



Illinois Solar for All
A STATE PROGRAM

Small and Emerging Business Annual Report

PROGRAM YEAR 2025-2026

Introduction

Illinois Solar for All is pleased to share progress from the past year regarding the support of participating Small and Emerging Businesses during Program Year 2025-2026 (July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026).

This Annual Report shares key accomplishments, challenges, and opportunities using statistics, metrics, and general interest stories to fulfill statutorily mandated reporting requirements.

Section 1-56 (b)(2) of the Illinois Power Agency Act requires the Illinois Power Agency (IPA) to "make every effort to ensure that small and emerging businesses, particularly those located in low-income and environmental justice communities, are able to participate in the Illinois Solar for All Program" and to report on progress and barriers to participation of Small and Emerging Businesses (SEBs) in Illinois Solar for All (ILSFA). The Small and Emerging Business team was launched in Fall 2023 to help businesses overcome barriers to participation. This report provides an overview of strategies, efforts, and key outcomes helping to foster a solar industry inclusive of small and emerging businesses in Program Year 2025-2026.

Small and Emerging Business Team

The Small and Emerging Business team is led by the ILSFA Program Administrator, Elevate, with oversight from the IPA. This effort is spearheaded by the ILSFA Associate Director and ILSFA Senior Associate at Elevate, alongside Elevate's subcontractor, EcoHealth Strategies. The EcoHealth Strategies team began operations with the ILSFA SEB team in December 2025. It primarily contributes direct technical assistance to SEBs, along with some event facilitation. The Illinois Shines Program Administrator, Energy Solutions, supported and presented at outreach events to provide opportunities for solar developers within Illinois Shines.

Small and Emerging Business Team Activities

The Small and Emerging Business team implemented a multi-faceted strategy to support small and emerging solar businesses seeking to enter or expand within the Illinois solar market. The Small and Emerging Business team continued collaboration with other state programs and agencies to expand reach and achieve greater impact through coordinated efforts. Regional differences in project types, market maturity, and community needs made it critical to tailor outreach and technical support locally.

In the previous Annual Report, most activities took place in Chicago, with two separate events that took place in Peoria in Illinois' Central region. This Program Year, the SEB team extended its presence throughout the state by hosting, presenting at, and supporting events in the state's Southern region, including Carterville, Fairview, Carbondale, and East St. Louis.

The ILSFA Small and Emerging Business team began the Program Year with an in-person, two-day Southern Illinois Clean Energy Summit in Carterville from August 20-21, 2025. Throughout the year, the

SEB team held targeted events, webinars, and workshops developed as part of a targeted outreach and technical assistance program.

The team prioritized diversity in both topics covered and in geography in order to reach SEBs in different regions and address a range of needs. The SEB team developed and hosted events in partnership with key local agencies and organizations to maximize potential. Addressing past geographic gaps, intentional geographic focus was given to Central and Southern Illinois. Four events were hosted in these areas to promote awareness of ILSFA and provide additional opportunities for SEBs, up from two events last year in those regions.

More information on events can be found in the report's Appendix.

Addressing Capital Barriers

Lack of capital remains a persistent barrier to growth and participation in the solar market. Recognizing that solar project development timelines are often lengthy, complex, and capital-intensive, the SEB team prioritized collaboration with agencies and programs equipped to help address this challenge.

The team engaged with the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) to promote funding opportunities such as the [Equitable Energy Future Grant](#). The Illinois Shines program was also highlighted as a key potential opportunity for developers with this challenge, as it offers incentives for market-rate solar customers and advances capital to help reduce the up-front financial burden for SEBs.

Additionally, the team engaged the Illinois Finance Authority, which offers financing opportunities at reduced interest rates. The team also identified financing opportunities with local Chambers of Commerce.

SEB Outreach Partners and Channels

In Program Year 2025-26, the SEB team engaged new partners: The Clean Energy Jobs and Justice Fund (CEJF) and the Ameren Illinois Market Development Initiative (MDI). The team promoted events through the ILSFA Approved Vendor and stakeholder email distribution lists, announcements on the ILSFA website, and through event partners' communication channels.

