



ACEC ILLINOIS THE CONNECTOR

LEADERSHIP & POLICY BRIEFING



KEVIN ARTL
PRESIDENT & CEO

FEBRUARY 2026

ACEC Illinois launches 2026 Engineering Works contest



The **American Council of Engineering Companies of Illinois** (ACEC Illinois) has kicked off its 2026 “Engineering Works” competition, inviting public votes for top infrastructure projects.

Why it matters: This contest underscores the innovation and contribution of Illinois’ engineering teams, highlighting projects that drive economic growth and connectivity.

- The engineering sector contributes \$20.7 billion annually to Illinois’ GDP, supporting over 182,000 jobs.

Key projects: Eight nominees span categories like transportation, structural systems, and community impact.

- Voters will consider design excellence, construction quality, and community benefits.

Community engagement: The Engineering Works competition encourages public participation in celebrating engineering achievements.

- Last year's winner, Ardmore Roderick, was recognized for enhancing mobility in Jackson Park.

Voting details: Public voting is open until February 18, with the winner announced at the ACEC Illinois Engineering Excellence Awards gala.

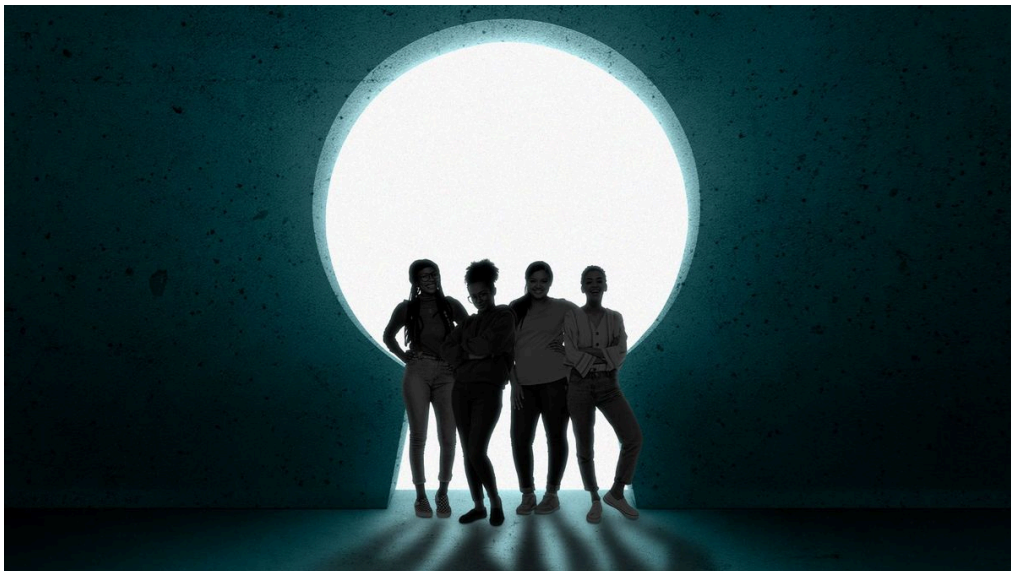
- View nominees and cast your vote at www.acecillea.com/engineering-works.

Vote Now

POLITICO Illinois Playbook

— **Engineering works:** The American Council of Engineering Companies of Illinois wants you to [vote](#) on the best infrastructure projects in the state. Voting ends Feb. 18, when the winner will be announced at the ACEC Illinois Awards gala.

5 Numbers That Explain America's Engineering Shortage



The United States faces an annual shortage of 18,000 engineers, according to new research from the ACEC Research Institute. This crisis threatens the nation's ability to maintain and modernize critical infrastructure. Here are five key statistics that illuminate the scope of this challenge:

1. 18,000: The Annual Engineering Gap - In 2022, approximately 184,000 engineers retired or left the profession, while only 166,000 new graduates entered the workforce. This net shortage of 18,000 engineers annually represents a structural imbalance that will worsen without intervention.

2. 91%: International Graduates Forced to Leave – Of 40,606 international students who earned U.S. engineering degrees in 2022, only about 3,825 received H-1B visas—roughly 9%. This means American universities train tens of thousands of qualified engineers who cannot legally work here after graduation.

