



Illinois Solar for All
A STATE PROGRAM



Illinois Shines

Participating in Illinois Shines and Illinois Solar for All as a Small and Emerging Business

PROGRAM YEAR 2026-2027

Illinois Solar for All: IllinoisSFA.com • info@IllinoisSFA.com • 1-888-970-ISFA

Illinois Shines: IllinoisShines.com • admin@IllinoisShines.com • 877-783-1820



Table of Contents

1. Overview: Illinois' Solar Incentive Programs	3
1.1. Illinois Shines	4
1.2. Illinois Solar for All (ILSFA)	4
1.3. Program Differences	5
2. What is a Small and Emerging Business?	5
2.1. Supporting SEBs: A Statutory Requirement	6
2.2. Small and Emerging Business Qualifications	6
2.3. How Illinois Shines Supports Small and Emerging Businesses	7
3. Begin Your Journey to Participation: Get Connected	8
3.1. State Programs	8
3.2. Industry Associations	8
4. Roles for Small and Emerging Businesses in the Illinois Solar Market	8
4.1. Other Roles a Small Business May Play in the Solar Market	9
5. Obtaining Certification	10
6. Program Registration: Illinois Shines and ILSFA	11
6.1. Become an Approved Vendor for Illinois Shines	11
6.2. Become an Approved Vendor for Illinois Solar for All	12
7. Need to Talk to a Program Team Member?	13



1. Overview: Illinois' Solar Incentive Programs

Illinois' solar incentive programs, Illinois Shines and Illinois Solar for All (ILSFA), meaningfully support the success and growth of solar companies and the Illinois solar market. Both programs make it possible to reduce solar installation costs through incentives, develop a diverse and inclusive workforce, offer consumer protections, vet and approve Approved Vendors, and support community solar projects that enable residents and businesses to access solar energy benefits even if they cannot install solar panels on their properties.

Illinois Shines and ILSFA utilize Renewable Energy Credits (RECs), incentives that make solar projects more financially viable and attractive to customers, as powerful drivers for individual participation, and business growth and investment, in solar energy. The following resources provide more information on RECs:

- [Video: What is a Renewable Energy Certificate?](#)
- [FAQs: Renewable Energy Credit Fact Sheet](#)

The programs offer incentive payments based on the number of RECs produced by eligible solar projects. RECs represent the environmental benefits of electricity generated from solar panels, not the electricity itself. Approved Vendors enter into contracts with Illinois electric utilities, or the Illinois Power Agency (IPA), and commit to transferring the RECs a project produces for 15 to 20 years in exchange for a fixed per REC incentive payment. The scale and timing of these payments vary, ranging from a few thousand dollars for small residential projects to \$5 million or more for large community solar projects. Notably, the growth of the solar industry in Illinois directly correlates with the inception and expansion of these two pivotal solar programs, Illinois Solar for All and Illinois Shines.

Mentorship opportunities are additional benefits of participation in Illinois Solar for All and Illinois Shines. Businesses new to Illinois' solar programs may participate in the Illinois Shines Mentorship Program and receive one-on-one support from the Illinois Solar for All program. ILSFA provides SEBs with training and resources to help them succeed in and outside of the state's programs and connect with other market stakeholders.



1.1. Illinois Shines

Illinois Shines provides incentives for the development of qualified solar projects, including on-site (distributed generation) and community solar through the purchase of Renewable Energy Credits (RECs) by Illinois utilities. Illinois Shines supports two main project types:

- [Distributed Generation](#): Solar projects installed directly on homes, schools, businesses, and customer sites
- [Community Solar](#): Large solar projects offering solar bill credits to subscribers who may not have the means to install solar panels themselves

1.2. Illinois Solar for All (ILSFA)

[Illinois Solar for All \(ILSFA\)](#) is a state-administered program designed for [income-eligible homeowners, renters, non-profit organizations and public facilities](#). Income-eligible participants pay no upfront costs for a solar installation or subscription.

