

Ameren Illinois Company Market Development Initiative

Assessment 2 Final Report

December 2025

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1. Executive Summary

This report presents the results and recommendations from the second assessment of the Ameren Illinois Company's (AIC) Energy Efficiency (EE) Market Development Initiative (MDI), conducted by The JPI Group and Opinion Dynamics. The assessment primarily covers MDI activities during 2023 and 2024, with some elements extending into early 2025. The MDI aims to create equitable access to energy savings for AIC customers while promoting growth opportunities for individual careers and businesses in the energy efficiency workforce. The MDI has three specific goals: to 1) engage customers who have not previously benefited from energy efficiency; 2) increase the number of energy efficiency jobs available to local candidates in the communities where they live and work; and 3) support new or growing energy efficiency businesses. The MDI includes three distinct channels: Community-Based Organization (CBO) Management, Workforce Development (WFD) Program, and Local Area Vendor Advancement (LAVA).

1.1 Assessment Overview

This assessment included all offerings within the MDI that were not included in the first assessment:¹

- **The Workforce Development (WFD) Channel:** includes training, job placement support, job readiness resources, wraparound services and support, internships, and scholarships to increase the number of individuals working in energy efficiency. This channel is implemented by Leidos and SEEL, with additional contributions from the National Energy Foundation (NEF) in internships.
- **The Program Ally Incubator (Incubator):** provides training and support for contractors working in AIC service territory to start or grow their businesses in the energy efficiency field and participate in AIC Energy Efficiency Programs. This is part of the LAVA channel, implemented by Leidos and Walker-Miller Energy Solutions.
- **Grant Writing Support:** provides training and support designed to assist community-based organizations (CBOs) and both for-profit and non-profit entities in securing funding for energy efficiency initiatives and related projects. This channel is implemented by Leidos and SEEL.

The assessment had the following research objectives:

- Assess the impacts the MDI has had on the energy efficiency workforce (individual careers and business growth).
- Assess how the MDI has enhanced AIC Energy Efficiency Programs.
- Identify opportunities to increase the impact of the MDI.
- Identify potential improvements for MDI implementation processes.

To address these objectives, we analyzed MDI and AIC Energy Efficiency Program tracking data and collected feedback from various stakeholders, including participants, partners, and program staff. More details on our assessment approach are available in Section 3. Our data collection methods included phone and online surveys, as well as in-depth interviews.

¹ The first assessment covered the CBO Management channel and the Vendor Procurement Database within the LAVA channel.

1.1.1 Data Sources and Limitations

The MDI's tracking data contained information that allowed us to assess some, but not all, of the MDI's impacts empirically. Scholarships and CBO Grant Writing Support particularly lacked sufficient data to understand the career outcomes of scholarship recipients or the connections between awarded grants and the MDI's objectives. As such, additional primary data collection with participants was necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the MDI's impacts. We conducted a census of all participants for the 2023-2024 period, but despite close coordination with the implementation teams, we generally received low response rates to our surveys, even with an incentive offer. These challenges further reinforce the importance of establishing more systematic, ongoing participant follow-up and data collection mechanisms earlier in program delivery. This limits the generalizability of participant feedback, which may be subject to non-response bias (e.g., those who did not benefit as much may not have responded). While anecdotal, the responses we received nevertheless add important nuance and expand upon the empirical impacts presented in the data, providing numerous examples of how the MDI is accomplishing its vision. Participant feedback also contained a balance of positive feedback and constructive criticism to help the MDI improve. In addition to the limited number of survey responses, the completeness of the tracking data varied across years and offerings, constraining our ability to fully assess participation levels and program outcomes—particularly for scholarships. These limitations underscore the need for more systematic and comprehensive data collection in the future.

1.2 Findings

We summarize the key findings from the assessment below. Detailed findings by channel are available in Section 4.

1.2.1 Impacts on the Energy Efficiency Workforce

The MDI has made substantial strides in enhancing the energy efficiency workforce by facilitating training programs and job placement initiatives. Participants in the WFD Program reported increased job readiness and placements in energy efficiency roles, showcasing a direct correlation between MDI and individual career development. Respondents indicated that the MDI successfully equipped them with essential skills, ultimately resulting in a more robust local workforce ready to engage in energy efficiency projects. Additionally, Program Ally Incubator participants who responded noted that the MDI has empowered them with training and resources to expand their businesses, thereby bolstering the overall energy efficiency sector. The Grant Writing Support channel also supported the MDI's goals by helping CBOs win grants from the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA) Hub and other initiatives that support their efforts to grow the local energy efficiency workforce.

Key MDI accomplishments related to the energy efficiency workforce include:

- 48 of 450 WFD Program participants in 2023 and 2024 gained employment through their participation in WFD program, and at least 25 gained jobs in energy efficiency. Within WFD, 21 of 22 participants in the 2023 and 2024 MDI Summer Internship Program secured employment, and 14 secured jobs in energy efficiency. There is room for improvement in post-participation employment rates; however, the MDI's impact is constrained by challenging local job market conditions, particularly in rural areas, which offer limited employment opportunities for participants.

- MDI awarded \$178K in scholarship funds in 2023 and 2024 to 70 community college students pursuing degrees in fields related to energy efficiency (e.g., HVAC, engineering, industrial technology, construction management, etc.). Post-graduation employment tracking data is not available.
- All (5 out of 5) Incubator survey participants reported that the program had a strong impact on attracting new customers to their businesses; 2 out of those 5 also noted that the Incubator prompted them to hire additional staff to manage the increased workload. In terms of revenue, 2 out of 5 participants experienced increases of more than 50%, one reported an increase of 11–20%, and another saw gains of up to 10%. Notably, two participants attributed more than half of their total revenue growth directly to the program.
- In 2023 through early 2025, Grant Writing Support helped five CBOs win \$9.7M in grant funds.

1.2.2 Enhancing AIC Energy Efficiency Programs

The achievements of the Program Ally Incubator and WFD Program synergize to improve the overall delivery and reach of AIC's Energy Efficiency Programs. The Incubator has helped AIC grow the number of Program Allies supporting AIC's Energy Efficiency Programs, with several graduates contributing to increased presence in historically underserved communities. Meanwhile, the WFD Program not only connects individuals to career opportunities within organizations dedicated to delivering AIC's Energy Efficiency Programs but also enhances the capacity of these organizations to better serve their communities and AIC. Of the 9 CBOs and 2 colleges that received grant writing support, three operate in historically underserved communities, and in some cases, the grant funds expanded their capacity to perform upgrade services for AIC's Energy Efficiency Programs.

Key MDI accomplishments related to enhancing AIC Energy Efficiency Programs include:

- At least 14 of 450 WFD participants in 2023 and 2024 landed roles within organizations involved with AIC Energy Efficiency Program delivery (e.g., Program Allies, CBO Partners, and implementation vendors).
- 19 of 21 Incubator graduates from 2023 and 2024 are completing projects for AIC's Energy Efficiency Program. A total of 387 projects were completed by the 2023 Incubator cohort after graduation, compared to 73 before graduation (more than five times the previous amount). A total of 197 projects were completed by the 2024 Incubator cohort after graduation, compared to 27 before graduation (more than seven times the previous amount).
- 4 out of 21 Incubator graduates in 2023 and 2024, and 3 CBOs that were rewarded grants from 2023 to 2025, are operating in historically underserved communities, increasing AIC's presence in those areas.
- At least one of the CBOs that participated in the Grant Writing Support Program was awarded a grant to enhance their capacity to complete projects through the AIC Energy Efficiency Programs (particularly the Income Qualified Initiative).

1.2.3 Opportunities to Increase Impact

The assessment identified opportunities to enhance the MDI's impact through improved program processes. Generally, participants in the Incubator and WFD Program were satisfied with their experiences, though some noted opportunities for additional support. School Partners and CBOs, however, reported more varied experiences. While school staff emphasized that scholarships were

highly beneficial for students, they also described communication and administrative challenges in managing the scholarship process. Among CBOs, some were satisfied with the Grant Writing Support program, whereas others identified opportunities to improve the quality and tailoring of the support they received.

There are specific improvements that each channel can make, which are detailed in Section 5 along with our recommendations. However, several key themes emerged across the channels. First, there is a need to enhance long-term data tracking to better measure post-participation impacts of the MDI. In practice, this type of tracking often relies on a combination of self-reported outcomes and administrative or partner-provided data, and requires deliberate system design to be sustainable over time. Second, there are missed opportunities to better communicate and coordinate across channels, which has translated into a general lack of connection across MDI services. Third, participants indicated a need for continued support post-participation, which may in part be solved through greater connections across MDI programs.

2. Introduction

This report provides findings and recommendations from The JPI Group and Opinion Dynamics' second assessment of the AIC EE MDI.² The second assessment builds on the initial evaluation of the MDI by examining program components that were not included in Assessment 1. Specifically, this assessment focuses on the WFD Program, the Program Ally Incubator, and the Grant Writing Support channel.

The purpose of Assessment 2 is to document recent implementation processes, analyze participant and partner experiences, and assess the impact of these offerings on Ameren Illinois' energy efficiency workforce and contractor ecosystem. The analysis primarily covers activities implemented in 2023 and 2024, with early 2025 activity included when available.

This report is organized as follows: Section 3 summarizes the evaluation methods, Section 4 presents findings for each channel, and Section 5 provides recommendations to strengthen, integrate, and expand the MDI moving forward.

2.1 Research Objectives

This assessment had the following research objectives:

- Assess the impacts the MDI has had on the energy efficiency workforce (individual careers and business growth)
- Assess how the MDI has enhanced AIC Energy Efficiency Programs.
- Identify opportunities to increase the impact of the MDI
- Identify potential improvements to MDI implementation processes

² The first assessment was completed in 2023. <https://www.ilsag.info/wp-content/uploads/AIC-MDI-Evaluation-Report-The-JPI-Group-Opinion-Dynamics-April-2024.pdf>

3. Methods

We collected feedback on the MDI programs implemented in 2023 and 2024 from participants and staff involved in the programs. Data collection methods included phone and online surveys, and in-depth interviews (see Table 1 below). For the Workforce Development Participant Survey, we collaborated with SEEL, and for the Incubator Survey, we partnered with Walker-Miller Energy Services, asking both implementers to directly contact participants to encourage participation. This approach leveraged participants' familiarity with the implementers to improve response rates. Despite these efforts, participation remained limited, as 43 Workforce Development participants and eight Incubator participants initially agreed to participate; however, the number of surveys completed was lower than expected (see Table 1). As a result, findings should be interpreted as indicative rather than statistically representative.

In addition to the primary data collection efforts, we reviewed tracking data and program materials provided by AIC to gain a better understanding of the MDI's offerings, document program performance, and understand each offering's structure. Tracking data varied in completeness across offerings and years; therefore, some metrics represent minimum known values. All survey and interview responses were coded thematically and analyzed independently by Opinion Dynamics and The JPI Group. All participant responses were kept confidential and reported only in aggregate.

Table 1. Data Collection Methods

Method	Purpose	Responses	Percent Complete Responses
Staff Interviews	Gather AIC, Leidos, Walker-Miller, and SEEL staff input on key successes and challenges. Document historical program implementation and recent changes.	7	100%
Program Ally Incubator Graduate Survey	Collect feedback from 2023 and 2024 Incubator graduates on how they have applied what they learned from the Incubator, their engagement with the AIC EE Programs, and the impact the Incubator has had on their businesses. Identify opportunities for improvement.	5	23%
Workforce Development Participant Survey	Collect feedback from 2023 and 2024 recipients of jobseeker support and wraparound services on the impact Workforce Development has had on their careers. Identify opportunities for improvement.	14	3%
School Partner Interviews	Collect feedback from staff at community colleges that partner with AIC to provide scholarships on the successes, challenges, and opportunities for improvement of scholarships.	4	57%
Grant Writing Recipient Interviews	Collect feedback from staff at CBOs and community colleges that received grant writing training and support from the MDI on the successes, challenges, and opportunities for improvement for grant writing support. Collect data on how CBOs have used their funding, what outcomes they have achieved, and how those outcomes relate to the goals of the MDI, if at all.	4	36%

4. Detailed Findings

This section presents the results of our assessment for each channel included in this study. We begin each subsection with a review of accomplishments across the 2023–2024 assessment period and into early 2025 based on data and materials provided by AIC. We then provide the results of our primary data collection (surveys or interviews) with participants and partners.

