

# Grassroots Education RFP Questions and Answers

## PROGRAM YEAR 7 (2024-2025)

*The questions below have been edited for brevity and clarity and to remove identifying information.*

### Eligibility

#### **1. Can local governments count as community-based organizations for the purposes of applying to be grassroots educators?**

Section 1-56 of the Illinois Power Agency Act (20 ILCS 3588), states that “community-based groups and other qualifying organizations” may be Grassroots Educators but does not further define these terms. The Illinois Power Agency (IPA) has clarified these terms and eligibility requirements for Grassroots Educators in its 2024 Long-Term Renewable Resources Procurement Plan (the 2024 Long-Term Plan), Section 8.15, which states:

For the purposes of grassroots education, community-based organizations must be registered nonprofit entities, excluding trade or political non-profits. It is recognized that the definition of community-based organizations or non-profit is very broad and may include a variety of organization types. It is not required that non-profit organizations have federal 501(c)(3) status, and collaborative or fiscal sponsorship should be encouraged to ensure that very small, hyper-local organizations can participate. Qualified organizations should work within the communities in which they will be providing grassroots education.

This definition was used to develop the eligibility criteria contained within the 2024-25 Grassroots Education RFP, and that RFP complies with the requirements of the IPA Act, including all modifications to that Act enacted through CEJA.

#### **2. Can an Illinois Shines Approved Vendor or Designee serve as an ILSFA Grassroots Educator?**

A Grassroots Educator must be a registered non-profit organization that works within the communities in which it will be providing grassroots education services. Additionally, the applicant must show that it can educate income-eligible households on opportunities that are unique to Illinois Solar for All (ILSFA), including guaranteed savings and consumer protections,



and differentiate ILSFA-specific benefits from those that would be available under Illinois Shines. Importantly, the RFP states that “Grassroots Education funding shall not support the marketing of solar project development firms and organizations...[and] organizations funded through this RFP, and officers, directors, employees, and volunteers of organizations funded through this RFP, cannot, at any time during the contract period or for six months after the conclusion of the contract period: receive payments from any Approved Vendor, engage in any other activity with an Approved Vendor that may constitute a Conflict of Interest (as defined in the Subcontractor Agreement included in this RFP as Appendix 1), or conduct outreach that prioritizes any particular Approved Vendor, designee, installer, or other related entity.”

All selected applicants will need to comply with the conflicts of interest provision of the Subcontractor Agreement:

Subcontractor represents that neither it, nor any of its subcontractors under this Agreement, whether presently known or identified after the execution of this Agreement, have any current Conflict of Interest (as defined below) and will not cause any Conflict of Interest to exist during the term of this Agreement. If Program Administrator or Agency, in its sole discretion, determines Subcontractor or its sub-subcontractors hereto has a Conflict of Interest, Program Administrator reserves the right to immediately terminate this Agreement in its entirety. For purposes of this Agreement, a “Conflict of Interest” arises in situations where (i) the outside interests or activities of Subcontractor interfere or compete with Agency’s interests; (ii) the stake of Subcontractor (including any director, officer, member, employee, or volunteer of a Subcontractor [each a “Subcontractor Party”]) in a transaction, entity, or arrangement is such that it violates any conflict of interest policy of Agency or the State of Illinois associated with ILSFA or the Services; or (iii) the actions or operations of Subcontractor or any Subcontractor Party breach or would reasonably be expected to breach any conflict of interest provision or requirement as specified in the MOU.

As a neutral government agency, the IPA may not award funding in a way that provides a competitive advantage in the acquisition of new solar customers.

### **3. Are churches and places of worship eligible to apply to be Grassroots Educators?**

Churches and places of worship organized as registered nonprofit entities are eligible to apply to be Grassroots Educators if they meet all other eligibility requirements in the RFP (pp. 8-9). This includes, but is not limited to, demonstrating that they: 1) Regularly provide services to income-eligible or environmental justice communities; 2) Have a demonstrated ability to provide outreach, education, training, or program delivery for energy-related programs or services; or 3) Have a demonstrated ability to provide outreach, education, training, or program delivery to income-eligible property owners and renters, workforce development stakeholders, or other community organizations and ILSFA participants and stakeholders.



## Submission Requirements

### **1. If we have a subaward partner with a 501(c)(3) status, what forms might they also be required to submit (i.e., a 990)?**

We encourage proposals that include collaborative partnerships. As noted on page 9 of the RFP, proposals with a lead applicant and one or more collaborative partners should specify “the roles and responsibilities of collaborative partners and demonstrate an equitable approach to decision-making processes.” Letters of recommendation from collaborative partners can also be attached as supporting documentation for the application (RFP, p. 9). Finally, when submitting your Labor Costs table (RFP, pp. 21-22), you must identify within the “Role on Campaign” column which campaign activities will be from the lead applicant and which will be from partner organizations.