3. 3.3%: The Shrinking College Pipeline – The college-age population (18-24) declined by 3.3% between 2013 and 2022, directly impacting the number of potential engineering students. This demographic shift compounds recruitment challenges for engineering programs nationwide.

4. 10,000: The Post-2019 Graduate Decline – Engineering degree completions peaked around 2019 at approximately 214,000 and have since fallen by more than 10,000. Civil, mechanical, and electrical engineering—core infrastructure disciplines—dropped by 5,000+ graduates since 2019.

5. 47%: Engineers Citing Burnout Risk – Nearly half of engineering professionals identify burnout as their top career concern, ahead of compensation or job security. This retention crisis means firms lose experienced talent faster than they can develop replacements.

The Infrastructure Impact – These numbers translate to delayed projects, increased costs, and potential infrastructure failures. State departments of transportation report difficulty finding qualified engineers to manage federally-funded projects. Private firms compete fiercely for limited talent, driving up project costs.

Policy Solutions Required – The engineering shortage demands three immediate actions: reforming H-1B visa policies to retain U.S.-educated international graduates, expanding engineering education pathways, telling the story of engineering better, and modernizing workplace cultures. Without these changes, America’s infrastructure ambitions will remain unrealized.

Zoom In: Read the entire workforce report and analysis by the ACEC Research Institute [here](#).

Cook County Found to have Misused Road Funds



Cook County’s allocation of \$243 million from transportation tax revenues violated the Safe Roads Amendment, [according to a Circuit Court ruling](#).

Why it matters: This decision marks a significant victory for the industry alliance including multiple plaintiffs led by the IRTBA, impacting how counties can use transportation funds.

- The ruling may prompt other counties to reevaluate their budgetary allocations for compliance with the amendment.

The big picture: The Safe Roads Amendment was designed to ensure transportation-related revenues are used solely for transportation projects.

- Cook County’s attempt to allocate funds for public safety departments was deemed unconstitutional.

What’s next: Cook County must now redirect its budget and determine how to manage the \$70 million previously allocated for public safety.

- The county has committed to complying with the ruling while continuing to fund transportation projects.
- Other Illinois municipalities may review their compliance with the amendment as a precaution.

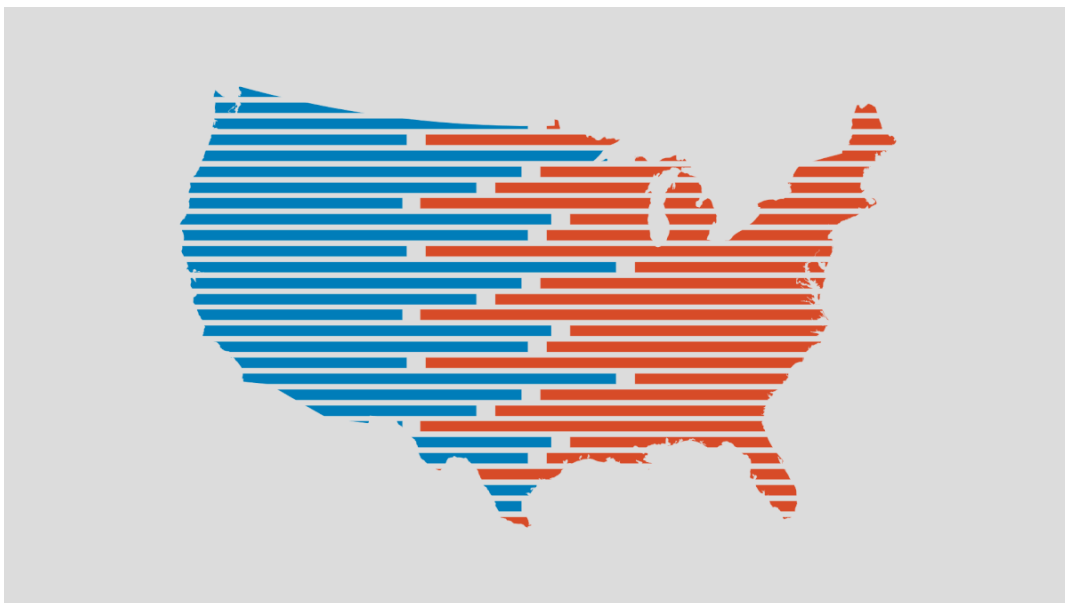
What they’re saying: John Fitzgerald, representing industry, hailed the ruling as a “total and absolute victory” for both industry and users.

