LIHEAP

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program

Utilizing Community Solar for LIHEAP Income Qualified Households

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Community Services, Division of Energy Assistance
Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

October 26, 2023

Agenda

Welcome and Introductions	Megan Meadows
Department of Energy Role and Connector Tool overview	Ariel Drehobl
National Association for State Energy Officials & National Energy Assistance Directors Association	Grace Lowe and Cassandra Lovejoy
Illinois Solar Power for All	Jennifer Schmidt and Adrienne Clewis
District of Columbia, Department of Energy and Environment	Thomas Bartholomew, Olivia Corless, and Danielle Wright
Minnesota Department of Commerce	Michael Schmitz and Jonathan Brown
Questions	All Panelists
Wrap-up and Thank you	Megan Meadows

Welcome and Introductions

Panelists:	
Ariel Drehobl	Department of Energy, Management and Program Analyst, Solar Energy Technologies Office
Cassandra Lovejoy	Policy Director, National Energy Assistance Directors Association
Grace Lowe	Program Manager, Clean Energy, National Association for State Energy Officials
Adrienne Clewis	ORISE Fellow, Illinois Solar Power for All, Illinois Power Agency
Jennifer Schmidt	Senior Program Manager, Illinois Solar Power for All, Illinois Power Agency
Thomas Bartholomew	Branch Chief, Renewable Energy and Clean Transportation, DC Department of Energy and Environment
Danielle Wright	Deputy Director, Utility Affordability Administration, DC Department of Energy and Environment
Olivia Corless	ORISE Fellow, DC Department of Energy and Environment
Michael Schmitz	Office of Energy Assistance Programs Director, Minnesota Department of Commerce
Jonathan Brown	Energy Vendor Manager, Minnesota Department of Commerce

LHEAP Information Memorandum 2023-04

ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES

Office of Community Services | 330 C Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20201
www.acf.hhs.gov/ocs

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program
Information Memorandum

IM#: LIHEAP-IM-2023-04

DATE: June 15, 2023

TO: Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) Grant Recipients

SUBJECT: Community Solar and LIHEAP Considerations

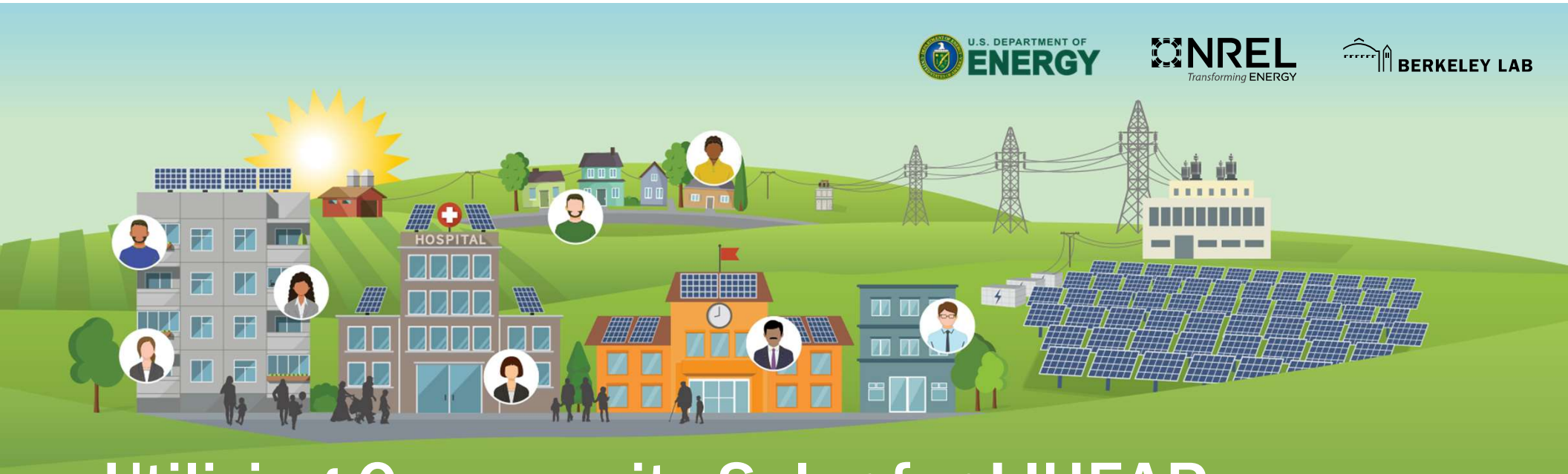
ATTACHMENT(S): N/A

The purpose of this grant communication is to 1) confirm that LIHEAP funds can be used for solar energy use through new and existing electric payment mechanisms, such as community solar subscription fees, and 2) provide LIHEAP grant recipients with recommendations to consider when utilizing LIHEAP funds for community solar subscriptions.

