



Use the Illinois Works Jobs Program to establish A pipeline into joint apprenticeship programs for workers from disadvantaged communities.

Climate Jobs Recommendation

Illinois can create clean energy employment opportunities in disadvantaged communities while preserving the high quality and safety that consumers deserve. This can be achieved by properly funding, appropriately staffing, and building upon the state-approved Illinois Works Jobs Program to include the clean energy sector. The Illinois Works Jobs Program was enacted in 2019 as part of the the historic Rebuild Illinois capital program. The Illinois Works Jobs Program is a cooperative effort between developers, contractors, unions, nonprofits, and community development agencies to recruit young workers, people of color, women, and other people from disadvantaged communities into joint labor-management apprenticeship programs and lifelong careers in construction. Developers and clean energy project owners participating in the Illinois Works Jobs Program would be given preference in awards for renewable energy credits (RECs) in Illinois Power Agency procurements.

Background and Details

The Illinois Works Jobs Program would become the centralized, “one-stop shop” for improving equity and opportunity on all taxpayer-funded and ratepayer-funded construction projects. The Illinois Works Jobs Program administers grants to nonprofit community-based organizations throughout Illinois to recruit and provide apprenticeship readiness training for people from disadvantaged communities while also ensuring that apprentices account for 10% of the total hours worked on public works projects costing \$500,000 or more. The Illinois Works Jobs Program can be enhanced by including the clean energy sector, investing in a small business incubator program for Illinois-based clean energy entrepreneurs, and adopting concrete hiring targets on clean energy projects– similar to those utilized by the City of Los Angeles and the City of San Francisco in their public works programs. Two pilot programs, one located in the Chicago area and one Downstate, should also be encouraged to test and demonstrate the effectiveness of the Illinois Works Jobs Program in the clean energy space. HIRE360– an organization launched by developers, contractors, unions, and the United Way of Metro Chicago to improve diversity in the trades and form new minority- and women-owned businesses through a contractor incubator– and similar nonprofit programs have the knowledge and the ability to lead these two pilot programs (Ori, 2019).

A Pro-Worker, Pro-Climate Illinois

An improved, well-funded Illinois Works Jobs Program would encourage utility companies, developers, contractors, and subcontractors to hire workers from historically underrepresented populations. Since the transition to a clean energy economy relies on ratepayer-funded subsidies created by the State of Illinois, it should reflect middle-class earnings, quality standards, and diversity goals supported by the people of Illinois through prevailing wage standards, project labor agreements, and joint labor-management apprenticeship programs– which deliver training hours, graduation rates, and competitive earnings at an average wage of \$40 per hour that rival the performance of Illinois’ four-year universities (Manzo & Bruno, 2020). By actively recruiting individuals from disadvantaged communities, preparing them for lifelong careers in construction and in the clean energy sector, and incentivizing developers and contractors to hire workers who have completed the recruitment and training process, the Illinois Works Jobs Program can ensure that clean energy and energy efficiency projects will be built locally by highly-trained workers from Illinois.