- [Participant Eligibility](#): Homeowners are ILSFA-eligible if household income is 80% or less of the Area Median Income (AMI). Non-profit and public facilities serving low-income/environmental justice communities are also eligible but have different criteria. ILSFA pays incentives to approved solar companies to help expand the benefits of solar energy to more families, organizations, and communities.
- [Consumer Protection](#): Approved solar companies are required to work within prescribed guidelines that govern their interaction with the marketplace and program participants. These requirements ensure consumers are protected against unsafe and unfair business practices, and are designed to minimize risk to participants. Consumer protection guidelines require that the information shared with participants is clear and accurate to ensure a transparent and positive experience for participants.
- [Environmental Justice Communities \(EJCs\)](#): EJCs stand to benefit the most from access to solar energy, based on the principle that all people should be protected from pollution and that all populations have a right to a clean and healthy environment. At least 25% of the funding within each ILSFA sub-program will be allocated to projects located in ILSFA Environmental Justice Communities (EJCs). If project selection is not required, these funds are available only for projects located within EJCs for the entire program year, as submitted on a first-come, first-served basis.
- [Grassroots Education](#): Grassroots Education campaigns conduct outreach across Illinois, focusing on income-eligible and environmental justice communities. Community-based organizations educate income-eligible residents on solar energy basics and the ILSFA program's benefits and eligibility requirements.



1.3 Program Differences

Illinois Shines and ILSFA both utilize Renewable Energy Credits as the revenue for incentives. Overseen by the IPA, the programs fulfill the requirements of the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA) and support the development of photovoltaic projects in Illinois. Some Approved Vendors participate in both programs, however, the programs are different in several noteworthy ways:

- ILSFA household customers must meet income-eligibility requirements. Illinois Shines customers are not subject to income-level verification.
- REC prices vary within and between both programs, with project size and utility location being key variables. ILSFA REC prices are higher than Illinois Shines to account for lower income levels of ILSFA participants and the higher costs of serving them. For complete REC pricing information visit: [Illinois Shines Program Website](#) and [ILSFA Approved Vendor Manual](#).
- Illinois Solar for All sub-program budgets are updated annually and made available through specific project submittal windows that open on specific dates. Project submission windows move into a rolling submission period if the total annual budgets are not initially apportioned to eligible ILSFA projects. Each program website has a project dashboard providing current details on approved projects. See [Illinois Shines](#) and [Illinois Solar for All](#).

The [ILSFA Approved Vendor Manual](#) provides detailed guidance on the intent, requirements, and processes for the program and is essential reading for Approved Vendors. The Manual includes an overview of the program's scope, goals, and detailed descriptions of processes—from vendor registration through project approval and facilitation of Renewable Energy Credit (REC) contracts. They are updated periodically.

2. What is a Small and Emerging Business?

Small businesses play a crucial role in Illinois for several reasons: they are a platform for entrepreneurship, provide career opportunities, services, social and community benefits, and strengthen local economies. ILSFA and Illinois Shines play a supporting role by providing incentives to markets served by small businesses.



2.1. Supporting SEBs: A Statutory Requirement

Section 1-56(b)(2) of the IPA Act requires the Illinois Power Agency to “make every effort to ensure that small and emerging businesses, particularly those located in low-income and environmental justice communities, are able to participate in the Illinois Solar for All Program.”

The 2026 Long-Term Renewable Resources Procurement Plan established the SEB designation in the Illinois Shines Program, and added new benefits for SEBs across both programs, including:

- A lower batch threshold for project submittal (Illinois Shines only)
- Project selection prioritization (ILSFA only)
- Collateral deduction from REC payments (ILSFA only)
- Early access to rolling project submission windows (ILSFA only)

In alignment with the statutory requirements of the IPA Act, the Small and Emerging Business Guide and accompanying supports and resources translate these mandates into practical tools and assistance that enable SEBs to effectively participate in the IPA’s solar programs.

2.2. Small and Emerging Business Qualifications

To receive the Small and Emerging Business (SEB) designation in both Illinois Shines and Illinois Solar for All, and utilize the above-mentioned benefits, Approved Vendors must submit an application and supporting documentation that [qualifies them as either a small or an emerging business](#). Following is the eligibility criteria for determining if an entity can be considered a small or emerging business.

