

# Advisory Committee Quarterly Meeting

## Transcript

FEBRUARY 18, 2025

### Introduction & Agenda Overview

JENNIFER BROWN

All right, good afternoon, everyone. This is Jennifer Brown from Illinois Solar for All and today is February 18th and this is our quarterly advisory committee meeting for program year 24, 25. And so we are again thankful for all of you all that are here today, and we're going to go ahead and get started. So, I'll begin with advancing our slides to what you can expect for our time today. We are going to of course talk about our purpose and our agenda here in just a second, but we also want, while you are coming into the room and getting acclimated to this space, we'd love to see who's in the room and being that it is as cold as it is today, we'd love for you to just put your name, your company, and what you love most about winter. I think that is something that is most appropriate today as cold as it is outside here in Chicago.

You may be joining us from other areas, but what do you love most about winter? You can go ahead and put that in the comments. That is our icebreaker for today. And so, then we're also going to talk about our committee structure. We're going to give you some updates from our last advisory committee meeting, and we'll give you some updates on what's going on with Illinois Solar for all, some of the latest things. And then we have a special guest from our marketing department today, and we're going to talk about Illinois Solar for all program marketing. And then we're going to have some space in between that presentation for discussion. And we really do covet your open and honest dialogue today as we are looking for information from our committee members with regard to messaging for Illinois Solar for all. And then of course, we'll just close out with our next step.

So, of course, these are very standard house rules. Be kind. Keep yourself mute. Of course, if you have any questions, don't hesitate to put them in the comments or you could use the hand raise button. And as soon as we have a moment, we will definitely acknowledge your question. And of course, the topics here are to spur your conversation. And so we are, and the purpose of spurring this conversation is so that we can improve the Illinois Solar for All program. Of course, we're not making decisions here, but we can make recommendations to the Illinois Power Agency for consideration. Just wanting to remind you again why we are a space that is

important. The objective of the advisory committee is to meet, to discuss and explore, and as I mentioned earlier, to advise the Illinois Power Agency on updates for the Illinois Solar for All program.

Our goal is to increase participation in the program, so we want to always have that goal right in front of us. We want to provide the experience that we have that's relevant to the program, and we want to also help improve the ongoing developments that are taking place within the program. So, I want us to stay focused on the why so that we can continue to do this great work. All right, and so I'm going to invite my colleague, Patrice, to come to the microphone. She's going to share a little bit about the committee and its structure.

## **Committee Structure**

**PATRICE MCFARLIN**

Thanks so much, Jen. Good afternoon, everyone. Again, Patrice McFarlin. I want to take some time and talk to you about the committee structure. As you all know, we've been putting forth a lot of effort and activities around really bolstering the advisory committee. And the first thing that we want to talk about today is the recruitment process. So we're still working through a number of the fine details with that process, but what we do know is that we are going to be looking for your support to reach out to your networks and identify people that you think would be a really good addition in bringing forth their perspective on issues that are brought forth through the advisory committee. We'll be sure to share any interim updates on the recruitment process with you via email to talk to you about what we're looking to do in advance of our May meeting, which brings me forth to our in-person meeting.

We're really excited to bring the advisory committee together for an in-person session, May 20th, and we're looking to have a longer day of programming that allows us the ability to really build community, get to know each other, but then also to tackle some additional topics and talk a little bit more in depth about those specific topics. To make our time together most useful, you should be expecting to receive a survey that's going to be sent out to all of the advisory committee members where we're going to be looking for input on what are some topics that you would like to see us cover during that extended meeting in May. We're going to send out some additional correspondence on this. We know that there are committee members that will require some travel accommodations into the Chicago land area, so we are preparing to work with the committee members who are impacted by any potential travel to make sure that we can coordinate because we want to have as much presence as we can get in this May meeting. The team is working really hard to put together some meaningful program for you. So again, May 20th will be our first in-person meeting, and we're planning to be in the Chicago land area.

## Update from last meeting:

So, moving on, excuse me, from our last committee structure updates, we want to talk to you a little bit about our last meeting. So, our last quarterly meeting was on November 12th, and during that process, that's when we started to introduce this section of the meeting to provide us a refresher and make sure that we're aligned on what we talked about in that previous meeting. Coming into the current meeting, we talked about our meeting topic, which is listed here for you, environmental justice communities and prioritization and project selection. During that meeting, the Elevate team was able to present some background information on the environmental justice community map and the most recent updates there. We then shifted and started to talk about the regional EJ score and geographic diversity points, and we really looked to the committee for some insights on some alternative methods for prioritizing EJ communities.

Since that meeting that we held in November, the Elevate and IPA teams have continued their discussions on updating the EJ map. Since that time, there have been some changes and some of the source data that was being used in order to input into that map. This is not to say that the maps are outdated, but moving forward, Elevate and IPA need to have some additional conversations and discussions around what the best data sets and input tools are to have an update to the EJ map. We also heard that project approvals and vendor availability specifically in Southern Illinois needs to be considered. So that is also top of mind in the discussions that continue around updating the EJ map. But we also heard in that meeting that program awareness and education and outreach are also really important considerations to the ILSFA program. This was echoed in what we heard from you all also in our one-on-one committee meetings, which really brought us to the discussion topic that we have for today, and working in partnership with the Elevate Marketing Team to really allow us a space to dive more into program messaging to make sure that we're positioning the program for as much awareness to increase participation in the program.

So that is an update on our committee structure and what we've talked about in our last meeting. Really look forward to the discussion for today, and I'll pass

It over to you, Jen.

**JENNIFER BROWN**

Wonderful. I'm going to invite my colleague Amy Jewel to the microphone to share a little bit about the ILSFA updates.

