



2025 Customer Satisfaction Survey Focus Groups Results and Analysis

July 2026



Background

The Illinois Shines Program Administrator introduced and conducted Customer Satisfaction Focus Groups to obtain further insights from customers who completed the 2025 Customer Satisfaction Survey and expressed willingness to provide feedback on their program experiences.

The Program Administrator invited 255 customers to participate in one of nine sessions. A total of 24 customers attended the sessions. The Program Administrator organized these customers into three groups based on their feedback to the customer satisfaction survey to best solicit feedback on three distinct topics for these sessions: Leases, the Illinois Shines website, and Disclosure Forms.

The specific goals of the focus groups were:

- To understand why Lease customers had an overall lower satisfaction score for the 2025 customer satisfaction survey when compared to Purchase customers.
- To gain insight into the effectiveness of the information included on the Illinois Shines website and to obtain feedback regarding potential improvements to this site.
- To provide customers with an avenue to share feedback related to the Illinois Shines Disclosure Form.

Focus Group Logistics

The Program Administrator sent invitations to customers by email and held sessions virtually through Zoom. The Program Administrator sent reminder emails to invitees the morning of their sessions to drive participation following low turnout in the initial session.

Timing

- October 14, 2025: The Program Administrator emailed customers to invite participation in one of three sessions available for their topic. The Program Administrator requested customers to respond to confirm which of the three sessions available for their topic they would like to attend.
- October 23, 2025: The Program Administrator sent a follow-up email to customers who had not yet responded to maximize participation.
- October 28, 2025: The first session was held.
- November 13, 2025: The ninth, and final, session was held.

Analysis of Results

A summary of findings for each focus group topic follows:

Leases

The 2025 Customer Satisfaction Survey results show that Lease customers had a Customer Satisfaction Score (CSAT) of 51%¹ compared to Purchase customers, who had a CSAT of 69%. The aim of the Lease sessions was to obtain insight into the customer experience with the process of financing solar with a Lease to learn why these customers had a lower overall satisfaction score. Ten customers took part in the Lease sessions.

Most Lease participants who indicated negative experiences pointed to a disconnect between the expectations set during the sales process and the actual experience of having solar with a Lease.

Summary of Findings

- Eight of ten participants signed up for a solar Lease from a door-to-door solicitor. Participants noted that their overall satisfaction was heavily influenced by whether the sales representative provided them with accurate information related to the Lease agreement. Most Lease participants who indicated negative experiences pointed to a disconnect between the expectations set during the sales process and the actual experience of having solar with a Lease. These disconnects include: failure to disclose the annual escalation rate associated with the Lease price, misrepresentation around the utility bill saving customers would experience, and misinformation on steps needed to transfer the Lease when selling the home.
- Six participants noted they were presented with purchasing a system as an option during the sales process but chose to move forward with a Lease agreement because it did not require a down payment and included maintenance and warranties for a longer period than a Purchase.
- When asked about their experience with the Illinois Shines Disclosure Form, nine out of ten participants indicated that they did not remember receiving a Disclosure Form or hearing mention of the Illinois Shines program. These responses back up the Program Administrator's observation from the customer satisfaction survey results report that "Lease customers do not directly receive a pass-through incentive payment through their participation in Illinois Shines, which may lead to sales representatives not thoroughly explaining the Disclosure Form." That the vast majority of Lease focus group participants did not recall receiving nor reviewing a Disclosure Form, despite signing it, suggests it may have been rapidly or improperly presented by the solar vendor, potentially undermining the purpose of providing customers with accurate project information before signing an agreement, and contributing to lower satisfaction.

¹ A 51% CSAT score indicates that an average of 51% of respondents Strongly Agree or Agree to the statements included in the customer satisfaction survey.

Disclosure Forms

A solar vendor is required to provide potential customers with an Illinois Shines Disclosure Form so that they have accurate information about the solar project before signing an installation agreement. The Disclosure Form sessions were aimed at soliciting feedback about the effectiveness of the Illinois Shines Disclosure Form from customers who recalled their experiences with receiving a Disclosure Form during the sales process. Seven customers took part in the Disclosure Form sessions.