No other required documentation must be submitted to collaborative partners at the time of application. However, if selected, the lead applicant must enter into a subcontractor agreement with its collaborative partners that complies with Section 5 of the Subcontractor Agreement (RFP, Appendix 1) and provide such subcontractor agreement(s) and evidence of insurance for each subcontractor to the ILSFA Program Administrator and Illinois Power Agency upon request.

### **2. Do you have a template for the optional letters of recommendation? Are these different than the optional references document?**

There is not a template available. We recommend optional letters of recommendation come from other community groups, partner organizations, or non-profits that you have successfully worked with in the past, in which the organization writing the letter can attest to your organization’s strengths, particularly in the areas of interest for this RFP.

The optional references are different from the optional letters of recommendation. The optional references would include contact information for groups that can serve as a reference for your organization; for example, this may include entities that have funded your organization for similar campaigns or similar programmatic work.

### **3. What's the link to apply? Is there an application form to complete?**

There is not a link to apply or an application form. Applicants must respond to questions, prompts, and attestations in a Microsoft Word document, PDF, or similar file type, and must submit this with the required and optional attachments.

Applications should include the following:

1. A Word document or PDF that answers the questions in the [GE RFP](#) on pages 16-25.
2. A completed [Labor Costs and Expenses Table Spreadsheet](#).
3. Additional required documentation, listed on pages 25-26 of the RFP.



Applicants may also include optional documentation, listed on page 26 of the RFP.

All materials should be emailed to [Grassroots@IllinoisSFA.com](mailto:Grassroots@IllinoisSFA.com) no later than April 1, 2024 (11:59 p.m. CT).

#### **4. How does fiscal sponsorship work for partners who do not have a 501(c)(3) status?**

In the case of fiscal sponsorship, the fiscal sponsor is the organization that has the 501(c)(3) non-profit status. For example, the organization being sponsored could be a small organization that is highly qualified to conduct these campaigns, but not be registered as a non-profit or otherwise may not be able to perform the financial and contractual obligations required by this funding.

The fiscal sponsor will be the lead applicant and must submit the proposal on behalf of the partnership. Should funding be awarded, the fiscal sponsor organization will execute the contract. It will be responsible for execution of the campaign and finances for the project, for submitting interim and final reports, and all other contract obligations. The fiscal sponsor will also manage invoicing on behalf of the fiscally sponsored organization.

For further details, please read the “Eligibility, Collaborative Partnerships, and Fiscal Sponsorship” section of the RFP (pgs. 8-9).

## **Availability of Materials**

### **1. Will the February 26th webinar presentation be available after the webinar or will the presentation be recorded and available on the website?**

Yes, the recordings of both webinars are available and posted on the ILSFA website.

View the [recording](#) of the February 26<sup>th</sup> webinar.

View the [recording](#) of the March 11<sup>th</sup> webinar.

### **2. Is the March 11th webinar different than the February 26th webinar?**

The webinar presentation is the same, though the questions raised by attendees may differ.

## **Program Clarifications**

### **1. How long are self-designated environmental justice communities considered to be environmental justice communities?**

Self-Designated Environmental Justice Communities do not expire. The Illinois Power Agency clarified that Self-Designated Environmental Justice Communities will not expire and will be



maintained throughout updates to the Environmental Justice Communities (EJCs) map in section 8.12.2 of the [2024 Long-Term Plan](#).

**2. Waukegan wasn't shown on the Environmental Justice maps shown in the RFP webinar presentation. Wasn't it an environmental justice community and part of the Residential Solar Pilot Program?**

The examples shown during the webinar of Environmental Justice Communities were just a few examples, not the complete map of EJCs. View the [full map of EJCs](#).

Waukegan has several EJC areas. Waukegan is included in the Residential Solar Pilot, also known as [Illinois Solar for All: Bright Neighborhoods](#).

## **Grassroots Education Campaign Questions**

**1. In what capacity do Grassroots Educators interact with Approved Vendors?**

Grassroots Educators may help connect interested participants with Approved Vendors currently serving the region where the interested participants are located. For example, as noted in the RFP, Approved Vendors may be invited to participate in outreach events hosted by Grassroots Educators. In these cases, the Grassroots Education organization must provide notice to all ILSFA Approved Vendors, so that all the Approved Vendors have the same opportunity to participate and do so in a transparent manner.

Furthermore, Grassroots Education funding shall not support the marketing of solar project development firms and organizations unless such education provides equal opportunities for all applicable firms and organizations to participate. Those efforts constitute commercial marketing and are not allowed in the scope of Grassroots Education. Grassroots Educators must be neutral to individual Approved Vendors in their activities.

