

Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO)



**Illinois
Department of Commerce
& Economic Opportunity**

Public Input Sought - Request for Information (RFI)

Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program

Please respond by submitting your information to:

<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/596d577661d9489b94fd4525b6aa40ef>

Purpose and Objective

DCEO is seeking information from stakeholders to inform the Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program implementation.

Background

On September 15, 2021, Governor JB Pritzker signed the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (P.A. 102-0662, referred to herein as “CEJA”) into law, designed to equitably transition the state to 100 percent clean energy by 2050. As part of this, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) is responsible for implementing programs to prepare the Illinois workforce for the transition to clean energy and to support Illinois communities undergoing energy transitions, including:

- Clean Jobs Workforce Network Program
- Clean Jobs Curriculum
- Climate Works Preapprenticeship Program
- Returning Residents Clean Jobs Training Program
- Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program
- Energy Transition Navigators Program
- Clean Energy Primes Contractor Accelerator Program
- Energy Transition Barrier Reduction Program
- Energy Transition Community Grant Program
- Jobs and Environmental Justice Grant Program
- Displaced Energy Workers Bill of Rights
- Energy Transition Workforce Commission
- Energy Workforce Advisory Council
- Utility Job Training Programs
- Coal to Solar and Energy Storage Initiative Fund Grant Program

Scope and Objective: Input on the Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program

This request for public information (RFI) seeks input on the **Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program**, which was established by CEJA and will be implemented by DCEO. The Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program (20 ILCS 730/5-45) will provide access to business development resources and support for small clean energy businesses and contractors in Illinois. The program focuses on providing services to the owners of clean energy contractor businesses and nonprofits in environmental justice communities. Other clean energy contractor business owners are eligible as well.

Program services will be delivered through a network of 13 program delivery hub sites located in or near each of these areas: Chicago (South Side), Chicago (Southwest and West Sides), Waukegan, Rockford, Aurora, Joliet, Peoria, Champaign, Danville, Decatur, Carbondale, East St. Louis, and Alton. Through a competitive process, DCEO will select and fund eligible community-based organizations to operate each hub site. Community-based organizations delivering the program may directly provide all services or subcontract to other entities to provide portions of program components.

For this program, “eligible community-based organization” means a nonprofit organization, including an accredited public college or university, that has experience providing business-related assistance and support for entrepreneurs; has knowledge of construction and clean energy trades; demonstrates relationships with residents and organizations serving the community; and demonstrates the ability to serve diverse and underrepresented populations effectively.

The Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program will:

- Facilitate access to low-cost capital for small clean energy businesses and contractors;

RFI on the Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program

- Provide support for obtaining business services, including, but not limited to, bonding; back-office services; insurance, permits, training, and certifications; business planning; and low-interest loans;
- Train, mentor, and provide other support needed to allow participant contractors to build capacity, expand their markets, and grow their businesses;
- Ensure that the participating and potential contractor clients and community partners are engaged in the Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program;
- Connect participant contractors with the Department of Labor for resources, training, and technical support on prevailing wage compliance;
- Provide recruitment and ongoing engagement with entities that hire contractors and subcontractors, programs providing renewable energy resource-related projects, incentive programs, and approved vendor and qualified installer opportunities, including, but not limited to, activities such as matchmaking, events, and collaborating with other Hub Sites.

These services will be required to be provided to owners of clean energy contract businesses and nonprofits who meet one or more of the following characteristics (see 20 ILCS 730/5-45(c) for more details):

- Reside in an “equity-investment eligible community,” which are communities that are either in an [R3 area](#) or an environmental justice community, as defined in CEJA
- Have low educational attainment
- Had prior involvement with the criminal legal system
- Have language barriers
- Graduate of or currently in the foster care system
- Displaced energy worker
- Current or past participant in the Clean Jobs Workforce Network Program, Illinois Climate Works Preapprenticeship Program, or Returning Residents Clean Energy Jobs Training Program

Please note that this RFI is not an application to enter the program or for funding to administer the program. There will be a future Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) released, after which applicants can compete through the process required by the Grant Accountability and Transparency Act (30 ILCS 708) to receive a grant award. Responding to the RFI is not a prerequisite for participating in a future NOFO process and does not obligate DCEO to conduct a future NOFO process based on the responses received. Further, responding to this RFI does not provide any advantages to the participant in any potential future NOFOs.