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Summary of Findings

- Focus group participants' projects were invoiced between December 1, 2023, and November 27, 2024. All focus group participants were presented with an [older version](#) of the Disclosure Form before signing their installation agreements, as they had signed installation agreements prior to the launch of an [updated version](#) of the Disclosure Form on June 1, 2023. During the sessions, the Program Administrator presented the updated version to participants to solicit feedback on updates to the Disclosure Form and to ask if customers had recommendations for further updates. Participants generally had positive feedback regarding the updated version of the Disclosure Form. One participant noted that the layout and coloring of the updated version of the Disclosure Form makes it obvious that the form is related to the Illinois Shines program, which differentiates it from other paperwork received during the sales process.
- Multiple participants noted that they did not receive information regarding Approved Vendor fees during the sales process, as the older version of the Disclosure Form did not include a breakdown of Approved Vendor fees associated with the Illinois Shines incentive. After viewing the updated version of the Disclosure Form, participants confirmed that the “Illinois Shines Incentive Payment” section of the updated Disclosure Form, which discloses the amount of the total REC incentive that will be passed through to the customer, adequately addresses this concern.
- Participants noted that the Disclosure Form is only useful when the customer is given time to read through the form and ask questions of the sales representative. Some participants noted that their sales representative walked them through the Disclosure Form while others noted that the Disclosure Form was not explained by their sales representative and was treated as just another document that needed to be signed to move forward with a project. One participant stated that “a good company makes a big difference on how this is all received.”

Illinois Shines Website

The Illinois Shines website provides information and resources designed to help consumers make informed decisions on whether to go solar and provides key information about Illinois Shines. The aim of the Illinois Shines website sessions was to solicit feedback on if and how customers use the Illinois Shines website and how the website can be improved to further assist customers in their decisions to go solar. Seven customers took part in the Illinois Shines website sessions.

The Program Administrator intends to drive more consumers to the Illinois Shines website through a social media marketing campaign throughout 2026.

Summary of Findings

- Two participants noted that the Illinois Shines website provided them with helpful educational resources during the sales process. The majority of participants did not use the Illinois Shines website for educational materials prior to signing an installation agreement. When asked what other online resources customers found helpful during the sales process, participants noted that they used PVWatts, Google's Sunroof, and EnergySage as resources when deciding whether to sign an installation agreement. Most participants found it helpful to use a tool that allowed them to enter their address and system size to see the estimated production of multiple potential system designs on their property.
- One participant stated that the [Program Violations Report and Consumer Complaint Report](#) provided helpful information when deciding which solar vendor to hire.
- One participant recommended that the [Find an Approved Vendor, Designee, or Subcontractor page](#) provide users with the ability to search for vendors that work in their area. The Program Administrator is working on updates to the Illinois Shines website to allow this functionality.
- One participant noted that while customers can use the [Project Status tool](#) to check the status of their Illinois Shines project application, they recommend that end-use customers be included on all application status update emails sent to Approved Vendors. This particular customer's application was in a Need Information Request status for months; the customer suggested that copying customers on emails with application status updates would allow customers to hold their Approved Vendors accountable for moving their applications forward.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Participants' comments provided the Program Administrator with insight into their experiences with Leases, Disclosure Forms, and the Illinois Shines website, which were topics highlighted in many responses to the 2025 customer satisfaction survey. While the sample size was small in these focus groups, our main takeaways were:

- Lease customers that did not have positive solar experiences generally noted that the information they received during the sales process was not accurate, was hastily presented, or was insufficiently explained. The Program Administrator will consider how to address this common concern as it updates Program Requirements and documents.
- Participants' feedback regarding the updated version of the Disclosure Form was generally positive and the Program Administrator will take participants' comments into consideration as it updates the Disclosure Forms in the future.
- The Program Administrator will view other educational resources flagged by participants to consider how the Illinois Shines website can include or link to information that a customer may find beneficial while looking into going solar. The Program Administrator intends to drive more consumers to the Illinois Shines website through a social media marketing campaign throughout 2026. The Program Administrator is also exploring ways to proactively provide customers with access to its educational resources, including potentially sending customers an email with useful resources after they sign a Disclosure Form.

These sessions, which were the first customer focus group sessions held by the Program Administrator, provided the Program Administrator with insights to support future sessions and better allow customers to provide feedback related to key topics:

- Forty-nine customers indicated they would attend a session, but only 24 customers attended the sessions. The Program Administrator and Illinois Power Agency will explore ways to encourage higher participation rates and ensure robust discussions.
- Focus group participants had their solar projects installed in 2024 or earlier. The sessions were held in fall 2025, so in some cases, appreciable time had passed since some of these customers had gone solar. Some customers indicated this gap limited their recollection of many aspects of the process of going solar. The Program Administrator will work to issue customer satisfaction surveys and initiate customer follow-up and focus groups more often to best capture customer feedback while the process of going solar is still fresh in their minds.
- The Program Administrator will continue to utilize customer satisfaction surveys and focus groups to gauge customer satisfaction and to gain insight into potential ways to improve the customer experience. The feedback received from customer satisfaction surveys and focus groups will be used as the Program Administrator continues to strengthen consumer protection requirements and update customer resources.

