

# Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

## Mentorship Program

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Illinois Shines Program Administrator  
(877) 783-1820 • [admin@illinoisshines.com](mailto:admin@illinoisshines.com)  
[www.illinoisshines.com](http://www.illinoisshines.com)

## Contents

<b>Illinois Shines 101</b> .....	<b>3</b>
REC Prices .....	3
Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA) and Minimum Equity Standards (MES).....	4
Transferring Project Ownership .....	5
Tracking Savings.....	5
Advance of Capital .....	6
Multiple Project LLCs .....	6
Prevailing Wage .....	7
Equity Eligible Contractors.....	7
Community-Driven Community Solar .....	7
Mentorship Program .....	8
Joint Ventures.....	8
<b>Application Processes and Portal Deep Dive</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Utility and REC Agreements.....	8
ICC and Batching .....	9
Collateral and Fees.....	9
Reporting.....	10
Developer Cap .....	11
Rollover Capacity .....	12
Disclosure Forms .....	12
<b>Ongoing Program Requirements</b> .....	<b>14</b>
RECs.....	14
Material Deficiency Timeline .....	14
<b>Marketing Best Practices and Consumer Protection</b> .....	<b>14</b>
Program Violations.....	14
Marketing .....	15
<b>Program Resources and Ongoing Opportunities</b> .....	<b>17</b>
Project Map .....	17
EEC Badges .....	17

# Illinois Shines 101

## REC Prices

*How are Renewable Energy Credit (REC) prices designed to advance equity?*

- In the Illinois Shines program, there is a designated category for Equity Eligible Contractors (EECs) to participate in, reserving capacity for these unique program participants. In addition to this reserved capacity, within program categories subject to scoring, projects that partner with and utilize EECs and Equity Eligible Persons (EEPs) often result in higher scores, resulting in a higher chance of an awarded REC contract. In the Illinois Solar for All program, projects are required to be sited in income eligible and environmental justice communities or serve income-eligible subscribers and receive higher REC prices.

*How are the REC prices established for the Illinois Shines program?*

- The Illinois Power Agency (IPA) is the organization that calculates and establishes the REC prices for the Illinois Shines program.

The IPA conducted two calls for feedback regarding REC prices in March 2023 (The 2023-24 Program Year REC Prices and the REC Pricing Model & REC Prices for Subsequent Years Process). You can access this information on the [Program website](#) on the [Stakeholder Feedback](#) page.

*Are utilities the only entity that can buy REC contracts?*

- In the Illinois Shines program, utilities are the only purchasing party for the REC contracts.

*How can vendors access the current Program Year's REC prices? Are the proposed REC prices for the next Program Year available?*

- REC prices for Program Year 2023-24 can be found on the Program website at the [Program Documents](#) page. The documents page includes a downloadable REC prices spreadsheet and rationale document for those REC prices as well as a REC payments calculator available for use. REC prices for Program Year 2024-25 are not yet established and published. Those will be available in closer proximity to the launch of Program Year 2024-25.

*How should I give REC pricing to customers for the next Program Year, when the REC prices for that Program Year (e.g., PY 2024-2025) have not yet been published?*

- Regarding REC pricing for future cycles (including projects currently on waitlist which are expected to be awarded capacity next Program Year), as Approved Vendors please offer guidance to your customers that REC prices for the next Program Year are not finalized. Additionally, an updated Disclosure Form including accurate REC pricing will be required once the prices are finalized and published in the Program Guidebook.

*Can vendors rely on the proposed REC pricing in the draft Long-Term Plan for next years' pricing?*

- No; final REC prices for the 2024-25 delivery year may change significantly from the draft Long-Term Plan to the version of the Long-Term Plan that is ultimately approved by the ICC. In addition, REC prices for future years are also likely to vary from the 4% decline used in the draft Long-Term Plan, as the Agency updates inputs into its REC Pricing Model each year, considers market-based price adjustments, and further refines REC prices in future Long-Term Plans.

## Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA) and Minimum Equity Standards (MES)

*Under the direction of CEJA, the Illinois Shines program is supposed to collect data to track and improve equity. Where can I find what data has been tracked?*

- CEJA legislation requires the Program to track and monitor demographic data based on project applications that is provided in Part II Program applications. At this time, there is no external reporting on the data. The Program Administrator will reach out to the Agency to obtain information on when and where the demographic data will be provided.

*The MES requirements indicate that Approved Vendors should employ graduates of solar training pipeline programs, craft apprentice programs, multi-cultural job training programs, or other job training programs. What would be considered the "other" training programs?*

- For both the job training criterion for becoming an EEC and for registering as an EEP, the eligible job training programs are exclusive only to the following CEJA-funded programs: Clean Jobs Workforce Network Program, the Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program, the Illinois Climate Works Preapprenticeship Program, Returning Residents Clean Jobs Training Program, or the Clean Energy Primes Contractor Accelerator Program; and the following FEJA-funded programs from the following offerors: Solar Pipeline Training Program: Elevate, Illinois Central College, OAI, Inc. and Safer Foundation; Multi-Cultural Job Training Program: ASPIRA, Inc of Illinois (ASPIRA), Austin Peoples Action Center (APAC), Chatham Business Association Small Business Development, Inc (Chatham Business Association), Chicago Urban League, Hispanic American Construction Industry Association (HACIA), and National Latino Education Institute (NLEI). These lists can be found on this page: <https://illinoisshines.com/become-an-equity-eligible-contractor-eec-approved-vendor-or-designee/>

*If a company is a registered EEC Designee under a non-EEC Approved Vendor would that company have to meet the MES requirements for the non-EEC Approved Vendor or does that company not have to meet the MES requirements because as an EEC that company automatically hits the requirements for the MES?*

- By virtue of being an EEC, EECs are automatically in compliance with MES requirements. EECs may still be required to submit an MES compliance plan and end of year plan but will only need to indicate their status as an EEC rather than fill out the entire form.

*What is defined as workforce? Is it solar installers only or can it be engineers and project managers as well?*

- For the purposes of the MES, “project workforce” includes: employees, contractors and their employees, and subcontractors and their employees, whose job duties are directly required by or substantially related to the development, construction, and operation of a project that is participating in or intended to participate in the IPA-administered programs and procurements under Section 1-75(c) of the IPA Act. This shall include both project installation workforce and workforce in administrative, sales, marketing, and technical roles where those workers’ duties are performed in Illinois.

## Transferring Project Ownership

*If a Traditional Community Solar (TCS) project is transferred from one Approved Vendor to another Approved Vendor would that have to occur before the Part II application is submitted, after Part II submission, after ICC approval or when the REC contract is issued? How would the transfer affect the developer cap? Also, if it is transferred from an EEC, does the other Approved Vendor have to be an EEC?*

- It all depends on when the transfer is happening. It can be project assignment which can be after ICC approval and that is essentially the selling of a project to a different Approved Vendor. On the FAQ page on the Program’s website, there is a step-by-step process for how assignment works. This process is much more extensive than if you are to transfer ownership prior to Part I in which case you would provide updated project application documentation to reflect the new Approved Vendor’s ownership of the project.

In terms of EECs transferring ownership, there is a six-year prohibition on the transfer of the EEC project to a non-EEC. So, within six years it does have to go to another EEC.

And the Program Year in which the project was assigned is the Program Year developer cap that that project’s capacity will be considered under. This is regardless of when the Part I application for the project was approved.

## Tracking Savings

*How does Illinois Shines track savings passed on to the customer and is there a particular way that you track that per project?*

- The Illinois Shines program does not track savings passed on to customers.

Program Disclosure Forms include a calculation of estimated savings based on the offer price and, in the case of Distributed Generation (DG) project, any incentives that may be passed on to the customer.

