

# Illinois EE Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) Equity Subcommittee Meeting

**Tuesday, October 28, 2025**

10:00 – 12:30 pm

Teleconference

## Attendees and Meeting Notes

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### **Meeting Materials**

Posted on the [October 28 meeting page](#) of the SAG website:

- [Tuesday, October 28 SAG Equity Subcommittee Meeting Agenda](#)
- [SAG Facilitator Presentation: Introduction to October 28 Equity Subcommittee Meeting](#)
- [IQ South Committee Report-Out to SAG](#)
- [Peoples Gas and North Shore Gas MDI Initiative Update](#)
- IQ North Committee Update (verbal)

### **Attendees**

Name	Company or Organization
Celia Johnson	Facilitator (Celia Johnson Consulting)
Zoe Knaus	SAG Facilitation Support (Inova Energy Group)
Abigail Miner	IL Attorney General's Office
Alex Deeb	Ameren Illinois
Aman Athwal	The JPI Group
Annette Beitel	Future Energy Enterprises
Briana Moore	Will County Land Use Dept.
Bryan Haney	Erthe Energy Solutions
Cassidy Kraimer	Community Investment Corp.
Channel Turbides	ComEd
Cheryl Watson	Equitable Resilience & Sustainability
Chris Vaughn	Nicor Gas
Christina Frank	Peoples Gas & North Shore Gas
Danish Murtaza	Peoples Gas & North Shore Gas
Deondre Rutues	Future Energy Enterprises
Elder Calderon	ComEd

<b>Name</b>	<b>Company or Organization</b>
Elizabeth Horne	ICC Staff
Elli Arzbaecher	Future Energy Enterprises
Gregory Norris	Aces 4 Youth
Irena Acic	Opinion Dynamics
Jane Anderson	Inova Energy Group
Jarred Nordhus	Peoples Gas & North Shore Gas
Jessica Minor-Baetens	Guidehouse
John Carroll	Leidos
John Dakarian	Nicor Gas
Jonathan Skarzynski	Nicor Gas
Josalin Wills	Ameren Illinois
Karen Lusson	National Consumer Law Center
Larry Kotewa	Elevate
Lee Ringo	Energy Infrastructure Partners
Martin Agbugui	The JPI Group
Matt Armstrong	Ameren Illinois
Michelle Norgard	CLEAResult
Mindy Browning	Embarras River Basin Agency (ERBA)
Nate Baer	i3 Energy
Neb Kistic	Erthe Energy Solutions
Nicole Popejoy	IL Association of Community Action Agencies
Odette J. Hyatt-Watson	East Central IL Community Action Agency
Omayra Garcia	Peoples Gas & North Shore Gas
Patrice McFarlin	Encolor Consulting
Peter Pasholk	Future Energy Enterprises
Philip Halliburton	ComEd
Randy Opdyke	Nicor Gas
Selena Worster Walde	Erthe Energy Solutions
Ted Weaver	Dunsky Climate + Energy Advisors
Theresa Collins	Senior Services Plus
Tim Dickison	Ameren Illinois
Tina Grebner	Ameren Illinois
Tori Woolbright	Metropolitan Mayors Caucus
Zion Campbell	Future Energy Enterprises
Zoe Huspen	Citizens Utility Board

## **Meeting Notes**

See **red text** for follow-up items.

## **Introduction to SAG Equity Subcommittee Meeting**

*Celia Johnson, SAG Facilitator*

Purpose of October 28 Meeting:

1. For the IQ South EE Committee to report-out on 2025 activities and preview 2026 activities;
2. For Peoples Gas and North Shore Gas to present the Market Development Initiative (MDI) assessment; and
3. For the IQ North EE Committee to present an update.

The October 28<sup>th</sup> SAG Equity Subcommittee meeting is held jointly with the IQ South EE Committee (LIEEAC).