Background

The benefits of community solar can be both environmental and economic. The types of benefits include:

- **Cost savings:** One of the main benefits of community solar subscriptions for low-income people is the potential for cost savings on their electric bills. Community solar projects offer subscribers a discount on the energy produced by the solar panels, which can help to lower energy costs. This can be especially important for low-income individuals who may struggle to pay their electricity bills.
- **Access to clean energy:** Community solar projects provide access to clean energy sources without the need to own or maintain solar panels. This can be particularly beneficial for low-income people who may live in areas with high levels of air pollution or who may have health conditions that are exacerbated by air pollution.
- **Support for local communities**: By subscribing to a community solar project, low-income individuals can support the development of local renewable energy projects, which can help to create jobs and stimulate economic growth in their communities.



Utilizing Community Solar for LIHEAP Income Qualified Households

Ariel Drehobl, Management and Program Analyst

U.S. Department of Energy, Solar Energy Technologies Office

October 26, 2023

U.S. DOE Solar Energy Technologies Office

Our mission is to accelerate the advancement and deployment of solar technology in support of an equitable transition to a decarbonized economy no later than 2050, starting with a decarbonized power sector by 2035.

To achieve this mission, solar energy must:

Be **affordable** and **accessible** for all Americans

Support the **reliability**, **resilience**, and **security** of the grid

Create a sustainable industry that **supports job growth**, **manufacturing**, and the **circular economy** in a wide range of applications

What is Community Solar?

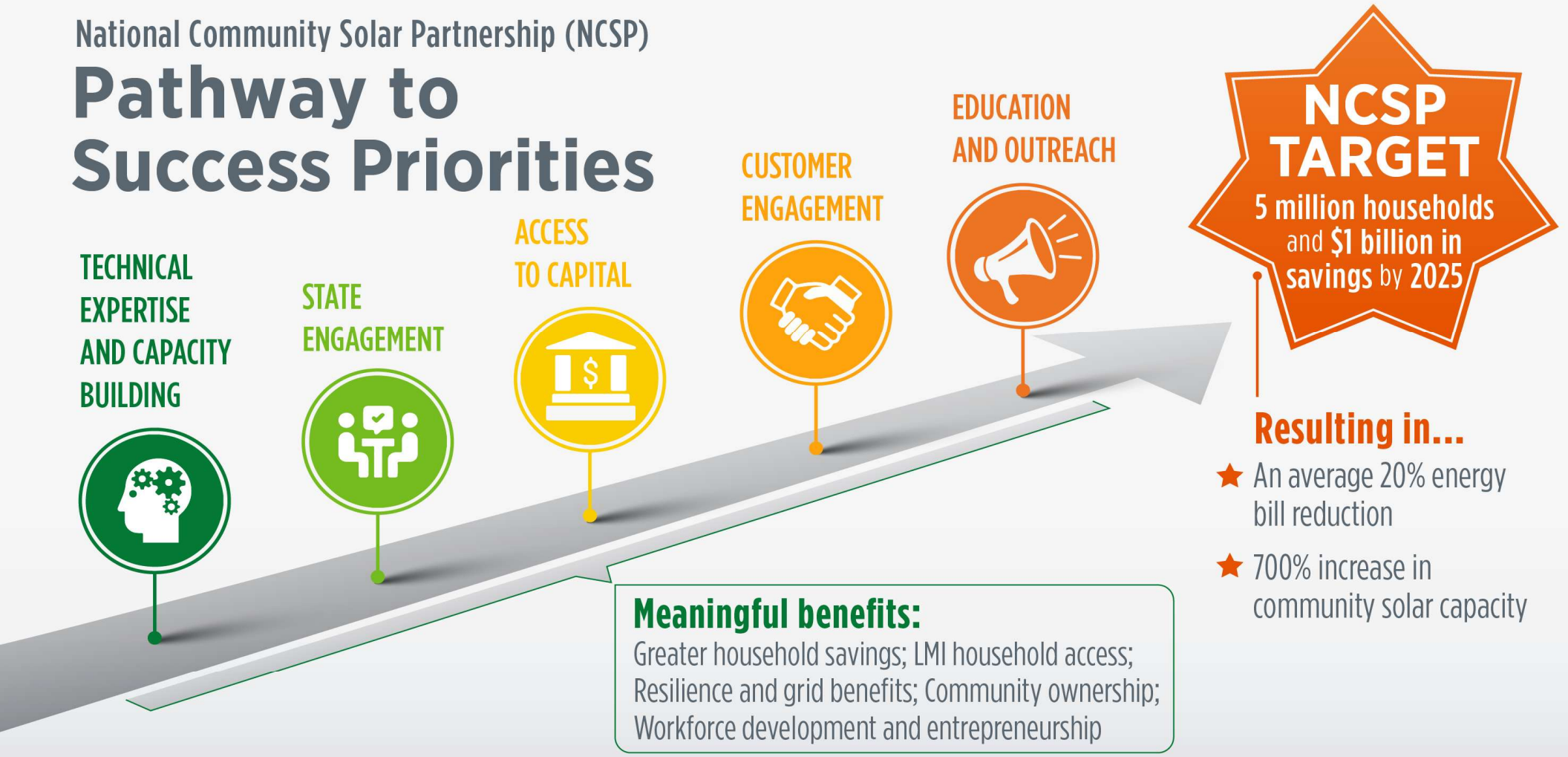
The U.S. Department of Energy defines community solar as any solar project or purchasing program, within a geographic area, in which the benefits of a solar project flow to multiple customers such as individuals, businesses, nonprofits, and other groups.