“It shows the county never even came close to meeting its constitutional obligation,” Fitzgerald remarked.

A collaborative legal effort: This case was the result of a strong industry collaboration. The Illinois Road and Transportation Builders Association led the effort in coordinating plaintiffs, securing expert testimony and legal counsel, and advancing the case through a lengthy process. As an original plaintiff, ACEC Illinois supported the effort through trial preparation, financial contributions, and testimony in the most recent court proceedings.



Bipartisan push for permitting reform gains momentum



Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Chairman Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV) emphasized bipartisan cooperation during the hearing on federal environmental review and permitting processes.

Why it matters: The bipartisan effort aims to create durable solutions that remove politics from permitting, crucial for advancing infrastructure projects without delays.

- Capito highlighted the need for legislative changes to ensure consistency in permitting processes, benefiting both public and private sectors.

What they're saying: Ranking Member Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) echoed concerns over permitting hurdles and stressed the importance of reform to boost competitiveness.

"Energy prices have surged 13% over the last year," noted Senator Adam Schiff (D-CA), highlighting the urgency for reform to expand energy generation capabilities.

Witness insights: The hearing featured a range of industry leaders, including Brendan Bechtel from Bechtel Industries and Abigail Ross Hopper from the Solar Energy Industries Association.

- Testimonies underscored the need for technology and energy-type neutrality in permitting, emphasizing a balanced approach to reform.

The bipartisan challenge: Despite shared interests, hurdles remain in enacting reform due to partisan differences and administrative actions.

Zoom Out: The hearing concluded with a call for trust and cooperation, as both parties recognize the economic and environmental benefits of reform. For a deeper dive, [click here](#).

House approves transportation funding bill



Last week, the House of Representatives approved a transportation funding bill as part of a comprehensive legislative package, with a vote of 341-88.

Why it matters: This move bundles critical funding for transportation, defense, labor, and health programs, setting the stage for Senate consideration.

- The inclusion of Department of Homeland Security appropriations has sparked debate over immigration oversight reforms, delaying the final approval.

Senate developments: Senate Democrats oppose the current DHS funding due to calls for new oversight measures, resulting in a temporary stopgap measure.

- The Senate approved a five-bill package, including transportation funding, and a short-term measure for DHS to allow further negotiation.

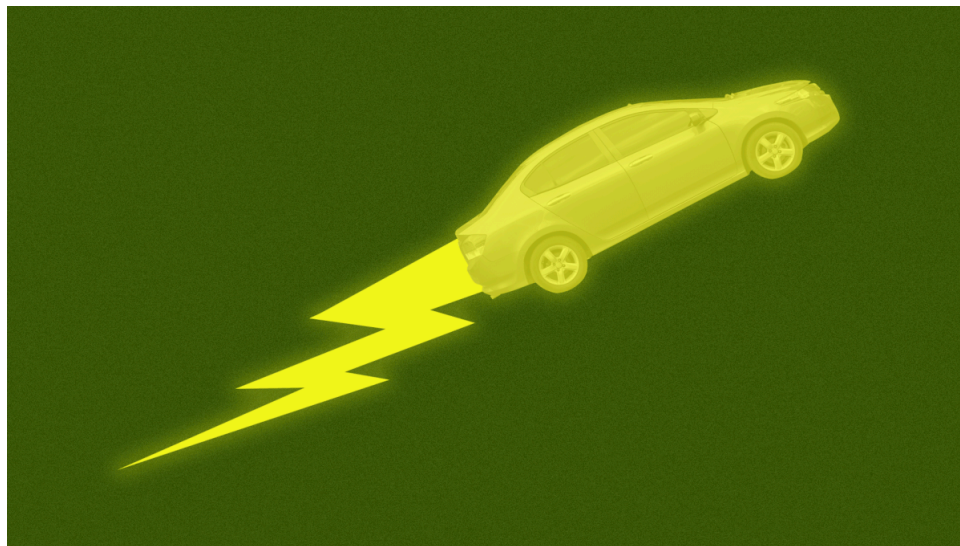
Impact of funding lapse: The temporary continuing resolution expired, causing a partial funding lapse.

