



## Illinois Power Agency Launches Dedicated Small and Emerging Business Hub

September 26, 2024

On September 26, the Illinois Power Agency (IPA) launched a dedicated [Small and Emerging Business Hub \(Hub\)](#), with a goal to centralize industry-specific information to help small and emerging businesses navigate the clean energy sector successfully. The Hub serves as a tool for Illinois's small and emerging business community to connect with targeted programs and resources that meet their needs in entering the clean energy economy.

The Hub, which resides on the [Energy Workforce Equity Portal](#), streamlines new and existing resources to small and emerging businesses navigating the solar landscape in Illinois. This includes information on essential aspects of the IPA's solar incentive programs, step-by-step guidance on becoming Approved Vendors with Illinois Shines and Illinois Solar for All, benefits of participation, financial incentives, and support services tailored to the needs of small and emerging businesses navigating the programs and their requirements. The Hub also features a wide range of local, state, and federal resources, including business planning, entrepreneurial development, grants and funding, workforce training and human resources, and more. Small and emerging businesses can leverage the Hub's wide range of materials to help them start and grow their businesses.

The concept for the Hub helps answer the IPA's mission to strengthen and advance equity in the clean energy industry by increasing access to the growing clean energy economy for communities that have been historically excluded from opportunities within the energy sector. The Agency and its Program Administrators conducted outreach with minority business associations and solar developers and contractors in 2022 and 2023 to garner feedback from the business community on barriers facing small and emerging businesses. One such challenge was navigating information amid the complexities of the clean energy landscape. As a result, the Hub was developed to provide education and support small businesses with knowledge on a host of topics to help bridge the gap.

"Achieving equity across the clean energy economy requires dedicated support for individuals and small business who may not have the same institutional experience as their larger counterparts," said IPA Director Brian Granahan. "We hope that the IPA's new Small and Emerging Business Hub gives those entities a helpful starting point in navigating business development and growth, thus allowing enhanced access to the clean energy economy for all."

Some of the key features of the Hub include:

- A step-by-step guide intended to help both prospective business owners and small businesses navigate the solar energy landscape in Illinois by providing essential information on business certification, market participation, and incentive program qualification requirements.

- Application process information for accessing Advancement of Capital for Equity Eligible Contractors in the Illinois Shines program, which ensures that contractors demonstrating need have access to the necessary funds to participate in renewable energy projects, thereby reducing upfront financial constraints and enabling a more level playing field for newer/smaller entities.
- Support services for qualified contractors and sub-contractors to provide personalized support and facilitate successful participation in the Illinois Shines and Illinois Solar for All programs, while minimizing barriers to entry.
- Clean energy trainings and programs targeted to diverse contractors working in ComEd and Ameren's energy efficiency programs.
- One-on-one business advice for small & emerging businesses and start-ups at no cost through the Small Business Development Centers administered by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO).
- Pro bono, one-on-one business advising for business owners offered through university consulting services.
- Wrap-around services to help small and emerging businesses owners in need of support.
- Consolidated information about grants and funding opportunities at federal, state, and local levels to help small and emerging businesses start and grow their businesses.
- Workforce and training programs that are targeted to help small and emerging businesses access a pipeline of skilled workers so they can stay competitive in the marketplace.

The Hub, created by the IPA to address gaps and barriers in the small emerging business ecosystem, will be further built out with new tools and features in the coming months to equip small and emerging businesses with the resources needed to participate in Illinois' growing clean energy market.