The team developed a video¹ presented by Aaron McEvoy, Grant Manager, Office of Business Utility at the Illinois DCEO, featuring DCEO and Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA) resources. The video is accessible to users at their convenience.

To promote events and resources provided by stakeholders and collaborators, the SEB team increased periodic publication of *The SEB* to monthly, highlighting topics relevant to ILSFA Approved Vendors and SEBs. The team also prioritized the Small and Emerging Business Guide. All these resources support

¹ See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQh-ktPieGE>

ongoing one-on-one engagement with SEBs, centered on personalized guidance that helps them navigate programs, access incentives, and build operational capacity.



Strategies and Programmatic Support

Reaching a variety of SEBs from regions across the state with equity in mind was a priority for the Small and Emerging Business team. SEB technical assistance sessions emerged from a variety of outreach tactics, including: 1) direct requests from SEBs, community-based organizations, and workforce development providers; 2) cold and warm outreach to EcoHealth Strategies' existing Illinois solar network; and 3) in-person connections with business owners during and after events. Approximately 60% of SEBs engaged with EcoHealth Strategies came directly through outreach efforts, rather than by request of the SEB.

The ILSFA SEB team offered technical assistance to SEBs through subcontracting partner, EcoHealth Strategies, to address a variety of needs, including business development, coaching, financing, and support in applying for State of Illinois grant funding. The team also assisted entities with the ILSFA Approved Vendor registration process, and supported applications for the State of Illinois Business Enterprise Program (BEP) and the City of Chicago Minority and Women-Owned Business (M/WBE) Certification Program. These certifications can strengthen SEBs' marketability as subcontracting vendors.

EcoHealth Strategies developed materials including a grant narrative building guide, checklist, and workplan providing structural guidance to SEBs completing Illinois DCEO grant applications. EcoHealth Strategies also created a preliminary timeline for compiling grant application materials.

- **The DCEO grant narrative building guide** was developed based on guidance and materials from FY2025 DCEO grant applications, in anticipation of FY2026 application openings. The guide provides questions SEBs can use to solicit valuable information and project details for use when drafting their grant narrative.
- **The DCEO grant checklist** provides a comprehensive list of documents and materials each applicant must compile to complete the Equity Eligible Future and Community Solar Energy Sovereignty grants.
- **The DCEO grant workplan** provides SEBs with structural guidance for completing grant applications. Based on the most up-to-date information available, the EcoHealth Strategies team formulated a sequence and timeline of action items to assist SEBs in time management and organization for upcoming grant applications.

Technical Assistance and One-on-One Meetings

EcoHealth Strategies team has built strong relationships with SEBs, creating rapport through both virtual and in-person events. The team's preexisting relationships have also been beneficial to the SEB team in expanding presence throughout the state. During technical assistance sessions, the capacity for administrative investment (time and/or resources) was noted as a barrier to participation. Most SEBs start as single member operators and maintain a rigorous schedule, balancing field work, customer education, and ongoing professional development with the management and administrative effort

required to run their business. SEBs are often unavailable or have limited ability to be at a computer during standard business hours due to shifting conditions in the field where they complete contracting work. For these reasons, professional development trainings (such as accelerators) and technical assistance programs will be easiest to access if offered during flexible hours or early evenings. Many SEBs also face challenges when navigating State of Illinois certification and procurement requirements; they can be complex and can require timely action once an application is initiated.

Competing successfully for an Illinois DCEO grant requires understanding the fundamental aspects of a solar project and how to navigate the State of Illinois Grant Accountability and Transparency portal. SEBs have expressed frustration at the difficulty of identifying opportunities to subcontract with larger firms. Currently, identifying subcontract opportunities is largely informal, requiring SEBs to initiate contact with larger firms. SEBs expressed a desire for additional pathways to encourage and facilitate larger firms to connect with them for subcontract and partnership opportunities.

Conclusion and Outlook

Accomplishments

SEBS RECEIVED \$4 MILLION IN DCEO GRANTS

The Small and Emerging Business team hosted two outreach events, helping attendees learn about the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) Equitable Energy Future Grant (EEFG) and the Community Solar Energy Sovereignty Grant (CSESG).