Additionally, organizations funded through this RFP, and officers, directors, employees, and volunteers of organizations funded through this RFP, cannot, at any time during the contract period or for six months after the conclusion of the contract period: receive payments from any Approved Vendor, engage in any other activity with an Approved Vendor that may constitute a Conflict of Interest (as defined in the Subcontractor Agreement included in this RFP as Appendix 1), or conduct outreach that prioritizes any particular Approved Vendor, Designee, installer, or other related entity.

**2. Can Grassroots Educators be neutral and still receive commission or referral bonus from a solar vendor?**

Grassroots Educators must be neutral and do not receive a commission for any particular project or for signing up any particular participant but rather are paid for ongoing campaign efforts and are not allowed to concurrently receive commissions or any other compensation



from Approved Vendors during the time of the contract period or for six months after the contract period.

**3. Is there a minimum goal for how many individuals should be engaged and successfully participate in ILSFA?**

No, there is not a minimum goal. Proposals should estimate a realistic target for how many potential participants you would likely reach in your campaign activities and include that target in your proposal.

**4. Are proposals to include contractors whose work is included in a budget for approval, or are contractors selected for us?**

Proposals should identify their own contractors and the role the contractors will play in the campaign and incorporate expected costs for their contractors in their proposed budgets as “Expense Costs.”

Note that there are limits to how much of a campaign’s budget can be directed to for-profit or other entities. In the “Eligibility, Collaborative Partnerships, and Fiscal Sponsorship” section of the RFP (pgs. 8-9), it states:

All subcontractor organizations working for the applicant that provide primary service delivery— specifically, conducting outreach, community engagement, or campaign strategy—must be non-profit or community-based organizations and collectively meet the qualifications of this proposal. Other organizations, including for-profit firms, can be used to provide discrete products and services in support of the campaign—for instance, the physical production of campaign materials—but may not make up more than 10% of the campaign budget. Organizations may contract with individuals to implement outreach efforts when there is a compelling reason. This should be explained within the proposal (e.g., the contracted organization does not have any paid staff or is seeking to employ members of traditionally underserved communities and partners with a workforce development program facilitating employment of people who were incarcerated).

**5. For clarification, is the purpose of the Grassroots Educators to share ILSFA Program information with the public and help residents participate?**

The overall goal of Grassroots Education campaigns is to engage and educate prospective participants on critical program-related information, including but not limited to:

- Building awareness of, and trust in, solar energy and the ILSFA program, including by educating communities regarding official branding, misleading offers, and methods for identifying legitimate services
- Educating income-eligible households on opportunities to participate in ILSFA (e.g., the additional value of ILSFA, such as guaranteed savings and consumer protections,



compared to Illinois Shines or other opportunities like federal tax credits for solar installations for eligible participants)

- Demonstrating how communities can access the benefits of solar such as economic development, workforce development training programs, and reduced environmental impacts (campaigns focused on solar installations at single-family and small multi-family (two- to four-unit apartments) are particularly encouraged)
- Conducting focused outreach in close coordination with the ILSFA Program Administrator to build awareness, assist prospective participants by guiding them through the process, and connecting them with the Program Administrator to begin income verification
- Involving community members in stakeholder engagement processes that will help inform ILSFA approaches, policies, and processes in ways that benefit income-eligible and environmental justice communities
- Educating consumers on mechanisms to protect against unsafe and unfair business practices and minimizing risk to participants

## Term of Awards Under This RFP

- 1. If requesting a 24-month contract, could \$200,000 be requested in total? (\$100,000 for each year)?**

Yes, that is correct. In the “Award Information and Term” section of the RFP states, “Organizations seeking a 24-month term shall include campaign activities and budgets for the full proposed term totaling no more than \$200,000.” (p. 14)

## Invoicing Requirements

- 1. Should a subaward partner who has a 501(c)(3) submit an invoice to the prime grantee/contractor?**

Yes, that is correct. Any subaward partner (regardless of their 501(c)(3) status) would submit an invoice to the prime organization. The prime organization would combine the partner(s)’ labor hours and expenses with their own labor hours and expenses into one single invoice each month.

Note that this differs from how a contractor’s work would be invoiced. A contractor that is supporting a Grassroots Educator’s campaign (e.g., a separate organization providing ongoing staff for a portion of the campaign’s activities) would submit an invoice to the Grassroots Educator, which could be included with Expenses on the monthly invoice. The contractor’s labor charges would be detailed within or accompanying their invoice in the same way as the Grassroots Educator’s own labor invoicing requirements.