

Illinois Shines Program Update 2026

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 Q1 2026 State of the Program update, which follows the [November 2025 State of the Program update](#), 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. This update 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 (MES) 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 administration 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:

Application Processing

Needs/Requests:

Illinois Shines continues to receive high volumes of project applications across categories, including expanded capacity following the Modified 2024 Long-Term Plan (LTP) and Re-Opening in October 2025.

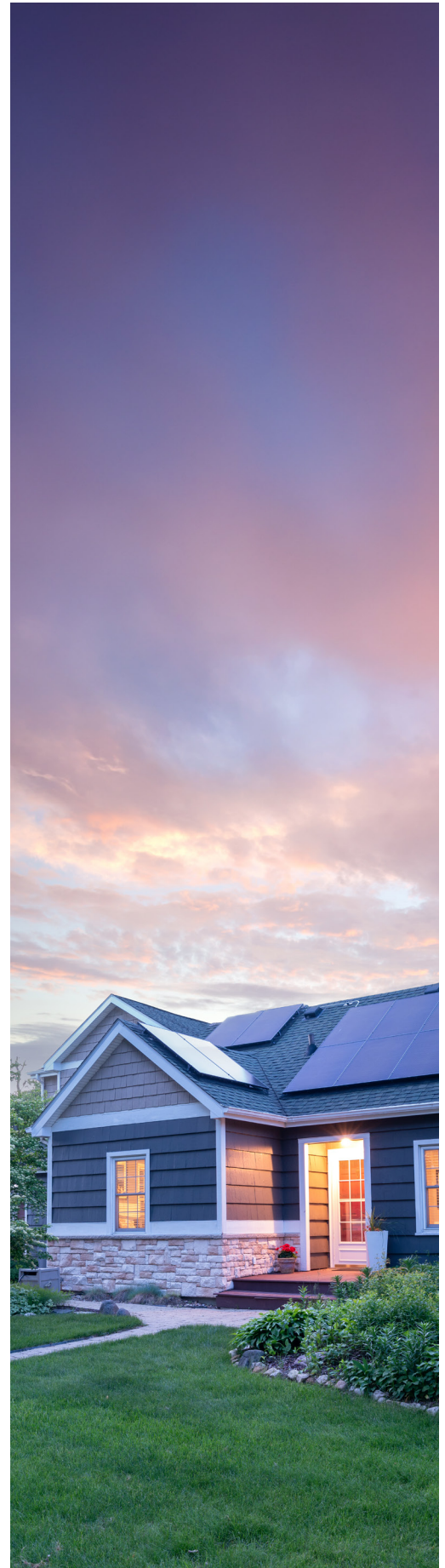
- The Program scored Community-Driven Community Solar (CDCS) project applications submitted during the 90-day window following the Program Year open and conducted a Random Selection event on December 17, 2026. As a result of the Modified 2024 Plan, an additional 45-day CDCS application window opened in January 2026, and review and scoring began after the window closed on March 2, 2026.
- The Traditional Community Solar (TCS) capacity was also expanded by the Modified 2024 LTP on October 31, 2025. Capacity was allocated to eligible waitlisted TCS projects, while the Program Administrator continued to review and score new applications submitted the day of and prior to the capacity expansion. The Program completed the application review and scoring of the TCS applications and posted project scores and awards on February 20, 2026.
- Following a spike in the submission of Small DG project applications, the Program announced in February 2026 that review of Part I applications exceeded the 10-day expected turnaround time. The Program Administrator is working to bring application review back into the expected turnaround time and will continue to inform stakeholders of progress on the [Project Application Reports](#) page. The status of individual project applications can be checked with the [Project Look Up Tool](#).

Consumer Protections

Needs and Requests:

The Program rigorously investigates consumer complaints against Approved Vendors and Designees, and where necessary, takes disciplinary action. The Program actively investigates, monitors, and resources situations related to AV and Designee bankruptcies, cessation of operations, and/or failure to pass through incentives that have harmed Illinois Shines customers.

- The Program administered three new Consumer Protection initiatives that were launched pursuant to the 2024 Long-Term Plan:
 - The [Solar Restitution Program](#) (SRP) launched in May 2025 and allows the IPA and its Program Administrator to 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 but did not receive a pass-through of the Illinois Shines REC incentive payment by their AV. The first group of successful restitution claimants received their claim awards in March 2026, totaling \$400,000 in restitution paid. Later phases of the SRP will expand to assist customers



who have experienced other types of harm. Pursuant to SRP changes included in the 2026 Long-Term Plan, after June the Program Administrator will work to implement expanded per-project and per-vendor caps for the SRP. Successful Phase I claimants will receive supplemental payments, so each receives full restitution for their AV's failure to pass-through their promised REC incentive payments.