The SEB team provided technical assistance to eight SEBs submitting 13 applications (some applications included two businesses) for second-round EEFG applications. Seven ILSFA AVs represented more than \$9.1 million. Significantly, several SEB applicants applied unsuccessfully during the first round but were encouraged to reapply. Four SEBs submitting second-round EEFG applications were awarded over \$4 million.

The EEFG provides seed funding and pre-development funding opportunities to Equity Eligible Contractors (EECs) for work on renewable energy projects in low-income and historically disadvantaged communities. Qualified entities can apply for grants from \$250,000 to \$1,000,000. The CSESG program supports both pre-development and development of community solar projects that promote community ownership and energy sovereignty, with grant awards ranging from \$50,000 to \$1,000,000.

Lessons Learned

- **Offer shorter events (half-day)**

While full-day events are well-attended, they can overwhelm attendees with information. Survey feedback suggests that shorter, more frequent events would be more effective.

- **Increase networking opportunities**

In post-event surveys, SEBs expressed interest in networking, looking for more opportunities to connect with program representatives, each other, and prospective business partners.

- **Consistently survey and review results**

One of the SEB team's greatest strengths has been its consistent collaboration with external organizations. This collaborative strategy has extended the team's reach throughout the state and expanded outreach to target audiences. An early challenge has been implementing a consistent approach to measuring the impact of SEB events with various partners. Surveying participants more consistently has given the SEB team response data that informs future program planning to make events more effective.

Opportunities

- **Survey technical assistance participants**

Feedback from EcoHealth Strategies indicated that surveying technical assistance recipients on their experiences is another opportunity for programming growth and development.

- **Create a mentorship program**

ILSFA participating companies have found their own pathways to business development in the Illinois Solar for All Program. ILSFA's focus on income-eligibility and environmental justice communities may justify a mentorship program focused on the unique concerns of small and emerging businesses. As the success of the "Finding Your Niche" webinars demonstrated, given the platform, entrepreneurs can find success and inspiration in mentor/mentee relationships.

- **Expand pathways to subcontract and partnership opportunities**

SEBs have expressed a desire for additional pathways to connect with larger firms for subcontract and partnership opportunities. The [Energy Workforce Equity Portal](#) exists but doesn't provide a direct way to connect SEBs with prime contractors for business. Some businesses have inquired about creating a space within the portal for this purpose.

- **Community outreach** - The SEB team partnered with Workforce and Contractor Development, and ILSFA Grassroots Educators at the Westside NAACP's Green Living Summit in Chicago on April 25, 2026. Represented by Tonya Johnson and Jack Jordon, the team promoted ILSFA opportunities and the Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program to attendees during Earth Week.

The well-attended event used a passport system for networking, and featured seminars, Eco kits, and presentations by ILSFA Approved Vendors. This collaboration created a platform for educating the community on sustainability, energy efficiency, and career opportunities in the clean energy sector. Similar events throughout the state would educate community members on the benefits of clean energy and increase demand for solar installations, supporting the objective of ensuring an equitable and inclusive clean energy economy.

Changes in the Coming Year

THE CLEAN AND RELIABLE GRID AFFORDABILITY ACT

On October 30, 2025, the Illinois General Assembly passed the Clean and Reliable Grid Affordability Act ("CRGA"). The bill was signed into law as Public Act 104-0458 by Governor J.B. Pritzker on January 8, 2026, and took effect on June 1, 2026.

CRGA is a comprehensive energy bill aimed at enhancing energy reliability, affordability, and sustainability by facilitating the development of new battery storage projects, improving energy efficiency, and introducing new long-term energy planning. CRGA includes new opportunities for SEBs.

SMALL AND EMERGING BUSINESS DESIGNATION

Beginning in Program Year 2026-2027, specific benefits will be available to entities that have an SEB designation from the Illinois Shines program. These benefits include:

- Project selection prioritization
- Collateral deduction from REC payments
- Early rolling submission window access

To receive designation as either a small or emerging business Approved Vendor in Illinois Shines and access the supports within Illinois Solar for All, the Approved Vendor must demonstrate it is either "small"² or "emerging"³ in its designation application. The SEB designation application opened June 1st, 2026.

