

Governor Pritzker Launches \$8.5 Million CEJA Community Solar Energy Sovereignty Grant Program

March 7 2024 9:25 AM



CHICAGO – Governor JB Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) launched \$8.5 million in funding for the Community Solar Energy Sovereignty Grant Program as part of a larger strategy to equitably grow the clean energy workforce in Illinois through the landmark Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA). The program supports community-based organizations and technical

service providers in low-income and historically disadvantaged communities to plan, develop and execute community solar projects. Grantees will be selected through a competitive Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) process.

“Illinois is leading the fight against climate change and putting environmental justice front and center, said Governor JB Pritzker. “With this latest investment of \$8.5 million to support solar energy projects in marginalized communities, we’ll create well-paying jobs and build healthier communities.”

The goal of this grant program is to provide upfront seed capital funding to overcome barriers to project development caused by lack of capital in historically disadvantaged communities. The program prioritizes funding for community solar projects that are located in and provide community benefits to environmental justice or Restore Reinvest Renew (R3) communities. Environmental justice and R3 communities are areas where residents have historically been excluded from economic opportunities, including opportunities in the energy sector, and areas that experience high levels of pollution.

“Illinois is at the forefront of climate justice for all our communities, regardless of zip code. Clean energy is a matter of equity, and the Community Solar Energy Sovereignty Grant Program is part of our equitable and sustainable future,” said Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton. “This program will not only provide a sustainable future for communities that have been historically left out and left behind, it will also bolster our workforce with jobs of the future.”

Grant funding may be used to support a variety of pre-development activities to benefit historically disadvantaged communities, including early-stage project planning, project team organization, site identification, procurement and contracting, securing financing, customer outreach, site assessments, and more. Funds may also be used to support the development of cooperative or community ownership models that allocate benefits to communities and support long-term governance, management, and maintenance of community solar projects.

“DCEO has launched several critical programs intended to move our state toward a carbon-free future under the landmark CEJA legislation,” said DCEO Director Kristin Richards. “The Community Solar Sovereignty Grant Program will help fuel community solar projects to benefit Illinoisans in the areas that need it the most.”

Qualified entities include community-based organizations and technical service providers working in direct partnerships with community-based organizations.

Through a competitive Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), qualified entities can apply for grants, with awards ranging from \$50,000 to \$1 million. Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis until July 1, 2024, at 5:00 p.m., or until funds are exhausted.

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 be holding a technical assistance [webinar](#) at 1 p.m. on March 14.

The Community Solar Energy Sovereignty is one of several contractor, workforce, and community support programs established by the landmark CEJA legislation intended to move Illinois to a 100% carbon-free future. This program is one of two programs under the Jobs and Environmental Justice Program (20 ILCS 730/5-60: The Equitable Energy Future Grant and the Community Solar Sovereignty Grant). 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.

CEJA training, contractor & community investment programs administered by DCEO include:

- 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)