- Despite the lapse, essential services continue, with minimal impact on transportation programs due to the Highway Trust Fund and advanced appropriations.

What's next: The House will reconvene this week to vote on the revised bill.

- Lawmakers aim to finalize the measure and present it to the President.
- The Department of Transportation contingency plan is [here](#).

Judge rules NEVI program pause unlawful



District Judge Tana Lin ruled that the USDOT's pause of the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI) program violated the Administrative Procedure Act.

Why it matters: This decision provides states with clarity on continuing their electric vehicle charging infrastructure projects.

- The ruling addresses the uncertainty caused by the program's freeze and highlights the need for consistent federal guidance.

Legal background: The NEVI program, established under the Infrastructure Investment Jobs Act, aims to build a national EV charging network.

- The pause, initiated by USDOT in February 2025, was challenged by 17 states and NGOs, arguing it exceeded USDOT's authority.

Current progress: Despite the pause, states have obligated \$1.4 billion for future charging stations, with only 2% of the \$4.4 billion in funds spent.

- New guidance issued in August simplifies state planning requirements and allows greater flexibility in determining charging locations.

Impact on infrastructure: The ruling emphasizes the importance of maintaining progress on electric vehicle infrastructure to meet national goals.

- The decision also underscores potential disruptions from the pending FY 2026 appropriations bill, which could reallocate NEVI funds to other highway programs.

For a deeper dive: [click here](#).



[Listen Here!](#)



ACEC-IL's podcast *Engineering Works* interviews Bria Scudder, Deputy Governor of Illinois. Bria discusses her role as a senior advisor and now Deputy Governor in shaping two of the most impactful infrastructure measures in Illinois history, ReBuild Illinois and the transit fix, and shares insights on building consensus among passionate stakeholders and advancing critical infrastructure priorities across the state.



Podcasting: A Turnkey Way to Elevate Your Voice

We're proud to be producing and hosting ACEC-Illinois' podcast, *Engineering Works*, a platform designed to highlight the people, ideas, and innovations shaping our industry.

Podcasting is one of the fastest-growing and most effective channels for engagement. Today, more than 546 million people worldwide listen to podcasts, and nearly half of Americans 12+ tune in at least once a month. By 2027, global listenership is projected to exceed 650 million.

For associations, firms, and industry leaders, this presents a powerful opportunity to position your firm as experts in the verticals in which you are growing, and to showcase your work.

Podcasts also help you:

- Establish thought leadership
- Highlight members, clients, and stakeholders
- Communicate complex topics clearly
- Strengthen relationships and retention
- Reach beyond traditional marketing channels

We offer a fully turnkey podcast production solution, from concept to launch, including:

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With decades of experience producing award-winning audio content, our team ensures a polished, professional product that reflects your organization and serves your audience.

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Essential infrastructure touches all of our lives – so how can we shape it for the better? At GFT, a privately held AEC firm, we innovate where transportation, water, power, and buildings converge. **We call this the Infrastructure of Life.**

We measure our success by the strength of our relationships – that's why we're the employer of choice for 5,000+ of the industry's brightest engineers, planners, architects, inspectors, designers, and construction managers, and more.

Our clients choose us for our expertise and prefer us for our nimble approach, creativity, and personal touch. Backed by over a century's experience, together, we're building a world where infrastructure creates well-being and opportunities for everyone.



Client
satisfaction
ratings over
90%
when surveyed

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Infrastructure of Life

Our team of experts design, engineer, and construct resilient, creative solutions that uplift communities across North America. Through technical excellence and enduring client relationships, we create better access and opportunities for people every day.

- Transportation
- Water Resources
- Power
- Education
- Federal
- Life Sciences
- Civic
- Industrial



5,000+
dedicated
professionals



110+
year history
of ingenuity

Engineering News-Record Annual Rankings

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| #6 Transportation | #15 Water Treatment, Desalination Plants* |
| #7 Mass Transit and Rail* | #16 Water Supply |
| #10 Pure Designers | #18 Top 500 Design Firms |
| #10 Bridges* | #40 Designers in International Markets |
| #10 Dams and Reservoirs* | |
| #11 Education* | |
| #14 Highways* | |

* 2025 rankings for this category have yet to be released. This represents a 2024 ranking from Gannett Fleming or TranSystems.



