

**Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO)**



**Illinois  
Department of Commerce  
& Economic Opportunity**

**Public Input Sought - Request for Information (RFI)**

**Clean Energy Primes Contractor Accelerator Program**

Please respond by submitting your information to:

<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/9f195977eb954fd1a81fd48784905477>

### **Purpose and Objective**

DCEO is seeking information from stakeholders to inform the Clean Energy Primes Contractor Accelerator Program implementation. The following sections provide background on the Program, and the RFI questions begin on page 5.

### **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 Pre-apprenticeship 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 Primes Contractor Accelerator Program**

This request for public information (RFI) seeks input on the **Clean Energy Primes Contractor Accelerator Program**, which was established by CEJA and will be implemented by DCEO. The Clean Energy Primes Contractor Accelerator Program (20 ILCS 730/5-55) will provide a 5-year, 6-month progressive course of one-on-one coaching to assist contractor participants in developing 5-year business plans, including review of monthly metrics and advice on achieving participant’s goals, operational support grants (not to exceed a total of \$1,000,000 annually) to support the growth of participant contractors with access to capital for upfront project costs and pre-development funding, among others.

Program services will be administered in 3 program delivery areas: Northern Illinois, Central Illinois, and Southern Illinois. The program will be run by a Primes Program Administrator selected by DCEO. Each program delivery area will have a Regional Primes Program Lead. Each Regional Primes Program Lead will work with the Program Administrator to select a new cohort of 3-5 participants in each region every 18 months.

The program will be available to selected contractors who meet the following criteria:

- 2 or more years of experience in clean energy or related contracting field;
- At least \$5,000 in annual businesses; and
- A substantial and demonstrated commitment to investing in and partnering with individuals and institutions in equity investment eligible communities,

The Department will hire a Primes Program Administrator with experience in leading a large contractor-based business in Illinois; experience coaching and mentoring; experience in the Illinois clean energy industry; and experience working with equity investment eligible community members, organizations, and businesses.

## RFI on the Clean Energy Primes Contractor Accelerator Program

The 3 Regional Primes Program Leads will report directly to the Primes Program Administrator. To be selected as a Regional Primes Program Lead, organizations must:

- Be located in the Program Delivery Area.
- Have experience leading a large contractor-based business in Illinois.
- Have experience coaching and mentoring.
- Have experience with the Illinois clean energy industry.
- Have the ability to develop relationships with companies in the Program Delivery Area.
- Work with equity investment eligible community members, organizations, and businesses.

### **Services for Contractor Participants in the Program**

The Regional Leads for this program will provide the following services to selected contractors:

- Operational support grants based on anticipated project size and scope.
- Business coaching based on the participant needs.
- Mentorship for 2 years through a qualified company in the participant's field,
- Individualized expert coaching, including training on working with returning residents and companies that employ them.
- Access to Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Services.
- Assistance with applying for Minority Business Enterprise certification and other relevant certifications and approved vendor status for programs offered by utilities or other entities.
- Assistance with preparing bids and Request for Proposal applications.
- Opportunities to be listed in any relevant directories and databases organized by the Department of Central Management Services.
- Opportunities to connect with participants in other Department programs.
- Assistance connecting with and initiating participation in the Illinois Power Agency's Illinois Shines and Solar for All Programs and utility programs.
- Financial development assistance programs such as zero-interest and low-interest loans of the Climate Bank as established by Article 850 of the Illinois Finance Authority Act or comparable financing mechanism.

### **Role of the Regional Prime Leads**

The Regional Leads shall:

- Publicize the program.
- Recruit qualified program applicants.
- Assist Program applicants with the application process.
- Introduce participants to the Program offerings.
- Conduct entry and annual assessments with participants to identify training, coaching, and other Program service needs.
- Assist participants in developing and measuring progress towards goals on entry and annually.
- Establish a metric reporting system with each participant and track the metrics for progress against the contractor's work plan and Program goals.
- Pair participants with a mentor company.
- Facilitate connections between participants and potential subcontractors and employees.
- Dispense a participant's awarded operational grant funding.
- Connect participants to zero-interest and low-interest loans from the Climate Bank as established by Article 850 of the Illinois Finance Authority or a comparable financing mechanism.
- Utilize the [Energy Workforce Equity Portal](#) to connect with contractors and share resources with participating contractors.
- Encourage participants to apply for appropriate State and private business opportunities.

## RFI on the Clean Energy Primes Contractor Accelerator Program

- Review a participant's progress and make a recommendation to the Department about whether the participant should continue in the Program, be considered a Program graduate, and whether adjustments should be made to a participant's grant funding, loans, and related services.
- Solicit information from participants, which participants shall be required to provide, necessary to understand the participant's business, including financial and income information, certifications that the participant is seeking to obtain, and ownership, employee, and subcontractor data, including compensation, length of service, and demographics.

### **Primes Program Administrator Role**

The Primes Program Administrator shall:

- Collect and report performance metrics
- Review and assess
  - Participant workplans and annual goals;
  - The mentorship program, including approved mentor companies and their stipend awards;
- Work with Primes Leads to publicize the program; design and implement a mentorship program; and ensure participants are quickly onboarded.

