



**BLACKS IN GREEN**

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**CO-OP FOUNDED BY BLACKS IN GREEN WINS UNPRECEDENTED SOLAR DEVELOPMENT AWARD FROM STATE OF ILLINOIS**

*Green Energy Justice Cooperative's 9-MW solar project will be one of the nation's largest non-utility-based solar projects launched by a clean energy co-op*

**CHICAGO, IL — December 12, 2023:** Last week, the Illinois Power Agency (IPA) [announced their Community-Driven Community Solar Project selection results](#) for program year 2023-2024. The agency selected the Green Energy Justice Cooperative (GEJC), a consumer-owned clean energy cooperative launched by Blacks in Green (BIG) and core partners, to develop three industry-scale solar projects at 3 megawatts DC each, totaling 9 megawatts of solar power, 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. Similar developments by BIG are planned for Cook and Kankakee counties. The estimated value of this renewable energy credit award is \$12.5M.

Blacks in Green projects ranked 1st, 2nd, and 4th in the Illinois Shines competitive process and validated years of investment by BIG to fulfill its 2nd Principle of Green-Village-Building: Each village produces and stores its own energy for light, heat, and transportation, and owns its means of production.

**"It's a culmination of more than a decade of movement alliance work to build an Illinois renewable energy industry through FEJA and CEJA legislation, and to build community-scale solutions as a Chicago Climate Action Plan partner," said Naomi Davis, founder and CEO of BIG.** This achievement adds an essential tool to BIG's Sustainable Square Mile/Energy Justice Portfolio, which it offers as open source innovation through an EPA Thriving Communities grant - along with options like village-scale microgrid and grid modernization study, neighborhood decarbonization, energy auditing workforce training, local

EV charging station network, and its energy affordability bill, the People's Utility Rate Relief Act [PURR]. **"All are critical to the success of our Campaign To End Energy Poverty, which aims to expand nationally the Illinois standard of a 6% cap on household income for life-essential services of light and heat," says Davis.**

When the 9-megawatt community solar project launches, it will allow LMI household subscribers without access to and/or control of a rooftop, such as renters, condominium owners, and homeowners with unsuitable roofs, to save money on their electric bills.

Subscribers of these community solar projects will see additional benefits, including: co-ownership of the solar co-op and accompanying profit sharing; a voice in the management of the clean energy cooperative; equitable workforce training and capacity development; and the opportunity to help create an equitable clean energy transition that provides meaningful benefits to people and protects the environment.

**"We are delighted to have our three solar projects scored so highly by the Illinois Power Agency. This will ensure that the projects are completed and thereby demonstrate the power of solar sovereignty for ownership and wealth building by Blacks in distressed Black communities. And the power of significant middle-class job creation at scale, by Blacks in distressed Black communities," said Rev. Tony Pierce, GEJC board member and CEO of Sun Bright Energy.**

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, where low-income communities of color own their energy and benefit from the economic and political power that comes with owning energy generation. This win ensures that the co-op is one step closer to getting the benefits of the burgeoning clean energy transition in Illinois to underserved and marginalized communities in this age of climate crisis.

The co-op was founded by BIG alongside the following coalition of mission-aligned, community-based organizations in the Chicagoland area:

- Grow Greater Englewood
- People for Community Recovery
- Southeast Environmental Task Force
- Imani Village
- Community Transformation Ministries / Sun Bright Energy LLC / Community Transformation Partnership Power (CTP-Power)
- Claretian Associates
- North Lawndale Employment Network
- Chicago Environmental Justice Network (CEJN)
- Urban Juncture
- Greenleaf Advisors

Many of these organizations have been working together on energy justice issues in the Chicago area for decades, and have been seeking to implement opportunities for community-based solar since the passage of the landmark clean energy transition legislation, the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA), that set ambitious goals for the equitable transformation of the state's energy portfolio by the year 2050.

GEJC is also supported by partners at Cooperative Energy Futures, a Minnesota-based member-owned clean energy cooperative that has developed similar models of equitable community ownership of solar projects in their own communities.

**Cooperative Energy Futures General Manager Timothy DenHerder-Thomas said "We're really excited to be supporting GEJC in bringing community-owned solar to GEJC's local communities in Illinois. Through our co-op in Minnesota, we've seen the power of this model in uniting communities around a clean energy future that works for renters and low-income households and makes sure local residents own and get the benefits too."**

The three GEJC Community-Driven Community Solar projects selected by the Illinois Power Agency will now be presented to the Illinois Commerce Commission, the Illinois public utility regulatory body in January 2024 for approval for Renewable Energy Credits (REC) contracts.

**"We're delighted to partner with Blacks in Green to help create new sources of renewable energy in Aurora and Romeoville through the Green Energy Justice Co-op," said Vibhu Kaushik, Senior Vice President and Global Head of Energy, Utilities, and Storage at Prologis. "As a member of the local business community, Prologis is focused on working with our customers, local governments, and local partners like Blacks in Green to help create a vibrant and sustainable economy."**

**"We are thrilled to hear this news as we continue our work to connect agriculture and energy projects in the proposed AgroEco District. This is a tremendous win for Chicago and further highlights why collective action works. Our communities NEED work and opportunities to support the brilliance and creativity to build a new economy that centers new concepts for commerce and energy in Black communities across the globe," said Anton Seals, Jr., GEJC board member and Lead Steward (Executive Director) of Grow Greater Englewood.**

**"Given that many environmental justice communities like mine, in the far Southeast Side of Chicago, bear the brunt of climate change, this is a great opportunity to begin to undo and heal our communities from that harm," said Olga Bautista, GEJC board member and Co-Executive Director of the Southeast Environmental Task Force.**

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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.