*Would the proposed savings affect the approval of a project?*

- For the Illinois Shines program, the proposed savings to a customer would not affect whether a submitted project is approved or not. For the Illinois Solar for All program, there is a minimum requirement of 50% savings or 50% less of the value of electricity that is being produced. If the minimum is exceeded, that isn’t taken in consideration.

## Advance of Capital

*Are Approved Vendors able to submit for advance of capital?*

- Advance of capital requests are again being accepted after the lifting of a brief pause on December 12, 2023. The evaluation criteria used for determining whether a request is approved or denied will be included in future iterations of the Program Guidebook but can currently be found here: <https://illinoisshines.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Final-Advance-of-Capital-Evaluation-Criteria.pdf>

*What processes are initiated if you choose "advance of capital" 'yes'?*

- If an Approved Vendor chooses "Yes" for "advance of capital", an additional document upload is required. This document is a narrative describing the request for the advance of capital. The evaluation criteria used for determining whether a request is approved or denied will be included in future iterations of the Program Guidebook but can currently be found here: <https://illinoisshines.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Final-Advance-of-Capital-Evaluation-Criteria.pdf>

*Does custom capacity factor roll into the collateral calculation?*

- The collateral calculation is going to be based on the total number of RECs that are contracted. So indirectly, yes, that that would roll into that calculation.

*Are collateral/batch fees not required at submission for projects requesting advance of capital?*

- There are no limitations to how the advance of capital is used as long as it relates to the development of the given project and is listed in an itemized format in the request for advance of capital. The request is reviewed with the Part I application and the application fee is required upon Part I submission, which prevents the advance from covering this fee. The advance, subject to approval by the IPA, may be used to cover the project's collateral since the posting of collateral is required within 30 days of batch approval.

## Multiple Project LLCs

*Can there be multiple single project LLC's?*

- Yes, there can be multiple single project LLC's. An EEP who is the majority owner of an EEC can submit applications to become another EEC only for single project Approved Vendors and they can submit as many as they want in terms of those single project Approved Vendors. But they would fall under that main parent EECs developer cap. If you have multiple single project Approved Vendors for Community Solar (CS) projects, all of those would still fall under the same developer cap.

## Prevailing Wage

*How are farms handled for purposes of prevailing wage? (If they still billed via a residential meter with the utility?)*

- The key determination and understanding whether prevailing wage applies to a farm is whether it's considered residential or non-residential.

On page 72 of the Program Guidebook, it states that for a property to be considered residential, it has to meet the following criteria: It has to be either an electric bill demonstrates residential rate classification, the property is classified as residential for purposes of property tax, or the structure usage is at least 75% residential. In order to demonstrate that a property is residential, you would show either an electric bill, proof of residential property tax class code, or documentation demonstrating the 75% usage is residential. There are no specific parameters that apply to farms in and of themselves. It's just the distinction is whether it's considered residential or non-residential.

## Equity Eligible Contractors

*What categories are the IPA encouraging EEC to be most active in?*

- There is not a particular category that EECs are encouraged to participate in. EEC Approved Vendors can submit projects within any category. The EEC category is the only category in which only EECs can submit projects in and submit an advance of capital request. EECs may receive additional scoring points in the TCS and Community-Driven Community Solar (CDCS) categories due to their unique status.

*Can multiple EEC vendors combine on a non-vendor contract to perform multiple different tasks?*

- Yes, though the other entities would need to register as Designees. Once that is done, yes if an EEC is utilized, they can utilize non-EEC Designees if they're participating in the ECC category, but they, again, they'd have to be registered as Designees first and be part of the Program that way. Please also note that only Approved Vendors can submit projects.

*Where can prospective EECs or EEPs look to determine if they are eligible for designation based on the primary residence criterion?*

- One of the four criteria for becoming an EEC or EEP is primary residence in an Equity Investment Eligible Community (EIEC). This map is used to determine eligibility and is inclusive of both the R3 areas and environmental justice communities:  
<https://energyequity.illinois.gov/resources/equity-investment-eligible-community-map.html>

## Community-Driven Community Solar

*Do all CDCS projects require subscribers? Or would a non-profit customer without subscribers qualify for the CDCS category?*

- CDCS projects require subscribers (including 50% small subscribers) and a non-profit may have a subscription to the project but may not exceed 40% of the capacity or be the only subscriber.