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MEMBER UPDATES:



InNova Consulting, Inc. Welcomes New Team Members:

InNovaConsulting, Inc. continues to grow its team and service capabilities, reflecting our commitment to delivering high-quality, multidisciplinary engineering solutions that support infrastructure and community development.

Wenmei (May) Englert, PE-Project Civil Engineer:

May has joined InNova as a Professional Engineer with a master's degree in civil engineering and over ten years of experience. Her background includes IDOT and land development projects, as well as research, teaching, and collaboration across multidisciplinary teams. She is excited to contribute to meaningful infrastructure projects while growing alongside the InNova team.

Mohammed Saiful Malik, Project Mechanical Engineer:

Mohammed brings strong technical expertise in mechanical engineering with a focus on HVAC system design and MEP coordination. His experience includes energy modeling, code compliance, and the development of construction documents for a wide range of building and infrastructure projects. Mohammed supports InNova's growing portfolio with a detail-oriented, systems-based approach to design and coordination.



New Employees Join Oates Associates



Kaia Morena



Donovan Sproull



Ryan Vogt

Collinsville, IL (January 15, 2026) - Oates Associates, Inc. – a 100% employee-owned civil and structural engineering and surveying firm – welcomes three new employees who bring fresh perspectives and enthusiasm to our growing team. Among them are Kaia Morena, Donovan Sproull, and Ryan Vogt.

Morena joins as an Associate Project Designer supporting transportation projects. She first worked with Oates Associates as a summer intern and continued part-time through the fall before transitioning to a full-time role after graduating with her engineering degree in December. Sproull, also an Associate Project Designer in transportation, brings valuable hands-on experience having previously supported engineering and construction operations for a contractor. Vogt joins as a Survey Technician and is currently working toward his land surveying certificate with a future goal of becoming a professional land surveyor.

As these newest employee-owners begin their careers with Oates Associates, the firm looks forward to supporting their growth and development while continuing to deliver innovative engineering and surveying solutions to local communities and institutions.

Oates Associates is a 100% employee-owned multi-disciplined design firm with offices in Collinsville and Belleville, Illinois and St. Louis and St. Charles, Missouri. Oates provides engineering and surveying services for transportation and building projects. Specifically, this includes transportation and traffic engineering, ADA transition planning, stormwater management, site design, building and bridge structural design and inspections, surveying, and drone operations. For more information, visit www.oatesassociates.com or call 618.345.2200.

Karlie Vogt Earns SHRM-CP Credential

Collinsville, IL (January 8, 2026) - Karlie Vogt, Human Resources / Office Manager at Oates Associates, has earned the Society for Human Resource Management Certified Professional (SHRM-CP) credential, a globally recognized certification that reflects advanced knowledge of human resources principles and best practices.



The SHRM-CP certification is recognized as a leading standard for HR professionals, validating knowledge in areas such as workforce planning, employee engagement, and compliance. Vogt's accomplishment reflects her dedication to professional growth, her focus on strengthening company culture, and her commitment to support organizational success.

Since joining Oates Associates in 2025 in the newly developed role of HR / Office Manager, Vogt has played a key role in supporting the firm's growing workforce. Earning the SHRM-CP credential further strengthens her ability to lead HR initiatives that support employee-owners and advance the firm's commitment to shared success.

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Oates Associates' Brandon Hamel Elected President of ASCE St. Louis Younger Member Group



Collinsville, IL – Oates Associates, Inc. – a 100% employee-owned civil and structural engineering and surveying firm – is proud to announce that Associate Project Designer Brandon Hamel has been elected President of the 2026 Executive Board for the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) St. Louis Younger Member Group (YMG).

The ASCE St. Louis YMG supports young professionals by fostering community engagement, encouraging student involvement, and promoting career development within the civil engineering field. As President, Hamel will lead initiatives that strengthen these efforts and continue building a strong network of emerging engineers. His responsibilities will include presiding over meetings, representing the YMG in society affairs, and advancing collaboration and professional growth among members.

