



ILLINOIS THE CONNECTOR

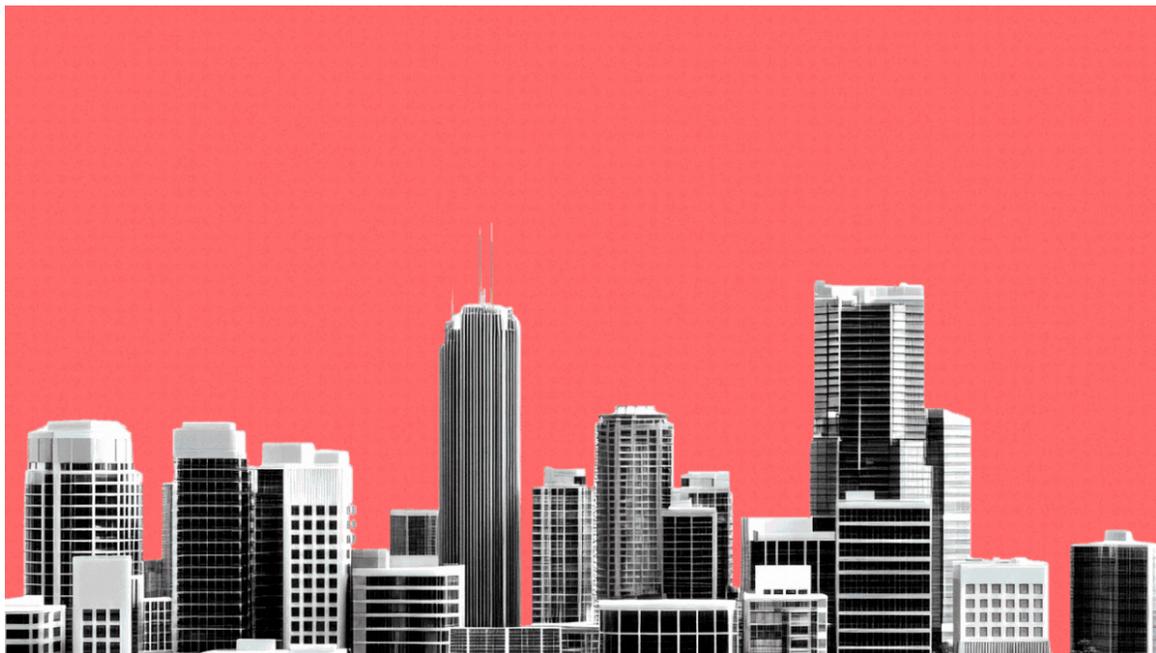
LEADERSHIP & POLICY BRIEFING



KEVIN ARTL
PRESIDENT & CEO

MARCH 2026

Economic Report: Engineering Firms Enter 2026 with Strong Backlogs, Measured Optimism



Engineering firms are starting 2026 from a position of strength, according to the **ACEC Research Institute's new Engineering Business Sentiment Report (Q1 2026)**. Industry executives report solid backlogs, steady hiring expectations, and improving views of the broader U.S. economy.

Why it matters:

Engineering firms are often a leading indicator for infrastructure investment and construction activity across the economy.

By the numbers:

- Median firm backlog is 11 months, with 47 percent of firms carrying a year or more of work.
- 88 percent of firms report open positions, though hiring pressure has eased slightly.
- 65 percent of firms expect hiring to increase over the next 12 months.

What's driving demand:

- Data centers and energy/utilities remain the strongest performing sectors. Public-sector work accounts for 61 percent of firm revenue, highlighting the continued importance of infrastructure investment and capital programs.

What's changing:

- Wage inflation remains a top concern but is moderating compared to prior years.
- Artificial intelligence adoption is accelerating. Nearly half of firms now have a formal AI strategy, and 86 percent expect AI to have a positive impact on their firm.

Zoom in:

Industry leaders say the operating environment is shifting from crisis management around labor shortages and inflation toward strategic adaptation, especially around technology adoption and potential changes in government infrastructure spending.

Read the full report:

Download the complete Engineering Business Sentiment – Q1 2026 report [here](#).

Legislation aims to boost Illinois engineering talent



Illinois Senate Republican Leader John Curran has introduced [Senate Bill 3855](#) to support Illinois engineering students and retain them in the state's workforce post-

graduation.