All information received in a participant’s response will be made available for public review and may be used by DCEO to inform the implementation of the Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program.

It is anticipated that DCEO will issue additional RFIs for the other projects listed above.

Participant Organization Information

Please provide for the organization or community submitting a response:

- The organization or community name,
- Contact information, telephone number, e-mail address, city and zip code,
- A brief overview of your organization and/or community

Questions

All interested parties are encouraged to respond to any question to which they can provide meaningful or helpful input for DCEO. Responses should not include confidential and/or proprietary information. All responses will be posted on the DCEO website. Responses are not limited to a word count, but brevity, where possible, is appreciated.

Regional Assets

1. DCEO will fund 13 program delivery hub sites located in or near each of these areas: Chicago (South Side), Chicago (Southwest and West Sides), Waukegan, Rockford, Aurora, Joliet, Peoria, Champaign, Danville, Decatur, Carbondale, East St. Louis, and Alton. Where would you recommend housing the Clean Energy Contractor Incubator programs within these areas? Are there considerations for access? Can you identify assets and community strengths (such as community-based providers and local economic development incentives) in one or more of these areas that make it an ideal location for a Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Hub site?
2. What are the qualifications, capabilities, and resources for community-based providers to operate a Clean Energy Contractor Incubator program successfully?
3. How do existing community-based organizations already provide or facilitate access to low-cost capital for small clean energy businesses and contractors? What resources are needed to provide this service? What resources are already available?

Focus of Contractor Incubator Program

4. What is the best way to identify business owners who will most benefit from the Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program?
5. What are the recommended best practices to ensure that the program resources and benefits are delivered to business owners within the targeted communities?
6. What are the most important resources contractors need to start or grow their businesses?

Coordination

7. How should the Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program coordinate with other programs to spread awareness of the program's availability and resources to potentially eligible and interested business owners? Feel free to respond with regionally specific examples or general best practices.
8. What are some specific examples of business support services that help small businesses to build capacity and grow? What organizations and financial services providers should the Clean Energy Contractor Incubator program coordinate with to provide these services to businesses?
9. How should the Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program connect a participating business owner with the Department of Labor for resources, training, and technical support on prevailing wage compliance? What relationships need to be built? What mechanisms need to be put in place?

RFI on the Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program

10. The Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program will inform participating business owners of business development and networking opportunities. What existing organizations and programs provide information about hiring opportunities for contractors, subcontractors, approved vendors, and qualified installers? What existing organizations provide business networking opportunities such as matchmaking or other related events?

Program Success & Best Practices

11. The Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program will train, mentor, and provide other support to participant contractors. What are examples of best practices from existing organizations and programs that provide these services?
12. What are some practical approaches DCEO can use during the NOFO and grant application process to ensure that eligible community-based organizations with relevant experience and relationships with contractors that would benefit the most from this program have the information and tools they need to provide a good application and, if awarded, run an effective program?

Engagement

13. How should the Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program ensure that potentially interested and eligible contractors, community partners, and other key stakeholders are aware of and engaged with this program?

Other

14. Please provide past examples, experiences, or lessons learned from other Contractor Incubator programs. This can include approaches from outside of Illinois.
15. Please provide any additional comments or thoughts not explicitly addressed in this RFI.

Process Overview and Stakeholder Submission

DCEO will review the responses to identify key concepts that may benefit DCEO in designing and implementing its Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program.

Responses to this RFI are due by submitting your information at the online form:
<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/596d577661d9489b94fd4525b6aa40ef>.

Responses are due by December 13, 2022.