

EXPANDED CONSUMER PROTECTION WORKING GROUP AGENDA

Friday, August 4, 2023

Poll Question Series 1:

Which marketplace participant best describes you?		34 of 46 participants
Approved Vendor		41% (14/34)
Designee/Nested Designee		12% (4/34)
Consumer		0% (0/34)
Government Agency		29% (10/34)
Non-Profit Advocacy/Community Group		12% (4/34)
Prospective Approved Vendor/Designee		3% (1/34)
Other		3% (1/34)

TOPIC 1	Reducing Consumer Complaints Regarding Application Delays Due to Incomplete Applications
BACKGROUND	<p>The Illinois Power Agency and the Program Administrators for the Illinois Shines and Illinois Solar for All Programs understand that there may be issues preventing Approved Vendors from submitting timely, complete, and accurate application materials. The Illinois Shines Program Administrator acknowledges the Program’s application processing delays during the 2022-2023 Program year; however, given the improvements in application processing times, we hope to assist Approved Vendors with improving application submission times in other ways. In Illinois Shines, some solar offers include the direct pass-through of the REC incentive payment after final approval of the project and invoicing. Delays relating to application submission and processing incomplete applications ultimately slow the efficacy of the Program in delivering timely incentives to the customers intended to benefit from them. These delays can cause customers uncertainty, prompting them to contact their Approved Vendor, installation contractor Designee, or the Program Administrator to investigate or complain about the status of their incentive. During the 2022-2023 Illinois Shines Program year, of the 309 complaints received by the Program Administrator regarding alleged Program violations, 35% concerned alleged delays by Approved Vendors in submitting applications to the Program Administrator.</p> <p>The Program Guidebook for the Illinois Shines Program describes how Approved Vendors must submit project applications for Program Administrator approval before being reviewed by the Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC). The Guidebook instructs that “[t]o ensure positive customer experiences, Approved Vendors are thus encouraged to submit applications in a timely manner.” Further, the Program Guidebook explains that, during its review of project applications, the Program</p>

	<p>Administrator may “request additional information from the Approved Vendor as needed to verify the submitted information and approve the project.” The Approved Vendor has “up to two weeks to cure deficiencies in an application;” however, if the Approved Vendor is responsive to the Program Administrator’s requests for additional information, the Program Administrator may grant an additional “two weeks from the last good faith effort to provide the required information.”</p> <p>In hopes of better understanding the cause(s) <i>within the control of Approved Vendors and Designees</i> of delayed submittal of applications and delayed responses to information requests from the Program Administrator regarding submitted applications, the Program Administrator seeks feedback from market participants and consumer protection advocates on these issues.</p>
<p>ISSUES/ QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What improvements or changes could be made to the application submission process to reduce the frequency of incomplete application submissions? Do Approved Vendors require additional training or resources to assist in the application process?</i> • <i>Do Approved Vendors and/or Designees have difficulty obtaining the required documentation to submit the application?</i> • <i>What improvements or changes could be made to help Approved Vendors and Designees respond to information requests from the Program Administrator regarding submitted applications? For example, would more frequent follow-up by the Program Administrator help improve response times to application information requests?</i> • <i>Are there any Program enhancements or actions the Program Administrator can take to reduce customer dissatisfaction with the process and timelines for Approved Vendors to submit their applications?</i>
<p>MEETING MINUTES</p>	<p>Stakeholder feedback included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggested enhancements to the Portal and Program website included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Allowing Approved Vendors to view previously uploaded documents when a Part II application is placed in Needs Information status by the Program Administrator. ○ Allowing Approved Vendors to view the submission dates of Part I and Part II applications within the Portal. ○ Allowing Approved Vendors and Designees to use a CSV upload function for Part I and Part II applications (as they may use for Disclosure Forms). ○ Functionality to autofill portions of the Disclosure Form to reduce incorrect or missing information inputted by Designees. ○ Adding a project tracker tool on the Program website to allow customers to monitor their application progress by entering their application ID number. • One participant requested the Program Administrator provide a checklist detailing what application reviewers look for in an application. This would

	<p>help Approved Vendors identify where disconnects may be occurring.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants noted that recreating site plans for minor changes in the system size and obtaining additional photos of an installation are time-consuming and delay responding to Needs Information requests. • One participant noted that additional follow-up from the Program Administrator on a regular basis about outstanding Needs Information requests and/or a report detailing all applications with outstanding Needs Information requests would be helpful.
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TOPIC 2	Designee Management Plans
BACKGROUND	<p>Section X.B of the Consumer Protection Handbook explains that “[e]very Approved Vendor that works with or uses Designees is required to have and follow a Designee Management Plan as of September 1, 2023.” The Handbook outlines the following 10 elements that must be included in a Designee Management Plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A process and criteria for vetting new Designees; • A plan for onboarding and setting expectations for new Designees; • A process and criteria for reviewing Designee enrollment processes (including generation and signing of Disclosure Forms and execution of contracts); • A process for ensuring adequate training of Designee employees and agents (including training on Program requirements and updates); • A plan for regular communications and/or check-ins between the Approved Vendor and Designees; • A process and guidelines for when Designees need to update the Approved Vendor on material changes to the Designee’s marketing materials or channels, enrollment processes, or other business practices; • [For Approved Vendors that offer distributed generation projects] Requirements to ensure Designees submit project application materials to the Approved Vendor in a timely manner; • A process for Designees to report customer complaints to the Approved Vendor; and • A plan for responding to Designees’ violations of Program requirements or applicable requirements of the Designee Management Plan. <p>As September 1, 2023, will mark the first time Designee Management Plans will be required of Approved Vendors, the Program Administrators for Illinois Shines and ILSFA seek feedback from market participants on any questions about Designee Management Plans and/or concerns about Approved Vendors’ effective management of their Designees.</p>
ISSUES/ QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What questions do market participants have about the requirements of Designee Management Plans?</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What bottlenecks, if any, are Approved Vendors experiencing in obtaining required information from Designees for Designee Management Plans?</i> • <i>Are there additional pieces of information that market participants and consumer protection groups believe should be required in Designee Management Plans?</i>
<p>MEETING MINUTES</p>	<p>Stakeholder feedback included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Program Administrator clarified that Approved Vendors are required to have and follow Designee Management Plans by September 1, 2023. The Program Administrator may request Approved Vendors provide these Plans at any time. • Participants asked if the Program Administrator has suggestions for how an Approved Vendors should enforce its Designee Management Plan, or if the Program Administrator plans to provide a template Designee Management Plan. Currently, the Program does not intend to provide additional guidance on these items due to the wide variety in business models and limited visibility into the business relationships. • Participants asked if the Designee Management Plan should be a binding document between the Approved Vendor and Designee and whether it should apply to existing Designees (or only future Designees). The Illinois Power Agency said it would respond to these questions soon. • One participant noted that some Designees work with multiple Approved Vendors and asked how conflicting Designee Management Plans may be addressed. The Illinois Power Agency explained that the Plan requirements allow flexibility for how each Plan element is met and noted that Approved Vendors that have relationships with overlapping Designees may work together to create consistent Plans.