## ILSFA Program Updates

AMY JEWEL

Thanks so much. These are just a few of the program updates from the last advisory committee meeting. My name is Amy Jewel and I'm also with the ILSFA team at Elevate. So, the first piece, the grassroots education that RFP will be coming out soon, and to find out when that is released, the best way is to sign up for the ILSFA, and that will be an announcement that will be made once the RFP is released. So, the link is here on the slide, and I know the slides will be shared out as well. And the link is also on the agenda. That's how you can sign up for announcements and updates so that you'll know when that RFP is released in case it is of interest. If it's not of interest to you or your organization, feel free to share it with other organizations that you think might be interested in applying to be a grassroots educator. Net metering, so many of you know this already, but there were some net metering changes that went into effect on January 1st, 2025, so a little over a month and a half ago. These changes have to do with how net metering credits are applied to customers' utility bills. And so, there were some FAQs and education that went on with some of our stakeholders around that. And we've also worked with approved vendors to make sure they understand the changes as well around net metering and how that impacts customers and future savings and bills.

It's not on the slide, but there I wanted to also mention another announcement you might have seen earlier this month. It went out on February 4th. This announcement was around some additional funding that the IPA and the IFA, the Illinois Finance Authority received from the US Environmental Protection Agency. This is something called the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund, solar for All Program. It's a federal funding source. And so, there were some dollars received through that federal funding source that will support the Community Solar Sub program budget in this current program year. And information will be released as soon as we have information on that. I think that was it in terms of general

Program updates. Any questions? All right. Thank you. Oh, sorry. If there's something in the chat. I didn't see it here.

JENNIFER BROWN

No, Amy, you're good.

## ILSFA Program Marketing

JENNIFER BROWN

Thank you, Amy. Alright, so next on our agenda, we are going straight into our presentation, but before I introduce Jelene Briton, who is our director of marketing at Elevate, I want to go ahead and begin with a presentation with regard to one of our participants who was able to experience Illinois Solar for all with their family. So,

let's go ahead and take a listen and the next voice you hear will be Jelene Britten, our Marketing Director.

**JOHN DELUREY**

Hey Jen, it might be something on my end. I'm not getting audio from the video.

**JENNIFER BROWN**

Okay, sorry about that. Let's try that video again.

Jennifer plays [this video](#):

“Good afternoon. My name is Jawad Barki. I'm living in this house with my wife and five kids. I got to the house through Habitat of Humanity. Right now, they're installing the solar panels through the Illinois Solar for All program. Yeah, this is Habitat Humanity Home. I got it like three years ago. I'm very happy about it. And right now, I'm going to be happier with the Solar panel and save some money. That's good. That's good that I never have any doubt. I mean, saving money always is good. So even for \$1, you save \$1, that's good too. Plus, you save the environment right now, all the prices going up, it is good time to have the solar panel to save some money. Now the process was easy for out the forms, and we sign online, you don't have to go anywhere just from home. You do everything according to the company. They say in the next 15 years we're going to save more than \$14,000. And that's awesome. I mean, that's good. That's good money. I mean, it's very good. I recommend everybody to go ahead and go ahead and start the process through the Illinois Solar for All it's a great program.”

**JELENE BRITTEN**

Thank you Jennifer for playing the video and thanks to the committee for having me here today. I'm Jelene Britton, the senior director of marketing here at Elevate, and I wanted to start our conversation with the voice of a participant. They're really our best advocates and I always enjoy hearing from them. They can speak directly about their experience with ILSFA, and they can talk about how they're saving money and all that helps us build some trust and credibility with potential participants who they're speaking with. I also wanted to say thank you to Kim Knowles, who's a fellow committee member and a grassroots educator who connected with that family and helped make this video. We really appreciate our grassroots educators and approved vendors who connect with participants and help us create testimonials.

So now I'd love to have a conversation with you about program marketing, and I'll start by giving an introduction to how program marketing works. So ILSFA is actually designed so that the marketing and outreach are done primarily by the approved vendors and the grassroots educators in the program. So, the approved vendors are the solar companies that we vetted and approved to offer the solar installations in

the program. They use marketing tactics such as direct mail, social media, advertising and community events to reach prospective participants. And they're also required to send us their marketing materials to us here at the program administrators so that we can ensure they're following all the program guidelines. And then grassroots educators are the nonprofit community-based organizations that are part of the program and have in-depth knowledge of ILSFA. They really work in their communities as trusted advocates to talk about the benefits of going solar and the process of participating in ILSFA.

So, they conduct community outreach activities such as events as well as one-on-one conversations, and they also offer guidance on how to participate. And the grassroots educators also send their marketing materials to us here at Elevate to review them as well. And then Elevate serves as the program administrator. We maintain the ILSFA brand guidelines, the message framework, the website, social media channels, newsletters, and other program wide marketing materials. These things that we really created to help generate interest in ILSFA across Illinois. We also provide materials to approved vendors and grassroots educators to help them promote the program. So, for instance, we create the approved vendor manual that has many guidelines in it as well as grassroots education presentations and fact sheets. This program year and also last program year, we're promoting the Bright Neighborhoods Initiative. That's the public name for the Residential Solar Pilot. This is actually the first time that the program administrator is promoting ILSFA directly to potential participants. And we also support stakeholder engagement activities such as sharing program announcements and updating program documents. Any questions about just this overview of who's doing what for program marketing?

So, I wanted to share a few things that we have done as the program administrator over the last few years to really bolster participant engagement across the program. So, we've updated the grassroots education fact sheets and presentation materials using some more participant friendly language. We've also partnered with grassroots educators to collect and share participant success stories. We have a whole page dedicated to them on our website, and we've updated the approved vendor manual as a guide for both approved vendors and grassroots educators. It contains our brand and logo guidelines as well as messaging dos and don'ts. Next slide please.

