

Illinois Solar for All Expansion: Residential Solar Outreach and Assistance Grants Responses to Applicant Questions Notice of Funding Opportunity [IFA-SFA-02](#)

May 5, 2025 – May 9, 2025

Question: [REDACTED] is a technical support consulting firm helping in Shared services. Part 2 of the grant application. Do they need to have the GATA ID as well?

Response: If they are not the lead applicant, they do not need a GATA ID. The only entity that needs to register and be pre-qualified in GATA is the lead applicant; all other partners should be listed in the project narrative with an explanation of what their role will be. Partners should also provide a letter of support or other documentation (if it's a consultant, potentially a contract) showing their intent to collaborate.

Question: Are you able to say how the intensive outreach is different from the existing ILSFA Grassroots Educators work?

Response: The work Grassroots Educators are doing is all different, so it will depend. We do expect this work to be as intensive as possible. It's not just helping people get through the income eligibility requirements (although that will be part of it since that paperwork is a barrier), but it's also helping folks through every step of the project – whether that's scheduling, working with contractors, etc. The Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) has a list of activities, which is not exhaustive, but it's a good starting point. Existing educators know what folks are facing, so we're hoping you will be creative in addressing those barriers and proposing solutions.

Question: What is meant by "shared services" under the second type of work eligible? Can you give examples of shared services?

Response: There are some examples in the NOFO, and we encourage you to look at those. One example is materials that all outreach grantees would find helpful. One requirement stated in the NOFO is how you would go about finding out what the outreach grantees need, in order to decide which shared services are helpful.

Question: What measures has the Illinois Climate Bank taken to minimize the risk for grantees of federal program discontinuation and funding claw backs?

Response: There are very few things that the Illinois Climate Bank itself can do. In an atmosphere of uncertainty, one of the things we can do is work diligently to get programs up and running as quickly as possible, minimizing risk by moving forward. There is risk, but we cannot give odds on those risks, and we cannot tell you that they don't exist. We're doing the best we can, and IFA/CB will continue work



with grantees to minimize risk. There are certain things we can do to assist, such as invoicing on a regular cadence, which will assist with administrative risk reduction efforts.

Question: Will grantees work directly with federal managers, or will we work through an intermediary as far as reporting, benchmarks, etc.?

Response: Any grantees will be subgrantees to IFA/CB, so you will be working with and directly reporting to IFA/CB.

Question: There is a condition of income qualified applicants, but then also in 1-4 unit buildings. Does this mean that an owner of a building with 1-4 tenants that are income qualified could take advantage of the program even if the owner themselves would not qualify.

Response: The Residential Solar Outreach Grant program is intended to increase the number of residents who successfully complete the Illinois Solar for All Residential Solar (Small) Program, and so will use the same definitions and eligibility criteria for residents as that program. The ILSFA program's Approved Vendor Manual defines program eligibility. The latest version of the Manual [is located here](#). The Manual discusses program eligibility on Page 15 and further in Section 6.1.

Question: Would supporting a new program be eligible under this grant? For example, if we have a program to do energy auditing and offers additional subsidies for weatherizing, air sealing or retrofitting an old home prior to installing solar panels.

Response: This program is not intended to stand up new home efficiency or repair programs, but would be great to coordinate with those programs if residents need them.

Question: For the Solar Residential Grant, is there a list of exclusions on what the money can't be used for?

Response: Yes, there is a list in the NOFO.

Question: You mentioned solar on roofs, are these funds allocated only for roofs or are ground arrays eligible as well?

Response: The grant funding is for the outreach component and helping residents go through the existing Illinois Solar for All (Small) program. If a project can get through that program, we are happy to help fund outreach to get it through the program. We recommend taking a look at the ILSFA Approved Vendor manual: [ILSFA-Approved-Vendor-Manual.pdf](#).

Question: If you qualify for a grant, how is the installer chosen for the project? Does the consumer have control over that?

Response: The consumer does have a choice over the approved vendor. See ILSFA website for more details: [Home - Illinois Solar for All](#).

Question: How does a solar company get on the approved vendor list?



Response: For information on how to get on the Approved Vendor list, please see this link: [Become an AV or Designee – Illinois Shines](#). Approved Vendors are not eligible to apply for the Residential Solar Outreach grants.

Question: Would local Community Action Agencies be considered eligible nonprofits?

Response: Yes.

Question: Should we be partnering with for-profit companies for the installations?

Response: Please review the eligibility section in the NOFO. We want people to be creative in their partnerships, but applicants cannot have a financial relationship with a solar company doing installations.

Question: What is the time length of this grant, and if approved can we apply again for the same grant?