Hamel's leadership within ASCE underscores his commitment to advancing the civil engineering profession and mentoring future engineers – a commitment shared by the firm. Oates Associates celebrates his achievement and looks forward to supporting his continued contributions to the industry.

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KLINGNER
& ASSOCIATES, P. C.
Engineers • Architects • Surveyors

Wavering named Quincy Regional Office Manager for Klingner & Associates, P.C.



QUINCY, ILL., JANUARY 19th, 2026 — Klingner & Associates, P.C. (Klingner) has formally announced that Curt Wavering, PE, has been named the Quincy Regional Office Manager. In addition to supervising Quincy staff, Wavering will be responsible for coordinating office operations, projects, and policies.

Wavering, who has been with Klingner for more than 19 years, also serves as the Civil / Site Department Manager. During his time at the firm, he has managed multiple small- and large-scale projects throughout Illinois, Missouri, and Iowa.

Wavering is licensed as a Professional Engineer in Illinois, Missouri, and Iowa, and holds a bachelor of science in civil engineering from Iowa State University.

Klingner provides engineering, architecture, surveying, and geotechnical services throughout Illinois, Missouri, and Iowa. For more information about Klingner or to schedule a consultation, please contact 217-223-3670 or visit klingner.com.

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ABOUT KLINGNER & ASSOCIATES, P.C.

Klingner & Associates, P.C. (Klingner) is a family and employee-owned engineering, surveying, and architecture firm focused on enhancing communities across the Midwest. Founded in 1905, Klingner features a staff of 161 licensed engineers, architects, surveyors, and support personnel. This multidisciplinary team manages projects of all sizes and complexities from offices in Quincy, Ill.; Galesburg, Ill.; Carbondale, Ill.; Columbia, Mo.; Cape Girardeau, Mo.; Hannibal, Mo.; Burlington, Iowa; Davenport, Iowa; and Pella, Iowa. www.klingner.com

Klingner engineering assistant becomes Professional Engineer



CARBONDALE, ILL., JANUARY 26, 2026 — Morgan Rich, a transportation engineering assistant for Klingner & Associates, P.C. (Klingner), has become a registered Professional Engineer (PE) in the State of Illinois. His experience includes both design and construction observation services for roadway projects throughout Illinois.

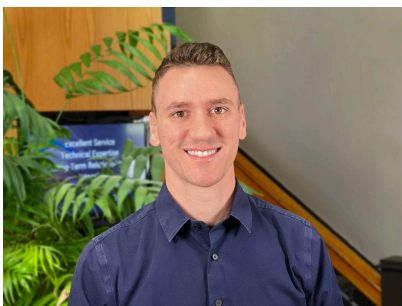
Rich joined the Klingner team in 2022 and is based in the firm's Carbondale Regional Office. He holds a bachelor of science in civil engineering from Southern Illinois University.

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Klingner engineering assistant earns Engineer Intern registration



QUINCY, ILL., JANUARY 26, 2026 — Fredric Hoerr, an electrical engineering assistant for Klingner & Associates, P.C. (Klingner), has earned his Engineer Intern (EI) registration from the State of Illinois. The EI registration marks the first step towards becoming a licensed Professional Engineer. His talents include a strong ability to design complex electrical systems for municipal and educational facilities. Hoerr joined the Klingner team in 2022 and is based in the firm's Quincy Regional Office. He holds a bachelor of science in electrical engineering from Grand Canyon University.

###

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Infrastructure Engineering Inc. Introduces Next Generation of Leadership



Pictured right: Paul Ajegba, PE, SVP National Strategic Growth; Dustin Quincy, PE, VP Engineering; Dr. Kia A. Sutton, CPSM, VP Business Development; Daniel Cox, PE, Asst. Program Manager

Joining the firm's ownership group are Paul Ajegba, PE, Daniel Cox, PE, Dustin Quincy, PE and Dr. Kia A. Sutton, CPSM, recognizing their leadership contributions and commitment to IEI's future.