QUALIFICATION AS A “SMALL” BUSINESS

To qualify as a small business, Approved Vendors must demonstrate that they are independently owned and operated and had a gross revenue of less than \$4 million in the previous calendar year.

QUALIFICATION AS AN “EMERGING” BUSINESS

To qualify as an emerging business, Approved Vendors must demonstrate that they have been authorized to do business in a U.S. state, district, or territory for less than three (3) years. A list of acceptable documents for both criteria can be found on the [Small and Emerging Business webpage](#).



2.3. How Illinois Shines Supports Small and Emerging Businesses

For Illinois Shines, the primary vehicle for increasing opportunities for new and small businesses is the Equity Accountability System (EAS). The EAS was established through the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA) to prioritize access to the clean energy economy for communities that have been excluded from economic opportunities in the energy sector. The EAS created the Minimum Equity Standard (MES) and the Equity Eligible Contractor (EEC) category of the Illinois Shines program.

The MES requires a certain percentage of an Approved Vendor or Designee's workforce to be Equity Eligible Persons (EEPs) or EECs. The current MES is 14%, and the IPA Act requires that percentage to increase to 30% by 2030. All Approved Vendors and Designees are required to submit an MES Compliance Plan to show how the company will meet the MES workforce percentages. The [Energy Workforce Equity Portal](#) is available to help facilitate connections between job seekers and clean energy project developers. EEPs can post their availability for hire to entities seeking EEPs for employment, and clean energy project developers can post clean energy jobs and search for EEPs.

Illinois Shines also has a [Mentorship Program](#) that provides in-depth small group training on Illinois Shines requirements and best practices. During a virtual training series, participants connect with 'Mentors' who share insights in facilitated mentor panels and breakout rooms. Mentors are also available outside the virtual training series for additional consultation with mentees.

Businesses can participate in Illinois Shines by subcontracting or partnering on project development and construction, or by providing complementary services such as electrical work, engineering, permitting, customer outreach, operations, or maintenance. They can engage in community solar by supporting project development or managing customer subscriptions.

Businesses with local or community connections can support outreach, workforce participation, and ongoing project operations. Equity Eligible Contractors¹ can leverage dedicated program pathways to grow internal capacity, pursue prime developer or installer roles, and build long-term presence in Illinois' clean energy market. Together, these avenues allow small and emerging businesses to gain experience, build portfolios, and scale participation across Illinois Shines as a whole.

¹ See page 11 for more information.



3. Begin Your Journey to Participation: Get Connected

3.1. State Programs

- [Sign up](#) for Illinois Solar for All (ILSFA) program updates and newsletters.
- [Sign up](#) for Illinois Shines program updates.
- [Sign up](#) for Illinois Power Agency announcements and newsletters. The IPA oversees the ILSFA and Illinois Shines programs.

3.2. Industry Associations

Industry associations can provide valuable services to small and emerging businesses, including networking opportunities that connect companies with peers and industry leaders and foster partnerships and collaborations. They also advocate on behalf of their members, helping shape policies and regulations. In addition, associations offer industry insights, market research, and training programs that support professional development. Below are several solar industry associations that may be of interest to your business.

- The [Solar Energy Industry Association](#) is a national trade association for solar and solar + storage industries.
- The [Coalition for Community Solar Access](#) is a national trade association representing community solar companies, businesses, and nonprofits working to expand customer choice and access to community solar.
- The [Illinois Solar Energy and Storage Association](#) is the state trade association for the Illinois solar energy and storage industry.

4. Roles for Small and Emerging Businesses in the Illinois Solar Market

Small and Emerging Businesses can participate in Illinois Solar for All and Illinois Shines as an Approved Vendor (AV) or as a Designee that partners with AVs. Designees can play various roles on a solar project, including solar system installation, marketing, lead generation, and sales, among others. The role of a Designee often involves direct interaction with end-use customers.



