

Date: April 10, 2024

To: Illinois Power Agency (IPA)

From: Members of the Illinois Clean Jobs Coalition's Jobs & Economic Justice Subcommittee

Re: Response to the IPA's Stakeholder Feedback Request on the Proposed Equity Accountability System Assessment

The below-listed Joint Commenters of the Illinois Clean Jobs Coalition's (ICJC) Jobs and Economic Justice Subcommittee thank the Illinois Power Agency for the opportunity to provide input on the Proposed Equity Accountability System Assessment. We recognize and appreciate the strong and ongoing commitment the Agency has demonstrated in promoting equity and increasing participation of historically marginalized communities in Illinois' clean energy economy.

The Joint Commenters include:

A Just Harvest

Illinois Environmental Council

Faith in Place

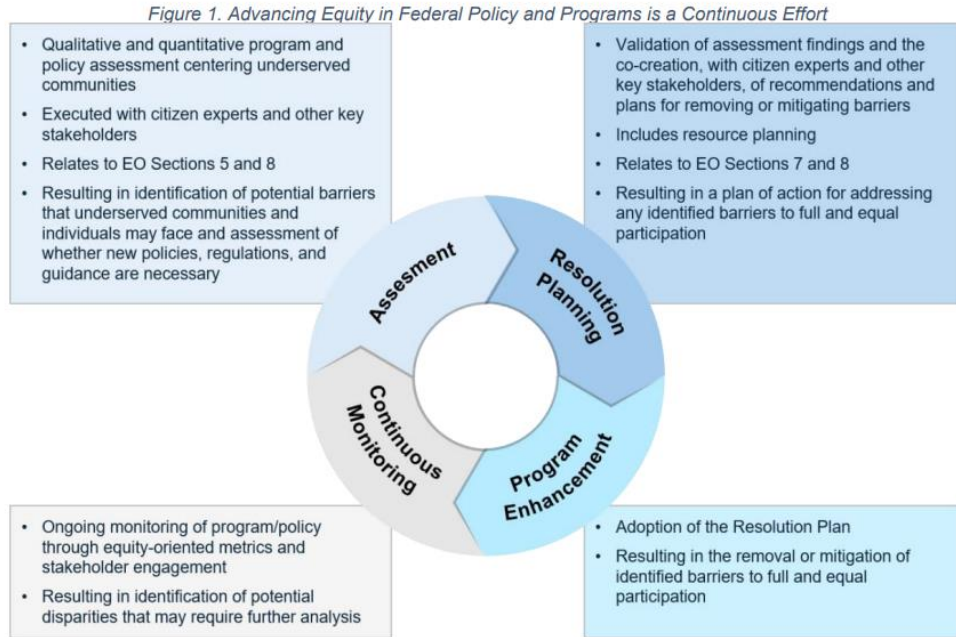
Central Road Energy LLC

Vote Solar

We appreciate the Agency's call for feedback on the assessment of Illinois' new Equity Accountability System. Given the importance of climate justice and equity to the State of Illinois, we highly recommend the IL Power Agency (in tandem with the Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity) use the Biden Administration's [Framework for Assessing Equity in Federal Programs and Policies](#) (Framework), which draws on leading practices in equity and program evaluation, as a helpful guide in developing and implementing this assessment.

As noted in the Framework, and shown in Figure 1 below, equity assessment is a continuous effort. Achieving the policy goals articulated in CEJA will require the Agency to adopt continual equity assessment processes and incorporate them into existing program management and policies.

A FRAMEWORK FOR ASSESSING EQUITY IN FEDERAL PROGRAMS AND POLICIES



Note: This document offers a framework for execution of the "Assessment" step of the lifecycle depicted above.

The Framework provides a useful guide to an ongoing, comprehensive, and iterative process that should allow for an assessment that will incorporate a circle of data collection, analysis, resolution planning, and program enhancements as we implement this new and vital system.

1. 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?

A. List effective assessment methods

We appreciate the following in the proposed assessment plan:

- Consistent use of disaggregated data to for instance, help better understand how the program is working for different demographic groups, in different regions of the state.
- Use of qualitative data as a complement to quantitative to deepen understanding of any issues or shortcomings that might arise.

B. List less effective methods and how they can be improved

As further discussed in our answer to Question 2. below, we believe it is essential that IPA coordinate its assessment of the EAS with DCEO's assessment of the CEJA Workforce Ecosystem (i.e., training hubs, contractor incubators, and contractor accelerators).

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

As noted above, there are strong elements of the assessment plan, and we appreciate the Agency's insight there. We are also keenly aware that the success of the Minimum Equity Standard is likely to be tied to the success of the state's nascent CEJA workforce ecosystem. Knowing this, we think it would be highly valuable to coordinate the EAS assessment with the assessments of the CEJA Workforce Ecosystem. Both agencies should ensure that common indicators, data collection methods, and timing are implemented in a way that allows for analysis among the datasets. Data on MES performance may indicate challenges with the hiring/contracting of CEJA program graduates. Being able to analyze program assessments in conjunction with MES performance will help create a better understanding of challenges that might arise.

As noted in the Energy Transition Workforce Commission Phase II report, we would like to encourage IPA to work with the DCEO to continue to develop a state dashboard to improve access to information and energy sector work opportunities. The information and data collected between the agencies should be made public to allow prospective companies to identify Illinois as a place for innovative job growth in the Energy sector, including construction, manufacturing, and energy production. Additionally, the public information will allow transparency so that outside studies can be conducted, and additional recommendations and adjustments be made by advocates.