4.1 Workforce Development

- *The WFD program engaged 450 participants (2023–2024), offering training, job-seeking support, internships, and wraparound services, with 48 participants gaining employment; at least 25 in EE and at least 14 with AIC-affiliated organizations.*
- *Despite high-quality training and supportive resources, participants experience a disconnect between skill development and actual EE employment opportunities, underscoring a need for improved pathways into the EE workforce.*
- *Wraparound services help reduce financial barriers, but some participants are unaware of them, reducing their reach.*
- *Scholarships support disadvantaged students in EE-related programs, but limited tracking of recipient outcomes, low awareness of other WFD offerings, and administrative challenges hinder overall program effectiveness.*

The Market Development Initiative's Workforce Development (WFD) Program offers support for individuals seeking careers in energy efficiency. Emphasis is placed on supporting returning citizens and other underserved groups, including those defined by race or ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability status, and veteran status. The goal of this program is to increase the number of individuals working in energy efficiency jobs through various offerings, including job placement support, job readiness training, internships, and wraparound services.

The WFD Program had a total of 450 unique participants across 2023 and 2024. Table 2 includes the number of individuals who have received different types of WFD support (i.e., wraparound services, support as a jobseeker, training, and/or employment). Some participants received more than one type of support.

Table 2. Workforce Development Participation in 2023 and 2024

Year	Total Participants	Job-Seeking Support ¹	Wraparound Services	Training
2023	212	157	23	47
2024	238	180	31	75
Total	450	337	54	122

¹ Job-seeking Support reflects the total number of individuals who interacted with the program, including those receiving career counseling or resume services.

Of the 450 participants in 2023 and 2024, 48 have gained employment through their participation in the WFD program, according to MDI tracking data. Of those 48, at least 25 secured roles in EE, and at least 14 participants who have secured employment in EE are working for organizations directly involved with AIC EE Program delivery, such as Program Allies, CBO Partners, and implementation

vendors. Participation in Workforce Development services reflects engagement across a range of readiness levels and career stages, including individuals who are exploring energy careers, building foundational skills, or receiving application and interview support. Participation should not be interpreted as an expectation of immediate job placement, as employment outcomes are influenced by individual readiness, employer hiring decisions, and broader labor market conditions.

Although we received a limited response, the survey anecdotally confirms these trends: 5 of 14 respondents gained employment in energy efficiency, and 4 of the 5 specifically worked with AIC Program Allies.

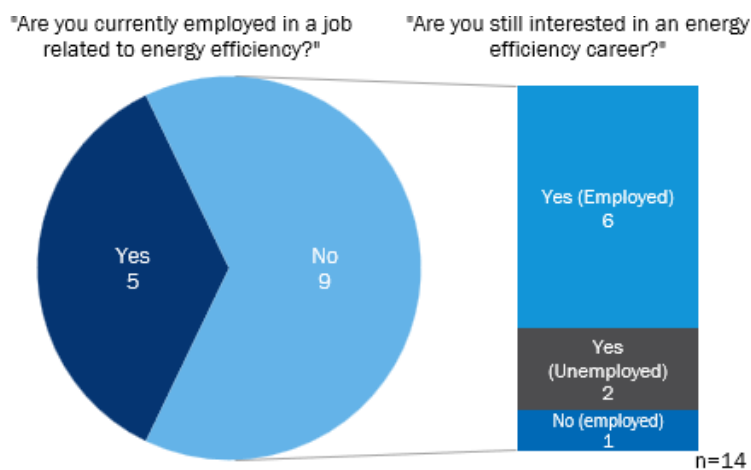
4.1.1 Workforce Development Participant Survey Results

We administered an online survey to gain a better understanding of the program's overall impact on advancing careers in energy efficiency. The survey included questions about participants' satisfaction with the program, their career development, and employment experiences and challenges, as well as sets of questions pertaining to specific aspects of the WFD: training and job placement services, scholarship and internship programs, and wraparound services. We describe these offerings in more detail in their respective sections below. The complete survey instrument is provided in Appendix A. Although only 14 of the 450 WFD participants over the two-year period completed the survey, this response rate reflects known challenges in maintaining contact with participants after program engagement, particularly given varying levels of readiness, mobility, and ongoing support needs. While limited, the feedback still provided valuable qualitative insight into participant experiences with the program and perceived career outcomes.

Impacts on Career and AIC Workforce

The findings in this section of the report illustrate the WFD program's influence on participants' EE career readiness, employment outcomes, and connection to AIC's workforce.

Figure 1. Employment and Interest in EE Careers



For some respondents, the WFD program served as a gateway to a career in energy efficiency. At the time of participation in the program, none of the survey respondents were employed in the energy efficiency (EE) industry. Upon completion, however, 5 out of 14 transitioned into EE careers after participating in the program, demonstrating a positive impact on EE workforce development (see Figure 1 above). These career outcomes include a range of roles, such as consulting and smart thermostat solutions. Of the five who transitioned into EE careers, one individual was participating in

the AIC Summer Internship Program, and the remaining four were working professionals. All five respondents reported that the program was extremely helpful in enabling them to start a career in the energy efficiency industry.

Interest in an EE career remains high, both among those unemployed and those employed in other industries, but some have struggled to find a job. Specifically, eight out of nine respondents who are not currently working in energy efficiency expressed an interest in pursuing careers in this field. Only one respondent indicated they were neither employed in the EE industry nor interested in an EE career (Figure 1). Respondents indicated various barriers to entering the EE workforce despite support from the WFD program. One respondent shared their experience:

*“Location has hindered my opportunities.
Rural areas have not caught up to current necessities.”*

This sense that there isn't robust job availability across the state was shared by other respondents. Particularly, feedback on training and job placement services indicated that the lack of job opportunities is a barrier to pursuing a career in EE after participating in the program. This sentiment is supported by broader data on the job market in Illinois, which indicates the challenge is not motivation, awareness, or training access; it is a mismatch between where job seekers live and where EE hiring is occurring.

Broader labor market conditions reinforce these barriers.³ The sentiments expressed in the survey align with broader economic patterns in AIC's service territory. The region is experiencing population contraction, slower-than-average job growth, and declining labor force participation – conditions that reduce the availability of local workers in specialized fields like energy. Key labor market factors shaping opportunity in AIC territory include:

Population decline reduces local demand and employer presence.

- The AIC service territory has lost 27,658 residents since 2019 (-0.7%).
- It is projected to lose another 42,695 residents by 2029.
- Illinois overall is experiencing similar contraction (-155,146 residents since 2019).

This decline disproportionately affects rural counties, precisely the areas where many MDI participants live, and results in fewer contractors, fewer community-based employers, and fewer job openings.

Job growth is occurring, but more slowly than national trends, and unevenly across the state.

- Jobs in the AIC region increased only 0.4% from 2019–2024 (compared to 4.3% nationally).
- Labor force participation slipped slightly from 64.7% to 64.6%, indicating stagnation.

This slow growth means even sectors projected to expand, like energy, face hiring headwinds because overall market dynamism is low.

Wages are competitive, but not enough to offset geographic limitations.

- Average earnings per job in AIC territory are \$78.9K, about \$7.9K below the national average.

³ Source: Analyst provides data as a hybrid dataset derived from official government sources including the US Census Bureau, Bureau of Economic Analysis, and Bureau of Labor Statistics, in addition to data available from online profiles and job postings

- Median household income statewide remains above the national median, but local disparities persist.

In many rural areas, EE employers operate on thin margins, limiting their ability to expand hiring and absorb newly trained talent.

There is a strong connection between employment in EE and supporting AIC Program Allies.

Although none of the respondents were directly employed by AIC, four out of five current employees in the energy efficiency industry reported that their companies are affiliated with AIC as Program Allies. Their employers support a variety of AIC channels, providing services that range from administration to installation. This outcome indicates that the WFD channel is not only preparing individuals for the EE workforce generally but is also helping strengthen Ameren's own contractor delivery network.

The benefits of WFD extend beyond job placement. Respondents gained professional benefits, including ongoing coaching, mentorship, and networking opportunities that went beyond their direct employment. They also gained insights into energy efficiency through education on industry-related equipment and science, as well as access to various employment pathways. Beyond professional resources, participants noted positive personal benefits. One explained that the program gave them a sense of community, while another described receiving help with their AIC energy bills.

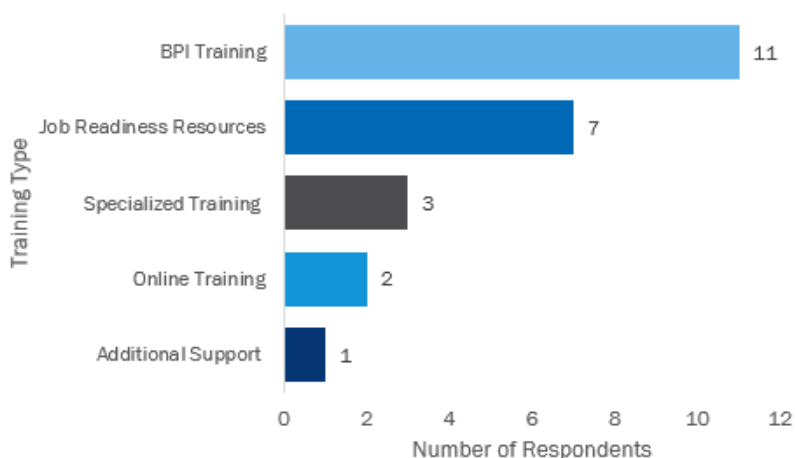
“[Ameren] stayed in contact and offered [their] resources far beyond my [tenure] of MDI. I look forward to exploring ways to be involved and give back to the next generation through my work, experience, and voice.”

Training and Job Placement Feedback

The training and job placement resources cater to individuals at all career stages, including high school graduates, returning citizens, and seasoned professionals looking to enhance their skills. Key offerings include job readiness services such as one-on-one coaching, resume design, job application assistance, interview preparation, and support to eliminate hiring barriers. Training programs combine technical and virtual components to help participants earn credentials in the energy efficiency sector, with the Building Performance Institute (BPI) training being a popular option that prepares individuals for the BPI certification exam. The survey gathered feedback from participants on these offerings.

Each of the 14 respondents participated in some form of training and job placement offering. Most of them, 11, received BPI training, while three received specialized training through a partner, and two engaged in online self-paced training in related skills. Additionally, seven respondents accessed job readiness resources, and only one received extra support, specifically interview preparation for returning citizens. Figure 2 offers a detailed breakdown of the types of training and job placement support participants received. There is an overlap between categories, as some respondents participated in multiple offerings, one even taking advantage of all five.

Figure 2. Respondent Participation in Training and Job Placement Resources



All respondents expressed satisfaction with training and job readiness resources.

Most (11 of 13) respondents who participated in at least one type of training reported being “extremely satisfied,” while only two were moderately satisfied. In terms of job readiness, all seven respondents were satisfied, with three employed in industries outside of EE, though two remain interested in EE opportunities. Lastly, the individual that received interview preparation support was also extremely satisfied with that assistance.

Job readiness resources were educational and beneficial for participants’ career advancement. All participants reported that these resources left a positive impact on their career development in some way, even if they are not currently employed in EE. One respondent expressed that these resources provided a supportive environment where guidance and coaching were highly valued. Another respondent noted that instructors exhibited cultural competence, creating a safe space for non-traditional job seekers. It was also stated that the pace and workload of the program were ideal, enabling effective learning. One participant noted having opportunities to gain corporate experience to prepare for a career.