## **IQ-S 2025 Subcommittee Report-Out**

*IQ-S Leadership Team (IQ-S LT), IQ-S Facilitation Team*

Illinois Income Qualified South Energy Efficiency Committee (IQ-S)

- The IQ-S Committee guides the design, delivery, and evaluation of Ameren Illinois' income-qualified energy efficiency programs.
- Justice-Involved Employment
  - Building equitable pathways for system-impacted individuals into clean energy careers
- Supporting Program Allies
  - Strengthening contractor engagement and success through data analysis, outreach, and feedback
- AC / High Heat Cooling Pilot (2026)
  - Developing strategies to address extreme heat and energy burden for IQ customers
- Marketing & Outreach Grants
  - Supporting grantees expanding community education and customer engagement
- CAA/ CBO Matrix & Landscape Analysis
  - Mapping partnerships to strengthen collaboration and portfolio implementation

Justice-Involved Subcommittee

- Best Practice Research
  - 6 interviews completed with orgs in NY and CA
- Workforce Development Opportunities
  - 46 organizations offering workforce training + re-entry services identified
  - Prospective employers of justice-involved individuals identified
- Employer Toolkit
  - Completed
  - Subcommittee members will review to refine
  - Employer roundtable in early 2026

Best Practice Research

- Top themes:
  - Whole-Person Support

- Paid training and wraparound services (housing, childcare, mental health, driver's license) drive retention and success.
- Lived Experience
  - Peer mentors and formerly incarcerated staff build trust and credibility.
- Strong Partnerships
  - Collaboration with re-entry orgs, unions, and employers ensures comprehensive support and job pathways.
- Employer Engagement
  - Reducing stigma and building relationships are key to second-chance hiring. Communicating loyalty, work ethic, and gratitude of justice-involved employees is key.
- Sustainability
  - Diversified funding, realistic scaling, and mission focus keep programs effective long-term.

#### Workforce Development

- 46 organizations identified across Ameren Illinois territory
- CEJA Workforce Hubs and community colleges = foundation of accessible clean energy training (located in Ameren IL service territory)

#### Prospective Employers in Ameren IL Service Territory

- We are connecting with all parties involved in the Ameren IL IQ portfolio, including PAs, CAAs/CBOs, and program implementers, as potential justice-involved employers

#### Initial Prospective Employer Feedback on Hiring Justice-Involved

- Interviewed PAs who both had and had not hired justice-involved (JI) employees, and organizations who are open to hiring.
- 50% of interviewees expressed interest in hiring JI individuals.
- Compiling list of potential employers to guide hiring efforts in 2026.
- Will survey and include CAAs and Ameren IL Implementation contractors as well

#### Justice-Involved Toolkit

- Offers templates, checklists, resources, and best practice habits for success
- Sections: Offers templates, checklists, resources, and best practice habits for success
  - Part I: Introduction
  - Part II: Organizational Readiness
  - Part III: Returning Citizen Preparation
  - Part IV: Partnership Model
  - Part V: Systems to Support Reentry
  - Part VI: Implementation Timeline
  - Part VII: Evaluation and Accountability
- Next Steps: Connect Ameren IL partners with justice-involved candidates