THE ILLINOIS SOLAR FOR ALL MINIMUM EQUITY STANDARDS OPTION

Section 1-75(c-10) of the Illinois Power Agency Act ("IPA Act") required that the Illinois Power Agency ("IPA" or "Agency") establish an Equity Accountability System, which includes a Minimum Equity Standard ("MES") for the project workforce of entities applying for renewable energy credit ("REC") contracts.

CRGA expands Illinois Solar for All workforce requirements by providing Approved Vendors with the choice to either comply with the Minimum Equity Standard (MES) or the pre-existing ILSFA Job Training requirements.

The Minimum Equity Standard (MES) is the cornerstone of the Equity Accountability System, designed to ensure a fair representation of [Equity Eligible Person\(s\)](#) ("EEPs") and [Equity Eligible Contractors](#) ("EECs") in the clean energy sector. The MES establishes a minimum percentage of the project workforce that must consist of EEPs, fostering an inclusive workforce and promoting equity within the clean energy economy.

² A "small" business is defined as a for-profit entity, independently owned and operated, that grossed less than \$4 million in the previous calendar year.

³ "Emerging" is defined as authorized to do business in a U.S. state, district or territory for less than 3 years.

Equity Eligible Persons (EEP) are defined as individuals who are:

1. Graduates of specific clean energy training programs
2. People who are formerly or currently enrolled in the foster care system
3. People who were formerly incarcerated
4. People whose primary residence is in an Equity Investment Eligible Community

Beginning the 2026-2027 Program Year, Approved Vendors choosing to comply with the Minimum Equity Standard must ensure their project workforce meets the required minimum percentage of 14%.

Participating companies are required to employ workers that are members of communities that have historically been excluded from economic opportunities, and in this way accomplishes the legislative objective of ensuring an equitable and inclusive clean energy economy.

Appendix: ILSFA Small and Emerging Business Events Program Year 2025-2026

Surety Bond Basics Webinar - July 24, 2025

The ILSFA SEB team launched the program year with the Surety Bond Basics presentation, conducted by Michael-Charles Hilson of Living the Dream Solutions. The webinar covered the following topics:

- Definition and Benefits of Surety Bonds
- Types of Surety Bonds
- Obtaining a Bond
- Costs of Bonds
- Managing and Tracking Bonds
- Avoiding Default
- The Claims Process
- Establishing an In-house Bonding Policy.

Attendees: 4

Exit survey results were favorable; attendees revealed that the most valuable parts of the event were:

- Expertise of the presenter
- Effective materials and discussion (presentation slides and Q & A)
- Breakdown of requirements for bonds
- Information on bonds and insurance

Southern Illinois Clean Energy Summit (In-person)

John A. Logan College - August 20-21, 2025

The SEB Team, in collaboration with Illinois Shines and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, hosted a Clean Energy Summit in southern Illinois, August 20-21, 2025, at John A. Logan College in Carterville, IL. The Southern Illinois Community Foundation (SICF) was contracted to assist with planning and on-site administrative and logistical support. Breakfast and lunch were catered through John A Logan College.

The objective of the Summit was to engage businesses, Approved Vendors, prospective solar contractors, community organizations, workforce programs and others. The two-day program focused on funding and financing opportunities in clean energy, and an overview of the statewide programs and resources available to support solar projects, small businesses, and prospective workforce participants. The event also provided an opportunity to hear from small businesses and create a space for networking.

Attendee count: 182

DAY ONE – FUNDING AND FINANCING

Speaker(s)	Title	Presentation Topic
Dr. Ken Anderson	Director, Advanced Energy Institute, Southern Illinois University	Agrivoltaics in Southern Illinois
Aaron McEvoy	Business Utility Grant Manager, Illinois DCEO	CEJA Economic Development Programs
Matthew Swaine	Business Utility Grant Manager, Illinois DCEO	CEJA Economic Development Programs
Claire Brinley	Program Manager, Illinois Finance Authority	Climate Bank Financing Opportunities
Keyla Ward	Manager, Market Development Initiative: Clean Energy Transition, Business Strategy and Development, Ameren Illinois	Illinois Clean & Equitable Market Development Initiative