“[I] was able to learn career-making information and become employable.”

Training and certification participants felt prepared for careers in energy efficiency. The educational materials and topics covered in trainings were described as comprehensive, practical, and relevant to an EE career. Participants found the information provided to be valuable, enhancing their understanding of energy efficiency and its importance. The trainers were professional, knowledgeable, and responsive to questions, ensuring a smooth training process. Communication and support throughout the training were strong, fostering a learning environment where participants felt more confident in themselves. The training was well-structured, and the instructors were patient and understanding, contributing to a comprehensive and informative experience.

“The education was very thorough and gave me the knowledge to begin working immediately after graduation.”

Continued support could bridge the gap between training and job opportunities in EE. Respondents reported that continued post-training resources would enhance their ability to transition into energy efficiency careers, as there is a noticeable disconnect between the training received and the availability of tangible job opportunities. While they felt prepared for an EE career, many lacked the means to capitalize on that preparation. Additional job readiness resources could further improve participant experiences and outcomes; some respondents expressed a desire for more educational opportunities, while others emphasized the importance of increasing in-person interactions with these resources.

“Job opportunities would be very beneficial, with training, I believe they are or should be in unison with one another.”

“The training and certification programs were very good. The only issue is finding work in the field after certification.”

Investing in post-training support and resources could address the disconnect between training opportunities and employment in EE, a core barrier constraining the WFD program's impact and alignment with Ameren's EE workforce goals.

Wraparound Services Feedback

Five respondents received wraparound services and support, which typically include financial assistance for expenses such as car or housing payments, but are tailored to help participants succeed in their professional endeavors. According to the MDI tracking data, wraparound support totaled over \$54,000 across 2023 and 2024. Wraparound funds were used to support WFD participants' basic needs, housing stability, and ability to attend training and pursue employment. Expenses included rent, security deposits, utilities, food, transportation and hotel stays for training or relocation. The program also covered training stipends, missed-work wages, certification fees, tools, textbooks, work apparel, and other supports that helped participants stay engaged in workforce development and energy-efficiency training.

To qualify for these services, individuals must be engaged in additional offerings from the MDI. This ensures that wraparound services serve as supplemental support for those actively working with AIC to pursue a career in energy efficiency. To facilitate this support, AIC connects participants with local Climate and Equitable Jobs (CEJA) hubs and navigators, which provide job support in the clean energy industry. MDI funding covers any gaps that these resources may not address. Four respondents received support primarily through AIC, with one respondent getting support from a CEJA hub.

Wraparound services were beneficial in supporting participants' career goals. Those who received services reported various forms of support, including stipends for job training, gas cards, grocery assistance, and financial stipends for home down payments. While four out of the five recipients found the support extremely beneficial for their career goals, one individual indicated that the assistance was only slightly helpful, expressing a desire for more support in post-training job searching.

“They helped me afford gas and food when I could not, while unemployed and studying as a full-time student.”

Some participants are unaware of this resource. Of the nine respondents who did not receive wraparound services, four were not aware of it, suggesting a need for greater connection across the WFD offerings.

Internship Feedback

Three respondents participated in the AIC Summer Internship Program. The AIC Summer Internship Program provides funding to employers to host internships for individuals seeking to start their careers in the energy efficiency sector. Internships last between 8 and 12 weeks, requiring interns to work no less than 30 hours per week. The program's primary goal is to fund energy efficiency positions that employers would not otherwise be able to support. A secondary objective is to encourage interns to transition to full-time roles after their internships.

There was mixed feedback on how well the Summer Internship Program prepares participants for careers in energy efficiency. One respondent felt the program set them up for success to a great extent, while others replied that it only set them up to a moderate and small extent.

“It opened me up to a new industry, which I now have a career in. I got a chance to have in-field experience, and know how to do a lot of work, which is ideal in my eyes when seeking leadership roles.”

Two out of three internship participants interviewed for this assessment received return offers, but neither chose to accept. Both indicated personal reasons for declining their offers, including plans to return to school and to pursue their own business ventures.

“The environment wasn't what I was looking for.”

Despite mixed feedback, the Summer Internship Program may play a role in guiding participants toward careers in energy efficiency. Of the three internship participants who provided feedback as part of this assessment, two subsequently secured employment in the energy efficiency industry. The remaining participant is employed in a different industry but remains interested in pursuing an energy efficiency career. These career outcomes indicate that, although respondents did not remain with their internship employers, the experience in the EE field left a positive impression on them. This is also reflected in the Internship Program tracking data, where 21 of 22 unique interns from 2023 and 2024 secured employment and at least 14 landed roles in EE.

All three interns who participated in the survey expressed high levels of satisfaction both with the program overall and their employers, describing them as professional, consistent, and supportive. One respondent specifically noted that the program provided them with the opportunity to network and grow, while others mentioned that they felt supported on a more personal level, especially when facing challenges.

“[My employer] gave me confidence that I can prevail in this.”

More hands-on tasks and support would enhance the internship experience. Although they were very satisfied with the internship program, participants still noted some opportunities to improve the

future internship experiences. One respondent explained that they were less comfortable working on a computer and found it more difficult to transition into these types of tasks. They described that having more hands-on support, such as training or direct mentorship, could make the transition towards tasks done on a computer easier. Another respondent noted they wish there were less office busy work, which also exemplifies a desire for a different work structure and increased oversight in future internships. Overall, interns expressed that a more hands-on approach from their employer would have made their internship experience more engaging.

4.1.2 Community College Scholarship Findings

The MDI partners with community colleges across AIC service territory to award scholarships to students pursuing degrees in fields related to energy efficiency (e.g., HVAC, engineering, industrial technology, construction management, etc.). The scholarship's intended outcome is to support the development of a skilled workforce necessary for the future of energy efficiency. Currently, AIC partners with seven community colleges. Table 3 presents the total number of scholarships awarded, the number of students who received the scholarships, and the total amount of funding distributed across the seven partner institutions in 2023 and 2024. The amount per student varied from \$240 to \$6,000. The most frequently awarded amount was \$1,500. In terms of the school engagement levels, some schools awarded as few as one or two scholarships per school year, while others awarded as many as 21.

Table 3. Scholarship Awards for 2023 and 2024

Year	Total Scholarships Awarded	Total Number of Scholarship Recipients	Total Funds Awarded
2023	57	42	\$116,898.90
2024	41	34	\$61,875.38
Total	98	70 ¹	\$178,774.28

¹ Six students received the scholarship in both 2023 and 2024

School Partner Perspectives

To better understand the impact of these scholarships and identify opportunities to strengthen this MDI offering, we conducted interviews with staff from four partner schools serving students in the AIC territory (the full interview guide is available in Appendix B). Their perspectives highlighted the benefits of the scholarships, such as expanding student access, as well as several areas where improvements could further enhance the scholarship's effectiveness and the student and staff experiences with the scholarship. The detailed insights gathered from the interviews are presented below.

Connection to MDI Goals

Colleges are not systematically tracking the post-graduation outcomes of scholarship recipients, making it challenging to demonstrate the direct impact of scholarships on workforce development. Currently, most, if not all, colleges we interviewed lack systems for tracking scholarship recipients' pathways after graduation. This means schools cannot consistently determine whether scholarship

recipients are entering jobs in fields directly related to their training, such as HVAC, construction management, renewable energy, industrial technology, or engineering. A few schools reported that they are beginning to collect post-graduation data through surveys conducted by their institutional research offices. However, there is still no mechanism for tracking scholarship recipients separately from their cohorts. Without systematic tracking, it is challenging for AIC to demonstrate the impact of workforce development or the long-term outcomes of the scholarship program.

Awareness of other MDI Workforce Development offerings is low. College staff were generally unaware of other opportunities available through the MDI WFD Program, such as internships, training programs, or job placement services. Interview participants shared that students also had little to no awareness of these additional resources, which could further strengthen their career pathways. Staff indicated not only the willingness to learn about other offerings, but also a strong interest in helping promote these opportunities.

Student Benefits

Scholarship funds are flexible and valuable for students. The expense reimbursement process could be improved. All community college staff we interviewed emphasized that the financial assistance provided through the program was extremely valuable for students, enabling them to continue pursuing their education and future career goals. Scholarship awards are most often applied directly to tuition and fees. When funds remain, they are used to cover required educational costs such as textbooks, personal protective equipment (PPE), uniforms, or specialized tools. According to college staff, students shared that this flexibility is especially meaningful because it reduces financial stress and allows students to stay enrolled without interruption.

“The scholarships have been life-changing for students.”

“For some of our students, being able to secure the funds is make it or break it. It’s what keeps them enrolled.”

However, in some cases, students are required to pay for tools up front and later receive reimbursement, which creates a temporary financial burden for those already struggling to cover basic costs. Two of the four school partners we interviewed noted that this occurred occasionally at their institutions.

Scholarships successfully reach disadvantaged students. The scholarships consistently reach and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds, including those who are low-income, minority, first-generation, veterans, and non-traditional students (i.e., older than 24).

“There were instances in which a mother and daughter graduated together from the same program.”

In many colleges, every single scholarship recipient falls into one or more of these categories. Staff emphasized that they have no difficulty identifying or recruiting qualified applicants, given the students' demand for financial assistance. School staff indicated that the ability to better support students from disadvantaged backgrounds aligns well with the mission of their institutions. Staff emphasized that scholarship funds allow them to serve their students more equitably and increase opportunities in energy efficiency. While the anecdotes about the scholarship recipients' success

seem to have been shared internally, more opportunities could be developed to enhance the external visibility of the scholarships' impact.

Administration

Adjusting the scholarship timeline and reporting requirements could alleviate administrative challenges. Colleges operate on an academic year cycle (fall through spring), whereas AIC and SEEL processes are sometimes aligned to the calendar year. This misalignment creates practical challenges, including invoicing delays, difficulties in finalizing student lists before deadlines, and confusion around payment schedules. In some cases, SEEL requested invoices before colleges could confirm the full roster of enrolled scholarship students, creating additional administrative burdens. Colleges emphasized that aligning scholarship timelines with academic schedules would be extremely beneficial.

“The workaround we applied in the past was that we had to front the money to students from the school funds and then get reimbursed from the scholarship funds. Not ideal. Not knowing if and when the money will come in is a major source of anxiety for students.”

In addition to the opportunity for better timeline alignment, school partners discussed the administrative challenges related to reporting requirements, such as responding to repetitive requests for the same information. This additional burden takes time and resources away from student-facing work.

Communication with SEEL is inconsistent. Three out of the four schools raised concerns about communication with SEEL, the implementer of the WFD Program. Staff described the communication process as inconsistent and often confusing. They noted delays in responses, lack of clarity about expectations, and inconsistent feedback. While SEEL sometimes provides positive recognition, colleges reported that it was not unusual for several months to pass without substantive follow-up. In addition, staff described site visits and student engagement efforts as disorganized, which undermines the partnership's credibility.

“Site visits were scheduled one day in advance.”

“Our students subscribed to information relevant to their training, but it seems that they've been mostly getting spam.”

Staff indicated that it would be beneficial to have a designated point of contact for all scholarship-related communication.

Scholarship Recipient Perspectives

We collected feedback from recipients of AIC's community college scholarships through the Workforce Development Participant Survey (see Section 4.1.1). Although the sample of survey respondents included only two scholarship recipients, their responses remain valuable, as they provide insights into the recipients' experiences with the scholarship program and offer a glimpse into what their post-college trajectory may look like. Overall, the feedback from both recipients was extremely positive and aligned with the school staff's perspective on the usefulness of the scholarship funds for students.