And we are also really excited about these two initiatives. We launched a new participant friendly website last year. We updated the navigation to make it easier for people to find information about the program, and we are also directing people to a form to indicate that they're interested in learning more about ILSFA. We wrote new copies across the site to make it easier for people to understand how to participate in ILSFA, and we redesigned the whole site with a fresh modern look. We also launched social media channels for ILSFA on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube last fall. We're really excited about these channels because we can meet our target audience where they're naturally gathering, which is on these social media channels. We've grown our base of followers over the last few months and we're also

tracking the type of content they're most interested in so that we can make adjustments to our content based on what's most successful.

Okay, now I'd love to have a conversation with you all about a few topics to help inform our future program marketing and planning activities. First, I wanted to share our target audience personas. So, in 2023, we researched our target audience of income eligible residents in Illinois, and then we created audience personas based on this research. So, the personas are profiles of typical participants. They describe what the participant needs are, what problems they're trying to solve and what motivates them to participate. The personas aren't based on specific individuals, but they're based on characteristics that our research showed appear across our target audience. These personas are commonly used in marketing as ways to tailor messages and tactics to connect with the right people for the program in a way that feels personal and relevant. We gave each persona a name as a way to bring their personality to life and to keep those characteristics in mind as we plan our marketing messages and strategies. So, I'm going to share three personas with you and then we have some discussion questions.

So first up is Corey. He's an income eligible homeowner. I value financial stability and constantly seek ways to improve my financial situation. I understand the importance of making informed decisions to secure my financial future, but I'm aware there's room for improvement. So I'm open to exploring new opportunities. I tend to prioritize immediate financial goals and stability over long-term concerns, including the environment and sustainability. I'm interested in practical solutions that can enhance my current financial standing, whether it's optimizing expenses, exploring low risk, low risk investment opportunities, or finding ways to increase savings. I'm ready to take the steps towards a more secure and prosperous future, but I need guidance and assistance. I can trust one that has my needs as their priority.

Next persona. Thank you. So, this is Patricia, another income eligible homeowner. As a proud Latina, my cultural values shape my aspirations. I'm always seeking ways to better both myself and my family's future with a genuine belief in making a difference in the world. While I'm diligent about my finances, I'm open to innovative solutions and technologies that align with my eco friendly mindset, understanding that my financial decisions have broader implications, whether it's educational investments, career advancements, or strategic financial planning and dedicated to continuing to create a future that's not only financially secure, but also marked by continuous personal and familial betterment.

And our next persona is Jess. Despite the challenges of renting, I see it as a temporary phase on the journey toward achieving the dream of owning a home. In the midst of renting, my primary concerns revolve around creating a comfortable and stable environment for myself and my loved ones. I carefully manage my budget to ensure that I can enjoy life's pleasures while still meeting the demands of rent and other expenses. I prioritize experiences, building memories and fostering a sense of

home. While the dream of home ownership is in the background, my focus is on the here and now I explore ways to enhance my current living situation, creating a cozy and inviting space that feels like home. So, this slide shows a summary of each of the personas, their characteristics, and some of their motivations related to solar. We have two different homeowner profiles because we realized there are some homeowners that are more where the environment is more of a motivator than others, and there's also a difference between the forward-thinking planning mindset versus thinking of the here and now.

And then we also chose a renter as a persona because one, they're eligible for the ILSFA Community Solar, so program, but they're also potential the ones who are interested in future home ownership, their potential participants for the residential solar program. So, I'd like to have a conversation with you all about these personas and how they do or don't align with how you've interacted with participants in your experience with ILSFA. So, the questions are on the next slide. Patrice, if you could put the questions also in the chat, I think that would be helpful. So, our first question is based on your experience as an ILSFA participant or in your work with participants, which characteristics of these personas ring true for you? And Jennifer, if you want to go back to the previous slides so people can, or I guess Patrice put the overview of them in the chat. So, either way, I just want to make sure people have a reference for the personas we're having the conversation. Any initial thoughts on what rings true for you in terms of these personas?

## Program Marketing Discussion

JENNIFER BROWN

And I just want to point out to committee members, if you would, you can go ahead and just raise your hand or you can just come off mute and share. But this is a part of our session slash dialogue part of the presentation.

PATRICE MCFARLIN

So maybe it's a good chance to think about, John, I see that you raised your hand, so I'll reframe my question and let you go ahead and jump in.

JOHN DELUREY

Yeah, thanks Jen. This is drawing more from my solar for all residential customers way back than it is from my current work at Vote Solar. But I found that the first profile around value and affordability rang true. That was what really brought the point home for most customers was not just the affordability, but also the predictability of bills. Like not having to worry about price shocks of a specific energy bill being high, especially for customers that were on fixed income. So that was a big piece of the puzzle. I'll say there were customers that I had that were interested in solar and were interested in the environment and that became a big part of it. So that is kind of like a medley of a couple different personas, but I think that that focus



on bill savings and affordability was the most common and popular motivation that I encountered.

**JENNIFER BROWN**

Thank you for sharing, John. Vee, you can go ahead. Vee, if you're talking, you're on mute. Oh, Vee, it looks like we still can't hear you. Vee might be having some audio issues. Okay. We can come back around to you Vee looking for comments from additional committee members not wanting to belabor the time. Patrice, you had a thought? You can go ahead.

**PATRICE MCFARLIN**

Yeah, I was going to just say when we think about these personas, we've got a few different stakeholder types. So, when we think about as an av, are these the types of customers that you're seeing that you're interacting with? So, want to just think about what are your day-to-day interactions? Do you see any of yourself in any of these personas that are listed here?

**JENNIFER BROWN**

Awesome. Thank you for providing some more clarity, Patrice. It looks like Laurie has her hand up. Go ahead, Laurie.

**LAURIE FIELDS**

OK. Can you hear me?

**JENNIFER BROWN**

Yes, we can.