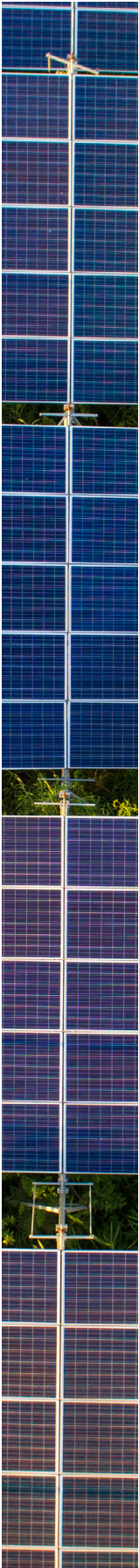
- In June 2025, the Program [launched an escrow process](#) which allows the Program Administrator to direct utilities to make REC incentive payments to an escrow agent (hired and directed by the Program), rather than continuing to pay AVs who fail to make promised pass-through payments to customers. Although the escrow process has not been utilized since its launch on June 26, 2025, the Program Administrator facilitated a voluntary escrow process for Revolution customers beginning in 2024. The Program continues providing [help for Stranded Customers](#) whose AV and/or Designee has gone out of business, ceased or 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. In October 2025, the IPA [implemented an economic incentive](#) for AVs that assist stranded customers in the form of a “REC adder”, an increased price in the REC Contract for projects they “unstranded.” Since its launch, the Program Administrator has received 44 REC adder requests from six different AVs covering 1,206 projects.
- The [Consumer Protection Working Group](#) meets regularly to discuss market trends, best practices, consumer education, updates to Program requirements and documents, and other consumer protection issues impacting Illinois Shines and Illinois Solar for All. The Working Group provides an opportunity for consumers, solar companies, community and nonprofit organizations, and other stakeholders to share insights directly with the IPA and Program Administrators. Meetings follow a published agenda and are open to the public to encourage broad participation and informed discussion. Effective June 2026, the meetings will occur quarterly on the first Friday of the month on a March, June, September, December cadence.
- On February 27, 2026, the IPA filed the [2025 Consumer Complaints & Disciplinary Action Report](#). This report, filed annually with the Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC), documents the frequency and nature of complaints related both to Illinois Shines and Illinois Solar for All, and includes details of enforcement actions taken by the respective Program Administrators related to such complaints. This year's report also highlights trends related to complaints.
- Following the publication of the [2025 Customer Satisfaction Survey: Results and Analysis](#) report, the Program convened focus groups in Fall 2025 to gain further feedback from interested respondents. The results of the focus groups have been shared with the IPA and are expected to be published to the Program website. The Program is also developing a Customer Satisfaction Survey for Community Solar customers.
- 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 and Requests:

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.