Both scholarship recipients were first-generation college students who received AIC's scholarship while enrolled in energy efficiency-related academic programs. Both also qualified as low-income according to their college's financial aid criteria. This aligns with the mission of the MDI to "provide all Ameren Illinois customers with access to opportunities and education to help complete energy-saving upgrades and increase their quality of life, regardless of income, socioeconomic status, or other participation barriers."⁴ One of the two recipients also participated in AIC's Internship program (see Internship Feedback).

Both scholarship recipients shared that the scholarship funds were extremely helpful in supporting their education in energy efficiency, and they expressed high levels of satisfaction with the scholarship program overall. When asked about potential areas for program improvement, neither recipient identified any.

"The scholarship helped me during times of struggle and allowed me to focus on graduating."

"Without it, I would not have been able to afford to go to college. Financial help was crucial for buying books and supplies. I was also able to buy a computer for my online studies."

Both scholarship recipients are currently employed in positions related to energy efficiency, specifically in energy consulting and solar and electrical upgrades. While these career outcomes cannot be attributed solely to the scholarship, the financial support enabled them to remain in school and earn the education and credentials that helped them secure their current roles.

Key Workforce Development Recommendations*

Enhance pathways to employment by expanding employer engagement for entry-level roles, increasing cross-promotion of workforce development offerings, implementing systematic post-graduation outcome tracking across training institutions, and providing upfront grants for essential equipment and expenses to alleviate financial burdens on students.

*See 5.1 for a detailed set of recommendations.

4.2 Program Ally Incubator

- The Incubator participants report high satisfaction with skill building and preparation for success in the EE workforce but could benefit from stronger post-graduation support.
- Project activity increased more than five times after graduation for both cohorts (2023 and 2024.)
- The Incubator helps graduates grow their businesses by attracting new customers, expanding service offerings, and increasing capacity, though small contractors continue to face hiring and retention challenges.

⁴ <https://amerenillinoissavings.com/mdi/>

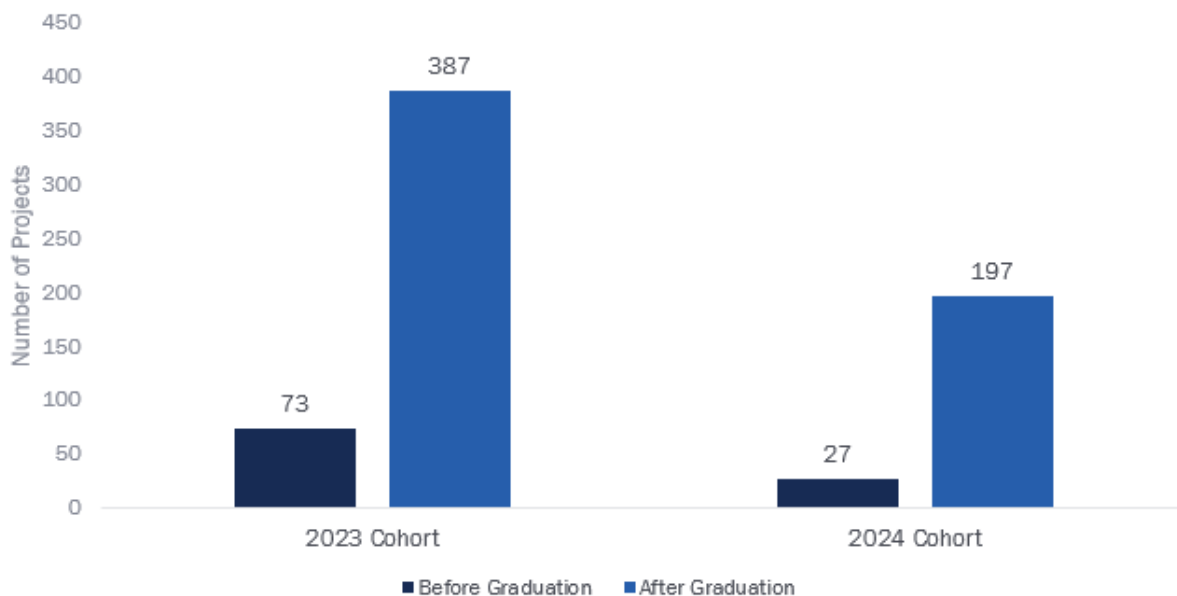
The Program Ally Incubator is designed to support contractors working in AIC territory in starting or growing their businesses in the energy efficiency field. Program participants participate in an eight-week hybrid training program that includes webinars, one-on-one coaching, and a business plan development activity. Seven webinars cover topics such as AIC EE offerings, business development, marketing, and project financing. The one-on-one coaching provides participants with mentorship and personalized learning pathways. Lastly, the business growth plans help participants envision their future by setting goals for the number of projects they aim to complete and the customer segments they wish to target, and by considering the key resources required to achieve their business objectives. Following their graduation from the Incubator, participants are encouraged to register or re-engage as AIC program allies, enabling them to grow their businesses while helping customers receive energy-saving incentives.

In addition to developing the EE workforce and helping businesses complete more work with AIC, the Incubator program also directly supports the MDI's goal of expanding the reach of AIC's programs. After graduation, Allies can offer EE services to their customer bases, which may include underserved communities. According to AIC staff, presence in certain communities helps the utility build trust and repair people's perceptions of the utility industry.

4.2.1 Impact on AIC EE Programs

To evaluate the Incubator's impact on AIC's EE programs, we analyzed business and residential data to determine the number of projects completed by Incubator graduates (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Comparison of Project Volume Pre- and Post-Graduation



Among the 2023 cohort of eight, six allies completed projects during their enrollment year. After their graduation in 2024, project activity increased substantially: seven of the eight allies completed projects, resulting in 387 projects between 2024 and 2025, compared to only 73 in 2023. The most common programs for this cohort were Smart Savers and Single Family Income qualified (SFIQ).

The 2024 cohort exhibited a similar pattern; only one of the 13 allies completed any projects before participating in the Incubator, although that single ally completed 27 projects. After graduation,

project volume grew considerably: 11 of the 13 allies completed a combined 197 projects across 2024 and 2025. The most common project for business programs was Small Business Direct Install, while for residential programs, it was Smart Savers, followed by Multifamily Income qualified (MFIQ) and SFIQ. The popularity of Smart Savers aligns with the fact that many of these allies are new to AIC programs, as Smart Savers is considered an entry-level initiative.

Assessing the 2025 cohort's progress is more challenging given that the year is still underway, and allies have had limited time to finish projects. Still, two allies have already completed projects so far.

Furthermore, the Incubator program enhances the MDI's effort to support EE programs in reaching customers who have been historically underserved by the AIC EE initiatives. Among the 21 Incubator graduates from 2023 to 2024, four are serving disadvantaged areas⁵. By having Incubator graduates successfully finish projects via AIC's Ally program, including some in disadvantaged communities, the Incubator program effectively enhances the MDI's impact.

4.2.2 Impact on Incubator Graduates

To further assess the impact of the Incubator program, we conducted a phone survey with 2023-2024 Incubator graduates. The survey instrument can be found in Appendix C. We interviewed five participants out of the total of 21 who participated in the program over the two-year period.

Preparation for Success in the Energy Efficiency Workforce

Participants are very satisfied with the quality of the Incubator program content, their AIC-specific knowledge, and the transferable business skills gained. All five participants who took the survey said that the webinars were extremely relevant to their daily business activities, and four of them reported that learning how to run an efficient business was one of the most helpful aspects. Participants specifically highlighted topics such as front- and back-office support, financial planning, business growth, and customer engagement as particularly helpful. One participant shared that they felt it was a lot of information in a short period but appreciated the amount of information provided. These responses indicate that the Incubator not only helps participants acquire new skills but also provides them with transferable business skills that can help them expand their businesses. Additionally, all five participants expressed extreme satisfaction with their overall experience in the Incubator.

“We gained valuable knowledge about the business side of things. They explained it in a way that we could understand.”

The webinars and one-on-one coaching sessions are very helpful in preparing participants for careers in the EE workforce. All five participants reported that the webinars on AIC's EE offerings and business development substantially increased their knowledge of those respective topics. Four participants found the project financing webinar extremely helpful, while one found it only slightly helpful. Regarding the marketing webinar, four participants found it useful, whereas one participant felt it was not helpful at all. The individual who deemed the marketing session unhelpful has been an Ally for numerous years and has already established effective marketing tactics. As such, this

⁵ Disadvantaged areas are defined by [the Illinois Energy Efficiency Policy Manual](#) as, “the entire area of certain municipalities where at 50% of the municipality is identified as income-eligible through Illinois Solar for All49.”

response may not reflect the quality of the content but rather the fact that this participant already considers themselves knowledgeable in this area.

When asked about the one-on-one coaching, four participants found it extremely helpful, and one found it slightly helpful. Participants reported that the one-on-one coaching enhanced their understanding of business management. One participant mentioned that a particularly helpful recommendation was to focus on a few key areas and excel at them, rather than attempting to handle many different tasks simultaneously.

Although beneficial, the business plan offering could be further improved. Four out of five participants found creating the growth plan to be very useful for estimating the resources needed to achieve their business goals, while one considered it only somewhat useful. Despite recognizing the value of the exercise, a significant gap existed between the estimated number of projects that Allies noted during the exercise and the actual number of projects they completed after graduation. A comparison of their completed projects to the projections in their business plans showed that they had achieved between 1% and 29% of the goals they intended to reach by now. However, the estimates of customer numbers were far more accurate, generally aligning with the figures participants reported after completing the program. This suggests that while participants were realistic in assessing their customer base, they may have overestimated their project capacity or the speed at which they could grow their business.

Moreover, when asked to recall the content of their original business plans, none of the participants could remember the specific goals or targets they had set. This indicates that, once the plans were finalized, participants rarely, if ever, revisited them. The limited recall raises questions about how the business plans are being used in practice, and whether their usefulness is confined to the initial planning phase or extends as a tool to guide post-graduation growth.

Participants are sharing the information they learned with colleagues or industry connections, widening the impact of the MDI. All five participants shared what they learned in the Incubator with other employees at their business, either by sharing resources from the Incubator or by inviting their employees to participate in the Incubator sessions. This knowledge transfer demonstrates that the Incubator's impact extends beyond the individual participants.

"I told the co-owner of my company to participate in the Incubator. He managed to triple the size of his other business thanks to the Incubator."

Preparation for Working with AIC

Although AIC outlines clear next steps for graduates, there is room for continued post-graduation support. Four out of five participants reported receiving clear next steps for participating in AIC Energy Efficiency programs after graduating from the Incubator. The participant who felt there could be more support explained that it would have been helpful to receive information on how to find and assemble a team of reliable workers. Additionally, they said it would be beneficial to receive some financial support for a couple of months after graduating, sharing that it's challenging to take on jobs with large start-up costs.

"It would be beneficial to have a mentor who can stay in contact with you after completing the Incubator. Also, it would be good to get connected with a contractor. I feel like I don't have enough support. Even though I went through the training, I still need to learn and figure things out."

The Incubator successfully engages participants in AIC EE programs, leaving them very satisfied with their business relationships with AIC. Four participants registered or re-engaged as Program Allies following completion of the Incubator, while one had been registered prior to participating. This participant had initially enrolled about 10 years ago but had to drop out because they couldn't keep up with the workload due to staffing shortages. Four participants reported being extremely satisfied with their business relationship with AIC.

“Walker-Miller and Ameren enabled me to be one of the four companies in the city that are licensed to install EV chargers, and I am the only small minority-owned company that does it here.”

One participant reported being moderately satisfied. This individual explained that their lower satisfaction stemmed from other forms of MDI participation rather than just the Incubator.

Business Growth

The Incubator program consistently helps graduates attract new customers to their business. All five survey participants reported that the Incubator had a profoundly influential impact on attracting new customers to their businesses.

“I was able to reach out to potential customers with a new range of services. I haven't received a 'no' yet. That opened a whole new stream of income for my business. I tell everyone about the Ameren EE program now.”