Community solar…

- **Allows households who cannot access rooftop solar to access the benefits of solar energy** (which can be due to barriers such as rooftop suitability, cost, or tenancy).
- Typically **provides participants with an electric bill credit** for electricity generated by their share of the system.
- **Can provide meaningful benefits** such as low-income access, electric bill savings, resilience, community wealth building, and workforce opportunities.

National Community Solar Partnership (NCSP)

Pathway to Success Priorities



COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS | STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT | DEVELOPERS | INVESTORS | PHILANTHROPISTS | UTILITIES | CUSTOMERS

Low Income Clean Energy Connector Overview

NCSP is partnering with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to develop and pilot a digital tool that will identify and make **community solar with verified savings and strong consumer protections more accessible** to households participating in a U.S. government-run low-income support programs (i.e., the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program/LIHEAP).

Main Project Partners

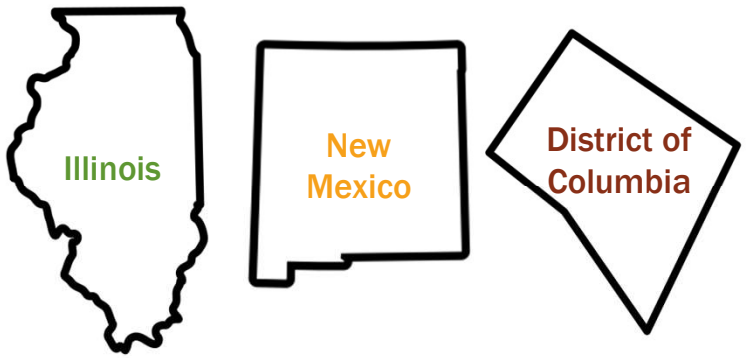
Additional Project Partners

Learn more: https://www.energy.gov/communitysolar/community-solar-subscription-tool

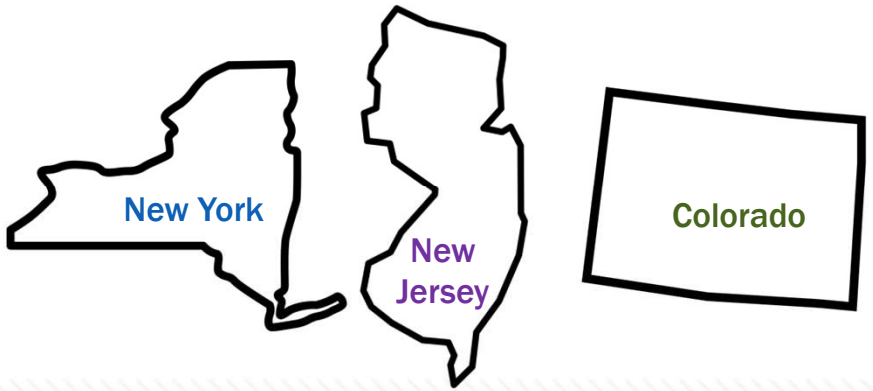
Connector Partner States

- Six states signed on in 2022 to support the initial project development
- Pilot states are beta testing the Connector in fall 2023 – winter 2024
- Advising and additional states can pilot and use the connector in 2024

