



Southern Illinois University System
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IRH & OCE NEWSLETTER

INSTITUTE FOR RURAL HEALTH &
OFFICE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

IRH/OCE Plan 2026 ESL Community Day

The SIU System Office of Community Engagement (OCE), in partnership with the United Congregations of Metro East (UCM), has planned a Community Day for April 4, 2026, at the Wyvetter H. Younge Higher Education Campus in East St. Louis. Community Day is a free, family-friendly event designed to connect residents with employment opportunities, workforce programs, and essential community resources — all in one place, on one day.

Attendees will have the opportunity to participate in on-site interviews with regional employers and workforce partners. While employment cannot be guaranteed, Community Day is intentionally structured to move beyond information-sharing to active hiring. Employers attending are prepared to interview qualified candidates, discuss immediate openings, and in some cases extend conditional or same-day offers. Through advance employer outreach, resume preparation support, and coordinated workforce partnerships, we are working to increase the likelihood that job seekers leave with clear next steps—and, whenever possible, tangible employment opportunities. Some of the onsite services and activities will include:

- Resume reviews and interview preparation consultations
- Energy-sector career pathway information
- Trade school and technical program resources
- GED and adult education information
- College admissions and workforce training guidance
- Records expungement
- On-site DMV services, including assistance with obtaining or renewing driver's licenses and state IDs



In addition to employment activities, the event will offer various activities for families and children, including an egg hunt, storytelling, face painting. The spirit of Community Day reflects the shared mission of UCM and the OCE to build stronger communities through access, opportunity, and partnership. Community Day is free and open to the public. Families are encouraged to attend and enjoy food, community activities, and raffles throughout the day.

For more information or to register, visit [Community Day](https://siusystem.edu/community-engagement/).



<https://siusystem.edu/community-engagement/>

January - March 2026

Clean Energy Contractor Incubator

From Planning to Activation: Doors Opening Soon

The Southern Illinois University System Office of Community Engagement, in partnership with NAACP East St. Louis Branch, is excited to launch the Clean Energy Contractor Incubator program. With support from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), OCE will open two regional incubators to help local contractors, entrepreneurs and businesspeople access the growing clean energy economy. The Incubators will deliver comprehensive, wraparound services that help contractors and builders grow, connect, and thrive in Illinois' clean energy economy, expanding access and opportunity to underserved populations.

The Clean Energy Contractor Incubator can help builders and contractors:

- Win more jobs in solar, HVAC, weatherization, and energy efficiency
- Get qualified and certified to bid on state-funded clean energy projects
- Strengthen bonding capacity, licensing, and compliance readiness
- Build back office systems so they can scale with confidence
- Connect directly with project owners, utilities, and prime contractors
- Access hands-on mentoring from experienced industry professionals
- Tap into workforce pipelines to hire and train skilled workers

Specialized support is available for minority-owned, women-owned, and emerging contractors ready to grow. Whether companies are just starting out or looking to scale up their clean energy business, the Clean Energy Incubator Program is here to help them grow, compete, and contribute to a more equitable and sustainable future for Illinois.

INCUBATOR LOCATIONS

The Wedge Innovation Center

620 East Broadway
Alton, IL 62002

TheWedge
powered by SIUE

Lansdowne Center

1800 North 25th Street
East St. Louis, IL 62204



Illinois
Department of Commerce
& Economic Opportunity

Lansdowne UP



Alton Medical District

The SIU System's Institute of Rural Health and the Office of Community Engagement are working with AltonWorks, a social impact development company focused on the revitalization of historic downtown Alton, to support development of an Alton Medical District. The proposed Alton Medical District represents a transformative opportunity to consolidate and coordinate healthcare, education and community resources. Anchored by four major institutions—OSF Saint Anthony's Health Center, Alton Memorial Hospital, SIU School of Dental Medicine and Alton Mental Health Center—the District aims to serve as a synergistic healthcare hub for the region.



Alton residents and community leaders discuss the proposed Alton Medical District

This initiative builds on successful precedents established by the Illinois Medical District in Chicago and the Mid-Illinois Medical District in Springfield, both of which demonstrate the power of coordinated healthcare, education, and research ecosystems to drive regional development. AltonWorks and IRH/OCE first convened a meeting on October 29, 2025, bringing together more than 30 key healthcare, academic and civic leaders to explore the formation of an Alton Medical District. The meeting focused on aligning healthcare delivery, education and economic development in a collaborative model inspired by the Illinois and Mid-Illinois Medical Districts. Participants identified shared priorities, infrastructure needs and opportunities for collaboration that would strengthen regional healthcare systems, improve community health outcomes and attract investment to the Alton area. IRH/OCE scheduled a follow-up meeting on February 18, 2026 as part of their Community Collaboration Lab series with more than 40 participants who represented various health care agencies, community organizations, civic institutions and residents.

Participants identified the following key outcomes for the project:

- **Unified Governance and Coordination:** Establishing a framework for joint planning, oversight, and communication
- **Shared Infrastructure and Data Systems:** Integrating technology and physical resources to improve patient outcomes and cost efficiency
- **Workforce Development:** Creating education-to-employment pipelines aligned with healthcare sector demand
- **Community Engagement:** Building lasting trust through transparent communication and inclusive participation
- **Policy and Funding:** Leveraging the Medical District's quasi-governmental status to access state and federal grants

The group will begin developing an implementation plan and identifying next steps for the project, including establishing a governance framework and working groups.

ALTONWORKS.

DATA CENTERS AND OUR COMMUNITY

The SIU System Office of Community Engagement and the SIUE Center for Predictive Analytics (C-PAN) prepared this brief information sheet to help community members better understand some of the issues that are commonly discussed when data centers are proposed. Across the United States, data centers are being built to support cloud computing, artificial intelligence and the digital services many people rely on every day. Communities view these projects more favorably when they are located in existing industrial areas or previously developed sites. In some cases, developers have reused abandoned factories or industrial buildings rather than building near residential neighborhoods. When a data center is proposed, residents and local leaders often consider several potential impacts.

Noise and Visual Impact: Data centers use large cooling systems that can generate continuous noise. Because of this, planners often recommend locating data centers at least half a mile from residential areas when possible. Landscaping, terrain and physical barriers can help reduce both sound and visual impacts.

Property Values: Properties located very close to large industrial facilities may experience decreases in value, particularly for properties directly adjacent to the site. Locating facilities in established industrial zones can help reduce these concerns.

Water Use: Newer closed-loop cooling systems reduce water use needed for cooling data centers compared with older designs, but overall demand can still be significant. Some experts recommend locating data centers in communities that rely on surface water sources rather than groundwater, which may be more sensitive to increased demand.

Electricity Demand: Data centers require substantial electricity. Some regions are exploring policies where data centers pay higher electricity rates or reduce energy use during peak demand periods.

Land and Geological Conditions: Historic underground mining can create risks of land subsidence over time. Sites above mined areas may require additional evaluation before development.

What Benefits Might Data Centers Bring?

Communities sometimes pursue data center development because of potential economic benefits, including:

- Increased local property tax revenue
- Construction jobs during development
- Long-term demand for electricians, HVAC technicians and other skilled trades
- Investments in power and connectivity infrastructure

In some cases, the value of a data center facility can increase a community's Equalized Assessed Value (EAV), which may help support local government services.

Please join or follow us on social media for program updates and news about our projects in the community.



If your organization or community is interested in working with IRH or OCE to engage in a Strategic Doing initiative, please contact Dr. Connie Frey Spurlock at connie.freyspurlock@siu.edu.

