

Illinois Power Agency Wins U.S. Department of Energy's Grand Prize Sunny Award for Equitable Community Solar

November 17, 2023 (CHICAGO) —The Illinois Power Agency's (IPA) income-eligible solar program, [Illinois Solar for All \(ILSFA\)](#), was named as one of five grand prize winners of the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) [American-Made 2023 Sunny Awards](#). Five teams were selected by the DOE's National Community Solar Partnership to receive a \$10,000 Grand Prize for their community solar projects or programs. Out of the five teams, ILSFA was the only state program winner of a Grand Prize Sunny Award this year.

Inaugurated by the DOE in 2022, the Sunny Awards is a prize competition that recognizes community solar projects and programs that employ or develop best practices to increase equitable access to the meaningful benefits of community solar for limited- and middle-income residential subscribers and their communities.

"The Sunny Award winners' projects and programs provide real world examples of how clean energy can bring benefits to households across the United States," said Jeff Marootian, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary in the DOE's Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy. "Through initiatives like the Sunny Awards, DOE is able to reduce energy costs for low- to moderate-income households and make clean solar energy accessible to all Americans."

ILSFA was named as one of five 2023 grand prize winners for serving as a blueprint for community solar programs that increase low-to-moderate-income households' access to community solar subscriptions while providing electricity bill savings. ILSFA's programmatic best practices and meaningful benefits include:

- Income-eligible community solar subscribers pay no upfront subscription fees and receive at least 50% of the monetary value generated from a subscriber's share of the system with the community solar project.
- Residential households with incomes at 80% or less of area median income qualify for program incentives.
- ILSFA empowers income-eligible households and community organizations to both own and manage solar generating facilities.
- ILSFA promotes job opportunities in marginalized communities by requiring solar companies participating in the program to hire trainees from qualified job training programs. Foster care alumni, individuals with records, and those who reside in environmental justice and income-eligible communities are especially encouraged to participate in job training programs.

- ILSFA engages income-eligible communities' feedback, including community outreach, education, and recruitment when designing community solar projects.

“Winning a Grand Prize Sunny Award this year, as well as a Meaningful Benefit Award last year, reflects the tireless efforts of those who work on the Illinois Solar for All program. This includes our Agency and Program Administrator’s staff, Grassroots Educators, evaluators, and our program stakeholders,” said ILSFA Senior Program Manager Jennifer Schmidt. “By adopting best practices and removing barriers to solar access and affordability, Illinois Solar for All continues to foster the growth of solar development in income-eligible and environmental justice communities in Illinois.”

Since Illinois Solar for All first opened for applications in 2019, the program has supported 22 community solar projects totaling over 29 MW of new solar capacity through incentives totaling over \$79 million. Sixty-eight percent of these community solar projects are located in income-eligible communities, 50% are located in qualified Environment Justice Communities, and 41% were developed by Women/Minority-Owned solar businesses. ILSFA Community Solar projects currently support approximately 1,699 subscribers.

About Illinois Solar for All

The Future Energy Jobs Act created Illinois Solar for All in 2017. Implemented by the Illinois Power Agency (IPA), Illinois Solar for All brings the benefits of solar energy to income-eligible households, non-profit organizations, and public facilities. Elevate acts as the Program Administrator for the IPA. Learn more at www.illinoissfa.com.

About Illinois Power Agency

The Illinois Power Agency is an independent state agency established under Illinois law in 2007. It is charged with the development and implementation of energy procurement plans for residential and small commercial customers of Illinois electric utilities. The IPA is also responsible for supporting new renewable energy development and the continued operation of nuclear plants. Learn more at ipa.illinois.gov.

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