- From October through December 2025, the Program held its annual AV Roundtables for each project category, providing opportunity for participants to share Program feedback, offer insights into market challenges and conditions, and connect with Program Administrator team members and other participating AVs. The Sector Strategy team compiled Roundtable insights into a Program Improvements Roadmap to support discussion about Program improvement opportunities.
- In February 2026, the Program Administrator distributed the 2025-26 Approved Vendor and Designee Program Satisfaction Survey, designed to gauge the satisfaction of AVs and Designees participating in the Program. Survey results will be reported to the IPA and published in a summary report, including next steps to address identified concerns and opportunities.
- In February 2026, Illinois Shines launched the new [Equity Accountability System \(EAS\) Learning Series](#). The first webinar in the series, *Advancing Equity Through Inclusive Recruitment and Retention of EEPs*, highlighted effective strategies for recruitment and retention of Equity Eligible Persons (EEPs), how to scale workforce to meet increasing Minimum Equity Standard (MES) requirements, and how to meet the needs of a diverse workforce. Webinar resources including an [audio recording of the content](#), [presentation slides](#), and a [one page resource guide](#) are available at the Program website.
- The [Mentorship Program](#), a key deliverable of the Equity Accountability System, doubled capacity in the 2025-26 Program Year to offer Fall and Winter cohorts. The Fall cohort ran from October to November 2025 (with 20 mentees, 17 of whom graduated), and the Winter cohort ran from January through March 2026 (with 17 mentees, 16 of whom graduated) during which mentees completed virtual training courses and participated in live, interactive sessions with experienced Mentor AVs and the Program Administrator's Subject Matter Experts. Each cohort culminated in a graduation and celebration event to honor mentees and mentors. A final report summarizing the 2025-26 Program Year Mentorship Program is expected to be published in the upcoming months.
- The Program continues to provide resources, support, and help guides for participating entities. To support processes for change of AVs for projects not yet selected for a REC Contract, a new [Assignment of Product Order\(s\) or Entire REC Contracts Help Guide](#) and an updated [Collateral and Performance Assurance Help Guide](#) was added to the Program website.
- In compliance with the 2025-26 Program Year MES requirement that at least 14% of the project workforce for participating entities be composed of EEPs, all participating entities, with specific exceptions for Equity Eligible Contractors, were requested to submit a *Mid-Year Report* by December 2025 to demonstrate progress toward meeting the MES. In April 2025, the Program will host an MES webinar, supporting stakeholders on the *2025-26 Program Year Year-End Report* activities and a new combined *Compliance Plan and Year-End Report* for the 2026-27 Program Year.
- In April 2026, the Program will host a *Financing Opportunities* webinar to provide information on financial resources and financing opportunities, including grant and loan programs Illinois Shines vendors can pursue. The webinar will include presentations from the National Laboratory of the Rockies (formerly National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL), Ameren, Hispanic American Construction Industry Association (HACIA), and Clean Energy Jobs and Justice Fund (CEJFF).
- Designees registered prior to the start of the 2025-26 Program Year were prompted to renew their status in the Program or indicate their withdrawal by December 2025. This process ensures that AVs' Designees and Nested Designees are compliant with the renewal requirements.
- 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. Since that time, a new, dedicated Public Schools Sector Strategist on the Program Administrator team has been developing relationships with schools and presenting to districts, community groups, and other educational consortiums. In March 2026, the Program launched a [Solar for Schools](#) webpage to help school administrators, facilities staff, and district leaders better understand how solar projects can reduce long-term energy costs, and support sustainability goals and student learning. The webpage provides numerous resources and the opportunity to request a tailored workshop with the Program.



Operations and Contracts

Needs and Requests:

The Program manages a high volume of REC Contracts, already totaling more than \$1.06 billion in REC Contract Values for Program Year 2025–26 to date through February 2026.

- The Program Administrator performed the REC Performance Evaluation and Community Solar Parameters Evaluations following the close of the Annual Report Cure Period in October 2025. Evaluation results were provided to the utilities in mid-November 2025. The Program Administrator shared draft results with AVs via SharePoint in December 2025, with formal notice provided by the contracting utility in January 2026.
- Per the Program Guidebook, AVs can only withhold projects from ICC submission twice before they must be withdrawn. In light of the Federal Reconciliation Bill (H.R.1), and the Executive Order issued on July 7, 2025, the IPA temporarily paused enforcement of the two withhold limit. This pause will lift at the start of the new Program Year.
- In coordination with the IPA, the Program Administrator is preparing to implement new 2026 REC Contracts, coinciding with the launch of the 2026-27 Program Year. Changes to the contracts will be made in accordance with the 2026 Long-Term Plan Final Order and the Clean and Reliable Grid Affordability Act.

Portal Functionality

Needs and Requests:

As Portal features expand, stakeholders have requested improved data transparency, centralized subscription management tools, enhanced security measures, and streamlined user functionality. Participants continue to seek tools that reduce administrative burden while maintaining data accuracy and compliance oversight.

- The Program Administrator successfully developed the [Community Solar Subscriber Management Feature](#) for the Program Portal, which launched March 2026. This new feature replaced the manual workbook process in SharePoint and allows for improved subscriber data quality and the centralization of access. The new feature gave AVs and Designees the ability to view and manage subscriptions, view unsubscribed Disclosure Forms, and import and export subscription data. Additionally, AVs gained the ability to manage project permissions and assign Designees to view/manage Community Solar projects. To support stakeholders, the Program hosted a CS Subscriber Management Webinar in February 2026; available resources include a [webinar recording](#), the [presentation slides](#), a [pre-recorded demo video](#), a [Training Guide](#), and [Q&A](#) from the webinar.
- Following a Portal update in December 2025, the Program Administrator became aware of and resolved an issue in which some Disclosure Forms associated with an AV's Disclosure Form Designees may have been temporarily accessible to other Disclosure Form Designees operating under the same AV via the Program Portal's Disclosure Form Report export functionality. The report export functionality was temporarily removed from the portal on Dec 11, 2025, while the issue was investigated, and the corrected report functionality was restored on Jan 20, 2026.
- In December 2025, new [Disclosure Form templates](#) were implemented, adding "Designee ID" as a new, last column and permitting users to be linked to multiple Designees. Previously, users working for multiple Designees (often under an umbrella company) were required to have separate logins for each Designee ID. Now, a user can manage Disclosure Forms for all their Designee IDs with one login.
- As an increased security measure, the Program Administrator began requiring the use of a multi-factor authenticator to access Illinois Shines SharePoint folders by all AVs and Designees, and other stakeholders, including utilities, in January 2026.