#### Supporting Program Allies (PAs) Subcommittee

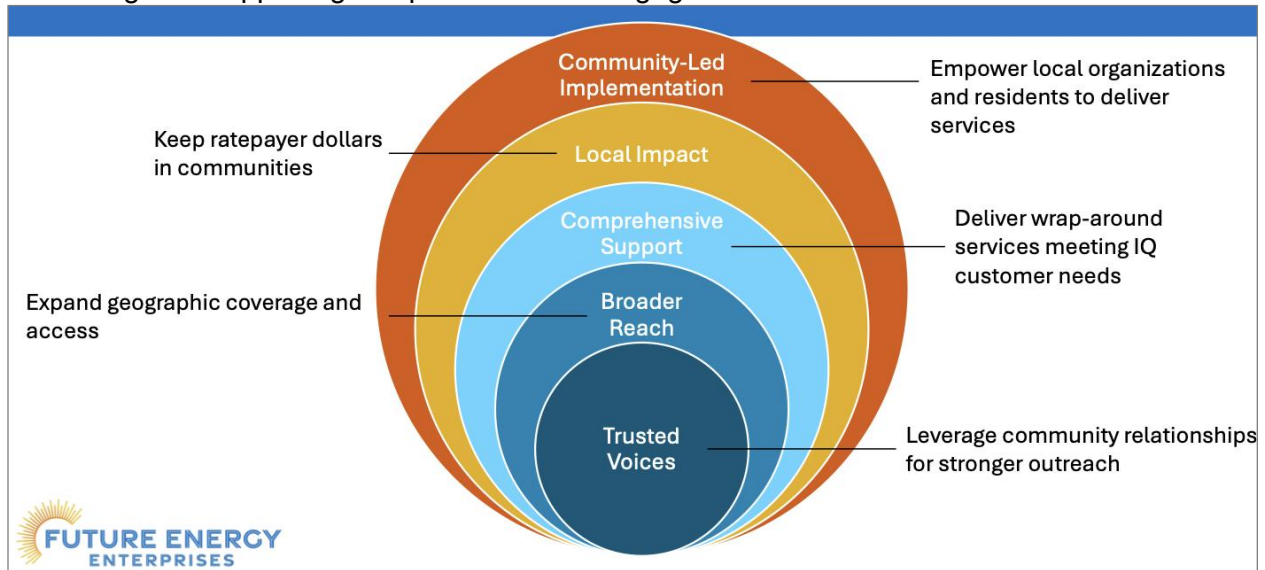
- Survey
  - Sent survey to ~270 PAs
  - 30 responses (via online survey + direct calls)
- Feedback
  - Developed tools to increase communication with Program Allies & Ameren
- Data Analysis

- Mapped and analyzed trends in PA portfolio engagement

#### Survey

- Sent to 270 Program Allies using a hybrid approach: 10 online responses (Survey Monkey, disclaimer issues) and 20 phone interviews completed.
- Key Themes:
  - Financial Barriers
    - Payments have improved, but slow reimbursements, limited startup capital, paperwork, and high operational costs continue to strain growth.
    - Strong interest in learning how to secure and apply grants to stabilize cash flow and expand business capacity.
  - Staffing Challenges
    - Struggle to find skilled workers, reliance on unions and referrals; need field-ready employees. High hiring cost (\$15-20K) with long ramp-up.
  - Training Needs
  - Mentorship & Peer Collaboration
  - Communication
  - Opportunities

#### Assessing and Supporting Deeper CAA/CBO Engagement in the Ameren IL IQ Portfolio:



- Deliverable: Research + recommendations on how to increase CBO/CAA participation
- Tasks:
  - Assess and map current CBO/CAA participation in the IQ Portfolio
    - Survey CAAs/CBOs across Ameren territory
  - Identify opportunities and challenges to expanding participation
  - Facilitate Marketing & Outreach (M&O) grants

#### 2025 Marketing & Outreach Grants

- Solicitation RFP in early 2025
- Selection resulted in 3 awards
- Total grant amount is \$80,000
  - Value per grantee is \$25,000 each

- \$5,000 will be awarded to top performers
- Different outreach approaches being utilized to target different customer types in various regions in Ameren territory
- Will assess and develop lessons learned at end of grant cycle (end of October)

#### AC Cooling/High Heat Pilot

- Rising temps = rising health risks
- Vulnerable residents need safe, affordable cooling
- Program Goals:
  - Ensure equitable access to life-saving cooling
  - Pilot efficiency, low-cost AC units through CBOs/CAAs
  - Educate customers on safe, energy-smart usage
  - Collect data to inform 2026-2029 program design

