



**BLACKS IN GREEN**

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**Media Contact**

Elza Ter-Arutyunov

872-316-0297 | [elza@blacksingreen.org](mailto:elza@blacksingreen.org)

**ILLINOIS FINANCE AUTHORITY APPROVES VITAL LOAN, RAISING  
FINANCING TO \$2.9M FOR PRE-DEVELOPMENT OF GEJC'S 9MW COMMUNITY  
SOLAR PROJECTS**

*Loan will enable Green Energy Justice Cooperative, launched by Blacks in Green and core partners, to facilitate the pre-development of three industry-scale solar projects to benefit community members in Illinois*

**CHICAGO, IL — April 15, 2024:** Last week, the Illinois Finance Authority (IFA)/Climate Bank unanimously passed a Resolution to authorize the IFA/Climate Bank's Executive Director, Chris Meister, to administer financial assistance of up to \$1.6 million through a participation loan to support community solar projects owned by Green Energy Justice Cooperative (GEJC), a consumer-owned clean energy cooperative launched by Blacks in Green and core partners. The approval paves the way for GEJC to finalize and execute the joint loan from Candide Group's Afterglow Climate Justice Fund and the IFA/Climate Bank, thereby advancing sustainable energy initiatives in Illinois.

This significant financing decision increases the total funding to \$2.9M for GEJC's community solar projects, a portion of which is privately funded. It will enable GEJC to kickstart the pre-development phase of three industry-scale solar projects, each generating 3 megawatts DC. In total, these projects will contribute 9 megawatts of solar power, aiming to foster wealth-building and economic development in the communities where they are located.

"We're elated by the news — history in the making — and real-life support for a project demonstrating BIG's 2nd Principle of Green-Village-Building which states that – *each village produces and stores its own energy for light, heat, and transportation, and owns its means of production*. It's one of the 8 building blocks of our Sustainable Square Mile system being replicated across the country. We say communities should own, develop, and manage their land and energy, and with our \$10M EPA Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Center

(TCTAC) award, BIG is offering free/open source access to our energy justice portfolio, which includes this 9MW solar project and community geothermal and wind,” said Naomi Davis, Founder and CEO of Blacks in Green. “With our energy affordability bill before the Illinois General Assembly, and our energy auditing workforce launching this summer, we aim to connect the dots of community-driven, community-scale energy solutions for low and moderate-income communities across America.”

In late 2023, the Illinois Power Agency [announced their Community-Driven Community Solar Project selection results](#) for program year 2023-2024. The Agency selected the Green Energy Justice Cooperative (GEJC) to develop three industry-scale solar projects to benefit community members in Illinois. On completion, the three projects will provide a rare community ownership stake in clean energy generation and lower the energy burden of its Black, Brown, and other low- and moderate-income (LMI) beneficiaries in Aurora, Naperville, Romeoville, and surrounding communities in Illinois.

“Thanks for Governor Pritzker’s national leadership on the equitable energy transition, through the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA). The Illinois Finance Authority/Climate Bank is proud to be able to assist private lender, Afterglow Climate Justice Fund in supporting a loan to GEJC, to our knowledge, the first BIPOC-led, Community-Driven Community Solar project in the state of Illinois,” said Chris Meister, Executive Director of the Illinois Finance Authority/Climate Bank.

Launched in 2022, GEJC is owned by its solar subscribers and supporters and serves as a vehicle towards economically and racially-just ownership of local clean energy. This unique approach ensures that low-income communities of color in Illinois have the opportunity to own their energy sources, enabling them to benefit from the economic and political power that comes with energy generation ownership.

“We are very pleased that the board of the IFA/Climate Bank has approved the pre-development loan for our Community-Driven Community Solar project that is being developed in the Aurora, Naperville, and Romeoville areas. When this project is completed over the next couple of years, it will be the largest non-governmental, non-utility, minority-community-owned solar project in Illinois. And as such, it will be the fulfillment of years of dreams and work by our Green Energy Justice Cooperative, to share middle-class jobs and wealth-building with historically deprived and distressed individuals and families throughout this area. In doing so, it will be the beginning of lifting these kinds of individuals and families from the bottom of our economic pyramid into the middle class. And it will therefore be the beginning of bringing some closure to the Black and White wealth gap that exists in Metro-Chicago; in addition to reducing the carbon footprint in our area, to reduce climate change,” said Rev. Tony Pierce, GEJC board member and CEO of Sun Bright Energy.

“The IFA/Climate Bank board's loan approval demonstrates the continued support and commitment to GEJC’s community solar projects. This loan will unlock a new vista of state, federal, and utility funds critical to the build-out of these wealth creation assets in our communities,” said Wasiu Adesope, Sustainable Engineering Associate at Blacks in Green.

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**About Blacks in Green™**

Blacks in Green (BIG) is a national network for environmental justice and economic development created to close America's racial health/wealth gap via the new green economy using a whole-system solution for the whole-system problem common to Black communities everywhere. Their Sustainable Square Mile System™ implements their 8 Principles of Green-Village-Building™ to cultivate walk-to-work, walk-to-shop, walk-to-learn, walk-to-play villages where African American neighbors own the businesses, own the land, and live the conservation lifestyle. By building economies in energy, horticulture, housing, tourism, and waste in a walkable village, BIG works to increase household income and resilience against the harms of climate crisis for practitioners in their pilot village of West Woodlawn, Chicago and beyond.

Launched by BIG and core partners, Green Energy Justice Cooperative (GEJC) is a consumer-owned clean energy cooperative that's building community-owned solar power, creating jobs, clean energy enterprises, and economic and political power that come with it.