Standing Left to Right: Paul Ajegba, PE | Maïke Rodriguez, PE | Ken Smorynski, PE, SE, Aaron Patterson, PE | Daniel Cox, PE | Dustin Quincy, PE
Seated Left to Right: Dr. Kia A. Sutton, CPSM | Kashif Khan, PE | Antoinette Coates

IEI 2026 Ownership Team



Kashif Khan, PE, CEO; Aaron Patterson, PE, President; Michael Sutton, PE, Chairman of the Board

"This evolution reflects the maturity of our organization and our commitment to developing the next generation of leaders. Our values, culture, and focus on engineering excellence remain unchanged."
Michael Sutton, PE

Infrastructure Engineering Inc. (IEI), one of the nation's largest majority African American-owned civil engineering firms, is entering its next chapter with a new leadership and governance structure, effective January 2026. This strategic evolution positions the firm for continued growth, long-term resilience, and multigenerational leadership.

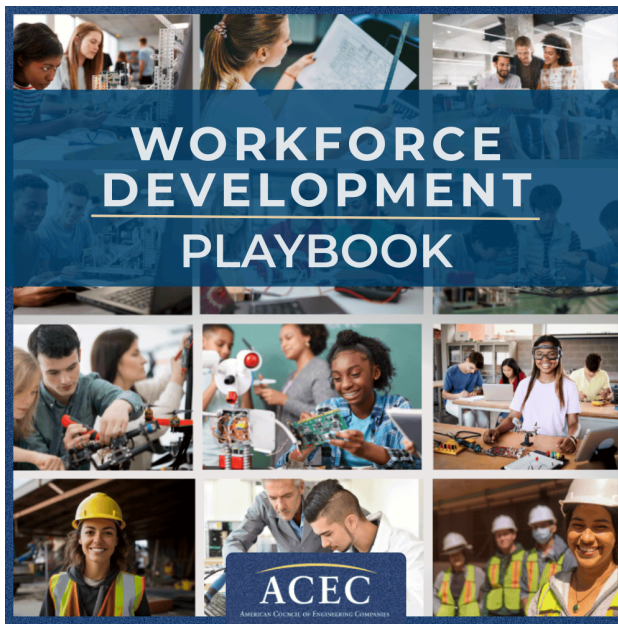
Established in 1998 by Michael Sutton, PE, with two employees in Chicago, IEI has grown to more than 200 professionals across nine offices in eight states. The firm's updated governance includes a Board composed of internal leaders and external industry professionals, providing broader perspectives and strengthening long-term stewardship.

IEI has also expanded its ownership group from six to nine shareholders, reflecting shared leadership and reinforcing continuity, while maintaining its status as a majority African American-owned firm. Founder Michael Sutton, PE has transitioned from owner to Chairman of the Board, where he will continue to provide strategic guidance and mentorship. Kashif Khan, PE has stepped into the role of Chief Executive Officer, and Aaron Patterson, PE has been appointed President.

Infrastructure Engineering Inc. (IEI) is a multi-disciplinary consulting firm that delivers design engineering, program management, and construction engineering and inspection services. We partner with public agencies and private owners of all sizes to reduce risk, compress schedules, and keep critical infrastructure and communities moving. Our local teams deliver practical, resilient, and responsive transportation systems that meet the highest standards of safety, compliance, and performance. Whether designing quick-turn assignments under tight schedules or managing multibillion-dollar programs, we measure achievement by the value we create for the communities we serve. That passion empowers how we work, earning our reputation for **INGENUITY**.

Visit IEI's website at www.infrastructure-eng.com for more information.





This Playbook outlines pathways to prioritize workforce development, increase outreach to students, and cultivate the next generation of engineering talent to build the communities of tomorrow.

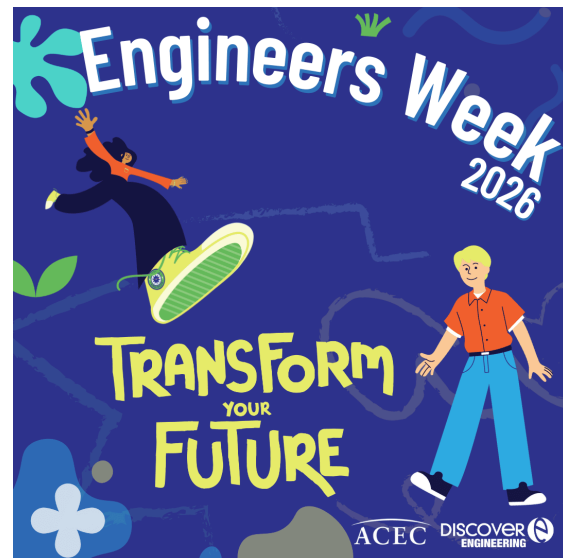
ACEC Workforce Playbook

Engineers Week is the only celebration of its kind—an opportunity to:

- Recognize and celebrate the ways engineers improve our world
- Elevate the conversation about the growing need for engineers
- Inspire and engage the next generation of innovators

Join ACEC and participate in 2026 Engineers Week!