Why it matters:

The bill seeks to address the engineering talent gap by offering scholarships to students who commit to working for the Illinois Department of Transportation for at least three years.

What they're saying:

“Our world-class universities are educating some of the finest engineers in the country,” said Curran. “I hope my colleagues will join me in supporting this legislation to encourage more engineering students to stay in Illinois.”

Scholarship details:

The Engineering Students of Illinois Scholarship Act will be managed by the Illinois Student Assistance Commission from 2027 through 2031. Eligible students attending an Illinois public university can apply.

Industry impact:

The engineering sector contributes \$20.7 billion annually to Illinois' GDP and supports over 182,000 jobs. Bridging the engineering gap is crucial as retirements increase and fewer graduates enter the workforce.

ACEC Illinois perspective:

“The projects that will shape Illinois over the next generation will require creative, well-trained problem solvers,” said Kevin Artl, President and CEO of ACEC Illinois.

Zoom in:

Explore the [full legislative text here](#) to understand its implications and opportunities for aspiring engineers in Illinois.

Zoom Out:

Check out the media's coverage of the legislation.

- [Politico: Study hard, Stay put. Curran proposes legislation to keep engineers in Illinois](#)
- [Will County Gazette: “Legislation proposes scholarships for engineering students tied to state employment”](#)
- [Kane County Chronicle “Illinois lawmakers propose scholarships tied to IDOT jobs for engineering students”](#)
- [DuPage Policy Journal “Legislation proposes scholarships for engineering students committing to work for IDOT”](#)

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OpEd: ACEC Illinois collaboration with Explore Engineering, Chicago Transit Authority and Chicago Public Schools creates model to inspire future engineers

Inspiring Future Engineers May Be Chicago's Smartest Investment

Partnerships between engineers, schools, and transit agencies are showing students how they can shape Chicago's future.

A [new op-ed](#) by Kevin Artl, President and CEO of ACEC Illinois, emphasizes the importance of partnerships between industry, transit agencies, and schools in addressing the growing engineering talent gap.

Why it matters:

Engineering leaders highlight a widening talent gap as retirements exceed new entrants. Meanwhile, demand for engineering expertise rises with modern infrastructure investments.

The challenge:

Engineers are essential for designing safe highways, modern transit systems, and reliable infrastructure. A shrinking talent pool could jeopardize the long-term strength and efficiency of these systems.

A partnership model:

The op-ed showcases Explore Engineering, an initiative by ACEC Illinois in partnership with the Chicago Transit Authority and Chicago Public Schools. Engineers lead hands-on activities in classrooms to connect theory with real-world projects.

- Schools along the Red Line Extension corridor participate, with engineers volunteering to mentor students and demonstrate infrastructure's role in shaping Chicago's future.

Zoom in:

Programs like Explore Engineering illustrate how collaboration among industry, education, and public agencies can inspire future engineers and strengthen the workforce pipeline.

Learn more and Volunteer Today:

Interested schools can learn about hosting a classroom visit from a practicing engineer at esquaredillinois.org. Interested in volunteering, [click here](#).



Illinois Engineers Power State's Infrastructure Boom at 2026 Engineering Excellence Awards

Award-winning projects showcase innovation shaping communities across Illinois.



Illinois' top infrastructure projects were recognized at the **2026 ACEC Illinois Engineering Excellence Awards**, honoring the engineers and project teams behind some of the state's most innovative and impactful infrastructure work.

Why it matters:

Engineering firms are helping deliver the infrastructure investments that keep Illinois moving — from transportation improvements and water systems to community redevelopment projects that strengthen local economies.

Top honors:

Lincoln's Grand Conceptor Award: Sequoit Creek Park Redevelopment — Strand Associates, Inc. transformed a downtown Antioch site into a vibrant public space featuring restored waterways, a splash pad, playground and public gathering areas.

Engineering Works Award (public vote): Flyover Chicago — A. Epstein and Sons International Inc. converted a former IMAX theater at Navy Pier into an immersive attraction showcasing Chicago's skyline and culture.

Outstanding Graphic Award: HR Green Inc. for its work on the Collins Road Extension project for Kendall County.

Governor Joins in Recognition

Several projects recognized this year were supported by the state's historic Rebuild Illinois capital program, including the Kennedy Expressway (I-90/94) rehabilitation and the Replacement of the Nettle Creek Aqueduct, demonstrating the impact of sustained infrastructure investment across Illinois. **Governor Pritzker** appeared via video to recognize the award winners, to watch the video [click here](#).