#### AC Cooling/High Heat Program Design

- Pilot Overview
  - Implement through CBOs/CAAs
    - Conduct marketing & outreach
    - Enroll customers
    - Provide education
  - Pilot: 20 EnergyStar units per CBO/CAA
    - Testing window heat pump Acs in addition to traditional Energy Star window units
- Data Collection & Analysis
  - Assess whether income-qualified (IQ) customers use cooling when needed, or avoid due to cost concerns
  - Measure additional energy usage from AC usage during heat events
  - Identify Strategies to address affordability concerns

#### Preview of 2026 Activities

- Justice-Involved Subcommittee
- Supporting PAs Subcommittee
- CAA/CBO Engagement
- AC Cooling Pilot
- ECEL Program
- Expanding Leadership Team
- Expanding Committee Membership

*Karen Lusson: When will the AC pilot begin in 2026?*

- *Elli Arzbaecher: We are finalizing our workplan but aiming for early 2026.*
- *Karen Lusson: This work is extremely impressive, kudos to those involved.*

#### **Peoples Gas and North Shore Gas Market Development Initiative Update**

*Omy Garcia and Jarred Nordhus, Peoples Gas and North Shore Gas; Bryan Haney, Erthe Energy Solutions; Jane Anderson, Inova Energy Group*

#### MDI Objectives

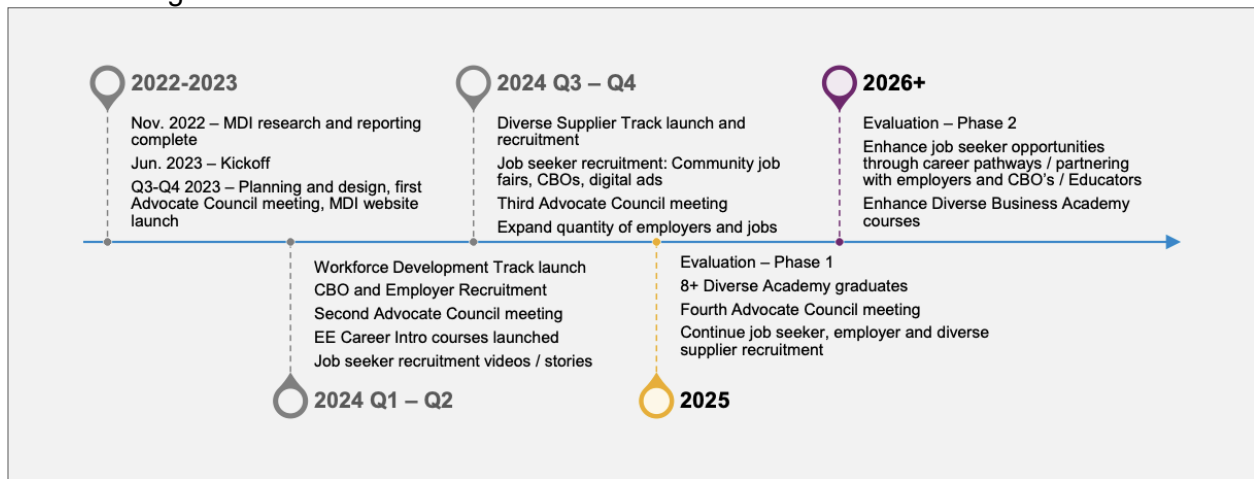
- Improve the diversity and inclusiveness of the Peoples Gas and North Shore Gas energy efficiency portfolio supplier workforce.
- Strengthen the partnership and support for local and diverse business enterprises.

- Increase contracting opportunities for diverse contractors, subcontractors, distributors, and other suppliers and community-based organizations at all contractual levels and assist them in developing the necessary capabilities to participate in the delivery of the Peoples Gas and North Shore Gas energy efficiency portfolio.
- Increase the transparency of and equity in the energy efficiency procurement process.