Engineers Week Toolkit



COMMITTEE CHAIR

Spotlight

JOHN YONAN
COLLINS
ENGINEERS INC.



How long have you been a part of ACEC IL?

3 years

Tell us a little bit about the committee you chair.

The City of Chicago in particular, CDOT and CDWM are two major infrastructure Departments that are doing a phenomenal amount of work that sometimes doesn't get realized until you invest time understanding the full cycle life of a project in the City of Chicago. Sometimes these projects are complex, but oftentimes, there are projects that don't get talked about that these Agency Leaders get excited to share with our Committee opportunities to do business with the City in those areas of our expertise. This Committee is made up of members that have done numerous projects with CDOT and CDWM and those that are looking for opportunities to build relationships with these Agencies to get a better understanding, share ideas and gain institutional knowledge of what working for the City of Chicago entails.

What's the number one reason people should join your committee?

This Committee allows Firms to get to know how these Departments are making an effort to bring all size of projects to our Industry from unbundling projects to Target Market opportunities. Some may find doing business with the City has its challenges, but over the years, the City Department Heads have always made an effort to listen to our Industry and make changes to policy and procedures when they can, and this Committee truly provides that forum for them to listen. These City Departments know the large programs they are looking to implement cannot get done without a close working partnership with ACEC, so our Committee is committed to listening to the challenges and bring fresh ideas to help this partnership.

What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

Spending time outdoors - taking in all that nature displays in its Beauty

Tell us one fun fact about yourself.

I have a passion for storytelling.

Mark Your Calendars: USACE Chicago Committee Meeting - Permitting workshop

Presenter: Sophia R. Morgan, USACE Chicago District – Regulatory Branch

Topic: USACE Chicago Permitting Workshop

Date: February 12, 2026 from 1 pm to 2:30 pm

Location: Michael Baker's Office. 200 West Adams St., Suite 1800, Chicago, IL 60606 (hybrid – virtual option)

RSVP: Email in person or hybrid attendance to - emily@acecil.org

Agenda:

- Introduction to Regulatory Permits
 - NWP Program update
 - Regional General Permits
 - Letter of Permission (LOP)
-

ACEC ILLINOIS

NEW MEMBER

N [] MILLSTONE
WEBER

NEW MEMBER

AFFILIATE MEMBER:

Millstone Weber

St. Charles, MO

www.millstoneweber.com

Millstone Weber utilizes a large staff entirely comprised of highly-driven, technically-skilled employees, operating in nearly every sector of the transportation industry.

With decades of experience, Millstone Weber provides pre-construction, design-build, construction management and general contracting services across the rail & mass transit, highway & bridge, and aviation sectors while self-performing an array of industrial, logistics infrastructure and specialty projects.

Connect Here: <http://www.millstoneweber.com>



ACEC ILLINOIS

NEW MEMBER

NE **Stambaugh
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NEW MEMBER

AFFILIATE MEMBER:

Stambaugh Ness

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Strategic Relationships: Trying to be all things to all people doesn't allow you to concentrate fully on your strengths.

So, we've developed strategic relationships with market leaders who offer leading-edge solutions for real business challenges facing our clients. These solutions complement the ones offered by Stambaugh Ness by delivering specialized tools and knowledge that can accelerate your success.

Connect Here: [Stambaugh Ness](#) | [Advisory, Tech & Financial Services for AEC](#)

UPCOMING EVENTS...
ACEC  ILLINOIS



[CHECK OUT THE CALENDAR HERE!](#)

SUBMIT UPDATES & ARTICLES:

Please submit firm update & news articles by the 20th of each month to: bethany@acecil.org
Articles and updates will be included in the membership newsletter, posted on our website,
and shared through our social media feeds.



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