The Incubator has allowed some graduates to hire more staff. Additionally, two survey participants noted that the Incubator was “extremely influential” in helping them grow their teams because of the increased workload after graduation. Meanwhile, three participants reported that they had not hired any new staff since graduating. Several participants described ongoing challenges in hiring and retaining reliable employees; two noted that it is difficult to compete with larger companies that can offer higher pay and more comprehensive benefits.

Graduates tend to experience a revenue increase after completing the Incubator. Of the participants surveyed, two experienced revenue increases of more than 50%, one reported an increase of 11% - 20%, one reported an increase of up to 10%, and one indicated no change.

When asked to assess the Incubator's contribution to their revenue growth, two participants credited the program with driving more than half of their revenue gains, while the remaining two who reported increased revenue attributed less than half of that growth to the Incubator.

The Incubator strengthened participants' skills, capacity, and credentials. All five participants noted that participating in the Incubator expanded their capacity in some way, whether by enhancing their business knowledge (one participant), preparing them to hire staff (one participant), improving their marketing and project management skills (one participant), enabling more energy-efficient work (two participants), or helping them earn industry certifications like BPI training (all five participants).

*“It gave us the opportunity to do more electrical work and EE lighting.”
 “In the marketing aspect, [I was] able to get outreach
 to clients and get business at the same time.”*

Key Incubator Recommendations*

Enhance support for Incubator graduates by assigning mentors for ongoing guidance, connecting them with WFD Program services for start-up costs, scheduling regular reviews of their business plans, and facilitating collaboration with fellow graduates on projects to improve revenue and address staffing challenges.

**See 5.2 for a detailed set of recommendations.*

4.3 Grant Writing Support

- *The Grant Writing Support Program assisted 9 CBOs and 2 community colleges in submitting 14 grant applications (2023–2025), resulting in five awards totaling \$9.7M.*
- *Funded CBOs serve underserved communities and, in some cases, directly support AIC EE programs, extending MDI’s reach through training, workforce development, and project delivery.*
- *CBO interviews highlighted administrative support, improved proposal organization, and stronger future funding readiness as the key program benefits but also noted inconsistent grant writing quality and limited grant writer availability.*
- *Perceptions of support varied by prior grant writing experience, with more seasoned CBOs expressing dissatisfaction and others emphasizing the value of structured guidance and proposal development.*

The MDI provides a Grant Writing Support Program and Grant Writing Training designed to assist CBOs and for-profit entities in securing funding for energy efficiency initiatives and related projects. All participating CBOs are based in Illinois and are dedicated to serving their local communities. The grants that participants have applied for directly align with MDI goals, with funding directed toward building an equitable clean energy workforce, helping small contractors grow, and expanding economic opportunities across Illinois.

From 2023 to 2025, 9 CBOs and 2 community colleges submitted 14 different grant applications through the Grant Writing Program (See Table 4.2 below). Of these, five grants were awarded (across five CBOs), five have not been awarded, and four applications are still awaiting a response. The total amount of funds awarded was \$9,729,326.57. While the Grant Writing Support program clearly contributed to securing funding for CBOs, we lacked insight into how the awarded grant funds were ultimately used to advance MDI goals. As a result, we were unable to assess the extent to which awarded funds supported activities such as workforce development, contractor growth, or energy-efficiency services.

Table 4.2 Grant Applications Submitted through the Grant Writing Program 2023-2025

Grant Applied For	Number of Applications	Number of Awards ¹
Climate Works Pre-Apprenticeship Program	1	0
Energy Transition Navigator Program	5	1
CEJA Workforce Network "Hub" Program	3	3
CEJA Primes Contractor Accelerator Program	1	0
CEJA Contractor Incubator Program	1	1
Returning Residents Clean Jobs Program	1	0
Small Business Infrastructure & Capital Grant	2	0
Total	14 ¹	5

¹Some of the 9 CBOs and 2 community colleges applied for multiple grants

4.3.1 Connection to MDI and AIC EE Programs

The Grant Writing Support program directly supports the MDI's goals by funding CBOs that grow the local energy efficiency workforce, reach underserved communities, and, in some cases, perform upgrade services for AIC EE programs. Out of the five CBOs that received funding during the evaluation period, three were in priority underserved communities for AIC: Macedonia Development Center in East St. Louis, and Senior Services Plus and Lewis and Clark Community College in Alton. By funding these CBOs, the MDI extended its impact directly to communities that are typically underserved.

Additionally, Senior Services Plus (SSP), which participated in the grant writing support program and received an award for the Energy Transition Navigator Program in 2023, completes projects through the AIC Ally Program. SSP contributes to multiple channels of the Income Qualified Initiative, primarily the Single Family Channel, but also including the Mobile Homes Weatherization and Air Sealing and Smart Savers channels. In 2024, SSP completed 2,117 Income Qualified projects and 31 Smart Savers projects. By mid-2025, they had completed 575 IQ and 14 SS projects. Lastly, the Minority Business Development Center, which received the CEJA Contractor Incubator Program grant to support small and diverse contractors in Illinois in growing their businesses in the clean energy sector, directly advances two of the MDI's goals: expanding the impact to underserved communities and growing the EE workforce.

4.3.2 CBO Participant Interview Findings

To evaluate the program's impact on the larger MDI's goals and identify areas for improvement, we conducted interviews with five staff members across four different CBOs. Four out of the five staff received grant writing support, while one participated in the grant writing training. The interview guide is available in Appendix D.

Among the four CBOs we spoke with, only one had received a grant. Supported by the grant, this CBO enrolled participants in training programs focused on solar, HVAC, and weatherization work. Participants also received individualized career guidance designed to promote long-term financial independence. One interview participant was not awarded a grant, and the remaining two were awaiting a response at the time of the interview.

Benefits

Program participation helped CBOs stay organized and meet the application deadlines. Two CBOs highlighted that working with the grant writer provided valuable administrative assistance. Having someone to ensure documents were submitted on time, correctly, and procedures clarified proved very helpful. One CBO mentioned that the grant writer went even further by offering broader advice about improving the overall processes within the CBO. Another CBO noted that, although grant writing is part of her role, other tasks often take priority, so having someone to handle these responsibilities and keep them on schedule was very helpful. One CBO even stated they believe the grant writer would be better suited as administrative support rather than a grant writer, explaining that their strengths lie in maintaining schedules and sharing correct materials, not editing content.

The program helped better prepare some CBOs to pursue future funding opportunities. One CBO mentioned that a key benefit of the program was developing a strong proposal concept that they could present to other donors or grant providers. Having a clear proposal, budget, and team will ease future application processes. This CBO also stated that writing the proposal prompted them to consider their long-term business plans.

“We now have what I believe is a very strong proposal concept that we can present to another potential infrastructure donor. We have a team and a budget. We are clear on what it will take, including all the necessary certificates for such a large infrastructure project. We wouldn't have had all these materials without this program.”

One participant that we spoke with attended the grant writing training and explained that it helped refine the CBO's best practices. The training taught them to develop programs that suit their needs and apply for grants that align with those programs, rather than creating programs solely to secure grants. It's important to note that these findings are based on one participant, so we are unable to draw general conclusions about the grant writing training.

Challenges with the Grant Writing Support Program

Perceptions of grant writing quality varied based on participants' prior experience with grant writing. Three CBOs we spoke with expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of the grant writing. One shared that the grant writer lacked the writing skills needed to turn the information into a compelling story, and the other stated that they could have written the grant themselves. Another grant writer shared that this round of support was not of the same quality as the support they received a few years ago.

“I don't think the support made a difference because they didn't have an acquired skill set.”

It is important to note that perceptions of the grant writing quality may have been influenced by CBO staff's own experience with grant writing. Participants with less experience tended to view the quality of grant writing more favorably than those who had previously applied for other grants; one such CBO expressed that the MDI grant writer substantially improved the clarity of the application, while the other CBO especially appreciated having someone knowledgeable about energy efficiency and its connection to the CBO's mission.

Only two CBOs reported that the support felt tailored to their organization. Among those seeking more customization, one CBO noted that the grant writer's limited familiarity with the Illinois community resulted in a proposal that felt less tailored to their needs.

Limited capacity and unclear expectations were key challenges in working with the grant writer.

One CBO noted that when they started working with the grant writer, they had only two months to complete their entire application, which was overwhelming. They also mentioned that it would have helped to set expectations at the beginning of the process to clarify what was needed from the CBO during the application stage. Another CBO also shared that they felt the grant writer was limited in their time and would have appreciated more conversation and collaboration through each part of the application process.

"The biggest struggle we had with the most recent application was that I think they felt they had too many things on their plate, so the quality of work was just a little bit different."

"Yeah, I think our biggest thing was maybe just having someone with less on their plate who could devote more time to working with us."

Key Grant Writing Support Recommendations*

Enhance the Grant Writing Support channel by conducting internal reviews of applications to improve success rates, evaluating the alignment of participants with grant writers based on experience, and reducing grant writers' workloads to ensure more accessibility and dedicated support for participants.

**See 5.3 for a detailed set of recommendations.*

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This assessment identified many tangible impacts of the MDI on the energy efficiency workforce, local businesses in AIC's service territory, and AIC's EE Programs. In 2023 and 2024, the WFD Program provided 450 individuals with a wide range of training, financial support, and opportunities to enter or advance within the energy efficiency workforce. Of these 450, 48 have found jobs through their participation in the WFD program, likely in energy efficiency, and our survey suggests that many of those jobs directly involved work with AIC. Feedback from participants indicates that the MDI has prepared individuals well for careers in energy efficiency; however, a challenging job market has limited local opportunities and prevented many participants from securing new jobs. The Program Ally Incubator trained 21 representatives of existing businesses and was effective in preparing them to launch or expand lines of business related to energy efficiency. All the graduates have started or continued serving as Program Allies in AIC's EE Programs, thereby expanding the number of allies available to customers. The allies' project activity increased substantially after Incubator participation, demonstrating the impact of MDI on expanding their EE lines of business. Additionally, 6 of the 34 graduates from 2023–2025 are serving disadvantaged communities, demonstrating the Incubator's contribution to expanding the EE program's reach into historically underserved areas. Finally, the MDI's Grant Writing Support helped CBOs win 5 grants from 14 applications, with some applications still pending. These grants supported organizations in growing the local energy efficiency workforce, reaching underserved communities, and, in some cases, performing upgrade services for AIC EE Programs.

Below, we present a set of recommendations that are not reiterations of what Ameren already does; they are intended to expand, formalize, and strengthen areas where current practice is partial or emerging. In some cases, the foundational elements exist (e.g., wraparound support, job readiness coaching, business plan development, grant writing assistance), but the structure, follow-through, and cross-channel integration necessary to achieve long-term outcomes may not be fully developed. These recommendations focus on elevating promising practices into coordinated, measurable, and strategically aligned components of the MDI, rather than introducing entirely new concepts or duplicating existing operations.

We recommend the following to build on the success of the MDI to increase impact and improve delivery of services to participants in the future:

5.1 Workforce Development

Finding #1: Although satisfaction with existing WFD offerings is high, not all survey participants successfully entered the EE workforce after completing the program. Many participants, including first-time job seekers and career changers, remain interested in pursuing opportunities, highlighting the need for clear pathways from training to job placement.

- **Recommendation:** Expand the engagement of employers offering internships to also provide entry-level roles for career changers who have completed training and job readiness resources, creating a clear pathway from program participation to employment.
- **Recommendation:** Foster more robust partnerships with Program Allies to create direct employment opportunities and enhance career outcomes for participants

For example, connect Program Ally Incubator graduates who identify a need to hire more staff (e.g., through Business Plan support or follow-up communication) to the job placement and internship offerings of the WFD Program.