As part of this, disaggregated data should be collected on hub applicants and participants so that, among other things, we can assess whether the hub admissions criteria and graduation data are/will ensure that there are enough EEPs and EECs through the state for MES requirements to be met.

It seems helpful to collect qualitative data from EEPs, EECs and entities subject to the MES throughout each program year rather than simply a one-time

gathering at one point in time. We would expect focus group participation to be a challenge for many EECs and EEPs and encourage the agency to offer generous incentives while planning to put significant time into recruiting for and maintaining participation. The Agency should consider requiring survey completion as part of the EEP and EEC certification and recertification processes.

The Framework has useful guidance for assembling a multidisciplinary, inclusive, and diverse assessment team.

- The team should adhere to and demonstrate the values of diversity, inclusion, and equity, and work to raise awareness of and mitigate personal biases that may influence the assessment.
- Relevant expertise to conduct assessments may include individuals with equity and/or civil rights, program evaluation, data analytics, systems thinking, stakeholder engagement, organizational effectiveness/change management, and relevant legal/regulatory/policy backgrounds.
- The team should also include citizen experts and relevant stakeholders. Engaging stakeholders early can enable insights and information that can prove valuable in the assessment process through resolution and implementation. *Framework*, page 8.

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

As noted in the IPA's Long Term Renewable Resources Plan of 2024, Section 1-75(c-20) of the Illinois Power Agency Act (the Act) acknowledges that "data collection, data analysis, and reporting are critical to ensure that the benefits of the clean energy economy provided to Illinois residents and businesses are equitably distributed across the State," and for "track[ing] and improv[ing] equitable distribution of benefits across Illinois communities." *IL Power Agency 2024 Long Term Renewable Resources Procurement Plan*, p. 362. In addition, the Act allows the Agency wide discretion in data points collected to achieve these laudable goals. Section 1-75 (c-20) allows IPA to collect "any other information the Agency determines is necessary for the purpose of achieving the purpose of this subsection." We strongly believe it would behoove the Agency to require tracking and reporting of hours worked by each EEP that any entity is using to demonstrate compliance with the MES. We do understand that the IPA is also concerned with MES compliance gaming but chose not to measure

compliance by hours worked during the first year of implementation. Given this choice, we encourage the Agency to seek to uncover any such gaming as it conducts this first assessment, particularly as it gathers qualitative data.

For waivers, it will be important to collect data on the service area of the company/project for which a waiver is sought; the reasons for grant or denial; and whether any conditions or recommendations accompanied the grant of a waiver. It would also be useful to be able to assess waiver applications over time regarding both changes in the total number of waivers sought, whether specific companies repeatedly seek waivers, and the percentage of companies that failed to comply in comparison to the total companies under the data collecting scope to put the concern of non-compliance into perspective.

Similarly, an assessment of MES violations and suspensions could help the Agency determine the effectiveness of suspension as an enforcement mechanism. For instance, do penalized companies return to the program and comply; does the MES discourage participation?

4. 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?

A nuanced analysis will be critical to the success of the Equity Accountability System. As such, all the data being collected will be important to the assessment.

Regarding the establishment of a baseline, we suggest the Agency use data from Program Year 6 (the first year the MES requirement was effective) as the baseline for assessing the efficacy of the program. This will allow the Agency to determine if the step-ups in the MES percentages are appropriate, and what effect the operation of the CEJA workforce ecosystem (which is not up and running yet) is having on MES compliance and EAS participation. We reiterate here the importance of coordinating this assessment with that of the workforce programs, which will allow the agencies to determine the impact the Hubs and associated programs are having on MES compliance and participation in the other components of the EAS.

5. 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?

As recommended in the Framework, the Agency should create:

[An] engagement plan for each group of stakeholders involved in the assessment. Engaging stakeholders is the best way to gain insights, truly understand where inequity may exist, and understand the barriers and burdens experienced. Citizen experts are those stakeholders who have lived experience of problems or issues. By engaging citizen experts as co-designers in the assessment, it is more likely that the real problems of inequity will be discovered. In addition, community stakeholders should be appropriately compensated for their time and contributions. *Framework*, p. 3.

In addition, data collected should be made publicly available in machine-readable format, with appropriate privacy protections, so that stakeholders can also analyze the data and work with IPA to improve the system in an informed way.

Finally, we suggest the Agency allow interested shareholders to participate in meetings that review the outcomes of the data collection efforts and meetings that promote suggestions for improving the methodology of the data collection and/or assessment (or host a webinar for shareholders with the intent to go over this information).

6. 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)

Throughout these comments, we have quoted from and cited to the [MITRE Framework for Assessing Equity in Federal Programs and Policies](#). There is a wealth of information in this Framework on best practices. According to the authors, the Framework “integrates leading thinking on equity assessment, compiled from local practitioners, global thought leaders and MITRE subject matter experts. It is a system-based data-driven approach to assess government policies and programs that incorporates equity and human-centered

research, design, and assessment practices currently used in the U.S. and around the world.” *Framework*, p.2. We highly recommend the Agency review the Framework and incorporate relevant best practices into its own assessment.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

[Redacted]