

Gov. Pritzker Announces \$16 Million In Funding For Climate Works Pre-Apprenticeship, Barrier Reduction Programs

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SPRINGFIELD - Governor JB Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) today launched \$10 million in funding for the Climate Works Pre-Apprenticeship Program and \$6 million for the Energy Transition Barrier

Reduction Program as part of the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA). The programs will increase training opportunities in the trades, expand the clean energy talent pipeline, and boost diversity in the clean energy trade industries by providing resources to limit barriers to participation. The programs will be run through training partners which will be selected through a competitive Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) process.

“The Climate Works and Barrier Reduction programs are essential to opening the door to countless opportunities in the clean energy trades industry for communities who have historically been left out and left behind,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “Economic progress in Illinois depends on our diverse workforce, and these investments will break down barriers for more women and people of color to pave the way with good-paying careers that will push our state toward a carbon-free future. The strategic investments we make today in our clean energy workforce will have a lasting impact for generations to come.”

“The future of Illinois is bright as we work towards creating jobs that will contribute to a robust economy, while building a clean energy environment that benefits all communities,” said Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton. “This pre-apprenticeship program seeks out and shapes talent, and addresses their needs equitably so they are set up for success. This is how we uplift communities to access the opportunities to thrive.”

The Climate Works Pre-Apprenticeship Program will prioritize underrepresented populations and Illinoisans living in communities that have historically faced economic and environmental barriers, bolstering a diverse workforce in the clean energy industry. The Climate Works program will be bolstered by Barrier Reduction Program funding, which will provide services for participants to address common barriers for underrepresented populations such as transportation, childcare, supplies, and other expenditures that often amount to roadblocks to success.

“Supporting Illinois’ strong, diverse and qualified workforce is among DCEO’s highest priorities as we build our clean energy future and grow our economy,” said DCEO Director Kristin A. Richards. “Climate Works doesn’t just offer training opportunities in the clean energy sector – it also provides comprehensive support, and funding to eliminate economic barriers to sector access. This pre-apprenticeship program relies on nationally recognized credentials to train the workforce, and is designed to help participants succeed while creating a more diverse workforce pipeline. Thousands of future Climate Works participants will help push Illinois toward securing a carbon-free future.”

The Climate Works Pre-Apprenticeship Program will align with the needs of clean energy employers in the construction and building trades, provide students with

nationally recognized certifications, and provide a pathway to an apprenticeship in the growing renewable energy, electrification and energy efficiency industries. The program will also provide access to educational and career counseling along with hands-on learning that will reinforce foundational professional skills taught in the classroom.

“Communities like mine are too often left behind, even when the larger economy is booming,” said State Rep. Marcus C. Evans, Jr. (D-Chicago). “This pre-apprenticeship program will go a long way in ensuring that Black and Latino men and women are at the forefront of the clean-energy economy. I look forward to seeing the graduates of these programs from my district working on projects that will power Illinois for generations to come.”

As outlined in statute, the pre-apprenticeship program will consist of three regional centers serving the Chicago metropolitan area, Northern /Central Illinois, and Southern Illinois. Centers will recruit, prescreen, and provide pre-apprenticeship skills training, for which participants can attend free of charge, receive a stipend, and access to support services through the Barrier Reduction Program.

“Illinois has been leading the clean-energy revolution, and we are leading the way with our clean energy workforce as well,” said State Sen. Cristina Castro (D-Elgin). “Between CEJA and the federal Inflation Reduction Act, there is going to be incredible demand for a workforce that knows their way around a wind turbine. Because of this pre-apprenticeship program, every community will have access to these jobs.”

People of color, women, and other underrepresented populations have historically been significantly underrepresented in apprenticeship programs. A pre-apprenticeship helps break down barriers and provide greater access to apprenticeships, which provide a pathway to good-paying long-term careers. The Climate Works model provides nationally recognized credentials, provides funding to cover costs to address barriers, and provides hands-on support that will help program graduates enter an apprenticeship program and lay the foundation for a long-term career in a growing sector.

The program is expected to enroll 500-700 pre-apprentices during its first year, with capacity increasing over the course of the program. Climate Works will help participants secure good-paying clean energy careers in construction, installation, maintenance and repair activities after being trained on topics specific to clean energy such as solar PV basics and building energy efficiency.

Through a competitive Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), qualified entities can apply for grants, with awards ranging from \$3 million to \$6.5 million (inclusive of Illinois Climate Works and Barrier Reduction Program funding). Applications will be accepted until June 2, 2023, at 5:00 p.m. To view the NOFO and apply for the grant,

please visit the [DCEO website](#). Interested parties are encouraged to reach out to CEO. GrantHelp@illinois.gov for application assistance.

To help applicants prepare to apply for funding, DCEO will also be hosting a series of informational webinars:

- Bidder's Conference: April 26 from 3:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.
- Technical assistance workshop for first-time applicants: May 9 from 3:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.

The Climate Works Pre-Apprenticeship Program and Barrier Reduction Program are two of several workforce programs established by the landmark CEJA legislation intended to move Illinois to a 100% carbon-free future. Under CEJA, DCEO will administer \$180 million per year in workforce and community support programs designed to build Illinois' clean energy economy and prepare the state's workforce and communities for the jobs of the future.

DCEO is responsible for implementing programs to prepare Illinois' workforce for the transition to clean energy and to support Illinois communities undergoing energy transitions, including the following:

- Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program (20 ILCS 730/5-45)
- Clean Energy Primes Contractor Accelerator Program (20 ILCS 730/5-55)
- Clean Jobs Workforce Network Program ("Clean Jobs Hubs") (20 ILCS 730/5-20)
- Coal to Solar and Energy Storage Initiative Fund (20 ILCS 3855/1-75)
- Energy Transition Barrier Reduction Program (20 ILCS 730/5-30)
- Energy Transition Community Support Grants (20 ILCS 730/10-20)
- Energy Transition Navigators Program (20 ILCS 730/5-35)
- Illinois Climate Works Pre-apprenticeship Program (20 ILCS 730/5-40)
- Jobs and Environmental Justice Grant Program (20 ILCS 730/5-60)
- Returning Residents Clean Jobs Training Program (20 ILCS 730/5-50)