



Press Release

For Immediate Release

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Region 1 Planning Council Launches APEX Accelerator Program to Help Businesses Compete for Government Contracts

ROCKFORD, IL – Region 1 Planning Council (R1) has launched an APEX Accelerator program at its downtown Rockford office to help Northern Illinois businesses identify and compete for government contracts to sustain and grow their business.

An APEX Accelerator Advisor at R1 provides businesses with confidential counseling, education, and technical assistance to compete for local, state, and federal procurement opportunities. All services are provided at no cost through the Illinois APEX Accelerator program, which is funded through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Defense with support from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO).

R1's APEX Accelerator program is designed for businesses that are new to government procurement or interested in expanding their role in the government marketplace. Services are available to businesses in Winnebago, Boone, McHenry, Ogle, Stephenson and DeKalb Counties.

Advanced Manufacturing, Transportation, Distribution and Logistics are core industry sectors in Northern Illinois, which make the region a natural fit for leveraging government procurement opportunities. The federal government spends hundreds of billions of dollars each year on contracts for goods and services, which consume a large portion of the federal budget. In FY 2025 alone, the federal government spent about \$793 billion on contracts for everything from cybersecurity software to consulting services to aircraft carriers, according to the U.S. Government Accounting Office (<https://www.gao.gov/federal-contracting>).

"A common thread among R1's programs – transportation and economic development planning, providing grant writing services and data analytics – is a commitment to help the region reach its full economic potential," said Brittany Allen, R1 APEX Accelerator Advisor. "The APEX Accelerator program is a natural extension of that mission – bringing people, resources, and opportunities together to enhance the economic prosperity of the region."

What do APEX Accelerator Advisors do?

APEX Accelerator advisors help businesses navigate applications, registrations, certifications and other mandatory requirements that must be fulfilled before a business can do business with the government.

Specifically, R1's APEX Accelerator program helps businesses:

- Understand the government contracting process
- Identify and research federal, state and local contract opportunities
- Review government solicitations and contract requirements
- Develop and strengthen capability statements to best demonstrate their goods and services
- Complete necessary procurement requirements and certifications
- Conduct market research
- Identify subcontracting and prime contracting opportunities

The APEX Accelerator program is a national network of offices that connect small businesses to government buyers. There are 10 APEX Accelerator offices in Illinois, and R1's program operates as a satellite of The APEX Accelerator at The Joseph Center in Forest Park, Illinois.

A "Compass" for Government Contracting

TopShot Commercial Kitchen Repair, a veteran-owned business based in Rockford, has provided commercial kitchen equipment sales, maintenance, and installation services since 1996. Owner Doug Finke recently contacted R1 to help him pursue government contracts to expand his business after registering with System Award Management (SAM), an online federal procurement portal that businesses must join before competing for contracts.

"Even for mandatory tasks like registering with SAM, I feel lost without a compass," Finke said. "The APEX Accelerator program is that guide that says 'You're doing this right' or 'I would do this differently. Having someone to call and talk through my questions has been amazing."

Businesses that want to learn more or get started with the APEX Accelerator program at R1 can visit www.r1planning.org/apex or contact:

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ABOUT R1 – [Region 1 Planning Council](#) is a special-purpose government agency providing cross-jurisdictional, government-to-government collaborative planning for Northern Illinois. The regional planning model provides an efficient means to promoting an informed, comprehensive dialogue that holistically addresses regional issues by fulfilling the needs of government entities for long-range planning, securing funding, and analyzing and providing data in support of regional projects and initiatives.