Pilot States/Regions



Partner States



Low-Income Clean Energy Connector User Types

State Community Solar Administrator

- Approves SMs and available projects
- Evaluates programs
- Adjusts project prioritization

State LIHEAP Administrator

- Approves local LIHEAP admins to use Connector
- Adjusts household prioritization

Subscription Managers

- Upload available projects
- Enrolls households in projects

Local LIHEAP Administrators

- Educates households about community solar
- Uploads interested households to Connector

Connector Key Project Components

Subscription managers providing compensation to local LIHEAP administrators

Community solar education and support materials tailored for participating states

State support and enforcement of consumer protections

Strong partnerships between state LIHEAP and community solar agencies

Guidebook to help states onboard to using the Connector, including all necessary policy changes

Connector Next Steps

Consumer Protection report to be published December 2023

State Guidebook to be published in Spring 2024

Pilot launch of the software in Spring 2024

Funding mechanism and software to be finalized this winter

Webinar attendees can join the National Community Solar Partnership to stay up to date on project updates and opportunities out of the Partnership!

Supporting State Partnerships to Expand Community Solar Access for Low-Income Households:

- NCSP Clean Energy Connector
- Inclusive Shared Solar Initiative (ISSI)

October 26, 2023

NEADA
NATIONAL ENERGY ASSISTANCE DIRECTORS' ASSOCIATION

NASEO

Inclusive Shared Solar Initiative (ISSI)

ISSI is a collaboration facilitated by NASEO and NEADA and funded by DOE's Solar Energy Technologies Office that brings together State Energy Offices and state LIHEAP offices to pilot innovative community solar projects that can be scaled

State Energy Offices' role:

- Advise and engage governors, legislators, and regulators
- Develop community solar incentives and programs
- Convene a wide array of stakeholders

+

State LIHEAP offices' role:

- Inform policy and develop programs
- Streamline income qualification processes
- Elevate the needs of low-income communities

Together, these agencies can collaborate to improve community solar access among low-income households at the state level

- Through ISSI, state agencies in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and D.C. are each piloting innovative approaches to reaching more low-income households

Illinois Solar for All

Illinois Solar for All

October 25, 2023

Jennifer Schmidt, Senior Program Manager

Adrienne Clewis, ORISE Fellow

History of ILSFA

The ILSFA program was created to promote equitable access to the solar economy through program incentives that help make solar more affordable for income-eligible communities. The program increases participation in solar energy projects serving income-eligible and environmental justice communities.

- CEJA helped ILSFA evolve and grow by expanding its funding from $16 million to $66 million in annual funds. Additionally, CEJA expanded authorization of grassroots education funding to support activities beyond community education campaigns including:
  - General energy education
  - Job Training program outreach

Illinois Solar for All Sub-Programs

Residential Solar (Small)

- Gives income-eligible households access to residential solar installations with no upfront costs and guaranteed savings for single-households or 1–4-unit buildings.

Residential Solar (Large)

- Supports residential solar installations with no upfront costs and guaranteed savings for income-eligible households in larger buildings with 5 or more units.

Non-Profits and Public Facilities

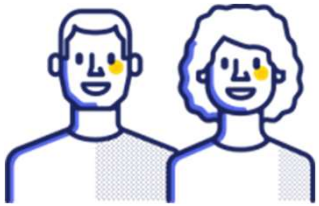
- Provides incentives for solar installations with no or low upfront costs on properties occupied by eligible non-profit organizations and public facilities that provide energy benefits directly to them.

Community Solar

- Offers income-eligible households' access to solar energy through subscriptions with guaranteed savings, without installation of solar panels on property .

ILSFA Roles and Responsibilities

Approved Vendors must register prior to submitting community solar project applications. They must meet program requirements and consumer protection standards.