**LAURIE FIELDS**

Yes. Okay, excellent. Sorry, I'm in a different location than normal and on a different tech setup, so the fact that you can hear me is exciting. Okay. I would agree with John. I think from my experience, and I don't have as much experience directly with residential customers, but the experience I do have, I would say economics is really the big thing. The predictability of billing, the insulation against price increases, the budget friendly stuff. That's all. And when I talk about solar for all with people who haven't heard of the program before, their number one question is what's it going to cost? I mean, that's what drives people. And so, I think that, and I also think the consumer protection stuff is wide term. It around cost is a big selling point. Not having to pay until the system is turned on is a big selling point that people feel like they're not going to get taken advantage of if they don't have to actually pay

anything until they actually see that there's a benefit to them. I hope that makes sense.

**JENNIFER BROWN**

Yeah, that makes perfect sense. Thank you. Thank you for sharing. Okay, Jelene, would you like to continue with your questions?

**JELENE BRITTEN**

Sure. Thank you so much everyone for the feedback. Is there, is there anything about the personas that summaries we have on the screen that don't ring true or is it based on your experience with the program or did it really align with your experience?

**JENNIFER BROWN**

I also want to add that if you're a position committee where you are unable to talk or to get on audio and you can put your comments. So, Vee, you can go ahead and put your comments in the chat. So please feel free to go ahead and put your comments in the chat. We will acknowledge it there as well.

**YVONNE LONG**

This is Yvonne. Just a quick comment. I echo the previous comments just generally speaking in my experience with doing community solar, which is really under Illinois shine, so I just wanted to clarify that also then related is that there are older people too that are participating in the project that we're doing that are not, it's maybe too good to be true kind of a communication and concerned that they could be taken advantage of and that this isn't a real opportunity potentially. I was just thinking about in terms of diversity of target audience, somebody who might be older or even somebody in a rural community that really doesn't have the ability to be able to have solar on their rooftop and that this is just really a great opportunity for them as well.

**JENNIFER BROWN**

That's an excellent point, Yvonne. Excellent point. Any thoughts regarding Yvonne's point? OK.

**JELENE BRITTEN**

I'm glad you brought that up too. It leads to my last question was are there any other audiences we should consider researching for Ilsa? And I think better understanding the rural audience is something that we know we'd like to do. So that's a great idea.

**YVONNE LONG**

And older too. I mean we've got families than somebody who's a single individual for a persona, but maybe somebody who's older. And again, the comments I get

frequently are around just a similar fixed income. Back to the couple comments that were made previously about predictability and how important that is for their budget, but they're in the small community where we have a small community solar project is that they're just, I'm worried about it being a real opportunity so to speak.

**JELENE BRITTEN**

Yeah.

**JENNIFER BROWN**

That's really good. That's really good. I want to read Laurie's comment. She said one concern or reason not to pursue solar panels is the time of investment or ROI. A couple of older adults I've talked to say that the investment is going to take too long to pay off for it to be worth it to them. So that's a really good point to consider as well. And I think we have John. Yeah, John has his hand up. And Laurie, you have your hand up too. I'm not sure if you have some additional commentary on your point. So go ahead John.

**JOHN DELUREY**

Yeah, thanks Jen. This is about the question about what types of personas or audiences we might be missing. And this could be entirely out of scope for this question or for this team, but I'm mindful that for at least the residential sub program, my perception has been that it hasn't always been for lack of customers or customer interests, especially with the grassroots educators doing some of that outreach. But it was in part just awareness among the solar company approved vendor community about this program. And so it's a very different profile, but if you can imagine trying to help solar companies who might be doing a lot of residential work in Illinois shines better, understand Illinois Solar for all that is an audience, I would love the program to market to a little bit more and to help build their familiarity. The one exception to that rule, the place where I think we're not contacting customers quite enough, and don't get me wrong, we can definitely get more contact and more awareness out there across the customer groups, but the one place that seems like a vulnerability is affordable housing complexes small, maybe mom and pop landlords, the four, sorry, the five plus unit sub-program, the large residential program has struggled more than others, had zero projects for the last few years.

And so just knowing how to tap into that profile of the person who owns a two flat or a three flat and everybody is low income or fixed income, or even a larger affordable housing developer that would qualify for that large residential subprogram would be helpful to tap into. So again, I might be drifting off scope or that might be beyond the bounds here but wanted to just flag those two things.

JENNIFER BROWN

No, no, your points are definitely well taken. John, thank you so much for sharing and helping us to think outside of just residential. So, thank you so much. I think Laurie, you still have your hands up. Laurie, did you want to add some commentary to your point?

LAURIE FIELDS

I always have more comments and adding to my written comment I want to say I'm not sure how accurate that perception always is. I've had older adults tell me, oh, well it's a 15-year investment and I'm 80, I'm not going to be here in 15 years. It's not worth it to be. That may or may not be true, especially with Solar for all and costs and stuff, but that's a perception. The other thing I think it's important to note is that there are a lot of people who qualify for this program who have low functional literacy levels. I say this as an adult educator in a rural community. And so being aware of that, making sure that information is clear, making sure that there's good use of graphics and pictures and not just paragraph after paragraph of text. There's a lot of folks who qualify who have very low functional literacy levels regardless of whether they have a high school diploma or not. And so that's a real concern. Again, I've had people who I know would qualify, but I hand them a sheet with a bunch of texts on it and it just goes straight over their head. So that's important to note.

JENNIFER BROWN

Excellent point. Excellent point. Thank you so much. Duly Noted. Alright.

LAURIE FIELDS

Jennifer, one other thing, sorry I forgot to, there are online websites where you can input text and get a reading level back. So, if that's ever something that you all want, I don't remember off the top of my head and I don't have the right computer in front of me, but I can share that if that's ever something that you guys want.

JENNIFER BROWN

OK, great. Great, great, great. Well, I'll let Jelene reply to that and from here Jelene, you could take it away.

JELENE BRITTEN

Thanks. That's a really great point, Lori. And one thing we're trying to work through with all our messages is to make sure that they are understandable to our audiences and think through how else we can convey our messages. Like you said, not just

paragraphs, but images. We do have a tool we do use internally that tells us the reading level. So, thanks for sharing that idea. It is something that we have internally.