- **Recommendation:** Proactively reconnect with past WFD participants who are still interested in EE roles but have not yet found placement. This would strengthen the long-term impact of the WFD channel and better support Ameren's workforce development goals.

Finding #2: The low visibility or uptake of some program offerings could hinder positive career outcomes. Participants in selected program offerings expressed interest in learning about other program offerings.

- **Recommendation:** Increase cross-promotion of WFD offerings with other MDI offerings and beyond.
- **Recommendation:** Provide colleges with accessible, clear, and up-to-date information about AIC MDI's broader workforce development offerings (training, job placement, wraparound services, and internships). Supplying promotional materials or ready-to-use content would enable staff to connect students with additional opportunities beyond scholarships, further advancing the initiative's workforce development goals.

Finding #3: Colleges are not systematically tracking the post-graduation outcomes of scholarship recipients, making it challenging to demonstrate the direct impact of scholarships on workforce development.

- **Recommendation:** Develop a consistent mechanism across all partner schools to track post-graduation outcomes and career trajectories. This could involve standardized follow-up surveys, partnerships with institutional research offices, or integration with the existing alumni tracking systems, if any.

Finding #4: Scholarship funds are flexible and valuable for students; however, students sometimes must pay out of pocket for equipment and expenses and then be reimbursed. Students who struggle financially may face difficulties with this process due to the upfront cost of the equipment.

- **Recommendation:** Work with school partners to identify common types of equipment and expenses that have substantial upfront costs. Consider offering upfront grants for an approved list of equipment or other expenses.

Finding #5: Adjusting the scholarship timeline and strengthening communication could help alleviate administrative challenges.

- **Recommendation:** Align the administrative scholarship deadlines and reporting requirements with the academic year calendar used by partner colleges. Improve the efficiency of scholarship administration and reporting processes to reduce delays and administrative burden for partner colleges. This includes streamlining invoicing timelines within existing program-year constraints, reducing redundant information requests, clearly specifying outstanding documentation needs in follow-ups, and providing upfront guidance on required reporting

materials. Minimize repeated requests for the same information by specifying in each follow-up which pieces of information are missing or require clarification, and by providing upfront guidance on what documentation is required.

- **Recommendation:** Establish a consistent and reliable point of contact at SEEL who can serve as the primary liaison for scholarship-related questions. Implement structured communication practices with clear timelines and predictable follow-up to reduce confusion, build trust, and strengthen the relationship between the school partners and SEEL/AIC.

5.2 Program Ally Incubator

Finding #1: The steps for completing AIC EE projects post-graduation are clear, but there is room for continued services and structured follow-up support for graduates.

- **Recommendation:** Make sure every Incubator graduate has a designated contact or mentor for questions and support after graduation. Consider setting up regular check-ins where graduates can discuss workforce development and staff recruiting.
- **Recommendation:** Create a dedicated source of funds to support Incubator graduates with start-up costs.

Finding #2: While the business plans helped participants estimate resources and customer targets, they overestimated their target number of projects and rarely revisited their plans after completion, limiting the long-term usefulness of the plans.

- **Recommendation:** To support graduates in tracking business growth and further planning, implement scheduled business plan reviews at 6-, 12-, and 18-month intervals to track performance, forecast revenue, and identify supports needed to grow EE project volume. This practice will help participants make more accurate growth projections. It will also provide clearer indicators of the Incubator's long-term impact.

Finding #3: The Incubator program has a substantial impact on advancing participants' skills, increasing their revenue, and enhancing customer engagement.

- **Recommendation:** To help participants boost their revenue even further, establish a system where, after graduation, they can work with other Incubator graduates to complete projects. This will support those struggling to find reliable employees.

5.3 Grant Writing Support

Finding #1: The Grant Writing Support channel contributes to the MDI goals of building up the EE workforce, supporting businesses to do more work with AIC programs, and extending the reach of AIC's programs to underserved communities. However, while overall program-level grant success has been strong, participant feedback indicates that additional review or continued support could further strengthen the experience for some applicants.

- **Recommendation:** Conduct internal reviews of grant applications to understand why some participants are not receiving funding and identify opportunities to improve application success.
- **Recommendation:** To further enhance the program's impact, grant writers can continuously send opportunities to past participants, regardless of whether they are receiving grant writing support. This will increase the impact of the program, allowing for more opportunities for CBOs to receive funding.

Finding #2: Participants reported varying levels of satisfaction with the quality of grant writing support, reflecting differences in their prior experience and the type of assistance they required.

- **Recommendation:** Prior to matching a program participant with a grant writer, conduct an initial evaluation of both the participant's and the grant writer's experience and writing skills to ensure better alignment between participant needs and the assistance offered.

Finding #3: Overbooked grant writers may be contributing to a less positive participant experience. Participants reported that grant writers were not always easily accessible, which slowed down the application process.

- **Recommendation:** According to SEEL, up to four grant writers have been available to assist program participants at any given time since the program's inception. Participant experiences suggest that reducing each grant writer's workload could benefit both the participants and the writers. SEEL can utilize all four grant writers to allocate more dedicated time for each participant.

Finding #4: CBOs do not consistently report how awarded grant funds were used to advance MDI goals.

- **Recommendation:** To better understand the impact of awarded grants and ensure alignment with MDI goals, require participating CBOs to submit brief, consistent updates on how grant funds were used, key activities completed, and outcomes achieved. Implementing a reporting template (e.g., quarterly or semiannual updates) would provide clearer insight into program effectiveness, inform future improvements, and strengthen accountability while minimizing administrative burden for CBOs.

The findings in this assessment confirm that the MDI continues to make meaningful contributions to Ameren Illinois' energy efficiency workforce, contractor network, and community reach. The recommendations provided are intended to support Ameren in strengthening these outcomes and improving coordination across program channels. Continued refinement of these strategies will help ensure that the MDI remains a valuable pathway for participants, partners, and the customers and communities served.

Appendix A. Workforce Development Participant Survey

Introduction/Landing page

Welcome! On behalf of Ameren Illinois Company (AIC), thank you for taking the time to tell us about your experience with Ameren's **Workforce Development program**.

If you cannot complete the survey at one time or accidentally quit in the middle of the survey, you can return to the survey by clicking on the link from your email and pick up where you left off. The survey should only take about 15 minutes to complete. Upon completion of the survey, you will receive a \$50 e-gift card.

Your survey responses will be kept confidential and only reported in combination with other customers' responses.

[INCLUDE ON EVERY PAGE OF SURVEY AS FOOTER: If you experience any technical issues with this survey, please contact Taylor Williams at Taylor.Williams@opiniondynamics.com.]

Employment and Involvement with Ameren Energy Efficiency [ask all]

Q1. Are you currently employed in a job related to energy efficiency? (Energy efficiency jobs involve installing energy-saving products, providing services to reduce end-use energy consumption, and improving the efficiency of buildings, appliances, and other systems.)

1. Yes
2. No

[ASK IF Q1 = 2]

Q2. Are you currently employed in an industry other than energy efficiency?

1. Yes. Please share what your job is [OPEN-ENDED]
2. No

[IF Q2 = 2 SKIP TO EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES]

[ASK IF Q1 = 1 OR Q2 = 1]

Q3. What is the name of your company? As a reminder, your responses, including company names, are confidential. [OPEN-ENDED TEXT BOX]

[ASK IF Q1 = 1 OR Q2 = 1]

Q4. Please briefly describe the services your company provides. [OPEN-ENDED TEXT BOX]

[ASK IF Q1 = 1 OR Q2 = 1]

Q5. Is your company a registered Program Ally for Ameren's energy efficiency programs?

1. Yes
2. No
98. I don't know

Q6. [EXCLUDE IF Q5 =1] Does your company provide any direct services to Ameren Illinois' energy efficiency program?

1. Yes, please describe [OPEN-ENDED]
2. No
98. I don't know

Employment Challenges

[ASK IF Q2 = 2]

Q7. What are the main barriers you've faced searching for a job? [OPEN-ENDED]

[ASK IF Q2 = 1 OR 2]

Q8. Are you still interested in an energy efficiency career?

1. Yes
2. No

[ASK IF Q2 = 2]

Q9. Please share why you are no longer interested in an energy efficiency career.

[OPEN-ENDED]

[ASK IF Q2 = 2]

Q10. Are you still actively seeking employment?

1. Yes
2. No

Influence of the Program on Career Changes [ask all]

These next questions are about training and job placement programs through Ameren Illinois.

Q12. Which of the following categories best describes your status at the time you participated in the Workforce Development program?

1. High school student
2. College student
3. Entry-level job seeker
4. Career changer
5. Returning citizen (formerly incarcerated individual)
6. Working professional
7. Other, please specify: [OPEN-ENDED]

Q13. Which of the following categories best describes your status at the time you participated in the Workforce Development program?

1. Already employed in the energy efficiency industry
2. Already employed in an industry unrelated to energy efficiency
3. Unemployed
4. Other, please specify: [OPEN-ENDED]

[ASK IF Q1 = 1 AND Q13 = 2 OR 3]

Q14. Earlier, you indicated that you are now employed in the energy efficiency industry. How helpful was participation in the Workforce Development Program in enabling you to start a career in the energy efficiency industry?

1. Not at all helpful
2. Slightly helpful
3. Moderately helpful
4. Extremely helpful

[ASK IF Q1 = 1 AND Q13 = 1]

Q15. After completing the Workforce Development Program, did you remain with the same employer, or did you transition to a different employer?

1. I kept the same EE job
2. I switched to a different EE job

[ASK IF Q15=2]

Q16. How helpful was your participation in the Workforce Development Program in supporting your transition to a different employer?

1. Not at all helpful
2. Slightly helpful

3. Moderately helpful
4. Extremely helpful

[ASK IF Q1=1 AND Q13 = 1 AND Q15=1]

- Q17. After completing the Workforce Development Program, did you receive a change in responsibilities at your current employer?
1. Yes
 2. No

[ASK IF Q17 = 1]

- Q18. How helpful was your participation in the Workforce Development Program in taking on these new responsibilities?
1. Not at all helpful
 2. Slightly helpful
 3. Moderately helpful
 4. Extremely helpful

[ASK IF Q17 = 1]

- Q19. Do you consider the new responsibilities you've acquired a promotion?
1. Yes
 2. No

[ASK IF Q15=2 OR Q17 = 1]

- Q20. Did this change come with a pay increase?
1. Yes
 2. No

[ASK IF Q20 = 1]

- Q21. If you're comfortable sharing, please specify the approximate percentage increase in your salary.
1. [OPEN-ENDED]
 99. Decline to respond

[ASK IF Q1=1]

- Q21B. Are there any other energy-efficiency career benefits that the Workforce Development Program provided?
1. [OPEN-ENDED TEXT BOX]
 2. No other benefits

Training and Job Placement [ask all]

- Q11. Which of the following did you receive through the Ameren Illinois Workforce Development program?
Please select

all that apply. [MULTIPLE RESPONSE]

1. Building Performance Institute (BPI) training
2. Specialized training through a partner (e.g., an advanced HVAC course)
3. Online self-paced training in related skills (e.g., Excel training)
4. Job readiness resources
5. Other, please specify [OPEN-ENDED]
6. None

[ASK IF Q11 <4]

- Q22. Overall, how satisfied were you with your experience in the training or certification programs provided by Ameren Illinois?
1. Not at all satisfied
 2. Slightly satisfied
 3. Moderately satisfied
 4. Extremely satisfied

[ASK IF Q11 = 4]

- Q23. Overall, how satisfied were you with the job readiness resources?
1. Not at all satisfied

2. Slightly satisfied
3. Moderately satisfied
4. Extremely satisfied

[ASK IF Q11=5]

Q23B. You mentioned the following support: [PIPE IN ANSWER TO Q11_5]. Overall, how satisfied were you with this support?

