



MEMORANDUM

To: CMAP Board

From: CMAP Staff

Date: October 1, 2014

Re: Support for Metro Chicago Exports

Metro Chicago Exports (MCE) is an unprecedented regional collaboration -- including the leadership of the counties of Cook, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Lake, McHenry and Will and the City of Chicago through World Business Chicago -- to develop strategies that support small and medium enterprises (SMEs) throughout the region in seizing the expanding global opportunity of exports and strengthen the network of regional service providers. Accelerating exports aligns with multiple regional economic development plans, including GO TO 2040, World Business Chicago's Plan for Economic Growth and Jobs, and Cook County's Partnering for Prosperity, and an initiative to increase manufacturing in the region through the Chicago Metro Metal Consortium.

There are three objectives of MCE:

1. Export Pipelines - the program will identify SMEs with high export potential, prepare individualized market analyses, assist with business plan development, and provide referrals to help streamline export opportunities.
2. Enhancement of Export Ecosystem - the program will cultivate relationships with the supplier network to improve efficient access for SMEs, create and align networks based on industry and market interests, and leverage reach to enhance the success of SME exports.
3. Grant Program - the program will create and implement a small grants program for 35-50 SMEs to increase their export capacity and activity. SMEs can use the \$5,000 grants for needed technical expertise.

MCE's grant program will be a complement to the Illinois State Trade and Export Promotion (ISTEP) grant program offered by the Illinois Office of Trade and Investment. MCE will refine best practices through collaboration with ISTEP to bolster the number of qualified candidates

for both programs. Roundtable discussions indicated that firms would use additional resources beyond ISTEP. It was also noted that the Office of Trade and Investment would benefit from collaboration that builds awareness for exporting generally, as well as their resources.

Direct benefits to firms provided through MCE include:

- SMEs will obtain one-on-one guidance and a roadmap of services specifically tailored to their specific export needs.
- SMEs will have access to individualized market analyses, assistance with business plan development, and referrals to help realize export opportunities.
- SMEs will be connected to export mentors to facilitate best practice exchange and peer learning.
- SMEs will have access to supplier networks cultivated by the Pilot Program to reduce barriers to exporting, created and aligned based on industry and market interests, and leveraged reach to enhance the success of SME exports.
- SME's will receive micro grants (~\$5,000) to be used for a variety of purposes in order to lessen the burden of starting the exporting process.
- Large firms will have outlets to serve as mentors within the local export ecosystem and firms in relevant supply chains.

In addition to funding from federal, state and local sources, private and philanthropic organizations are supporting MCE, such as, JP Morgan Chase, The MacArthur Foundation and Illinois Manufacturing Excellence Center.

It is recommended that the Board authorize \$100,000 to support MCE over a two-year period. The support will be from the CMAP general fund.

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