitive application process.

This **six-month** program, requiring a commitment of **16+ hours**, is designed to develop leadership skills that enhance collaboration, innovation, and workplace effectiveness.

This is an opportunity to grow as leaders and contribute to the community's continued success.

Ask Me! The Illinois SBDC participated in Harper College's Welcome Week. We volunteer to help students on campus during the beginning of each semester.



Experiencing all the entrepreneurial emotions? We get it! Check out our Pixar *Inside Out* inspired Halloween costume.



# Illinois SBDC at Harper College

## Our Clients

The Illinois SBDC at Harper College provides one-on-one, confidential business guidance for for-profit businesses - both service and product based businesses

- No-cost to the client
- Confidential Advising
- **309** Active Clients in 2024
- **651** Total Active Clients
- **93%** of our clients were able to get an advising appointment within 2-10 business days
- **100%** of our clients are **somewhat satisfied** with our services with **80%** of them being **very satisfied** with our services
- **93%** of our clients are likely to **recommend our services** to a friend or colleague



## Client Success Stories

Read all about our clients' success stories [here](#)

#SupportSmallBusinesses



“Where you begin is not where you will end up. You don't have to have all of the answers or have everything just perfect to start—you just have to trust and begin!”

- Molly Kranovich,  
Owner of LUMI Studio  
+ Shoppe

# Illinois SBDC at Harper College

## What our clients are saying about our work

Economic  
Impact Survey  
Word Cloud

SMALL BUSINESS COACH guidance  
advice **invaluable**  
**mentor**  
growth-minded  
business plan  
started  
**EXTREMELY HELPFUL**  
TAILORED SUPPORT Great LOVE  
team Just go for it **HIGHLY** resource  
people first **RECOMMEND** experience  
amazing excellent  
KNOWLEDGEABLE

"I went from feeling like an amateur to feeling comfortable calculating numbers to build a profitable business."

"I think every entrepreneur shares this feeling of "I don't know what I don't know" - this is where the SBDC comes in."

"The SBDC's tailored support can greatly benefit business success and their broad knowledge helps reinforce and strengthen all aspects of business."

“

### A few of our favorite client quotes:

*"The SBDC's tailored support can greatly benefit business success and their broad knowledge helps reinforce and strengthen all aspects of business."*

- Illinois SBDC at Harper College Client

*"I think every entrepreneur shares this feeling of "I don't know what I don't know" - this is where the SBDC comes in."*

- Illinois SBDC at Harper College Client

*"If someone offers to help, take it. You don't have to do everything yourself!"*

- Blended Health & Smoothie Bar by April Doremus

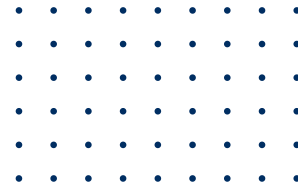
*"The more I talked with my advisors the less things felt so intimidating and big. With slow and steady progress, learning one thing at a time, the SBDC made the process approachable. Suddenly, it didn't seem so impossible."*

- Good Manners Dog Training by Asia Poe

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# Illinois SBDC at Harper College

2025 Plans



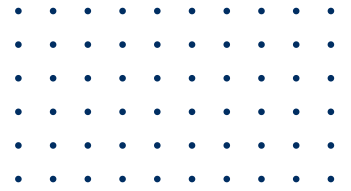
## Let's get down to business

As we step into 2025, we're more energized than ever to support, empower, and innovate for our small business community!

- **Empower Small Businesses** - Continue providing tailored one-on-one business advising and high-quality educational workshops to equip entrepreneurs with the tools they need for success.
- **Expand Our Reach** - Increase the number of clients we serve, ensuring more small business owners have access to valuable resources and expert guidance.
- **Strengthen Community Presence** - Enhance awareness of the SBDC's impact through outreach, engagement, and strategic initiatives within the local business ecosystem.
- **Foster Meaningful Collaborations** - Deepen partnerships with Harper College, community leaders, lenders, municipalities, libraries, and other key organizations to create a stronger support network for small businesses.
- **Embrace Innovation with AI & Technology** - Stay ahead by integrating emerging trends, including trainings from America's SBDC AI U, to better serve our clients in an evolving digital landscape.

**We look forward to seeing you and your business thrive in 2025!**





# For More Information

## We're here to support YOU!

Whether you're looking to schedule a no-cost, confidential business advising session with one of our expert business advisors or you are looking to explore other ways to collaborate with the Illinois SBDC at Harper College, we'd love to hear from you!



## Contact Us :



Phone Number  
**847-925-6570**



Email Address  
**[sbdce@harpercollege.edu](mailto:sbdce@harpercollege.edu)**



Office Address  
**1200 West Algonquin Rd.  
Palatine, IL  
60067**



The Illinois SBDC at Harper College is funded in part through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration and the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and Harper College. Reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities will be made if requested at least two weeks in advance.