1. Not at all satisfied
2. Slightly satisfied
3. Moderately satisfied
4. Extremely satisfied

[ASK IF Q11=5]

Q23C. Please describe why you are [PIPE IN ANSWER TO Q23B] with the following support: [PIPE IN ANSWER TO Q11_5]

[OPEN-ENDED]

[ASK IF Q11 = 1, 2, 3, or 5 AND Q22 > 1]

Q24. What went well in the training and/or certification programs?

[OPEN-ENDED]

[ASK IF Q11 = 1, 2, 3, or 5]

Q25. What, if any, opportunities for improvement are there in the training and/or certification programs provided by Ameren Illinois?

1. [OPEN-ENDED]
2. No opportunities for improvement

[ASK IF Q11 = 4 and Q23 > 1]

Q26. What went well in the job readiness program?

[OPEN-ENDED]

[ASK IF Q11 = 4]

Q27. What, if any, are the opportunities for improvement in the job readiness program?

1. [OPEN-ENDED]
2. No opportunities for improvement

Scholarship program [ask all]

These next questions are about a scholarship program through Ameren Illinois.

[SKIP Q28 if Q12 = 2]

Q28. Have you attended a college or university?

1. Yes
2. No

[IF Q28 = 2 SKIP TO NEXT SECTION]

Q29. Did you receive a scholarship from Ameren Illinois while enrolled in college?

1. Yes
2. No

[IF Q29=2 SKIP TO NEXT SECTION]

[ASK IF Q29 = 1]

Q30. What college did you attend?

1. Heartland Community College
2. Illinois Central College
3. John A. Logan College
4. Kaskaskia College
5. Lincoln Land Community College
6. Richland Community College
7. Southwestern Illinois College
8. Other, please specify: [OPEN-ENDED]

[ASK IF Q29 = 1]

Q31. Please specify your major.

[OPEN-ENDED]

[ASK IF Q29 = 1]

Q32. How helpful was the scholarship from Ameren in supporting your educational goals?

1. Not at all helpful
2. Slightly helpful
3. Moderately helpful
4. Extremely helpful

Q33. Tell us a little bit about why you said the scholarship was [PIPE IN: "RESPONSE TO Q32"] in supporting your educational goals.

[OPEN-ENDED]

Q34. Overall, how satisfied were you with your experience with the Ameren scholarship program?

1. Not at all satisfied
2. Slightly satisfied
3. Moderately satisfied
4. Extremely satisfied

Q35. Tell us a little bit about why you said you were [PIPE IN ANSWER TO Q34] with the Ameren scholarship program.

[OPEN-ENDED]

[IF Q34<4]

Q36. How could the Ameren scholarship program be improved?

[OPEN-ENDED]

Q37. We'd love to hear how this scholarship specifically helped ease the financial burden of your tuition, fees, and other related educational expenses. Please share some of the ways it made a difference for you.

[OPEN-ENDED]

Q38. Which of the following categories describes you? Select all that apply.

1. First in family to attend college
2. Person with disabilities
3. United States Military Veteran
4. Justice-involved/returning citizen (recently released or soon to be released from incarceration)
5. Qualify as low-income eligible according to the College's financial aid criteria
6. None of the above

Summer internship program [ask all]

These next questions are about an internship program through Ameren Illinois.

Q39. Have you ever participated in an internship through Ameren Illinois' summer internship program?

1. Yes
2. No

[IF Q39=2 SKIP TO NEXT SECTION]

Q40. In what year was your internship?

1. 2023
2. 2024

Q41. At which company or organization did you intern? As a reminder, your responses, including company names, are confidential.

[OPEN-ENDED]

- Q42. To what extent did the internship set you up for success for a future role in the energy efficiency industry?
1. Not at all
 2. To a small extent
 3. To a moderate extent
 4. To a great extent

- Q43. Could you tell us why you responded [PIPE IN: "RESPONSE TO Q42"] when asked about how much the internship set you up for success for a future role in the energy efficiency industry?
[OPEN-ENDED]

- Q44. Did you receive a full-time job offer from the employer after your internship?
1. Yes
 2. No

[ASK IF Q44=1]

- Q45. Did you accept the offer?
1. Yes
 2. No

[ASK IF Q44 = 1]

- Q45B. Please tell us why you either accepted or did not accept the offer.
[OPEN-ENDED]

- Q46. How satisfied were you with your experience with Ameren Illinois's summer internship program overall?
1. Not at all satisfied
 2. Slightly satisfied
 3. Moderately satisfied
 4. Extremely satisfied

- Q47. How satisfied were you with your experience with your internship employer?
1. Not at all satisfied
 2. Slightly satisfied
 3. Moderately satisfied
 4. Extremely satisfied

- Q48. What went well in the Ameren Illinois internship program you participated in?
[OPEN-ENDED]

- Q49. Are there any opportunities for improvement that you noticed in the internship program you participated in? If so, tell us about that.
1. [OPEN-ENDED]
 2. No opportunities for improvement

- Q50. What did the internship employer do well during your internship?
[OPEN-ENDED]

- Q51. What advice would you give to future employers participating in the Ameren Illinois internship program?
[OPEN-ENDED]

Wrap-around services and support [ask all]

These next questions are about wrap-around services through Ameren Illinois.

- Q52. Did you receive wrap-around services from Ameren Illinois and/or your local Climate and Equitable Jobs (CEJA) hub in 2023 and/or 2024? Wrap-around services include assistance with bills or expenses such as gas cards, grocery support, a stipend to attend job training, and other types of financial support. *Select all that apply*

1. Yes, I received wrap-around services from Ameren Illinois
2. Yes, I received wrap-around services from my local Climate and Equitable Jobs hub
3. No, I did not receive any wrap-around services [EXCLUSIVE]
4. No, I was not aware of these types of wrap-around services or support [EXCLUSIVE]

[IF Q52 =3 or 4 SKIP TO NEXT SECTION]

Q53. What wrap-around services did you receive? Wrap-around services include assistance with bills or expenses such as gas cards, grocery support, a stipend to attend job training, and other types of financial support.

[OPEN-ENDED]

Q54. How helpful were the wrap-around services from Ameren Illinois in supporting your career goals?

1. Not at all helpful
2. Slightly helpful
3. Moderately helpful
4. Extremely helpful

[IF Q54>1]

Q55. In what ways were the wrap-around services helpful?

[OPEN-ENDED]

[IF Q54<4

Q56. What, if anything, could be changed in the future to make the wrap-around services more helpful in supporting job seekers' career goals?

[OPEN-ENDED]

Closing

Q57. Thank you for your answers. As a token of our appreciation, we will be sending you a \$50 Tango e-gift card that can be redeemed at one of many businesses, such as Amazon, Best Buy, Nike, Home Depot, and many more. Below, please enter your name and the email address you would like your Tango gift card sent to. *We will not associate this information with your answers.*

If you do not want to receive a Tango gift card, please select "I do not want my gift card."

1. Name: [OPEN-ENDED TEXT BOX]
2. Email Address: [OPEN-ENDED TEXT BOX]
3. I do not want my gift card [EXCLUSIVE]

Thank you very much for taking the time to share your experience participating in the Workforce Development program. Ameren Illinois appreciates your valuable feedback.

[IF Q57<98 DISPLAY "Please allow up to 2-4 weeks for your gift card to be delivered."]

Appendix B. School Partner Interview Guide

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. As I mentioned in the email, Opinion Dynamics and the JPI Group are evaluating Ameren Illinois' Market Development Initiative, or MDI. As part of that effort, we're speaking with staff at community colleges that have partnered with Ameren on their scholarship program to hear about their experiences and perspectives. My questions cover what's been working well in the partnership and what additional support from Ameren Illinois would be valuable for the school or scholarship recipients themselves. Your responses are confidential. We won't attach your name or organization to any responses and results will be aggregated in the final report.

Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

Background

The opening questions are about you and your organization.

- Q1. What is your role at [school name]?
- Q2. How long have you been in that role?
- Q3. How long have you been partnering with Ameren Illinois on scholarships?
- Q4. How would you describe the range of educational offerings your school provides?
- Q5. What are the eligibility criteria for receiving Ameren Illinois scholarships at your school? [PROBE: types of students, targeting disadvantaged students, certain academic or technical tracks]
- Q6. What proportion of scholarship recipients come from disadvantaged backgrounds?
- Q7. How do students typically learn about this scholarship opportunity?
- Q8. How are the Ameren Illinois scholarships connected to careers in energy efficiency?
- Q9. Does your school have other scholarships that also support careers in energy efficiency?

Benefits and Value

- Q10. In your own words, how would you describe your school's partnership with Ameren's Market Development Initiative (MDI) in terms of how it works and your satisfaction with the partnership?
- Q11. How much does your partnership with the MDI align with your school's mission and offerings?
- Q12. How does your school benefit from being a partner in the Market Development Initiative?
- Q13. [IF UNCLEAR] How does being involved in the MDI allow your school to better serve students?
- Q14. How do students typically spend their scholarship funds? What tools, resources, and opportunities become available to them thanks to the scholarship?
- Q15. To the best of your knowledge, describe student experiences with scholarships. What worked well for the students?
- Q16. To the best of your knowledge, describe staff experiences with scholarships. What worked well for the staff?

- Q17. Do you or your school's alumni office collect data on scholarship recipients' post-college career trajectories? [If yes: Would you be able to share the data with us and if so, in what format? If not, would you or other staff at the school be able to give us additional insights into post-graduation trends among Ameren Illinois scholarship recipients?]

Barriers, Challenges, and Gaps

Let's talk about barriers and challenges now.

- Q18. Can you describe the effectiveness of your scholarship program in reaching its target number of recipients, particularly disadvantaged students?
- Q19. What are the primary challenges or roadblocks you encounter in expanding your reach to more students?
- Q20. What kind of support, if any, could Ameren Illinois provide to help you expand your reach?
- Q21. Would you say that the scholarship recipients are aware of the other offerings of the Ameren MDI Workforce Development channel, like training, internships, and job placement?
- Q22. How could Ameren make better connections between the scholarships and the other offerings that would be beneficial to your students?
- Q23. To the best of your knowledge, what part(s) of student experiences with the scholarships were the most challenging?
- Q24. To the best of your knowledge, what part(s) of staff experiences with the scholarships were the most challenging?

Partnership Communication and Processes

Now let's talk a little bit about tools and resources.

- Q25. What sorts of tools and resources does Ameren Illinois provide that you use? [IF NEEDED: These could be templates or forms, outreach materials, etc.]
- Q26. Are you satisfied with them?
 Are they up to date and accurate?
 Do you need any materials in more than one language or format (print, web)?
- Q27. What tools, resources, or information do you not have that would really help?
- Q28. Are there any tools or resources provided that you don't find helpful?
 [IF YES] What are those, and why are they not helpful?
- Q29. Are you able to get any questions you have for Ameren Illinois answered in a timely manner?
 [IF UNCLEAR] How do you access the information you need, is it on websites, or do you have a main point of contact?
- Q30. How does Ameren Illinois provide you with feedback on your MDI scholarship work, if at all?

Q31. What are your thoughts on the current MDI scholarship progress reporting process? Are there any changes you'd like to see in how you report back on your work? [PROBE: Different kind of information, different frequency or format]

Closing

Q32. Those were all the questions I had for you today. Is there anything else we haven't talked about that you think is important for us to know as we look at the Market Development Initiative?

Thank you so much for your time.

Appendix C. Program Ally Incubator Participant Survey

Introduction/Landing Page

Welcome! On behalf of Ameren Illinois Company (AIC), thank you for taking the time to tell us about your experience with the Incubator. This survey will be conducted over the phone and should take between 30 and 45 minutes. Upon completion of the survey, you will receive a \$50 e-gift card.

Your survey responses will be kept confidential and only reported in combination with other customers' responses.

SCREENING [ask all]

Let's make sure you're eligible for the survey.