**PATRICE MCFARLIN**

Jelene, we've also got one more comment in the chat from Vee. Coco's primary audience is our senior renters. The long-term contract was very attractive. Savings is key, but also having a long-term community solar subscription was also an attractive feature. Feeling like their solar subscription is helping them live a healthier life coupled with the trust built with the ILSFA AV. And then we've got one more from Yvonne, agree with Laurie even so the nonprofit tax-exempt organizations with which we work have trouble with this as well. They are not solar or utility experts. Many do not understand how to read their utility invoice.

## **Program Marketing: Key Messages**

**JELENE BRITTEN**

Thank you all for the comments. This is giving us some good food for thought as we're planning for the next year, we can move on to our next topic. It actually ties right in with what we were just talking about key messages. So, I'd like to review some of the messages that we use to describe the program as a whole. And then residential solar specifically. So, Illinois Solar for all is a state program that makes solar installations more affordable for income eligible households and organizations allowing more people to enjoy savings on their energy bills. Participants can take advantage of the following benefits, no or low upfront cost. You're protected. We guide you through the process and ensure safe and fair business practices. Solar savings are guaranteed, and you can reduce the impact of climate change in your community and across the state. So those are program wide messages.

And then for these are a few that we use to talk about our residential solar. So, the first one is about no upfront costs for owners of single-family homes and small multifamily buildings. And then there's that caveat for owners of large multifamily properties, they may have a small upfront cost. Next, it'll spend ensures that all qualified participants see savings on their energy bills because you'll be using electricity generated from the solar project, you'll pay less in your electric bills and most participants won't owe a monthly payment to a solar company. But if you do have a solar contract that does include payments. ILSFA requires the costs and fees for the solar project, no more than half of the value you receive from the energy produced by your solar project. So again, these are messages we've been using for some time for the program, and we are continually looking for ways to make sure our messages are accessible and understandable to our audiences. So, I wanted to use the collective wisdom of the committee members to hear more about your experience with ILSFA messages. So, in your experience talking to participants or as a participant, what are the main challenges you faced with program messages? What do people seem to have the most questions about or find the hardest to understand? It could be savings language, it could be the participant journey, it could be

something else. And again, feel free to raise your hands or type a comment in the chat.

**JENNIFER BROWN**

Go ahead, John.

**JOHN DELUREY**

Definitely the savings language, it's always been hard to communicate that as half of the value of the energy that's coming. It's hard. I swim in these waters as my day job, and I sometimes even get tripped up on the way to describe that. And I know it's baked into the statute and the program guidelines to have it be a 50% savings on the energy. It's even more complicated now that we're post full retail net metering and there's just got to be some better way. There's just got to be, I wish I had better ideas, but even if it's just low balling the savings estimate or vetting specific offers to ensure that they meet a certain threshold, I would rather be able to guarantee 20% savings than have this half of the value of the solar coming off your roof. And I think it just causes eyes to glaze over a little bit. So, I'll try to think of some productive alternatives rather than just complaining about it. But that's been a struggle for some time for me when I'm communicating the program.

**JELENE BRITTEN**

Thanks for sharing, John. I think that's a common experience.

**JENNIFER BROWN**

We have, I think Vee's. Hand is still up, but I think it might still be up from earlier. So, I'll go ahead and lower. Oh, there you go. Okay. We have a comment from Laurie. She says, I would love to see a sample savings example like case studies of participants showing what they used to pay in comparison and then show the cost of the panels and the savings. So, thank you so much for sharing that, Laurie, that's a great, great idea. For any of our folks that are here from the approved vendor side, is there anything that you have seen with regard to our messaging that has been difficult to communicate? Or should I say challenging? Not necessarily difficult, staying on the positive side here. Okay, hearing no comments there. Well, no additional comments I should say. Jelene, if you want to, oh, it looks like John has a comment. Go ahead John.

**JOHN DELUREY**

Yeah, I mean there's two quick thoughts here. Hopefully one is relevant as far as I know a lot of the residential offers are free, and this can change, right, because it's not a requirement of the program, but that a lot of the current customers have essentially received a no cost power purchase agreement. Meaning that whatever

energy comes off the roof is free to them. They might still need some power from the grid, they might not be able to fully offset what they use, but it's essentially having a little free solar power plant on your roof that you get to benefit from as a homeowner. And I know that because that's not a program requirement, Elevate has been hesitant in the past to allow approved vendors who have free offers to advertise it as such. But it would be great to be able to make that a little bit more tailored and maybe it already is, this might be outdated information, but to allow a company that is attempting to offer free power purchase agreements to say that as such, even if it's them advertising their own sort of bespoke product, rather than suggesting that the Illinois Solar for All program always allows for this type of free solar power plant savings.

So that was one piece. And then the other piece was just about participant flow, that participant journey. It would also help manage expectations to help customers flow into the community solar program if they don't for whatever reason qualify for residential. There's a lot of customers that sort of jump through the initial hoops and get income qualified and become interested in the program. We'll need to realize that they need more repairs than the deferred maintenance program can pay for, or that their roof is too shady. And it would be nice to be able to say more about how pretty much no matter what, if you start this journey and you're eligible, you'll find some savings, whether it's in the form of residential and significant savings or community solar and more limited savings. I recognize that the community solar subscriptions are often overbooked and managed by third parties, but having a better bridge there I think would enhance the overall customer experience.

**JENNIFER BROWN**

All great points there, John. All great points. Jelene, I think that Vee's comment in the chat speaks to your second question that you were about to go into. So, a good segway there. The question was for those committee members who talk with participants, how have you helped participants understand the benefits of Illinois Solar for all? And Vee said what KoKo is doing, I guess after communicating is she'll ask, does what we just said makes sense? And then follow up with how could we say this or explain it differently just to ensure that clarity is established?