What they're saying

Illinois Transportation Secretary Gia Biagi:

"These projects happen thanks to the partnership between our agency and the engineering community — a collaboration that keeps Illinois at the forefront of transportation innovation and investment."

Jerald T. Payonk, ACEC Illinois Board Chair:

"The projects honored this year are well designed, solidly built and transformative, reflecting the high standard of work Illinois engineers bring to modernizing our state's infrastructure."

Zoom in:

Projects were recognized across categories including transportation, water resources, structural systems, environmental restoration, public engagement and innovative construction materials.

→ [See the full list of 2026 Engineering Excellence Award winners.](#)

Zoom Out:

Check out the statewide press coverage of the 2026 EEA Awards.

Politico: [600 gathered for the ACEC Illinois' 2026 EEA Awards](#)

Daily Herald: [“Antioch’s Sequoia Creek Park named among Illinois’ top infrastructure projects”](#)

NCTV-17: [“Washington Street Bridge in the running for Engineering Works award”](#)

Illinois Business Journal: [“ACEC Illinois announces ‘best’ state infrastructure projects at 2026 Engineering Excellence Awards”](#)

Sun Times News: [“ACEC of Illinois names Best Infrastructure Projects in Illinois”](#)

IDOT legislative package aims to expedite projects



Illinois Department
of Transportation

The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) has rolled out legislative proposals to enhance efficiency, modernize procurement, and accelerate project delivery statewide.

Why it matters:

With ongoing transportation investments worth billions, IDOT seeks statutory changes to reduce administrative delays and increase flexibility in project transitions from planning to execution.

Procurement modernization:

One key proposal is to consolidate procurement under IDOT’s Chief Procurement Officer, streamlining the acquisition process for construction-related materials and equipment.

Project delivery improvements:

Another measure proposes raising the approval threshold for contract changes from \$250,000 to \$750,000, allowing quicker decision-making and payments.

- Additional provisions aim to remove bottlenecks by allowing construction to begin under “conditional right-of-way”.

ACEC Illinois involvement:

ACEC Illinois has collaborated with IDOT, ensuring that engineering firms’ input is incorporated, aligning the package with a common goal of efficient infrastructure development.

Zoom in:

[Explore the full legislative package here](#) to understand all initiatives and implications for stakeholders.

ACEC Illinois, IDOT and Tollway Connect with over 100 Students During National Engineers Week



ACEC Illinois member firms joined transportation leaders during National Engineers Week to connect with more than 100 students at St. Raphael Catholic School in Naperville. Engineers from ACEC Illinois member companies volunteered alongside **IDOT Chief Operating Officer John Donovan** and **Illinois Tollway Chief Engineering Officer Manar Nashif**, sharing insights into careers in engineering and infrastructure. Through the [Explore Engineering program](#), students participated in hands-on activities and learned how engineers design projects like the recently rebuilt Washington Street Bridge that keep Illinois communities safe and connected.



[Listen Here!](#)

On this episode of Engineering Works, we welcome back Chris Burke, President of Christopher B. Burke Engineering.

Chris joins us to discuss the 2026 recipient of the prestigious Washington Award and what the honor means for the engineering profession. We also talk about the launch of the Western Society of Engineers' new podcast, Engineering Legends, which he hosts — highlighting the stories and impact of extraordinary engineers.

MEMBER UPDATES:

[InNova Consulting Inc. Leads with Confidence in the Age of AI](#)



On February 17, 2026, Amal Muhsin, MCIS, Solutions & Strategy Manager at Innova Consulting Inc., presented at the Lincolnwood Chamber of Commerce Women in Business Luncheon on the practical use of artificial intelligence in today's workplace.

Her session, "The Augmented Professional: How AI Makes You More Valuable, Not Replaceable," focused on how AI can reduce repetitive work, improve clarity, and strengthen decision-making without removing the human element that drives leadership and innovation.

Amal encouraged attendees to approach AI strategically by identifying workflow friction, defining measurable outcomes, and ensuring data readiness before adopting new tools. A central theme of her talk was that professionals who learn to leverage AI effectively increase their value and impact within their organizations.