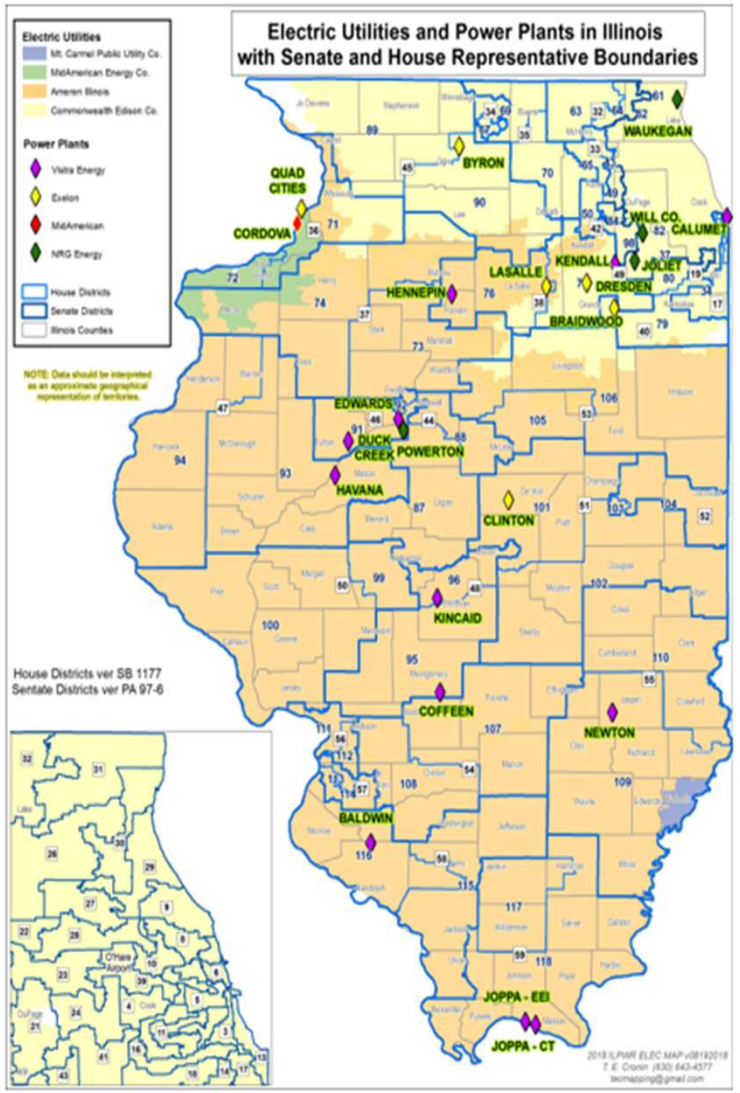
Elevate reviews and approves Approved Vendor registration, reviews project applications, conducts project selection and ensures site suitability guidelines are followed by Approved Vendors.

IPA
ILLINOIS POWER AGENCY

The Illinois Power Agency (IPA) oversees the work of Elevate and plans long term program policies and goals.

Community Solar Metrics PY 5

- **Utility Territory:** Ameren (orange) and ComEd (yellow)
- **Available funding for the PY:** $29,380,509
- **Total projects submitted:** 12 including 1 withdrawal and 1 ineligible
- **Total projects eligible:** 5
- **Total incentives approved:** $25.11 MM
- **Total projects approved:** 5
- **Total capacity of projects approved:** 8.75 MW