**JELENE BRITTEN**

Yeah, that's a great idea, especially when you're able to have these one-on-one conversations to help people understand and you learn from them at the same time. So that's a great idea. Any other thoughts from the committee on how you've bridged some of these challenges in your work?

**JENNIFER BROWN**

I also want to add that sometimes when you are sharing, you have your own tack or your own way of communicating the message and have you found a really easy way or a really fun way of sharing it so that it kind of gets to sharing the message so that it gets to your audience quick rather quickly, especially for those who have been communicating it for a while. So that's just another way, trying to think about it. What are some of the tactics that you use? What's the type of messaging that you use? Okay, well in consideration of our time, if you think of anything while we are still talking, please do share it in the comments. And, we want to extend an opportunity for you to maybe you might think of something a little bit later after the meeting is over. We also want to extend an opportunity for you to share those thoughts that you may have even after the meeting is over. So definitely our marketing department and Jelene and her team will be happy to gather that information. I'll turn it back over to you, Jelene.

## Marketing Planning

### JELENE BRITTEN

Thanks Jennifer. We can move to the next slide. So, our next topic is marketing planning. So, we'll soon start planning our marketing or developing our marketing plan for the next program year, and we'd love to get some ideas from the committee members to inform our planning. So first I thought I'll give you an overview of the elements of the marketing plan. So first up is our goal, which outlines what we're trying to achieve with the marketing plan. So, our goal for the 2024-25 program year is to expand program awareness to drive participation in ILSFA. The plan also outlines our audience. That's who we're trying to reach. So, these are participants, like we mentioned earlier, approved vendors, grassroots educators and stakeholders. Our stakeholders are defined by the program administrator who is elected and other public officials who we want to stay informed about Ilsa policy and advocacy groups and utilities. And then the tactics are the activities that we use to reach our audience and help achieve our goals. The next slide please.

You'll see one of my discussion questions will be what are some ideas of your ideas for tactics that we can pursue? So, I thought to get your creative juices flowing, I'll share a few of the tactics that we've implemented this year as the program administrator. So, we've created and implemented a marketing plan for Bright Neighborhoods. We're enhancing our website, including creating Spanish translations for our participant webpages. We're revising our program messaging and enhancing our brand guidelines with the help of a marketing subcontractor. We launched and maintained social media channels, so that will be an ongoing promotional vehicle for us. And we are updating the grassroots education materials and we're working right now on the Spanish translations of those materials. And as I mentioned earlier, we are reviewing all approved vendors in grassroots education marketing materials. Next slide. And then is further food for thought. I thought I'd mentioned briefly some of the tactics that we've implemented to promote Bright neighborhoods.



So, we created a dedicated landing page for the initiative on the ILSFA website. We created a share kit that community partners and elected officials can use to share information about bright neighborhoods with their constituents. We are also running outreach events and our communities, and we've created a lot of event materials to help promote those events. We're building relationships with community organizations. We'll be doing some media outreach and partnership with the Illinois Power Agency. We're close to launching a direct mail campaign and targeted zip codes of the Bright Neighborhoods communities. And we'll soon start running ads on social media and a Google search. And then we're also using our ILSFA email list to promote the initiative as well as our social media channels. Next slide please. So again, we'd love to have a little brainstorming session with you all here. We'll be working on our marketing plan and really curious about some ideas, any ideas that you have. So, are there any marketing tactics you think we should consider that would be successful in reaching income-eligible participants?

**JENNIFER BROWN**

Go ahead, John.

**JELENE BRITTEN**

Go ahead, John.

**JOHN DELUREY**

Can you remind me of where the leads or the potential customers go outside of the bright neighborhoods? That one I think I understand, but for residents where you're actually working to direct folks to the chosen, approved vendors. But if somebody expresses interest in the program or clicks one of the social media ads or posts and goes onto the website, what happens to that customer and what does their journey look like?

**JELENE BRITTEN**

So they're directed to an interest form on the website. And then from there we have a protocol to follow up with them from our program support center will follow up with them and help them take the next steps. So that could be verifying their income through the program administrator and also directing them to the approved vendor directory so that they can start to look for a vendor in their area and start the process with the approved vendor.

**JOHN DELUREY**

Thanks. Really helpful. I'm curious, and definitely not to put you on the spot, so I can look for this elsewhere, but do you have a sense of how many customers begin their

solar for all journey in that way?

**JELENE BRITTEN**

I think from what I've heard with the program over the years, that most participants begin their journey with an approved vendor and it's a smaller amount that comes through the program administrator. We have noticed after redesigning our website that we are getting more of those interest forms filled out. So that's a positive sign that perhaps with additional advertising or awareness activities, we can create a referral pool for approved vendors. Any ideas of marketing tactics you've used or in your own work, whether it's for ILSFA or something, a different program for a similar audience or something you've seen a similar organization implement?

**LAURIE FIELDS**

This is Laurie again. One thing that I think would help is if the program can make contact with other people who work with the target population. So, I'm an adult educator, the vast majority of my students would qualify for this program. So having brochures in my classroom so that when I talk to students, if they mention financial difficulties or they're interested in solar or think I can give them something, I'm also thinking about local health departments who do WIC signups, community action agencies, all those places. And I know some of those we already have partnerships with, but I think the more we can get the information out places, the better. The more people hear about it, the more they're going to trust that the program is actually a real thing and not some figment of their imagination that someone's trying to sell them a line and stuff. So, I know down here Bright neighborhoods got put on social media for local governments and we got a huge response from that. And so, I think just the more ways we can get it out there, particularly targeting those populations.

**JELENE BRITTEN**

That sounds great.

**JENNIFER BROWN**

Great suggestions. Thank you so much Laurie for sharing that. John came back with another question for you, Jelene, and that is, is there a budget for online ads or other customer acquisition costs?