### **Mentorship Program**

The Regional Leads will recruit mentors for the Mentorship Program. To be selected as a mentor company, the company must meet the following qualifications: excellent standing with state clean energy programs; 4 or more years of experience in their field; a proven track record of success in their field. Mentor companies may receive a stipend in accordance with the legislation (20 ILCS 730/5-55 Mentorship Program).

The Regional Primes Program Leads will collaborate with the mentor companies and participants to create a plan for ongoing contact such as on-the-job training, site walkthroughs, business process and structure walkthroughs, quality assurance and quality control reviews, and other relevant activities. The Regional Primes Leads will pair mentors with mentees. Regional Primes Leads will review the mentorships annually and review the stipend level. The review shall also ensure that any profit sharing and purchased services agreements adhere to guidelines established by Primes Program Administrator.

### **Reporting**

The Primes Program Administrator and Regional Primes Leads shall collaborate to collect and report the following metrics quarterly to the Department and Energy Workforce Advisory Council. Performance Metrics for this program include (see 20 ILCS 730/5-55 (k) for more details):

- Demographic information on cohort recruiting and formation, including racial, gender, geographic distribution data, and data on the number and percentage of R3 residents, environmental justice community residents, foster care alumni, and formerly convicted persons who are cohort applicants and admitted participants
- Participant contractor engagement in other Illinois clean energy programs such as the Adjustable Block program, Illinois Solar for All program, and the utility-run energy efficiency and electric vehicle programs\*
- Retention of participants in each cohort
- Total projects bid, started, and completed by participants, including information about revenue, hiring, and subcontractor relationships with projects\*
- Certifications issued
- Employment data for contractor hires and industry jobs created, including demographic, salary, length of service, and geographic data\*

## RFI on the Clean Energy Primes Contractor Accelerator Program

- Grants and loans distributed
- Participant satisfaction with the Program

\*Starred metrics shall be collected from Program participants and graduates for 10 years from entrance into the Program to help the Department and Program Administrators understand the Program's long-term effect.

### **Program budget**

Per the legislation, the Department may allocate up to \$3,000,000 annually to the Primes Program Administrator for each of the 3 regional budgets from the Energy Transition Assistance Fund (\$9,000,000 total). The Primes Program Administrator shall work with the Illinois Finance Authority and the Climate Bank as established by Article 850 of the Illinois Finance Authority Act or comparable financing institution so that loan loss reserves may be sufficient to underwrite \$7,000,000 in low-interest loans in each of the 3 Program delivery areas. Any grant and loan funding shall be made available to participants in a timely fashion.

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 Primes Contractor Accelerator Program.

### **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.

### **General administrative questions**

1. DCEO will fund three Regional Primes leads to deliver the program in Northern, Central, and Southern Illinois. How should the Regional Leads recruit, select, and serve participant contractors throughout these large regions?
2. What are the qualifications, capabilities, and resources for organizations to operate a Primes Contractor Accelerator Program successfully?
3. How should the operational support grants and zero-interest or low-interest loans be allocated to

## RFI on the Clean Energy Primes Contractor Accelerator Program

participant contractors and administered by the Program?

4. What are some practical approaches DCEO can use to ensure that the NOFO application process is equitable and accessible to eligible organizations with relevant experience and relationships with diverse contractors?

### **Program Success & Best Practices**

5. How should the Primes Contractor Accelerator Program ensure that potentially interested and eligible contractors, community partners, and other key stakeholders are aware of and engaged with this program?
6. The Primes Contractor Accelerator 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?
7. What are some specific examples of business support services not listed above that would help clean energy businesses build capacity and grow?
8. What kinds of assistance would help participants prepare bids and Request for Proposal applications and help them participate in the Illinois Power Agency and utility programs?
9. Please describe the business coaching, training, and planning support that would be most helpful for participating contractors.
10. How should mentors be recruited and vetted for participation in the Primes Contractor Accelerator Program? How should the Program Lead determine a good match between the Mentor and Participant mentee?

### **Coordination**

11. What existing organizations and financial service firms provide or facilitate access to operational support grants and zero-interest or no-interest loans? How should the Program coordinate with and leverage these additional funding opportunities?
12. How should the Primes Contractor Accelerator Program coordinate with the Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program to support applicants? How do the services of these two programs overlap or complement each other? How should the services between these programs be coordinated?
13. The Primes Contractor Accelerator 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?

### **Budget**

14. Describe a sample budget or provide a sample budget justification for how a Program Lead would spend \$3 million a year to provide one-on-one business services to a cohort of 3-5 participants for a 5-year, 6-month period, and brings on a new cohort every 18 months. What are the most

## RFI on the Clean Energy Primes Contractor Accelerator Program

important budget expense items for Program Leads in the administration and operation of this \$3 million per year program, which includes one-on-one business development services and mentorship for 3-5 participant contractors every 18 months?

15. What compensation level is appropriate as a stipend for business leaders that provide mentorship to participant contractors?

### **Other**

16. Please provide past examples, experiences, or lessons learned from other similar programs. This can include approaches from outside of Illinois.

17. 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 Primes Contractor Accelerator Program.

Responses to this RFI are due by submitting your information at the online form:

<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/9f195977eb954fd1a81fd48784905477>

Responses are due by May 5, 2023.