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Bright Neighborhoods Request for Proposals (RFP) Questions and Answers

On August 13, 2024, the Illinois Solar for All (ILSFA) Program Administrator released a Request for Proposals (RFP) for Approved Vendors to participate in the Bright Neighborhoods Initiative. The RFP specified that potential offerors may submit questions or clarification requests about this RFP until 5 p.m. Central Time (CT) on Tuesday, August 27, 2024, and that the Program Administrator would publish responses. Two entities submitted the following questions regarding the Bright Neighborhoods Request for Proposals. The Program Administrator's responses to each question are included below.

As a reminder, proposals in response to the RFP are due by **Monday, September 16, 2024, at 5 p.m. CT**. For more information about the Bright Neighborhoods RFP, please view the [webinar](#). RFP responses should be submitted as a PDF to Bright@illinoisSFA.com.

QUESTION 1

Which Bright Neighborhoods communities are in Ameren Illinois's service territory?

RESPONSE

The Bright Neighborhoods community that exists in Ameren territory is the Carbondale-Marion Micropolitan area, which includes Jackson, Johnson, and Williamson counties.

QUESTION 2

Which vendors are designated as "Approved Vendors" and how did the vendors receive Approved Vendor status?

RESPONSE

An Offeror can learn more about the ILSFA requirements for being an Approved Vendor in Section 3 of the [Approved Vendor Manual](#). Each selected Offeror, if not already a registered Approved Vendor with ILSFA, must complete the registration process to participate in the initiative.

QUESTION 3

Could you provide additional details on the specific roles and responsibilities of the Approved Vendor during initial participant interactions? Specifically, what level of involvement is expected from the Offeror during income verification and the initial site suitability screening?

RESPONSE

Approved Vendors selected to participate in Bright Neighborhoods will be expected to attend up to four community outreach events hosted by the Program Administrator. During these events, the Approved Vendors can begin to build trust with the community residents and answer technical installation questions. This is the extent of the responsibilities of the Approved Vendor during the initial participant interactions.

The income verification and the initial site suitability screening will be handled by the Program Administrator. The Approved Vendor does not have any responsibilities to complete those steps. The Approved Vendor roles and responsibilities in Bright Neighborhoods can be found in the "[Bright Neighborhoods Background Information](#)" section of the RFP.



QUESTION 4

How are subcontractor services managed within the scope of the Bright Neighborhoods Initiative?

RESPONSE

Subcontractors are used for any non-Approved Vendor role that does not include direct interaction with the end-use participant. Use of a subcontractor is not a requirement under Bright Neighborhoods or ILSFA, but an Approved Vendor within Bright Neighborhoods may use one and should follow the same management requirements as under the general ILSFA program. If a subcontractor works in a role that requires direct interaction with end-use customers, they must be registered as a Designee with the Program Administrator. More information about the use of subcontractors and Designee installers can be found in Section 3 of the [Approved Vendor Manual](#).

QUESTION 5

Can you confirm the timeline for final site assessments, solar system design, and project installations? Are there specific deadlines for each phase within the 2024-2025 program year?

RESPONSE

There are no deadlines to complete final site assessments, solar system design, and project installations for Bright Neighborhoods in the 2024-2025 program year. All project applications under Bright Neighborhoods should be submitted for Part I approval to the Program Administrator by May 31, 2025, the end of the program year. Approved Vendors may continue working with customers who are under contract but whose projects have not been submitted to the Program Administrator by May 31, 2025; however, such projects must follow the standard ILSFA process and will not be considered to have been completed through the Bright Neighborhoods Initiative.

QUESTION 6

How will the prioritization of small and emerging businesses be factored into the evaluation process? Can you provide specific scoring weights or criteria that will apply to Offerors qualifying as small and emerging businesses?

RESPONSE

Proposals submitted by an entity qualifying as a small and emerging business will be scored first. Proposals must reach a minimum score of 80 points to be considered for selection. The Program Administrator will only score proposals from Offerors that do not qualify as small and emerging if no small and emerging Offeror obtains the minimum score of 80 points for a Bright Neighborhoods community area. More information about scoring can be found in the "[Proposal Scoring and Evaluation](#)" section of the RFP.

The "Bright Neighborhoods Proposal Content" section of the RFP shows the points awarded for each question. Because the prioritization of small and emerging businesses is effectuated through scoring their proposals first, no additional scoring weight or criteria are available through the scoring process. All proposals must reach at least 80 points to be considered. Proposals will be scored according to the table below:

Category	Total Section Score
Offeror Background and Capacity	55
Community Commitment and Readiness	35
Company Offer	20
Plan to Employ Job Trainees	5
Total Possible Points	115

QUESTION 7

Could you clarify the payment terms and schedule for projects completed under the Bright Neighborhoods Initiative? Is there an advance payment option available to assist with initial project costs?

RESPONSE

The payment terms and schedule for projects under Bright Neighborhoods follow the same schedule used for other Illinois Solar for All: Residential Solar (Small) sub-program projects. The REC contract includes a one-time payment for the full 15 years of REC deliveries at the end of the quarterly period when the system is energized. The Program

Administrator follows an invoice schedule that is posted in the [Approved Vendor Portal](#) and is updated annually. More information about the invoicing schedule can be found in Section 13 of the [Approved Vendor Manual](#).

There are no advance payment options available in Illinois Solar for All. Small and emerging businesses may find external resources to assist with initial project costs through the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity's Equitable Energy Future Grant Program or other State programs.

