U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY | Office of ENERGY EFFICIENCY & RENEWABLE ENERGY

SOLAR ENERGY TECHNOLOGIES OFFICE

# ILLINOIS GREEN ECONOMY NETWORK

## Expanding the Solar Workforce through the Illinois Community College System

energy.gov/solar-office

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# Role of Team Members

**Awardee: Lewis and Clark Community College (fiscal agent for Illinois Green Economy Network), college participant**

**Subrecipients:**

- City Colleges of Chicago, college participant
- College of Lake County, college participant
- John A. Logan College, college participant
- Kankakee Community College, college participant
- Lincoln Land Community College, college participant

# Background

The Illinois Green Economy Network (IGEN) is a consortium of all 39 Illinois community college districts, formed in 2008. IGEN's mission is to provide a platform for collaboration among all Illinois community colleges and their partners to drive growth of the green economy. IGEN's vision is the Illinois community college system as a global leader in transforming education and the economy for a sustainable future. IGEN is considered a national model for a sustainability-focused network in higher education.

# Project Objectives

Create/sustain a project and strategy to equip education/training providers, workers, businesses, and communities with resources and tools to prepare a solar workforce.

Objective 1: Address an unmet need by increasing the pool of skilled solar workers.

Objective 2: Keep pace with evolving needs of the solar workforce by improving programs to be more accessible and industry-driven.

Objective 3: Strengthen IGEN's capacity as a resource statewide for solar education, training, and workforce initiatives.

# Project Implementation

## Increase the pool of skilled solar workers

- Broadened/new recruitment channels focusing on community-based organizations, high schools, and veteran-serving organizations
- Deeper relationships with businesses for the purposes of recruiting currently-employed workers for training to enhance skillsets
- Evidence-based student retention strategies, such as early alert systems, intrusive advisement, and career coaching
- Enhanced career services for participants, including internships and other work experiences
- Dedicated staff needed in recruitment, retention, and career services

# Project Implementation

## Improve offered programs/training

- Create, expand, and/or update solar-related courses, programs, and trainings available at participating Illinois community colleges
- Ensure that nationally recognized certifications and credentials, industry standards, and licensure are embedded, as appropriate/needed
- Align curriculum with knowledge and skills sought by businesses
- Update education and training delivery methods (such as online and technology-enabled learning)
- Collaboration between businesses and education/training providers, including an advisory group, to assess barriers to participation and placement, understand local solar workforce needs, and evaluate worker skills gaps

# Project Implementation

## Strengthen capacity as resource statewide

- Launch and sustain a business engagement initiative in collaboration with partners
- Increase and sustain capacity to conduct market research for targeted outreach to businesses and program planning
- Businesses will serve on the advisory group, provide data on needed skills to be incorporated into curricula, and provide internship opportunities and job openings, as available
- Develop a resource sharing platform that enables delivery of programs across Illinois community college districts and geographies
- Bring solar workforce education and training to regions that have a need but not enough capacity or demand

# Project Results

## Increase the pool of skilled solar workers

- 180 students enrolled in courses, certificates, degrees, and/or training programs
- Within 3 months of completion, 95 students employed in the industry

## Improve offered programs/training

- 20 courses, certificates, degrees, and/or training programs created, expanded, or updated
- Curricula made available to additional colleges and partners through Creative Commons

## Strengthen capacity as resource statewide

- 35 businesses engaged and participating with the network (and advisory group)
- Businesses provided data on needed skills, internship opportunities, and job openings, as available

## Evaluation/sustainability

- Third-party for evaluation and measurement of successful project performance and outcomes
- Letters of commitment/support from colleges to continue programing after grant period

# What does Success Look like?

## Project Outcomes

- 180 students enrolled in solar education/training programs
- 95 students employed in the solar workforce
- 20 courses, certificates, degrees, and/or training programs created, expanded, or updated
- 35 businesses engaged and participating with the network for career pathways
- Education/training programs shared with colleges in regions underserved

## Project Impact and Sustainability

- Provide individuals from diverse communities/populations with skills for the solar workforce, while supplying local talent to businesses in the industry
- Higher education and retention rates, better quality of job applicants, and improved employee engagement
- Letters of commitment/support from colleges to continue programing after completion of grant period
- Potential for future replication and/or scale-up