Response: This is a two-year grant. We have funding yearly for the next 5 years. At this point, there is nothing to prevent a grantee from applying more than once.

Question: My organization currently receives an ILSFA Grassroots Education grant. Does the Residential Solar Outreach and Assistance Grant program replace that grant program?

Response: It does not replace the Grassroots Education grant. This is intended to be additive to that program. IFA will have systems in place to help ensure grantees are not double counting work.

Question: Wouldn't it be more effective if ILSFA Grassroots educators submitted together?

Response: There is nothing in the NOFO that prevents this.

Question: Is this grant on top of the existing funds/program that Elevate is managing?

Response: Yes. This is a different funding source, but IFA/CB wants their programs to coordinate seamlessly with existing Illinois Solar for All programs.

Question: Elevate works with ILSFA closely. Will the program administrator for this grant do the same? For example, will there be weekly or monthly check-ins and workshops organized by the program administrator?

Response: IFA has not made our plans for this yet, but if it were something that grantees would like to see, we will take it under advisement. It's our goal to work closely with the program administrator at IPA. IFA has limited program staff, but our goal is to create a positive grantee experience.

Question: When will grantees be announced?

Response: The Solar Outreach grant applications are due May 19. We hope to turn around the scoring by no later than mid-to-late June, and we expect work to begin shortly thereafter. Each NOFO has an outlined schedule that everyone should look at, as it outlines potential rolling admissions and future applications.



Question: Is the ideal applicant another nonprofit that is already working at the state level?

Response: That is certainly one situation, but there are many other types of strong applications. We believe local governments or nonprofits who do not work at the state level could also submit strong applications .

Question: How will funds be distributed?

Response: Funds will be distributed as organizations invoice the IFA on a regular cadence (either monthly or quarterly). When IFA receives an invoice, we will draw the money from US EPA and send it to the grantee. IFA/CB will work with grantees to make that process as efficient as possible, as we realize reimbursement creates uncertainty to grantees.

Question: Is there a working list of potential partner organizations for the Solar Outreach Grants?

Response: No.

Question: Is this the first year of this program?

Response: Yes. This is the first year of five, with a new NOFO released each year.

Question: Why was the Solar Outreach Grant created?

Response: The Solar Outreach grant, along with all other IFA programs being rolling out, was developed through outreach done between 2021-2023. There were a number of specific Solar for All outreach opportunities during those years. IFA took that feedback and developed a proposal to the U.S. EPA Solar for All program. One of the things we heard was the need to increase the amount of outreach and assistance, and in particular, increase detailed assistance to income-qualified residents to get them through the Illinois Solar for All residential program, as it can be a difficult program with lots of documentation.

April 28, 2025 – May 2, 2025

Question: Can you please tell me when funds have to be used by? How much time is allowed for the money to be spent after award?

Response: As noted in the NOFO, the period of performance for this grant is two years, so grant funds would need to be spent within that time frame.

Question: For the metrics, is there a minimum number of people who need to sign up for Solar for All?

Response: We do not have a minimum number of people who need to sign up for Solar for All. However, as noted in the NOFO, the proposal's potential to increase the number of qualifying residents who complete the ILSFA Residential Solar (Small) program is one of the scoring criteria.

Question: Can you please give me a definition of Shared Services? I am not clear on that section of the NOFO and what exactly that means. Is there somewhere I can look for additional guidance?



Response: Shared services are services that support the delivery of residential solar outreach services and which are a common need among Grassroots Educators and other grantees who are delivering residential outreach services. Shared services could be provided to the Grassroots Educators and other outreach grantees by a grantee who is not directly providing residential outreach services. Some examples noted in the NOFO are:

- Coordination with customer outreach grantees and Grassroots Educators to determine the types of materials and services needed;
- Providing training to customer outreach grantees and Grassroots Educators;
- Create materials to facilitate customer education, outreach, and assistance such as communications materials, a reasonable amount of branded items such as polos, tablecloths, posters, and low-cost handouts (such as stickers and pens); and
- Social media or other targeted promotional campaigns, including a limited amount of paid advertising costs.

Question: Can applicants make referrals to specific Approved Vendors?

Response: Please see the NOFO for limitations on the relationship between grantees and Approved Vendors (Section C.1: "Nonprofits and units of government that are ILSFA Approved Vendors, affiliated with Approved Vendors, or who receive payments from Approved Vendors in exchange for referrals or other services are not eligible to apply.") This limitation does not address referrals made without any financial relationship and based on the experience of the grantee.

Question: What I am asking you is how does the state see this work lining up with the work that the GEs are already doing for ILSFA? What insight do you have that you can share with our team so that we know how it will impact their current work for ILSFA.