## Mentorship Program

*Will participants in the Mentorship Program have the opportunity to access the Mentorship presentations after the sessions? If so, how do you access it?*

- Mentorship participants have access to the recordings of the presentations in their SharePoint folder. In addition to the presentation recordings, Mentorship participants can also find a PDF of the slide deck and recordings of additional presentations.

## Joint Ventures

*Can EEC's joint venture with other EECs on projects?*

- Yes, EECs can collaborate on projects. One would be the Approved Vendor as the contractual party on the REC contract and the other would be the Designee under that Approved Vendor.

*Regarding EECs collaborating, is there a value add for the Approved Vendor?*

- It would depend on the category into which a project is being submitted. If it's in the EEC category, there are no additional points or advantages to this arrangement, because there are no project scoring criteria in the EEC category. For projects submitted to the TCS or CDCS categories, projects would earn more points with this arrangement, because the project would be satisfying being submitted by an EEC and also utilizing EEC Designees. For the CDCS category two points are provided for projects that are developed by an EEC (p.123 of the Program Guidebook) and for the TCS category there are four ways for projects to gain points: developed by an EEC Approved Vendor and EEC Designees (four points), developed by a non-EEC Approved Vendor and EEC Designees satisfy all project development (three points), developed by an EEC Approved Vendor and the work of EEC Designees represent 50% or more of the project's REC Contract value (2 points), and developed by a non-EEC and the work of EEC Designees represent 50% or more of the project's REC Contract value (one point). Scoring criteria is updated on a periodic basis and it is encouraged you review the most up-to-date Program Guidebook version, which can be found on this page: <https://illinoisshines.com/program-documents/>

## Application Processes and Portal Deep Dive

### Utility and REC Agreements

*When registering with GATS and M-RET, can a project be registered on GATS and M-RET regardless of if it is in Ameren or ComEd territory? Can either system be used to register a project or is that determined by something?*

- Any project in Illinois can register in GATs. However, only projects located in the MISO area of Illinois can register in M-RETs.



*Is there an online example of the REC agreement that the Approved Vendor will have to sign with the utility?*

- Examples of the REC agreements can be found on the Program website [Program Documents](#) page under the "REC Contracts" section.

*Is there a map available to know rather whether a project is being submitting in MISO or PJM or would that just generally be the difference between the utility?*

- Both PJM and MISO offer territory maps which can be found at:
  - PJM Territory Map: <https://www.pjm.com/library/maps.aspx>
  - MISO Territory Map: <https://api.misoenergy.org/MISORTWD/Impcontourmap.html>

## ICC and Batching

*If an Approved Vendor submits a batch with the 100 kW size, but then have a project that needs to be withdrawn, does that impede the progress of the rest of the projects in that batch through the whole funding process?*

- If the project is getting withdrawn prior to contracting, which is the ICC approval, then the Approved Vendor will need to substitute in an additional project. If the project is being withdrawn after it's been contracted, the Approved Vendor would not need to substitute in another project after it's contracted once, as once a project is sent to the ICC, that 100 kW batch is considered a product order. It's all contracted at the same time. If a project is withdrawn, it's just withdrawn from that particular project. The Approved Vendor will not need to submit another project to meet the 100 kW once it's been contracted.

*Has there ever been a time when the ICC doesn't approve the submitted batches and if so for what could be the possible reasons?*

- This has not been a common occurrence, but Approved Vendors are encouraged to double check batches before submittal.