#### MDI Design Priorities

- Wraparound Services and Support
  - CBOs, CAAs, DFSS
- Candidate Recruitment and Coaching
  - RiseKit
- Workforce Training
  - CBOs, Educations, Training Programs
- Diverse Suppliers
  - Trade Allies, Contractors
- Clean Energy Jobs
  - Trade Allies, Contractors

#### Initiative Progress:



#### Success Stories

- Diverse Business
  - Minnich Insulation worked with the academy to get WBENC certification (women-owned business) and become a Trade Ally.
- Job Seeker
  - “I connected with the Peoples Gas Energy Efficiency Program. I was able to take a few classes, learn new things about the future of energy, how important efficiency is, and how much we need to stop wasting resources. Also, it's really great because I found a lot of opportunities, job opportunities that were either local or not too far from me.”
- Employer
  - 24 Heating and Cooling - hired an MDI graduate and is seeking Diverse-owned Business Certification through Academy

*Karen Lussion (via chat): What third party is implementing the MDI? Can you discuss how you are coordinating with the joint northern Illinois utilities (ComEd and Nicor)?*

- *Brian Haney: Erthe Energy Solutions is the implementer. We have partnered with RiseKit for career coaching and online job placement services, with Equinox Creative for marketing and digital recruitment, and L3 agency for outreach.*
- *Omy Garcia: We are collaborating with the northern Illinois utilities through quarterly touchpoints and would like to increase the frequency of these meetings. We will continue our collaboration into 2026 to mesh program offerings.*

*Josalin Wills (via chat): Is the diverse certification free for qualified businesses? Is there a web-based process for requesting certification?*

- *Bryan Haney: Our Diverse Business Academy is designed to provide financial support to businesses that participate. We offer a \$2,000 microgrant to reduce application fees and prep time. Any interested diverse business can apply to participate.*

#### Evaluation and Objectives

- Evaluation objectives
  - Understand participant impact
  - Recommend actionable adjustments for 2025 and scaling for 2026-2029
  - Assess similar workforce and diverse supplier initiatives
  - Identify success stories
- Process evaluation
  - Phased approach
    - Phase 1: January 2024 – December 2024
    - Phase 2: January 2025 – December 2025

#### Evaluation Approach

- Phase 1:
  - Workforce Track focused
  - Implementation team perspectives
  - General operations and messaging
  - Participant perspectives
- Phase 2:
  - Deepen evaluation of the Diverse Business Track
  - Targeted benchmarking
  - Focus Groups with SMEs and Advocates” Council
  - Partial participant perspectives

#### Phase 1 Evaluation Considerations

- The PGL NSG MDI is designed to:
  - Leverage established workforce training and business support ecosystem
  - Serve as a connector
  - Provide a highly individualized approach
- 2024 was a ramp-up year
- Workforce Development Track launched first, greater data and insights available
- Attempt to get holistic insights of MDI actors

#### Evaluation Methodology

- Documentation Review
- Benchmarking
- In-Depth Interviews
  - 20 interviews completed

- Held with MDI actors: implementation team, PGL NSG, CBOs, employers, coaches, diverse business participants, and job seekers
- Online Surveys
  - Administered to 104 Workforce Track candidates, 23% response rate.
- Data Review and Analysis
  - Reporting tools, trackers and databases, and surveys and interviews

#### Findings – Strengths

- Strong alignment with intended objectives
- CBO partnership model is effective for participant recruitment
- Employers see clear value in the model
- High level of interest and initial engagement among job seekers
- Online, self-paced format was well-received
- Energy Efficiency Training Series has a high level of satisfaction among job seeker candidates (7.95/10)
- High level of interest and initial engagement among job seekers
- Online, self-paced format was well-received

*Irena Acic (via chat): What was your outreach strategy for the online survey?*

- *Jane Anderson: It was two parts: providing a financial incentive via Visa gift card to each respondent and deploying it through a trusted source, as respondents are more inclined to take the survey from a trusted source. Also, expressing upfront the amount of time it will take and how the feedback will be used.*