Communications

Needs and Requests:

Given ongoing Program updates and federal policy developments, stakeholders have requested accessible communications materials that support consistent messaging, media engagement, and informed participation across customer and vendor audiences.

- The Program actively updates the [IllinoisShines.com](https://illinoisshines.com) website, making ongoing content additions, updating FAQs, adding resources, and adding other enhancements to improve user navigation and stakeholder journeys, and continues publishing a monthly [Illinois Shines Data Report](#) to share updated Program Year-to-Date and Program Lifetime-to-Date data for key project, participation, and impact areas.
- The Program developed and launched its first statewide digital advertising campaigns to expand awareness of Illinois Shines, inform interested consumers of available resources and the benefits of Illinois Shines, and increase visibility of the Public Schools category. The campaigns include geo-targeted search and display ads within Illinois. Ads are scheduled to begin running in Q1 2026, with additional campaigns to highlight EEP workforce opportunities in Illinois Shines to follow in Q2.
- The Program continues to share Illinois Shines success stories and support the IPA in media coordination. Several program stories were spotlighted in the IPA's [Fiscal Year 2025 Annual Report](#), showcasing successful Illinois Shines projects and participation. Two recently published case studies illustrate the opportunities and positive community and economic impacts of solar projects developed through Illinois Shines, including a [Community-Driven Community Solar project in Rockford, Illinois](#) and a [Traditional Community Solar project in Pontiac, Illinois](#). Case studies showcasing project successes are in development for each project category.

Regulatory and Program Management

Needs and Requests:

The Program continues to operate under the Modified 2024 Long-Term Plan, and recent changes affecting the Federal Investment Tax Credit and related policies have created market uncertainty, prompting requests for guidance and predictable timelines.

- In addition to ongoing Program administration, the Program supported the IPA's development of the 2026 Long-Term Plan, which was approved by the ICC in February 2026, with associated impacts to Illinois Shines that the IPA and the Program Administrator are currently implementing. The IPA and Program Administrator are also preparing for provisions affecting Illinois Shines from the Clean and Reliable Grid Affordability Act, signed into law in January 2026, and effective June 2026.
- [Elective Pay](#) is a new mechanism that allows tax-exempt entities such as local government offices, public schools, nonprofits, or houses of worship who have installed or plan to install a clean energy project to file a tax return and receive a reimbursement for a portion (often at least 30%) of their project costs, even if they don't pay federal taxes. To support Elective Pay opportunities, the IPA held two stakeholder webinars in December, including one for public school districts, and one for AVs working with tax-exempt entities. Information about Elective Pay and in-person workshops the IPA is hosting for eligible entities in late March and early April can be found on the new "[Other Opportunities](#)" page at the Program website.

Program Vision and Future State

Illinois Shines remains focused on collaboration, transparency, and responsiveness toward fulfilling the requirements of the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act and the Clean and Reliable Grid Affordability Act. Through ongoing stakeholder forums, working groups, surveys, and direct engagement it provides, the Program will continue gathering feedback to assess market impacts, identify operational improvements, and support informed decision-making by stakeholders across project categories.

Illinois Shines will continue prioritizing expansion of participation in the Public Schools category, and consumer protection and support to fulfill Program objectives. The Program will support the implementation of the Equity Accountability System, workforce development, mentorship opportunities, and pathways for small and emerging businesses to participate meaningfully in Illinois' clean energy economy.

Looking ahead, Illinois Shines will continue evaluating market trends, federal policy impacts, and stakeholder input to ensure Program implementation remains stable and effective. Through continued collaboration with developers, contractors, community organizations, educational institutions, utilities, and customers, the Program will support equitable solar growth and sustained market development across Illinois.