## Collateral and Fees

*Could you speak to the line of credit payment options?*

- The Program Administrator isn't a party to the REC contract. The utilities and the Approved Vendor handle the transfer of funds, whether it's a line of credit or if it's the 5% collateral. If the RECs are not delivered according to the schedule once that three-year rolling average starts, then the line of credit is drawn upon commensurately with the gap is between the RECs that were contracted for and the RECs that were delivered. Please refer to the REC Contracts provided in the Program Documents webpage for specific details: <https://illinoisshines.com/program-documents/>

*Is there or will there be some type of extension or notification informing you that you have been approved for the advance of capital prior to the 30-day point that you would have to have signed and presented the 5% collateral?*

- The advance of capital is only relevant to EEC projects. The evaluation criteria used for determining whether a request is approved or denied will be included in future iterations of the Program Guidebook but can currently be found here: <https://illinoisshines.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Final-Advance-of-Capital-Evaluation-Criteria.pdf>

*If an Approved Vendor has to resubmit a project, do they have to pay the application fee again or would that fee be already covered to 5%? Additional, once the contract is completed, who owns the contract –the owner or the developer?*

- If an Approved Vendor is resubmitting a project (withdrawing the project and changing it prior to resubmitting), the Approved Vendor would have to pay another application fee for that.

The REC contract is between the utility (Buyer) and the Approved Vendor (Seller), so they are the parties responsible for the contract.

## Reporting

*Is the system performance only reviewed at three years?*

- Performance starts to be reviewed after three full years. After that performance will be reviewed annually until the direct delivery has been met. If a system under-delivers, the delivery expectations will be adjusted for the subsequent years to ensure a project isn't penalized twice. This is applicable to all categories with the exception of projects that are on a 20-year contract.

*For the Annual Report that each Approved Vendor is required to submit, is there a summary data that an Approved Vendor can pull from the M-RETS to archive it and submit it in the Annual Report?*

- Annual Reports are to be submitted in July of each year. For each system that is contracted, the Program Administrator will pull the number of RECs transferred from M-RETS and GATS and we aggregate that information on a yearly basis and then make it available to Approved Vendors. The Program Administrator does that part for the Approved Vendors. If an Approved Vendors references that report and they could even pull their own report and just verify that everything lines up and then if the Approved Vendor agrees or disagrees with the information provided.

*For CDCS, do the Quarterly Reports affect the payment?*

- Yes, the Quarterly Reports affect the invoice payments for CDCS. After the close of the first full Quarterly Period, submission and verification of the Quarterly Report subscribers, a project may have changed percent subscribed and percent small subscribers. Changes in these values impact invoice calculation for the invoice following the submission of the Quarterly Report.

*Are CS systems that are not Part II verified and energized required to submit Annual or Quarterly Reports?*

- The first Quarterly Report is due in the month after the first full quarterly period after Part II verification. Projects that have completed all four Quarterly Reports will be subject to an annual subscriber verification that will occur as part of the Annual Report. The Bi-Annual System Status Report is applicable for projects not yet energized and is due bi-annually starting six months from the trade date regarding project status; this report does not request subscriber information and is not applicable to this process.

*Is there a checklist available to help understand all of the different layers and requirements Approved Vendors have for different categories? If so, is the checklist updated with the guidebook?*

- An Approved Vendor Program Requirements Annual Checklist (<https://illinoisshines.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Approved-Vendor-Program-Requirements-Annual-Checklist-30Oct2023-final-for-publication.pdf>) can be found at to the Program Help Guides and Application Tips page of the Program website. Mentorship participants were also provided the document in their SharePoint folders.

Additional resources will be available to the Program participants in early 2024.

*Is quarterly reporting covered in the Approved Vendor Program Requirements Annual Checklist?*

- Quarterly reporting is covered under the Subscriber Verification section of the Annual Checklist resource. The Program plans to have one-pagers published to the website in early 2024 as additional Approved Vendor resources.

## Developer Cap

*Does the EEC 20% developer cap remain in place for a given Program Year after that Program Year has ended?*

- Yes, the EEC 20% developer cap remain in place for a given Program Year after that Program Year has ended.

