

# Tollway puts \$4 million toward increasing contractor diversity

Daily Herald  
updated: 3/23/2017  
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Illinois tollway directors agreed Thursday to spend up to \$4 million to assist minority-, women- and veteran-owned construction companies that are seeking work with the agency.

The funds will be distributed among seven entities including the Mexican-American Chamber of Commerce, Illinois State Black Chamber of Commerce and Chicago Minority Supplier Development Council.

Training ranges from basics such as explaining the technicalities of bidding for a contract and obtaining financing to advanced classes in estimating the cost of a job or managing a business.

The program will be evaluated based on the number of businesses served and successful bids, among other criteria, diversity chief Gustavo Giraldo said. It will be offered at locations primarily in Chicago, the South suburbs and the Rockford area.

A 2015 tollway study concluded that blacks, Hispanics and women are underrepresented compared to whites when it comes to construction contractors and professional firms hired by the agency.

Several construction contractors informed tollway directors the agency wasn't doing enough to hire black-owned businesses.

"We feel slighted and overlooked," said Omar Shareef, president of the African American Contractors Association.

But others like Shelia Morgan, president of Chicago Minority Supplier Development Council, told directors "the work you're doing is unprecedented."