*Alex Deeb (via chat): Could you provide more information about the online, self-paced format?*

- *Bryan Haney: The MDI aims to avoid redundancy and provide a complimentary training. It is a three-part series with three different modules to help jobseekers learn about energy efficiency jobs and develop necessary communication skills. The first two modules highlight available jobs, and the third module is a virtual walkthrough of a single-family home where they can identify energy-saving measures. The process takes anywhere from 3-4 hours, and a certificate is added to your profile after completion.*

#### Findings – Opportunities

- MDI messaging
  - Clear messaging and stronger communication to boost engagement, reduce drop-off, and better support MDI partners and participants
- Completion rates
  - Standardize CBO partnerships to scale impact, streamline services, and drive success
  - Refine the definition of the “ideal” participant to better focus limited programmatic resources
  - Balance personalized support with a more focused approach to improve outcomes and scalability for the Workforce Track
- Post-training support
  - Develop a post-training support process for candidates
- Active employer participation and retention
  - Expand employer engagement to provide MDI participants with meaningful job opportunities

Karen Lusson (via chat): Will you follow job retention rates of program graduates? Are there check-ins with graduates and their employers?

- Bryan Haney: We have conversations with candidates and employers. Career coaches check-in at 90 days and are continuously checking up. We want to expand reporting on jobseekers in pursuit of a job or placed through surveys, following Inova's recommendation.

### Recommendations – Next Steps

#### MDI Messaging:

Activity	Timing	Status
Transition to a new domain name	Q3 2025	Completed
Launch print materials ordering microsite for partners	Q3 2025	Completed
Update website to offer separate pages for job seekers / employer and adjust content to establish clear benefits, participation commitment and next steps for each audience.	Q4 2025 – Q1 2026	In-Progress
Boost visibility of key partners and employers on website (logos, highlights and testimonials)	Q1 2026 – Q2 2026	Planned

- FutureInEnergy.com
  - New domain name
  - Enhanced Community Partners Toolkit
    - FREE print materials ordering
    - Digital files download

#### Spotlight: MDI Career Events

- CPS Careers In The Park, Dunbar High School – 5/15/25
- Covenant House Youth Resource Fair – 6/12/25
- Chicago Urban League Citywide Job Fair – 6/18/25
- Chicago Public Library Green Job Fair – 6/25/25
- Malcom X College Career Fair – 9/17/25
- 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, & 5<sup>th</sup> Ward Job & Housing Fair – 10/11/25

### Recommendations – Next Steps

#### Completion Rates:

Activity	Timing	Status
Prioritize CBO, Educator, CEJA hub partnerships with skill training aligned with career families	Q3 2025 – Q1 2026	In-Progress
Implement formal statements of collaboration with partners and recurring training and coordination meetings	Q3 2025 – Q1 2026	In-Progress
Narrow focus on recruiting / partnering efforts to energy efficiency career families	Q3 2025 – Q1 2026	In-Progress
Adjust messaging in recruiting ads for narrow focus	Q3 2025 +	Ongoing
Refine online registration and energy efficiency screening survey to enhance engagement with career coach and referrals to desired services, training or jobs	Q4 2025 – Q1 2026	In-Progress

*Josalin Wills (via chat): Is there attention to partnering with schools to create interest in careers in energy at a young age? If so, what does that partnership look like?*

- *Bryan Haney: We have partnered with Dunbar Academy to educate students about energy efficiency opportunities.*
- *Omy Garcia: There are regular recruitment efforts like this. We partnered with CPS for a 6–8-week summer cohort program where students learn about the natural gas industry and energy efficiency.*

*Alex Deeb (via chat): Would you be willing to share details on the post-placement survey for jobseeker candidates?*

- *Bryan Haney: We do not have many details at this point, but it is in development and modelled after Inova’s evaluation. We send the survey at a certain milestone in their job search or after they’ve been placed in a job.*