4.1. Other Roles a Small Business May Play in the Solar Market

- **Solar Installation:** A solar installation company builds the solar system onsite and ensures it complies with design specifications and regulations. Solar projects vary in size and complexity, with larger installations having larger crews and budgets, more permitting requirements, and longer development timelines. All solar installers must be ICC certified. Details about how to become ICC certified can be found in Section 5: Obtaining Certification.
- **Solar Sales:** A solar sales company meets with a customer, assesses the site, and provides the customer with a project proposal. A sales or lead generation business does not have to install the solar system.
- **Distribution:** Solar projects involve the procurement of many different components, usually from a distribution company. An electrical supplier, for example, may add solar equipment to its product offerings by sourcing solar system components from manufacturers.
- **Design:** Solar system designers are specialists who use software to select and layout the components of a solar system. They may be engineers themselves or consult with engineers to ensure the proposed solar system meets local and state codes.
- **Engineering:** A structural engineer conducts analysis of structural support systems for solar projects. Engineering firms may provide support on a per project basis.
- **Project Finance:** Solar projects require significant investment, and often the customer lacks the capital available to pay for the project outright. Project finance firms specialize in lending for solar projects and perform due diligence on the project to ensure it is financially viable.
- **REC Aggregation:** Renewable Energy Credit (REC) incentives stimulate solar markets. REC Aggregators buy and sell RECs through contracts. RECs sales are essential to ILSFA and Illinois Shines project viability.
- **Project Development:** Project developers tend to focus on large and complex projects, and assemble teams to plan and execute them. Teams include many disciplines and expertise, including engineering, surveying, permitting, legal, procurement, and more.
- **Sub-contracting:** A sub-contractor may work on a specific and limited scope of work for a project. An electrician may complete the electrical connections on a project. An engineer may assist with site analysis and provide stamped drawings. A construction company may install the support structures and solar panels for a project. Larger projects may have one or more sub-contractors working for a prime contractor responsible for overall project construction.
- **General Contractor:** General contractors can parlay their relationships and expertise in building systems and trades like electrical, roofing, and construction, to add solar systems to their offerings.
- **Other:** IT professionals, project managers, code officials, lawyers, surveyors, procurement specialists, marketing specialists, and many other disciplines may work on solar projects.



5. Obtaining Certification

A [Distributed Generation Installer](#) installs equipment that can generate or store electricity, such as a photovoltaic system or battery storage system. A distributed generation facility typically includes an electric generator, a prime mover, and the equipment required to safely interconnect with the local utility's electric power system.

With the exception of self-installers,² all entities that install distributed generation facilities must be certified by the Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) under the [Distributed Generation Installer Certification Rule \(Part 468\)](#), and be in good standing prior to installing any distributed generation facilities in the State of Illinois. Businesses that do not hold the DG Installer Certification may work with a firm that is DG-certified to partner on projects. A list of Certified Distributed Generation Installers is available [here](#).

To become a Certified Distributed Generation Installer under the ICC, companies must complete and notarize the five-page [DG Installer Certification Application](#) and pay a \$50 application fee. Applicants must certify that only a “qualified person” will perform or directly supervise DG installations. A qualified person performs installations on behalf of the DG Installer Certificate-holder and meets one of the following requirements:

- Completed at least five satisfactory installations in the appropriate DG technology. If the application is for solar, the completed installations must be in solar.
- Satisfactory completion of one of the following programs in the appropriate DG technology:
 - Apprenticeship as a journeyman electrician from a Department of Labor-registered electrical apprenticeship and training program.
 - A North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners (NABCEP) distributed generation technology certification program.
 - An Underwriters Laboratories distributed generation technology certification program.
 - An Electronics Technicians Association distributed generation technology certification program.
 - An Associate in Applied Science degree from an Illinois Community College Board-approved community college program.
- A properly completed application typically takes between five and nine weeks for approval.