Amal's presentation reflects Innova's broader commitment to helping organizations move beyond AI buzzwords and toward practical, results-driven implementation. Our team partners with clients to assess readiness, align AI initiatives with strategic objectives, strengthen data foundations, and deploy solutions that enhance productivity, insight, and decision-making. By combining technical expertise with business strategy and change management, Innova ensures AI is not just adopted but integrated thoughtfully to deliver measurable impact and sustainable competitive advantage.



CBBEL Named Best Workplace for Commuters for Ninth Year

National designation recognizes innovative and impactful commuter benefits

Rosemont, Ill. – Christopher B. Burke Engineering, Ltd. (CBBEL) has been named a 2026 Best Workplace for Commuters® (BWC™), a national designation recognizing employers that lead the way in offering innovative and impactful commuter benefits. For the ninth consecutive year, CBBEL joins more than 800 organizations across the United States and Canada committed to helping employees commute smarter, save money, and improve quality of life.

"Employers like CBBEL understand that commuter benefits are no longer a perk. They are a strategic investment in employees, communities, and long-term success," said Julie Bond, BWC™ Program Director

This designation recognizes CBBEL's multi-award-winning Bike to Work Program, which reflects the company's commitment to sustainability, employee wellbeing, and thoughtful transportation planning. By supporting active transportation, CBBEL encourages firsthand understanding of multimodal infrastructure, insight that informs how our teams design safer, more accessible transportation systems.

As part of the program, employees earn \$1 for every mile commuted by bike and, since its launch in 2006, more than 200 employees have commuted nearly half a million miles by bike. These efforts have eliminated approximately 870,000 pounds of CO₂ emissions, saved over \$100,000 in fuel costs, and promoted healthier, more active lifestyles. CBBEL is also recognized as a Platinum-level Bicycle Friendly Business by the League of American Bicyclists.

To help make it as easy as possible to commute by bike, the program has implemented on-site locker and shower facilities, annual and quarterly incentive programs, fleet bikes for employees using public transit, and assistance with routes, equipment, and safety.

CBBEL's additional commuter benefits include free electric vehicle charging stations, transit subsidies and pre-tax commuter benefits, and hybrid working options.

About Christopher B. Burke Engineering, Ltd. (CBBEL)

Founded in 1986, CBBEL is a multidisciplinary consulting engineering firm that partners with communities and clients to plan, design, and deliver infrastructure that improves how people live, move, and interact with their environment. With more than 260 professionals, CBBEL provides integrated in-house engineering and surveying services, including civil, environmental, transportation, water resources, structural, and construction engineering. Learn more at CBBEL.com.



Klingner employee becomes Professional Engineer

QUINCY, ILL., February 10, 2026 — Ryan Kelley, water resources engineer for Klingner & Associates, P.C. (Klingner), has become a registered Professional Engineer (PE) in the State of Illinois. His experience includes complex bridge hydraulic modeling for both IDOT and MoDOT, watershed studies, and advanced hydraulic modeling.

Kelley joined the Klingner team in 2022 and is based in the firm's Quincy Regional Office. He holds a bachelor of science in civil engineering from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville and a master of engineering in civil engineering from Colorado State University.

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.; Hannibal, Mo.; Cape Girardeau, Mo.; Burlington, Iowa; Davenport, Iowa; and Pella, Iowa. www.klingner.com

ENGINEERING ENTERPRISES, INC. WELCOMES BACK A SUMMER INTERN AS A FULL-TIME EMPLOYEE

Engineering Enterprises, Inc. (EEI), an award-winning civil engineering and land surveying firm, is pleased to announce the full-time employment of one previous summer intern – **Ivan Westcott, EI**. This past summer, Ivan interned with the firm and demonstrated outstanding abilities and a strong commitment to the profession.

Hiring summer interns is a testament to EEI's internship program, which gives students the opportunity to apply their coursework to challenging, meaningful projects. During their internships, they are assigned a mentor who partners with them to set realistic yet challenging goals, engage in daily work activities, and collaborate on training and hands-on learning.

"We are pleased to welcome him back to EEI in a full-time role," said Brad Sanderson, Chief Operating Officer / President. "His strong performance and dedication during his internship stood out, and we're confident he will continue to grow and succeed in his career."



For more information about EEI and our services, please visit: www.eeiweb.com.

