

To Whom It May Concern:

Founded in 1979, the Hispanic American Construction Industry Association (HACIA) is a Chicago 501(c)(6) organization dedicated to ensuring the equitable participation of its members in the construction industry.

Our vision is to foster a community of diverse construction leaders with equitable opportunities, creating generational wealth and transforming communities. This commitment extends to small and diverse-owned Business Enterprises across the Midwest, as we advocate for public policy changes, provide essential business tools, and offer training and education to help diverse communities thrive in the construction industry.

HACIA serves as a bridge into the construction trades through registered apprenticeship programs and/or employment opportunities within the construction industry for those who are unemployed, underemployed, underrepresented, and/or in career transition.

As always HACIA appreciates the commitment and thought the Illinois Power Authority (IPA) has put into making the Long-Term Renewable Resources Procurement Plan ("LTRRPP") beneficial to the residents of Illinois. HACIA appreciates the opportunity to comment on the 2026 LTRRPP as the decisions that are being made will directly impact the services we provide our students.

The Illinois Shines program category, Community-Driven Community Solar (CDCS), is designed to ensure solar developers further benefit the local community such as financially in areas the community identifies as important. We have continued to be key stakeholders in many CDCS projects and have affirmed to developers that contributions in the form of workforce development and training help us fulfil our commitment to diversify the solar energy workforce and provide career paths for our students.

One example of the success our Introduction to Solar Photovoltaics program is having is the collaboration we have with STEP-UP Solar, which is a solar installation training program supported by one of the developers through the CDCS program. The training facilitated by STEP-UP is one of our most popular programs as it augments other training we offer, such as our Electrical Pre-Apprenticeship, Introduction to Solar Program, and our General Construction Program, and provides a pathway to employment. Here are some examples of how the CDCS program is benefiting HACIA:

- A developer in the CDCS program has partnered with HACIA to provide solar training for more than 50 people since launching our partnership in 2022
- The next training course is scheduled for June 23-June 26, 2025.
- Training covers commercial solar installation basics and solar PV Operations & Maintenance (O&M)
- The developer has committed to supporting HACIA's DCEO Illinois Works Pre-Apprenticeship program and other workforce programming.

- The training they provide is followed by connecting our students to solar career opportunities with their partners, supporting the statewide goal of creating 1,000 new solar jobs.

We understand from our meetings with developers that these training and resources are made possible through the structure and commitments associated with the Illinois Shines Community-Driven Community Solar program.

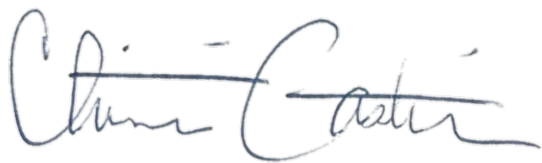
One project developer has covered all costs of the STEP-UP trainings that are preparing our students for careers in solar energy. Moreover, through their placement services, STEP-UP is connecting our students with their solar energy partners to fill the jobs created through the IPA's programs. This would not be possible without the CDCS program, and we sincerely need this program to continue and expand to continue to do this important work at HACIA preparing our students for an Illinois clean energy present and future.

Rooftop solar projects are executed quickly, bringing new solar energy onto the grid with less delay than other energy projects. Rooftop CDCS projects also allow construction to take place in and around urban areas mitigating some of the travel challenges to newly hired employees presented by other projects.

The promise of Illinois community solar is being realized through CDCS by creating solar projects in the community, saving residents money, and creating career opportunities for residents who live in the community.

HACIA supports the Illinois Power Agency's leadership in advancing clean, equitable energy across our state. We urge you to commit more capacity to CDCS which benefits all Illinois residents and is the one program making the most impact training and employing our students.

Your program has become a national model for inclusive solar development, and we appreciate the opportunity to help strengthen its impact through these comments. We urge you to consider our recommendation.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Christina Castillo', with a stylized, flowing script.

Christina Castillo
Deputy Programs Director
Hispanic American Construction Industry Association