A Conversation with Russell Electric		
Van Ikner, Facilitator	Director of Engagement, Clean Energy Jobs and Justice Fund	
Max Russell	Owner, Russell Electric	
Monte Russell	Owner, Russell Electric	
Speaker(s)	Title	Presentation Topic
Christine Flynn	Public Service Consultant, CEJA Workforce Policy Lab at NIU	Intro to CEJA Ecosystem
Linda Larsen	Associate Director of Research, Climate Jobs Institute	Growing Occupations in Clean Energy
Mia Korinke	Campaign Mobilization Director, Climate Jobs Illinois	The Impact of Federal Changes on Clean Energy in Illinois
Hilary Scott-Ogunrinde	Deputy Director of Energy and Utility, Illinois DCEO	Building a Clean Energy Capital Stack
Rebecca Sanders	Executive Director, Clean Energy Jobs and Justice Fund	Funding Clean Energy in Illinois

DAY TWO – PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS

Regional Subcontractor Opportunities Panel	
Kevin Clark, Facilitator	Program Director NAACP Carbondale
Steve Tanner	Owner, A&I Electrical
Justin Martin	Owner, D & D Electric, LLC
Kyle Burke	Owner, Burke Electric

Speaker(s)	Title	Presentation Topic
Ola Tomaszewski	Program Outreach Coordinator, Illinois Shines	Illinois Shines Program Overview
Jan Gudell	Associate Director, Illinois Solar for All at Elevate.	Illinois Solar For All Program Overview
Ella Johnson-McGowan	DEI Data Analytics Manager, Illinois Power Agency	IPA Equity Accountability System Assessment
Emily Asbury	Support Program Associate, Illinois Power Agency	IPA Equity Accountability System Assessment
Brent Ritzel	Senior Solar Project Developer, StraightUp Solar	JALC Solar Array Overview
Equity Eligible Contractor (EEC) Contractor Panel		
Wade Halva, Facilitator	Southern Illinois Outreach Senior Coordinator, Faith in Place	
Steve Williams	Owner, Williams Enterprise	
Joseph Smith	Owner, ADL Solutions	
Austin Frank	Owner, ARF Solar	
Samuel Freidhof	Owner, Equityinterra LLC	
Beyond Funding: Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) Panel		
Christine Flynn, Facilitator	Public Service Consultant, CEJA Workforce Policy Lab at NIU	
Michelle Cerutti	CEJA Southern Regional Administrator, Illinois DCEO	
Noah Bond	CEJA Small Business Manager, Illinois DCEO	
John A. Logan College (JALC) Solar Array Tour		
Brent Ritzel, Guide	Senior Solar Project Developer, StraightUp Solar	

FEEDBACK

- Make networking a more prominent part of the agenda. Attendees highly value the opportunity to connect with program staff, small businesses, and other stakeholders. Future events should include more time for structured networking.

- Shorten presentations and add more break time. Some attendees felt the presentations were dense and that more break time would help. One area where presentations could be shortened is to standardize and limit speaker biographies to three to four sentences.
- Explore other means to make presentations more interactive. This may mean conducting more facilitated break-out discussions or small group activities focused on specific themes.

HACIA “State of Solar in Illinois” Webinar, November 24 and December 4, 2025

The ILSFA SEB team presented during the Hispanic American Construction Industry Association (HACIA) “State of Solar in Illinois” Webinar on two dates. The webinar covered the following topics:

- What types of solar projects these programs fund across Chicago and Illinois
- Who is contracted to implement these projects
- How your business can get involved in the growing clean energy market
- Everything you need to know about the Equitable Energy Contractor (EEC) category, including how to become an EEC, compliance requirements, certification steps, and utility integration

Finding Your Niche in the ILSFA Program Webinar January 24, 2026

The “Finding Your Niche in the Illinois Solar for All Program” webinar revisited a topic originally presented in 2024. The ILSFA SEB team reimaged the topic as a panel discussion of five Approved Vendors: Austin Frank, CEO of ARF Solar; Shon Harris, CEO and Founder of LiveWire Construction; Robert ‘A.J.’ Patton, Chairman & CEO of 548 Enterprise; Martel Richardson, Founder of CC Solar, LLC; and Christopher Williams, Founder and Director of Millennium Solar Electric Inc.

