

Illinois Shines Program Update 2025

from Energy Solutions

Energy Solutions rigorously approaches its responsibilities as the Illinois Shines Program Administrator to support stakeholders and help realize Illinois' goals in building an equitable, clean energy future. This State of the Program update, which follows the most recent version published in [April 2025](#) and the [Program Year 2024–25 End of Year Report](#), includes important messages and updates regarding Program objectives, solutions achieved or in development, feedback from stakeholders, and updates on Program vision.

In Program Year 2025-26, the Program continues supporting stakeholders to develop new solar projects through Illinois Shines. Progress includes:

- **Supporting project and vendor participation** via the processing of high volumes of project applications across categories and increasing enrollment for Approved Vendors (AVs), Designees, and EECs
- **Progress in equity efforts and goals**, including automations to support Minimum Equity Standard report submission and an increase in project workforce percentages, and further expansion of the Mentorship Program
- **Rigorous enforcement of Consumer Protection requirements**, investigation and resolution of complaints, and rollout of new Consumer Protection initiatives
- **Portal updates**, including feature development, enhancements, and bug fixes
- **Hosting stakeholder forums and providing feedback opportunities**, including AV Roundtables, AV/Designee and Customer Satisfaction surveys, working groups, office hours, 1:1 vendor appointments and more
- **Stakeholder support**, including Contact Center operation, new resources and communications, and responsiveness to legislative, trade group, and media inquiries



Needs/Requests, Solutions, and Continued Commitments

Energy Solutions prioritizes Program operational, strategic, and technical improvements, and in this update addresses the following areas:

Needs/Requests: Application Processing

Illinois Shines continues receiving steady volumes of project applications and allocating capacity across categories, including capacity additions resulting from the 2024 Long-Term Renewable Resources Procurement Plan (LTP) Re-Opening following a brief pause in October. The Program Administrator continues processing new applications within expected review times, after resolving a waitlist of applications at the start of the Program Year.

Solutions

- An enhanced Quality Assurance/Quality Control process has been implemented that will ensure all quality checks are completed prior to verification. The quality checks combine and automate several disparate checks across both application processing and contracts teams. This process not only improves efficiency but also captures and resolves errors much earlier in the application verification process.
- The Program continues scoring Community Solar project applications per established processes and conducted a TCS Random Selection event in September; review of CDCS applications submitted during the 90-day window following 2025-26 Program Year opening continues, and a Random Selection event will be held in December. Following the 2024 LTP Re-Opening, capacity for the TCS and CDCS categories was expanded by 100%. An additional 45-day CDCS application window will open on January 16, 2026. The Program will follow review and scoring processes for these capacity blocks as detailed in Program announcements.
- To highlight common areas of confusion, omission, or error in project applications that can prevent or delay project verification, the Program continues to share Application Tips and Tricks in weekly Market Announcements.

Needs/Requests: Consumer Protections

The Program rigorously investigates consumer complaints against Approved Vendors and Designees, and where necessary, takes disciplinary action. The Program has actively investigated, monitored, and resourced several complex situations related to Approved Vendor and Designee bankruptcies, cessation of operations, and/or failure to pass through incentives that have harmed Illinois Shines customers. Pursuant to the 2024 Long-Term Plan, the IPA and Illinois Shines developed and launched three major Consumer Protection initiatives. The team continues hosting a monthly Consumer Protection Working Group to discuss market trends, best practices, consumer education, and Program updates with stakeholders.

Solutions:

- The [Solar Restitution Program \(“SRP”\)](#) launched in May 2025 and allows the IPA and its Program Administrator to help provide economic assistance to customers who have experienced harm through their participation in Illinois Shines. Phase I of the SRP provides compensation to customers who were promised a pass-through of the Illinois Shines REC incentive payment by their AV, but their AV failed to pass-through the promised amount after receiving the incentive payment from the utility. Later phases of the SRP will expand the scope to other types of harm. Illinois Shines published a [Rationale Document](#) explaining final decisions on the design and implementation of the initiative.

