



Stakeholder Feedback Request – Equity Accountability System Assessment

March 20, 2024

The Illinois Power Agency (“IPA” or “Agency”) invites public comment on our proposed plan to assess the Equity Accountability System (“EAS”) and its impact on promoting equity and increasing participation of historically marginalized communities in Illinois’ clean energy economy. As part of this endeavor, the Agency is seeking stakeholder feedback to gather insights and recommendations.

Stakeholders are encouraged to provide feedback on the assessment questions, scope of data collection, proposed methodologies, and additional considerations outlined below. Stakeholders may comment on as many or as few of the items outlined within this document as they would like. Stakeholders should not feel limited by the questions offered below and may provide comments on these proposals beyond the scope of these specific questions as it relates to the EAS Assessment.

Please provide comments via email attachment to IPA.ContactUs@illinois.gov with the subject “[Responder’s Name] – Stakeholder Feedback on EAS Assessment” by April 10, 2024.

In general, responses will be made public and published on the IPA’s website. Should a commenter seek to designate any portion of its response as confidential and proprietary, that commenter should provide both public and redacted versions of its comments. Independent of that designation, if the Agency determines that a response contains confidential information that should not be disclosed, the IPA reserves the right to provide its own redactions.

Background

The Illinois Power Agency Act (“IPA Act”) establishes the objective of providing “priority access to the clean energy economy for businesses and workers from communities that have been excluded from economic opportunities in the energy sector, have been subject to disproportionate levels of pollution, and have disproportionately experienced negative public health outcomes.”¹ To advance that objective, the Act directs the Agency to establish an Equity Accountability System, which includes: (1) a [minimum equity standards](#) applicable to all applicants to

¹ 20 ILCS 3855/1-75(c-10).

the Illinois Shines Program, the Self-direct Program, and competitive procurements of Indexed RECs from utility-scale projects; (2) the [Equity Eligible Contactor category](#) within the Illinois Shines program; and (3) [optional bid adjustments](#) for competitive procurement processes that advance the equity goals of the Act.

The IPA Act further establishes several data collection and reporting requirements to support the assessment of the Equity Accountability System and improve transparency regarding who participates in and benefits from the clean energy economy. Specifically, the Act directs the Agency to **assess the effectiveness of the Equity Accountability System to determine the extent to which it has advanced its goal of increasing participation of Equity Eligible Persons (EEPs)² and Equity Eligible Contractors (EECs)³ in IPA programs and procurements.**

The Agency recognizes the significant interest surrounding the Equity Accountability System and, consequently, seeks to actively involve stakeholders in our assessment process. The proposed plan outlined below includes the primary objectives of our assessment, as well as the identification of relevant data sources and methodologies to be employed. The Agency invites stakeholders to contribute their perspectives on the assessment process, including considerations on how to conduct the assessment, key stakeholders to engage, and strategies to enhance data collection methods.

Questions for Stakeholder Feedback:

- What aspects of the proposed EAS assessment plan do you think will be effective at assessing the EAS and which ones do you believe need improvement?
- How can the assessment plan be refined to better capture the diverse experiences and perspectives of stakeholders, including EEPs and EECs?
- What additional methodologies or data points do you think should be considered to enhance the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the assessment?

² Equity Eligible Person (EEP) - an individual that “would most benefit from equitable investments by the State designed to combat discrimination,” and CEJA provided four specific characteristics that would qualify a person as an EEP:

1. Persons who graduated from or are current or former participants in a qualifying FEJA or CEJA workforce training program;
2. Persons who are graduates of or currently enrolled in the foster care system;
3. Persons who were formerly incarcerated; or
4. Persons whose primary residency is in an equity investment eligible community (EIEC)

³ Equity Eligible Contractor – a business that is majority-owned by Equity Eligible Persons, or a nonprofit or cooperative that is majority governed by Equity Eligible Persons or is a natural person that is an Equity Eligible person offering personal services as an independent contractor.

- What specific metrics or data points should be prioritized when evaluating the success of the EAS in promoting equity and inclusion? What baseline should the Agency use to assess the effectiveness of the EAS?
- How can the assessment process be made more transparent and inclusive to ensure that all stakeholders have the opportunity to contribute their insights and feedback?
- Are there any other sources of data or examples of best practices that the Agency should review in order to ensure a successful assessment? For example, successful equity programs or assessments of equity programs at the federal, state, or city level (not limited to Illinois).