- S1. Did you participate in the Incubator?
1. Yes
 2. No, it was someone else from my business

[IF S1=2]

- S2. We are looking for feedback directly from the Incubator participants. Please provide the name and email address of the employee who participated in the Incubator.
[OPEN-END TEXT BOX]
[END OF SURVEY; TERMINATE TEXT: Thank you for taking the time to answer our questions]

[IF S1=1]

- S3. How many people work in your current business?
1. Just me
 2. 1—4 other people
 3. 5 or more other people
 4. My business is no longer operating

[IF S3=4]

1. [END OF SURVEY; TERMINATE TEXT: Thank you for taking the time to answer our questions. Unfortunately, you do not qualify for the survey since we are looking for feedback from current business owners.]

Skill Development and Application

The first set of questions asks about the knowledge and skills you developed thanks to the Incubator. Remember, the Incubator included virtual training webinars, one-on-one business coaching sessions, and business growth plan development.

Q1. How did you first hear about the Incubator?

1. Alumni referral
2. Recruiter outreach (e.g., in-person, via phone or email)
3. Ameren Illinois website
4. Social media
5. Other (please specify)

[IF Q1=2]

- Q2. What, if anything, could be improved about the recruiter outreach?
1. 1.[OPEN-ENDED]
 2. 97. No improvements

Q3_1. How helpful were the webinars for increasing your knowledge of the following:

[1 – Extremely helpful, 2 – Moderately helpful, 3 – Slightly helpful, 4 - Not at all helpful]

1. Ameren Illinois EE offerings
2. Project financing
3. Business development
4. Marketing
5. Other available resources from Ameren Illinois

Q3_2. How relevant were the webinar topics to your daily business operations?

1. Extremely relevant
2. Moderately relevant
3. Slightly relevant
4. Not at all relevant

Q3_3. How helpful were the one-on-one coaching sessions in clarifying your business goals?

1. Extremely helpful
2. Moderately helpful
3. Slightly helpful
4. Not at all helpful

Q3_4. How helpful was the one-on-one coaching in creating actionable next steps for your success in the EE market?

1. Extremely helpful
2. Moderately helpful
3. Slightly helpful
4. Not at all helpful

Q3_5. What are your key takeaways from the 1:1 sessions? [OPEN-ENDED]

Q3_6. According to your business growth plan created in the Incubator, your goal was to complete [READ NUMBER] projects for your selected Ameren Illinois offering. How many projects have you completed so far? [NUMERIC OPEN END]

Q3_7. According to your business growth plan created in the Incubator, your goal was to have [READ NUMBER] customers. How many customers have you had so far? [NUMERIC OPEN END]

Q3_8. How helpful was creating the Business Growth Plan for estimating the resources you need as your business grows?

1. Extremely helpful
2. Moderately helpful
3. Slightly helpful
4. Not at all helpful

Q3_9. What, if any, suggestions do you have for making any components of the Incubator more useful in helping participants develop the knowledge and/or skills needed to participate in Ameren Illinois' energy efficiency programs? \

1. [OPEN-ENDED RESPONSE]
2. No suggestions

Q3_10. Please share any additional feedback on the virtual training webinars, one-on-one business coaching sessions, or business growth plan development support if you would like [OPTIONAL] [OPEN-ENDED RESPONSE]

[IF S3>1]

Q3. Have you shared what you learned from the Incubator with other employees in your business?

1. Yes
2. No

[IF Q3=2]

Q4. What prevented you from sharing what you learned from the Incubator with other employees?

[OPEN-ENDED RESPONSE]

[IF Q3=1]

Q5. How did you share what you learned from the Incubator with other employees?

[MULTIPLE RESPONSE]

1. By sharing the slides from the Incubator
2. By inviting other employees to the Incubator session(s)
3. Other (please specify)

[IF S3>1]

Q6. Who typically carries out the work related to Ameren Illinois energy efficiency programs within your business?

1. Primarily the Incubator trainee (the "trainee" may refer to yourself, if applicable)
2. Mostly the Incubator trainee, with some delegation
3. Split evenly between the Incubator trainee and other staff
4. Mostly delegated to other staff
5. Entirely delegated to other staff
6. Other, please specify

Training experience

In this section, we will ask you about your experience in the Incubator.

Q7. Which of the tools or resources shared during the Incubator have been the most valuable to your business and why?

1. [OPEN-ENDED RESPONSE]
2. None

Q10. After completing the Incubator, did you receive clear instructions on the next steps you needed to take to participate in Ameren Illinois Energy Efficiency Programs?

1. Yes
2. No

[IF Q10=2]

Q11. What information or guidance would have made the next steps clearer for you after completing the Incubator? [OPEN-ENDED]

Engagement with Energy Efficiency Programs

Next, we will ask you some questions about how your business has engaged with energy efficiency programs.

Q12. Did you enroll as a Program Ally in any of Ameren Illinois' residential or business energy efficiency programs before or after completing the incubator training?

1. Before completing the incubator training
2. After completing the incubator training

Q13. Since participating in the Incubator, have you completed at least one project in an Ameren Illinois energy efficiency program?

1. Yes
2. No

[IF Q13=2]

Q14. What assistance could Ameren Illinois provide to help you complete at least one project in their energy efficiency programs? [OPEN-ENDED]

Q16. Since participating in the Incubator, has the number of projects you completed in Ameren Illinois energy efficiency programs increased, decreased, or stayed the same?

1. The number of projects increased

2. The number of projects stayed the same
3. The number of projects decreased

Q17. How satisfied are you with the number of energy efficiency projects your business has completed through the Ameren Illinois programs?

1. Extremely satisfied
2. Moderately satisfied
3. Slightly satisfied
4. Not at all satisfied

Q18. How satisfied are you with your current business relationship with Ameren Illinois?

1. Extremely satisfied
2. Moderately satisfied
3. Slightly satisfied
4. Not at all satisfied

[IF Q18>1]

Q19. What could be done to improve your current business relationship with Ameren Illinois?
[OPEN-ENDED RESPONSE]

impact on participant businesses

Finally, we would like to hear about any impact on your business that occurred as a result of the Incubator.

Q20. How influential was your participation in Ameren Illinois programs in attracting new customers to your business?

1. Extremely influential
2. Moderately influential
3. Slightly influential
4. Not at all influential

[IF Q20<4]

Q21. Could you tell us in what ways participating in Ameren Illinois programs influenced your engagement with new customers? [OPEN-ENDED]

[IF S3>1]

Q22. How influential was your participation in Ameren Illinois programs in increasing the number of your staff since graduating from the Incubator program?

1. Extremely influential
2. Moderately influential
3. Slightly influential
4. Not at all influential
97. Did not add staff

[IF Q22<4]

Q23. Could you tell us how participating in Ameren Illinois programs influenced the increase in the number of your staff?
[OPEN-ENDED]

Q24. To what extent has your business revenue increased since graduating from the Incubator?

1. Significantly increased
2. Moderately increased
3. Slightly increased
4. No increase

[IF Q24<4]

Q25. Approximately what was your business's average annual revenue increase since participating in the Incubator?

1. Less than 5% per year

2. 5% - 10% per year
3. 11% - 20% per year
4. 21% - 50% per year
5. More than 50% per year

[IF Q24<5]

Q26. Thinking about the increased revenue since you graduated from the Incubator, roughly how much of that increase came from your participation in Ameren Illinois energy efficiency programs?

1. None
2. Less than half
3. About half
4. More than half
5. All/nearly all

Q27. Did participating in the Incubator help you earn any certifications (e.g., BPI, MBE, WBE, etc.)? If so, please list the certification(s).

1. 1. [OPEN-ENDED]
2. 97. Did not earn any certifications

Q28. Did participating in the Incubator help you expand your capacity or capabilities in any other way? If so, how?

1. 1. [OPEN-ENDED]
2. 97. Did not expand capacities

Q30. Overall, how satisfied are you with your experience in the Incubator?

1. Extremely satisfied
2. Moderately satisfied
3. Slightly satisfied
4. Not at all satisfied

Q31. If you have additional comments you would like to provide about the Incubator or its impact on your work, please provide them here. [OPEN-ENDED RESPONSE]

Closing

Q32. Thank you for your answers. As a thank you for your time and insights, we will be sending you a \$50 gift card that can be redeemed at one of many businesses, such as Amazon, Best Buy, Nike, Home Depot, and many more. Below, please enter your name and the email address you would like your Tango gift card sent to. *We will not associate this information with your answers.*

If you do not want to receive a Tango gift card, please select "I do not want my Tango gift card."

1. Name: [OPEN-END TEXT BOX]
2. Email Address: [OPEN-END TEXT BOX]
3. I do not want my Tango gift card [EXCLUSIVE]

Thank you very much for taking the time to share your experience participating in the Incubator training. Ameren Illinois appreciates your valuable feedback.

[IF Q57<98 DISPLAY "Please allow up to 2-4 weeks for your gift card to be delivered."]

Appendix D. Grant Writing Support Participant Interview Guide

Introduction

Thanks for taking the time to talk with me today. As I mentioned in the email, Opinion Dynamics and the JPI Group are evaluating Ameren Illinois' Market Development Initiative (MDI) Grant Writing Support Program. As part of that effort, we're speaking with staff at organizations that have participated in the program to hear about their experiences and perspectives. My questions cover what's been working well in the program and what additional support from Ameren could help you do more. Your feedback will be included in a report that will be posted publicly, but we will not share your name or any other personal information.

Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

Respondent Background and Context

The opening questions are about you and your organization.

- Q1. Can you briefly describe your organization's mission/focus and the communities/clients you serve?
- Q2. What prompted your organization to seek grant writing support through the Ameren MDI program?
- Q3. According to the records, you have received the following services through the Ameren MDI program [LIST SERVICES]. Is this accurate?
- Q4. Was the support tailored to your organization's specific needs? If so, how? If not, what could have been tailored better?

Training Experiences [if "Training" was listed in Q3]

Let's talk a little bit about your experiences in the MDI Grant Writing Training.

- Q5. What were the most valuable aspects of the training (e.g., curriculum content, interactivity, feedback)?
- Q6. To what extent did the training enhance your organization's ability to independently pursue future funding in clean energy, energy efficiency, or workforce development?
- Q7. Are staff putting the training into practice in their work? How?
- Q8. Were there any aspects of the training you feel could be improved?
- [IF "GRANT PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT" WAS NOT LISTED IN Q3]
- Q9. Have you pursued any grant funding opportunities since the training?
- Q10. Have they been successful?
- Q11. How influential was the grant writing training in your success in securing funding?

Grant Proposal Development [if "Grant Proposal Development" was listed in Q3]

Let's talk about your experiences with grant proposal development support.

- Q12. How would you describe the quality of the support you received for developing your grant proposal?
- Q13. Did the grant writing assistance help your organization improve the clarity, persuasiveness, or competitiveness of your applications?

- Q14. Were there any components of the proposal (e.g., budget, project narrative) that were especially improved thanks to the support?
- Q15. Were you ultimately successful in securing any grants as a result of this support? If so, which ones?
- Q16. Did the funding enable you to launch or expand any programs, particularly in clean energy, energy efficiency, or workforce development? If so, what programs?
- Q17. If you were not successful in securing funding, do you feel the support still built your organization's capacity? In what ways?
- Q18. What were the biggest strengths of the Ameren MDI grant writing support program?
- Q19. In what ways, if any, could grant writing support be improved in the future?
- Q20. What additional support or resources from the MDI would help your organization be more competitive in securing grants?

Closing

Those are all the questions I had for you today. Is there anything else we haven't talked about that you think is important for us to know as we look at the MDI Grant Writing Support Program? Thank you.

This assessment represents a truly collaborative partnership between The JPI Group and Opinion Dynamics, completed in service of Ameren Illinois Company's goals for the Market Development Initiative. The work reflects the integrated contributions of both teams and the guidance of Ameren's staff and partners. We are grateful for the collective effort, shared problem-solving, and commitment that made this report possible.

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