The panel was moderated by Tonya Johnson, Senior Associate of the SEB team. Kavi Chintham and Kim Knowles presented on the Illinois Solar for All Working Group after the panel discussion. SEB Associate Director, Jan Gudell, provided closing remarks.

Each of the panelists responded to the following four topics:

1. **How did you enter the clean energy industry?** Would you share a little about your journey—from learning the industry to running your own business and entering the solar space—and what motivates you along the way?
2. **Funding:** Access to capital is often one of the biggest hurdles for small businesses in the solar industry. What strategies have worked for you in securing funding—whether through traditional financing, grants available in Illinois, or creative partnerships? What advice would you give to others looking to enter the market?
3. **Navigating Change:** How do you prepare your business to adapt to market changes? Solar businesses are facing the accelerated phase-out of the federal Investment Tax Credits (ITC), new tariffs on solar imports, and inflationary pressures. What strategies help your business stay resilient and competitive during periods of uncertainty?

4. **Collaboration:** What role do you see for local partnerships—whether it’s other solar developers, churches, civic groups, or schools—in making sure that clean energy adoption stays on track? If we put more focus on mentoring and training small and emerging businesses, what kind of change could we see in five or ten years?

FEEDBACK

- The average time spent on each survey was 13 minutes, indicating thoughtful consideration in responses. Interest in networking, referred to by several respondents remains strong as in previous surveys. An interest in mentorship was expressed by fifteen percent (15%) of respondents.
- The array of panelists and their sharing of their experiences and advice were cited as the most valuable parts of the event.

Joliet Junior College Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Event (In-person), Joliet, IL – February 25, 2026

The ILSFA SEB Team presented at the Joliet Junior College Business Enterprise Program Certification and Equity Eligible Contractor Event.

The morning portion of the event covered:

- Business Enterprise Program Certification (BEP)
- ComEd Market Development Initiative

The afternoon portion of the program covered the following topics:

- Illinois Shines program
- Illinois Solar for All program
- Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity
 - o What types of solar projects do these programs fund across Illinois
 - o Who is contracted to implement these projects
 - o How your business can get involved in the growing clean energy market

Speaker	Organization	Title
Johnny Rodriguez	Illinois Commission on Equity and Inclusion (CEI)	Outreach Manager, Veterans Business Program
Gregory Wilson	Com Ed Market Development Initiative	Program Manager
Ola Tomaszewski	Illinois Shines (Energy Solutions)	Program Outreach Coordinator
Tonya Johnson	Illinois Solar for All (Elevate)	Senior Associate

Hilary Scott-Ogunrinde	Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO)	Deputy Director of Energy and Utility
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Ameren Contractor Access to Capital Series Webinar March 17, 2026

Jan Gudell, Associate Director of the ILSFA SEB team, along with Claire Brinley, Vice President, and Francisco Galliano, Senior Vice President, of the Illinois Climate Bank presented during the Ameren Contractor Access to Capital Series Webinar hosted by Tim Dickison, Ameren Illinois' Energy Efficiency Program and Aris Hoosier, Walker-Miller Energy Services –Ameren Illinois MDI Contractor.

A cohort of four contractors are participating in the Ameren Contractor Access to Capital Pilot. In the Week 10 edition of the program, the topic was Intro to Non-Lenders Part 3 with speakers from the Illinois Climate Bank and Illinois Solar for All Small and Emerging Business Initiative.

The webinar agenda covered the Illinois Solar for All program and Illinois Climate Bank financing opportunities for small businesses.

Chicago Clean Energy Workforce Week Workshop (In-person) ComEd Training Center - April 7, 2026

The SEB team participated in Chicago's Clean Energy Workforce Week, as part of the Interactive Mapping of the Illinois Workforce Ecosystem Workshop as part of the Entrepreneurship portion of the Workforce Ecosystem.