**JELENE BRITTEN**

We do have a budget for Bright neighborhoods, customer acquisition in ads, and then our other program-wide efforts. I wouldn't necessarily call them customer acquisition; it's more awareness building and then we have a small budget for those activities as well.

JENNIFER BROWN

I want to offer a follow-up question for you, John. When you were asking about the budget for customer acquisition, did you have anything in mind that you thought would require that budget? We'd love to hear your thoughts with regard to that.

JOHN DELUREY

Yeah, I've always been curious. I think I've raised this in a prior advisory committee call about the role that the program could play in getting the word out and helping customers, helping to build a list of interested and pre-vetted customers that might lure more approved vendors into the program. I still view the lack of approved vendor interest as the primary concern for the viability of this program, especially since they are the primary force of customer acquisition too. The more vendors we get in, the more customers we'd start to see as they go out and start to build connections with grassroots educators and other groups to start pulling in customers, that's where that purchase cycle really begins. So, in my mind, that's still the primary goal, but I have wondered at times if we can kind of reverse that purchase cycle and kickstart it by preceding an area with additional interested customers.

If we know that there's an approved vendor or maybe there are a couple of approved vendors who are interested in doing more work downstate in Ameren territory, do we pick out a few towns and figure out, all right, how much interest is there in this part of the state? Let's run some ads. Let's figure out how many of those people who express interest are income qualified. Let's do a little bit of prescreening and then we can kind of serve those up to the approved vendor community, both present and hopefully potentially future for them to realize there's a lot of interest and that the program has already helped them get a foothold in this area. And so, some of that is what Bright Neighborhoods is meant to do. And I think Bright Neighborhoods has made it clear how hard this is in some respects, but I've always wondered if there's more room to do that, to have the administrator play that role. But I think it would have to dramatically change shape. Bright neighborhoods have revealed certain cracks in that foundation or that vision there. And so, I'm back to thinking that approved vendors need to be the primary source of customer acquisition and bringing them in. But I'm still open and at times excited about this idea of having a stronger brand with more visibility that isn't just for awareness but is also for customer acquisition.

JENNIFER BROWN

Wow. John, you bring a great point. This is definitely something that we are taking note of to have further conversations about. So, thank you so much for sharing that perspective with regard to the approved vendors. We recognize that that is definitely an area of opportunity we'll say. So, thank you again. All right, wonderful. Wonderful. Any other thoughts on this particular question or can we move on to our next set of

questions here? We've got about just looking at time, we've got about 17 minutes or so still on our timeframe.

#### JELENE BRITTEN

I can move on to the next question and of course if you have another thought about the first question, please jump in or put it in the chat. So, my next question is what other resources could we provide to approve vendors and grassroots educators to support their marketing and outreach efforts? So, as a summary, we provide the approved vendor manual, which has marketing guidelines as well as logo guidelines and message guidelines. And then we provide the grassroots educators with fact sheets presentations and other resources to help in their outreach efforts. But I'm curious from your perspective working in the program if there's any other resources that could be helpful in their work.

#### JENNIFER BROWN

This is a great question. I'll add, Vee had to leave, and so she was our grassroots educator representative for this meeting, but we definitely will bring this conversation to the grassroots educator space as well. So, we'll get a chance to get some of their feedback on this one. But this speaks to what you were saying, John, with regard to providing education to our approved vendors of the program. So, I don't know if you have any additional thoughts there after Laurie speaks. Go ahead, Laurie.

#### LAURIE FIELDS

Sorry, John can go first if he wants to, or I will. And I'll just say again that my spouse is a grassroots educator, is the grassroots educator down in far southern Illinois. So, this is coming from that perspective kind of a little bit secondhand, and I'm losing track of my thoughts here, but again, I think the more concrete information and examples helps. The other thing is I know we've had trouble getting approved vendors down here. I know there's one vendor who was in the program who dropped out because they had such trouble getting projects approved, it just wasn't worth it for them. And they're one of the longest standing solar vendors down here. They've been in business 25 years or something. So, it's not that they don't know what they're doing in the solar field, it's just that the program did not work for them. There's a lot of overhead for vendors, especially for small businesses and local companies and such. It's a lot of paperwork, it's a lot of financial commitment and just realizing that and anything we can do to ease that burden is going to help more vendors be interested in the program because I know there's some that just feel like they can't afford to participate as much as they might want to because the burden is too much as a relatively new small business, they just don't have the capacity for it.

**JENNIFER BROWN** Thank you, Laurie. Thank you for sharing from a grassroots educator perspective and for sharing some of the insight that you guys are experiencing in Southern Illinois. That's really helpful. John, did you have anything that you wanted to add with regard to your point that you were making earlier about approved vendors?

**JOHN DELUREY**

No, not really. Yeah, I think that this program has, especially on the residential side, has struggled in the absence of approved vendors and the years when approved vendors show up as was the case with Sunrun in particular, there were a ton of customers that they were able to help find and vet and get up to speed with the program. And so, it just keeps me focused on that question. I do wonder, I think the website has come a long way. I love a lot of the improvements and think it's a lot more consumer friendly. It speaks like a human a lot more than it used to, which is great. I keep wondering though, if you have somebody who is a live potential lead, somebody whose interest in the program has come that far to maybe click once or twice and land on that customer acquisition landing page, I've always envisioned a slightly more user-friendly web form process to just get a better read of that customer right off the bat, that customer has some sense of maybe how old their roof is.

That customer has some sense of if they own their home or not, they might have some sense of their income, even if they can't self-verify, they could at least start to indicate that based on members of the household. And so, I've seen some of that emerge on the website. Again, I think it's a lot better than it used to be, but I can still imagine this landing page where a customer in maybe five or six clicks is pretty much halfway there in terms of knowing if Solar for all would be a good fit, and that same web form could help direct them to a sub-program that works better for them. If they're clearly not eligible, then maybe they can go to Illinois Shines. Or if it doesn't work for Rooftop, maybe they can go to Community Solar. So, I sense that that's on the website now in ways that it wasn't before, and that there's continued room to improve that process and to make it even more user-friendly, and that in turn would hopefully start to lure in more approved vendors.