QUESTION 8

What are the technical requirements for final site assessments, particularly concerning electrical panel health, roof age, and shading levels? Are there standardized criteria that the Offeror must follow when evaluating these factors?

RESPONSE

A home participating in on-site solar is expected to have a roof with at least 15 years of life left, an electrical system suitable for solar, no shading obstructions closer than twice the height it extends above the array, and a structure that will be supportive of an installation. The Approved Vendor must present an assessment identifying all barriers identified, each with a mitigation plan. The Illinois Solar for All site criteria and requirements for solar photovoltaic systems can be found in the ILSFA [Site Suitability Guidelines](#), and shading study requirements can be found in Section 10.11 of the [Approved Vendor Manual](#).

QUESTION 9

Is there a budget cap on the number of installations per community, or is it determined solely by the capacity of the Approved Vendor? Can Offerors propose additional installations beyond the stated goals if they have the capacity?

RESPONSE

This initiative functions under the Residential Solar (Small) sub-program and will receive funding through the annual budget. The allocated budget for the 2024-2025 program year Residential Solar (Small) sub-program is \$30,146,606.40. Bright Neighborhoods projects do not receive preference over other submitted Residential Solar (Small) projects and will receive incentives as the budget allows.

The Offeror can complete more than the goal of 20-25 installations in each community if they have the capacity. In the event the Program Administrator identifies more prospective participants than the Offeror indicated they have the capacity to support in

their RFP, the Program Administrator reserves the right to refer prospective participants to the next highest-scored vendor that applied but was not selected to complete that portion of projects.

QUESTION 10

Is there grant funding available for pre-installation activities such as main service panel upgrades or roof repairs?

RESPONSE

There is no grant funding available to complete pre-installation activities through ILSFA. The Illinois Solar for All: Home Repairs and Upgrades Initiative provides additional REC incentives to Approved Vendors for the completion of eligible home repairs necessary as a pre-condition to a solar installation.

Approved Vendors may reference an [External Funding List](#) as a resource for available external funding opportunities to fund home repairs, as compiled by the Program Administrator.

QUESTION 11

What specific certifications or licenses must subcontractors hold to be eligible to participate in this initiative? Additionally, what are the insurance requirements for both the Offeror and any subcontractors?

RESPONSE

Any ILSFA Approved Vendor or installer should have proof of Distributed Generation Installer Certification from the Illinois Commerce Commission in the form of a Commission order granting the certification. Approved Vendors working in this initiative may use subcontractors as they see fit, but subcontractors do not require any specific certifications or licenses to participate. Any subcontractors participating in Illinois Solar for All must register by filling out this [Subcontractor Registration Form and Attestations](#). If a subcontractor works in a role that requires direct interaction with end-use customers, they must be registered as a Designee with the Program Administrator. More information about the use of subcontractors and Designee installers can be found in Section 3 of the [Approved Vendor Manual](#).

Other requirements, including licensure and insurance requirements, may be imposed by the municipalities in which this work is occurring, but Approved Vendors and subcontractors are not subject to greater requirements than other solar installers by participating in the Bright Neighborhoods Initiative.

QUESTION 12

If an Offeror opts to participate in the Home Repairs and Upgrades Initiative, how will this affect REC price adjustments for their projects? Is there a separate budget or additional funding available to cover these repair costs?

RESPONSE

The Home Repairs and Upgrades Initiative provides additional incentives in the form of REC adders of up to \$6,500 for electrical work and up to \$14,000 for roofing and structural work for a Residential Solar (Small) project for Approved Vendors who complete eligible roof and/or electrical repairs. These REC adders will not impact the Bright Neighborhoods base REC prices.

Eligible Home Repairs and Upgrades Initiative projects are funded by the Residential Solar (Small) sub-program budget. That initiative includes an upper limit on the number of projects that can receive funding for eligible repairs. The updated design of the Home Repairs and Upgrades Initiative, including an updated budget, will be released on the ILSFA website in early September 2024.

QUESTION 13

Can you provide more details on the expectations for subcontractor oversight? What specific measures or reporting requirements must be in place to ensure high-quality installations by subcontractors?

RESPONSE

Approved Vendors are not required to use subcontractors, but if they choose to use one, the subcontractor must register by filling out this [Subcontractor Registration Form and Attestations](#). Subcontractors are used for any non-Approved Vendor role that does not include direct interaction with the end-use participant. If a subcontractor works in a role that requires direct interaction with end-use customers, they must be registered as a Designee with the Program Administrator. More information about the use of subcontractors and Designee installers can be found in Section 3 of the [Approved Vendor Manual](#).



QUESTION 14

How frequently will the Program Administrator provide the pipeline of income-verified participants to the selected Offeror? Is there a process for replacing participants who become ineligible or opt out of the program?

RESPONSE

The outreach, marketing, and enrollment period for Bright Neighborhoods runs from September 17, 2024, until April 30, 2025. During this time, the Program Administrator will coordinate with the selected Approved Vendors to refer income-eligible participants on a rolling basis as they become income verified. The project flow will fluctuate depending on participant interest.

There is no process for replacing participants who become ineligible or opt out of the program. If, upon in-person inspection, an Approved Vendor finds the participant's home is not immediately suitable for solar due to home repair needs or too much shading, the Program Administrator will work with them to support the needs of the participant.