

Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO)



**Illinois
Department of Commerce
& Economic Opportunity**

Public Input Sought - Request for Information (RFI)

Illinois Clean Jobs Workforce Network Program

Energy Transition Navigators Program

Energy Transition Barrier Reduction Program

Please respond by submitting your information to the following:

<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/eb7a37d169fe4cb5a09d31be009010cb>

Purpose

DCEO is seeking information from stakeholders on the anticipated needs of target communities, the structure and eligible uses of funds, and additional feedback to help the creation of the Illinois Clean Jobs Workforce Network Program, Energy Transition Navigators Program, and Energy Transition Barrier Reduction Program.

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, which is designed to equitably transition the state to 100 percent clean energy by 2050. Under CEJA, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (“DCEO or the “Department”) is responsible for implementing workforce development and community support programs designed to prepare the Illinois workforce for the transition to clean energy and to support Illinois communities undergoing energy transitions, including:

1. Clean Jobs Workforce Network Program
2. Clean Jobs Curriculum
3. Illinois Climate Works Pre-apprenticeship Program
4. Returning Residents Clean Jobs Training Program
5. Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program
6. Clean Energy Primes Contractor Accelerator Program
7. Energy Transition Navigators Program
8. Energy Transition Barrier Reduction Program
9. Energy Transition Community Grant Program
10. Jobs and Environmental Justice Grant Program
11. Displaced Energy Workers Bill of Rights
12. Energy Transition Workforce Commission
13. Energy Workforce Advisory Council
14. Utility Job Training Programs (220 ILCS 5/16-108.12)
15. Coal to Solar and Energy Storage Initiative Fund Grant Program

Scope & Objective

To ensure the programs best meet the needs of Illinoisans, this request for public information (RFI) seeks input on three related programs: the **Illinois Clean Jobs Workforce Network Program**, the **Energy Transition Navigators Program**, and the **Energy Transition Barrier Reduction Program**, which were established by CEJA and will be administered by DCEO. Respondents may choose to reply to any or all questions in this RFI.

DCEO is seeking information from stakeholders on the content and outcomes of these programs, desired characteristics of providers, opportunities for program coordination, and feedback to help inform program creation.

Please note that the RFI is not an application for the programs. There will be one or more future Notices 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 to 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 obtained in a participant's response will be made available for public review and may be used by DCEO to inform the implementation of the Illinois Clean Jobs Workforce Network Program, Energy Transition Navigators Program, and Energy Transition Barrier Reduction Program.

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

Workforce Program Summaries

The **Clean Jobs Workforce Network Program** (20 ILCS 730/5-20) will create a network of 13 Clean Jobs Hubs throughout the state to provide training for clean energy careers. The hubs will be located in or near the following areas: Chicago (South Side), Chicago (Southwest and West Sides), Waukegan, Rockford, Aurora, Joliet, Peoria, Champaign, Danville, Decatur, Carbondale, East St. Louis, and Alton. A central community-based organization¹ and its subcontractors will deliver program elements at each hub site. Delivery of the program elements may be customized to fit the needs of the service delivery area.

Key program elements include:

- Deliver clean energy jobs training that aligns with the Clean Jobs Curriculum Framework. This Framework (currently being developed by DCEO with stakeholder input) will include training requirements for certification preparation and skill development (personal effectiveness skills, academic skills, workplace skills, and technical skills) to prepare people for a range of clean energy careers. Hubs can determine which training areas to focus on based on regional workforce needs.
- Coordinate with Energy Transition Navigators and the Energy Transition Barrier Reduction Program to increase participation in the clean energy workforce and training opportunities offered through the hubs.
- Partner and coordinate with employers to ensure program participants have priority access to workplace training and hiring opportunities.
- Coordinate with other community-based organizations, educational institutions, and labor-based training providers to ensure participants have dedicated and sustained support to complete training and join the clean energy workforce.

¹ "Community-based organization" means an organization that: (1) provides employment, skill development, or related services to the community; (2) includes community colleges, nonprofits, and local governments; (3) has at least one main operating office in the community or region it serves; and (4) demonstrates relationships with local residents and other organizations serving the community. (20 ILCS 730/5-5)

The **Energy Transition Navigators Program** (20 ILCS 730/5-35) will fund community-based providers² to serve as Energy Transition Navigators. These Navigators will provide education, outreach, and recruitment services to equity-focused populations to promote awareness and engagement with statewide and local clean energy workforce development systems.

