Nicor Illinois Community Investment awards $600,000 in Impact Grants

Impact Grants to amplify innovative economic development projects

CHICAGO, IL, UNITED STATES, July 15, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Grants to fund nonprofit programs focused on access to employment opportunities, small business support and community-building initiatives across Northern Illinois

Nicor Illinois Community Investment (NICI) has awarded four $150,000 Impact Grants to nonprofits in Rockford and South Suburban Cook County. These grants support projects fostering economic mobility, small business growth and workforce development programs.

“At Nicor Gas, we believe strong communities are built on access to opportunity. Through NICI’s Impact Grants, we are proud to support organizations that are creating pathways to economic mobility, strengthening workforce development and helping entrepreneurs and small businesses thrive,” said Wendell Dallas, president and CEO of Nicor Gas and chairman of the NICI Board of Directors. “These collaborations reflect our long-term commitment to investing in Northern Illinois and empowering residents with the tools they need to succeed.”

“For the past five years, NICI has built a reputation as a relationship-driven foundation committed to learning from, connecting with and resourcing communities in Northern Illinois. Our latest round of Impact Grants builds on years-long collaborations with innovative, locally rooted grantees. We’re thrilled to see them continue to support the region with these transformational projects,” said Tovah McCord, NICI executive director.

This year’s grantees are:

Think Big Corporation (Rockford): expanding entrepreneurship education and business incubation, with community events to showcase participants’ successes.

“This $150,000 Impact Grant represents more than funding; it is a vote of confidence in the entrepreneurs, families and communities we serve every day. At Think Big Corporation, we believe that when people are given access to the right resources, education and opportunities, they can transform their futures and create lasting economic impact," noted Dr. Sheila Hill, president & CEO.

Goodwill Industries of Northern Illinois (Rockford): supporting high-demand trade certifications through the Goodwill Excel Center, Illinois' first adult high school that provides a state-recognized diploma.

"This investment from NICI will create meaningful opportunities for adult learners by connecting them directly to high-demand careers that offer family sustaining wages and long-term growth. By expanding access to robotics, transportation, logistics, welding and advanced manufacturing careers, these funds will help students gain credentials, secure employment more quickly and contribute to the economic vitality of the region. Ultimately, this investment empowers individuals to build brighter futures while strengthening the local workforce and meeting critical industry needs," said Courtney Geiger, vice president of mission services.

Comprehensive Community Solutions (CCS) (Rockford): piloting a year-long initiative designed to deepen relationships, increase collaboration and expand access to economic opportunity for youth, adults, families and community partners.

"CCS is excited about partnering with NICI because the investment strengthens our ability to expand workforce development, youth engagement and community-centered economic opportunities while building stronger partnerships throughout Rockford," stated William Chatman, executive director and CEO.

OAI, Inc. (Park Forest): launching contractor readiness pathways within its workforce development programming to prepare students to join or establish HVAC and energy efficiency businesses.

"The entire OAI team looks forward to hosting training programs, employer connections and regional convenings that bring together residents, businesses, nonprofits and public-sector partners to create pathways to good-paying careers and strengthen economic opportunity throughout Chicagoland," expressed Sandra Dafiaghor, executive director.

NICI's Impact Grants are part of a multipronged approach to foster economic mobility in Northern Illinois. NICI has invested more than $2.5 million in support of economic opportunity since it was founded by Nicor Gas in 2021. Learn more at nici-il.org.

ABOUT NICOR ILLINOIS COMMUNITY INVESTMENT (NICI)
Nicor Illinois Community Investment (NICI), established in 2021, has invested more than $3 million in Rockford, Joliet and South Suburban Cook County, supporting high-impact community projects, small businesses and entrepreneurs, and expanding economic opportunity across

Northern Illinois. Learn more at nici-il.org.

ABOUT NICOR GAS
Nicor Gas is one of four natural gas distribution companies of Southern Company Gas, a wholly owned subsidiary of Southern Company (NYSE: SO), and serves 2.3 million customers in more than 650 communities across Northern Illinois. Ranked as a Most Trusted Utility Brand by Escalent, Nicor Gas is fueling customer choice, innovation, economic growth and a sustainable energy future. Nicor Gas is working to keep bills as low as possible as we continue providing access to clean, safe and reliable natural gas. For more information, visit NicorGas.com.

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