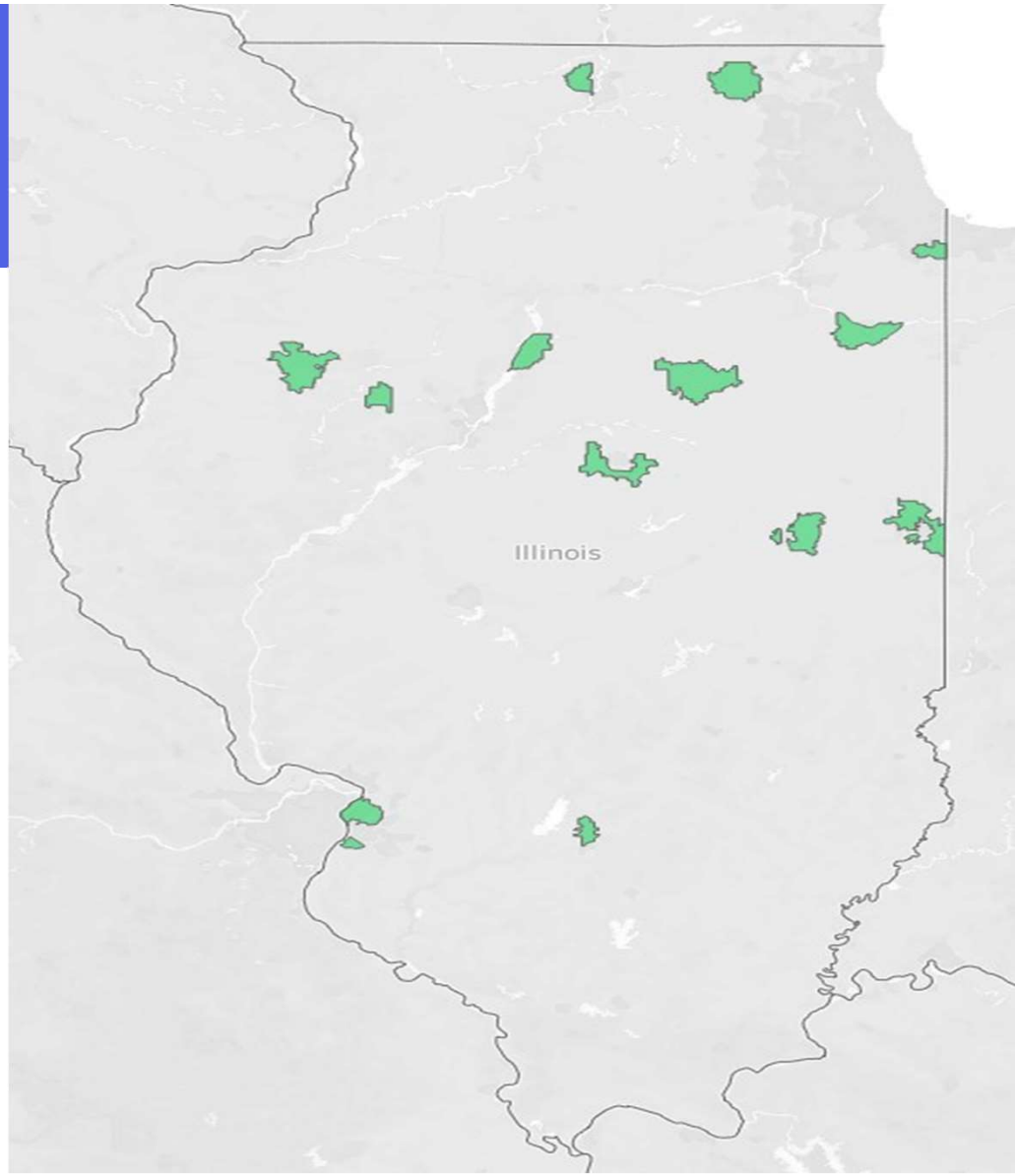
ILSFA Project Location in IL

Community Solar projects approved from PY1-PY5

Cities:

- Cahokia
- Champaign
- Chicago Heights
- Danville
- Galesburg
- Granite City
- Kankakee
- Lacon
- Pontiac
- Rockford
- Sandoval
- Urbana
- Woodstock
- Yates City

**Locations shown on map are shaded by zip code



What consumer protections are in place in Illinois Solar for All?

Consumer protections are in place for customers:

- **Before** with Disclosure Forms, Cost and Savings Requirements,
- **During** with Site Assessment and Suitability Requirements and
- **After** project installation with Warranties and Ongoing Maintenance

Consumer protections are in place for Approved Vendors and their Designees (subcontractors):

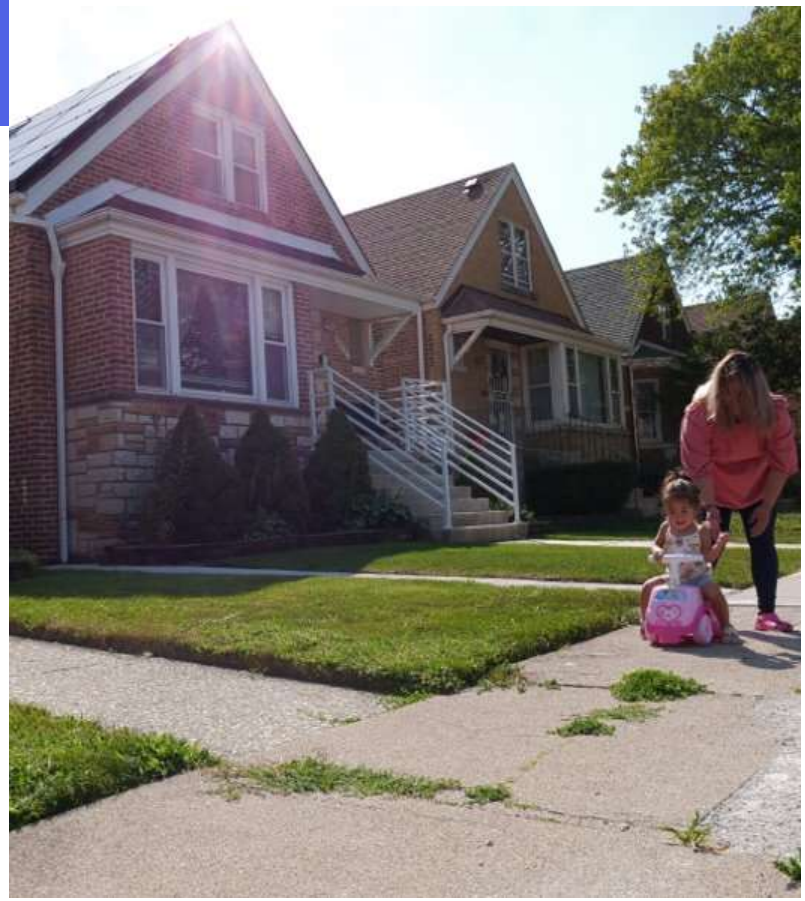
- **Before** with Registration for Approved Vendors and Designees,
- **During** with Marketing Guidelines that Approved Vendors and Designees must follow,
- **After** with standardize contracts and requirements.