*If Approved Vendor decided to do a joint venture with another Approved Vendor, can both developers' available capacity be combined from each Approved Vendor be used on a project?*

- If two companies are affiliated legally, then the developer cap capacity is already combined throughout the Program Year. For unaffiliated companies, the Program Administrator does not believe it would be advantageous for the Approved Vendors because they are trying to stay below that 20% threshold because they won't be able to develop more.

## Rollover Capacity

*Is the only source for rollover capacity from the EEC block or is there other places rollover capacity can be rolled over into the EEC block? Also, is the formula for rollover capacity changing and if so, how will that impact rollover capacity?*

- The actual block size for the following Program Year is determined ahead of time. At the end of the current Program Year, the Program halts application submissions, during which time the Program finalizes the waitlist for each category, and the Program Administrator allocates capacity to those projects that are on the waitlist. In some instances, there may be some projects to which capacity is not allocated. For example, for the 2023-24 Program Year, the Program Administrator had far more TCS projects/capacity on the 2022-23 Program Year waitlist than the Program had for the TCS block for the full, new Program Year. In this case, the Program allocated as much capacity as possible to waitlisted projects in order of their place on the list.

At the beginning of every Program Year the Program takes any uncontracted capacity from that prior Program Year and allocates that uncontracted capacity into the new block according to a process outlined in the current Long-Term Plan and Program Guidebook. In summary, the Program takes all of the uncontracted capacity for the prior Program Year and percentage wise the Program allocates that to the new blocks.

There is a proposed revision to the rollover process as part of the currently filed Long-Term Plan. Pursuant to the note the Program Administrator shared at the beginning of the Mentorship session, that would constitute ex parte communication because it's a part of that filed proceeding. Approved Vendors are welcome to become a participant to the proceeding. On our Program website, the proposed changes from the current Program Guidebook are published on the Program Documents page and stakeholders can view the red line version, current version, and proposed changes. These can be found on the [Program Documents](#) page.

## Disclosure Forms

*Is there a plan to add functionality to the UI user interface of the portal so that we can have a complete unified copy of all the data entered for a single project either as a single PDF document and or in a spreadsheet format? If so, is there a timeframe for this functionality?*

- Yes, functionality to have all Disclosure Form data, as well as all project data available for export from the portal so that Approved Vendors and Designees can view the information in a .CSV or an Excel file is planned. Approved Vendors and Designees will be able to filter the information needed. There is not an estimated timeline for this function at this time. Vendors should monitor the Program's weekly announcements for progress on this and other functionality, including near term and longer term items on the portal road map.

*Can you go over the different Disclosure Form types?*

- The different form types include three different Distributed Generation Disclosure Forms mapping to project financing types (Power Purchase Agreement (PPA), Purchase, and Lease) and a Community Solar Disclosure Form. There are video walkthroughs of each specific form on the Program website on the [Vendor Disclosure Form Resources](#) page.

***Are Designees able to see project applications or batches? Or is this feature only available for Approved Vendors?***

- Approved Vendors are the only ones who can see project applications and batches. Designees are limited to only forms that they have created.

***Is the capacity factor automatically calculated on spreadsheet?***

- Yes, the capacity factor is automatically calculated. The only the field that you can change on that section is the first-year production. Any other any other inputs are automatically calculated.

***Until Program capacity becomes available next June (for Program Year 2024-25), are there ways companies can use the Disclosure Form to let the consumer know that the REC prices yet to be determined and will need to be recalculated?***

- One place on the Disclosure Form that can be used to inform consumers that the REC prices have yet to be determined for Program year 2024-25 and will need to be recalculated is the open text filed in additional terms and disclosures section. Please see the following Guidance: <https://illinoisshines.com/vendor-disclosure-form-resources/>

***Do Approved Vendors have to give system warranties?***

- No, Approved Vendors do not have to give system warranties. It is important to note that Approved Vendors do need to have this clearly disclosed to customers. Find the contract requirements that Approved Vendors must abide by here: <https://illinoisshines.com/vendor-disclosure-form-resources/>