A CEJA Ecosystem Panel discussion, moderated by Sherelle Withers, Executive Director, Innovation Metropolis, consisted of the following:

- Jacob Carruthers – Business Services Representative, Calumet Area Industrial Commission (CAIC)
- AJ Patton – Founder and CEO, 548 Foundation
- Kiecha Lacey – Energy Transition Navigator, North Lawndale Employment Network
- Alek Jaunzemis – CEJA Incubator Program Lead, HACIA
- Esther Kim – DEI Partnerships Manager, Illinois Power Agency

Following the presentation, panelists moved to assigned locations representing their position in the participant's lifecycle in the ecosystem. Attendees were encouraged to move between different stations representing a participants' lifestyle to learn more about the role and services available in the ecosystem and gain a deeper understanding of how a participant may navigate the system.

Panelists and program staff at each station talked with participant cohorts about how they would address each of the "participants'" interests and background to help them be successful in the ecosystem. The stations, organizations and participating program staff were as follows:

- **Outreach & Recruitment** - Kiecha Lacey (ET Navigator)
- **Training** - AJ Patton (Climate Works) & Jacob Carruthers (Workforce Hub)
- **Employment** - Esther Kim (Illinois Power Agency - MES, Equity Portal), Kristie Conklin (ComEd)

- **Entrepreneurship** - Alek Jaunzemis (CEJA Incubator), Jan Gudell (Small & Emerging Business Hub + ILSFA), Anna Solorio (Illinois Shines)

Carbondale Clean Energy Town Hall (In-person) Carbondale City Hall/Civic Center - April 16, 2026

Illinois Solar for All Small & Emerging Business team subcontractor EcoHealth Strategies, collaborated with the City of Carbondale, the Clean Energy Jobs and Justice Fund (CEJF), and Faith in Place, an Illinois Solar for All Grassroots Educator, to hold a Clean Energy Town Hall at the Carbondale City Hall/Civic Center in Carbondale, IL Thursday, April 16, 2026, from 3:00 to 5:00PM.

The event's purpose was to:

- Provide an overview of Illinois policies, state solar programs, and funding and financing opportunities in clean energy.
- Educate and inform current and potential contractors about opportunities in clean energy in Carbondale in the public sector and among faith-based institutions.
- Offer opportunities for networking and relationship building among contractors, community-based organizations, utilities, local governments, green banks, job hubs, and others.

To promote community ownership over the clean energy transition, EcoHealth Strategies, The City of Carbondale, and CEJF partnered to develop a public-private partnership (P3) plan to bring clean energy projects to Carbondale and open avenues for SEB participation. This event promoted the P3 plan and previewed ways to be involved in its realization.

The following organizations presented at the Town Hall:

- **City of Carbondale** – Hannah Weber
- **EcoHealth Strategies** – Theodora Okiro Quarles
- **Faith in Place** – Wade Halva
- **Clean Energy Jobs and Justice Fund** – Rebbecah Sanders and Van Ikner

Illinois Workforce Summit 2026 (In-person) Peoria, IL - May 7– 8, 2026

The SEB Team presented as part of Workforce Equity in the Illinois Shines and Illinois Solar for All Programs presentation. Speakers included: Esther Kim, DEI Partnerships Manager, Illinois Power Agency, Ola Tomaszewski, Program Outreach Coordinator, Illinois Shines, and Jan Gudell, Associate Director, Illinois Solar for All.

The Workforce Equity Presentation Agenda covered the following topics:

About the Illinois Power Agency

- The Clean Energy Jobs Act (CEJA)
- The Minimum Equity Standard
- The Energy Workforce Equity Portal

About the Illinois Shines program

- What is Illinois Shines?
- Equity Framework

About the Illinois Solar for All program

- What is ILSFA
- Job Training Programs
- Small & Emerging Business Resources.

Illinois Solar for All Minimum Equity Standards (MES) Webinar - May 21, 2026

The SEB Team launched the Illinois Solar for All Minimum Equity Standards (MES) Option with a webinar. MES became an option for entities participating in Illinois Solar for All in lieu of the program's job training requirements. Emily Asbury, Procurement Programs Equity Specialist and Ella Johnson-McGowan, DEI Data Analytics Manager at the IPA conducted the Minimum Equity Standards presentation. Joanna Racho, Senior Strategist at Illinois Solar for All (Elevate) presented on ILSFA Job Training requirements.