**JELENE BRITTEN**

Thanks, John. We've definitely made some of those improvements, as you mentioned, and they're of course always open to ideas to make it easier for people to indicate their interest and to hopefully get started on their journey.

**JOHN DELUREY**

Sorry, I did have one last question about customers and leads and outreach. One of the big changes from SEJA and then the long-term plan that happened after that was

a stronger commitment to reach out to other low income or income qualified energy programs like the Weatherization Assistance Program or LIHEAP, the Home Energy Assistance Program. I'm curious to what extent we might have pamphlets or leaflets or inserts or anything that those program administrators are able to pass out to those customers. I keep waiting for that bridge to form where somebody who gets blown in insulation in their home is immediately made aware of the fact that now that their home is tight and slightly warmer and safer, they can put some panels on it and that they'd already be pre-qualified by income. I'm curious if that is within this team's purview and if there's any updates about how that type of cross-pollination between programs is going.

**SCHMIDT, JENNIFER M.**

I can speak that a little bit. So, this is Jennifer from the IPA. So, we've been working with the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunities, office of Community Assistance that runs both LIHEAP and IWAP, so both energy assistance and weatherization assistance programs. We had met with the weatherization program before the program started. It was too early. We didn't really have a good idea of what the program would shake out to look like and synchronize the development cycles. With the connector progressing. I've started asking OCA and testing the waters to see if they would be willing to consider working with us through the weatherization program to make those connections. I don't have a response yet for that, but that is something that we are pursuing with OCA.

**JOHN DELUREY**

Great. Thanks, Jennifer.

**JENNIFER BROWN**

Awesome. Thank you for sharing that, Jen. In our last few minutes, we had one last question that we wanted to ask. So, I think we have just enough time to get into that one. But I did want to acknowledge Laurie's comment and that is instead of just talking about savings from the perspective of money, Laurie suggested talking about it from the perspective of what you are experiencing. So, paying fees for extracurricular activities, for kids, for vacations, for home improvements, stories that are what hook people is what she's saying in general. So, we can facilitate that to tell the story better. So just wanted to share that and I think we can go right into our last question.

**JELENE BRITTEN**

Thanks Jennifer, and thanks Laurie for that comment. So, the last question is where do people learn about new income eligible programs and your work in this space? How do you find that people learn about income eligible programs? I think we've

mentioned a few possible avenues in terms of community action agencies working with other programs that are reaching the income eligible population. I'd be curious if people have other ideas.

**LAURIE FIELDS**

I have ideas. I would say, I know in Saline County where I work, if you really want to reach the income eligible population, you need to have information available at food pantries, at emergency financial assistance points, adult education classes, anywhere the where there's English as a second language class, that would be another place I think to have information and community development agencies, WIC offices, public housing, all of those places. And at least in the rural parts of the state where the population is lower. If you can make contact with one of those people in a county and say, where else do we need to send information? They'll be able to spout out the names and information about where to send stuff. But those are the types of offices, those are places people are already going to access services and so having the information there is what I would recommend.

**JELENE BRITTEN**

Thank you. Any other ideas from the committee?

**LAURIE FIELDS**

I don't know if this is something that you could do, but another great way to access low income, at least with families, with kids is the free and reduced-price school lunch program. And so that might be, I don't know if that's something that we could send stuff to schools for kids to take home or how that, I know there's a lot of school districts now where the whole district gets free lunch and such. It's that way in Saline County, I think in all the school districts, but through the schools is another option. And the school social workers know which families could use help and know what would be able to tell you that. And if they can't, they may not be able to disclose a list of names to you, but they could take information and pass it on to families.

**JELENE BRITTEN**

Thanks for that, Laurie.

**JENNIFER BROWN**

OK. That sounds great. Jelene, do you have any other questions that you wanted to pose? We were just about at time.

## Closing

**JELENE BRITTEN**

Those were my questions. Thank you all so much. You've really given us a lot to think about as the program administrator. We're really excited to explore some of your ideas and think about how we can implement them in the next program year. I can give you a little bit of information on timing. We'll be spending the next few months planning for the next program year in partnership with IPA and our internal program team here. And then we'll be implementing the plan, our marketing plan, starting in the next program year in June. And we can keep in touch with you just to give you an update on how we've used your ideas or how they've influenced our planning and what we plan to implement in the next year. So, thank you so much. This has been a great conversation.

**JENNIFER BROWN**

Awesome, awesome. Okay, well thank you so much Jelene for that amazing presentation and opportunity for us to share with our advisory committee how we can improve the messaging for Illinois Solar for all. Thank you to all that have attended today and thank you so much to the committee for that very robust dialogue. With regard to next steps in what you can expect, of course in usual fashion, we will follow up an email with the recording from today, the links so that you can catch the recording as well as the slides and the agenda for today's meeting and the transcripts as we usually do. In addition to that, there will be a document in there so that you can provide any additional feedback. As I mentioned earlier, if you maybe think of something later that did not come to mind today during this conversation and you want to share it with us, you can use that document to be able to reply to any of the questions that we had in today's discussion. But we are right at time. So, thank you again for all of you taking the time to attend today's meeting and we look forward to seeing you in person in May. As we mentioned earlier, that will be our next quarterly meeting, and we are planning very excitedly some wonderful times and wonderful conversations for us to have at that time, and you'll get more details about that in the coming weeks. Thank you again to all of you. Have a great afternoon.

**JOHN DELUREY**

Thanks Sean.

**SCHMIDT, JENNIFER M.**

Thanks everybody.



JELENE BRITTEN

Thank you.