How does ILSFA ensure safe and fair business practices?

- ILSFA participants have the right to cancel an on-site project [illegible] 14 calendar days of executing the contract, and community solar subscribers have the right to cancel a subscription agreement within 3 calendar days after initially subscribing, or to cancel a subscription at any time by providing a 30-day notice.
- Monthly Consumer Protections Working Group
- Customers may file complaints with the ILSFA Program Administrator by emailing info@IllinoisSFA.com or by calling 1-888-970-ISFA.
  - Consumer complaints received by ILSFA are published on the ILSFA Consumer Complaints Database
- For cases subject to fraudulent or deceptive sales practices, the Illinois Attorney General's office may be able to help: IllinoisAttorneyGeneral.gov/Customers

Challenges and Success

- ILSFA Program
  - Delay in Billing
    - Single billing
    - Delaying in timing of bill. Usage reports are sent out later than expected. Customer may get bill for June in August.
    - Construction delays due to pandemic
    - Success- Guaranteed saving
- Partnership with LIHEAP
  - Verified offers
  - Success- Allocating funding



State Collaborations

- DOE Low Income Clean Energy Connector
  - Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity- Office of Community Assistance
    - Weekly discussion on the interaction between LIHEAP and Community Solar
    - Monthly meetings with local LIHEAP agencies
    - Community Solar education
    - Workforce development
- Collaboration with Attorney Generals Office
- Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC)
- Illinois Solar for All Advisory Committee

DC Solar for All

Thomas Bartholomew, Renewable Energy & Clean Transportation Branch Chief

Olivia Corless, ORISE Fellow

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
MURIEL BOWSER, MAYOR

Overview

SOLAR FOR ALL
A PROGRAM OF DC'S DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT
GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

DC SUSTAINABLE ENERGY UTILITY

1. DC SFA Background & Partnerships
2. Consumer Protections
3. Program Successes & Challenges

DC SFA Background

1. Solar for All aims to bring the benefits of solar energy to 100,000 low to moderate income families in the District of Columbia (defined as at or below 80% AMI). So far, over 8,000 households have been served.
2. DC DOEE partners with organizations across the District to install solar on single family homes and develop community renewable energy facilities (CREFs). To date, over 36 MW of capacity has been installed.
3. All Solar for All participants should expect to see a 50% savings on their electricity bill over 15 years. Average annual savings is $521.
4. DCSEU contracts with local solar developers to install CREFs around the District that produce solar energy for community solar subscriptions. SFA supports the development of these projects by providing a capacity-based incentive system.

Strategic Partnerships

The Department has developed strategic partnerships to increase the rate of solar installation on public land and buildings throughout the District and conduct community outreach about the program. Some key partners are identified below.

DOES
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DEPARTMENT OF
EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

DC
SUSTAINABLE ENERGY
UTILITY

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA HOUSING AUTHORITY
Commitment to Excellence

DC public library

DGS
THE DEPARTMENT OF
GENERAL SERVICES

Groundswell
COMMUNITY POWER

Consumer Protections

1. No subscription fees
2. Average annual savings of over $500 (meeting 50% average savings requirement)
3. “Welcome to the Program” calls, emails, and letters
4. No cancellation fees
5. Complaint mechanism on application
6. Hotline and email account to gather feedback
7. No credit checks or income re-verification for 15 years

Successes

Actions that have led to higher SFA participation

- Unified Application
- Data Sharing Agreements
- Categorical Eligibility
- Low-Income Clean Energy Connector Pilot
- Pilot with Community Org
- Direct Mail Campaign
- Benefit Center Recruitment
- Partnership with Affordable Housing