Proposed EAS Assessment Plan

Objectives:

- Assess the impact of the EAS on promoting equity and inclusion.
 - Determine the effectiveness of the Minimum Equity Standard (MES) in increasing workforce diversity.
 - Monitor the participation of EEPs and EECs in IPA programs and procurements.
 - Evaluate the success of the EEC category within the Illinois Shines program.
 - Assess the effectiveness of the equity prioritizations for competitive procurements.
 - Determine the impact of geographic and sectoral variations on the participation of EEPs and EECs in IPA programs and procurements. Evaluate the effectiveness of the Energy Workforce Equity Portal in supporting clean energy companies and job seekers.
- Gather feedback from stakeholders, including EEPs and EECs, to identify areas for improvement and inform recommendations for enhancing the EAS.
- Develop recommendations based on assessment findings to enhance the EAS.

Data Collection Scope:

- Minimum Equity Standard:
 - Projected data from MES Compliance Plans for Illinois Shines Program and competitive procurements: race/ethnicity of project workforce, gender of project workforce, number of EEPs currently in project workforce, number of EEPs the company seeks to hire to meet the MES, etc.
 - Mid-Year Report for Illinois Shines and competitive procurements: percentage of companies on track to meeting the MES, types of barriers or hurdles faced by companies trying to meet the MES, and additional resources needed for MES compliance.
 - MES Waivers for Illinois Shines and competitive procurements: number of MES waivers requested, number of MES waivers granted, MES waiver criterion.
 - MES Year-End Report for Illinois Shines and competitive procurements: percentage of companies achieving the 10% MES requirement for the 2023-24 Program Year, project workforce engaged, project workforce demographic information, EEP workforce engaged, EEP qualifying criteria, EEP demographic data and employment classifications (Full time, Part time, Temporary/Seasonal employees, and Independent Contractors), etc.
- Equity Eligible Contractors:

- Number of EECs and the basis for their EEC qualification.
- Percentage of Illinois Shines program capacity that is derived from projects submitted by EECs.
- MWBE status, geographic location, business type, ownership structure, ownership share of established renewable energy companies, demographic information of principal owners, company size, years in business for all EECs.
- Number of Advance of Capital requests and approvals, project size, type, and costs covered by the advance, barriers faced by EECs to access capital, etc.
- Energy Workforce Equity Portal:
 - Number of clean energy companies registered on the [Energy Workforce Equity Portal](#), including their participation in Illinois Shines, the number of companies posting jobs, and the number of companies that met the MES or requested waivers, etc.
 - Number of EEPs registered in the Energy Workforce Equity Portal, including the basis of qualification, demographic and geographic data, key skills, etc.
- Illinois Shines (in addition to MES and EEC collections mentioned above):
 - Annual reporting of workforce diversity data, job training graduate hiring, foster care system enrollment, former incarceration, and residency geographic data from Approved Vendors' and Designees' project workforce.
- Competitive Procurements (in addition to MES collections mentioned above):
 - Number of equity bid adjustments requested and awarded, winning bids by EECs or with projects being developed in Equity Investment Eligible Communities, etc.
 - Annual reporting of geographic and demographic data of the project workforce.

Methodology:

- Analyze quantitative data collected from IPA programs and procurements to examine trends, patterns, and changes over time within the EAS data.
 - Utilize descriptive statistics to summarize and describe key features of the data collected in order to provide a snapshot of the EAS. Examine the data for variations related to demographic/geographic characteristics, EEP/EEC qualifying criteria, industry/sector, etc. For example, to assess the participation of EECs, consider demographic, geographic, and sectoral variations.
 - Conduct trend analysis to examine changes or patterns in quantitative data over time. Identify any notable increases, decreases, or stability in EAS metrics. For example, review the MES compliance data provided by companies at three key points in time: the initial compliance plan submission, the mid-year check-in, and the year-end report. Track any changes in compliance levels and identify trends or barriers to MES adherence over time.
 - Perform comparative analysis of project workforce data collected in the first year of EAS implementation versus overall state workforce demographics to assess the level of workforce diversity achieved by the MES. For example, compare demographic characteristics of EEPs employed versus overall state workforce data.

- Conduct surveys, focus groups, and/or interviews with EEPs, EECs, and other stakeholders to gather qualitative insights about their perceptions and experiences with the EAS.
 - Utilize thematic and content analysis to identify recurring themes, patterns, and sentiments from stakeholders regarding the EAS and its perceived effectiveness. For example, analyze EEC round table discussions to understand the factors influencing their participation and identify any barriers hindering their engagement.
- Integrate findings from quantitative and qualitative analyses to provide a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of the EAS in promoting access to and participation in the clean energy economy for historically marginalized communities and workers.
- Prepare a detailed report summarizing the methodology, findings, and recommendations for enhancing the EAS based on the assessment. Publish report by August 1, 2024.