- In June 2025, the Program launched an [escrow process](#) which may be used when an AV fails to make promised pass-through payments to customers. The escrow process allows the Program Administrator to direct the utilities to make the REC incentive payment to an escrow agent (hired by the Program), rather than continuing to pay the offending AV. The Program Administrator would then direct the escrow agent to pay relevant customers any REC payment amount previously promised by the Approved Vendor, and to pay the AV any remainder of the REC payment. This will prevent additional customers from being put in harm's way. The escrow process was developed through a stakeholder feedback process in Fall 2024, and necessary updates were included in the amendment to the REC Contracts earlier in 2025. A [Rationale Document](#) explaining final decisions on design and implementation was published.
- The Program continues providing [Help for Stranded Customers](#) whose AV and/or Designee has gone out of business or ceased/limited operations, is unable to meet Program requirements, or is suspended due to disciplinary action and prohibited from advancing projects through the application process. The Program proactively informs potentially impacted customers when their solar company goes out of business in case they need assistance finding a new company to complete their project. The Program Administrator has assisted multiple customers in finding new companies to continue their applications.
- In October 2025, the IPA implemented an economic incentive for AVs that assist stranded customers in the form of a "REC adder"—that is, an increased price in the REC Contract for projects that were stranded and then "unstranded." A [Rationale Document](#) outlining the IPA's final decisions on the policy, a [chart](#) outlining the REC adder value in US dollars available per category of stranded customer, and both customer-facing and vendor-facing FAQs were added to the Program website.
- The Program developed new resources as part of the [Homeowner Handouts Series](#) designed to educate consumers about going solar with Illinois Shines and help them make informed, confident decisions. The newest materials, offered in both English and Spanish, include [Solar Loan Financing](#), [Buying a Home That Has an Illinois Shines Solar Project](#) and [Selling Your Home That Has an Illinois Shines Solar Project](#).
- In Spring 2025, the Program distributed the 2025 Customer Satisfaction Survey to deepen understanding of participant experiences and identify opportunities to obtain customer insights about their experiences with Illinois Shines and with the solar companies with whom they contracted. Details, outcomes, and analysis were published in the [2025 Customer Satisfaction Survey: Results and Analysis](#) report. In Fall 2025, the Program convened focus groups with interested respondents to gain further feedback to potentially improve the Program.
- The Program regularly updates both the [Program Violations Report](#) and the [Consumer Complaints Report](#) to support consumers in their review of participating Approved Vendors and Designees.

Needs/Requests: Vendor Support

Through a variety of feedback forums, the Program encourages, receives, and evaluates requests for resources and support from participating AVs and Designees, as well as portal features and functionality. The Program also implemented updates to accommodate changes required by the Modified 2024 Long-Term Plan.

Solutions:

- From October through December, Illinois Shines is hosting its annual AV Roundtable meetings for each project category. These forums provide an opportunity for participants to share Program feedback and offer insights into market challenges and conditions, and to connect with Program Administrator team members, including Sector Strategists, and other participating AVs. Prior Roundtables have yielded beneficial insights which help drive specific Program improvements and discussion about potential Program changes.
- Following a successful Mentorship Program session in Spring of 2025, a [2024-25 Mentorship Program Final Report](#) highlighted expansion of the program and the virtual and live, interactive sessions that experienced AV mentors provided to small and emerging solar entities participating in Illinois Shines. For Program Year 2025-26, the Mentorship Program, a key deliverable of the Equity Accountability System, has doubled participation capacity to offer both Fall and Winter cohorts and support more mentees. Enhancements in Mentorship Program design have increased the direct mentoring provided to mentees by experienced Mentors, and both the Fall and Winter sessions will culminate in-person Graduation Celebration and Networking Events for mentees who successfully complete all coursework and participation requirements.