Response: The Illinois Climate Bank would like this work to be both complementary and additive to the work that Grassroots Educators are already doing for ILSFA. The Climate Bank welcomes proposals from Grassroots Educators and encourages creativity in expanding the depth and scope of their existing work to assist residents throughout the process of completing the Residential Solar (Small) program.

Question: Will the IFA be providing any feedback/guidance on applications and/or identifying opportunities for applicants to collaborate/combine efforts?

Response: The IFA may identify opportunities for applicants to collaborate and combine efforts if it sees useful opportunities to do so. However, that review and decision will be made after scoring applications and making selections. IFA welcomes collaborative proposals.

Question: Will the IFA convene/connect awardees to foster collaboration, post-award?

Response: Yes.

Question: When are projects expected to commence, and for how long are they to last? Can the first year's grant workplan contain time for planning/ramp-up?



Response: The beginning of the grant period will be dependent on the timing of US EPA's approval of selected grantees, but we hope that the period will begin in summer 2025. The grant period will last until June 30, 2027. The first year's grant workplan can contain time for planning and ramp-up. However, one of the scoring criteria is the proposal's potential to increase the number of qualifying residents who complete the ILSFA Residential Solar (Small) program. A lengthy ramp-up period would reduce the time available to recruit and assist residents. Proposals with a ramp-up period would benefit from a description of how such a trade-off would be managed.

Question: What are budgeting and accounting requirements for grantees?

Response: Grantees must be familiar with and able to comply with US EPA budgeting and accounting requirements. These requirements are described in the US EPA's Grants Management Training for Applicants and Recipients, available at <https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-grants-management-training-applicants-and-recipients>. Please note that there are text versions of the training at the bottom of the webpage.

Question: Since we are also Grassroots Educators (for the next year, at least), what documentation will be needed to ensure we aren't double-counting work, i.e. getting paid for the same work twice?

Response: Grantees should have workplace policies in place to prevent double-counting across multiple grants, including detailed time sheets and supervisor review of employees working on similar grants.

Question: What will we need to track and submit for our semi-annual reports?

Response: Reporting requirements may change over the course of the grant. At this time, grantees will need to track and submit expense information and fields such as type and location of outreach, who attends (as a general matter - community members, government leaders, etc), language of materials circulated, description of the outreach or meeting, description of feedback received (if any), meeting outcome, project highlights, and media attention.

Question: Will grants be paid upfront, paid out via a "drawdown" process, or something else?

Response: Unfortunately, at this time, it is our expectation that grants will be paid out through a drawdown process. IFA understands the inherent financial difficulty, including cash flow concerns, that the drawdown process creates. IFA will work with grantees to make this process as simple and expedient as possible.

Question: IPA/Elevate have stringent requirements when it comes to mentioning ILSFA in public-facing printed and digital materials. Will educational materials developed and utilized in programming funded by this grant be subject to the same oversight?

Response: IFA will have requirements for printed and digital materials. However, they may not be the exact same requirements as those currently used by IPA and Elevate.

Question: Is this grant opportunity open to nonprofits also? I read it as only units of government being able to apply.



Response: The residential solar outreach grant is open to nonprofits.

April 21, 2025 – April 25, 2025

Question: I have a question regarding the Illinois Solar for All Expansion: Residential Solar Outreach Grant, found here. Specifically, are 5-26 awards expected to be made through this solicitation? I ask because the program information also provides other numbers of expected awards.

Response: Apologies for the confusion. 5-26 is the correct number of awards.

Question: [REDACTED] is interested in applying for the Illinois Solar for All Expansion: Residential Solar Outreach Grant. We are a nonprofit based in [REDACTED]. We recently applied for the Illinois Solar for All Grassroots Education grant to serve income eligible populations in [REDACTED].

We are an Illinois Shines designee providing marketing/outreach and community solar subscriber services for the [REDACTED], a community-driven community solar project serving only [REDACTED]. We do not feel that this would present a conflict of interest for the Residential Solar Outreach program because [REDACTED]. Our application for the Residential Solar Outreach grant would target the same income eligible communities in [REDACTED] that we are hoping to get the Grassroots Education grant for.

Please let us know if we are eligible to apply. Thank you.

Response: Thanks for reaching out. We encourage you to apply and please include documentation of the facts you stated in your email related to the potential conflict of interest concern. We will then make a final determination of eligibility based on all of the information in your application.

Question: Are non-profits able to apply for any of these funds beyond the RESIDENTIAL SOLAR OUTREACH GRANTS program? I have reviewed the other NOFOs and it states only municipalities, but maybe I missed something?

Response: Nope, just residential solar outreach grants!



The last day for question submission is May 16th at 5:00 PM CT.