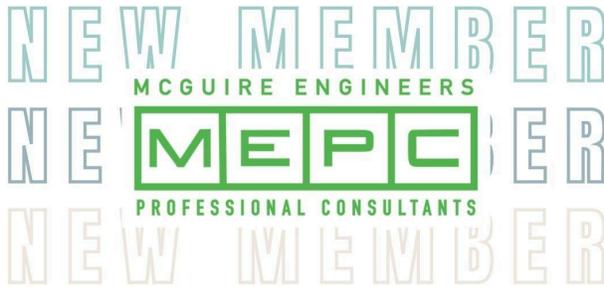
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About Engineering Enterprises, Inc. (EEI)

Engineering Enterprises, Inc. (EEI), founded in 1974, is an award-winning consulting engineering firm providing services to public agencies and private entities throughout northern Illinois. Over 80 experienced firm members including licensed professional civil engineers, land surveyors, and support team members provide a full range of services for planning, design, and construction of infrastructure projects, funding assistance, and municipal consulting. Our core values guide our staff on every project from initiation through completion keeping us committed to quality, service, and value for our clients. By offering outstanding service to every client, every day, we are able to assist with bettering the communities in which we serve.



ACEC ILLINOIS



MEMBER FIRM:

McGuire Engineers Inc.

Chicago, IL

www.mepcinc.com

McGuire Engineers is a Chicago-based, full-service design, engineering and consulting firm, committed to delivering engineering excellence to clients worldwide. Whether evaluating building systems for code compliance, replacing aging equipment, or designing new construction projects, MEPC helps clients reduce energy consumption through practical, cost-effective, and personalized solutions.

As a professional consulting firm, our product is the technical skills of our people. Strong teams build strong solutions. Our commitment to a strong, collaborative corporate culture ensures that every project meets the highest standards, results that are practical, efficient, and designed to make a lasting impact.

<http://www.mepcinc.com>

Onyx Architectural Services, Inc. a dedicated player in the Architectural, Planning, Construction Management and Civil Engineering business, has established a respectful reputation through our work in various phases of Development, Renovation, and New Construction, and also through our ability to manage a project effectively and efficiently. It is our ability to focus our talent and resources on the critical areas of a project, which allows us to routinely manage multiple projects within limited time frames while maintaining quality, control, and budget.

Onyx Architectural Services, Inc., a minority owned business, is a unique organization providing and independent project team committed to servicing each client. This team responds to individual client needs with innovation, creativity, technical knowledge, and the project management skills required to maintain a project through to completion.

<https://onyxchicago.com/>

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O'Hagan Meyer

Oak Park, IL

www.ohaganmeyer.com

O'Hagan Meyer's Architects & Engineers Group is widely regarded as one of the nation's leading group of practitioners providing sophisticated and specialized legal counsel to design professionals and professional liability insurance carriers. Our team not only defends architects and engineers, but also actively counsel them regarding contracts and other steps to be taken to protect against such claims in the future.

O'Hagan Meyer's A&E attorneys represent design professionals (architects, engineers, and surveyors) in cases alleging design errors, breach of contract, personal injury, breach of warranty and statutory violations. Over the course of their careers, our attorneys have navigated clients through almost every conceivable type of claim.

<http://www.ohaganmeyer.com>

BSquared Consulting Group, LLC offers the comprehensive capabilities and deep industry knowledge necessary to help you solve the most complex issues of your organization. Since its inception, BSquared has helped businesses win. Our firm was established on the premise of leveling the playing field for workers and small businesses using laser-focused, solution-based strategies. Our consultants specialize in the areas of Workforce, Business, and Organizational Development as well as Diversity, Community Engagement, and Construction Management — Document Control and Inspection.

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AFFILIATE MEMBER:
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www.bsquaredcg.com



MSA specializes in the sustainable development of communities. We achieve this by building honest, open relationships that go beyond the project to become a trusted source of expertise and support for immediate challenges and long-term goals. Big or small, we do whatever it takes to meet each need, working to make communities stronger in the process.

<https://www.msa-ps.com/>

MEMBER FIRM:
MSA Professional Services
Champaign, IL
www.msa-ps.com

UPCOMING EVENTS...

ACEC ILLINOIS



[CHECK OUT THE CALENDAR](#)
[HERE!](#)

Questions - please reach out!

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.



ACEC-Illinois | 5221 S 6th Street Road, Suite 120 | Springfield, IL 62703 US

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