The ILSFA Minimum Equity Standards Agenda covered the following topics:

The Minimum Equity Standard (MES)

- MES Overview
- Defining Equity Eligible Persons, Contractors, and Project Workforce
- MES Combined Compliance and Year-End Report
- MES Safe Harbor
- Waiver Process

Illinois Solar for All Job Training

- Program Requirements
- Defining Qualified Job Training
- Programs and Eligible Job Trainees
- Data Collection

Q&A time was allotted for attendees to ask questions

Ameren Illinois Spring 2026 Solar Job Fair (In-person) Jackie Joyner-Kersee Foundation East St. Louis, IL - May 29, 2026

The Solar Job Fair was a multi-faceted networking, educational, and workforce development event. It included a networking component consisting of employer and organization tabling, encouraging connection between employers and job seekers. Job seekers engaged freely with employers, community organizations, training and apprenticeship programs, three CEJA Hubs, one CEJA apprenticeship program, Carbondale CEJA Navigator and Illinois State programs related to the solar industry. Each job

seeker was encouraged to speak to at least 5 employers and organizations with a “punch-card” system; this system entered job seekers into a drawing for a prize to

incentivize networking. To enhance accessibility of the hiring process, Ameren’s Implementation Contractor, Solutions for Energy Efficient Logistics (SEEL), provided resume support to job seekers, including printing services.

Agenda

- **10:00 AM–10:30 AM | State Policy and Compliance**
The Illinois Power Agency spoke about the benefits of registering as an Equity Eligible Person or Equity Eligible Contractor in the context of solar industry hiring.
- **11:00 AM–11:30 AM | Solar Company Hiring Needs**
A panel of solar companies and union representatives spoke about their hiring needs, how to enter the solar industry, and the types of jobs available.
- **12:00 PM–12:30 PM | Contractors & Aspiring Entrepreneurs Financing Opportunities**
The Clean Energy Jobs and Justice Fund discussed financing resources for contractors and Ameren’s Contractor Access to Capital the details of their upcoming financing support program.

Speaker(s)	Title	Presentation Topic
Esther Kim	DEI Partnerships Manager, Illinois Power Agency	State Policy and Compliance
Solar Company Hiring Needs Panel		
Theodora Okiro Quarles, Facilitator	Principal, EcoHealth Strategies	
Austin Frank	Owner, ARF Solar	
Stephen Erspamer	Instructor, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers	
Heidi Schoen	Director of Employee Experience, StraightUp Solar	
Speaker(s)	Title	Presentation Topic
Rebecca Sanders	Executive Director, Clean Energy Jobs and Justice Fund (CEJF)	Contractors & Aspiring Entrepreneurs Financing Opportunities
Nathan Perkins	Walker-Miller Energy Services	Contractors & Aspiring Entrepreneurs Financing Opportunities

ILSFA Small and Emerging Business Team Schedule of Events 2025-2026

Event	Event Type	Event Date	Location	Attendee Count
Surety Bond Basics Webinar,	Webinar	July 24, 2025	Virtual	8
Southern Illinois Clean Energy Summit	In-person	August 20-21, 2025	Carterville, IL	182
HACIA State of Solar in Illinois First Edition	Webinar	November 24, 2025	Virtual	4
HACIA State of Solar in Illinois Second Edition	Webinar	December 4, 2025	Virtual	9
Finding Your Niche Webinar Panel Discussion	Webinar	January 24, 2026	Virtual	58
JJC Clean Energy Incubator EEC Event	In-person	February 25, 2026	Joliet, IL	39
Ameren Contractor Access to Capital Series	Webinar	March 17, 2026	Virtual	12
Chicago Clean Energy Workforce week: Connecting the Illinois Ecosystem	In-person	April 7, 2026	Chicago, IL	50
City of Carbondale Clean Energy Town Hall	In-person	April 16, 2026	Carbondale, IL	46
Illinois Workforce Summit 2026	In-person	May 7-8, 2026	Peoria, IL	13
ILSFA Minimum Equity Standard (MES)	Webinar	May 21, 2026	Virtual	29
Job Fair - Jackie Joyner-Kersee Center	In-person	May 29, 2026	East St. Louis, IL	91
Total				534