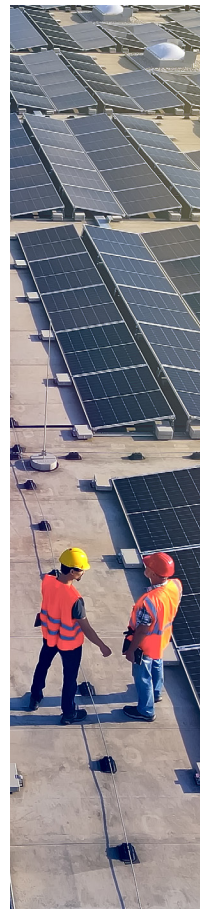
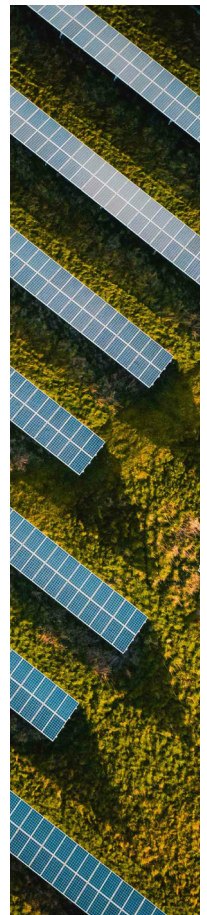
- Successful implementation of the Minimum Equity Standard (“MES”) continues. Illinois Shines provides resources and support to participating entities with their MES compliance. Compliance is tracked via the submission of the Program Year Compliance Plan demonstrating AV commitments to meeting the MES, the MES Mid-Year Report demonstrating progress, and the MES Year-End Report demonstrating successful compliance with each year’s required participation of Equity Eligible Persons. In Spring 2025, the Program hosted a webinar for stakeholders, provided updated FAQs and support, and introduced time-saving automations for submissions of MES Year-End Reports. In November, the Program published the [Program Year 2024-25 MES Year-End Report Implementation Report](#) to share and summarize stakeholder compliance.
- The Program continues to prioritize development of the Public Schools category, and in October published a [Public Schools Outreach Action Plan](#) to outline its planned steps to grow category participation. Implementation strategies will include targeted relationship building with public school professionals, education association engagement, conference attendance, and one-on-one meetings with priority schools and districts, as well as Program website improvements, digital marketing activities, and media efforts.
- In October, the IPA released two major updates that strengthen access, visibility, and recognition for Equity Eligible Persons (“EEPs”) participating in Illinois’ clean energy programs. All newly approved EEPs will receive an official certificate of recognition as part of the standard application process, and EEP resumes (for individuals who chose to share them during their application process) are now available on the External EEP Dashboard, giving clean energy employers direct access to diverse, skilled candidates who are ready to contribute to Illinois’ clean energy future.
- In October, the Program launched an updated Designee Registration Form incorporating the Maintenance and Repair Designee type for entities that perform routine maintenance, monitoring, and/or repair to a system after installation.
- In response to an uptick in stakeholder inquiries about Prevailing Wage requirements of Illinois Shines projects, the Program provided additional information and resources to the Program’s [Prevailing Wage Hub](#), including FAQs, compliance requirements, Certified Transcript of Payroll guidance, a [Prevailing Wage Requirements for Illinois Shines resource](#) and the [Prevailing Wage Walkthrough Video](#).
- House Resolution 1 (“H.R.1”), was signed into law on July 4, 2025, and introduced significant changes to clean energy tax credits previously available under the Inflation Reduction Act. These changes have implications for clean energy customers, developers, and communities across Illinois. Both the IPA and [Illinois Shines website](#) published information about navigating H.R.1, including impacts of the law, timelines relating to federal clean energy tax credit eligibility, and relevant educational resources for residents and businesses.

Needs/Requests: Contracts and Projects

The Program manages a high volume of REC Contracts, already totaling more than \$650 million in REC Contract Values for Program Year 2025–26 to date through October 2025. Updated Distributed Generation and Community Solar contracts were introduced in Program Year 2025-26.

Solutions

- Inspections are critical to ensure Program requirements are met, that the equipment described in the project documentation matches what is installed on-site, and that the project is on track to meet its Renewable Energy Credit (REC) delivery obligations. For Program Year 2025–26 to date, the Program has conducted more than 230 project inspections, including 204 Small DG projects, 22 Large DG projects, and 9 CS projects, with a very low rate of infractions.
- The Annual Report cure period concluded at the end of October. This year boasted the lowest discrepancy rate to-date at 32%, down from 55% in 2024 and 73% in 2023. This positive outcome is a result of operationalizing lessons learned from previous years, including delivering informational emails to AVs across Q2 to prepare for Annual Report submission in Q3, updating and distributing recorded and printed training materials for AVs in advance of the Annual Report opening, updating internal processes for receiving and tracking Annual Report submissions, and coordinating with the Data team to generate all reports.



Needs/Requests: Operations and Portal Functionality

As portal functionality expands and new data features are introduced, stakeholders have expressed the need for smoother navigation and more transparency around how information is managed within the system.