Challenges

1. Securing limited available roof space
2. Creating an indirect benefits model for residents of master-metered buildings that is scalable
3. Consumer education – addressing "too good to be true"
4. Slow and costly solar interconnection process
5. Addressing utility billing errors and creating necessary billing infrastructure

COMMERCE DEPARTMENT

Energy Assistance Program

Solar Gardens as Energy Vendors

October 26, 2023

Jon Brown| Energy Vendor Manager
Michael Schmitz | Director
mn.gov/commerce

Solar Gardens as Energy Vendors

- Solar gardens as energy assistance vendors first became available for program year 2022
- Low income focused solar garden approached EAP because of customers concerned about solar and EAP
- Didn’t want participating in solar gardens to prevent or harm energy assistance households
- Worked with them to ensure participation in solar garden would not negatively impact their household's benefit

Solar Gardens as Energy Vendors

How are benefits determined?

- Based on income and prior year energy costs, if available
  - Costs are supplied by our participating energy vendors
- Backup benefit table used if costs are not known, or vendor does not provide for whatever reason
  - Backup created using the data provided from all participating vendors
- Solar garden vendors are not eligible for crisis benefit

Solar Gardens as Energy Vendors

How are benefits paid?

- Households indicate where they want benefits paid
  - Default 70%/30% split between primary heat and electric
  - Can specify on app if they want paid differently

Unless indicated below, we will split your benefit. 70% will be paid to your main heating company and 30% to your electric company.
OPTIONAL: If you want your benefit paid differently, please indicate below:
○ All to main heating ○ All to electric ○ Other:

  - Subscription costs factored into benefit doesn't mean solar garden will receive benefit

Solar Gardens as Energy Vendors

How are benefits paid continued?

- Benefits paid when app is approved
- Paid in a lump sum
  - Household can request benefit spread out over several months
- Payments are made in bulk - more than one household's payment could be on the same check/EFT

Solar Gardens as Energy Vendors

How do solar gardens become vendors?

- Treated essentially the same as any other vendor
  - Difference is asked to supply subscription costs instead of consumption
- Households list solar garden provider on their application
- Commerce reaches out to get them registered
- Currently have two solar gardens signed up as vendors
  - Households have listed three more on their apps
  - These gardens have not registered despite requests to participate

Solar Gardens as Energy Vendors

What if solar gardens don't participate?

- Electric costs are made invalid since credits reduce reported costs
- This triggers the benefit to be determined using the backup tables
- This helps limit any potential loss of benefit from participating in a solar garden

Solar Gardens as Energy Vendors

What happens if a household ends their subscription after applying?

- Any future payments to the garden would be stopped
- Any remaining credits on the account should be refunded to the program
- Future applications would not factor in solar subscription costs

Solar Gardens as Energy Vendors

What if they join a solar garden after applying?

- Applications are a snapshot in time
- Benefits would **not** be redetermined
- The garden should be added to their application
- Any remaining benefits could be directed to the solar garden

Questions & Answers

Please type your questions into the Q&A function or chat

Thank You!


ENERGY.GOV


NASEO
National Association of
State Energy Officials


IPA
ILLINOIS POWER AGENCY


NEADA
NATIONAL ENERGY ASSISTANCE DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION


DEPARTMENT
OF ENERGY &
ENVIRONMENT


COMMERCE
DEPARTMENT
ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM


CSBG


LIHEAP
Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program


neuac
NATIONAL ENERGY & UTILITY AFFORDABILITY COALITION


NASCSP
National Association for State Community Services Programs


Helping People. Changing Lives.
community Action
PARTNERSHIP
AMERICA'S POVERTY FIGHTING NETWORK

Resources

- Community Service Block Grant Funds supporting Clean and Affordable Energy Video Spotlight
- LIHEAP IM 2023-04, Community Solar and LIHEAP Considerations
- National Community Solar Partnership, Ariel Drehobl, ariel.drehobl@ee.doe.gov
- National Association of State Energy Officials, Grace Lowe, glowe@naseo.org
- National Energy Assistance Directors Association, Cassandra Lovejoy, clovejoy@neada.org
- Illinois Solar For All, Jennifer Schmidt, Jennifer.M.Schmidt@Illinois.gov and Adrienne Clewis, Adrienne.Clewis@Illinois.gov
- District of Columbia, Department of Energy & Environment (DOEE), Thomas Bartholomew, thomas.bartholomew@dc.gov and Olivia Corless, olivia.corless@dc.gov
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