² "Self-installer" means an individual who leases or purchases a cogeneration facility for his or her own personal use and installs such cogeneration or self-generation facility on his or her own premises without the assistance of any other person. Self-installers are required to submit information proving that they are a Qualified Person. [220 ILCS 5/16-128A(a)]



Businesses that design, sell, and install solar systems should consider obtaining applicable NABCEP Board certifications. These certifications may satisfy the DG Installer certification requirements and also signal professionalism to customers. The PV Installation Professional (PVIP) encompasses PV design, installation, operations, commissioning and maintenance. The PV Installer Specialist (PVIS) is for individuals who are highly competent with all aspects of solar installation processes. Firms that sell solar systems to customers may pursue the PV Technical Sales (PVTS).

6. Program Registration: Illinois Shines and ILSFA

6.1. Become an Approved Vendor for Illinois Shines

Interested entities must submit an Approved Vendor application, which must be approved before any solar project applications can be submitted to Illinois Shines.

- [Small and Emerging Business](#): Entities acting as or applying to become an Approved Vendor (“AV”), that meet the definition of either a “small” or “emerging” business, may apply for the SEB Designation with a single SEB registration form for both Illinois Shines and ILSFA. Upon application approval, AVs will receive the SEB designation for both programs. Please note: Single Project Approved Vendors are not eligible for the SEB designation. See “Section 2. What is a Small and Emerging Business?” for information.
- [Equity Eligible Contractor](#): An Equity Eligible Contractor (EEC) is a business that is majority-owned by eligible persons, or a nonprofit or cooperative that is majority governed by eligible persons or is a natural person that is an eligible person offering personal services as an independent contractor.
 - The IPA Act defines Equity Eligible Person (EEP) as a person who would most benefit from equitable investments by the State designed to combat discrimination, specifically:
 - A graduate or current or former participant in the Clean Jobs Workforce Network Program, Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program, Illinois Climate Works Pre-apprenticeship Program, Returning Residents Clean Jobs Training Program, or the Clean Energy Primes Contractor Accelerator Program, and the Solar Training Pipeline and Multicultural Jobs Program
 - A person who was or is currently enrolled in the foster care system
 - A person whose primary residence is in an equity eligible investment community
 - A person who was formerly incarcerated



- EECs are eligible for several benefits within the Illinois Shines program. For example, certified EEC Approved Vendors are eligible to submit projects to the EEC category within Illinois Shines. This also enables them to request an advance of a portion of REC Contract value prior to the associated project's Energization. Approved Vendors must first apply to become EEC certified, which they may do in their Approved Vendor application or any time after submitting their initial Approved Vendor application.
- Companies can also become certified as an EEC Designee or EEC Subcontractor. Application requirements and forms can be found on the Illinois Shines' Become an EEC webpage.

6.2. Become an Approved Vendor for Illinois Solar for All

A solar business that wishes to [become an Approved Vendor](#) must first register with Illinois Shines, before registering with Illinois Solar for All. The ILSFA Approved Vendor registration application asks applicants to show that they understand and commit to the spirit, goals, and requirements of the program. An Approved Vendor Manager can help applicants through the registration process.

- [Minority-Owned Business Enterprise \(MBE\) Certification](#): Must be at least 51% minority-owned, managed, and controlled by one or more individuals who are:
 - U.S. citizens, or lawful permanent residents of the United States
 - African American, Asian American, or Native American, as well other groups found to be disadvantaged pursuant to Section 8 (a) of the Small Business Act federal statute.
- [Women-Owned Business Enterprise \(WBE\) Certification](#): Must be at least 51% owned by a woman or women who are U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents of the United States. See the [State of Illinois Business Enterprise Program \(BEP\)](#), which offers certification opportunities.³

³ 30 ILCS 575/2(3) (Business Enterprise for Minorities, Women, and Persons with Disabilities Act)



7. Need to Talk to a Program Team Member?

If you have questions or need further assistance with any aspect of Illinois Solar for All or Illinois Shines, please use the following contact information:

ILLINOIS SOLAR FOR ALL

Info@IllinoisSFA.com

ILLINOIS SHINES

EEC Sector Strategist: eec@illinoisshines.com

Small DG Sector Strategist: smalldg@illinoisshines.com

SEB inquiries: admin@illinoisshines.com