Energy Transition Navigators will:

- Provide information and consultation to equity-focused populations on educational opportunities and supportive services offered through CEJA.
- Establish partnerships with employers, educational institutions, local economic development organizations, environmental justice organizations, trades groups, labor unions, and entities that conduct outreach, education, and recruitment to equity-focused populations to (a) target the skill needs of local industry and (b) increase participation in the CEJA workforce programs.
- Connect participants interested in starting their businesses with entrepreneurial services, such as a Small Business Development Center or Procurement Technical Assistance Center.
- Provide support, where reasonable, to individuals and entities applying for CEJA services and programs.
- Identify individuals who need upskilling to advance in their careers and work with local industries to identify skill needs for localized training curricula.

The **Energy Transition Barrier Reduction Program** (20 ILCS 730/5-30) will fund community-based organizations and other nonprofits to provide supportive services and barrier-reduction funds to eligible individuals participating in the **Clean Jobs Workforce Network Program** and the **Illinois Climate Works Preapprenticeship Program**. Services will help individuals overcome financial and other barriers to participation in these programs. DCEO will determine appropriate allowable program costs, elements, and financial supports to reduce barriers to successful participation for eligible participants. Organizations providing barrier reduction services will coordinate with Energy Transition Navigators to ensure eligible individuals can access services.

Participant Organization Information

Please provide the following information for the organization or community submitting a response:

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

² "Community-based provider" means a not-for-profit organization that has a history of serving low-wage or low-skilled workers or individuals from economically disadvantaged communities. (20 ILCS 730/5-35 (a)).

"Economically disadvantaged community" means areas of one or more census tracts where the average household income does not exceed 80% of the area median income. (20 ILCS 730/5-35 (a)).

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 or proprietary information. All feedback will be posted on the DCEO website. While there is no word count limit, please be as brief as possible.

1. Thinking about the Illinois region you are most familiar with, what are the clean energy training and workforce needs of this region? Please also list any employers that could hire clean energy job trainees in this region.
2. How should **Clean Jobs Workforce Network** hubs ensure accessible and equitable distribution of training programs and services across their region?
3. Considering the qualifications of the organization or team that will run the **Clean Jobs Workforce Network** hubs, what experience, program capacity, and community connections should they have?
4. How should the community-based organizations that run the **Clean Jobs Workforce Network** hubs coordinate with their subcontractors to provide holistic training opportunities and support services for program participants?
5. What experience, program capacity, and community connections should the community-based providers who serve as **Energy Transition Navigators** have?
6. What experience, program capacity, and community connections should the community-based providers who administer the **Energy Transition Barrier Reduction Program** have?
7. How should the **Clean Jobs Workforce Network** program coordinate with the **Energy Transition Navigators** and the **Energy Transition Barrier Reduction** program to provide holistic support to program participants? Consider each program's unique and overlapping roles and any handoff or coordination procedures in your answer.
8. How should the **Clean Jobs Workforce Network** and the **Energy Transition Navigator** programs work with employers to identify needs for localized curriculum, offer work-based training, and connect participants to jobs?
9. Should the **Energy Transition Navigator** and the **Energy Transition Barrier Reduction** programs be embedded, co-located, or independently situated from the Clean Jobs Workforce Network hubs? Please provide your rationale in the response.

10. How should the three programs coordinate with the **Climate Works Preapprenticeship Program**, the **Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program**, and the **Clean Energy Primes Contractor Accelerator Program** to meet the needs of program participants?
11. What best practices should be employed by these programs to ensure that training programs and services reach target populations³ and improve employment outcomes?
12. Please share examples of workforce development and training programs (including your own) that have successfully served these target populations.⁴
13. What challenges or roadblocks can you foresee in carrying out the mission of these three programs, based on your experience with similarly run programs? What advice would you provide to address these challenges?
14. For the **Energy Transition Barrier Reduction Program**, what program costs, elements, and financial supports should DCEO consider as effective ways to reduce barriers to successful participation for eligible participants? Examples include support for transportation, childcare, supplies, income support, and more.
15. What are some approaches and policies DCEO can adopt during the NOFO and grant application process to ensure that eligible community-based organizations with relevant experience and relationships with potential trainees and employers have the information and tools they need to provide a good application and, if awarded, run an effective program?
16. How should these programs leverage existing funds, programs, and services to serve participants more effectively and extend the reach of existing community resources?
17. For these programs, what would program success look like? How should DCEO define and measure success?
18. Please provide any additional comments or thoughts not addressed explicitly 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 Jobs Workforce Network, Energy Transition Navigators, and Energy Transition Barrier Reduction Programs.

³ Target populations include applicants who reside in a geographic area that is impacted by economic and environmental challenges; applicants who face barriers to employment, such as low educational attainment, prior involvement with the criminal legal system, and language barriers; applicants that are graduates of or currently enrolled in the foster care system; and displaced energy workers.

⁴ See note 3, above.

Submit your responses to this RFI using this form:

<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/eb7a37d169fe4cb5a09d31be009010cb>

Responses are due by January 6, 2023.