Solutions:

- The Program Portal's main menu was updated in an April 2025 release, offering simplified navigation and main menu access to Disclosure Forms, project applications, and batches, without the need to expand AV or Designee folders to see these options. Dual-role users gained the ability to navigate to a central location to access all Disclosure Forms via a single list of the AV IDs to select from. This menu change enabled more granular restrictions for the Program pause between the end of the 2024-25 Program Year and the launch of the 2025-26 Program Year.
- The Program Administrator is developing a new Subscriber Management feature which will be added to the Illinois Shines Portal. This feature will allow subscription management of Community Solar subscribers to move from SharePoint to the Illinois Shines Portal, effectively centralizing access and increasing subscription management permissions for AVs and Designees. This feature will bring all current subscriber data into the Portal and create relationships between records, providing users with two dashboards: the Subscriptions Dashboard and the Projects Subscriptions.
- In response to an issue in which the use of identical Disclosure Form file names made an incorrect project Disclosure Form accessible to credentialed Program portal users via download of an executed Disclosure Form from an unrelated record, the Program Administrator implemented a solution to ensure that uploaded Disclosure Forms receive unique names regardless of how the stakeholder named the file.
- To help reduce ambiguity around Program capacity while maintaining transparency of the project application pipeline, the Program updated the Block Capacity Dashboard with the addition of a new column titled 'Capacity Availability', which will indicate if there is unreserved program capacity for the category and introduced a new, more intuitive color scheme. Reserved Program capacity categories will be shaded red, while unreserved Program capacity categories will be shaded green.

Needs/Requests: Communications

With constant Program updates and increased capacity, stakeholders have requested more accessible and centralized communication materials that support clear and consistent messaging surrounding Illinois Shines policies and proposals.

Solutions:

- In July the Program issued the Illinois Shines [Program Year 2024-25 End of Year Report](#), highlighting data on some of the most significant and high-impact activities produced by the Program and its participating stakeholders including information on REC invoicing, project applications and customer participation, Equity Accountability System and Consumer Protection activities, and more. The report is available in both English and Spanish.
- To support a growing volume of media inquiries and responses, the Program in April published the [Illinois Shines Media Kit](#) to provide short summaries of information commonly requested by journalists and to offer useful context, details, dates, definitions, data and visual assets for use in developing stories.
- Monthly [Illinois Shines Data Reports](#) update and spotlight both Program Year to Date and Program Lifetime to Date data for key Illinois Shines Project Participation and Impact areas. This report augments other Program website data including the [Block Capacity Dashboard](#), [Project Application Reports](#), the [Project Map](#) tool, and the [End of Year and State of the Program reports](#), and the IPA's [Clean Energy Dashboard](#).
- In April 2025, Illinois Shines completed a significant refresh of the Program website including content updates, additions and new topical hubs, redesigned reports, refreshed help guides, new visuals and animations, new usability features including improved search, navigation, and page organization, a Spanish-language toggle, other accessibility improvements, and more. The Program is developing additional enhancements including structural, navigational, design, and usability improvements to refine the site's information architecture and improve user experiences for different stakeholders

Program Vision and Future State

Illinois Shines continues to strengthen and expand to fulfill the requirements of the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act and make progress toward achieving the state's Renewable Portfolio Standard targets. The Program continues to work with stakeholders and to invite, understand, and remain responsive to improvements that can support solar development and achieve Program objectives, while expanding support and protections for customers. The Program also seeks to maintain and develop new opportunities to expand access to Illinois Shines across project categories, to drive workforce growth including the participation of Equity Eligible Persons, and to serve as a model for other solar incentive Programs.

In addition to gathering input from solar developers, community organizations, and consumers, the Program aims to expand market partnerships with educational institutions to further expand Public School category growth. The Program will also address requirements of the Modified 2024 Long-Term Plan, as well as future requirements upon approval of the 2026 Long-Term Renewable Resources Procurement Plan and applicable Illinois legislation.

The Program remains committed to providing educational resources and support for consumers, to meeting expectations for project application processing, portal development, the provision of necessary tools, resources, and participation reports, and delivery of high-quality, responsive support and information to stakeholders.

Thank you for your support,

The Energy Solutions Team

