



American Clean Power's and Clean Grid Alliance's Response to the Illinois Power Agency's Request for Stakeholder Feedback on Proposed Equity Accountability System Assessment Plan

American Clean Power (ACP) and the Clean Grid Alliance (CGA) sincerely appreciate the Illinois Power Agency's (IPA) invitation for stakeholder feedback and public comment on its assessment of the Equity Accountability System (EAS) and its impact on promoting equity and increasing participation of historically marginalized communities in Illinois' clean energy economy.

As the IPA works to assess the impact of the EAS on promoting equity and inclusion, ACP and CGA have engaged their members to solicit candid, productive feedback with the aim of helping the IPA further improve the EAS plan. Below is that synthesized 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?

Waivers could be one gauge to effectively assess industry compliance with the EAS, or more specifically, the reasons behind the waivers and the effectiveness of steps taken to meet the waiver requirements. Looking at the participation rate in the general competitive procurement process may lend some helpful insight and answers of why participation rates are currently lower than desired. Some companies have faced difficulties achieving the 10% Minimum Equity Standard (MES) requirement due to the lack of available workforce that meet the minimum threshold of the MES designation in many project areas, especially in central and southern Illinois.

In cases where companies are failing to achieve the minimum 10% MES requirement but achieving the waiver, it may be helpful to also assess how effective the waiver requirements are in achieving these goals. E.g. if an entity is doing the right thing but not achieving the EAS' desired results then perhaps there are barriers to self-identification, and it would be worth exploring how we better ensure alumni of the foster care system or formerly incarcerated persons are more visible to companies as qualified Equity Eligible Persons (EEPs) and/or Equity Eligible Contractors (EECs). By better marketing to these EEPs and EECs that their foster care or incarcerated history is not a disadvantage, but in fact a strong advantage in the wind and solar industry, there may be increased participation and a willingness to disclose this background information.

Additionally, looking into the number of projects that have been developed in Illinois that were outside of the IPA procurement rules and didn't have to meet MES standards could also be telling when considering ways to improve participation.



How can the assessment plan be refined to better capture the diverse experiences and perspectives of stakeholders, including EEPs and EECs?

Sustained engagement with and solicitation of feedback from stakeholders, including EEPs and EECs, will help better capture the diverse experiences and perspectives of these groups. Also, offering less formal and more frequent opportunities with lower barriers to participation would likely increase stakeholder engagement and help smaller and emerging businesses participate in these broader discussions.

We commend the IPA on this feedback solicitation and think sustained requests such as this will result in increased buy in and involvement by all.

What additional methodologies or data points do you think should be considered to enhance the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the assessment?

Assessing the barriers to achievement of EAS goals is equally as important as assessing the achievement of the EAS goals themselves. Understanding the bottlenecks that may be preventing companies from reaching MES requirements could tell an enlightening story of why projects in certain geographic regions within Illinois have a more difficult time meeting these requirements than other areas in the state.

Data and status reports on the projected timing and progress of DCEO programs and the possible universe of graduates and trainees who could become EEPs and EECs and how the data compares with the number of expected jobs from indexed REC contracts could also be helpful in enhancing the efficacy of the EAS.

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?

With the EAS plan only in its inaugural year, there is currently no comparable data as EEPs and EECs didn't exist as legislatively-define statuses in Illinois or, to our knowledge, elsewhere until CEJA. So, it is difficult to tell which data points should be prioritized when evaluating the success of the EAS in promoting equity and inclusion. This first year should be helpful in creating baseline data for the IPA and the industry. Once available, it would be helpful if the IPA could release a report on the findings and then provide stakeholders in the industry with the opportunity to comment and discuss these findings further. Once we have a baseline of where



we are in the industry, we will have a better understanding of how great we can be in the future.

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?

ACP and CGA represent a coalition of established entities in the industry, so we cannot speak for all organizations, but the IPA's more formal means of soliciting feedback may serve as a barrier to participation and be seen as less inclusive to smaller or emerging entities in the industry. The dialogue initiated by the IPA in this assessment is a step in the right direction as it gives stakeholders the chance to not just talk about compliance but also about ways to improve the EAS, which is critical to ultimately increasing long-term participation and compliance.

The easier and more frequent this feedback process becomes, smaller and emerging companies and other stakeholders, including EEPs and EECS, will have the opportunity to highlight the barriers they are facing, which could lend helpful insight into how the industry can grow engagement with and participation from EEPs and EECs.

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).

To our knowledge, because there is nothing quite like the broad classification of EEPs or EECs as specifically defined like they are in Illinois elsewhere in the marketplace today, we are unaware of other existing models or where to look for best practices at this time.

ACP and CGA members have expressed that there is uncertainty on how to reach compliance with the EAS despite their best efforts. In these situations, we respectfully ask for the IPA's flexibility for the issuing of waivers so that RECs do not become at risk and Illinois' clean energy economy does not regress.

In order to see further progress toward achieving the EAS' goals, we believe continued and increased investment in programs and resources that produce the diverse workforce needed for the future must be a top priority to catch up and maintain pace with the rapid growth seen in this sector. In the meantime, we believe setting realistically achievable goals will help grow industry participation rates and increase the impact of the EAS in a timelier manner.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit these comments. It is very important to ACP, CGA, and the future of Illinois' clean energy economy that the IPA's EAS plan guidelines push us



all to further promote equity and increase participation of historically marginalized communities.

We welcome further dialogue around this important issue and the opportunity to serve as an ally of the IPA for these efforts along the way.

Sincerely,

American Clean Power & The Clean Grid Alliance