***Can performance insurance be added to the contract later?***

- If contract terms are changed, a new Disclosure Form would be required. Please see the following chart that describes circumstances where a new Disclosure Form and customer signature are required: <https://illinoisshines.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Disclosure-Forms-Circumstances-Requiring-New-DF-Issuance-and-Signatures.pdf>

***What qualifies as proof of site control? Would a copy of Homeowners' Insurance policy count?***

- No, a copy of Homeowners' Insurance policy would not count. Typically, a binding contract between the installer and the homeowner would count as proof of site control. There is an FAQ that details the various things that can be accepted for proof of site control. See: <https://illinoisshines.com/vendor-faqs/>

## Ongoing Program Requirements

### RECs

*What happens if the system over-performs?*

- The most recent three years of REC deliveries are averaged and compared to the expected REC delivery from the delivery schedule for the delivery year being analyzed (this comes from the Schedule B). This results in either a REC surplus or REC deficit for each system in the portfolio (a single contract ID). Two things can happen if there is a REC surplus:
  1. If there are surplus RECs for individual systems (i.e., because a system over-performed), they can cover the shortfalls of other systems in the portfolio. These are applied in order of ascending REC Contract Price (lowest to highest).
  2. If there are still surplus RECs after being applied to the shortfalls of other systems, they will be tracked by the Program Administrator and applied to the next year's Drawdown calculations where systems may have a deficit.

### Material Deficiency Timeline

*Is there a timeframe which material deficiencies must be addressed?*

- Material deficiencies must be addressed within five business days.

## Marketing Best Practices and Consumer Protection

### Program Violations

*How often do complaints and violations occur? Are they arbitrary and/or contentious? Can you explain the process and if it is a collaborative thing, how is it decided if there was or wasn't a violation, and do potential violations impact projects moving forward?*

- When the Program Administrator Consumer Protection team receives a complaint from a customer, it attempts to facilitate a resolution to the complaint. If during the process of resolution we learn of a possible violation of a Program requirement, the Program Administrator begins a secondary process of alerting the entity with a Notice of Potential Violation (NOPV) letter that explains what the Program requirement at issue is. It is termed a "potential violation" because an actual violation has not yet been confirmed at this point, and the Program provides the entity an opportunity to provide information about their side of the situation, including any information the Program Administrator may not have. It also provides an opportunity to correct incorrect information the Program Administrator has received. The process is designed to provide Approved Vendors an opportunity to respond through a dialog with the Program Administrator, if necessary, before a determination of whether a Program requirement was violated is reached.

Depending on the nature of the complaint and how much it impacts the Consumer Protection concerns, a determination is made as to whether that project will be put on hold pending the resolution of that complaint, or if the Program allows the project to proceed while the potential violation is handled separately.

The Program maintains both a Consumer Complaint Report and a Program Violations Report, found at the [Program Violations and Complaint Reports](#) page of the website. The Complaint Report lists all of the complaints the Program has received. The Program Violations Report informs the reader which complaints progressed to a warning letter and/or a suspension for the participating entity. The Program does not list publicly all Notices of Potential Violations (NOPVs) it issues; the Consumer Protection Handbook doesn't require this reporting, and reporting on the significantly higher volume of NOPVs than warning letters and the suspension letters is less practical.

## Marketing

*Do the marketing requirements include website and social media marketing in terms of those statements? I've seen some just on social media campaigns and generally those campaigns are targeted toward keywords. For example, if you type solar often on your computer, now a marketing campaign will be generated by the algorithms to you. How does the IPA or Program Administrator identify online marketing violations given many online advertisements are tied to algorithms targeting the specific consumer?*

- The marketing guidelines and requirements do relate to online ads, websites for the Approved Vendors and Designees, social media marketing, etc. Regarding Program guidelines, these can relate to any online or in-person activity and is thus a “catch all” for any form of marketing that would be seen or received by a customer via an Approved Vendor or Designee.