#### Energy Efficiency Career Families

- Weatherization/Insulation (Recruitment in progress)
  - Weatherization Technician
  - Insulation Installer
  - Laborer
- Customer Engagement and Marketing
  - Outreach Specialist
  - Sales Representative
  - Marketing Specialist
- Business Operations and Support
  - Customer Care Representative
  - Delivery Driver
  - Warehouse Inventory Specialist
  - Schedule/Office Manager
- Energy Assessment and Management
  - Energy Advisor
  - Energy Analyst
  - Building Operator
- Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC)
  - Apprentice
  - Technician/Installer

- Estimator
- Sales Representative

**Job Seeker Recruitment: Targeted Digital Campaign**

- Target Audience
  - Job Seekers
- Territory and Language
  - Co-branded for both territories, in English and Spanish
- Ad Type
  - Social Media Ads (Facebook Reels/Ads)
  - Banner Display Ads
  - Social Display Ads
- Schedule
  - 3 x 3 week waves – Sep 11 – Nov 28

**Recommendations – Next Steps**

**Post-training support:**

Activity	Timing	Status
Explore options to market candidates directly to registered employers (i.e. job fairs, direct referrals, etc.)	2026	Planned
Expand follow-up and collect ongoing feedback from participants	2026	Planned
Pilot employer mentorship / placement grants for on-boarding job seeker participants	2026	Planned

**Active employer participation and retention:**

Activity	Timing	Status
Focused employer recruitment campaign to boost quantity of participating employers and volume of job postings	Q3 2025 – Q4 2025	In-Progress
Conduct employer focus group and survey employers about barriers / hiring plans; consider additional support	Q3 2025 – Q1 2026	In-Progress

*Nicole Popejoy: You mentioned you were looking for more employers to partner with for job placement. Have you connected with community action agencies in the northern part of the state? Such as Community Action Partnership of Lake County, CEDA, DuPage County Human Services, or McHenry County Housing Authority?*

- *Bryan Haney: Yes, we have partnered with Community Action Partnership of Lake County and would like to partner with the others mentioned.*

*Karen Lusson (via chat): Why not connect with CEDA, who serves your service territory and has training facilities?*

- *Bryan Haney: Apologies for misspeaking, we have partnered with CEDA.*

## **IQ North EE Committee Update**

*Briana Moore, Will County Land Use Department*

### IQ North Subcommittee

- ComEd service territory in northern Illinois

### Recent Progress

- The IQ North Committee reached agreements with the Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC), ComEd, and the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus (MMC) to support administrative functions
- The IQ North Committee is preparing to hit the ground running.

### Grant Opportunity

- Low Income Energy Efficiency Education and Outreach Grant Opportunity:  
<https://metropolitanmayorscaucus.submittable.com/submit/bc53f8b1-f66f-416b-9508-a80dfb3114a6/low-income-energy-efficiency-outreach-and-engagement-grant-opportunity>
- Intended for CBOs, nonprofits, municipalities, and CAAs that have connections with low-income (LI) communities looking to support with education and outreach.
- Offering up to \$25,000 on a quick timeline:
  - Application review begins November 5<sup>th</sup>.
  - Selected grantees notified by November 12<sup>th</sup>.
  - Agreements finalized by December 15<sup>th</sup>.
- Designed to be simple, focusing on current outreach efforts, target audiences, and proposed activities.
- Funds to be obligated this year.

*Nicole Popejoy (via chat): Will this grant opportunity be available again at a different time? Community Action Agencies conduct more outreach in the spring and summer.*

- *Briana Moore: Yes, we anticipate more grant opportunities in 2026 pending additional agreements with ComEd and ICC.*

*Deondre Rutues (via chat): Is this available to all CBOs/CAAs in Chicago?*

- *Briana Moore: Yes, it extends to all CBOs in ComEd territory.*

*Cheryl Watson (via chat): When is the next IQ North meeting?*

- *Briana Moore: Planning for 2026.*

## **Closing and Next Steps**

No follow-up items.