

Promoting Equity in Illinois Power Agency Renewable Energy Programs



Illinois Power Agency Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement:

“The Illinois Power Agency recognizes and celebrates the uniqueness and dignity of all individuals, and is committed to understanding the personal, cultural, and historic aspects of identity. The Agency continues to strive for creating a diversely positive, inclusive, and equitable environment, to support and provide access to clean energy for all. The IPA is committed to fostering an environment for communities that have been excluded from economic opportunities with the energy sector.”

With the enactment of Public Act 102-0662 (the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act, or “CEJA”) in September 2021, Illinois continues to focus on ensuring equity that brings the benefits of the clean energy economy to the state’s workforce. Measures taken by the Illinois Power Agency (“IPA”) to implement that focus and to prioritize equity include:

Key Concepts:

- ❖ An Equity Eligible Person (“EEP”) is an individual who: 1) has graduated from or is a current or former participant in a qualifying job training program,¹ 2) has graduated from or is currently enrolled in the foster care system in Illinois, 3) was formerly incarcerated, or 4) primarily resides in an equity investment eligible community.
- ❖ An Equity Investment Eligible Community (“EIEC”) is either an Environmental Justice Community (“EJC”) or a Restore, Reinvest, Renew (“R3”) community.

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- ❖ An Equity Eligible Contractor (“EEC”) is: 1) a business that is majority-owned by equity eligible persons, 2) a nonprofit or cooperative that is majority-governed by equity eligible persons, or 3) a natural person that is an equity eligible person offering services as an independent contractor.
- ❖ The Minimum Equity Standard (“MES”) ensures that the growing clean energy economy is accessible to all by requiring entities participating in Illinois Shines or competitive renewable energy credit procurements for utility-scale projects to meet baseline workforce equity requirements. Under the MES, an increasing percentage of workforce on renewable energy projects receiving REC incentives must be comprised of Equity Eligible Persons or Equity Eligible Contractors.
- ❖ The Equity Accountability System (“EAS”) is a comprehensive framework designed to ensure that underserved and disadvantaged communities have access to the opportunities created by the clean energy economy. It establishes standards and mechanisms to embed equity considerations into the Agency’s solar incentive programs and utility-scale renewable energy credit procurements, fostering greater inclusion and accountability in the clean energy sector.

Equity Accountability System Assessment

The EAS ensures that underserved and disadvantaged communities have access to the opportunities created by the clean energy economy by embedding equity considerations into the Agency’s solar incentive programs and procurement of utility-scale renewable energy credits.

The EAS Assessment is a two-part IPA-authored report assessing the effectiveness of statutory EAS provisions in promoting equity across the clean energy economy.



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Because the first-year MES compliance reports were still in review at the time of its publishing in August 2024, the first part of the Assessment examines the overall implementation of the Equity Accountability System based on data collected through the Agency's programs and procurements, stakeholder interviews, surveys, and other feedback.

The second part, published in February 2025, provides a comprehensive analysis and discussion of MES compliance, and gathers insights from the MES Year-End Reports, MES Waivers, workforce demographics, as well as annual reporting data. In addition, the report addresses recommendations to the EAS for continued improvement in ensuring its equity-driven impact is made.

Parts I and II of the EAS Assessment can be found on the Publications pages of the IPA website at ipa.illinois.gov and the Energy Workforce Equity Portal at energyequity.illinois.gov.

Illinois Shines Equity Eligible Contractor Category

Illinois Shines features a dedicated block of program capacity for projects submitted by EECs. The EEC category ensures that EECs may access program capacity by reducing the competition from non-EEC and well-established Approved Vendors. The EEC category also addresses financial barriers faced by EECs by offering an option to request an advance of the REC incentives awarded to an individual project. By receiving advances on incentives, EECs can access capital earlier in the project development process, easing the burden many disadvantaged firms face in securing financing.

For more information, please visit the Equity Accountability System at IllinoisShines.com.



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Energy Workforce Equity Portal

On January 31, 2023, the IPA launched the Energy Workforce Equity Portal, an accessible, online, public-facing tool that connects clean energy companies and developers of utility-scale solar and wind projects, with EEPs. Making these connections is a key aspect of ensuring that the clean energy industry in Illinois grows in an equitable manner. The Portal was designed to:

- Help clean energy companies post jobs and search for EEPs seeking employment in Illinois' clean energy sector, or help those companies certify their current employees as EEPs.
- Help individuals find out whether they qualify as EEPs, connect with prospective employers, and find jobs, workforce training programs and more.

Additionally, the Energy Workforce Equity Portal provides access to resources for small and emerging businesses navigating the solar landscape in Illinois. The Small and Emerging Business Hub (“Hub”), launched on the Portal in September 2024, provides centralized industry-specific information on essential aspects of the IPA's solar incentive programs, step-by-step guidance on becoming an AV with Illinois Shines and Illinois Solar for All, benefits of participation, financial incentives, and support services tailored to the needs of small and emerging businesses navigating the programs and their requirements.

The Hub serves as a tool to provide entities a helpful starting point in navigating business development and growth, thus allowing enhanced access to the clean energy economy for all. It also features a wide range of local, state, and federal resources, including business planning, entrepreneurial development, grants and funding, workforce training and human resources, and more. Small and emerging businesses can leverage the Hub's wide range of materials to help them start and grow their businesses.

To learn more, visit the Energy Workforce Equity Portal at energyequity.illinois.gov.



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Racial Disparity and Availability Study

In 2024, the IPA set out to identify a consultant to conduct a complete, comprehensive, and legally supportable Racial Disparity and Availability Study to assess the presence and impact of racial discrimination or disparities in Illinois' clean energy economy. Between May and November of 2024, the IPA issued a Request for Qualifications, a Request for Proposals, and conducted a thorough evaluation of submitted proposals.

For the latest updates on the Racial Disparity and Availability Study, please visit the DEI page on the IPA website.

DEI Advisory Committee

In November 2024, the IPA established a DEI Advisory Committee to create an inclusive and structured platform for Illinois' clean energy sector stakeholders to engage in dialogue, provide input, and offer feedback on the Agency's equity initiatives. The Committee includes representatives from the following categories: coalitions, community-based organizations, Community Action Agencies, Equity Eligible Persons, Equity Eligible Contractors, environmental justice advocates, clean energy companies, unions, and educational institutions. The Committee aims to ensure that the implementation of IPA-related equity initiatives of CEJA is informed by diverse stakeholders in Illinois' clean energy economy, enhancing the effectiveness and inclusivity of these programs.

For more information, please visit the DEI Advisory Committee webpage on the IPA website.

Outreach & Partnership Development

The IPA conducts outreach to educate entities on equity requirements for IPA programs and procurements, while highlighting the opportunities available to EEPs and EECs.

Additionally, the IPA's outreach efforts continue to evolve with a strategic



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focus on both cultivating new relationships and deepening existing partnerships in local communities across the state that have been excluded from economic opportunities within the clean energy sector. To meet this goal, IPA will prioritize strengthening engagement with key stakeholders, including minority business associations and other agencies. IPA will aim to support the development of accessible pathways for EEPs and the sustainability and growth of EECs and emerging small businesses. This includes collaborating with educational institutions, community organizations, and industry leaders to ensure that individuals—particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds—have the resources and opportunities to succeed.

For more information, please visit the DEI web page on the IPA website.