Information about the scope of what types of marketing are covered by the Program can be found on page one of the Consumer Protection Handbook.

Potential marketing violations may come to the Program Administrators attention in multiple ways. For example, a customer might contact our Program and send us a screenshot of something they've seen online that we can investigate. Beyond that, the Program Administrator proactively monitors the market, including searches for online ads on social media, as well as review of Approved Vendor and Designee's websites.

*Is there any way to actually conduct business with a third party or our customer, without using explicit and binding statements on projects?*

- If an Approved Vendor or Designee doesn't have a production guarantee or savings guarantee in its contract, it's best to avoid that language in communication to customers, and use more general language. Any language regarding savings in marketing materials must be clearly backed up by an offer. If an Approved Vendor or Designee has a more general statement in their marketing, it must be done in good faith, with customers actually seeing those results.

*Do companies need media release forms for customer testimonials? How do companies protect themselves and the customer base when using that content, whether it be on the company's websites or social media? Is it a matter of their comfort level, we take the media and post it or does there by the Program's standards and requirement have to be some kind of form in place allowing us to use that content?*

- The Program doesn't weigh into whether there's legal compliance requirements outside of the Program documents. Whether Approved Vendors or Designees need to obtain signed agreements or notice from customers to be able to put their testimonials on the website, that is for Approved Vendors and Designees to determine. What the Program requires in terms of testimonials is:
  - All testimonials must be provided by an actual customer of the entity using the testimonial and include a disclaimer that individual customers' experience may differ.
  - If the testifying customer received payment or other incentive to provide the testimony, the testimony must include a disclaimer stating that the customer received payment or incentive.
  - Testimonials shall not make false claims, promise savings, or otherwise violate any of the requirements of these Guidelines. (For example, a customer saying that they eliminated their electric bill is prohibited.)
  - Any testimonials that reference a customer experience from outside of Illinois must clearly state the location of the customer who had this experience.

*What is the agent ID number?*

- The required agent ID number is a unique number that the entity provides its employees/agents. This allows the Program Administrator to be able to contact an Approved Vendor or Designee, provide the badge number, and learn which specific agent was involved in a consumer complaint. It is not the same number that Approved Vendors and Designees receive from the Program Administrator.

*If an Approved Vendor or Designee is either going to or coming back from a scheduled appointment with a resident at a multi-unit residential building, are you allowed to drop flyers off if there are many mailboxes in one area or some sort of common area?*

- Neither the Program Guidebook nor the Consumer Protection Handbook specifically or implicitly prohibit entities from leaving flyers in a common area when they are going to/coming from an appointment with a resident in a multi-unit building.

*Can you explain the possibility of Net Zero energy costs versus no energy bill?*

- CS subscriptions may ultimately result in net zero energy costs so an explanation of that possibility could be appropriate in that setting. For DG contracts, the Program Administrator is not aware of any arrangements where a customer's surplus production would cover all costs, fees and taxes on the customer's electrical bill. Therefore, any implication that a DG customer could have net zero energy costs would be misleading and run afoul of the Consumer Protection Handbook. If an Approved Vendor or Designee believes otherwise, they may apply to the Program Administrator for a Program exception.



# **Program Resources and Ongoing Opportunities**

## **Project Map**

*Does the project map identify all active projects that have received SRECs?*

- The Project Map can be found at <https://illinoisshines.com/project-map/>. The map shows both energized and non-energized projects in the Illinois Shines program, which is inclusive of projects that are both Part II and Part I verified and exclusive of those that have not.

## **EEC Badges**

*Can you please provide a link to the EEC digital badge application?*

- Information on the Program badges can be found in the Consumer Protection Handbook, <https://illinoisshines.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Consumer-Protection-Handbook-Final-4.17.23.pdf>, page 12. To request the logo and badge from the Program Administrator please email [eec@illinoisshines.com](mailto:eec@illinoisshines.com).