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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Illinois Power Agency Wins National Clean Energy Awards for Illinois Shines Mentorship Program and Solar Consumer Protection Initiatives

The Clean Energy States Alliance's State Leadership in Clean Energy (SLICE) Awards recognize programs that are most effectively accelerating adoption of clean energy technologies

CHICAGO – Today, the Illinois Power Agency (IPA) announced that its Illinois Shines Mentorship Program and Solar Consumer Protection Initiatives were awarded national [State Leadership in Clean Energy \(SLICE\) Awards](#) by the Clean Energy States Alliance (CESA), a bipartisan coalition of state energy agencies.

"States continue to innovate and are driving considerable clean energy progress," said CESA Executive Director **Warren Leon**. "CESA's State Leadership in Clean Energy Awards bring attention to creative and successful state clean energy programs, so that other states may learn from them."

The SLICE Awards recognize state or state-funded programs that have accelerated the adoption of clean energy technologies. Selected by an independent panel of distinguished judges, award recipients were evaluated based on leadership, innovation, cost-effectiveness, and replicability.

"These awards reflect the tireless dedication of our Illinois Shines and consumer protection teams, whose commitment continues to drive meaningful change across Illinois' clean energy landscape," IPA Director **Brian Granahan** said. "Through innovative new initiatives, our programs are advancing equity, removing barriers to participation, and supporting positive customer experiences as increasing numbers of customers adopt solar in Illinois."

Mentorship Program

Piloted in 2023 and fully launched in 2024, the [Illinois Shines Mentorship Program](#) is designed to expand access to opportunities within Illinois' growing clean energy economy. The program provides participants with live virtual training sessions covering Program processes and requirements, one-on-one support from Illinois Shines staff, and direct connections to experienced clean energy businesses serving as volunteer mentors. Through these resources, participants build the knowledge, relationships, and business capabilities to successfully participate in the Illinois Shines program.



“The IPA is honored to have the Illinois Shines Mentorship Program recognized for demonstrating how targeted support can expand participation in Illinois’ clean energy economy while creating new opportunities for historically underrepresented businesses,” Illinois Shines Program Manager **Andrea O’Shea** said. “This award is a testament to the program’s continuously evolving model under the stewardship of the Illinois Shines team and its Program Administrator Energy Solutions, as well as invaluable contributions of the mentors and mentees whose commitment has made the program a success.”

Since the initial pilot, the IPA has implemented three additional mentorship cohorts, refining and expanding the program each time. The 2024-25 cohort grew to 20 mentees, a 40% increase from the pilot. For the 2025-26 cycle, the Agency introduced both spring and fall cohorts to meet growing demand and broaden participation. Since the program’s inception, Mentorship Program graduates have submitted more than 335 project applications to the Illinois Shines program and successfully energized 180 solar projects across Illinois.

Additional Mentorship Program lifetime performance indicators, as well as testimonials from mentees, can be found in the [2025-26 Mentorship Program Final Report](#), published July 2026.

Consumer Protection Initiatives

The IPA’s [consumer protection initiatives](#) reflect the Agency’s commitment to ensuring Illinois residents and businesses can participate in clean energy programs with confidence. The SLICE Award recognizes the IPA’s pioneering approach to consumer protection, pairing preventive safeguards with financial restitution to strengthen consumer confidence in Illinois’ growing solar market. As the solar market has grown nationwide, some consumers have experienced financial harm from bad actors. In response, the IPA developed two innovative solutions to protect Illinois customers participating in the Agency’s solar programs by remediating harm and ensuring customers receive promised incentive payments.

The Solar Restitution Program reimburses customers who have been financially harmed by a solar company. So far, claims for 162 customers totaling over \$472,000 have been paid out. The Escrow Process is an innovative system to ensure that customers receive promised incentive payments from their vendors. An initial vendor-specific escrow initiative led to 235 customers receiving over \$2.2 million. Together, these new initiatives combine proactive safeguards with responsive remedies, creating a comprehensive consumer protection framework that helps ensure Illinois residents receive the full benefits of participating in the state’s clean energy programs.

“The IPA is proud of our efforts to continuously explore and develop novel initiatives that directly help customers and strengthen our state solar programs,” said **Rachel Granneman**, Deputy Legal Counsel for Consumer Protection. “By creating tools to address unique challenges in the solar market, the IPA reaffirms its ongoing dedication to consumer protection and supports consumer trust in our Programs. In



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coordination with Program Administrator Energy Solutions, we intend to continue to strengthen the Agency's broader consumer protection framework, which includes vendor registration requirements, marketing and conduct requirements, and comprehensive consumer education materials."

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About the Illinois Power Agency

The Illinois Power Agency (IPA) 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 the development and implementation of other procurement plans, including those to support new renewable energy development and the continued operation of nuclear plants. The IPA administers incentive programs and conducts procurements to promote renewable and zero-carbon energy generation to benefit all Illinoisans. Learn more at ipa.illinois.gov.